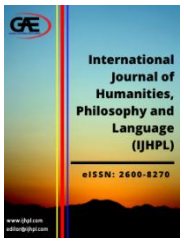
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REPRESENTING METROSEXUALITY IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NEWS PUBLISHED IN CHINA: A CORPUS-ASSISTED DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract:
This study examines the representation of metrosexuality in English-language newspapers in China using a corpus-assisted discourse analytical approach. Metrosexuality has been investigated in previous research in terms of consumer culture, advertising, social media, and individual experiences, but few studies have examined how metrosexuality is represented through recurrent linguistic patterns in English news discourse. To address the gap, a corpus of 40 English newspaper articles on metrosexuality, published between 2004 and 2025, was collected to conduct a corpus-assisted discourse analysis using AntConc. The analysis employs wordlist, collocate, cluster, and Keyword in Context (KWIC) procedures to identify recurrent lexical and phraseological patterns in the representations of metrosexuality. The findings reveal four representational patterns. First, metrosexuality is reconfigured by integrating appearance management as a legitimate component of masculine identity rather than as threats to masculinity. Second, grooming practices are normalized through discourses of self-management, confidence, and personal improvement. Third, metrosexuality is prominently framed in terms of an expanding consumer economy characterized by growing cosmetic consumption and purchasing power. Finally, metrosexuality is represented as a normal expression of masculine identity among younger generations. The research contributes to

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English media representations of metrosexuality and corpus-assisted discourse analysis in the Chinese context.

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Keyword:

Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis; China; English-Language Newspapers; Male Grooming; Masculinity; Media Representation; Metrosexuality

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Introduction

Over recent decades, metrosexuality has become a more prominent mode of masculine expression. Simpson (1994) first coined the term of metrosexual to describe urban men who invest substantial time and effort in cultivating personal looks via fashion choices, daily grooming, skincare routines and cosmetic use. Traditional masculinity has long been characterized by physical roughness and unkempt appearance. By contrast, metrosexuality is framed as valid masculine expressions through its emphasis on self-care and aesthetic refinement (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Appearance management is no longer considered feminine but has slowly become men's daily routine. Such cultural shifts reflect the forces of consumer culture in shaping identity construction and modern understandings of masculinity (Edwards, 2006). The rapid expand of the male cosmetics market and beauty industry has made grooming practices commonplace among men, which makes metrosexuality a valuable lens to observe shifting media representations of masculinity in modern society.

A similar striking expansion of the male beauty economy has also been witnessed in China over the past decade. In response to the rising male demand for skincare, cosmetics and fashion, international beauty and luxury brands have stepped up efforts to penetrate China's male

cosmetic market (Chiu et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the rising popularity of male celebrities and idols has brought appearance-centered masculinities further into public view. The media discourse tends to frame appearance practices as negotiable and largely gender-neutral, rather than inherently feminine practice (An, 2026). Male public figures often appear in public wearing foundation, lipstick, eyeshadow and earrings. Their carefully polished aesthetic stands apart from traditional masculine standards. Broad media exposure familiarizes audiences with such imagery and brings about wide discussion on what contemporary masculinity can look like. Metrosexuality therefore is not only a social transformation driven by consumer culture, but also a discursive space where masculinity is negotiated and reconfigured (Wolfman et al., 2021).

Metrosexuality has been investigated from different perspectives, especially in terms of consumer culture, media representation and the construction of masculine identities. Some studies have examined metrosexuality from the angles of neoliberal consumer culture and lifestyle consumption (Edwards, 2006). Other research has examined how advertising and media commercialize the male body by promoting male beauty and fashion as desirable forms of masculine expression. (Gill, 2003). Further research has investigated men's motivations and identity negotiations in their daily appearance management through qualitative interviews and ethnographic approaches (Jung, 2023). Studies have also examined how self-identified metrosexuals construct and negotiate their identities through a discourse analytical approach (Hall, 2014). Collectively, these studies have contributed to better understanding of metrosexuality as a cultural and social phenomenon.

However, existing studies still leave some research gaps. Methodologically, previous studies mainly use qualitative discourse analysis, interviews, or ethnographic method to investigate the experiences and identities of metrosexual men themselves. Comparatively little attention has been paid to how metrosexuality is represented in media discourse, particularly through corpus methods. Contextually, few studies have examined how metrosexuality is represented and constructed in the Chinese context despite the fact that China has become one of the world's most important male beauty markets. Since newspapers are crucial in shaping public understandings of masculinity through different language choices, examining media discourse offers valuable insights into the social construction of masculinity.

