

# Emerging masculinities in Chinese luxury social media marketing

Chinese luxury  
social media  
marketing

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate masculinity in Chinese social media marketing for global luxury fashion brands through two studies.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Study 1 compares physical characteristics of males in visually oriented US (Instagram) and Chinese (Weibo) social media posts promoting global luxury fashion magazine brands (e.g. *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, *GQ* and *Esquire*). Study 2 examines the prevalence of and Chinese consumers' responses (reposts, comments and likes) to different masculinities depicted in luxury fashion brand-sponsored Weibo posts.

**Findings** – Male portrayals for Chinese audiences feature more characteristics associated with emerging East Asian hybrid masculinities – “Little Fresh Meat” (LFM) and “Old Grilled Meat” (OGM) – than associated with global or regional hegemonic masculinity (i.e. the scholarly Wén and action-oriented Wu). Wén remains common in social media posts for luxury fashion goods, but LFM and OGM engender more consumer responses.

**Practical implications** – Chinese luxury fashion marketing depicts masculinity more similarly to other East Asian marketing than to Western marketing. Some luxury fashion brands are struggling for acceptance among Chinese youth. Luxury fashion marketers should incorporate hybrid rather than hegemonic masculinities to prompt more favorable responses among Chinese consumers, especially younger female target markets.

**Originality/value** – Growing female occupational and consumer power and shifting male employment from blue-collar to white-collar jobs have influenced media portrayals of masculinity. Social media marketing for luxury fashion brands demonstrates the prevalence and appeal of hybrid masculinities in China.

**Keywords** China, Masculinity, Marketing in China, International advertising, Social media marketing, Luxury fashion brands, Hegemonic and hybrid masculinity, Male gender roles, Luxury fashion marketing

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Gender portrayals in international advertising continue to interest marketing scholars (Behm-Morawitz, 2017; Furnham and Lay, 2018; Grau and Zotos, 2016; Matthes *et al.*, 2016; Paek *et al.*, 2011; Shaw and Tan, 2014). Much of their research has examined female portrayals (Grau and Zotos, 2016; Furnham and Lay, 2018). Of the limited research on male portrayals in advertising, most focuses on advertisements targeting general audiences viewing major television network programs (e.g. Fowler and Thomas, 2015; Gentry and Harrison, 2010) or reading popular magazines (e.g. Kolbe and Albanese, 1996; Vokey *et al.*, 2013). Male portrayals targeting privileged (wealthy and upper-middle class) audiences, such as those in luxury fashion advertising, remains uninvestigated, especially in Asia. However, other aspects of advertising images targeting such audiences differ from images targeting mass-market audiences (Kim *et al.*, 2016; Ko *et al.*, 2019; Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015).



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Hybrid masculinity is “men’s selective incorporation of performances and identity elements associated with marginalized and subordinated masculinities and femininities” (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014, p. 246). Sociological theories suggest privileged men possess economic and social power that affords them greater freedom to integrate aspects of female and other marginalized groups into hybrid masculinities (Arxer, 2011; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Pfaffendorf, 2017). In contrast, men lower in economic and social power respond to their beliefs about failing to meet personal expectations by exaggerating their masculinity (Barber and Bridges, 2017; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Hall, 2015; Holt and Thompson, 2004; Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018; Vokey *et al.*, 2013). However, the scope of this contrast is poorly understood because hybrid masculinity research has focused almost exclusively on young, privileged US Caucasian males (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Hrynyk, 2015; Pfaffendorf, 2017).

Although social media marketing enables consumer brand producers to communicate directly with consumers and is especially useful in shaping identity (Hall, 2015; Ismail, 2017), social media marketing research on gender portrayals is rare (Furnham and Lay, 2018) and on hybrid masculinity is non-existent. Fashion and appearance are often framed in opposition to hegemonic masculinity – the most exalted configuration of gender practice that legitimates patriarchy (Connell, 1995). Nonetheless, portrayals of hybrid masculinity in social media marketing should lead consumers to associate the focal brand with status and power because economic and social power affords privileged men the greatest latitude to adopt these portrayals.

Several international fashion brands currently struggle in the Chinese market, but social media marketing approaches appear to differentiate successful from unsuccessful fashion brands (Jun, 2019). Thus, the use of hybrid masculinity portrayals in Chinese social media marketing for luxury fashion brands is investigated to determine if hybrid masculinity portrayals help to explain differences in social media marketing efficacy.

Upper- and middle-class Chinese have made China into the world’s second-largest luxury market. With 15–20 percent annual sales growth, China will soon surpass Japan as the largest luxury fashion market. Thus, global luxury brands cannot afford to ignore Chinese consumers. Luxury brands that gain and maintain a meaningful share of this market will sustain their global image and better compete with emerging Chinese luxury brands (Degen, 2009).

China’s luxury consumers tend to be younger and more male than consumers in other luxury markets. In 2017, 20–34-year-old consumers made 30 percent of the \$73bn (500bn yuan) in Chinese luxury fashion purchases (Master and Kwok, 2018). Although responsible for only 40 percent of luxury goods expenditures globally, males are responsible for 55 percent of such purchases in China, with 25–40-year-old men comprising a growing proportion of Chinese luxury consumers (Daily, 2017). An Hongyu, a Global Director at McKinsey (2011), claims:

China’s young consumers spend a lot of time on the Internet to collect information about brands and products, read other people comments on the product, so brands can use social media agencies to monitor and respond to consumer online chat, and participate in discussion.

Thus, marketing scholars and practitioners should benefit from understanding male portrayals in social media posts for luxury fashion brands.

Hence, the main goal of research summarized here is to investigate male portrayals in Chinese social media marketing for luxury fashion brands. As prior studies have assessed masculine characteristics in US media (e.g. Fowler and Thomas, 2015; Kolbe and Albanese 1996), the current research compares the physical appearance of males in Chinese vs US social media posts for luxury fashion brands. To expand beyond male characteristics and explore how marketers depict masculinity to privileged consumers, the secondary goal is to investigate the prevalence of holistic masculinity types in Chinese social media marketing for best-selling luxury fashion brands.

## Theoretical background

### *Social media and luxury fashion brands*

Social media are media, platforms and online applications that facilitate instant interaction, collaboration, content generation and sharing via personal computer and mobile devices (Kim and Ko, 2012; Sundar and Limperos, 2013). Online content and interactions with brands influence roughly 40 percent of luxury consumption (Digimind, 2018). Given the speed and pervasiveness of social media, marketers increasingly deploy it in strategies for enhancing brand awareness, engagement and switching (Bento *et al.*, 2018). Luxury fashion marketers should not underestimate social media's impact on their brands' visibility, image and reputation (Digimind, 2018).

Rather than traditional media's push communications, social media enable brands and consumers to have direct two-way interactions. Social media marketing for luxury fashion brands introduces products sincerely and provides ancillary services to social media users (Kim and Ko, 2012). Consumers develop positive thoughts about a brand when they interact with it and other consumers on social media (e.g. liking and replying to comments). Such interactions contribute to customer service and public relations in ways that can enhance brand image (Gilliland, 2018). Through visual characteristics that complement a brand's aesthetic standards, platforms such as Instagram facilitate online engagement for luxury fashion brands (Dahlhoff, 2016). Furthermore, exposure to social media marketing correlates positively with consumers' intentions to electronically share information about and endorse the brand to others (Ananda *et al.*, 2019).

### *Luxury fashion brands and privileged consumers*

Studying hybrid masculinity requires a context in which privileged consumers are major participants (Pfaffendorf, 2017). Luxury fashion brands help communicate a consumer's power (i.e. prestige, status and dominance over others) and resources, such as money and social connections (Tuu *et al.*, 2017). Men use luxury brands to signal wealth and success, and women use luxury brands as signals to other women about their partner's devotion (Ko *et al.*, 2019). Thus, luxury fashion marketing is an excellent context in which to study privileged consumers' responses to masculinity portrayals.

Due to their symbolic, innovative and expressive aspects, luxury fashion clothing and beauty products are vital to constructing consumers' self-image (Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015; Tuu *et al.*, 2017; Ko *et al.*, 2019). Their importance to self-image construction encourages luxury fashion marketers to depict human models with meanings consumable through product purchase or use (Sharif *et al.*, 2018; Trampe *et al.*, 2011; Vokey *et al.*, 2013). Symbolic meaning, such as that associated with a specific masculinity, is central to a luxury brand's appeal (Ko *et al.*, 2019; Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015), especially among young East Asian consumers (Tangsupwattana and Liu, 2017). In this way, luxury fashion marketing helps formalize socially constructed masculinities.

