

# *A Study of the Changing Image of Women's Day Advertisements on the Chinese Internet*

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**Abstract:** Advertising reflects public perception and culture. This study examines changes in Women's Day advertisements and the symbols they contain to construct a new image of Women's Day advertising. In this era of emphasising gender equality, it is valuable to examine the evolution of Women's Day advertisements and the symbols they use to convey meaning. This can help create a new and improved image of Women's Day advertisements. This is a topic worth exploring. This paper analyses changes in the portrayal of gender and roles in Women's Day advertisements on the Chinese internet from 2013 to 2016. The study finds that recent Women's Day advertisements have shifted from tastelessness to regression in their design, from special to general in the portrayal of main characters, from singularity to plurality in their topics, and from 'both genders' to independent individuals in their propositions. The shift is from the concept of 'gender' to that of 'individual'. Our aim is to offer innovative ideas for future advertisers to promote Women's Day advertisements, as well as a fresh perspective for the study of gender issues in China.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of women's image is heavily influenced by cultural communication and changes with historical and social developments. This is also reflected in the history of March 8 Women's Day advertisements, which mirrors the Chinese women's pursuit of emancipation, freedom, and progress, albeit with twists and turns. International Women's Day and its associated activities have become a significant platform for the Chinese women's movement to create a shared memory and a public cultural space. [1]

It is worth noting, however, that the term "Women's Day" has long been controversial. The article "From Women's Day to Goddess Day: New Discourse, New Communication and New Narrative", interpreted by a number of journalism and communication scholars from the perspective of international communication, suggests that the change of title is not only a change in the way different genders of society position themselves and others, but also a concrete manifestation of new communication patterns in the new era. The article suggests that the title change is not only a change in the way different genders of society position themselves and others, but also a concrete manifestation of new communication patterns in the new era. Zhang Lei, a professor at the Communication University of China, believes that the change in title can be understood in terms of

the embedding of consumerism, and that the development of the Internet has made the network the main platform for consumerism, and that by ignoring Women's Day and emphasising Goddess Day, companies are using this discourse to express the importance of the relationship between the sexes, injecting the colour of commodity exchange and promoting women's materialism. The shift from 'Women's Day' to 'Goddess Day' is a way for companies to use this discourse as a way of injecting the colour of commodity exchange into the relationship between the sexes and promoting women's material consumption. [2]

As a reflection of social culture, advertising not only reflects popular concepts but also plays a role in constructing spiritual civilization with its cultural and moral character. [3] It also influences social perceptions of women's image to a certain extent. In the current era of cultural prosperity, the deconstruction of women's image, economy, and power holds important theoretical and practical value. Advertisers often take advantage of Women's Day to promote their brand image and encourage consumption, using it as a holiday symbol. This trend has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. Major brands are likely to take advantage of the holiday season to engage in marketing activities that emphasise the sense of occasion. Media coverage and advertising during this period are particularly prominent, making it difficult to avoid exposure to them. In this era of emphasising gender equality, it is valuable to examine the evolution of Women's Day advertisements and the symbols they use to convey meaning. This examination can inform the creation of a new Women's Day advertisement image. This is a topic worthy of discussion.

## 2. Review of the study

As an international holiday, Women's Day has its own unique traditions. Media coverage of the holiday can enhance the public's understanding of it. The concept of media rituals can be traced back to the work of American communication scholar James W. Carey, who emphasized the important role of communication in maintaining society. Carey believed that communication is at the core of society, and that it creates a sacred ceremony that brings people together in a common identity. James utilises semiotic theory to analyse the content of communication, rather than the method of studying information. The 'referent' of symbolic change is closely linked to a particular social culture, and the cultural significance of communication can be analysed through the interpretation of symbols. [4]International Women's Day is a globally recognised holiday with significant historical meaning. Reports related to this holiday reflect the substantial impact of media rituals on society. Regardless of the gender of the sender, the recipient is typically female, and the media content is predominantly focused on popularising the holiday or celebrating exceptional female figures. The media content mainly consists of promoting the festival, honouring remarkable women, and offering blessings to women in general. It is a sacred commemoration and ceremony of women's progress.

