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Framing Gender: Comparative Analysis of Lipstick Campaigns within Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) in Western and Asian Contexts

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
List of Figures.....	3
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	4
Abstract.....	5
Declaration.....	6
Acknowledgements	7
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	8
1.1 Brief Background of Gender Representations in CCI.....	8
1.2 Research Scope and Focus.....	10
1.3 Dissertation Structure.....	10
1.4 Research Overview and Questions.....	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
2.1 Theoretical Framework	13
2.2 Women Empowerment.....	15
2.3 Femvertising.....	17
2.4 Lipstick Feminism.....	18
2.5 Male Representation in Cosmetics Industries	20
Chapter 3: Methodology	21
3.1 Methodology: Case Studies Analysis.....	21
3.2 Analytical tool: Semiotic Analysis.....	24
3.3 Analytical tool: Literature Review	26
Chapter 4: From Object of Desire to Object of Control: Women Empowerment in Western Lipsticks Campaigns.	27
4.1 Tom Ford “Lips and Boys” Campaign	30
4.2 L’Oréal 2022 “Lipstick is Not a Yes” Campaign	39
4.3 Findings.....	43
Chapter 5: Men in Lipsticks: Redefine Male Beauty in Asian Lipstick Campaigns.....	44
5.1 South Korea: Candy Lab X NCT Dream Campaign	46
5.2 Mainland China: Li Jiaqi X Florasis 2019 Collaboration Campaign	50
5.3 Findings.....	55
Chapter 6: Conclusion	56
Reference List:.....	60
Reference List for Figures:.....	78

Dissertation Word Count: 11863

List of Figures

Figure 1: Bebe Eau De Parfum Campaign.....	29
Figure 2: Screenshots of “TOM FORD LIPS AND BOYS BRING ON THE BOYS”	32
Figure 3: Screenshots from “Tom Ford: Bring on the boys & Meet the new boys”	33
Figure 4: Screenshot from “Tom Ford: Bring on the boys”	35
Figure 5: Screenshot from “Tom Ford: Bring on the boys”	35
Figure 6: Screenshot from “Tom Ford: Bring on the boys”	36
Figure 7: Screenshot from “Tom Ford: Bring on the boys”	37
Figure 8: Screenshot from “Tom Ford: Bring on the boys”	38
Figure 9: Screenshots from “Tom Ford: Meet the new boys”	38
Figure 10: L'Oréal's 5Ds Training Program	40
Figure 11: Lipstick is not a Yes campaign.....	40
Figure 12: Celebrities supporting 5D program	41
Figure 13: Lipstick is not a Yes Campaign.....	42
Figure 14: Evo Longoria as L'Oréal Spokesperson	43
Figure 15: 1996 Kanebo Super Lips Campaign.....	45
Figure 16: Screenshots from "Full Bloom NCT"	47
Figure 17: Candylab X NCT Dream Special Event Information	48
Figure 18: Screenshots from the video "Melt in Blur Lip Colour"	49
Figure 19: Florasis X Li Jiaqi Campaign	53
Figure 20: Screenshots from “Florasis X Li Jiaqi”	54

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CCIs - Creative and Cultural Industries

CNNIC – China Internet Network Information Centre

GGGR – Global Gender Gap Report

IPSOS - Institut Public de Sondage d'Opinion Secteur (French)

Abstract

The current state of gender representations in CCIs reveals a complex landscape where traditional norms are both challenged and upheld, reflecting the broader cultural and societal tensions within diverse global contexts. Discussing gender representation in the context of CCIs is significant because it not only influences public perceptions and cultural narratives but also plays a crucial role in shaping and reflecting evolving societal values around gender identity and equality. This dissertation investigates the central question of how gender is represented in lipstick advertising campaigns within CCIs across Western and Asian contexts. Focusing on the comparative analysis of four campaigns from different cultural contexts, this paper critically explore the ways these advertisements navigate and reflect gender norms. Employing intersectional feminism and performative gender theories, this dissertation utilizes a qualitative methodology, integrating semiotic analysis with an extensive literature review. Final findings reveal significant disparities in how gender fluidity and empowerment are portrayed, with Western campaigns emphasizing inclusivity and social activism, while Asian campaigns often balance traditional masculinity with market-driven strategies. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the role CCIs play in shaping and reflecting societal values, offering valuable insights for future research and practical applications in media and advertising.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work, except where specific references are made to the contributions of others. Furthermore, I confirm that no part of this work has been submitted previously in support of any application for a degree or qualification at this or any other university or institution of higher education.

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Acknowledgements

I dedicate this research to all those who have experienced gender bias and discrimination. As a woman who has encountered gender inequality since childhood, I also dedicate this work to myself as a tribute to my unwavering pursuit of empowerment and freedom.

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1. Introduction

The Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) involve the creation, production, and commercialization of culturally significant content that is protected by copyright (Moore, 2014). These industries, including media, publishing, multimedia, audio-visual, and design, operate in a high-risk commercial environment due to market unpredictability. Since the 1990s, the digital era has expanded CCIs, integrating design, text, music, and IT solutions into service-based economies. This led to widespread investment in creative infrastructure, noted as “serial replication” (McCarthy, 2005). This was officially documented in Australia in 1994 with the launch of a new cultural policy to integrate IT and digital media opportunities nationwide (Moore, 2014). The 2000s saw the expansion of CCIs across Europe and North America, establishing creative quarters in cities like New York and Toronto. According to the European Commission (2021), CCIs significantly impact innovation and creativity in other industries, making them crucial for driving sustainable change. Despite global economic downturns, these creative cities have shown resilience, becoming expansionary economic zones (Harvey, 2001; Jessop, 2006). In the 2010s, Southeast Asia began developing CCIs by building creative cities in Seoul and Shanghai, bolstered by digital technologies and global investment. Simultaneously, the rapid growth of Asian CCIs, particularly Japanese Anime, Korean Idols, and Chinese E-commerce, underscores their significance in the global cultural economy (Lee, 2021).

1.1 Brief Background of Gender Representations in CCIs

Connecting CCIs' economic and cultural impacts to focus on gender issues, this dissertation examines gender representations in lipstick advertisements from both Western and non-Western CCIs contexts. As cultural artifacts, lipstick campaigns embody dualities of empowerment and subjugation, making them representative for exploring gender dynamics.

Historically, lipstick not only symbolizing female autonomy but also reinforcing narrow beauty standards. Lipstick can represent female self-expression (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004), but also perpetuate traditional femininity (Bartky, 1982; Bordo, 1993). This dual nature provides a rich context of societal shifts and consumer culture's intersection with feminist movements. Analysing gender representations in lipstick advertisements uncovers the tension between progressive branding and societal resistance, offering crucial insights into how CCIs can challenge or reinforce existing gender ideologies.

Despite increased female workforce participation and a narrowing gender gap in cultural employment, women remain underrepresented in higher-status positions and encounter significant barriers to empowerment (Eurostat, 2023). Women representations in CCIs are frequently portrayed as objects of desire rather than active controllers, leading to stereotypical representations and perpetuating patriarchal ideologies (Gaitán, 2023). This portrayal largely obstructs women's social development, symbolically denigrating them through media representations (Tuchman, 2000). Persistent gender inequalities, evident in pay gaps and underrepresentation in management roles, are attributed to the patriarchal system (Barrett & McIntosh, 1985; Jones, 2010; Woodhull, 2003).

Judith Butler's theory of performative gender provides a critical framework for understanding gender representations, as it challenges the view of gender as a fixed identity (Butler, 1999). By depicting women in stereotypical roles, CCIs reinforce the performative nature of gender through a natural way. Some campaigns now depict women as empowered and autonomous, breaking away from traditional stereotypes. However, the intersectional framework of gender analysis emphasizes the need to consider multiple identity dimensions, including race, class, and sexual orientation, in understanding gender dynamics (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality

reveals how various forms of discrimination intersect, impacting women's careers and representations in CCIs. For instance, women of colour often face additional layers of marginalization in media portrayals, which are not only sexist but also racist. Despite these challenges, emerging efforts significantly confront traditional gender norms within CCIs.

1.2 Research Scope and Focus

This dissertation aims to critically analyse the evolution of gender representation in lipstick advertisements within Western and Asian contexts. It seeks to explore how these representations have evolved in response to changing societal norms and the implications of this evolution on consumer culture and feminist movements. By examining multiple case studies through a qualitative methodology, this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of lipstick campaigns in reinforcing or challenging existing gender norms. Four lipstick campaigns from Western and non-Western contexts are selected as exemplifies of how genders are portrayed and how these representations impacting on patriarchal norms. These case studies show how ideologies of “lipstick feminism,” “power feminism,” “hashtag feminism,” and empowerment are conveyed through semiotic and visual signifiers. The study is significant because it takes a comparative approach, helping to fill gaps in literature that mainly emphasize Western perspectives. By integrating theories from gender studies, media representation, cultural studies, and CCIs, this dissertation seeks to offer critical insights into the complex dynamics of gender portrayal in advertising.

1.3 Dissertation Structure

The dissertation is structured as follows:

First, the introduction provides an overview of gender representations in CCIs, both historically and theoretically. Next, Chapter 2 reviews the history and ideology of lipstick

campaigns, examining their role in shaping societal attitudes towards femininity and identifying research gaps. Then, Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, including case study selection and analytical tools. Following this, Chapters 4 and 5 analyse the chosen lipstick campaigns from Western and Asian perspectives, respectively, exploring their cultural context and societal impact. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes key findings, proposes recommendations for future research, and discusses the findings in relation to existing literature, offering insights on the role of lipstick campaigns in gender equality.

1.4 Research Overview and Questions

To achieve the objectives outlined, this dissertation employs a qualitative methodology consisting of two primary tools: semiotic analysis and secondary literature research. On the one hand, this involves a detailed examination of the signs and symbols used in lipstick advertisements to understand how they convey meaning and reinforce or challenge gender norms. Each advertisement will be analysed to identify the visual and textual elements that contribute to its overall message about femininity and gender roles. On the other hand, a comprehensive review of existing literature will be conducted to contextualize gender representations in different cultural contexts. This includes exploring theoretical frameworks such as Butler's performative gender and Crenshaw's intersectionality, as well as reviewing previous research on gender representations in advertising and CCIs.

