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**School of Management and Economics**  
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**Exploring Consumer Behavior in Today's Marketplace: From the  
Perspectives of Gender and Modernity**

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**Selected Topics:**

- 1) Bright versus Dark Colors on Gender Association
- 2) Evolutionary Psychology on Mating Preferences and Consumption
- 3) Benign vs. Malicious Envy



## Topic 1: Bright versus Dark Colors on Gender Association: An Exploration of Gender-based Color Preferences and Market Implications on Disney

### 1. Introduction

Your dear aunt Gloria just had a pair of twins, a lovely baby boy and a cute baby girl. Since aunt Gloria is your favorite relative, you are going to visit her babies with gifts and postcards. When you are standing in front of the shelf labeled with “Newborns Postcards”, it is so natural for you to pick a blue postcard for the boy while a pink one for the girl (Figure1).

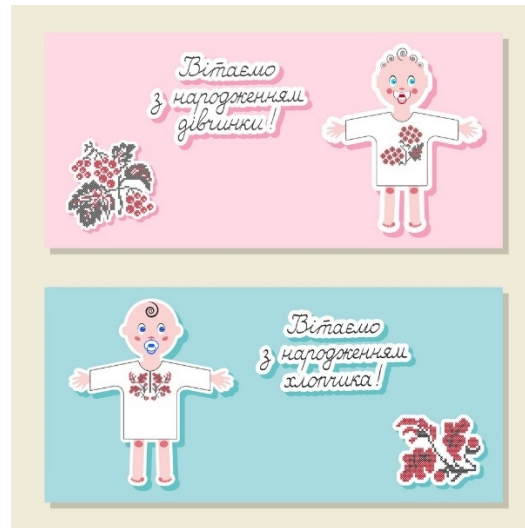


Figure 1: Newborns Postcards

This kind of scene is quite common in our daily life. During the ballet shows, no one will be doubtful about actresses' white dresses or actors' black tights. When faced with two identical iPhones except for their colors, people match the black one with males while the white one with females without thinking (Semin & Palma, 2014). Why do people associate darker colors with males and brighter colors with females? Is there any proof that different genders have different color preferences?

Numerous studies have found huge differences in gender preferences for colors (e.g., Fortmann-Roe, 2013; Semin & Palma, 2014). The evolutionary perspective claims that essential sex differences between males and females have tremendous impacts on gender-based color preferences (e.g., Alexandar, 2003; Hulbert & Ling, 2007). This perspective also insists that the evolutionary gender labor division (e.g., female gatherers tend to detect red leaves and fruits) is essential in determining gender color preferences. One of the most prominent studies in this field utilized the cone-contrast approach to indicate the biological components of sex differences in color preference (Hulbert & Ling, 2007). Though the evolutionary perspective and essentialist theories have made enormous contributions to the field, they have some fallacies. Franklin et al.'s (2010) study indicated no observation for gender-based color preference differences among 4-5 months old infants, revealing that cultural and social contexts may also influence color preference in adults.

As the importance of existentialism and post-structuralism become more prominent in sociology studies, more Consumer Behavior researchers have applied Consumer Cultural Theory (CCT) to the gender and marketing research fields. Some studies claim gender-based color preference differences are a social construct (e.g., Bridges, 1993; Davis et al., 2021; Palmer & Schloss, 2010). One standpoint is “Cultivation theory”, which emphasizes that the widespread of mass media and global consumer culture has enhanced gendered marketing



significantly (Auster & Mansbach, 2012). For example, children tend to follow the marketing messages in the advertisement and then adjust their behaviors to conform to the social expectations of different genders. This echoes the concept of “doing gender”, namely, gender display in West and Zimmerman’s (1987) study. The other viewpoint is stemmed from ecological valence theory, which also favorably supports social constructivism. This perspective claims that people form their attitudes toward different colors based on their likability of the things with these colors (Palmer & Schloss, 2010).

Multiple studies have indicated that color, as a significant factor in marketing, has a tremendous influence on consumer behavior (e.g., Fugate & Phillips, 2010; Gorn et al., 1997). As e-commerce develops rapidly, color as a visible factor is becoming more critical in affecting online-shopping behaviors (Nitse et al., 2004). Though the essentialist theories and social constructivism are opposite in some ways, both of them can generate practical insights into marketing strategies. The visible gender-based color preference differences have provided considerable development opportunities for the gender-specific markets. Companies can provide male and female consumers with different products that respectively congruent with their gender identities. On the other side, the surge of gender equality movements and the emergence of desexualizing (unisex) styles echo social constructivism, calling for gender-neutral products in marketplaces. These two marketing strategies can integrate to enhance companies’ competence in facing the new era’s challenges while maintaining the existing advantages sustainably.

As one of the most outstanding multinational media corporations, Walt Disney Company is famous for its classical and constantly updated cartoon IPs. These IPs first appear in Disney’s film and television works, then consumers can find their figures on the souvenirs (e.g., toys, clothes) in the Disney theme parks and Disney online stores. Though Disney is still reputable and attractive to many consumers, some negative reviews on its marketing strategies and values exist. Some scholars claim that Disney’s media works reveal heavy gender stereotypes, negatively affecting children’s development (e.g., Coyne et al., 2016; England et al., 2011). Auster and Mansbach (2012) also pointed out that the color of toys in Disney’s online toy store reflected severe gender stereotypes. The Disney toys have distinct binary gender features, and even the gender-neutral toys have more characteristics related to “boys only” toys. These toys rely heavily on girls’ willingness to cross the gender boundaries and limit boys’ alternatives simultaneously.

Though previous studies have generated significant market implications based on gender color preference, few of them have provided specific and detailed market strategies for Disney’s dilemma. Combining the gender-specific market practices and gender-neutral market insights, this paper focuses on Walt Disney Company’s toys product line, aiming to provide new marketing strategies for Disney to promote its toy sales while showing more inclusiveness that can help improve the brand image.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Color and marketing

#### 2.1.1 *Color as a significant factor in marketing*

Previous studies have indicated the essential functions of color in marketing. Singh’s (2006) study made a longitudinal analysis of prior literature, indicating that color can serve as a significant brand differentiation factor and affect consumers’ emotions and then attitudes toward products. Previous studies also showed that specific colors are related to particular moods. For example, brighter colors (e.g., yellow and orange) are viewed as pleasant colors, while darker colors (e.g., black and grey) are thought to be depressed colors (Cimbalo et al.,



1978). The rational and appropriate application of color can positively influence consumers' views on specific brands and products. One representative example in Singh's (2006) study is the color of restaurants. The author claims that red and yellow colors can stimulate consumers' appetites and indulgent consumption in fast-food restaurants. Conversely, formal restaurants like buffets utilize blue colors to create a relaxed and comfortable environment for consumers to enjoy tasty food.

While earlier studies lack empirical verification of color's function in affecting consumers' moods, Gorn et al.'s (1997) research analyzed the effects of three concepts of color: hue, chroma, and value by engaging undergraduate students in a magazine advertisement reading experiment. The result showed that the different color concepts in advertisements could significantly affect participants' moods. Higher levels of color chroma tended to generate excitement and pleasure, while higher levels of color value are more likely to trigger relaxation and calmness. This study implied that companies could utilize a broader range of strong chroma to differentiate their own brands. Also, leisure brands can use higher color values to enhance comfortable feelings.

Nitse et al.'s (2004) study analyzed the importance of color in online shopping. This study investigated the negative effects of color inaccuracy in fashion products by surveying consumers' online shopping experiences related to color incongruency. The results strongly revealed that the color inconsistency of online representations and the actual products could cause sales loss, customer complaints, and difficulty retaining loyal consumers.

Color is a significant factor in marketing, especially in the information era. Companies should realize the importance of color in brand and product designs, using appropriate color strategies to promote the products and convey the brand value.

### *2.1.2 Product gender congruence in marketing*

Self-construal theory and self-image congruence models effectively explain why consumers tend to purchase products that conform to their self-identities. Male and female consumers have different product preferences in multiple aspects. Fugate and Phillips' (2010) study empirically explored the product gender congruence phenomena and gender-specific market. This study firstly claimed that products are gendered as masculine or feminine to meet the needs of male and female consumers, respectively. Then, it utilized identity theory to explain that consumers tend to find products congruent with their genders, which is hugely influenced by mass media. Finally, the research result indicated that males were more likely than females to buy gender congruent products that show their gender identity. Consumers with stronger binary gender concepts were more focused on gender congruent products.

However, this study also raises a novel point regarding gender-neutral marketing. The research result showed that consumers raised in families with non-traditional sex roles (e.g., females can have work outside instead of being full-time mothers) were less influenced by gender-congruent views. Also, as the gender equality movements gain ground nowadays, more female consumers tend to find gender-neutral products to replace traditional femininity.

This study has revealed some practical marketing implications. Firstly, since men focus more on product gender congruence, companies can pay more attention to developing masculine products that conform to male consumers' needs. Secondly, since women are less influenced by product gender congruence concepts, they tend to have a wider choice regarding gender-neutral products. Companies' gender-neutral products can promote more among female consumers to gain a higher purchase rate. Lastly, marketers can follow the trends of gender equality and LGBT equality movements, exploring the potential of niche markets in the current pluralistic society.

### *2.2 Gender-based color preference differences*



### *2.2.1 The phenomena of gender color preference differences*

Semin and Palma's (2014) study explored gender-based color associations by conducting four in-depth color experiments. The research results revealed that females preferred bright colors (white as a representative) while males preferred dark colors (black as a typical case). The first experiment showed that males names in the black background were processed faster than in the white background, while female names were processed faster in the white background. The second experiment proved that male names were recognized more quickly in dark green shades while female names were recognized faster in light green shades. The third and the fourth experiments revealed that participants tended to associate darker-colored products with male consumers and lighter-colored products with female consumers. These four experiments showed that typical gender-based color preference differences were males related to dark colors while females associated with light colors.

Fortmann-Roe's (2013) study indicated the gender-based color preference differences on social platforms. This study took Twitter as a research sample, investigating different genders' perceptions of color as a powerful self-expression tool. The research results also showed that males prefer darker colors than females, which echoed Semin and Palma's (2014) study. Meanwhile, males tended to like more saturated colors than females.

Earlier studies have also observed gender color preference differences in children and teenagers. Turgeon's (2008) study showed that K2 and K3 elementary female students tended to prefer pink and purple colors when engaged in a free drawing. In contrast, male students tried to avoid pink, a traditionally feminine color. Karniol's (2011) study asked K3 Israeli elementary students to choose colors for both male and female-stereotyped figures. Male students showed strong avoidance of using pink color and painting female-stereotyped pictures. In contrast, female students used fewer pink in male-stereotyped figures but equally color types in female-stereotyped figures. The observations echoed the standpoint that girls can conform to a greater range of color choices.

### *2.2.2 Essentialist theories on gender-based color preference differences*

Some studies utilized evolutionary and historical cultural meanings of dark and light colors to associate females and males with different colors. Jablonski (2004) claims that darker skin is related to strong sperm production, while lighter skin is associated with optimal pregnancy and lactation abilities. White is related to feminine personalities like purity, innocence, and virginity in many cultural contexts. In contrast, black is considered to represent masculine characteristics like dominance, stateliness, and maturity. However, these traditional meanings may be challenged by some current fashion trends. Nowadays, tanning is becoming more and more popular among young female consumers. The safe tanning industry is growing at a phenomenal rate. On the other side, many males purchase skincare products to keep lighter skin color. These reversed phenomena may reveal the gender-neutrality trends in the marketplace.

