


## Mechanisms of social media influence on qipao consumption decisions among Gen Z women in Macao, China



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### ABSTRACT

#### Article History

Received: 29 January 2026

Revised: 19 March 2026

Accepted: 7 April 2026

Published: 17 April 2026

#### Keywords

Digital consumer behaviour  
Fit-authenticity evidence chain  
Gen Z women  
Purchase decision-making  
Qipao consumption  
Social media influence  
Visibility governance.

This study examines how social media could substantially influence the purchasing decisions of Gen Z female university students in Macau, China, with particular attention to the specific processes through which influential social media content might shape their perceptions and choices. An interpretive qualitative research design was employed, based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 university students aged 18-25. Moreover, the data were processed through thematic analysis, with saturation monitoring to ensure the credibility and depth of interpretations. Given that social media platforms continue to evolve, data analysis may reveal that they provide information. Additionally, analysis might indicate that social media plays a formative role in constructing purchase considerations. However, short videos and live-stream content may stimulate scenario-based imagination. Furthermore, content could influence perceptions of authenticity and shape risk assessments. Findings indicate female students identify three interrelated mechanisms during the cheongsam purchase conversion process: scenario script construction, visibility management, and a mechanism termed the "fit-authenticity evidence chain." Nevertheless, mechanisms help explain why initial interest does not necessarily translate into actual purchase. In light of these important empirical findings, this research could provide cheongsam brands with significant opportunities to enhance competitiveness through scenario-based content strategies, clearer sizing guidance, and strengthened return/exchange/alteration service commitments. Thus, tight integration between online promotion and offline fitting services may boost Gen Z consumers' trust. Notwithstanding current market conditions, integration might improve conversion rates.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature by examining how social media structures qipao purchase decision-making among Generation Z consumers. It develops a process-oriented explanation of purchase conversion and introduces the fit-authenticity evidence chain as a mechanism linking online content, perceived risk, and actual buying behaviour.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid diffusion of social media and social commerce could indicate that fashion consumption has shifted from a significant brand-led communication model and offline try-ons to one centred on critical content exposure, peer influence, and livestream interaction. Moreover, prior research may suggest that platforms such as Instagram,

TikTok, and Pinterest shape consumers' fashion inspiration. Furthermore, the platforms shape product discovery and purchase decisions through visual content, influencer collaborations, and algorithmic feeds. However, platforms might facilitate impulse buying and immediate conversion (Kapoor & Pandey, 2024). Nevertheless, social media marketing may influence consumers' purchase decisions at a broader market level. Given that younger audiences show more potent effects, the findings appear relevant (Bhonsle, Soni, & Mohan, 2024). Moreover, evidence from the Chinese apparel market could suggest that strategically designed social media marketing activities enhance perceived value.

Additionally, the activities might enhance customer satisfaction (Yang, Khan, & Zhang, 2020). Thus, these dynamics may be amplified in livestream commerce. However, entertainment value, information quality, interactivity, peer customer evaluations, and streamer attractiveness could increase Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions (Ngo, Bui, Chau, & Tran, 2023). Furthermore, social interaction and social-commerce emotional motives strengthen trust. In light of emotional connection findings, the motives may encourage impulse purchases (Mardhiana, 2024).

Nevertheless, research grounded in the S-O-R framework could indicate that the functions of livestream content affect impulse buying. Moreover, opinion leadership, professionalism, entertainment, interactivity, and promotional intensity might affect impulse buying through pleasure and arousal. Additionally, interactivity may play a critical role (Xiao et al., 2026). Therefore, these studies position social media as a key channel. However, the channel could shape young consumers' fashion decision-making.

The shift in the object of inquiry, from general fashion items to the qipao as traditional dress, may suggest that existing conclusions are insufficient to capture the complexity of decision-making. Moreover, the qipao carries cultural symbolism and aesthetic expression, yet it appears sensitive to cut, fit, and body-garment alignment; thus, consumers might be exposed to size uncertainty and fit-related risks. Furthermore, research on online apparel consumption may show that body-related self-discrepancy and body dissatisfaction heighten concerns about fit and sizing. However, the "discrepancy risk deterrence effect" could suggest that thin models intensify perceived fit risk among larger-bodied consumers. Nevertheless, body-similar presentations might mitigate risk and improve purchase decisions (Zhang, Ikonen, Eelen, & Sotgiu, 2025). Given the relevance of brand authenticity, ideal self-congruence may strengthen authenticity-related perceptions and shape consumer responses (Zogaj, Mähner, & Tscheulin, 2024). Thus, qipao consumption might reflect a decision process shaped by authenticity judgment, fit-risk governance, and social-situational boundaries. Given the widespread use of social media in Macao, there remains a limited systematic explanation of how social media cues are learned through consumer socialisation. Notwithstanding the concentration of higher-education communities in which online and offline channels coexist, little qualitative evidence from this significant population exists on how cues drive Gen Z women's qipao consumption decisions across contexts such as graduation, "Republican-era"-themed travel, and campus life.

