From "Gazing" to "Defining": Li Jiaqi's Identity as the "Feminist Man" Spokesperson and the Reconstruction of Gender Discourse

Mingzi Xing*, Yan Gao

Communication University of China, Nanjing, China
*Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

Abstract: *In recent years, male endorsements for women's products have become a new marketing strategy in China's consumer market. The rise of Li Jiaqi, the "King of Lipsticks", is a typical example of this phenomenon. This article combines the gaze theory, post-feminism, masculinity research, gender manipulation theory and Bourdiere's symbolic violence theory to deeply analyze the construction logic, power relations and influence on gender discourse of Li Jiaqi as the spokesperson of "feminist men". Research has found that Li Jiaqi, through the discourse construction of "all girls", ingeniously bound the consumption of female goods with the discourse of gender equality, achieving a transformation from "the man being gazed at" to "the gaze medium", while simultaneously triggering widespread controversy over "pseudo-feminist" marketing. This study not only expands the connotations of feminist theory and gaze theory, but also provides practical guidance for gender equality in commercial communication.*

Keywords: Li Jiaqi, Feminist male, Reconstruction of Gender Discourse, Gaze theory, Post-feminism.

1. Introduction

In recent years, a remarkable phenomenon has emerged in China's consumer market: Men endorsing women's products is becoming a marketing strategy that subverts the traditional. In this trend, the rise of Li Jiaqi as the "Lipstick King" is particularly typical. From the rise to fame of "OMG" in 2018 to becoming a top live-streamer in the beauty industry, Li Jiaqi has not only redefined the role of men in the beauty industry, but also created a unique image of a "feminist man" through the construction of the phrase "all girls". As China's first top male beauty live-streamer, he has set multiple sales records on Taobao Live, and his "lipstick try-on" video has gone viral on social media. Unlike short-video bloggers who operate in a fragmented manner, Li Jiaqi has established a complete "beauty mentor" persona system, forming a systematic endorsement model from product reviews to the output of "independent female" values. Its advertising text has rich research value. Marketing slogans such as "Apply it and you'll be an independent woman" and "All girls should be kind to themselves" ingeniously bind women's commodity consumption with gender equality discourse, demonstrating the mechanism by which consumerism incorporates feminist discourse. Through the textual analysis of his live-streaming scripts and advertising copy, the construction logic of the "feminist man" persona can be deeply deconstructed. Furthermore, the case of Li Jiaqi reflects the complex power relations. He not only challenges the traditional perception that "beauty belongs to women", but also holds the power to set aesthetic standards by defining words such as "bright red represents working women", revealing the formation of a new type of gender power relations. The "she economy" narrative presented in the advertisements of the brands she endorsements, such as Hua Xi Zi, is even more worthy of critical interpretation from a feminist perspective. This phenomenon has sparked widespread controversy, with supporters arguing that it has broken the gender occupational segregation. Critics point out that simplifying women's empowerment to a consumption behavior is essentially a pseudo-progressive narrative of capital. This study aims to reveal the power logic and gender politics behind the "feminist man" marketing through an in-depth analysis of Li Jiaqi's endorsement practice, expand the application scenarios of feminist theory, enrich the connotation of the gaze theory, promote the research on masculinity, and provide practical guidance for gender equality in commercial communication.

2. Theoretical Foundation: Gaze, Post-feminism and Multiple Perspectives in Gender Studies

2.1 Gaze Theory

The theory of gaze, a profound insight derived from the field of philosophy, was first proposed by Sartre and others and has been widely applied in feminist theory. This theory profoundly reveals the subtle gaze relationship between the subject and others and the power dynamics behind it. Laura Mulway's "Male Gaze" theory [1] is particularly remarkable. It points out that in films, male audiences often satisfy their own desires and fantasies by gazing at female images. This behavior not only reflects the dominant position of men but also reinforces the object status of women. With the rise of feminist thought, the gaze theory has been used to combat unequal power relations. However, its connotation has also undergone extension and alienation during the development process, triggering widespread controversy over whether women are "objects of desire" or "subjects of viewing" [2]. In the field of advertising research, the gaze theory is used to deeply analyze the gender images and power relations in advertisements. For instance, Zhao Yang's research found [3] that on the Douyin platform, short videos of male body performances have formed a new kind of "female gaze landscape", but this kind of gaze is still profoundly restricted by the gender power structure of society. Furthermore, in advertisements, women are often portrayed as the objects being gazed at, while men demonstrate their dominance and power through gazing. This approach not only reinforces gender stereotypes but also restricts women's self-expression and dominant status [4].

