

A Study on Visual Narrative Strategies for “She Economy” Brands in the Digital Context: The Case of Dove Chocolate

Weiwei Fan^{1*}

¹ School of Art and Design, Zhengzhou University of Light Industry, Zhengzhou, China

Email Address

820893284@qq.com (Weiwei Fan)

*Correspondence: 820893284@qq.com

Received: 5 December 2025; **Accepted:** 24 December 2025; **Published:** 31 January 2026

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the visual narrative strategies of “she-economy” brands in the digital context, using Dove Chocolate as a specific case study for analysis and research. Against the backdrop of evolving converged media environments, brand visual communication is transitioning from singular information delivery toward emotional expression and relationship building. By examining Dove Chocolate's emotional, symbolic, and data-driven visual narrative approaches in digital communication, this study seeks to reveal how the brand reconstructs its visual communication relationship with young female consumers. Research findings indicate that within the “she economy” consumption context, digital visual expressions centered on “self-indulgence” and “empathy” help mitigate the utilitarian nature of commercial communication. This approach renders brand imagery more approachable and contemporary. Such emotion-driven visual narratives not only enhance female audiences' emotional identification with the brand but also contribute to a more youthful brand image expression. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for brands pursuing digital transformation within the “she economy” and for practical exploration of visual communication strategies.

Keywords:

“She Economy”, Visual Narrative, Digital Brand Communication

1. Introduction

The “she economy” has evolved from a niche market centered on female consumption into a core driver of overall growth, underpinned by the comprehensive advancement of women's autonomy, economic standing, and consumer influence. Against this backdrop, visual storytelling emerges as a crucial strategy for brands to forge emotional connections with consumers—particularly young women—in the digital age, making its innovative approaches increasingly vital. The evolution of new media technologies provides diverse platforms and interactive possibilities for such narratives, enabling brands to transcend traditional advertising and create more immersive, empathetic communication experiences.

This paper examines Dove Chocolate as a representative case study, highlighting its long-term focus on women's emotional needs and its proactive use of visual storytelling for brand revitalization during digital transformation. By dissecting Dove's visual strategy, the research explores how brands targeting the "she-economy" can effectively integrate technology, data, and emotion to forge sustainable paths for visual narrative innovation, thereby providing actionable strategic insights for similar brands.

2. The Evolution and Theoretical Drivers of Dove's Brand Visual Narrative

2.1. Visual Narrative Mechanisms from the Perspective of the "She Economy"

With the transformation of social structures and the rise in women's educational attainment and employment participation, women's roles within families and society have continuously expanded. Their consumption behavior has gradually shifted from being a secondary choice to becoming a primary decision-maker. In China, Professor Shi Qingqi, an economist, first introduced the concept of "she-economy" at the Ninth National Women's Congress in 2003, playing a pivotal role in understanding the economic role of Chinese women. [1]

In the contemporary context, "self-indulgence" transcends mere sensory gratification to embody a lifestyle philosophy centered on self-care, emotional well-being, and psychological fulfillment. Unlike past market labels such as "pleasing others," "pleasing the family," or "light self-indulgence," modern female consumers prioritize their own feelings and psychological needs during purchases, emphasizing freedom and self-expression. [2] Reflected in visual storytelling, an increasing number of brands are prioritizing the emotional resonance of their advertising campaigns—establishing connections by tapping into consumers' feelings. In this process, brands also convey their core values through a deep understanding and responsive approach to women's needs. [3] Brands no longer deliberately cultivate an air of "being watched" with meticulous refinement. Instead, they increasingly showcase women's authentic states of solitude, relaxation, and savoring the present moment. The visual palette has shifted from a cool, industrial aesthetic to a warmer, more soothing sensibility. Constructed through color and other visual elements, it stimulates the visual senses to evoke the audience's perception and associations with specific objects or environments. [4] Today, digital social platforms have narrowed the distance between brands and consumers. Visual storytelling captures the subtle moments in women's lives, using cinematic language to create an atmosphere of "understanding her". This empathy extends beyond the sensory level, achieving psychological alignment with values through visual symbols.