To address these gaps, this study employs a corpus-assisted discourse analytical approach to examine the representation of metrosexuality in English newspapers in China. Using AntConc, the study analyzes wordlists, collocates, clusters, and keywords in context (KWIC) to identify recurrent lexical, phraseological, and semantic patterns associated with metrosexuality. Rather than examining individual texts in isolation, the corpus approach enables systematic identification of recurring linguistic patterns across newspaper discourse, thereby revealing how metrosexuality is discursively represented. By providing corpus-based evidence from Chinese English-language newspapers, this study extends existing research on metrosexuality beyond individual identity construction and consumer practices, contributing to scholarship on media representation, masculinity, and discourse in the Chinese context.

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Literature Review

Metrosexuality As a Media and Consumer Phenomenon

The term metrosexual originally described urban men who devote significant attention to fashion, grooming, skincare and appearance (Simpson, 1994). As consumer culture expanded, metrosexuality evolved from a niche lifestyle choice into a widely recognized cultural trend characterized by self-presentation, body care and aesthetic consumption (Coad, 2008; Edwards, 2006). Far from remaining confined to individual lifestyle choices, metrosexuality has circulated and gained popularity via media representations, fashion industries and beauty marketing. This makes it an important subject for studying how public discourse portrays modern masculinities.

Although scholars have different views on the relationship between metrosexuality and traditional masculinity, existing research generally agrees that metrosexuality marks a tangible shift in men's appearance practices and consumption patterns. Accordingly, a growing body of work examines media representations of appearance-focused masculinity, as well as how such representations shape public understandings of modern masculine identity.

Media Representations of Metrosexuality in Western Contexts

Research in Western media has primarily examined how metrosexuality is represented through advertising, magazines and popular media. Gill (2003) and Gill et al. (2005) argued that commercial media increasingly commodify the male body. These media frame grooming, fashion and beauty consumption as desirable masculine pursuits. Such representations position appearance management as a natural element of modern male lifestyles while simultaneously highlighting the expansion of male cosmetic markets.

Pompper (2010) combined focus group interviews with textual analysis of American magazines to examine metrosexuality. Her findings showed that metrosexuality was frequently represented through physical appearance and consumption. While magazines promoted fashionable and well-groomed men as modern and attractive, they also showed concern with appearance that may incur gender role conflict, constructing a contrast between traditional masculinity and metrosexuality. Similarly, Coad (2008) observed that Western media representations mainly focus on white, middle-class, heterosexual men, which implies that metrosexuality was often portrayed within relatively narrow social and cultural contexts.

Media Representations of Metrosexuality in Asian Contexts

As metrosexuality spread beyond Western societies, increasing attention has been paid to its representation in Asian media. Rather than simply reproducing Western models, studies consistently show that metrosexuality is represented through local cultural values, commercial practices and social expectations.

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Research on South Korea demonstrates that media representations frequently associate male grooming with professionalism and workplace competence. Elfving-Hwang (2021) argues that the flower boy image reflects the growing importance of appearance within South Korea's neoliberal labor market, where careful self-presentation is represented as a form of professional competitiveness rather than gender transgression. Jung (2023) further found that Korean digital media present contrasting representations, with youth-oriented media celebrating male beauty practices while mainstream news remains more cautious towards highly feminized appearances. Similar patterns have been identified elsewhere in East Asia. A content analysis of a magazine in Singapore indicated that metrosexuality was increasingly constructed through branding, consumption and lifestyle representations (Khoo & Karan, 2007). A study in Japan reported that media representations of male grooming remained relatively conservative, and indicated that excessive attention to appearance could undermine men's professional credibility (Tso, 2024).

Research on Chinese media has mainly focused on social media platforms with few studies conducted on news discourse. A study of representations of male beauty vloggers showed challenge of traditional masculine norms, gendered occupational boundaries and heteronormative expectations (Li & Wu, 2025). However, the study also suggested that such representations were constrained by platform censorship, which led content creators to adopt indirect forms of expression. Similarly, research on online discussions of feminine men revealed competing discourses between normative masculinity and more inclusive forms of masculine expression (Jung, 2023).

Overall, the studies of media representations of metrosexuality vary across cultural contexts, reflecting the broad social values as well as changing gender identity. However, existing research has concentrated mainly on commercial advertising, magazines, entertainment media and social media platforms, with inadequate attention to mainstream news discourse.

In review of the current studies on metrosexuality reveal several research gaps. Methodologically, existing studies have mainly employed qualitative methods, including interviews, ethnography, content analysis and critical discourse analysis, while corpus-assisted approaches remain limited. From a data perspective, the data were mainly retrieved from commercial media, fashion magazines, advertising and social media, while English-language newspapers have received little attention. Contextually, while metrosexuality has been widely examined in East Asian contexts, little is known about how it is represented in the Chinese cultural context.

To address these gaps, this study examines the representation of metrosexuality in English-language newspapers through a corpus-assisted discourse analytical approach in the Chinese context. The study aims to reveal how metrosexuality is discursively represented in English-language newspapers in China by identifying recurrent lexical and semantic patterns through analyses of wordlists, collocates, clusters and keywords in context (KWIC).

