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## Gender Social Media Marketing: the Female Dimension in China

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### Abstract

With the rise of women's voices and changing consumer attitudes in the new digital era, gender social media marketing is becoming a problem area for researcher, and the features of gender marketing is constantly being questioned. The aim of the study is to reveal the presence of gender marketing in Chinese social media in three aspects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, and determine the gender marketing in the current context by means of a questionnaire survey (N = 142, 2022). The results show that Chinese women are relatively supportive of gender marketing. Gender social media marketing based on correctly capturing women's emotional appeal usually further triggers positive emotional resonance among women, which in turn can have a positive effect on promoting consumer behavior. This study argues that the impact of gender marketing on Chinese audiences at the cognitive level is reflected in their attention to marketing activities; at the affective level, it is reflected in their attitudes and empathy towards marketing content; and at the behavioral level, it is the behaviors of searching, purchasing, or disseminating relevant content. The study demonstrates that gender marketing on Chinese social media generates interest and positive emotional resonance among female consumers, thereby contributing to their purchase decisions.

**Keywords:** social media marketing, gender marketing, female consumers, effectiveness, China, questionnaire survey.

### 1. Introduction

According to Accenture (Accenture, 2019), Chinese women control \$10 trillion in annual consumer spending, consequently, women's issues have been the focus of brands in marketing and social media marketing (SMM) in particular. With the growth of contemporary thinking among Chinese women, women's views regarding consumer spending, consumption, and brands and their values are also changing (Heidarian, 2019; Teng et al., 2021). Liu (Liu, 2021) points out that the gender differentiated marketing approach of the past has gradually failed. In recent years, female marketing and even feminist campaigns such as 'Queen's Day', which are consumerist in nature, have also fallen out of favour (Duan, 2020). Chinese women's appeal for brand marketing is no longer satisfied with product promotion, they begin to pay more attention to brand values, and often induce purchase motivation under the effect of emotional factors (Liu, 2021).

However, the influence of emotions on consumers does not happen overnight (Sangeeta, Arpan, 2022; Shilina, Wirth, 2021; Tarka et al., 2022). Existing studies on social media marketing in terms of gender mainly are devoted to the relationship between feminism and marketing (Abitbol, Sternadori, 2019; Schiele, 2020), gender differences in consumer behavior (Feng et al., 2019; Leung et al., 2022; de Kerviler et al., 2022; Prothero, Tadajewski, 2021) and the strategy and impact of

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female advertising (Hainneville et al., 2022; Varghese, 2022), while there are fewer studies related to studying the communication effects of gender marketing on social media, in particular female (Hye, Lee, 2021; Kordrostami, Russell, 2022; Lima, Casais, 2021; Nathaly et al., 2022).

This study aims at investigating the effects of gender marketing on social media through a questionnaire based on the three dimensions of communication effects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. We propose the following three hypotheses.

H1: Gender marketing in social media is of particular interest to female consumer (cognitive aspect)

H2: Gender marketing in social media based on the correct understanding of women's emotional appeals has a positive impact on women's emotional perceptions (emotional aspect)

H3: Gender marketing in social media based on a proper understanding of women's emotional appeal has a positive effect on female consumer decisions (behavioral aspect)

## 2. Materials and methods

This study is based on the method of questionnaire survey. The purpose of questionnaire survey is to investigate the Chinese public's attitudes towards gender marketing on social media, to determine the features of gender marketing communication on social media in China. As feminism in China continues to develop and consumer attitudes and values upgrade, the Chinese public is gradually demanding more and more from gender marketing, from products to values.

This study takes users of social media platforms as the research target. The questionnaire was placed on Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Xiaohongshu and Questionnaire.com community between April 20 and April 25, 2022, and 142 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire for this study consisted of 13 questions and was composed of three parts. Among them, questions 10-11 used a 5-point Likert scale and question 13 was a supplementary opinion question.

The first section (Q1-5) provides basic characteristics of the respondent, including the respondent's gender, age, level of education, occupation, and social media usage habits.

