

Subversive Incongruence: G-Dragon and the Multi-step Flow of Gender-Disruptive Luxury Branding

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The European Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

In contemporary luxury advertising, the strategic leverage of gender incongruence—male celebrities explicitly styling womenswear—has evolved into a dual-layered tool of persuasion. This study investigates the “G-Dragon (GD) effect” and his association with CHANEL to explore how gender-disruptive aesthetics are negotiated by consumers. We argue that this phenomenon operates through a double persuasion: facilitating commercial consumption while normalizing the broader cultural acceptance of fluid gender performances. Crucially, we distinguish this from traditional “gender-neutral” or subcultural “queer” aesthetics. By maintaining a distinctly masculine appeal to a female-dominated fanbase, GD’s persona enables a form of subversive stylization where incongruence is seamlessly merged into his identity. This allows “feminine” luxury signifiers to be recoded as markers of elite taste rather than gender dissonance, naturally eroding the rigid cultural imaginations of the gender binary. Our research examines how this dual persuasion is filtered through a multi-step cultural flow: the legitimization of incongruent styles by elite fashion media, the validation of peer groups who mirror these choices, and the role of female appreciation in redefining male desirability. Through a survey of consumers in mainland China, this study explores how attitudes toward the celebrity and purchase intent are shaped by social validation and peer evaluation. The findings suggest that such “merged” incongruence represents a radical departure from traditional congruence-based cultural and marketing values, offering a new lens for understanding how high-fashion provocations persuade audiences to embrace both luxury goods and the re-articulation of masculine identity.

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Introduction

In modern luxury advertising, the use of incongruent gender roles by male celebrities intentionally wearing womenswear has become one way to subvert gender norms. Nonetheless, the existing endorsement theories such as the match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990) suggest that a mismatch between an endorser's image and product attributes may undermine consumer persuasion. The above-mentioned paradox can be seen in the case of G-Dragon, a world-famous K-pop singer who serves as a muse for CHANEL and frequently appears in the brand's campaigns wearing womenswear. Although there is clear incongruity, G-Dragon and CHANEL have managed to make a commercial and cultural impact through their collaboration. However, existing studies have mainly concentrated on gender-consistent celebrity endorsement, while the process through which gender-incongruent luxury branding achieves persuasion remains under-explored.

The above discussion highlights two specific gaps: the lack of empirical testing on how media legitimacy and peer legitimacy collectively termed cultural environment certification operate, and the unclear joint effect of gender incongruence and fashion stylishness on purchase intention. To address these gaps, the present study conducts a survey of 674 respondents in mainland China. Based on the findings, we formulate the following research question, and derive two hypotheses grounded in the theoretical framework outlined in the literature review.

Literature Review

Celebrity Endorsement and the Match-Up Hypothesis

Celebrity endorsement is a pervasive strategy employed to heighten brand salience, enhance brand and product imagery, facilitate brand repositioning, and support global marketing initiatives (Erdogan, 1999). Within this framework, the personal attributes of the celebrity and their perceived relationship with the brand are frequently invoked to explain the efficacy of the endorsement.

The Source Credibility Model (SCM) is one of the most prominent frameworks for analyzing the persuasive impact of an endorser. The SCM posits that persuasion is positively moderated when the receiver perceives high levels of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990), as well as authenticity (Kim & Kim, 2021) and similarity (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Beyond these source characteristics, traditional advertising paradigms emphasize the "Match-up Hypothesis." This theory suggests that the persuasive power of an advertisement depends on the logical alignment between the celebrity and the product category. When an endorser's attributes are congruent with the product, the promotional effect is significantly amplified (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Misra & Beatty, 1990). Common manifestations of this alignment include gender-matching (e.g., a male endorser for a male-targeted product) and categorical matching (e.g., an athlete for sports apparel).

These gendered product schemas are deeply rooted in sociocultural history. A content analysis of women's magazines (1990–1999) revealed a heavy emphasis on appearance and domestic products, with a notable absence of financial or technological categories, documenting long-standing societal expectations regarding "who buys what" (Mastin et al.,

2004). Consequently, prior research has consistently maintained that gender-congruent endorsements—male celebrities for men’s products and female celebrities for women’s—are the most reliable and market-validated strategies. Such consistency minimizes cognitive processing costs for consumers, creating a perceived sense of “natural harmony.”

Gender Schemas and the Fluidity of Fashion Boundaries

The Deconstruction of Gender Boundaries in Fashion

In the luxury industry, the traditional emphasis on match-up congruence is increasingly being diluted. While traditional gender schemas presuppose rigid boundaries for masculine and feminine attire (Bem, 1981), the contemporary fashion landscape is witnessing the deconstruction of biological binary categorizations through trends such as gender-neutrality, gender-bending, and gender-fluidity (Lee, 2020).

Leveraging their vast capital and cultural influence, luxury brands act as cultural vanguardists, actively integrating gender-blurring elements into product concepts and promotional strategies. Brands such as Gucci have mainstreamed this aesthetic by merging male and female runway shows and launching dedicated gender-fluid collections (Bernardi et al., 2024). In this context, incongruence between the endorser’s gender and the product’s traditional gender-typing is no longer viewed as a logical error but as a symbol of aesthetic and cultural avant-gardism.

Consumer responses are also contingent upon product types (Kim et al., 2017). For functional products, consumers rely on credibility and diagnosticity, whereas for symbolic categories, they prioritize identity value (Lee & Eastin, 2020). Luxury fashion occupies a unique position in this framework: these products are inherently symbolic—serving identity and status functions—and typically elicit high engagement from consumers who value aesthetic connoisseurship and brand heritage. Consequently, acceptance of luxury offerings is driven less by functional evidence and more by symbolic resonance, aesthetic appeal, and the perceived stylistic authority of the endorser.

Schema Incongruity Theory

Beyond cultural leadership and product attributes, Schema Incongruity Theory provides a robust psychological foundation for this phenomenon. When incoming information seamlessly integrates into existing knowledge structures, it is classified as congruent (e.g., an infant in a diaper advertisement). Conversely, when information is difficult to assimilate into existing semantic networks, it is considered incongruent (Mandler, 1982).

Schema Incongruity Theory posits that moderate incongruity stimulates deeper cognitive elaboration. When consumers encounter a “mismatch” that can be resolved or explained, it generates stronger recall and more positive attitudes than complete congruence. Research indicates that visual cues that make a substantive contribution to the theme—even if atypical—often elicit more favorable evaluations than mundane, congruent cues (Heckler & Childers, 1992).

The cognitive impact of incongruence depends on its intensity (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Moderate mismatches—those that deviate from expectations but remain reconcilable with existing schemas—yield superior outcomes because the process of resolving the

discrepancy is inherently rewarding and encourages elaborate processing. In contrast, extreme incongruity, which cannot be reconciled without a fundamental restructuring of core cognitive schemas, often leads to information overload and negative affect. Ultimately, efficacy depends on the audience's ability to successfully resolve the unexpected elements.