This study examines the social media-driven mechanisms that could substantially shape the qipao consumption decisions among Gen Z women in Macao. Moreover, the key objectives appear to indicate: (RQ1) the identification of significant types of social media cues and interaction formats, and the explanation of how these critical elements may be learned and internalised through the important processes of exposure, comparison, and engagement; (RQ2) the clarification of how the cues might influence consumers' cognitive appraisals and decision processes through mechanisms such as self-congruence, perceived authenticity, and risk governance; and (RQ3) examination shows how mechanisms shape wearing and purchase intentions, channel choice, and post-decision sharing and feedback loops, while the study specifies boundary conditions under which mechanisms hold or weaken across different wearing contexts. Furthermore, existing studies have examined relationships among social media marketing, livestream commerce, and Gen Z purchase behaviour (Kapoor & Pandey, 2024; Ngo et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2026) however this study may advance discussion by focusing on qipao as fit-sensitive and obvious heritage fashion item, and by integrating prior insights on fit risk, self-congruence, and authenticity (Kim & Damhorst, 2010; Zhang et al., 2025; Zogaj et al., 2024) to enrich explanations of consumer decision mechanisms in social media contexts. Given the study's

significant empirical findings, it could also offer actionable recommendations for qipao brands and practitioners on critical content strategy, livestream engagement, and online–offline coordination to improve conversion rates and competitiveness. Thus, the study may provide practical guidance for the digital operations of qipao brands and new insights into conversion dynamics and the contextual boundaries of traditional dress consumption in contemporary social media environments.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *The Influence of Social Media and Livestream Commerce on Fashion Consumption Decisions*

Social media platforms have evolved from communication channels into key arenas where fashion consumption decisions may be shaped. Moreover, a growing body of research could indicate that these significant platforms influence consumers' product discovery processes, information evaluation activities, and purchase journeys through content marketing strategies, influencer effects, user-generated content, and electronic word-of-mouth mechanisms, resulting in important impacts on both purchase intention and actual buying behaviour (Bhonsle et al., 2024; Siddiqui, Zafar, & Naseem, 2025). Furthermore, platform formats have shifted, and the convergence of short-form video and livestreaming might amplify this influence. Thus, consumers may move from initial interest to decision-making through immersive viewing and real-time interaction (Apriyani, Respatiningsih, & Nugrahani, 2025). However, in the context of Douyin, evidence indicates that both content marketing and livestreaming positively affect Gen Z consumers' apparel purchase decisions, with livestreaming showing a stronger path coefficient. Nevertheless, real-time interaction and product demonstration could be more decisive than static content in shaping purchase decisions (Apriyani et al., 2025). Given that social media's role in fashion consumption has extended beyond "exposure and awareness," this might suggest a broader shift toward "interaction and conversion" at the decision stage.

Studies in livestream commerce research could indicate that scholars have further examined the key drivers of purchase intention. Moreover, research on Gen Z suggests that entertainment value, information quality, interactivity, peer customer evaluations, and streamer attractiveness significantly increase purchase intention in livestream settings, with streamer-related factors often exerting the most decisive influence. However, perceived risk does not necessarily function as a significant deterrent (Ngo et al., 2023). This implies that consumers respond not only to informational quality but also to interactive atmospheres. Additionally, research on livestream social commerce may demonstrate that parasocial interaction and social-commerce emotional motives strengthen consumers' trust in streamers and their emotional connection to them, thereby significantly increasing Gen Z consumers' impulse buying tendencies and highlighting the distinctive advantages of livestream platforms in emotion-driven and relationship-driven persuasion (Mardhiana, 2024).

Furthermore, S–O–R-based studies could indicate that livestream content functions, such as opinion leadership, professionalism, entertainment, interactivity, and promotional intensity, affect impulse buying through pleasure and arousal. Nevertheless, interactivity might emerge as the most influential factor across both path coefficients and indirect effects (Xiao et al., 2026). Given that significant empirical research demonstrates these patterns, these studies could form a mainstream explanatory framework for how livestream commerce shapes fashion consumption decisions: content features and interaction design might trigger emotional responses and foster trust. Thus, emotional responses and trust formation may drive purchase intention and impulse buying.

Platform-based livestream selling appears closely linked to attitude- and trust-based mechanisms that may substantially influence consumer behaviour. Moreover, empirical studies using TikTok or Douyin livestreaming data could suggest that engaging content and streamer characteristics indirectly increase purchase intention by enhancing consumer attitudes and trust. Promotional programmes may directly affect purchase intention. However, such programmes might not strengthen the relationships between trust and purchase intention. Furthermore, these promotional strategies could weaken the links between attitude and purchase intention (Cam Thuy & Ngoc Quang, 2025). This indicates conversion in livestream commerce may not simply reflect price incentives.

Nevertheless, the conversion data suggest a more complex interplay among content value, relational trust, and promotional strategy. Given that livestream shopping provides real-time product information, other research indicates that it may serve as a primary source of product information compared with online customer reviews. Given these interactive capabilities, livestream formats could exert a more substantial influence on trust and satisfaction. Thus, these mechanisms might more effectively shape purchase decisions (Yang et al., 2020). Livestream commerce may enhance product visualisation. Additionally, such platforms could strengthen decision confidence through real-time interaction and relationship-oriented communication.

Research from social media marketing and livestream commerce perspectives demonstrates that interactive content, influencer effects, eWOM, and peer evaluations can significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions and decision processes (Apriyani et al., 2025; Mardhiana, 2024; Ngo et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2026). However, this important literature may provide a solid foundation for understanding the effects of social media and livestreaming on fashion consumption decisions. Notwithstanding these significant theoretical contributions, existing evidence is concentrated on general fashion products, and research frameworks treat impulse buying as a typical outcome. Moreover, current studies might place heavier emphasis on emotional reactions, trust formation, and conversion efficiency (Cam Thuy & Ngoc Quang, 2025; Xiao et al., 2026). These mechanisms may not fully explain decision-making for apparel categories. Furthermore, apparel products exhibit stronger product constraints and more precise contextual boundaries, warranting further investigation.

