

# Analysis of Feminist in Dove Products Project with Cultural Circuit Theory

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**Abstract:** This article introduces the concept of cultural objects and how each cultural object goes through the five steps of the cultural circuit by analyzing the “Real Beauty” project launched by Dove Products. Representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation eventually become cultural objects. This article analyzes the positioning of Dove’s “real beauty” campaign, which challenges traditional aesthetic views and markets an image that is different from traditional female aesthetic. This article analyzes the primary audience for Dove products: women, and explains how the movement has been given cultural significance, leading to the feminist perspectives presented in the movement. This paper also compares two different views: cultural pessimism and cultural optimism on the commodification of feminism like Dove’s “real beauty” and proposes that commodification of feminism has a positive effect on society.

**Keywords:** Gender culture object; Feminist dove

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## 1. Introduction

Cultural objects seem to have become an unavoidable topic when people discuss a series of social issues. This is because, in today’s context, cultural objects are not only a reflection of social values and norms, but also shape social values and norms. To better understand ways cultural objects understand society, it is crucial to first understand ways cultural objects acquire meaning, because the meaning of each cultural object is given by elements such as society, audience and specific identity, rather than generated by the cultural object itself. Circuit of culture provides a good perspective for this study. This article selects a recent campaign of the American brand Dove and combines the theory of circuit of culture to analyze ways it, as a cultural object, convey values and influence users’ views and purchasing behaviors. This article discusses from the perspective of cultural populism, criticizes cultural pessimism, and incorporates some feminist views.

## 2. Literature review

The theoretical framework of circuit of culture believes that the generation of cultural meaning needs to go

through five steps, namely representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. These five steps are interrelated and influence each other, forming a cycle, and finally form cultural meaning <sup>[1]</sup>. If something is considered a cultural object, then it must at least meet the five steps in the circuit of culture to be given cultural significance, because these five steps encompass all the processes and conditions to become a cultural object. The Dove brand launched a marketing campaign called “real beauty” in 2004 and is still promoting it until 2024. The mission of this brand is to convey feminist values to consumers and maximize the spread of female diversity, that is, the view that female beauty does not necessarily conform to the traditional female aesthetic.

Dove’s “real beauty” campaign has positioned itself as a campaign that challenges traditional aesthetics and is based on feminist ideas. At the same time, it attempts to promote the concept of body positivity, which is the positive view of consumers on their body and image, which can also be called image confidence. The surface presentation of this campaign seems to be that the brand wants to create an image similar to a challenger through such marketing, trying to subvert the traditional and limited aesthetic view. The main message that this campaign wants to convey is to let women realize that they cannot feel insecure because of their appearance and body. More often, it tells women that not making too many changes and always maintaining confidence is also a unique beauty. This is the representation of this campaign.

### **3. Discussion**

The campaign states a series of diverse women, especially those who are alienated by traditional aesthetics. Therefore, the identity of the campaign is to allow more women to find a sense of belonging in the product. In the process, the campaign is also fully in line with the concept of feminist values of body positivity and empowerment. Therefore, women who buy its products will think that they meet the identity of feminists. Those customers who want to obtain a feminist identity are also potential audiences of the product. For women who buy products, their identities may be habitual users of the products, that is, consistent supporters, or they may be feminists who saw the campaign and felt that their psychological needs were met, so they bought the product. But no matter which type they are, if they buy it, their identity as consumers will give the campaign cultural significance, which is the identity in the circuit of culture <sup>[2]</sup>. This once again proves that the meaning of any cultural object is passive, and they cannot define cultural meaning themselves. From the design of Dove products, its conditioners, cosmetics, shampoos and other products have been designed to help women become beautiful from the beginning. However, Dove has set new aesthetic standards while trying to achieve its mission, that is, more diverse women, which has also expanded the audience of the products. This is the meaning given to the campaign by the “production” in the circuit of culture. Analyzing this campaign in conjunction with the circuit of culture, its representation and identity influence each other, and there is a similar connection between its identity and production. For example, since the moment the representation of “real beauty” was discovered, the main audience of its products has become women who are insecure about their image and feminists. Therefore, the surface presentation of this commercial activity will have more and more elements related to the definition of female aesthetics. The production of this product will increasingly meet the needs of this group.

