

Gender performance in livestream shopping—An empirical study  
of the most popular male host for beauty product in China

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**Abstract:** This thesis explores how a successful male beauty host and his viewers perform gender roles in the Chinese livestream shopping. Although a vast scope of research has approached different gender-related topics in marketing and consumer research, livestream shopping has remained unexplored. Livestream shopping, as a new market practice, also lacks research from a gender perspective. This thesis draws on Judith Butler's gender performance theory, taking a qualitative approach that combines observation and interview to study how Li Jiaqi and his viewers perform gender. We find that consumers have contradicting perceptions on gender norms and generally have positive impression of Li Jiaqi, partly because of their legitimization. We also find that Li Jiaqi performs androgyny, taking advantage of traditional and contemporary gender norms to attempt to achieve better sales. We call on consumers and marketing practitioners to raise awareness of gender stereotypes in livestream shopping, which has a significant impact on the development of equality in society.

**Keywords:** marketing, consumer, livestream shopping, gender performance

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## **Glossary**

Gender roles - The socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (WHO, n.d.).

Gender performance - A view that sees gender is engraved in day-to-day practice, learned and performed upon the basis of cultural norms of femininity and masculinity (Butler, 2011).

Gender norms - The societal rules on how people are expected to act, speak, dress, groom and behave according to the assigned biological gender. It is also gender roles that different genders are called upon to play in the family, community workplace and society.

Livestream shopping - A new e-commerce practice that combines livestreaming (a function that can be found on most social media platforms) with shopping online, which provides consumers with a more engaging experience than clicking and filling their shopping cart.

Matthew effect – A phenomenon that the strong get stronger and the weak get weaker.

Livestream host - The main character in the livestream, which can be mainly classified into 3 categories: online shop owners, celebrities and professional hosts. The Matthew effect in China's livestream e-commerce industry is notable as top hosts occupy the majority of Gross Merchandise Volume (GMV) and popularity.

Li Jiaqi - A successful male livestream host who mainly sells beauty products. He is in the second place in China in terms of GMV becoming popular since overcoming Jack Ma in selling lipsticks during Double 11 Shopping Festival, 2018.

Beauty products - Skincare products and cosmetics (makeups).

Masculinity / Femininity - A series of socially constructed characteristics associated with men / women, which is widely accepted by a certain culture during a certain period of time.

## 1 Summary

Since modern society, scholars in various fields have challenged the notion of essential sex differences (Beauvoir et al., 2015; Bem, 1974; Butler, 1988; Mead, 1935). With the development of society, people get different interpretations of traditional gender concepts. The differentiation of sex and gender have deepened our understanding of gender and society. That is, sex is seen as a binary biological categorization whereas gender is constructed socially. Under the influence of the worldview of gender-as-social-construct, market and consumer-related research has undergone the same process, shifting from simplest sex research to gender research (Bettany et al., 2010).

Livestream shopping, as a new e-commerce practice, is fast developing around the world, especially in China. It was first introduced in 2016 and got massive attention after the outbreak of Covid-19. An interesting phenomenon is that the top two professional host normally occupy over 50% of GMV, and other dozens of thousands of hosts share the rest. Li Jiaqi, as one of the two super host, is a professional male host who mainly sells beauty products which is a category that is traditionally considered as a “woman product”. His livestream room was mainly watched by women and he becomes the best host for beauty products. The unconventional phenomenon and the absence of societal and gender-related research in the livestream shopping setting give us space and motivation to study it from a gender perspective.

As a research stream that mainly use qualitative method in consumer research, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) has a huge amount of research related to gender and consumer (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In “Consumer identity project” paradigm of CCT, consumption is considered as an important site for negotiating gender identities. Gender concepts are largely rooted in local culture, which is why we need to study it in different cultures. Several researchers in this field proposed the globalization of CCT (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Bettany et al., 2010; Silva et al., 2020). At the same time, we find most gender & consumer research are in offline settings and lack online research (see [Table 1 in 3.2](#)).

As Murto (2019) argued, most gender research focused on consumers or advertisements, but ignored the impact from marketing and marketing practitioners during consumption. Gender research in marketing is mostly related to advertising, which focused only on the “end-results” of marketing and not on the process by which advertising is created (Murto, 2019). Livestream shopping is a marketplace where consumers are in close contact with marketing practitioners. Hosts are the “end-results” when they sell on stream, and they are also responsible for arranging and planning how to create those livestreams. This dual identity makes livestream shopping an excellent context for the

research of marketing and marketers, which has implications for the development of related research.

To address these research gaps, we propose our research question:

*“How are gender roles performed by Li Jiaqi and his woman viewers in livestream shopping setting in China?”*

This thesis explores the gender performance of woman consumers in Chinese livestream contexts for the well-known man host Li Jiaqi who successfully sells beauty products as the main category. Our findings are that woman viewers: 1) have new and old concepts of gender roles at the same time; 2) believe beauty products are necessities; 3) believe that Li Jiaqi is a good combination of masculinity and femininity; 4) actively legitimize the gendered messages (stereotypes) in Li Jiaqi’s livestream shopping.

In addition to using the interviews to try to understand consumers, observation method is also used to study the way the representative livestream host perform gender in the consumption process. We find that Li Jiaqi is breaking traditional gender roles while at the same time using traditional gender roles to sell his products. The former brings a deep and positive impression to his viewers, while the latter is ignored or actively legitimized. At the same time, he plays the role of objectification & categorization of marketing to consumers in livestream, which has a subtle influence on consumers’ gender performance.

In order for readers to better understand the research context of this paper, we introduce livestream shopping, Li Jiaqi as well as beauty product and categorization in Chapter 2. The literature review and theories are in Chapter 3: we go through the gender-as-social-construct, gender in marketing and consumption research and gender in China, and we establish a theoretical framework in 3.4. Chapter 4 introduces methodology, which focuses on how we collect and analyze the data and the quality of our research. In Chapter 5, we summarize and analyze in detail the insights we gained from our observations and interviews and divide them into four subsections according to the theoretical framework, from macro-level to micro-level. In Chapter 6 we explain how we have successfully answered our research questions and further discuss the findings. In Chapter 7 we propose the implications, contributions and limitations of this research. We put the interviewee profiles and our interview guide in the appendix 1 and 2, and finally we translate abstracts of cited Chinese articles that do not include English abstracts in appendix 3 as it might be useful to some readers.

## **2 Background**

This chapter will introduce the development of livestream shopping and why we think it is interesting and necessary to study livestream shopping from the perspective of gender research. The first section will introduce the development of livestream shopping and an interesting gender phenomenon that a man host becomes a top seller by selling beauty products, and also research progress of livestream shopping. The second section will introduce the relevant research of beauty products and product categorization.

### **2.1 Livestream Shopping**

Livestream shopping, a new type of online retailing, is a combination of online shopping and live shows. Consumers can watch the live show held by online shop owners, celebrities or professional hosts, interact and learn about products then make purchase decisions. Livestream shopping has been developed in some places around the world, such as the US, Sweden and especially China. As it is at its beginning phase, not many research articles can be found on database. So, we also use magazine articles from credible publishers as a source to introduce its status quo.

In America, traditional TV shopping such as QVC and HSN (inventors of TV live shopping), internet giants such as Facebook and Amazon and newly established companies are actively developing their livestream business (Kharif & Townsend, 2020). Some new practices are also being tested such as personalized one-on-one livestream shopping and users using livestream selling to each other (George, 2021). Even so, the US online shopping can be clunky and disjointed to customers as Kharif & Townsend (2020) argued that the combination of payment networks, marketplaces and lenders makes it difficult to have a seamless purchase with one click such as what Alibaba does in China. We could also see Bambuser, a Swedish company, provide livestream shopping platform for retailers and brands such as Samsung, Farfetch and Åhléns (Bambuser, 2020, 2021). From the published information regarding the engagement of these companies, we could foresee its prosperity in the near future just as current livestream shopping in China.

In China, livestream shopping came to the fore in 2016 and has become extremely popular under the pandemic of Covid-19, and it is now an indispensable part of online retailing. One of the most interesting phenomena we found is the Matthew Effect, namely the phenomenon that the strong get stronger and the weak get weaker, has been salient as the top two professional hosts, Viya and Li Jiaqi, grabbed majority of sales, traffic and influence in the industry. The GMV of Viya and Li Jiaqi was 9140.57 and 5953.29 million yuan respectively, in October, 2020 (Statista, 2020). Viya was titled “livestream queen” who could sell anything while Li Jiaqi was titled “lipstick king” who sold



15,000 lipsticks during 5 minutes of his livestream. Li Jiaqi has triggered our interest in the sense of gender and marketing practice in that a majority of the products he sells are beauty products which was traditionally seen as a “women’s product”.

An example of Li Jiaqi’s livestream would be useful for readers to understand the form of livestream shopping. Figure 1 is a screenshot of playback of Li Jiaqi’s livestream on 2021 Valentine’s Day. He was showing the color of three Armani lipsticks to his audience. We can see from top-left corner and bottom-right corner that there were 5.82 million person-time in total watched the show, and he got 19.34 million times of “liked” on that night.

***Figure 1. Li Jiaqi showing lipsticks’ color for his audiences***



China owns the largest market for livestream shopping. Its market was only worth 20 billion USD in 2018. In 2019, its market was worth 66 billion USD, and now it is worth around 150-170 billion USD which is a number equal to around 1% of 2020 China GDP (DATA100 Insight, 2020). Factors such as the advancement of telecommunication, logistics and online shopping, with the pandemic of Covid-19, make livestream shopping become unusually popular practice adopted by an assortment of large and small sellers from 2020. Currently, livestream shopping is dominated by Taobao (Alibaba), Tiktok (Bytedance) and Kuaishou, three giants in Chinese internet industry (Statista, 2020). We could see another Chinese internet giant company, Tencent is also actively developing their livestream shopping business (Kang et al., 2020).

Some shop owners even give up their physical store, focusing on developing their livestream studio (Asia News Monitor, 2020). Livestream shopping also helped African farmers in exploring distribution channel, connecting Chinese customers and their unsalable coffee beans (Beijing review, 2020). It is believed that livestream shopping would generate more benefits in the future.

Some articles about livestream shopping have been published. For companies, livestream shopping, as an innovative marketing practice, contributed much to crisis management during the pandemic (Y. Wang et al., 2020). Yang (2020) researched the reason why Chinese people are motivated and engaged by livestream shopping. Chen (2019) examined the effects of livestream shopping on consumers' satisfaction and purchase intentions. Wang et al. (2018) researched the effects of source attractiveness and argument quality on hedonic and utilitarian products respectively. Using quantitative and stimulus-organism-response framework, Xu et al. (2020) investigates the three contextual and environmental stimuli's effect on customers' cognitive and emotional states and their subsequent responses. And Cai et al. (2018) found that hedonic motivation is more related to celebrity-based intention while utilitarian motivation is more related to product-based intention.

These articles approached different aspects of livestream shopping in China, most of which did not touch upon the societal side but focused on livestream shopping as marketing management tool or consumers' psychological response. As most extant research focus on economic and psychological aspect of consumers, gender-related issues could be explored more and help people understand livestream shopping from a societal perspective.

## **2.2 Beauty Products & Categorization**

Beauty product is one of the most sold products (purchased by 36.14% of respondents) in livestream shopping (Beijing Consumer Association, 2020). Beauty product brands have long been targeting women as their main customers. Sales associates in beauty retail stores are also more commonly women. That is, the buyer, seller and products were all conventionally regarded as feminine. However, an interesting phenomenon now is that people start to see male sales in beauty product selling situation. Li Jiaqi is one of them and the most successful one. A research (Rosenbaum et al., 2017) indicates that straight female customers would favor to work with gay male sales when buying merchandize that only requires non-sexual intimacy such as clothes and beauty products in the context of offline shopping. Standing from gender as social construct perspective, we could understand it as those mentioned sales perform their gender in a different way compared to heterosexual males, making those consumers like to work with them. In this angle, it would be interesting to see how Li Jiaqi has performed his gender role, and how it is understood and constructed by his consumers (watchers).

In 1990, 81% of new introduced products adopted a gender extension strategy due to the high cost of product launch (Jung, 2006; Keller, 1998 as cited in Jung 2006), showing that changing products' gender category was quite common for marketers. This could make consumers act and think differently with the same product. More recently, Avery (2012, p. 322) notes: "Marketers are gender-bending their brands, taking products that had been targeted to one sex and targeting them to the other." However, not all customers are favorable of this practice. In general, women are more likely to buy a male-gendered product than the reverse situation (Stuteville, 1971). It was explained by Peñaloza (1994, p. 366) that masculinities are regarded as "rational and naturalized" in society, so men do not want to step into femininities.

