

Study of Portrayal Strategies for Powerful Female Images in Femvertising --Illustrated by Cases of *This Girl Can*, *Behind the Mac* and *Cheers to All*

Zixuan Zhao

The HBU-UCLan School of Media, Communication and creative industries, Hebei University,
Bao Ding, China.

ZZhao13@uclan.ac.uk

Abstract. The study on female image has always been a hot topic in advertising research. However, due to the positive social response of feminist advertisements, many brands have started to deliberately impose feminism on their advertisements for the purpose of attracting female audiences and gaining profits. Portrayal of women's image in advertisements is faced with challenges and the exploration of its strategies also plays an important role in promoting its development. Therefore, this paper selected three influential representative western advertisements featured by feminism in 21st century as samples, and critically analyzed the powerful female images in the advertisements – the selection and portrayal of female characters, the development of the plot and the use of video style are all included. Compared with the perspective that the female group should be portrayed as commodities, it emphasized women's personal values and inner pursuits. In the meanwhile, this paper discovered the new trend of positive and diverse presentation of female images, and offered new ideas and methods for future advertisers, helping them shape images of female group in two ways – the multi-dimensional way and the positive way.

Keywords: Femvertising; Powerful Female Image Portrayals; Feminist; Female Values.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, women's education level and consumption power has kept improving, stimulating an increasing number of brands and organizations to embrace feminism as an important marketing strategy. In 2015, SheKnows Media, a digital lifestyle media company specializing in female, debuted the Femvertising Awards, in order to recognize brands that are working to eliminate gender stereotypes and empower women and girls through creative advertising campaigns [1]. The award has sparked a worldwide wave of feminist advertising. In this regard, Femvertising refers to advertising that promotes women's rights by delivering positive female messages. With the rise of social media, Femvertising has gained more frequent attention in the past decade, especially among the common users of social media, Gen Y and Gen Z female groups [2]. As an essential communication carrier, the powerful female images portrayed in women's advertisements are gradually drawing the attention of advertising industry. Unlike the stereotypical female characters portrayed in previous advertisements, the images portrayed in these female advertisements are mostly based on deep insight into women's psychology, and focuses more on presenting women's personal values and inner pursuits rather than depicting them as commodities.

Although there has been extensive previous research on the portrayal of women in advertising, these studies mainly concerned about the stereotypical portrayal of women in traditional advertising, which is typically presented as exaggerated physical images, sexuality, and family obligations. However, there is limited research on the powerful female images in advertising that highlights women's rights. Meanwhile, even if there are studies on strong female images, they are mostly sampled from traditional media such as magazines and printed advertisements, but ignoring online video advertisements displayed on social platforms. Hence, on the grounds of previous study's limitations, this paper will select three female advertisements as cases, which have been spread frequently on western social networking sites in the 21st century, namely *This Girl Can*, *Behind The*

Mac and Cheers To All, and critically analyze them, in order to guide future research on female images and advertiser's marketing strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Evolution of Female Images in Advertisements Under Feminism

From the early 18th century to the early 20th century, as industrial revolution rose, the feminist movement in the West was in full bloom. Under this social background, in 1928, Edward Bernays, father of American advertising and public relations, took advantage of the prevailing feminist movement gaining great momentum that time, and planned an advertisement for the American "LUCKY STRIKE" cigarettes with females as its protagonists, which, to a certain extent, provided ideas for the new female image's portrayal in advertising. In the 1960s and 1970s, a second wave of feminism took hold in the West, after which more and more women demanded to pursue higher education and to actively engage in the labor force, in order to seek more employment opportunities. As their education level and disposable income continued to increase, their social status gradually changed [3]. As a result, ethical considerations and concerns regarding their image in cultural carriers (e.g., advertisements) have been stimulated, triggering further academic discussions [5]. Scholars of that time considered the portrayal of women in advertisements as introducing and promoting stereotypes of female roles and sexism, and criticized the depiction of women's limitations as well as the depiction of women as sexual targets, chiefly in advertisements [4].