Alexandar's (2003) study explained the gender-based color preferences for toys from an evolutionary perspective, claiming that girls' preferences for pink-colored toys could be retrieved from ancient times when females played the roles of gatherers. Females evolved to have a more sensitive reaction to red fruits as gatherers. Females' preferences for pink and purple colors are greatly influenced by this evolution process. Hurlbert and Ling's (2007) study applied the cone-opponent approach to find the biological reasons for gender-based color preference differences. This study utilized an efficient and straightforward "color-picking" task to ask participants to click preferred colors on the screens. The results revealed that women tended to choose reddish-purple colors while men preferred greenish-yellow colors. Women preferred reddish-purple hues because the evolutionary adaptation to specific





environmental requirements provided them with a long-medium-axis on visual systems. This study further enhances the evolutionary perspective in this field.

### *2.2.3 Social constructivism on gender-based color preference differences*

Though Hurlbert and Ling's (2007) study found the biological components of gender-based color preference in adults, Franklin et al.'s (2010) study could not observe infants' gender-based color preference differences by utilizing the contrast-opponent approach. The findings suggested that cultural contexts can significantly influence adults' color preferences, contrasting the essentialist theories' emphasis on biological components.

Two non-essentialist theories can be applied to the social construct of gender color preference. One is the cultivation theory, which claims that mass media and gendered advertisements that employ schema theory can significantly influence children's behaviors. They tend to follow the market messages that promote traditional masculine and feminine characteristics and conduct gender displays that conform to these features. The other theory is the ecological valence theory, that people tend to prefer colors that are associated with the objects they love (Palmer & Schloss, 2010). For example, a person may like light blue because he or she likes the beautiful ocean or sky.

Davis et al.'s (2021) study generated great insights into gender-based color preference differences from a social constructivism perspective, aiming to investigate the cultural components of gender color preference for pink and blue. This study claims that global consumer and media cultures have tremendous influences on girls' preferences for pink. The mass media and market advertisements associate pink with girls and convey this message to children in multiple ways. In the developed industrialized countries where mass media communication is more effective and prevailing, girls tend to prefer pink while boys try to avoid pink products. Children from four different populations were asked to point to the preferred color on papers in this study. These four populations consist of three remote villages and one Australian city. The research results showed no significant differences between boys' and girls' preferences for pink color in three remote village communities. However, girls in the Australian city strongly preferred pink while boys strongly avoided pink. This study further proved that social and cultural contexts greatly influence gender-based color preferences.

Auster and Mansbach's (2012) study focused on the gender-coding of toys in the Disney online store, indicating that gender marketing reveals heavy gender stereotypes regarding color preference. The research findings showed that pastel colors are more likely to be found in the "girls only" category, while bold colors are more related to the "boys only" category. Besides, the predominant colors in the "boys only" category are darker colors like red and black, while in the "girls only" category are lighter colors like pink and purple, which is consistent with Semin and Palma's (2014) study. The toy types for "only boys" and "only girls" conform to traditional masculinity and femininity greatly. For example, the action figures are associated with males' stronger physical power, while the cooking and nursing toys are related to females' caring roles. An interesting finding is that all these three features of toys in the "Both boys and girls" category are more conform to the "boys only" category, which means Disney relies on girls' crossing gender behavior to sell these gender-neutral toys. However, boys have limited alternatives compared with girls since their preference for caring toys may be viewed against traditional masculinity, which is more unacceptable by most parents. This study also claims that gendered marketing can limit children's development potential by reinforcing gender stereotypes, which is exactly the problem Disney currently has.



### 3. Daily Example Illustrations

#### 3.1 Color as a stimulus on consumers' feelings and attitudes

Color is a significant visual factor in sensory marketing. Entering the information era, visual stimuli have become more important in online shopping since other stimuli (e.g., scents, tastes) appear almost impossible to be felt. Color can influence consumers' feelings and attitudes toward specific brands, products, and even services positively and negatively. The key to achieving sensory marketing success by utilizing color stimulus is selecting appropriate colors to enhance consumers' positive attitudes and then trigger their consumption desires.

##### 3.1.1 Color hues as emotion triggers

Marketers use different colors on their brand logos and products to enhance consumers' recognition. The most classic colors that influence people's emotions are red and blue. While red serves as an 'exciting' color that triggers consumers' indulgent consumption, blue plays an important role in relaxing and comforting consumers' moods. For example, McDonald's as a fast-food brand, used red as its package hue (Figure 2). This can convey an attractive market message that enhances consumers' excitement. Busy people may be more triggered to recognize the time-saving fast food and rushing to dine in McDonald's. People on a diet may yield to the temptation after seeing red color and then break the rules. In contrast, the blue color can always be seen in leisure brands. For example, many travel brands' logos use blue as the major hue (Figure 3). Blue can help create a comfortable and relaxing leisure atmosphere in consumers' heads, enhancing their trust in the travel brands.



Figure 2 McDonald's package

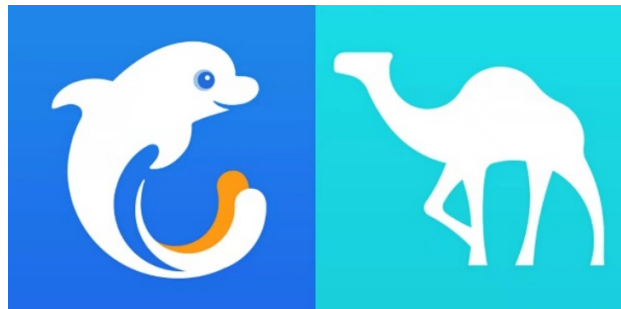


Figure 3 Ctrip and Qunar logos

##### 3.1.2 Color in different cultural contexts

Since the history and traditions are varied around the world, the same color may have different meanings in different cultures. For example, Chinese people view red as a symbol of happiness and luck. During the Spring Festival, people wear red clothes, send out red pockets, and decorate their homes with red couplets and lanterns (Figure 4). However, in many African countries, red symbolizes mourning. People put on red clothes at funerals (Figure 5). The green color also has multiple different meanings varied from culture to culture. Green is related to health, luck, and environmental-friendly in Western cultures. However, green symbolizes infidelity between partners in some Eastern countries (e.g., Indonesia, China). Much worse, green symbolizes death and unluck in South America. Since color meanings are different in specific cultural contexts, marketers should pay more attention to using appropriate colors to adjust to the traditions and cultures in different areas to prevent taboos and improve the brand images.



Figure 4 Chinese Spring Festival



Figure 5 African funerals

### 3.2 Gender product congruence

Self-image congruence models and self-completion theory effectively explain why consumers are what they buy. Namely, they try to purchase products that conform to their self-identities. In the marketplace, products are gendered. Most consumers tend to buy products that conform to traditional society's expectations of masculinity and femininity. Based on this feature, marketers explore the gender-specific market to better satisfy both genders' needs.

Self-image congruence models indicate that consumers focus more on image-oriented products when they want to enhance their gender traits. Take perfume, a typically gendered product, as an example. Some scents are naturally associated with masculinity (e.g., musk), while others reveal femininity (e.g., floral). Consumers who view perfume as a gender-expression product will buy perfume associated with their corresponding gender. Many perfume brands have distinct gender-categorized options in their online stores. However, as the gender equality movements surge, genderless or unisex perfume has become the ideal development direction. For example, Calvin Klein One fragrance is one of the best unisex perfumes nowadays (Figure 6). The product's appearance adopted unisex minimalism while the scent is appropriate for both male and female consumers.



Figure 6 Calvin Klein One Fragrance

Different age groups also show distinct gender congruence product preferences. In America, many teenage boys prefer oversized T-shirts and loose pants to display their street gang style (Figure 7), while their peer girls like crop tops and tight skirts to show their body shapes (Figure 8). Though oversized T-shirts are becoming more gender-neutral nowadays, these gender-neutral clothes still rely on girls' willingness to cross the gender boundary. It is common to see more girls prefer gender-neutral clothes with more traditionally masculine traits. However, we can barely see cross-dressed boys wearing tight tops or skirts in our daily lives.





Figure 7 American street boys



Figure 8 American teenager girls

There are also gender-based product preference differences among children. Most toy brands have clear categorization of “boy toys” and “girl toys”. Weapons, vehicles, and action figures are representative “boy toys” while barbie dolls, makeup toys, and cooking toys are typical “girl toys”. Parents buy toys related to traditional gender temperaments for their children following the advertisement. Children cultivate their gender identities through interaction with these toys. Nowadays, some toy brands in more gender-equal countries (e.g., Sweden) provides traditional masculine toys like toy guns for girls and traditionally feminine toys like cooking equipment to boys (Figure 9). However, most toy brands still rely on girls’ willingness to play with gender-neutral toys without providing boys with more alternatives.



Figure 9 Swedish gender-neutral toys

### 3.3 Gender-based color preference difference

Except for the important role in sensory marketing, color is also an essential factor in distinguishing products’ gender. Darker colors like black and brown are typical “male colors” while lighter colors like white and pink are typical “female colors”. According to previous studies, gender-based color preference differences result from evolutionary needs and social contexts.

#### 3.3.1 *Black-male and white-female*

Semin and Palma’s (2014) study indicated that dark color is associated with masculinity while light colors reveal femininity. Male-black and female-white phenomena have been integrated into cultural traditions and are commonly seen in daily life. During the wedding parties, brides wear white dresses while grooms put on black suits. Many prevailing lover packs T-shirts contain a black one for males and a white one for their female partners (Figure 10). People always associate black-colored products with male products while white ones with female products. For example, many waiters and waitresses will assume that vanilla milk is for the lady in the same order from a couple while hot chocolate is for the gentleman. The shopping guides in Apple stores always firstly introduce their female customers to devices with white or other lighter colors (e.g., purple) instead of dark colors.



Figure 10 Black-white lover packs T-shirts

### 3.3.2 Blue-boy and pink-girl

Except for the black-male and white-female phenomenon, another classic gender-associated color sets are blue-boy and pink-girl. This phenomenon is commonly seen in teenagers' and children's color preferences. Many previous studies insist that this phenomenon is a cultural product rather than a biological one (e.g., Auster and Mansbach, 2012). Girls' preferences for the pink color result from the gendered marketing advertisement and mass media culture in more developed countries. For example, all the four teenage girls in *Mean Girls* appear with pink tops throughout the movie (Figure 11). Media works like this classic American teen comedy film hit great success among young girls, imperceptibly influencing their behaviors to conform to gender norms. The blue-boy and pink-girl phenomenon is also prevailing when parents choose products for their children. When parents have a pair of newborns (a boy and a girl), most of them tend to pick blue baby clothes for the boy while pink ones for the girl (Figure 12). Cultural force strengthens the inheritance of this perception between generations, reinforcing the gender color stereotypes.



