

Beauty in *RED*:

How Social Media Influencers Construct Aesthetic Norms of Chinese Women

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A senior thesis submitted to the Department of Communication and Media
at the University of Michigan in partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts degree (Honors)

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April 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the following individuals for their invaluable support and contribution towards the completion of this honor thesis paper.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to my advisors, Hollis Griffin and Jimmy Draper, for their unwavering guidance, encouragement, and support throughout the entire project. Their expertise and insights were instrumental in shaping the direction of this work. For Prof. Griffin, I especially appreciate him on always offering his time, dedication to this program, and always being an available resource for all my questions. For Prof. Draper, I would like to thank him for always being prepared for the honor class and giving us countless classic examples and useful information. Moreover, I would like to thank both of them for being the most inspiring person on my academic research path, and also feel grateful for their guidance, advice, and support throughout this rewarding journey of completing a thesis paper. Without their inspiration and engaging conversation during the research period, I would not have learned as much as I did during this process.

Besides, I would also like to thank my classmates in COMM 492 course as well as other friends outside of this class for their invaluable assistance and support, whether it was through brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, or providing technical assistance. Their feedback and constructive criticism helped me to refine and improve the quality of this work.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and my boyfriend for their unconditional love, support, and patience throughout this process. Their unwavering encouragement and belief in me helped me stay motivated and focused, even during the most challenging moments. Thank you all for your invaluable contributions to this paper. I could not have done it without you guys!

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Chapter 1 Introduction	6
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Research Aim and Research Questions	8
1.3 Significance of the Study	8
Chapter 2 Literature Review	9
2.1 Cosmetic Surgery and Facial Dissatisfaction	10
2.2 Post-feminism	12
2.2.1 Definition of Post-feminism.....	12
2.2.2 Post-feminist Sentiments	13
2.3 Social Media Female Influencers.....	15
2.4 Chinese Aesthetic.....	17
2.5 Summary.....	19
Chapter 3 Methodology.....	19
3.1 Research Method.....	19
3.2 Visual Methodology.....	20
3.3 Data Collection	22
3.4 Data Analysis.....	23
3.5 Ethical Considerations	24
3.6 Methodological Limitations	24
Chapter 4 Data Finding-the Process of Construction of Female Aesthetic Norms.....	25

Running head: BEAUTY IN <i>RED</i>	4
4.1 Facial Management.....	25
4.2 Staying Young.....	29
4.3 Body Management.....	32
4.4 Positive Personality Style.....	35
Chapter 5 Discussion.....	39
5.1 How Social Media Influencers Express Female’s Gender Identity.....	39
5.2 How Does Content Posed By Social Media Fashion Women Influencers on <i>RED</i> Generate Ideas about ‘Proper’ Appearance and Female Beauty Norms?.....	41
Chapter 6 Conclusion.....	43
References.....	45

Abstract

With the widespread use of social media in contemporary society, a large number of social media influencers have appeared in the public view and have influenced the lives of the public. This study takes the Chinese social media platform *RED* as an example to analyze the construction of social media influencers' aesthetic norms for women. The research method used in this study is visual methodology. Two prominent social media influencers on the *RED* platform, "Cheng Shian" and "Doudou-babe", were selected as the subjects of this study. The researcher selected 39 posts from the posts made by these two social media influencers to be discussed in this study. By analyzing the posts of the selected social media influencers, the researcher concluded that the combination of the social media influencers' own gender identity and the social media influencers' presentation of their own gender identity on the social media platform and the interaction of the audience resulted in the construction of per appearance and female beauty norms. The results of this study are of reference value and significance for future research on the influence of social media influencers on the public.

Keywords: social media influencers, aesthetic norms, gender identity, female and beauty

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In contemporary society, with the rapid development of the internet, various types of social media have emerged and have become an essential part of life for many people. Social media provides a platform for communication, but it also has two sides to it (Fardouly, Pinkus, and Vartanian, 2017). The use of social media, including viewing glorified photos of peers and liking or commenting on others' posts, can lead to comparisons that increase self-consciousness about one's appearance, leading to appearance anxiety, especially among females. As an internal report by social media outlet Facebook shows, using social media increases the likelihood that women will experience body image issues, primarily due to unrealistic or Photoshopped content created by the influencers or peers they follow (Bue, 2020).

Women are more susceptible to the spread of beauty norms on social media due to the long-standing cultural expectations that emphasize female beauty. In many societies, women are expected to conform to certain beauty standards, and social media has become a platform where these expectations are magnified and amplified. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and Tiktok, are known for their visual nature and focus on aesthetics, which often leads to the promotion of unrealistic and unattainable beauty standards (Bue, 2020). This emphasis on female beauty reflects broader societal norms and values that are reinforced through a variety of media channels, including advertising, television, and film. These cultural expectations make social media a place that places particular emphasis on female beauty, and women may feel pressure to conform to these standards.

This is also the case in Chinese social media, where having great looks has become an important label for Chinese women to present themselves on social media, and where the female population has developed an appearance anxiety dilemma as a result of social media. The vast majority of Chinese women choose to pursue an aesthetic perception of a youthful appearance, a lean body type, and light skin (Ahadzadeh, Sharif, and Ong, 2017).

With the development of social media, the “beauty economy” industry has changed dramatically in the wave of the Internet. Chinese social media fashion influencers have become a major driver of the new economy. The emergence of social media fashion female influencers in different fields has had a huge impact on female perceptions of beauty, especially on the platform *Little Red Book* (*RED*) (Chan, 2022). *RED* (Chinese: 小红书; pinyin: xiǎohóngshū) is a popular social media and e-commerce platform in China that is a counterpart of Instagram (Chan, 2022). The latest figures from *RED* show that it has over 100 million active users, 90.41% of whom are women (Chan, 2022). As a typical sharing community, *RED* has attracted a large group of female users in collaboration with various obvious, online celebrities. These social media influencers are the most likely to post their well-groomed photos online (Li, 2022). The *RED* platform is full of ‘standardized’ beautiful bodies, and it is difficult for users to fully escape the influence of the social media platform’s atmosphere and personalized recommendations, making them vulnerable to the ‘appearance anxiety’ created by the social media platform.

On *RED*, the ‘appearance anxiety’ generated by social media is more accurately communicated to women through the content tagging and social chain recommendation mechanisms used by *RED* (Tiggemann, Anderberg, and Brown, 2020). Young women, as the main actual and target audience of *RED*, are more sensitive to the aesthetic standards on social

media. At the same time, most female audiences are easily attracted to and follow the celebrity bodies that populate social media and are influenced by the herd mentality, Pemarathna, 2019). With a fan-based economy, influencers are competing for traffic hotspots, using their fan base to share content on how to get the perfect body, clothes, and make-up on a ‘stage’ of their own making. As a result, more and more people subconsciously feel that “white, thin, and youthful” is the only standard of beauty for Chinese people, and they follow suit in order to stay fashionable and beautiful. Under such aesthetic standards, women gradually develop psychological stress and a crisis of self-identity and are unable to make positive self-evaluations of their appearance and body (Pemarathna, 2019). In the absence of social identity and self-identity, females begin to invest a lot of money and time in “processing” their appearance. This sense of ‘processing’ continues to attract young people to invest huge amounts of energy and money in self-grooming and self-transformation. As a result, an increasing number of females are joining the ranks of excessive weight loss and cosmetic surgery, reinforcing an alienated social aesthetic (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2016).

