

The Impact of Congruence Between Self-concept and Female Advertising Image on Advertising and Brand Attitudes

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Abstract: With the rise of women's personal consciousness, femvertising has become one of the key topics in today's research. Researchers mostly explore the impact of feminist advertising on consumers from the perspective of social comparison and self-identity. However, there is still a research gap on how consumers' awareness of self affects their perception and acceptance of femvertising. Therefore, this paper connected the consumer self-concept with the female image in feminist advertising and explored the relationship between the consistency of the two and the consumer's advertising attitude and brand attitude. Through the review and analysis of 19 relevant literature, this paper found that the high consistency between consumers' ideal self and female image in femvertising will make them have a more positive attitude towards advertising and brands, compared with the impact of the consistency between actual self and advertising image. Enterprises should understand the self-concept and values of target consumers in order to better meet their needs and expectations in advertising and marketing activities.

Keywords: self-concept, feminist advertising, advertising attitude, brand attitude

1. Introduction

As an individual's cognition and evaluation of himself, self-concept will affect the individual's acceptance and evaluation of advertising image. At the same time, as an important marketing tools, advertising often attracts consumers' attention and improves brand recognition by shaping a specific image, which plays a good guiding role for the audience. Especially the shaping of the female image, which directly affects people's evaluation of women [1]. However, due to the influence of the patriarchal ideology for thousands of years, the image of women in advertising has been labeled as "beautiful", "sexy", "charming" and so on, which has led to women being objectified, stereotyped and vulgar, misleading public opinion and aesthetic perception.

Due to the rapid development of the economy and society, the role and status of women in society have undergone great changes, and their role in modern society has been more and more concerned by the public. In this process, women's awareness of "self" gradually awakened, reflected in the consumer behavior of product quality and practical concerns, sensitivity to social and cultural factors, environmental and social responsibility concerns and personal image and identity concerns. With the

gradual awakening of female consciousness and the influence of advertising on human thought and concept, the study of feminist image advertising is a research topic worthy of in-depth discussion.

With the development of marketing, many scholars have proposed that there is an interaction between brand and consumer's self-concept. The previous research has confirmed that self-congruence can have a positive impact on various brand results [2]. A number of studies further show that perceived consistency between consumers and brands has a great impact on all aspects of consumer behavior, while self-congruence can increase consumers' positive behaviors toward brands. When conducting research on self-congruence theory, scholars mainly focus on advertising attitude. In recent years, femvertising has gradually occupied the public's vision, attracting consumers' attention by changing the stereotypes of women in the media. Importantly, in response to the topic of feminist advertising, consumers believe that raising feminist issues in advertisements and opposing gender stereotypes and sexism is positive, the same as consumers responses in terms of brand attitudes.

The study of self-concept is crucial, especially the exploration of actual self and ideal self. Studies has increasingly focused on the discrepancy between individual's actual self and ideal self. Many studies have shown that the consistency between the actual self and ideal self has a positive impact on consumer behavior. However, when the two concepts are inconsistent, things are the opposite, that is, negative emotions may arise when the actual self is quite different from the ideal self.

This article aims to explore the relationship between self-concept consistency and female images in femvertising through a review and analysis of the relevant literature on these two topics. Based on the inductive analysis of the previous literature, this paper will first summarize the concepts of self-concept and femvertising, and then review the relationship between self-concept and consumer attitude towards brand and advertising, in an attempt to establish the relationship between the two and propose a new relationship network.

