

The Influence of the Image of "Strong Female Lead" on Audience Consumption Behavior: The Cross-Border Analysis from Role Shaping to Marketing

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Abstract: In recent years, the image of the "strong female lead", a female character constantly appearing in film and television, usually refers to the role setting with an independent spirit, brave wisdom, and blooming brilliance in a certain field. They have a strong personality charm, writing a new image of contemporary women. This image reflects the multi-dimensional and diversified characteristics of modern women and also affects the audience's consumption behavior and the development of the film and television market. This paper studies from the perspectives of feminism, consumerism, and emotional psychology, Taking *Story of Yanxi Strategy* as a reference case, this paper analyzes the interaction mechanism between role-shaping, marketing, and audience consumption behavior, and explores the relationship between role-shaping and marketing across the boundary. It aims to reveal the circular interaction between film and television works and marketing, highlights the multi-faceted nature of women embodied in the role shaping of the "strong female lead" image in film and television, and also shows great commercial potential in marketing, driving changes in consumer behavior and markets.

1 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on contemporary society with the continuous development of social politics, economy, and culture, and the image of the "strong female lead" in film and television has become one of the hot topics discussed by the audience. By shaping female characters with an independent spirit, the film and television works show the image of a "strong female lead" which is different from the traditional "saying good words, doing good deeds and keeping good intentions". The breakthrough in the role image is more in line with the change in women's social status and role image during the social and cultural transformation and improves the female audience's identification with the role.

On the other hand, with the increase of female authors and the improvement of social status, women's subjective consciousness is constantly enhanced (Chen and Chen, 2019). Film and television creation has focused on women themselves and has paid more attention to the growth of women, the main female drama has gradually become the mainstream. The rich plot setting and dramatic performance arouse the emotional resonance of the female audience and

meet the psychological needs of the female audience for independent and self-reliant characters. The market is to the "strong female lead" image as a selling point to attract more audiences for the role of consumption. These "strong female lead" images affect the audience's value consumption and behavior choice to a certain extent.

Therefore, this study mainly focuses on two aspects of research, "How does the image of the "strong female lead" in film and television work affect the audience's consumption behavior through role shaping?" and "What is the relationship between character image and brand marketing?". This paper uses the case study method to select the *Story of Yanxi Strategy* as a case study. Based on the search and reading of relevant materials and literature, this paper analyzes the audience's core and peripheral behavioral motivations for consumption because of roles. The final goal is to construct the theory of market consumption driven by role shaping from three aspects: the interaction between role shaping and marketing, the path analysis from role shaping to consumption transformation, and how film and television characters affect consumption behavior through emotional resonance and cultural identity.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

With the frequent release of a large number of film and television "strong female lead" works, the image of "strong female lead" has caused extensive discussion inside and outside the industry. By collecting and sorting out the relevant materials of the research on the image of the "strong female lead" in film and television in recent years, the author finds that the research on the image of the "strong female lead" in film and television mostly focuses on the female image itself, and studies the construction of the role image from the perspective of feminism through the interpretation of female consciousness (Xu, 2020). And the role image problem in the context of consumerism (Xu, 2018). This paper analyzes the social value and research value brought by the image of a "great heroine" from the perspective of female subjects.

Secondly, based on the image of the "strong female lead", existing studies analyze the impact of role shaping on the audience's emotions and consumption behavior. The existence and development of film and television character creation can reflect the audience's potential psychological and emotional needs, and the audience can obtain emotional identification, vent their emotions, and seek emotional resonance from the experience of the characters (Lei and Ye, 2022). Role shaping can also stimulate the audience's emotional types at different levels. According to Alvin Carl Plantinga's "Cognitive-perceptual Approach", it can be known that a certain type of role image often enters the audience's consciousness automatically and unconsciously and has an impact on the audience's emotions (Lu, 2020). Additionally, the emotion driven by the image of the "strong female lead" can often stimulate the audience's invisible desire for consumption. Based on analyzing the short-term and long-term effects of film and television roles on consumer behavior, this paper combines Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to realize the problem of satisfying one's desire layer by layer (Ye, 2007).

Thirdly, with the gradual commercialization trend of film and television creation, it is increasingly clear that film and television works can meet the needs and imaginations of audiences as consumers by shaping roles. Many plays cater to the concept of consumerism through the east wind of the "strong female lead" type characters, packaging the characters into commodities to use and spread, so that "strong female lead" plays become a symbol of cultural consumption (Zheng, 2018).

From the above analysis, it can be seen that in the existing research, there is a lack of systematic exploration of the actual impact of the image of "big woman" on marketing. This paper will study this problem based on previous research.