1.2 Research Aim and Research Questions

The research aim is to explore how social media influencers construct aesthetic norms of women.

RQ1: How do social media fashion female influencers express female gender identity?

RQ2: How does content posted by social media fashion women influencers on RED generate ideas about ‘proper’ appearance and female beauty norms?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the study of social influence and how social media affects people's attitudes. By analyzing the influence of social media influencers on female aesthetic norms, the study can provide insight into how social media shapes cultural norms and aesthetics. The audiences of social media influencers vary greatly depending on the market segment or industry in which they operate. However, in general, social media influencers tend to have diverse audiences that include individuals from different age groups, genders and cultural backgrounds. These audiences typically follow influencers because they are interested in their content, whether it is about beauty, lifestyle or entertainment. Also, the current study involved an audience of social media influencers, including groups from different gender and cultural backgrounds who were interested in the content of their posts and some who tweeted posts because of their use of social media platforms. The current study informs future research on the interaction between social media influencers and their audiences. Moreover, this study has practical implications. The findings of this study can help companies design marketing campaigns that minimize negative effects on women's self-esteem and body image. Marketers and companies can use the results of this study to understand what types of content and messages are less likely to promote unrealistic beauty standards and instead promote positive and healthy beauty standards.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is a review of the literature on related research questions. This will be divided into four main sections. The first part is a review of the literature related to Cosmetic surgery and facial dissatisfaction; the second part mainly provides literature related to

post-feminism; the third part focuses on literature related to social media female influencers and the fourth part mainly deals with literature related to aesthetics in China.

2.1 Cosmetic Surgery and Facial Dissatisfaction

A selfie is a number of self-portrait photos taken using a webcam or smartphone and uploaded to social media sites (Weiser, 2015). Women are more likely and frequent to take selfies and post a large number of selfies on social media sites compared to men (Dhir et al., 2016). According to Murray (2015), selfies are a common and powerful way to showcase and express oneself. Individuals often want to present an image of their ideal body in selfies and post photos of their ideal body on social media sites (Grogan et al., 2018). Therefore, viewing and scrutinizing photos when posting selfies can expose women to the concept of the ideal body and facial appearance.

Selfie editing is the act of making changes to one's selfie and posting it on SNS, which involves cropping the photo as well as using photo editing software and filters (Fox and Rooney, 2015). Cohen et al. (2018) further found in their study that a new vulnerability factor for dissatisfaction with body images was selfie editing. Furthermore, the popularity of photo editing apps is playing a significant impact in the field of cosmetic surgery (Rajanala et al., 2018). For example, a study by Belluz (2018) showed that some patients transform their photos into reality by carrying their own filtered and edited photos and asking the doctor to follow the edited body image. This psychological phenomenon is also known as Snapchat deformity. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2019) found that people's use of photo-editing apps significantly increased their consideration of cosmetic surgery.

Based on these findings, several studies have further demonstrated that selfie editing may further drive people's behavior towards personal body checking. Chua and Chang (2016) argued that during the selfie editing process, editors scrutinize their body image. Then based on comparison with socio-cultural standards, they think about how to modify it and expect to modify it in an editorial way to be closest to their ideal appearance image. Thus, through selfie editing, those who edit their selfies are more likely to notice the extent to which there is a gap between their actual body image and their ideal body image. Upon perceiving this gap, people can develop immense negative emotions and feel extremely dissatisfied with their bodies (Ahadzadeh et al., 2017). In fact, this finding was demonstrated in a study by McLean et al. (2015). According to McLean et al. (2015), women's body image dissatisfaction increased as they invested more time and effort into altering their selfies. Cohen et al. (2018) found a strong relationship between body dissatisfaction and higher psychological feelings of bulimia symptoms in young women and more investment in selfie activities like photo editing and selection. Selfie editing causes young women to feel more negatively about their bodies and faces, as Tiggemann et al. (2020) discovered. Women are prompted by this unhappiness with their appearance to take both internal and exterior steps to address it, for example, one may change one's body image by undergoing cosmetic surgery and the act of dieting to achieve one's ideal body shape (Sun, 2021).

Furthermore, Rajanala et al. (2018) argued that the use of photo-editing apps can lead to an increase in inappropriate aesthetic perceptions among women, which significantly disconnects them from reality and creates an inappropriate and unrealistic expectation that they should strive for their ideal body and facial image. In order to achieve their ideal body form, some women

may be motivated by this anticipation to undertake cosmetic surgery (Zhang and Wen, 2017). Additionally, Chinese ladies frequently edit their selfies (aurora data institute, 2016). According to Rajanala et al. (2018), Chinese women may use selfie editing techniques and modify them to make themselves look better. Such selfie-editing methods can encourage women to improve and beautify their pictures and get cosmetic surgery to make the pictures resemble filtered and edited versions. A study of Chinese adolescents found a positive correlation between viewing selfies and facial dissatisfaction (Wang et al., 2019). Tiggemann et al. (2020) found that selfie editing was a significant influence on young women feeling dissatisfied with their faces, but did not have a significant effect on feeling dissatisfied with their bodies. This study suggests that when editing selfies, women may be more concerned with their facial attractiveness than with their body shape and weight. This can raise the perception of personal imperfections and increase dissatisfaction with aspects of their facial appearance. Therefore, the present study is consistent with the Tiggemann et al. (2020) study in that facial dissatisfaction may prompt women to opt for holistic surgery.

Therefore, combining these findings, this study concludes that facial dissatisfaction is an important factor for young Chinese women to consider cosmetic surgery to improve their appearance. In selfie editing, the process of viewing and examining selfies can lead women to develop a clear perception of their facial imperfections and the resulting dissatisfaction with their own faces. Selfie editing may lead to a greater tendency to undergo cosmetic surgery to achieve the desired beautiful facial appearance.

2.2 Post-feminism

2.2.1 Definition of Post-feminism

The concept of Post-feminism is a highly controversial topic in mass media and feminist studies. Few scholars agree on a precise definition of the term. The term is validated and has a variety of different characteristics. Post-feminism stands in stark contrast to feminism and indicates a historical turning point by encapsulating the epistemic rupture within feminism and suggesting cooperation with other “post” movements, such as post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and suggesting links to the Third Wave (Berkowski, 2017). In line with this view, Thompson and Kingree (2010) argued that post-feminism is an important analytical term for the patterns or rules of experience in contemporary cultural life, including the disappearance of vocabulary that speaks of cultural influences and structural inequalities, the emphasis on choice; individualism as the dominant mode of accounting; the expansion and intensification of forms of monitoring, surveillance, and discipline of the body; and the de-territorialization of patriarchy and its territorialization within the female body and the beauty industrial complex. Crucially, as McRobbie et al. (2009) pointed out, postfeminism is one of the reasons for the demise of feminism.