The research questions guiding this dissertation are:

1. How have representations of femininity in lipstick advertisements evolved in response to changing societal norms in Western and Asian contexts?
2. How does the representation of lipstick campaigns reinforce or challenge existing gender norms?

3. How do contemporary lipstick advertisements employ gender-neutral and inclusive marketing strategies, and what implications do these strategies have for self-identity and societal perceptions of gender in Western and Asian contexts?

2. Literature Review

CCIs have significantly impacted social cohesion and overall economy, necessitating the depiction of diverse and marginalized representations (Borck, 2018; Van der Pol, 2007). Pujar (2016) states that “Culture is a driver of sustainable development and cannot be achieved without gender equality” (p.14). However, gender representations in CCIs are often constructed with a “heteropatriarchal bias”, portraying women as desired objects rather than active protagonists (Gaitán, 2023). These stereotypes perpetuate the androcentric and patriarchal gaze prevalent in CCIs, positioning women in subordinate roles within an institutional framework of power (Patnaik, 2020). Female representations in media are often confined to idealized (caring and maternal) or deviant (domineering) roles (Macdonald, 1995). Tuchman (2000) argues that media symbolically denigrates women, impeding their development into socially valuable human beings through stereotypical representations.

Building on these observations, current literature attributes these complexities in cultural practices to patriarchal systems (Barrett, 1985; Jones, 2010; Pollock, 1999; Woodhull, 2003). Gaitán (2023) emphasizes that "culture is strongly gender biased" (p.8), highlighting the persistent pay gap between female and male workers within CCIs, evident in average wages and artwork prices (Allen, 2005; Artnet, 2022; Halperin & Burns, 2019a). Gender equality remains a significant issue in CCIs, with common beliefs about women’s lower creative skills and lack of representation in management roles (Nwonka, 2021; Ruano & Muñoz, 2021; WOMarts, 2020). Data from Artnet (2022) shows that acquisitions of female-created art stagnated between 2008 and 2018, representing only 2% of the global auction market share.

Female workers comprised only 46.1% of EU-28 cultural employment in 2018, with particularly low numbers in Spain, Portugal, and the United Kingdom (Eurostat, 2019). With a reduction in the gender gap in cultural employment in the EU from 2020 to 2022 (Eurostat, 2023), minor growth in female workforce does not directly equate to empowerment (Henry, 2009). In other words, the increase in female participation alone is insufficient to ensure women empowerment. In fact, women are often employed in lower-status and lower-paying occupations, facing slow career progression and enduring gender stereotypes, remaining a 'social minority' (Obrien & Whitmore, 2001).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

To bridge the gap between achieving women's empowerment and dismantling the heteronormative nature rooted in contemporary society, it is crucial to evaluate gender representation through the discourse of performative gender (Butler, 1999). This perspective shifts the understanding of gender from being a static role to a dynamic, socially constructed performance. Butler posits that gender is a performative ideology enforced by social norms and taboos, challenging its perceived natural status. Thus, gender is a historical situation rather than a natural fact, especially in real-life contexts heavily influenced by social conventions. Butler (1999) argues that gender is a socially compelled act rather than a role, resonating with Goffman's (1956) notion that life is filled with complex social constructions.

Within the context of CCIs, gender representations are performative constructions shaped by societal norms and patriarchal ideologies. Macdonald (1995) illustrates how media often confines female representations to either idealized (caring and maternal) or deviant (domineering husbands) roles, reinforcing stereotypical gender norms. Tuchman (2000) adds that media symbolically denigrates women, impeding their development into socially valuable individuals through these representations. Recognizing gender as a performative

construction rather than a natural fact is crucial for understanding how societal norms and patriarchal ideologies shape gender representations. By acknowledging this perspective, we can better inform efforts to achieve women's empowerment. Consequently, this approach provides a framework for addressing and dismantling these deeply ingrained societal norms.

Acknowledging this, feminism is defined as a composition of socio-political movements and discourses targeting gender equality at the political, economic, and social levels (Brunell & Burkett, 2024; Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2001; Hawkesworth, 2018). Theoretical foundations impacting historical and societal changes for female human rights (Messer-Davidow, 2002) ground feminism in movements addressing gender-related issues in women's social roles and cultural contexts (Chodorow, 1989). Feminism can be divided into three waves: the first wave sought political and legal equality since the 19th century (Artwińska & Mrozik, 2020), the second wave in the 1960s aimed to eliminate patriarchy (Maynard, 1995), and the third wave since the 1990s emphasizes intersectionality, addressing layers of gender, race, and class (Crenshaw, 1989). Feminism has since developed into various forms, including white, black, and intersectional feminism (Weedon, 1997). Bennett (1989) highlighted the need for inclusivity through an 'intersection of race, class, and gender,' integrating feminist politics with scholarship. This approach effectively reveals issues of exclusivity and hierarchy while enhancing narratives that advance the status of women. However, gender remains a 'primary way of signifying power' (Scott, 1988), and its impact on social and cultural contexts and how to evaluate femaleness and maleness equally remains uncertain (Bennett, 1989).

To address this question, this dissertation utilizes an intersectional framework to deeply evaluate gender representation in lipstick campaigns. This approach integrates variables of race, gender, and sexual orientation to provide a complex evaluation of behaviours (DeFelice

& Diller, 2019). Contemporary scholars emphasize the need to redefine gender empowerment measurement to capture gender context and content (Syed, 2010; Kabeer, 1999; Syed, 2008a). Most studies focus on Western interpretations of women empowerment, dominated by Eurocentric paradigms of gender stratification. Few scholars explore this topic in non-Western contexts (Essed, 2002; Mohanty, 1988; Sen, 1992; Syed, 2008a; Syed, 2010). Moreover, although current research primarily examines gender representation in CCIs within various cultural contexts (Alkan, 2016; Byerly & Ross, 2008; Brooks & Hébert, 2006), there is a lack of comparative studies analysing gender representation across multiple cultural backgrounds (Mackay & Hassan, 2000).

This dissertation aims to address this gap by applying an intersectional feminism theoretical framework to a comparative case study of four lipstick campaigns. Two of these campaigns exemplify Western "dominant group" norms (Cole, 2009, p.172), while the other two highlight representations from relatively marginalized Asian perspectives. This unique comparative approach will uncover the critical ways in which cultural contexts shape gender portrayals and contribute to or hinder the advancement of gender equality. By highlighting these differences, the dissertation aims to provide critical insights into the effectiveness of gender representation strategies in diverse cultural settings and propose actionable recommendations for fostering more equitable gender norms globally.

2.2 Women Empowerment

Systematic analysis of women empowerment is necessary for evaluating gender representations. Since the United Nations proclaimed women empowerment in 2001, it has been a popular topic academically, discussed from various perspectives. Most scholars view women empowerment as a multi-dimensional process advocating for gender equality across

all spheres of life (Squires, 2007). Mandal (2013) further categorizes women empowerment into five levels: social, educational, economic, political, and psychological.

- **Social empowerment** enhances women's roles by addressing discrimination and fostering community power.
- **Educational empowerment** is crucial for socio-political change, requiring free education to boost women's self-awareness and confidence.
- **Economic empowerment** involves making women independent through employment and resource control.
- **Political empowerment** enables women to influence policies and challenge power structures.
- **Psychological empowerment** breaks traditional taboos, fostering self-confidence and personal growth

Nowadays, women empowerment extends beyond economic and political achievements; wearing makeup itself has become a symbol of empowerment (Chant, 2016), mirroring significant contradictions among sexuality, social issues, and politics (Peiss, 1998). Gaitán (2023) indicates that deconstructing gender stereotypes and masculinity roots in the origin of the sexual division of labour. Therefore, creative approaches are essential to combat stereotypes and promote inclusive and equal societies (European Commission, 2022). During the second wave of feminism, advertisements on cosmetics were critiqued and protested as "sexist" by feminists (Angle, 2015; El-Husari, 2016). In fact, women were portrayed as sex symbols in 1970s advertisements, perpetuating negative stereotypes of female representation. By the end of the 1970s, a new stereotype called the "superwoman complex" emerged, depicting women balancing social responsibilities as independent workers and family responsibilities as beautiful wives and caring mothers (Nelson, 2012). Meanwhile, racial and

gender issues significantly impact the nexus of inequalities and consumer culture through media representations (Jerald et al., 2017; Sobande, 2019). Resisting "dominant ideologies which are characteristically masculine" (Woodruffe, 1997, p.667) rooted in institutional whiteness and heteronormativity, existing studies reveal that intersectional feminism targets historically marginalized consumer groups (Johnson et al., 2019). However, it is necessary to narrow this focus into specific cultural contexts and explore how brands (mis)reinforce marketized feminist ideologies and intersectional understanding of feminism through different feminist positions.

2.3 Femvertising

A significant research gap exists in evaluating marketing research and representation studies in "femvertising" (Sobande, 2019), which denotes a brand's support of women's empowerment and gender equality through advertising (Dobson and Kanai, 2018). Coined by Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign with SheKnowsMedia in 2004 (Flux, 2019), "femvertising" has become pivotal in advertising that challenges traditional representations of women (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). This approach has notably succeeded in highlighting female talents, promoting pro-woman representations, and dismantling stereotypes (Skey, 2015). In this context, the #LikeAGirl campaign from Always exemplifies successful femvertising by depicting models of different ages and genders behaving "like a girl," thereby promoting diversity and inclusivity in representations. Introduced during the Super Bowl in 2014, this campaign encouraged girls to be strong and sparked a widespread trend of femvertising (Iqbal, 2015).