## *2.2. The Role of Fit Risk and Body Anxiety in Online Apparel Purchasing*

Research may suggest that apparel, compared with many highly standardised consumer goods, may pose greater perceived risk in online purchasing contexts, and that the significant empirical uncertainty about fit and appearance has repeatedly been identified as a significant barrier to purchase decisions. Drawing on perceived risk theory, prior research suggests that product performance risk in online apparel shopping is multidimensional. In light of the absence of physical contact and try-on opportunities, consumers might develop three core concerns: visual risk, tactile risk, and trial risk. Using a sample of 403 female university students, Yu, Lee, and Damhorst (2012) show consumers' evaluations of apparel attributes may depend heavily on virtual product experiences, and trial risk could include critical judgements about fit, reflecting the difficulty of confirming the match between garment cut and body shape in online settings (Yu et al., 2012). Nevertheless, this may imply that risk in online apparel consumption is not driven solely by insufficient information about price or quality, but also by fit uncertainty resulting from a lack of embodied interaction with the product.

However, fit risk might also lead to a range of negative consequences, affecting satisfaction and subsequent behaviour. Hong and Pavlou (2010) demonstrate that fit uncertainty could significantly weaken consumers' ability to match product features with personal needs and may lead to higher price premiums, dissatisfaction, increased returns, and reduced repurchase intention, indicating fit issues shape not only pre-purchase decision-making but also post-purchase experience and longer-term consumption tendencies (Hong & Pavlou, 2010). Given that fit risk appears important in online apparel contexts, the evidence suggests it functions as both a primary barrier at the decision stage and an important factor influencing brand relationships and long-term value.

At the same time, fit risk appears to intertwine with the body-related psychological mechanisms, thereby further amplifying the significant uncertainty in online shopping. Moreover, the research may indicate that body-related self-discrepancy and body dissatisfaction could intensify consumers' important concerns about fit and sizing. However, when online try-on is not possible, worries about appearance presentation may affect purchase intention. Given that visual representations can relieve psychological pressure, size accuracy, and the need to "make the right impression" increase consumers' reliance on realistic presentations (Kim & Damhorst, 2010). Furthermore, the "discrepancy risk deterrence effect" might suggest that thin models heighten perceived fit risk among larger-bodied consumers.

Nevertheless, body-similar presentations can mitigate these effects in online shopping environments (Zhang et al., 2025). Thus, findings may indicate that fit risk is not merely functional uncertainty. Notwithstanding this observation, fit risk appears as a holistic risk experience tied to self-evaluation and body image.

From an information-source perspective, online consumer reviews have been shown to provide key cues for reducing the fit uncertainty. Additionally, the related studies developed measurement scales for fit-related problems and examined how fit information in reviews could influence purchase confidence. However, findings may suggest positive fit evaluations, compared with negative ones, exert more potent effects on credibility. Moreover, individual characteristics could moderate responses to fit-related reviews. Given that consumers demonstrate functional health concerns, lower weight satisfaction, or higher weight self-esteem, fit information influences these consumers more strongly (Shin, 2016). Thus, fit risk can be managed through informational cues. Nevertheless, risk governance effectiveness varies across individuals.

The literature may provide important evidence for understanding fit risk and body anxiety in online apparel consumption; however, there appears to be significant room for further methodological advancement in these critical areas. Moreover, research suggests that much of the relevant field relies on cross-sectional designs or controlled experiments. Additionally, longitudinal causal evidence on how body anxiety changes over time and shapes long-term purchase behaviour may remain limited. Thus, claims about sustained effects could require further validation (Acar, Ofluoğlu, Kanat, Ünal, & Atilgan, 2017). Given that fit risk and body anxiety constitute key constraints on online apparel decision-making, findings might highlight the need to examine how risk-governance mechanisms, such as visual evidence, review cues, and service guarantees, operate within more specific product categories and situational contexts, notwithstanding the observation that these mechanisms provide a foundation for subsequent mechanism-focused explanation in category-specific research.

### *2.3. Self-Congruence and Authenticity Mechanisms from a Consumer Socialisation Perspective*

Consumer decision-making in social media environments may well be shaped not only by informational stimuli but additionally by significant socialisation processes. Moreover, consumer socialisation could demonstrate how individuals learn and internalise important values, norms, and modes of identity expression through interaction, thereby developing stable preferences and behavioural tendencies. Within brand and community contexts, socialisation and internalisation might unfold simultaneously; brands no longer appear merely as functional choice objects but become carriers of identity, meaning, and group belonging. However, prior research suggests that the internalisation process in consumer relationships can translate need fulfilment into brand attachment. Furthermore, the socialisation process may transform supportive value into community identification, with both pathways likely influencing loyalty behaviours (Hung, 2014).

Nevertheless, this work argues that brand self-congruence and authentic self-expression could operate as important mediators in the formation of brand attachment and community identification. Thus, identity elements within brand relationships may not only strengthen emotional bonds with the brand but also expand into a sense of collective identification with the brand community (Hung, 2014). Given that consumers' social ties with others and their sense of belonging within brand communities appear central to the development of brand love, conceptual research similarly emphasises these relationships. Moreover, the research proposes perceived community membership as a significant mediator between social relationships and brand affect, suggesting that this membership can evolve into "psychological ownership" of the community. Additionally, this ownership could strengthen feelings of responsibility and long-term commitment (Ahuvia, Izberk-Bilgin, & Lee, 2022). However, these studies may indicate that consumption in social media settings is not an isolated act. Notwithstanding various interpretations, consumption appears embedded in social interaction and identity construction through socialisation mechanisms.