2.2.2 Post-feminist Sentiments

Gill (2016) outlined several features of post-feminist sentiments, including gender role identification and the conceptualization of masculinity and femininity. Firstly, the prominence given to women’s physical attributes is both key to the value of femininity and the location of femininity (Winch, 2015). This contrasts with the earlier construction of femininity in Western culture. In Western culture, other features of femininity are emphasized despite the frequent presence of problematic femininity. For example, women not only take on the role of motherhood but are also the inherent bearers of certain psychological traits such as empathy.

Although the body is considered to be everyone's project in late modernity, women's demand to perfect and improve their bodies has reached such a strong level that it has been argued that patriarchy has been re-stereotyped in the beauty and fashion industries (McRobbie, 2009). A key aspect reflected in this is that this aesthetic labor must be seen as a free choice for women, rather than a cultural imperative that women simply please themselves (Elias et al., 2017).

The key theme of post-feminist obsession with appearance and the body. Gill (2016) argued that today is an era centered on the conceptualization of femininity, where femininity is primarily embodied in appearance rather than psychological or social structures. Historically, femininity has been characterized as having emotional, passive, maternal, or caring features. While some feminine identities may still be centered on this conception of femininity, many academics contend that beauty has supplanted other aspects of femininity (Douglas, 2010). These academics contend that following the Second Wave movement, women must exhibit femininity in their looks (Douglas, 2010). As long as they maintain their femininity and maintain a beautiful appearance, it is more socially acceptable for women to demonstrate some masculine character qualities like authority, independence, and leadership (levy, 2005).

Many feminist academic agrees that feminism has succeeded in altering how women view femininity. According to feminism, women should be free to reject societal expectations regarding their looks and personality. Rubin et al. (2004) examined the bodily consciousness of women who identified as feminists using qualitative data. They discovered that feminists struggle to give up the notion of pursuing beauty, just like other women. However, feminism offers women a number of strategies to resist cultural beauty behaviors. According to Stuart and Donaghue (2011), many women engage in beauty awareness as a means of boosting their status

and confidence among other women. However, post-feminism seeks to reaffirm the gender differences between men and women. In a post-feminist media environment, traditional gender roles appear to be sexualized or glorified. With the support of neoliberalism, women are now free to choose to return to traditional gender roles. Rather than being enforced, gender roles are now celebrated, and as such, it is encouraged (Negra, 2009). The popularity and success of the beauty industry, the continued bombardment of women with advertisements for beauty products, and the continued appearance of celebrities and fashion influencers. The beauty industry is increasingly pushing women to fight the rate of aging through cosmetic surgery and cosmetics (Negra, 2009). According to McRobbie (2009), this tendency is a result of efforts to recover femininity at a time when women are becoming more independent and less dependent on males. Therefore, taking these findings together, this study argues that in a post-feminist era, as Chinese women's conceptions of aesthetics continue to deepen, women have full freedom and rights to make decisions that respond to their aesthetic choices.

2.3 Social Media Female Influencers

The characteristics of the influencer category have been studied and summarised by a number of scholars. Influencers differ from traditional celebrities in terms of the source of their fame and the nature of their influence. Shi (2021) argued that while traditional celebrities are recognized and acknowledged by the public for their abilities or appearance, influencers get followers and market their brands by producing highly engaging original material. Influencers routinely communicate with their fans online and disclose highly private content. These glimpses into the influencers' personal lives for their followers lead them to have a lot in common with their followers, and these followers strive to bring themselves closer to their influencers (Li,

2021). Teenagers follow their favorite influencers because they believe they are trustworthy sources of knowledge and inspiration, which may have an impact on how they decide to consume (Perloff, 2014).

Furthermore, research has shown that seeing sophisticated, gorgeous photos posted by some female influencers on social media, including tall and slim bodies, can increase the likelihood that women will be anxious about their body shape and appearance (Murray, 2015). Some research conducted by Fardouly et al. (2017) suggests that young women's use of social media creates a negative mindset. These women are more inclined to seek possibilities to change their appearance, for example, to have fairer, smoother, and younger skin. Some studies have found that influencer engagement is tied to women's dissatisfaction with their body image (Holland and Tiggemann, 2016). There is no shortage of celebrities on social media, with many fashion influencers posting pictures of make-up and outfits to show off their beautiful bodies. However, not all of them have the same ideal body as celebrities, even if they dress like female influencers. Social media has provided a vast platform for young women, and women, as well as female influencers, to express themselves by posting images. Women's judgments of appearance and body image occur more frequently (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, through pictures posted by female influencers on social media, people are more likely to find their own shortcomings through comparison, which can lead to personal dissatisfaction.

In China, users can experience a variety of environments through regular exposure to the abundance of videos and photographs uploaded on social media platforms. They can compare their appearance to others in these settings, which may affect how they feel about their own bodies. Women's skin is more prone to acne, especially throughout adolescence when they put

on weight as a result of hormonal effects (Yeung, 2015). In conventional mass media, images of white, slim, and youthful women have never been in short supply. The prevalence of these images has caused many individuals to realize that they are problematic, and as a result, the notions they express may no longer hold as much weight as they once did (Perloff, 2014). However, Perloff (2014) argued that because social media places more focus on attractive peers than on conventional models who are isolated from the lives of regular people, users may internalize excessively ideal images of beauty under peer pressure. In light of this, in an effort to conform their bodies to the idealized one that is promoted on social media and by female influencers, a significant proportion of adolescent girls may attempt to shape up through excessive exercise and dieting, thus the age of girls who are gradually acting out or forming this idea is getting younger (Perloff, 2014). Furthermore, Butler (2018) discovered that some millennial ladies sell nude images of themselves to loan sharks in order to get modest loans; they only do this to buy luxury goods and high-end cosmetics, or to have cosmetic surgery to change the way their bodies look. This implies potential criminal and financial hazards, as well as how having too many body image concerns can result in physical and mental health issues.

Therefore, based on the above research, this study believes that the presentation of female aesthetics by female social media influencers has been recognized by young people. In the process of pursuing the ideal appearance of being white, thin, and young, many young people choose to accept the aesthetic norms constructed so that they conform to the ideal image of beauty.

2.4 Chinese Aesthetic

Skin whitening has been popular in many parts of the world, both in the past and in the present. In China, the metaphor for female skin is like white porcelain or blood cream, which expresses the praise of beautiful qualities such as fairness, transparency, smoothness, and delicacy (Zhang, 2012). The well-known idiom ‘white skin covers three flaws’ reflects the Chinese perception and importance of a fair complexion. This idiom is still widely used today. This fact also indicates that the Chinese aesthetic of light skin tones is still dominant. Samizadeh (2022) found that the beauty ideal of a smooth texture, fair skin, and a thin, small face has been highly revered in Asia and can also be found in Asian literature and poetry across the states. Despite the global influence of Western media on beauty standards, Asians prefer to retain their racial identity and have always been committed to improving their facial features and enhancing their beauty through cosmetic surgery and treatments.