It was not until the early 2000s that commodity feminism dominated women-centered advertising. During this period, more and more advertisements chose to break through the stereotypes of women and demonstrate women's rights, and women's images in advertisements placed more emphasis on showing their abilities rather than their sexuality and housewife roles. For instance, since Dove first launched "Real Beauty" in 1994, the strategy has been adopted by dozens of brands and its popularity has increased year by year [5]. In the 21st century, a growing number of brands and organizations have adopted feminism as an important marketing strategy. In 2015, the "Femvertising Awards" have created a worldwide wave of feminist advertising. Femvertising is defined as "advertisements that feature pro-feminine talents, messages and images to empower women and girl" [6]. With the rise of Femvertising, powerful female images portrayed in feminine advertising have gradually made their way into the public consciousness, sparking resonance with an ever-growing female audience.

2.2 Research of Female Images in Advertising

Although some brands have begun to emphasize the female's personal value in their advertising, stereotypical female's images in advertising are still common and significantly influenced social attitude towards women and their self-cognition. Driven by the feminist movement and the evolution of women's roles in society, the prevalence of inherently biased images of women in advertising is gradually explored and criticized by an increasing number of experts and scholars.

Regarding the content of the previous researches, however, most of the studies on female's images are concerned with the communication effect of using female characters, or concerned with the criticism of the prejudiced women's images in traditional female advertisements; and the studies on female's images are still focusing on the stage of criticism and review, while there are few studies on the methods of shaping women images in the new era of advertisements. The social media platforms have gradually become a lifestyle for young people since the beginning of 21st century. Due to their high viewing rate and exposure, the influence of advertising on these social media channels has gradually become higher than that of traditional media. However, in terms of research samples, there are only a few analyses of females' advertising images with media ads placed on social media platforms.

2.3 Summary

Research on females’ images in advertising has been progressing for nearly seven decades. From the initial exploration of the relationship between women’s bodies and the effectiveness of advertising communication to the exploration of women’s values in female advertising, women’s image in advertising has always been a hot subject. However, most studies still consider the rise of feminist advertising as a social change and explore its trend, and there is rare discussion of its methods. Additionally, due to the positive social response of feminist advertisements, many brands have started to deliberately impose feminism on their advertisements, for the purpose of attracting female audiences and gaining profits. Portrayal of women’s image in advertisements is faced with challenges and the exploration of its strategies also plays an important role in promoting its development. Meanwhile, social platforms have gradually become an essential medium for people to obtain information, and because of the popularity of this medium, Femvertising has gained more popularity in the past decade. The samples selected in previous studies on the female’s image in advertising were mostly on print advertisements such as magazines, and the number of samples analyzed for advertisements placed on social media platforms was limited.

Therefore, taking account of the limitations of these studies, this paper adopted a content analysis approach to explore the strategies of powerful female portrayal in contemporary feminist advertisements, and combined them with three female advertisements that was been widely broadcasted on social networks like Youtube in the 21st century, so as to provide directions for the future portrayal of female images.

3. Research Design

3.1 Methodology and Sample Selection

This paper selected three influential representative western advertisements featured by feminism in the 21st century as samples, and adopted a case study approach to critically analyze the powerful female images portrayed in the advertisements, the selection and portrayal of female characters, the plot development and the video style.

This Girl Can – Me Again by FCB inferno, a UK advertising agency, was designed for Sport England to free women aged 18-35 from the fear of being judged to become actively engaged in sport [7]. Released in 2017, Behind The Mac - International Women’s Day, was created by Apple to commemorate female heroes in history, and the ad conveys the message that women’s individual ideas and efforts can help achieve a broader goal of rejecting prejudice and realizing gender equality. Cheers To All was firstly designed by Publicis Group, an advertising agency, for the European beer company Heineken during COVID-19 epidemic in 2020. Since then, it has gained much attention and web circulation, and firstly unlocked Heineken’s female market in Europe.