Within this framework, gender incongruence in endorsements emerges as a pivotal visual cue. Gender Incongruence, the core variable of this study, is defined as the deviation between an endorser's gender identity and the pre-existing gender image associated with a product. In the luxury sector, gender-atypical endorsements exemplify the mechanism of schema resolution. Although a male celebrity wearing feminine attire may initially trigger an "expectancy violation," the conflict is swiftly reconciled when the endorser demonstrates aesthetic expertise (stylishness) or long-term self-consistency. This allows the audience to assimilate the unexpected gender cues without disrupting the persuasion process, thereby enhancing the advertising effect.

The Social Construction of Gender Paradigm Acceptance

The public acceptance of gender-incongruent advertising is inextricably linked to the broader social environment. The shift toward accepting non-traditional gender behaviors is not an isolated event; rather, it is a constructive process led by individual aesthetics, endorsed by media authority, and finalized through social consensus.

Aesthetic Capital: Reshaping Norms Through Individual Style

The endorser's Aesthetic Capital serves as the foundation for persuasion. According to Entwistle (2009), aesthetic capital is a form of personal capital acquired through taste, style, and image presentation. When individuals successfully lead trends, they exercise symbolic power. For instance, when a celebrity like G-Dragon exhibits high levels of "stylishness," his established success and broad influence transform this trait into "aesthetic authority" in the eyes of the audience.

High-level aesthetic value acts as a tool for cognitive reframing, redrawing the boundaries between "normal" and "atypical" (Postrel, 2003). Consequently, when individuals with high aesthetic capital engage in gender-incongruent behaviors, the public is more likely to interpret these actions as "stylistic innovation" rather than "normative violation," laying the psychological groundwork for societal acceptance.

The Legitimization of Aesthetic Capital

The transformation of individual fashion sensibility into a broader social consensus is contingent upon the legitimizing significance conferred by media dissemination. According to McCracken's (1986) Meaning Transfer Model, the flow of cultural meaning necessitates processing through a system of mediation. McCracken (1989) further posited that celebrities act as conduits for cultural meaning, whereby their personal attributes are transferred to brands and consumer perceptions through the media as an intermediary. Consequently, when a celebrity exhibits fashionability and amasses aesthetic capital, the media re-narrates and amplifies the cultural meanings they carry, ultimately facilitating the transfer of aesthetic authority to the public consciousness.

When media outlets re-narrate styles traditionally deemed “inappropriate” within conventional gender systems, they initiate a process of legitimization within the fashion domain. Suchman (1995), in his research on institutional legitimacy, posits that cognitive legitimacy stems from the social system’s endorsement of a behavior’s appropriateness. Applying Suchman’s framework, fashion media serve as institutional constituents that exercise the power to define “aesthetic appropriateness.” Within the fashion context, legacy media act as institutional gatekeepers, utilizing their extensive discursive authority to redefine and recode gender-incongruent attire. This institutional endorsement transforms potentially controversial cross-gender styling into cognitively legitimate stylistic expressions, thereby facilitating a transition from “normative violation” to “artistic legitimization.”

By featuring male celebrities in feminine attire in positive reports or cover stories, authoritative media exercise a “right of aesthetic confirmation,” elevating subcultural behaviors to the status of “high fashion.” While traditional media provide “institutional authorization,” social media facilitates “social penetration” through the Spillover Effect. According to networked communication theory (Kozinets et al., 2010), social media is a decentralized site of meaning production. This spillover effect breaks the walls of fashion elitism, diffusing “legitimate” labels from authoritative media to the masses via algorithmic push and viral dissemination. Through this horizontal interaction, challenging gender expressions are transformed into a global, participatory culture trend, evolving from “elite consensus” to “mass common sense.”

Group Interaction and Peer Norms: Micro-assimilation of Cognition

The “common sense” fostered by social media must ultimately manifest in individual cognitive shifts. Individual evaluations are deeply embedded in social networks, a phenomenon explained by Reference Group Theory. This theory posits that individual attitudes and behaviors are strongly influenced by the norms of groups with which they identify (Childers & Rao, 1992).

Building upon the social media context, when an inherently avant-garde, cross-gender style ignites widespread discourse and generates a “spillover effect” on social platforms (e.g., Xiaohongshu), it effectively constructs a dynamic “peer norm” within audience circles. As peer groups reach a consensus—reimagining gender-incongruent attire, such as “GD-inspired” looks, as “high-end” or “trendy”—individuals often recalibrate their initial biases. This psychological shift is driven by the desire for group identification or the need to mitigate cognitive dissonance arising from non-conformity to mainstream trends. Consequently, when an aesthetic is validated by one’s immediate social circle, legitimization transcends mere media proclamation; it evolves into a tangible form of social pressure and collective identity.

Furthermore, in luxury markets, this collective cognition is market-driven. For the female-dominated luxury market, “Female Approval” acts as the core threshold for commercializing cross-gender styles. Advertising efficacy depends on alignment with the target audience’s aesthetic ideals; drawing upon the perspectives of Schroeder and Zwick (2004), advertising serves as a representational force that reconstructs masculinity, thereby granting media legitimacy to gender-crossing behaviors. When these practices overcome the psychological resistance of female audiences—shifting from rejection to appreciation—they evolve from mere visual spectacles into realized mainstream commercial value.

In summary, while traditional advertising theories emphasize gender match-up, the symbolic nature of luxury goods and the rise of gender fluidity provide the conditions for a paradigm shift. This study posits that Gender Incongruence is not a logical failure but an aesthetic narrative rooted in Schema Incongruity Theory. Its efficacy depends on the audience's ability to resolve information discrepancies: high Aesthetic Capital reframes conflict into innovation, while Institutional Legitimacy and Peer Norms provide a cognitive “buffer zone” for acceptance.

Despite these developments, previous research has focused predominantly on functional gender-matching, overlooking how gender incongruence—mediated by aesthetic capital and the social environment—affects persuasion in the luxury context. Therefore, this study aims to explore the mechanisms by which male endorsers of feminine luxury goods influence purchase intentions, specifically examining the mediating roles of aesthetic perception and social legitimization.

Research Question and Hypothesis

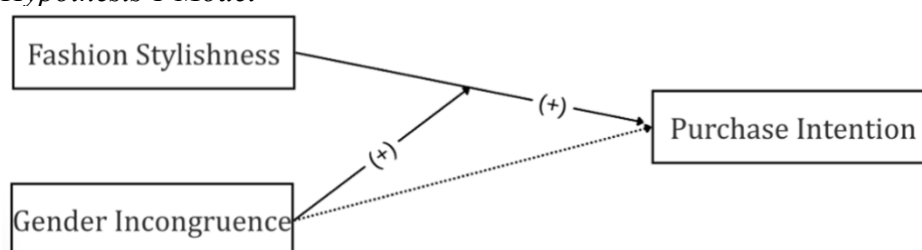
Building on the gaps identified above, we first formulate the following research question: How do cultural environment certification (media certification and peer certification) and the joint effect of gender incongruence and fashion stylishness shape purchase intention toward gender-disruptive luxury branding?