Figure 11 Teenager girls in *Mean Girls*



Figure 12 Blue-boy and pink-girl infants

### 3.3.3 Gender color preference differences in toys

Auster and Mansbach's (2012) study pointed out that the gender-typed Disney toys revealed distinct color hue differences between "boy toys" and "girl toys". Generally, boys prefer strong and dark colors like black and red (Figure 13). These colors reveal traditional masculinity's dominance. Girls prefer light and pastel colors like pink and purple (Figure 14), which show traditional femininity's obedience. However, girls tend to be more willing to cross the gender boundary to play with gender-neutral toys than boys. Boys always avoid playing feminine colored toys (e.g., a pink pony). This phenomenon reveals that girls have more toy options than boys since it is much easier to break traditional femininity than boys.



Figure 13 Typical colors of boy toys



Figure 14 Typical colors of girl toys



## 4. Case Study of Walt Disney Company's Toy Product Line

### 4.1 3Cs analysis: Company, consumers, and competitors

#### 4.1.1 Company overview

Established in 1923, Walt Disney Company is one of the most successful diversified multinational media corporations, with a total asset of 203.61 billion US dollars in 2021 (Disney, 2021). Walt Disney Company has three major business lines: media and entertainment, theme parks (Disneyland), and Disney IP-related products (including branded merchandise and licensing). These three business lines are closely linked. Disney's cartoon characters (IPs) first appear in films or TV shows. Then, actors and actresses in Disneyland theme parks show these characters by playing reality roles (e.g., Snow White) or dressing in animal customs (e.g., Duffy and friends) to attract customers and enhance their tour experience. Finally, visitors of Disneyland will buy the IP-related products either at the theme park souvenir shops or Disney's online stores. The retail and licensing of Disney's products account for 21.87% of the total revenue in 2021 (Disney, 2021), which generates enormous profits for the company.

The first Disney toy was born in 1930 with the Mickey Mouse appearance in *Steamboat Willie*. Before 1990, most Disney toys have the gender-neutral features we discuss today. In 1990, Disney officially launched the franchise of Disney princesses (Fandom, 2022). The gendered-coding Disney products started to appear in the marketplace. Entering the 21 century, Disney's toys have become more gender-specific. On one side, the appearance of animal characters (e.g., Linabell) toys conveys the cuteness (baby schema) to attract female consumers. On the other hand, the technological trend makes new series like Star Wars action figures more popular and attracts boys. When Disney was faced with some negative reviews on their gender-specific toys' adverse effects on children's development, Disney created new gender-neutral roles (e.g., Merida in *Brave*) and related toys to defend the brand value.

Disney's parks, experiences, and products are the most profitable business among its business lines (Johnston, 2022). Since toys account for a large part of Disney's top product sales, it is very important for Disney to constantly improve its provided toys and meet consumers' needs.

#### 4.1.2 Consumer analysis

Disney primarily targets 4-12 years old boys and girls. The Disney cartoon characters play important roles in influencing children's perceptions, value formation, and individual development. The Disneyland theme parks attract children to experience the fairytale tour and play different roles in the virtual world. Disney toys also have tremendous influences on children's growth and development. Through the interaction with toys, children cultivate their personalities, gender identities, and temperament. A distinct feature of this target group is that they are heavily influenced by media messages and parents' expected gender norms since most of them have not developed a mature mind to make their own decisions. Thus, appropriate toys are essential for children's health at this stage.

Nowadays, Disney also pays more attention to young adults. Since Disney's products and theme park experience can recall the nostalgia of their childhood, some classic toy series are also attractive to them (e.g., Toy Story). Besides, new IPs that conform to modern aesthetic standards can also drive many of them crazy. Disney launched a new IP in the series of Duffy and Friends called Linabell in 2021. Linabell, the pink fox (Figure 15), has become very popular among young Chinese consumers. The product price rises five times the original price. Since young adults have certain purchase power and independent decision values, Disney needs to capture their hearts.



#### *4.1.3 Competitor analysis*

Walt Disney Company's main competitors include other strong media corporations like 21st Century Fox and Time Warner in the media and entertainment business. However, compared with these brands, Disney has more robust and diversified business lines, which enhances its competitiveness in the marketplace.

Meanwhile, Disney also has many other competitors in the toy industry. Due to the high quality and prevailing IP values, Disney's toy price is relatively high in this industry. The affordability of its products is lower than some cheap toy brands like Play Day. Except for the high price, Disney's toys have been criticized for the highly gender-stereotyped toy distinction. Some toy brands in more gender-equal countries (e.g., Swedish brand Ciccibello) produce gender-neutral toys for boys and girls, providing children with equal development opportunities through toy interaction.

#### *4.2 4Ps analysis of Disney's toys*

##### *4.2.1 Product*

Currently, Disney toys have 266 IPs from Disney, Pixar, Marvel, and so on (Fandom, 2022). The toy types include action figures, cars & RC toys, dolls, plush & stuffed animals, learning toys, etc.

Disney's toys are famous for their high-quality and sophisticated workmanship. For example, one of the stuffed toys, Lotso (the strawberry bear in Toy Story), has a soft tactile, strawberry scent, and cute outlook, which hit a huge success in sensory marketing. The constantly updated and multitudinous toys continuously capture loyal consumers' hearts and attract new consumers.

Disney's toy style reveals traditional masculine and feminine traits. For example, there is a gender option in Disney's online store. Most toys in the "boy" category are action figures (e.g., Spiderman) and weapon toys (e.g., Captain America Shield). Most toys in the "girl" category are dolls (e.g., Mirabel singing doll) and stuffed toys. However, there are more traditional masculine toys (e.g., Woody action figure) in the "girl" category than traditional feminine toys (e.g., Castel playset) in the "boy" category. It reveals that Disney's gender-neutral toys have more features of "boys only" toys. Girls have a wider range of toy alternatives than boys since people hold the stereotypes that boys should not play with girly toys like dolls and princesses.

##### *4.2.2 Price*

Disney sells its toys by using a value-based pricing strategy. Since Disney has a long history and the brand image is quite impressive in consumers' hearts, it has a 'fan base' and high perceived values from them. Consumers tend to trust Disney products' quality and their augmented values. By utilizing this consumer psychology, Disney sets the higher price of its toys on a justified base. Besides, Disney integrates its pricing strategy with flexible, budget-friendly pricing to attract more consumers and show its brand inclusiveness for more children to enjoy their toys.

##### *4.2.3 Place*

Currently, Disney distributes its retail toys in 77 physical stores in North America, Europe, Japan, and China (Disney, 2021). Besides, Disney has online toy stores on the official website and fan page. In 2021, Disney expressed its determination to achieve Corporate Social Responsibility and environmental sustainability by enhancing e-commerce to cut its enterprise footprints. The next step for Disney is to focus more on online store distribution.





#### 4.2.4 Promotion

Disney promotes its toys through both traditional and social media. The traditional media include films, advertisements, magazines, etc. Consumers see the toy character prototypes in the media work or the toy advertisements and then form their primary impression of these toys. However, social media also play an important role in attracting potential consumers of the toys. Disney relies on the Word of Mouth (WOM) effect and Key Opinion Leader (KOL)'s promotion. Take the prevailing IP Linabell as an example; she first appeared in Disney's stop-motion animation series 'Duffy and friends' as a clever pink fox who loves solving puzzles. Then, she debuted in Shanghai Disneyland on parade with Duffy and friends. Finally, the toys based on her character hit unprecedented success in the Chinese market. During this process, Linabell was promoted by many consumers on online platforms like Weibo and RED. Some celebrities (e.g., Mao Xiaotong) also shared their love for Linabell in their official moments. The WOM and KOL effects indeed help Disney capture more consumers' hearts and keep their loyalty.

#### 4.3 Problem reveal of Disney's gender-coded toys

Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the tide of gender equality movements is growing. The widespread Internet use has facilitated online campaigns in a significant way. Gender studies scholars have paid more attention to reflecting the inequality revealed in media works. For a long time, Disney's princess roles in the films have been criticized for the gender stereotypes they show. Coyne et al.'s (2016) study indicated that Disney's gender-coded princess characters show traditional femininity's obedience, passiveness, and controllability. For example, Snow White is depicted as a melting housewife who helps seven dwarves clean their house and prepare meals when they finish work and come home. The end of Snow White is to marry the handsome prince. This story reinforces the stereotypical gender labor division and the perception that 'only kind and hard-working women can find charming mates and live happy lives. Coyne et al. (2016) also claimed that the interaction with Disney princess toys has three negative effects on children. First, this exposure reinforces the gender stereotypes in both boys' and girls' hearts, limiting their development opportunities. Second, the thin figures of Disney princesses encourage body shame, negatively affecting girls' body esteem and twisting children's aesthetic standards. Lastly, Disney's princesses barely drive girls' prosocial behaviors but encourage boys' prosocial behaviors. Boys become more 'hero' type while girls are still in the position of protégé.

Though Disney has promoted gender-neutral characters (e.g., Merida in *Brave*) and toys, children are still heavily influenced by the classic princess roles. Auster and Mansbach's (2012) study pointed out the limits of Disney's gender-neutral toys. First, the "boys only" and "girls only" toys show stereotypical masculinity and femininity in their colors and types, adversely affecting children's cognitive development and career expectations by reinforcing the gender norms. Second, most gender-neutral toys contain the features of "only boys" toys. These gender-neutral toys rely on girls' willingness to cross gender boundaries. However, boys avoid playing with stuffed dolls or caring playsets since they are more expected to strive for traditional masculinity.

To summarize, Disney's toys have the following two problems:

1. Disney has become profitable by targeting the gender-specific market among children. How to maintain this advantage while eliminating the gender stereotypes in toys and promoting gender equality values to improve the brand image?
2. Disney's gender-neutral toys still have some specific limits. How to improve the gender-neutral toys to show more inclusiveness and provide children with more possibilities?





## 4.4 Market strategies development

### 4.4.1 Market strategies overview

Since Disney's toys primarily focus on 4-12 years old children, the proposed market strategies are prepared to better serve this specific market's needs better. The goal is to help Disney improve its brand image by providing toys that reveal equal development opportunities and promoting gender equality values for children of different genders.

To solve the first problem in the above section, the key strategy is subdividing the current primary market into two segments. One is the children aged from 4 to 7. Since their cognitions are more immature, they are more likely to be influenced by the external messages from the media and their parents. Thus, it is essential for Disney to provide them with gender-stereotype-free toys and encourage them to explore their self-expression and identities. Regarding this segment, it will be better to provide them with more gender-neutral toys with masculine and feminine features. The other segment is the children aged from 8-to 12. Since they are more likely to develop their own preferences and gender congruence needs for products, it will be more flexible to integrate gender-specific and gender-neutral products. Besides, since boys are more focused on gender congruence than girls (Fugate & Phillips, 2010), it will be better to provide boys at this stage with more gender-specific products than girls.

Regarding the second problem, the new 4Ps strategies of Disney's gender-neutral toys can be taken into consideration. The core strategy is about product improvement. Disney can adopt the following three strategies to make gender-neutral toys more suitable for both genders. First, enriching the colors and types of gender-neutral toys. Second, providing boys with more suitable gender-neutral products like Castel playsets and stuffed dolls of superheroes. Third, carrying out product innovations (e.g., the action figures that can transform between heroes and heroines). Disney should also pay attention to the promotion of its new gender-neutral toys. Except for Disney's own media channels, Disney can promote these toys by cooperating with parenting bloggers and feminist YouTubers to follow the gender equality trends.

