

Female Image in Chinese TV Advertisement from the Perspective of Gender Theory

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Abstract: Based on the perspective of gender theory, this paper analyzes the types of female images in TV commercials, the reasons for their formation and their impact on society. The study found that the female images in TV advertisements have made a breakthrough with the improvement of women's social status, but it still has to maintain the male mainstream consciousness of the society either openly or covertly, and scrutinize and judge women from a high position.

1. Introduction

The analysis of TV commercials and female images involves two major theories: gender theory and communication theory. Gender refers to the understanding of the differences between men and women formed by social culture, as well as the group characteristics or behaviors patterns of women or men formed in social culture. The concept of gender clearly shows that prejudice about gender and social understanding of gender differences are not necessarily inevitable in terms of physiology. The research results of anthropology, social psychology and other disciplines prove that a person's gender consciousness is formed in the response to family environment and social environment, and is the product of psychology and society ¹.

As an integral part of the superstructure, mass media not only reproduces the status and status of gender, but also reflects the value orientation and ideology of society. At the same time, mass media itself also participates in the process of gender construction. Mass media reflects social and cultural norms through selective statements and emphasis on certain topics, gains the maximum recognition from the audience ².

In today's world, TV has become the most extensive, popular and influential mass media, as well as the most effective advertising medium. In 2019, the national TV advertising turnover reached 134.114 billion yuan, which is highly expressive and easy to understand, and can quickly guide the audience to receive advertising content. Rotzoll, Haefner and Sandage (1990) believe that advertising is a cultural product that reflecting the social status ³, Sherry (1987) further pointed out that the main purpose of advertising is to persuade people to consume, but more importantly, advertising is a cultural system, because it uses symbols derived from the human cultural world to form another social order, and even has the power to shape social culture ⁴. Advertisements that seem to be far away from ideology are actually a barometer of social and cultural changes.

As a special symbol, female images are widely used in TV commercials, which add the artistry and affinity to TV advertisements. However, the commercial attribute of advertisements is to attract the attention of the audience, and the female image in the advertisement is regarded as a commercial tool to increase sales and promote information. The abuse and misuse of female images set a wrong gender example for women, which is not conducive to women's healthy growth and harmonious development of society. Based on the perspective of gender theory, this article analyzes the changes of female images in TV commercials, the reasons for the formation of female images and their impact on society.

2. Common Female Images in Advertisements

The advertisements have been flooded with a large number of beautiful women since they born. From the modern girls on the old Shanghai month brand to the common contemporary advertisements, characters such as good wife and mother, sexy and beautiful vases, and all-around goddesses can be seen everywhere, which endow women with the characteristics of youth, beauty, gentleness, obedience, industriousness and capability.

2.1 Good Wife and Good Mother

The ongoing rights defense movement of modern women promotes feminism to a large extent, but the traditional social division of labor between men respecting women and men outside and women outside is still rooted in the minds of our social members. The model of good wife and good mother is the stereotypes of traditional gender role, which is inadvertently strengthened and copied by TV commercials. 51.5% of the places where women appear in advertisements are at home, while only 14.5% of the place where women appear in the workplace⁵. They always play a leading role in advertisements for household appliances such as washing machines, washing powder, dishwashers, and cooker hoods, while men appear in mechanical, electronic, and technological advertisements, manipulate the world with technology and expertise, and promote social development with wisdom and ability. Such advertisements imply that it is the correct choice for women to become good wives and good mothers to take care of the family. A happy family scene was shaped in a kitchen advertisement in Supor, mom was busy cooking in the kitchen, dad sat leisurely on the sofa reading the newspaper, and son was running around in the living room with a small plane. When mother came out to greet her father and son for dinner but no one took care of it. The lost mother had to turn around and go back to the kitchen. Suddenly an empathetic, gentle and considerate handsome man came down from the sky to teach her how to cook, and finally the delicious food made by mother won the favor of son and dad. But no one noticed her mother's ups and downs, she could only secretly buried in the bottom of her heart.