This product categorization is completed by both marketing and consumers and is constantly changing. In Avery's research (2012), marketers' gender-bending efforts that promote the originally masculine car to women entail men customers' resistance, because men feel they would have been unable to perform their masculinities in owning and driving that car. It was not the case in Harley-Davidson subculture context because women were "engaging, resisting and co-opting hyper-masculinity" (Martin et al., 2006, p. 188), showing that man consumers' acceptance depends largely on if the newcomers disrupt its original brand cultural core in a way it negatively affects their performance of masculinities.

Even products' gender category is changing, it still exists. Beauty products still have a feminine tendency as toothpaste, originally regarded as masculine, now becomes androgynous due to marketers' focus on the tooth-whitening and smile-brightening functions (Fugate & Phillips, 2010). Murto (2020) proposes to shift the focus of cultural and visual content of gender categorization to market representational practice. Li Jiaqi could be seen as a marketer conducting representational practice during his livestream. In our context, we will explore how a man using gender performance to sell a traditionally feminine product in such a successful way, and also explore how consumers are thinking about beauty products.

### **3 Literature Review & Theories**

This chapter reviews relevant research of gender, consumption and marketing. It contributes to 1) identify research gaps; 2) confirm the significance of our research. It contains four sections. The first section introduces the development of gender and consumption research. The second part reviews the gender categorization of products and beauty products which were traditionally seen more feminine than masculine. Li Jiaqi could be seen as a marketer that also contributes to the gender categorization of product, so the third part reviews the gender research in marketing and advertising field. The fourth part is a summary and conclusion of the findings in this literature review.

#### **3.1 Gender as Social Construction**

For a long time, there has been a debate about whether gender is biologically determined or socially constructed. Along with the development of the feminist movement, the focus has been shifted more on the doctrine of social construction of gender, challenging the traditional gender relations of biological determination of gender and the dichotomy between men and women (Schaffer, 2017). On the contrast, gender is regarded as more flexible and it can vary based on different situations. In this doctrinal context, the understanding of gender has become more complex and diverse. The sex in which a person is born does not represent gender identity; people's gender identity is acquired and constructed during the process of growing up. Anthropologist Mead (1935) emphasizes the variable nature of gender roles and that perceptions of gender are culturally defined (Goulding & Saren, 2009). Mead argued that so-called masculine and feminine personality traits could be seen as "clothes", which could be seen as a pioneer of gender research (Goulding & Saren, 2009). After this thought-provoking theory came out, more scholars start to change the way they see gender. The philosopher Foucault, who also holds a social constructionist view, sees "gender" as an outcome rather than an origin, arguing that biological gender, whether masculinity or femininity, has evolved over history and is a product of discourse and heteronormative hegemony, shaped by sexual and gender practices (Butler, 2011; Foucault, 1990). Bem (1974) went further to challenge the biological determinism and gender binary by introducing androgyny theory, a new psychological construct which mixes "masculinity" and "femininity" rather than treating them as two opposing aspects (Goulding & Saren, 2009). The concept of androgyny (Bem, 1974) allows us to think masculinity and femininity as two axes of a Cartesian coordinate system in which human could be located based on their personality traits. The concept of masculine and feminine would not be absolute, but are independent and could be mixed and interwoven in each individual, with each person showing a different degree of masculinity and femininity (Bem, 1974). Gender as a performative "act" (Butler, 1988; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and

as socially and culturally construct (Lorber & Farrell, 1991) enable us to analyze so-called masculinity and femininity from a social and contingent aspect.

### **3.2 Gender in Consumer and Marketing Research**

Gender in consumer and marketing research is a multidisciplinary combination of sociology, psychology, business and gender research. Researchers followed the evolvement of gender research, gradually changing from “sex difference” to a more fluid “gender research” (Bettany et al., 2010). Bettany et al. (2010) summarized the development of gender research in consumer and marketing field from the perspective of the biennial Gender, Marketing and Consumer Research Conference in which articles and presentations delivered are frontier of the field. As they point out, two mainstream research directions exist: Sex & Gender. Sex and gender are different concepts stemmed from psychology and sociology research (Fischer & Arnold, 1994). Sex is a binary categorization based on the biological characteristics of human. A large volume of research in marketing and consumption research uses innate sex as a variable, which was a straightforward and simple setting. This has been valuable to both gender and marketing research, but it does not consider the social and cultural aspects of masculinity and femininity. This bipolar, binary and fixed categorization was challenged both academically and politically (Bettany et al., 2010; Peñaloza, 1994). Gender performativity, as a way of conceptualizing the social construction of gender, is Butler’s (1988) most important concept and has been used by marketing and consumption researchers in exploring consumers’ attitudes toward specific types of consumption (e.g. Goulding & Saren, 2009). We would also use it as our lens to explore how Li Jiaqi and his viewers perform gender.

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) refers to a “family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings”, containing four main research programs (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868). Recurrent gender topic has become a small part in CCT studies and substantial amount of research have been done in the past 30 years. The development of CCT embodies the increasingly broad and deep understanding of gender in different consumption context. Some radical research also indicates the imbalance of power between genders under “heteronormative” social institution (e.g. Peñaloza, 1994).

One of the four research programs is Consumer Identity Projects in which consumers are considered as “identity seeker and makers” in the consumption process (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 871). Bristor and Fischer (1993) point out the systemic problems of biased method and objectivity in consumer research from three feminist perspectives, providing new standpoint for consumer researchers. Thompson (1996) followed this path, examining the construction of gender identities by studying the preferences and life stories of professional mothers who are “juggling” their work and life. Men from different

social class also construct their masculinities through everyday consumption in different ways (Holt & Thompson, 2004). Similarly, men's construction of domestic masculinity was also studied based on their social capital in the context of DIY home improvement consumption (Moisio et al., 2013). We regard this as the first stream studies under Consumer Identity Projects because of its assumption of "a coherent sense of self-identity" (Murto, 2019; Thompson, 1996, p. 389).

The second stream under Consumer Identity Projects is based on Butler's theory of gender performativity. For instance, the engagement and resistance of women riders in Harley-Davidson communities, a hyper-masculine subcultural one (Martin et al., 2006). Goulding & Saren (2009) focused on the gender identities in gothic subculture—Whitby Goth Festival, investigating people's practice of challenging conventional gendered aesthetics and constructing and expressing "true-self". Also, roller derby field is seen as a market place where girls could contest orthodox gender order by gender performativity without losing sociocultural legitimacy (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Researchers also explored the marginalized overweight woman bloggers' resistance to normativity and the exclusion generated therein and subjectification process in online context (Harju & Huovinen, 2015).

The earlier stream of studies, as Murto (2019, p. 14) pointed out, assume that there is core gender identity, rather than gender is completely performed through daily interaction with others, while the latter perspective provides a more fluid notion of gender that allows for non-binary explorations. This non-binary standpoint has been appealed as Peñaloza (1994) argued that the gender dualism dominating marketing field, as a dichotomous categorization, could not match the need from the changing world. In short, this trend of moving from dualism to pluralism has deepened our understanding of gender in consumption.

With the extension and diversification of studies on gender and consumption in the last decades, gender research in consumption has promising future direction, especially in terms of its globalization (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Bettany et al., 2010; Silva et al., 2020) as gender performance is deeply rooted in culture background, which needs to be studied in different cultures. This stream of study shed light on our research as we ask how viewers of Li Jiaqi perform gender during the whole process of livestream shopping.

We also checked gender and consumption research published in Chinese database. We found that Jin et al. sufficiently introduced the background, theoretical framework and development of CCT (2014). In this research, they point out that CCT research in China has much potential to grow since consumption in China is large-scale and very complex. Six years passed, we still only see few works in CCT, and barely relevant to gender.

Besides, existing studies were mostly conducted in offline context and there are still few gender studies in the online consumption context. Table 1 is attached below, which is a brief chronological summary of the context of gender and consumer research mentioned above. The lack of research in online context also leaves us room to explore our topic.

***Table 1. Context & topic of gender & consumer research***

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Context</b>
<b>Caring consumers: Gendered consumption meanings and the juggling lifestyle</b>	Thompson, Craig J	1996	Professional mothers & gendered consumption	US, Offline
<b>An ecofeminist analysis of environmentally sensitive women using qualitative methodology: The emancipatory potential of an ecological life</b>	Dobscha, Susan; Ozanne, Julie L	2001	Ecofeminist & consumption	US, Offline
<b>The protean quality of subcultural consumption: An ethnographic account of gay consumers</b>	Martin, Diane M; Schouten, John W; McAlexander, James H	2002	Women in hyper-masculine consumption	US, Offline
<b>Man-of-action heroes: The pursuit of heroic masculinity in everyday consumption</b>	Holt, Douglas B; Thompson, Craig J	2004	Men's everyday consumption	US, Offline
<b>Claiming the Throttle: Multiple Femininities in a Hyper-Masculine Subculture</b>	Martin, Diane M; Schouten, John W; McAlexander, James H	2006	Women's consumption of Harley-Davidson	US, Offline
<b>Performing identity: an analysis of gender expressions at the Whitby goth festival</b>	Goulding, Christina; Saren, Michael	2009	Subcultural consumption and gender performance	UK, Offline
<b>Defending the markers of masculinity: Consumer resistance to brand gender-bending</b>	Avery, Jill	2012	Men's action against gender-bending efforts	US, Offline
<b>Productive Consumption in the Class-Mediated</b>	Moisio, Risto; Arnould, Eric	2013	Men & DIY home project	US, Offline

<b>Construction of Domestic Masculinity: Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Home Improvement in Men's Identity Work</b>	J; Gentry, James W			
<b>Practising gender: The role of banter in young men's improvisations of masculine consumer identities</b>	Hein, Wendy; O'Donohoe, Stephanie	2014	Men & bantering	UK, Offline
<b>Women Skating on the Edge: Marketplace Performances as Ideological Edgework</b>	Thompson, Craig J; Üstüner, Tuba	2015	Women & roller derby skating	US, Offline
<b>Fashionably voluptuous: normative femininity and resistant performative tactics in fatshion blogs</b>	Harju, Anu A; Huovinen, Annamari	2015	Plus-size women's resistance to normativity	7 Western Countries, Online
<b>"I'll wait for him": Understanding when female shoppers prefer working with gay male sales associates</b>	Rosenbaum, Mark S.; Russell, Eric M.; Russell-Burnnett, Rebekah	2017	Women & homosexual male beauty sales	US, Offline
<b>Fashionable subjects and complicity resistance: power, subjectification, and bounded resistance in the context of plus-size consumers</b>	Zanette, Maria Carolina; Pereira Zamith Brito, Eliane	2019	Plus-size women's resistance to normativity	Brazil, Online
<b>Men's consumer identities and their consumption norms in the perceived, conceived and lived spaces of spas</b>	Petrylaite, Edita; Hart, David	2019	Men's construction of identities in Spa	UK, Offline

Stepping back, market and marketing have been paid less attention compared to consumption in terms of gender research. Even though it had been often brought up together with consumer research, scholars only consider market and marketing a background where consumption practices are conducted (Murto, 2019). In this sense, market and marketing were only seen a space where consumers construct or perform their gender. Advertising, as an important tool of marketing, are more often researched with gender topics, as



gender is “one of the most prominently used social resources” in advertising field (Jhally, 1987 as cited in Zayer et al., 2019, p. 239).

Advertising is one of the most influencing means for marketers to reach and impact consumers. Mikkonen (2010) states that “advertising is an important form of contemporary cultural text, and has a significant role as “raw material” in the process through which communities constitute themselves and negotiate their symbolic boundaries (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).” The debate called “mirror versus mold” focus on if advertising has significant impact on the society, and scholars finally suggested these two should be a continuum (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Zayer et al. (2019) also points out that scholars conceive advertising is a creation of culture, and also reflection of culture. Besides, Zayer et al. (2019) explores the legitimization process of man consumers in China, the U.S., and Spain with respect to gendered messages in advertising, proposing the macro-meso-micro model which is adapted to help get understandings in our context. The adapted model will be illustrated in the next subsection.

