Exploring the Impact of Marketing Communication on Consumer Behaviors in China's Cosmetics Industry

Kai Ren *

Fisher College of Business, The Ohio State University, Columbus, 43210, The United State

* Corresponding Author Email: ren.588@osu.edu

Abstract. The Chinese cosmetics market is one of the country's most dynamic and quickly rising economies. Marketing communication is one of the industry's success elements, as more and more firms expand their markets using various marketing tactics. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of marketing communication on consumer behavior. The significance of this paper is to explore the impact of marketing communications on consumer behavior in order to provide a theoretical basis for future measures to be taken by policymakers. In-depth interviews were used to acquire primary data for this study. Eight individuals who buy and use cosmetics on a regular basis participated in the survey. The findings revealed that most participants see the influence of marketing communication. This paper concludes that marketing communications are critical in the Chinese cosmetics industry, particularly as marketing communications influence consumer purchasing behavior.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Marketing Analysis, China's Cosmetics, In-depth Interview.

1. Introduction

In recent years, China's cosmetics business has expanded dramatically in tandem with economic growth. Despite the fact that the Covid-19 outbreak had an impact on physical shop sales, online sales of skincare items and makeup via the Alibaba group of ecommerce platforms increased by 31.8% and 32.5%, respectively, year on year [1]. Meanwhile, the top three sales channels in China's cosmetics sector are integrated e-commerce platforms, department shops, and specialty stores.

As technology continues to develop and digital platforms advance, the widespread use of social media has created more possibilities for the cosmetics industry in China. Brands are not only limited to offline shopping stores, but also delivering the latest news to their customers through the official websites. With this trend, more and more brands are focusing on marketing communications. Marketing communication can bring more profits and awareness to brands, especially integrated marketing methods are widely used. Instead of limiting themselves to a single marketing tool, brands are choosing to promote themselves through multiple channels. Therefore, the entire article will explore the impact of marketing communication on consumer behavior in the Chinese cosmetics industry and how does it affect consumers' buying decisions.

This article divides the Chinese cosmetics marketing communication channels into two main categories: offline and online sales channels. The offline sales channel focuses on whether the attitude and performance of salespeople in physical stores have an impact on consumer behavior. How the salesperson's performance affects consumers is one of the questions studied in this article. On the other hand, the online channel will focus on the use of social media platforms, in other words, how brands communicate their messages to potential consumers through online platforms. With the technology advancement, new mediums are constantly emerging in people's lives. The medium's existence has transformed the way humans perceive the world, understand the world, and affect the world with their conduct, while the content of the message given by the medium is insignificant compared to the medium's influence on the growth of human society. Therefore, the article will analyze the impact of marketing communication on consumers' behaviors from each of these two aspects.

Existing studies point out that marketing mix factors (quality, brand, price, advertising, product availability, previous purchase experience, product packaging, etc.), socio-cultural factors, and

personal factors all influence consumer behavior [2]. Consumers care about a reasonable price level as well as the quality of the product. The purchasing process consists of several stages. Consumers first identify a need, then seek information from friends or social media channels, evaluate the goods, and finally make the buying decisions. Consumers will select the best alternative based on their unique needs, preferences, and financial position [2]. Since few in-depth interviews have been conducted in the Chinese cosmetics market, this study will use in-depth interviews to explore the impact of marketing communications on consumers in the Chinese cosmetics market.

2. Methods

2.1. Data Collection

This study used in-depth interviews to exploring impact from the narratives of cosmetic consumers in the Chinese market. To better examine the impact of marketing communications on consumer behavior in the Chinese cosmetics industry, this study narrowed the scope to three categories: skin care, hair care, and color cosmetics, which are the top three categories in terms of market share of personal care and beauty products in China in 2019 [3]. Participants were selected from the group of adults who buy and use cosmetics. Purposeful sampling criteria included: (1) people with some knowledge of the Chinese cosmetics market; (2) adults (both female and male) aged 19-29; and (3) people with extensive experience buying and using cosmetics. The age range selected was based on the age group distribution of Chinese consumers of personal care and beauty products in 2019, with the adult group in China accounting for 39.3% of consumption, ranking first in age distribution [4].