2.2 Post-Feminism

Post-feminism, as a critique and transcendence of traditional feminism, emphasizes the diversity and differences of women and opposes regarding women as a unified whole. From the perspective of post-feminism, advertising has become an important window reflecting the changes in social gender concepts. With the improvement of women's social status and the enhancement of their consumption capacity, female advertisements have shown a diversified trend. They not only focus on women's external image but also emphasize their inner qualities and independent spirit. Women empowerment advertisements, as the practice of post-feminism in the advertising field, empower women by showcasing their talents and supporting messages for them [5]. However, such advertisements may also exacerbate gender inequality and become a trap of consumerism [6]. From the perspective of post-feminism, the gender images in advertisements have become diverse and dynamic. Women are no longer passive objects of gaze but individuals with self-awareness and dominant status. They express their needs and desires through advertisements and challenge traditional gender stereotypes and power relations.

Furthermore, post-feminism also focuses on how advertisements reflect the changes in social gender concepts. For instance, some studies have pointed out that with the improvement of women's social status, the female images in advertisements have gradually been liberated from the traditional family roles and presented a more independent, confident and diverse image [7]. This change not only reflects the improvement of women's social status, but also the progress and development of gender concepts in society.

2.3 Research on Masculinity

Research on masculinity focuses on the roles, identities and behavioral patterns of men in society. With the progress of society and the change of gender concepts, the definition of masculinity is also constantly changing. In advertising research, the diversity of masculinity has received more attention. In recent years, the emergence of male beauty bloggers has challenged the traditional concept of masculinity. They showcase their beauty and charm through makeup, skin care and other means, breaking the boundary between men and beauty. Zheng Yuan [8] took male beauty bloggers on Xiaohongshu as her research subjects and found that they shaped diverse masculine qualities through strategies such as facial makeup, clothing coordination, and hairstyle selection, challenging traditional gender stereotypes. Furthermore, research on masculinity also focuses on how advertisements shape and enhance masculinity. For instance, in advertisements, men are often portrayed as brave, strong and responsible, which conforms to traditional gender stereotypes and social expectations [9]. However, with the progress of society, this traditional concept has gradually been challenged and questioned.

2.4 Gender Manipulation Theory

The theory of gender manipulation, proposed by Judith Butler, emphasizes that gender is constructed and performed through social norms and cultural practices. In advertising research, the theory of gender manipulation

is used to analyze how gender images in advertisements are constructed and performed. This theory holds that gender is not a fixed biological attribute but is constructed through social norms and cultural practices. In advertisements, gender images are often shaped into symbols that conform to social expectations and aesthetic standards. However, this construction is not objective truth but is influenced and restricted by social norms and cultural practices [10]. Meanwhile, the theory of gender performance emphasizes the diversity and fluidity of gender performance. In advertisements, gender images showcase different lifestyles and values. For instance, male beauty bloggers display their beauty and charm through makeup, skin care and other means, breaking the boundaries between men and beauty, challenging traditional gender stereotypes, enriching the diversity of gender expression, and promoting the progress of gender concepts in society.

2.5 Bourdieu's Theory of Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence reveals how symbolic power is applied and reproduced in social practice. In advertising research, the theory of symbolic violence is used to analyze how advertisements shape consumers' concepts and behaviors through symbols and signs. This theory holds that [11], symbols and signs have powerful power and influence in social practice. Advertising, as an important means of cultural dissemination, shapes consumers' concepts and behaviors through symbols and signs. For instance, the goods in advertisements are endowed with specific symbolic values, becoming symbols of consumers' identities and status, and satisfying consumers' material and spiritual needs as well as social recognition. However, symbolic violence may also lead to consumers' blind pursuit and excessive consumption [12]. For instance, in female advertisements, female images are often portrayed as symbols that conform to the male gaze and aesthetic standards, which limits women's self-expression and exacerbates gender inequality. Meanwhile, the consumerist tendencies in advertisements may also lead consumers to pursue blindly and consume excessively, which has a negative impact on the sustainable development of society.

