

# Perceived Authenticity through Short Video: Audience Perceptions of Emerging Independent Fashion Designers Self-Presentations

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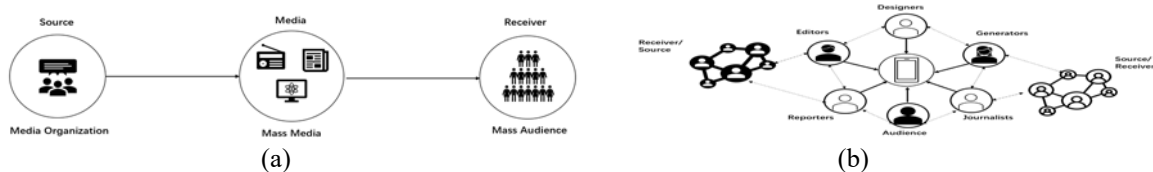
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**Abstract:** The prevalence of We-Media short videos has attracted emerging independent fashion designers (EIFD), a new force in the fashion industry directing their brand promotion to We-Media for amassing online followers. However, compared to famous content generators, EIFDs' creative, design-based visual appeal has not provided them with the significant edge. The former's success is admittedly supported by the platform backstage algorithm. Yet, the content is the cornerstone for building relationship between the sender and the reception. The authentic perception of the content is one of the basic appeals for which the audience chooses to follow the source. Therefore, with the EIFD short video as the research content, this study is established from the audience's perspective to understand the different dimensions of their authentic perceptions of EIFDs short video. The study was conducted mainly in the form of the Q method. The collection of 52 Q samples were realized through the Focus Group Interview and literature review on multidimensional authenticity. Thirty-six subjects participated in the sorting of the Q-sets. Finally, four dimensions of audience authenticity perceptions of EIFDs were derived: 'ingenuity', 'relevant', 'transparent', and 'experiential'. The corresponding short video content design strategies are suggested for effective communication of EIFDs and their personal brands.

**Keywords:** Emerging Independent Fashion Designer; Perceived Authenticity; We-media; Short video; Q methodology

## 1. Introduction

We-media, a medium that enables users to achieve the dissemination of self-generated content, empowers the masses to have a superimposed of identity—originally, they only have the attributes of receiver, and now they obtain the attributes of communicator source [1]. In terms of definition, it shares some similarities with 'social media' and 'SNS', which are commonly called in European and American academic, and '1인 미디어' (personal media) in Korean academic [2] [Figure 1]. As one of the forms of We-media content, short video, with its dynamic communication characteristics of audio and video and relatively easy-to-operate content production technology, meets the audience's demand and experience for media regarding audio visual expression. At present, the number of short video users in China has reached 873 million, accounting for 88.3% of the total Internet users [3]. Among them, many communicators use this channel for personal promotion or transaction, basically through shaping the attitude of the audience via the self-generated content [4].



**Figure 1.** The Communication Process of Mass Media (a) & We-media (b).

The content production related to fashion industry is regarded as one of the most successful digital cultural products in terms of communication effect and commercial transformation [5]. Beauty, branded clothing, even luxury brands have transferred their brand campaigns in online environment. Their use of influencer enables effective conversion of brand publicity [15]. Likewise, emerging independent fashion designers (EIFD), a nascent group in the fashion industry, have also turned to the We-media for the promotion to obtain the corresponding communication advantages. EIFD has a dual identity of both an individual and a personal brand. They are recognized by the public with their unique and personalized design style [6]. However, the wide, fast, and equal communication advantages given by We-media have not brought about the exponential accumulation of followers to it. Aside from the niche characteristics of their brand products, the individual identity of communicators is concerned. The academic background of EIFD has different tastes and design-based perspectives from the public. But neither of these advantages helps make it stand out in a platform conducive to the flourishing of individual communicators. It is true that the popularity of the influencer is affected by the operation of content with the platform algorithm mechanism [4], but the essential reason lies in the quality of individual self-generated content [7,19].

According to the research, authenticity in terms of individual's intrinsic motivation, noncommercial orientation, originality, and trust, is the recipient's expectation and demand for the self-generated content characteristics of the source in the We-media [8,9]. Meanwhile, it is also valued as the essential for the establishment of the online relationship between the two parties [10,11]. Authenticity is defined differently based on its diverse presentations in various contexts. Reference [12] suggest that, regardless of the context of authenticity, the words "genuine," "real," and/or "true" of an entity refer to the fundamental understanding of authenticity. However, with the commercial attributes attached to We-media, authenticity is used as a communication boundary strategy for business communicators [13]. Academic research on We-media authenticity focuses more on the staging and performed authenticity management, while the research subjects are mainly on the influencer [8,14,15]. For example, some studies are about their individual honesty and professionalism, some are about the transparent presentation of their brand endorsement and the corresponding influence on the relationship establishment and brand interaction with audiences as well as on the purchasing behavior [11,16,17]. However, regarding the EIFDs, who are both individual and brand communicators, little research focuses on their We-media content design or authenticity communication strategies. In addition, recent research on authenticity of communication information cues is mostly concentrated in the field of graphic information [5,14], while studies on the authenticity of dynamic short video content is still scarce [18]. With the fading of incremental dividends for users in China's local short video market, it is confirmed that more specialized and refined content will release greater value [19]. Thus, it is of practical significance to study we-media communication strategies of the EIFDs, the content producers with certain professional subdivision in the fashion industry.

Therefore, this study takes the audience's different authenticity perceptions presented by the EIFDs in short videos as the main research question. To gain an in-depth understanding of audience perceptions of the authenticity of the EIFDs' short video content in terms of their unique insights (qualitative), and the verification of information data (quantitative), respectively, the study adopted Q methodology. Meanwhile, the study combines the authenticity judgement framework proposed by [20], and Focus Group Interview (FGI), as well as the literature research, to give a conceptual basis for the Q method in practice.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Short Video & Fashion Industry

As one of the forms of We-media, the definitions of short video in the industry and academia have different focuses. Based on different platforms attributes and user characteristics, the industry is inclined to define short videos in terms of the time duration [21]. For example, the definition of short video by KUAISHOU platform is "57 seconds vertical screen." JIN RI TOU TIAO puts forward a 4 – minute "next-generation graphics" of short video [22]. But some industry insiders suggested, "short video, in essence, is the mobile terminal's subversion of the original graphic content format. So, the content and form compliance are the key to the definition [21]." The affordance of technology has gradually shifted the streaming platform from desktop to mobile facilities. The transformation of the screen from the horizontal to the vertical and the shortening of the video content time bring not only the change of the recipient's audiovisual experience, but also the design language (logic, editing, etc.) of the content producer. From the perspective of content production, the

academics propose that, compared with the closed-loop time spreading of traditional film and television, the narrative of short videos achieves its distribution in a nodes-like time compression way [22] [Figure 2]. Video durations ranging from 15 seconds, 1 minute, 5 minutes, or 15 minutes create fragmented viewing experiences and scenes for audiences and provide equal creative opportunities which put individual satisfaction on top priority [19,21,22].