Previous advertising research consists many analyses from the cultural and visual perspective of advertisement, studying how masculinities or femininities are represented in the advertisement (e.g. Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; Mikkonen, 2010; Zayer et al., 2019). These researches have been conducted in different contexts, but mostly focus on the advertisement itself. Just as Murto (2019, p. 17) points out:

*“While research on representations of gender, especially as it pertains to advertising representations, does take up marketing’s role in reproducing the gender system, it is limited by its focus on the end-results, the published or broadcast ads, alone.”*

Some scholars propose a shift of perspective, which is not only focus on the result or finished product, but also look at the process of creating. This extends the gender research from a touchpoint back to its origin. Some research has already explored the marketers’ action (e.g. Ariztia, 2015). But gender research in marketing is still at its minority. Notably, a research explored advertising practitioners’ view of how gender portrayals affect men and women, and how their view impacts their decisions (Tuncay Zayer & Coleman, 2015). In Chinese context, a research has found that practitioners consider advertisement only as a mirror, denying their work might shape the culture (Shao et al., 2014). Murto (2020) argued that gender topic could be combined with market representational practice, which is part of Kjellberg & Helgesson’s conceptual framework of market (2007).

Livestream shopping, as a new and influential marketing practice, can be seen as advertisement of brands and products. Therefore, Li Jiaqi could be conceptualized as two identities: marketer and advertisement. As professional livestream host, he is responsible for the arrangement of his show, and at the same time he is the key role in his show. The complexity of his identity and the

extant literatures have not touched on this point, which gave us opportunity to explore on both the process and the new form of advertising end-result—livestream.

To conclude this subsection, our first finding is that gender in consumption research is becoming increasingly diversified and extensive, while dominantly situated in the off-line context of western society. A promising research sphere mentioned in two reviews in 2005 and 2010 is the globalization of CCT and its manifestation in transitional economies and developing countries (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Bettany et al., 2010). However, in regard to gender research in CCT studies, the US is still the most productive country, occupying around 1/3 of all papers, and western context is still the majority of research (Silva et al., 2020). The second finding is that gender topic has not been massively involved in the research of process of marketing and advertising practice. Li Jiaqi's double identity, as marketer and also new form of advertisement, gives us space for exploring gender-related issues in livestream shopping context.

### **3.3 Gender in China**

Gender concept is rooted in culture, and culture always changes through time even in the same place. In book *Gender Stereotypes* (2008, p. 207), it was mentioned about traditional physical stereotypes of men and women from western perspective: "... women's physical attributes include dainty, pretty, soft-voiced, and graceful; men's include athletic, brawny, broad-shouldered, and physically strong." In Chinese culture, Xiao's review (2007, p. 176) on Louie's book (2002) argues that Wen & Wu is a better paradigm in analyzing Chinese masculinity, and Wen stands for "qualities such as scholarly, civil, mental and genteel" while Wu stands for physical strength and martial arts. Hu & Kai (2016) critiqued three classic types of ideal women gender roles in traditional Chinese culture, that are 1) beautiful heart and look; 2) helping husband improve his career, study, personality and social status; 3) weakness is beauty.

On top of these, Liu et al.'s CSRI-50 could better help in understanding contemporary gender roles in China. Based on BSRI (1974) and CSRI compiled by Qian et al. (2000), CSRI-50 proposed 16 positive words for each masculinity and femininity, and 18 neutral words (Liu et al., 2011). Many viewers of Li Jiaqi, that are our interviewees are university students and recent graduates. The data of CSRI-50 is collected from university students, which can fit well in our context. The authors of CSRI-50 also mentioned in their conclusion that the influence of traditional gender roles has weakened, but it still exists; traditional single gender ideas no longer occupy a dominant position and are replaced by non-single ideas. Table 2 is a translated positive word of CSRI-50 summarized by Liu et al. (2011) in their work, which helps us understand the traits associated with men or women in contemporary time.

**Table 2. Positive words of masculinity and femininity in CSRI-50 (translated)**

<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>Femininity</b>
Masculine	Gentle
Dominating	Meek
Adventurous	Elegant
Have leader manner	Understanding
Have leader capability	Happy to comfort people
Uninhibited	Mild intonation
Bold	Approachable
Good at judgment	Feminine
Calm	Empathetic
Brave	Frugal
Rational	Gentle and quiet
Dispassionate	Scrupulous
Generous	Diligent and thrifty
Have organizing capability	Caring
Broad-minded	Considerate
Magnanimous	Good at listening

From a marketing perspective, advertising is a distillation and reflection of reality, which in turn influences reality in society. The gender images portrayed in advertisements reflect, to some extent, real-life gender role identities and expectations (Goffman, 1979). A comparative study of the portrayal of female characters in Chinese advertising over a 10-year period found that women were mainly portrayed as traditional caretakers (good wives and kind mothers) and modern shopping-loving and pleasure seekers (Han & Xu, 2019). Behind the image of the virtuous woman is a patriarchal context of submissiveness and softness, reflecting the subordinate status of women, while the modern fashionable woman has an eroticized character (Zhu, 2008). However, delving into the cultural connotations of the women's role, researchers have found that the image of women in advertising has begun to change in recent years, with the appearance of independent, professional women (Li, 2015). On the other hand, the age range of women appearing in advertisements is also expanding upwards and is no longer limited to young women (Han & Xu, 2019). Similarly, the emergence of new and different images of masculinity in today's advertisements, including the family man (caregivers) and the pretty boy, signifies a trend towards a more diverse image of masculinity (Yang, 2013).

### **3.4 Gender Performance in Marketing and Consumption**

In the following section, we discuss gender performances within marketing and consumption-based contexts. Our study of gender roles in Li Jiaqi's livestreams

is based on a socially constructed view of gender, and on this foundation, we introduce Judith Butler's doctrine of gender performance and Fredrickson and Roberts's theory of objectification to understand and interpret our research questions. On the other hand, we also draw on the market as practice perspective to contextualize the gendered categorization of products in livestream. The theoretical framework of our thesis is derived from an adaptation of the theoretical framework of the Zayer et al.'s article (2019), which we visualize at the end of this chapter.

### **3.4.1 Gender Performativity**

Butler's theory of gender performativity provides a unique perspective for understanding the gender roles presented in the livestream shopping process. In her book *Gender Trouble - Feminism and the Subversion of "Identity"*, Judith Butler (2011, p. 34) offers her own definition of gender:

*"Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes...that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Gender proves to be performative— that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be."*

She proposes the theory of gender performativity in which she claims that the acquisition of gender identity is accomplished through repetitive performance, a fluid process on a timeline (Butler, 2011). Butler's definition of performativity, on the other hand, emphasizes the process of gender production and formation in which the actions of subjects are not autonomously chosen by the subject, but instead are compulsive and repetitive (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). More specifically, in the process of gender identity, the perception of gender identity is formed and confirmed by the subject through the continuous implementation of various norms from the culture in which gender is embedded (Butler, 2011). Thus, as Thompson & Üstüner (2015) point out, gender identity is not shaped by the subjective choice, but by social norms and is inextricably linked to discipline and punishment. Social norms are not only embodied in written rules and regulations, but also implicit in unwritten socially accepted values, such as aesthetics for women and stereotypes of gender roles. The social meanings generated by these disciplinary processes and the social meanings therein play a large role in the subjection of women to a position of dominance and submission (Matich et al., 2019). For example, mainstream society expects women to be slim, fair-skinned, sexually attractive, hairless, etc. (Bordo, 2004). And these mainstream aesthetics and expectations of women are largely reflected in products that are traditionally feminine, such as make-up products, skin care products, and other beauty products.

### **3.4.2 Objectification**

In their paper, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) propose the theoretical

framework of “objectified femininity” to understand women’s experience of the sociocultural phenomenon of sexual objectification. This theory states that women’s social processes are always exposed to a social climate that is highly permeated by heteronormative culture, and this social climate is deeply rooted in the sexualized social oppression of women by men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The sexual objectification concept affects women’s self-perception and behavior, causing women to see themselves as an observer, and the mass media plays a crucial role in this (Sun et al., 2013). The media focuses on the women’s body or a body part and perceives women as objects to be viewed. Through the analysis of Chinese advertisements, Wang have found that the image of a woman is often replaced by a body part, be it a leg or a red lip (Sun et al., 2013; C. Wang, 2005). Studies by Western scholars also support this view. Vandebosch and Eggermont (2012) stated that both traditional as well as new communications media have revealed that they often focus on women’s appearance in a sexual way, while ignoring their individuality.

Based on objectification theory, another important point made by Frederickson is women’s objectification of themselves, i.e., women stand in a third perspective to observe their own bodies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). By internalizing beauty standards in the media, according to Moradi & Huang’s (2008) women have increased their monitoring of their own bodies and appearance. As Calogero (2009) pointed out, having higher levels of self-objectification, women have a tendency to perceive appearance as central to their self-concept, anticipating what others might think of their appearance and vigilantly monitoring their appearance.

Livestream shopping as an emerging form of network interaction, hosts can show themselves in real time and interact with audiences through live video streaming, in which the host’s face and body become the main part of the screen interface. Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory suggests that people form clear self-evaluations by comparing their own states with those of others, while the object of comparison can be further specified as the body or body parts (Sun et al., 2013). A study by Lindner et al. (2012) found that both self-objectification and social comparison were associated with body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Projecting these concepts onto Li Jiaqi’s live show, when he wears delicate makeup, sitting in the carefully decorated room with shining lighting effects, trying on red or pink lipstick on his lips, at that moment he is the object to be seen and compared. On the other hand, in order to increase the live viewing, and more intuitive display the beauty products, Li Jiaqi’s live room will also have his female assistant, try lipstick and cosmetics female models. Without exception, they all have beautiful faces, exquisite makeup and carefully tended hair, and a slim figure. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the woman viewers will watch the effect of lipstick (or other beauty products) being tried on the model while comparing their own bodies to the image shown on the model in front of the mobile phone screen.

### **3.4.3 Gender Categorization in Market Practice**

Many scholars have proposed that markets are viewed as evolving complex systems rather than stable structures that already exist and do not change, and that markets are shaped by participants in the process of market formation, including the dual participation of producers and consumers (Callon et al., 2002). In turn, other models and concepts of market shaping have been proposed by scholars. Kjellberg & Helgesson (2007) presents a model for shaping markets that consists of three practices that are intrinsically interconnected: exchange, representational, and normative practices. Exchange practices encompasses all the specific activities that make exchange in an economic sense possible and occurring; representational practices encompasses activities that help describe markets and how they operate, such as the price fluctuations of index stocks that reflect market movements; and normative practices are activities that help set guidelines for how markets should be formed or operate according to certain actors, as well as setting normative goals, such as setting rules for market competition, etc. Kjellberg (2007). Subsequent scholars have explained some phenomena in the business community based on the theoretical framework proposed by Kjellberg. Veal & Mouzas (2012) analyze the market and regulation of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the perspective of a market practice framework. Rinallo (2006) uses this framework to evaluate the shaping role of the Paris Fabric Fair for the apparel and fashion industry.

Murto's paper (2020) combines the market as a practice with an ethnomethodological view of gender to explore gender categorization in products. Murto noted that established market research that contextualizes gender categorization also focuses directly on a diverse range of performances and artifacts, rather than merely on interactions between individuals (2020). Our research draws on the concepts integrated by Murto to understand product gender categorization from a market practice perspective.

