How Does the Gender of Spokesperson Affect the Audience’s Perception

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ABSTRACT

Spokesperson has become an important communication strategy of modern marketing. How does the gender of spokesperson affect the audience’s perception? To address this problem, a mixed experiment was designed: 2 (gender of audience) × 2 (gender of spokesperson) × 3 (Product type). The results show that female have homosexual bias on spokesperson, and product types have a moderating effect on this deviation; male have no homosexual bias on spokesperson, and they tend to recognize heterosexual spokesperson firstly. This study supports the conclusion that women tend to relational processing, while men tend to item-specific processing.

INTRODUCTION

Spokesperson has become an important communication strategy in modern marketing\(^1\). There are varies of factors that can influence the effect of spokesperson, gender is one of them. The traditional view is that audiences tend to pay attention to the heterosexual spokesperson. Caballero and Lumpkin found that audience had better attitude towards advertising which endorse heterosexual, and more willing to buy the products of heterosexual endorsement\(^2\). Dudley studied advertising of sex appeal, found the law that "opposites attract"\(^3\). However, more and more research showed that audience tended to pay more attention to the same-gender. By testing the characters’ face recognition rate between male and female subjects, Lewin and Herlitz found strong homosexual bias effects for women\(^4\). Wright and Sladden found that ‘homosexual bias effects’ also existed among man\(^5\). Whipple and McManamon found the type of product moderate this effect, that is spokesperson’s gender has great impact on female product ads, but the impact on male product ads is not significant, and have no impact on neutral product ads\(^6\). How does the gender of spokesperson affect the audience’s perception and whether the type of product moderate this effect are the key research problem in this study.

Eye tracker is an instrument which could monitor audience’s eyeballs’ movements, and it is particularly suitable for researching consumer cognitive
responses during processing advertising messages. Eye-tracking technology would be adopted to explore the audience perception differences of different gender spokesperson.

METHOD

Participants

There were 90 participants (38 male and 52 female), all were college students, aged 16-25 years. All subjects’ uncorrected visual acuity or corrected visual acuity were normal, no color blindness and other eye diseases. None of them had participated in any relevant experiment before. After the experiment, the data with low sampling rate and the abnormal data which over-passed 3 standard deviations were excluded leaving 54 samples (27 each).

Instrument

The instrument was a Tobii T60 eye tracker (17 inch TFT monitor, 1,280×1,024 pixel resolution) and Tobii Studio Version 3.3.0. (Tobii Technology AB, Danderyd, Sweden).

Materials and Procedure

There were eight experimental materials, including two practicing materials, six formal experiment materials. Formal materials were divided into three groups: male commodity group, female commodity group and neutral commodity group, each group had two pictures. We selected the following three groups of commodities: razors and male facial cleanser, cream foundation and handbags, toothpaste and beverages. These commodity patterns were obtained from internet.

Each subject was tested individually. Experiment procedure saw figure 1.

Step1: Pre-prepared. Subjects were seated, then explaining the requirements and processes of experiment to them. In the end, adjusting their posture and distance from the screen to head;

Step 2: Eye-movement calibration. Using five-point positioning method calibrates the subjects’ eye-movement. After calibrated, Subjects were asked to try to keep the head and the body still during watching the photos;

Step 3: Formal experiment. After finished watching the practice material and were familiar with the experimental process, formal experiment photos began. Subjects could control the view time of every photo. Subjects changed the photo by clicking the mouse.

Step 4: After watching, the screen showed "the experiment is over, thank you for your participation”. Then each participate were thanked, debriefed and dismissed.
RESULTS

Area of interest (AOI) means a particular region that provided to Subjects by experimenter, its location and extent can be set in advance. Two types of eye-tracking data of each AOI were chose for further analysis. Time to First Fixation refers to the time from starting to the first time glazing at the AOI. If this time is shorter, that indicating subjects note AOI more easily. Total Fixation Duration is the total time the subjects watched AOI. If this time is longer, that indicating Subjects had more interested in AOI. Fixation duration is usually regarded as the most effective indicator for the level of information processing. Fixation duration is longer, indicating the level of processing is deeper.

Time to First Fixation

We took AOI, product types as a within variable, subjects gender as between variable, the Time to First Fixation of subjects gender for AOI as dependent variable, then processed 2x2x3 repeated measures analysis of variance (see Table 4-2). We found that the interaction between the three was marginally significant, $F(2, 51)= 2.484$, $p = .093$. For male subjects, under neutral product conditions, the Time to First Fixation for spokeswoman was significantly less than spokesman, $F(1, 52)= 4.360$, $p = .042$, in other words, male subjects noticed spokeswoman in neutral product firstly. However, there was no difference in male and female product conditions.

For female subjects, the Time to First Fixation of AOI of different gender spokesperson was almost unanimously, that means female subjects had same Sensitivity for spokesman and spokeswoman.