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Hegemonic Masculinity and Commercial Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the configuration of gender practices that establishes hierarchical relations among multiple masculinities (Connell, 2005). It also legitimizes patriarchal relations between genders, ensuring the dominance of men and the subordination of women. It represents a culturally dominant form of masculinity that performs a normative function and enjoys cultural consent, discursive centrality, and institutionalization. Hegemonic masculinity is internally contradictory, layered, overlapping, blurring, heterogeneous, flexible, and context-dependent (Connell, 2005). It is constantly challenged by alternative masculinities and is destined to change in response to changing social, cultural and economic conditions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The development of commercial culture has contributed to new forms of masculine expression in which consumption, appearance, fashion and lifestyle serve as resources for masculine self-presentation and identity construction (Beynon, 2002; Mort, 1996). Commercial masculinity therefore extends masculine expression beyond traditional masculine attributes of strength and toughness by incorporating consumer practices and appearance management as markers of modern, confident, and sophisticated masculinity. This process is particularly evident in metrosexuality, which incorporates consumption, appearance, fashion and lifestyle as new resources for masculine expression (Shugart, 2008).

However, commercial masculinity does not necessarily replace hegemonic masculinity. Although metrosexuality may challenge traditional masculine boundaries by normalizing grooming, fashion, and beauty practices, these practices may simultaneously reproduce dominant masculine values for pursuit of confidence, attractiveness, success and status (Barber, 2008; Bridges, 2014). Commercial masculinity may both reconfigure and reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Drawing on perspectives on hegemonic and commercial masculinity, this study examines how newspapers discourse represents and negotiates the relationship between appearance, consumption and masculine identity in the Chinese context.

Method

A corpus of 40 English newspaper articles on metrosexuality was collected for analysis. The corpus contains a total of 32934 tokens and 4805-word types and covers the period from 2004, when the first relevant article appeared, to 2025. The data were retrieved from mainstream English newspapers, including China Daily, Global Times, Shanghai Daily, Shenzhen Daily, and South China Morning Post, using the following keywords: metrosexual, sissy, feminine masculinity, and related search terms concerning male grooming, male beauty, male cosmetics, male makeup, looks, and appearance. Only articles containing descriptions or discussions of male grooming-related practices were included. Duplicate articles were deleted, leaving a final data of 40 articles for analysis.

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The distribution of the articles in the newspapers is shown below (Table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of Articles across Newspapers

Name of Newspapers	China Daily	Global Times	Shanghai Daily	Shenzhen Daily	South China Morning Post
Number of Articles	20	14	4	1	1

The articles are mainly clustered around 2011 and 2018. The corpus was examined using a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach, with AntConc employed to conduct frequency, collocation, cluster, and KWIC analyses. The analysis began with a wordlist search. The minimum frequency was set at 10 and the minimum range at 5 to identify high-frequency lexical items across the corpus. The resulting wordlist was manually examined, and words related to masculinity, metrosexuality, male grooming and cosmetics were retained. These words were initially classified into six semantic categories. Within each category, synonymous or semantically similar words were grouped together, and the most representative lexical items were selected. This process resulted in 23 node words, which served as the basis for the subsequent collocate and cluster analyses.

Each node word was then analyzed using the Collocates function in AntConc. The search parameters were set to a window span of five words to the left and five words to the right (5L–5R), with a minimum frequency of 2, a minimum range of 2, and results ranked by Log-Likelihood. The same set of node words was subsequently analyzed using the Cluster function. The minimum frequency and minimum range were both set at 2, while the cluster size varied from two to four words in order to obtain the most meaningful and stable phraseological patterns while minimizing noise.

The collocate results were manually grouped according to semantic similarity, and representative collocates from each semantic category were retained for preliminary interpretation. Likewise, the clusters were organized into broader discourse categories, from which the most representative clusters were selected for further analysis.

Finally, the representative collocates and clusters were combined to form a pool of search terms for the Keywords in Context (KWIC) analysis. The KWIC concordance lines were examined to investigate how recurrent lexical and phraseological patterns were realized in their immediate contexts. Through the sequential analysis of wordlists, collocates, clusters and KWIC concordances, the study identified the recurring linguistic patterns through which metrosexuality is represented in Chinese English-language newspapers.

Analysis

A minimum frequency of 10 and a minimum range of 5 were set for the wordlist search. The results were sorted by frequency. The resulting wordlist is presented below (Table 2).