3. The Construction of Li Jiaqi's "Feminist Man" Image and His Business Strategies

Li Jiaqi, the renowned "Lipstick King" in the beauty industry, has carved out a niche for himself in the highly competitive business market with his unique identity and image. With a male body, he has broken the seemingly insurmountable boundary between men and beauty through in-depth research and brilliant performances in fields such as makeup and skincare, and has become a pioneer in the field of gender performance.

From the perspective of image construction, Li Jiaqi's image as a "feminist man" was not achieved overnight. In traditional concepts, beauty has always seemed to be the exclusive domain of women, and men who venture into it often encounter strange looks. However, Li Jiaqi boldly challenged this traditional perception. He meticulously crafted his external image, presenting himself in the public eye with exquisite makeup and fashionable outfits, demonstrating through his actions that men can also pursue beauty and showcase their charm. In the live stream, he confidently applied lipstick and skillfully explained various skin care tips. Every move and every word he said was reshaping the public's perception of the relationship between men and beauty. This kind of image construction is not only a powerful challenge to traditional gender stereotypes, but also injects new vitality into the diversity of gender expression, allowing more people to see that gender should not be a shackle that restricts personal interests and career development.

Li Jiaqi's success is undoubtedly attributed to his gender performance strategy, but his unique business strategy has also played a significant role. Today, with the highly developed social media, he keenly captured the huge potential of this platform and took it as the main battlefield for promoting beauty products. Through carefully planned short videos, graphic and text sharing and other contents, he successfully attracted the attention of a large number of consumers. These contents not only showcase the appearance of beauty products, but also delve deeply into the stories and cultural connotations behind the products, stimulating consumers' purchasing desire.

During the live stream, Li Jiaqi pushed his marketing strategy to the extreme. He personally demonstrated and tried out various beauty products, introducing the features and usage methods of the products to the audience with professional knowledge and vivid language. He can accurately grasp the advantages of different products and combine them with the needs of the audience, enabling them to have a strong resonance during the live broadcast. For instance, when recommending a lipstick, he would describe in detail its color, texture, durability, etc., and even try on the color himself, allowing the audience to see the effect more intuitively. This intuitive display method has significantly enhanced the product's popularity and sales, while also strengthening the audience's trust in it and their willingness to purchase.

In addition, Li Jiaqi also ingeniously applied multimodal discourse analysis theory to optimize live-streaming scripts and marketing strategies. He makes full use of various means such as language, sound and images to convey commodity information. In terms of language, his humorous, witty, kind and natural way of expression makes the audience feel very close. In terms of voice, his infectious tone can quickly capture the audience's attention. In terms of images, high-definition product displays and vivid usage scenario simulations make the audience feel as if they were right there. This multimodal marketing approach has greatly attracted the audience's attention and interest, enhanced the interactivity and fun of live streaming, and thus effectively promoted the sales and conversion of products.

However, Li Jiaqi's success was not smooth sailing and has also triggered widespread social impact and controversy. On the positive side, he undoubtedly made significant contributions to promoting the progress of gender concepts in society. He broke the traditional gender stereotypes and gender discrimination concepts, making more people realize that gender should not be a factor restricting personal development, and encouraging people to bravely pursue their interests and dreams. But at the same time, his success has also exposed some problems. Some studies have pointed out that there are signs of excessive manipulation by commercial capital behind Li Jiaqi's success. To a large extent, his image has been overly consumed and commercialized, losing its original authenticity and individuality. In order to meet market demands and commercial interests, he may have to perform in accordance with established patterns, which gradually makes his image stereotyped and monotonous. Furthermore, his gender performance strategy might also bring about some negative impacts. For teenagers, they are at a crucial stage in the formation of gender identity and values. Li Jiaqi's gender performance might cause them confusion and ambiguity about gender, affecting the formation of their correct gender concepts. In his live streams, female viewers often satisfy their desires and fantasies by staring at him, which to a certain extent reinforces gender stereotypes, placing women in the position of being stared at as objects and restricting their self-expression and subject status.

The construction of Li Jiaqi's image as a "feminist man" and his business strategies not only have positive significance but also present some issues worthy of deep consideration. While pursuing business success, how to maintain the authenticity and individuality of the image and how to avoid having a negative impact on gender concepts in society are all problems that he and the entire industry need to seriously consider and solve.

