

Exploring Gender Element in European Perfume Advertising

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Abstract: Advertising industry has experienced rapid development, both in terms of content and form, which has undergone earth-shaking changes, constantly impacting the public's thinking. With the increasing influence of media, the social influence of the mass media, advertisement, cannot be ignored. As it has gradually become a media form reflecting social ideology. Europe, as the historical region for perfume production, has emerged numerous perfume products with similar features. For differentiating perfume products with others, advertisement becomes the main tool of perfume marketers. However, the particularity of perfume advertising-using gender element as the tool for communicating product characteristics, has led to an inevitable issue in perfume advertising-the controversy about gender elements. The influence of gender element in perfume advertisement lies in that it not only reflects and embodies people's thoughts and ideology, but also influences the ideological change of other people, and finally evolves into a gender stereotype with social influence. In this case, producers and designers of perfume advertisements should think about their own social responsibility and mass influence, and explore a more suitable form for the continued development of perfume advertisements, rather than ignoring their social communication significance.

1. Introduction

Advertisement, as one of the most frequently appeared mass media, becomes an indispensable tool for companies to achieve their success. Bowersox and Morach (1989) have suggested that successful advertisement allowed companies to differentiate their product with others, as well as persuade the existed customers or potential customers of their desirability to enter the exchange relationship [1]. In the book 'Advertising as Communication' written by Gillian Dyer (1982), it has mentioned that numbers of advertisements contained signs of people which represents particular qualities, and these qualities have been shifted onto their product, including: age, gender, race, hair, body, size and looks [2]. Within the signs concluded by Dyer, signs of gender are depending heavily on the stereotypes. Perfume advertisements as one of the examples, shown strong dependencies on the gender stereotypes to differentiate their product due to the lack of vocabularies to describe certain odours. European perfume industry has flourished a great number of perfumes in the last century due to its historical background. In order to differentiate their products, numerous perfume advertisements have been occurred. In this particular study, European perfume advertisements will be picked to discuss whether perfume advertisement promotes any gender stereotypes.

2. European perfume advertising and gender elements

2.1 The development of Europe perfume

Perfume connects with our window to the world: the sense of smell. According to Brian Moeran (2008), perfume acts an important role in the western society on communicating the spirituality, passion, and both masculinity and femininity [3]. It is evident that the modern perfume in Europe was flowered from the age of Louis XIV, which is between the time of the mid-17th century to early 18th

century. During that period, perfume was acted a tool for covering the body and environment odours. At the beginning of 19th century, European countries such as Paris, still owned poor air circulate system and sewer system. People at the beginning of 19th century in Paris believed fragrance is the cure for the contaminated air, and improves the physical and mental healthiness. Brian Moeran has concluded that the smell of fragrance on individuals in the beginning of 19th century, are shown as a symbol to present individual's hygiene and social status. Due to the improvement of hygiene conditions of individuals have been solved by soaps and improved toiletries, marketers of perfume start to emphasize more on the perfume function, the social-cultural adornment of body.

2.2 Origins of gender elements in Perfume advertising in Europe

Brian Moeran (2008) has also suggested the raising demand of modern perfume can be partly due to the fondness of eau de cologne by the first Emperor of France, Napoleon Bonaparte [3]. After the revolution of France, perfume and luxury products have been distributed to the emergent bourgeoisie from the court. Man of the emergent bourgeoisie family transform his house along with his wife and mistress, into a display of the luxuries and wealth. Women in a bourgeoisie family are acting as the role of displaying the wealth of the men. As a result of this phenomenon, women consume more perfume than men. Vaporizer is the perfume invented in 19th century causing huge fascination. It is the perfume that can be used to diffuse into the bathwater. For women, the bathroom is the place of privacy and intimacy. Therefore, the bathroom itself becomes a site for men's voyeuristic fantasies about the nakedness and sensuality of women. This fantasy was believed to explain the reason of the occurrence of nakedness of female body in modern perfume advertisements. Tuna and Freitas (2012) have done a research on the female nakedness in significant amount of modern perfume advertisements between 2010 and 2011, which has further verified the function of the female nakedness are for stimulating the desiring emotional response [4].

