

The Influence of Cultural and Economic Factors on the Tampon Market in China

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Abstract. Menstrual health has increasingly gained recognition in public views, being recognized as a public health and human rights issue, and influencing the newer generation to make changes in this aspect. This paper argues how cultural norms and economic factors guided the development of the tampon market in China. The findings suggest that the suppression for consumer demand of tampons is due to the cultural taboos surrounding menstruation, combined with misinformation and limited menstrual education. These cultural factors are further enforced by pricing disparities, limited product availability, and conservative corporate marketing strategies. The cultural and economic constraints collectively sustain a low demand for tampons and reached an equilibrium in the Chinese market, proving that economic barriers could not fully explain the underdevelopment of the market. By highlighting the interactions of the cultural and economic forces, the paper contributes to deeper discussions on menstrual equity, consumer behaviors in taboo markets, and the role of businesses and public institutions in addressing menstrual health inequalities.

Keywords: Cultural and economic factors; tampon market; China.

1. Introduction

Menstrual health has been recognized as a significant issue in global public health and gender equity increasingly throughout the past decade. International organizations like World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations (UN) state that access to safe and affordable menstrual products is essential for physical well-being, dignity, and social participation [1,2]. Despite the growing global attention on the topic, the adoption of menstrual products varies in cultural and economic constraints. One example is China, where tampon usage is significantly lower than in many Western countries even when incomes are rising and the menstrual market is expanding. The variations proposed the significance of measuring not only material access but also the social backgrounds in which the menstrual goods are purchased.

China represents a notable case. Although China has experienced social development, economic growth, and a stable expansion of feminine Hygiene market, tampon usage remains substantially lower than in many other Western countries [3,4]. Just by looking at, this underdevelopment may appear to be driven by economic factors such as Pricing and accessibility. However, existing studies suggest that economic explanations are not sufficient to account for consumer resistance to tampons in the Chinese Market.

This paper examines how cultural norms and economic factors jointly shaped the development of tampon market in China jointly. The analysis focuses on the mutual effects and interactions rather than treating the two factors separately. Demonstrating on qualitative secondary research from public health, consumer psychology, and market studies, this paper investigates that the long-term underdevelopment of the tampon market results from a cycle which cultural stigma and expectations on women exceed real demand, and the responses reinforce taboos and barriers.

2. Current Situation of Tampon Market in China

2.1. Market Supply and Distribution Channels

Studying the tampon market of China, the supply system of the market is defined by the dominance of foreign brands and the relatively smaller scale of domestic participation. Accordingly, popular

international brands still take a good share of the lucrative segments of this market, especially in the high-end and exotic foreign product segments [4].

The domestic Chinese brands, although the attention on them has been increasing, they are still facing significant challenges that could disable their strong competitive stance. Most domestic firms have relatively smaller scale, limiting their ability to achieve low cost or offer a variety of products. This supply problem will also keep an imbalanced market, making a supply structure in which the product list is very narrow and reinforcing the idea that tampons are the specialist or luxury item the same as the common menstruation products.

The distribution channel also plays a critical role in matching the customers' needs. This activity is highly relied on and concentrated on the online sectors, namely domestic online sales platforms, as well as cross border shopping channels. It is proven by both supply side strategy and demand side accommodation. Online platforms save up fixed distribution costs, and at the same time, they help brands to target niche consumer groups efficiently. For consumers purchasing sensitive goods in a cultural context, greater privacy is guaranteed. Cross-border e-commerce, specifically, is an easy avenue towards imported brands and varieties that are less known than others at the offline retail market [5].

However, the offline sales of this product are limited. In most supermarkets and convenience stores, tampons take little rack space as sanitary napkins bring in more sales. The narrow presence of tampons in the retail industry is offline followed by the decreased incidental purchasing values and trial purchasing opportunities. Such a strategy contributes towards identifying the low-awareness items as niche goods while they are intended to be daily-use products.

2.2. Characteristics of Consumer Groups and Consumption Scenarios

The consumer pool of the tampon market of China is composed of two sections. From earlier studies, it was noted that most of the users of tampons are young women living in urban areas with high education levels, who come from the upper-middle class with stable family incomes [6]. The market in these segments is likely to rely on technology for health information or participate in global consumption trends, as well as be open to other alternative menstrual products.

Despite this demographic concentration, the overall market penetration rate is not comparable. Self-reports in survey data show that although there has been a rise in previous knowledge of tampons in recent years, regular usage is still becoming a ride. A majority of consumers claim to have knowledge about the product, but do not have confidence in the specifics of usage or the trust for the lifespan of the product, which adds up to the attitude of buying cautiously or experimenting but not fully accepting the item into their daily usage [7]. Such data simply shows that awareness alone does not invariably improve market share within the target audience.

Consumption on the way is geographically disproportionate. To illustrate this situation, first and second tier cities are critical to the most share of the market, and third tier cities and rural areas have not participated in the consumption wave. Spatial gaps can be resulted from the varying factors that include income, education level, and the spatial retail distributions. Geographically, this data characterization shows the tendency of present demand to remain within structural confines, therefore restricting the potential for widespread diffusion of tampons soon.