The second section (Q6-8) is designed to assess respondents' awareness of this type of marketing, this section looks at respondents' "exposure", and if they choose "noticed this type of marketing" they are also asked about their "exposure channels" and "form of exposure".

The third section (Q9-11) is designed to understand the impact of gender marketing on respondents' emotions. Based on the values conveyed by the latest examples of gender marketing and the Chinese Women's Personality Inventory, questions are set in the third section to understand respondents' attitudes towards this type of marketing, the possible reasons for resonance and the values that may resonate with them.

The fourth section (Q12) assesses the impact of this type of promotion on respondents at the behavioral level, referring to the three active parts of the AISAS model 'Search-Action-Share' (Pelawi, 2019), and investigates whether respondents purchase or share after gaining emotional resonance.

## 3. Discussion

This study analyzed the communication effects of gender social media marketing on respondents from three aspects of cognition, emotion, and action through questionnaire survey, and summarized the following findings, providing theoretical and empirical impact in gender social media marketing.

According to psychologist Wagner, an individual's attitude towards things consists of cognition, emotion, and behaviors. Cognition is the objective basis for the formation of attitudes, on which emotions and behaviors are derived; emotion is an internal experience that occurs when individuals come into contact or interact with things, which is a subjective component and an important part of attitudes; and behavior is a predictable response to things.

*Effective gender marketing in social media is of particular interest to female consumer (cognitive aspect)*

Most people found in the survey indicated that they had noticed this type of marketing, with women showing a more pronounced interest. This is because there are gender differences in the way consumers interact with promotional messages. Female consumers are more subtle and sensitive than male consumers to the details and subtle experiences of the consumer environment,

the object of the transaction, etc. However, there are also some who are less willing to participate even if they do notice.

*Gender marketing in social media based on the correct understanding of women's emotional appeals has a positive impact on women's emotional perceptions (emotional aspect)*

The survey found that respondents believe that the values currently conveyed by gender marketing on Chinese social media are mainly positive, with most respondents saying that marketing that correctly understands women's emotional appeal is most likely to resonate with them. The message from gender marketing reflects ideals of inclusion, and of modern societies where women take up diversified roles and responsibilities outside homes (Varghese, 2022). The latest report of HubSpot also states that consumers now more than ever care those brands share the same values (HubSpot, 2022). Therefore, in gender marketing, brands should show respect for women's diverse identities, affirm the value and power of women, avoid gender stereotypes.

*Gender marketing in social media based on a proper understanding of women's emotional appeal has a positive effect on female consumer decisions (behavioral aspect)*

Cognition and emotion are the subjective and objective foundations that lead to action. In the survey, it was found that gender marketing that resonates with female consumers will further trigger female consumers to search or share or buy, thus maximizing the effectiveness of a brand's marketing communications. Philip Kotler also pointed out that marketing 3.0 is driven by customer interaction and consumer relationships to the brand (Kotler, 2019). Therefore, for a brand, although it is important to provide consumers with performance experience and satisfaction at the product level, the brand should necessarily represents a certain value for consumers.

#### 4. Results

##### *Demographic analysis (Q1-5)*

Among the respondents, the gender distribution was predominantly female, accounting for 73.94 % of the respondents. In terms of age distribution, young people aged 18-24 (61.97 %) dominated; in terms of education distribution, undergraduates (46.47 %) accounted for the highest proportion, followed by postgraduates (34.5 %), with a high level of education overall; in terms of occupation distribution, students (64.78 %) accounted for the highest proportion, followed by working people (27.4 %); in terms of time spent on social media, the highest percentage was for more than 3 hours (43.66 %), followed by 1-2 hours.