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Table 2 Keyword List

Semantic group	Word	Frequency	Range
Generic Gendered Referents	Men	537	40
	Male	184	35
	Women	119	35
	Female	40	18
Constructed Identity Labels	Gender	76	15
	Masculinity	31	14
	Masculine	30	16
	Neutral	26	5
	Feminine	23	14
	Metrosexual	20	14
	Sissy	17	16
	Manly	10	9
Grooming & Appearance-management behavior	Appearance	70	21
	Look	70	24
	Grooming	61	17
	wear	28	13
	personal	17	11
	routine	14	9
Cosmetic & Skincare Product Vocabulary	Products	204	30
	Cosmetics	114	25
	Makeup	92	19
	Skincare	78	19
Market & Commercial-Scale Discourse	Market	117	26
	Company	41	20
	Growth	38	17
	Brands	29	16
	Industry	24	15
Consumption Behavior	Consumers	28	13
	Shopping	18	13
	Spending	17	9
	Luxury	16	8
	Consumption	12	9

Table 2 shows that the keywords identified from the word list can be grouped into six semantic fields. The first field consists of gendered references, including men, women and their synonyms. The second field relates to gender identity, which are expressed by words of masculine, neutral, feminine, metrosexual, sissy and manly. The third field concerns grooming practices, which are realized by words of appearance, grooming, personal and routine. The fourth field relates to cosmetics, as indicated by words of products, cosmetics and makeup. The fifth field is market discourse, exemplified by words of market, growth, company and brands.

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The final field relates to consumption practices, including words of consumers, shopping, spending and luxury. Overall, the major lexical domains are identified by the six semantic fields through which metrosexuality is represented in the data.

A set of core node words was selected from the keyword list for collocate and cluster analyses. The selection followed four criteria. First, node words should have high frequency in the keyword list and appear across a wide range of texts to ensure both representativeness and the capacity to generate adequate collocational patterns. Besides, the node words had to be directly relevant to the research focus on metrosexuality, with relevance to masculinity, gender identity and male grooming. Finally, only content words with clear semantic relevance to the research object were retained, excluding function words, proper nouns and semantically uninformative high-frequency words. The resulting node words are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Core Node Words for Collocate and Cluster Analysis

Semantic Group	Core Node Words
Generic Gendered Referents	men, male, women
Constructed Identity Labels	gender, masculinity*, neutral, feminine, sissy, metrosexual*
Grooming & Appearance-Management Behavior	grooming, appearance, routine
Cosmetic & Skincare Product Vocabulary	products, cosmetics, skincare, makeup
Market & Commercial-Scale Discourse	market, growth, brands
Consumption Behavior	consumers, spending, luxury, consumption

Table 3 presents the core node words selected from the keyword list for each semantic field. The most representative lexical items in each semantic field that were highly relevant to the research focus were retained. These node words were used as search terms for the collocate and cluster analyses.

For the collocate analysis, the window span was set at five words to the left and five words to the right (5L–5R), with a minimum frequency of 2, a minimum range of 2, and the results ranked by Log-Likelihood. The resulting collocates were then manually examined and grouped according to semantic similarity. Synonymous or closely related collocates were consolidated into semantic categories, and the most representative collocates from each category were retained for analysis. The consolidated collocate results are presented below in Table 4.

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Table 4 Representative Collocates

Semantic categories	Representative collocates
Gender identity & masculine norms	masculinity, masculine, feminine, gender, gender-neutral, gender roles, stereotypes, equality, sissy, metrosexual, definitions
Appearance management & grooming practices	appearance, grooming, skincare, cosmetics, beauty, makeup, routine, habits, personal care, wear
Consumerism & the male beauty economy	market, products, brands, companies, consumers, spending, sales, growth, demand, buying
Social normalization & cultural transformation	increasingly, young, Chinese, urban, celebrities, bloggers, transformed, no longer, exclusive

Through regrouping synonymous collocates and consolidating related lexical items, broader semantic patterns underlying the representation of metrosexuality can be identified. Four major semantic categories emerged from the collocate analysis. The first category concerns gender identity and masculine norms. The recurring collocates reveal several patterns in the representation of metrosexuality. These include tensions between femininity and masculinity, as reflected by the recurrent lexical associations of "feminine" and "masculine"; discussions of masculinity through the lens of gender relations, as indicated by "masculinity", "gender-neutral", "equality" and "gender roles"; and negotiations of the reconstruction of masculinity, as indicated by "definitions", "stereotypes", "metrosexual" and "sissy". These patterns indicate that metrosexuality is constructed as a site where conventional masculine boundaries are questioned and expanded. It is represented as a form of masculine identity through which traditional gender boundaries are negotiated, and the meanings of acceptable masculinity are redefined.