3.2 Categories and Units of Analysis

By compiling and analyzing the recent female ads with high view counts in Europe, the study selects the above three advertisements as representatives respectively. By January 2022, the platform volume of the three ads is as follows.

Table 1. Statistics of Three Ads View Counts

Web Search \ Ad Cases	This girl can – Me again	Behind The Mac – International Women’s Day	Cheers To All
Google (Times of Item Searches)	700 million	27 million	150 million
YouTube (Broadcast Volume)	110 thousand	10 thousand	670 thousand

This paper analyzed the powerful female images portrayed in these three advertisements, in the aspects of female images shaped in these advertisements, plot arrangement and detail depiction, respectively. By referring to the framework of previous studies and the research methods of female images in advertisements, the paper took the following three categories to analyze the powerful female images shaped in female advertisements.

- 1). Selection of female characters: appearance, professions
- 2). Methods of shaping female characters: real characteristics, multiple roles
- 3). Forms of video presentation: fast-paced, slide mode, interactive mode
- 4). The use of video style: the application of comedy style

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Diversity of Selection in Female Images

The portrayal of women in advertisements should be up-to-date and to some extent, be consistent with their real aesthetics and social roles. Along with women's increasing awareness of their identity, a slim figure and fair looks are no longer their only pursuit of beauty; and they will no longer be restricted by the role as housewives. Thus, for women in the new generation, what they want is not monotony but to have their uniqueness recognized by society. Therefore, it is important to convey the recognition of their diversity in advertisements. The paper analyzed the diversity by cases of two ads *This Girl Can* and *Behind The Mac*.

4.1.1 Display of Diverse Female Appearances

There are about 15 female characters in the *This Girl Can* commercial, of whom the ratio of Generation G to Generation Z is about 1:1, and the ratio of “black: white: yellow” female characters is about 3:2:1. The detail analysis of six representative role selected from the group in terms of their role, age, sport, skin color and personal state is as follows.

Table 2. Analysis of Representative Female Characters in *This Girl Can*

Character	Age	Sport	Skin Color	Personal State
Character one	30	Swimming	Black	Obesity
Character two	40	Stair climbing	Black	Asthma
Character three	20	Yoga	Black	Menstruation
Character four	40	Rock climbing	White	Wrinkly
Character five	30	Basketball	Yellow	Gestation
Character six	25	Boxing	White	Sweaty

The commercial film *Behind the Mac* commercial presents a total of 17 women, the youngest of them being 14 years old and the oldest being 87 years old, and female characters from almost every age group are included. The ratio of “black: white: yellow” female characters is 7:6:4 and the detail analysis of them are as follows.

Both the ads take diversity into account when casting female characters, especially in terms of age and skin color. For example, *This Girl Can* chooses ordinary people instead of a star to be the model serving as the protagonists, which is a really bold decision. Compared with the slender and elegant female images depicted in traditional female advertisements, *This Girl Can* adopts ordinary people as models and rebuilds the realistic and diverse women’s images. Through restoring women’s real state in preparation for sports and their confident exercising process without fear, this commercial frees women from the stereotype of female appearance.

The ad video pays special attention to the diversity of character selection in shaping powerful female images, which is not only reflected in their age and skin color, but also in the sports they choose to play and their personal state while doing sports. All the females depicted are ordinary people, and various of their real states in doing sports are presented. The women portrayed in the advertisements display a sense of pride in all their body parts, conveying a powerful message to all females that “everyone can.” [8]

Table 3. Analysis of Female Roles in *Behind The Mac*

Character (In Order of Appearance in the Video)	Age	Skin Color
Malala Yousafzai	25	Yellow
Ava Duvernay	50	Black
Marie Kondo	38	Yellow
Greta Gerwig	39	White
Diane von Furstenberg	75	White
Lady Gaga	35	White
Gloria Steinem	87	Yellow
Megan Rapinoe	36	Yellow
Shannon Boxx	44	Black
Olivia Wilde	37	White
Alicia Keys	41	Black
Elizabeth Banks	48	White
Tarana Burke	48	Black
Lilly Singh	33	Black
Audrey Gelman	35	White
Victoria Monet	33	Black
DJ Switch	14	Black

4.1.2 Diversity of Female Professional Competency

Behind the Mac features 17 females who have achieved success in various fields ranging from entertainment to business, including Ava Duvernay, Lady Gaga and Marie Kondo, showcased by a large number of black and white photos. Among them are renowned directors, Oscar-winning artists and writers who have made great contributions to various industries. In doing so, they have inspired many women by showing women’s power to the world.

