

An Analysis of Female Identity Construction in English Advertisements

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Abstract. Advertisement has become an important medium for commercial promotion. The construction of female identity in advertisement has been a controversial topic among scholars at home and abroad. The discrimination in advertisements shows problems in the construction of female identity in advertisements. Although a number of studies have examined female identity and identity construction mainly in literary works, films and television, they receive little attention in the field of English advertisements. This paper analyzes problems and reasons for the construction of female identity in English advertisements, and discuss how to construct female identity from three aspects of the relationship between discourse and identity, the relationship between power and identity and self-identity consciousness. This study can raise awareness of the problem of gender discrimination in advertisements today, as well as women's status in society and equality in gender relations. This study mainly focuses on the register of English advertisements and conducts case studies, and explores how to construct the female identity in the advertisements.

1. Introduction

Advertising, as one of the most important media products in modern society, not only conveys the latest information about goods and services, but also induces consumption. It also reflects the picture of social relations we live in, marks the trend of social culture, and subtly affects people's values. For a long time, women have been considered to be the followers in gender relationships, which shows that their gender identities are stereotyped and stereotypically reflects the gender relation between males and females [1]. Unavoidably, this kind of phenomenon has been embodied in language. In linguistic aspect, language is bias-based and women suffer from language sexism. In the advertisement dominated by the patriarchal culture, women are only simple aesthetic objects that exist in order to meet the aesthetic needs of men, and they are unable to express their charm and characteristics freely. In some advertisements full of gender differences, the women lost the independent personality and independent existence value, and how to please men has become the embodiment of their value. These advertisements reflect the existing values of society to a certain extent and the long-standing sexism in the society. That is not conducive to the realization of equality between men and women.

Valuable advertisements play an important role in shaping people's ideas. The values embodied and advocated in advertisements can have a positive or negative impact on social members [2]. The construction of female identity in English advertisements is not only practical for women's status but also for those lacking the awareness of the female identity hidden in advertisements. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to propose construction strategies of female identity in English advertisements by investigating how the female identity in English advertisements represents ideas about female in English advertisements from various aspects and analyzing the difficulties in constructing female identity.

2. Problems in Construction of Female Identity in English Advertisements

The problems in women images and roles presented in advertisements can be divided into three aspects.

Firstly, the female roles are stereotyped in advertising. Influenced by historical traditions, more or less traditional female roles are stereotyped in people's subconsciousness. Most advertisements limit women's living space to the family, which also has its traditional basis for the potential

psychological needs of the audience -Men outside the home, women inside. As a result, female characters are rigidly stereotyped in mass media [1]. A foreign kitchenware advertisement says "Choose a pot as you Choose a husband." The advertisement puts the selection of pots and husbands together, suggesting that women are housewives who have been working in the kitchen for a long time.

Secondly, gender differences are overstated to render women's gender roles. In many English advertisements, the value of women is limited. The male images often appear with leader, while the female often are often placed in the subordinate social status. The advertisements invisibly exaggerate the differences between men and women in their professional lives and inadvertently belittle the role and contribution of women in social life. For example, in the advertisement of Gap's children's wear, a famous clothing brand, "the Little scholar" and "The Butterfly" are respectively used to describe the boys and girls. Gap is clearly setting goals for the future of children with very traditional career plans by praising the boy's scholarly skills and reducing the girl to a social butterfly, which conveys the notion that men can be successful characters in society while women cannot. It also ignores the contribution that women make in social work, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Thirdly, women are objectified and judged by men. British artist John Berg mentioned in his book *Ways of Seeing* that men see women and women see themselves being seen. This determines not only the relationship between men and women, but also the relationship between women and themselves. In this way, women become a visual object and a landscape [3]. The female images in the advertisement often appear as such a visual symbol, embodying the male perspective and demand to satisfy the male desire. The woman and other things are juxtaposed together to objectify the female. For example, the advertisement of BMW's used-car says that "You know you are not the first" with a picture of beautiful lady with sexy gesture. Obviously, it compares the women with cars and embodies a strong hint of seduction. Men and women are equal, but women in the above English advertisement are only a backdrop and decoration for men. This type of advertisement is targeted at male consumers, and its particular attraction is to link the product to the sexy image of the woman and using women's sexy image to promote products. Such advertisements are attractive to men, while women become an object to be watched by men.

3. Construction Analysis of Female Identity in English Advertisements

The problems mentioned above have negative impact on the construction of female identity. To better understand the female identity in English advertisements, construction analysis is proposed from three aspects: the relationship between discourse and identity, the relationship between power and identity, and self-identity consciousness [4].