It is evident that in women's consumption patterns, "I like," "I want," and "I need" are increasingly becoming the key drivers influencing purchasing decisions. [5] Today, brands' core objective in visual communication is to forge deeper emotional connections with consumers. By employing strategies like product placement and experiential marketing, brands aim to appear naturally within everyday life scenarios, thereby bridging the gap between themselves and us. [6]

2.2. Digital Transformation of the Dove Brand Visual Identity

The advancement of media technology inevitably drives the evolution of advertising dissemination models—a product born of the new era. Simultaneously, the shift in advertising’s visual narrative communication represents a necessary adaptation within the broader currents of our times. [6] This also opens up new avenues for brand promotion.

Visual symbols serve as the core medium for constructing brand meaning, embodying the visual expression of cultural identity. They enable brands to stand out in the marketplace and precisely attract their desired consumer groups. [7] Effective brand communication significantly impacts revenue generation. As a long-established chocolate brand, Dove owes much of its high market share to its consistent, high-quality advertising campaigns and the quality of its chocolate products themselves, [8] its visual identity has undergone a significant transformation in the digital age. Traditional Dove advertisements tend to showcase the abstract concept of “silky smoothness” against fantastical backdrops. In digital promotions, however, Dove’s visual content increasingly appears in everyday settings—such as beside desks, next to bedside books, or at gatherings with close friends. This deliberate simplification of visuals paradoxically enhances the brand's authenticity within the digital landscape.

As the main force in market consumption, the younger generation is more receptive to novel and engaging brand promotion methods and consumption scenarios. By extensively utilizing dynamic posters, interactive videos, and other formats to replace traditional static images, the pacing of brand advertising narratives is dynamically adjusted. This allows audiences to experience emotional fluctuations in sync with the story’s rhythm, thereby enhancing the visual impact of brand advertisements. [9] Visual design is no longer a one-way presentation. Instead, it employs more impactful close-ups and fast-paced editing to capture users’ attention amidst fragmented screen-scrolling, thereby achieving effective communication of visual information.

2.3. Characteristics Analysis of Dove's Digital Visual Communication

For Dove Chocolate, the “she-economy” represents a significant market opportunity that cannot be overlooked in the brand’s current development. As women’s purchasing power and influence over consumption decisions continue to grow, they are increasingly becoming the core decision-makers in the fast-moving consumer goods market. By launching marketing campaigns and cross-industry collaborations highly relevant to female audiences, Dove has effectively enhanced its visibility and appeal among female consumers. This strategy has helped boost the brand’s influence and market share within the young female consumer demographic.

At the level of visual output, Dove Chocolate has established a stable and recognizable visual style. In its brand communications, it combines its signature “Dove brown” with soft, light-toned palettes symbolizing gentle strength. Through soft lighting and restrained compositions, it cultivates a feminine aesthetic that is both gentle and powerful. This visual approach quickly triggers emotional resonance among female audiences, linking the brand image to feelings of “security,” “relaxation,” and “self-indulgence,” thereby enhancing its emotional affinity.

At the brand narrative level, Dove Chocolate has long centered its core slogan around “Indulge in Silkiness,” reinterpreting this concept visually through digital communication. In related videos and visual content, female figures no longer appear merely as “consumers” of chocolate but are instead shaped as protagonists and agents within the narrative. The camera’s focus has gradually shifted from women’s outward

appearance to their expressions of concentration and emotional states during work, daily life, and personal challenges. This reimagining of female roles has distanced the brand narrative from traditional gift-giving contexts. To some extent, it has propelled Dove's evolution from a "gift-oriented chocolate" to a brand image that embodies women's attitudes and emotional value, gradually endowing it with cultural significance as a symbol of the female spirit.

3. Constructing Visual Narrative Pathways for “She Economy” Brands in the Digital Context

According to data from QuestMobile released on March 7 by Financial News, as of January 2023, the number of active female users in the mobile internet sector reached nearly 600 million. Those under 24 years old accounted for 24.1% of this group. Women significantly outpaced men in both spending power and willingness to spend over 2,000 yuan. [3] Against the backdrop of digital media deeply permeating daily life, the communication environment and methods for “she-economy” brands have undergone significant changes. Female consumers no longer exist solely as information recipients; instead, they engage in content interaction, meaning production, and value dissemination through social platforms. Consequently, brand promotion must re-examine how relationships with female consumers are built within the digital context.

