

Lipstick Worship research

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Background

This research addresses the topic of lipstick worships among many Chinese women that has invited much interests in earlier debates on such crazy longing for lipsticks from some luxury brands. It focuses on content taken from Chinese large social media platforms on which a lipstick is given symbolic meanings through strategic marketing in order to stimulate lipstick purchases. The research relies mainly on case study of YSL Star Clash Edition and content analysis about social media platforms in order to figure out what role that social media has played in shaping the term ‘lipstick worship’, to show the influence of consumer culture in the example of lipstick worship, and to demonstrate how lipstick worship affect women’s image and social cognition of gender identity. It starts with the description of lipstick worship and of its phenomena on social media. Then we give a specific example of YSL lipstick and how it actually creates lipstick worshippers since its Star Clash Edition released around 2016 Christmas. Moreover, in an attempt to analyzing this phenomena, we draw on marketing on social media, consumer culture especially the love myth established in lipstick worship, and gender analysis on gender roles that probably are stereotyped.

Use of subheds would help

Lipstick worship is a lipstick mania phenomenon originated from Chinese social media that women tend to buy more lipsticks than they actually need and value lipsticks as a way to show off their life quality, class distinction and to see whether their

boyfriends love them or not when they ask and enjoy lipsticks as gifts. In order to see how this mania spreads among different media platforms, we searched Weibo, the Chinese largest social media platforms, and Little Red Book, the largest cosmetics-sharing platforms, to know how people, especially women, think about lipsticks. How do you know all of this? Without sources, one wonders. Female users tend to show off their lipsticks collection and it is quite prevailing many users especially on the Little Red Book have several hundreds lipsticks. They are being carefully placed together with golden-shining lights that make them look luxurious and even give people a sense of richness and nobility. Users share and recommend some lipsticks and post pictures of how it looks when wearing that lipstick. Besides, they even make lipsticks functionally distinctive, for example, certain lipsticks are featured by the circumstances where a particular lipstick makes you look better. Moreover, these lipsticks are generally from large luxury brands with special design of its shape and color that allows them to be recognized at one sight.

Why 'lipstick worship' spreads in recent years? First is the characteristics of lipstick. Compared to other cosmetics, lipstick is more distinct in the photos circulating on the social media as well as more portable and easier to collect. It is also cheaper to possess even it's a luxury brand. It is said to increase the sexual attraction. Secondly, lipsticks have been long viewed as feminine and thus they can perform one's gender

How so are you drawing on Butler? Explication of theory needed.

identity, drawing on Judith Butler. The last reason is that consumer culture intentionally promotes this worship. Strategic marketing and advertising are made to add many additional values, such as class distinction, ideal lifestyle, and love, to the lipsticks, Reads too atheoretical. which we will discuss later in this paper.

Research Questions

Should appear in a narrative form.

1. What is the role of social media in shaping the term ‘lipstick worship’?
2. What is the influence of consumer culture, take lipstick worship as an example?
3. How does lipstick worship affect women’s image and people’s cognition of gender identity?

Methodology

In this research, we use two methodologies, content analysis and case study.

Content Analysis

Zhihu is a Chinese biggest question-and-answer website where questions are created, answered, edited and organized by the community of its users. When we search ‘lipstick’ as the keyword, we find 6043 questions and over 76700 followers about that topic. ¹ Under the question “The story you want to share about the lipstick?” The top answer received 6418 likes.

“In tests, I wore the Dior 999. Although the foundation of the makeup is very rough, that bright red color gave me power, so I gained the courage to overcome all difficulties and challenges.

How the data are presented is very confusing.

During the interview, I always looked at the examiners with a smile, no fear, and everything ended smoothly. In the end, I got 30 points for the Boya project.

.....

This 30 points helped me step into the door of Peking University. I think I can partly

¹ Data source: <https://www.zhihu.com/topic/19829713/top-answers>

attribute that success to Dior 999. It gave me the self-confidence that I lack, and I was able to start my career.”

From the narrative above, we can see lipsticks are bound with confidence and courage. The writer convinced by the idea that the lipstick contributes to her admission to the top Chinese university. It is a reflection of the brainwashing lipstick marketing strategy.

The other story is about lipstick and love received 1174 likes.

“In my senior year, I decided to dress myself up. I was quite fond of one YSL lipstick called ‘color that can seduce men’(斩男色) and told my boyfriend that I wanted that lipstick.