**Figure 2.** The Narrative Differences between Traditional Movie(a) and Short Video (b)

Meanwhile, with the endowment of commercial attributes, the dimensions of content production are also diversified. Videos that originally were funny videos of single entertainment have gradually developed to be refined content with vertical subdivision [19]. Taking the fashion industry as an example, Xiaohongshu, a We-media platform with a certain degree of discourse in fashion in China; Douyin, China's short video head platform; BILIBILI, which has the largest generation Z user base, have respectively increased its flow of content producers and financial support in the fashion industry, achieving remarkable results [23]. Vertical segmentation of content, to a certain extent, puts forward higher requirements for the professionalism and personalized narrative style of content producer [19]. Also, it also lays foundation for the platform to accumulate high-quality content and creates more opportunities for content producers with specific professional backgrounds to present themselves.

## 2.2 Emerging Independent Fashion Designer & Short Video

EIFDs generally refer to independent fashion designers who have their own personal apparel brands established from 3- 5 years [6]. Due the impact of the epidemic as well as the popularity of short video platforms of We-media, EIFD, originally whose main brand promotion channels were offline buyers and physical stores have gradually turned to online in China [24]. With the help of more intuitive and vivid presentation of short videos, the EIFDs have gained the advantage of getting direct access to the audience. Besides, with the independent and equal individual or personal brand display space of We-media short videos, the EIFDs' personal design taste and value concept are disseminated to the mass.

There are some EIFDs with high followings in the We-media platform. Take MAGGIE MA for example, in August 2019, with only a release of a 10-second video of the collective curtain call from the brand owner and the models, the post received 80 million likes and thousands of "seeking the same style" messages. Another EIFD, Yang Yang, famous for its novel content and creativity, whose clothing styles are inspired by the outer packaging of various lifestyle foods, has accumulated nearly 1.53 million fans. Based on our research, the short videos made by EIFDs are mostly in the form of VLOG, mainly about how to wear and fashion-related professional knowledge sharing, and some others are about direct sales of clothing. However, due to the general homogenization of self-generated content among EIFDs, most EIFDs receive much less attention compared to well-known independent designers and general fashion influencers.

Recent research of the EIFDs online communication dedicated to the EIFDs' short video content design and communication strategy is in scarcity [25]. In the fashion industry nowadays, the fashion luxury brands have incorporated into short video platforms such as KUAISHOU, TIKTOK, and XIAOHONGSHU to reach the audience effectively [23]. In conjunction with the exponential growth trend of the audience's consumption of short videos compared to the graphic duration [3], and the subdivision content demanded by the short video platforms [19], the study of EIFDs short video content design strategy assumes certain meanings.

## 2.3 Authenticity Perceptions

Based on different scenarios, art, culture, psychology, and experience, scholars in their respective fields have assigned different definitions to this "dimension word"-Authenticity [26]. It may refer to various characteristics of an entity, including "credibility, originality, sincerity, naturalness, genuineness, innateness, purity, or realness [27]." With the ample meaning construction practice in a plural social context, the term acquired a versatile of perceptions.

### 2.3.1 Authenticity Perceptions & Judgement

According to the construction from the objectivity of entities and the individual's subjective cognition of entities, reference [28] divided authenticity into two categories: indexical and iconic. This is consistent with the research ideas of authenticity experience of objectivism and constructivism proposed by [29]. The author put forward the perspective of "existential authenticity" in tourism experience based on the research context of post-modernism [29]. The research posited that the tourism experience of related activities stimulates the spontaneous participation of individuals, and the authentic cognition of internal spirit and emotional reconstruction of multiple existences; and it even stimulates the cognition of social authenticity among the construction of individual relationships. Reference [30] also put forward a similar dimension of authenticity cognition in interaction design, ranging from the evaluation of the designer's skills to the awakening of individual emotions, and then to the guidance of spontaneous participation. Reference [31] proposed the cognitive dimension of 'moral authenticity' based on the audiences' authentic perception of the talents of content creators. Apart from audiences' authentic perceptions from objective entities or subjective experience, the content creators also perceive authenticity in the creation context. Based on the authenticity of art, reference [26] proposed the 'expressive authenticity' of creators. It originates from the true expression of individual or social values, beliefs, and arguments.

Building on the multitude of scholars' studies on authenticity, reference [20] proposed a framework for individual's judgments of authenticity in terms of the entity types and the mechanisms of audiences' perceptions of internal and external information sources. As our research object is the short video of EIFD, and its content contains both the entity attributes proposed by [20], i.e., object and agent. Thus, we propose a conceptual framework appropriate for this study enlightened by information source characteristics – 'external reference' and 'internal reference'. Based on this judgment mechanism, different authenticity perceptions are categorized Table 1. Meanwhile, it provides the basic framework for the design of Q concourses.

**Table 1.** Authenticity Judgment & Categorized Authenticity Perceptions

Information Sources	Authenticity Perceptions	Character Descriptions
External	Indexical Authenticity [28]	Object- A factual and spatiotemporal link with the entity. Person- true to oneself.
	Historical Authenticity [20]	Spatiotemporal history assessment
	Expressive Authenticity [26]	True expression of individual or social values and beliefs. The brand presentation will contribute to self-authenticity through a connection with personal ethical values.
	Moral Authenticity [31]	Individual's normative considerations which is intrinsically motivated, and value embedded.
	Value Authenticity [20]	'Authentic reproduction / recreation', user's sensory experience influencing by the preexisting knowledge or expectations.
Internal	Iconic Authenticity [28]	The reconstruction of the object.
	Categorical Authenticity [20]	The external effects on the internal perceptions.
	Self Authenticity [20] Existential Authenticity [29]	The influence of the inter & intra relationship of individual induced by the external activities.

### 2.3.2 Perceived Authenticity in We-media

With the social attributes embedded, some scholars who study authenticity indicate that there exists no objective authenticity [27,32]. Based on individual’s different interests and needs, the nature of the performance, crafting or imagination of authenticity is revealed [27]. As the individual foreground performance mentioned by reference [33]’s self-presentation theory - Individuals regularly define situations for their audiences in a particular way and produce certain effects on them. Orchestrated strategies of individual impression management, social interaction, and emotional control can all be understood as the authenticity management [33]. Correspondingly, with the parallel properties of individual advocacy and capital operation shared by the We-media content, authenticity as a boundary strategy is basically held by online communicators with commercial characteristics [13]. "Being recognized as authenticity" has been emphasized by many content creators, who believe that only "accounts with authenticity can achieve success" [18].