Based on the framework of the gender categorization in market practice, Li Jiaqi's show can be seen as a microcosm or representational scene of the livestream shopping sector, or more broadly speaking, of product marketing industry. The ultimate aim of all the marketing activities created by his livestream is to sell products and thus generate an exchange relationship with consumers. According to Kjellberg & Helgesson (2007), these three practices do not exist independently or distinct from each other, but influence and rely on each other. The results and outcomes produced by each practice can be translated into the other practice as an input. Thus, market shaping is done through a process of interdependence. The product gender categorization is reinforced and solidified in this marketing representation by Li Jiaqi's livestream. As the exchange relationship is created and the marketing representation plays out over and over again in the livestream, consumers

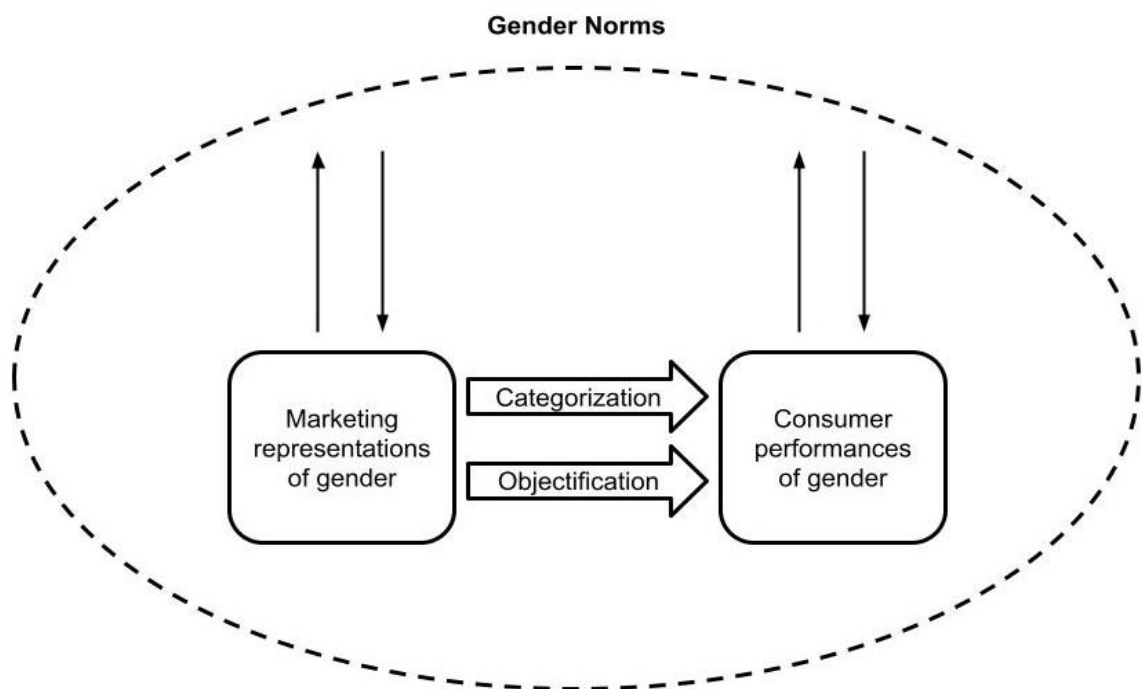
become more receptive to the ideas and product classifications conveyed in the livestream, a process that also leads to the reinforcement of social gender norms.

Gender norms prevail in most cultures as it was traditionally seen a “right lifestyle that people should follow”. A typical example is bread-winning men and care-giving women, which was popular gender stereotypes in both western and eastern culture (Kite et al., 2008). In Butler’s gender performativity framework, this norm is constructed through reiterative and resignifying expressions in daily life, which were seen as naturalized and objective (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Even if people have started to reflect on this naturalized discourse, such norms still permeate people’s lives.

### 3.4.4 Visualization of framework

To summarize and conceptualize the findings of this theory section, we adapt the framework from Zayer et al.’s article (2019) on how consumers (de)legitimize gendered messages in advertisement. Figure 2 is attached below. This visualization could help readers understand through what lens we could look at livestream shopping.

**Figure 2. Visualization of Framework**



The arrows in the visualization represents influencing. In our framework, gender norms exert influence on both marketing representations of gender and consumer performances of gender. Marketing representations of gender, as mentioned above, include both advertisement and practitioners’ actions. These

representations impact consumers' performances of gender through categorization and objectification. Conversely, both feed back into gender norms by repetition of discursive discourse and performance. Consumer performances of gender have an impact on marketing representations of gender because marketers are also consumers, and they make decisions from their insights of consumers. However, in our research project, we do not focus on how consumer impact the marketing process or marketing end-results, which we omit in the framework. According to the framework, we will collect the marketing representations of gender by observing Li Jiaqi's livestream, and the consumer performances of gender by holding one-on-one interviews with livestream viewers. Detailed methods will be introduced in the next chapter.



## **4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Methodological Fit**

A qualitative research approach has been taken in this thesis. According to our research question, we try to understand how gender roles are performed by male beauty host and the viewers in livestream shopping. We hope to understand the gender construction in Li Jiaqi's livestream from the perspective of the Butler's gender performativity theory and Fredrickson & Robert's objectification theory. In this process, we are not concerned with testing the validity of the theories, but rather with answering our research questions by exploring the explanation and evaluation of the phenomena we observe in light of the theory. For this reason, the inductive approach is more appropriate for our research (Bryman et al., 2007).

We adopted an exploratory approach to understand gender roles as they are performed in livestream. From this perspective, a qualitative study consisting of an observational approach and semi-structured in-depth interviews allows us to obtain a deeper understanding of respondents' opinions and attitudes and thus more insightful data with a greater degree of interpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). As Corbin & Strauss (2008) pointed out, compared with conventional research method, qualitative method can allow researchers to have higher possibility to obtain detailed information about the phenomena including interviewees' feelings, moods and personal thoughts.

### **4.2 Research Design**

We used observation method, in-depth semi-structured interview to obtain data and study it for analysis. Videos and visual materials are widely accepted and intensively being used in consumer researches as study material (R. W. Belk & Kozinets, 2005). We watched Li Jiaqi's livestream and made real-time notes by observing the live scene setup, the use of words during the livestream, the use of body language, and the interaction between the host and the viewer and the interaction between the host and his assistant. In-depth interviews were used to ask questions about the content of the livestream, the image of the host, and other matters, so as to get the feelings and opinions of the interviewees on these issues, and to provide a reference for our study of gender roles in the livestream based on the real thoughts and perceptions of this group.

The choice of using a semi-structured interview format was also based on the characteristics and nature of our research questions. Interviews can gather more authentic answers than focus groups because individuals may be less willing to reveal their true feelings in a group context (R. Belk et al., 2012). Therefore, we decided to use this format because it is a more appropriate technique for studying sensitive topics (Zayer et al., 2019). As for the design of

semi-structured interviews, an outline of the interview was prepared beforehand to avoid any omission of content (Refer to Appendix 2 for a detailed interview outline). In light of the fact that some new content would be generated in the actual interview process, the outline was only used as a reference. During the interview process, we also made changes to the interview guide so that we could get more informative answers. As suggested by McCracken (1988), several simple and descriptive “Grand Tour” questions such as “How do you see beauty product?” was asked in the beginning of the interview to help the interviewee relax and create a good atmosphere for more specific and in-depth questions later on. Interview questions in later phases were also based on the literature review and observations from the first part of our findings. The interviews were conducted in Chinese which is the native language of the interviewees and the transcript was translated into English. In the next chapter where we present our findings, we have adopted a pseudonym to protect the privacy of our respondents, anonymising them in alphabetical order according to the chronological sequence of the interviews.

Elicitation materials were used in the interview, including screen recording of the livestream with some representative clips. By using elicitation material which is specifically tailored to collect respondents’ rich descriptions of their experiences, it is possible to simultaneously reduce the bias associated with post-rationalization (Hogan et al., 2015). Prior interpretive researches have employed a comparable process (e.g. Mikkonen, 2010). We used elicitation material to focus on a specific issue, namely the gender role of women in Li Jiaqi’s livestream. To achieve this and to get some answers that are comparable, we showed respondents two representative videos and asked them similar questions before and after playing the videos, how Li Jiaqi’s livestream portrayed women’s characters. Interviewees were then asked to describe the situation in the elicitation materials and also express their emotions or thought evoked by the scene.

We have selected two representative video clips of 5 minutes each, in which Li Jiaqi’s marketing discourse implicitly uses portrayals of female stereotypes. The first video involves Li Jiaqi selling L’Oréal’s men’s skincare kit to his women audience, in which he says: *“You (woman audience) have bought so many things, buy some for your boyfriends too. The boys are embarrassed to go to the shopping center and pick out skincare products by themselves. When a neatly groomed man goes out, people will think that his wife is taking good care of him!”* We have selected Li Jiaqi’s marketing lipstick as the second video, in which he selects two lipsticks to try out in person. The first one he says as he shows it off, *“This color makes the skin look very bright and white, just like the heroines in Korean dramas.”* When showing the second one he says: *“This color is very high class, wearing it makes you feel like ‘I don’t need to compare myself with others, I just need to please myself.’”*

### **4.3 Data Collection**

The observation is conducted for answering the first half of our research question on how Li Jiaqi performs gender when selling beauty products. Two authors watched Li Jiaqi's livestream on 22, 24, 25, 26 Feb 2021. He also sells other daily necessities and food products in his livestream room, which was not the emphasis of this research, so we skipped his livestream on 23 Feb. His livestream starts at 8pm CST, or 6-7pm earlier on holidays. We as observers entered the livestream room at the beginning of the show and watched it for 2-3 hours, separately taking notes when Li Jiaqi mentioned or performed in relation to gender and power relations as he is selling beauty products, including his words, body language, interaction with the audience and assistants and other content. After discussion of Li Jiaqi's performance during his 4 livestreams, we summarized and extracted his course of actions.

For interviews, due to geographical constraints and epidemic control, web-based interviews were the main format in this study. This type of interview setting helps to ease the tension of the interview to a certain extent and helps our interviewees to express more information. According to Weller (2017), the informality afforded by video telephony offsets the "pressure to be present", while the remote distance and physical separation promotes a greater level of easiness on both sides of the interview. The target population selected for our paper is the group of viewers who follow Li Jiaqi's livestream shopping frequently. In terms of in-depth interview, we conducted a subjective judgment sample of 10 fans who follow Li Jiaqi's livestream shopping, and the sampling criterion was that they have watched Li Jiaqi's livestream at least twice in the past week. Therefore, they are more likely to remember the details of the livestream and their feelings and thoughts while watching it. We focused on the women audience because the vast majority of the viewers watching Li Jiaqi's livestream consists of women, and the products of Li Jiaqi's livestream are all aimed at women as the target audience.

### **4.4 Data Analysis**

#### **4.4.1 Thematic Analysis**

The responses and data obtained from the interviews and observations was primarily subjected to thematic analysis, which is a method that has been widely used to analyze qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We converted the audio recordings of the interviews into words transcripts and did the first preliminary coding from there. During this process, we coded as many potential themes as possible to prevent from missing something that might be of interest later. In excerpts from the code, some contextually relevant data was retained to ensure the integrity of the information and to avoid out-of-context quotations. After completing the initial coding, the resulting codes were

organized and categorized to summarize the themes and subthemes, and the obtained themes were explained and defined (Bryman et al., 2007).

#### **4.4.2 Visual Analysis**

With the development of new information and communication technologies, the venues for visual expression are increasing. People are receiving images and visual stimuli through media devices such as magazines, TV and mobile phones, and, and visual expression is an important part of contemporary consumer culture (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Some scholars therefore suggest that because contemporary society is inundated with images and films to an unprecedented degree, the study of visual images has become increasingly important if the complexities of society and culture are to be understood (Kellner, 2002). Part of existing marketing and consumer research is based on visual analysis of advertising images, decoding the elements in the images into descriptive text and thus analyzing the meaning behind the images (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). From a more specific methodological perspective, Gillian Rose (2016) provides an illustrative guide to visual material analysis from a semiotic perspective, suggesting the first step is to identify the signs and symbols embedded in the images and then examine how the individual symbols implied within the analysis of images are linked together and what meanings are formed. Our research approach is inspired by this methodology. As we watched the livestream, we transcribed the scenes into a written narrative and explored some of the symbols in the live footage.

#### **4.5 Research Quality**

A well-defined research question is one essential criteria in a high-quality qualitative study and expected to be clarified in the study, which signifies that the research is “timely, original, rigorous, and relevant” (Lingard, 2015). Just as the quality of quantitative research is assessed, in qualitative research, reliability and validity (both internal and external) are two fundamental dimensions in evaluating the quality of research. It has been suggested that these two criteria in quantitative research should not be directly transplanted to qualitative research, but rather an alternative conceptual definition of “reliability” and “validity” in qualitative research should be made to distinguish them from quantitative research according to the characteristics of qualitative research (Bryman et al., 2007). Guba and Lincoln (1994) support the view that an alternative measurement system should be adopted in the sense that they do not take the realist position, which implies the existence of absolute facts in the social world. Therefore, they deny the replication of reliability and validity based on this view, and instead propose another measure of qualitative research, namely credibility and truthfulness. In this thesis, we have adopted the trustworthiness dimension proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994), which consists of four criteria, including credibility, dependability, confirmability and

transferability. In addition to this, we have selected reflexivity as a criterion to measure the quality of our research, which is a key criterion according to Watt (2007).