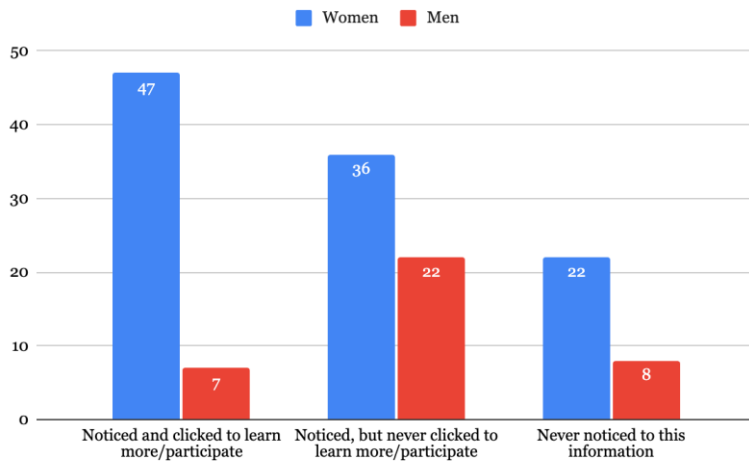
In summary, the sample is mainly concentrated on the characteristics of women, young people, higher education level, students, and heavy social media users.

##### *Cognitive aspect (Q6-8)*

*Q6 - Have you seen any marketing promotions on social media platforms related to women's issues?*

**Table 1.** Respondents' awareness of this type of promotion (N=142)

Items	Q1 - Gender		Total
	Women	Men	
Never noticed to this information	22(73.3 %)	8(26.7 %)	30(21.13 %)
Noticed and clicked to learn more/participate	47(87.0 %)	7(13.0 %)	54(38.03 %)
Noticed, but never clicked to learn more/participate	36(62.1 %)	22(37.9 %)	58(40.85 %)

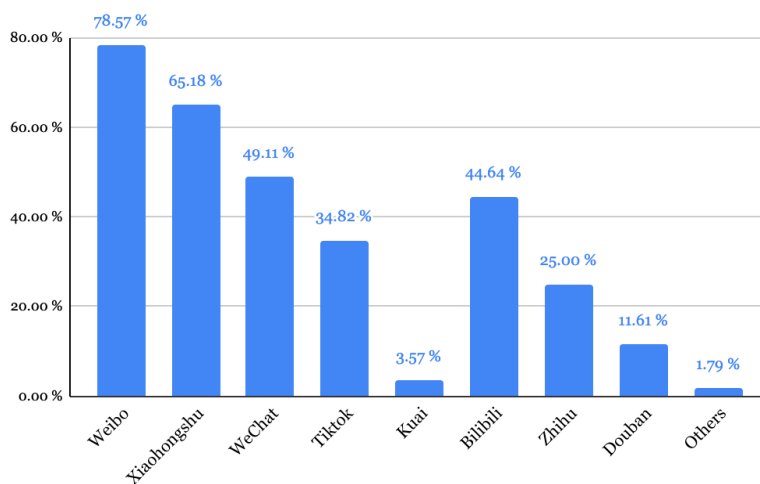


**Fig. 1.** Differences in exposure by gender (N=142)

The exposure of respondents from Figure 1 shows that 79 % of the respondents have paid attention to this type of marketing. In addition to this, the results from the comparison of exposure by gender in Figure 1. show that 38.03 % of these 79 % of respondents said they would continue to click/participate, with over 8 % of them being female. This indicates that women show a more significant interest in this type of marketing compared to men. However, 40.85 % of respondents also said that they had noticed but never clicked to learn more/participate, suggesting that brands need to think about how to increase consumer engagement in the future.