Models appearing in luxury fashion marketing materials influence consumers' attitudinal and behavioral responses to brands (Sharif *et al.*, 2018). Because the luxury market entails more than \$1 trillion in annual sales, with a large and growing proportion of those sales in East Asia, the effects of model masculinities on Chinese luxury fashion marketing should interest luxury fashion producers (Ko *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the two studies summarized here investigated Chinese consumers' responses to social media marketing portrayals of hegemonic and emerging hybrid masculinities.

### *Male portrayals in luxury fashion marketing*

Studies of male portrayals in marketing communications are rare. Most such studies evaluated US-based samples (Fowler and Thomas, 2015; Gentry and Harrison, 2010;

Kolbe and Albanese, 1996; Vokey *et al.*, 2013). The few international studies have focused on men's relative prevalence and prominence compared to women (e.g. Bresnahan *et al.*, 2001; Furnham and Lay, 2018; Kim and Lowry, 2005; Luther and Smith, 2014; Matthes *et al.*, 2016; Paek *et al.*, 2011). No readily identifiable research exists about international differences among male portrayals in luxury fashion marketing.

Some research into male portrayals has examined the prevalence of specific characteristics (e.g. Kolbe and Albanese, 1996; Sharif *et al.*, 2018; Vokey *et al.*, 2013). However, socio-cultural differences across societies and nations can affect masculinity's meaning and portrayal (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016). Thus, Study 1 focuses on cross-cultural differences in luxury fashion marketing on social media. Specifically:

*RQ1.* Do characteristics associated with male portrayals differ between US and Chinese luxury fashion marketing on social media?

#### *Global and regional hegemonic masculinity*

Advertising worldwide incorporates the Western male gender norms that became global hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Hird, 2016; Sharif *et al.*, 2018; Vokey *et al.*, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity portrays men as dominant compared to women or other masculinities, such as gay, minority, foreign, elderly or weaker. Hegemonic masculinities represent widely desired male characteristics (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018). Advertising portrayals of hegemonic masculinity stress status and self-confidence through business success, independence and mastery over emotions and the environment; toughness as physical strength; and virility through muscularity, surviving dangerous situations, aggression and avoiding feminine behaviors and attributes (Barber and Bridges, 2017; Hall, 2015; Thompson and Pleck, 1986; Vokey *et al.*, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity appears in both US and Chinese advertisements (Barber and Bridges, 2017; Behm-Morawitz, 2017; Shaw and Tan, 2014; Vokey *et al.*, 2013).

The Chinese culture has traditionally featured two regional hegemonic masculinities: *Wén* (文) and *Wù* (武). Although global hegemonic masculinity dominates (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018), the sociological theory of gender order posits societies contain multiple masculinities that differ across regions, cultures, historical periods and social positions (Barber and Bridges, 2017; Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018; Pascoe and Bridges, 2016).

*Wén* embodies the genteel, refined, reflective and civilized ideal associated with literary, scholarly, artistic and cultural attainment (Louie, 2015, 2016). Modern-day *Wén* are scholars, writers, professors, scientists, conscientious businessmen, creative artists or other males with substantial educational, intellectual or cultural achievements. Examples include Alibaba founder Ma (Jack) Yun (马云), who often appears in traditional Chinese or Western suits, and Chinese physicist Zhang Jie (张杰), with his glasses and conventional business attire.

*Wù* embodies physical strength, assertiveness, action-seeking, military prowess and knowing when not to fight. It is associated with athletes, martial artists and acrobats (Louie, 2015, 2016). *Wù* masculinity centers around men-of-action distinguished by muscularity, physical strength, martial arts prowess and darker skin and wrinkles from lax skin care and sun exposure. Examples include Hong Kong martial arts star Jackie Chan (成龙), Chinese actor and Wushu champion Li (Jet) Lianjie (李连杰) and *Wolf Warrior* actor and director Wu Jing (吴京).

Both *Wén* and *Wù* stress self-control and suppressing emotional expression (Li and Jankowiak, 2016). Although the Chinese traditionally consider both manly, *Wén* has tended to dominate *Wù* in the gender hierarchy (Li and Jankowiak, 2016; Moskowitz, 2013).

Through exposure to standardized global advertisements and Western media featuring muscular action movie stars like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Wù*

gained ascendancy over *Wén* during the 1980s, as Chinese culture migrated toward global masculinity norms. This migration manifested itself through martial arts (*Wǔxiá*, 武侠) movies and literature presenting frail men yearning to be anima-rejecting “manly men” (*nanzihan, nán zǐ hàn*, 男子汉) (Jung, 2003; Louie, 2015, 2016; Moskowitz, 2013).

By the 1990s, global hegemonic masculinity was ubiquitous in Chinese culture. Sexually adventurous men, powerful businessmen and athletes became popular male icons (Hird, 2016; Moskowitz, 2013). At that time, Chinese literature’s most popular heroes were successful entrepreneurs writing about their business triumphs (Louie, 2015, 2016). However, expressions of masculinity often differ across a country’s social classes (Hird, 2016; Holt and Thompson, 2004; Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018). Currently, two new hybrid masculinities rooted in other East Asian cultures appear in marketing messages targeting privileged Chinese consumers.

### *Emerging hybrid masculinities in East Asia*

Although known by different names throughout East Asia, the two emerging hybrid masculinities selectively incorporate feminine characteristics and characteristics associated with other groups into privileged men’s gender performance and identity (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Charlebois, 2017). Despite appropriating some feminine characteristics, heterosexual men – especially privileged younger males in urban East Asian areas – have adopted hybrid masculinities to enhance their attractiveness to women (Arxer, 2011). Although appearing initially in luxury fashion marketing, advertisers have extended these masculinities into other markets (e.g. business, popular music) (Anderson, 2014; Park *et al.*, 2019; Thanh, 2014; Tso and Nanase, 2017).

These emerging hybrid masculinities frequently diffuse via social media, including social media marketing (Anderson, 2014; Bennett, 2016; Thanh, 2014; Yue, 2014). Because few published scholarly treatments of this phenomenon exist, contemporary Chinese and East Asian popular culture best describe these emerging masculinities, which Chinese refer to as “Little Fresh Meat” (LFM) and “Old Grilled Meat” (OGM). These terms are idioms with opposite meanings in Chinese. LFM relates to freshness and purity, whereas OGM is like a finely aged steak (*China Daily*, 2016; Wu, 2016; Yue, 2014; Zdramaland, 2015; Zhou, 2015).

“Old Grilled Meat” (OGM, *lǎo là ròu*, 老腊肉) is an emerging East Asian hybrid masculinity resembling the Western metrosexual (Hall, 2015; Song and Hird, 2014). Metrosexuals are well-groomed, well-dressed, stylish men who strive to visually present ideal masculinity through heightened consumption of attractiveness-enhancing products and services. Although some men always have been relatively more concerned with appearance, metrosexual masculinity differs by its emphasis on image-conscious consumption practices (Hall, 2015).

Although of a similar age, OGM masculinity differs greatly from Japan’s corporate warrior (*kigyō senshi*, 企業戦士) or China’s white-collar man (*bailing nanren*, 白领男人), who neglect their outward appearance, health, hobbies and family to focus on corporate success. This business-related masculinity features conservative dark suits, plain white shirts, short practical hairstyles and an austere appearance – which was the male aspirational ideal or regional hegemonic masculinity common in the 1950s–1990s Japanese or the 1990s–2000s Chinese advertisements (Charlebois, 2017; Hird, 2016; Luther and Smith, 2014; Moskowitz, 2013; SturtzSreetharan, 2017; Tso and Nanase, 2017).

OGM culturally appropriates characteristics associated with mid-twentieth century Caucasian males. OGM describes fashion and appearance-conscious middle-aged men distinctively dressed to express their individuality. OGM is cool and stylish, with moderate muscle-mass but without skin-whitening makeup or bleached skin (unlike LFM). Exemplars include Chinese singer/actor Wu Xiubo (吴秀波) with retro-style Western suits and glasses or Japanese television star and Italian expatriate Girolama Panzetta.



OGM has roots in Japan, where it was known as *choi-waru oyaji* (ちょい悪オヤジ). Japanese magazines, such as *Leon*, and shelves full of self-help books in Japanese bookstores target middle-aged men desiring this sophisticated portrayal. Increasing sales for such fashion magazines – since 2010, annual sales among 30–40-years-old men rose more than 35 percent – corroborate this persona’s growing popularity in Japan (Hughes, 2013; Luther and Smith, 2014; Tso and Nanase, 2017). Chinese OGM and Japanese *choi-waru oyaji* are characterized by fine suits; stylish retro clothing, hats, shoes, accessories and hairstyles; cocktails; cigars; a *Playboy* Club-era taste for decorative women; and luxury goods that differentiate a man from his peers and attract younger women (Charlebois, 2017; Marx, 2007).