The second category relates to appearance management. Appearance is represented as an active and conscious pursuit, as reflected in the recurrent lexical associations of "beauty", "appearance", and conscious efforts to improve it. Such efforts are further reflected in recurring grooming-related lexical patterns, including "grooming", "wear", and "skincare", as well as references to beauty products such as "cosmetics" and "makeup". Appearance management is further represented as daily practices, as indicated by "routine" and "habits". It is normalized as "personal care" rather than as a feminine practice. Metrosexuality is therefore represented in close relation to everyday appearance management and self-care, constructing grooming as a normalized masculine practice.

The third category is about commercialization and consumption. Metrosexuality is frequently represented through the expanding male cosmetics market, as indicated by "market", "products", "brands", "companies", "sales", and "growth". It is also represented through men's

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growing consumption practices, as indicated by "consumers", "spending", "buying" and "demand". Metrosexuality is thus represented as a consumer economy characterized by growing cosmetics market and rising demand for beauty products and services.

The fourth category highlights the social actors involved in promoting metrosexuality. The social actors are mainly young urban Chinese people, particularly celebrities and bloggers, as indicated by the recurrent lexical patterns of "young", "Chinese", "urban", "celebrities" and "bloggers". They are represented as consumers who are more appearance conscious and contribute to the transformation of masculine expressions, with grooming no longer regarded as a feminine practice, as indicated by lexical patterns of "increasingly", "transformed", "no longer", and "exclusive". Young men are thus represented as active participants who expand the visibility and acceptance of male grooming practices. Metrosexuality is normalized as a cultural transformation reflecting changing social values.

Overall, the four semantic categories reveal the major patterns through which metrosexuality is represented in the corpus, which are gender negotiation, normalization of grooming practices, commercialization of appearance management and the role of social actors in shaping public visibility.

Clusters analysis was further conducted using the same set of node words. Since lexical contexts varied with different node words, the cluster span was adjusted between two and four words to identify meaningful and stable phraseological patterns and minimize noise as well. The clusters search was conducted in a way to ensure a balance between recall and precision in corpus analysis. The resulting clusters were manually examined and grouped into semantic categories based on semantic similarity, from which representative clusters were selected for further interpretation. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Representative Clusters

Semantic categories	Representative cluster
Gender discourse & identity construction	gender neutral; gender roles; gender stereotypes; gender equality; gender identities; feminine side; feminine behavior; men are no longer; men are supposed to
Male beauty & grooming practice	Men's skin care; men's skincare products; men's grooming market; male beauty products; male beauty bloggers; male grooming products; skincare routine; grooming habits; grooming rituals; makeup products; appearance conscious; appearance matters
Male beauty industry & market scale	cosmetics market; cosmetics companies; cosmetics industry; cosmetics brands;

	skincare market; makeup products; male beauty products; market in China; market for men; growth rate; growth potential; market research firm
Consumer behavior & purchasing power	male consumers; cosmetics users; consumers in China; spending power; spending money; consumption power

The clusters generated from the same set of node words were manually examined and regrouped by merging semantically similar clusters. Four broader semantic categories emerged from the cluster analysis (Table 5).

The first category concerns gender identity and gender norms. Metrosexuality is represented through discussions of changing gender boundaries, as indicated by recurrent lexical clusters of "gender neutral", "feminine side", and "feminine behavior"; challenges to traditional masculinity, as reflected in clusters of "gender stereotypes" and "gender equality"; and negotiations between conventional and emerging forms of masculinity, as indicated by clusters of "gender identities", "gender roles", "men are supposed to" and "men are no longer". Among these, "gender neutrality" is represented as the most prominent cluster, suggesting a discourse that challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes while advocating gender equality and diverse gender identities.

The second category relates to grooming practices. Men are represented as more attentive to their appearance, as indicated by the clusters of "appearance conscious", "appearance matters", and "men's skincare", and as increasingly engaged in cosmetics use, as elucidated by the multiple synonymous clusters of "men's skincare products", "male beauty products", "male grooming products", and "makeup products". These practices are further normalized through references to "skincare routine", "grooming habits" and "grooming rituals", which result in the expansion of "men's grooming market" and popularity of "male beauty bloggers". These recurring clusters demonstrate that grooming is constructed as a normalized and legitimate masculine practice rather than an exclusively feminine activity.

The third category is commercialization and market discourse. This group of phraseological patterns refer to the cosmetics market, the male beauty industry and market growth. These patterns represent metrosexuality in terms of expanding consumer markets driven by product innovation and industry development, framing masculinity as a commercial category.

The fourth category includes two types of clusters. One cluster focuses on male consumers, as indicated by "male consumers", "cosmetics users", "consumers in China", and the other cluster focuses on consumption practices as shown by "spending power", "spending money", and "consumption power". The portrayal of male consumers and their consumption power in the cluster's frames metrosexual men as active participants in cosmetics consumption and as an emerging consumer group in the beauty market, which further commercializes masculinity.