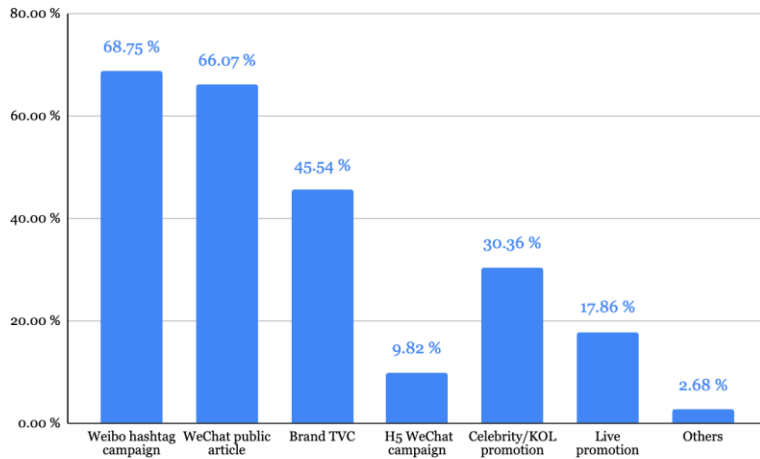
Next, for the 79 % of respondents who had "noticed this type of marketing", the questionnaire further investigated the channels and methods of engagement. The 30 respondents who chose not to be aware of it were removed, leaving a sample of 112.

*Q7 – On which of the following social media platforms have you noticed this type of promotion?*



**Fig. 2.** Respondents' main channels of contact (N=112)

*Q8 – What are the main forms of marketing and promotion of women's issues that you have come across in the above media platforms?*



**Fig 3.** Respondents' main mode of contact (N=112)

The results show that respondents mainly use Weibo (78.57 %) and Xiaohongshu (65.18 %), channels that are highly topical and have a high number of female users. In terms of promotion methods, "Weibo hashtag campaign" (68.75 %) was the main method used to generate quick buzz.

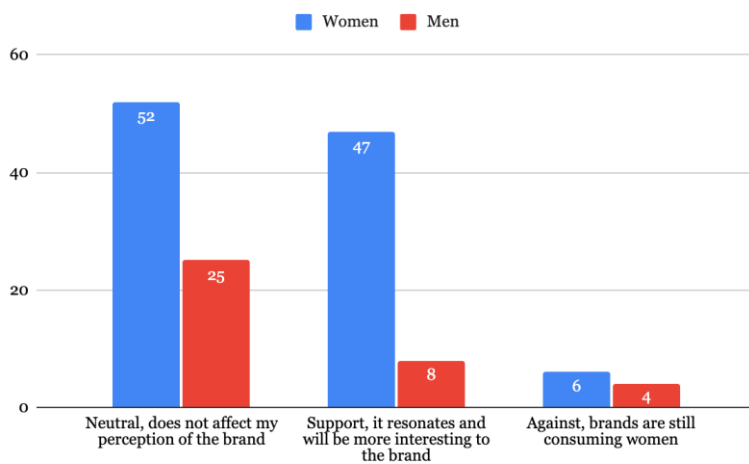
In summary, the results of the second section show that respondents are mainly aware of this type of gender marketing through social media platforms with a high number of female users and community attributes. Female respondents show more interest in gender marketing and are more willing to participate and support it. Based on this, H1 that "Effective gender marketing in social media is of particular interest to female users" is valid.

*Emotional aspect (Q9-11)*

Q9 – What is your view on existing social media marketing promotion for women?

**Table 2.** Respondents' perceptions of this type of marketing (N=142)

Items	Q1 - Gender		Total
	Women	Men	
Neutral, does not affect my perception of the brand	52(67.5 %)	25(32.5 %)	77(54.23 %)
Against, brands are still consuming women	6(60.0 %)	4(40.0 %)	10(7.04 %)
Support, it resonates and will be more interesting to the brand	47(85.5 %)	8(14.5 %)	55(38.73 %)



**Fig 4.** Gender differences in attitudes towards female dimension of marketing

The results in Figure 4 show that 54.23 % of respondents were neutral, 38.73 % were supportive and only 7.04 % were opposed. This indicates that most respondents were neutral, but

relatively few said they were opposed to the idea, indicating that they were not opposed to gender marketing. In addition, the biggest gender difference was in the option "support, resonate with, more interested in the brand", with female: male = 5.9:1, once again confirming that women show more significant interest in gender marketing.

