

The Reconstruction of Female Images in the TV Drama The Story of Rose and Its Social Significance

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Abstract: In contemporary society, the portrayal of female image holds an increasingly significant role in cultural products. As a major entertainment medium, TV dramas reflect social values while subtly shaping viewers' perceptions of gender and identity. With the increasing emphasis on gender equality in society, the re-imagining of women's identities in the new era has become particularly critical. As a prominent television drama, *The Story of Rose* presents a spectrum of female images, capturing the nuances of women's experiences across different social contexts and cultural frameworks. Through the theoretical framework of communication studies, the study analyzes the construction of multiple female characters and their interrelationships in *The Story of Rose*. These characters showcase a rich and diverse array of female experiences, reflecting gender performance within specific historical and social contexts. Using textual analysis, this study deconstructs the character traits and behavioral motivations of the female characters, as well as their interactions with the male characters in the drama. Meanwhile, the audience's acceptance and identification with these female characters are explored, thus revealing how the drama shapes the audience's gender perceptions and its potential impact. The results indicate that the female characters in *The Story of Rose* reflect the evolving characteristics of the times, and address the contemporary audience's expectations and needs for female reconstruction. Their performance in different contexts highlights the multiple identities and challenges that people face in the workplace and in society.

Keywords: Female Images, TV Drama *The Story of Rose*, Media Studies, Agenda-Setting, Uses and Gratifications Theory.

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of society, the role of women in both family and society has changed significantly, especially in urban environments, where more and more women have begun to present an independent and autonomous image. Popular TV dramas such as *The Story of Rose*, *Ode to Joy*, and *Nothing but Thirty* have become important mediums for exploring the role of modern women, with *The Story of Rose* standing out prominently. In recent years, female-centered TV dramas have gained widespread attention, and such works not only reflect the independent spirit of women in the new era, but address societal issues, prompting audiences to reflect on female identity and value. This study seeks to explore how the TV drama *The Story of Rose* affects viewers' perception of modern women's independence by presenting diverse female images. Thus, it focuses on the use of

agenda setting theory and uses and gratifications theory. In particular, the agenda-setting theory, proposed by Shaw and McCombs, emphasizes the influence of the media on public perceptions and judgments, further explaining how the media shapes viewers' agendas and priorities by selectively emphasizing certain topics [1]. The uses and gratifications theory, on the other hand, focuses on the needs of the audience and suggests that viewers have a purpose in approaching the media and that their media use behaviours are based on the motivation of a specific need to obtain satisfaction through the media. Through the combination of these two theories, the study analyzes how *The Story of Rose* reflects and satisfies the audience's expectations of female characters in the communication process. Thus, the study aims to reveal the communication characteristics of current female-centered TV dramas via theoretical analyses of the drama, and provide new perspectives for understanding the status and image of contemporary women in society, which helps to promote in-depth research on female-centered film and TV works.

2. The Reconstruction of Female Images in the New Era

Through characters like Huang Yimei and Su Gengsheng, *The Story of Rose* captures the diversity and complexity of women in the new era. Their varied choices in career, love, and family break traditional female stereotypes, showing rich life experiences and options. By using communication theories like agenda-setting and uses and gratifications, the drama shapes audience perceptions of women and sparks meaningful discussions on gender roles, carrying great socio-cultural impact.

2.1. Equality and Respect in Relationships: The Case of Huang Yimei

In this drama, Huang Yimei's approach to love emphasizes equality and respect, embodying key qualities of modern women in relationships. Her refusal to compromise her dignity for love is evident in her relations with Zhuang Guodong. Upon realizing he does not envision her in his future, she decisively ends the relationship. This plot choice underscores the importance of self-respect and personal value, encouraging viewers to rethink traditional gender roles. By focusing on this scene, the episode brings attention to the independence and self-worth women should maintain in romantic relationships, fostering discussion on equality in love for women. Besides, the interactions between Huang Yimei and Fang Xiewen underscore the value of effective communication in relationships. This theme highlights for viewers that a healthy relationship requires mutual understanding and support. The storyline encourages viewers to reflect on their relationships, promoting awareness of communication skills and emotional needs in line with the agenda-setting theory. Huang Yimei's independence and bold approach to love broaden perceptions of women's emotional lives, while her balance between career and romance underscores exemplifies how contemporary women negotiate traditional expectations and personal aspirations [2]. And this narrative enriches the diversity of women's roles and prompts viewers to reflect on modern women's autonomy in emotional choices, sparking a broader social discussion on women's values. Huang Yimei seeks emotional resonance in her relationships, especially with Fu Jiaming, choosing to commit despite potential risks because he understands her inner world. This decision highlights her emphasis on emotional depth and quality, reflecting the evolving and complex needs of women in love today. Therefore, the focus is placed on the diversity of emotional connections, encouraging viewers to consider how different levels of fulfillment influence romantic choices. Huang Yimei's perspective on love drives the episode's plot, inviting viewers to re-examine women's roles and choices from a communication standpoint.