2.2. Data Analysis

A total of 8 interviews were conducted between June and July 2022. These included 5 adult females (N = 5) and 3 adult males (N = 3). The study population included current undergraduates (N = 4), work interns (N = 2), and people with jobs (N = 2). Their mean age was 21.4 (SD = 0.92). The participants were all from China. All participants were people who often purchase and use cosmetics, and they had made purchases in the past three months. Their most frequent purchases were in the skin care category, followed by shampoo and hair care products, and color cosmetics. The interview results show that the frequency of their cosmetic purchases depends on their own demand for the product and the rate of consumption, with an average of once every one and a half months (SD = 0.76). Due to the wide range of amounts willing to spend on cosmetics, participants spent an average of 2412.5 RMB (SD = 2149.71) on a single purchase, with female consumers spending an average of 3600 RMB (SD = 1816.59) and male consumers spending an average of 433.33 RMB (SD = 416.33). The specific details of the data collection can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Collection on In-depth Interview.

Participants	Buying Frequency (Month)	Spending per Time (RMB)	Gender (Female/Male)
Catherine Li	1	2000	Female
Suki Liang	1	6000	Female
Yida Li	1	300	Male
Irene Ma	3	5000	Female
Rio Ni	1	100	Male
Emma Wang	2	3000	Female
Sicheng Yang	2	900	Male
Alex Zhuang	1	2000	Female
Mean	1.5	2412.5	/
Standard Deviation	0.76	2149.71	/

All participants were informed and given permission for their interviews to be cited in this paper. Interview questions were mostly open-ended, with a small number of closed-ended questions. In one-on-one interviews, participants were asked to share their perceptions of cosmetic products, their spending habits in the cosmetics category, their spending experiences, and the influence of advertising and salesperson performance on their purchasing decisions. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, all interviews were conducted in an online video format. All interviews were recorded, subsequently transcribed, and translated. On average, each interview lasted about 20-30 minutes.

3. Results

The data analysis shows that marketing communication has an impact on consumer behavior through different channels. The influence on consumer behavior is reflected in two main areas: the performance and attitude of the salesperson and the quality of information conveyed by the advertisement.

3.1. The Performance and Attitude of the Salesperson

All participants consider skincare to be an indispensable part of their daily routine. According to the survey, the skincare and sun care products segment is the highest-grossing segment in 2019, with revenues of $23.1 billion, and is predicted to increase to $27.2 billion by 2027 [5]. Since the global COVID-19 outbreak, people started wearing masks for long periods of time, and the masks rubbed against their skin causing many skin problems, especially for people who are prone to skin allergies. As a result, people have started spending more on skin care, which has led to the skin care segment contributing to a larger market share of over 40% globally in 2021 [5].

Interviews revealed that the vast majority of participants (88%) prefer to purchase skincare products in physical stores. Since they have various skin types and different needs, participants expressed a desire to try products before purchasing to ensure that they are truly suitable for them and do not cause symptoms such as allergies. Catherine explained it this way:

I was worried that the products I bought back online would not suit me because I had not seen the real thing. So I would choose to buy from a physical store because I can try the product. I would only choose to order online if it is a product that I have used.

Another advantage of buying in a physical store compared to buying online is that there are salespeople in the store who can explain the functions of the product to consumers. This is true for all categories of cosmetics. Sometimes it is difficult for consumers to find accurate information about products from online platforms, and not everyone knows the effects of cosmetic ingredients. Alex believes that when she does not know enough about a product, she asks the salesperson for help:

The last time I went to buy eyeshadow, I was *not sure how to match the colors, and the staff helped me with my makeup and showed me how to* use *it. It was a very pleasant shopping experience.*

This shows that the salesperson's performance influences the consumer's behavior to some extent. Consumers want to get enough information when they need to know about the product, and this tests the staff's marketing skills. According to the study, the majority of participants thought that salesmen should be honest, patient, and trustworthy. A good image is essential, and salespeople should continually strive to attract new customers [6]. In the interviews, some participants (75%) stated that the attitude of the salesperson influences their buying decision. If the salesperson's attitude is poor, they will not want to buy the product in that store. Catherine strongly agrees with this view, as she tends to make a purchase decision because of the quality of the salesperson's service:

Once out shopping, *I did not want to buy the mask and moisturizer because I still had unused ones, but the* salesperson *carefully explains the effectiveness of the products to me. She had such a great attitude, so I bought it.*

3.2. The Quality of Advertisement

When shopping for cosmetics, participants indicated that the quality and effectiveness of the product were their primary considerations. With limited information, consumers evaluate what they can see to help them make a purchase decision [7]. This idea is cited in Macharia (2019). Price is also an important consideration for consumers when purchasing cosmetics; nevertheless, cosmetic purchasers are more concerned about product quality than about pricing levels. The authors contend that consumer choice is predicated on quality perception since consumers want to get the best deal possible [2].