Meanwhile, along with the disseminator's orchestrated authentic content production, the audience's authenticity perception criteria have also been nurtured and transformed. In We-media, the audience's perception of authenticity is mainly based on their self-recognition and evaluation needs of information sources [18]. For example, many ordinary people have never had a chance to show a glamorous self-performance on the runway like designer MAGGIE MA did, however, the audience's recognition of authenticity is not from the runway show, but from the identity of MAGGIE MA as a brave and confident female entrepreneur [34]. This can be understood as the subjective construction of the information source. The audience in We-media environment is not objectionable with the performing authenticity. As existential authenticity points out that the pursuit of the audience has already been shifted from the objective authenticity of entity to the real experience of fun and aesthetic enjoyment [29].

The academic studies on authenticity mostly centered on the ways that influencer balances commercial endorsements and individually expressed content giving audiences perceptions of authenticity. But the systematic research on audience authenticity perceptions in We-media is relatively lacking. Scholars generally conclude that the authenticity presented from inside out has the best positive perceptual impact on the audience [8]. In part, this also affects the effective establishment of the relationship between the communicators and the audience [16,35]. Reference [36] regarded authenticity as an important dimension to evaluate influencer reputation. Reference [15] systematically organized the audience's authenticity perception of influencers from five perspectives. Reference [18] interpreted the relevance of authenticity information and audience perception in graphic and videos from the perspective of "visual authenticity" labor creation. Reference [37] proposed ‘unlikely creativity’, ‘vernacular creativity’, and ‘comical authenticity’ in short videos as influencers authentic expression strategies with Chinese characteristics. Above all, however, there is almost no study on perception of authenticity aimed at EIFDs. For young entrepreneur, reference [38,39] discussed strategies for presenting authenticity in social media from the perspective of young brands and start-ups, respectively. However, the scope of the study only focuses on the brand.

With unique characteristics, the EIFDs communication content of authenticity through We-media, advocating that the expression of their inner true self always comes first [2], which is somehow contradictory to the expression management of authenticity in mainstream communication content. Moreover, the products of the EIFDs present the characteristics of niche categories, but in We-media, the expansion of their individual and brand communication effects should be based on the public’s perceived characteristics of the information [7]. Hence, we propose the authenticity as a driver for the communication strategy of authenticity in the short video content of the EIFDs. Through understanding different dimensions of the audience's authenticity perceptions, we aim to propose effective communication strategies for delivering authenticity to the audience.

Based on EIFDs’ identity characteristics--it has both individual and brand attributes, the author sorted out the authenticity information cues in different contexts from We-media short videos and provided a reference basis for the final design of the Q samples Table 2.

**Table 2.** Information Cues of Authenticity Judgment

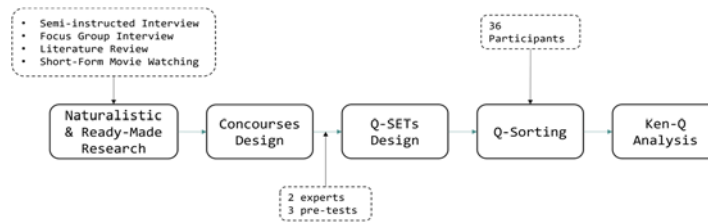
Information Cues	A.	B.	C.	D.	E. F.	G.	H. I.	J.	K.	L.	M.	N.	O.
Honesty, Objective & Transparent of endorsement brand information; of product comment; emotions & experience	•	•		•						•	•		

Sincere communication; true self exhibition; Internal satisfaction									
expression; positive/real emotion; the defects of self; funny communication; polite communication	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•
Possess the clear belief & self-proposition; belief & point of view; self-confidence; self-satisfaction; Information popularity (trustable, reliable, believable); Virtuousness	•	•				•		•	•
Speech styles- Stable tones; local tone	•		•		•				
Consistency expression in different time and platform; Consistency of characteristic; Stable			•	•	•		•		
Perceived relatable; similar attitude		•							
Staged spontaneity; Shy in front of the camera skillfully		•	•		•				
The working process		•							
Individual information; story telling combining individual life & endorsing brand		•		•	•				
Live show		•							
Editing skills- Unprofessional, simple content making and design; amateur disclosure			•	•	•	•			
Online interaction and engagement; sustained intimacy; responding to audience; the commitments to the consumer			•				•	•	•
Self-deprecating narratives; absurd humor; Entertainments		•			•				
Community building & interaction; community affiliate; friendship building; the intimacy with the brand; satisfied interactions in brand community		•			•			•	•
Original content; Attractive of the information			•			•	•	•	
Role play of a helper; quality of the point (helpful; valuable; persuasive)			•			•		•	
Sadness emotion present				•					
Personality exhibition					•			•	
Expertise; identity; the intelligence of the brand & startups		•				•		•	•
Gender							•		

A. [36]; B. [18]; C. [37]; D. [8]; E. [40]; F. [41]; G. [16] H. [11]; J. [42]; J. [43]; K. [13]; L. [15]; M. [44]; N. [38]; O. [39]

### 3. Methods & Results

In this study, Q method is used to gain a deep understanding of the audience’s subjective and objective authenticity perceptions of EIFDs short video contents. Combining with semi-structured and focus-group interviews, relevant short video content and literature review, this study collects Q Concourses related to the research topic, and extracts Q-sets. The author first invites specific short video viewing groups to evaluate Q-sets, and then uses the data analysis from Ken-Q software [45] to extract the authenticity perception characteristics of the audience in different dimensions Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** The Process of the Q methodology Practicing of this Research

### 3.1 Q methodology

The Q method is mainly used to study human subjective attitudes or behaviors due to its qualitative and quantitative characteristics [46]. The method is aimed at collecting the value and opinions of a minority group of people. The method assumes that people have a limited number of representative views on a particular issue, so the views expressed by the minority are to some extent consistent with the perception of the majority [46], [47]. Since the niche nature of EIFD and the subdivision characteristics of its short video content in the field of fashion and considering the focus of our study is the audience's authenticity perceptions, Q method was adopted to obtain the final collection of different perception types. Meanwhile, in-depth research on small number of samples allows authors to understand different views of a specific audience group more intuitively, which is more conducive to the mining of individual unique views [48].