H1: Cultural Environment Certification significantly and positively influences the perceived Fashion Stylishness and Gender Incongruence of the styling.

Traditional congruence theories, such as the match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), would predict consumer resistance to gender-incongruent endorsements specifically when male celebrities explicitly style womenswear. Yet the case of G-Dragon, a world-famous K-pop singer who serves as a muse for CHANEL, clearly defies this prediction. To resolve this paradox, we introduce the concept of cultural environment certification, which captures how gender-disruptive aesthetics are negotiated by consumers. As we argue, such a gender-disruptive aesthetic does not persuade in isolation; rather, it relies on a multi-step process of certification. First, media certification records feminine luxury signifiers as indicators of elite taste rather than gender dissonance (e.g., CHANEL's advertisements and fashion media coverage). Second, social risk is decreased by peer certification, which is confirmation from reference groups that make similar decisions. Together, these two forms of certification enable consumers to perceive the styling as both highly fashionable (Fashion Stylishness) and acceptably norm-defying (Gender Incongruence), thus naturally eroding the rigid cultural imaginations of the gender binary.

Figure 1

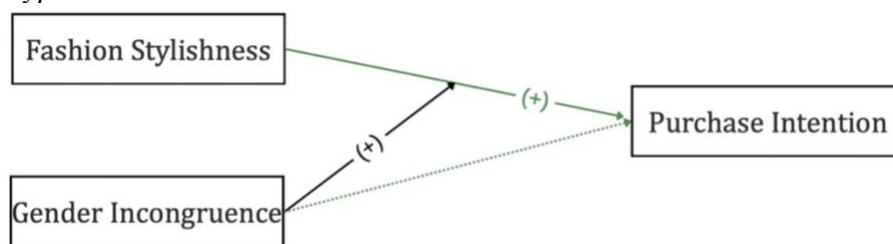
Hypothesis 1 Model



H2: Gender Incongruence and Fashion Stylishness exert a synergistic effect on Purchase Intention, such that the positive influence of Fashion Stylishness is amplified when Gender Incongruence is high.

Building on the above logic that consumers can perceive both stylishness and incongruence simultaneously, H2 addresses a further gap: the unclear joint effect of gender incongruence and fashion stylishness on purchase intention. We argue that the G-Dragon effect operates through a double persuasion facilitating commercial consumption while normalising fluid gender performances. H2 embodies this synergistic quality. In particular, we hypothesise that Gender Incongruence actively increases the persuasiveness of Fashion Stylishness rather than just coexisting with it. When gender incongruence is perceived as high (i.e., the styling is clearly disruptive), the very boldness signals a form of subversive stylization where incongruence is seamlessly merged into G-Dragon's identity maintaining a distinctly masculine appeal to a female-dominated fanbase. This, in turn, enhances the value of stylishness, turning feminine luxury signifiers into markers of elite taste rather than gender dissonance. Therefore, the positive influence of Fashion Stylishness on Purchase Intention is amplified when Gender Incongruence is high: consumers are persuaded not despite the disruption, but precisely because of the unique, elite taste it signifies within a certified cultural context.

Figure 2
Hypothesis 2 Model



Operationalization

To investigate the impact of G-Dragon's gender-subversive marketing for CHANEL, this study identified eight key constructs. Given that this research explores a unique intersection of K-pop influence and luxury branding—a niche area with limited pre-existing scales—all measurement items were self-developed to ensure context-specific accuracy as shown in Table 1. To validate these instruments, a preliminary reliability analysis was conducted, as shown in Table 2. The results indicate high internal consistency across all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.788 to 0.864, well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70. This confirms that the self-developed scales provide a robust and reliable basis for further empirical testing.

Table 1*Operationalization and Measurement Items of Key Variables*

Variable/Dimension	Items
Fashion Stylishness	1. I find this styling highly attractive. 2. I think this styling is very creative. 3. I feel this style has a sense of cynicism. 4. I find this styling somewhat playful and naughty.
Gender Incongruence	1. I believe this endorsement does not align with traditional gender images. 2. I think it is unusual for a male celebrity to wear female clothing items. 3. I find it unexpected for a male celebrity to wear this style. 4. I think this styling breaks common gender boundaries.
Media Certification	1. Fashion magazines (e.g., Vogue) generally praise this styling. 2. Fashion magazines generally describe this style as a fashion trend. 3. Fashion bloggers on social media generally praise this styling. 4. Social media influencers generally describe this style as a trend.
Peer Certification	1. People around me generally think this style is interesting. 2. This dressing style is generally accepted within my social circle. 3. My friends generally hold an open attitude toward this style.
Peer Certification (Other Gender)	1. Peers of the opposite sex generally consider this style fashionable. 2. Peers of the opposite sex generally find this style attractive. 3. Peers of the opposite sex generally hold a positive attitude toward this style.
GD Fashion Icon Factor	1. G-Dragon himself is the personification of fashion. 2. G-Dragon's dressing style is always leading the trend. 3. G-Dragon's style often carries a sense of rebelliousness. 4. G-Dragon's style often carries a sense of cynicism.
Self Fashion Sense	1. I highly follow fashion trends and often read fashion magazines/blogs. 2. I am sensitive to different clothing styles. 3. I frequently try new dressing styles.
Purchase Intention	1. I am interested in purchasing this clothing product. 2. I am willing to try products from this brand.

Table 2
Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	No. of Items	Eigen	Cronbach's Alpha	M	SD
Gender Incongruence	4	-	0.8	3.013	0.905
Fashion Stylishness	4	-	0.825	3.061	0.928
Media Certification	4	5.546	0.86	3.065	0.928
Peer Certification	3	1.036	0.788	2.905	0.912
Peer Certification of the Other Gender	3	-	0.82	2.863	0.961
GD Fashion Icon Factor	4	-	0.864	3.108	0.959
Self Fashion Sense	3	-	0.797	2.942	0.96
Purchase Intention	2	-	0.79	2.847	1.137

Gender Incongruence

Gender Incongruence is conceptualized as the cognitive mismatch perceived by consumers between traditional gender expectations and the actual visual presentation of an endorsement. In this study, it specifically describes the phenomenon where a male celebrity wears clothing originally designed for women, thereby creating a psychological “distance” between the endorser's biological identity and the gender-coded nature of the product. Within the research framework, this variable serves a strictly neutral and descriptive function. It emphasizes that the consumer recognizes the product was originally designed and marketed for the opposite gender. This awareness establishes the necessary cognitive foundation upon which subsequent social certifications and aesthetic evaluations are processed.