Total Fixation Duration

We took AOI, product types as a within variable, subjects gender as between variable, the Total Fixation Duration of subjects gender for AOI as dependent variable, then processed 2x2x3 repeated measures analysis of variance. The results showed that interaction between the type of products and spokesperson gender presented a marginally significant, $F (2, 51) = 2.732$, $p = 0.075$. The Total Fixation Duration for
spokeswoman was significantly more than spokesman among the male and female subjects. We found that the interaction between the product type, spokesperson gender and subjects gender was very significant, $F(1, 52) = 4.155, p = .021$. For male subjects, under male product conditions, the Total Fixation Duration for spokeswoman was significantly more than spokesman, $F(1, 52) = 4.624, p = .036$. In other words, male subjects had more attention for spokeswoman. However, there was no difference in female and neutral product conditions.

For female subjects, under male product conditions, the Total Fixation Duration for spokeswoman was significantly more than spokesman, $F(1, 52) = 5.925, p = .018$. In other words, female subjects had more attention for spokesman in male product. Under female product conditions, the Total Fixation Duration for spokesman was significantly more than spokesman, $F(1, 52) = 4.017, p = .050$, in other words, female subjects had more attention for spokeswoman. Under neutral product conditions, the Total Fixation Duration for spokeswoman was significantly more than spokesman, $F(1, 52) = 6.240, p = .016$, in other words, female subjects had more attention for spokesman.

Based on the above data, we could conclude that Time to First Fixation of male subjects for spokesperson had heterosexual bias under neutral product condition. But there was no difference under male or female product condition. Total Fixation Duration of male subjects for spokeswoman was significantly more than spokesman under male product condition, but there was no difference under female or neutral product condition.

Time to First Fixation of female subjects for spokesperson had no difference under all types of product conditions. Total Fixation Duration of female subjects for spokesman was significantly more than spokesman under neutral product condition. Female homosexual bias phenomenon does exist, and this phenomenon regulated by product type, and it was consistent with sexual orientation of product.

**DISCUSSION**

This study confirmed that gender differences of male and female for spokesperson by using eye-tracking technology. The attention of female for spokesperson had strong homosexual bias phenomenon, male did not have this phenomenon. This conclusion was consistent with the view of many scholars whom research gender differences. They found that recognition and memory effect of homosexual figures was significantly better than heterosexual for female, in the character recognition, but recognition of homosexual figures was not better than heterosexual for male [7, 8].

Scholars who research male and female group bias found that in-group bias of man was weak than woman. But currently, the reason for this gender differences still have different interpretations among the academia. Greenwald believes it was gender identity differences of audience that leaded to homosexual bias [9]. Rudman shows that women have a high gender identity, while male gender identity is relatively low, so there are larger differences in in-group bias for male and female audiences [8]. Some scholars attributed this gender difference to biological factors. A study of newborns interest tendency found that female baby tend to watch face, while male baby tend to watch mobile phone [10]. Ramsey further found that newborn earlier developed the ability to distinguish female faces compared to male faces [11].
In this study, male subjects have more attention on spokeswoman under conditions of neutral product, and also more likely to notice spokeswoman in sensitivity. This result was consistent with Lovén’s study. They found male attention to female faces rapid development during puberty, resulting in weaken homosexual bias effect in the male population, and even their pay more attention to women than men \(^7\). In addition, for male subjects there is no difference in sensitivity and attention under the condition of sexual orientation products. This might because of the adding of the product types which leaded male subjects organizing a more complex cognitive processing mechanism.

Hunt believes that there were two ways when audiences processed information: the correlation processing, item-specific processing. Correlation processing refers to the cognitive processing of things from the perspective of relevance; item-specific processing refers to the cognitive processing of things from the project or unique information perspective\(^1\). Men who are project-specific processors often focus on some of the outstanding properties; while women who are correlation processor tend to seek the relationship between clues which is available.

The results of this study revealed that product types had regulation effect for homosexual bias effect of female subjects. In other words, the attention of female subjects to spokesperson is consistent with the product sexual orientation under the condition of sexual orientation product. Probably because under this condition, female audiences tend to search for relative clues in ads, and concern with spokesperson that has a high correlation with product type. In other words, the attention of female subjects to spokesperson is consistent with the product sexual orientation. However, interestingly, male subjects have no gender bias phenomenon in neutral product. But they have shown a strong heterosexual tendency under a condition of male product. Probably because male subjects consider gender differences do not exist for spokesperson in neutral product, there is no attention difference between male and female; spokeswoman as the "outstanding property" in ads is particularly concerned by the male subjects under a condition of male product.

Conclusion of this study has implication for marketing communications activities. There is a suggestion for companies which take female as targeting consumer that can use spokesperson who is matched with sexual orientation of product can lead better results. Information processing mechanisms of male audiences are more complex. They tend to focus on the female initially. But on the level of deep processing, they tend to focus on spokesman who do not match with product type. Based on this, if companies take male as targeting consumer, they can try to break the convention when select spokesperson.

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