Femvertisements have been closely linked with issues of gender equality and women empowerment, particularly through positive brand engagement towards the interpretation of empower (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2018). From a brand perspective, embracing a gender-

equal ideology positively impacts its sustained development (Byrd, 2018). This strategy is regarded as one of the most visible expressions of cultural shift, representing a strategic portrayal of females through empowering images and signifiers (Skey, 2015), and is commonly adopted globally as a communication strategy (Rodrigues, 2016). This strategy is employed not only in advertisements for female products (e.g., cosmetics products) but also in male-oriented products (e.g., vehicles and trucks). Departure from focus on how the interpretation of femvertising evolves through semiotic interpretations (Drake, 2017; Kapoor & Munjal, 2019), this research semiotically evaluate two Western lipstick campaigns to examine how feminist ideologies have been recontextualized through femvertising culture.

2.4 Lipstick Feminism

Current literature reveals that the development of the cosmetic industry serves as a powerful tool for gender-equitable poverty reduction (Dolan & Scott, 2009; Peiss, 1988). On one hand, lipstick has become a polarizing marketplace icon, with the global lipstick industry expected to reach \$13.4 billion by 2024 (P&S, 2019). This significant market growth underscores the profound impact of lipstick on female autonomy, self-expression, control over life, and empowerment (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Davis, 1995). Baumgardner and Richards (2004) argue that lipstick can be seen as a tool for female empowerment, allowing women to assert control over their appearance and express their identity. Similarly, Davis (1995) highlights how the use of lipstick can serve as a form of resistance against societal norms and expectations. This dual perspective reflects the complexity of lipstick as both a commercial product and a symbol of empowerment in contemporary culture.

On the other hand, “lipstick feminism” plays an essential role in feminist discourse, celebrating femininity through self-expression with makeup (Schuster, 2017). Introduced during the third wave of feminism, lipstick feminism echoes a “girlie culture” that embraces

feminine symbols (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004). As a key signifier of femininity (Brownmiller, 1984), lipstick represents empowerment (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000), suggesting that women can assert their sexuality and confidence through wearing lipstick. Lipstick feminism has become a prominent theme within CCIs, particularly in films and TV series from the 2000s. Notable examples include "Legally Blonde" and "Sex and the City," which feature heroines who use their femininity to their advantage (Wilkins, 2016).

However, lipstick can also be seen as a symbol of reinforcing patriarchal ideologies and gender inequality (Kandiyoti, 1988), further sexualizing women's bodies as objects (Dworkin, 1974). Critics argue that lipstick upholds a narrow feminine ideal rooted in the patriarchal and capitalist nature of the beauty industry (Bartky, 1982; Bordo, 1995; Merskin, 2007), functioning to control women and maintain existing power relations (McRobbie, 2015). This perspective highlights the complexity of lipstick as both a symbol of empowerment and a means of reinforcing traditional gender norms within feminist discourse and CCIs.

Contrastingly, Lazar (2011) argued that lipstick can depict "power femininity", with women wearing lipsticks as a form of self-determination through "heroic" and "in charge of their sexuality" representations (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2021, p.227). Red lipsticks were used as an act of defiance by suffragettes to confront men and disrupt wartime masculine codes of power during World War II (Delano, 2000). Lipsticks became associated with "bad girls" and "sex symbols" in Hollywood (Hamilton, 1997), further amplified by Marilyn Monroe's signature red lipstick looks. Empowerment, therefore, is signified by women's independent control over their bodies (Liimakka, 2011), symbolizing women's subjective desire for self-pleasure and exploration of their sexualities (Tungate, 2011). Evaluating lipstick names, many are related to sex, such as "Desire," and "Long Kiss" (Merskin, 2007). These names carry a dual

meaning: they both celebrate and objectify women's sexual desire and agency. This duality reflects broader societal attitudes towards female sexuality, where expressions of desire are simultaneously empowered and commodified.

2.5 Male Representation in Cosmetics Industries

Building on the longstanding history of the male grooming industry, current advertising for men's cosmetics encodes two contrasting masculinities: traditional and metrosexual (Harrison, 2008). This shift has witnessed the rise of the metrosexual economy, which includes male-only spas and boutique outlets selling a range of products from skincare to lipsticks (Simpson, 2007). Typically, a metrosexual is a young man with disposable income living in a metropolitan area, prioritizing self-love and pleasure, regardless of his sexual orientation (Simpson, 2002). The marketing of cosmetics to male consumers represents the most extreme aspect of the metrosexual trend (Watkins, 2017). This trend quickly became a market icon, with the North American grooming market valued at around \$8 billion in 2002 (The Economist, 2003). The commercial success of male grooming products indicates that the blend of traditional and metrosexual masculinity in advertising has significantly influenced the (re)construction of masculine identity (Harrison, 2008).

However, there is a notable research gap in examining the role of lipsticks in male representations within the contexts of CCIs. Critical research evaluating the impact of lipsticks on men in terms of self-expression and sexual identity is needed to fill this gap. Wang and Dong (2022) offer insights from queer studies, demonstrating that male endorsements in cosmetics can negatively impact female consumers' perceptions of self-identity regarding gender and sexuality. This highlights the need for further examination of how male use of cosmetics, particularly lipsticks, affects broader societal views on gender and identity. This research will offer insights into how lipsticks contribute to building gender

ideologies, self-identities, and sexual expression through a comparative case study of Asian lipstick campaigns portraying males in lipsticks.

3. Methodology

To build upon mentioned gaps, this section will outline the research process, and methodologies employed to critically analyse gender portrayals in lipstick advertising campaigns within both Western and Asian contexts through four case studies. The primary objective is to elucidate the systematic approach employed to dissect and interpret representations of gender in these advertisements, linking them to broader creative campaigns within the CCIs.

My research follows a qualitative methodology, acknowledging its openness, contextuality, and reflexivity (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004; Mey, 2023), which is essential in contextualizing sensitivity in research development. Realizing Denzin (1989)'s theory of "triangulation" in qualitative research, this dissertation employs a "within-method" approach, combining similar methodological tools to differentiate research findings while mutually relating them. The primary research approach used in this study is case study analysis, which narrows the scope of gender awareness to lipstick campaigns chosen from different cultural contexts. Additionally, semiotic analysis and literature review are utilized as tools to evaluate how the chosen case studies evolve with the gender discourse, not only in their cultural landscapes but also within the broader CCI contexts.

3.1 Methodology: Case Studies Analysis

The use of qualitative case studies is a well-established approach in cultural and social research, offering focused, in-depth analysis of complex gender portrayals within different cultural contexts. Firstly, this method allows for empirical inquiry into contemporary

phenomena within real-life settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). Additionally, it engages with theoretical frameworks and socio-political contexts, facilitating a better understanding of research problems (Njie & Asimiran, 2014; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Tellis, 1997). Moreover, practical benefits include benchmarking against best practices, providing rich descriptions, and offering a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2012).

Four case studies were selected for their prominence and representativeness in the lipstick campaign market, ensuring a thorough analysis of various advertising strategies for gender representation. This helps in understanding how gender is portrayed in different cultural contexts. Multiple case studies are employed to provide a comprehensive picture of how gender depiction has been reinforced or challenged within the studied cases (Stake, 1995). This typically lead to more robust outcomes than single-case research, especially in the context of inductive theory building (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Each case should be chosen to either predict similar results, termed literal replication, or to produce contrasting results for specific, anticipated reasons, termed theoretical replication (Yin, 2003). If results are contradictory, this should lead to revisions and further testing with additional cases (Yin, 2003). This method ensures that outcomes can consistently confirm a hypothesis or reveal differing results that can be explained by the underlying theory. Descriptive case studies completely evaluate different characteristics of a phenomenon in its context, often used for theory building. They may also identify differences between individual cases, potentially generating a classificatory framework (Gerring, 2004). Furthermore, a comparative case study approach has been adopted to fulfil a full dimension of macro, meso, and micro case-based research in this dissertation, demonstrating its adaptability regardless of conceptual shifts in cultural contexts (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

Two parameters, by time and place (Creswell, 2003) and by definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994), are utilized to maintain the specificity and adaptability of this research. Analysing case studies through the criteria of time and place reveals key narrative elements within different social, cultural, and political contexts (Creswell, 2007). Case studies from different geographical locations, such as lipstick campaigns produced in Western and Asian contexts, aim to demonstrate a comprehensive and critical insight into gender portrayals in CCIs. This dissertation focuses on contemporary lipstick campaigns produced between 2016 and 2024, providing an up-to-date examination of gender discourse.

Considering context and definition, a case study is “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Case studies should thus represent how definitions of gender representation, femininity, and masculinity evolve with different cultural contexts. Cases are chosen for their conceptual relevance and may be placed on a continuum or contrasted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first set of comparative case studies represents Western interpretations of gender representation, such as L’Oréal’s 2022 “Lipstick is not a Yes” campaign and Tom Ford’s 2016 lipstick campaign, demonstrating increasing awareness of women empowerment and its wider impact on CCIs. The second set represents Asian interpretations, including Candy Lab’s 2021 campaign with idol brand NCT Dream in South Korea and Li Jiaqi’s collaboration with Florasis (Huaxizi) in mainland China (Tan, 2021), depicting ongoing trends in redefining masculinity in Asian CCIs.

However, there has been ongoing debate regarding the purpose and implementation process of the case study method (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011; Dooley, 2002; Gerring, 2004; Stuart et al., 2002). Therefore, it is crucial to follow a structured case study process (Yin, 2009), considering the importance of addressing how and why in case study analysis. This involves considering the research questions and objectives (Ravitch & Riggan, 2011), conducting a

comprehensive literature review, and identifying research gaps (Dooley, 2002; Darke, Shanks, & Broadbent, 1998). The quality of empirical studies, including case studies, depends on construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2012). Qualitative validity ensures the accuracy of findings through specific procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates a consistent approach across different researchers and projects (Gibbs, 2007). The researcher must actively incorporate validity strategies into their proposal. Moreover, integrating validity strategies through multiple case studies positively impacts the accuracy of findings (Creswell, 2003).

Qualitative research must provide a detailed examination of various perspectives to ensure the validity of findings (Creswell, 2003). This research will further contextualize case study analysis through two analytical tools: semiotic analysis and literature review, maintaining an in-depth evaluation of the focused topic.