He told me that “I don't have money...”

I didn't expect him to buy it for me. I never asked him anything other than to hug me.

During this time, my boyfriend told me that "It is not happy to establish a family with you." More than two years' relationship broken down.

After a month, I received a gift on my birthday, the exact YSL Lipstick No. 12. It was my friend who gave it to me. She told me, "He never spoiled you, but I will comfort you.”

.....

That lipstick for me is the last straw, and also weak me up from the dream. If someone is not that into you, you can feel it by yourself. But too often we choose to deceive ourselves to cover up our stupidity.”

As the narrative mentioned, people create a nickname for the lipstick like “color

that can seduce men”(斩男色) . Such term is prevailing on Chinese social media.

“斩” is short for “斩获,” which means to “capture decisively,” “男” means “men,” and “色” means “color.” This term refers to certain colors of lipsticks that will reportedly help seduce a straight guy. The top color that falls into this category is said to be “nude,” represented by YSL lipstick No. 12. Although it looks like a cheesy sales gimmick, not only did the term catch on and helped push sales of specific brands of lipsticks, but it also emphasis on the sexual attraction of lipstick and closely relate lipstick with the relationship.

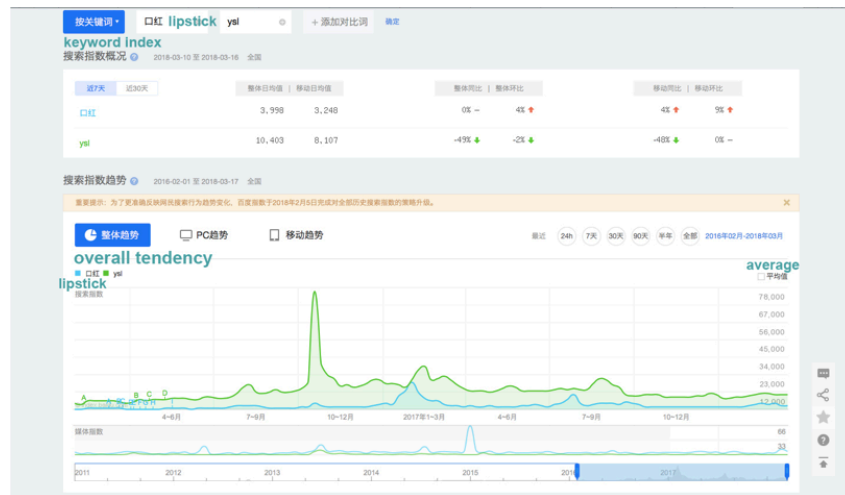
It’s interesting to notice when the girl’s friend gave her the lipstick to comfort her, and even herself regard the lipstick as the last straw in her relationship. They’ve been convinced by the information circulating online that if a man loves you, he will willingly buy your lipstick. Thus, the strategic advertisement constructs the “true love myth.”

Case study This really isn't a case study. How do you define such an approach?

The case study our group use to analyze the phenomenon of ‘lipstick worship’ is YSL Star Clash Edition. This special edition was released on Christmas in 2016 and received a lot of attention. What needs to be paid attention to is that this edition was not put into the market in mainland China, but a lot of people in mainland China crazily chased after this edition. Their craziness of Star Clash began from an article on WeChat on 17th October, 2016 called *How Your Boyfriend Responds When You Ask for a YSL Star Clash?* It was spread widely on social media and received over 100,000 reviews and 10,730

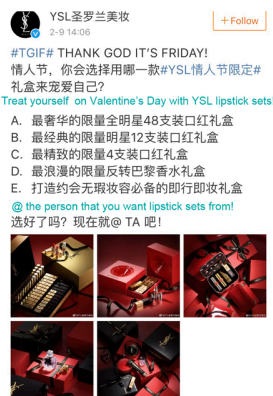
likes. In this article, a lot of examples of asking boyfriend to send YSL Star Clash were presented. Acts of buying lipsticks for girlfriends are encouraged and praised and girls are proud of showing off their lipsticks of limited edition bought by boyfriends. This article was not only popular on the platform of WeChat, but also aroused widespread debates over lipsticks and this article on social media. Take Zhihu, Chinese Quora, as an example, the question ‘How do you view the article on WeChat *How Your Boyfriend Responds When You Ask for a YSL Star Clash*’ received over 2,000 followers, 632 answers and nearly 200,000 reviews. From the numbers, it can be concluded that this article as well as the topic of boyfriend buying lipsticks raised great concern and popularity.