Within this socialisation process, self-congruence could provide a critical theoretical pathway demonstrating that self-expressive mechanisms may substantially mediate the relationship between individual identity and consumption

choice. Moreover, self-congruence may treat consumption as an important extension of self-expression: individuals might select objects that appear to reflect their self-concept in order to maintain consistency between behaviour and self-perception. Furthermore, the research shows that self-construal influences whether consumers exhibit behavioural consistency across sequential decisions. Consumers with an interdependent self-construal may maintain consistent behaviour, whereas consumers with an independent self-construal may exhibit a licensing effect, leading to inconsistent subsequent behaviour (Xiong, Wang, Zhang, & Xiao, 2023). Nevertheless, reminding consumers of behaviours strengthens consistency under interdependent self-construal and weakens licensing under independent self-construal, highlighting that social norms amplify the self-congruence mechanism (Xiong et al., 2023). Thus, in social media contexts characterised by visibility and peer evaluation, self-congruence may be expressed as "whom I want to be" and as "whether I meet role expectations," shaping judgements about clothing choices.

Beyond self-congruence, perceived authenticity could reasonably serve as a significant mechanism through which these social media platforms may substantially drive consumption of culturally symbolic products. For products carrying cultural symbolism and identity meaning, consumers often rely on authenticity judgments to evaluate cultural value and the legitimacy of self-expression. Research on hanfu indicates that the authenticity of cultural elements and cultural compatibility significantly increase purchase intention, and that needs for social identity and self-pursuit mediate these effects. However, findings suggest the appeal of cultural products is not only aesthetic but also depends on alignment with consumers' identity needs and values (Li, Niu, & Xu, 2024). Nevertheless, research may show that authenticity and legitimacy are not necessarily in conflict. In broader authenticity research, scholars argue that organisations may achieve both through mechanisms such as imagination, evangelism, shame conversion, and transformation, thereby strengthening consumer identity and brand value. Given that authenticity operates as a dynamic process, the view is that it is better understood as a significant value process that can be constructed and maintained rather than as a static attribute (Yousefi & Wijan, 2023). Thus, research in brand authenticity contexts may show that alignment between a brand and consumers' ideal self can enhance authenticity-related experiences. Moreover, alignment might shape consumer responses through identity signalling (Zogaj et al., 2024). Additionally, findings may suggest that culturally symbolic categories such as traditional dress, perceived authenticity, and self-congruence often operate together, determining whether consumers perceive a consumption choice as both "right for me" and "authentically grounded."

Notwithstanding the diverse theoretical foundations, the significant literature on brand relationships and brand communities, cultural product consumption, and the important theories of self-congruence and authenticity could collectively indicate the central role of social interaction, identity expression, and authenticity judgment in the formation of consumer behaviour (Ahuvia et al., 2022; Hung, 2014; Li et al., 2024). In light of social media environments, the evidence might demonstrate that consumers learn and internalise values and norms through ongoing interaction with content, other users, and brands. Furthermore, self-congruence may shape identity expression and behavioural consistency, while perceived authenticity influences evaluations of credibility and legitimacy for culturally symbolic products (Xiong et al., 2023; Yousefi & Wijan, 2023; Zogaj et al., 2024). However, mechanisms might provide a theoretical foundation for understanding traditional dress consumption. Thus, mechanisms may underpin the explanatory framework developed in this study to examine how social media drives qipao consumption decisions.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses an interpretive qualitative research approach, with semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary data source. Moreover, the objective could plausibly demonstrate that the significant social media signals might be acquired and assimilated through these critical consumer socialisation processes. Furthermore, the study may explore how cues influence qipao purchase among Generation Z women in Macao. The target population comprised female university students aged 18–25 enrolled in higher education institutions in Macao, China.

Nevertheless, purposive and snowball sampling may be employed in combination. However, this method appears designed to guarantee diversity in terms of social media usage intensity, educational background, and life circumstances (e.g., travel, banquets, and routine scenarios). Notwithstanding the importance of sample diversity, the present study proposes an expanded sample size to include individuals who have either worn or purchased qipao, those who have considered doing so, and individuals who have not. Given the importance of sample fit, a brief pre-screening questionnaire lasting about 2 minutes could be administered before official interviews to improve sample fit and provide a traceable sampling frame.

Therefore, the questionnaire may encompass questions regarding basic demographics, social media usage, experience with qipao, and channel preferences. Given the methodological considerations, pre-screening can be used to match and select samples. Additionally, the final interview sample may be set at around ten people. Moreover, the sample size may vary depending on the themes present. Nevertheless, sample sizes and saturation criteria are recognised in qualitative interview research. Each interview could last between 60 and 75 minutes.

Furthermore, prior to the commencement of interviews, the researcher may use a standardised opening script to explain the study's significant aims, duration, audio recording protocols, anonymisation techniques, and participants' right to withdraw. However, interviews could be audio-recorded with participants' consent. Thus, recordings can then be transcribed verbatim. Additionally, participant identities can be removed.

The interview guide encompassed three primary domains of inquiry. The guide could indicate that participants' social media exposure and significant cue sources might help identify influential types of content, such as celebrity demonstrations, peer try-on sharing, topic pages, and live-stream clips. Moreover, the guide examined mechanisms by looking at turning points, such as the transition from 'it looks good' to 'I want to try it'. The study investigated factors such as self-congruence and authenticity judgements. However, the guide examined the consequences of decisions, such as wearing intentions and channel selection. Investigation may analyse intentions to wear across contexts.