### 3.2 Process

#### 3.2.1 Concourse Design & Q-sets Extract

Scholars have pointed out that the Q concourse comes from all aspects of our daily life. It can be a first-hand "naturalistic" result from research interviews or a second-hand "ready-made" result from literature reading [48]. In this research, the Q concourse is mainly collected from semi-structured interviews with EIFDs, focus-group interviews with audiences, content browsing of related short videos, and literature research.

Semi-structured interviews with three EIFDs are conducted to reveal their main behaviors and perspectives in the use of We-media platforms for individual and brand authenticity management. Each interview lasts for about 30-45 minutes. Referring to the information and combining the contents of EIFDs, fashion commentators, and fashion influencers account that the author has followed on Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Bilibili short video platforms, guiding questions for focus group interview are elaborated. These interviews conducted in this research with 12 users who have a habit of viewing short videos in their daily life. The users are divided into 2 groups, and the interview for each group is controlled in 1.5 hours so as to figure out why they watch "short videos on fashion"; their specific behaviors of "Following, commenting, and sharing" such short videos, as well as their attitude and perceptions about the "authenticity" information source presented by the source, which help to achieve the concourses design. In addition, the information cues of "authenticity" in We-media related to literature research is also an important reference for the concourses design. Finally, by combining EIFDs and short video content features, the research has extracted 62 concourses.



The researchers have pointed out that Q-sets are generally set between 49-70 to guarantee a higher survey efficiency without challenging the patience of the interviewees for cooperation [48], [50]. The method of "unstructured Q sample" is adopted in order to obtain a comprehensive information source for the audience to choose [49]. The expressions in 62 Q concourses are evaluated and screened by two experts from the short video industry. Also, the study adjusts the Q sample by pre-testing three subjects for clear statement and finally extracts a total of 52 Q samples [50] Figure 4.

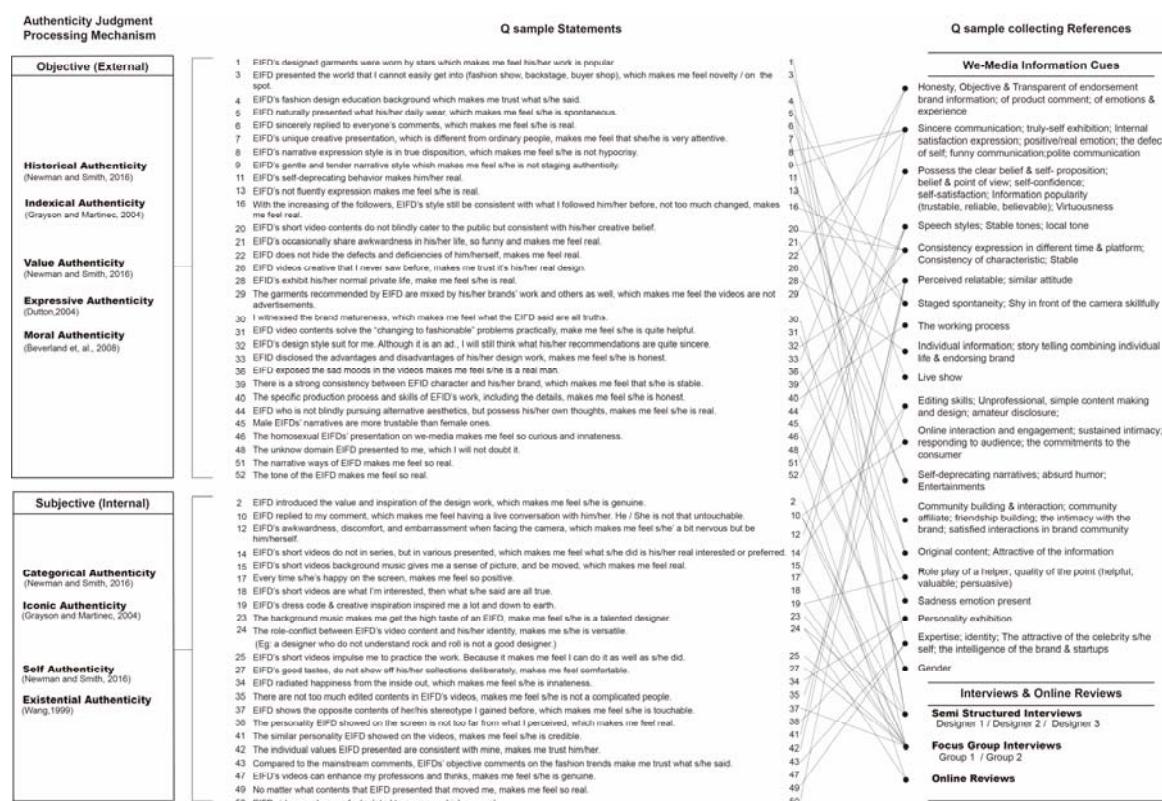


Figure 4. The Curation of Q sample Statements

### 3.2.2 Participants (P-sample)

This research focuses on the audience's perception of the authenticity of EIFD short video content. Taking account into the fashion attributes of the content and users' viewing experience of short videos, the author adopts extensive person-sample method for the selection of subjects [48]. Basically speaking, when choosing the subjects, we mainly consider the following participants like: Audiences with certain experience of viewing short videos (1-2 years); users who browse short videos for 1-2 hours a day; audiences who are interested in the fashion industry and know about or have purchased fashion independent designer products; audiences who have professional backgrounds in art design [Table 3]. Compared to the large number of the participant, diversity of the p-samples needs to be relatively considered [51]. Therefore, the age and gender of the subjects for P-sample selection are also considered. Altogether there are 36 subjects participated in the survey, including 8 men and 28 women, aging between 20-40 years old.

