

# The influence of consumer culture on feminist consciousness in social media field

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**Abstract.** In the era of consumerism, the establishment of a robust consumer culture becomes crucial. Within the realm of consumerism, women's values are closely intertwined with their consumption patterns. The quality, quantity, and nature of women's consumption, as well as their consumption habits and preferences, significantly impact their value system. However, Women's Day is in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the name "Women's Day" is progressively associated with entertainment, commercialization, and even stigma, leading to its perception as a "neglected celebration." On the other hand, various merchants, particularly those in e-commerce, exploit the notion of "caring for women" as a marketing strategy, triggering a promotion frenzy that reinforces the strong link between consumption and feminism. To explore the relationship between the content of advertisements published by businesses on Women's Day using the Weibo platform and the impact of consumerism, this paper adopts consumerism theory and employs Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. Focusing on the content and format of advertisements on the Sina microblog platform during Women's Day, the study examines the effects of consumer culture on feminist consciousness within the realm of social media. The findings reveal that the pervasive influence of consumer culture and the commercialization of social media platforms catering to consumerism have shaped women's values and contributed to the erosion of humanism. This research holds significant academic and practical implications for understanding and transforming feminist consciousness and promoting women's independence and empowerment.

## 1. Introduction

International Women's Day was introduced to China in the 1920s. This day went hand in hand with the political aspirations of China to fight against imperialism and feudalism and to participate in the national liberation movement of the world revolution. Thus, it can be seen that International Women's Day entered China with solid political and revolutionary overtones, and the commemoration of Women's Day should embody feminist aspirations that cannot be ignored. Meanwhile, the influence of new media (microblogging) advertising, represented by the Internet, on women's culture is pervasive. The new media would be influenced by consumerist culture in constructing women's culture and promoting women's socio-cultural processes. However, what feminists never expected was that new media network operators have spied on unlimited business opportunities from women, and various propaganda and campaigning have made March 8 a day of consumption and entertainment.

Consumerist culture emerged in the 1930s and experienced rapid dissemination in Western capitalist countries following World War II. Today, it stands as a crucial component of Western bourgeois morality. Characterized by the unrestrained acquisition of goods and the pursuit of hedonism, consumerism represents a

value system and way of life centered around consumption for its own sake. This cultural phenomenon marks a departure from consumption driven by human needs and aimed at fostering human development, embodying an extreme perspective. However, consumerism also embodies a profound economic and socio-cultural phenomenon as societies transition from production-focused to consumption-oriented paradigms. The growing influence of social media is further amplifying the impact of consumerism, assuming an increasingly significant role in disseminating social events and shaping cultural trends.

This paper focuses on the influence of consumerist culture on feminist consciousness in the social media arena, focusing on the impact of commercial advertising on women through the use of the Women's Day content format on the microblogging platform Weibo. By analyzing the impact of consumerism, the author hopes to alert the female community to the potential influence of consumerist culture and provide some insights into feminist research on feminist consciousness in the social media arena. This paper will use critical discourse analysis and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to explore how feminist consciousness in the social media arena is influenced by consumer culture. How has consumer culture used social media to influence and change feminist consciousness? The study also explores the impact of

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consumer culture on feminist consciousness in the social media sphere to better understand and exploit the impact of commercial practices on women through the excessive marketing of Women's Day, without distorting the intention of the commemorative holiday.

## **2. Advertising and marketing approaches and features in the social media arena - the example of Weibo**

Social media platforms serve as virtual communities and online platforms where individuals can create, share, and exchange opinions, views, and experiences. What sets them apart from traditional mass media is the freedom and editorial power they provide to users, allowing them to curate their own reading and listening communities. Currently, social media encompasses various types, such as forum communities, social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, location check-ins, Q&A platforms, and WeChat. Among these, Weibo stands out as a prominent social media platform, particularly due to its real-time, on-site, and swift performance, surpassing many traditional media outlets.