2.2. The Career Perspectives of Reason and Independence: The Case of Su Gengsheng and Jiang Xueqiong

In the drama, Su Gengsheng is deeply impacted by domestic violence and a lack of affection, yet she refuses to be defeated by her circumstances, choosing to fight back with courage. Through her legal battle against her stepfather and her break with her irresponsible mother, Su Gengsheng embodies the resilience and determination of women in the new era. This characterization not only emphasizes individual courage but also reflects society's growing expectations and empowerment of women, challenging traditional stereotypes. Furthermore, her strong focus on her career reflects values of rationality and independence. Despite the ups and downs in her relationship with Huang Zhenhua, Su remains committed to her principles and career, hence prompting the audience to reflect on the evolving role of women in modern relationships. This rational emotional choice aligns with the agenda-setting theory in communication studies, which emphasizes how the media shapes public perception of women's independence through character portrayal. Jiang Xueqiong, a strong woman in the workplace, has achieved success through her own efforts and professional abilities, reflecting the pursuit of self-realization by women in the new era. Her success is not dependent on men's financial support, but on her own struggle for financial independence. Jiang's story highlights women's professional challenges and accomplishments, while also prompting viewers to consider the real-life dilemmas faced by career women. Besides, the intertwined narratives of Su and Jiang illustrate the dual roles women play in both the family and the workplace. This role construction not only reflects personal growth but also symbolizes broader social and cultural changes [3]. Through the analysis of these two characters, viewers gain a deeper understanding of the diverse challenges and choices women face in modern society, prompting a reexamination of gender roles. From a communication studies perspective, the TV drama draws attention to gender issues through the in-depth portrayal of these female characters. The independence and rationality exhibited by the characters reflect both their personal traits and societal expectations. This aligns with the "agenda-setting" theory, which emphasizes how the media directs public attention to specific issues and shapes social perceptions. Through these portrayals, viewers find emotional resonance and are also prompted to reflect on their own career development and personal values. This exploration of broader social issues highlights the crucial role of television drama as a cultural medium in shaping societal perceptions and values.

2.3. The Resilient and Courageous Outlook on Life: The Case of Guan Zhizhi

In the drama, Guan Zhizhi refuses to dwell on emotional setbacks and instead bravely confronts life's challenges. Her choices and actions embody the theme of women's self-empowerment, demonstrating the pursuit of independence and self-realization in the face of adversity. This positive attitude highlights key qualities of modern women in their quest for happiness and career success. Moreover, the obstacles she faces in her entrepreneurial journey only strengthen her determination and resolve. This resilience aligns with the relationship between personal needs and media usage emphasized in the uses and gratifications theory, while illustrating the feasibility of seeking self-realization in the face of adversity. Meanwhile, Guan Zhizhi's emotional clarity and maturity add depth to her character. She refuses to be defined by the pain of her past and chooses to leave her disrespectful partner. This decision not only underscores the importance of self-worth and dignity but also resonates with agenda-setting theory, highlighting how the media shapes public perceptions of healthy relationships. Guan's rational choice encourages viewers to think about the importance of maintaining self-worth in a relationship, and encourages women to remain rational and independent in their pursuit of love [4]. In starting a business with her current partner, Guan Zhizhi takes control of her voice and realizes her professional dreams. This transformation emphasizes the pursuit of career and personal values

among modern women, showing that they are no longer content with traditional family roles. Guan's journey inspires the audience to reflect on the importance of self-actualization and encourages women to pursue love without neglecting personal development and independence. In short, while Guan Zhizhi is an emotional survivor, she is also a successful career woman. Through her journey, viewers witness the diversity and complexity of modern women in their pursuit of self-worth and emotional independence. This portrayal not only shifts the audience's perception of women but also fuels social discussions on women's empowerment and independence.

3. The Multiple Characteristics of Media's Reconstruction of Female Images

The female characters show autonomy and independence, challenging traditional roles and inspiring women to pursue self-worth and freedom. The reconstruction of women's images includes four key characteristics: they challenge stereotypes with their mysterious nature, embody motherly love, affirm women's autonomy and desires, and assign mythological significance to women's bodies. Together, these traits reflect the diversity and complexity of women in the new era.