Koreans call these experienced, fashion-conscious middle-aged sophisticates “flower middle-aged” (꽃중년). They are especially popular among young female adult consumers of luxury products (Eun-mi, 2015; Newsis, 2017). Korea’s OGM masculinity differs from fashion-insensitive middle-aged men (known as *oji-san* (伯父さん) in Japan and *ajeossi* (아저씨) in Korea) with passé business attire and poor personal appearance (Tso and Nanase, 2017).

To an older (30–55-year-old) Chinese audience that skews male, OGM has become a popular portrayal (Zhou, 2015). Distinct from innocent, naive and unsophisticated LFM, OGM means fashionable, energetic despite wrinkles and mature due to career and life experiences. Like a fine wine, OGM has age well and attracts people with a calm temperament (Zdramaland, 2015).

LFM (*xiǎo xiān ròu*, 小鲜肉) is a hybrid masculinity combining male and female attributes valued in Chinese culture. LFM incorporates feminine cultural beauty ideals (e.g. slender build, longer hair, feminine-color or -cut clothing and cosmetically altered facial appearance) beyond the mere image-enhancing product consumption of OGM or Western metrosexuals. In China, LFM means fashion- and appearance-conscious, innocent-looking young males with a softer androgynous, effeminate appearance arising from obvious cosmetic use, long to moderate-length tousled styled and dyed hair, slenderness with lean muscles, no visible body/facial hair and cosmetically or chemically lightened skin. Examples include Chinese singer and actor Yang Yang (杨洋) and Lu Han (鹿晗), a Chinese singer and actor who is a former K-Pop boy band member.

The popularity of LFM and OGM is changing male media portrayals. Tough, muscular male leading characters consistent with global hegemonic masculinity had previously been *de rigueur*, whereas pale, willowy males played sissies or objects of contempt. Now LFMs are often cast as leading men in Chinese films and television programs (Wu, 2016; Yue, 2014).

LFM’s cosmetically or chemically lightened skin highlights the Asian-specific nature of this hybrid masculinity. Fair skin, metaphorically termed *white jade* in China, is a standard of female beauty throughout Asia. For example, both male and female Chinese judge fair-skinned women as more attractive (Mak, 2007; Gao *et al.*, 2013). Thai women prefer lighter skin and use skin-whiteners (Cuny and Opaswongkarn, 2016). Among men, 68 percent in Hong Kong and 55 percent in Taiwan prefer women with lighter skin (Schwartz, 2002). University-educated adults in Hong Kong believe whiter-skinned Asian women are higher status and more elegant, youthful, feminine and energetic. In contrast, they believe darker-skinned Asian women are coarse, unsophisticated and less beautiful menial laborers. First- and second-generation Asian immigrants to Western countries maintain this entrenched fair-skin beauty ideal; for example, US-resident Asians, especially women, desire lighter skin (Krishen *et al.*, 2014). However, this ideal does not pertain to Western culture, as US-residing Caucasians desire darker skin (Krishen *et al.*, 2014) and British men and women do not believe whiteness reflects social status or femininity (Leong, 2006).

Common Chinese sayings reinforce the *white jade* beauty standard:

- (1) “white, rich, and beautiful” (*bái fù měi*, 白富美), and
- (2) “whiteness masks a hundred uglinesses” (*yī bái zhē bǎi chǒu*, 一白遮百丑).

Advertising studies confirm the favorable consumer response to fair-skinned models and skin-whitening products. In general, Asian males evaluated an advertisement more positively when it featured a lighter-skinned than a darker-skinned female Asian (Krishen *et al.*, 2014). Roughly 30 percent of Hong Kong television commercials advertise skin-whitening products (Leong, 2006). Either Caucasian or light-skinned Asian models appear in advertisements for cosmetics, skin-care, skin-related or skin-quality-enhancing products and services in Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and India (Li *et al.*, 2008).

Because *white jade* is associated with female beauty regionally, portrayals similar to LFM have diffused throughout East Asia. In Japan, this youthful, delicate and effeminate-faced portrayal is rooted in *bishōnen* (美少年) of classic Japanese literature, modern manga and anime (Charlebois, 2017; Darling-Wolf, 2004). Since the late 2000s, Japanese advertisements often feature slender effeminate and smooth-skinned young men wearing long hair, jewelry, eyeliner, lipstick and skin-whitening cosmetics (Luther and Smith, 2014). In Korea, the so-called “flower handsome man” (*kkon-minam*, 꽃미남) uses cosmetics, plucks his eyebrows, manicures his nails, gels and styles his hair and undergoes cosmetic surgery to achieve the “right look.” These males speak softly, are polite, and embody purity and innocence. East Asian women view both emerging masculinities as understanding, gentle and emotionally relatable, which starkly contrasts with the prior stoic, authoritative, violent and powerful East Asian hegemonic masculinity (Charlebois, 2017; Darling-Wolf, 2004; Jae, 2013; Maliangkay, 2010; SturtzSreetharan, 2017; Yamakawa, 2014).

#### *Socio-cultural drivers of emerging hybrid masculinities*

Until the 1990s, the Japanese and Koreans, like the Chinese, embraced the strong, silent machismo characteristic of Western and traditional Asian hegemonic masculinity. However, socio-cultural changes alter how consumers view gender portrayals (Paoletti, 2015; Yalkin and Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2014). Since the late 1990s, East Asian women have become more economically and socially independent, and fewer East Asian men work as physical laborers or in heavy industry. Sociologists argue masculinity evolves in response to transforming gender roles (Barber and Bridges, 2017; Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018). Coinciding with these East Asian transformations, OGM’s and LFM’s popularity has soared. Such hybrid masculinities appeared first in Japan, then Korea and now China (Charlebois, 2017; Cook, 2015; Louie, 2016). Starting in the late 1960s, Britain, Canada and the USA experienced similar socio-cultural changes and the rise of culture-specific androgynous hybrid masculinities, including more youthful and middle-aged types (Hall, 2015; Hrynyk, 2015; Paoletti, 2015).

Masculinity is a cultural concept that evolves through social interactions and communication among societal members (Cook, 2015; Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018; Pascoe and Bridges, 2016; Pfaffendorf, 2017). Throughout East Asia, social media has dispersed and enhanced the popularity of Japanese celebrities and Korean K-Pop boy bands displaying hybrid masculinities (Anderson, 2014; Bennett, 2016; Park *et al.*, 2019; Thanh, 2014; Yue, 2014). As young Chinese males cultivate LFM masculinity, celebrities sporting it amassed large online followings skewed toward adolescents, younger adults and females. Roughly two-thirds of the most-followed male celebrities on the Chinese social media network Weibo exhibit LFM characteristics; the remaining celebrities are primarily *Wú* (Koetse, 2015).

Advertising and other marketing communication tools rely on, promulgate and reinforce socially constructed meanings, including those about masculinity, to promote brands (Vokey *et al.*, 2013). Among marketing communication tools, social media is associated with socially constructed meanings more targeted to local or regional audiences (Centeno and Wang, 2017; Okazaki and Taylor, 2013). For example, Western men’s lifestyle magazines and luxury fashion advertisements of the 1970s and 1980s channeled and reinforced

Western hybrid masculinity among affluent UK and US males (Hall, 2015; Luther and Smith, 2014; Paoletti, 2015).

Prior research has examined the prevalence of holistic gender portrayals (e.g. Gentry and Harrison, 2010; Shaw and Tan, 2014). Therefore, Study 2 explored the prevalence of and responses to regionally hegemonic masculinities (i.e. *Wén* and *Wǔ*) and the emerging hybrid masculinities (i.e. LFM and OGM) in Chinese social media marketing for luxury fashion brands:

*RQ2.* Do Chinese consumers' social media responses (i.e. likes, reposts or comments) differ across *Wén*, *Wǔ*, LFM and OGM masculinities?

Celebrity status influences consumers' responses to social media posts (Okazaki and Taylor, 2013). Because many popular Chinese celebrities portray *Wén*, *Wǔ*, LFM or OGM masculinity (Escobedo, 2017; Koetse, 2015; Lynch, 2014; Swatman and Martin, 2015), results may vary based on whether an unknown model or a celebrity appears:

*RQ3.* Do Chinese consumers' behavioral responses (i.e. likes, reposts or comments) toward *Wén*, *Wǔ*, LFM or OGM masculinities differ if the male model is or is not a celebrity?