3.2 Analytical tool: Semiotic Analysis

Semiotic analysis enhances the visual representation analysis by decoding the signs and symbols within advertisements to uncover their deeper meanings and cultural significance. This approach examines how these elements contribute to constructing gender identities and roles, embedding meaning within campaign texts and specific organizational contexts (Lazar, 2003). It facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the visual and symbolic dimensions of gender portrayal in advertising. This method involves interpreting the denotative and connotative meanings of ad elements, focusing on symbols that convey specific cultural or gender-related meanings and referencing cultural or historical contexts in CCIs or gender theory. Semiotics, as the science of signs, provides an evaluation of symbolic systems, encompassing language and semiotic systems across all forms of communication and expression that structure narrative (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). This tool has been widely accepted, positively impacting structural linguistics and phenomenological sociology

(Denzin, 2017; Guiraud, 1975). By linking content with expression, it significantly enhances the interpretation of gender portrayals in lipstick campaigns at the semiotic level. This involves detailed scrutiny of visual content, including colours, imagery, body language, and settings, to understand how femininity and masculinity are depicted.

Although visual semiotics has not yet fully emerged as a movement (Doubravová, 2002), it is continuously adopted and discussed in academic and advertising landscapes. Advertising creates communication through three characteristics: the communicator is the author or sponsor of the advertisement, the recipient is the potential consumer, and the transmitted message is a commercial one aiming to fulfil the advertising goal (Pospínil & Závodná, 2012). As a means of communication, advertising reinforces ideology by integrating shared societal understandings, significantly impacting recipients (Dyer, 1990; Solík, 2014). It is characterized as “parasite discourse” consisting of contents, forms, creators, and other discourses (Cook, 2001), which further contextualize into creating a “new world and language” that translates known signs into new interpretations (Williamson, 2010). Additionally, advertising expands its meaning into “symbols of social status,” representing certain lifestyles of particular social groups (Hradiská, 1998).

Eco (2009) identifies three basic semiotic methods of examination: interpretation, formalization, and language analysis. The semantic interpretations articulated by recipients function as fundamental principles of advertising and its existence (Solík, 2014). Solík (2014) further categorizes external signs into three types: physiognomic signs (physical aspects of human existence), adjustment of appearance, and demonstrations of behaviour (body posing). However, to critically evaluate the visual and textual elements of chosen lipstick campaigns, it is important to examine case studies not only through external signs and interpretations but also components of language, textual, and audio elements. The purpose of using this semiotic

analysis tool is to understand the entire meaning of lipstick campaigns from the recipients' perspective, providing a comprehensive examination of case studies in gender portrayals. Importantly, semiotic analysis forms the foundation for examining lipstick campaigns through cultural and social factors that evolve gender portrayals within the context of CCIs in both Western and Asian contexts. Key questions guiding this analysis include:

- How are female and male models portrayed in terms of posture, attire, and expressions?
- What visual symbols and motifs are used to convey or challenge gender norms?
- How do the visual elements align with or diverge from traditional gender stereotypes?

3.3 Analytical tool: Literature Review

The theoretical framework is crucial in case study research, providing the lens through which findings are interpreted, and aiding in the development of a conceptual structure for this study (Yin, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A thorough literature review above underpins this research, identifying existing gaps and forming a comprehensive, logical narrative imbued with critical insights (Rozas & Klein, 2010). This involves reviewing and synthesizing previous studies and secondary sources, which provide essential contextual backdrops. By situating findings within existing theoretical and empirical frameworks, the research identifies trends, patterns, and gaps, thus informing the analysis and interpretation of case studies. Literature review sets the context for research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), this study builds on established knowledge to interpret findings and contextualize the chosen lipstick campaigns within academic discourse.

The review will evaluate theories from gender studies, media representation, cultural studies, and CCIs studies, incorporating ideologies such as Butler's gender performativity and "Femvertising." Media studies will provide a foundation for contextualizing findings within

broader media theory and practice, examining existing research on advertising strategies, media representation of gender, and the impact of media on societal norms. This includes historical trends in gender portrayals and the media's role in shaping and reflecting societal perceptions of gender. Research on CCIs will offer insights into industry practices and trends influencing lipstick advertising campaigns, highlighting the economic significance of advertising within CCIs, industry trends in marketing strategies, and the impact of cultural policies and market dynamics on creative outputs.

Considering the chosen case studies, it is essential to conduct in-depth research on both Western and Asian contexts, exploring how creative and cultural sectors develop and disseminate gendered messages and the economic and cultural factors driving these practices. This involves understanding the interconnectedness of advertisements with other forms of cultural production, illustrating how gender portrayals in advertising reflect and influence broader societal norms and values.

The focus will be on the connection between gender representation in lipstick advertisements and broader creative campaigns within CCIs. This involves analysing how advertising strategies integrate into wider cultural narratives and industry practices, examining the role of brands in shaping their narratives, the influence of case studies on cultural trends, and their impact on gender norms. By doing so, the research will demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gender portrayals in advertising and their broader socio-cultural implications.

4. From Object of Desire to Object of Control: Women Empowerment in Western Lipsticks Campaigns.

Following an intersectional framework, this section examines two Western lipstick campaigns through the lens of power femininity and performative gender. This analysis

considers intersections between race, gender, and sexual orientation (Butler, 1988; DeFelice & Diller, 2019), providing a comprehensive narrative of empowerment across macro, meso, and micro dimensions in Western CCIs (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Employing a literature review to unpack contexts and ideologies, and a semiotic analysis to decode gender representations and cultural significances (Lazar, 2003), this study offers critical insights into gender representation.

Understanding the historical context is crucial for grasping the persistent gender disparities in contemporary creative industries and the ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality. Women have faced exclusion from art and creative practices since the 15th-century European Renaissance, a period that emphasized male dominance and regarded "genius" as a distinctly male trait (Korsmeyer, 2004, p.6). Additionally, femininity was often depicted merely as a muse to inspire male creators (Korsmeyer, 2004), aligning with what Conor, Gill, and Taylor (2015) describe as the "myths of equality and diversity within the CCIs" (p.5). Transitioning to contemporary times, female representation in CCIs remains disproportionately low, especially in media and advertising (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015). Despite claims of equality and diversity, O'Driscoll (2023) argues that creative processes often mirror societal values and hierarchies, echoing feminist critiques of sexism and gendered perceptions of creativity. This persistent male dominance in cultural production underscores the need for continued efforts to challenge and change these entrenched biases, fostering genuine gender equality and recognition of women's contributions.

Moreover, the portrayal of women in cosmetic advertisements continues to emphasize gender bias through idealized appearances, negatively impacting women's self-perception (Apaolaza-Ibanez et al., 2011; Kaur et al., 2013). Tehseem & Kalsoom (2015) reveal that the 'ideal' representation of women is portrayed through textual, visual, and contextual elements in

advertising, necessitating a semiotic approach to decode deeper meanings. Female representation in social discourse is frequently evaluated through a patriarchal lens, with 60% of advertisements depicting women as decorative objects intended to seduce males (Sullivan & Connor, 1988). Significantly, the United Nations addressed this issue during the 4th Women's Conference in 1995, calling for an end to negative and degrading images of women in media. Despite claims of diversity and inclusion, CCI's persist in reflecting and perpetuating societal inequalities. This reality necessitates a critical examination of how creative practices can promote genuine gender equality. Recognizing advertising's process as a 'meta-structure' that decodes and creates new structures (Williamson, 1978), advertisements represent social power structures and significantly impact gender identity construction (Jhally, 1990). For example, Bebe's perfume advertisement (see *Figure 1*) depicts a sexualized woman through the male gaze, integrating the female body with the perfume to deliver a message of seduction. This further objectifies women and reinforces unequal gender power relations. Echoing Butler's (1988) assertion that body expression is predetermined by specific historical contexts, this advertisement exemplifies how becoming a woman involves shaping the body to fit the historical idea of women as objects.



Figure 1: Bebe Eau De Parfum Campaign, published in 2009. Available at: http://www.mimifroufrou.com/scented salamander/2009/08/bebe_eau_de_parfum_2009_new_fr.html.

A contextualized analysis of gender representation is needed to fill this research gap and highlights the importance of lipstick campaigns that challenge traditional norms and promote women's empowerment. Especially, hashtag feminism has significantly influenced the transition of women's representations in advertisements from sexualized objects to subjective agents of control (Feng et al., 2019; Grau & Zotos, 2016). An example of this is the 2021 political gendered attack on Portugal's left-wing candidate Marisa Matias for her use of red lipstick, which sparked the significant social media movement #VermelhoEmBelem (#RedInBelem) (Caldeira & Machado, 2023). This movement featured selfies of individuals of various genders wearing red lipstick, exemplifying growing feminist awareness and everyday feminist practices (Pruchniewska, 2019). Furthermore, the rise of femvertising in Western CCIIs has become a crucial chapter in the fourth wave of feminism since the early 2010s (Iqbal, 2015). Women's empowerment has become central in advertising narratives, positively influencing the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and biases while enhancing women's self-perception (Sobande, 2019; Sterbenk et al., 2022). These shifts underscore the potential of targeted campaigns to foster greater inclusivity and challenge entrenched societal norms.

4.1 Tom Ford "Lips and Boys" Campaign

Building on the momentum of feminist movements, the Tom Ford "Lips and Boys" limited campaign, launched between 2014 and 2016, offers a compelling example of how advertising can subvert traditional gender roles and promote female empowerment. Through pictures and videos across various platforms, this campaign reinforced a powerful and dynamic representation of women, portraying them as empowered protagonists. Eco (2009) proposed three semiotic methods regarding interpretation, formalization and language analysis. This section contextualizes Tom Ford's campaign through language analysis and visual

interpretation. I examined two promotional videos from Tom Ford's official YouTube channel for this campaign: "TOM FORD Lips and Boys: Meet the New Boys" and "TOM FORD Lips and Boys: Bring on the Boys." By using figurative language with metaphorical meanings, these campaigns enhance readability and buying interest through a sense of empowerment (Supasamout, 2006). The titles celebrate sexual diversity and encourage women (consumers) to pursue sexual freedom and dominance, aligning with Ford's campaign intention. Acknowledging that advertisements heavily rely on language (Colston & Katz, 2004), the denotative meaning of these slogans encourages diverse gender identities, while their connotative meaning refers to the products (Taflinger, 1996). These slogans resonate with consumers' "emotional appeal" (Cohen, 1972), motivating their awareness of freedom to pursue their sexuality while attracting them to purchase. Through this analysis, the campaign's semiotic strategies effectively promote a powerful feminine identity, aligning with contemporary CCIs' goals of inclusivity and empowerment (European Union, 2015).