Baidu is the largest search engine in China and Baidu Index provides statistics about how many times and when a keyword has been searched. Our group used ‘lipstick’ and ‘YSL’ as two keywords to search and the result shows the overall tendency of the two keywords. The chart below shows that the keyword YSL experienced a peak around October in 2016, which is exactly when the article on WeChat and lipsticks were released. Both the keywords had two rises in 2017, the first one happened around January to March which was the time of Valentine’s Day while the second one appeared around July which was the time when Chinese Valentine’s Day was at. Through analyzing the tendency of keywords, lipsticks have a close tie with holidays that are related to love.



DataStory, a leading statistics analysis company in China, provided statistics about overall public opinion on Internet in the first half of 2017. According to its statistics, in the first half of 2017, 7 out of ‘10 hottest topics in beauty industry’ are concerned with lipsticks. Lipsticks have occupied the space of a lot of heat discussion in people’s daily life.

After the event happened in 2016, lipsticks have been closely related to ‘boyfriend’ or ‘true love’. For example, later in the advertisement on Valentine’s Day in 2018, YSL adopted the advertising strategy of relating boyfriends with lipsticks and implying to use lipstick sets to prove love for girlfriends. Including men into the potential customers is the strategy a lot of cosmetics companies take and lipsticks have been representations of true love.



Analysis

We analyze lipstick worship from three aspects. The first one is social media and advertising, the second one is consumer culture and the third one is gender identity.

How do you distinguish
between adv and sm?

Social media and advertising

Now you are doing a content analysis?

From the content analysis of lipsticks on social media and the case study of YSL Star Clash, our group find that social media and advertising are combined with each other to realize strategic advertising.

Social media are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications (Obar and Wildman, 2015), they are the platforms highly interactive and instant. Users are allowed to respond to the contents online instantly and also, they can also generate contents by themselves on social media. In other words, social media which are based on Web 2.0 allow a two-way communication (Boateng and Okoe, 2015). Under this background, companies find new advertising opportunities on social media because their dialogic potential and capability to track users' behavioral responses (Rodgers and Thorson, 2000). Also, users can be the content generator who promote products voluntarily which further strengthen the effect of advertising. Based on the background of social media, advertising and potential consumers can affect each other mutually.

In the case of advertising lipsticks, cosmetics companies choose the strategy of including male into the target consumers. They instill the idea that men should buy lipsticks to show their love for their lovers into people's mind and make them believe that lipsticks are symbols of love and the ability to purchase. The expansion of target

consumers and use of social media make advertisements themselves become hot topic online and cause heat debate. Just as in the case study of YSL, the ads on Valentine's Day in 2018 showed its strategy of targeting male as consumers and encourage them to buy lipstick sets for their lovers to show their true love. The ads cause people's pursuit and interest in the products.

In turn, social media will mutually affect advertising strategies. The contents related to products generated by users and customers on social media also function a lot in promoting products. In the case study of YSL Star Clash, the article on WeChat is a best example of user-generated content that caused heat debate on different social media platforms. The user-generated here may not necessarily be positive, it only needs to be worth discussing. A heat debated topic around products will make people pay attention to it and improve its exposure to the public. The case of YSL successfully introduced the idea of boyfriends' purchasing lipsticks for girlfriends. Thus, in the later ads of lipsticks, a lot of companies choose to relate lipsticks with 'true love' or 'boyfriend'. The content on social media produced by users will also affect advertising strategies.

To sum up, companies choose to advertise on social media which will lead target consumers to actively discuss, promote and introduce these products. Under this circumstance, products are efficiently advertised. In this process, the content generated by users on social media will also in turn affect advertising strategies of companies. This is mutually influenced process.

Consumer culture

Consumer culture composes two main parts; one is commodities produced for markets, and the other is the symbolic market value which causes people's desire. (Holt, 2002). The term “consumer culture” also means a sophisticated system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that groups use through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities, and meanings—to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members’ experiences and lives (Kozinets, 2001). The social roles of consumers are shaped and embodied during this process. Meanwhile, with the rapid development of globalization, the local culture is influenced by the expanding of international brands and corporations. (Appadurai, 1990; Slater, 1997; Wilk, 1995).