Advertising differs in its portrayal of male models by race in both the USA (Behm-Morawitz, 2017) and East Asia (Luther and Smith, 2014). A model's race also affects Chinese consumers' responses to an advertisement. Chinese consumers rated advertisement and model likeability lower when the advertisement featured an East Asian male alone rather than alongside a Caucasian or Black male, and they rated brand attitude lower when it showed an East Asian rather than a Caucasian male (Gao *et al.*, 2013). Thus, a model's race may affect consumer responses to masculinities:

*RQ4.* Do Chinese behavioral responses (i.e. likes, reposts or comments) toward *Wén*, *Wǔ*, LFM or OGM masculinities depend on a model's race?

The Asian preference for lighter skin affects consumers' responses to advertisements featuring lighter- vs darker-skinned models (Cuny and Opaswongkarn, 2016; Krishen *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, model skin tone may moderate behavior responses to masculinity portrayals:

*RQ5.* Do Chinese consumers' behavioral responses (i.e. likes, reposts or comments) toward *Wén*, *Wǔ*, LFM or OGM masculinities depend on a model's skin tone?

Finally, young Chinese followers of LFM celebrities tend to be loyal consumers with substantial purchasing power (Wu, 2016). Thus, LFM celebrities should be effective endorsers for youth-oriented luxury fashion brands. Hence, Study 2 investigated the moderating influences of target market demographics on consumers' responses to the four masculinities:

*RQ6.* Do Chinese behavioral responses (i.e. likes, reposts or comments) toward *Wén*, *Wǔ*, LFM or OGM masculinities differ when the luxury fashion brand targets younger female consumers rather than all consumers?

#### *Overview of the studies*

In accord with *RQ1–RQ6*, two empirical studies were conducted. Study 1 investigates *RQ1*, which focuses on the physical appearance characteristics of males in social media posts promoting global luxury fashion magazines in China vs the USA. Because fashion magazines portray current gender ideals, this study should identify current cross-cultural differences in male portrayals. Study 1 compares data from company-sponsored sites on similar visually-oriented social media platforms – Instagram (USA) or Weibo (China).



To explore whether Chinese consumers prefer regional hegemonic masculinities (*Wen* or *Wu*) or hybrid masculinities (LFM or OGM), Study 2 examines *RQ2–RQ6*, which focus on the prevalence of and audience response to different masculinities in Chinese social media marketing for luxury fashion brands. It relies on Weibo posts from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016 from brand-sponsored sites for luxury-fashion-clothing brands with the highest net worth (Forbes, 2015).

### Study 1: male portrayals in USA vs Chinese social media posts

Study 1 applies quantitative content analysis to brand-sponsored sites on similar visually-oriented social media platforms – Instagram (USA) or Weibo (China) – for two men’s and two women’s fashion magazines that publish both US and Chinese editions – *Vogue* (*Vogue 服饰与美容*), *Cosmopolitan* (*时尚Cosmo*), *GQ* (*智族GQ*) and *Esquire* (*时尚先生*). The social media posts ( $n = 371$ ) selected for analysis met the following criteria: depicted at least one male whose physical appearance characteristics a coder could ascertain (i.e. not in the distance or a crowd), and published between January 1 and December 31, 2015.

Two marketing doctoral students – a US female and a Chinese male – coded each post. Training continued until coders consistently agreed on interpretations and applications. Then, coders independently coded the sample and later resolved disagreements through discussion. As the proportional reduction in loss (Rust and Cooil, 1994) ranged from 81 to 100 (see Table I), inter-rater reliability was acceptable. Previous content analyses of physical appearance characteristics of males in advertisements informed coding category choices (e.g. Kolbe and Albanese, 1996), with added characteristics associated with the emerging Asian masculinities (e.g. obvious cosmetic use and artificially lightened or pale skin tone).

### Results

*RQ1* asked if characteristics associated with male portrayals in social media marketing differ between US and Chinese luxury fashion brands. As shown in Table I, males portrayed for US audiences depicted physical characteristics and adornments that stressed machismo, ruggedness, aloofness, control, mastery over the environment, outdoor work, and bold, testosterone-fueled lives. Specifically, US social media was more likely to depict men with the following characteristics: short to medium-length hair; dry, natural hairstyles; receding hairlines, balding, or bald; facial hair; natural, unadorned faces; tanned skin; tattoos; bare skin or shirtless; muscular bodies; athletic clothing; and sunglasses or body piercings.

In contrast, males portrayed for Chinese audiences featured more characteristics associated with East Asian hybrid masculinities than characteristics associated with Western or regional hegemonic masculinity. Specifically, Chinese social media was more likely to show men with wet, slicked or moussed hair; smooth, clean-shaven faces; willowy bodies; artificially lightened or pale skin; obvious cosmetics; earrings; and casual or formal attire. Table I presents the number and percent of luxury fashion magazine social media posts by country in which male models displayed each characteristic.

### Discussion

Study 1 suggests that emerging hybrid masculinities in East Asia have altered male depictions in luxury fashion marketing on Chinese social media. They neither align with characteristics of regional hegemonic masculinity, such as eyeglasses associated with the scholarly *Wen* or muscular and tanned bodies associated with *Wu*, nor global hegemonic masculinity more aligned with Western norms.

In US social media marketing for luxury fashion magazines, 83.8 percent of male portrayals adhere to global hegemonic masculinity norms for muscular bodies, which is consistent with the 81 percent reported for US television commercials (Fowler and Thomas, 2015)

Characteristics	PRL	USA (n = 179)		Chinese (n = 192)		$\chi^2$ test
		n	%	n	%	
<i>Hair</i>						
Short to medium-length hair (i.e. above the ears and neck)	75	71	39.7	21	10.9	40.995****
Moderately long or longer hair (i.e. covers some or all of the ears or neck)	75	84	46.9	165	85.9	63.874****
Wet, slicked or moussed hairstyle	83	76	42.5	153	79.7	54.347****
Dry, natural hairstyle without obvious use of hair gel or other styling products	84	98	54.7	38	19.8	48.752****
Receding hairline, balding or bald	100	12	6.7	3	1.6	6.312**
Smooth, clean-shaven faces	86	122	68.2	166	86.5	17.867****
Facial hair (e.g. stubble, mustache or beard)	86	57	31.8	26	13.5	17.867****
<i>Skin</i>						
Artificially lightened or pale skin tone	80	3	1.7	172	89.6	287.266****
Tanned or dark skin tone	79	174	97.2	17	8.9	289.508****
Obvious cosmetics (e.g. colorful or bright lipstick, eyeliner or eye shadow)	90	3	1.7	119	62.0	152.633****
Natural, unadorned face (i.e. no obvious cosmetics use)	90	176	98.3	73	38.0	152.633****
Tattoos	96	23	12.8	6	3.1	12.156****
Bare skin or shirtless	99	11	6.1	1	0.5	9.363***
<i>Body type</i>						
Willowy body type (e.g. thin or skin and bones)	93	8	4.5	44	22.9	26.158****
Muscular body type (obviously muscular with evident muscle-mass)	97	150	83.8	122	63.5	14.614****
Body type indeterminate due to loose clothing or too little of the body shown	92	21	11.7	26	13.5	0.274
<i>Clothing and accessories</i>						
Casualwear (e.g. t-shirts, sweaters or blue jeans)	84	77	43.0	147	76.6	43.575****
Formalwear (e.g. a tuxedo or other formal attire)	81	31	17.3	50	26.0	4.130**
Classic menswear/business attire (e.g. suits and ties)	81	53	29.6	46	24.0	2.670
Athleticwear (e.g. sports-related clothing, baseball cap or cowboy hat)	100	13	7.3	6	3.1	3.264*
Feminine-color clothing (e.g. lavender, rose or pink)	94	5	2.8%	15	7.8%	4.576**
Masculine-color clothing (e.g. navy blue or olive green)	70	78	43.6	79	41.1	0.224
Neutral-color clothing (e.g. black, white or grey)	75	70	39.1	80	41.7	0.252
Earrings	97	7	3.9	34	17.7	17.941****
Sunglasses or body piercings	100	23	12.8	8	4.2	9.12***
Regular glasses	100	8	4.5	15	7.8	1.781
Wristwatches	98	29	16.2	20	10.4	2.704*

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.005$ ; \*\*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table I.**  
Masculinity characteristics in USA vs Chinese luxuryfashion magazine social media posts

and 88.7 percent reported for US magazine advertisements (Kolbe and Albanese, 1996). US social media posts of men depicted 39.7 percent with shorter hair, 31.8 percent with facial hair, 12.8 percent with sunglasses or body piercings and 6.1 percent as partially nude, which is similar to the incidence in US fashion magazine print advertisements of the late 1990s, which Kolbe and Albanese (1996) found depicted 47.1 percent of men with shorter hair, 29.3 percent with facial hair, 7.8 percent with sunglasses or body piercings and 10.2 percent as partially nude.