To measure this construct, the study utilizes four indicators focusing on the transgression of gender norms: role-mismatch (“I believe this endorsement does not align with traditional gender images”; 我认为这个代言不符合传统的性别形象), perceived unusualness (“I think it is unusual for a male celebrity to wear female clothing items”; 我认为男明星身着女装单品很不寻常), unexpectedness (“I find it unexpected for a male celebrity to wear this style”; 我认为男明星上身这样的款式出乎意料), and boundary-breaking (“I think this styling breaks common gender boundaries”; 我认为这种搭配突破了常见的性别界限). ($M = 3.013$, $SD = 0.905$, $\alpha = 0.8$)

Fashion Stylishness

Fashion Stylishness is conceptualized as a consumer's subjective aesthetic appraisal of a styling's innovative quality and its expressive “vibe.” Beyond mere physical appeal, this variable evaluates the artistic success of the gender-fluid presentation, focusing on whether the unconventional look is perceived as trend-leading and creatively executed.

To operationalize this construct, the study measures four dimensions of aesthetic perception: perceived creativity (“I think this styling is very creative”; 我觉得这种风格很有创意),

attractiveness (“I find this styling highly attractive,” 这种造型非常有吸引力), cynicism, reflecting a rebellious and ironic edge (“I feel this style has a sense of cynicism”; 我觉得这种风格很有玩世不恭的感觉), and playfulness, representing a non-serious or “naughty” approach to high fashion (“I find this styling somewhat playful and naughty”; 我觉得这种风格有点调皮感). ($M = 3.061$, $SD = 0.928$, $\alpha = 0.825$)

Cultural Environment Certification

Cultural Environment Certification is conceptualized as the external validation provided by the cultural ecosystem, which transforms a controversial or boundary-breaking style into a socially legitimate one. Based on the logic of institutional and social authorization, it consists of three distinct modes: media certification, peer certification and peer certification of the other gender.

Media Certification

Media Certification is conceptualized as the aesthetic validation performed by institutional and digital authorities. To measure this construct, the study utilizes four indicators focusing on external professional approval: professional fashion media coverage (“Fashion magazines (e.g., Vogue) generally praise this styling”; 时尚杂志 (如 Vogue、Harper's Bazaar) 普遍赞赏这一穿搭风格), trend endorsement by media (“Fashion magazines generally describe this style as a fashion trend”; 时尚杂志 (如 Vogue、Harper's Bazaar) 普遍将该服装风格描述为一种时尚趋势), influencer praise (“Fashion bloggers on social media generally praise this styling”; 社交媒体上的时尚博主普遍赞赏这一穿搭风格), and trend endorsement by influencers (“Social media influencers generally describe this style as a trend”; 社交媒体上的时尚博主普遍描述这服装风格为一种时尚趋势). ($M = 3.065$, $SD = 0.928$, $\alpha = 0.86$, Eigen value = 5.546)

Peer Certification

Peer Certification refers to the interpersonal validation occurring within a consumer's immediate social circle and peers. It functions as a “social safety net” for the individual, mitigating the perceived embarrassment or social risk associated with adopting unconventional aesthetics by providing a sense of localized social acceptance. The construct is measured through three indicators of interpersonal approval: perceived interest from peers (“People around me generally think this style is interesting”; 我身边人通常认为这种风格很有趣), social acceptance (“This dressing style is generally accepted within my social circle”; 在我的朋友圈中, 这种穿衣风格通常被接受), and friends' open-mindedness (“My friends generally hold an open attitude toward this style”; 我的朋友对这种风格普遍持开放态度). ($M = 2.905$, $SD = 0.912$, $\alpha = 0.788$, Eigen value = 1.036)

Peer Certification of the Other Gender

Peer Certification of the Other Gender specifically addresses cross-gender aesthetic validation received from members of the opposite sex. In the context of gender-subversive marketing, this variable measures the “attractiveness leap” that occurs when gender boundaries are crossed. For instance, if female peers perceive a male celebrity's female-coded attire as attractive, it reinforces acceptance among male consumers by signaling that the gender incongruence does not compromise one's heterosexual appeal. This variable is

operationalized through three indicators of opposite-sex approval: perception of fashionability (“Peers of the opposite sex generally consider this style fashionable”; 我身边的异性通常认为这种穿衣风格具有时尚感), perception of attractiveness (“Peers of the opposite sex generally find this style attractive”; 我身边的异性通常认为这种风格具有吸引力), and positive attitude (“Peers of the opposite sex generally hold a positive attitude toward this style”; 我身边的异性通常会对这种穿衣风格持积极态度). ($M = 2.863$, $SD = 0.961$, $\alpha = 0.82$)

G-Dragon Fashion Icon Factor

To mitigate potential confounding effects and enhance the robustness and accuracy of the empirical findings, this study designates the G-Dragon Fashion Icon Factor and Self Fashion Sense as control variables. These variables are incorporated into the research model to isolate the independent influences of celebrity prestige and individual consumer traits on purchase intention, thereby ensuring a more precise identification of the causal relationships between the core constructs.

G-Dragon Fashion Icon Factor is conceptualized as the celebrity’s perceived cultural capital and symbolic authority within the global fashion system. As a control variable, it accounts for the consumer’s baseline acceptance of gender incongruence; because the endorser is recognized as a “fashion icon,” his adoption of female-coded attire is interpreted as a trend-leading maneuver rather than a stylistic error. This construct is measured through four indicators of fashion authority: personification of fashion (“G-Dragon himself is the personification of fashion.”; GD本人就是时尚的代言人), trend-leader perception (“G-Dragon’s dressing style is always leading the trend.”; GD穿衣风格总是在引领潮流), rebellious style (“G-Dragon’s style often carries a sense of rebelliousness.”; GD的风格常常带有一点桀骜不驯的), and cynical edge (“G-Dragon’s style often carries a sense of cynicism.”; GD的风格常常带有一点玩世不恭). ($M = 3.108$, $SD = 0.959$, $\alpha = 0.864$)

Self Fashion Sense

Self Fashion Sense refers to an individual’s internal level of fashion involvement and their psychological readiness to engage with unconventional aesthetic stimuli. This variable is controlled to adjust for individual differences in cognitive frameworks, as high-fashion-sense individuals are inherently more capable of interpreting “stylishness” and “gender incongruence” as intentional artistic expressions rather than confusing signals. The variable is operationalized through three indicators of fashion engagement: media consumption (“I highly follow fashion trends and often read fashion magazines/blogs.”; 我平时关注时尚趋势的程度很高, 经常看时尚杂志 / 时尚博主), sensitivity to diverse styles (“I am sensitive to different clothing styles.”; 我对服装风格比较敏感), and intention to experiment (“I frequently try new dressing styles.”; 我经常尝试新的穿衣风格). ($M = 2.942$, $SD = 0.96$, $\alpha = 0.797$)

Purchase Intention

Purchase Intention is defined as the consumer’s willingness or plan to buy the endorsed item. As the ultimate outcome variable, it reflects the marketing strategy’s effectiveness by measuring whether gender-subversive imagery can successfully convert a consumer’s aesthetic appreciation into concrete purchase behavior. The construct is measured via two indicators of commercial interest: interest in the specific item (“I am interested in purchasing this clothing product.”; 我有兴趣购买这套服装产品) and willingness to try the brand (“I am

willing to try products from this brand.”; 我愿意尝试该品牌的产品). ($M = 2.847$, $SD = 1.137$, $\alpha = 0.79$)

Methodology

Research Design and Instrument

This study utilized a quantitative research design, employing a self-administered online survey as the primary data collection instrument. The survey was hosted and distributed via Qualtrics. All measurement items utilized a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). An online approach was selected due to its efficiency in reaching a geographically dispersed audience of “digital natives”—those most likely to be influenced by G-Dragon’s social media presence and luxury branding campaigns.