As in the case of ‘lipstick worship,’ lipstick is the commodity produced by the cosmetic company and has use value. But to sell more lipstick and set a high price to make more profit, especially for those luxury brands. Lipstick producers make series of strategic advertising. For example, the well-designed image and video about lipstick, usually connect to the middle-class women lifestyle and amplify the sexual attraction of model’s mouth, which contain the message like if you use this lipstick, you can get close to the ideal life and get men’s attention.

In the case of ‘YSL—STAR CLASH EDITION,’ the strategic advertising started from an article on WeChat and soon swept the entire social platform. That article displayed chat records between different lovers, but the common point is about how boy respond to his girlfriend when she asks for a YSL lipstick. Nearly all boys were

willing to give their girlfriend this gift. The text of the record is quite entertaining thus attract people's attention.

It's interesting to notice the comment of the editor writes on the end of the article. "I want to know how to find those boyfriends who give you the lipstick or transfer money without the second thought? Will the marriage registry office send them when we get married? Do we need to line up?" Thus, the article connected buying the lipstick to the proof of love and commitment.

Besides, the article kept using the term 'other girl's boyfriend' which can raise readers' sense of competition. Many girls sent this article to their boyfriends to see their responses and even posted their chat record on social media. Some of them tended to show off the way their boyfriend treat them and others complained about their boyfriend's stinginess and dullness.

During this process, the circulating information and participants who join this game constructed the 'true love' myth. The marketplace has become a preeminent source of mythic and symbolic resources through which people, including those who lack resources to participate in the market as full-fledged consumers, construct narratives of identity. (Belk, 1988; Hill, 1991; Holt, 2002; Levy, 1981).

Gender in Lipstick Worship

Lipsticks are often closely connected with female identity. Gender identity is an individual's sense of themselves as a man or a woman(Gould, 1996), which can be used to explain behavioral differences. As a cosmetics tool, the lipstick is often used to

strengthen female identity and to increase women's sexual attraction. The relationship between a woman's gender identity and lipsticks, as a gendered products, requires exploring.

When a lipstick is given symbolic meanings, such as life quality and true love, it is not just a cosmetics. It has been said that people buy things not only for its functions, but also for 'what they symbolize in relation to their self-concept'. Lipsticks are used to symbolize female identities, as we can see in many advertisements where women are wearing shining lipsticks, which makes them sexually attractive and pretty. These advertisements also strengthen the gendering characteristic of lipsticks. Wearing lipsticks and posting lipsticks they have collected can be viewed as efforts to highlight a person's gender identity, to create images of beauty spreading on social media, and to gain attraction from other women and men.

Lipstick worship, to some extent, can be seen as a successful strategic marketing, because it does not just promote lipsticks sale among women yet it actually involves men into this worship. Obviously, this does not mean that men are worshipping a lipstick—they buy lipsticks as gifts for their girlfriends and wives. In many cases that are posted on social media, men can buy just one or two lipsticks to make their girlfriend happy and even be able to prove what they call as 'true love'. A very prevailing saying on Chinese social media that there is no such things that can not be fixed by one lipstick, and if is, it can be fixed by two lipsticks. Women ask for lipsticks as gifts to test whether their boyfriends or husbands love them or not. In this sense, women are in a risky position where men might tend to think that women are easily pleased by a lipstick, or

other luxury goods when two are in a love relationship. More importantly, women are intentionally materialized by such marketing strategy. Articles like ‘asking a YSL as gifts’ involve men into this marketing activities. Lipsticks sale originally target at women, in other words, women are the main consumers for lipsticks. But when they do not buy lipsticks for themselves, instead asking their boyfriends to buy them, women are passive consumers. They do consume lipsticks by collecting and wearing them everyday, but they do not directly buy them—lipsticks are given by men. In this sense, the traditional gender roles of men as producers and women as consumers are intensified and strengthened.

Conclusion

From this research, we find out the lipstick worship is the product of consumer culture. In this process, lipstick producers create the true love and middle-class lifestyle myth while consumers want to find their personal identity. With prevalence of social media, people are exposed to more advertising of lipstick and have more chances to generate their own content of lipstick. What’s more, cosmetic companies include male as their target customers in order to increase sales of lipsticks which reinforce traditional gender roles.

What about areas for future research and critique of method?

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