A notable difference between characteristics presented to US vs Chinese audiences was the almost complete absence of nudity in Chinese posts. Although men often are sexually objectified in US advertisements (Barber and Bridges, 2017), this rarely occurs in Chinese advertisements for luxury fashion brands.

Study 1 indicates global hegemonic masculinity continues to dominate USA but not Chinese male portrayals in social media marketing for luxury fashion brands. However, Chinese consumers' responses to male portrayals in social media marketing is unclear because particular characteristics related to physical attributes, clothing styles or adornments sometimes pertain to multiple masculinities (e.g. global hegemonic masculinity and *Wu* both assume muscular bodies; *Wen* and LFM both assume willowy bodies; global hegemonic masculinity and OGM both assume classic menswear in masculine or neutral colors). Therefore, Study 2 examined overall masculinity types to reveal Chinese consumers' responses to regional hegemonic *Wen* and *Wu* masculinities or emerging LFM and OGM masculinities.

### Study 2: male portrayals in Chinese social media marketing

Study 2 was a field study combining quantitative content analysis of Weibo posts, similar to the Chinese data collected for Study 1, with observations of Chinese consumers' responses to these posts – likes, comments and reposts. (Note: Weibo is China's primary visually-oriented social media platform.) To extend generalizability, Study 2 examined masculinities in brand-sponsored Weibo posts for luxury-fashion-clothing brands, whereas Study 1 examined brand-sponsored posts promoting luxury fashion magazine brands.

Weibo posts from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016 were collected from brand-sponsored sites for the luxury-fashion-clothing brands with the highest net worth (Forbes, 2015). These brands were categorized by their primary Chinese target market (Bain and Company, 2017; Guo, 2015). Dior, Armani, Louis Vuitton, Hermes and Ralph Lauren offer products attractive to a broad range of Chinese luxury fashion consumers. In contrast, Gucci, Burberry, Prada, Versace, Fendi, Coach and Givenchy primarily focus on 18–35-years-old female Chinese consumers.

Coder training and procedures were identical to Study 1. Coders analyzed all posts ( $n = 690$ ) with at least one male whose characteristics could be determined. Coded variables included advertised brand, ethnicity (Asian, Caucasian or other), skin tone (light, dark or indeterminant) and celebrity (present vs absent).

Because a post could contain multiple masculinities, each masculinity type was coded as present or absent. (Note: 81 posts with multiple or unclassifiable – not LFM, OGM, *Wen* or *Wu*—masculinities were discarded). The coding sheet helped to categorize the different masculinities by providing definitions and photo exemplars.

### Results

Hybrid masculinities ( $n = 351$ ) appeared more often than regional hegemonic masculinities ( $n = 339$ ). However, posts most frequently featured *Wen* ( $n = 283$ ), followed by LFM ( $n = 222$ ), OGM ( $n = 129$ ) and *Wu* ( $n = 56$ ).

A series of multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) assessed consumers' responses to masculinities in Weibo posts. Because raw repost, commenting and liking data are skewed, a logarithmic transformation was used to normalize the data before analysis.

Regarding *RQ2*, LFM and OGM received more positive responses than *Wen* and *Wu*. MANOVA results indicate response differences across masculinities (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.886$ ;  $F = 9.394$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Univariate *F*-tests revealed differences for all three responses: likes ( $F = 25.557$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ), comments ( $F = 22.467$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ) and reposts ( $F = 22.364$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Table II's bottom row shows the logarithmically transformed response results by masculinity. Simple contrasts indicate no difference in likes between *Wen* and OGM ( $p = 0.532$ ), but *Wen* and OGM received more likes than *Wu* ( $p$ 's  $\leq 0.04$ ) and LFM received the most likes ( $p$ 's  $< 0.001$ ). Chinese consumers wrote the most comments about posts featuring LFM ( $p$ 's  $< 0.001$ ), more comments about OGM than *Wen* or *Wu* ( $p$ 's  $< 0.050$ ), and more comments about *Wen* than *Wu* ( $p \leq 0.050$ ). The most reposts featured LFM

**Table II.**  
Moderators of  
masculinity's effect on  
behavioral responses  
to Weibo posts

	n	Likes				Comments				Reposts			
		Wén	Wù	LFM	OGM	Wén	Wù	LFM	OGM	Wén	Wù	LFM	OGM
<i>Celebrity status</i>													
Non-celebrity	265	4.35 <sup>a</sup>	3.61	4.31 <sup>a</sup>	2.72 <sup>a</sup>	2.10 <sup>a</sup>	0.69	1.98 <sup>a</sup>	1.01 <sup>a</sup>	2.88	2.20	2.71 <sup>a</sup>	1.82 <sup>a</sup>
Celebrity	425	4.79 <sup>b*</sup>	3.73	6.63 <sup>b*</sup>	4.76 <sup>b*</sup>	2.77 <sup>b*</sup>	1.47	5.01 <sup>b*</sup>	2.90 <sup>b*</sup>	3.15	2.16	5.94 <sup>b*</sup>	3.47 <sup>b*</sup>
<i>Ethnicity</i>													
Asian	242	4.61	3.91	7.05 <sup>a</sup>	4.93 <sup>a</sup>	3.07 <sup>a</sup>	1.56	5.68 <sup>a</sup>	3.26 <sup>a</sup>	3.68 <sup>a</sup>	2.43	6.65 <sup>a</sup>	3.81 <sup>a</sup>
Caucasian	276	4.21	–	4.41 <sup>b*</sup>	3.99 <sup>b*</sup>	1.85 <sup>b</sup>	–	1.98 <sup>b*</sup>	1.73 <sup>b*</sup>	2.34 <sup>b*</sup>	–	2.68 <sup>b*</sup>	2.41 <sup>b*</sup>
<i>Skin tone</i>													
Light	280	4.62 <sup>a</sup>	5.09 <sup>a</sup>	6.29 <sup>a</sup>	5.68	2.27 <sup>a</sup>	2.94 <sup>a</sup>	4.55 <sup>a</sup>	3.85 <sup>a</sup>	2.83 <sup>a</sup>	3.78 <sup>a</sup>	5.54 <sup>a</sup>	4.43 <sup>a</sup>
Dark	289	3.98 <sup>b*</sup>	3.84 <sup>b*</sup>	5.19 <sup>b*</sup>	4.35	1.83 <sup>b*</sup>	1.18 <sup>b*</sup>	3.49 <sup>b*</sup>	2.48 <sup>b*</sup>	2.34 <sup>b*</sup>	1.74 <sup>b*</sup>	3.99 <sup>b*</sup>	3.04 <sup>b*</sup>
<i>Target market</i>													
General	259	3.93 <sup>a</sup>	3.55	4.85 <sup>a</sup>	4.51	2.02 <sup>a</sup>	1.26	2.75 <sup>a</sup>	2.79	2.92	2.00	3.71 <sup>a</sup>	3.72 <sup>a</sup>
Young female	431	4.87 <sup>b*</sup>	4.44	6.39 <sup>b*</sup>	4.76	2.57 <sup>b*</sup>	2.11	4.67 <sup>b*</sup>	2.77	3.03	2.87	5.50 <sup>b*</sup>	3.03 <sup>b*</sup>
Overall	690	4.53	3.72	5.94	4.63	2.37	1.42	4.11	2.78	2.99	2.16	4.98	3.37

**Note:** Different superscripts between pairs of means within a masculinity for a response indicates a significant difference at  $p \leq 0.05$

( $p$ 's < 0.001), with more reposts for OGM than  $Wù$  ( $p$ 's < 0.050), and no difference in reposts between  $Wén$  and either OGM or  $Wù$  ( $p$ 's  $\geq 0.090$ ).

*RQ3–RQ6* pose potential moderators of the various masculinities' influence on consumers' responses. These analyses should inform practitioners about the boundary conditions for positive responses by Chinese consumers to LFM and OGM masculinities. Simple contrasts compare likes, comments and reposts.

