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“Keeping up with the Joneses.” A sociological content analysis of advertising catalogues with the eye-tracking method

Abstract

Is it possible to look at something without actually noticing it? Is it possible to see something in the picture that is not really there? The answers to these philosophical questions can be obtained by comparing the results of eye-tracking tests combined with interviews based on sociological theories. The answers, however, have more than the philosophical dimension in that they can provide insight into everyday processes of social perception and its application, also for commercial purposes. In the design phase of the present study, we chose a popular advertising folder available for free for the average consumer. While showing the selected photographs to the respondents (all the pictures included people portrayed during everyday activities), we asked them to pay particular attention to the situations presented. Afterwards, each participant took part in a standardised interview. In our view, the conclusions formulated on the basis of the obtained results are relevant not only to the investigated catalogue, but can also be treated as an indicator of how people usually browse through advertisements and what kind of inferences they make about the world on that basis. While most attention should be given to watching the advertisements, we constitute our dreams of a perfect life, environment and the items that furnish it.

Keywords

Erving Goffman; Eye-tracking Research; Visual Analysis; Qualitative Research.

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Our objective is neither to advertise nor to criticise the company whose products are presented in the investigated catalogue. We do not aim to evaluate its marketing actions, financial results, mission or policy. Rather, we intend to analyse the widely available paper catalogue by presenting and trying to interpret certain regularities we have observed. Moreover, we endeavour to reflect upon the force and extent of the catalogue's impact, which seems to reach far beyond the advertising of specific products. Just like George Ritzer (1999), who put under analysis one of the global fast-food chains and subsumed the discovered trends under the term 'McDonaldization,' so do we observe one of the global companies and the ways in which it presents its products. Is it possible to give a common name to the observed regularities? This question cannot be answered yet, however, it is not the search for the label that we consider most important. Instead, we intend to discover in what ways the said catalogue influences the everyday lives of its readers and to raise the general awareness of this impact.

In the present study, we decided to use the advertising catalogue of a global furniture and interior decorating company, which has been present in the Polish market for many years. Gradually, with time, a similar strategy of reaching an individual client with a printed advertising catalogue was adopted by other companies in Poland. However, the catalogue and the company we have chosen for the purposes of the study can be treated as the forerunner of this form of communication with clients in the Polish market. The catalogue is several hundred pages long (in the successive, annual editions of the catalogue it is about 200-300 pages). It presents the company's offer by showing, in an attractive way, the interiors of houses and apartments (in this respect the company "helps" the Poles with the arrangement by using the layouts of popular pre-fabricated blocks of flats in Poland). Apart from that, the catalogue contains the manuals for the company's webpage and makes available there graphic software, which can be used, for example, to design one's own kitchen equipment or check the optimal mattress hardness.

The recent changes occurring in this field are an interesting research topic. A considerable improvement could be observed both in the standard of Polish residential households, as well as in the level of importance attached to the place of residence. The studies carried out in recent years have shown that the average surface area per person has been increasing in recent years and in 2005 it was more than 26m², (Czapiński and Panek 2006:87). According to 2010 data, approximately 40% of Poles live in pre-fabricated blocks of flats (Pankowski 2010), 19% in houses built after 1989, and 81% declares they would like to live in a newly built home. Poles also keep paying more attention to the appearance, design and functionality of their residence (Pankowski 2010). Approximately 40% evaluate the material conditions of their household as good, and the upward trend in this category has been maintained for the last 10 years. In 2007, the number of people satisfied clearly exceeded the number of those dissatisfied, who in 2010 constituted 15% (Wądołowska 2010). We believe that one of the important aspects of these changes is the growing interest in the place of residence, which, to a considerable extent, is inspired by advertising catalogues like the one analysed in the present study.

Study

At no point does the catalogue say that the people in the pictures are family members. However, as confirmed in the in-depth interview stage, it can be concluded from the context that what we are looking at are relatives, parents and children, or

friends. In fact, we are being convinced from the very first page by a smiling figure that home is the most important place in the world. Obviously, it is an advertising catalogue and its main aim is to present the commercial offer of the company to its potential customers. What drew our attention, however, was the manner of this presentation. Most pictures show furniture and home appliances in their everyday use. What can be seen are people who are bustling about the kitchen, a person who is putting a pullover into the wardrobe and a cat which is lying next to the armchair. Such manner of presentation provides a perfect opportunity to say, “see how nice it is to sit in our armchair” or “make yourself at home in... our store” (sentences taken from the Polish catalogue).