#### **4.5.1 Credibility**

Credibility measures aspects similar to internal validity, that is whether the theory used is relevant and compatible with the observed phenomenon, and whether the explanation given for a phenomenon in the study is supported by the sources applied (Bryman et al., 2007). Within the credibility dimension, triangulation is often used to determine how trustworthy a study is (Denzin, 2017). In our study, we used a combination of in-depth interviews and observations to collect different opinions on one topic, and then generalized and cross-compared the data based on the multiple sources collected to confirm the trustworthiness of the material. From the perspective of the in-depth interview data collection, we interviewed viewers who have watched different livestreams at different times (the interviews lasted for three weeks, and Li Jiaqi's livestreams is available every day, so there is a high probability that the interviewees have watched different livestreams, or alternatively, different times of the same livestream), so we can expect the interviewees to have watched various content of Li Jiaqi's livestreams. In addition, participants were selected from social media platforms such as Weibo and Douban, which are highly used throughout China, and therefore were heterogeneous in terms of social and geographical backgrounds.

#### **4.5.2 Dependability**

Corresponding to reliability is dependability, the degree to which the results of a study will be the same if the same research steps and methods are repeated. In comparison, from a constructivist perspective, the research process is co-constructed by the researcher and the respondent together, and is therefore very difficult to restore (Stenfors et al., 2020). In order to test the reliability of qualitative research, scholars have proposed auditing the research process (Guba et al., 1994). This requires the researcher to keep detailed records and descriptions at each stage of the research, including identifying the research questions, designing the interview outline, selecting the interviewee and so on, thus increasing the likelihood of "replicating" the entire study. In our study, we gave a detailed description of all steps and procedures of our research, from the development and evolution of the research questions to the methodology, thus providing the reader with more information to judge the reliability of our research.

#### **4.5.3 Confirmability**

When testing the confirmability of a study, the objectivity of a study and the neutrality of the researcher are important criteria in this dimension. But in

qualitative research, this is almost an impossible task for the researcher to remain absolutely objective and impartial. It is therefore more important to consider whether the author is aware of this and strives not to let his or her own inclinations and attitudes influence the research process and the results of the analysis. The concept of confirmability is concerned with whether the researchers are able to demonstrate that their interpretation of the participants' constructions are anchored in the participants' expressions of their own views, and that the analysis of the data and subsequent inferences about the results and statements are based on the respondents' perceptions (Given, 2008). In the words of Bryman et al. (2007), the researcher should act in good faith. When acting from this point of view in more concrete practice, we did our best to understand the interviewees' point of view, the words they used and the meaning behind the phrases they used in the interviews, and then restored and expressed the interviewees' intentions in the subsequent analysis, without making our own subjective assumptions.

#### **4.5.4 Transferability**

Unlike quantitative research, the results of qualitative research cannot be compared with an objective fact that exists, and the same results cannot be guaranteed even if the equivalent research methods are used. In this setting, the extend of transferability of the study can be determined by the description of the research. By providing a detailed and rich description of the research, as Geertz (1973) suggested, we as researchers can offer the reader with a database on which they can make their own judgements about the transferability of our research, in the sense whether our findings are still consistent with the theory in different contexts (Bryman et al., 2007).

#### **4.5.5 Reflexivity**

As researchers we cannot be absolutely neutral and objective, and we are inevitably influenced by our personal social context and project it onto our research subjects. As we interview and collect data, we develop personal responses to scenarios, in other words, the researcher's response to the research site (in our case, Li Jiaqi's livestream) and to the interviewee affects the quality of the findings. This influence, in Bourdieu's view, needs to be recognized and reflected upon by the researcher (Bourdieu, 2004). On the other hand, in the process of in-depth interviews, our involvement as researchers is essential, and we interacted with the interviewees in the process, in which we need to reflect on our role in the research and weigh up the possible consequences of our involvement.

## 5 Results and Analysis

Our analysis revolves around four main perspectives, which are largely guided by our theoretical framework. The first section generally talks about gender norms in consumers' eyes by analyzing their performances of gender. The second section more detailedly introduce Li Jiaqi's gender role by analyzing the data from our observation and interviewees. The third perspective is the process that marketing shapes consumers' performances of gender. And the fourth perspective is how consumers make sense of the information coming from marketing. The data from interviews and observations is weaved in this section, and the sequence of presentation is from general picture of gender roles to details on Li Jiaqi's performance as we hope the clear storyline improve understanding.

### 5.1 Gender Norms in Consumers' Eyes

#### 5.1.1 New vs Old Concept on Gender Roles

When we talk about the theme of gender, biological gender differences cannot be avoided. With a long history of social, cultural and traditional thinking, the understanding of gender differences between men and women has remained largely biological and physiological. In contrast to social construction view, this biological determinism assumes that the differences between men and women are determined by biological properties and that gender differences are intrinsic and binary. Some of our interviewees emphasized this discourse in their own responses. For instance, when Della was describing gender roles in society, she suggested: *"I think it's all a biological characteristic of people, isn't it? You're born that way."*

Behind biological gender lies an invisible social concept, where people's behavioral activities are framed by social norms. Closely linked to this binary system is the persistence of gender stereotypes in society, which reflects the general expectations that society has of particular groups. For example, blue represents men and pink represents women; men are supposed to be active, dominant and strong, while on the contrary, women are passive, submissive and soft (Kite et al., 2008). This view was also evident in the responses of our interviewees. When we asked our interviewees to describe the ideal masculinity, more than half described it as tough, responsible, rational and powerful. As Della said: *"[The ideal manhood] would be more responsible, be more thoughtful and tolerant of girls, be stronger and powerful."* Ella held a similar view: *"masculinity should be tough rather than soft."* One possible explanation is that in areas with relatively low levels of gender equality, women are more likely to desire the "benefits" of men's benevolent gender prejudices, such as economic support from men and protection from men (Glick et al., 2000).

Similarly, when we asked about the ideal femininity, most of the responses we received focused on women being empathetic, more soft, sensual, and with a liberal arts mindset. One of our interviewees, Clara, held these views: *“I myself think women should be slightly or a bit softer, you have a tender heart, and I also think we’d be a bit more empathetic than man.”* Due to various elements of social and cultural influences, the social norms based on biological sex which shows the strength of gender categories are institutionalized and permeate all aspects of life, creating a series of social expectations and evaluation systems based on this for both men and women, ranging from behavior, character and personality to the division of labor within the family and society, creating a whole set of gender-specific patterns of behavior. According to Butler’s (2011) gender performativity theory, people constantly act and behave based on established gender norms and social expectations, and these behavioral norms in turn reinforce and consolidate the manipulation of people, strengthening traditional gender perceptions. This invisible social norm forces people to behave and perform in accordance with gender roles within this framework. When people conform to this code of conduct and continue to practice it, they gain acceptance of gender roles and are punished if they try to break away from it (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015).

In addition to gender stereotypes of particular social groups, some interviewees internalized such stereotypes as aesthetic requirements for themselves as individuals, and Cindy had the following to offer when describing her ideal self-image: *“The criteria for good looks ..... white, young and thin ..... I think it should be something that every woman would basically like.”* This strongly stereotyped view is also discussed in Bordo’s (2004) article that in a patriarchal system, society expects women to be fair-skinned and delicate to be protected. Another of our interviewees Billie specified the aesthetic requirements for herself to every part of her body: *“I want to be thinner because I’m rather fat. But I’m not looking for a very thin figure, I think it’s because my legs are thick and I want them to be a little thinner, my eyes are not good, mouth is a bit convex.”*

It is noticeable from Billie’s words that when she no longer sees the body as a whole, but breaks it down into its parts, this constitutes a fragmented perception. She takes a third-party view of her body and appearance, and this discourse reveals her dissatisfaction and anxiety about her current state. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) attribute this phenomenon to women’s objectification of themselves, where women treat their bodies as an object to be viewed and evaluated, focusing excessively on observable physical possessions, such as each body part.

Although many of the interviewees responded to certain questions with a more traditional approach of gender roles, a significant proportion of them also recognized the existence of gender stereotypes in society and took a more constructionist view regarding these issues.



Betty claimed that: *“Although society nowadays gives men and women a precise positioning, for example, men must be strong and brave, and women must be gentle, generous and considerate, I think this can also be reconciled.”*

Amy shares a similar statement: *“I think it’s because families and society have brought up the idea that girls should be quieter and boys should be more active, but I think the status quo is just getting better. It’s true that men and women have physical advantages in certain areas, but that shouldn’t be a reason to treat them differently.”*

It appears that even though traditional ideas about gender still exist and cannot be easily erased, new ideas about gender pluralism are slowly penetrating society and having an impact. The interviewees realized that gender roles should not simply be attributed to the biological sex, but should also be considered from a social constructive perspective. In the context of diversity, both men and women should be accepted when they present a diverse range of images.

Another interesting phenomenon is that there were some respondents who hold a binary view of gender on some group-specific questions, indicating stereotypical ideas about biologically heterosexual groups, but they seem to hold more progressive ideas about themselves as individuals. When we asked about the ideal image of yourself, half of our respondents mentioned about being independent, self-supporting, confident and liberal minded.

As Della stated: *“My ideal image of myself is a more independent image, financially independent also mentally independent, in the sense that I can buy what I want to buy and do what I want to do.”* Elena also expressed the importance attached to her career: *“I think I’d like to be more disciplined and I’d like to focus on my career.”*

It is noticeable that the respondents hold progressive ideas and a desire of equality between men and women in the construction of their ideal selves outside of the group context. When these interviewees talked about their ideal self-image, they talked about traits that are not traditionally associated with women, but rather traits that are considered masculine. Laughlin (2016) also illustrates in his research that the younger consumers tend to disassociate themselves from traditional gender boundaries.

To summarize, the interviewees already have a new trend of thoughts different from the traditional gender ideology, but the influence of the dominant gender roles in society cannot be underestimated. In a state where the old and the new coexist, the interviewers show progressive opinions on certain issues, but are still held hostage by the traditional ideology on some matters.

### **5.1.2 Beauty Products as Necessities**

Although the influence of new concepts becomes stronger, the patriarchal

discourse system of women and society are still reflected in the use of beauty products. The vast majority of interviewees mentioned that beauty products are a necessity to them. Some people make themselves happy or gain confidence by applying beauty products. This is an idea based entirely on themselves. However, in this study, we cannot explore whether we gain confidence from the behavior of applying, or to confidence from the reactions of others. If it is the latter, we believe that its motivation is also a repetitive performance of the gender norm.

Almost every interviewee believed that the key role of cosmetics is to show respect for others. Ella discussed the importance of applying cosmetics in the workplace: *“It shows that you care about your work and the people in your workplace, making others feel that you attach importance to them.”* Billie mentioned the importance of applying in the interview: *“Personally I do not like using cosmetics, so I only use it when there is an important occasion or person, or when I am super happy. For me, it is a necessary way of showing respect to other people.”* Elena also argued it is important in daily occasions: *“I think make-up a little bit is politeness to other people, so it is fair to the people you meet.”*

We find that a suitable makeup has become an important way for women to express their “respect” to others in several different occasions, which is a strong norm that it is women’s duty to be pretty. This is a women-specific phenomenon in that men do not commonly show respect by using make-up. Both Peñaloza (1994) and O’Neil (1981) argued that men do not want to, or are afraid of making themselves feminine, because masculinity is considered superior. For men, using a feminine product possibly has very different meanings to themselves and other people. Bordo (2004) mentioned that under the heteronormative discourse system, society’s expectations of women (that is, men’s expectations of women) include slim body, fair skin, sexiness and less hair. Most of these expectations can be realized by using various types of beauty products, which further pushes women to use beauty products.