*RQ3:* Masculinity interacts with celebrity status (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.908$ ;  $F = 7.415$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Univariate  $F$ -tests confirm an interaction for likes ( $F = 16.709$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ), comments ( $F = 17.448$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ) and reposts ( $F = 20.107$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Simple contrasts indicate posts with celebrities received more likes and comments than posts without celebrities for LFM, OGM and  $Wén$ , but not for  $Wù$ . Posts with celebrities were reposted more often than posts without celebrities for LFM and OGM, but not for  $Wén$  or  $Wù$  (see Table II).

*RQ4:* Masculinity interacts with ethnicity (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.880$ ;  $F = 11.187$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Univariate  $F$ -tests confirm an interaction for likes ( $F = 28.671$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ), comments ( $F = 31.149$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ) and reposts ( $F = 26.448$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Simple contrasts indicate Caucasian and Asian  $Wén$  portrayals received similar numbers of likes. However, Caucasian  $Wén$  portrayals received fewer comments and reposts than Asian  $Wén$  portrayals. Asian LFM (OGM) portrayals outperformed Caucasian LFM (OGM) portrayals in likes, comments and reposts. (Note: The sample contained no Caucasian  $Wù$  portrayals.)

*RQ5:* Masculinity interacts with skin tone (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.926$ ;  $F = 2.920$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Univariate  $F$ -tests confirm an interaction for likes ( $F = 2.956$ ,  $p \leq 0.010$ ), comments ( $F = 5.380$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ) and reposts ( $F = 5.167$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Posts featuring males with indeterminate skin tone – due to monochrome image, silhouette or colored lighting – were discarded. Simple contrasts indicate lighter-skinned portrayals received more likes, comments and reposts than darker skinned portrayals for each masculinity except likes and OGM, where no difference arose between lighter- and darker-skinned OGMs ( $F = 0$ ,  $p = ns$ ).

*RQ6:* Masculinity interacts with luxury fashion brands' primary target market (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.942$ ;  $F = 4.598$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Univariate  $F$ -tests confirm an interaction for likes ( $F = 4.495$ ,  $p \leq 0.005$ ), comments ( $F = 7.821$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ) and reposts ( $F = 9.394$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). For brands from broad luxury fashion product lines, LFM outperformed  $Wén$  and  $Wù$  in likes,

comments and reposts. OGM outperformed *Wèn* in likes, comments and reposts, and *Wǔ* in comments and reposts but not likes.

In contrast, for brands from product lines primarily targeting young female consumers, LFM outperformed OGM, *Wèn* and *Wǔ* in likes, comments and reposts. There was no difference in likes, comments, or reports among OGM, *Wèn* and *Wǔ*.

For luxury fashion goods, social media posts for brands targeting young Chinese females (mean = 3.36) received more likes than brands targeting Chinese in general (mean = 2.34;  $F = 6.389$ ;  $p \leq 0.050$ ). LFM received more likes, comments and reports when paired in posts with brands targeting young females rather than the general market. *Wèn* received more likes and comments, but not reposts, when paired with brands targeting young females rather than the general market. In contrast, posts featuring *Wǔ* did not differ in likes, comments, or reposts between brands targeting young females rather than the general market. Posts featuring OGM did not differ in likes or comments, but were reposted more often when posts advertised brands targeting the general market rather than young females.

### Discussion

Study 2 shows *Wèn* remains common in social media posts for luxury fashion goods, but OGM and LFM hybrid masculinities engender more consumer responses. However, OGM's advantage over hegemonic masculinities is largest with general luxury fashion consumers, which includes more older and male Chinese consumers, whereas LFM offers greater appeal to both the general and young female Chinese target markets. For example, most comments in response to a Louis Vuitton post featuring LFM actor and singer Jing Boran (井柏然) were made by teenage girls and young women, judging from the profile photos. In comparison, commenters to an Armani post featuring 42-year-old OGM actor Chen Kun (陈坤) ranged from young to middle-aged, although still mostly female, again judging from profile photos.

The lower incidence and effectiveness of *Wǔ* indicates muscular, man-of-action masculinity is less desirable, at least in a luxury fashion context, in Chinese than Western advertising and retail settings where prior research found muscular men-of-action appeared frequently (e.g. Fowler and Thomas, 2015; Gentry and Harrison, 2010; Kolbe and Albanese, 1996; Vokey *et al.*, 2013). It also indicates that privileged Chinese consumers prefer *Wèn* or hybrid masculinity to *Wǔ*, which reestablishes *Wèn* as the dominant hegemonic masculinity in China's gender hierarchy.

Celebrity endorser status influences LFM and OGM substantially and *Wèn* somewhat. As many commenters note the close fit between a celebrity and the advertised brand, the symbolic meaning of hybrid and *Wèn* celebrities should transfer to the brands. For example, many commenters on the Louis Vuitton post featuring LFM celebrity Jing Boran spoke highly of his portrayal in the post and looked forward to seeing him wearing Louis Vuitton more frequently. Some of their comments included “合作愉快，井柏然好帅” (“Such a pleasant cooperation, Jing Boran is so handsome!”) and “谢谢路易威登的邀请，井柏然和路易威登简直是绝配！” (“Thanks Louis Vuitton for inviting Jing Boran to your event. Jing Boran and Louis Vuitton are perfectly matched!”). Commenters on a Burberry post featuring another LFM celebrity, Kris (Yifan) Wu (吴亦凡), stated “凡凡和Burberry好配哦！” (“Such a good match between Kris and Burberry!”) and “我也想要有吴亦凡名字的Burberry围巾。” (“I really want to have a Burberry scarf with Kris Wu's name on it.”). The Armani post with OGM actor Chen Kun wearing a blue velvet Giorgio Armani suit elicited comments such as “坤把这衣服穿的更好看了。” (“Kun makes this suit even better.”) and “真优雅” (“very elegant”). Comments on a Gucci post featuring another OGM actor, Jin Dong (靳东), included “名表配绅士，优雅高贵，气度不凡。” (“Gentleman wearing a nice watch, elegant and noble, very extraordinary.”) and “魅力熟男靳东!” (Jin Dong, charming and mature!”).



Consumer response in terms of likes, comments and reposts was especially strong for LFM and OGM celebrities. For example, the Louis Vuitton post with LFM celebrity Jing Boran received 5,403 likes, 1,627 comments and 14,112 reposts, and the Burberry post with Kris Wu received 11,104 likes, 1,953 comments and 5,801 reposts. By comparison, the averages for non-celebrity LFM were 165.3 likes, 13.2 comments and 35.6 reposts. The Armani post with OGM actor Chen Kun received 2,175 likes, 157 comments and 451 reposts, and the Gucci post with Jin Dong received 489 likes, 200 comments and 345 reposts. By comparison, averages for non-celebrity OGM were 34.0 likes, 3.0 comments and 26.1 reposts.

The *white jade* phenomenon was stronger in consumers' responses for all masculinities except OGM, which received comparable likes regardless of skin tone. This result meshes with OGM's rejection of skin-whitening makeup or bleached skin because it incorporates aspects of Western metrosexuals (e.g. frequent tanning to enhance appearance). Finally, the East Asian regional nature of both hegemonic and hybrid masculinities was highlighted by their greater efficacy in eliciting consumers' responses when depicted by Asian rather than Caucasian models.

### General discussion

The studies summarized here explored social media marketing messages for luxury fashion brands and represent an initial exploration of two emerging East Asian hybrid masculinities – "Little Fresh Meat" (LFM) and "Old Grilled Meat" (OGM). Hybrid masculinities incorporate characteristics associated with other gender (e.g. androgynous or feminine), racial or cultural groups. This exploratory research describes the prevalence of LFM and OGM-associated characteristics as well as the prevalence of and consumers' responses to these hybrid masculinities vs global and regional hegemonic masculinities in social media posts for luxury fashion brands. Global hegemonic masculinity portrays men as physically strong, rugged, tough, danger-seeking, aggressive, independent, self-confident, and in control of their emotions and environment while avoiding feminine behaviors and attributes. Regional hegemonic masculinities dominate within certain geographically proximate or culturally connected countries. East Asia has two regional hegemonic masculinities that the Chinese term *Wen* (文) and *Wu* (武). *Wen* is civilized, scholarly and cultured. *Wu* is physically strong and action-oriented.

The current research suggests that emerging hybrid masculinities have displaced hegemonic masculinity in Chinese social media marketing for luxury fashion brands. Male characteristics in US social media marketing mostly align with global hegemonic masculinity. However, male characteristics shown in Chinese social media posts for luxury fashion products were more likely to appear androgynous or effeminate, unlike global or regional (*Wu* or *Wen*) hegemonic masculinities. Additionally, Chinese consumers are more responsive to social media posts for luxury fashion brands featuring hybrid masculinities, especially LFM. In contrast, prior research on magazine advertising from 2008 to 2010 showed adherence to global and regional hegemonic masculinity in China, Taiwan and the USA (Shaw and Tan, 2014). The moderators investigated (i.e. celebrity status, race, skin tone and target audience demographics) alter responses to the masculinity types.