### 4.4.2 New 4Ps strategies on Disney's gender-neutral toys improvement

#### 4.4.2.1 Product

The most important 4Ps strategy to improve Disney's gender-neutral toys is the product concept. There are mainly three strategies to improve the products:

- 1) *Adjustment of the existing toys.* Disney can make adjustments to its existing gender-neutral toys that mainly contain "boys only" features. First, it can enrich the product colors of the same toy type. To ensure children's consistent love for the characters, producers can flexibly change the colors of accessories (e.g., action figures' clothes) without changing the characters' original appearances. The key point is to replace the dominant masculine colors (e.g., black and red) with more gender-neutral colors (e.g., white and green). The black-white Mickey Mouse from *Steam Willie* can be a good representative (Figure 15). Second, it can enrich the product types. Currently, most of Disney's gender-neutral product types are action figures and vehicles that rely on girls' cross-gender willingness. Producers can add more product types like Castel playsets to the existing gender-neutral toys to include more boys.
- 2) *Provide traditional feminine toys to boys in a gender-neutral way.* Some products like Castel playsets are viewed as 'girly' toys since they have 'play house' functions. However, it is important for children to break the gender labor division stereotypes of male workers and female homemakers. The playhouse is also



important for boys to acknowledge the family's responsibility in caring for children. Thus, producers can redesign the playsets with more gender-neutral traits by playing down gendered life scenes. Playmobil's gender-neutral farm playset is an excellent example for reference (Figure 16).



Figure 15 Mickey Mouse from *Steam Willie*



Figure 16 Playmobli's farm playset

- 3) *Product innovation*. Disney can also carry out product innovation to improve the compatibility of gender-neutral toys. For example, producers can utilize new technology to facilitate the transformation between action figures' gender appearances (e.g., Captain America can transform into Wonder Woman by some actions). Besides, this can also be applied to some brick play sets that can have multiple playing methods. Through exposure to both gender appearances or scenes, children can have more alternatives to cultivate their gender temperaments.

#### 4.4.2.2 Promotion

Disney can promote its gender-neutral toys by combining the Disney media promotion and promotion on other social platforms. With about 130 million subscribers of the Disney plus channel worldwide, Disney can promote its gender equality values by making short animate videos like *Out* in 2020. Meanwhile, Disney can insert advertisements at the end of these videos to arouse parents' buying intention. Besides, Disney can also use the Disneyland theme park to promote the new gender-neutral characters through parades and interaction with the visitors.

Since online gender equality campaigns are gaining ground nowadays, many parenting bloggers and feminist YouTubers have expressed their opinions against gender-coded marketing. Feminist parenting has provided new insights for gender equality movements. It will be a new opportunity for Disney to cooperate with these bloggers who have huge influences on Disney's target consumers: families. Some famous bloggers like Allison Lindstrom and Rebecca Watson can be considered.

#### 4.4.2.3 Place

Disney can distribute its gender-neutral toys in both physical shops and online stores. Since Disney has announced the transformation to more robust e-commerce, online stores can be a good choice to promote new products. Disney's online stores can create a new category for gender-neutral toys with clear age divisions serving for two age segments mentioned above.

#### 4.4.2.4 Price

While maintaining the value-based pricing strategy, Disney can appropriately increase the budget-friendly pricing strategy to show more inclusiveness and promote gender equality values to more families.

#### 4.4.3 Benchmarks and potential risks

Disney can use some benchmarks like consumer or social reviews, sales volume, and likes & reposts of the cooperative bloggers to evaluate the new 4Ps strategies for gender-neutral toys improvement. However, some potential risks, including parents' stable parenting philosophies, traditional expectations of binary genders, and the difficulties in finding willing bloggers, are worth more considerate and comprehensive strategies to face the challenges.



## **Topic 2: Evolutionary Psychology on Mating Preferences and Consumption: An Analysis of Gender Mating Strategies and Its Market Values on Tinder APP**

### **1. Introduction**

It is a beautiful Sunday morning. You are wandering on Cornelia Street and looking for a café to enjoy your precious leisure time in a week. You stopped at the front door of ‘Sugar Cherry’, a new outdoor café that has attracted numerous customers these days. While you are waiting for the espresso you’ve ordered, you start to observe the people around you. To your surprise, most customers here are pairs of an older man and a young woman. The men are well dressed and wearing luxury items like Rolex watches, while the young women have sophisticated makeup and beautiful body shapes. You suddenly realize: This is a sugar daddy-sugar baby dating heaven!

Sugar daddy-sugar baby is the relationship between a relatively older man with rich resources and a young, beautiful woman. Why is this mating phenomenon becoming more prevalent nowadays that many sugar daddy dating sites have emerged to help pair the older men with younger women?

Studies on mating preferences have indicated that men are more willing to provide resources and ask for beauty and sex than women. In contrast, women are more likely to ask for economic resources and offer attractiveness and sex than men (e.g., Wiederman, 1993). Besides, men prefer younger mates while women prefer older mates.

Numerous studies researched gender-based mating preference from the perspective of evolutionary psychology. These studies have indicated that gender mating strategies are a product of evolution (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buss & Foley, 2020; Wagstaff et al., 2015). These studies argue that mating is an adaptive strategy of humans to resist environmental pressure and keep the species continuation of human beings. The parental investment disproportion, sexual selection, and gender labor division have driven men to devote more to short-term mating and women to long-term mating.

Since both men and women are under reproductive pressure from different aspects, they have developed short-term and long-term mating strategies to face these challenges better. Men’s short-term mating can help them overcome the reproductive constraint of finding fertile women. However, women tend to view short-term mating as a tool to gather resources and get away from the former relationships (Buss & Schmitt, 2019). Both men’s and women’s short-term mating strategies are prepared for the long-term commitment. Though they have different mating strategies in the long-term (e.g., men emphasize paternity certainty in the long-term), they have more common ones. For example, both of them highly value good parenting skills in the long term. Except for the internal qualities, both men’s and women’s aesthetic preferences varied from short-term to long-term mating. Men tend to prefer body attractiveness in short-term mating but facial attractiveness in long-term mating, while women prefer facial attractiveness regardless of the mating contexts (Buss & Foley, 2020; Wagstaff, 2015).

Gender-based mating preference has generated great marketing insights. Firstly, consumers have different needs for short-term mating (temporal discounting) and long-term mating (focus on the future). Marketers should accurately utilize the present-future cues to promote their products. Secondly, mating preference has provided huge development opportunities for the gender-specific market (e.g., dating sites) and market segmentation (e.g., age segments). Thirdly, the novel observations like women’s mate choice copying and men’s sexual-over-perception have enlightened more careful marketing practices. Lastly, there are other issues like cultural contexts (e.g., sex ratio)’ influences on mating strategies and corresponding marketing.



As one of the most popular dating APPs, Tinder is very welcomed by young generations in Western countries. It is simple and convenient to set up a Tinder account and use it to find dating mates. Just swipe right on the screen and see if you can match your ‘heartbeat’ target and start chatting with him or her. However, Tinder still has some problems that can be improved. First, it is reported that Tinder’s successful match rate is relatively low, revealing the lack of accurate knowledge of users’ mating preferences and needs. Second, Tinder is stigmatized as a ‘hookup’ APP that serves people who only look for short-term relationships. This has adverse effects on attracting new users who are striving for long-term relationships.

Though previous studies have emphasized the importance of gender-based mating preference in gender-specific marketing strategies development, few of them discussed their market values in the dating sites contexts. This paper explores the marketing strategies originating from the mating preference in the short-term and long-term, aiming to generate marketing insights for Tinder APP’s improvement.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Mating preference phenomenon and its evolutionary origin

Previous studies have indicated gender-based mating preferences in different mating contexts. Hinsz et al.’s (2001) study based on the mating preference originated from reproductive purposes, claiming that women’s hair, as an important appearance cue in men’s short-term mating, can signal reproductive potential. The study results showed that younger women who have longer and better-quality hair tend to have healthier bodies and stronger reproductive abilities than older women. Besides, they are more likely to identify as looking for romantic relationships. These observations showed that women tend to attract men looking for short-term relationships by their appearance, echoed with Buss and Schmitt’s (1993) study. Wiederman (1993) analyzed 1111 personal mating advertisements of advertisers’ personal information, the mating preference they have, and the things they tend to offer. Consistent with Buss and Schmitt (1993), the results reveal huge mating preferences between men and women. Men were more likely to seek attractive younger women with beautiful body shapes, while women tended to look for older men with rich economic resources. Surprisingly, men tend to seek sexual relationships 40 times more than women, reinforcing the concept that men tend to have sexual-over-perception than women.

Mating preference and mating strategies are the evolution products for human beings to face reproductive challenges and better adapt themselves to the dynamic environment. Earlier studies have explored the evolutionary origin of mating preference. Except for the adaptive function, Darwin’s (1871) sexual selection theory claims that mating strategies can help one sex win the rivals among their species groups in reproduction. The reproductive needs have driven both men and women to seek long-term commitment and produce their successive descendants. However, the parental investment disproportion (a sexual act with reproductive purpose may result in long pregnancy in women but nothing in men) has favored men in short-term mating to overcome the long-term reproductive pressure. Thus, men and women have more differences in short-term mating strategies than in long-term mating contexts.

### 2.2 Men and women’s mating strategies in short-term and long-term mating contexts

#### 2.2.1 Mating strategies in the short-term mating context

Though both men and women face reproductive pressure, the parental investment disproportion has differentiated men’s short-term mating strategies from women’s in a significant way. The short-term mating context allows men to ‘escape’ from the long-term reproductive mission by utilizing some mating strategies (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buss &



Schmitt, 2019; Buss & Foley, 2020). First, short-term mating (temporal discounting) like one night stand can help men avoid long-term commitment. Second, men focus more on sexual gain in the short-term mating context than women, and they tend to seek larger numbers of sexual mates. This can increase the possibility of having more offspring and ensure long-term reproductive success. Third, men are more likely to seek body attractiveness in the short-term mating context because this signals women's fertility (the current reproductive ability), which has long-term implications (Wagstaff et al., 2015). Last, men focus more on the sexual accessibility of women in the short term to ensure an adequate number of sexual mates.

However, women's short-term mating strategies reveal more preparation for their long-term commitment. First, women attach great importance to men's immediate resource quality and quantity. This can help them identify the mates that are more likely to meet her and her children's future financial needs. Second, women also focus on men's masculine physical attractiveness, which implies the quality of their genes related to reproduction. Third, women focus more on prospective long-term mates who show honesty and generosity in the short-term mating. Last, some novel observations found that women are more likely to conduct mate copying (following other women's mating preference) to ensure mating reliability. Besides, women use short-term mating to achieve 'mate switching' to cut off the former relationships.

### 2.2.2 Mating strategies in the long-term mating context

Though men and women have very different short-term mating strategies, they share many things in common when engaged in long-term mating (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buss & Schmitt, 2019). First, both men and women delay gratification (temporal discounting) to carefully consider long-term commitment. They focus more on mates' honesty. Second, both of them prefer good partner and parent skills that devote to marriage and children's development. Third, they seek shared mate values in the long-term mating context. Fourth, both men and women consider health cues and gene quality since these are related to reproductive abilities. Last, both of them prefer 'neat' relationships, namely, the mates who have nothing to do with their former relationships anymore (e.g., the children from the last marriage). Except for these shared strategies, men tend to shift their emphasis on women's facial attractiveness in long-term relationships. Besides, they tend to seek women with high sexual fidelity to ensure their stable paternity certainty. Women also have some specific long-term mating strategies. They carefully assess men's resource potential, willingness, and ability to invest in long-term relationships and family input. Meanwhile, they highly value the physical protection men can provide.

