


The Positive Chinese Women Image in the 21st Century from the Perspective of Multimodal Analysis in the Milk Advertising Discourse ---Take Two Milk Brands as Examples

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Abstract

This paper is a multimodal analysis of women image in milk advertisement, including the analysis of Bright Dairy advertisement of Chinese women volleyball team and the analysis of Mengniu advertisement of Eileen Gu. By applying multimodal method, the author analyzes these two milk ads respectively to point out that the milk ads in the 21st present a positive women image. In these ads, women are portrayed as courageous, independent, indomitable and perseverant.

Keywords: Positive women image; Milk advertisement; Multimodal analysis.

1. Introduction

As people's living standards continue to improve, healthy diets are becoming more and more concerned. Milk and beverages containing milk are selling well in the Chinese market and are favored by consumers. At the same time, a wide variety of milk advertisements are gradually coming into people's lives, especially in the 21st century.

This paper explores the women image presented in two milk brands that is Bright Dairy and Mengniu in the 21st century to reveal that women image has changed from derogatory to complimentary. The reason why Bright Dairy and Mengniu are chosen is that they are two of the most representative dairy companies in China. In terms of Bright Dairy, as one of three big domestic dairy giants, Bright Dairy has a history of more than one hundred years. Up to now, it has totally applied for nearly 200 patents for inventions, which ranks the first among domestic dairy enterprises. Therefore, the women image presented in Bright Dairy is suitable to be chosen as analytical material. As for Mengniu, it is ranked among "Global Dairy Top 20" list released by RAOBANK and is also included in the "Fortune China 500". It is also a representative milk brand in China like Bright Dairy, thus the women image presented in its ad is convinced.

The theoretical framework and analytic approach adopted in this study relate to what is broadly known as 'Critical Discourse Analysis' (Fairclough, 2001; Van, 1993). CDA is a relatively young field of linguistic inquiry which has its roots in critical linguistics. It is a branch of discourse analysis that goes beyond the description of discourse to an explanation of how and why particular discourses are produced (Peter, 2007). The focus of CDA paradigm is not only on what is the meaning but also on how this meaning comes to be. Based on that, CDA can be perfectly used in public discourses like milk advertisement which are freely available to public to analyze how women image is constructed in this discourse.

Multimodal discourse is a phenomenon that uses multiple senses such as hearing, sight and touch to communicate through a variety of means and symbolic resources such as language, images, sound and movement, according to Zhang D. (2009). The materials in this paper are video advertisements, which belong to multimodal discourse. By adopting CDA, the author analyzes the advertisements from three modes, which are visual, sound and verbal mode. Zhu (2007), mentions that the significance of multimodal analysis lies in its ability to integrate language and other related meaning resources. It allows for a more comprehensive and accurate interpretation of the meaning of discourse by seeing not only the role played by the linguistic system in the exchange of meaning, but also the effects produced by other symbolic systems such as images, music and colors in the process. The multimodal analysis of the milk advertisements helps us understand more about the inner and deeper meaning, thus this paper enriches the practical use of this theory and helps us know that the positive women image is presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies on Milk Advertisement at Home

When we put "milk advertisement" as keywords into CNKI, the result shows that a total of 46 articles have been published till May, 2023, containing 9 master's thesis and 37 research articles. From the result of retrieval, it is not difficult to see Chinese researchers started the research in 2003, and the research has been increasing since then. 2007 and 2018 are the most prosperous years which command the most published papers. However the total number for each year is still little: only 6 and 5 respectively.

Among these papers, multimodal analysis and persuasive strategy of milk advertisement are the most popular topic which has been studied by Xu (2019), Huang (2018), Zhang (2007) and so on. They study milk advertisement from the perspective of multi-modes, such as vision, listening, feelings, which takes full advantage of the various human senses, including music, color, gesture and other different modes. From this multimodal analysis, it helps readers to understand more deeply about advertisers' persuasive strategies. They argue that multimodal analysis contributes to the deeper understanding of milk advertisements. However, the previous study which related to women image is quite a few. Zeng (2020), is the only one we can find who talks about women image. She claims that Li Na's positive image reflects the social attitude towards women. Even though she doesn't studies women image and milk advertisement alone, at least she mentions it in her research, which gives me a hint to write my paper.