In traditional advertisements, women are often shown in a derogatory and discriminatory way, and they are portrayed as “inferior” and “indolent” roles in a weak position [9]. Unlike previous commercials that focused on female housewives, Behind The Mac liberates females from the public prejudice that women should merely care for the home and keep the house clean, highlights female’s competence, as well as recognizes their professional values.

4.2 Approaches to Shaping Females Close to the Real

There is the problem of women being “over-glamorized” in advertising, either by heavy makeup or cam filters, or by the imposition of unrealistic abilities. Nevertheless, with the increasing education level of female, the unrealistic portrayal of women in advertisements will instead make the audience feel distant. To convince the audience, the key is to resonate with them, therefore, the images in the ad should be shaped in a way that creates a true sense of identity among the audience, and this sense can be derived from the realistic image depiction. Concerning this point, the paper gives analysis combined with two advertisements This Girl Can and Behind The Mac.

4.2.1 Return to the True Characteristics of Females

This Girl Can and Behind the Mac both focus on presenting the most realistic state of women, the real state of female movement and the real state of their work. The key point is to restore the characteristics of women’s appearance and reproduce the real scenes. In this paper, several representative characters from This Girl Can and Behind the Mac were selected for sexual analysis, and the specific analysis is as follows.

Table 4. Analysis of Female Close-up Body Parts in *This Girl Can*

Character (In Order of Appearance in the Video)	Close-up Body Parts
Character 1 (swimming)	Hip flab
Character 2 (Rock climbing)	Arm flab
Character 3 (Menstruation)	Lip and tampon
Character 4 (jogging)	Leg flab
Character 5 (Boxing)	Facial sweat

Table 5. Analysis of Part of Characters in Behind The Mac

Character (In Order of Appearance in the Video)	Working State
Character 1	Working while caring for the child
Character 4	Working while talking to others
Character 7	Working in pajamas
Character 8	Working while breastfeeding
Character 12	Working with the pet
Character 13	Work during gestation

As showcased in Table 4, *This Girl Can* presents females’ real state in doing sports by mainly displaying their real appearances. Instead of deliberately fitting women into a perfectionist trap, *This Girl Can* exposes some of her less-than-perfect details, and even magnifies those details as well as present them to audience through close-ups. For instance, the first shot of the video shows the flabby hips of women in a perverse way (Fig.3.). Taking the woman in menstruation as another example, the video depicts the woman with details such as rubbing her stomach, sighing and having pale lips, truly reproducing her menstrual state (Fig.1.).

In the meantime, the ad even shows the wrinkles and sweat on the woman’s face without any use of retouching software. As a woman appearing in the video practicing weightlifting, her face is closely featured in the commercial – spoiled makeup and sweat marks are all over her face (Fig.2.). Compared with typical female advertising, female’s images in *This Girl Can* are closer to audience’s real life and more likely to resonate with them.



Fig. 1 Screenshot (Ads of Brands, 2020)



Fig. 2 *This Girl Can* (The Dots, 2019)

4.2.2 Acknowledgement of Female’s Multiple Identities

This Girl Can and *Behind the Mac* are two commercials that recognize women’s multiple identities while reflecting their sports abilities and job values. As illustrated below, *This Girl Can* features a mother and her daughter playing sports together, as well as present a scene in which an Asian woman caring for a child with a “TRYIN’ TO FIND A BALANCE” slogan, encouraging females to strike a balance between responsibility and freedom.