2. Relevant Theoretical Concepts

2.1. Self-concept: Actual Self and Ideal Self

Researchers at home and abroad have discussed and analyzed the concept of ideal self and real self from many angles. The earliest definition of the concept originated from abroad, Higgins E. T. put forward the self-discrepancy theory. In line with the hypothesis, each person has three potential selves: the actual self, the ideal self, and the ought self. A person's accurate self-description is their "real self", the ideal self is an idealized description of what a person wants to be, and the supposed self is a description of what a person thinks he should be. When there is a gap between these selves, there will be self-inconsistency or self-contradiction, that is, ego gap [3]. Some scholars believe that the ideal self is the expectation, desire and value within the individual, and the desired condition that the person aspires to achieve. The real self is the individual's current state of reality, is the individual's actual characteristics, abilities and behavior. At present, there are some controversies about the definition and definition of ideal self and real self. Some researchers believe that the ideal self and the real self should be dynamic concepts, rather than static concepts. There is therefore a need to describe these two concepts more accurately and to explore how they evolve during individual growth and development. With the development of society, some studies gradually focus on the difference between the ideal self and the real self, and study how this difference affects the emotional and behavioral responses of individuals. Mandel et al. Believed that the gap between individual's actual self, ideal self and supposed self would lead to emotional discomfort and lead to individual's negative emotions [4]. Previous research on self-differences, mainly in the field of psychology, can help us more comprehensively understand the process of self-cognition and self-evaluation of individuals, and how it affects individuals' emotional and behavioral responses. This paper discusses from the

Angle of marketing field and will provide certain reference value for advertising marketing enterprises.

2.2. Femvertising

Nowadays, the channels of communication for advertising have been broadened, and thus its content, forms and concepts are changing constantly. With the feminist movement on the rise, the emancipation of women's mindset has affected all aspects of the state and society, including, of course, the advertising industry. Brands, in order to meet the psychological demands of consumers and respond to contemporary social issues, used women as advertising images to promote, which boosts the emergence and prosperity of femvertising. In that case, many scholars engaged in research on femvertising and tried to define it from different perspectives.

Femvertising is defined by some scholars such as Åkestam as the "advertising that challenges traditional stereotypes of women's advertising", which seeks to increase women's self-awareness and break down stereotypes around the role of female in society [5]. In line with the times and society, brands now are moving away from presenting traditional images of women to presenting modern images of women in order to build and maintain a personal relationship with the brand and to provide a medium for expressing emotions through their products. It is becoming an increasingly effective and powerful tool for strengthening brand recognition, convincing customers (mostly women) to consume particular products and increasing the mutual loyalty between consumers and brands [6].

On the other hand, some scholars consider feminist advertising to be advertising that empowers women by portraying women who can control their choices and take responsibility for their choices and identity [7]. Yoder and Kahn interpreted women's power in two ways, the first is power-to, which refers to the control over one's own feelings, thoughts and actions; while the second is power-over, which refers to the control one person has over something outside oneself, such as control over another person or an environment, and they also suggested that empowerment involves the ability to change the self [8]. Later, in Drake's study, he also included empowerment as one of the dimensions of power, closely related to the concept of power-to mentioned by Yoder and Kahn.

2.3. Advertising Attitude

Although the concept of advertising attitude has been developed for more than 30 years, the use of this concept is still not clearly defined in domestic and foreign research. In theory, advertising attitude has at least two basic dimensions: "attitude toward ad" and "attitude toward advertising in general". Scott & Richard stated that "attitude toward ad" refers to a psychological tendency of consumers to react like or dislike advertisements under certain circumstances [9]. Lutz R.R. proposed that "attitude toward advertising in general" is the consistent positive or negative preferences that people have learned to make about the entire advertising. Previous studies have shown that differences consumers have very different attitudes towards advertising, which is largely determined by the social environment in which these consumers live. The differences in attitudes towards advertising will first be reflected in the attitudes of different groups toward advertising in general, and the attitudes are then reflected the specific advertising such as social media. Yuxiang Lv once used the A(Affect), B(Behavior tendency), C(Cognition) model of attitude in the field of social psychology to explore the attitude and influencing factors of information flow advertising[10]. However, the existing studies on the influence of femvertising are limited, and further exploration is needed in this field.