2.2. Previous Studies on Milk Advertisement Abroad

In the international academic community, the research about milk advertisement is mostly from the perspective of linguistics. Hero Gunawan (2022) has studied figures of speech in the jingle of children's milk advertisement. He finds out figures of speech such metaphor, repetition and hyperbole, which are used in the milk advertisements attract people to purchase. Ardhiyanto and Son (2019), has conducted a visual semiotics analysis on television ads UHT Ultra Milk "Love Life, Love Milk". He claims that uht ultra love live love milk television advertising has the messages contained in each video scene which have their own meaning to trigger emotions from consumers. Yong and Yin (2018), research is about genre and multimodal analysis of milk formula advertisements. He puts forward that the use of language and images in advertisements can persuade readers and create awareness in them of the certain brand and product. Just like the research in China, foreign scholars has also analyzed the impact of advertising milk on consumers' behavior in one specific area.(e.g., Papaioannou *et al.*, (2015;2016)). However, the study of the women image in the milk advertisements is still almost a blank space like the situation in China.

In view of most of the researches at home and abroad, we find that study on the positive women image in milk advertisement is a new but meaningful topic. Previous researches nearly focused on one discipline, such as linguistics and advertisement; they did not combine and integrate two or more disciplines. By learning from their research methods of each discipline, the author integrates them in this paper and find out the women image in milk advertisements.

3. Multimodal Analysis of Women Image in Milk Advertisement

This part is a multimodal analysis of women image in milk advertisement, including the analysis of Bright Dairy advertisement of Chinese women volleyball team and the analysis of Mengniu advertisement of Eileen Gu. The reasons why the two ads are chosen are as follows. First of all, each ad is from one milk brand, which makes it more convinced. Secondly, the released years of the ads are 2016 and 2022, which has a time span to make the women image more representative. Last but not the least, the spokespersons are not only positive in ads but also in their true life.

3.1. An Analysis of Bright Dairy Advertisement of Chinese Women Volleyball Team

For this ad, Bright Dairy invites Chinese women volleyball team which is led by Lang Ping as spokesperson. Lang Ping is a famous volleyball player and coach in China. Lang Ping, who was known as the "Iron Hammer", was one of the "Three Dominant Spikers" in the world in the 1981s. This ad was released in 2016 Olympic Games. It is exciting that the Chinese women volleyball team beat Serbia 3-1 in the final at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics, winning their first Olympic gold medal since coming out on top 12 years ago in Athens and bringing joy to the whole country. This victory was achieved in part due to Lang Ping's expert efforts as chief coach. For all those achievements made by Lang Ping and her team, they are positive models for women.

The ad tells the story about Lang Ping and her team. It only lasts 14 seconds. At the beginning of this ad, Lang pours the Bright Dairy milk into the cup, she says: freshness is a cup of milk. From the pictorial signs, two volleyball players having the action of spiking jump out from the milk, with Lang's voice-over: drinking milk makes people energetic. Then Lang says: freshness is the better of us who are ready for the competition. At 0:08, volleyball players change into milk person who spikes the volleyball right at the Bright Dairy milk. Meanwhile, Lang says Bright Dairy believes in the power of freshness. At last, a voice-over of a man says Ubest cheers for the Chinese women volleyball team. At that moment, Lang and her teammates all hold Bright Dairy milk in their hands. In short, the main characters in this ad are Lang Ping and her teammates and what they are doing is playing volleyball.

From the perspective of visual mode, first of all, courage and perseverance are the main spirits presented by Lang Ping and her team. With the help of visual mode, the audience can see that the girls jump out from the milk and practice spiking repeatedly. According to common sense, dunk shot is the most offensive skill among the volleyball basic skills, and the most difficult and complicated skill in the volleyball teaching as well. The dunk shot

metaphorically indicates the challenge in life. Facing dunk shot, the girls practice repeatedly and spike the ball powerfully. Here their practice is a symbol of perseverance and spiking the ball signifies the courage and energy of women. Then a milk female who also jumps out from the milk spikes the volleyball right at the Bright Dairy milk. Here the milk person not only stands for Chinese women volleyball players, but also stands for all women, they are as courageous as volleyball players and have enough courage and power to deal with all kinds of challenges.

Secondly, the girls in Chinese volleyball team are all wearing sports suits, which is a symbol of their professionalization and individuality. The girls in Bright Dairy ad are athletes and we can see they are in a good shape, but they do not wear any dress or sensual clothes. In another word, they highlight their role as athletes rather than women who want to attract men by showing their good figures. They have their social status rather somebody's mother or wife. To put it in a nutshell, sports suit is a symbol of women's professionalization and individuality.

From the perspective of verbal mode, women's striving for a better person is the first one we can see from the ad. What's more, agreement of the society for women is also presented. There are several words we can see from the ad: "drinking milk makes people energetic"; "freshness is the better of us who are ready for the competition". Those words show the volleyball players are energetic and they are striving to be better. They have achieved a great success in Olympic Games, but they do not want to be stagnant. Instead, they keep practicing and strive to be better. Therefore, here Mengniu milk is a symbol of women's enterprise. Another words we can see is Ubest cheers for the Chinese women volleyball team. Ubest stands for the society, it cheers for the girls, which can be seen as the society cheers for them. Their great success is acknowledged by society and has won the praise of the society.