Moreover, "Lips and Boys" symbolizes boys as accessories that the female protagonist changes according to her lipstick colour (See *Figure 2*). This challenges societal stereotype of women as appendages to males in patriarchal contexts (Tomaselli, 2012; Mahon & Campling, 1997; Price & Evans, 2005). Moreover, this aligns with Lazar's (2011) ideology of 'power femininity,' where a powerful feminine identity is encouraged, and wearing lipstick becomes a symbol of self-determination and expression.



Figure 2: Screenshots of “TOM FORD LIPS AND BOYS BRING ON THE BOYS”, by Tom Ford, published in 2016.
Available at: <https://youtu.be/b4CY6ScdPWQ?si=Ak0IG-76B8uA-3oQ>.

As a business organization, Tom Ford adheres to core ideologies of fighting gender injustice to meet consumers' expectations (Abitol & Sternadori, 2020; Bissell & Rask, 2010). This campaign demonstrates the brand's ambition to combat gender stereotypes and prejudices, connecting with female consumers and enhancing their sense of affirmation (Sobande, 2019; Sterbenk et al., 2022). It reflects the growing trend of empowering female representation in advertising over the past decade (Cheng & Hong, 2008; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Varghese & Kumar, 2022), revealing a changing mindset among contemporary consumers (Turner & Maschi, 2015). Importantly, Tom Ford's campaign shows how semiotic elements in advertising can reshape societal perceptions of women, positioning them as empowered and independent protagonists.

By championing diversified sexuality and gender roles, this campaign promotes progressive gender concepts, advocating for gender freedom in both sexual and daily life. Tom Ford's campaigns feature models from different genders, races, and sexualities (See *Figure 3*), celebrate an intersectional narrative of romantic encounters. By presenting powerful and dominant women in lipstick ads, this campaign offer a new interpretation, particularly relevant in the pre-MeToo contexts from 2014 to 2016 (Borah et al., 2023). Tom Ford crucially acknowledge that sexual difference should not reinforce binary gender identities or an implicitly heterosexual framework for describing gender, gender identity, and sexuality (Butler, 1988). This campaign not only reflect a shift in marketing strategies but also signal a growing recognition of the importance of representing all individuals authentically. However, it is crucial for future campaigns to go beyond surface-level inclusivity and address the deeper, systemic issues that perpetuate gender inequality. By continuing to push boundaries and challenge societal norms, advertising can play a pivotal role in shaping a more inclusive and equitable future.



Figure 3: Screenshots from "Tom Ford: Bring on the boys & Meet the new boys", by Tom Ford, published in 2016 and 2015.

Available at: <https://youtu.be/b4CY6ScdPWQ?si=Ak0IG-76B8uA-3oQ> & <https://youtu.be/7vJYan9R7gE?si=ln5IFIRp-2DSSZTm>.

Visual Symbols

Building on the semiotic signifier of gender representation, we now focus on the visual symbols used to challenge patriarchal gender norms in this campaign. By examining these elements, we can see how they diverge from traditional gender stereotypes. Analysing the appearance adjustments (Solík, 2014), we explore the fundamental characteristics of femininity and masculinity in terms of outer appearance. In this campaign, a woman is portrayed as a powerful protagonist with gender-neutral elements such as short hair, smoky eye makeup, and nude lipsticks (See *Figure 4*). While most advertisements portray females as idealized, underweight, and perfectly shaped (Dittmar, 2007; Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002; Woertman & Brink, 2012), current understanding reveals an increasing awareness of body image as a multidimensional construct (Cash, 2002) rather than simply sexual objects of male desire (Blood, 2005). This representation challenges traditional portrayals of females as sexual, feminine objects.

Although nudity in advertisements remains controversial and varies according to different cultural contexts (Nelson & Paek, 2005; Young & Piron, 2015), this campaign uses nudity to present a new representation of femininity and masculinity. For example, the female protagonist in an oversized blazer demonstrates a powerful, assertive woman showcasing her body without sexual messages (See *Figure 5*). In contrast, the boys are portrayed seductively, focusing on a man in white underwear to show muscles and skin (See *Figure 6*). Body image, influenced by social understandings of race, gender, and class, impacts sexuality, behaviours, and roles (Blood, 2005; Smith, Resick & Kilpatrick, 1980). This campaign portrays women as controllers in sexual relationships, focusing on the male body rather than female body

shapes. This reversal challenges societal norms and encourages viewers to reconsider gender and power dynamics in advertising.



Figure 4: Screenshot from "Tom Ford: Bring on the boys", by Tom Ford, published in 2016. Available at: <https://youtu.be/b4CY6ScdPWQ?si=Ak0lG-76B8uA-3oQ>.



Figure 5: Screenshot from "Tom Ford: Bring on the boys", by Tom Ford, published in 2016. Available at: <https://youtu.be/b4CY6ScdPWQ?si=Ak0lG-76B8uA-3oQ>.



Figure 6: Screenshot from "Tom Ford: Bring on the boys", by Tom Ford, published in 2016. Available at: <https://youtu.be/b4CY6ScdPWQ?si=Ak0lG-76B8uA-3oQ>.

Behavioural Demonstrations

At the level of behaviour demonstration (Solík, 2014), this research focuses on how females and males are portrayed in terms of posture, attire, and expressions in this campaign. Frames of femininity often polarize two forms: traditional feminine images and independent empowered images (Farvid & Braun, 2006; Gill, 2009; Lulu & Alkaff, 2019). This campaign portrays empowered women throughout its narrative. For instance, in single shots of different protagonists, a woman uses hand posture to mimic a masculine portrayal of smoking a cigarette, while a boy is portrayed with a sexualized symbol (See *Figure 7*), his skin taking up two-thirds of the composition as he looks directly into the camera from a slightly lower angle with a lipstick bite, challenging the traditional male gaze.



Figure 7: Screenshot from “Tom Ford: Bring on the boys”, by Tom Ford, published in 2016. Available at: <https://youtu.be/b4CY6ScdPWQ?si=Ak0IG-76B8uA-3oQ>.

Moreover, this campaign uses signals to depict empowerment ideologies, using lipstick as a symbol representing a cigarette (See Figure 8), signifying lipsticks as epitomes of patriarchal power (Robertson & Kingsley, 2021). Applying lipstick becomes a symbol of empowerment, with women protagonists applying lipstick to male and female models, delivering a message of power exchange between genders (See Figure 9). This demonstrates the brand’s awareness of fluid sexuality and addresses the controversial issue of power balance in sexual encounters, where male dominance has been prevalent despite a growing awareness of egalitarian relationships (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; McDonald, 1980; Grauerholz, 1985).



Figure 8: Screenshot from "Tom Ford: Bring on the boys", by Tom Ford, published in 2016. Available at: <https://youtu.be/b4CY6ScdPWQ?si=Ak0IG-76B8uA-3oQ>.



Figure 9: Screenshots from "Tom Ford: Meet the new boys", by Tom Ford, published in 2015. Available at: <https://youtu.be/7vJYan9R7gE?si=In51FIRp-2DSSZTm>.

4.2 L'Oréal 2022 "Lipstick is Not a Yes" Campaign

These insights pave the way for a deeper exploration of how gender representations in advertising can be leveraged to foster inclusivity and challenge entrenched societal norms, as evidenced by other impactful campaigns such as L'Oréal's 2022 "Lipstick is Not a Yes" campaign. Utilizing the "time and place" semiotic method (Creswell, 2023), it illustrates how cultural context and social media significantly shape awareness of anti-sexual harassment and the protection of women's rights and empowerment in contemporary Western society. Launched in October 2022, this campaign aimed to amplify L'Oréal's "Stand Up Against Street Harassment" training program. This case highlights the influence of CCIs in leveraging social media trends to address critical social issues, demonstrating the power of CCIs in promoting social change and empowering women.

Contextual Analysis

This campaign exemplifies hashtag feminism by adopting a digital marketing strategy that emphasizes hashtag movements through social media. Central to this effort is the bold red lipstick, specifically designed to enhance self-identity and confidence (Viguié-Hovasse, 2022). L'Oréal uses lipstick as a weapon against harassment, collaborating with feminist activists, celebrities, NGOs, and professional "5Ds Forces STAND UP" training sessions (See *Figure 10*). In the UK, L'Oréal partnered with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, donating 100% of profits to support training and development (Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2022). This program supports charity partners with lipstick proceeds and has completed training for over 950,000 people across 41 countries, with 97% of trainees effectively intervening in harassment, significantly decreasing feelings of vulnerability and fear (L'Oréal, 2022). The campaign's impact on social media platforms was substantial, with celebrities like Kate Winslet and Eva Longoria participating (See *Figure 11*). They led a selfie campaign featuring images with a

"D" written on their hands (See *Figure 12*), encouraging the public to join the stand-up movement against street harassment using the hashtag #WeStandUp on Instagram, TikTok, X, and Facebook.



Figure 10: L'Oréal's 5Ds Training Program (Graph created by author using Canvas with information at <https://www.lorealparis.ca/en-ca/a-lipstick-is-not-a-yes>)



Figure 11: Lipstick is not a Yes campaign, by Grazia, published in 2022. Available at: <https://graziadaily.co.uk/beauty-hair/makeup/lipstick-is-not-a-yes-it-is-time-to-stand-up-against-street-harassment/>.