Social media and beauty companies have also intentionally led Chinese women to believe that lighter skin tone is an important beauty criterion. According to Berkowski (2017), when women choose the image they want and work towards it, it is often seen as a sign that they are freeing themselves from traditional gender roles and focusing on their own beauty and needs. However, According to Arnould et al. (2011), this is a loss rather than a gain. This is because Chinese women often forget to value and cherish their beauty and healthy bodies in their pursuit of beautiful images in photographs produced by advertisements and published by influencers. Based on post-feminism, women are given the right to choose to do whatever they want with their bodies and faces without being punished by ideology (Mercer, 2010). As Chen (2016) pointed out, in China, local female celebrities have talked in interviews about their experiences of rebelling and pursuing their dreams. When asked how to pique men’s interest, Chinese actress

Gao Yuanyuan advised female readers to “be yourself” rather than try to please them in interviews. Therefore, based on the above literature, the influence of Chinese social media female influencers on women’s aesthetic perceptions of the pursuit of whiteness, thinness, and youthfulness is worth examining and reassessing.

2.5 Summary

In summary, relevant theoretical and empirical studies have demonstrated that Chinese social media female influencers significantly influence the public, especially women. Based on the review of related studies, regarding the research questions this study reviewed the relevant literature and mainly focused on cosmetic surgery and selfie editing, post-feminism, social media female influencers, and Chinese aesthetics.

From these studies, it was concluded that social media influencers shaped and influenced women’s attitudes toward their facial imperfections and the pursuit of white, thin, and young aesthetics through their posts on social media sites. It is argued that these women often undergo cosmetic surgery to improve and refine their faces to achieve the same desired image as the social media female influencers. However, this study finds a lack of attention on how fashion influencers on Chinese social media Xiaohongshu present and construct female aesthetic norms, and thus, this study is a strong addition to the field.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Method

Qualitative research is a method or perspective of studying social phenomena or things in terms of their properties and contradictory changes in motion, in terms of their intrinsic

prescriptive nature, which can be gathered through observation, experience, or on-site interviews (Allan, 2020). Qualitative research can facilitate discussion, gain a detailed view of the subject of the study and provide depth and detail, meaning that the causes are explored through ideas, perceptions, and behaviors (Allan, 2020). This study focused on how Chinese social media fashionable female influencers on the *RED* platform construct the aesthetics of body imagery among Chinese women. This type of research is empirically and phenomenologically based, rather than discussing quantitative data through extensive calculations (Allan, 2020), so this study used qualitative methods rather than quantitative methods. Specifically, it analyzed data from Chinese women's qualitative social network texts on the *RED* platform to analyze how they present aesthetic norms of the body in their social network texts.

3.2 Visual Methodology



Rose (2022) proposes a critical approach to vision in order to explore vision in terms of social practices, power relations, and cultural meanings. Her visual methodology argues that social science researchers should start by thinking about the social conditions and influences of visual objects as well as considering how researchers view images in their own way (Lichtman, 2002). Rose's (2022) visual methodology helped this study to explore the content of images and videos on *RED* and also relate this content to the social context, social conditions, and influences in which they are found. As visual patterns are always constructed, this study needs to adopt a critical approach to interpreting the meaning of visual images. Rose (2022) explains that the three sites of meaning construction for visual images are production, image, and viewer, therefore this study can also consider how the three elements of social media influencers' production, the image itself and the viewer come together to construct aesthetic norms.

The purpose of this study specifically wanted to analyze how fashion influencers have expressed female gender identity and produced appropriate appearance and feminine aesthetic norms by focusing on content such as social media posts, videos, and images. Duffy and Hund's (2015) study provides insights into the purpose of the address. They show that fashion blogs are an ideal site to explore how female social media producers represent their brand image and that these bloggers with their personal style can go some way to demonstrating how the discursive practices of male entrepreneurialism have negotiated and influenced norms of heterosexual femininity (Lewis, 2014). In that study, bloggers were considered as a representation and extension of bloggers. Therefore, in this study, the posts, videos, and images above *RED* are an extension or representation of fashion influencers. For this reason, this study can consider how the fashion consumer market, audience gazing, and commercials shape and produce the aesthetic appearance and femininity norms of fashion influencers. The expression of content by fashion influencers through videos, posts, and images can be seen as a convention and a form of aesthetic expression. Pham (2015) argues that fashion can be seen as a fundamental function of body technology, and Cixous (1994) describes it as shelter, mirror, shield, and shimmer. Fashion sustains the continuity between the body, clothing, world, and hand (Cixous, 1994). Pham (2015) argues that participatory media shapes a new visual paradigm in which the power relationship between the viewing subject and object becomes more dynamic, meaning that the viewed (i.e. fashion influencer in this study) is both an object and an agent through user-generated media (i.e. *RED* in this study). Pham (2015) points out that participatory media allows networked subjects and represented objects to participate in controlling and shaping their performance, which in this study means that fashion influencers and fan users on *RED* are collectively influencing when

videos or photos are posted, the position of the head, body and face in relation to the camera, the way text and captions are written and the way content is shared. In this process, these objects of gaze (i.e. users or viewers) are co-creators of the interpretive conditions (Rocamora, 2011; Pham, 2015) through which feminine aesthetic norms are presented and seen.

3.3 Data Collection

For the purpose of this study and within the constraints of time and effort, two fashion influencers on the RED platform, each with over 4 million followers, were finalized and focused on. They are both popular female influencers and are active in the areas of make-up, fashion matching, fashion clothing, face, and body care. They publish pictures, videos, and posts about these areas. Thirty-nine posts from these two influencers were selected for this study, covering the period from November 1 to December 1, 2022. McQuarrie et al. (2013) showed that fashion blogs based on visual phenomena typically require 20-40 posts to be used for analysis, so an appropriate number of posts were selected for this study. These two influencers are 25 and 26 years old respectively and have long-term careers as fashion influencers. Their age and skin color reveal that they fit the heterosexual aesthetic profile of the Chinese consumer market such as fair-skinned, young, and well-built (Otis, 2021).

Fashionable female influencer at RED	Account name	Gender	Number of followers	Specialist areas
<u>Cheng Shian</u>		Female	809.2 million	Beauty
<u>Doudou-Babe</u>		Female	405.0 million	Skincare

3.4 Data Analysis

Textual analysis is a method of describing, interpreting, and understanding text (Wickham, 2016). This research analyzed the blog content and comment threads posted by social media fashion female influencers. Firstly, textual analysis involves identifying the research question: how fashion influencers express female gender identity and how social media content produces appropriate appearance and feminine aesthetic norms. Secondly, the raw data was extracted and cleaned to remove various useless characters, and incomplete sentences at the end of lines. Then it involves feature extraction, i.e. the extraction of features of the aesthetic view of the body from the text for generalization and classification, then simplifying the text and coding keywords or phrases. Next, conceptual relationships were explored and coded (Wickham, 2016). Since the content was taken from Chinese social media sites, the selected content needed to be translated from Chinese to English for presentation. In order to maintain the accuracy of the translated content, a back translation strategy was adopted in this study (Brislin and Freimanis, 2001). Back translation is often a form of quality assurance (Brislin and Freimanis, 2001), which requires the translation of the text into the original language. In this study, the extracted content was translated from Chinese to English by the researcher (Document 1), however, a professional translator was hired to translate this Document 1 from English to Chinese (Document 2). Behr (2017) showed that this approach can detect if the target content translation deviates from the original meaning. This approach could further support the quality of the data in this study to improve reliability and validity.