## 2.3 Mating preference and marketing strategies

Previous studies have indicated that gender-based mating preference can be applied to marketing strategies development significantly.

*Temporal discounting vs. focus on the future.* Different people may have different mating needs. People that are actively seeking short-term relationships highly value the accessibility of one thing (Buss & Foley, 2020). It will be a wise marketing strategy to release limited editions using the 'buy now' ads and stimulate consumers' impulsive consumption. In contrast, people who are looking forward to long-term mating may prefer things that need long-term investment. Marketers use this psychology to attract consumers who focus on future benefits. For example, by inserting a promising figure (e.g., a newborn baby) into the advertisement, the products become more attractive to consumers engaged in long-term mating context.

*Gender-specific market and market segmentation.* Since men and women have huge mating preferences and strategies differences in both short-term and long-term mating





contexts, marketers can utilize these traits to effectively develop corresponding marketing strategies. Generally speaking, men focus more on the short-term relationship than women. It will be effective for marketers to use some attractive cues like female models with sophisticated makeup and sexy body shape to attract more male consumers. Women highly value men's resources potential regardless of the mating contexts. It will be practical to use mature male models with luxury items to show the stability and reliability to target female consumers. However, both men and women can prefer short-term or long-term relationships in different life stages. Marketers need to utilize market segmentation to distinguish consumers' short-term or long-term relationships preferences.

*Mate choice copying and sexual-over-perception biases.* To ensure mating reliability, women tend to refer to other women's mating preferences. Marketers can create the advertisement by using endorsement effects of a very popular male celebrity that has superior fans base to enhance the likability of female consumers. However, this strategy may backfire among male consumers since they do not refer to other men when selecting mates. Compared with women, men are more likely to have sexual-over-perception biases (Wiederman, 1993). They are more sensitive to sexy marketing cues like female models' eye contact.

*Other issues.* Other marketing implications include implicit vs. explicit marketing cues and cultural influences on mating preference. Buss and Foley's (2020) study states that explicit marketing cues have three main disadvantages compared with implicit cues. First, explicit marketing cues like female models' body shapes can evoke the risk of objectification of women. Second, explicit marketing cues can be easily stolen by copycats among the competitors. Last, explicit marketing cues are always evident and instant, which is easily outdated. It may be wiser for marketers to reflect on the marketing cues. There is a typical example of sex ratio variance in different areas regarding cultural preferences. It is reported that more short-term mating strategies should be used in low sex ratio countries (men less than women) while more long-term mating strategies should be adopted in high sex ratio countries (men more than women) (Buss & Foley, 2020; Stone et al., 2007).

### 3. Daily Example Illustrations

#### 3.1 Mating preference in short-term and long-term mating contexts

##### 3.1.1 Short-term mating preference: an example of sugar dating

The most striking short-term mating preference between men and women is that men prefer younger women with charming appearances and beautiful body lines. In contrast, women seek older men with more financial resources and higher social status. Men are more willing to offer financial resources to women, while women are more willing to provide their appearance and body shapes. One typical example is the sugar daddy-sugar baby mating phenomenon.

Based on men's and women's short-term mating preference differences, the sugar daddy-sugar baby relationship has evolved to form a new dating trend. There is a complete industry chain of sugar dating in today's marketplace. Many dating sites offer pairing services for men looking for sugar babies or women seeking sugar daddies nowadays. The cover pages of these dating sites always consist of an older man accompanied by a beautiful younger woman in intimate gestures (e.g., Figure 1). Consumers who are looking forward to having sugar dating can set their age preferences and update their requirements on their own page to pair with suitable mates.

Many sugar daddies are married and economically successful men. They are always much older than their attractive sugar babies in the age. They provide sugar babies with generous living standards and financial support to exchange their sex services and



accompany. Through the interaction with each other, both men and women in the sugar daddy-sugar baby relationship can get the things they want in the short-term mating contexts. Men can satisfy their sexual desire, enhance their masculinity, and raise their social status (e.g., go to dinner parties accompanied by attractive young sugar babies). They do not need to consider long-term commitment since this is a tradable win-win strategy between them and sugar babies. The average allowance for a sugar baby is \$2000-\$2500. Women can acquire financial resources and have higher purchase power by sugar dating. However, women may be more likely to devote themselves to short-term relationships with their sugar daddies and desire long-term commitment with these rich men.

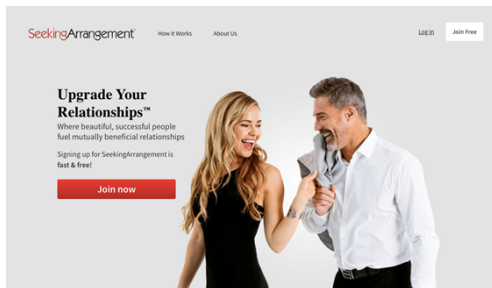


Figure 1 A sugar dating site cover



Figure 2 Darry Ring quote

### 3.1.2 Long-term mating preference

Men and women tend to share many common strategies in the long-term mating context. First, both of them focus more on mates' facial attractiveness than body attractiveness. Men tend to develop more emotional needs from their women partners instead of sexual desires in the short-term mating context. Women shift their emphasis on men's facial characteristics from short-term masculinity to long-term femininity since the feminine facial traits can show good partner and parent skills. Besides, these traits can reveal the emotional support from men. Second, both men and women attach great importance to long-term commitment and honesty. One marketing example is the diamond ring brand: Darry Ring (Figure 2). Its well-known quote 'Men can only order one in their life'. This shows that diamond rings represent long-term mating (e.g., marriage), promoting the honesty and importance of stability in romantic relationships. Third, they seek mates who share similar mate values with them. For example, women who do not want to have children tend to prefer men who share the DINK value with her. Last, both men and women do not like costly relationships. For example, most people think a mate with a child from a previous marriage is burdensome. Besides, many people dislike their partners keeping contact with their mates from the former relationships.

## 3.2 Mating preference and marketing strategies development

### 3.2.1 Temporal discounting and future-focus

Since different consumers have different mating needs, marketers should accurately detect their needs and divide them into short and long-term mating segments. Generally, younger consumers tend to show more passion for short-term mating since their relationship status is quite unstable and changeable. Thus, it is effective for marketers to use limited edition and 'Carpe Diem' advertising to attract these consumers. For example, Nike has made good use of this consumer psychology to attract young consumers by releasing limited-edition sneakers with a high price premium (Figure 3). In contrast, older consumers who have established or are looking for long-term relationships are more likely to engage in long-term mating strategies. Marketers can emphasize the future value of their products or services to



better serve these consumers. For example, children are a typical investment object in long-term relationships. Marketers can use kids' figures related to family to differentiate their products from others. Take insurance companies as an example. Since insurance meets consumers' future needs, marketers should highlight their future values to promote the service. An emotionally-appealing insurance advertisement always has kid characters (e.g., Cardif Assurance's 2011 advertisement) with a moving family story. This kind of advertisement can also improve the brand value of a company.

### 3.2.2 Gender-specific market and market segmentation

Men and women have very different mating strategies. Marketers can utilize these features to develop the gender-specific market to meet male and female consumers' needs. Since men tend to focus more on short-term mating, male consumers may show more temporal discounting in their consumption. Thus, some marketing strategies like limited editions can more effectively target male consumers. For example, luxury sports brands can design more limited-edition clothes and sneakers for men to arouse their impulsive consumption. However, this strategy is only effective for men when there exists a price premium. When marketers offer limited-time discounts on the products, both men and women will be more willing to purchase the products.

Because women are more likely to prefer long-term mating than men, it will be more effective for marketers to promote their products by using gender-neutral models in the advertisement when targeting female consumers because feminine characteristics stand for emotional support and stable caring. For example, Prada has adopted the famous transwoman actress Hunter Schafer as the model in its 2022 Spring collection advertisement (Figure 4). This gender-neutral figure has successfully attracted many female consumers, accompanied by the hit HBO TV series *Euphoria*.



Figure 3 Nike's limited edition: *Air Dior*



Figure 4 Hunter Schafer in Prada Spring 2022

### 3.2.3 Mate choice copying and sexual-over-perception biases

Because women tend to refer to other women's mating preferences and strategies when choosing mates, it is practical for marketers to utilize the endorsement effects of some recognized appealing male stars to promote their products or services. When the Korean drama *Descendants of the Sun* hit huge success in 2016, the leading actor Song Joong-ki became the 'national husband' in many female consumers' hearts. Many brands have chosen him as the spokesman for their advertisements (e.g., Figure 5). Men tend to have higher sexual-over-perception biases than women. Thus, it will be effective for marketers to utilize more sex cues in their advertisements when targeting male consumers. For example, Calvin Klein chose the sexy endorser Kim Hyun-ah as its spokeswoman (Figure 6). This can help attract more male consumers to purchase their products.



Figure 5 Song Joong-ki as a spokesman of Vivo

Figure 6 Hyun-ah as a spokeswoman of CK

#### 4. Case Study of Tinder Application

##### 4.1 3C analysis: Company, consumers, and competitors

###### 4.1.1 Company overview

Launched in 2012 as a prototype called ‘MatchBox’, Tinder is a young, promising, and highly profitable online dating application with a 32% dating market share in the US (Iqbal, 2022). In contrast to traditional dating sites, Tinder operates as an ‘exhibition’ platform of users’ personal photographs to facilitate their mating instead of applying the mathematical algorithm. Tinder is the initiator of the “Swipe” feature. Users easily swipe right to show like while swipe left to show dislike of others. If two people like each other, they can successfully match and start chatting. At the end of 2021, Tinder had 9.6 million paid subscribers and more than 80 million users worldwide (Iqbal, 2022).

Except for the core function “Swipe”, Tinder has also released many functions to continuously facilitate users’ mating experience. The “Rewind” function allows users to turn back to the last profile they’ve seen and revise their decisions. The “Super like” function can allow other users to see your like for them before they choose whether to like or not. The “Boost” function makes one user’s profile one of the top profiles in his or her area for 30 minutes, which can help increase the successful matching possibility. In 2015, Tinder launched Tinder Plus, the paid subscription which allows members to enjoy more “Swipe” opportunities than free users. In 2017, Tinder updated Tinder Plus to Tinder Gold. The membership provides subscribers with more privileges (e.g., unlimited “Swipe” right & one monthly boost).

In recent years, Tinder has released some innovative practices. For example, it launched an immersive game called “Swipe night” with a storyline in which users can make their own choices related to moral dilemmas. This gamification enhances the user experience based on a dating culture that conforms to Tinder’s brand value.

However, Tinder has faced some critics regarding safety and public health problems. Since Tinder users contain much more males than females, some crimes happened through Tinder dating. Besides, many users look for one-night stands targets on Tinder, which increase the transmission of venereal diseases like AIDS. Thus, Tinder launched the new functions of “Panic” and “Anti-fishing” in 2020. When users encounter an insecure situation, they can press the “Panic” button to report the emergency and share their locations to ask for help.