3 FILM AND TELEVISION "BIG GIRL" AND MARKETING

Story of Yanxi Strategy is a palace drama released in 2018, which was set during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty and followed the growth of the palace lady Wei Yingluo. The success of this drama lies not only in the excellent costume design but also in the successful creation of the "strong female lead" image represented by Wei Yingluo. This "strong female lead" image also caters to the demand orientation of the current society and forms a virtuous interaction cycle with consumers through positive marketing strategies, which helps the development of the film and television consumption market.

3.1 Role Shaping

As the heroine, Wei Yingluo embodies the complexity and depth of the role. First of all, Wei Yingluo is not a conventional palace girl, she pursues justice and freedom, dares to challenge authority, and highlights the wisdom and courage of the "strong female lead" image to survive in the patriarchal society and power struggle. Secondly, in the process of growing up, Wei Yingluo gradually realizes her weakness and gradually establishes the value direction of exploring the meaning of life. These developments add depth to the character, making her more multidimensional and allowing the audience to resonate with her growth trajectory. Third, Wei Yingluo's two complex emotional experiences show fuller of the authenticity of the role. She balances emotion, power, and morality, showing the image of external beauty and inner stability of the character, so that the audience is full of expectations for the development of the character.

3.2 Marketing

In terms of marketing, by showing the complex emotional relationship between the characters and the political struggles of the court, the *Story of Yanxi Strategy* attracted a large number of audiences who liked the historical drama of the court. The heroine Wei Yingluo's tenacious and intelligent personality

charm can inspire the audience, especially young females' audience's emotional resonance.

Story of Yanxi Strategy fully utilizes modern social media and major marketing platforms to accurately target audiences, play character specials and promotional videos to expand its reach, and some popular lines even dominate the charts and hot searches, with high popularity. At the same time, the costumes of the characters in the drama are exquisite and restore history, and the color scheme of the screen abandons the bold use of Morandi color scheme, which has been imitated and sought after by the audience. These exquisite clothing designs and color combinations have attracted the attention of businesses, who have collaborated with the production team to launch related derivative products, which have been launched in shopping malls and offline stores, thus triggering a consumer boom.

In addition, because Wei Yingluo shows the image of authority is neither serval nor overbearing, and the majority of the audience's recognition of female independence, the audience began to buy products related to the show of female power. Merchants seize this opportunity to promote the independent spirit of women and launch related high-end products to attract consumers' purchases. Through precise control of the market and flexible marketing strategies, *Story of Yanxi Strategy* combines character images with the consumer market, bringing new consumer opportunities.

3.3 Consumer Reaction

After the broadcast of *Story of Yanxi Strategy*, the audience had heated discussions on social media about the spirit of independence and resistance embodied in the characters of Wei Yingluo, Empress Fuchai, and Concubine. They expressed their opinions through apps such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu, and some viewers shared wonderful clips to express their love. During the official Weibo broadcast, the total number of reads was nearly 800 million, the total interaction volume was over 1.6 million, comments, and the number of comments and likes reached 52.22 million. The #Story of Yanxi Strategy# topic has been read 11.9 billion, discussed 8.57 million, consistently occupying the top spot on the overall chart in the hour list, and TV drama chart. Tiktok Micro-vision has generated 127 hot search words for Tiktok, which have been listed over 230 times; TikTok *Story of Yanxi Strategy* dynamic stickers are also popular in Vietnam.

The tenacious image portrayed by Wei Yingluo in the drama has been widely recognized by female

audiences, generating strong emotional resonance. Wei Yingluo is no longer just a character image but has become a symbol of female independence and autonomy, thus establishing a long-term emotional connection between the audience, the work, and the characters. With the popularity of *Story of Yanxi Strategy*, audiences not only feel emotional needs but also have a strong willingness to purchase products related to the series or characters, which proves the leading role of character images in the market and promotes the development of consumption.

4 CASE ANALYSIS

The *Story of Yanxi Strategy* effectively combines role image with marketing, successfully achieving a virtuous cycle between emotional resonance and consumption motivation, role image and brand linkage, cultural symbols, and long-term consumption.

4.1 Emotional Identification and Consumption Motivation

Emotional identification refers to the process in which the audience evokes emotional resonance through the emotions experienced by the character, such as joy, anger, sadness, and happiness. The audience projects their emotions onto the character, resulting in psychological and emotional identification. The relationship established between the "Wei Yingluo" portrayed in the *Story of Yanxi Strategy* and the audience is based on this theoretical foundation.