4. The Evolution of Women's Advertising: Image, Equality and the Influence of Social Media

4.1 Diversification of Female Images

With the improvement of women's social status and the enhancement of their consumption capacity, the female images in female advertisements have gradually shown a diversified trend. These advertisements not only focus on the external image of women, but also emphasize their inner qualities and independent spirit. The image of women has gradually been liberated from traditional family roles, presenting a more independent, confident and diverse image, which reflects the improvement of women's social status and the progress of gender concepts in society. In addition, women's advertisements also focus on the diverse needs and hobbies of women. For instance, in beauty advertisements, female images are portrayed as individuals who pursue beauty and fashion. They enhance their external image and self-confidence through makeup, skin care and other means, satisfying women's pursuit of beauty and their needs for self-expression and individuality display.

4.2 Gender Equality and Consumerism

The issues of gender equality and consumerism in female advertisements have attracted much attention. On the one hand, female advertisements have promoted the process of gender equality by showcasing the independent, confident and diverse images of women. For instance, women's empowerment advertisements empower women by showcasing their talents and supporting messages, challenging traditional gender stereotypes and power relations, enhancing women's social status and influence, and promoting the progress of gender concepts in society. On the other hand, female advertisements are also facing the challenges and doubts of consumerism. Some advertisements promote the sales and conversion of goods by shaping women's consumption desires and shopping behaviors, which may lead to women's blind pursuit and excessive consumption, exacerbating gender inequality and social stratification issues. In order to balance the relationship between gender equality and consumerism, female advertisements need to focus on social responsibility and ethical norms. Advertisers should avoid using

gender-discriminatory and stereotypical advertising content, respect the diverse needs and interests of women, pay attention to the impact of advertisements on consumer behavior and social culture, and actively promote gender equality and social progress.

4.3 Social Media and Women's Advertising

With the rise and development of social media, female advertisements have presented new characteristics and trends. Social media provides a broader and more convenient dissemination channel and interactive platform for female advertisements. For instance, on social media platforms such as Weibo and Douyin, beauty bloggers and Internet celebrities have attracted a large number of women's attention and purchases by sharing their beauty experiences and insights, enhancing the dissemination effect and coverage of advertisements, and increasing the interactivity and participation between advertisements and consumers. However, female advertisements on social media also face challenges and problems. Some advertisers may take advantage of the concealment and anonymity of social media to make false claims and mislead consumers. There may be issues of gender discrimination and stereotypes in their advertisements, which can have a negative impact on women's social image and mental health. To address these challenges and issues, advertisers need to focus on the authenticity and credibility of their advertisements, avoid false promotion and misleading advertising content, pay attention to the impact of advertisements on women's social image and mental health, and actively promote gender equality and social progress. Meanwhile, the government and social organizations should also strengthen the supervision and management of female advertisements on social media, establish and improve laws, regulations and regulatory mechanisms to standardize the advertising market and behaviors, enhance the education and guidance of the public, and improve consumers' media literacy and identification ability.

5. From "Gazing" to "Defining": Li Jiaqi's "Feminist Man" Endorsement's Reconstruction Path of Gender Discourse

5.1 Discourse Construction: From "Being Stared at" to "Staring Medium"

Li Jiaqi broke the power structure of the traditional gender gaze through discourse strategies. In the early days, men venturing into the beauty industry were often regarded as "outliers". However, Li Jiaqi, with the addressing strategy of "all girls", positioned himself as the "best friend" or "mentor" of female consumers, thus completing the transformation from "the one being gazed at" to "the intermediary of the gaze". For instance, he defines consumers with labels such as "independent woman" and "Queen of the workplace", binding product consumption with gender equality discourse, such as "Put on this lipstick and you are Queen of the workplace". This strategy not only eliminates men's rebelliousness in the beauty field, but also grants them the power to define their female identity through words, transforming the "gaze" from a one-way man's gaze at a woman to a man acting as an intermediary to "empower gaze" at a woman.

5.2 Power Relations: The Formulation of Aesthetic Standards and the Redistribution of Gender Power

Li Jiaqi has seized the symbolic power in the beauty industry by defining aesthetic standards such as "bright red represents working women" and "red bean paste is suitable for gentle girls". This kind of power is not only reflected in product recommendations, but also extends to the construction of gender identity. For instance, he claimed that "This foundation can make you look 'naturally good skin', just like independent women can be confident without disguise", tying the product features with the independent value of women and making consumption behavior a symbol of gender identity. This strategy not only challenges the traditional perception that "beauty belongs to women", but also reconstructs the distribution logic of gender power by defining the aesthetic standards for women. While purchasing goods, female consumers are also accepting the gender norms defined by Li Jiaqi, forming a kind of "voluntary discipline".