Consequently, rather than analyse the content of the catalogue, we are more interested in scrutinising its ways of representation. The most important issue being the models that appear in the catalogue (including children and pets), who, in line with the catalogue’s agenda, act out specific and pre-arranged roles and social situations. The catalogue is treated as a source of information on how an average apartment should look. In our view, however, the presented patterns concern not only the kinds of furniture and their arrangement, but also some determined models of social life, for example, human relationships based on age, gender or family affiliation. Furthermore, we will also explore the space which, although designed as domesticity, serves a number of purposes connected with, for example, the separation into public and private spheres or into work and recreational areas.

The grammar of visual design

What content do we choose when looking at the centrefold of an interior design catalogue? How does the layout affect the trajectory of our gaze? These were the main questions governing our analysis of the popular home furnishings catalogue by IKEA. The empirical data for the present study was collected by means of eye-tracking tests run on a group of respondents viewing the investigated catalogue. The results were compared to the grammar of visual design theory by G. Kress and T. Van Leeuvena (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) as it gives a means to determine theoretically the possible visual interactions occurring between the reader and the catalogue's layout. This approach is particularly relevant for the analysis of the spatial distribution of illustrations, photographs, paratexts, signatures, or headers that a potential recipient searches for.

In our framework the catalogue’s centrefold (i.e. two adjacent catalogue pages) is treated as a semiotic space (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:182). The semiotics of graphic space assumes that the viewer reads the message by comparing the textual and pictorial components. Some of the key elements of the catalogue pages are the paratexts mentioned-above (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:69). Kress and Van Leeuwen define the concept as small textual forms that are secondary to the main text. These include headlines, captions under illustrations, leads, vignettes, symbols, product durability, news, et cetera. Their main function is to attract the gaze of the reader and encourage them to read the main text.

The assumptions of visual semiotics

A specific placement of graphic elements in space communicates a specific meaning. The model of semiotics proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen distinguishes

three main determinants of graphic elements: their spatial structure, their components and the visual connectors between them. The structure of the catalogue's space can be defined according to such parameters as the arrangement of elements on a vertical or horizontal plane and the position of elements relative to the centre of the page. In the vertical arrangement, the most prominent information is placed at the top, while the details are located at the bottom. In the horizontal arrangement, the repetitive information (e.g. the table of contents, menu, numbering) is placed on the left side of the space, whereas the content that is prone to change can usually be found on the right. The typical layout of websites can serve as an example illustrating the above-described principles. The last regularity identified by Kress and Van Leeuwen concerns the validity of the item due to its position relative to the centre of the page.

Theory – Impression management

There are many sociological texts on the meaning of space, manner of its representation and the influence this has on people (Hall 1990; Banks 2009). One of the most well-known sociologists of the mid 20th century, Erving Goffman (2000, 2006), gave a considerable amount of thought to the ways in which the stage (front stage) and the surroundings (backstage) can influence human relations by helping to create or to improve a desired impression in the interlocutors. The force of this influence depends on how skilfully and deliberately we can utilise the interactional space in order to, among other things, create a desired impression. For example, senders can reinforce the message about themselves through the so called *façade*, 'presentation of self' that consists of such aspects as 'a look,' 'a way of behaviour,' 'sets on the scene,' and is a consistent part of one's image and can be redefined according to the particular situation, partners of interaction, or any circumstances (Goffman 2000:136-137; Turner 2004:459; Sztompka 2005:113-118). All these techniques might be described as an 'impression management' strategy, which everyone tries to follow to improve their image (Goffman 2000:235), and ultimately – their social position. Goffman extensively uses a very inspiring distinction between the stage where social interactions take place and the backstage where individuals are preparing to play their performances with a view of making the right impression on others (Goffman 2000; Turner 2004:459-462). The distinction between the stage and backstage is functional and depends on how the actors define the situation at a given moment.

According to Goffman, every social interaction is a kind of a show whereby people try to impress others by using various culture-specific, readable symbols connected with personal appearance, behaviour in specific situations, or such arrangement of spaces that would facilitate the above-mentioned experience management (Sztompka 2005:116). However, for a performance to be successful all participants of the interaction must share the codes for interpreting the symbols, it is also important to draw attention to changes in this area that have been taking place in recent years.