Table 3. The Detailed Information of P-sample

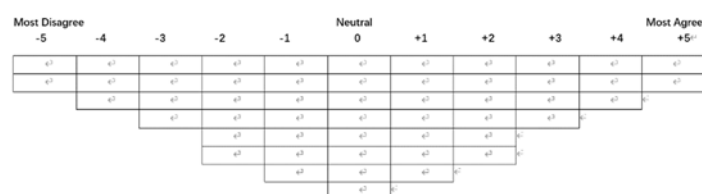
Criteria	Categories	Number	Criteria	Categories	Number
Age	20-25	14	Short Video Viewing Years	1-2 years	23
	26-35	14		3-4 years	11
	36-40	8		Over than 5 years	2
Gender	Male	8	Short Video Viewing Hours	1-2 hours / per day	26
	Female	28		3-5 hours/ per day	8
				Over than 5 hours	2



### 3.2.3 Q-sorting process

The Q-sorting is in the form of ‘forced-choice’ [Figure 5] in a one-to-one manner. Initially, the participants were required to concur with the researcher proposed basic definition of the perceived authenticity before they start the Q-sample ranking. Following the instructions of the researcher, subjects could work with the content of the EIFDs’ short videos they had watched and make sense of the corresponding Q-sample. Once the respondents understand each Q-set, they are divided into three groups: fully agree, neutral, and disagree. Then, in accordance with the Q-segment grading quantity requirements, a specific Q-set is arranged with 11-level measurement units, that is (left: -5, most disagree-right: +5, most agree), in the form of left and right, back and forth [48]. In addition, the author conducted a one-to-one interview after the respondents finished ranking the Q-sets [50]. Firstly, the specific reasons of their ranking were mainly elaborated, especially of the most agreeable, least agreeable, and most impressive expressions. Secondly, the participants were asked to share their personal thoughts on the authenticity of EIFD short video. All the interviews were recorded and collated.

The entire Q-sorting process lasted from mid-May to mid-June, 2021, about a month. It takes about 1 hour for the participants to practice Q-sorting and be interviewed by the researcher.



**Figure 5.** The ‘forced-choice’ Condition of Instruction for Q-sorting

### 3.3 Result

"Ken-Q Analysis" version 1.0.6 [45] for the Q method calculation is adopted in this research. When the survey data is organized, centroid factor analysis and varimax rotation commonly used in the Q method are adopted to extract the final research results. When using Q method, we need to extract factors with Eigenvalues bigger than 1 as the final dimension [47]. Therefore, we extract 4 factors out of 5 in the end. Based on the 4 dimensions, the author analyzes the audience's authenticity perceptions on EIFDs short videos. The four dimensions are categorized as follows: the ingenuity (E=9.3366), the relevant (E=2.4578), the transparent (E=1.9264), the experiential (E=1.5176). Each factor is defined by at least 5 participants who enjoy significant influence (P<0.05), which is more credible [48]. In this way, the data from a total of 34 participants are of reference significance, while the data of 2 participants is eliminated. According to [Table 4], the number of representatives in each group is 8, 8, 6, and 12 respectively.

**Table 4.** The Research Result of Four Dimensions

	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4
Eigenvalues	9.3366	2.4578	1.9264	1.5176
%Explained Variance	12	8	9	14
%Cumulative Variable	26	33	38	43
No. of Defining Variables	8	8	6	12

(N=34)

The characteristics of each category are specifically defined with reference to discourses as follows: Z-score bigger than or equal to 1, and smaller than or equal to -1 [48]. Based on the Ken-Q analysis [45], the p-value of each Q-sample was also tested [Table 4,5,6,7]. Those p value <0.01 were presented by ‘\*\*\*’. And those p value < 0.05 were presented by ‘\*’. Meanwhile, all the detailed explanation of the representative Q samples for each dimension are as follows:

#### 3.3.1 The first dimension (D1): ingenuity authenticity

The first dimension of authenticity perception is the audience’s recognition and expectation of the unique and creative style of works designed by EIFDs (garments and short videos), and the consequent perception of

the sincerity of EIFD. Thus, we named it as ingenuity authenticity [Table 4]. For a detailed understanding, the definitions of indexical authenticity, iconic, value, and expressive authenticity can be referred to. EIFD's objective presentation of clothing (No.33,  $Z=1.93$ ); the creativity and uniqueness of their video content that is different from ordinary mass content (No.7,  $Z=1.292$ ); and the audience's resonance for the creative ideas presented in the video (No.19,  $Z=1.012$ ) are clear manifestations of the audience's authenticity perception of the EIFD's short videos on this dimension ( $P<0.01$ ). Meanwhile, as EIFD do not blindly cater to market needs, and adhere to their unique and creative style (No.20,  $Z=1.686$ ), the audience perceives their diligence and sincerity of EIFD in content production. In addition, the professional background of EIFD on fashion (No.4,  $Z=1.176$ ) also has an impact on the participant's perception of the authenticity of EIFD. In contrast, the background music or content related to an EIFD's identity attributes alone do not have a significant impact on the authenticity perception in this dimension (No.15,  $Z=-1.019$ , No.49,  $Z=-1.417$ , No.18,  $Z=-1.77$ , No.12,  $Z=-1.053$ ).

**Table 5.** The Prominent Statements of the First Dimension (D1)

NO.	Statements	Z-score
33**	EIFD disclose advantages and disadvantages of his/her design work made me feel s/he's honest.	1.973
20*	EIFD's short video contents do not blindly cater to the public but consistent with his/her creative belief made me so real.	1.686
44	EIFD who is not blindly pursuing alternative aesthetics, but possesses his/her own thoughts, I feel s/he is real.	1.313
7**	EIFD's unique creative presentation which makes me feel s/he is genuine.	1.292
47	EIFD's short video can enhance my professions and thinks, makes me feel s/he is genuine.	1.251
26	EIFD's short video creative that I never saw before, makes me trust his/her real design.	1.242
4*	EIFD's fashion design education background which makes trust what s/he said.	1.176
40	The specific production process, skills and details of EIFD's work made me feel s/he's honest.	1.165
22	EIFD's does not hide the defects and deficiencies of him/herself, makes me feel real.	1.113
27	EIFD's has good tastes, do not show off his/her collections deliberately, makes me feel comfortable.	1.039
19**	EIFD's dress code & creative inspiration inspired me a lot and down to earth.	1.012
15**	EIFD short videos' background music gives me a sense of picture made me feel real and moved.	-1.019
12*	EIFD's awkwardness, discomfort, and embarrassment when facing the camera, which makes me feel s/he's a bit nervous but be him/herself.	-1.053
52	The tone of the EIFD makes me feel so real.	-1.194
24**	The contrast between EIFD video content and his/her identity, makes me he/she is versatile. (e.g.: a designer who does not understand rock and roll is not a good designer.)	-1.326
13	EIFD's not fluently expression makes me feel s/he is real.	-1.375
49**	No matter what contents that EIFD presented that moved me, makes me feel so real.	-1.417
46	The homosexual EIFD makes me feel so curious and innateness.	-1.764
18*	EIFD short videos are what I'm interested, then what s/he said is all real.	-1.77
48	The unknow domain EIFD presented to me, which I will not doubt it.	-1.899
45	Male EIFD narratives are more trustable than female ones.	-1.921