Notably, numerous celebrities utilize Weibo as a platform to cultivate a significant presence in the digital realm. Moreover, Weibo boasts a wealth of high-quality original content, continuously attracting grassroots users and garnering substantial popularity. Given these reasons, this article focuses on Weibo as a case study to investigate advertising practices within this platform.

Weibo distinguishes itself from traditional one-way communication media by offering interactivity, enabling advertisers and target audiences to engage in reciprocal communication. This interactive nature facilitates the establishment and maintenance of favorable relationships between advertisers and their target audience, evoking emotional responses and fostering customer loyalty.

Furthermore, Weibo advertising showcases a distinct sense of creativity when compared to traditional advertising formats. It incorporates diverse formats, including text, video, and imagery, enhancing its appeal and acceptance among the audience. As a result, Weibo has emerged as the preferred advertising platform for numerous companies, providing an effective means to promote products and cultivate brand recognition.

In addition, the spontaneity of Weibo advertising has gained significant prominence in recent times. Weibo ad content has evolved to become increasingly captivating, capturing the attention of viewers and eliciting positive responses. In certain cases, these engaged audiences actively interact with the ads by retweeting, liking, or commenting, thereby amplifying the reach and effectiveness of Weibo ad dissemination.

## **3. The impact of Weibo advertising on women's awareness through Women's Day marketing**

The annual "Women's Day" is a holiday for women compatriots, but businesses have packaged it as a variety

of marketing gimmicks, "Queen's Day", "Goddess Day", and "Princess Day". Although all these appellations are ways to appreciate the day for women, It is indeed a betrayal and derogatory to the original intention of Women's Day.

### **3.1. The Commercialization and Gender Biases Surrounding Women's Day**

First, businesses promote Women's Day through marketing means to sell goods. Before the festival comes, major businesses will launch all kinds of Women's Day promotions, limited gift boxes and more. Some advertisements on Weibo use the image and rhetoric of women as selling points and hype, creating shopping pressure and a gratuitous burden for female consumers.

Second, festival consumption-oriented production gender bias. In order to meet the needs of female consumers, some businesses have a wider commodity market for women and produce a large number of expensive and colored products that are not equivalent to men and women. This practice can be likened to the imposition of a gender-based price disparity commonly referred to as the "pink tax." "And this term is proposed by Wang Luyao[1] in "Her subject matter", she believes that the market has "her subject matter" film and television works, and the women in the works are weak and cannot withstand scrutiny, and the surface thinks that the status of women is the purpose, but the plot is conventional and the object of pleasing deviates from the women themselves. Such discriminatory pricing not only perpetuates entrenched gender stereotypes within society but also manifests clear instances of gender discrimination.

The existence of these problems makes Women's Day face the risk of losing its original meaning and brings new challenges to improving women's social status.

### **3.2. Labeling Women: A Critical Examination of Women's Day Advertising**

In the realm of feminist advertising, the emphasis lies in removing labels rather than imposing new ones. On March 8, the Snail Rice Noodles brand, HaoHuanluo, sparked a heated debate among netizens with their Weibo article titled "Women, What's the smell?" Despite its intention to convey a positive message, this headline inadvertently stepped into sensitive territory for most individuals by criticizing females. Speaking at the celebration in the General Assembly Hall [2] at UN headquarters in New York, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said gender inequality is one of the great injustices of our time and the greatest human rights challenge we face.

Mostly, Women's Day marketing often falls into two extremes: either leveraging copy and content to tap into a particularly favorable trend or attempting to resonate with women but ultimately falling short. Businesses and brands have devised two approaches to "please" their audience. The first approach involves adopting the "good marriage style" and employing the "man-slaying color" to appeal to

women seeking to captivate the opposite sex through their own allure. Yuan Shaofeng[3] has explored the influence of mate attraction goals on women's conspicuous consumption tendency. Women who are motivated by mate attraction goals will conspicuously consume certain goods or services out of the need to enhance beauty and attractiveness. The second approach revolves around promoting the concepts of "be your own queen" and "treat yourself after work," targeting independent women influenced by feminist ideals.