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The semantic categories identified through cluster analysis do not completely correspond to those derived from the collocate analysis, but the two sets of findings reveal similar representational patterns. The semantic preferences concerning metrosexuality were identified through collocate analysis as recurrent lexical associations, and the linguistic realizations of those preferences were identified through cluster analysis as prominent phraseological patterns. The results of both collocate and cluster analyses were used as a pool from which representative search terms were selected for the KWIC analysis.

The selection of KWIC search terms followed several principles. First, the search terms needed to be closely related to the research focus, including the representation of metrosexuality, masculinity, grooming practices and consumption. Besides, the terms needed to represent the most prominent lexical patterns and capture the major semantic categories identified from both collocate and cluster analyses. Twelve representative node words were selected based on these principles, which were further consolidated by merging synonymous items and regrouped according to their shared representational meanings. Four discourse categories were identified which were gender identity and reconstruction, appearance management and aesthetic self-care, commercialization of male beauty, and normalization of metrosexual practices.

Each node word was then entered separately into AntConc for KWIC analysis to examine its concordance lines and contextual realizations. The KWIC results of representative node words are presented below in Table 6.

Table 6 Representative KWIC Lines

Discourse themes	Node words	Representative concordance lines
Gender identity & the reconstruction of masculinity	Masculinity, Gender, Gender neutral, Gender roles,	Masculinity is undergoing a makeover; changing definition of masculinity;
Appearance management & aesthetic self-care	Appearance, Grooming, Skincare routine,	appearance matters appearance management grooming habits look better
Commercialization of male beauty	Market, Male consumers, Spending power	market growth market expands expanding market booming market purchasing power
Normalization of metrosexuality	Increasingly, Young,	younger generation no longer unusual becoming common

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Concordance lines were generated with a context window of 10 words to the left and right of each node word. The concordance lines were sorted by the first, second and third words to the right and, where necessary, to the left, to facilitate the identification of recurrent lexical and discursive patterns.

Table 6 presents representative KWIC concordance lines for each discourse theme. These concordance lines provide contextual evidence illustrating how the identified themes are realized in actual newspaper discourse.

For the theme of reconstruction of metrosexuality, concordances such as “masculinity is undergoing a makeover” and “changing definition of masculinity” indicate that metrosexuality is represented as contributing to changing understandings and reconstructions of masculinity. The second group of concordances, including “appearance matters”, “grooming habits” and “look better”, demonstrates that grooming practices are represented as a routinized aspect of men’s self-improvement and appearance management.

The third group of concordances, such as “market growth” and “purchasing power”, indicates that metrosexual practices are framed through processes of marketization and commercialization, particularly in relation to the expansion of male beauty consumption.

The fourth group of concordances, including “younger generation” and “becoming common”, suggests that metrosexuality is represented as a practice increasingly associated with younger generations and gaining broader social acceptance.

Findings

By integrating the results of collocate, cluster and KWIC analyses, four major themes were identified regarding the representation of metrosexuality in Chinese English-language state media. These themes reveal how metrosexuality is discursively constructed through changing understandings of masculinity, appearance management, market discourse and social normalization.

Gender Identity and Reconstruction of Masculinity

Under this theme, four semantic patterns are identified. They reveal that masculinity is becoming more diverse and undergoing redefinition through metrosexual behavior, but it still remains bounded by existing masculine norms, with traditional masculinity as a reference point.

Pattern 1: Masculinity Is Repeatedly Represented As A Concept Under Redefinition

The KWIC analysis shows that masculinity is frequently constructed as a dynamic and negotiable concept rather than a fixed identity. Left-side modifiers such as changing, different, definition of and forms of indicate continuous discussions surrounding the meaning of

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masculinity, while right-side patterns such as is undergoing a makeover, is not defined by and has become emphasized processes of change and redefinition. Typical concordances include:

- masculinity is undergoing a makeover
- masculinity is more about
- masculinity is not defined by
- masculinity has become
- masculinity has become increasingly important

These patterns represent masculinity as open to reinterpretation and allow metrosexual practices to be incorporated into broader understandings of male identity.

Pattern 2: Masculinity Is Frequently Modified By Lexical Patterns Indicating Plurality and Change

The recurring phraseological patterns further demonstrate that masculinity is often represented through diversity and transformation. Examples include:

- definition of masculinity
- changing definition of masculinity
- changing face of masculinity
- different forms of masculinity
- loss of masculinity

The repeated modification of masculinity through terms associated with change and plurality indicates that newspaper discourse presents masculinity as a concept undergoing continuous negotiation.

Pattern 3: Metrosexual Practices Are Explicitly Dissociated from The Loss Of Masculinity

A further pattern concerns the discursive separation between appearance practices and masculine identity. Metrosexual practices are repeatedly represented as compatible with masculinity rather than threatening it. Examples include:

- nail polishing does not take away men's masculinity
- beauty products will not affect one's masculinity
- masculinity is not defined by the way a man groom
- facial appearance would neither undermine masculinity

These patterns construct grooming practices as independent from masculine legitimacy and challenge the assumption that appearance-related practices necessarily weaken masculinity.