3.1. Challenging Stereotypes with The Mysterious Nature

The reconstruction of female characters reflects the mystery, complexity, as well as diversity of contemporary women. Through these characters, the multidimensionality of this theme is explored. For example, Huang Yimei embodies women's initiative and decisiveness in love and career. Her confidence in the workplace and proactive actions highlight her independence and role as an active agent in society. These positive portrayals help shift societal views on women's status, encouraging more women to pursue their dreams and happiness. In addition, Su Gengsheng's story reflects resilience and rationality in the face of adversity. As a victim of domestic violence, she defends her rights via legal means, breaking the traditional victim stereotype of women. Viewers can relate to this character for emotional resonance or find inspiration and support when facing their own challenges. Guan Zhizhi's journey of self-reinvention after her marriage breakdown showcases modern women's growth and independence in the face of emotional setbacks. Her transformation reflects both resilience in adversity and the emotional complexity of women. This inner struggle and rebirth align with the exploration of personal-media interaction in communication studies, as viewers empathize with Guan Zhizhi's experience and reflect on their own emotional and life choices. Jiang Xueqiong illustrates the complex balance between career and family. Beneath her calm and noble exterior lies an inner struggle, highlighting the modern woman's ability to adapt to multiple roles [5]. The complexity of these roles challenges the audience's one-dimensional view of female portrayals and reflects the media's multifaceted approach to representing women. Such reconstructions prompt reflection on gender roles in society and encourage a greater recognition of female diversity.

3.2. Showcasing the Innate Maternal Charm of Women

The reconstruction of female characters is also marked by a deep sense of maternal love, reflecting the complexity of women's identities and responsibilities in both family and society, as seen in Huang Yimei's character. The media conveys information, shaping social perceptions. By allowing her daughter to make mistakes and taking a gentle approach to guidance, Huang Yimei's portrayal emphasizes respect for her daughter's autonomy and active involvement in her education. This challenges traditional motherhood stereotypes and highlights women's emotional role in family education, illustrating the media's influence on shaping female identities. In addition, Huang's emotional stability provides her daughter with a sense of security, highlighting the deep significance of motherly love. Based on Barthes' semiotic theory, emotional stability is a core trait of motherly love and a key feature of contemporary female characters in media. And she demonstrates a deep

understanding and mature reflection on complex issues like divorce and death, reinforcing women's authority and decision-making power within the family [6]. This character construction prompts the audience to re-examine the multiple identities of women in the family and society, as well as the emotional burdens these identities carry. However, Huang Yimei's motherhood also reveals the inherent contradictions and conflicts faced by women's roles. In fulfilling her maternal duties, her personal development is constrained, reflecting the conflict modern women face between self-worth and family responsibilities. This duality can be interpreted through Heidegger's existentialist theory, which emphasizes the struggle between self-actualization and family obligations. This complex portrayal encourages viewers to examine the character from multiple angles, hence sparking deeper reflection on gender roles.

3.3. Affirming Women's Autonomy and Desires

The female characters' pursuit of autonomy through their control over their bodies and life choices reflects modern women's challenge to traditional concepts and is closely related to the theory of multiple identities in communication studies. Specifically, Huang Yimei's choices in love and career demonstrate her insistence on her own identity. Her love story is not compromised by traditional notions; instead, her independence in relationships is highlighted through her interactions with Zhuang Guodong and Fu Jiaming. This independence emphasises how an individual constructs and expresses his or her identity in society. Huang Yimei not only pursues true love emotionally, but also pursues her ideals in her career, highlighting the possibility for modern women to realize their self-worth in their dual roles. Su Gengsheng's experience reflects resistance and growth in the face of family trauma. By leaving her hometown and building her career, she demonstrates her desire for freedom, emphasizing women's agency and autonomy. Her story encourages the audience to reflect on their own choices, inspiring women to pursue independence and resilience in the face of adversity. While Guan Zhizhi turns to self-improvement and growth after experiencing remorseful marriage. Her choice is not only a reflection on the traditional view of marriage, but also a pursuit of self-worth. By redefining her role, Guan Zhizhi gains emotional and social support, leading to personal growth and transformation. This role change not only affects herself, but also resonates among the audience, prompting them to think about the relationship between marriage and self-worth [7]. Jiang Xueqiong's story highlights the balance between career and love. Her decision to embrace single life after her divorce reflects a strong commitment to her right to self-determination. This independence challenges traditional gender roles and shows how the media shapes women's perceptions of their own lives. Her choice is not only a personal rebellion but a challenge to societal norms, encouraging viewers to reflect on their own life choices.