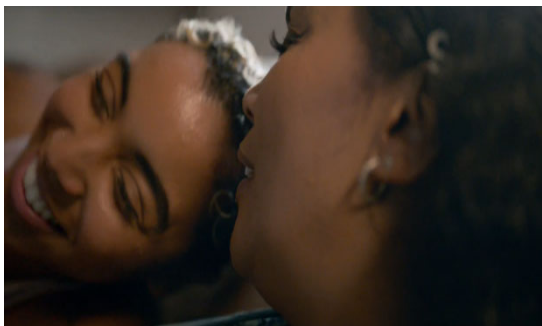


Fig. 3 Screenshot (Ads of Brands, 2020)

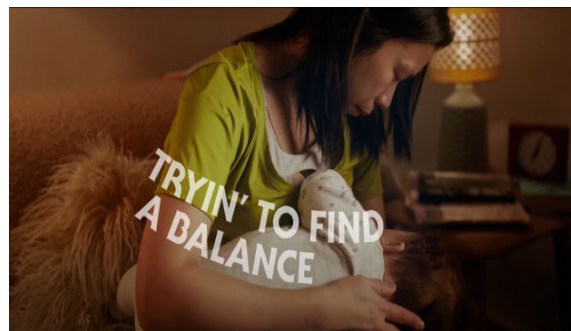


Fig. 4 Screenshot (Ads of Brands, 2020)

Behind the Mac also presents three mothers – Marie Kondo, Audrey Gelman and Megan Rapinoe. In the video, Marie Kondo is working and caring for her child at the same time (Fig. 5.), and Audrey Gelman is working on her bed in gestation (Fig.6.).



Fig. 5 Marie Kondo (adobo magazine,2020); **Fig. 6** Audrey Gelman (adobo magazine, 2020)

These two advertisements show the value of women while not denying their identity as mothers. Instead, they present these two roles in parallel – The two females are both the mother of their own children and themselves; they take on their own responsibilities, but at the same time, they do not give up their own freedom and values. Furthermore, multiple roles of women make them have more in common with the audience, and to a certain extent, making their distance closer. By highlighting the maternity of these females in the two videos, it conveys an acknowledgement of women’s multiple identities and inspires all females around the world to face up to their status and discover more possibilities for themselves.

4.3 Innovative Video Presentation

According to the survey, social media advertising is the second largest market for digital advertising, and it is expected that by 2022, advertising on social platforms could account for 33% of the overall digital advertising [10]. The main placement platform of the three ads are social media platforms like YouTube. Since the platform is featured by a high volume and a wide variety of information, as well as remarkably fragmented dissemination, novelty of videos must be ensured if they are expected to be widely spread among user groups, which will be analyzed via the following three ads – This Girl Can, Behind The Mac and Cheers To All.

4.3.1 Fast-paced Plot Arrangement Interspersed with Flashbacks

This Girl Can-Me Again runs only 1 minute, but it features nearly 11 women within this minute, and quick shots of different main characters doing sports are interspersed. One character’s story can be divided into multiple segments and interspersed with others’ stories, and total duration of each character’s story varies from 2-12 seconds. The following table shows the plot arrangement and time duration of the six selected characters.

Table 6. Plot Analysis of This Girl Can

Character	Frequency of Appearance (By Times)	Total Duration of the Plot (By Seconds)
Character 1 (swimming)	6	9
Character 2 (Rock climbing)	6	13
Character 3 (Menstruation)	2	7
Character 4 (jogging)	5	7
Character 5 (Basketball)	6	8
Character 6 (Boxing)	6	2

The combination of the fast-paced shots and the rhythmic music makes the video appealing and makes it convey the message efficiently, which is one of the reasons for its high YouTube viewership. Moreover, the fast tempo of video makes the transition between different characters and different scenarios very pleasant, so that the preparation before the portrayal of sports could not be too long.