Numerous authors (Hannerz 2000; MacCannell 2002; Macnaghten and Urry 2000; Sztompka 2005; Turner 2004) followed this trail of thought stressing not only the importance of the space of interactions (perceived mostly visually), but also how it can be intentionally exploited by the social actors for emphatic purposes. Cultural differences in this matter have also been brought to light, as well as potential

misunderstandings (Hall 1990) stemming from culture-specific readings of gestures and space (Krzywicki et al. 2005).

Eye-tracking methodology

Eye-tracking (ET) is the method of investigating and recording eye movements. Such measuring allows someone to determine precisely the spots that the viewer has been looking at, as well as the order in which he/she has read the visual information. The above description is, of course, a very rough specification of the eye-tracking measurements. In an attempt to investigate eye movements more should be said on eyeball movement as a physiological symptom of looking.

In the early ET studies, eye movements of the respondents reading visual materials were recorded with a video camera or involved ET equipment in the form of a helmet that was put on the head. Currently, ET equipment looks like a computer monitor with a built-in eye-tracking camera. The advantage of this solution is that it allows for the observations to be conducted in almost natural-like conditions of reading on screen.

Eyes move constantly in various directions. These movements are, in turn, essential to the process of seeing. From among various types of moves the most important for the ET method are rapid ballistic movements or saccades (Młodkowski 1998). Saccades are associated with placing the objects in the zone of the most acute vision. Since this zone is relatively small, in order to see the details, we must constantly scan the object with our eyes through saccades. The saccades place in the centre of the retina the part of the picture that we want to see acutely. The process can be compared to seeing the world through a hole about the size of a thumbnail at arm's length (Ober et al. 2009). Saccades are described with 1000/second units. Large saccades are divided with so called fixations during which the proper reception of the visual information takes place. The role of saccades consist of changing the points of fixation. Their trajectories form broken, often intersecting, lines which consist of many segments between consecutive points of fixation. The fixation can be better understood as visual activity aimed at collecting further pieces of information.

What kind of data does the eye-tracker provide? Three main types of information measured by the eye-tracker can be distinguished: the frequency of fixations, the length of fixations and the order of fixations (Duchowski 2007). The most important for our study are the frequency of fixations and the order of fixations of respondents.

The frequency of fixation is the total number of gazes made by a person on the object he/she is looking at. The order of gaze is the representation of the sequence in which the recipient has read the visual information. Since the zone of acute vision is relatively small, the analysis of the picture is done through point-by-point scanning (Ober et al. 2009). The points of fixation are not distributed randomly, though. Rather, they focus on the selected, most important parts of the picture. By tracking eye movements, we can conclude, with high probability, that certain psychical processes are occurring in the examined person. Normally, the length of fixation is indicative of the time necessary for the processing of visual information, which, on the one hand, can be interpreted as interest in the given object or, on the other hand, the prospective difficulties in the reading process.

The operationalisation of the research question

What we found most interesting in the catalogue were, mostly secondary from the point of view of the catalogue authors, the social situations presented there. The most important criterion for the selection of pages to be used in the experiment was the presence of at least two people in the picture. We were interested not only in the way our respondents would perceive the mentioned situation (and if they would notice the presence of people at all), but also the extent to which this perception would be conscious and how it would be evaluated. To this end, apart from eye-tracking tests, each respondent took part in an interview that consisted of a survey and an in-depth interview. 52 respondents aged 19-25 participated in the study. The majority of them were women (35) and 17 men. The respondents were selected by means of intentional sampling, and the results are not representative. Notably, during the in-depth interviews all participants admitted that they had already seen the catalogue. It can be assumed, therefore, that an average Polish student who lives in a big city is not only familiar with the catalogue and its subsequent editions, but also treats it as a source of information about trends (see: section later in the text).

The respondents were recruited through a public advertisement and received a nominal payment for their participation. The study took place between April and June 2009. The examination of a single respondent lasted from 90 to 120 minutes and consisted of the ET session, the researcher-administered survey and the in-depth interview. As far as the equipment is concerned, TOBII T60 was used in the procedure. During the eye-tracker session the examined person was sitting 60 centimeters away from the front of the monitor. The presentational material consisted of catalogue pictures showing people in certain social situations, for example, a woman and a boy in the kitchen, a woman and a man in the kitchen or children in the kitchen. Each centrefold with photos (a slide) was shown for 10 seconds during which time the respondent could freely watch the material (a slide). Prior to the projection, each participant was given written instructions asking them to pay particular attention to the prospective social interactions presented. Furthermore, each respondent provided answers to the survey questionnaire and participated in about a 30-minute interview. Whereas the ET test provided the information on what the participants were looking at, the aim of the standardised interview was to collect the information on what the participants actually noticed and remembered since we were also interested in capturing the potential differences between these two scopes. Some disparities between the particular stages of the study were revealed; when viewing the slides, participants were found to pay extra attention to objects different than the ones they would choose to comment upon in the follow-up interview.