Sampling and Target Population

The target population for this research consists of residents in Mainland China, with a specific focus on First-tier cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen). These urban centers represent the primary hubs for institutional fashion media and luxury retail consumption in China.

Participants were recruited through a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Initial outreach was conducted via Weixin (WeChat) social networking tools to leverage the research team’s immediate social circles. These initial respondents were then encouraged to share the survey within their own peer networks to broaden the study’s reach and diversify the participant pool.

To mitigate the inherent biases associated with non-probability sampling and enhance the overall representativeness of the data, a stratified sampling matrix was employed. This matrix overlapped six age groups and seven occupational categories, creating a total of 42 potential demographic segments. From this pool, 24 specific cells were randomly selected to serve as the targeted clusters for data collection, as illustrated in Table 3. Respondents span six age cohorts from 18 to 60+, with a strategic focus on the 18–39 demographic to capture the primary consumers of digital fashion and luxury brands most susceptible to G-Dragon’s influence. To ensure the validity of the “attractiveness leap” and cross-gender aesthetic validation analysis, the study maintained a balanced gender ratio. Furthermore, the sample incorporates seven occupational categories—ranging from Managers and Government Employees to Service Workers and the Unemployed—facilitating a robust testing of Media and Peer Certification across varied socio-economic strata.

Table 3*Stratified Sampling Matrix by Age and Occupation With Randomly Selected Cells*

	Managers & Professionals	Technicians & Associate Professionals, Clerical Support	Service & Sales Workers	Craft & Related Trades Workers, Machine Operators & Assemblers	Elementary Occupations	Government Employees	Unemployed / Homemaker
18– 22	1	7	13	19	25	31	37
23– 29	2	8	14	20	26	32	38
30– 39	3	9	15	21	27	33	39
40– 49	4	10	16	22	28	34	40
50– 59	5	11	17	23	29	35	41
≥ 60	6	12	18	24	30	36	42

Descriptive Results

Sample Profile and Market Realism

The final validated sample consists of 674 respondents. The demographic distribution exhibits significant “mainstream” characteristics in terms of educational attainment and economic capacity: 37.8% of respondents hold an undergraduate degree or above, and 55.2% fall within the monthly income bracket of HKD 20,001 to 60,000. This profile confirms that the sample represents not a fringe subculture, but a mainstream group of potential luxury consumers with substantial purchasing power. These characteristics provide a robust empirical foundation for the external validity and market realism of the research findings.

Cross-Gender Comparative Analysis

Table 4

Comparison of Mean Differences Across Gender Groups (N = 674)

Variables	Female (N = 300)	Male (N = 327)	Other Gender (N = 47)	Sig. (p)
Purchase Intention (PI)	2.76	2.81	3.69	< .001***
Fashion Stylishness (FS)	3.06	2.91	3.80	< .001***
Gender Incongruence (GI)	3.01	3.05	3.77	< .001***

Note. *** Denotes $p < .001$; significance results are based on Scheffe post-hoc tests.

Table 4 summarizes the mean scores for Purchase Intention (PI), Fashion Stylishness (FS), and Gender Incongruence (GI) across different gender groups.

Key Descriptive Findings

Cognitive Homogeneity and “Gender De-sensitization” in Mainstream Markets

The data indicate no statistically significant difference in Purchase Intention between male ($M = 2.81$) and female ($M = 2.76$) respondents ($p = .850$). This suggests that the acceptance of gender-bending marketing strategies has reached a point of homogeneity across mainstream binary gender segments. In the contemporary fashion context, mainstream consumers exhibit a clear tendency toward “gender de-sensitization” regarding male icons endorsing feminized luxury products.

Identification and Proportion of the “Other Gender” Segment

This study identified a significant “Other Gender” cohort, accounting for 7% ($n = 47$) of the total sample. This proportion is statistically meaningful in a quantitative context, indicating that research into Gender Incongruence is expanding from fringe subcultures into commercially representative social segments.

Strong Psychological Resonance and Identity Among the “Other Gender” Group

The “Other Gender” group reported significantly higher scores across all key variables compared to binary groups ($p < .001$). This segment demonstrated the highest recognition of “Subversive Incongruence” ($GI = 3.77$), the most positive aesthetic evaluation ($FS = 3.80$), and the strongest consumption drive ($PI = 3.69$). These results validate that for non-binary audiences, gender incongruence acts not as a cognitive risk, but as a powerful aesthetic asset and a medium for identity-driven resonance that translates into purchase motivation.

Hypothesis Testing and Results

Within the context of marketing, the primary objective of an endorsement is to generate Purchase Intention, thereby converting celebrity influence into tangible commercial value for the brand. Consequently, we first examined the factors influencing Purchase Intention, specifically testing the effects of Fashion Stylishness and Gender Incongruence as proposed in Hypothesis 2, while incorporating control variables such as age and gender.

Table 5

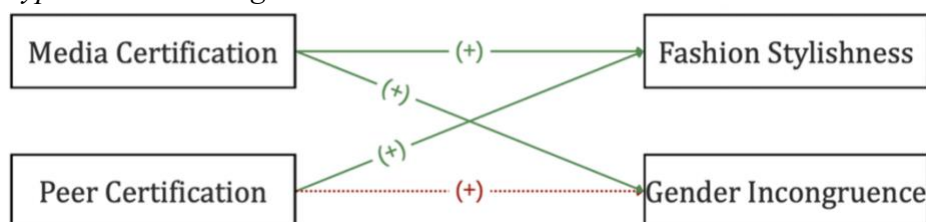
Linear Regression Analysis of Purchase Intention

Independent Variables	Purchase Intention
Gender	-.067*
Age	.072
Education level	-.131***
Family Income Range	.029
GD Fashion Icon Factor	-.065
Self Fashion Sense	.12***
Gender Incongruence	.059
Fashion Stylishness	.633***
R ²	.507***
N	666

Following the linear regression analysis (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.507$, $p < .001$), we found that Gender Incongruence does not negatively affect Purchase Intention as commonly assumed by conventional wisdom. On the contrary, its beta value is notably low (0.059), indicating a minimal impact rather than a reduction in consumer desire to purchase. In stark contrast, Fashion Stylishness plays a vital role in determining Purchase Intention, with a significant beta value of 0.633. This demonstrates that consumers prioritize aesthetic value and avant-garde styling as critical fashion factors. When these elements align with consumer expectations, they are more inclined to make purchase decisions, which validates the two paths within Hypothesis 2.