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Pattern 4: Traditional Masculinity Remains A Reference Point

Although metrosexuality is represented as an expanded form of masculinity, traditional masculine norms continue to appear as an important reference framework. Examples include:

- loss of masculinity
- death of masculinity
- opposite of masculinity
- devaluing masculinity

The recurrence of these expressions suggests that metrosexuality remains discussed in relation to existing masculine boundaries.

Appearance Management

Under this theme, three semantic patterns are identified. Appearance is normalized as daily routine and as an essential component of masculinity that has both personal and social benefits.

Pattern 1: Appearance Is Represented As An Essential Component Of Modern Masculinity

Appearance-related collocates frequently construct physical appearance as an important dimension of contemporary male identity. Examples include:

- appearance matters
- physical appearance
- personal appearance
- improve appearance

Rather than being represented merely as vanity, appearance management is constructed as a form of self-management and personal improvement.

Pattern 2: Grooming Is Normalized Through Everyday Routines

Grooming practices are repeatedly associated with routine and personal care. Examples include:

- grooming habits
- skincare
- Appearance Management
- personal care

These recurring patterns represent grooming as an ordinary daily practice rather than exceptional or gender-specific behavior.

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Pattern 3: Beauty Practices Are Framed Through Self-Confidence Rather Than Femininity

Beauty-related practices are frequently connected with positive personal qualities rather than feminine characteristics. Examples include:

- feel good
- confidence
- self-care
- look better

The representation of grooming as confidence-building and professional self-presentation contributes to its normalization within masculine practices.

Commercialization of Male Beauty

Under this theme, there are two semantic patterns which represent metrosexuality through the expanding male beauty market and industry and the growing consumption power of metrosexuals.

Pattern 1: The Market, Products and Industry Are Repeatedly Constructed As Expanding

Market-related patterns dominate the representation of metrosexuality. Examples include:

- market growth
- market expands
- expanding market
- booming market
- brands
- companies
- products
- industry

These patterns frame metrosexuality as closely connected with the rapid development of the male beauty industry. Such patterns demonstrate that newspaper discourse often represents metrosexuality through economic development and consumer markets rather than solely through gender discourse.

Pattern 2: Consumers Are Represented As Economically Significant Actors

Male consumers appear as important participants within the expanding beauty market. Examples include:

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- consumers buy
- consumers spend
- purchasing power

These patterns construct metrosexual men not only as individuals engaging in grooming practices but also as emerging consumer groups.

Cultural Change and Normalization of Metrosexuality

Under this theme, three patterns emerge, showing that the young generation serves as the main force to promote metrosexuality as a socially acceptable form of masculine expression and contributing to its cultural transformation and normalization.

Pattern 1: Young Men Are Consistently Represented As Principal Adopters Of Metrosexual Practices

Examples include:

- young men
- young consumers
- young Chinese men
- younger generation

These patterns indicate that newspaper discourse strongly associates metrosexual practices with younger male consumers.

Pattern 2: Metrosexuality Is Portrayed as An Increasingly Mainstream Lifestyle

Metrosexuality is repeatedly represented as becoming more socially accepted. Examples include:

- increasingly
- more men
- more young men
- no longer unusual
- becoming common

These expressions construct metrosexuality as moving from marginal practice toward a more visible and accepted lifestyle.

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Pattern 3: Consumption Becomes A Mechanism For Normalizing Metrosexuality

Young men frequently co-occur with market-related terms, including products, brands, beauty and consumption. These patterns suggest that media discourse connects metrosexual practices with consumer participation, presenting consumption as an important pathway through which appearance-oriented masculinity becomes visible and accepted.

Discussion

The above findings suggest that metrosexuality is represented as a socially acceptable form of masculinity in Chinese English-language state newspapers through four interconnected representational dimensions: identity reconstruction, appearance management, commercialization and normalization. Rather than portraying metrosexuality as a challenge to masculinity, the newspapers consistently construct it as an expanded normal masculine expression that accommodates contemporary appearance practices and consumption while maintaining masculine.