In the preparation phase of the present study we formulated the following research problems:

1. The respondents will notice people presented in the pictures and the character of the relations (ties) between them.
2. The relations will be described and evaluated from the perspective of ties linking the presented people, for example, father-daughter or parents-children.
3. The presented slides will be treated by respondents as illustrations of everyday family/social life, as 'normal and everyday' situations rather than 'marketing' and 'commercial' ones.

In the research design phase, we made a further assumption that the respondents will be more likely to pay attention to these objects which may seem weird or surprising in some way, for example, a pregnant woman at work or

employees with pets (dogs) in their arms. The above expectation was corroborated in the results.

The analysis of the eye-tracking test results

The dominating graphic element of the investigated catalogue were the pictures of apartment space covered with such marketing symbols as product durability, price tags, technical descriptions, room descriptions, page numbers, or graphically emphasised symbols of novelty. We assumed that the respondents would scan the entire surface first and then focus on the chosen element.

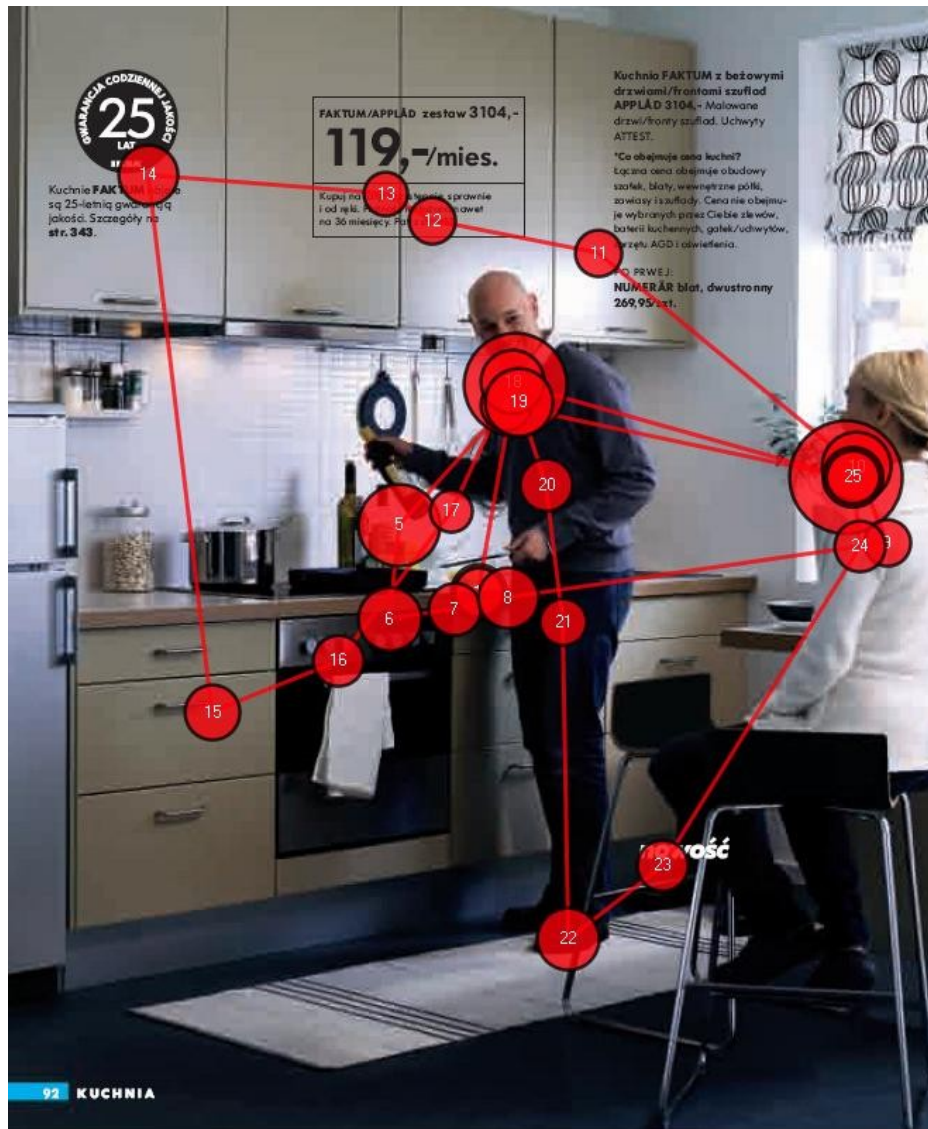


Figure 1. An example of plotting gazes during the 10-second exposure to the catalogue's page.