Last but not the least, women's energetic and competitive spirit is conveyed through the sound mode. The encouraging background music can be heard throughout the whole ad. Traditionally, the background music for women is soft and slow with the aim to highlight the gentleness of women. However, the background music in this ad is inspiring and encouraging. It seems that even the music is urging the girls to strive for a greater success in their career.

In conclusion, positive women image is vividly presented through this Bright Dairy milk ad. Several great spirits can be seen through visual, verbal and sound modes, such as courage, individuality and perseverance. Taking volleyball players as representatives, the women image for the all society is the same as them. For the women themselves, they are energetic and competitive. For the people in the background they accept and praise their success and cheer for them. All in all, women image in 21st century is portrayed positive in this milk ad.

Figure-1. Screenshots of Bright Dairy Advertisement of Chinese Women Volleyball Team



3.2. An Analysis of Mengniu Advertisement of Eileen Gu

Released in 2022, this ad is mainly about Eileen Gu's freeskating. It only lasts 15 seconds, but vividly portrays Eileen Gu's image. In the first 4 seconds, Gu begins to practice skiing from a high land full of ice. However, she does not succeed in doing it, but falls on the snowy slope. At this time, with words on the screen a woman says: we are indomitable. In the next 4 seconds, with the background voice: it is time to make a brilliant appearance. Gu holds a glass of milk and begins to drink it, and then she puts her skiing glasses on and starts to ski again. From 0:09 to 0:11, Gu restarts to ski from a high snowy slope and successfully performs spinning tricks. In the last 4 seconds, Gu's beautiful smiling face appears on the screen and then an advertising slogan for Mengniu comes out. The video is short but we can read more inner meaning from the perspective of visual, sound and verbal modes.

From the perspective of visual mode, confidence, courage and perseverance are the main spirits presented by Eileen Gu. In the beginning, we can see Gu jump from a high snowy slope and fall down. Here slope signifies challenges in life, and Gu confronts with difficulties. Facing problems, she does not give up, but restarts to ski. This time, she succeeds in performing freeskating perfectly, which is a symbol of success. After skiing from the slope, her smiling face shows her confidence and positive attitude towards life. Her smile brings happiness to everyone and

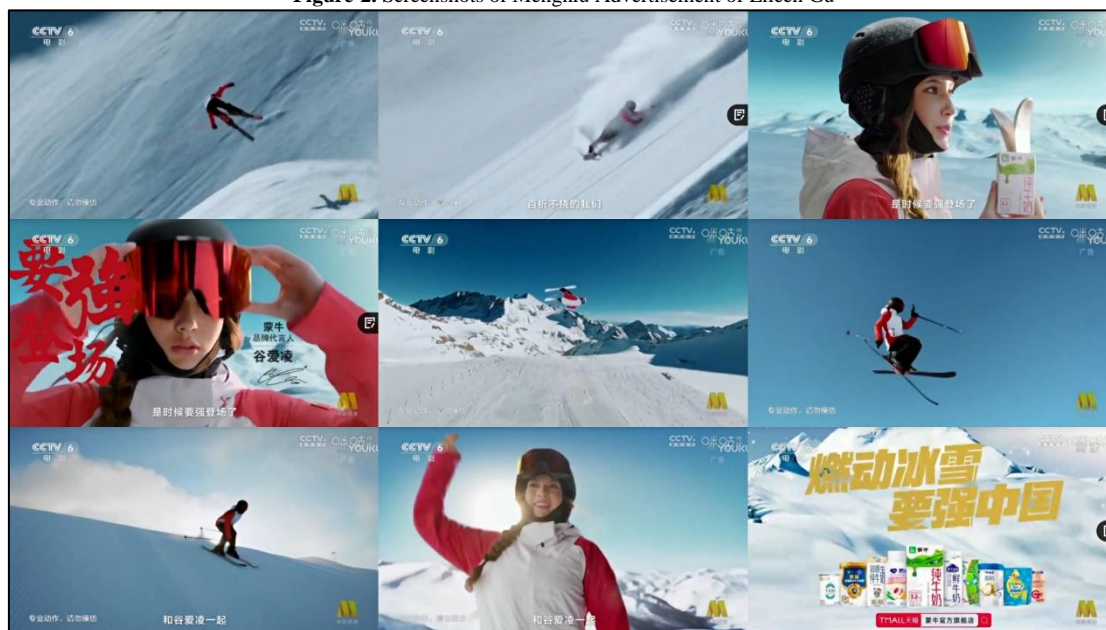
shows that there is no difficulty can hinder us as long as we do not give up. Secondly, the background in the video is snowy mountains and slopes, which are practice and competition field for Gu. Thus we can see it is a symbol of Gu's career. What's more, the suit which she is wearing is ski suit, which signifies her professionalization. Like Lang Ping's volleyball team, they all wear their sports suit. Sports symbolize health and good life style, wearing sports suit has the same meaning. Therefore, a positive women image has been fully presented by them. Last but not the least, support from the society can also be seen from this video. When Gu succeeds in skiing from the high slope, she is showing a beautiful smile. At this time, there is bright sunshine behind her. Sunshine can be seen as optimism of Gu, but is also a symbol of all support which cheers for Gu, such as her family, friends and the society. In conclusion, Gu is showing confidence, perseverance and professionalization when she skis with the support from the society.