Hence, Chinese luxury fashion marketing no longer mirrors portrayals in Western marketing. Instead, Chinese male portrayals now more closely resemble those found in other East Asian countries, such as Japan or Korea. Adopting these hybrid masculinities is recommended for the continued success of international luxury fashion brands in China.

### Contributions and implications

The current studies, which applied hegemonic and hybrid masculinities to male portrayals in social media marketing for luxury fashion brands, have important implications for cross-cultural advertising, luxury fashion marketing and sociological constructs associated

with masculinity. As it becomes more pervasive, social media marketing increasingly defines, portrays and influences masculinity (Hall, 2015). Furthermore, social media marketing messages for luxury fashion brands are often at the forefront of evolving gender portrayals (Paoletti, 2015).

### *Theoretical implications*

The current research answers the call for more cross-cultural studies on luxury fashion marketing, especially on social media marketing and with theoretical perspectives beyond collectivism vs individualism (Ko *et al.*, 2019). The two studies summarized here apply a new theoretical perspective to cross-cultural luxury fashion marketing. Application of hegemonic and hybrid masculinities in marketing is rare (e.g. Bokek-Cohen, 2016) despite frequent application in sociology and gender studies (e.g. Arxer, 2011; Barber and Bridges, 2017; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018; Pascoe and Bridges, 2016).

Despite the importance of cultural context, most studies of hybrid masculinity have been limited to Western countries. Even sociology and gender studies tend to focus on privileged Western Caucasian males (e.g. Pfaffendorf, 2017). Because the extant literature may not pertain cross-culturally, this research addresses inattention to regional issues in studies of Asian marketing communication elements, cultural norms, symbols and masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Hall, 2015). As social media shifts message production from multinational brands and international advertisers to individual consumers, regional differences based on geographic proximity, language and culture are more likely (Hall, 2015). If cultural artifacts reflect regional masculinities arising from society-wide meanings (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), then social media marketing research is an excellent context for revealing regional masculinities.

Western cultural influences, including mass media and advertising, reinforce hegemonic masculinity (Hall, 2015). Advertisements represent men as vessels for socially desirable masculinities that can augment a brand's appeal and communicate that brand purchase and use enhances maleness (Vokey *et al.*, 2013). Male models are chosen to sell a "looks package" that boosts attitudes toward and purchases of advertised luxury fashion brands (Sharif *et al.*, 2018).

Consumers can create an identity by buying and using products – such as clothing, accessories, hairstyles and cosmetics – that alter self-presentation. Self-presentation is stressed by hybrid masculinities, which amalgamate culturally-valued masculine (e.g. *Wén*) and feminine ideals (e.g. *white jade*) for LFM, or Chinese masculine with Western metrosexual and mid-twentieth century ideals for OGM. As China shifts from an industrial export-oriented economy to a consumer-oriented economy, advertisers are embracing hybrid masculinities that encourage consumption of beauty-enhancing products by associating these masculinities with employment success, popularity, health, self-confidence and sexual attention (Hall, 2015). Because luxury fashion brand purchase and use convey sociocultural and personal meanings from products to users (Ananda *et al.*, 2019; Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015), Chinese consumers seek luxury fashion brands to express their identity (Jun, 2019).

Hegemonic masculinity is the benchmark against which men – especially less privileged ones – position their masculinity (Hall, 2015). Less privileged men often define their masculinity in terms of their limited resources, which often relate to physical strength and interpersonal power (e.g. attempts to dominate women or physical aggression) (Vokey *et al.*, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity in US magazine advertisements appeals more to lower-class than mainstream male audiences (Vokey *et al.*, 2013). Because privileged men have considerable financial, social and political power, they are allowed to explore hybrid masculinities (Arxer, 2011; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Hrynyk, 2015; Pfaffendorf, 2017);

hence, social media marketing and luxury fashion brands targeting them should feature these masculinities.

In China, a luxury fashion brand's communications that feature hybrid masculinities signals to mass-market consumers that the brand appeals strongly to privileged consumers. Compared to US consumers, Chinese consumers are more interested in a luxury brand's ability to communicate status, success and sophistication (Ko *et al.*, 2019). The downstream flow of cultural concepts from privileged to mass-market consumers means understanding emerging hybrid masculinities in social media marketing for luxury fashion brands helps marketers to anticipate future cultural trends.

By relating Chinese consumers' reactions to social media posts to hybrid and hegemonic masculinities, the current research meets the call for efficacy studies of gender portrayals that combine content analysis with consumer response measures (Furnham and Lay, 2018). Most prior research on hegemonic and hybrid masculinities has been conducted via focus groups or qualitative interviews (see Bridges and Pascoe, 2014 for a review) in which the researchers' methodology or unconscious reactions may bias participants' responses. In contrast, observing male model characteristics in and consumers' behavioral responses to social media posts featuring different masculinities complements the qualitative approach of previous studies, which can be prone to question-related, social desirability or acquiescence biases. This description of marketing practice and consumer reactions related to hybrid and hegemonic masculinities both indicates the efficacy of different masculinities and suggests managerial implications related to how each masculinity influences consumer responses to social media posts.

#### *Managerial implications*

Findings reported here have significant implications for international managers of luxury fashion brands. Some international luxury fashion brands and fashion retailers face increasing difficulty as they lose their appeal among young Chinese consumers; however, social media marketing images have helped other luxury fashion brands and retailers succeed in China (Jun, 2019). Social media have global reach and influence brand reputations meaningfully (Kim and Ko, 2010).

Throughout East Asia, many young consumers follow social media marketing for fashion brands (Ananda *et al.*, 2019). Social media benefits the fashion industry by offering customers direct brand interactions. Interacting with customers enhances opportunities for fashion brands in general and luxury fashion brands in particular. Customers can see luxury fashion brands modeled directly (i.e. without third-parties like fashion editors and merchandisers). Posts with photos stimulate customers' immediate desire for luxury products (Kim and Ko, 2012). Model portrayals are the key component and responses to those portrayals affect opinions about luxury fashion brands.

Previous studies on male portrayals mainly were conducted in Western countries, mostly in the USA, and with a focus on Caucasian males. The current research suggests that preferred male portrayals in Western countries may not dovetail with Chinese customers' preferences. Hence, luxury fashion brand managers should consider the cultural context when pursuing Chinese consumers. When depicted by Asian or light-skinned models and celebrities shown to enhance consumer responses to social media messages, emerging masculinities should improve luxury fashion brands' appeal to Chinese consumers, especially among privileged (wealthy and upper-middle class) consumers whose socio-economic power grants them greater latitude to experiment with hybrid masculinities. Such depictions should help luxury fashion brand producers entering or growing sales in China and other East Asian markets. Symbolic meaning, such as that associated with a specific masculinity, is central to a luxury brand's appeal (Ko *et al.*, 2019; Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015), especially among young East Asian consumers (Tangsupwattana and Liu, 2017). To sustain their global image, luxury fashion brands must entice these East Asian consumers.

The stronger behavioral response among Chinese consumers to emerging hybrid rather than hegemonic masculinities would likely pertain to other marketing contexts beyond social media marketing, such as retailing, traditional or web advertising and website design. Thus, practitioners should explore incorporating LFM and OGM masculinities into Chinese marketing communication and retail contexts, especially those promoting luxury fashion products targeting younger consumers or privileged males.

Chinese consumers' tendency to make social comparisons (Kim *et al.*, 2015) has strategic marketing implications for luxury fashion products. Emerging hybrid masculinities provide opportunities for inventive advertising strategies in China's burgeoning luxury fashion market. They suggest a *white jade* appearance, which helps beauty product and services providers meet Asian women's preferences (e.g. Cuny and Opaswongkarn, 2016), may offer similar opportunities for increased sales to men. The more favorable Chinese response to lighter-skinned males and the prevalence and effectiveness of LFM images relate to prior research on fair skin (Gao *et al.*, 2013; Krishen *et al.*, 2014; Leong, 2006; Li *et al.*, 2008; Mak, 2007; Schwartz, 2002). Findings also suggest future research possibilities regarding the power, longevity and applicability of similar masculinities in other East Asian markets. For example, recent ethnographic research indicates that Korean musicians with LFM persona are popular among Vietnamese youth (Thanh, 2014).

