

Gender stereotypes in advertising campaigns



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The role of women is more stereotypical than that of the men in the promotional campaigns, and the power of women are inferior to the man especially in the TV advertisements. According to the research on adverts researchers have been done before, the results usually fall into the following categories including: (1) Women being linked with sexual meanings. (2) Women being viewed less powerful than men. (3) Women being thought to be obliged to dominate the housework. (4) Women being believed to comply with their male partners.

“ Over 30 years ago it was argued that advertising placed women into subordinate roles and that the male voice was authoritative” (Lewin-Jones, J, Mitra, B. 2009), which is supported by a number of researches. Ferguson, Kreshel and Tinkham (1990) suggested that woman have long been viewed as sexual objects in the advertisements. Dilevko and Harris (1997) stated that in the journals’ advertisements they researched, females’ activities are more restrained than males’, and men are more likely to gain fame and to be connected with a promising future. Meanwhile, Sexton and Haberman (1974) illustrated that “ the images of women reflected in advertisements is narrow”. All they have to do is to dress up, stand still and being watched.

In addition, advertisements also help to cultivate social roles and responsibilities of men and women respectively, in particularly the later ones. The image of women constructed by some established magazines are mostly in conventional occupations and working women profiled in these magazines tend to express themselves by lacking power in their jobs (Ruggiero and Weston, 1985). Simultaneously, Bartsch, Burnett, Diller and Rankin-Williams (2000) argued that “ Gender bias still exist as females are

underrepresented as product representatives for domestic products and males are overrepresented as representatives for non-domestic products. Briefly speaking, these studies show that in the advertisements, women are more inclined to the jobs and titles of housewives while men are more likely to domain in the working field.

Moreover, an interesting point has been found out in several of the researches, i. e., in the advertisements, the voice of the spokesmen/spokeswomen can affect the acceptance of the products, which also reflects gender stereotypes. Peirce and McBride (1999) stated that in the commercial advertisements they have studied, “ more males are used as spokes-characters, and more male spokes-characters are remembered than the female spokes-characters”.

Media, especially the commercial advertisements of promotional campaigns, do have some strong influence on the construction and cultivation of gender stereotypes, because it helps to reinforce the different roles of man and women in the society and it repeats and retells every day through various channels such as newspapers, radio, bulletin board and TV. In those ads, men are strong and powerful, and they are supposed to save the world, while women are weak and sentimental, and they are set to worship their male heroes. Men should be working outside whilst women should clean the house. Although it is hard to tell whether ads have been affected by the culture or vice versa, it is true that advertisement, as a part of culture itself, do make a difference in constructing gender stereotypes.

In fact, gender stereotypes that outstand in the advertisements are not rare. For example, the Mercedes-Benz S Class 8 airbags advertisements. In that advertisement, a woman showing only her breast was being copied four times so that it made eight breasts in one dimension, which compared the breasts as the airbags to symbolise safety and reliability. It is true, to some extent, that this ad is creative enough to stimulate the male audience and to call on their emotional appeals which can turn into actions of buying in the end, but it also used female image, or sexual image specifically, to persuade their targets. As said by Diane Barthel (1988), “ the beauty role—the importance of appearing attractive in public, of maintaining standards, of encouraging male attention—becomes a central preoccupation for girls and mains a concern for women for much of their lives, if not all their lives”.

Another typical status quo that represents gender stereotypes in the advertising campaigns can be found in one of the channels from Chinese Central Television, namely CCTV5, which is focused on sports news. And it has been years since this channel only broadcast advertisements on men's sports wear, suits, wines, luxury watches and cars. In that channel, ads are made for the males to notice and watch, as are sports programs. If a female audience is watching this channel, she might get a confusing impression that she is not supposed to watch it. Men are born to be sport-oriented, and women are too weak to do intensive exercises. This is blatantly shown in the advertisements that the companies do not even bother to take their female customers into account when it comes to the field of sports and sports competitions. As a matter of fact, this phenomenon has already been studied and by some researchers, and they come up with the conclusion that “

advertisers made no attempt to appeal female sports market as a separate segments". (Shani, Sandler, and Long, 1992)

Based on the researches and the examples listed above, it is likely to draw a conclusion that gender role portrayals in ads has been and is still going to be stereotypical for a long period of time(Ivy & Backlund, 1994 , as cited by Brasted, M 2010). There might be some new ads showing that females are gaining their own power and are stronger than they used to be, but the mainstream of the promotional campaigns in the market nowadays are still emphasising on the different roles that man and women plays respectively, or on the point that women should stay home and maintaining attractive to men.

However, one thing people can not deny is that, the ads producers get their ideas and thoughts from the cultures they have long been lived in, which in return affect the culture itself by influencing the audience who grow up there as well. People can not avoid from the gender stereotype thoroughly because it roots in their lives, but people do can avoid imposing on it by realising the potential effect it will have on them.