Figure 12: Celebrities supporting 5D program, by L'Oréal, published in 2022. Available at: <https://www.lorealparis.ca/en-ca/a-lipstick-is-not-a-yes>.

To contextualize this campaign within cultural frameworks, it is essential to consider the #MeToo movement. Initiated by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 to publicize sexual harassment (Ohlheiser, 2017), the movement gained significant momentum in 2017 following sexual abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein (BBC, 2023). This heightened awareness empowered women, supported marginalized communities, and raised societal awareness of sexual harassment issues. Further emphasizing the need for such initiatives, IPSOS (2022) data revealed that 80% of women have experienced sexual harassment and 76% of people have witnessed it in public places. In response, the “Stand Up Against Street Harassment” campaign was launched in 2020. Researchers at Cornell University and L'Oréal Paris trained 15,000 people in the UK and 700,000 worldwide (Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2022). L'Oréal's campaign demonstrates its determination in supporting anti-harassment and women empowerment, delivering the message that wearing lipstick is for self-empowerment. This

context demonstrates the critical role of CCIs in addressing and combating social issues through impactful campaigns.

Semiotic Analysis

An in-depth evaluation of L'Oréal's campaign focuses on how semiotic signals translate into ideological empowerment. Compared to Tom Ford's lipstick campaign, L'Oréal shows more awareness of the intersection between race and gender (See *Figure 13*), featuring three women wearing the same red lipstick, looking confidently at the camera, challenging traditional lipstick campaigns that sexualize women. The intimate postures of the three women represent solidarity among females, regardless of race. In another poster (See *Figure 14*), L'Oréal's spokesperson Eva Longoria wears a black blazer and red lipstick, arms akimbo, smiling directly at the camera, echoing the slogan "Lipstick is not a yes." Beyond her acting career, Longoria is an activist promoting diversity and female representation, supporting the Latino community through the Eva Longoria Foundation (Longoria, 2024). Longoria exemplifies the "celebrity endorser" phenomenon (Friedman, 1979, p.63), using her solid fanbase from her role in "Desperate Housewives" to draw attention with her brave, bossy, and independent look (Li, 2014).



Figure 13: Lipstick is not a Yes Campaign, by L'Oréal, published in 2022. Available at: <https://www.lorealparis.ca/en-ca/a-lipstick-is-not-a-yes>.



Figure 14: Evo Longoria as L'Oréal Spokesperson, by L'Oréal, published in 2022. Available at: <https://www.lorealparis.ca/en-ca/a-lipstick-is-not-a-yes>.

4.3 Findings

Tom Ford's "Lips and Boys" campaign presents women as powerful and dynamic protagonists, using semiotic strategies to redefine femininity and sexuality. By celebrating sexual diversity and encouraging women to pursue sexual freedom and dominance, the campaign challenges traditional gender stereotypes, promoting an empowered feminine identity. In contrast, L'Oréal's campaign exemplifies the #MeToo movement, leveraging hashtag feminism to address anti-sexual harassment and empower women through social media campaigns, training sessions, and collaborations with activists and NGOs. By featuring women wearing bold red lipstick as symbols of empowerment and self-identity, L'Oréal shifts its focus to practical contributions in gender equality through partnerships and training sessions.

Both campaigns highlight the evolving narrative within Western CCIs, showcasing how strategic semiotic elements can reshape societal perceptions of women. While Tom Ford emphasizes empowerment through the redefinition of femininity, L'Oréal focuses on

promoting gender equality and combating sexual harassment, resonating with CCIs' characteristics and the #MeToo context, promoting portrayals of gender through the lens of inclusivity and diversity.

5. Men in Lipsticks: Redefine Male Beauty in Asian Lipstick Campaigns

Building on the analysis of Western representations of gender in lipstick campaigns, it is crucial to examine how non-Western contexts, particularly in Asia, navigate the evolving roles of gender and the growing awareness of gender equality. While current literature focuses on the practical aspects of Asian CCIs, examining relevant cultural policy and economic achievements (Keane, 2007; Kim, 2020; Park, 2022), there is a significant gap in addressing societal issues within these contexts. From an Eastern perspective, individual creativity stems from tradition and the past (Niu & Sternberg, 2006), signifying the necessity of understanding creative representations critically through contextual analysis. This dissertation examines gender discourse within South Korea and China's lipstick campaigns, using two case studies to explore how males are depicted and how these campaigns impact public understanding of gender in different cultural contexts.

With remarkable achievements from the global popularity of South Korean popular music and dramas ("Hallyu"), and Chinese e-commerce livestreaming (Lee & How, 2021; Yang & Patrick, 2021), CCIs in Asia have significantly impacted its cultural landscape within the global cultural economy. Asian CCIs protect domestic creative workers and local cultural expressions while actively engaging global audiences. This dual approach is exemplified by the success of South Korean boy band BTS, who topped the Billboard 200 chart in March 2018 (BBC, 2018), demonstrating the significant presence of Asian CCIs in the global landscape.

This influence extends to the cosmetics industry, where males in lipstick campaigns have become a notable trend in Asia. Beginning with Takuya Kimura, a member of the Japanese boy band SMAP, who was prominently featured in Kanebo's "Super Lip" campaign in 1996 (See *Figure 15*). This campaign initially launched through paper posters, which were later archived and shared globally by fans on various picture-sharing platforms. Kanebo's advertisement sold over three million lipsticks within two months, setting an unprecedented sales record in Japan (China Daily, 2018). This marks the growing representation of new masculinities in Asian CCIs, resonating with the gender-less subculture originating from Japan (Kim & Cho & Park, 2022). Male models have increasingly taken roles traditionally reserved for women in lipstick campaigns, directly challenging conventional gender stereotypes (Nair, 2017). Current literature highlights the effectiveness of male celebrity beauty endorsements in satisfying public aesthetics and enhancing brand awareness, transferring male idols' fanbases into a fan economy (Chen & Zhong, 2022; Ji, 2021). However, there is a significant research gap in contextualizing how male celebrity endorsements evolve gender discourses within the Asian CCIs landscape.



Figure 15: 1996 Kanebo Super Lips Campaign, from Pinterest, originally created by Kanebo. Available at: <https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/456130268500652518/>.

5.1 South Korea: Candy Lab X NCT Dream Campaign

As the first and only Asian artists to appear three consecutive times on Billboard's "21 Under 21" list from 2018 to 2020 (Billboard, 2021), NCT Dream has achieved mainstream success and maintained global appeal. Candy Lab announced NCT Dream as their first endorsement models, starring five members (Renjun, Chenle, Jaemin, Jeno, and Jisung) in their campaign series from 2020 to 2021 (Han, 2020). Their endorsement in the 2021 Candy Lab lipstick campaign is an ideal case study to examine how K-Pop's representation of the flower boy influences the development of gender equality within the context of Asian CCIs. Three campaign videos are selected for semiotic analysis to unpack signifiers and underlying ideologies.

Semiotic Analysis

Although Korean culture is deeply rooted in Confucian traditions and upholds hegemonic masculinity (Moon, 2005), K-Pop merges Western music genres and visuals with Korean cultural elements to produce content with global appeal. Korea utilizes a 'soft' approach to the global economy through cultural hybridization, collaborations with global talents, organizations, and platforms, and direct engagement with targeted audiences on social media platforms (Lee & How, 2021). This phenomenon, characterized by "Mugukjeok" ("Nationlessness"), creates a hybrid culture that balances Koreanness with transnational appeal (Oh, 2017, p. 2275). Challenging traditional gender norms that depict males as dominant figures (Sanday, 1981), K-Pop introduces a new form of masculinity that deconstructs stereotypical images of men as powerful and aggressive.

This shift is exemplified by the global "flower boy" craze, which originates from the "khonminam" persona portrayed in K-dramas and K-Pop (Jung, 2023). This trend highlights a softer masculinity that contrasts sharply with traditional, hegemonic male ideals. Jung

(2010) defines “khonminam” as idols and actors with girl-like pretty looks and toned bodies, resonating with Western interpretations of “millennium masculinity” (Beyon, 2002). This trend parallels socio-political fluctuations and economic downturns in South Korea, such as the International Monetary Fund crisis in 1997, indicating a move towards deconstructing the male/female dichotomy and demonstrating egalitarianism in gender representations (Kim, 2003; Maliangkay, 2010).

Instead, K-pop fandom culture constructs a comprehensive portrayal of idols in diverse forms to satisfy the imagination of youth (Siriyuvusak & Shin, 2007). Candy Lab’s “Full Bloom” campaign provides an example of male beauty tailored to K-Pop fandom, portraying five NCT Dream members as gender-fluid idols, representing the flower boy craze within South Korea CCIs. Semiotically, these portrayals echo the concept of full bloom, depicting boys and flowers with purple-tone backgrounds in close-up shots, emphasizing their lipsticks and makeup to blur gender characteristics and maximize visual appeal (See *Figure 16*).



Figure 16: Screenshots from "Full Bloom NCT", by Candylab, published in 2021. Available at: <https://youtu.be/uMW52VetOFc?si=7XX984ynBY7LTIWf>.

Instead of emphasizing the product, Candy Lab leverages fandom culture through the photocard strategy. Ding & Zhuang (2021) identify five motivations for K-pop fandom: learning skills, demand for art and music styles, empowerment, mental comfort, and a sense of belonging. Photocards, which come with album purchases and contain photographs of each member, are a common fan engagement practice (Attwood, Hakim & Winch, 2020). Fans view photocards as substitutes for their idols, maintaining an intimate connection with fan communities (Desnika & Tambunan, 2023). This turns idols into embodied advertising, with fans imagining photocards as friends or partners, thus enhancing their experience (Williamson, 1978; Santos, 2023). For instance, Candy Lab's "Cream Pop Candy Lip Tint" campaign included special sets with limited-edition photocards (See *Figure 17*), linking lipstick campaigns with the fandom economy and providing fans with mental comfort and a sense of belonging. Comments on Candy Lab's official YouTube channel frequently included words such as "beautiful," "cute," "pretty," and "soft" (YouTube, 2021). This usage challenges the traditional perception of these terms as being exclusively female-oriented, as argued by Wolfson (1984). This aligns with South Korea's obsession with beauty regardless of gender, fuelling the craze for plastic surgery and beauty cosmetics and the "flower boy" trend (Balen, 2023).