From the viewpoint of verbal mode, indomitable and aggressive women image is portrayed in the ad. There are totally four sentences in the video, and every sentence conveys inner meaning. The first sentence is we are indomitable, which directly shows Gu's characteristic. What's more, "we" in the sentence is an inclusive "we", which means it is, not only refers to Eileen Gu, but also refers to the audience. We are as indomitable as Gu and never give up, which gives the audience especially girls a perseverant image and sets a good example. The second sentence is it is time to make a brilliant appearance, which shows women begin to show their talent in the society. It is a symbol of the awakening of women independence. Traditionally, woman is expected to be a good wife or mother in the home and take care of the family, and the social status of woman is relatively low. However, it has been changing with the development of the gender equality, especially in the 21st century. Thus woman like Eileen Gu has the opportunity to make her appearance in public and gains a lot of applause. The third sentence is together with Eileen Gu and the last one is China is striving for a better future. Here this slogan is calling on everyone to work with Gu, to make our country better, which is a symbol of strong enterprise. What's more, from Gu's public speech which she gives in many public platform we know she is always advocating that girls should help each other to prove we are as good as boys. Thus, this slogan also shares the same, meaning that is girls' cooperation. In short, we can see an indomitable, perseverant and independent woman image presented by Gu through verbal mode, as well as girls' cooperation spirit.

According to sound mode, the praise of the society and gender equality can be seen from the ad. First of all, like the background music in Lang Ping's team, the music used in this as is also encouraging and cheerful. It is like the applause and cheer-up of the audience. Gu's great success has been approved and praised by the society. What's more, the background ad slogan is read by a man and a man. The first two slogans are read by a woman and the last two are read by man. The company deliberately arranges it not only for the variety of gender but also for their awareness of gender equality. Gu's success shows that girls can do extreme sports as good as boys, and the society accepts this idea. During the Olympics games people notice women's power and want to show it to the public. Therefore, this ad by inviting Gu successfully makes this idea known to the public. In short, the praise of the society and gender equality is presented through sound mode, which indicates a positive women image.

In conclusion, women image presented by Gu is confident, indomitable, perseverant, independent and health. Gu herself is a successful woman and she is dedicated to advocating gender equality and girls' cooperation, which can be also seen from her milk ad. Besides her own positive image, we can also see the approving and praise of the audiences for her success through sound mode, as well as social awareness of gender equality.

Figure-2. Screenshots of Mengniu Advertisement of Eileen Gu



4. Conclusion

This paper is mainly about multimodal analysis of women image in milk advertisement, including the analysis of Bright Dairy advertisement of Chinese women volleyball team and the analysis of Mengniu advertisement of Eileen Gu. By applying multimodal method, the author analyzes the milk ads respectively to point out that the milk ads in the 21st present a positive women image. In the ads, women are portrayed as courageous, independent, indomitable and perseverant. There is a lot of commonness among these two spokespersons. First of all, they are both athletes and they are talented, perseverant, and hardworking. What's more, sports are thought to be the symbol of power, which was expected to be played well by men. However, there are women who can do as well as men or even better, which gives girls a lot of confidence and motivation to realize their own value in society. Secondly, the background music in these three ads is all encouraging and cheerful, which metaphorically means the approving and praise for women's success. From the above mentioned we can see the women image presented in the ads is complimentary and positive. By noticing this positive women image, we have more confidence and motivation to pursue our own dreams and make our life more meaningful.

In spite of all the efforts the author has made, it should admit that there still exist some shortcomings in the study. Firstly, although the multimodal theory has been employed, the lack of theoretical knowledge and research capacity of the author cause some subjective analysis. Secondly, the samples employed in the research are limited and the selection of ads is subjective. Thirdly, the research of multimodal method is still developing. Most of the analyses in this paper are made in the light of this theory, thus the findings are subjective in some way.

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