Given the rapid dissemination and interactivity of social media platforms like Weibo, advertisers need to carefully navigate their advertising and marketing strategies and attitudes toward women. Missteps or flippant expressions can potentially lead to backlash and negative publicity. By carefully considering the implications of their messaging on Weibo and avoiding the reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes, businesses and brands can engage in feminist advertising that resonates with their audience and fosters positive societal change.

### 3.3. Younger and older women from biases

People's pursuit of beauty and businesses' marketing have 'achieved' each other, successfully encoding Women's Day as an important ritual for others to focus on women and women to focus on themselves. In the process, businesses profit from the festival and women consumers enjoys the commercial pandering and finding deals and discounts, making it seem like a win-win situation. However, the problem is that just like "the customer is God", the purchasing power is the focus of the business. The concept of "queens" and "goddesses" is reserved only for young women with the financial means to indulge in luxury. In contrast, older, less privileged, and non-materialistic women, whom commercial forces have marginalized, face an uncertain future. What will be the fate of these women who have been stripped of their worth by commercialism?

Although the term "woman" is used in the dictionary to refer to all women over the age of 14. In a narrower sense, however, 'woman' does mean married with children, and the perception of 'women' as old, sexually unattractive, uneducated and of low social status has been reinforced by the popularity of 'Girls' Day' and 'Goddess Day'. "The popularity of 'Girls' Day' and 'Goddess Day' has further increased the stigmatisation of 'women' and 'Women's Day'. Older women tend to appear only in ads that represent negative stereotypes of old age, such as incontinence pads, chair lifts and hearing AIDS. On Women's Day, most of the advertisements are made by young women, and there are many young female consumers. Even the advertisements, rather than just for Weibo users, of Yili and Mengniu milk powder for middle-aged and elderly people are made from the perspective of young women, asking young women to buy them for their mothers. As a result, young women become the group that attracts much attention on women's Day, while middle-aged and elderly women are ignored. Jiang Wen[4] said in "Looking at the World" that the word

"women" has been stigmatized for a long time, and seems to have attributes such as "middle-aged" and "married", while "38" is also a slightly derogatory adjective.

Especially when it comes to social media platforms like Weibo, which predominantly attract a younger user base, the advertising suppliers and brands often default to assuming that all user demographics are young and possess purchasing power. As a result, on occasions like Women's Day, older women become a neglected group, abandoned by capital. Even though they may indeed possess purchasing power and decision-making abilities, the capital entities fail to adjust their product strategies or cater specifically to the target users, i.e., older women.

### 3.4. Reduction to "symbols" under the male gaze

The German philosopher Cassirer[5], in his work *On Man*, argues at a high level that the fundamental difference between man and other animals is that man is a symbolic animal that can consciously create a complex world or system of symbols through language. Cassirer divides language into two categories, 'emotional' and 'propositional', arguing that the former may have its origins in the hissing of animals, while the latter is the naming of objects, which is unique to humans and constitutes the fundamental dividing line between humans and other animals. "Women" and "goddesses" belong to the latter category, as a status symbol distinguishing them from social groups. Goddess worship[6] and female religious life in Roman classical period reveal the close relationship between goddess worship and female religious life. However, as time passed, language was fine-tuned or drastically changed, and "women" were stigmatised, while "goddesses" became more and more sacred. Today, is the 'goddess' really as desirable as she appears to be in her glamorous guise?

With the advent of modernity, rationality and civilisation have become the dominant consciousness of society, and the whole of traditional culture, including religious culture, has been overshadowed by ignorance, backwardness and feudal superstition, and the 'goddess' is naturally not immune to this. From deification to demythologisation, the "goddess" in the human community needs to be presented in a more masculine way and is in fact still under the gaze of men. Today, with the proliferation of images, the image of the 'goddess' expected by men often appears in various guises in advertisements, magazine covers, films and television productions.