In addition to the dominant images, most of the catalogue's centrefold included 5 parataxis. The top left side of the semiotic space featured a symbol of a 25-year warranty. Beside the warranty symbol, for example, also at the top but centred, there was the price frame with a brief description of the loan scheme. On the right side of

the spread, in a vertical column, there was a long description of presented products. The bottom part of the spread was filled by a bookmark folder marking the housing space to which the furniture and equipment presented were dedicated. An element that appeared in the floating position was the word “novelty.” Analysing the importance of the space represented on the centrefolds, one cannot ignore the characteristic structure of the catalogue photos. They usually show the wider section of rooms (kitchen, rooms) providing the customer with the opportunity to see many details of the design. In a relatively small area of the photograph, the recipient can see actors recreating different social roles typical of presented interiors. At first glance, it is difficult to conclude which layer of the message is most important from the perspective of the catalogue’s creators. These images seem to communicate to the recipient much more than just a marketing presentation of wardrobes, shelves and chairs. They create idealistic scenes of social life by showing the relationships between partners, children and their guardians, et cetera. Do recipients of the catalogue pay any attention to these scenes and, if so, do they consciously analyse them? These questions can be answered with the results obtained in our ET study.

The ET measurement is giving the presentation the data in the form of so called eye movement trajectories (Młodkowski 1998), which reflect the respondent’s visual activity during a 10-second slide presentation (fig. 1).

The circles in the picture indicate fixations, for example, points where the gaze has stopped in order to collect the visual information. The numbers inside the circles reflect the order of eye movements during the reading (viewing) of the catalogue’s page. The bigger the circle the longer the fixation. The lines connecting the circles represent saccades, for example, rapid eye movements during which the viewer changes their eye position in order to find the next point of fixation. From the cursory analysis of the above fact, it can be concluded that although the pages of the catalogue consist of photos with lettering elements (captions, prices, symbols etc.), the respondents scan them and either search for interesting elements, which are then put under detailed analysis or treat them merely as sensory stimulus. Considering the assumptions of the present study, the most valid would be the qualitative analysis of respondents’ activity, in particular, their perception of social relations depicted in the catalogue’s scenes. Consequently, three research questions have been posited:

Research hypothesis

1. Which of the elements depicted in the catalogue are noticed by the readers and which are omitted?
2. Who (depending on gender) notices the social relations depicted in the catalogue?
3. In what order, or by what hierarchy, are the elements of the centrefold read?

Do the catalogue recipients pay any attention to the scenes related to the social life and analyse them in any way? Drawing on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s theory of semiotics, we formulate seven hypothetical strategies for catalogue viewing: (a) the recipient searches for new and surprising information on the right side of the page (b) the recipient looks for the most important information in the upper part (c) the recipient considers the most important the elements located in the centre (d) the recipient focuses on the information that is graphically highlighted (e) the recipient reads paratexts first (f) the recipient follows the elements that are connected by lines

or arrows (g) the recipient initially scans the whole semiotic space in order to choose the item that interests them most.

Apart from recording the fact that a respondent noticed the presented people and their relations, we were interested in the perceptual differences related to gender. In connection to this question, we assumed that it is possible to distinguish two levels of analysis of the viewed material with regard to the social relations between people presented on the slides: a) casual, b) thorough (fig. 2).