Figure 17: CandyLab X NCT Dream Special Event Information, by CandyLab Instagram, published in 2020. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CEVfZK7j9TO/?igsh=ODFmMjNucXdwZjZ2>.

The flower boy craze is vividly depicted in this campaign, boys are portrayed through close-up shots, utilizing the colour contrast between red in the background and their pale skin and lip colours (See *Figure 19*), creating a male beauty persona (Elfving-Hwang, 2020). This video challenges stereotypical binary representations of males by reinforcing a performative gender known as “khonminam,” presenting an idealized image of beauty and youth. This portrayal appeals to fans' desire for mental comfort, offering a psychological escape from unwanted realities (Jenol & Pazil, 2020).



Figure 18: Screenshots from the video "Melt in Blur Lip Colour" by Candylab, published in 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQNNEZNRdo>.

Contextual Analysis

Celebrities, as objects of both consumption and parasocial interactions (Elfving-Hwang, 2018), significantly impact forming beauty ideals, normalizing males' use of cosmetics through "transnational identification" (Blum, 2003). Male celebrities redefine masculinity as fluid and move away from conventional Western qualities (Yam, 2019; Park & Yim, 2018), deconstructing gender binaries and disrupting gender dynamics (Oh, 2015). However, K-Pop's impact on gender equality is controversial, with some arguing it reinforces traditional gender norms (Zhang et al., 2022; Lin & Rudolf, 2017; Jonas, 2021). Lin & Rudolf (2017) suggest that sexual objectification and sexist portrayals in K-Pop reinforce Korea's patriarchal culture, obstructing gender equality development.

Korea, with a significant gender pay gap and the worst working environment for women among 146 countries, ranks 14 out of 19 East Asia and Pacific countries on the *Global Gender Gap Index ranking*, despite securing its ranking in the top 15 in GDP by countries from 2021 to 2023 (GGGR, 2023; World Bank, 2023). K-Pop's male beauty trend, therefore, functions more as a motivation for the fan economy rather than challenging and impacting traditional perceptions of gender. Although the representation of masculinity has transformed into idolized "flower boy" personas, lipstick campaigns like Candy Lab's endorsement of NCT Dream help reinforce gender inequality and secure the patriarchal nature of South Korea. The idolized "flower boy" image, while subverting some traditional masculine ideals, still operates within a framework that ultimately reinforces existing gender inequalities, pointing to the need for more substantive changes to support gender equality.

5.2 Mainland China: Li Jiaqi X Florasis 2019 Collaboration Campaign

Shifting focus to Mainland China, there is a similar interplay between gender representation and commercial interests. Although there is a growing trend towards equality in modern

commercials in China (Pounder, 2018), there is a gap in research on how contemporary e-commerce culture impacting gender representations within Chinese CCIs (Cottle, 2003). Nowadays, creative industries in China have expanded to include cultural activities such as e-commerce and social media platforms (Keane, 2007). The growth of online based “internet plus” companies in China has led to the convergence of internet and cultural industries, with practical applications such as “Internet + Finance” industries represented by e-commerce giant Alibaba’s Taobao platform. Launched in 2016, Alibaba’s live streaming service, Alibaba Live, aims to help online retailers market their products more effectively (Schmuck & Benke, 2020). Livestreaming has become a key feature during the COVID-19 pandemic since 2019, with 512 million active users and sales of 1.43 trillion RMB (\$197 billion) in 2022 (CNNIC, 2023). The rapid development of livestreaming e-commerce has significantly boosted the development of Chinese CCIs, radiating globally through platforms like TikTok E-commerce (Budaya, 2023).

Li Jiaqi, known as the “Lipstick King”, exemplifies the influence of livestreaming on gender representation. Listed in the 2021 Time 100 Next, Li has over 170 million followers and raised \$14 million in two months on Taobao (Ni, 2022). He is renowned for selling 15,000 lipsticks in 5 minutes by 2022. Li’s significant impact on the market extends beyond sales; he collaborates with cosmetic brands through campaigns. The 2019 collaboration campaign between Li Jiaqi and Chinese cosmetic brand Florasis (“Huaxizi”) serves as an example to explore gender representation in lipstick campaigns and their influence on public consciousness. A video and main promotional photo will be analysed semiotically to reveal underlying messages through denotations and connotations, accompanying with contextual analysis of Chinese CCIs.

Contextual Analysis

Understanding Chinese CCI policies is complex due to their unique blend of neoliberal and state-driven approaches to creativity and culture (Wang, 2018). Like South Korea, China is deeply rooted in Confucianism from the 6th century BC, fostering a patriarchal social system that bound females to follow the feudal ethics of “Three Obedience” (follows her father, husband, and son) and “Four Virtues” (fidelity, physical charm, good manners, and efficiency in needlework) (Cheng, 1997). Masculinity in China is traditionally constructed around the ideals of “Wen” (literary strengths) and “Wu” (physical power), emphasizing a softer manliness (Wang, 2006). However, the Western notion of masculinity became prevalent in pre-modern Chinese society, especially after the failed promotion of gender equality during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the reemergence of gender differences in the 1978 modernization acts (Leung, 2003; Song, 2004). China’s media content often stereotypes gender roles, depicting men as active in public spheres and women as confined to domestic roles (Cheng, 1997).

On one hand, China adopts a 'hard approach' through international co-productions and knowledge transfer. On the other hand, it views cultural infrastructure as a key element of its soft power, aiming to ensure broad international reach. Essentially, China regards cultural infrastructure as part of its 'soft power,' with significant government investment in programs, universities, and career pathways to ensure its global cultural reach (O'Connor & Gu, 2018). This dual approach is exemplified by Dalian Wanda Group’s acquisition of global cinema chains, including AMC (US), Hoyts (Australia), and Odeon & UCI (Europe) (BBC, 2016; Financial Times, 2017). There are growing concerns about China’s expanding 'hard power strategy' and the anxiety it causes over using culture as capital power (Flew, 2012; Kong et al., 2006). Contemporarily, policymaking in China is a continuous process open to interpretation (Chin, 2011; Keane & Zhao, 2014). This intricate combination reflects China's

strategic efforts to foster innovation while maintaining governmental oversight, offering a distinctive model within the global CCI landscape.

Semiotic Analysis

This strategic approach is vividly illustrated in the “Florasis X Li Jiaqi” campaign, where the main post (See *Figure 20*) semantically features Li holding a lipstick, dressed in a stylish red outfit that matches the lipstick's colour. Red, a colour associated with passion, confidence, and boldness, suggests that wearing lipstick is an empowering choice, irrespective of gender. The richly decorated background, adorned with intricate wooden carvings and a red and gold colour scheme, evokes a sense of luxury and tradition, blending modernity and heritage to imply that lipstick use is both contemporary and timeless. Li's confident and challenging gaze, coupled with the act of holding the lipstick, subverts traditional gender roles, presenting lipstick as a bold and unapologetic choice for men.



Figure 19: Florasis X Li Jiaqi Campaign, by Bazaar, published in 2019. Available at: <http://m.fengsung.com/n-191030175603218.html>.

Moreover, screenshots from “Florasis X Li Jiaqi” (2019) (See *Figure 21*) show Li confidently applying and examining lipstick with precision and seriousness. This meticulous examination of the lipsticks and the variety of shades underscores makeup as a crucial aspect of personal identity and self-expression, transcending gender boundaries. By redefining modern masculinity to include traits like self-care and aesthetic appreciation, the campaign dismantles stereotypes and fosters a more inclusive understanding of beauty, elevating makeup to an art form. By featuring a male model confidently using a traditionally feminine product, the campaign signifies a progressive shift in the fashion and beauty industry towards embracing gender diversity and empowering individuals to express themselves freely.



Figure 20: Screenshots from “Florasis X Li Jiaqi”, by Florasis, published in 2019. Available at: <https://www.digitaling.com/projects/85091.html>.

Further emphasizing this point, the voiceover in the video reveals an underlying ideology that cherishes lipsticks as artworks, signifying the regard for women as artists. On the denotation level, this message resonates with female empowerment but creates deeper division between gender usage of lipsticks, causing controversies on social media platforms (Chen, 2022),

resulting in the video being taken down from Florasis's official social media channels.

However, on the connotation level, Li's representation subverts the conventional association of makeup with femininity, advocating for a more fluid understanding of gender expression.

However, this campaign did not perform well and sparked societal debates regarding Florasis and Li, with critics questioning whether it misrepresented both lipsticks and male identity (Ikrama & Qumer, 2024). This incident resonates with the current state of gender inequality and stereotypes in mainland China, underscoring the sensitive nature of gender representation within CCIs. According to GGGR, China ranked 107 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2023 rankings and ranked 145 in health and survival. This deeply resonates with traditional norms of "son preference" rooted in Chinese society's patriarchal culture (Zhang et al., 2022), leading to high abortion rates in rural areas, workplace sexual discrimination, and treating daughters as commodities for "jiazhuang" (dowry) (Fan, 2022). Although e-commerce introduces a new masculinity through male beauty influencers, lipstick campaigns often utilize inclusivity and gender fluidity as marketing tactics primarily targeting female audiences.

5.3 Findings

The gender representations in lipstick campaigns from South Korea and China reflect distinct socio-cultural contexts, blending tradition and modernity. In South Korea, lipstick campaigns use the "flower boy" image to create a hybridized, gender-fluid persona, promoting a softer masculinity but largely catering to the fan economy without challenging entrenched norms, aligning with Butler's theory of performative gender. Conversely, China's Florasis campaign with Li Jiaqi challenges norms by featuring a male beauty influencer with a traditionally female product. However, this approach advocates for broader acceptance of makeup among

men but sparked controversy, highlighting societal discomfort with shifting gender roles in China's patriarchal context.