The image of the "strong female lead" portrayed in the *Story of Yanxi Strategy* has a strong spiritual core. Wei Yingluo grew from an ordinary palace maid to a female image symbolizing the power center of the harem. *Story of Yanxi Strategy* builds Wei Yingluo's growth trajectory by showcasing her emotional experiences in family, love, and friendship. Audiences, especially female viewers, see a reflection of their growth in her experiences, resonating emotionally with the character. The audience is not only a spectator of Wei Yingluo's growth, but also a witness of her difficulties and pain. The empathetic emotional investment also enhances the audience's motivation to consume for the character. Following the series' airing, sales of products associated with the characters—such as daily necessities and cosmetics—surged. Viewers hoped to distance themselves from the characters and express their emotions by purchasing products related to the series.

The brand successfully transformed from character-driven content to market-driven commercialization.

4.2 Role Image and Brand Linkage

Wei Yingluo is not only a symbol of female independence but also a combination of traditional female tenderness and modern female wisdom. The complexity and versatility of the characters satisfy the audience's different emotional experiences. Emotional communication refers to the interpersonal and group interactions that people engage in based on certain contexts and mechanisms, to achieve the sharing of emotions and meanings (Jiang and He, 2016). The script implants resilient and independent female characters into people's hearts, and the brand uses emotional identification as a communication bridge to form an interactive model, deepening the linkage upgrade from character image to brand marketing.

The combination of character image and brand linkage is not only a continuation of character image but also injects new vitality into brand development. Firstly, some clothing brands have launched new Chinese style clothing, the same style of Yingluo earrings, and the same style of Fucha Empress bracelet based on the clothing in *Story of Yanxi Strategy* as design samples. Secondly, the distinctive makeup provides an opportunity for video special effects. For example, the Tiktok platform launched the *Story of Yanxi Strategy* role with the same makeup shooting and online star interaction function; Camera apps such as Tian Tian P Tu and B612 have also launched one click cross dressing or the same filter. Tian Tian P Tu's *Story of Yanxi Strategy* "My Stills" H5 exposure has reached 200 million+, with over 40 million users participating in face changing. Customized face changing materials and pendant usage has exceeded 25 million users; The B612 camera used 3288W filter stickers in 20 days, and the total exposure of stickers and screen opening in 20 days reached 125 million. Thirdly, some gaming platforms have seized the popularity of the IP of *Story of Yanxi Strategy* and launched the same mobile and board games online, such as "Flowers Like Brocade" and *Story of Yanxi Strategy* to jointly launch cross dressing and palace survival games. Fourthly, the well crafted cuisine in *Story of Yanxi Strategy* has also allowed some catering brands to seize business opportunities. Liangpinpuzi and *Story of Yanxi Strategy* jointly created the "Imperial Afternoon Tea" and launched a series of nut gift boxes that can express love words; Pizzahut China launched the Zhixin Moonshot Palace Reunion Gift Box to witness

the beauty of ending the reunion with "moon cakes in the palace". Fifthly, with the popularity of "Yanxi Raiders", the novel of the same name has been uploaded to iQiyi Literature, realizing the reverse output of literature from film and television IP. At the same time, the audio book radio drama of the same name based on the original script has been launched on various application platforms such as Palm Reading, Penguin FM, Kuwo Music, etc. The official radio broadcast volume of Kuwo Music has reached over 240W.

The cooperation between characters and brands not only combines the spiritual traits of the characters themselves with the brand value, but also promotes product sales through emotional connections, deepens the relationship between characters and brands, and provides a reference for the development of the market.

4.3 Cultural Symbols and Long-Term Consumption

Consumption is a social and cultural process that is closely linked to culture (He and Liu, 2013). With the popularity of *Story of Yanxi Strategy*, it is no longer just a simple film and television work but has gradually evolved into a cultural symbol. The exquisite costumes and thoughtful detail design in the drama serve as carriers of cultural symbols, continuously satisfying people's consumption desires. The image of the "strong female lead" portrayed in the drama continues to influence the audience's consumption behavior as a concrete manifestation of this cultural symbol.

Firstly, the costumes of the characters in *Story of Yanxi Strategy* are exquisite, referencing various historical materials and ancient paintings. From willow leaf eyebrows and red lip makeup to clothing designs such as "one ear, three pincers" and "pressed collar", as well as the display of scene props, the historical style is maximally restored. Secondly, the intangible cultural heritage represented by Nanjing velvet flowers, Guangdong fragrant cloud gauze, and Yu Jin striking iron flowers presented in the drama has also revitalized traditional culture. The traditional culture and craftsmanship presented in the drama not only attract the audience's interest in watching but also bear the mission and responsibility of inheriting traditional culture. Incorporating traditional culture into film and television works provides audiences with opportunities and platforms to understand and immerse themselves in traditional culture.

The exquisite design in the drama gives the TV series a rich sense of texture and a palace atmosphere

with a strong traditional Chinese flavor, which not only deepens Chinese audiences' recognition of traditional culture but also deepens overseas audiences' understanding of Chinese culture.