2.3 Reasons of overemphasising on gender elements behind European perfume advertising (Male gaze)

Jonathan Beller (2006) has stated an attention economy which the mass media trade for the attention information [5]. He has also stated that, the attention has been treated as the productive value. Companies will compete for the number of received attention of individuals, in order to reach a higher productive value. Thus, during the process of producing an advertisement, the aim of producing the advertisement has become how to receive more attention from its audiences. For pursuing more attention, female nakedness has therefore been used on the perfume advertisement; to satisfy male audiences' voyeurism and fetishism and creates a desiring emotion to the women on perfume advertisement for attracting more attention. The unequal in the gender nakedness appearances on perfume advertisements are believed to be originated from the gender stereotypes. Laura Mulvey (1989) has introduced a male gaze theory which was originated from the significant amount examples of the traditional narrative films that male actors are always acting actively to gaze women, and women can only be passively gazed by man [6]. Furthermore, the movement of cameras also imitate the male gaze process to focus on the female bodies that creates a desire of possession for female bodies. Under the influence of the mass medias, males became the symbol of acting actively and females lose its possibility of agency and becoming a passive object. Advertisements are another mass media still plays the vital role in influencing the society; the messages embedded in the contents of advertisements will also critically influence audience's perceptions. In this case, it is necessarily to analyse the advertisements in multi-perspectives to consider if these advertisements contained any gender stereotypes.

3. Excessive emphasis on gender elements in perfume advertising

In modern society, perfume is no longer just a commodity, but also has a cultural significance and symbolic value. Perfume is not only an object to modify the smell of the body, but also a symbol to show the user's identity, taste and image. Therefore, the purpose of perfume advertising is to show the characteristics of perfume as a non-life necessity and the cultural value of perfume brand.

The particularity of perfume itself leads to the fact that perfume advertisements cannot convey the smell of perfume only through perfume products. In other words, it can show the smell of perfume with the help of the medium-the body, because the body image can cause the change of people's thoughts or emotions.

Perfume advertisements tend to use men's and women's bodies to represent perfumes, especially women, because the main consumers of perfume products today are women. Perfume advertisements hope to emphasize the aesthetic and symbolic significance of perfume through female images. But in this trend, advertising as a very common way of communication media, perfume advertising in the female body as the medium of performance process, quietly some women's body image as the standard of beauty to the public. Perhaps in this form of communication, perfume advertising is overemphasizing gender elements.

Therefore, the gender controversy caused by perfume advertising is also emerging in endlessly.

3.1 Excessive emphasis on existed gender elements



Fig 1. Jimmy Choo MAN perfume 2014

Fig 1. is a male perfume advertisement by Jimmy Choo, released in 2014. By reading this advertisement in a denotative way, we can see a male is sitting on something and a female is sitting on his shoulder. The male model here corresponded to the name of the perfume 'man'. The product here is placed on the lower right corner of this poster. By comparing the size of the product and the male on the advertisement, we can see this advertisement puts more effort on emphasizing the male instead of the product. Furthermore, the female nakedness element has been shown significantly on this poster. The female model in this advertisement has only shown a pair of legs instead of the whole model, while the male model is holding one leg of the female model. For this posture setting of male and female models on this advertisement, it is hard not to criticize this advertisement could embed the meaning of promoting the information that males can 'possess' women by using this perfume. As a perfume product for male, this advertisement satisfied the males' voyeurism and fetishism to winning more attention. It is worth noting that, the deliberated arrangement of this advertisement makes the female on this poster become a passive object which actively possessed by male. On this very advertisement, the female model loss her possibility of owning agents. As a mass media product, the information embedded will inevitably influence its audiences.

3.2 Excessive emphasis on non-existed gender elements

Different from those who believe that perfume advertisements emphasize gender elements, there are also those who do not believe that perfume advertisements demean the female elements and that perfume advertisements are just pure advertisements. There are two reasons for this belief:

The first situation is that there is no excessive emphasis on gender elements in perfume advertisements, and gender prejudice is only imagined by consumers themselves. This idea is mainly due to some extreme sexists who regard some normal male and female behaviors as gender bias.



Fig 2. Givenchy Gentleman only perfume, 2015

Fig 2. is a perfume advertisement poster for the product ‘Gentleman Only’ by Givenchy, released in 2013. The background of this picture is raining. The male model is holding an umbrella for this female actor, while he does not stand under the umbrella. The behaviour of the man holding the umbrella for the woman is considered as a gentleman's behaviour. In this advertisement, he is the symbol of the gentleman image, which corresponds to the ‘only gentleman’ in the advertisement, as the distinguishing feature of the product from other products.