The first representational pattern concerns the reconstruction of masculine identity. Male grooming is represented predominantly in positive ways and is repeatedly framed as an ordinary component of contemporary masculine life. Grooming practices are routinized through recurring lexical patterns such as “grooming habits”, “grooming routine” and “grooming ritual”, while the outcomes of these practices are frequently associated with self-confidence, self-improvement and personal development. Grooming becomes a way not only for self-expression but also for constructing masculine identity (Shugart, 2008). As shown by the KWIC analysis, masculinity is repeatedly described as “undergoing a makeover”, “changing” or “not defined by the way a man grooms”, indicating that masculine identity is represented as flexible, negotiable and open to multiple forms of expression. Even where concerns about male beauty are mentioned, the discourse is quickly redirected towards gender diversity, gender equality and gender neutrality, as reflected in recurrent clusters such as “gender equality”, “gender stereotypes” and “gender neutral”. Traditional assumptions that masculinity should be associated with roughness and an unkempt appearance are represented as “gender stereotypes” rather than unquestioned social norms. Consequently, masculinity is discursively reconstructed to incorporate appearance management and consumption into legitimate masculine identity, consistent with previous findings (Hall, 2014; Jung, 2023; Mansoor & Yasin, 2022). Metrosexuality is represented as transgressing traditional masculine boundaries by integrating feminine practices and enabling gender-neutral self-expression (McDermott, 2024).

However, traditional masculinity still functions as a reference point for evaluation of masculinity. Expressions such as “beauty products will not affect one’s masculinity”, “facial appearance would neither undermine masculinity”, and “nail polishing does not take away men’s masculinity” consistently reassure readers that grooming practices remain compatible with masculine identity. Rather than replacing traditional masculinity, metrosexuality is

represented as extending its acceptable boundaries. Appearance management is normalized not through feminization but through its association with conventionally masculine values such as confidence, professionalism and career success. For example, statements such as "beauty treatment may help them relax and enhance their self-confidence" and "a good-looking face can bring better career development" frame appearance management as a practical resource for personal and professional advancement. This representation corresponds with Elfving-Hwang's (2021) argument that appearance management in East Asia is increasingly associated with professionalism and workplace competence rather than gender transgression. In this way, metrosexuality is represented as reinforcing rather than undermining masculine legitimacy, which is clear evidence of the control of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005).

Another prominent representational pattern is the commercialization of metrosexuality (Beynon, 2002; Shugart, 2008). Throughout the corpus, metrosexuality is consistently embedded within the discourse of consumer markets rather than ideological debates over gender. Instead of presenting male beauty as socially controversial, newspapers primarily discuss it through expanding cosmetic markets, increasing consumer demand, new product launches and business opportunities. Recurring lexical patterns surrounding market, brands, companies, products and industry, together with modifiers such as "booming", "expanding" and "growth", position metrosexuality within the rapidly developing male beauty economy. Likewise, metrosexual men are repeatedly represented as consumers possessing considerable purchasing power, reflected in expressions such as "consumers buy", "consumers spend" and "purchasing power". Consequently, metrosexuality is represented less as a contested gender category than as an emerging consumer identity embedded in market expansion and economic development. Metrosexuality is constructed and validated through men's purchasing power (Beynon, 2002; Das et al., 2023; Shugart, 2008). This finding supports (Gill, 2003) observation that commercial media increasingly commodify the male body by linking appearance to consumption. It also resonates with Arigi et al. (2024), who conceptualize metrosexuality as a consumer lifestyle in which beauty consumption becomes central to masculine identity formation. The discourse reconfigures masculinity through consumption and commercial value, thereby commercializing and consolidating metrosexual masculinity (Beynon, 2002).

The final representational pattern concerns the normalization of metrosexuality within contemporary society. Recurrent expressions such as "increasingly", "more men", "more young men", "becoming common" and "no longer unusual" consistently portray metrosexual practices as gaining wider social acceptance. Young men are repeatedly represented as the principal adopters of grooming practices and appearance-oriented lifestyles, while beauty products, skincare and fashion are described as ordinary aspects of men's daily lives. Expressions such as "skin care is no longer considered sissy", "beauty products are no longer exclusively for women", and "men are no longer shy of using cosmetics" collectively construct metrosexuality as an increasingly mainstream social practice. These representational patterns demonstrate that state newspapers portray metrosexuality as a visible marker of ongoing social and cultural change. Through repeated associations with youth, consumption and everyday grooming practices, metrosexuality is represented as a normalized expression of contemporary

masculinity. This finding is broadly consistent with Jung (2023), who observed that Korean media increasingly normalize male grooming among younger generations, and with Li & Wu's (2025) analysis of Chinese social media, which found that beauty practices are becoming more acceptable among young men. Metrosexuality is therefore normalized through its alignment with traditional masculine values, particularly the pursuit of success, and by the integration of economically significant consumption practices and appearance-conscious self-expressions (Beynon, 2002; Magklaras et al., 2023).

These representational patterns demonstrate that Chinese English-language state newspapers do not portray metrosexuality as a threat to masculinity. Instead, they selectively incorporate appearance management into acceptable masculine identity while simultaneously embedding it within consumer discourse and economic development. Through this representational strategy, metrosexuality is normalized not by abandoning masculinity but by redefining its acceptable boundaries.

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