The text, images, and video elements posted by both influencers were coded which by collating the posts into an Excel spreadsheet and then extracted similar themes or characteristics.

The categories that emerged included facial management (no acne, make-up, smooth skin, skincare), staying young and energetic, body management (fitness, health, and regular diet), and positive character style (love of life, personal charm, outfit matching). Together, these categories constitute a standardized femininity aesthetic in the Chinese consumer market. It draws on post-feminist theory and the concept of aesthetics to analyze how feminine aesthetic norms are constructed in social media content.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Although no interview or questionnaire data were obtained from the participants, ethical issues cannot be ignored in research (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013). This study considered the issue of privacy by anonymizing personal information such as the names of people appearing in the blogs of female social media influencers. In addition, the content of the posts used was cited with the attribution of the source (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013). Some potential risks still exist such as private information on the influencer's homepage, address, gender, and phone number in the post. Although public social media posts are available, there are many studies that have focused on the ethics of data on social media. Because it may also involve copyright, reputational damage, and data on sensitive topics (Town & Wallace, 2016). To this end, this study abides by the principles of fairness, honesty, integrity, compassion, and respect to guide the implementation of this study (Hammersley, 2015).

3.6 Methodological Limitations

The limitation may be that time and effort limit the number of influencers and the number of posts to follow. Although the two case studies are rich in content, focusing only on two fashion influencers may lead to one-sided or inaccurate aesthetic norms. For example, other

studies in this field have focused on more than 2 influencers or bloggers such as the study by McQuarrie et al. (2013) focused on 10 fashion bloggers and Duffy and Hund (2015) focused on 38 fashion bloggers. Because each fashion influencer has unique characteristics and personal style, the findings may not be sufficient to explain the situation of the entire industry such as male beauty influencers. In addition, the participation of researchers affects the objectivity of the research results. Whether it is the selection and elimination of posts, or the extraction of topic categories and the interpretation of topics, it all depends on the interpretation and experience of researchers. This may be a common pitfall of qualitative research, as Androutsopoulos (2008) suggested that the involvement of the researcher may contextualize subjective views, which may lead to bias or generalization. Deepening the explanation and using other literature to explain it may help to improve this limitation.

Chapter 4: Data Finding-the Process of Construction of Female Aesthetic Norms

4.1 Facial Management

The study obtained relevant research data through the data collection phase. The researcher analyzed this information through a text analysis method. The specific information contained image posts made by social media influencers on *RED*.

In terms of constructing women's aesthetics for skin and face management, many of the posts by social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" on *RED* are very useful in constructing women's aesthetics. For example, social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" posted a post about "Five Steps to Enhance Your Aura". The post, titled "Helping your whole body look radiant and smooth," introduces the social media influencer's own care for the body that is usually

overlooked. These specific treatments include the use of the products featured in the video to treat women's lips, hands, and feet. Firstly, for the producer of the post, social media influencer "Doudou_Babe", her posts on various social media platforms, including the *RED*, are all about perfect care for the skin. Secondly, this post by "Doudou_Babe" on helping to brighten the skin of the whole body, which was chosen for this study, shows the same content. The post shows the different treatments and products that "Doudou_Babe" uses for different body skin dullness and other problems. Finally, for the social media influencer audience, the study found from the user comments under this post that the audience comments mostly included "love these little items", "so beautiful", "I'm so impressed!", and "I can only become more beautiful by grasping the details". These keywords show that "Doudou_Babe's" fans agree with this kind of care for the whole body skin.

Also, the aesthetics of fair skin is conveyed in social media influencer "Doudou_Babe's" post. For social media influencer "Doudou_Babe", the skin she shows in the post is fair and smooth without any flaws. This led to many of "Doudou_Babe's" followers leaving comments after the post about how to make their skin fair. One of the posts by social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" was titled "Whitening and anti-aging in one step, I'm one step ahead of beauty". The main content of the post is about how to use the three skin care products recommended by the social media influencer to achieve lighter skin, the ingredients, and the effects of these skin-lightening products. The entire post is about how to make skin whiter through skincare products. The social media influencer also mentions "I'm one step ahead of beauty" in the copy, which implies that one can only become beautiful after one's skin becomes fair, and the post is followed by a lot of *RED* users who desire and love this fair skin.

In addition, the social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” also found traces of the construction of aesthetic norms for women in other posts. The social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” in a post about make-up is also something that can be studied in this data. Social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”’s knowledge and understanding of women’s makeup is shown through her posts about make-up on *RED*. All of the posts show that social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”’s own makeup is perfect, including the flawless cheeks and three-dimensional features that “Doudou_Babe” has created using makeup techniques in this post. For social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”, the entire look is flawless and perfect. Also, in social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”’s post about make-up, the text of the post was “Dating Makeup for the Heart”. The entire post is based on three aspects: makeup, hair, and outfit. The social media influencer’s hair is presented with a high cranial top to modify the shape of the face and head. The post concludes with specific clothing and accessories to modify the body’s deficiencies, including tight pants to reflect the thinness of the body and a lower collar on the top to reflect the slimness of the neck, as mentioned by social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”. These elements were presented by social media influencers in their posts. For other social media users and fans of “Doudou_Babe”, many of them commented below the post with comments such as “That’s beautiful”, “I want your full set!” and “So beautiful”. These comments under the social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” show that people agree with the content of the post.

From the above data on the three different posts of social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”, it is clear that social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” has her own aesthetic

norms in terms of makeup, dressing, and overall skin management and fairness. own aesthetic norms. This aesthetic norm is built through the social media platform *RED*.

In the process of social media influencers' posting to construct female aesthetic norms, "Doudou_Babe" as the producer of the post, i.e., the social media influencer also has a post about this full-body skincare, and the social media influencer's fans, i.e., the users of the post. These three components work together to construct a new feminine aesthetic norm, namely the general aesthetic of fair skin and smooth skin all over the body. The construction of this female aesthetic is based on the construction of the meaning of visual images. According to Rose (2022), the construction of visual image meaning is achieved through the image producer, the image, and the viewer. The social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" posts and creates carefully curated content on the *RED* platform, including posts on skin whitening and total body management, and "Doudou_Babe" displays images through carefully selected products and editors. These images were accompanied by enhanced text, including copies about skin whitening and total body skin management in the postings. Also, because social media influencers' personal brands and aesthetic preferences shape the content they produce, their collaboration with brands further reinforces women's aesthetic standards (Eggerstedt et al., 2020). Second, the images created by social media influencers "Doudou_Babe" as social media influencers are also key players in the construction of aesthetic norms. Digital images can be altered in a variety of ways, including their visual content and interactivity through social media platforms, and the images that "Doudou_Babe" posts on the *RED* platform about skin whitening and full-body skin management are also filtered, cropped, and edited with other software tools to create a specific emotional tone. These images are then shared and distributed on the *RED*

platform, inviting viewers to engage with them in various ways, including liking or commenting (Rose, 2022). Thus, for Doudou_Babe, a social media influencer on *RED*, the construction of women's aesthetics is conveyed through the aesthetics of the social media influencers themselves, as well as through the posts on the *RED* platform and the likes and interactions of users and fans that these posts generate on the platform. The social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" on *RED* has constructed women's aesthetic norms for fair skin and whole-body skin management through these three perspectives.