### 3.3.2 The second dimension (D2): relevant authenticity

The second dimension of authenticity perception is mainly manifested in the emotional resonance between spectators and EIFD, or EIFD's video content. So relevant authenticity is named [Table 6]. Different from the more objective perception of D1, authenticity perception in D2 highlights the subject's sense of relevance to the EIFD. The authenticity perception triggered by this relevance is mainly reflected in the sense of belonging (No.50,  $Z=2.082$ ) resulted from the value sharing between individual subjects and the community, and the uplift of individuals resulting from the professional value output by EIFD's short videos (No.47,  $Z=1.916$ ). In addition, the inside out joy delivered by EIFD can also trigger individuals' positive emotions (No.34,  $Z=1.005$ ). The attributes of EIFD's identity and their frank and straightforward way of speaking also interpret the way the audience perceive authenticity of EIFD perceptually (No.49,  $Z=1.712$ , No.51,  $Z=1.464$ ). On the contrary, the

objective information presented by EIFD, such as their analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of design works (No.33,  $Z=-1.009$ ), professional advice on becoming more fashionable (No.31,  $Z=-1.1$ ), and personal life presenting (No.28,  $Z=-1.148$ ) etc., do not provide effective cues to the subject in their authenticity perception in this dimension.

**Table 6.** The Prominent Statements of the Second Dimension (D2)

NO.	Statements	Z-score
50**	EIFD's short videos make me feel related to a group, makes me feel s/he is sincere.	2.082
47**	EIFD's short video can enhance my professions and thinks, makes me feel s/he is genuine.	1.916
2	EIFD introduces the value and inspiration of the design work, which makes me feel s/he is genuine.	1.892
44	EIFD who is not blindly pursuing alternative aesthetics, but possesses his/her own thoughts, I feel s/he is real.	1.729
49**	No matter what contents that EIFD presented that moved me, makes me feel so real.	1.712
51**	The narrative way of EIFD makes me feel so real.	1.464
20	EIFD's short video contents do not blindly cater to the public but consistent with his/her creative belief made me so real.	1.2
40	The specific production process, skills and details of EIFD's work made me feel s/he's honest.	1.041
34	EIFD's radiate happiness from the inside out, which makes me feel s/he is innateness.	1.005
33**	EIFD disclose advantages and disadvantages of his/her design work made me feel s/he's honest.	-1.099
31	EIFD's video contents solve the changing to fashionable problems practically, make me fell s/he's quite helpful.	-1.1
28**	EIFD exhibits his/her normal private life, make me feel s/he is real.	-1.148
11	EIFD self-deprecating behavior makes him/her be real.	-1.222
35	There are not too much edited contents in EIFD videos, makes me feel so real.	-1.403
13	EIFD's not fluently expression makes me feel s/he is real.	-1.408
46	The homosexual EIFD makes me feel so curious and innateness.	-1.855
45	Male EIFD narratives are more trustable than female ones.	-1.881
12	EIFD's awkwardness, discomfort, and embarrassment when facing the camera, which makes me feel s/he's a bit nervous but be him/herself.	-1.908

### 3.3.3 The third dimension (D3): transparent authenticity

The third dimension of authenticity perception is the construction of subjects' perception of authenticity achieved by personal brand promotion-related information of EIFD. It is mainly reflected in the subject's perception of EIFD s/he self and EIFD personal brand, including perception of an EIFD's diligence in content creation (No.7,  $Z=2.813$ ); recognition of his works because of his branded clothing being tried on by famous celebrities (No.1,  $Z=2.005$ ); perception that s/he has a stable style that does not change as her/his popularity increases (No.16,  $Z=1.818$ ); and perception of her/his funky daily life (No.21,  $Z=1.29$ ). At the same time, the EIFD's unarticulated presentation before the camera (No.5,  $Z=1.332$ ) and acceptable personal brand publicity means (No.29,  $Z=1.252$ ), together with the above-mentioned dimensions of authenticity perception, constitute the information cues for the subjects to perceive the authenticity of EIFD in this dimension. In addition, the subject also bases their authenticity perception on their interactions with the EIFD, and on the EIFD's earnest responses to their comments (No.10,  $Z=1.027$ ). It is worth noting that the characteristics of authenticity perception in this dimension are quite different from those of D1 and D2. It neither highlights the information impacts on the participant intrinsically, such as their emotion, value (No.34,  $Z=-1.326$ ; No. 47,  $Z=-1.658$ ), nor interpret from objective perspectives, such as creativity and inspiration (No.19,  $Z=-1.06$ ), production process (No.40,  $Z=-1.749$ ), and objective viewpoints (No.43,  $Z=-1.457$ ). It is more emphasized on the way of EIFD's personal brand promotion. Therefore, we name it as transparent authenticity Table 7.

**Table 7.** The Prominent Statements of the Third Dimension (D3)

NO.	Statement	Z-score
7**	EIFD's unique creative presentation which makes me feel s/he is genuine.	2.813
1**	EIFD's designed garments were worn by stars which makes me feel his/her work is popular.	2.005
16**	With the increasing of the followers, EIFDs style still be consistent with what I followed him/her before, not too much changed, makes me feel real.	1.818
5*	EIFD's naturally present what his/her daily wear, which makes me feel s/he is spontaneous.	1.332
21**	EIFD's occasionally share awkwardness in his/her life, so funny and makes me feel real.	1.29
29**	The garments recommended by EIFDs are mixed by his/her brands work and others as well, which makes me feel the videos are not advertisements.	1.252
3	EIFD's presented the world that I cannot easily get into (fashion show, backstage, buyer shop), which makes me feel novelty / on the spot.	1.107
10	EIFD replied to my comment, which makes me feel have a live conversation with him/her. S/he is not that untouchable.	1.027
31	EIFD's short video contents solve the changing to fashionable problems practically, make me feel s/he is quite helpful.	-1.052
19*	EIFD's dress code & creative inspiration inspired me a lot and down to earth.	-1.06
39	There is a strong consistency between EIFD's character and his/her brand, which makes me feel that s/he is stable.	-1.239
34*	EIFD radiates happiness from the inside out, which makes me feel s/he is innateness.	-1.326
51**	The narrative way of EIFD makes me feel so real.	-1.43
43**	Compared to the mainstream comments, EIFD's objective comments on the fashion trends made me trust what s/he said.	-1.457
46*	The homosexual EIFD make me feel so curious and innateness.	-1.509
47**	EIFD's short videos can enhance my professions and thinks, makes me feel s/he is genuine.	-1.658
40*	The specific production process, skills and details of EIFD's work made me feel s/he's honest.	-1.749

### 3.3.4 The fourth dimension (D4): experiential authenticity

The characteristics of the fourth dimension of authenticity perception is based on the subject's sense of participation or experience when viewing EIFD's short-form videos. It presents the audience's authenticity perception of participation, experiencing, and trying. Then, we named it as experiential authenticity [Table 8]. The detailed presentation of the inspiration generation process of fashion production in the video content (No.2, Z=2.112), including the presentation of the production process and product details (No.40, Z=1.994), allows participants to perceive authenticity delivered by the EIFD and by her/his brands in an audiovisual way. In addition, the audience's pursuit of authenticity of experience can be seen in their interests in "becoming fashionable" with new ways of dressing (No.31, Z=1.629). Also, the witness of the brand matureness, can also be valued as the audience companioned experience with the EIFD or their brand (No.30, Z=1.152). The tone of the EIFD's discourses in videos (No.52, Z=-1.114), and whether they speak fluently (No.13, Z=-1.845), however, have little impact on the audience's authenticity perception. And the audience in this domain want to experience by themselves of what is unknown to them and what attract them most. (No.18, Z=-1.327, No.48, Z=-1.882).