The study used thematic analysis to examine the data. Nevertheless, established procedures could indicate that transcripts were initially tagged using open coding to identify the significant meaning units associated with these critical cue kinds: situational triggers, visibility pressure, and important feedback-sharing loops. Codes were contrasted and organised into themes, which might develop into a cohesive framework. Data collection occurred concurrently, and coding was used to evaluate thematic saturation iteratively. Furthermore, negative case analysis can pinpoint obstructive elements. Thus, methods may strengthen credibility and align with trustworthiness standards employed in thematic analysis research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

**Table 1.** Participant profile and qipao-related decision status (N = 10).

Participant ID	Age	Education level	Study location	Qipao experience status	Main context(s) discussed	Channel preference
1	19	Undergraduate	Macao	Considered only (No purchase)	Travel and photo shoots; graduation-related trigger	Offline for important occasions
2	19	Undergraduate	Macao	Considered only (No purchase)	Travel and photo shoots	Online private try-on first
3	20	Undergraduate	Macao	Considered only (No purchase)	Graduation and ceremonial contexts	Mainly online
4	19	Undergraduate	Macao	Purchased and worn	Travel and photo shoots (Chinese-style architecture)	Mainly online
5	19	Undergraduate	Macao	Purchased and worn	Travel and photo shoots; performance/banquet scenario	Mainly online
6	20	Undergraduate	Macao	Tried on but did not purchase (Would buy if needed)	Offline try-on experience; uncertain occasion	Context-driven (offline for important occasions)

Participant ID	Age	Education level	Study location	Qipao experience status	Main context(s) discussed	Channel preference
7	21	Undergraduate	Macao	Worn for performance; no purchase	Campus and performance: comparison with everyday settings	Mainly offline
8	19	Vocational/ Associate	Macao	Purchased and worn	Every day trial with online ready-to-wear	Mainly online
9	20	Vocational/ Associate	Macao	Purchased and worn (Including online return and offline try-on)	Triggered by period drama imitation; ceremonial presentation	Offline try-on preferred
10	19	Vocational/ Associate	Macao	Non-converter (Neither worn nor purchased)	Lack of everyday occasions; observation/Hesitation	Online observation (Private try-on tendency)

**Note:** All respondents are female students enrolled at higher education institutions in the Macao Special Administrative Region of China. The column 'qipao-related experience status' distinguishes respondents' actual engagement with cheongsams (e.g., purchased, worn, merely considered, or not yet acquired); 'Primary discussion context' reflects the everyday situations where their decision-making and narratives predominantly occur; 'Channel orientation' summarises their preferences and inclinations when discussing methods of acquiring qipao.

#### 4. FINDINGS

##### 4.1. Overview of Themes and Analytical Approach

The present study examines thematic analysis based on semi-structured, in-depth interview transcripts. Moreover, the significant sample characteristics could indicate that detailed information is provided in Table 1. Furthermore, the respondents may encompass diverse decision-making states, including 'considering but not yet purchased', 'purchased and worn', 'tried on but not purchased (would buy if needed)' and 'non-converters', and their narratives might centre on typical life contexts such as travel, photo shoots, graduations and campus daily life (see Table 1). However, open coding, thematic aggregation, and iterative cross-referencing were employed in this study. Given that the analysis progressed systematically, three interrelated themes may have emerged to examine how social media influences cheongsam purchasing decisions and delineates contextual boundaries. Thus, the following terms are used in this text: 'Scenario Scripting', 'Visibility Governance', and 'Fit Authenticity Evidence Chain'. Nevertheless, thematic analysis can be posited as a chain of mechanisms, spanning from 'content exposure and cue acquisition' to 'cognitive evaluation and risk governance', ultimately resulting in 'channel selection and behavioural conversion'. Additionally, findings provide empirical support for subsequent discussions. Figure 1 summarises the mechanism chain identified in the thematic analysis, linking social media cues to cognitive appraisals and risk governance, and ultimately to channel choice and conversion, with contextual boundaries shaping when these mechanisms strengthen or weaken.

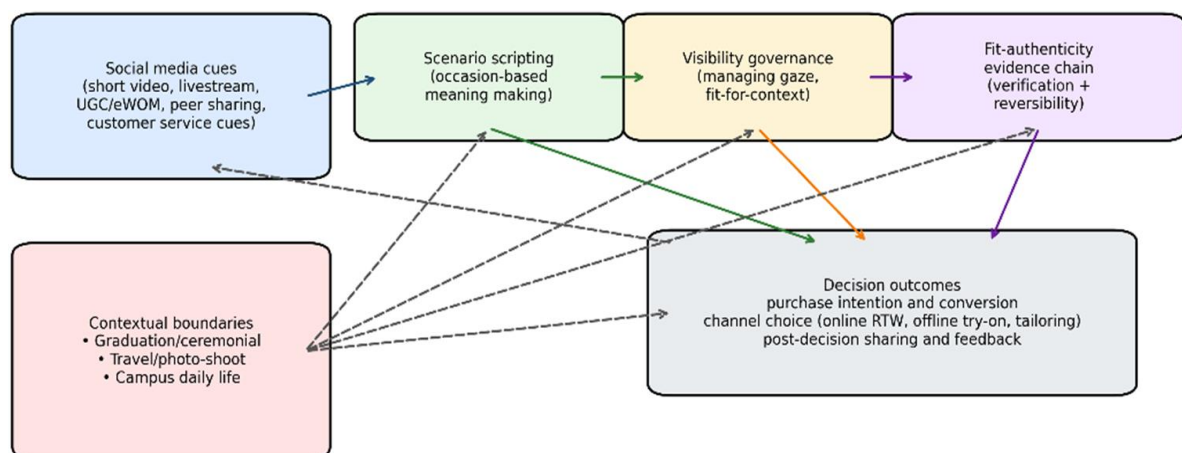


Figure 1. Mechanism model of social media influence on qipao (Cheongsam) consumption decisions.

Table 2 presents the identified themes, subthemes, and representative evidence extracted from the interview data.

**Table 2.** Identified themes, subthemes, representative evidence from the interview data, and linked research questions.