Study 2 also contributes to marketing practice by identifying boundary conditions through moderators of the overall greater responsiveness of Chinese consumers to LFM and OGM than other masculinities. Although both emerging hybrid masculinities tend to induce more likes, comments and reposts than hegemonic masculinities for brands targeting luxury fashion consumers, LFM outperforms both OGM and hegemonic masculinities when the target market includes mostly females and younger consumers.

Previous studies indicate that Chinese consumers prefer Caucasian to Asian endorsers (Gao *et al.*, 2013). However, current results show Asians – relative to Caucasians and others – in social media marketing elicited more favorable responses from Chinese consumers, especially when depicted as LFM or OGM. Furthermore, LFM induced more favorable responses than OGM only for Asian models.

LFM and OGM work best in social media advertising and with brands targeting audiences wanting to embrace these emerging masculinities. For example, Study 2 found Weibo posts with Asian LFM elicited the most favorable responses. Weibo users are almost exclusively young Chinese, with 53 percent born during the 1990s and 37 percent during the 1980s, which mimics the youthful LFM masculinity (China Internet Watch, 2014). Chinese luxury consumers are younger than Western luxury consumers (Bain and Company, 2017). Young Chinese affirm their social status and success (*Mianzi*, 面子 or “face”) through luxury purchases (Marketing China, 2016). Thus, LFM models should effectively market luxury fashion products in China.

When the model shown in a social media post was a celebrity, likes and comments increased for *Wen*, LFM and OGM but not *Wu* models. Celebrity status enhanced repost behavior for posts featuring LFM and OGM models, which supports conjectures in the popular press about LFM celebrities' popularity driving responses to social media posts in China. For example, Lu Han (鹿晗), with 26,204,422 Weibo followers, set a record in 2012 for most comments (13,163,859) to a social media post (Lynch, 2014). A birthday message to TFBoys lead singer Wang Junkai (王俊凯), with 19,755,450 Weibo followers, was reposted a record 42,776,438 times (Swatman and Martin, 2015). Hence, marketers should leverage LFM celebrities' huge fan base to highlight marketing efforts.

Symbolic interaction theory, which posits that meaning is attributed to objects through social interactions, may explain the synergy between celebrity status and specific masculinities (i.e. celebrities are social symbols representing cultural values and consumers' role model ideals) (Centeno and Wang, 2017; Hung *et al.*, 2011; Sharif *et al.*, 2018). To boost

their security and confidence when selecting fashion brands, consumers may imitate admired celebrities. Luxury fashion brands could use LFM and OGM celebrities as ambassadors in East Asian markets. For example, Burberry selected LFM celebrity Kris (Yifan) Wu (吴亦凡), who has 21,367,591 Weibo followers, to make his runway debut at its January 2016 finale and then serve as its first non-British brand ambassador in October 2016 (Khoo, 2016). However, using non-celebrity opinion leaders who are LFM or OGMs (e.g. *Wanghong* (网红, internet celebrities) and bloggers) might be a more cost-effective approach to influencer marketing, which prevails in China (Escobedo, 2017; Lucas, 2017).

Although digital communications seem responsible for their diffusion, the popularity of emerging hybrid masculinities in Asia may be due to the increasing buying power of East Asian women who prefer non-stereotypical male and female portrayals in prime-time television commercials. Nonetheless, gender portrayals remain more traditional in Asian than Western European advertisements (Bresnahan *et al.*, 2001; Furnham and Lay, 2018; Grau and Zotos, 2016).

### Conclusion

The current research explored the characteristics, prevalence and response to different masculinities in Chinese social media for luxury fashion brands and provides initial evidence for two emerging hybrid masculinities. These masculinities, called “Little Fresh Meat” (LFM) and “Old Grilled Meat” (OGM) by Chinese, increased social media likes, comments and reposts relative to hegemonic masculinities traditionally associated with male power in China (i.e. *Wén* and *Wú*). These emerging hybrid masculinities, which pervade Chinese social media posts promoting luxury fashion magazine and apparel brands, have counterparts in other East Asian countries. Relative to *Wén* or *Wú*, LFM and OGM encourage more favorable responses to social media marketing. LFM is now the most effective male portrayal in luxury fashion advertisements on Chinese social media, especially for brands targeting younger or female consumers. International marketers who ignore these emerging male portrayals will miss opportunities to attract young Chinese consumers.

### Limitations and future research

Prior content analyses on the characteristics of male advertising models have focused on the USA (Fowler and Thomas, 2015; Kolbe and Albanese, 1996). The current research focuses on emerging East Asian hybrid masculinities in Chinese social media marketing for luxury fashion brands. Study 1 contrasts Chinese posts that contain more characteristics associated with these emerging masculinities to US posts that contain more characteristics associated with global hegemonic masculinity. By examining posts from luxury fashion magazines with both Chinese and US social media marketing – *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, *GQ* and *Esquire* – Study 1 relied on comparable data. However, global luxury fashion magazines may differ less than local luxury fashion magazines, such as *Ray Li* (瑞丽), *Yoho* (风尚志, YOHO!), *Self* (SELF悦己) and *Mochou-Tianxia Nanren* (莫愁 — 天下男人). Hence, future research should compare males in social media marketing for global vs local luxury fashion magazines. Similarly, studying the largest Western (USA) and East Asian (China) economies may obscure differences among smaller markets. Thus, future research should determine the generalizability of the reported findings to other Western and East Asian countries.

Study 2's generalizability regarding masculinities in social media marketing for luxury fashion brands is unknown. Future research should explore LFM and OGM portrayals' efficacy in promoting other products and their likely global acceptance; for example, LFM masculinities might be successful with Western youth, as suggested by the popularity of Justin Bieber, One Direction, BTS and Lucky Blue Smith. Also, hybrid masculinities



portrayed in other Asian advertisements require investigation. Finally, the methods in the current research cannot offer insights into Chinese consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions resulting from masculinity depictions in social media marketing. Although results suggest the prevalence and overall consumer responses to social media posts, reasons for marketers' communication design decisions or consumers' evaluation and purchase decisions only can be inferred. Future studies could use consumer engagement research (e.g. Schivinski *et al.*, 2016) to determine if LFM (OGM) appear more frequently in brand-related social media for younger (middle-aged) Chinese.

OGM was less effective at increasing likes, comments and reposts over *Wén* and *Wú* masculinities than LFM, which may be a byproduct of the sampled social media posts. Study 2 suggests LFM has greater appeal among youths. Because younger Chinese are more engaged with social media posts for luxury fashion brands than older Chinese (Bain and Company, 2017), future research should examine a marketing medium more used by middle-aged Chinese to determine if LFM remains more powerful than OGM in boosting consumer responses.

Unlike US fashion luxury posts that depicted male sexual objectification consistent with prior research (Barber and Bridges, 2017; Kolbe and Albanese, 1996), Study 1 noted that male nudity and even partial nudity were almost non-existent in social media marketing targeting Chinese audiences. Although not specifically coded, a perusal of posts from Study 2 confirms these results in social media marketing images specifically developed for the Chinese audience, although not in standardized marketing images. Future research could explore reasons for such cross-cultural differences in male sexual objectification.

If brands use the same Western male portrayals targeting both US and Chinese audiences, the nudity level remains the same. However, the nudity level significantly decreased if brands use Chinese male portrayals in social media posts, especially on Weibo.

The two empirical studies summarized here reflect the current state-of-affairs for emerging hybrid masculinities in social media marketing for luxury fashion brands. Cultural values, norms, attitudes and beliefs that affect the meaning and preference for certain masculinities evolve and are altered or reinforced by marketing messages. Future longitudinal research should investigate China's and other East Asian countries' masculinities in marketing communications. In particular, additional research should describe how these masculinities diffuse from privileged to mass-market consumers. Will these emerging East Asian masculinities follow the path of many fashions, fads and cultural practices by trickling down from the privileged to the common people?

Although these emerging hybrid masculinities in East Asia may indicate a changing power balance among genders (Arxer, 2011; Hall, 2015; Luther and Smith, 2014), blurring the gender line and incorporating characteristics of other masculinities into a culture's portrayal of men (i.e. hybrid masculinity) allows privileged males to surreptitiously retain and secure their power and position while creating the illusion that change has occurred (Barber and Bridges, 2017; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Pascoe and Bridges, 2016; Messerschmidt and Messner 2018; Pfaffendorf, 2017). Future research is needed to determine if emerging hybrid masculinities in China are associated with greater equality of power across genders and social class or whether they allow privileged men to maintain the power traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity while outwardly seeming to distance themselves from it.

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