However, the behaviour of the man holding the umbrella for the woman in the perfume advertisement will be considered by some people as excessive emphasis on gender elements, because they believe that the man takes the initiative to hold the umbrella for the woman, while the woman can only bear it passively, which is biased. But there are also some people who don't think there is sexism at all. For them, there is nothing gender about opening an umbrella. As long as one person is holding an umbrella for another person, the first thought is actually joy, not that the other person is insulting them, or has a gender stereotype, let alone gender prejudice. Therefore, it can be said that many advertisements are indeed misunderstood as advertisements that excessively emphasize gender elements and are labelled with gender bias. In this case, it is reasonable for some consumers to reject the idea that advertisements overemphasize gender elements.

But in the second case, the consumers are totally unaware that the content in the advertisement is overemphasized with gender elements, and they cannot judge that such behaviour is a kind of gender bias.

What lies behind this phenomenon is a stereotype of the female image. ‘Stereotype’ generally refers to social groups and general opinions, and advertising forms that highlight female elements are a manifestation of Stereotype. This term refers to traditional patterns, usually simple concepts, ideas, beliefs, or patterns, that individuals or groups view as permanent and devoid of any personality traits. In the advertisements, there are many concepts that women should stay at home, wash clothes and cook food. They strengthen the status and responsibility of women in the family and fully let the audience know the division of labour and obligations of women in the family. The media and women's magazines created special images telling women how to be “the perfect mother, lover, wife, housewife, charming accessory, secretary, etc., whatever role a woman plays, she needs to meet the needs of the system (Van Zoonen, 2007)” [7]. In the era of consumerization, female images are symbolized. In such advertisements, there is a close connection between women and commodities, not only consumer goods, but also a consumption female image, which provides a stereotypical impression of female images in brand advertisements.

And this stereotype affects not only men, but women as well. For men, as vested interests, they are not well aware of the damage to women's rights, and it is difficult or even impossible for them to change the stereotype. Nowadays, the quality of women in the whole social system is constantly improving, and their self-awareness is also increasing, which makes women begin to consciously pursue their own rights. However, due to the influence of traditional gender concept for a long time, the majority of women's subjective consciousness lags behind the development speed of the whole society, so this stereotype cannot be eliminated in a short time. Therefore, although modern women also know how to realize their self-ability and self-ideal, they still have some psychology deeply influenced by traditional consciousness in the process of putting it into practice: dependence,

inferiority, narrowness and closure. Under such circumstances, some women are naturally unaware of the damage to the female image in the advertisement, and naturally take it for granted that they are attached to men, so they have already attached the stereotype label to the female image.

3.3 Signs of decreasing gender elements focus of audiences

Past perfume does exist a large number of elements of gender imbalance phenomenon in the advertising, but contemporary female consciousness awakening is not meaningless, the huge influence of female consumers and power makes more and more advertisers began to call women too much emphasis on trying to downplay sex element, make the effect of gender stereotypes coming down.

Nowadays, the image of women in perfume advertisements is more independent professional women, rather than traditional domestic women. The purpose is to show that women can also play multiple roles, such as good mothers who love their families, and strong women who bravely pursue career and love.

Under this consciousness, the stereotypes brought by traditional ideas gradually disappear, so that women can go to the workplace like men, not as men's accessories, or even beyond men. Perfume advertisements hope to convey the symbolic meaning of perfume through female images, which is no longer just elegant, beautiful, gentle, sexy, but brave, strong, confident and so on.

In such a trend, the emphasis on gender elements in perfume advertisements is being increasingly diluted, and consumers pay more attention to perfume products. Therefore, the female images in perfume advertisements are playing a very good role in promoting perfume products, and also getting rid of the stereotypical aesthetic impression of female media and superficial value transmission.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Perfumes contain excessive emphasis on gender elements, leading to stereotypes

Based on the awakening of women's consciousness in modern society, the appeal of women's power and the rise of women's family status, advertising, a mass media, is also affected and constantly changing. It can be said that the emphasis on gender elements in perfume advertisements is constantly weakening or even disappearing.

However, it is undeniable that the emphasis on gender elements in perfume advertisements cannot be solved in a short time. Just like the solidification of female consciousness, the stereotypes in most perfume advertisements still exist, which is also the problem in most advertisements.