Theme	What the theme captures	Key subthemes	Indicative evidence (Participants)	Linked RQ
Scenario scripting	Social media packages qipao into ready-to-enact scenarios (e.g., travel photo shoots, graduation rituals), turning cultural symbolism into executable action and making adoption feel legitimate and “worth doing.”	(1) Occasion-based meaning making (travel, graduation) (2) Aesthetic script and style templates (e.g., Republican-era vibe) (3) Scene-self fit as a gatekeeper	“travel memory” and “Republican-era photo style” (P1); “graduation as a life milestone” (P1); “needs a solemn setting and personal aura” (P3); “fits Chinese-style architecture, photos look better” (P4)	RQ1, RQ3
Visibility governance	Participants manage the social costs of being seen in a qipao. Desire for photogenic outcomes coexists with concerns about gaze, judgment, and awkwardness in everyday campus life, producing context boundaries and coping strategies.	(1) Visibility paradox (wanting to look good vs fear of attention) (2) Campus daily-life boundary (3) Group-wearing as a buffer (4) Online private-space trial to avoid exposure	“too conspicuous/awkward on campus” (P1, P4); “body anxiety and evaluation pressure” (P2); “needs a group atmosphere to feel less awkward” (P3); “buy online and try at home to feel safe” (P2); “people may find it strange because few wear qipao” (P7)	RQ2, RQ3
Fit-authenticity evidence chain	Consumers reduce fit uncertainty and body-related anxiety through a chain of verifiable cues and reversible service guarantees. This reframes the qipao purchase as risk governance and shapes channel choice (online RTW vs offline try-on/Tailoring).	(1) Verifiable fit cues (buyer photos, movement videos) (2) Sizing calibration (sizing advice, body-type references, customer service consultation) (3) Reversibility guarantees (Return/Exchange/Alteration) (4) Channel switching triggers (Image-reality mismatch; need for fit certainty)	“walking try-on videos” and “real buyer photos” (P1, P3); “body-type-similar reviews help choose the right cut” (P1); “buyer photos show real Cut/Colour/Workmanship” (P4); “learned practical solutions from buyer photos” (P5); “returns/exchanges/alterations make hesitation turn into purchase” (P6); “qipao has no one-size logic; offline gives better fit certainty” (P2)	RQ2, RQ3

**Note:** RTW = Ready-to-wear. Participant codes (P1–P7) correspond to the interview sample described in Table 1.

#### 4.2. Theme One: Scenario Scripting

Social media may demonstrate that qipao serves as a visual mnemonic device tied to significant life milestones and specific scenarios, thereby underscoring its importance in both wearing and purchasing, and accelerating decision-making. Moreover, the multiple interviewees do not view the qipao as high-frequency everyday wear. However, prompted by social media content, interviewees associate qipao with 'travel photo shoots,' 'classical landmarks,' graduation ceremonies, or photoshoots.' Nevertheless, this creates replicable scripts around 'where to wear it, what style to adopt, and for whom it is worn.' Given that Respondent 1 provided detailed descriptions, the travel photoshoot script could indicate representative patterns of qipao consumption behaviour. Triggered by Xiaohongshu's image-text content during her trip, she explicitly linked qipao with 'Nanjing's distinctive character' and 'Republic of China-style photography', prioritising visual output: I came across qipao photo shoots for Nanjing's Qinhuai River night tours... to create a memorable keepsake of my Nanjing trip... aiming for a Republican-era aesthetic in the photos... visual impact is the primary objective.' (Participant 1) Thus, this may demonstrate that social media not only provides product information but also offers 'scenic significance and stylistic templates,' integrating qipao into travel narrative.

Additionally, a similar script operates in narratives about 'life milestones.' Respondent 1 expressed a strong desire to try 'pairing qipao with graduation attire' after seeing such content during graduation season: 'Combining significant life moments with cultural elements I cherish... subsequently transforming this personal interest into a way to capture pivotal life scenes.' (Participant 1) In light of the significant data on graduation ceremonies, Respondent 3 similarly linked qipao to them. However, her account might reveal the important limitations of scenario scripting: 'I deliberated between Western formal wear and the qipao, but ultimately chose against the latter. However, I felt it required a more solemn setting and a certain personal bearing to carry it off.' (Participant 3).

Furthermore, this 'abandonment case' may demonstrate that scenario scripting does not solely facilitate conversion. Therefore, scripting also creates exclusionary conditions. Notwithstanding the scenario templates provided by social media, when individuals perceive a mismatch between 'scenario requirements' and 'self-presentation,' decision-making is blocked. Thus, scenario scripting may explain why qipao are more frequently incorporated into milestone events such as travel photo shoots and graduations. Additionally, scenario scripting shows weaker conversion in everyday campus settings. Given that qipao decisions involve multiple significant evaluation dimensions, this critical theme might indicate decisions are not solely driven by aesthetic preference, but rather a comprehensive assessment of scenario fit, stylistic narrative, and identity presentation.

#### 4.3. Theme Two: Visibility Governance

These significant respondents may desire the photogenic allure and the expression of sophisticated elegance, yet simultaneously apprehend scrutiny and evaluative pressure in quotidian contexts, leading to situational constraints and strategic decisions. Moreover, the qipao's attractiveness may suggest the assumption that it will make you look "more photogenic and elegant" and the psychological cost of "standing out, being stared at, and facing scrutiny." Given that these concerns appear significant, interviewees restrict wearing qipao to appropriate contexts (such as vacation photos, performances, banquets, and graduation ceremonies) while eschewing it in routine university environments. However, Participant 1 may have mentioned the "sense of incongruity" and "pressure of scrutiny" that led them not to want to wear a qipao on campus. Nevertheless, they said, "I generally would not choose to wear a qipao in everyday campus settings... it feels slightly out of place... I do not really like the feeling of everyone looking at me." (Participant 1).