4.2 Staying Young

Among the data collected in this study, social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" from *RED* also made posts about anti-aging. The keywords that social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" often mentions in her posts include beautiful, aging, and young, which shows that social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" is in pursuit of younger skin and is resistant to aging. In a post by social media influencer "Doudou_Babe", the social media influencer introduces some products that the social media influencer thinks are better for anti-aging. The social media influencer introduces these anti-aging products with an emphasis on the restorative effects of these products on the skin so that the skin and condition of the face can remain very young. The main keywords in the choice of copy about the video included anti-aging, making the skin exquisitely radiant, and overnight high-energy repair. Underneath the post about anti-aging, there are fans of "Doudou_Babe" and other users of *RED* who are seeking these anti-aging needs.

The comments in the comment section include, "The blogger is really good at choosing brands", "It's really good", "Anti-aging is really necessary" and so on. The comments are all

about the recognition of the products recommended by social media influencers and the anti-aging attitude of social media influencers.

Also, the collection of social media influencers on the *RED* platform included posts about social media influencers keeping delicate about women. The social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” included keywords in the post, including “delicate” and “smelling good all over”. Throughout the post, the social media influencer was targeting the idea of building an aesthetic norm of feminine sophistication through the introduction of some products. The social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” shows her knowledge and attitude towards the aesthetic norms of delicate women through the good editing and production of the post. At the same time, the images in the post also show the social media influencer’s image of delicate and perfection. The exquisite life and environment and the exquisite background of the photo shoot contribute greatly to the exquisiteness of the entire post.

Finally, the number of comments and favorites on the post is in the thousands, illustrating that many social media users agree with the content posted by the social media influencers about women’s exquisite lives. Among all the comments, many of them are “how to buy”, “love it”, “delicate women are the most beautiful”, and so on. It is the interaction of social media users with social media influencers that have built such an aesthetic code for women’s exquisite life. The social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”, as a woman, is widely recognized by the public for her knowledge and attitude towards female aesthetics through images on social media, and has gained the recognition and support of other social media users.

As for the social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” of *RED*, how she constructs female aesthetic norms in this process. First of all, what “Doudou_Babe” plays in this whole process is

her social identity and experience. “Doudou_Babe” spreads her knowledge and experience of the aesthetic norms of beautiful women who are always young and delicate in appearance by posting on the platform of *RED* through its fan base. This is the first aspect of social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”’s construction of the aesthetic norm that women should always look young and delicate.

As a social media influencer, “Doudou_Babe” influences the aesthetic norms and behaviors of other users through the content she disseminates and creates on social media platforms, and through this content, she influences the aesthetic norms and behaviors of other users through these aesthetic norms about the need for women to always look young and delicate. The second aspect is this post about anti-aging posted by “Doudou_Babe” on the *RED* platform. These posts contain pictures and videos. According to Rose (2022), in the context of social production, images are not only representations of reality but are also constructed through the mobilization of social and political identities. As Harrison (2003) argues, photographs are not neutral but are influenced by the photographer's own biases and ideas. Thus, for “Doudou_Babe’s” social media posts about anti-aging and about how to become a delicate woman, it is essentially a process of spreading her own feminine aesthetic norms about how women should keep their appearance youthful and delicate.

The last aspect is the audience. The fans of social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”, as the audience of social media influencers, are indispensable in the construction of female aesthetics. The social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” has made elaborate posts about anti-aging and becoming a delicate woman on *RED* to achieve the aesthetic effect that women should always look young and delicate. For fans of social media influencers, these images and

posts are interacted with by liking and commenting on social media platforms such as *RED*, sharing, etc. This means that other users and viewers of social media can actively participate in the youthful aesthetic concept reinforced by “Doudou_Babe”. At the same time, these users can also interact with the social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” and other viewers through comments, which can further the construction of a female aesthetic. Thus, the social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” constructs female aesthetic norms in the sense of visual images in *RED*.

4.3 Body Management

Cheng Shian constructs an aesthetic standard mainly through its emphasis on body beauty and thinness. This “thinness as beauty” is the main body standard presented by Cheng Shian based on the influencer effect. The “thin waist”, “butterfly back”, “right-angled shoulders” and “arm line” are all concrete expressions of thinness. At the same time, a thin and curvy figure is a further refinement of the Cheng Shian definition of the female figure, with a waist-to-hip ratio and trimline included in the “thinness as beauty” requirement.

Specifically, as a core influencer, Cheng Shian is very conscious of her body management. In her *RED* notes, Cheng Shian shows her A4 waist, her butterfly back without excess fat, and her smooth and good-looking arm muscles through relevant videos, and she also shows users how to effectively develop the aforementioned good body shape. For example, in one of the “Beauty Tips” notes, Cheng Shiani says she is addicted to self-discipline. The secret to her success in losing weight and getting the body she has today over a three-year period was exercise and dieting, without even eating any staple foods for the first year. Words such as these paired with the visual impact of Cheng Shian’s fabulous figure are very likely to trigger an

association with users, namely leading them to believe that they can have the same body with dieting and basic exercise.

For the average female user of *RED*, Cheng Shian's video content is usually centered on daily body showcases and body maintenance methods. Such notes and video content clearly show concrete physical changes in Cheng Shian's body before and after self-discipline, body management, and diet control, which has inspired many users to engage with them. As the comments under the influencer's related notes show, namely users have shown "long legs with white skin", "so skinny with breasts", "long legs with a thin waist", and "this body also shows the charm of a goddess", "this body is also too great", and "curvy body" related comments. In addition, user comments such as "shapely body" and "superb body proportions" highlighted Cheng Shian's proportional beauty. In fact, while these comments complimented Cheng Shian's figure, they also conveyed a greater degree of contemporary standards of female physical beauty, such as the classic thin waist, long legs, and curvy figure. Likewise, users in the comments attribute Cheng Shian's good figure to her own strict self-discipline and body management. So Cheng Shian is one of the key figures in the construction of women's body beauty on the *RED* platform as a benchmark for body image, and they communicate the standard of beauty through their own body beauty displays.

Visual methodology and visual centrism can better explain the norms of stature beauty developed by Cheng Shian in *RED*. Firstly, Rose's visual methodology suggests that the three sites of meaning construction are the image itself, the viewer, and the production (Rose, 2022). In the case of this influencer, it can be seen that the images and videos produced and posted by Cheng Shian, the audience, and the beauty consumer production market all work together to

construct aesthetic norms about a “good body”. This means that fat, ugly, short, and deformed bodies caused by irregular diets are not acceptable. Secondly, according to Yu (2021), under visual centrism, men are the gazers and women are in the position of being seen and shown. Based on the gaze, men gradually take control of their decisions about women’s bodies and temperaments. In turn, women internalize this masculine imagination and constrain themselves with it, which reduces them to objects of male spectacle. As a result, in contemporary aesthetics, women’s demands on the body have been unable to escape a single and pathological orientation. Like the influencer Chen Shian, she focuses on slimming and body management and tries to convey the standard beauty of body image to a wider group of women. This has led to “A4 waist”, “good curves”, and “distorted body management” becoming more and more popular among female users of *RED*. In addition, the gaze and demands of users are also driving the need for influencers to stay in shape. In the comments section of some of the videos, users are consistently critical of women's looks, bodies, and movements, such as “that’s too fat”, “thick neck” and “fat waist”.