5.3 Consumerist Logic: The Inclusion and Alienation of Gender Equality Discourse

Li Jiaqi's endorsement model has exposed the mechanism by which consumerism incorporates gender equality discourse. He simplified women's empowerment into a consumption behavior and transformed gender equality into a purchasable commodity attribute through phrases like "Buying, buying, buying is loving yourself". For instance, he claimed, "With this essence, you are an exquisite independent woman," directly linking the consumption of the product with women's self-actualization. This strategy caters to the post-feminist emphasis on female diversity, but commercializes the discourse of gender equality through consumerist logic, leading women

into the trap of excessive consumption, while true gender equality issues (such as workplace equality and sharing of family responsibilities) are diluted.

5.4 Controversy and Reflection: The Boundaries of Gender Discourse Reconstruction

Li Jiaqi's endorsement model not only challenges traditional gender stereotypes but may also reinforce gender labels and limit the diversity of female identities. The background of its commercial capital makes the reconstruction of gender discourse inevitably driven by interests, resulting in the image of "independent women" being overly commercialized and packaged, losing its original criticality. How to balance the discourse of gender equality and the logic of consumerism in business practice and avoid the alienation of gender discourse has become an urgent problem to be solved.

6. Conclusion

The rise of Li Jiaqi as the spokesperson for "feminist men" is not only a typical case of the reconstruction of gender discourse in China's consumer market, but also a microcosm of the deep interweaving of contemporary gender power relations and consumerism. From a theoretical perspective, its image construction and business strategy comprehensively employ multiple logics such as the gaze theory, post-feminism, masculinity research, gender manipulation theory, and Bourdius' symbolic violence theory. By using the discourse strategy of "all girls", he successfully transformed from "the man being stared at" to "the staring medium", binding commodity consumption with the discourse of gender equality. This not only eliminated the rebellious nature of men venturing into the beauty field but also reconstructed the logic of gender power distribution by defining the aesthetic standards for women. However, this reconstruction path reveals the incorporation and alienation of gender equality discourse by consumerism: Women's empowerment is simplified to consumption behavior, and independent value is transformed into purchasable commodity attributes, leading to the gradual hollowing-out of the gender equality issue under the influence of commercial capital.

The controversy of its endorsement model lies in that it not only challenges the traditional perception that "beauty belongs to women", but also commercializes the discourse of gender equality through capital operations. The right to set aesthetic standards held by Li Jiaqi enables female consumers to accept the gender norms defined by her while accepting product recommendations, thus forming a kind of "voluntary discipline". Although this redistribution of power relations has broken some gender stereotypes, it may strengthen new gender labels and limit the diversity of women's identities. For instance, the slogans in its advertisements such as "bright red represents working women" and "red bean paste is suitable for gentle girls" seem to give women the right to choose, but in fact, they standardize and categorize femininity through symbolic violence, further solidifying the binary opposition of gender.

What is more alarming is that behind Li Jiaqi's image as a "feminist man", there are signs of excessive manipulation by commercial capital. The authenticity and individuality of its image have gradually been replaced by stereotyped performances. Gender manipulation strategies may mislead teenagers' gender cognition, and at the same time, by strengthening the status of female consumers as the objects of gaze, the power structure of gender inequality has continued. This contradiction reveals the boundaries of the reconstruction of gender discourse: When commercial interests are deeply bound to the discourse of gender equality, the former often implicitly undermines the criticality of the latter, reducing gender equality to a marketing tool.

The significance of this study lies not only in deconstructing the power logic of Li Jiaqi's case, but also in providing a reflective framework for gender equality practices in commercial communication. Future research needs to further explore how to maintain the independence of gender equality discourse in the context of consumerism and prevent it from being absorbed by capital. Meanwhile, attention should be paid to the subversion and reproduction of traditional gender power relations by emerging gender performance practices, and gender studies should be promoted to develop in a more critical direction. Only in this way can the reconstruction of gender discourse truly break through the trap of "pseudo-feminism" and become a positive force promoting social progress.

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