Furthermore, the important Participant 2 could identify 'body image worries' and 'fear of criticism' as primary obstacles, emphasising the cumulative impact of visibility costs and physical anxiety: "The main worry is definitely body image anxiety... then the strain of what other people think... Not many people wear qipao in public, and I am afraid of being watched." (Participant 2). In light of these significant findings, she might further elaborate on her channel preference as 'private experimenting,' indicating visibility management affects not only clothing choices but also shopping decisions: "I like buying things online better." Additionally, she may indicate that she tried them on at home, in a place where she feels safer. Thus, she might not be sure she wants to go offline, where shop assistants or other customers could see her.

Participant 2 might indicate that the people who answered the survey could suggest "group atmosphere" as a significant approach to make these potentially awkward situations less noticeable in contemporary settings. Moreover, Respondent 3 may have said directly that this approach requires a group atmosphere in which everyone agrees to attend certain events together and wear the qipao together, which could make the traditional qipao less noticeable in modern city life. Respondent 7 also discussed evaluation pressure from the perspective of "social scarcity," noting that few people wear qipao these days, and others might think you are strange or very noticeable. However, visibility governance may clarify the rationale for the claim that "social media influence does not necessarily translate into adoption" in typical college environments. Given that the weight of inspection and judgement could increase the social cost associated with wearing qipaos in these particular settings, the results suggest group support or a reason for being in public makes adoption more probable. Nevertheless, when there is group support or a reason

for being in public, such as graduations, banquets, or travel photography, the costs of being seen appear to decrease considerably, making it more likely that people will adopt the behaviour in these specific contexts.

#### 4.4. Theme Three: Fit-Authenticity Evidence Chain

The evidence suggests that social media platforms may have the capacity to address size uncertainty through a fit-authenticity evidence chain, one that transforms high-risk purchasing decisions into calibratable processes. Moreover, for fit-sensitive categories, participants might indicate consistent prioritisation of verifiable evidence regarding real-body presentation alongside adjustable service guarantees. However, this evidence chain may show the typical composition of real buyer photos, movement-based try-on displays, sizing recommendations, and body-type-similar references. Thus, these cues might reduce the risk of trial-and-error.

Given that Participant 1 examined moving try-on videos and buyer photos, the findings could indicate that these elements function as significant anxiety reducers linked directly to personal body characteristics. Nevertheless, the participant may suggest relevance of body-type-similar reviews: "Try-on walking videos and real buyer photos... reviews by bloggers with a similar body type... I have an H-shaped body... in real buyer photos, I can see what it looks like on ordinary people... and choose a cut and style that suits me better" (Participant 1). However, Participant 3 might emphasise dynamic presentation value. Additionally, concerns about polished bias may appear relevant: "Walking videos let me see how the outfit actually looks in motion in everyday life, rather than a static model shot or something that's been edited... sizing advice helps me understand what size fits me... and real buyer photos give me more realistic information" (Participant 3).

Furthermore, the important evidence from Participant 4 could demonstrate that buyer photos receive priority in authenticity judgements, while craftsmanship explanations might provide a significant complement for reducing concern: "Buyer photos... show the real cut and colour, and details like the workmanship... explanations of fabric and craftsmanship... if the workmanship looks refined... it makes me more willing to buy" (Participant 4). Moreover, Participant 5 may illustrate the actionability of this chain. In light of buyer photos, concrete coping strategies could emerge: "Real buyer photos are the first thing that eases my worries... if the sleeves are short, you can add a jacket to cover thicker arms... I learned that from buyer photos" (Participant 5).

The evidence chain suggests that trust-building mechanisms extend well beyond simple product visualisation, as these critical components also encompass pre-purchase seller communication and comprehensive post-purchase guarantee structures. Participant 6 may suggest that return policies, exchange options, and the important alteration services represent essential prerequisites for enabling the transition from purchase hesitation to final commitment: "The return and exchange issue... if the size feels a bit big or small when it arrives... they can alter it, or I can exchange it" (Participant 6). Moreover, Participant 2 might indicate that qipao differs fundamentally from standardised T-shirt sizing logic. Furthermore, the research may demonstrate that achieving fit certainty triggers offline tailoring preferences: "Qipao is not like a T-shirt with standard sizes... if you want an excellent wearing effect, you will choose offline" (Participant 2). However, evidence chains may support online purchasing decisions. Given that buyer comments and reviews provide social proof regarding fit, inclusivity, and quality assurance, these elements could plausibly become the final purchase trigger: "Buyer comments... whether you are thinner or heavier... the quality is guaranteed... then I would definitely consider buying it" (Participant 2). Thus, findings may show the fit-authenticity evidence chain reframes qipao purchasing from a high-uncertainty choice into a risk-governed decision that appears "verifiable, adjustable, and reversible." Therefore, evidence suggests that this process reshapes channel-choice patterns. In light of important occasions or prioritised fit certainty, participants may prefer offline try-on or tailoring services. Nevertheless, online ready-to-wear could become acceptable when evidence chains appear sufficiently strong through dynamic displays, sizing guidance, buyer photos, and return or alteration commitments.