3.1. Scenarized Narrative: Crafting an Immersive Visual Space Centered on “Self-Indulgent” Experiences

In the digital social environment, female consumers often exhibit strong resistance to overly rigid, hard-sell advertising. Therefore, the primary focus of brand promotion should shift from one-way information dissemination to content creation that evokes emotional resonance. Compared to grand yet unrealistic visual settings, content formats that closely mirror women's everyday experiences are more likely to capture audience attention and gain recognition. Brands should gradually shift the focus of their visual narratives from the product itself to authentic life scenarios of individual women, highlighting their emotional experiences and personal perspectives in both work and daily life.

Take Dove Chocolate as an example. In some of its digital communications, the brand no longer solely emphasizes the taste characteristics of chocolate. Instead, it shifts the visual focus to moments of women embracing self-care in their daily lives and displaying confidence and courage when facing challenges. This narrative shift brings the brand image closer to the real-life experiences of female consumers, while also softening the overtly commercial feel of the promotion to some extent. From a visual expression perspective, brands can also leverage current digital technology trends to expand traditional print advertising formats. They can explore ways to integrate three-dimensional graphics with brand visual content, enhancing spatial depth and layering within the imagery to elevate the immersive impact of visual storytelling.

Building on this foundation, brands can leverage AR technology or interactive features within social platforms to further drive the evolution of visual storytelling. This transforms audiences from passive “viewers” into active “participants” Through carefully designed interactive experiences, visual content achieves organic dissemination and sharing within social contexts, fostering a natural “influencing”

process. Simultaneously, brands can gain deeper insights into target female consumers' aesthetic preferences and emotional needs during these interactions, providing valuable reference points for optimizing future products and services.

Additionally, brands can design aesthetically valuable digital interactive scenarios centered around visual communication, guiding female consumers to project their emotions during participation. This transforms the visual experience from being confined to the screen into one that gradually extends into consumers' real-world perceptions, thereby enhancing the emotional depth and lasting impact of the brand's visual narrative.

3.2. Symbolic Narrative: Enhancing Visual Distinctiveness to Resonate with Female Emotions

Symbols occupy a crucial position in visual storytelling. Brands often rely on highly condensed visual symbols to convey the complex emotional values and cultural connotations behind them. From a semiotic perspective, only a relatively stable signifier system can help audiences accurately grasp the meaning a symbol conveys. Therefore, when engaging in visual communication, brands should progressively establish a recognizable core visual grammar system. This ensures brand symbols remain consistently identifiable and understandable across diverse media environments. [7]

In the context of digital communication, as media formats become increasingly diverse, brand visual symbols must also possess a degree of flexibility. While maintaining relative consistency in overall style and cultural DNA, they should undergo appropriate adjustments and variations based on different platforms and communication formats. Take Dove Chocolate as an example: its long-standing emphasis on the "silky smooth" concept not only describes the product's texture but can also be further transformed into an emotional visual symbol. In specific digital promotions, visual techniques like slow-motion shots and fluid lighting effects combine "silky smoothness" with emotional experiences of relaxation and ease. This creates a visual cue that alleviates female anxiety, thereby strengthening the emotional resonance between the brand and its female consumers.

Additionally, brands can extend and integrate their existing visual symbols through cross-industry collaborations. For instance, partnering with industries closely tied to women's lifestyles—such as cosmetics and apparel—enables the fusion and collision of distinct brand symbols on a visual level. Such collaborations not only enrich the original visual narrative but also generate greater discussion and sharing on social media platforms. This leverages organic user-driven dissemination to further amplify the reach of the brand's visual identity.

3.3. Data-Driven Storytelling: Understanding Aesthetic Preferences for Precision Communication

A key advantage of digital communication lies in its ability to leverage data analytics to make brand visual narratives more targeted. By analyzing user browsing habits, interaction behaviors, and content feedback, brands can gain clearer insights into the differences in aesthetic preferences and emotional needs among various female demographics. This enables them to adjust the design and delivery of visual content accordingly. Compared to the traditional "one-size-fits-all" approach, this data-driven visual communication proves to be more refined and effective.