Both campaigns illustrate the tension between progressive branding and societal resistance. While promoting gender inclusivity, they reveal the complexities of changing deeply rooted norms, suggesting these campaigns, though innovative, often balance between challenging and reinforcing existing ideologies (Butler, 1999).

6. Conclusion

Current literature reveals significant gender bias in both Western and Asian CCIs, where women are often portrayed through a heteropatriarchal lens, limiting them to stereotypical, subordinate roles (Sullivan & Connor, 1988). Gaitán (2023) highlights that these portrayals position women as objects of desire, reinforcing patriarchal power structures and hindering women's social development, perpetuating gender inequality (Tuchman, 2000). There is an urgent need for more inclusive and diverse representations to dismantle these biases and promote gender equality (Borck, 2018).

The comparative analysis of Western and Asian lipstick campaigns provides a detailed examination of gender representation in CCIs. Integrating the literature review with case study findings reveals a complex interplay between cultural contexts and gender portrayals. Western campaigns proactively redefine gender roles, emphasizing female empowerment and addressing issues like sexual harassment (Sobande, 2019). Asian campaigns, though innovative, highlight the challenges of achieving genuine gender equality within different cultural frameworks. This examination underscores the potential of Asian campaigns to both challenge and reinforce traditional gender norms, emphasizing the need for continued advocacy and strategic efforts for inclusive and empowering representations in CCIs.

Western campaigns focus on challenging societal norms by addressing female empowerment and gender equality through impactful initiatives and partnerships. These campaigns often engage with broader social movements, like #MeToo, to push for structural change. Asian campaigns, while innovative in their portrayal of gender fluidity and new masculinities, often focus on appealing to specific fan bases and maintaining market success. The use of celebrity endorsements in these campaigns reflects a cultural strategy to blend tradition with modernity without fully confronting or changing deep-seated gender norms.

The findings significantly impact the theoretical frameworks of intersectional feminism and performative gender. By demonstrating how gender is socially constructed and performative, the research aligns with Butler's (1999) theory that gender identities are enacted through societal norms. Utilizing intersectional feminism, the study provides a nuanced analysis of how gender identities are constructed and represented in Western and Asian lipstick campaigns, bridging a significant gap in existing literature. The intersectional analysis reveals how race, gender, and sexual orientation intersect to shape representations, underscoring the importance of considering multiple identity dimensions in understanding gender dynamics (Crenshaw, 1989).

Reflecting on the broader impact of these findings, this study contributes to the field by offering a contemporary understanding of gender dynamics in CCIs, providing a framework for future research and practical applications. It not only emphasizes the role of media and advertising in both challenging and perpetuating gender norms, but also underscores the importance of intersectional approaches in analysing gender representations. In return, the findings advocate for more inclusive and diverse portrayals, which are crucial for fostering an equitable cultural landscape and advancing societal progress towards gender equality. Practically, the study suggests actionable steps to promote gender equality and diverse

representations in CCI contexts. Firstly, marketing strategies should prioritize inclusivity by featuring diverse models and narratives that challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Adopting trends such as “Male Beauty” and gender fluidity, leading global brands like L’Oréal can set an example for CCIs, pioneering campaigns that promote inclusivity and diversity. Secondly, brands should engage with feminist movements and social causes to demonstrate a commitment to gender equality, learning from successful femvertising strategies and consistently adjusting marketing strategies and content according to social debates. Lastly, creating empowering content that portrays women as active protagonists rather than objects is essential. These recommendations aim to foster a cultural shift towards more equitable and empowering representations in media and advertising, significantly impacting the entire CCI sector.

However, this study still faced several limitations. The scope of case studies was restricted to four Western and Asian lipstick campaigns, which may not fully capture the diversity of gender portrayals in CCIs. Moreover, the study employed qualitative analysis through semiotic examination and literature review, which, while providing depth, might lack the broader generalizability of quantitative methods. Future research should broaden the scope to include a wider range of cultural contexts and media forms. Quantitative studies could complement qualitative insights, providing a more comprehensive understanding of trends in gender representation. Further exploration into audience reception and the impact of diverse portrayals on societal norms would also be valuable.

However, gender equality is not only represented in advertisements but also embodied in the underlying messages and societal perceptions of genders. While deconstructing traditional norms rooted in longstanding patriarchal cultures is challenging, industries within global CCIs must lead by disseminating gender-equality ideologies and encouraging women's

empowerment. This study underscores the transformative power of media and advertising in shaping societal perceptions of gender. As Beauvoir (1952) profoundly noted, “To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue nonetheless to exist for him also: mutually recognising each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an other.” Contemporary examples of women's empowerment highlight significant achievements of female entrepreneurs like Lisa Su. As the CEO of AMD, a leading global semiconductor company, Su became the first female recipient of the *IEEE Robert Noyce Medal* in 2021 and was named on the World's Most Powerful Women list in 2023 (Forbes, 2023). Su exemplifies how women can empower themselves through education and skills, significantly impacting the CCIs. This can begin by featuring models of all genders, races, and sexualities and by launching training and support sessions for marginalized groups. Scholars should expand research into diverse cultural contexts, practitioners must adopt inclusive marketing strategies, and policymakers should support initiatives that promote gender equality. Only by achieving inclusivity and diversity at practical levels and collaborating with targeted audiences can the CCIs realize Beauvoir's vision of comprehensive gender equality.

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FINAL GRADE

77 / 100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Congratulations on writing and submitting a MA dissertation. You should be very proud of what you have achieved. You chose an important topic for your dissertation exploring how gender stereotypes and norms are both reinforced and challenged in lipstick advertising campaigns across Western and Asian contexts, focusing on the role of CCIs in shaping societal perceptions of gender. Through a comparative analysis, you examines the intersection of media representation, gender inequality, and the commodification of femininity and masculinity in contemporary advertising.

Structure and Argument

Your dissertation presents a robust comparative analysis of how gender stereotypes and norms are both adopted and challenged in lipstick advertising campaigns across Western and Asian contexts, highlighting the important role of CCIs in shaping and reflecting societal values. In your acknowledgement, you effectively acknowledge your subject position, which adds a powerful and passionate rationale to the research, grounded in personal experience of gender inequality. The introduction is strong, clearly outlining the global significance and development of CCIs, and providing an overview of gender representations within these industries. Your analysis of the dual role of lipstick campaigns, representing both empowerment and subjugation, forms a compelling rationale for your research, linking media representation of gender to wider societal impacts, such as workplace gender inequality. Your research questions are focused, clear, and well-articulated,

driving the investigation forward with precision. You build your argument with evidence and reach a strong conclusion.

Knowledge and Understanding

You demonstrate an excellent knowledge of the research landscape, identifying a gap in the literature on gender representation in media that often overlooks the Asian perspective. Your comparative study fills this gap, particularly through its focus on male lipstick advertising from a media studies perspective, rather than just from a queer studies framework. The interdisciplinary approach you employ, engaging with gender studies, media studies, and cultural studies, is essential for a study of this nature in CCIs. Your use of Butler's theory of gender performativity is an effective choice as a theoretical framework, allowing you to delve deeply into how gender roles are communicated through lipstick advertising. You introduce important concepts such as 'Femvertising' and 'Lipstick Feminism' that enhance your theoretical analysis. Your methodology, including case studies and semiotic analysis of advertisements, is thoughtfully chosen and well-articulated.

The case studies are analysed with criticality and attention to details manifesting the good understanding and application of semiotic analysis. However, the engagement with intersectionality could be deepened—while you explore gender fluidity, a more critical analysis of how diversity is signified would add nuance to your argument - does simply including an ethnically diverse woman in the same campaign signify diversity? You offer a fascinating analysis of the South Korean and Chinese context and the commodification of the 'idol' and 'flower

boy' as a way to sell an illusion of gender fluidity while in reality maintaining a patriarchal structure. Nonetheless, these gender transformative gender portrayals are definitely redefining masculine ideals. Here would have been an ideal place to engage with Butler's gender performativity more and try to apply some of her thought to the analysis.

Use of Sources

Your dissertation is well-researched, drawing on an extensive body of literature that spans feminism, gender in media, and CCIs. The analysis of how advertising commodifies gender norms and symbols like lipstick, balancing between empowerment and sexualisation, is particularly insightful. In a few instances, ensure that when paraphrasing content from sources, you avoid reproducing phrases too closely to the original. If a direct quotation is necessary, use quotation marks to ensure accurate referencing. The list of figures is well-referenced and greatly enhances the reader's understanding of key points in your argument.

Style and Presentation

Your dissertation is written in a clear, accessible style, making it easy for the reader to follow your argument. The organisation of the dissertation is excellent, and the use of subheadings contributes significantly to the clarity and flow of your argument. The list of contents reflects a high level of thoughtfulness and organisation, and the use of visual aids, such as screenshots, strengthens your points by providing clear

visual examples that complement your textual analysis.

PAGE 1

PAGE 2

PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

PAGE 11

PAGE 12

PAGE 13

PAGE 14

PAGE 15

PAGE 16

PAGE 17

PAGE 18

PAGE 19

PAGE 20

PAGE 21

PAGE 22

PAGE 23

PAGE 24

PAGE 25

PAGE 26

PAGE 27

PAGE 28

PAGE 29

PAGE 30

PAGE 31

PAGE 32

PAGE 33

PAGE 34

PAGE 35

PAGE 36

PAGE 37

PAGE 38

PAGE 39

PAGE 40

PAGE 41

PAGE 42

PAGE 43

PAGE 44

PAGE 45

PAGE 46

PAGE 47

PAGE 48

PAGE 49

PAGE 50

PAGE 51

PAGE 52

PAGE 53

PAGE 54

PAGE 55

PAGE 56

PAGE 57

PAGE 58

PAGE 59

PAGE 60

PAGE 61

PAGE 62

PAGE 63

PAGE 64

PAGE 65

PAGE 66

PAGE 67

PAGE 68

PAGE 69

PAGE 70

PAGE 71

PAGE 72

PAGE 73

PAGE 74

PAGE 75