This suggests that this unavoidable male gaze and user gaze has caused women to lose control over their own bodies and that they limit beauty to standard beauty such as slim bodies and perfect curves. This also means that the relevant notes and content posted by Cheng Shian on the *RED* platform do not break through the aesthetic constraints of the audience gaze to some extent, which makes women’s aesthetics more standard and stereotypical.

In addition to the visual methodology and visual centrism described above, this essay argues that post-feminist theory can further explain the construction of a normative and standard beauty by the influencer Cheng Shian. The post-feminist theory argues that women’s

representations of the body and aesthetic standards come in part as a result of social construction. Namely, these aesthetic standards are shaped (rather than natural or objective) through y a social and cultural force. On the *RED* platform, female influencer Cheng Shian shows her curves and shares her weight loss experiences and slimming tips to convey a normative and standard beauty to women that “thin is beautiful”. As mentioned above, Cheng Shian’s figure and exquisite body parts convey the message that only a thin and well-managed body can be considered beautiful by the public. However, there are problems with this normative beauty advocated by blogger Cheng Shian. On the one hand, it ignores the diversity of women’s bodies today. Every woman is unique in her body and there is no one standard that applies to all women. On the other hand, the aesthetic concept of “thinness as beauty” advocated by Cheng Shian on the *RED* platform tends to lead to a sense of dissatisfaction and anxiety about women’s bodies while creating a standard of beauty. This is likely to cause most women to feel uneasy about their bodies not conforming to this standard, leading to unhealthy behavior toward their bodies (such as excessive dieting like Cheng Shian). It can be found that this beauty standard of “thinness as beauty” as conveyed by the *RED* female influencer Cheng Shian is inappropriate and should be criticized. This is because this normative beauty does not reflect well on the diversity and beauty of women’s bodies today.

4.4 Positive Personality Style

In general, a positive personality style means that people tend to approach life with a positive attitude and disposition. On social media platforms, this positive personality style means that female influencers often promote a positive personality style, emphasizing on-trend dressing and outfits, a love of life and their own charisma. Female influencers often promote a positive value by sharing their selfies, fashionable outfits, positive attitude towards life, positive mindset

and good travel times. With this in mind, the female influencers on the *RED* platform are creating a community of women who believe that the only way to be beautiful is to dress well, live well and have a positive personality.

Cheng Shian also regulates and constructs a standard beauty of positive personality through a positive personality style. In the *RED* notes, Cheng Shian is always in tune with fashion, keeps a perfect face and has a curvy body that people will see associated with being young and pretty and trendy. Cheng Shian focuses on creating a consensus of beauty among the female community by setting aesthetic standards for modern women.

Instead, the female influencer constantly provides women with information on how to be beautiful in an everyday and relevant way, which subtly instills in women the idea of looking good and staying beautiful. For example, in most of the videos, Cheng Shian shows beautiful selfies of herself in her daily life, traveling, fashionable outfits, and photos. In Cheng Shian's short videos in the *RED* life category of notes, for example, the influencer often shows scenes of her sophisticated and romantic life to her followers in the form of videos. While this gives fans an immersive sense of engagement, it also further closes the psychological distance between the influencer and his fans, making it easier to showcase his charisma. In a video titled "Sharing two outfits from the first drag shoot", influencer Cheng Shian is wearing a loose blue t-shirt and black trousers, with her head down as she applies lipstick. She then looks up and walks towards the middle of the door with the balcony behind her and quickly changes into a black halter dress using the video's transitions into effects. Wearing the black dress, Cheng Shian makes full use of her eyes, body language, and facial expressions to interact with the video camera. Together with the romantic background music, the whole video displays a strong sense of storytelling and

emotional atmosphere, which shows her sophisticated life and personal charm to the fullest. As can be seen through the content of this video, Cheng Shian's life, glamour, and personal outfits are often shown in the form of graphic categories or videos. In the photos and videos, the influencer Cheng Shian presents herself online through the platform *RED*, mainly through her distinctive aesthetic style and beautiful personal image. The images or videos with a strong sense of storytelling and atmosphere add to the eye-catching nature of the influencers. Whether it is the pursuit of beauty, a positive personality style, or the deliberate portrayal of an "ideal persona", the female influencers of *RED*, exemplified by Cheng Shian, are acting as positive personalities online and in front of their fans.

This further suggests that Cheng Shian continues to convey her personal appeal and positive attitude toward life through her videos. Although not all of the female Netflix videos are about the female form, her own form is present, which makes it easy for users to form subtle associations and aesthetic attitudes. This is because each video features Cheng Shian with a great dress code, sophisticated make-up, and a positive personality style. None of her videos convey a negative personal character or style. This potential standardization may therefore lead to a misconception of the concept of beauty among the female population, creating a singular and paranoid perception of beauty among female users. This leads women to start following Cheng Shian's guidelines on media image to refine themselves, for example, through accessorizing, enriching their lives, and wearing fashionable clothes. In the comments section of Cheng Shian, some users commented that they "want the same outfit", "life is so colorful" and "envy the style of dress".

The key reason why Cheng Shian does not present his negative character and things in the images of influencer fashion is in two aspects. On the one hand, users don't like to see messages that are negative and negative content is frowned upon by users. On the other hand, fashion influencer Cheng Shian needs to constantly maintain her positive personality style on the *RED* platform (e.g. showing personal charisma, sharing a positive life mindset, and sharing her outward beauty).

Both the positive personality style and user identification advocated by Cheng Shian influencers can be explained using Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow analyzed the different psychological needs of individuals, both internal and external, on five levels (Hopper, 2020). For users, the realization of their potential is a process of self-actualization. For female influencers, the use of the *RED* platform for self-presentation creates the opportunity to see the expression of individuality. As users, viewing and identifying with the female influencers' content actually fulfills the need for self-actualization. On the *RED* platform, female influencers are able to become the person they aspire to be, and the persona portrayed by Cheng Shian is a reflection of her ideal self.

When a female influencer appears to the user, she projects a contextual definition to the other person, which comes from the subjective will of the influencer (Coenraad et al., 2019). Just like Cheng Shian, she wants her performance to match social expectations, namely, she wants to create an idealized impression and beauty for the user with different video content. To ensure that her impression in users' minds is in line with social ethics and personal idealized standards, Cheng Shian then achieves her goals based on idealized communication, successively constructing ideal images and avoiding character style collapse.