On March 7, a day before women's Day, Hurenshenbao posted a series of articles on its official Weibo account, including "Actually women practice yoga for men" and "Where men stop looking at women first in summer", along with vulgar pornographic pictures. Once released, it caused "serious discomfort" among netizens. Advertisements like Huren Shenbao, designed to catch the male gaze, often feature images of women associated with soft porn.

In addition, the influential American liberal feminist Betty Friedan [7], in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), debunked the myth that women were content with the

traditional role of the good wife and mother, deconstructing and deconstructing the domestic role of women. In *The Feminine Mystery* (1963), Friedan debunks the myth that women are satisfied with their traditional role as wives and mothers and deconstructs and criticises the domestic role of women. In one advertisement, a young mother returns from work to see her daughter lying asleep on the sofa with a note saying: "Mum, I can help you with your work now". It is clear that the idea of "the man is the master, and the woman is the master" has been deeply engraved in the young girl's mind. This ideal image was created by a patriarchal culture, but for women it was a myth. The traditional responsibility of the mother to care for her children is culturally determined, not a biological necessity. The role of wife and mother limits the development of the female personality and denies them the opportunity to participate in 'creative work' outside the home, with the result that the female intellect is not fully developed.

### **3.5. Deviating from the most precious modern and historical values of Women's Day and misleading women's values**

Women's Day is gradually losing its original meaning amidst the consumer frenzy created by capital. For most women, the only meaning of the festival is to set the alarm for March 8, to make the purchase, pay the final payment and go on a spending spree. "Girls' Day" and "Goddess Day" have dismantled the original seriousness of Women's Day, departing from its "most precious modern and historical values" with a single aesthetic and consumerism. AXE, an American brand of men's deodorant, was reviled for an affirmative action advert it created. In the AD AXE took the initiative to speak up for women and to "break gender bias". At first glance, there's nothing wrong with it. However, why did AXE get such a bad rap? The reason is that AXE has so many priors! Wang Wei[8] once wrote in "Commercial Flattery of the Goddess Festival", which to a large extent removed or deviated from the most precious modern and historical value of "Women's Day"

AXE had previously produced too many ads objectifying women in an effort to stimulate consumption, resulting in low favorability ratings for the brand among the public. Even when AXE began speaking out for women, it was seen as tapping into a feminist advertising buzz whose brand values didn't truly embrace equality for women. Now the women's Day is biased by the merchants to alienation, said what goddess festival, early put the meaning of the women's Day to the cloud nine, in order to make money, what festival can be turned into shopping to send gifts, who still remember the meaning of the women's day. However, it is encouraging to note that, along with the awakening of women's consciousness and the development of feminism, more and more women are becoming wary of the "alienation of Women's Day and the consumption of feminism by consumerism.

## **4. The awakening of female consciousness under the influence of consumerism culture**

Instead of showing sincerity and understanding towards women, such a marketing tactic may deepen societal stereotypes and discrimination against women. Nor does it help women to increase their self-awareness and self-confidence; instead, it may lead them to pursue materialism and vanity. Nor does it promote equality and cooperation between men and women; instead, it may create a divide and antagonism between men and women. In such a complex environment, to be a woman who does not even know what she really stands for and is only defined by various definitions is really to be in chaos without knowing it.

### **4.1. The State's Call for Social Attention**

The state needs to call on society to take this issue seriously and protect the holiday's original meaning, making it an important holiday to commemorate women's fight for equal rights and respect for women's rights. As CCTV (short for China Central Television, is the national television station of the People's Republic of China) wrote for Women's Day. The vast world, there should be stretch women, for her "unbound lighten the burden", let her fly freely. The importance of women's power is mentioned in the Bible[9], and the importance of women's role can be seen in the course of human history.