Kite et al. (2008, p. 272) discussed about the physical appearance of men and women. Sontag (1997) titled her work “the double standard of aging”, that is, women are more afraid of aging; compared to middle-aged men, middle-aged women are more concerned about aging and more dissatisfied with their appearance (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2003), and will use more “age-concealment” techniques (Noonan & Adler, 2002). Kite et al. also uses society views to explain this phenomenon:

*“A woman’s most socially valued qualities—her ability to provide sex and attractive companionship and to have children—are associated with the physical beauty and fertility of youth. As a woman ages, she is seen as less attractive because her years of social usefulness as childbearer are behind her. Men, on the other hand, are seen as possessing qualities—competence,*

*autonomy, and self-control—that are not associated with youth but rather increase with age. Thus, the same wrinkles and gray hair that may enhance the perceived status and attractiveness of an older man may be seen as diminishing the attractiveness and desirability of an older woman (2008).”*

Women becomes beautiful, confident and showing respect by using beauty products are derived from social construction. Even though most of our interviewees agree with the legitimacy of this and are not aware of the power inequalities, we still argue that this phenomenon is rooted in the patriarchal discourse system. At the same time, according to Fredrickson & Roberts (1997), when women start to ask themselves “what would others think when they look at my appearance”, they are already going through the process of self-objectification. In society, women will internalize others’ thoughts on their appearances, and treat themselves as an object to be watched and assessed. This resonates with Rosenbaum et al.’s description (2017) that some female customers believe that gay man has social perceptiveness that allows them to judge these customers from outsiders’ perspective. This may lead to negative psychological consequences, body shame and anxiety of appearances for many women who are not satisfied with how they look, just because they do not look at what the norm expects. Marketing, as the frontier of shaping culture, is strongly and secretly using these women’s negative feelings to sell more products. Li Jiaqi, although not perceived by most of our interviewees, has even more undetectable impact because he is not only the one behind the scene, but also an idol-like star to his viewers.

## **5.2 Performing Androgyny**

Li Jiaqi uses same pattern for most beauty products. He starts with loudly saying “this is coming” to his audience, then introducing the products in a very professional way that uses many technical words very quickly. Then he tells the discount that customers can have only in his livestream room. For common products he sells, he would just open the link for sale; and for new products, he articulates a story, normally from the manufacturers, himself or someone he knows, to showcase the benefits that the product could provide.

A typical example is that he visited the production line, finding that the products are made of real stuff and really good quality. Another one is that he has one on his dressing table and he use it every time when something happens. These stories are told repetitively to show his reliability. Most livestream shopping has limited inventory for most products, so does his. He sometimes would say that he negotiated with the manufacturer (boss) of the product to get more for viewer’s sake, showing the popularity of the product and his consideration to “his girls”. He also showed his resourcefulness and competence in picking products in these stories.

Table 3 shows the representative actions of Li Jiaqi's livestream and its categories from the perspective of gender performativity and gender categorization in his representational practice. In general, we see Li Jiaqi performing androgyny by taking advantage of the loosened gender norms and increasing sales by taking advantage of traditional gendered normativity, while he does not get aversion from his viewers.

***Table 3. Li Jiaqi's course of actions and the interpreted category***

<b>Observed Course of Actions</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>Pulling close to the microphone (showing sexiness by using low-pitched voice).</b>	Masculinity
<b>Exaggerated body movements, try lipstick (using orchid fingers for color), try mascara on himself, apply cream on colleagues.</b>	Different from masculinity
<b>Exaggerated &amp; representative catchword "OMG! Buy it!" in high-pitched voice.</b>	Different from masculinity
<b>Repetitively saying that he stands in the consumers' shoes and recommend products for consumers' sake.</b>	Considerate/Femininity
<b>Saying: "Li Jiaqi's girls buy this for only N yuan." Using juvenile inflectional adjuncts and soft voice: "is it okay, shall we?"</b>	Spoiled for girls/Traditional masculinity
<b>Professional product introduction (use many specialized vocabularies intensively).</b>	Masculinity (competency)
<b>Teaching makeup application steps, skin care techniques.</b>	Masculinity (competency)
<b>Target segmentation: "All girls! Piggy girls/student girls would love this. Ladies would consider this."</b>	Representational gender categorization
<b>Emphasizing product's function such as anti-primary aging and anti-sunspots.</b>	Aesthetic norms for women
<b>Saying: "This lipstick makes your skin look white, bright, and glow."</b>	Aesthetic norms for women
<b>Saying: "When a neat man goes out, other women will see him and think 'his wife takes good care of him, I can't compare with his wife!'"</b>	Woman as caregivers (femininity)
<b>Saying "If you don't buy this L'Oréal Men's skincare set for your husband, then buy one for your father or brother. A man needs to save their face out of home!"</b>	Woman as caregivers (femininity)
<b>Saying "Buy this for your mother-in-law, buy this for husband...."</b>	Woman as caregivers (femininity)

### 5.2.1 Taking Advantage of the “Two”

At the first sight of his show, Li Jiaqi is not a man with strong masculinities. He has a soft tone, high-pitched voice, fine makeup on his face and often shouts in a much-exaggerated way to attract more customers to buy. Loud “*OMG! Buy it!*” has become his representative catchword. He often tries mascara and lipsticks on himself or on his colleagues, which gives viewers special impression of this man. The first impression of Li Jiaqi’s performed characteristics are not regarded as masculinity in both western and Chinese culture. On the contrary, he is more like a man with femininities, which makes many people curious and attracted.

Besides, his livestream’s main product category is beauty products which was traditionally seen a “women’s product”. This also gives Li Jiaqi a special image that is unconventional, because people do not see many men engaging in this “feminine” industry. However, his professional technique of applying beauty products on skin and deep knowledge of beauty product let people feel he is an expert in skincare and makeup. This expert image gives a contradicting sense to people in that for one thing, men were traditionally expected as competent professionals (Ellemers, 2018), for another thing, Li Jiaqi is a professional of beauty product which is a traditionally feminine category.

Apart from his proficiency in beauty products, he also showcased his masculinities. He often grabs the microphone on the table, pulling it close to his mouth and using very low-pitched voice to say a few words. He took this stagy way of talking not only for catching viewers’ attention, but also trying to show his sexiness. Li Jiaqi kept telling his audience that he promotes quality product genuinely for the sake of the viewers, and that the discount offer is only available to “his girl”. Soft tone and babyish words are used, like he is talking to a child. These actions fall in the category of masculinity, which helps Li Jiaqi build his community.

In one of the most popular social media in China, Weibo, Li Jiaqi once had a hashtag called “Jiaqi’s Diary of Spoiling Fans”. By 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021, this hashtag had 340 million pageviews, 886 thousand times of discussion. Li Jiaqi’s performance of masculinity enables this “spoiling fans” model, guiding women consumers to buy based on traditional gender norms that women should be protected and specially treated by men.

Li Jiaqi shows his traditional views on gender roles even more in his discourse. In addition to displaying his own masculinity from time to time, Li Jiaqi often uses traditional gender norms in his sales talk to promote products. The color of the selected lipsticks is mainly pink-red, a color that is believed to enhance femininity and attractiveness (Guéguen & Jacob, 2012). When Li Jiaqi sells lipsticks, he often uses words such as “*it makes your skin looks white, glow and bright, you will look like a queen wearing this lipstick, and you will win over*

*your crush.*” Bordo (2004) has pointed out that under the heteronormative discourse system, society’s expectations of women include fair skin, sexual attractiveness, etc., which are in line with men’s expectations. In local Chinese studies, a number of scholars have peered into the implied gender power relations by examining the portrayal of women in traditional works of art. Wang (2017) focuses on traditional New Year paintings and finds that the women in these artworks present a morbidly frail beauty: slender, soft bodies, small cherry mouths and pale skin. When we turn our attention back to Li Jiaqi’s livestream, his sales pitch for lipstick also reflects society’s expectations and disciplines for women. This pitch appears to be offering women attentive advice and services, but in essence, it uses traditional gender stereotypes to suggest to women that they need to understand preferences and adjust themselves to cater to men’s aesthetic in order to win men’s favor.

On the other hand, even though the target audience is a woman’s demographic, Li Jiaqi’s livestreams promote products designed for men, such as men’s skincare products. When Li Jiaqi promotes man skincare products, he would encourage his viewers (mainly women) to buy for their boyfriends or man family members. His frequently used promotional words include *“When a neat man goes out, other women will see him and think ‘his wife takes good care of him, I can’t compare with her.’ So buy this for them!”* In traditional gender roles, women are perceived as more gentle, attentive and caring, and this stereotypical femininity is directly linked to the stereotype of the role who provides care (Kite et al., 2008). In the words used by Li Jiaqi, he also applies this stereotype of women to man’s skincare product promotion, seeing it as a woman’s duty to look after the men in the family. This is just as Billie commented:

*“Doesn’t he say that boys can wear make-up too? So many people have thoughts before that guys wearing makeup is girly. But it’s actually a normal skincare process. It’s interesting that he’s breaking down stereotypes on the one hand and reinforcing them on the other. For example, a girl dresses up to please someone she likes, and then her boyfriend takes her out and feels his girlfriend is shiny and beautiful.”*

To sum up, it seems that the gender norms imposed on people in today’s society are being dismantled. With more loose gender norms, Li Jiaqi is achieving great success in this traditionally feminine industry. However, he constantly uses traditional gender norms during his livestream in an effort to stimulate the desire of his viewers. This is the first meaning of taking advantage of the “two”, that is, Li Jiaqi enjoys the new gender norms while using the old ones to achieve higher sales. The second meaning is the androgyny he performs in the livestream, which is more straightforward to most viewers. He shows strong masculinity at times and strong femininity at others, thus effectively attracting consumers and making them happy to buy in his livestream room. Interviewees’ opinions on this will be further discussed in the next subsection.

### 5.2.2 Best of the “Two”

We found that most interviewees have a positive view of Li Jiaqi, even though he is not an entirely masculine image in his viewers' thought and he reveals his gender stereotypes in his speech from time to time. We found that there are three mainstream views of Li Jiaqi among the interviewees: 1) He is active, hardworking, and enthusiastic; 2) he is a rational expert, and the things he sells are reliable. 3) he is very considerate and can promote products from the perspective of his woman consumers. The first two views are so-called “man characteristics”, while the last one has so-called woman characteristics.

Majority of our interviewees believed that Li Jiaqi is a positive person who works very hard. Just as Cindy says: *“In general, he works hard, and I think he is quite serious to his work and live positively.”* Such thoughts could come from his intense workload (from 7 o'clock to 1 o'clock at night, dozens of products are sold one by one), and his excitement during his livestream. Daisy also praised Li Jiaqi's social responsibility:

*“In addition to working hard in his own job, he also pays attention to social problems... he goes to CCTV to help Wuhan recommend the products from Wuhan, such as Wuhan's duck neck, etc. With Zhu Guangquan, right? His concern on the society makes people think that he is not just a salesperson.”*

In addition to his activeness to his work and society, Li Jiaqi was deemed as a professional who provides comprehensive information and solid quality products to his viewers. Della said: *“I think he has that kind of fighting spirit and rationality of boys, because the selection of products necessitates a very rational and objective attitude.”* Amy said: *“The information he provided is comprehensive enough, and the selection of products is reliable, my friends have never complained about his products.”* Ella said: *“Maybe he has used it on himself, so it is more convincing.”* This competent image goes hand in hand with expectations of men. Our interviewees see Li Jiaqi as possessing professionalism and giving his viewers feeling of reliability.

Also, more than half of the interviewees mentioned that he recommended products from the perspective of woman consumers. As Ella said:

*“He is a man, and people may think that it would be strange for men to make makeup recommendations a few years ago, because at that time this stereotype was still quite serious, and it may have eased a little in recent years. Recently, I think women may treat him as a sister. Although his gender is different from ours, he can think about some issues from our perspective. He breaks the boundaries of gender... Although his biological role is a male, he can think from a female perspective. So, this is the reason he can achieve a better effect.”*

Li Jiaqi's performed considerateness is contradicting in that it is regarded as a

feminine characteristics while he keeps emphasizing his considerateness is for “his girls”. Besides, the first video of our elicitation material is filled with gendered message. Only Amy told us that she feels “*uncomfortable after paying attention to this video*”, showing her resistance to his discourse that portrays women as caregivers. Most of our interviewees ignored his patriarchal discourse, instead, deem Li Jiaqi as a sister and bosom friend. Just as Daisy described after watching one of the two elicitation video:

*“This video is about L’Oréal Men, and really good. He cited many examples, and then he described it more specifically from the perspective of a woman. He made me want to buy it.”*

In traditional dichotomous culture, men and women should carry different behavior pattern and personalities. Li Jiaqi carries both: active and professional from masculinity (Liu et al., 2011; Xiao, 2007); and considerate and understanding from femininity (Hu & Kai, 2016; Liu et al., 2011). Bem (1974) argued that androgyny people are more effective and flexible compared to single-gendered people. From our observation and interview results, we could speculate that being androgynous is an important part of his success formula.