Zhang et al. (2021) indicate that constructing an ideal personality style image is also manifested in the way female influencers on the *RED* platform capture the dynamic nature of video to constantly showcase their positive personality and styles, and present themselves in the form of video. In other words, the ideal self plays a role in the construction of personality style, conveying aesthetic attitudes, thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of the self that the user wants to know about. As mentioned above, Cheng Shian portrays a beautiful, sophisticated, new-age, independent female personality on the *RED* platform. Cheng Shian presents her “world through her eyes” from her own first-hand perspective, allowing users to learn about her attitude towards normative beauty, a different world, and her love for life-based on her videos.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 How Social Media Influencers Express Female’s Gender Identity

With the data analysis described above, the following section will discuss the current research questions in the context of the literature review. To address the first research question, which is how social media influencers express female gender identity.

From the results of the researcher’s study and analysis of social media influencers’ posts on *RED* during the data discovery phase, it is clear that among the two social media influencers selected by the researcher, the posts made by “Doudou_Babe” and “Cheng Shian” both show their own gender identity. What the researcher found in social media influencer “Doudou_Babe’s” posts was “Doudou_Babe’s” pursuit of beauty. The social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” seeks to manage her skin and face in a way that makes her whole body shiny and smooth, and “Doudou_Babe” needs to take care of not only her face but also her lips, hands

and feet. This is a demonstration of social media influencer “Doudou_Babe”’s pursuit of beauty as a woman. The researcher also discussed in the data findings section that social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” as a woman’s pursuit of fair skin. In the post, “Doudou_Babe” showed the pursuit of fair and flawless skin and the identification of fair and flawless skin as a beautiful woman. In the post, social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” identifies with fair and flawless skin as a beautiful woman, and also her own pursuit of whiteness. Lastly, “Doudou_Babe” shows her gender identity as a woman through her glowing makeup and three-dimensional facial contours in the post, as well as through the specific clothing and accessories that she uses to modify her body’s deficiencies. As Negra (2009) mentioned in her study, post-feminism has changed women’s perception of their own attributes and their own gender identity. This is because with the support of neoliberalism, women no longer strive to abandon the idea of pursuing beauty, but are free to choose to return to traditional gender roles. The social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” mentioned in the above study is a good example of how to express one’s gender identity in the context of post-feminism. Because “Doudou_Babe” does not give up the idea of pursuing beauty, she boldly shows her own pursuit of perceived beauty.

Social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” demonstrates her gender identity as a woman by posting about her pursuit of beauty on social media platforms, including “Doudou_Babe’s” posts on the *RED* platform about her pursuit of smooth, fair skin, flawless makeup, and a better body. Skin, fair skin, flawless makeup and a better body. These are all channels and ways for social media influencers “Doudou_Babe” to show their identity as women in the post-feminist era. Also, according to Mceobbie (2009), in this post-feminist trend of female self-identification,

women are becoming more independent and less dependent on men. The posts chosen by social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” in this study show her own independent posts on *RED* to get the attention of the public. Because of this, it can also be used as a way for social media influencer “Doudou_Babe” to express her female gender identity.

Similarly, another social media influencer chosen for this study, Cheng Shian, presents her own gender identity in her posts about post-feminist women. The way “Cheng Shian” chose to express her female gender identity was also to post her beauty tips on *RED*. For example, Cheng Shian’s post about slimming on *RED* is about her own pursuit of a good body. “Cheng Shian” also shows her pursuit of beauty through her positive personality style on *RED*, including her distinctive aesthetic style and beautiful personal image with a strong sense of story and atmosphere. These are the ways in which the social media influencer “Cheng Shian” presents her own female gender identity.

Therefore, according to the above analysis, the social media influencer's gender identity for women is mainly through the full display of her power and freedom of aesthetic choice.

5.2 How Does Content Posed By Social Media Fashion Women Influencers on *RED* Generate Ideas about ‘Proper’ Appearance and Female Beauty Norms?

The second research question was how the content posted by the social media influencers on *RED* generated per appearance and female beauty norms.

According to the researcher’s analysis of the content posted by the two social media influencers on *RED* during the data discovery process, the whole process of posting content on the *RED* platform and eliciting feedback from the audience or analysis is composed of three parts, namely the social media influencers themselves, the *RED* platform, and other users and

viewers. This is in line with the three sites of meaning construction of visual images mentioned by Rose (2022). According to Rose's (2022) explanation of the sites of meaning construction of visual images, the three elements including production, image, and viewer jointly construct the aesthetic norms. For the social media influencers in this study, "Cheng Shian" and "Doudou_Babe" also identified with their female gender on the *RED* platform through their image posts on *RED*, as well as their followers. and other users on the *RED* platform to achieve the construction of aesthetic norms. For example, the social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" shows her gender identity as a woman through her pursuit of fair skin, smooth skin all over her body, and flawless makeup. At the same time, "Doudou_Babe" also shared her posts with other users on the *RED* platform by posting them as images, with text and subtitles. Finally, other users interacted with the social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" by commenting on these images and posts. In this process, other users and viewers on *RED* saw through the posts that social media influencer "Doudou_Babe" self-identified as a woman and that they collectively formed the aesthetic norms of a woman with fair skin, smooth skin all over, and flawless makeup. For the social media influencer "Cheng Shian", the body management and positive personality style posted by "Cheng Shian" on *RED* platform is also her own gender identity for women. Together with the edited image posts and viewers, Cheng Shian constructs aesthetic norms of a thin body and positive personality style under the influence of visual images.

Therefore, from the above analysis, it is clear that the content posted by social media influencers is combined with the gender identity of social media influencers themselves and the interaction between social media influencers and viewers on social media platforms to achieve the construction of per appearance and female beauty norms. The main reference in the

construction of per appearance and female beauty norms is the process of meaning construction of visual images.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The current study has certain research limitations. Firstly, from a research design perspective, the data analysis method used in this study was textual analysis. Because visual elements such as video were excluded, this resulted in the researcher being unable to possibly not fully capture the complexity and nuance of how social media influencers construct aesthetic norms (Smith, 2017). Besides, from a research content perspective, a limitation of this study is the lack of generalizability of the potential findings. Since the analysis focused on specific social media influencers, it may not accurately represent a broader range of influencers and their impact on the construction of female aesthetic norms. Additionally, another potential limitation is the potential bias of researchers in choosing which social media influencers to analyze and how to interpret their posts. Therefore, future research could benefit from using a more diverse sample of influencers, incorporating visual analysis, and taking steps to minimize researcher bias.

The significance of this study is that it reveals the complex and multifaceted ways in which social media influencers construct aesthetic norms of femininity. Research that helps everyone understand the perspectives of social media influencers, social media platforms, and audiences can help marketers and advertisers better tailor their messaging and advertising campaigns. Next, the research contributes to the ongoing discussion about the role of social media in shaping cultural norms and values. It highlights the interplay between individual agency and broader social structures in the construction of femininity in the digital age. Overall, this

study provides valuable insights into the ways in which social media influencers shape feminine aesthetic norms.

Future research could build on the findings of this study by utilizing a more diverse sample of social media influencers and incorporating visual analysis. In addition, it may be valuable to further investigate the ways in which social media platforms shape women's aesthetic norms. Researchers could also explore the potential impact of these aesthetic norms on women's self-esteem, body image, and overall health.

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