###### 4.1.2 Consumer analysis

Tinder is very prevailing among younger generations. The dating application market penetration rate of Tinder among users below 24 years old is 52% (Civic Science, as cited in Iqbal, 2022). 60% of Tinder users in the US are below 35 years old, which is consistent with the concept that younger people are more likely to engage in short-term mating.

Regarding the gender demographics, Tinder’s male users are much more than female users in number. The US Tinder users consist of 24% female and 75% male (App Ape, as





cited in Iqbal, 2022). More surprisingly, only 9% of UK Tinder users are female, while 89% are male (Ogury, as cited in Iqbal, 2022). Males and females show huge differences in their user behaviors. Firstly, male users tend to like more profiles than female users. However, they have only a 0.6% successful matching rate (Tyson et al., 2016). This revealed males' short-term mating strategies. Since they perceive that they can find many potential mates on Tinder, they tend to like a larger number and increase the successful mating rate in the short term. In contrast, women are much choosier than men when they go through the profiles on Tinder and like significantly fewer profiles than men. However, they are more likely to successfully match with others than male users. This showed that women are more cautious when engaged in the short-term mating context. They attach great importance to the prospective long-term attributes of male mates.

Besides, men's successful matching is always much slower than women receive it, proving that women think more before showing their attitudes. Even after successfully matching, men and women show different chatting styles. Men are more likely to send short messages averaging 12 characters and respond more quickly (Tyson et al., 2016), while women's messages are ten times longer than men's, with a much lower response (Emerging Technology, 2016).

#### 4.1.3 Competitor analysis

Tinder's direct competitors include other online dating applications like Bumble, Coffee Meets Bagel, Hinge, etc. Though Tinder is the most popular dating application among millennials, these applications may have some superior advantages over Tinder. Some applications have safer matching settings than Tinder. For example, Bumble does not allow males to send the first message, which reduces the possibility that women get trapped in men's short-term sexual purposes and enhances security. Since more Tinder users tend to seek short-term relationships, users looking for long-term relationships may prefer to use other applications like Hinge.

Some social media applications like Instagram and Tik Tok are Tinder's indirect competitors. Since these applications are more related to users' daily life and friend circles, consumers spend more time on these applications than on Tinder.

## 4.2 Problems reveal

Based on the above analysis, Tinder has three problems that can be improved:

1. The successful matching rate of Tinder is still very low at about 1.63% (Julian, 2018). This is related to Tinder's limited function use opportunities and the imbalanced needs between male and female users.
2. The Tinder profile mainly shows one's appearance, reinforcing the 'fast-food' relationship (short-term mating). These impression cues conform more to some male users' needs for short-term relationships but ignore female and other users' needs for seeking long-term relationships. Because the Tinder profile only shows one's photograph and basic information like age, the lack of other judgmental standards can backfire on users' matching desires, especially female users who are more cautious when choosing mates.
3. Due to the impression-matching setting and some security issues, Tinder is stigmatized as a 'hookup' rather than a dating application. People always relate Tinder with open sex relationships, viewing that Tinder users can be dishonest and cheat in their romantic relationships. Besides, Tinder has caused some public concerns about safety and health problems due to extreme users crossing the legal or moral boundaries.

These three problems are closely linked together. It is essential for Tinder to carry out





some strategies to improve the user experience and its brand image at the same time.

#### 4.3 Market strategies development

##### 4.3.1 Gender-specific Tinder Gold service & Function optimization

Since male users are much more than female users on Tinder, to solve the first problem, the key is to attract more female users to engage in Tinder mating and optimize their user experience. Because women tend to be more cautious than men when engaged in mating contexts, they need more information about their counterparts. Tinder Gold service can make strategic adjustments to better serve female consumers' needs:

1. *Increasing the "Rewind" opportunities in the Tinder Gold service package for female users.* Because female consumers are more cautious and need more time to make their mating decisions, they tend to avoid matchings that may have negative results. Based on this psychology, they are more likely than men to compare different profiles on Tinder and carefully make decisions. They also tend to think more about the missing opportunities. However, though the Tinder Gold service provides unlimited "Rewind" times, users can only turn back to the last profile they've seen and revise their choices. This can also explain the low matching rate since female users cannot turn back more and then give up seeking mates. When targeting female users, Tinder Gold can adjust the number of profiles they can "Rewind" to 5-10 pages to allow them to compare and make wiser decisions.
2. *Adding a new function of "Exploration" in the Tinder Gold service package for female users.* Since female users are more likely to know more about their mating targets before they have interaction, the Tinder Gold service can add a new function of "Exploration" to provide female users with limited opportunities to know the people they "Super like". For example, this function may allow female users to see more information (e.g., interests) about the people they "Super like" once a week. This can help female users make more comprehensive decisions and stimulate them to match their counterparts.
3. *Offering appropriate discounts on Tinder Gold service for female users.* Currently, the gender demographics of Tinder reveal a huge surplus of male users. Combining this situation and women's passion for sales discounts, it may be effective to offer female users of Tinder appropriate discounts on the Tinder Gold service.

Considering that these strategies may backfire among the male users because they may think these are unfair to them, the Tinder Gold service can offer some extra profits to male users to bring psychological balance to them. For example, Tinder can reduce the limited use of some functions like "Boost" and "Super like" that males use more. Initially, "Boost" can only be used one time per month by the Tinder Gold membership. Tinder can flexibly adjust the using time to 3-4 times at the original price to keep male users' loyalty.

##### 4.3.2 Offering customized profile options on a voluntary base

Currently, Tinder's impression profile conforms more to male users' short-term mating needs, ignoring many females and other users seeking long-term relationships. Besides, the current profile can only show one photograph, the age, and the occupation of each user, which is difficult for most users to make wiser choices based on further consideration. Thus, it may be more practical for Tinder to offer customized profile options for both male and female users on a voluntary base.

Since male users focus more on women's photographs (Wiederman, 1993), Tinder can allow users to set more than one photograph on their profiles. Tinder Gold subscribers can see profiles with more than one photograph. This can stimulate female users' willingness to put



more photos to attract their male counterparts. Meanwhile, more male users will be pleased to subscribe Tinder Gold service to see more photographs of female users.

Besides, since female users attach great importance to prospective long-term mate skills and are more likely to seek long-term relationships on Tinder, it will be effective to allow users to voluntarily add more basic and non-personal information like hobbies to their profiles. Tinder Gold members can see profiles with more details. This can help female users know more about their male counterparts before making decisions, increasing the matching rate and user experience.

#### *4.3.3 Launching the online user education programs and promoting the positive and safe dating values*

Except for the functions like “Panic” which can help users report emergencies and ask for help, Tinder can conduct online user education to promote positive and safe dating values. Online consumer education has a wider range of audiences and shows Tinder’s determination in improving users’ mating experience and safety. The user education can consider the following issues and forms:

1. *Content*: The education programs should include these three core themes: information & physical security, public health, and moral issues. Tinder can highly emphasize the legal penalties the violators may face regarding the information and physical security and appropriately warn the users of the dire consequences of raising their safety awareness. As for public health, Tinder can promote the basic knowledge and preventive measures of STDs, especially among the younger millennial users. In terms of the moral issue, Tinder should pay more attention to emphasizing the importance of honesty and fidelity in a relationship. To gradually eliminate the stigma of a “hookup” application, Tinder can also encourage users to find their true love and seek and enjoy long-term stable relationships.
2. *Forms*: Tinder can launch some short online videos to promote these positive and safe dating values. These short videos should convey the core values based on factual data and cases. Still, they can be interesting and inspiring at the same time by utilizing animated figures to attract consumers’ attention. Besides, Tinder can make good use of its famous storyline of “Swipe night” to integrate the plot with the consequences of these issues and guide the users to make their own choice through learning.
3. *Promotion & incentive mechanism*: Tinder can cooperate with other social media platforms to promote the education programs. It can also use its own platform to play the education videos. It can be an attractive incentive for Tinder users to get free trials of Tinder Gold membership (or less limit of membership functions if the user is already one) after watching these videos and finish answering some simple MC questions. Tinder can also set a five-star rating system regarding user behaviors. If a user has a very well mating impression and never violates rules, he or she can get some rewards like more privilege on Tinder functions. However, if a user violates the rules that result in fewer stars, he or she will face some function bans. Additionally, Tinder can join the campaigns related to these important issues and promote its values through these campaigns. For example, it can join the gender equality movements to anti the violence from one sex toward the other. Besides, it can also show Tinder’s inclusiveness by joining the anti-AIDS-discrimination movements to help eliminate the stigmas on AIDS patients.



### **Topic 3: Benign vs. Malicious Envy: A Review on the Effects of Consumer Envy in the Modern Marketplace and Its Inspiration on Burberry**

#### **1. Introduction**

Ten days ago, you saw the promotion advertisement for Louis Vuitton's 2022 Spring new handbag. Looking at the old and outdated Coach handbag that you've used for five years, you really want to buy that new LV bag and throw the old one away. However, the bloody high price of \$2200 scared you away. You thought over and over these days but still failed to make the trade-off decision. Today, when you were checking your Instagram moments, you suddenly saw Kevin, your high school best friend who is currently the CEO of a unicorn company, sharing a photo of him holding the new LV bag you want to buy. Without thinking more, you opened Louis Vuitton's official page and bought that LV bag immediately, even if the price has gone up to \$2500.

People always want to fill the gap between the actual self and the ideal self. The social comparison between themselves and others reinforces this desire. When we see people who are superior to us, we tend to have upward comparison and benign envy. In this scenario, you bought the LV handbag as an impulsive consumption resulting from the comparison.

Previous studies have indicated that social comparison is a product of people's inner desire to compare themselves with others to achieve self-assessment (Wood, 1989). In some scenarios, the upward social comparison can drive people to work harder to follow the superior reference group. However, this kind of comparison can also have negative consequences like envy, low self-esteem, and even anxiety and depression.

Among the above consequences, envy is a hot research topic in the Consumer Behavior field. Some earlier studies have claimed that envy can be harmful to people as a negative emotion. First, envious people can hurt others. For example, they are likely to destroy others' possessions they do not have (Zizzo & Oswald, 2001). Besides, this psychology can result in other related psychological problems in some cases (Habimana & Massé, 2000). Second, people who are envied may be afraid to perform well (Schoeck, 1969). Though many people view envy as an extremely negative emotion, it has some constructive sides. For example, benign envy can boost people's consumption desire for some products possessed by superior others. This can help companies become more profitable and create consumer value. Additionally, envy can stimulate people to put more effort into striving for higher positions.

Previous studies have divided envy into benign envy and malicious envy (Van de Ven et al., 2009; Van de Ven et al., 2011). Benign envy happens when people want to move up to others' situations after upward comparison. This only occurs when people think the reference groups deserve their possessions or status. In this situation, people tend to work harder to improve their positions. Besides, their willingness to pay (WTP) increases a lot, providing huge opportunities for products' price premium, especially for luxury items. However, malicious envy happens when people think the reference groups do not deserve their possessions. In this situation, people are more likely to conduct social differentiation to separate themselves from people who are superior. Additionally, malicious envy can be more negative since people in this situation can hurt others sometimes (Zizzo & Oswald, 2001). Malicious envy provides differentiation opportunities, highlighting the effects and importance of brand differentiation strategies.