### **5.3 Categorization & Objectification**

In Li Jiaqi’s livestream, he occasionally states that “piggy girls” (a cute word referring to younger women, often students who do not have much money) can choose cost-effective brands, and that “dignified ladies” (an informal, somewhat bantering word referring to wealthier women, such as white-collars in big cities) should buy some luxurious beauty products. This type of segmentation based on social class puts boundaries around the products he sells. When we only look at women viewers, this is similar to social class categorization that echoes in consumers’ daily life.

However, if we also consider man viewers, this would be a typical gender categorization as Murto (2020) defined. Notably, although most of his viewers are women, some men still watch his shows. Li Jiaqi almost never calls his men viewers in his livestream, even when he is selling a set of L’Oréal Men’s skincare products. From his nearly 6 minutes of introduction, we realize that he is exclusively selling the set to women consumers. The only time we captured he brought up his men viewers is when he was selling a liquid foundation that has a few dark color models, and just in a few words: “boys could buy this color.” His repetitive calls on piggy girls and dignified ladies partly come from gender norms. It is also gender categorization that strongly impacts consumers’ performance of gender. Men consumers hear his different calls of women again and again, it is likely that men feel that they are intruders, strangers or innovative adopters in terms of consuming beauty products. Then both Li Jiaqi and consumers subtly put impacts on the gender norms of the society.

Li Jiaqi refers to his audience as “all girls” in his livestream, and each time he



does so, it means he is highlighting or explaining a particular beauty product in hopes of getting the audience's attention. The term "all girls" is in fact a discursive "call" to women, secretly guiding them to a constructed field and strengthening their identity through the repetition and acceptance of their identity. As a professional host, his aim is to sell a set of goods adapted to women's identity so that he can get the most from his selling.

In addition, Li Jiaqi keeps telling his viewers "*You'll look like a queen/princess if you use this lipstick...*", which guides his viewers to self-objectification. His representation of genders acts as one of the sources and an activator to many women's anxiety on their appearances, imperceptibly putting impacts on viewers' minds and daily life.

## **5.4 Legitimization**

As the viewers are mainly women, Li Jiaqi's livestream is also full of gendered messages. In the few livestreams we observed, we found that he frequently used stereotypes about women to market his products. For example, in the first video clip we used as elicitation material in the interview, Li Jiaqi is selling man skincare products to his woman audience. Women present a dual image in the video and they are portrayed as shopaholics and caregivers, taking on the responsibility of caring for their partners, which reflected their virtuous and wifely qualities. On the other hand, it shows it is not commonly accepted by the general public for men to buy and use skincare products. In the second video where Li Jiaqi is promoting lipstick, emphasizing that lipstick would make the skin look brighter. The video shows the direct demands on women's aesthetics, that women should strive for bright white skin and elegant grooming. The video also expresses the opinion that women need to please themselves, but this point of view is closely linked to wearing makeup and having the lipstick which is being advertised in the livestream. In other words, while this type of marketing may seem to undermine existing norms and appeal to the increased feminism in society, it is hard to argue that this marketing discourse is not giving a veneer of beauty to existing social norms while in essence still urging viewers to internalize such norms as part of the requirements for their own image and self-regulation.

However, during the interview, we found that interviewees were actively legitimizing Li Jiaqi's this kind of marketing discourse rather than perceiving this phenomenon as inappropriate. Our interviewers adopted a business logic for understanding the system of gender discourse presented on livestream, including how the hosts and their marketing teams produced and communicated messages for different potential target audiences. When we asked our interviewees what they thought of the two videos, the vast majority said they understood the wording he used in the livestream and thought he was appealing to his audience. As Elena mentioned:

*“I think he is a salesman who has identified a need from his customers, and if the majority of this customer group does have such a need, the demand exists objectively, and salesmen like him are merely exploiting gender stereotypes.”*

Della, who also detected traces of gendered messages in the video, commented:

*“I think he’s talking about the traditional image of women, the girl behind the man. And then he says that probably because most of his audience really like it, so he’s going to cater to them by saying that.”*

Academic research into stereotypical gender roles in advertising has been going on for decades. Eisend (2010) did a meta-analysis of gender stereotypes and gender roles in advertising, and the study found that stereotypical gender stereotypes are still prevalent in advertising today, and that such stereotypes are mainly related to occupational status. Goffman (1979) addresses this issue in his book *Gender Advertising*, where the constant use of gender stereotypes in advertising is criticized by academics, but not by the average consumer. He pointed out that advertising borrows the conventions in the society to make consumers identify with the message expressed in the advertisement and thus accepts the product advertised (Goffman, 1979). Although we cannot say whether advertising reflects reality or whether it creates a new phenomenon in reality, to a certain extent it reinforces the stereotypes that exist. As we discussed earlier, Li Jiaqi has a dual role in the livestream, both as a marketer and as an advertisement itself, and this new marketing model carries cultural connotations and values that are widely accepted by the public while spreading product information. Schroeder and Zwick (2004) agree that advertising plays a powerful role in reinforcing binary gender roles, with most advertising campaigns borrowing concepts of gender identity and drawing imagery from both male and female stereotypical representations. As advertising planners and promoters, Li Jiaqi and his team are also deliberately exploiting stereotypes in the minds of consumers to simplify communication and promote consumer awareness of their products. Such a strategy works also because such imagery, constructed by various cultural histories and power relations together, still has a place in society and a certain influence.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Answering the Research Question

In this section, we explain why we believe our findings and analysis answered the research question and deepened our understanding of relevant fields.

Li Jiaqi performs androgyny as he mixed some typical masculinities (e.g. competent) and femininities (e.g. considerateness) during promoting, which has brought him enough attention and praise from his viewers. In our findings, many viewers saw him as a man who can be a “sister” (or best friend forever) and can put himself in the girls’ shoes to provide suggestions on shopping. This shows that Li Jiaqi is highly rated by these viewers, and that he is quite successful both in terms of the charm of his performed gender role and the extremely high sales he has achieved.

What we see behind this androgyny is that Li Jiaqi is simultaneously taking advantages of a relaxed gender norm environment and a marketing discourse based on traditional gender roles. In the loose gender norms, he became able to receive huge sales, popularity and success with the fast-developing livestream shopping and became the second ranked host in China in terms of GMV. It seems unlikely that Li Jiaqi would have achieved such results under strict gender norms—people would be much skeptical of accepting hosts with such an androgynous gender role.

At the same time, according to our observation, Li Jiaqi uses a lot of gendered messages in his livestreams to stimulate sales. He recommends beauty products for women from a man aesthetic perspective, and imperceptibly ties women’s values to beauty products. As Baudrillard (2018) suggests, the consumptive value of a good is determined not only by the utility value it has, but also by the value it represents. The product is branded with a social identity, so that the consumer is invariably constantly seeking the symbols attached to the object. This discursive and repetitive marketing discourse gradually constitutes a part of contemporary gender norms, and it also has a negative impact on consumers’ gender performance through categorization and objectification. Halton and Rumbo (2007) claim that although consumer identities are expressed through consumption, these are merely a self that is compromised by marketing ideology. Because the gender norm and consumption exist in lives of every member of society, and the society’s perception of women is closely related to it. Consumers are easily “carried away” by its information and fall into it unknowingly. Unknowingly performing gender normativity in accordance with Li Jiaqi’s traditional discourse could once again strengthen gender norms, which would become a vicious circle. We extend Matich et al.’s judgment (2019) on the efficacy of online activism that though it provoked some progressive thoughts in the society around the symbolic power of women’s body part, there

is still a long way to go. The role of livestream shopping is like the opposite of the online activism as it gradually reproduces backward concepts in society, including reinforcing the symbolic power of women's body parts. Again, there is still a long way to go to adjust these hegemonic and normative gender ideals.

Even so, consumers maintain a relatively conservative attitude towards this. Some interviewees actively legitimize the gendered message, thinking that Li Jiaqi's use of those statements is based on business logic—many other people may buy it. This is quite similar to the phenomenon described by Zayer et al. (2019) that man consumers ascribe the gendered message to alternate logics. Most interviewees showed their confidence that they would not follow this type of information from Li Jiaqi, and some have not noticed the gendered information at all. We want to point out that the impact does not just come from Li Jiaqi who is just one of the agents in the market. Harju & Huovinen (2015) studied the resistance to normativity among online activists rather than ordinary consumers. Just as Zanette & Pereira Zamith Brito's research (2019), we paid attention to ordinary consumers' attitudes to normativities by using gender performativity theory, but in another online environment.

In addition, interviewees often distinguish themselves from others, and expect their own image to have untraditional characteristics such as being independent, controlling their life, becoming businesswoman (more associated with men in traditional and contemporary norms), while hoping that men still maintain their masculinities. That is to say, they want to perform a gender role that has masculinity in the current gender norms. In a sense, this answer shows the psychology of women in the new era, which is hoping to have more of the privileged qualities that were thought to be associated with men. This resonates with Brittan's (1989, p. 3, as cited in Brownlie & Hewer, 2007) opinion: *"Masculinity, therefore, does not exist in isolation from femininity—it will always be an expression of the current image that men have of themselves in relation to women."*

In this regard, according to the different depths of women's understanding of the social construction of masculinity/femininity, we have two speculations. First, this may indicate that women have awakened on this issue, and they have begun to pursue the advantages that were given to men by the patriarchal social order. Second, it may mean that women only realize that masculinity is regarded as superior, but ignore why only masculinity is considered attractive (because these norms are largely decided by patriarchy). We do hope that it is the former possibility, which represents the progression in society and consciousness of equality.

Judging from the results of our interviews, we believe that current situation is still transforming from the latter to the former. We found that the interviewees have initiated some concepts on feminism and equality. When the questions were dualistic (e.g. what is your ideal masculinity and femininity), interviewees

would be more inclined to constructivism, answering like “there is no specific spirit, those are imposed by society.” This indicates that they do not think that personal characteristics should be attached to any gender. But the influence of this advanced concept may still be limited. Traditional concepts still have a deep influence, which is reflected in the logical inconsistency of some of their answers: they may have just emphasized that people should not classify those characteristics by gender, next to a few words stating that women are more suitable for perceptual work.

In conclusion, based on the proposed research framework, this thesis explores and describes how Li Jiaqi and his viewers perform gender, which empirically compliments CCT’s gender research in an online context in China. Performing androgyny brought Li Jiaqi personality charm and career success, which is an demonstration to Bem’s assertion on the advantage of being androgynous (1974). As a marketing practitioner and advertising “end-result”, his traditional gender discourse has an imperceptible impact on gender norms and gender performances of his viewers. Researchers (Murto, 2020; Zwick & Cayla, 2011) suggested to shift attention from the end-result of marketing to people who create it and how, and in our context hosts are marketer and advertisement at the same time, which points new direction for gender research in marketing. On the one hand, consumers have a newer concept of equality, and on the other hand, they are greatly influenced by traditional ideas, which is reflected in their contradictory words and emphasis on using beauty products. We also found that viewers’ legitimization and ignorance of the gendered messages from Li Jiaqi’s livestream, which is likely to become an obstacle to the progression in concepts.

## **6.2 Further Appeals**

We want to point out the inequality of showing respect through the use of cosmetics. Gender norms are closely related to cultural system, which is enormous, complex and difficult to change. But we call on women to ask themselves when using beauty products: Do I really like it? What can we do to change the gender norms that force us to wear makeup? We hope that women do not have to feel anxious about their appearance, do not use makeup as the main means of showing respect, and do not have to lose the opportunity that belongs to them because they do not have makeup on their face. When it comes to beauty products, everyone has the right to choose.

The viewers should pay attention to and understand the discriminatory discourse in marketing and consumption contexts. Although we cannot confirm if Li Jiaqi intentionally takes advantage of the “two” or not, in the long run, the society’s gender norms for appearances of women may be further reinforced, making more attention be paid to appearances rather than other outstanding qualities. We see it as an unequal situation that should be changed.

## 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Practical Implications

The content and direction of our research is relevant to different stakeholder segments of society and the findings have practical implications for different groups.