In practice, brands can develop differentiated visual expression strategies based on the interests and characteristics of different female demographics. For instance, when targeting women who favor a refined lifestyle and prioritize quality of life, visual content can employ brighter color palettes and relatively clean compositions. By focusing on details and creating an overall ambiance, it highlights the sense of quality and lifestyle sophistication conveyed by the product. Conversely, for audiences who value emotional experiences and resonance more, incorporating narrative elements into visual presentations—using scenes that feel more grounded in everyday life and human warmth—can guide viewers toward emotional associations.

This data-driven, precision-focused visual communication approach can enhance the alignment between brand content and its audience to a certain extent. Since visual expressions more readily resonate with the interests and emotional needs of specific demographics, female consumers are more likely to engage with such content—staying longer, clicking through, or even sharing it—thereby amplifying the brand’s communication reach.

4. Conclusions

This study takes Dove Chocolate as a case study, grounded in the digital communication context, to analyze the visual narrative strategies of “she-economy” brands. It explores how brands reconstruct their communication relationships with young female consumers through visual expression in the contemporary media environment. By examining and dissecting the new forms of Dove Chocolate’s brand promotion, this paper argues that for “she-economy” brands targeting young women, achieving effective visual communication and brand revitalization amid the digital wave hinges on precise user positioning. This requires integrating women’s “self-indulgence” needs and empathy mechanisms into the visual narrative system.

Research indicates that leveraging digital technology to construct immersive, emotionally resonant, and interactive visual narratives enables brands to transcend traditional function-oriented communication models. This shift transforms visual communication from mere information delivery into emotional engagement and relationship building. Such emotion-centric visual expression not only facilitates the reinterpretation of brand imagery for younger audiences but also extends content reach and amplifies dissemination across converged media platforms. Consequently, it enhances brands’ emotional recognition and identification among female consumer groups.

Furthermore, in the digital age, the visual communication of “she-economy” brands is no longer confined to a single medium or fixed format. Instead, it is gradually integrating into a converged media ecosystem characterized by multiple platforms and diverse forms. Moving forward, relevant brands should proactively leverage data analytics, interactive technologies, and emerging visual media tools to continuously explore diverse possibilities for emotional storytelling and female-centered expression. Through the ongoing evolution of their visual language, they can strengthen and deepen the emotional connection with female consumers.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Ran, X.Z.; Li, J. On the Characteristics of Packaging Design in the Context of “She Economy”: Focusing on the Emotional Needs of Contemporary Urban Young Women in China. *Industrial Engineering Design*, 2025, 7(05), 21-29.
- [2] Guan, W.W. “Exploring Women’s Consumption Trends and Behaviors on Xiaohongshu Platform from the Perspective of ‘She Economy’”. *New Media Research*, 2024, 10(05), 41-44.
- [3] Xie, Z.W.; Xu, Y.; Zhao, Y.Y. The Impact of Emotional Advertising on Female Consciousness in the Context of She Economy. *Mass Literature and Art*, 2024, 07, 61-63.
- [4] Ye, M.Y.; Liang, Y.M.; Duan, S.B. Visual Narrative Expression in Brand Advertising Design. *Footwear Technology and Design*, 2023, 3(24), 34-36.
- [5] Lei, X. “She Economy” Blooms, Highlighting Consumer Vitality. *China Quality Journey*, 2024, 07, 58-59.
- [6] Wang, Y.L. Innovation in Brand Visual Communication and Advertising Strategy Driven by New Media. *Old Brand Marketing*, 2022, 03, 13-15.
- [7] Wei, M.Y.; Kong, X.; Liu, J. Strategies for Constructing Visual Symbol Systems from a Brand Narrative Perspective: The Case of “Chayanyueshuang” Brand. *Journal of Art and Design Studies*, 2025, (04): 37-39.
- [8] Li, W.H. Brand Strategy for Dove Chocolate. *Marketing World*, 2021, 03, 3-4.
- [9] TAI Ziyue, Cui Huachun. An Exploration of Visual Narratives in Brand Advertising Motion Graphics. *Design*, 2023, 36(13), 97-99.



© 2026 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)