**Table 8.** The Prominent Statements of the Fourth Dimension (D4)

NO.	Statement	Z-score
2	EIFD introduces the value and inspiration of the design work, which makes me feel he/she is generous.	2.112
40**	The specific production process, skills and details of EIFD's work made me feel s/he's honest.	1.944
19**	EIFD's dress code & creative inspiration inspired me a lot and down to earth.	1.781
31**	EIFD's short video contents solve the practical problems of changing to fashion, makes me fell s/he are quite helpful.	1.629
22	EIFD does not hide the defects and deficiencies of him/herself, makes me feel real.	1.33

30**	I witnessed the brand matureness, which makes me feel what the EIFDs said are all real.	1.152
33**	EIFD disclose advantages and disadvantages of his/her design work made me feel s/he's honest.	1.134
47	EIFD's short videos can enhance my professions and thinks, makes me feel s/he is generous.	1.056
52	The tone of the EIFD makes me feel so real.	-1.114
35	There are not too much edited contents in EIFD's short videos, makes me feel so real.	-1.116
18*	EIFD's short videos are what I'm interested, then what s/he said is all real.	-1.327
12	EIFD's awkwardness, discomfort, and embarrassment when facing the camera, which makes me feel he/she's a bit nervous but be him/herself.	-1.622
11	EIFD's self-deprecating behavior makes him/her be real.	-1.648
13*	EIFD's not fluently expression makes me feel s/he is real.	-1.845
48	The unknow domain EIFD presented to me, which I will not doubt it.	-1.882
45	Male EIFDs' narratives are more trustable than female ones.	-2.258

### 3.3.5 Consensus Statements

Consensus statements refer to statements with no clearly distinguishable perception dimensions, or representations of the unanimous recognition tendency of the four dimensions [48]. The scores on these information sources of different dimensions shows that participants take a neutral attitude of authenticity toward the positive or negative disclosure of the EIFDs' personality or mood [Table 9]. Through the afterwards interview of Q-sorting, most of the interviewees' explained that 'There are too much performed characteristics on the screen. Although I can feel the similarities of the personalities, it is hard to judge whether it is consistent with the real life.' Meanwhile, the gender of the communicator has almost no impact on the audience's perception of authenticity in terms of the data. However, during the interview, compared with male respondents, female respondents show a stronger negative perception of 'male EIFD is more credible than female EIFD'.

Data aside, there exist some common cues of perceived authenticity in the different dimensions. Based on the Z-score and interview content, the different meaning focus they carried in each dimension can be further explored. For example, cue 33 is better interpreted in dimension one rather than in dimension four. 'Creative presentation' of cue 7 in dimension three can be understand that the impact of creative expression of short video on the authenticity perception of EIFD's branding.

**Table 9.** Consensus statements of the four dimensions

NO.	Statements	D 1	D 2	D 3	D 4
17	Every time s/he's happy on the screen, makes me feel so positive.	0	1	0	0
36	EIFD exposes the sad moods in the videos makes me feel so real.	-1	-2	-1	-2
37	EIFD shows the opposite contents of the stereotype I gained before, which makes me feel s/he is touchable.	-2	-1	-1	-2
38	The personality EIFD showed on the screen is not too far from what I perceived, which makes me feel real.	-1	0	0	-1

## 4. Discussions

The four dimensions of the audience's authenticity perception on EIFD short video content extracted from this research, "ingenuity, relevance, transparency, and experience", to a certain extent, reflect their focus and specific expectations on EIFD short video content. Based on these four dimensions of authenticity, this research provides a practical reference basis for the effective dissemination of EIFD short video content production.

### 4.1 The authenticity perception of ingenuity- 'soft' attributes of design value output

The ingenuity of EIFD's design works and short video content reflects the audience's perception of authenticity based on the objective attributes of the information. Also, as a communicator with professional design education background, EIFD is presupposed and expected by the audiences to have the creative originality content output. This is synonymous with 'iconic authenticity' of fashion designer. "Originality" & "Creative talent" is the preconceived schema of what the designer should look like. Further, by browsing the content, the audience has inspired their sincere, thoughtful authenticity perceptions on EIFD or its brand, which in turn illustrated audience's perception construction from the perspective of 'moral authenticity'. Moreover,

the originality of the EIFDs also gives their short video content design the possibility of differentiation from other influencers content production. The lack of the latter's fashion professional education background and the attachment of other brands' commercial interests have led to certain limitations in the proposition of its dissemination content [52]. In comparison, EIFD's independent control of personal and brand content can ensure its more inner-self authentic content production.

Thereby, the author believes that EIFD's 'soft' design value output can be considered as the main information content of ingenuity authenticity perception. Creative content that is professional and entertaining; content that highlights ideas and perspectives, and brand story narrative content with artistic connotations can all be used as soft design value references. Meanwhile, the designers also mentioned in the interview that they can also gain a certain amount of attention when they are producing some contents related to their personal interests (e.g.: rock music, diving etc.). Taking this factor into account, the author believes that EIFDs' extended design of their own niche contents can also be used as a reference for content design.

#### 4.2 The authenticity perception of relevance- parasocial relationship building of 'immaterial labor'

Reference [53] defines 'immaterial labor' as non-material labor to produce cultural content information. It is related to the intangible emotional products produced by interpersonal contact and interaction, including a sense of association and a sense of community. With this concept, the production of EIFD short video content is akin to the information production of cultural content. The audience's "sense of relevance" can be regarded as the intangible output of EIFD, and it is also the highlight of the audience's authenticity perception on EIFD's immaterial labor. We argue that this kind of authentic perceptions is unique to individual communicators in We-media, and it is based on the establishment of online parasocial relationship. Just like reference [38],[39] put forward, the audience's perception of authenticity-"proximity" and "existential" generated by establishing an intimate relationship with the brand community in the activities. One participant of this research said: "I like Harry Potter, so as long as designers have products related to Harry Potter, I will follow them." The 'connection between brand and culture or community' is one of the criteria for the audience to judge the authenticity [12].