Entering the information era, social media has become more and more irreplaceable in people's daily life. The widespread use of social media has reinforced social comparison significantly, resulting in social media envy. Earlier studies have indicated that social media envy can increase people's buying intention of the specific products or experiences others have (e.g., Jin & Ryu, 2020; Liu et al., 2019). Combining the e-WOM trend and KOL effects,



it is essential for marketers to make good use of social media platforms, consumers' envy psychology, and influencer marketing when promoting their products.

As a long-history luxury brand, Burberry is famous for its highly recognizable trademark Burberry Check. The Burberry trench coat and Burberry Check scarf are the most popular items. Though Burberry's British style is quite mature, its moderate price among luxury products has attracted many young people who want to follow the fashion trend. However, this moderate price has left Burberry in an awkward situation at the same time. First, the higher prices of other luxury brands attract more upper and middle classes consumers since higher prices show higher purchasing power and social status. This results in Burberry's lower popularity among luxury brands. Second, compared with other fashion brands (e.g., street brands), the latter are more welcomed by young consumers since they are more affordable.

Though previous studies have generated managerial implications based on benign and malicious envy, most of them separated these two envy types when providing marketing suggestions. This paper explored the functions of benign and malicious envy in today's marketplace, aiming to provide Burberry with insightful pricing and promotion strategies to help Burberry get out of the dilemma.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Social comparison theory & Envy as a double-edged sword

Social comparison theory claims that people are constantly driven by their inner desire to compare with others to achieve self-evaluation (Suls et al., 2002; Wood, 1989). When people are engaged in upward comparison, they tend to compare themselves with the superior reference groups and struggle to reduce the gap between their actual self and ideal self. However, people who want to feel a sense of achievement or superior may compare themselves with the inferior reference group. This is called downward comparison. Consumers are constantly engaged in upward comparison and want what others possess. This consumer psychology results from different factors, for example, the bandwagon or underdog effect, which means people are driven to follow the dominant groups and powerful influencers in society (Schmitt-Beck, 2015).

The upward social comparison is always accompanied by Materialistic envy (Belk, 2008), which stimulates consumers' buying intention (Van de Ven et al., 2011). As an emotion and consumer psychology, envy has both constructive and destructive effects. When people are engaged in benign envy, they tend to struggle and spend more effort filling the gap between themselves and superior others. For example, a high-school student who is envious of another student who has a higher ranking may want to study harder to approach that ranking. Besides, Materialistic envy that can drive impulsive consumption can increase companies' profits and consumer values, which significantly drive economic growth. This positive effect is more prominent with social media marketing. However, envy can be harmful, especially when consumers engage in malicious envy. First, envious people may suffer from other psychological problems like low self-esteem and depression (Krasnova et al., 2015). They are more likely to harm superior others in both verbal and non-verbal ways. Second, people who are likely to be envied by others may become afraid to perform well under the pressure of attacks from the envious ones, which can also lead to psychological problems. Third, envy can result in impulsive decision-making, which can even incur criminals in some extreme cases (Habimana & Massé, 2000). Last, envy can backfire on collaboration and teamwork spirit, resulting in low efficiency and worse well-being.



## 2.2 Benign versus malicious envy: Price premium or product differentiation?

Van de Ven et al.'s (2009) study indicated clear distinctions between benign envy and malicious envy. While benign envy serves as a moving-up motivation for people, malicious envy drives people to pull others down. This study consisted of three experiments. Experiment 1 was conducted in the Netherlands with the two distinctly different expressions of benign and malicious envy. This experiment asked participants to recall their feelings of experience of envy. The results showed that benign envy could improve people themselves, while malicious envy can drive people to hurt others. Besides, another important finding from experiment 1 is the differentiation between benign & malicious envy and admiration & resentment. For the former one, benign envy is accompanied by comparison and self-improvement, but admiration does not. Besides, admiration is pleasing, while benign envy may have more negative feelings. Regarding the latter, resentment can have more severe emotional destructive than malicious envy without comparison. Experiment 2 and Experiment 3 enlarged the research area to other cultural contexts (US & Spain) whose cultures only have a single expression of envy. The experiment results showed that people from different cultures have two distinct experiences of benign and malicious envy regardless of cultural and social factors.

Based on this study, Van de Ven et al.'s (2011) study claimed that benign envy only happens when consumers think superior others deserve their possessions or status and want to improve their own positions. However, malicious envy happens when consumers believe that superior others do not deserve specific things and turn to social differentiation. Earlier studies have indicated that people who are envious of others tend to have a stronger desire for the possession others have (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2000). Van de Ven et al.'s (2011) study used three experiments to explore the relationships between consumer envy and their willingness to pay (WTP). Experiment 1 investigated participants' tendency to compare with others on favorable internships opportunities. The results showed that benign envy increases consumers' WTP for specific products or services in a significant way. The higher level of comparison led to higher WTP. Experiment 2 asked participants to image a peer student who has an iPhone, aiming to distinguish between benign and malicious envy's effects on WTP. Results revealed that participants engaged in benign envy tended to have significantly higher WTP of an envy premium of 48% than participants engaged in malicious envy, proving that only benign envy leads to higher WTP. Experiment 3 asked participants to watch a video of a peer student who owned an iPhone. The student got the iPhone for his hard work in the benign envy situation. However, the student acquired his iPhone from his father in the malicious envy situation. The result indicated that benign envy induced higher WTP for the same possession of superior others, while malicious envy led to higher WTP for other products to differentiate oneself from others.

These studies have generated practical marketing implications. First, products that induce consumers' benign envy can utilize price premiums to arouse their impulsive consumption and become more profitable. This is more effective among luxury products or limited-edition products. Second, service or experience can also arouse consumers' envy. Marketers can provide membership privileges to differentiate consumers and induce upward comparison and consumption. Last, marketers should also pay attention to differentiating their products based on consumers' malicious envy. It will be effective for them to conduct strategic differentiation to attract consumers from other brands.

## 2.3 Social media envy & Influencer marketing

Entering the information era, many social media platforms have emerged and become irreplaceable in people's daily life. Previous studies have revealed the significant effects of





social media marketing on improving brand values (e.g., Hamilton et al., 2016; Rishika et al., 2013). Marketers can use social media as brand communication platforms with their consumers. Both official accounts and social media platform celebrities can significantly induce consumers' upward social comparison. Consumers' benign envy of celebrities or close friends can increase their purchase intentions and WTP. This can help companies become more profitable and keep loyal consumers concurrently. As e-WOM becomes more important in consumers' daily life (Kim & Johnson, 2016), it is essential for marketers to make good use of public opinion. Thus, marketers tend to find Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) to help them communicate the brand value and promote their products.

Jin & Ryu's (2020) study has investigated the effects of Instagram influencer marketing on consumers' buying intention by adopting the perspective of consumers' envy. This study analyzed the relationships between social media envy and buying intentions, KOL effects, and brand trust. Experiment 1 investigated the effects of three types of photos: selfies, photos taken by others, and group photos on consumers' purchase intention. The results showed that higher social media envy generated higher WTP among consumers. Specifically, male consumers tended to have stronger purchase intentions than women when they were envious. Besides, selfies and photos taken by others have greater influence than group photos for them. In contrast, female consumers have higher WTP when exposed to group photos. Experiment 2 indicated that consumers' envy implied higher e-WOM trustworthiness. Instagram celebrities (KOLs) have more effects than mainstream celebrities (e.g., famous actresses). Experiment 3 revealed that consumers' social comparison resulted in materialistic envy and impulsive consumption, which showed strong brand trust. When the content generators were Instagram celebrities (namely, the KOL effects) with the products, female consumers tended to have stronger comparison desire, impulsive consumption tendency, and brand trustworthiness. However, male consumers were more likely to have higher consumption desires when exposed to models instead of product photos, reflecting males' stronger intrasexual rivals (Buunk & Massar, 2012).

Previous studies have stressed the importance of social media envy in influencer marketing and brand value improvement. Marketers should make good use of the social media platforms, e-WOM, and KOL effects to strategically create more consumer values.

### 3. Daily Examples

#### 3.1 Social comparison throughout people's life & Envy's dual character

Social comparison can be seen everywhere. From the kids who engage in running competitions with others to older people who play mahjong or chess, social comparison accompanies people throughout their whole life. People evaluate themselves through social comparison with others. Social comparison can be both upward and downward. Upward social comparison is the comparison between oneself and superior others. People engaged in this type of comparison tend to spend more effort striving for the ideal self and filling the gap between themselves and superior others. For example, when a woman sees the new Chanel bag of her best friend, she may be engaged in the upward comparison and then wants to get the same Chanel bag to reduce the gap between them. Thus, she worked much harder and saved money for a new Chanel bag. When she acquired that Chanel bag, she filled the gap between the actual self and ideal self and made herself more conform to her sisters, revealing the bandwagon effects. In contrast, downward social comparison happens when people compare themselves with inferior others. People sometimes seek achievement and fulfillment through this type of comparison. For example, a student got a B in his Macroeconomics course. He wanted to comfort himself by self-encouragement. However, the upward comparison can only make him more anxious, and hard-working is the only solution. Thus, he



turned to compare himself with the inferior others who got a B- or even below. The downward comparison provided him with instant comfort and relief.

Social comparison can sometimes induce envy. As a common emotion and consumer psychology, envy has both positive and negative sides. Since upward social comparison can stimulate people to work harder to fill the gap between themselves and the superior others (ideal selves), benign envy can become moving-up motivation and drive people to strive for higher positions and success. Consumers' benign envy can also stimulate economic growth by impulsive consumption. Air Jordan sneakers are a typical example, especially among male consumers. Since Air Jordan symbolizes the fashion and street styles in younger consumers' hearts, teenagers who wear Air Jordan sneakers can be 'dominant' among their peers. When teenager boys see their peer friends' new Air Jordan sneakers, especially the sneakers bought with their saved money, they may be engaged in benign envy and save money from full-time jobs and buy the dream sneakers themselves to fill the gap. Marketers of Air Jordan sneakers always make good use of this psychology and flexibly utilize price premiums to earn more profits. However, envy can be destructive sometimes, especially in malicious envy situations. In the same case of Air Jordan sneakers, some teenagers who engage in malicious envy may suffer from severer negative emotions, which can even become resentment. This can not only destruct their mental health but can increase their possibility of hurting others. For example, some teenagers may be driven by a stronger desire for sneakers but cannot earn enough money in a short time. They may steal money from their parents, resulting in criminal behaviors in their later life. Besides, the teenagers who are envied may be afraid to wear the Air Jordan sneakers since he or she cannot bear the risk of being mocked by envious others. This type of envy can also break the friendship sometimes, which can cause further negative impacts on teamwork. For example, suppose two close friends are on the same football team. One of them broke with the other because of envy. They may deliberately behave less cooperative, which can result in the worse performance of the whole team.

### 3.2 Benign versus malicious envy & its marketing implications

People who engage in benign envy tend to have the moving-up motivation and improve their positions by making more efforts. In contrast, people are more likely to conduct social differentiation to separate themselves from superior others or pull them down.