2.2 Beautiful Sexy Vase Type

Bohong Liu and Wei Bu "conducted a study based on a sample of 1,197 advertisements from 10 national TV stations in the country, and found that female characters had up to 89.2% of facial close-ups, followed by hand close-ups at 6.4%, and leg and chest close-ups respectively at 3.5 % and 1.7%, there are individual close-ups of the abdomen and buttocks⁶". The female in the advertisement is the object of the male "gaze" and serves as the male aesthetic object, they are regulated and interpreted according to the male experience, reflecting the male perspective and needs, and satisfying the male viewing desire and psychological expectations. The coconut tree brand coconut juice ads criticized by netizens for "spicy eyes" take the breast enhancement effect of "drinking from small to large" as the promotion point of coconut juice products. In the advertisement, several women dressed in cool clothes exposed coconut palm juice and happily ran on the beach. The narration was "A cup a day, white and tender, full of curves". Women in advertisements are still dependents, decorations or sexual objects that belong to men. Women's "body is sold, beauty is sold, pornography is sold." This kind of female image has undergone beautification packaging and image processing, and it is seriously separated from reality, but it has become the object of everyone's pursuit. "Beauty can enter a certain area more easily, can have complete success, can have better love and marriage, can have a better material life, have a higher social status and extensive diplomacy, and enjoy being beaten \attention glory⁷". This type of advertisement makes women start to doubt their bodies and take a mythical image that will never be achieved, the sexy female paradigm created by the consumer society as their goal, hoping to reconstruct a beautiful sexy image through consumption. While sinking in various cosmetics and beauty services, women also lost themselves.

2.3 Super-Powerful “Goddess” Type

In recent years, the steady increase in the employment rate of women and the explosion of senior management have led to the emergence of a new image of women in the workplace. Superpower Group's three stories formed by Sun Li and others formed a series, condensed into a force, and interpreted the same concept: as long as you continue to work in your own field, every woman is a superpower woman⁸. This kind of tradition The subversion of the image of women in advertisements can undoubtedly be regarded as the presentation of the positive and healthy development of female gender roles in social culture, prompting people to no longer exclude professional women. However, we cannot ignore that the advertisements are to promote household products and laundry detergents, so these successes The “super woman” not only needs career success, but also needs to be diligent and capable in family life to achieve the definition of female success by husbands, brothers and other male members. This is the current situation of professional women presented by advertising to us. On the one hand, it must adapt to the male-dominated organizational culture and work norms, and participate in work competition with men on the same level. On the other hand, it must also bear the primary expectations of society and the family for women and become a “good wife and good mother”. Women who work hard in the workplace are no longer a harbour of rest, but another backstage that continues to work hard. Despite the concerns of male discourse, it is too light and empty compared to the actual sharing. In terms of working women in the workplace and family, the “Super Woman” advertisement is more difficult for her career inspiration. The advertisement maintains the requirements and judgments of the ideal women by the male culture in a more subtle way.

3. The Social Impact of Female Images in Tv Advertisements

3.1 The Internalized Male Social Norms and Gender Order Became the “Collective Unconsciousness” of Women

“Advertisements can not only motivate people to go shopping, but also a symbolize a happy life, and promote a certain lifestyle...Advertisements work closely with other mechanisms to vigorously build the mainstream intentions and public anxiety of today's society, and even recommend certain views to guide individuals to self-identify⁹”. The female image in TV advertisements is always constructed according to the male ideology that occupies a hegemonic position in social life, and this kind of restrictions on gender norms, roles, and levels is often internalized into the audience's expectation of society, which in turn affects their gender awareness behavior. Simon de Beauvoir pointed out in “Second Sex” that “eternal femininity” is just a lie. The way a woman thinks about things, her emotions, and the way of walking are not born like this, but gradually formed as the result of education and daily life¹⁰. Girls have been educated to be “like a girl” from an early age, obedient, quiet, and submissive, and behave in accordance with the girls' norms. If a girl is naturally carefree and bold, she will be characterized as a “tomboy”, and society and parents will make every effort to pull her back into the “girl” team. In his research paper “Advertising the American Dream,” Roland Mathod concluded that “most women are either persuaded or at least accepted the image of women as mothers and housekeepers, and this situation continues to the end¹¹”. This is the cage of femal fetter created by the concept of male power and the media.