Livestream shopping has become popular in China in recent years as a new form of advertising and marketing. Its audience base has also expanded in recent years, which means that the social impact of livestream is also growing. We observed that Li Jiaqi has become popular by the loosened gender norms, but he still uses and promotes traditional gender stereotypes in his show to sell products, which gives pause to consider the extent to which Li Jiaqi and other hosts take their social responsibility as marketers. The gender images portrayed in the livestream and the aesthetic standards in real life are mutually influential. When Li Jiaqi uses stereotypical images of women to sell his products, his viewers will consciously or unconsciously transpose the ideas conveyed in the livestream into their lives, internalizing this discipline and reinforcing the solidification of gender stereotypes. While pursuing commercial interests is beyond reproach, the top hosts of livestream should also be aware of their social influence and their production teams should take on their own social responsibility and be more careful to consider the image of women in their livestream promotions in order to present a gender image that is more diversified and closer to the realities of society.

On the other side of the coin, consumers at the other end of the business exchange loop also play an important role. The development of the internet has given rise to numerous platforms that enable the general public to have a hearing, which has strengthened the voice of the consumer. Consumers' opinions are more likely to be heard and taken into account by merchants and marketers. What we have observed is that despite the fact that Li Jiaqi's audience is predominantly women, the logic of patriarchal social discourse is still reinforced throughout the livestream. However, some viewers are actively trying to legitimize this phenomenon from a variety of perspectives, even though they are aware of the obvious exploitation of traditional gender stereotypes in livestream marketing. We believe that consumers should be encouraged to question this situation, rather than ignore it or take a hands-off approach. Zayer et al. (2019) also suggests that consumers also have an essential role to play in shaping and reaffirming what is "desirable, appropriate or proper" (Suchman, 1995). As more and more diverse voices are raised, the power from each individual's small contribution will add up and make an impact.

In addition, our paper can provide insights for regulators within the industry

and the public sector. The dissemination and promotion of gender stereotypes is not only a problem for content producers, but also reflects a lack of vetting and gatekeeping by the various livestreams and internet platforms as rule developers. As the marketing model of livestream shopping is still relatively novel, there is a time lag in terms of regulation and legislation. The industry and relevant public authorities should pay more attention to the abuse of gender stereotypes in livestreams and provide regulations to guide practitioners in order to build a more equal gender image in society.

## **7.2 Theoretical Contributions**

Firstly, this research extends gender studies in CCT in the context of livestream shopping in China, contributing to the globalization of CCT and further developing gender studies in CCT in the online environment. It also sets the scene for future CCT research in China. Secondly, this study contributes to the understanding of the gender performance of Li Jiaqi, a man host with a dual identity of marketer and advertisement, which breaks with previous gender studies that only looked at advertising “end-results”. Thirdly, this work also adds to the societal and gender aspects of livestream shopping research. And finally, we provided an adapted model which is useful to understand the gender performance in livestream shopping and found out woman consumers have similar legitimization process as man consumers in the original model (Zayer et al., 2019). We believe that our study has some reference significance to a certain extent for future research in the above-mentioned areas.

## **7.3 Limitations & Future Research**

The thesis has a few limitations. In our thesis, we focus on women’s roles within a gender framework, mainly because women viewers make up the majority of Li Jiaqi’s livestreams and the host designs his livestreams content primarily for women. In this respect, therefore, we formulated our research questions and focused mainly on women. However, it is undeniable that the men’s perspective is indispensable in the discussion of gender roles. There is also male audience watching Li Jiaqi’s livestream, which we think would be an interesting topic for future research. Due to the setting of the research questions in our thesis and the limitation of space, we did not deeply concern ourselves with the men’s perspective. Future research could examine more of the men’s gender role in order to fill this gap in our thesis.

Due to time limits, we observed only four livestreams and interviewed ten consumers. For an exploratory study, more findings can be obtained by increasing the amount of data collected. In qualitative research, interviewers and interviewees co-construct the interviews, but the two authors did not have much experience in interviewing. We did our best to create the appropriate atmosphere and probe at necessary moments, trying to uncover and understand the interviewees’ thoughts and feelings as much as possible.

However, because of the overwhelming human factor affecting consumers' expression, we cannot guarantee that our performance was perfect. Finally, we did not have the opportunity to speak directly with Li Jiaqi, which might have allowed the research questions to be better answered.

Future research could improve the research design, as the majority of our respondents lived in provincial capitals and were all highly educated, which resulted in a convergence of respondents' backgrounds. As CCT research is embedded in the local social context and cultural environment, it cannot be ruled out that consumers from more remote cities and with different educational backgrounds may have different perspectives. How does social class affect consumers' performances of gender in livestream shopping? This may also be an area that future research could explore in depth. Secondly, our study focused on a top host with high influence and selected only his main audience which is the women's group. How would man viewers of Li Jiaqi perform gender and think of him? Future research could also expand the selection of hosts and extend to the interpretation of gender performances in livestream by viewers having different values, genders and ages.



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## Appendix 1. Interviewee Profile

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Interviewed by</b>	<b>Interview date</b>
<b>Amy</b>	Graduate	Wuhan	45 mins	Zhaoze Wang	March 29, 2021
<b>Abby</b>	Employee	Guangzhou	35 mins	Xiaorui Hu	April 1, 2021
<b>Betty</b>	Graduate	Wuhan	36 mins	Xiaorui Hu	April 3, 2021
<b>Billie</b>	Student	Beijing	50 mins	Zhaoze Wang	April 7, 2021
<b>Clara</b>	Graduate	Shanghai	55 mins	Xiaorui Hu	April 7, 2021
<b>Cindy</b>	Student	Beijing	40 mins	Zhaoze Wang	April 10, 2021
<b>Daisy</b>	Student	Beijing	47 mins	Zhaoze Wang	April 11, 2021
<b>Ella</b>	Employee	Changsha	44 mins	Zhaoze Wang	April 12, 2021
<b>Della</b>	Employee	Hangzhou	45 mins	Xiaorui Hu	April 13, 2021
<b>Elena</b>	Employee	Dalian	55 mins	Xiaorui Hu	April 20, 2021

## Appendix 2. Interview Guide

Phase	No.	Key Questions
<b>Background</b>	<b>0</b>	What is your occupation?
	<b>1</b>	How do you see beauty product? Do you use it? Where do you buy it?
<b>Grand tour</b>	<b>2</b>	Is it important to you? Why? (Motivation, goal)
	<b>3</b>	How often do you watch livestream shopping? How often do you buy on livestream shopping? Which host do you like the most? Why?
	<b>4</b>	What do you feel about Li Jiaqi and his livestream? What do you like him compared to others?
<b>On livestream shopping</b>	<b>5</b>	How do you see his performance in every product category? (What do you think his performance on beauty product?)
	<b>6</b>	What do you think about the information he mentions in his livestream?
	<b>7</b>	[before elicitation] How do you think women are portrayed in Li Jiaqi's livestream?
	<b>8</b>	[after elicitation] Can you describe what happens in the clips? How does he portray women? Is this something that typically happens in the livestream?
<b>On society</b>	<b>9</b>	Do you have any ideal appearance?
	<b>10</b>	What ideals of masculinity and femininity do you have?
	<b>11</b>	What's your opinion about gender role in society & your life in general?
	<b>12</b>	How do you think what you said is embodied in Livestream shopping?
<b>Follow-up question</b>	<b>13</b>	Please describe the gender roles of Li Jiaqi.

### Appendix 3. Translated Abstracts of the Cited Articles

1. Han, H., & Xu, T. (2019). 角色设定与形象呈现：女性角色的广告视角解读——基于近十年知网文献的分析, Characterization and representation: An advertising perspective on female characters - An analysis of the recent decade of literature on the China national knowledge internet.

Advertising is the mirror of business, and woman image is an important element in the creation of advertising. The interpretation of the advertising perspective of woman role is to see the setting of woman role and woman image from advertising. Using China Knowledge Network as the data source, all relevant studies that could be searched during the 10 years from 2008 to 2017 were used as the basis, and three basic research methods in the field of social sciences were used as the basis. We divided the literatures into three categories: descriptive research, interpretive research and critical research, and analyzed the research on woman role description, woman role issue, feminism and woman role. The analysis is intended to draw attention to the study of women's roles in advertising.

2. Hu, H., & Kai, Z. (2016). 回溯中国传统文化中的三种女性理想人格范型, Tracing back three ideal women gender roles in Chinese traditional culture. Traditional Chinese culture has shaped three ideal models of femininity: the fair lady, the virtuous woman and the weak woman, reflecting the view of femininity of the time and the expectations of the ideal female personality. As the culture served reality, these three paradigms gradually deviated from their original intent and became shackles that imprisoned women's development. By tracing the emergence and evolution of the three ideal female personality paradigms, it is possible to understand women in history from a different perspective and to re-examine the influence of traditional Chinese gender cultural genes on the development of both sexes today.

3. Jin, D., Wang, X., & Liu, W. (2014). 消费者文化理论的产生背景、理论框架及研究进展述评, Background, theoretical framework and development of Consumer Culture Theory.

Since its introduction in 2005, consumer culture theory has been the subject of much debate among scholars. In the past eight years, the theory has grown considerably and has become one of the main elements of consumer behaviour research. However, there has been little attention paid to this area by Chinese scholars, and there is a lack of literature to provide a holistic introduction to the theory. This paper reviews the literature on consumer culture theory, introduces the background, theoretical framework and the latest research progress, and finally reviews the theory and its development.

4. Li, Q. (2015). 消费“她时代”女性时尚杂志广告中的女性形象塑造, Consumption “Her Time” women's fashion magazine advertising in the portrayal of women.

Women's fashion magazine advertisements construct our perceptions of gender through the presentation of gender. Although women's fashion magazines and advertisements have started to consciously present the image of independent and modern women, they are still not free from the constraints and influences of traditional gender culture, and women are still not completely free from the status of male subordinates. This article summarizes the common images of women in women's fashion magazine advertisements and criticizes the stereotyped positioning, blurred status and commodified image of women in women's fashion magazine advertisements, hoping that the images of women in women's fashion magazine advertisements can be richer, more autonomous and more vivid in the context of the "her era" of consumption.

5. Sun, Q., Zheng, L., & Zheng, Y. (2013). 性客体化与女性自我客体化, Sexual objectification and female self-objectification.

Sexual objectification usually refers to women becoming bodies or collections of body parts for the pleasure or use of others. Sexual objectification is ubiquitous in life, mainly through the media, interpersonal and some covert contexts. Women are more likely to be targets of sexual objectification than men, and the self-objectification of women can affect women's mental health, leading to eating disorders, depression and sexual dysfunction. The internalisation of cultural norms of attractiveness and social comparison are important psychological mechanisms that contribute to female self-objectification. Future research is needed to expand the research community, apply multiple methodologies, explore interventions and promote research on sexual objectification and female self-objectification in the context of Chinese culture.

6. Wang, C. (2005). 被肢解的女性——广告中的女性形象解读, Dismembered Women - Interpreting the image of women in advertising.

From ancient times to the present, women have been shaped by male aesthetic standards. Through the analysis of some representative cosmetic advertisements in China and abroad, this paper points out that behind a variety of advertisements for women is the invisible gaze of men judging them, and that advertisements guide women to be beautiful for men, mutilating women's bodies and making them incomplete.

7. Wang, F. (2017). 中国古代女性形象及其生活空间的建构与表达——以四大木版年画为考察中心, Construction and expression of the female figure and her living space in ancient China.

New Year paintings are one of the traditional folk arts of China, with a long history, rich subject matter and folkloric functions that have always attracted much attention and favour from the public. The "painting of women" is one of the most important subjects in Chinese New Year painting, and richness and diversity within the subject matter has provided a valuable visual text for exploring the image of women and their lives in ancient China. The "morbid beauty" of women in New Year paintings was not only an artistic expression of the male domination of society, but also an important way for men to view

women in ancient Chinese rituals, where “body contact are not allowed between men and women”. The “painting of women” became an important way for men to view women in ancient Chinese rituals, and the “painting of women” became an object of male visual desire. As such, the woodblock print is used as a text to present the lives of women in ancient China while at the same time peeking into the gender power relations implied by them.

8. Zhu, H. (2008). 视觉文化中的女性形象展示——从电视广告看大众文化中的女性角色, The presentation of women in visual culture - The role of women in popular culture through television advertising.

Advertising, with television as the main medium of communication, has given women today a splendid and colourful stage and an unparalleled absolute advantage. The images of women in television advertising reflect and influence the values of the members of society. The images of women in advertising are a kind of object to be viewed, shaped by the male discourse, which is the expectation of the social ideology dominated by the male discourse for the construction of women’s identity, and at the same time provides women with the values and reference standards for the maintenance of a patriarchal society.