Advertising as a tool in marketing communication also plays a key role in the cosmetics market. All participants indicated that they often see advertisements about cosmetics through different channels, which include magazines, newspapers, television, social media platforms, etc. Among them, online platforms play a majority role, including Weibo, Baidu, WeChat, Zhihu, etc. Participants reported that Little Red Book and TikTok are also used by them daily, and they often see advertisements on these platforms from influencer and KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) recommending cosmetics. Irene said in the interview that she often sees cosmetics ads on Little Red Book:

I often see influencer *working with some brands to help advertise cosmetics. If the influencer presents the product features in detail and analyzes the pros and cons of this product thoroughly, I will want to buy it.*

The right KOLs are a great investment for brands to grow in the Chinese cosmetics market. Many KOLs have large, successful audiences, which means they have the ability to promote brands. Finding the right celebrity to advertise with is also a marketing tool, and Yida has his own take on this:

Celebrity should have a good image, although it is only a skin care product, but a more accepted image by the public *will make people more comfortable. Secondly, the features should be more detailed, so I know what it is a product.*

Advertising has a certain degree of influence on consumer behavior. When the content of the advertisement is rich enough and the message is precise, it is more likely to stimulate consumers' desire to buy. Interviews revealed that participants wanted to know enough about the effectiveness and price of a product before buying it. In many cases, consumers did not know enough information about the product from the content of the advertisement, which made it difficult for them to make a purchase decision.

4. Discussion

This study explores the impact of marketing communications on consumer behavior in the Chinese cosmetics industry through in-depth interviews and data collection. The results show that marketing communications across different channels have an impact on consumers. People are exposed to the cosmetics market through different channels and use the information they receive to determine whether they need the product or not. Most people go toward well-known, renowned brands because they believe the products are of superior quality. Consumers consider similar product qualities from an evoked set while choosing between brands that are similar to make a purchase [2]. In this process, in addition to factors such as the quality of the product, price, and packaging, marketing techniques and the attitude of the salesperson play a crucial role.

The conclusions of this study confirm that marketing communications have an impact on consumer behavior in the Chinese cosmetics industry, with the most intuitive impact being on consumers' purchase decisions. Customers are likely to be more devoted to a cosmetics company if it can give them access to more pertinent information via social media. Another crucial strategy for attracting devoted customers is to regularly update your cosmetics material on social media [8]. Advertising, as a form of marketing communication, has considerable influence in the cosmetics market, either through social media platforms or offline communication modes. In-depth interviews revealed that the frequency of advertising also has a direct impact on consumers' purchasing behavior. A higher

frequency of advertising drives consumers to learn about the brand, even if they have not yet purchased the product.

Brand communities on social media had a good impact on the relationships between customers and brands, companies, and other customers. These four linkages were directly correlated with brand loyalty, which in turn positively enhanced customer loyalty [9]. In China, social media marketing has a positive impact on both customer service and customer connections, which in turn has a good impact on brand loyalty [10]. This argument was also confirmed in the interviews. In the offline marketing communication channel, consumers are more likely to buy cosmetics recommended by their friends. It is convincing that if a friend recommends the brand and the product works well. Thus, the influence of consumers is highly considerable.

For the offline sales channel, consumers are most often in contact with the salespeople. When they shop in the store, they are greeted by salespeople at the front desk and presented with products. This means that consumer behavior may often depend on the "performance" provided by the salespeople. Usually, salespeople will help customers by presenting product details and selecting cosmetics. Through in-depth interviews, the result shows that most of the participants stated that the salespeople's attitude would have an impact on their purchasing decisions. Through suitable performance, a salesperson's job has a favorable impact on their selling behavior and establishes strong relationships with their consumers. The findings indicate that experienced salespeople perform better. It is also discovered that for less experienced salespeople, the influence of working well on job satisfaction is smaller than for more experienced salespeople [6].

5. Conclusion

The results show that marketing communications sent through various channels influence consumer behavior, with the most obvious impact shown in purchasing decisions. Customers usually expect reasonable prices and high-quality products. Advertising for a product that appears frequently can impact consumer behavior. A nice celebrity endorsement picture will also encourage consumers to make a purchase. Furthermore, when buying offline, salespeople who deliver a positive shopping experience encourage customers to buy.

The demand for cosmetics in China is maturing and diversifying. Statistics show that marketing communications have various influences on consumer behavior. Companies in the cosmetics industry should promote their products through various communication channels to ensure that they reach the intended audience. A good marketing communication strategy can influence consumer behavior and promote the advancement of the cosmetics industry in China. Marketing communications are worthwhile for brands to use in their operations. Promoting the development of the cosmetics industry can advance the overall development of China's economy. A larger sample size for in-depth interviews is advised for future research on this topic. The study could group the interview population by gender and explore the differences between male and female consumers. It is also necessary to explore the impact of economic market environment factors on consumers' consumption decisions.

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