Advertising is an activity that disseminates information with a view to marketing. In the article 'Study on Effects of Ritual in Marketing', Scholar Fang Yingfeng defines ritual marketing as the practice of creating and guiding consumption activities through ceremonial design of people's special consumption behaviours by the marketing body. This is done by giving the consumption behaviours sacred meanings or inherited values. For example, mooncakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival and dumplings during the Dragon Boat Festival. Analysing and studying this series of advertisements reveals different marketing tendencies in different periods, similar to the mooncakes of the Mid-Autumn Festival and the dumplings of the Dragon Boat Festival. [5]The marketing campaigns that take advantage of the festive nature of Women's Day are also a form of ceremonial marketing, and analyses of this series of advertisements reveal differences in marketing tendencies from one period to the next.

### 3. Research process

The samples for this analysis were selected based on the availability of advertising materials and the comprehensiveness of the study. They were taken from the case base of the projects on the Digital website. It is important to note that the selection process was objective and unbiased. The following steps were taken to obtain the data: A search was conducted for the terms 'Women's Day', 'March 8th', '38', 'Girls' Day', '37 Festival', 'Queen's Day', and 'Goddess Day' on the Digital website. A total of 111 relevant advertisement cases were selected from the 8-year period between 2016 and 2023, based on comprehensive analysis of advertisement copy, posters, videos, and other contents. The specific analyses are outlined below.

#### 3.1. Gender in advertising

Women's Day advertisements should not only target one gender. They can be divided into three categories. The text appears to be a discussion on the different types of messages that are conveyed on Women's Day. The first type is blessings or praise, while the second type may seem to favour women but actually has an inscrutable connotation, such as 'the mind of a young girl can't guess'. The third type tends to objectify women, as seen in the example 'the trouble of a girl with big breasts is that other people take pictures of her breasts only'. It is important to avoid objectifying language and to use clear, objective language that does not contain biased or emotional language. When advertisements feature both genders, they often depict a gender relationship that falls into two categories: one emphasises the need to 'protect', 'pamper', and 'scrutinise' women on Women's Day, for example. The first category suggests that women should be 'protected', 'pampered', and 'scrutinised' on the day of the festival. For instance, 'Take some time for yourself and let the boys be fascinated by you' and 'Finish work early today and spend time with your loved ones'. This kind of language reinforces the idea that women are in a state of 'being needed'. The other category objectifies men by portraying them as objects of desire for women, for example, 'playing with fresh meat, six-pack abs for you to poke'. This kind of language reduces men to mere objects of pleasure for women.

#### 3.2. Roles in advertising

In Women's Day advertising and marketing campaigns, there are differences in the selection of roles mentioned. These can be divided into family and professional roles based on social attributes, and by age groups of 55+, 26+, and 26-. Additionally, the context distinguishes between 'beautiful women' and 'undefined women'. "Beautiful women" refers to advertisements that tend to focus on portraying women as beautiful or blessed with beauty, while "undefined women" refers to women who are not described with any adjectives in advertisements. These women are not necessarily virtuous mothers or successful professionals, but simply women.

### 4. Conclusions

Analysing the above cases, the following conclusions can be drawn to summarise the changing trends of Women's Day advertisements on the Chinese Internet:

Firstly, the festival has undergone several name changes, from 'girl' to 'goddess' to 'queen', before finally settling on the name 'Women's Day'. In around 2010, '37 Girls' Day' was created as an alternative to Women's Day, with slogans such as 'Girls' Day, not Women's Day', reflecting a lack of understanding of the true meaning of Women's Day. It is important to recognise and address the underlying prejudice behind these slogans. Using the example of college and university banners, it