Women are not the only victims of this gender imbalance in advertising, but also men. For women, the body is put in the perfume advertisement, which becomes a kind of materialistic desire, or even pornographic element, which makes the female stereotyped gender element infinitely magnified, and finally takes the female body as a commercial symbol. Men, on the other hand, are bound by words like "success, power, honor, power" that make people believe that men should pursue these values. The result of this phenomenon is a kind of stress and anxiety in men, which makes men become paranoid and have to do anything to gain more wealth and power.

Perhaps today's society has not moved to such an extreme situation, but the imbalance of gender elements is subtly changing the public's thoughts and ideologies. It can be said that the imbalance of gender elements appears in most perfume advertisements, which also influences the public's understanding of female body to a certain extent.

In the book of 'Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man', McLuhan (1994) pointed out that "media culture constructs our daily life and ideology, shapes our ideas about ourselves and others, and restricts our values, emotions and understanding of the world." [8]. McLuhan believed that the power of media communication is very powerful, which can easily affect the public's thoughts and consciousness, change and guide the public's aesthetic cognition.

This is also the problem existing in most perfume advertisements at present. With the continuous enhancement of gender consciousness, people begin to realize that it is unreasonable to emphasize gender elements in perfume advertisements. This is also a problem that needs to be solved in the future development of perfume advertising, and the influence of gender elements should be taken into

account.

4.2 Gender controversy in advertising is inevitable

The reason for the birth of gender controversy is that people hold different views on perfume advertisements and gender elements in perfume advertisements. One would think that perfume advertisements might avoid this controversy by not incorporating such gender elements into their advertisements.

But in fact, this is an inevitable phenomenon. As a mass media, advertising itself transmits ideas to the audience to some extent and shows the ideology of the public in it. Crane D (1992), an American cultural sociologist, believes that media, as a place for cultural activities, plays an important role in reconstructing reality and reinterpreting social events and social changes [9].

In other words, the gender narrative in advertising is the reflection of people's gender concept in the real society, and it shows various viewpoints and ideologies of various social groups. In this case, it's inevitable that people will talk about the gender narrative in advertising and have various opinions. But in fact, there is no need to think about the reasons for the birth of such gender controversy. It is not accidental that people will have gender controversy in perfume advertising, which is also the inevitable process of the development of perfume advertising.

For such a phenomenon, how to reduce gender controversy as much as possible, reduce its impact on the public, is perfume advertisers design more need to think about the content.

4.3 Gender elements in advertisements influence mass consumption and social ideology

From another point of view, advertising will not give up the gender element of the important reason is consumption. The birth purpose of advertisement is consumption. In order to accomplish this purpose, advertisement not only entrusts various items with consume-ability, but also develops gender into an attractive consumer goods. In advertising, the image of characters is the most effective advertising factor. Good male and female gender images can stimulate consumers' senses to a great extent and attract consumers to buy goods. In this case, advertising brings not only the consumption of goods, but also the consumption of gender images. Therefore, no matter whether it is associated with the product or not, gender image will appear in the advertising image and become an indispensable and important content of contemporary advertising.

In 'Gender Advertising', Goffman (1976) analyses how viewers frame images [10]. He sees "commercial realism" as a way of describing social life, a ritualized form of reality-shifting created by contemporary advertisers to promote mass consumption. People flock to the commodities in the advertisement pictures, compete to learn and imitate the behaviour in the advertisement, and desire to become the characters in the advertisement, so as to produce the purchase behaviour.

In this sense, gender image not only becomes the catalyst of mass consumption, but also changes and influences the consumption concept, ideology and ideology of the masses.

So advertising is not only a reflection of the real world, it in turn creates and shapes the real world. Commercial advertisement reflects a kind of ideal social and cultural value, it gives people a collective desire and imagination, and stimulates imitation and comparison of consumption.

Visual images can be a powerful social tool that reinforces gender differences and governance patterns in social interaction. Similar to textual analysis of language, Goffman made a visual interpretation of the AD. In his opinion, what the advertisement describes is not necessarily the real behaviour of men and women in real life, rather, it describes how people imagine the behaviour of men and women, that is, it contains constructive social intention.

Therefore, advertisement, in the form of textual images, expresses the expectation of the society on the behaviour of individuals. It constantly maintains and replicates the social order, thus shaping not only the individual itself, but also the relationship between individuals and others. Perhaps advertisers, as an important part of social media, should also take their social responsibilities into consideration.

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