3. Advertising Attitude and Self-concept

Consumers' attitudes about the commercial are positively impacted by the great degree of congruence between their ideal selves and the feminine image in the female advertisement. Through an integrated

analysis of past studies on the image of women in advertising, this paper finds that most of the studies focus on the stereotypes of women in advertising, such as vulnerability and incompetence, and believe that the female roles shaped by advertising are single and attached, such as mother and wife. In recent years, with the rise of the concept of feminist advertising, brands and advertisers have increasingly emphasized the diversity, inclusion, and empowerment of female images in advertising. In addition to challenging distorted aesthetics from the perspective of appearance and showing the beauty of healthy women to encourage women to establish a positive body image, advertising also shapes the image of women in advertising from other directions, such as highlighting women's athletic ability [11]. The characters in the female advertisement are completed through the construction of the scene and the shaping of the story, forming a meaningful image. This image not only reflects the expected role of women in society, but also enables them to obtain information and knowledge related to product attributes and brand concepts through perception by consumers to a certain extent [11]. In the three social influence processes of producing the attitude desired by the advertiser - obedience, identification and internalization, when the ideal self of the individual is consistent with the image in the advertisement, the individual will have identification and tend to follow the attitude and behavior advocated by the image in the advertisement to achieve the ideal self-image and obtain satisfaction [12]. Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that when the female image in the advertisement is highly consistent with the ideal self-image of female consumers, consumers will have a positive reaction to the product and brand. From the perspective of positive self-image and product image, when consumers believe that their product image is consistent with their ideal self, they will buy the product out of the motivation of self-esteem, so as to improve and improve their image and make themselves look more like their ideal self. Other studies have proved that no matter how big the gap between real self-image and product self-image is, Customers' buy intentions will be greater and they will have a more favorable disposition toward advertising, which will further impact their own cognition and behavior the higher the consistency involving their ideal self-perception and the image of the good [13].

According to self-image congruence models, consumers tend to choose products and brands with characteristics, ideas and their own values [14]. When the real self has a high consistency with the female image in the advertisement, consumers are inclined to have a positive attitude towards it and a strong willingness to purchase, and the corresponding characteristics and values are reflected in its use. They tend to demonstrate their values and attributes through such purchasing behaviour and the process of using the product. It can thus be seen that in this case the consumers are motivated to consume the product concept because it matches their own values. However, from the perspective of the ideal self, consumers who aspire to the advertised image of female and have an incomplete self-definition are more incentivised to complete the identity by purchasing the brand's products. Therefore, this paper proposes that while a high degree of congruence between consumers' actual selves and the image of women in femvertising will have a positive impact on consumers' attitudes towards advertising, consumers' ideal selves will take a more important role.

4. Brand Attitude and Self-concept

As a channel for direct communication between brands and consumers, brands will maximise their own brand philosophy and image in advertising. In other words, the image of the character in the advertisement will reflect the brand value symbol.

Brand self-consistency refers to the relationship between consumers' perceived brand personality image and their self-concept personality image [15]. Levy, who first proposed the theory of consistency between self-concept and product image, argued that consumers are influenced by the image of a product or the symbolic value of a brand when buying a product and tend to buy products and brands that are compatible with their self-concept [16]. The more consumers perceive the brand

personality to match their self-concept, the more likely they are to choose the brand. The self-concept is mainly the actual self and the ideal self, which is driven to a large extent by self-esteem and can be seen as a need for self-expression, self-improvement and the pursuit of an ideal self-image. Individuals often emphasise certain positive aspects of their lives by associating themselves with a particular product or brand, thereby increasing their rather self-esteem. Prominent examples of this perspective are luxury hotels or the use of symbolic brands. Symbolic brands are often purchased out of a need to express values and associated with the ideals and goals of consumers [17].