Figure 3

Hypothesis 2 Testing



Next, we focused on the antecedents of these two factors. Fashion Stylishness is not an inherent trait but a cognitive product shaped by external influences. Therefore, our regression analysis emphasized the role of the cultural environment by introducing Media Certification and Peer Certification as primary independent variables while maintaining constant control variables. In daily life, the perceptions of the media and social circles often shape individual cognition. If these entities validate or praise a specific fashion mode, such cognitive preferences are likely to influence consumer judgment. The empirical results (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.551$, $p < .001$) confirm a positive relationship between these factors and Fashion Stylishness. When authoritative media define a specific style as fashionable, consumer

perception tends to become more positive and accepting (Media Certification beta value = 0.325, $p < .001$). While high recognition from peers also encourages consumer acceptance (Peer Certification beta value = 0.102, $p < .05$), this shift in attitude is far less substantial than the influence of Media Certification. Compared to professional media judgment, the transfer of individual cognition remains limited even among close social circles.

Table 6
Linear Regression Analysis of Fashion Stylishness

Independent Variables	Fashion Stylishness
Gender	-.016
Age	.021
Education level	.002
Family Income Range	-.016
GD Fashion Icon	.292***
Factor	.126***
Self Fashion Sense	
Cultural Environment	.325***
Certification	.102**
-Media	.551***
Certification	.666
-Peer Certification	
R ²	
N	

Similarly, Gender Incongruence is not an innate prejudice. We utilized the same variables as the Fashion Stylishness regression, as Cultural Environment Certification serves as an external element that shapes consumer attitudes. The results (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.428$, $p < .001$) indicate that Media Certification remains the most critical and only significant factor (beta value = 0.511, $p < .001$). Whether a style conforms to traditional gender norms or impressions depends largely on media validation from sources such as fashion magazines and social media influencers. Conversely, the influence of Peer Certification is negligible, with a non-significant beta value of -0.041, proving that there is no meaningful relationship between Peer Certification and Gender Incongruence.

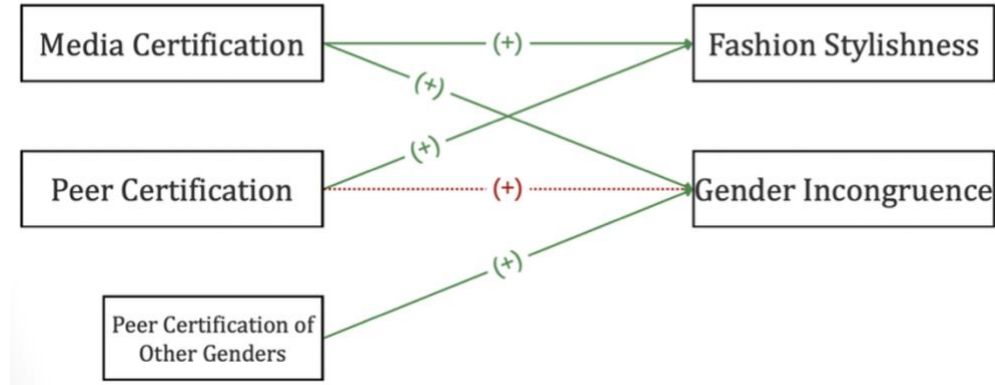
Table 7
Linear Regression Analysis of Gender Incongruence

Independent Variables	Gender Incongruence
Gender	-.094
Age	.08
Education level	-.051
Family Income Range	.006
GD Fashion Icon Factor	.101
Self Fashion Sense	.138***
Cultural Environment	
Certification	.511***
-Media Certification	-.041
-Peer Certification	.428***
R ²	.666
N	

These findings validate three paths within Hypothesis 1, although one path demonstrates weaker persuasive power. Consequently, we conducted a deeper investigation into whether the original definition of the Peer Certification variable was sufficiently accurate when discussing Gender Incongruence.

Figure 4

Hypothesis 1 Testing



When a male consumer encounters feminized clothing or styling, he may consider the opinions of his male friends as well as the views of the other gender. For instance, if a girlfriend perceives a style as reasonable, a man who is initially resistant or indifferent may accept this breach of gender norms out of consideration for her perspective, and vice versa. To clarify this mechanism, we narrowed Peer Certification down to a new variable, Peer Certification of Other Gender. We utilized a split-file analysis for male, female, and other gender groups, and performed a linear regression with Gender Incongruence and basic control variables. And to isolate the unique influence of external social validation and enhance model parsimony, we excluded Self Fashion Sense and GD Fashion Icon from this specific regression to focus on the direct impact of Peer Certification of Other Gender on Gender Incongruence.

The results show a significant and positive correlation between Peer Certification of Other Gender and Gender Incongruence. This implies that while individuals may not prioritize how their general peer group views gender-disruptive styles, they are exceptionally sensitive to how the other gender perceives them. Interestingly, among the three groups, the other gender group showed the highest significance (beta value = 0.656, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who identify outside the traditional gender binary are more sensitive to these social signals.

Table 8

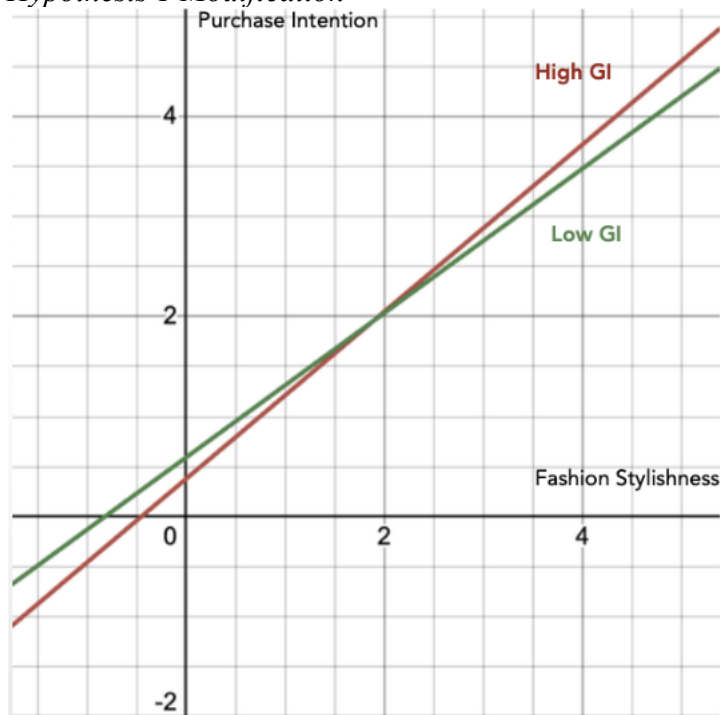
Impact of Peer Certification of Other Gender Across Gender Groups

Independent Variables	Gender Incongruence		
	Male	Female	Other Gender
Age	.064	.018	.014
Education level	-.052	.077	.024
Family Income Range	-.036	.010	.229
Peer Certification of Other Gender	.459***	.345***	.623***
R ²	.209***	.108***	.433***
N	325	292	47

This completes the testing of Hypothesis 1, which was modified to include the influence of Peer Certification of Other Gender.