### **4.2. Emphasizing Copy Presentation in Social Media**

Copywriting is the soul of marketing. A copy that hits the audience's pain points can resonate with more people and raise the level of marketing. Moreover, there are many brands that have flopped on their copy. Even Chanel, which has been popular for over a century because of its female founder, used its copy to flip its Women's Day marketing on Women's Day 2020. On the day of Women's Day, a spokesperson published a marketing copy on the Internet. The content of the copy is probably "girls who can't wear perfume have no future". This sentence seems to be nothing wrong at first glance, but after reading it for a long time, it will be found something wrong. In fact, this sentence is ambiguous; what is called cannot use perfume girls have no future? Isn't it allowed for some girls not to like perfume? Also, perfume is not only for women; this sentence is more or less misleading factors.

### **4.3. Choose more middle-aged and older women's positive brand endorsement**

Miu Miu has always been targeting girls, and its product style is younger than other luxury brands. MiuMiu broke through the traditional definition of "girly feeling" by collaborating with Wu Yanshu on Women's Day and won praise from many netizens. Although Grandma's age is not the main audience of the brand, it has succeeded in



bringing goods to young people. Just like Zheng Yonghui [10] said, three points of age and seven points of wear, highlighting the charm of middle-aged and elderly women

Cooperation with middle-aged and elderly artists can be regarded as the reverse solution to the problem of brand rejuvenation strategy. Young people are not necessarily needed to find endorsements and promote goods. For example, the photos of Wu Yanshu's grandma trigger a wonderful chemical reaction with their unique personal temperament and products, showing the middle-aged and older women's temperament and highlighting the brand connotation, quietly winning over the hearts of young people.

#### **4.4. Fostering a Positive Consumer Philosophy and Self-Esteem among Women**

Women consumers should choose products that are distinctive, combine multiple textures, have a distinctive personality from their own values, hoping to reflect on themselves, express their personality and realise their self-worth in consumption.

Women are not only beautiful and gentle, but also resilient and diverse. Women can also be generous and sunny; they can also have freedom and can choose their own lives freely. No one is born to be defined. Like Jo in *Little Women*, women all have infinite possibilities.

#### **5. Conclusion**

With the rise of consumerism, the aesthetic value of the human body has been highly valued. As a result, in order to satisfy the desire of women to become "independent women of the new age", public consumer media and commercial organisations, driven by coarse and capital interests, took advantage of Women's Day to embed feminist symbolic elements into the corresponding cultural commodities, thus packaging them into beautiful consumer products to please the corresponding consumer audience. This is the marketing strategy of both online bloggers and the many lifestyle-related self-publishers. Women's pursuit of self is activated, and although women look to consumption to prove their social existence and status and to build their identity, the advertising campaigns made by businesses on Weibo in the context of Women's Day have misdirected women's consciousness and led to a loss of self.

The innate commercial character of social media dictates a philosophy in line with consumer culture and with commercial factors such as advertising profitability. Social media advertising has an impact on the perception, philosophy and behaviour of the female population; it is weakening of the functionality of the media subject and causes a loss of the humanistic spirit of society. The lack of rationality, spiritual cohesion and the confusion of cultural values make it impossible to fight for equality for women.

In general, advertising is a vane of consumer culture. The gendered images in advertising are a reproduction of modern female ideology. On Weibo Women's Day, the

image of women in advertising is on the one hand a reflection of traditional ideas and the ideology of male domination; on the other hand, this stereotype of women does not change in time with the changes in feminist consciousness and changing ideas. The key lies in correcting the direction of development. In conclusion, the new era of social media must prioritize cultivating a consumer culture that aligns with its values. This includes addressing the prevalent issue of derogatory and discriminatory depictions of women in advertisements. By harnessing the power of advertisements, social media platforms can effectively achieve both economic and social benefits, ultimately contributing to the advancement of societal civilization. Moreover, the mission of fostering a correct consumer philosophy should be emphasized, leading to creating cultural products better suited for social progress. Through these efforts, promoting women's spiritual development, enhancing consumer literacy, and building a more inclusive and enlightened society is possible.

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