Take the recently popular star Gu Ailing (Eileen) as an example (Figure 1). She is a talented and hard-working girl who has become the youngest gold medalist in freestyle skiing in the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games. Besides, she spent one year on self-learning and got an offer from Stanford. She is so beautiful and confident that she has attracted many fans these days. Some girls who are envious of Eileen appreciate her omnipotent talents and hard-working spirit. They want to become a person like Eileen with good grades, a beautiful appearance, and a good sportswoman figure. They are engaged in benign envy and want to move themselves to their ideal selves like Eileen. Thus, they work harder in their study and spend much more time following Pamela's videos and doing exercise. Some of them also want to have the same makeup and clothes as Eileen does. However, some girls engaged in malicious envy may claim that Eileen's achievement is a product of her good family material conditions and her mother's patient care and education. They think she doesn't deserve these honors because she has a higher start-point than many other Chinese girls. In this scenario, these girls may switch to other less-perfect idols than Eileen.

Since consumer envy can provide considerable profits for brands' marketing development, marketers should utilize this psychology when adjusting pricing strategies. First, benign envy can occur when consumers think that superior others deserve their possession. This type of envy can increase consumers' WTP, especially for luxury and



limited-edition products. Thus, marketers can make good use of price premiums based on consumers' benign envy. For example, many co-branded products (e.g., GUCCI× Balenciaga's sneakers, Figure 2) are sold at higher prices than their release price since consumers' envy psychology drives their demands for these products significantly.



Figure 1 Gu Ailing won the gold medal



Figure 2 GUCCI × Balenciaga sneaker

Second, some brands can also utilize consumers' benign envy to increase the profitability of their products and services. Many companies have a membership system, which provides members with privileges to differentiate them from regular users. For example, many makeup brands like Yves Saint Laurent send Christmas subscription boxes to their members. Consumers can enjoy the seasonal surprises from their memberships. The other example is Disneyland's annual pass membership. Visitors who hold the annual pass card can visit Disneyland unlimited times within one year. Besides, they can enjoy the 'skip-queue' privilege a few times when enjoying some particular entertainment. This differentiation can significantly increase consumers' benign envy and stimulate higher WTP for memberships.

Third, even malicious envy can have marketing practice in some scenarios. Because consumers are more likely to have social differentiation when engaged in malicious envy, they tend to get away from the mainstream trends and make themselves more distinct. Thus, marketers can differentiate their products from other brands by product innovation.

### 3.3 Social media envy and influencer marketing

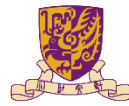
The widespread of social media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has significantly reinforced social comparison. Marketers aim at consumers' envy psychology, actively engaging in influencer marketing on multiple social media platforms. They cooperate with mainstream celebrities and social media celebrities to promote their products. Mainstream celebrities have solid fans bases because of their strong influence in the entertainment circle. Thus, brands are willing to cooperate with them for product promotion. For example, Armani collaborated with the famous actress Cate Blanchett to promote its female perfume Armani SÌ, which hit huge success in the marketplace (Figure 3). Besides, more companies tend to seek social media celebrities who serve as more direct consumer communication generators for product promotion. These celebrities include makeup bloggers, street artists, popular couples, etc. Take the famous Korean makeup blogger PONY as an example (Figure 4). She is well-known for her extraordinary makeup arts. She sometimes posts Instagram moments with some brand names appearing in the photos (e.g., Christian Dior, Supreme).



Figure 3 Cate Blanchett & Armani SÌ



Figure 4 PONY & Dior makeup and perfume



## 4. Case study of Burberry's pricing and promotion strategies

### 4.1 3Cs analysis: Company, consumers, and competitors

#### 4.1.1 Company overview

With a long history of 165 years, Burberry is a British luxury brand that sells leather goods, fashion accessories, and cosmetics & perfume. The trench coat and Burberry Check scarf are Burberry's most recognizable and representative star products, which significantly show Burberry's elegant brand tone and attract many consumers. In 2021, Burberry's brand value was approximate \$5.2 billion (Burberry, 2021) and ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in 2021's Top 50 luxury & premium ranking (Brandirectory, 2021).

#### 4.1.2 Consumer analysis

Burberry has currently paid more attention to late Millennials and early Gen Z consumers because of their fast-growing market share and their promising potential purchasing power (Burberry, 2021). Growing up in the information era, these consumers are highly immersed in the Internet social network and familiar with multiple social media platforms. They always follow the latest fashion trends and have a great passion for self-expression. Compared with their previous generation, they are more likely to have social comparison and social media envy. Thus, they tend to have higher WTP when engaged in benign envy of social media celebrities and their peer colleagues or friends.

Since young consumers care more for the brand values and Corporation Social Responsibility (CSR), it is also important for Burberry's marketers to promote the brand's positive values regarding issues like social justice, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

#### 4.1.3 Competitor analysis

Burberry's strong direct competitors mainly include other luxury brands like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Chanel. Compared with Burberry, these brands have faster upgrades of products, which meet the fast-changing needs of young consumers. Besides, these brands have more product innovation and co-branding practices (e.g., GUCCI × Balenciaga), which are highly valued by young consumers. Last but not least, since Burberry's product prices are much lower than these brands (especially for the clothes and leather bags), consumers who attach great importance to price premium to differentiate themselves may like other luxury brands more. However, Burberry is considered more cost-effective than these luxury brands, which fits some consumers' needs for practicability.

As for the indirect competitors, some original design brands and cheaper makeup brands (e.g., Etude House) are worth consideration. Since their product upgrading is also much faster and more affordable for young consumers, consumers who want to follow the fashion trend without many economic resources are more likely to turn to these brands. However, they also have some drawbacks compared with Burberry. For example, lower prices are sometimes related to lower quality, which may backfire on consumers' loyalty significantly.

### 4.2 Burberry's pricing and promotion strategies

#### 4.2.1 Pricing strategies

Currently, Burberry mainly uses price premiums to maintain the luxurious brand tone. Compared with other luxury brands, the product prices of Burberry are more affordable for young consumers. However, consumers who strive for more distinct social differentiation may turn to more expensive products from other luxury brands. As for the middle and low-end products like cosmetics, Burberry's pricing is relatively high for many young consumers





to purchase frequently. However, they are great choices when consumers want to differentiate themselves from others who use cheaper cosmetics products from other brands.

#### 4.2.2 Promotion strategies

Burberry has made good use of both traditional media (e.g., magazine and TV ads) and social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, RED) to promote its products. Besides, Burberry has cooperated with industry giants like Tencent to promote its brand. However, Burberry has less cooperation with mainstream or social media celebrities compared with other brands, which may be a disadvantage since influencer marketing is very prevalent in today's marketplace.

#### 4.3 Problems reveal

From above, Burberry has three problems that need more attention for improvement:

1. Burberry's high-end products like outwears and leather bags have lower prices than luxury brands like Louis Vuitton and Chanel. Consumers with higher purchase power may prefer other luxury brands to show their higher social status. Besides, since Burberry's star products are more affordable for young consumers, consumers who have a stronger desire for self-expression and distinction may prefer more niche and stylized brands like Versace.
2. Burberry's middle and low-end products like cosmetics and perfumes have higher prices than other cheaper cosmetics brands like Maybelline and Perfect Diary, which are much less affordable for many young consumers to buy them frequently. Besides, the iteration of Burberry's cosmetic products is much slower than other luxury cosmetic brands (e.g., Armani), which is less attractive to young consumers.
3. Burberry has not made good use of social media platforms and influencer & KOL effects for consumer communication, resulting in its lower media influence ranking than other luxury brands (Launchmetrics, 2021).

#### 4.4 Marketing strategies development

##### 4.4.1 High-end products differentiation: Make good use of malicious envy

The key to solving the first problem is differentiating Burberry's high-end products from other luxury brands. Since consumers are more likely to be engaged in malicious envy when they think superior others do not deserve their possession. Some consumers tend to believe people who own the most expensive products from luxury brands like Goyard and GUCCI are using their families' financial resources for indulgent consumption. Thus, they want to conduct social differentiation by avoiding buying products from these brands. Burberry can make good use of this consumer psychology to carry out product differentiation and attract these consumers. Here are some practical differentiation strategies:

1. *Product line extension.* Burberry can differentiate its products by the expansion of its existing product lines. Since some consumers attach significant importance to self-expression and social differentiation, Burberry can carry out new designs based on the original products' prototypes to make these products more distinct and stylish. Designers can use some factors like color, patterns, and decorations. For example, to target the niche market of LGBT+ consumers, Burberry can flexibly add rainbow patterns to its classic Burberry Check since these consumers view the rainbow colors as an expression of their pride.
2. *Cooperation with avant-garde artists.* Since many luxury brands have cooperated with famous artists to develop their products (e.g., Louis Vuitton × Takashi Murakami), it may be a differentiation point for Burberry to collaborate with some avant-garde and low-key artists. These artists integrate forward trends like



environmental protection, feminism, and diversified masculinity into their artworks, which are highly recognized by young consumers. Burberry can collaborate with these artists to develop new products (especially products with various patterns while maintaining the brand tone) and show distinct brand values.

#### 4.4.2 Middle & low-end products: Flexible pricing strategies

To solve the second problem, Burberry can make good use of consumers' benign envy and maintain the price premium of its middle and low-end products while supplemented by some flexible pricing strategies:

1. *Frequent buyer privileges.* Burberry can differentiate the buyers by setting a frequent buyer privilege system. For example, consumers who have purchased Burberry's cosmetics more than five times can get Burberry's seasonal cosmetic subscription boxes and enjoy more sales discounts than regular users. This can attract more young consumers based on their benign envy.
2. *Product bundling.* While Burberry maintains its premium pricing of the middle and low-end products, it can make good use of product bundling to persuade consumers to enjoy more discounts by purchasing the bundling products. For example, Burberry can release the bundling cosmetic boxes at a lower price than the total original price of the single items, making consumers feel they've saved a lot by buying the bundling products.
3. *Sample sales.* Since many consumers are concerned about the high price and how long their love for cosmetics can last, they tend to buy cheaper cosmetics frequently. Burberry can appropriately sell its cosmetic or perfume samples to young consumers based on their fast-changing consumer preferences.

#### 4.4.3 Engaging in influencer marketing: Make good use of social media envy

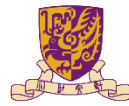
To enhance the media influence and online consumer communication, it can be more effective for Burberry to make good use of social media envy among young consumers. Burberry can cooperate with both mainstream and social media celebrities to promote its products. Meanwhile, it can adopt gender-specific promotion based on Jin & Ryu's (2020) study. Last but not least, Burberry can also use 'peer influence' to attract more consumers:

1. *Utilizing KOL effects.* Since celebrities have a lot of followers on social media platforms, their product choices or representations can tremendously induce followers' benign envy and increase their WTP. Burberry can collaborate with the mainstream and social media celebrities for product promotion, especially the latter ones who tend to have more influence nowadays.
2. *Gender-specific promotion.* Since male consumers' WTP is higher when they see KOL's selfies and photos taken by others and female consumers' WTP is higher when they see KOL's group photos, Burberry can ask male and female celebrities to present their products in the corresponding ways to reach male and female consumers respectively.
3. *Peer influencer promotion.* Because young consumers tend to have close relationships with their peer friends, they are more likely to compare themselves with them. Burberry can drive its current consumers' positive e-WOM of the brand by granting these consumers extra profits like sample products and appropriate discounts if they post Burberry's products in a positive way. This can stimulate current consumers' sharing desires and help attract potential consumers simultaneously.



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