*Q10 – Why do you think this type of social media marketing promotion for women's issues might resonate with you?*

**Table 3.** Possible factors for gender marketing to resonate with respondents (N = 142)

Items	Average	Standard deviation	Variance
The values and attitudes conveyed are in line with mine	3.8	0.96	0.91
Understands women's emotions correctly and captures pain points	3.83	1	0.99
The topics are realistic and in line with current social issues	3.79	0.99	0.97
The content has depth of expression (e.g., copywriting, images, etc.)	3.61	1.04	1.08

Table 3 shows that the mean values of the four options are relatively close to each other, indicating that all four factors are recognized. The average score for "correct understanding of women's emotional needs" is relatively high, while the average score for "content expression" is the lowest. We can say that values, relevance to respondents' 'pain points', relevance to real social issues, and content expression are all reasons that resonate with respondents. In contrast, the ability to correctly capture the emotional appeal of women is a key factor in resonance. In short, respondents are more likely to resonate with a brand's attitude in this type of gender marketing because their emotional appeal is seen and valued.

*Q11 – The values that you think might resonate with such women's issues social media marketing promotions are likely to be.*

**Table 4.** Respondents' agreement with the emotional values that may be conveyed in such marketing (N = 142)

Items	Average	Standard deviation	Variance
Women should be brave and confident	4.2	0.91	0.82
Women should be bold in defending their rights	4.23	0.93	0.85
Women should reject appearance anxiety	4.27	0.98	0.96
A woman's career is as important as her marriage	4.08	1.03	1.04
Women should be economically independent	4.28	0.97	0.93

As can be seen from the results in Table 4, the mean difference between the five options is not significant, indicating that respondents tend to agree with all five values. In other words, most people believe that through such marketing women are likely to learn about positive values such as "women should be brave and confident", "women should be bold in defending their rights", "women should reject appearance anxiety" and "women should be economically independent". "Women need to be financially independent" and other positive values. In conclusion, the respondents indicated that they could derive positive values from this type of marketing on gender issues and that the value of "independence" was more highly valued.

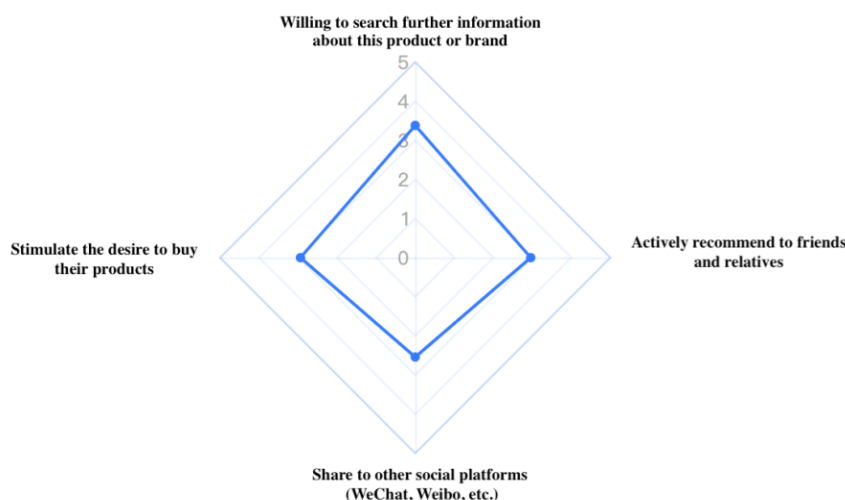
In summary, the results of the third section show that women are relatively supportive of gender marketing and are more likely to have emotional resonance, as they tend to have positive emotional resonance because their emotional aspirations are valued, thus having a positive effect on the emotional level. Therefore, we can say that H2. Gender marketing in social media based on



the correct understanding of women's emotional appeals has a positive impact on women's emotional perceptions" is valid.