The TV drama *Story of Yanxi Strategy* has not only been popular in mainland China, but also spread to Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas regions. The TVB finale has set a record for the highest ratings of mainland dramas in Hong Kong; the YouTube single episode has nearly one million views; Overseas broadcasting covers new media platforms in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Australia, and other regions. The successful broadcast of this drama has spread traditional Chinese culture represented by intangible cultural heritage to China and other countries around the world, presenting the excellent cultural heritage of the Chinese nation to the world and letting the world experience the refinement and excellence of Chinese culture. It also proves that only by adhering to our own national culture and aligning with world values can we create high-quality content that truly satisfies audiences at home and abroad (Wang, 2020). These traditional crafts not only showcase the superb skills and persistence of great country craftsmen but also demonstrate China's cultural confidence to the world, attracting a large number of foreign tourists to come to China for tourism, enjoying the beautiful scenery of China, tasting Chinese cuisine, understanding Chinese history, experiencing the charm of Chinese culture and promoting cultural exchange and dissemination.

5 THEORETICAL REFINEMENT

5.1 Emotional Resonance Mechanism

With the process of character development, the three-dimensional and multi-faceted features presented by the character establish emotional connections with the audience. The audience experiences complex emotions such as happiness and pain through the character's experiences, which generate deep emotional resonance. The audience will identify with the value orientation conveyed by the character and seek a sense of belonging emotionally.

5.2 Brand Linkage Mechanism

A successful character will drive a wave of consumption, and the linkage between clothing, catering brands, and character images not only spreads the drama characters but also increases the market influence and attractiveness of the linked

brand to consumers, meeting their shopping needs and achieving the short-term consumption needs of the audience.

Brands cater to the resonance psychology of the audience and stimulate their consumption expectations. Brands are no longer focused solely on dramas; they have started addressing the broader needs of female consumers. By collaborating with industries such as jewelry, fashion, skincare, health, and home goods, brands expand consumption pathways, launch derivative products, and amplify the consumption influence of characters. This strategy shifts the audience's consumption behavior from film and TV-related products to a wider range of everyday items, fostering long-term engagement. The sharing of resources and complementary advantages between the main female drama and its derivatives, with the user experience of the audience as the center, jointly create high-quality personalized services for the audience. While maintaining their respective brand characteristics, the two parties leverage each other for cross-border marketing, enabling audiences to have a favorable impression of the main female drama and its derivatives while receiving high-quality services, thereby achieving market and profit maximization through cross-border cooperation between both parties (Li, 2020).

5.3 The Dissemination Mechanism of Cultural Symbols

The successful portrayal of a character often depends on the influence of the current social and cultural environment. The image of the "big female lead" portrayed in this drama is in line with the values of female independence and empowerment promoted in contemporary society. With the continuous dissemination of character images, the image of the "strong female lead" has gradually become a cultural symbol, symbolizing the spiritual value of women seeking self-worth. Consumers' adherence to this cultural symbol also promotes the emergence of consumer behavior.

Simultaneously, in the process of character development, in addition to the internal personality traits that attract the audience's attention, the external expression and image of the character's intentions will also have an impact on the consumer market. The drama embeds Chinese cultural texts into popular culture and universal values through cultural blending (Zhang et al., 2020). The integration of traditional culture and character images has promoted the dissemination of traditional culture. With the gradual expansion of the dissemination scope, these character

images integrated with traditional culture have become symbols of national culture and have gone global. With the support of traditional culture, more and more brands have begun to promote traditional culture, and more and more types of characters have been shaped to undertake the responsibility of disseminating culture. This has also established a sustainable strategy for the circular development of roles, brands, and culture.

6 CONCLUSION

This study is based on the analysis of the case of *Story of Yanxi Strategy*, exploring the interactive path between film and television character shaping and marketing, breaking through the boundaries of disciplines, combining cultural research, marketing research, and consumer behavior research, deepening the relationship between audience emotions and consumer behavior, broadening the transformation and integration forms of character shaping and marketing, and revealing the cultural value of character images.

However, due to the limited sample selection, it is unable to fully showcase the diverse perspectives and consumption behaviors of audiences from different cultural backgrounds, ages, and genders, resulting in one sidedness. In the future, cross-cultural and multi-dimensional research on the characteristics of audience consumption behavior can make up for this deficiency. However, film and television creation and audience psychology are constantly changing, and this article ignores the dynamic relationship between the image of the "strong female lead" and the market in the context of social development and changes. Based on the above analysis, this study cross disciplinary analyzes the relationship between role shaping and marketing, which not only provides a new perspective for the study of consumerism behavior, but also provides a practical reference for brands to better utilize role images and highlights the positive impact of role images on social and cultural communication.

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