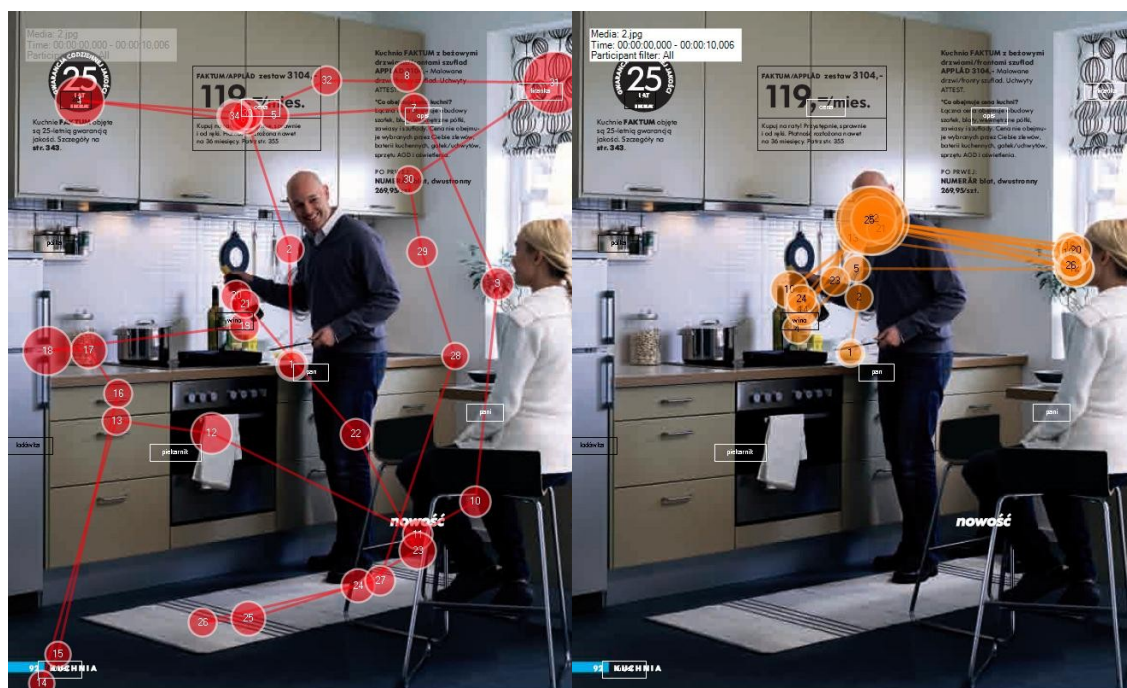


Figure 2. Gaze trajectories of two different respondents. Figure a) illustrates the situation whereby the social relation has not been recognised by the respondent (casual analysis). Figure b) illustrates the thorough analysis of the situation presented.

In what order do the respondents read the elements of the centrefold?

When analysing the visual material during the ET tests, we also paid attention to the gaze trajectories found between people presented in the pictures. For example, we have assumed that multiple trajectorial links between the faces or other body parts of people in the picture could suggest that the respondent has noticed, recognised (fig. 2 b) and analysed in detail the social situation presented. By analogy, the lack of such recognition would correspond to the fixations distributed over other elements of the presented scene (fig. 2 a). For the purposes of the present study, it was assumed that the latter ET result would indicate that either the respondent has not recognised the represented social relation or that they have not analysed in detail the noticed relations.

The results related to the proportions of the above mentioned viewing styles are not conclusive. To illustrate, for centrefold number 1, the vast majority of the respondents (41 people) did not notice the social relations, and of those who did, half would subject it to in-depth analysis. For centrefold number 2, few of the respondents (7 people) did not notice the social relation, and of those who did, 17 people would subject it to in-depth analysis, whereas for centrefold number 3, two of the

respondents did not notice the social relations, while those who did, 8 people would subject it to in-depth analysis.

Comparing general assumptions and actual reading behaviour

One of the main purposes of the present study was to track the visual behaviours of respondents and compare them with the semiotic analysis of the catalogue page. The first and second hypotheses assumed that in the first step the reader finds information graphically highlighted and provided in the form of a paratext. This hypothesis has not been confirmed, as a specific layout, based on the big picture, and central figure of a man caused the insertions that all respondents guided precisely in this place during the first look.



Figure 3. Gaze opacity showing the location which the respondents most often visually highlighted.

Then, the respondents received two possible strategies for viewing. In the first, most respondents relocate their eyes on paratexts and interior fittings. On the other hand, the rest of the time was devoted to the recognition of the context of the social situation.

The third hypothesis assumed that the reader scans the entire surface of the spread, and then begins a thorough look at interesting parts of it. Two-thirds of respondents have adopted a strategy of visually scanning the directory before they

decided to choose the most interesting of those elements. In this case, paratexts at the top of the spreads were places of fixation (fig. 4). The remainder of the study participants immediately focused on the selected item without wasting time on wandering eyes.