In addition, consumers would strengthen their self-concept by choosing a particular brand that is consistent with their identity. In 1982, Sirgy pointed out that self-theories indicate that individuals have special sense about -identification, value and lifestyle, and so forth. After the establishment of self-theories, strong motivation will be generated to maintain the belief in self [16]. In the self-consistency theory, the more consumers perceive that a brand's personality image matches their self-concept, the more likely they are to choose that brand [18]. In this way, self-consistency is in fact the fulfilment of a brand's own needs as defined by the consumer.

The portrayal of stereotype-busting women in femvertising demonstrates the brand's philosophy and image, and helps to build a stronger connection between the brand and the consumer. The changes of female images in advertisements in recent years reflect the changes of female consumers' self-cognition and female expected images in today's society. The closer the advertising image is to women's consumer psychology, the higher the market share of the product. Both the expression of the ideal self and the maintenance of self-beliefs play a significant and positive role in building consumers' attitudes towards the brand. It is therefore argued that a high degree of congruence between the consumer's self-concept and the image of women in femvertising will have a positive impact on their attitudes towards the brand.

5. Advertising Attitude and Brand Attitude

Advertising has a three-fold effect on consumers' attitudes towards brands. Firstly, customers' emotional effects on advertising are transformed through automatic processing into an emotional response to the products the brands promote. Secondly, there is a degree of congruence between the brand personality and its own image in consumers' attitudes towards advertising, which in turn influences brand attitudes. Further, advertising attitude has a role in the formation of brand attitudes, which is achieved by conveying the feelings that customers expect [19]. Advertising attitude represents the degree to which consumers recognize the message conveyed by the advertisement, as well as their emotional response to the brand being advertised, and thus it is able to turn their attention to the brand being advertised with relative ease [20]. It is thus clear that consumers' perceptions of the image of women in femvertising not only directly influence their understanding of the brand, but their advertising attitudes will also act as a mediator and impact consumers' attitudes towards the brand. To a certain extent, these two concepts are consistent.

6. Conclusion

This study mainly discusses the effect of the consistency of self-concept and female advertising image on advertising and brand attitude, and puts forward the following views: The high consistency between consumers' ideal self and female image in female advertising makes their attitude towards advertising positive; The high consistency between the actual self of consumers and the female image in the female advertisement makes their attitude towards the advertisement positive; The high consistency between consumers' ideal self and the female image in the female advertisement makes their attitude towards the brand positive; The high consistency between the real self of consumers and

the image of women in femvertising has a positive impact on their attitude towards brands. Consumers' attitude towards advertising has a direct positive impact on their attitude toward brands.

The implications of this study are as follows. Enterprises should understand the self-concept and values of target consumers with the purpose of better satisfying their needs and expectations in advertising and marketing activities. For example, if target consumers pay more attention to the practicality and environmental protection of products, companies should emphasize these characteristics in advertising and marketing campaigns to increase consumer brand awareness and loyalty. Enterprises can emphasize the quality, practicality and environmental protection of products through advertising and marketing activities, as well as corporate social responsibility and public welfare activities, so as to establish a positive and healthy brand image. Female consumers are playing a significant role in consumer behavior, and they are more susceptible to the influence of identity in consumer behavior. Companies can provide personalized products and services through product design and service innovation to meet the needs and expectations of female consumers. Enterprises can emphasize the values and cultural connotations of the brand through advertising and marketing activities, and establish emotional connections with female consumers, so as to improve brand awareness and loyalty.

The study summarizes the existing research, and provides research directions for the research on self-concept and advertising attitude and self-concept and brand attitude, so as to provide guidance for the in-depth research on the consistency of self-concept and female image. On the basis of providing help for scholars' research, this study will also be conducive to the understanding between enterprises and consumers, so as to help enterprises better carry out product and brand marketing, and provide consumers with more information to find suitable products. The research content of this paper is not in-depth enough: the current research mainly focuses on the impact of self-concept and advertising image consistency on advertising and brand attitude, and future research can further explore the impact of self-concept and advertising image consistency on consumer purchasing behavior, word-of-mouth communication and brand loyalty, so as to better guide the marketing strategy of enterprises.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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