3.4. Endowing the Female Body with Mythical Significance

The female body in the drama is not just a symbol of allure but also a vital representation of self-realization and identity. The portrayal of these characters enriches the understanding of the female body while revealing the medium's multidimensional and complex approach to depicting women. Huang Yimei, as the female protagonist, embodies both the physical allure of the female body and the empowering force of self-realization [8]. Her experiences in love and career show a woman's ability to shape her self-image and life ideals through her actions. Despite the challenges she faces, Huang Yimei remains true to herself, embodying the pursuit of body autonomy. However, there is a male character's interpretation of her in the play, and this male gaze reflects a stereotypical view of women's behaviours, depriving women of the right to express their true feelings and reinforcing the dominance of men in emotional relationships. Su Gengsheng's character reveals women's resilience and self-redemption in the face of physical trauma. Confronting her past, Guan Zhizhi embodies the

dignity and strength of the female body, challenging traditional perceptions. While her body myth isn't explicitly highlighted, her independence and courage reflect the struggles modern women face in their pursuit of self-realization [9]. Though not the main character, Guan Zhizhi's story highlights the complexity of women's body status in society. Behind her accusations of Huang Yimei, Guan Zhizhi's emotional insecurity highlights women's vulnerability in relationships and underscores the importance of bodily autonomy. In contrast, Jiang Xueqiong embodies both physical allure and inner struggle, showing how women cope with trauma while preserving their beauty and zest for life. Her resilience challenges simplistic views of the female body, highlighting the complexity of women's psychology amid societal expectations and personal struggles.

4. The Significance of Reconstructing the Image of Women in the New Era

The reconstruction of the image of women in the new era is not only a challenge to traditional gender roles, but also an important manifestation of women's autonomy and identity. Through the portrayal of characters such as Huang Yimei, Su Gengsheng, Jiang Xueqiong and Guan Zhizhi, the audience is able to see the choices and challenges that women face at various stages of life, and these characters are not only supporting roles in the traditional narrative, but also the main body of autonomous decision-making. Such a performance advocates women to bravely pursue their dreams and happiness, breaking gender stereotypes. However, there are still inherent concepts from a male perspective in the play [10]. For example, Zhuang's choice to go abroad alone for the sake of his career hints at the male dilemma between career and love. This portrayal may have overlooked the reality that many men struggle to balance career and family, making the portrayal of male characters seem one-sided. In addition, when Huang Yimei chooses to break up with Zhuang Guodong for the sake of her career, this decision is often seen as a betrayal of male loyalty. This suggests that women also have the right to pursue professional development and personal happiness, and that the lack of this notion may lead to misunderstanding and prejudice of women's choices. And the reconstruction of these women's images has multiple meanings, focusing on individual growth and self-realization as well as reflecting the awakening of contemporary women's consciousness. From the perspective of communication studies, such reconstructions can be seen as a record of social change, and at the same time a critique of gender role stereotypes. It is found that the positive performance of female characters helps to change the audience's perception of the image of women, thus promoting the social progress of gender equality. In addition, the female protagonist, Huang Yimei, demonstrates the glamour of women's health and beauty through her fitness and self-discipline lifestyle [11]. This image emphasises the combination of women's inner strength and outer image, providing viewers with positive role models. The resilience and courage shown by the female characters in the play in the face of difficulties further highlights their inner strength and independence. All in all, *The Story of Rose* demonstrates the complexity of the situation faced by women in modern society, providing the audience with a profound reflection on women's issues. The reconstruction of this female image promotes social understanding and respect for women's roles, while also encouraging the audience to reflect on their own life choices. It provides important cultural support for the diversification of women's identities in the modern era.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals the diversity and complexity of the image of women in the new era by analyzing the TV drama *The Story of Rose*. The results indicate that the female characters in the drama exhibit strong independence and autonomy, emphasize the pursuit of career and personal values, and break the limitations of traditional female images. In addition, the characters are rational and independent in their romantic relationships, highlighting principles of equality and respect, hence reflecting the

importance that women in the new era place on emotional depth and quality. Moreover, the episodes successfully trigger viewers to reflect on hot social issues such as gender equality and female empowerment. However, this study has limitations as it focuses on just one TV drama, limiting a broader exploration of women's image portrayal. The theoretical framework mainly relies on the agenda-setting and uses and gratifications theories in communication studies, and future research could introduce more theoretical perspectives to enrich the depth and breadth of the analysis. Future research can explore multiple directions, such as expanding the sample size to analyze multiple female-themed TV dramas and comprehensively examining the evolution of women's images in the new era. Cross-media analysis can also be considered to compare the portrayal of women in TV dramas with other media, exploring similarities and differences across different media and socio-cultural contexts. These approaches will contribute to a deeper understanding of the construction of women's images in the new era and their social impact.

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