Figure 4. The first five seconds of the reader's spread reading presented as gaze plotting throughout the paratexts (gazes 4 to 10).

Our first and second hypotheses are that a reader is firstly searching for graphically highlighted information and those as paratexts. These hypotheses were confirmed.

Another interesting question concerning us was which items on the page are noticed and which are ignored. Figure 5 illustrates fixation counts of respondents who focused their attention on Areas of Interest (AOI).

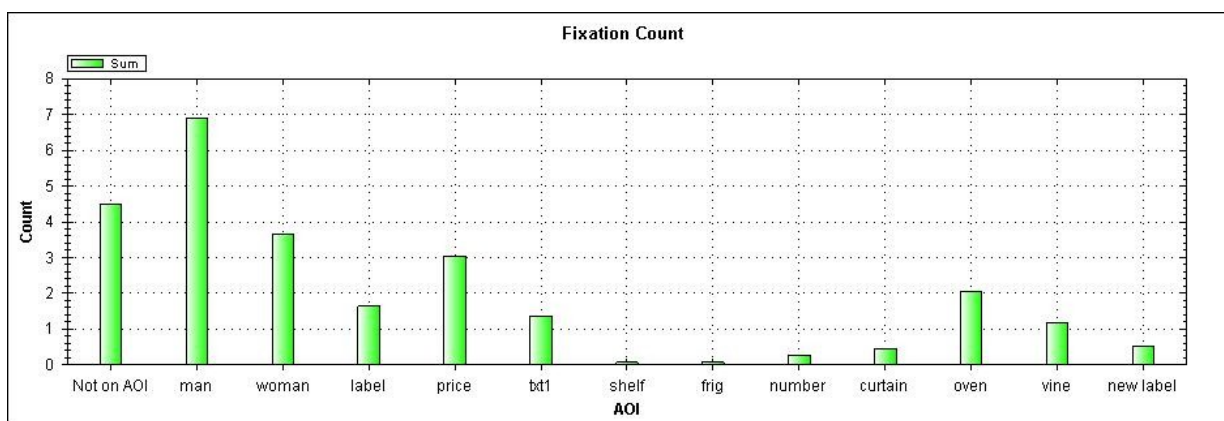


Figure 5. Gaze (fixation) count spent on the various items on the spread.

This chart may be a reference to the data obtained during interviews with respondents.

Data analysis – interviews

Equally interesting results have been obtained from the interviews. First of all, the respondents were asked whether they have noticed “anything surprising.” Secondly, they answered a series of questions concerning the observed social relations (on every slide there was more than one person) and tried to describe them.

Already, at the initial stage of the analysis, it was revealed that although the greater majority of the respondents claimed to not have noticed anything surprising on the slides, the ET data suggested the opposite. Only during the in-depth interviews did the respondents mention “the man in the kitchen” and the fact that he takes care of food preparation as often as the woman. According to the respondents, the kitchen is presented as the place for hanging out, reading a book, kids’ playing and, in general, the place for household members to spend time together. The people in the pictures are associated with positive emotions – lack of problems and worries, a happy and well-organised life with plenty of free time. Home is also often presented as a place of work (mostly intellectual work), which is, however, as pleasant as preparing meals with children in the kitchen.

The respondents would find conspicuous the relatively low number of people in the rooms, two or three children or three to four adults, which is associated with the corresponding model of family and social life, for example, restricted to a group of merely a few people. Although the context of the catalogue does not state whether the people in the pictures are family, friends or neighbours (needless to say these are obviously models acting out the pre-arranged situations), the respondents were quite unanimous in describing them as “family,” regardless of the visible racial or age differences (particularly salient in the case of children). Interestingly, only three respondents mentioned the “racial motive,” for example, different skin colours of the presented people, which one of the respondents considered “surprising.”

For all of the presented slides, most respondents (over 2/3) paid attention to the presented people and devoted most of the time to the systematic analysis of their figures, appearance and the relations between them (e.g., distance, context of presentation, things they were doing, etc.). Interestingly, during the follow-up interviews, regardless of the demographic features of the respondents (age, gender), there was a high correlation in the evaluations of the observed situations. As few as

three of the respondents paid attention to the “anti-stereotypical” role of the catalogue (showing the man cooking in the kitchen or a multicultural group of kids playing at home). Five people would mention that the presented scenes are “much too ideal,” and that they would associate them with Western Europe rather than with Poland.