4.3.2 Interactive Plot

Cheers To All aims to challenge the gender stereotype that cocktails are for women and beer for men. The ad is appealing in that it portrays females who are free to choose in a unique way, and demonstrate the freedom in a realistic and interactive setting. First of all, the ad is concerned with the embarrassing situation when people are served the wrong drink in daily life, which is closely related to audience's real life and reminds them of similar experiences, thus creating a certain degree of perceptive interaction with the audience. Secondly, it shows not only a female, but also a series of vignettes of interaction between men and women. When being served the wrong beverage, the female in the video does not show her shame or embarrassment, but decently initiates the exchange of drinks with the male next to her.

The female's initiative to exchange the wrong liquor is a reflection of her freedom to choose. Meanwhile, the interaction between the male and female characters fleshes out their images and personalities, while at the same token suggesting that the natural stereotyping of women is an obligation for everyone, not just for women. What's more, characters' high level of involvement and their interaction in the video accelerates the pace of the story, making it more compelling and convincing.

4.4 Comedic Style of Storytelling

For female customers, a positive emotional guidance in advertising can be more persuasive than negative stimulus [11]. Therefore, a positive way of presenting female images in advertisements is of particular importance. To break prejudices against women, This Girl Can and Cheers To All do not employ the serious and depressing tone as before, instead, they combine comic techniques to make the story more lively and lighter. This Girl Can adopts a storytelling way in which a comedy is combined with monster-beating episode. This video incorporates comedic effects to a more serious topic. As opposed to a tragic narrative that shows the disparities between sports people with different genders, this ad conveys a positive, upbeat message that encourages sports, meanwhile, it infuses a sense humor that audience would like to accept, thereby helping them develop a positive attitude free of others' opinions. Texts matched with the plot like "Jiggle, therefore I am", "hot and not bothered", or even some self-mocking texts like "Sweating like a pig, feeling like a fox" enhance the positive attitude the ad means to advocate and makes it more influential.

Via a light and witty presentation of the plot, Cheers To All interprets gender equality in a natural way. The humorous presentation of serving the wrong alcohol further emphasizing in terms of choice, men and women are equal. Moreover, the plot reversal of men eating salad and women eating hamburgers in the end makes the film more dramatic, and it shows the rebellion against another

prejudice of females, namely “they can only eat salad”, further deepening the ad theme and encourage females to pursue their freedom of choice.

5. Discussions and Implications

Successful portrayal of powerful female images in women’s advertising is often based on the brand’s or agency’s deep insights into their inner mind. As an important communication medium in advertising, the portrayal of female characters plays a crucial role in the presentation of the value in advertisement. Therefore, it is significant to explore the strategy of portraying female characters in female advertisements.

5.1 Multi-dimensional Restoration of True Female Images

Although women’s rights are now recognized and valued by a large number of brands, female images in advertisements can still be deviant-positioned and lopsidedly, and “over-glorification” and “over-packaging” are still a common problem in the advertising industry. The problem of “over-glamorized” and “over-packaged” female images are still common in advertising [12]. Therefore, it is of vital importance whether female images’ portrayal in advertisements can make female customers identify with them and thus form a sense of resonance. Based on these two identities, this paper will further explore and discuss the strategy of female characters’ portrayal in advertisements in two dimensions-- female appearance and identity construction.

5.1.1 Display of Diverse Female’s Appearance

As women become more educated, females in the new era have gradually got rid of the traditional ideology and started to recognize and accept the beauty of their own bodies, as well as being willing to demonstrate their own diversity through various choices of beauty [13]. Their tolerant attitude toward beauty means that slender, fair body and appearance are no longer the mere criterion for appreciating female appearance. Instead, diverse and realistic “imperfect” female appearance gradually becomes their perception of female image. Therefore, the portrayal of females’ image in advertisements should be based on the female customers’ recognition of their diverse appearances, and the ads are expected to present a realistic image of women in terms of character selection and character portrayal.

To begin with, regarding the role selection, most of the characters appearing in advertisements have the same skin color or similar body shape, for which it is influenced by, on the one hand, regional factors of the ads, and on the other hand by the stereotype for woman. As women’s aesthetic values diversify, however, this kind of uniform female image is more prone to cause their aesthetic fatigue, and then affect their curiosity and attention to the advertisement, thus influencing its communication effect. Therefore, regarding the character selection in advertisement, diversity is an essential strategy and a factor to be considered.