According to the interview, the audience's focus on this dimension of authenticity includes: the relevance of EIFDs' intrinsic values and personality to audience's self-recognition; the relevance of garment design works to audiences; the audience's taste and sense of identity arising from EIFDs' intonation and video soundtrack etc. Also, one interviewee expresses the emotion of admiration and yearning towards EIFD that they can practice their interests as a personal career mentioned in the Q-sets. Regarding the output of 'immaterial labor', EIFDs can pay attention to these design content and deal with the relevance based on the perceptual level of the audience in a professional way, so as to establish a long-term and effective relationship between the disseminators and the audience.

#### 4.3 The authenticity perception of transparency-professional identity shaping of popular awareness

The purpose of EIFDs' production of short video content is not only to build a space for individual self-presentation, but also to gain more online audience awareness for personal brands. Through the interviews, the author finds that regarding the content authenticity perception on EIFDs' online space for personal branding purposes, the audience have an understanding and tolerant attitude. Unlike the requirement for influencers regarding their authentic expression, such as the transparent presentation of endorsement products or endorsement behavior [15], the audience's transparency perception on EIFD lies in the fact that the proportion of personal brand promotion in their video content should not be large, in addition, the product promotion method should be natural. As for the transparency on EIFDs' work and life, it is more inclined to be the content needs that match the taste and identity of the fashion designers.

Therefore, in designing EIFD short video content, it is necessary to consider the coordination between the content characteristics of the designer's professional identity and personal brand, and the content characteristics recognized and accepted by the public. Besides, the degree of information transparency also needs to be carefully considered. Reference [54] pointed out that no matter what kind of media, reducing the uncertainty of others is an instinctive need for people to establish relationships. The identity presentation of individuals in We-media is created and invoked for a specific group of audience under specific circumstances [35]. The author believes that the differentiated personality traits that the EIFD identity leaves to the public still need to be preserved. However, the content output of EIFD gives to the audience should be close to the public's aesthetic

needs and cognitive level. Meanwhile, at different times and on different platforms, the stable and internal consistency of content presentation between EIFD individuals and brands also need to be considered.

#### 4.4 The authenticity perception of experience-the self-authenticity pursuit of vicarious experience

One of the motives for the audience to use We-media is for 'vicarious experience' [55], which refers to the audience's perception of browsing the communicator's content to obtain a substitute experience and practice. Based on the short video information characteristics in this dimension, the author proposes that the audience authentic awareness is inspired by the virtual experience. This kind of perceived authenticity, to some extent, can be synonymous to the perception of "existential authenticity", which the activities and experience can stimulate people's active participation, and meanwhile, their authenticity perception of potential self-development is realized [29]. It is discovered from the interview that the audience would stimulate their urge to try on their own when they browse the EIFD apparel production process or get to know designers' inspiration. Besides, the "fashion show, backstage, factory on-site experience" also satisfies the audience's curiosity and exploration of experiences unknown to them in their daily life. We argue that, in addition to the authenticity perception on the "process" presented on the surface, the audience's visual virtual experience of 'designer inspiration and garment production process' reflects people's pursuit of a sense of real experience.

In interactive experience design, designers are advised to complete the design with a positive, resonant, but less predictable sense of experience for the audience [30]. The blank left in the experience process is also to stimulate the audience's sense of participation [30]. The existential authenticity perception can give the audience a more intrinsic awareness of authenticity on the potential self. We-media short videos provide audiences with a more multi-dimensional perception of online interactive experience from the perspective of technological affordance and content diversity. Therefore, the EIFDs can stimulate the audience's sense of cooperation and participation through the design of short video content. Furthermore, based on such authenticity perception building, the EIFDs can also try to enhance the audience's awareness of reliability on them, bring up their sense of dependence and inspire them to discover their potential internal selves.

## 5. Conclusion

The definition of authenticity with different connotations is achieved with respect to the perception of authenticity in various contexts. In this research, we place authenticity in the context of the generation of EIFDs short video content and derive four authenticity perception dimensions based on EIFD short video content: "ingenuity", "relevant", "transparent", and "experiential". Further, the suggestions on how EIFDs present self and brand authenticity in the form of We-media short videos are discussed.

The main findings of the study are as follows. Firstly, according to four dimensions, we can see that the creative, emotional, commercial, and experiential attributes of EIFD short video content potentially possess the authenticity dimension submerged. Participants' authenticity perception on EIFD short videos is mainly constructed from the perspective of content design, emotion arousing, brand promotion and individual experience. Meanwhile, the study also confirms the scholars' proposal that people's objective judgment and subjective construction of information authenticity are not binary or independent; instead, they are realized on the basis of the interrelation and guidance of information clues [28,31]. Further, with the help of the Q method, the author observes that the individual's judgment of authenticity is also influenced by the recipient's individual characteristics, such as personality, professional background, and purpose of use. Reference [31] pointed out that the goal and purpose of an individual is also one of the influencing factors of the authenticity judgement. In addition, in current research, standards for judging the authenticity of short video content are few and less systematic. As the focus of this study, EIFDs' short video content possesses the attributes of individual, brand, and fashion at the same time, which can provide a certain reference for designing related short video contents in the fashion industry for the purpose of audience's perceived authenticity.

Although the research delved into the audience's special perspective on the authenticity perception of the information, the substantial communication effects of multi-perception traits, such as the impact of perceived authenticity on audience's specific behavior in terms of the parasocial relationship building between communicator and audience, etc. need further empirical research. Meanwhile, the various individual attributes of the audience, such as character, motivation and other intermediary variables need to be verified in a larger number of samples.



In We-media, the main production environment of contemporary cultural information, discussing the issue of authentic content production of fashion, which is highly commercialized, is of practical relevance for the sustainable production of We-media platform content. While this paper focuses on EIFDs, the emerging group in the fashion industry, it emphasizes the possibility that We-media gives individuals equal voice and influence. The expression of individual short video content is like the presentation of individual performance art in the We-media. As far as the emerging fashion independent designers' role attributes are concerned, they are a group of communicators with professional design education background in We-media. In addition to the content assignment of commercial interests, their content output should also reflect the cultivation and promotion of the public's aesthetic education in its content value. For further study, a systematic and effective support scheme of content design and communication strategy for this emerging power of fashion industry will be further provided.

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