*Behavioral aspect*

*Q12 – If this type of social media marketing promotion for women resonates with you, you might:*



**Fig 5.** Impact of Gender Marketing on Respondents' Purchase Decisions (N = 142)

As seen in [Figure 5](#), respondents were more willing to search for further information about the product or brand after gaining emotional resonance (AVG – 3.38), followed by "Actively recommend to friends and relatives" (AVG – 2.96), and "Stimulate the desire to buy the brand's products" (AVG – 2.94) and the least number of people would like to "Share to other social platforms (WeChat, Weibo, etc.)" (AVG – 2.54). The results show that the respondents' desire to search, buy, and share is related to the cost of the desired behaviors, with "search" being the least costly and scoring high, while "Share to other social platforms" scored the lowest due to the highest behavioral and psychological costs involved. It is worth noting that in the Q13 opinion question, Respondent No. 127 also stated that "I would consider this product based on the values that the brands bring to the customer".

In summary, the results of the fourth section show that gender marketing has a positive impact on driving respondents to further search, purchase, and share, the three main consumer behaviors, and the smaller the behavioral cost, the more significant the effect. Therefore, H3. ender marketing in social media based on a proper understanding of women's emotional appeal has a positive effect on female consumer decisions, is valid.

## 5. Conclusion

A rapidly evolving society is also posing new challenges to the gender marketing. To reveal the features of gender marketing on social media in China today, this study investigated Chinese people's attitudes towards gender marketing on social media on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels by means of a questionnaire survey.

From the audience's perspective, communication effects can be seen as the changes that occur in the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the message after it has been received by the recipient ([Huang, 2017](#)). Based on this, this study argues that the impact of gender marketing on audiences at the cognitive level is reflected in their attention to marketing activities; at the affective level, it is reflected in their attitudes and empathy towards marketing content; and at the behavioral level, it is the behaviors of searching, purchasing, or disseminating relevant content.

According to this theoretical framework, this study analyzed the communication effects of gender social media marketing on respondents from three aspects of cognition, emotion, and action through questionnaire survey, and summarized the following findings, providing theoretical and empirical impact in gender social media marketing.

Cognitive aspect of effective gender marketing in social media means that it is of particular interest to female consumer. Therefore, companies can try to find unique perspectives on conventional issues to engage in dialogue with female consumers, while at the same time innovating marketing formats and materials, and copywriting design to attract consumers' interest in terms of creativity and detail and to create brand differentiation and memorability.

Emotional aspect of gender marketing in social media has a positive impact on women's emotional perceptions when it is based on the correct understanding of women's emotional appeals. A valuable marketing campaign for women should not only be innovative in terms of content format but should also maintain an ideological and cultural resonance with consumers. In gender marketing, brands should pay more attention to gender issues, gain insight into the 'pain points' of female consumers, and deliver values that consumers can identify with.

Behavioral aspect of gender marketing in social media has a positive effect on female consumer decisions when it is based on a proper understanding of women's emotional appeal. For a brand, its highest development goal is to achieve the consumer's emotional desire, which will increase the consumer's goodwill and desire to buy.

In addition, marketers should also pay attention to the involvement of male consumers in women's marketing, for example, by placing more emphasis on "gender equality" in women's marketing, rather than just celebrating independent women, but also emphasizing that men and women are born equal. A unique marketing angle will greatly increase the attention to gender marketing and thus increase consumer awareness of the brand.

This study found that gender social media marketing stimulates consumers' interest, and women perform more significantly; gender social media marketing in female dimension based on correctly capturing women's emotional appeal usually further triggers positive emotional resonance among women, which in turn can have a positive effect on promoting consumer behavior such as searching, sharing, and purchasing. In other words, with marketing becoming increasingly homogenized, the values that brands communicate have really get to the female consumer.

## 6. Limitations

This study also has the following limitations. First, the gender and occupation ratio of the respondents to the questionnaire was not balanced, thus causing some bias in the results. Future research should expand the number and range of respondents to improve the accuracy of the results. Secondly, as most of the gender marketing cases are currently female, this study is limited to female marketing, but the male and genderless economies in China also show great potential, so it is necessary to look at more gender perspectives in the future.

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