The findings suggest that social media may not drive these important qipao decisions through a single pathway of "emotional arousal" or "instant conversion." Moreover, the evidence suggests that social media operates through

a significant mechanism that simultaneously involves scene-based meaning-making, visibility-related risk, and fit-related uncertainty governance. However, scene scripting might explain why the qipao becomes closely associated with events such as travel photo shoots and graduations. Additionally, visibility governance highlights socio-psychological boundaries that hinder conversion in everyday campus life. Given that consumers use content and service cues to reduce uncertainty, the fit-authenticity evidence chain shows how channel choice occurs. These mechanisms may form an integrated pathway, learning and internalising social media cues, moving through cognitive appraisal and risk governance, and resulting in behavioural outcomes and channel decisions. Thus, the findings provide an empirical foundation for the theoretical contributions and managerial implications discussed in the next section.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

### 5.1. Summary of Key Findings and Mechanism Explanation

This study examines semi-structured interviews with Gen Z women in Macao, China, to investigate the three primary ways that social media could substantially affect perceptions of wearing the traditional qipao, as well as the important contextual factors relevant to these processes. Moreover, the pivotal scene scripting may suggest the qipao evolves from traditional clothing into a "visual memory solution" linked to notable places and events. This procedure allows individuals to wear a qipao for occasions like graduations and photo sessions, enabling them to set intentions. However, wearing a qipao may show a unique aspect of visible regulation. Nevertheless, participants aspire to seem appealing in images and exude a unique "aura," while simultaneously feeling compelled to attain perfection in daily situations. Thus, participants may use methods like "group attire to alleviate discomfort" and "virtual private-space experiments," generally wearing a qipao alone in socially permissible settings. Additionally, qipao may be prone to fit and size discrepancies; therefore, participants might employ a chain of evidence to authenticate legitimacy and alleviate problems related to body image and anxiety. Given that these findings emerge from the data, this chain features authentic photos of purchasers and fitting displays. Furthermore, sizing guidelines may provide body-type standards and clear guarantees for returns and exchanges. However, this strategy converts ambiguous decisions into risk-governance frameworks, affecting the choice between online ready-to-wear and offline try-on alternatives.

These findings, derived from extensive research enquiries, may imply that social media cues serve not only as informational resources but also as educational instruments and normative standards for consumer socialisation. Moreover, assessment of qipao garments may not rely exclusively on personal tastes. Therefore, compromises between scene scripts and visibility costs might necessitate substantial risk management. Additionally, contextual changes are not simply ancillary factors. Notwithstanding these observations, they are crucial boundary factors that could affect processes.

### 5.2. Theoretical Contributions, Practical Implications, and Limitations

This attempt may offer theoretical improvements alongside practical contributions. Furthermore, substantial empirical research may reasonably imply that the extensive consumer socialisation framework indicates that social media cues are potentially learnt and internalised. Moreover, the study may indicate that self-congruence and perceived genuineness affect qipao purchasing choices. The study enhances the discourse on social media marketing by shifting the focus from associations to processes. Even yet, the article suggests a strategy that emphasises the qipao as a garment that is sensitive to fit. Since the collection of techniques may involve scenario scripting and visibility management, consumers assess situational appropriateness in scenarios such as graduation ceremonies. Consequently, the framework may elucidate that evaluations yield differing channel preferences. Results may enhance the explanatory capacity of consumer behaviour research. Nonetheless, the substantial findings suggest the establishment of a mechanism-based reason for the persistence of interest.

Despite these theoretical contributions, the empirical study may yield practical managerial insights for qipao brands and practitioners acting within market environments. The results may indicate that brands might enhance conversion rates by creating content centred on high-conversion scenarios. Also, brands might offer scenario-based wearing solutions that make individuals feel like they belong. Companies can make consumers feel uncomfortable in high-pressure situations by employing more ordinary information. So, brands might show that the online private-space trial experience needs improvement. Businesses can make it easier to prove suitability and validity by simplifying verification. Still, brands should make it easier to check products by including pictures of genuine buyers. Based on these practical findings, marketers might argue that clear return policies make it cheaper to try their products. Also, the primary methods may help people trust you more and buy more from you.

The study might show that substantial improvements could signal significant progress, but the fundamental empirical question suggests that these substantial problems could persist in the relevant situations. Additionally, the sample focuses on female Gen Z university students in Macao, China, indicating that the findings should be evaluated across different geographical contexts. Given the substantial demographic diversity, the results suggest that platforms need to be evaluated for relevance. The study is based on interviews, which means that researchers might create measuring scales from the framework. Nonetheless, evaluations may measure mechanisms and their influence on purchasing intention. The study may also use data from multiple sources, such as social media posts, comments, livestream transcripts, or customer service records, to make the sample more diverse. Nonetheless, the study could elucidate the core principles behind social media-influenced qipao decision-making. Given the strong empirical evidence, the findings may indicate that these pivotal theoretical frameworks could significantly augment academic comprehension of the essential conversion routes in digital contexts. Moreover, the results may indicate that traditional clothing requires specific solutions. Thus, the data indicate that digital consuming contexts warrant significant attention.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that three key mechanisms through which the significant social media platforms could substantially influence these critical qipao consumption decisions among Gen Z women in Macao, China: scene scripting, visibility governance, and a fit-authenticity evidence chain, and it could clarify that the important boundary conditions might emerge across contexts such as graduation and ceremonial occasions, travel photo shoots, and everyday campus life. Moreover, findings suggest that social media influence on traditional dress consumption could extend beyond raising purchase intention. Additionally, influence may shape how consumers learn wearing norms, manage visibility costs and fit risk, and make channel choices. However, the study's findings might guide qipao brands in their content planning. Nevertheless, the study could provide brands with livestream engagement approaches and sizing consultation strategies. Furthermore, the study might offer a theoretical perspective for understanding conversion and boundaries of traditional dress consumption in digital environments.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study is situated within qualitative social science and design research and involved voluntary interviews with adult participants. No minors, medical data, or sensitive personal information were involved. All participants were informed of the research purpose and provided informed consent prior to participation. Data were anonymized throughout the analysis process.

**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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