Figure 5

Hypothesis 1 Modification



Returning to the final path of Hypothesis 2, we previously verified the correlations between Fashion Stylishness, Gender Incongruence, and Purchase Intention. We then tested how the interaction term of Fashion Stylishness and Gender Incongruence affects purchase desire. By adding this new variable to the regression table, we found a highly significant beta value of 0.284. This relationship is far more substantial than the direct effect of Gender Incongruence alone (beta value = -0.094).

Table 9

Linear Regression Analysis of Purchase Intention

Independent Variables	Purchase Intention
Gender	-.066
Age	.07
Education level	-.124***
Family Income Range	.027
GD Fashion Icon Factor	-.062
Self Fashion Sense	.196
Gender Incongruence	-.094
Fashion Stylishness	.48***
GI x FS	.284**
R ²	.509***
N	666

To further clarify the relationship between these three variables and Purchase Intention, we derived a functional expression based on the descriptive characteristics of the variables, including mean and standard deviation, alongside the regression results.

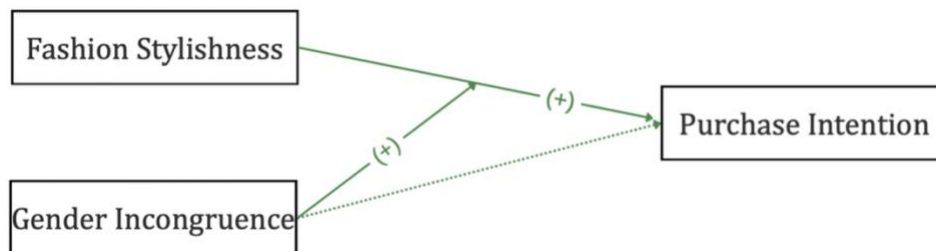
$$PI = 0.839 + 0.591(FS) - 0.119(GI) + 0.063(GI \times FS). \quad (1)$$

To provide a more intuitive interpretation of the interaction effect, we conducted a simple slope analysis by selecting two representative levels of Gender Incongruence. Following the standard statistical methodology for probing moderation, these values were determined as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the variable. Specifically, the value of 3.92 represents the high Gender Incongruence group while 2.11 represents the low Gender Incongruence group.

Regarding the slope, the high Gender Incongruence group exhibits a significantly steeper incline. This indicates that for individuals with a higher sensitivity to gender subversion, the positive influence of Fashion Stylishness on Purchase Intention is amplified. Consequently, as the style is perceived to be more fashionable, the Purchase Intention of these consumers increases more rapidly and significantly. Regarding the intercept, the high Gender Incongruence group corresponds to a lower baseline value. This suggests that Fashion Stylishness serves as an essential prerequisite for the acceptance of gender-disruptive fashion. If Fashion Stylishness is perceived as weak or absent, high Gender Incongruence will instead function as a psychological barrier that hinders the Purchase Intention of the consumer.

Figure 6

Purchase Intention Formula

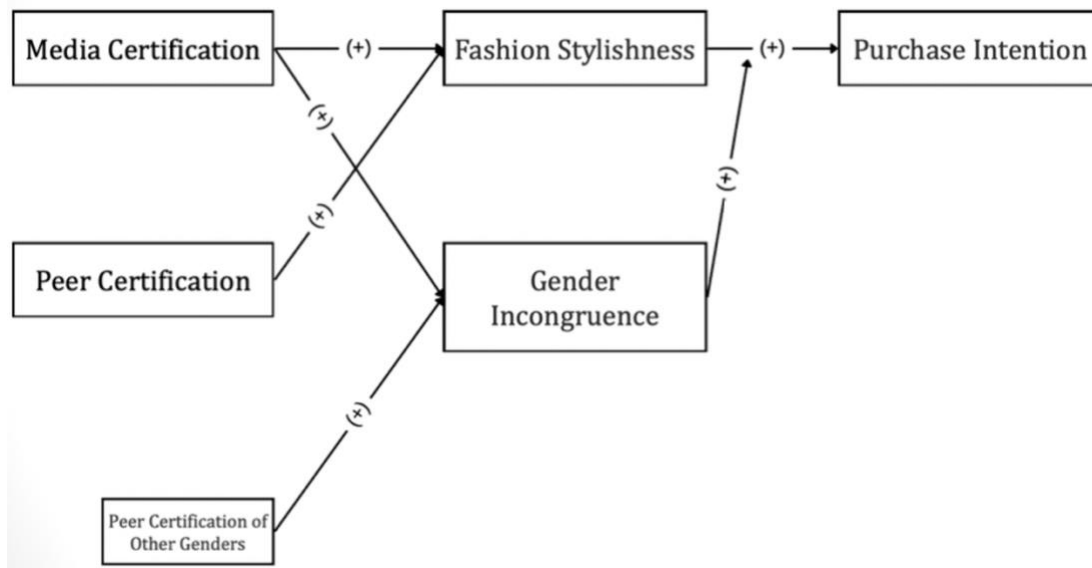


$$HIGH\ GI: PI = 0.373 + 0.838(FS) \quad (2)$$

$$LOW\ GI: PI = 0.588 + 0.724(FS) \quad (3)$$

This evidence provides a perfect validation of Hypothesis 2.