3.2 “Beautiful Myth” Created by Media Destroys Female Body

“Qumei” commercial TV advertisement endorsed by international star Li Gong, Li Gong presents an “S”-shaped sexy figure on the TV lens, highlighting the sexy measurements. The primary purpose of the advertisement is to satisfy the audience's pursuit of beauty. As female viewers and consumers, they will unconsciously align with the image of sexy women in TV advertisements. When they find that their dress and makeup are different from the image of Li Gong in the advertisement, the information symbols obtained from the advertisement will play a role and become the scale of the female standard image, while the way to make up for this difference is to

consume “Qumei”. The “beauty mythology” created by the media has driven many women to take the dangerous journey of reinventing the body of dangerous creatures. Angela Mercuri believes that only “returning the body to reconstruction, allowing the body to enjoy its own physicality, planting the content of pleasure, and freeing the body from all kinds of attachments¹²” can break the hierarchy, order, and cultural customs among social groups, and let women really be masters of their own body.

4. The Reason for the Female “Other” Image in Tv Advertisements

4.1 Media Mechanism and Discourse Power

From the perspective of organization and system, male-dominated media institutions still implicitly produce information content in accordance with patriarchal discourse. Under this power structure, the feminist voice is on the edge of suppression and exclusion. In the survey report “on the Status and Development of Female Journalists in China”, it was found that “the proportion of men and women at the senior decision-making level in the media accounted for 10.5% and 4.4%, respectively, while the proportion of men and women at the middle decision-making level accounted for 24% and 9.6%. The number of female decision makers is disproportionate compared to their male counterparts. This ratio means that the decision-making power and control right of the communicator as a ‘gatekeeper’ is still controlled by males. The dominant position of males in the media contradicts the females in the media low-level and subordinate position in the profession¹³”. Workers in the TV Advertising Department firmly hold the “discourse power”, and they lead the ideological direction of TV advertising. As the “main force” of these workers is men, it is precisely because men have the dominant position of the “discourse power” of TV advertising media, that “other” female images will appear in TV advertisements, and the male discourse power manipulates the entire semantic system of society. The male has created characters between the sexes, while also constructing female ethical values, femininity and female images.

4.2 Conspiracy of Consumer Culture and Male Power

With the rapid development of economy, culture, politics and other aspects, material desires and cultural needs are increasingly diversified, and the traditional consumption concepts and lifestyles that meet people’s basic life needs have changed. People pursue high-standard material enjoyment, and consumption has become the fashion of the whole society. TV advertisements spare no effort to create dreams for women, but also cater to men’s psychological. On the platform of TV advertisements, they shape the “standard” female image, convey the image that women should stimulate the consumer demand of the audience. As a collective unconscious deeply rooted in the roots of culture, the concept of male power exists in the world. In Chinese Confucian culture, women are stipulated as selfless, kind, and forbearing qualities, which are regarded as women’s “ideal personality”. Although in the current social system of China, women are given the greatest degree of respect, such as marriage autonomy, gender equality between men and women, and other legal policies, which really reduce the degree of gender role discrimination against women. However, as a deep social concept and cultural psychology, many TV advertisements unconsciously complete the shaping of women’s stereotyped images. However, from another perspective, it reflects that patriarchal culture has been deeply rooted in the psychology of TV advertising media and TV audience, forming a kind of collective unconscious psychology with blind spots of gender concept, which limits the main behavior of women, it also restricts the role expectation and value evaluation of women.

In summary, with the development of society, the “gender paradigm” of advertisements has become more and more abundant, which shows that advertisements have begun to try to break the model of using gender stereotypes to shape gender images, so that the grasp of gender characteristics in advertisements is more reasonable. At the same time, it also reflects that the social roles and social status of men and women are changing in reality. Advertisements have captured this change and reproduced it in time, shaping it into a new consumption paradigm, promoting the birth

and development of a new consumption and lifestyle. Nonetheless, we still have to be vigilant that these “progressive” advertisements still reproduce gender stereotypes in the clues: successful women still have to be responsible for all housework to satisfy men. Modern advertisement should jump out of the traditional mode of thinking of the duality of the power relationship between men and women. It is not to take one side of men and women over the other as a victory, but it is neither deliberately favored for material interests, nor conservative, unchangeable, and bravely assumes the society. It should bravely assume the responsibility of social and cultural control system, and make due contribution to the realization of real gender equality in the future.

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