However, this culture object will be questioned by cultural pessimists. Although the campaign demonstrates that it can be given meaning by the five steps of the circuit of culture, some cultural pessimistic views would argue that this beauty is obtained through consumption. The campaign has not real dismantled stereotypes and is essentially a commodification of feminist ideals. So, cultural pessimists ultimately promote the idea that beauty is something that is earned through hard work, that is, through consuming products. This approach is intended to

serve capitalist interests rather than truly thinking for women. In fact, no matter how a cultural object satisfies the five steps in the circuit of culture, cultural pessimists will argue the opposite. They believe that the representation of Dove's "real beauty," although on the surface it conveys the idea of challenging traditional aesthetics, is just a means for capital to make more profit. They believe that this practice is to commercialize feminism, because when the brand creates such a non-traditional female image with a new aesthetic, it will be favored by more women. In the past, only women who meet traditional aesthetics may buy this product, but when Dove conveys such a view, all kinds of people will become the audience of this product, because the concept conveyed by the campaign is: everyone is beautiful. Many pessimists would also question the campaign's ability to satisfy identity in the circuit of culture. They believe that consumers can only show their feminist identity by buying Dove products. If consumers do not choose to buy, it proves that they are not the audience of the product, and their feminist identity seems to be unable to be recognized. This is a typical consumerist concept and a moral kidnapping of information. The core of cultural pessimism's questioning of the "production" of this campaign is that the original intention of this marketing method was not really for women. They will have some questions like is Dove products really trying to subvert traditional, oppressive aesthetic standards or implement new standards? If the product wants to overturn traditional aesthetics and establish its new standards, and its products are highly in line with these new standards, then from the perspective of product sales, the manufacturer will gain great benefits. Likewise, they would question the consumption of the campaign, such as whether it is a form of commodification of women's self-esteem, or whether this consumption method is nothing more than another form of commodification of feminism.

Admittedly, the concerns of cultural pessimists are justified, but making money is the goal of manufacturers. After all, manufacturers must make money to survive, and the important thing is that Dove is making money while also conveying good social ideas, so making money through this marketing method is always better than some other improper means. Although various marketing methods are commercial activities and can also reflect the company's good sense of social responsibility. It also has certain positive significance for society. They ultimately achieved the goal of empowering marginalized women, also known as empowertising. Therefore, from the perspective of cultural populism, the impact of the campaign is generally positive, because this move has given more marginalized women the opportunity to speak out. Therefore, it is somewhat limited to view such commercial activities merely as a means for capitalism to make money. In comparison, the view of cultural populism is more objective and comprehensive. From a feminist perspective, it can be seen that why it makes more sense to view the campaign from the perspective of cultural populism. Because cultural populism believes that this business activity has a positive impact on society, including feminism. Dove's "real beauty" project aims to break the limitations of past female aesthetics, making women's diversity one of the elements that determine aesthetics, while also providing opportunities for some traditional women who are generally considered "not so beautiful". This is called female empowerment<sup>[3]</sup>. Because the society exerts great importance to feminism, this business activity has undoubtedly accomplished the task of empowertising. Dove's "Real beauty" as a language of female empowerment will be widely favored by women. Many manufacturers will expand the audience of their products by promoting the concept of female empowerment, so that they can also make money. This is a perfect result in both aspects. It can be seen that Dove has made its products one of the symbols of feminism through "real beauty," just as high heels are a fashion label for women. Women are invited to buy the company's products. At the same time, the company uses some commercial means to promote the social concept of female empowerment<sup>[4]</sup>. The persuaded women also become one of the audiences of the product, and inadvertently help the company spread this view. The company's original intention may be just to promote its products, but the

concept it promotes is generally beneficial, whether as a gimmick or a way to attract customers. The company uses the language of empowerment to sell its products, meet the needs of feminists, and spread this positive concept to society.

## 4. Conclusion

In summary, Dove's "real beauty" is a typical cultural object because it is given meaning by the five steps of the circuit of culture: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. The campaign attempts to subvert traditional female aesthetics and redefine the concept of beauty, while vigorously promoting feminism and female empowerment to expand the audience of its products. Although some cultural pessimism claims that this is nothing more than a means for capital to make money, from the perspective of cultural populism, this move has certain positive significance for society. From a feminist perspective, the campaign can meet the needs of feminists, while emphasizing the importance of female empowerment and striving to turn its products into a new symbol of feminism. Therefore, this campaign can be called perfect both from a commercial and social perspective.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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