Firstly, the ads emphasize to select female images with various skin colors. As the world has gradually opened up, women of different colors have appeared in people’s real life, films and TV series, meanwhile, different racial colors have gradually been incorporated into female's diverse aesthetics.

Secondly, as trade between countries becomes more frequent, many brands are not only aiming at expanding domestic markets, but also international markets.

Thirdly, regarding the shaping of female roles, traditional advertisements always over-glamorize them by software processing, and “regard beautiful appearance as women’s only criterion of confidence”, which could be a reflection of the inherent prejudice against females. Under such prejudice, women present the image of losing themselves, and are always passively required, but their shining points under the appearance are gradually overlooked. Not everyone is born with a perfect figure and looks, so under this inherent prejudice they lose the confidence and fear of being talked about.

Therefore, it is a question worth of ads' consideration on how to precisely capture women's anxiety, and convey the ideas in an easy-to-accept way. With this insight, they can easily understand it not convincing through straightforward expression or heavily-beautified presentation of well-shaped models. Therefore, when depicting female characters, it seems important to create a sense of identity with the audience, so that they are more likely to accept their present appearances. The exposure of women's true state, even their flaws in advertisements, to a certain degree, can help ads resonate with the audience.

5.1.2 Acknowledgement of Female's Multiple Identities

Gao once mentioned that, the identity of female characters in traditional advertising can be divided into two categories: homely female role and dependent female role [14]. However, the rise of female consciousness has made women's demand for self-liberation stronger, and they attach more importance to the realization of self-worth. Hence, the depiction of female in advertisements should also prioritize women's own values. For instance, *Behind The Mac* features females who have made history in various fields, and females who have quietly contributed to the world, such as the Nobel Prize laureate, soccer player, philanthropist, etc. On the one hand, the presentation of women's value in the ads helps to spark a resonance with female audience, thus making the ads more influential; On the other hand, it reflects women's expectations and outlooks on the present society to some extent, and influences their self-perception in a subtle way.

But embodying women's personal value in advertising does not mean denying their identity as mothers and wives. The responsibility of female as a mother or wife is undeniable, but the key is how to balance women's self-worth and their responsibility as mothers and wives in advertising. However, reflecting women's personal value in advertising does not mean denying their identity as mothers and wives. Women's responsibilities as mothers or wife are undeniable, but the key is how to balance the realization of their self-worth with the responsibilities as mothers and wives. In *Behind The Mac*, the female characters are shown working while raising children as well as working on the bed in her gestation. By showing the balance of women's dual identities, the ads restore the female's real status in the new era and arouse a resonance with the audience. And meanwhile, they deliver female's values to the society, calling for the rise of women's self-awareness and society's respect for them.

5.2 Positive Presentation Methods of Female Images

It has been shown that women are more sensitive to positive emotions conveyed in advertisements than men [15]. Moreover, for female customers, positive emotional guidance in commercials is more convincing than negative stimuli [11]. Therefore, women are more willing to pay for ads that express their values and positive attitudes, than for ads that present a "sacrificial" female image and seek sympathy by glorifying women's dedication. This is especially true when the theme of the ad focuses on motivating women and encouraging them to break through prejudice, and controlling the emotion of the mind is of vital importance at that time. It is better to directly display females' confidence and bravery to take their initiative than to reflect their passive situation. For example, instead of showing the tragic narrative of the disparities between sports people with different gender, *This Girl Can* takes a self-mocking style, and the protagonist, with her initiative and self-confidence free of others' views, sends a positive and uplifting message to the audience and encourages them to do sports. In *Cheers To All*, the female characters also choose to confront the inherent prejudices of others. And the film also adopts a humorous style as well as portrays women's confidence in a most natural way. No matter it is the self-mocking comedy style in *This Girl Can* or the humorous plot setting in *Cheers To All*, they all deliver a positive emotional value to the female audience by upbeat presentation.