Figure 7
Hypothesis 2 Testing

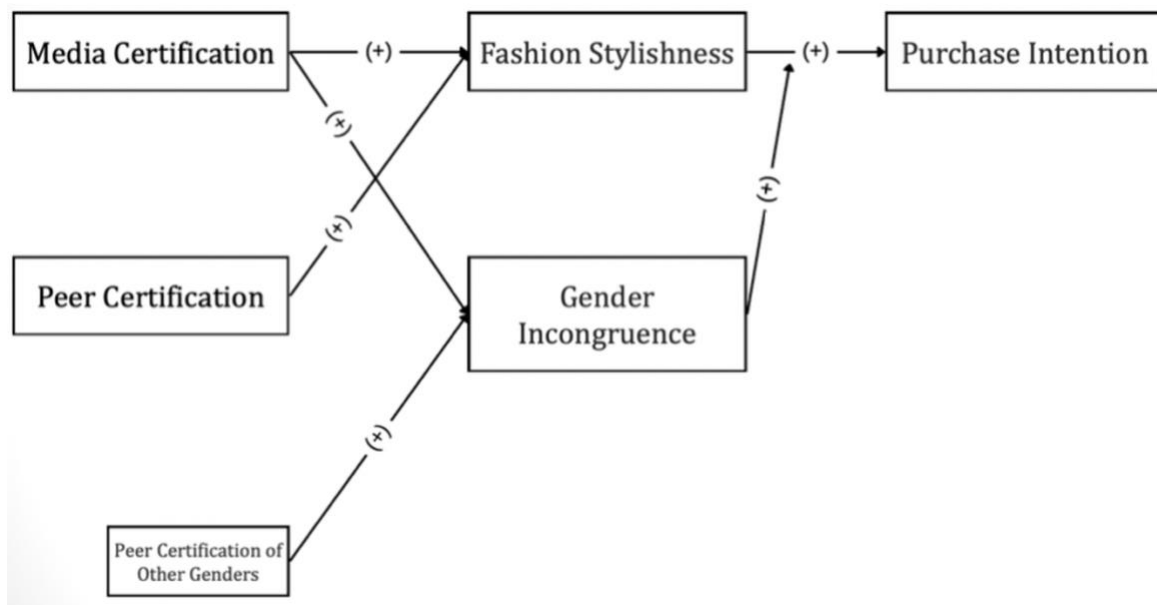


Conclusion

From a macro perspective, the quantitative testing reveals that Cultural Environment Certification significantly influences consumer cognition. Media Certification is the primary factor, exerting a direct positive impact on both Fashion Stylishness and Gender Incongruence. In contrast, Peer Certification only influences Fashion Stylishness, while Peer Certification of Other Gender plays the decisive role in shaping perceptions of Gender Incongruence.

From a micro perspective, the functional expressions derived in this study highlight the core drivers of Purchase Intention. Fashion Stylishness and Gender Incongruence do not act in isolation; they interact and work synergistically to collectively drive consumer Purchase Intention.

Figure 8
Overall Model



Discussion

The findings suggest that gender-disruptive luxury branding does not become persuasive through incongruence alone. Its appeal depends on cultural mediation. Media certification is the strongest predictor of both fashion stylishness and perceived gender incongruence, while peer certification plays a more limited role. Purchase intention, in turn, is driven primarily by fashion stylishness rather than by gender incongruence itself. At the same time, the positive and significant interaction between gender incongruence and fashion stylishness indicates that the effect of stylishness on purchase intention becomes stronger when incongruence is high. Consumers, then, do not simply reward norm violation; they respond when unconventional gender presentation is rendered stylish, legible, and desirable. In this respect, the study supports the argument that the commercial force of gender-disruptive branding lies less in disruption itself than in its successful symbolic framing.

This has implications for both advertising practice and cultural communication. Celebrity-centered branding appears valuable not only because it attracts attention, but because it helps audiences interpret unconventional style positively and attach aspirational meaning to it. In that sense, fandom and star endorsement can function as mechanisms of symbolic translation, making unfamiliar gender presentation easier to accept and more compelling as a reason to consume. More broadly, the findings suggest that advertising may contribute to the mainstream visibility of nontraditional gender expression by presenting it through culturally certified style codes.

Some caution is still needed, since several models show only moderate explanatory power and the measure of gender incongruence remains grounded in deviation from traditional binary stereotypes. Even so, the central conclusion remains clear: gender-disruptive luxury branding works not because incongruence itself sells, but because cultural certification—especially through media—turns incongruence into stylishness, and stylishness, in interaction with incongruence, into purchase appeal.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Appendix

一、问卷说明

您好，我们是香港中文大学新闻与传播学院广告学硕士研究生，正在进行一项关于品牌形象的学术研究，问卷共有 2 部分，希望您能花约 6 分钟时间为我们填写一份网上问卷。该问卷不会记名，资料也将保密并仅作研究用途。您的参与对我们的研究和学习十分重要，希望您能帮忙。谢谢您！

二、量表测评

请根据您的真实感受，对下列表述进行评价

1 = 非常不同意 2 = 不同意 3 = 一般 4 = 同意 5 = 非常同意

1. 我有兴趣购买这套服装产品。
2. 我愿意尝试该品牌的产品。
3. 我认为这种风格很有吸引力。
4. 我觉得这种风格很有创意。
5. 我觉得这种风格很有玩世不恭的感觉。
6. 我觉得这种风格有点调皮感。
7. 我认为这个代言不符合传统的性别形象。
8. 我认为男明星身着女装单品很不寻常。
9. 我认为男明星上身这样的款式出乎意料。
10. 我认为这种穿搭突破了常见的性别界限。
11. 时尚杂志（如 Vogue、Harper's Bazaar）普遍赞赏这一穿搭风格。
12. 时尚杂志（如 Vogue、Harper's Bazaar）普遍将该服装风格描述为一种时尚趋势。
13. 社交媒体上的时尚博主普遍赞赏这一穿搭风格。
14. 社交媒体上的时尚博主普遍将该服装风格描述为一种时尚趋势。
15. 我身边人通常认为这种风格很有趣。
16. 在我的朋友圈中，这种穿衣风格通常被接受。
17. 我的朋友对这种风格普遍持开放态度。
18. 我身边的异性通常认为这种穿衣风格具有时尚感。
19. 我身边的异性通常认为这种风格具有吸引力。
20. 我身边的异性通常会对这种穿衣风格持积极态度。
21. GD 本人就是时尚的代言人。
22. GD 穿衣风格总是在引领潮流。
23. GD 的风格常常带有一点桀骜不驯。
24. GD 的风格常常带有一点玩世不恭。
25. 我平时关注时尚趋势的程度很高，经常看时尚杂志 / 时尚博主。
26. 我对服装风格比较敏感。
27. 我会经常尝试新的穿衣风格。

三、个人基本信息

1. 年龄：_____
2. 性别：
☐ 女性
☐ 男性
☐ 其他性别
3. 您的最高学历是：
☐ 小学毕业或以下
☐ 初中
☐ 高中

- ☐ 大专
- ☐ 大学本科
- ☐ 大学硕士及以上

4. 您的家庭月入大约是：

- ☐ 5000 元以下
- ☐ 5001-10000 元
- ☐ 10001-15000 元
- ☐ 15001-20000 元
- ☐ 20001-25000 元
- ☐ 25001-30000 元
- ☐ 30001-35000 元
- ☐ 35001-40000 元
- ☐ 40001-45000 元
- ☐ 45001-50000 元
- ☐ 50001-55000 元
- ☐ 55001-60000 元
- ☐ 60001-65000 元
- ☐ 65001-70000 元
- ☐ 70001 元或以上

5. 您的婚姻状况是：

- ☐ 已婚
- ☐ 未婚
- ☐ 离婚
- ☐ 丧偶

四、问卷结束语

问卷完。非常感谢您的参与！