From the perspective of the relationship between language and identity, social construction theorists believe that language is not only a tool for people to know the world, but also an integral part of the product of society and social reality. Language is a kind of dynamic form of social practice, which constructs society identity, social relations and people's understanding of the world [5]. Discourse, as one of the specific application forms of language, naturally has the function of constructing identity. Therefore, female identity can be constructed by discourse in English advertisements. In advertisements, stereotypes and prejudices should be avoided in the words to describe women images. The positive aspects of women are supposed to be advocated, thus the female identity could be better constructed. In advertisement of Bobbi Brown, a brand of American cosmetics, the spokesperson Ni Ni says: "Some people do one thing really well, not me. I want to be everything at once. I can be lively and still. Fantasy and reality. The world is so big. I want to see it all, and still create my place within it. Be real, be honest, be kind. Play it all by instinct to figure out what's true and you can become anything. Truth: I have no single definition." The words show the pursuit that women should not be defined as one type of things by anyone very well and break through the traditional stereotype. What's more, by describing the good qualities of women, an independent and positive image of woman is successfully constructed.

From the perspective of the relationship between power and identity, social identity exists in

power relations and is obtained through power relations. The implementation of power leads to multiple, intersecting or conflicting discourse, which in turn constructs the multiple identities of an individual or social group through the description of historical, political and cultural processes or individual narratives [6]. Therefore, female identity is supposed to be constructed by presenting female power in society. In society, women are often defined as followers and subordinates of men. The idea is also expressed in advertisements [7]. If people want to subvert the traditional female stereotyped image, then one of the effective strategies is to highlight and emphasize the previously neglected and weakened female power in advertisements. On the one hand, more attention should be paid to the contribution that women make to society, thus providing an example for those women who want to be more independent and aggressive. On the other hand, women's ability should not be restricted in specific areas or underestimated. The work of men could also be done by women, and what women contribute to their work cannot be denied. In an advertisement of Nike's sportswear, women in Arabian countries are shown to break through themselves to skate, box, play soccer and fence. In traditional view, women are thought to have beautiful faces, fine and delicate hands, luxurious jewelry. Power is dominated by men, and being a good wife and loving mother for women is enough. But through this advertisement, women are encouraged to break through bravely and struggle for power in society. Women are no longer staying at home and follow others. It also advocates eliminating the traditional idea that women are subordinate to men and promotes the equality between men and women.

From the perspective of self-identity consciousness, the development of self-consciousness in women promotes the construction of female identity. Women have long been oppressed in the society, while men are the dominant forces in political, economic, and cultural decisions. In this kind of social relationship, women internalize the needs and standards of men into their own needs unintentionally, thus giving up their independent self-personality and their self-identity. The awakening of women's self-consciousness starts from their own experience and thinking about their existence and essence. Finally, a series of cognitions of themselves and the outside world are formed. In traditional views, women's images are evaluated from men's point of view. They shaped what women should be and what they should do. Women make up and pursue the beauty for men but not for themselves. With the rise of feminist movement, the wakening of women's identity consciousness makes women begin to reflect traditional views and believe that they are independent individual but not accessory of men [8]. It is a useful practice to transform male discourse into feminist discourse by saying that women's pursuit of beauty is not for men, but to please themselves and live a more individual and wonderful life. In terms of material consumption, especially the consumption of luxury goods, it is not only for the sake of material enjoyment and the pursuit of vanity, but also for the aspect of self-practice and self-proof. Material is used as a proof for the economic independence and volition independence of women such as "I am capable, I am willing and I like" [9]. Therefore, women's self-consciousness about their identity should be embodied in advertisements. The brand of skin-care product Dove also presents similar idea in its advertisement "My Beauty, My Say". The advertisement selects 9 true stories of women who have different experiences, and from their own point of view, tells the story of how to regain self-confidence and define oneself in the face of all kinds of prejudices. Taking women in the workplace as the subject, the secular aesthetic bondage imposed on women by social factors such as age, gender and occupation lead to females dare not to be themselves. In this advertisement, women with different kinds of occupations such as lawyer, dancer, model, poet and clinical psychologist are brave to face others' doubts and make changes. It appeals to people not to judge them with stereotype and advocate that discourse right of beauty should be brought back to women's own hands. Obviously, it presents women's pursuit for their sense of personal identification and they don't want to be defined by others' expectations.

4. Conclusion

Advertisements with gender discrimination have a negative impact on shaping people's views about women. To improve such phenomenon and convey a more positive female identity to the

whole society, this paper proposes construction analysis with examples after presenting the existing problems in constructing female identity in English advertisements. The paper proposes that female identity can be constructed through discourse, power and self-identity consciousness. There still exist many limits and deficiencies in this study. First, the construction analysis of female identity is not deep going and specific strategies are not proposed yet. Second, the examples selected are not representative and adequate enough. Further research can explore the construction strategies of female identity in mass media and establish more extensive theoretical basis.

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