is important to avoid using language that objectifies women. The use of phrases such as 'if we don't accompany you to celebrate Women's Day today, someone else will take you to celebrate Women's Day tomorrow'. During Women's Day celebrations, advertisers have been known to use a 'celebratory' discourse with a male gaze, which replaces the serious and respectful meaning of the day. In 2016, for example, Estee Lauder celebrated Girls' Day with the beauty of women. This term 'Girls' Day' is used instead of 'Women's Day' during this period. Yazı stated that Girls' Day would transform them into beautiful goddesses, while Wen Bizumi emphasised that it is a day solely for celebrating girls. In 2017, Kunlun Mountain stated, 'After 50 years of filtering and mineralising, the precious water is now ready for 37 Girls' Days and 38 Women's Days, but one day is never enough.' Later, the terms 'Goddess Day' and 'Queen's Day' have become increasingly popular on e-commerce platforms around 8 March each year. This is particularly noticeable with the large number of 'goddess' references on Taobao sales pages. The media's use of this term has accelerated its internalisation by women, which has led to the gradual fading of the original cultural memory of 'Women's Day'.<sup>[6]</sup> This type of language is also commonly used in advertising and marketing, as seen in Gome's 2017 advertisement 'whether she's a goddess or not, men say', Pyle Burger's 'Teach you how to play a muscular man' on Goddess' Day, and Weilong's 'woman is justice' to celebrate Queen's Day in 2018. It is important to avoid using biased or ornamental language in advertising and marketing. Although some terms such as 'girl', 'goddess', and 'queen' are still used after 2020, they have been significantly reduced. After 2020, gendered terms such as 'girl', 'goddess,' and 'queen' have significantly reduced in usage. Instead, most internet adverts now use gender-neutral terms such as 'she,' 'female,' and 'Women's Day' as keywords. Consequently, the term 'Women's Day' has regained its original meaning on the internet.

Secondly, the main body of roles ranges from the specific to the general. It is important to avoid such subconscious biases. It includes glamorous women who are pampered by men and are often compared to female celebrities, as well as mothers and wives with family status. Additionally, it includes new women in the workplace who struggle to balance family and career, and are particularly hardworking. Finally, it includes ordinary women. The first three identities still define what society considers to be 'good women', implying that only those who are pretty and sexy are valued. It appears to suggest that only physically attractive and sexually appealing women, those who conform to traditional gender roles as good mothers and wives from a male perspective, or women who work tirelessly in the workplace are deserving of celebrating International Women's Day. This goes against the original intention and meaning of the day, and imposes restrictive and oppressive expectations on Chinese women during a commemoration of their emancipation. In 2022, many brands are shifting their focus away from intentionally creating and selling anxiety and avoiding gender confrontation. Thus, from being a good wife, a good mother, a good daughter, to being beautiful, sophisticated and sexy, to being independent, to being a career woman, to working hard day and night, and finally to "living well is worth celebrating every day", and focusing on real women and the plight of real women, the festive advertisement belonging to women has finally gained the vitality it is supposed to have.

Thirdly, the analysis of the advertisements' content reveals that Women's Day advertisements often depict more than just women as a gender and frequently place them in a gender relationship, even on the day of Women's Day. In advertisements targeting Women's Day, men are encouraged to pamper women and give them gifts. Some ads suggest that men should leave work early to spend more time with their partners. However, it is important to avoid gender stereotypes and ensure that both partners are treated equally. It is also worth noting that recent advertisements have moved away from traditional gender roles and focus more on equality. Taking the advertisements of the dating website Jiayuan in 2020 and 2021 as an example, the ad copy was 'The Queen Gets Married' in 2020, accompanied by an image of a woman wearing a crown and a low-cut dress. In 2020, the

ad copy read 'The Queen is Married', and the poster image featured a beautiful woman wearing a crown and a low-cut dress. In 2021, the copy reads 'Let every woman have the right to love and be loved', and the poster depicts a working woman holding a rose.

Advertisement reflects social culture and promotes cultural character and morality. It also influences social judgement of women's image to some extent. In this era of emphasising gender equality, it is valuable to examine the evolution of Women's Day advertisements and the symbols they use to convey meaning. This will enable the creation of a new Women's Day advertisement image. The study above highlights the significance of Women's Day advertisements in the Chinese Internet marketing industry. By analysing the changes in its image, we can conclude that advertisers, consumers, and the public are increasingly concerned about gender issues. The emphasis is on portraying women as independent individuals who do not require protection and need not act like superheroes. It is important to treat individuals equally, without the need for protection or strength like Superman. It is also believed that in the future, advertising and marketing programmes will increasingly address gender issues and promote gender equality.

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