Just as interesting are the associations the respondents reported in connection with the private space (home) as the “ideal” workplace. A proper arrangement of a part of the house, possible thanks to the furniture available at the store and the assistance of the designers, allows them to create an optimally (in the sense used by Ritzer in the context of McDonaldization; c.f. Ritzer 1999) organised working nook that makes it possible to perform all tasks without bothering other household members.

Conclusion

The respondents, in line with our expectations, turned out to be familiar with the catalogue investigated. All of them provided the correct name of the company. When asked to describe in their own words the situations presented, the respondents would stress the fact that they show “the ideal” world. They frequently mentioned the new, nice and clean, spacious interiors equipped completely with the appliances from the offer of the company represented by the catalogue (which is obviously not surprising because the catalogue advertised the furniture and interior design company). Interestingly though, the quality of “perfectness” was also visible in the people presented and the relations between them. Consequently, according to the respondents, they were all “happy and smiling,” “spending time placidly at home preparing meals,” or “playing,” while the chores seemed “lots of fun” and there was an occasion to “spend time together.”

Analysing the results from a sociological point of view, we noticed that the respondents very rarely mentioned that the presented slides were not an illustration of social life, but an advertising message. Interestingly, although not all the respondents would pay attention to the social context and the relations between particular people (1/3 of the respondents did not pay any attention to the context of the pictures indicating the relations between the people), in the interviews all of them would mention those “ideal” relations representing ordinary family life.

It must be remembered though, that the materials used in the experiment were the photos from the advertising catalogue, the purpose of which was to present a given product rather than people or the social interactions between them. However, the respondents participating in the study were asked to view and evaluate the background of each slide, that is the element of secondary importance. Nevertheless, in our view, the study did reveal a few interesting regularities. Among those, the most important being the fact that the presented people and the situations in which they appeared were treated as “everyday, but ideal/real life.” Beautiful interiors, tasteful clothing and the optimism written all over the models’ faces are treated very often as unattainable perfection. Just as beautiful interiors and furniture are treated as a point of reference and information on how a flat should look, the people appearing in those spaces are described as “very happy” and with a “positive attitude towards life.” Because of that, they inspire quite understandable jealousy and, at the same time, indicate the conditions favouring such outlooks on life. Given that the catalogue has been on the market for several years now (new editions are issued every year) and the fact that it reaches a great number of recipients, it is worth considering whether the pictures from the everyday life it presents can influence the readers. For, it seems

that the recipients tend to treat those photos as information not only on the ideal interiors, but also on the ideal scenes from social life. The scale and scope of our study does not allow us to extrapolate the observed tendencies to the whole population of the potential catalogue readers. Nevertheless, the obtained results confirm the general familiarity of young people with the catalogue, who tend to treat the everyday life scenes just as genuine as the company's offer. Although, the social situations obviously cannot be checked out like the products in the company's store, their authenticity is evaluated by the respondents correspondingly. And thus, when, during the interviews, the respondents mentioned the possibility of arranging their apartment in such a way that it is convenient to work in, they did not reflect on whether they would like to work at home at all. They simply accepted this option as a commercial offer from the catalogue. When they were talking about happy household members spending time together while preparing meals in the kitchen, they would sadly admit that they themselves do not have time for such things, and that the situation is too "ideal." In conclusion, it ought to be mentioned that the catalogue selected for the study has a considerable impact. By employing the pre-arranged scenes from everyday life for promoting its commercial offer, it reaches the recipients with the additional message on how everyday life can look at home and at the workplace (which sometimes happens to be the same place).

In line with our preliminary assumptions, the respondents did notice the social relationships between the people shown on the photographs, for example, the respondents would discuss the observed characters and the degree of kinship between them. They would also comment on some unusual activities that, in their opinion, did not match the gender or age of the people in the photographs or were uncommon for the places where the interaction took place. Interestingly however, in no case was "working from home" labelled as "surprising."

Our next assumption, concerning the assessment of the relationship between people visible in the pictures, has also been confirmed. Due to the fact that the photographs presented a private space/home, the respondents would automatically search for the marks of kinship between people in the pictures.

And finally, in compliance with our third assumption, slide viewers were likely to see photos as the representations of the scenes from everyday life, succumbing to the illusion that the catalogue is not a marketing/advertising tool, but a guide to interiors, daily life and, perhaps, consumer dreams of Poles.

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