This positive feeling serves as an emotional bond between audience and brand. On the one hand, it encourages women to fight against inherent prejudices; and on the other hand, the positive presentation suggests that females are right and they do have the ability and obligation to fight. The positive display of women's roles in advertising helps promote the self-cognition of their own identities, and also helps to construct female images in the new age of society.

6. Conclusions

Illustrated by three popular female advertisements, namely This Girl Can, Behind the Mac and Cheers to All on European social media platforms, this paper gives an in-depth investigation into the portrayal strategies of female images, in the paper the selection and shaping of female characters, the presentation and style of videos are all elaborated. The paper also finds that with the rise of women's awareness, they no longer need the mercy from brands, rather they demand for more understanding and respect, and therefore, embodying women's value is the core of building a powerful female image. Through analysis of four categories, the paper provides two major approaches to shaping a powerful female image: one is to restore the real female image in multiple dimensions, and the other is to adopt positive presentation of the female image, offering new ideas and methods for the future advertisers. However, due to the word limit, only three female advertising cases are selected for this study, which is still insufficient for the research on female images. Although the paper focuses on several methods of portraying powerful females, all of which are based on psychological insights into women. Therefore, there is one suggestion that brands and research scholars are expected to consider--how to combine brand's selling points and their insights into females, and this is a key factor worth deeply thinking.

References

- [1] Åkestam, N., Rosengren, S., & Dahlen, M. (2017). Advertising "like a girl": Toward a better understanding of "femvertising" and its effects. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(8), 795–806. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21023>
- [2] Champlin, S., Sterbenk, Y., Windels, K., & Poteet, M. (2019). How brand-cause fit shapes real world advertising messages: a qualitative exploration of "femvertising." *International Journal of Advertising*, 38(8), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1615294>
- [3] Wang, Y., & Zhao, J. (2021). The inspiration of western feminist socialist thinking to the development of contemporary Chinese women[J]. *Journal of Hotan Normal College*, 40(04), 12–17.
- [4] Courtney, A.E. & Whipple, T.E. (1983). *Sex stereotyping in advertising*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- [5] Goldman, R., Heath, D. and Smith, S. (1991). Commodity feminism. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8(3), 333-351.
- [6] Gill, R. (2008). Empowerment/sexism: Figuring female sexual agency in contemporary advertising. *Feminism & Psychology*, (18)1, 35-60.
- [7] Bahadur, N. (2014, January 21). How Dove Tried To Change The Conversation About Female Beauty. Retrieved from HuffPost website: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/21/dove-real-beauty-campaign-turns-10_n_4575940.html
- [8] James,E. (2015) 'Adwatch: "This Girl Can" campaign scores goal for
- [9] "jiggling"', *Marketing* (London), p. 26–.
- [10] Wang, M. (2021) A review of research on gender stereotypes in advertising[J]. *Western Radio and Television*, 42(15), 44-45+90.
- [11] Cooper, P. (2018, June 6). Social Media Advertising Stats that Matter to Marketers in 2018. Retrieved from Hootsuite Social Media Management website: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-advertising-stats/>
- [12] Deng, Y., Chang, L., Yang, M., Huo, M., & Zhou, R. (2016). Gender Differences in Emotional Response: Inconsistency between Experience and Expressivity. *PLOS ONE*, 11(6), e0158666. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0158666>
- [13] Shen, C. (2017). Analysis of the image of women in advertising from feminist visuals [D]. Northwestern University.
- [14] Feng, W. (2019). The transmutation of domestic women's advertising image in the era of "her economy" [D]. Nanchang University. <https://doi.org/10.27232/d.cnki.gnchu.2019.001910>

- [15] Gao, L. (2010). Examining the role of women in advertising[J]. *News World*, 2010(04), 72–73.
- [16] Kasper, R. (2020) ‘Gender Differences in Emotional Advertising, How Types of Emotion Impact One’s Trust and Attitude Toward a Brand’, *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 11(1), pp.13-24.