Usage also displays the niche positioning of tampons in China's feminine hygiene space. The fact that tampons play a vital role in a few life situations, such as sports, swimming and travel, instead of being the more widely used menstruation device. Such a situational consumption cycle suggests an extremely limited frequency of repeat purchase and thus effectively figures out the capacity of the market to scale. Therefore, it can be pointed out that the tampon market remains with sporadic demand with no stable and routine consumption.

3. Analysis and Implications

3.1. Demand Side Constraints: Cultural Perceptions and Consumer Behaviors

Existing materials and research suggest that consumer demand for tampons in China is shaped not only by pricing or availability, but also by cultural norms and female expectations. Studies suggest that menstruation most of the time in some countries is framed as concealable, discouraging open discussion and opportunities limited to accurate information [8]. In this aspect, individuals will avoid engaging with unfamiliar men struggling with products, especially with those associated to inner body use.

Beyond avoidance, cultural stigma affects the way the risk is perceived during the process of consumer decision making. Instead of merely judging tampons based on tangible attributes, customers might think of pain, health risks, or being judged before they try the product. Demand can be inhibited when worried, even though fears may be unfounded, meaning many consumers may rule out a product before buying it.

Education gaps play an important role in intensifying this effect. Scholars identify Kaci in puberty and menstrual education, noting that limited proper instruction increases reliance on informal knowledge resources [9]. In the context of China's market, this reliance refers to misconceptions on health damage and others on tampon use. Empirical studies have shown that tampons are frequently misunderstood as physically uncomfortable and potentially harmful, leading to consumer avoidance [10]. As a result, weak demand emerges from the way tampons are cognitively framed before purchase decisions are made.

Consequently, it is not that the existing sales of tampons are low primarily due to a lack of need or affordability; rather, it is in how these products are understood before purchase decisions are made. Cultural predispositions and informational gaps hinder evaluation for trial and can diminish market expansion from the demand side.

3.2. Market Responses: Supply-Side Constraints and Corporate Strategy

Well-known companies operating in the family hygiene market in China react cautiously to observed demand signals. Multiple market analyses demonstrate that tampons take only a relatively small part of Chinese feminine hygiene industry, characterized by small product variety, restrained advertising, and comparatively higher price than sanitary pads [11]. These characteristics are strategic firm behavior rather than simple market ignore.

Research on cultural taboo related goods (taboo products) investigates that corporations are more risk-averse when products are related to culturally sensitive topics and domains [8]. In such cases, companies may avoid strong or aggressive marketing or educational campaigns to achieve as less reputational risk and consumer backlash as possible. Which lead to discouragement of investment in distribution expansion, product innovation, or visibility-enhancing strategies by limited demand.

Due to economic realities, limited demand reflects the increased perceived cost of market cultivation. Thus, the prospects of consumer education or product innovation may seem unworthy of the substantial capital investment that would be required. For this reason, companies practice tight strategies that prefer avoiding risks in place of promoting them.

While economically rational, these responses further reduce consumers' access to the real information of tampons, reinforcing marginal market position.

3.3. Structural Interaction: a Self-Reinforcing Market Cycle

The continuity of a small tampon market in China could be learned through the interaction between consumer perceptions and market responses. Constrained initial demand signals low market potential to firms, resulting from menstrual stigma and misinformation [7]. In response companies adopt conservative strategies that limit product exposure and Costner familiarity [9].

Reduced visibility, in turn, reinforces cultural perceptions of tampons as not common or inappropriate, further suppressing demand. Due to economic realities, limited demand reflects the

increased perceived cost of market cultivation. Thus, the prospects of consumer education or product innovation may seem unworthy of the substantial capital investment that would be required. For this reason, companies practice tight strategies that prefer avoiding risks in place of promoting them.

This mode aligns with frameworks of taboo trade offs, which explains how products associated with ethical or bodily sensitivity are evaluated outside the spectrum of conventional economic logic [5]. Later, this relationship produces a stable pattern of anti-consumption embedded within both bilateral norms and market strippers [10]. The equilibrium of low demand explains why rising income levels alone do not lead to a large amount of increase in tampon adoption. This equilibrium explains why rising income levels alone have not led to an increase in tampon adoption.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Public Health Implications

Low levels of tampon uptake in China are not a problem that can be solved with mere tampon availability but is more complex and should include wider public health contexts such as education, shame reduction, and social normalization. The international organizations underline that menstrual health comprises access to products, valid information, and the backing of social quarters .

Menstrual stigma and inaccurate information lead to the inability of the individuals to make proper choices concerning the management of menstruation [4]. The discussion in section 3 shows that in societies where the use of tampons is risky or forbidden, some individuals might reject it before trial, which reduces individual autonomy and maintains existing social inequalities. Lastly, the UN Women division adds that an insufficient amount of education on menstruation is one factor contributing to period poverty, coupled with the fact that stigma keeps this poverty-related issue from affecting women and obstructs their learning and social engagement, especially when they are young [2].

These results will confound policymakers, as they hint at the necessity of public health programs that ensure comprehensive information on menstruation in which the concept of a variety of acceptable products is preferred to a single prescribed option. Young people education programs can particularly work as accurate information received at an early age could help shape long-term attitude towards menstruation and the concept of personal ownership over one's own body.

4.2. Business and Market Implications

In view of the development status of tampon market in China, enterprises and the market need to work together to break the shackles of development with a gradual strategy. Enterprises should abandon conservative marketing thinking, integrate popular science education into product communication, popularize the use of tampons and safety knowledge through short videos, popular science columns and other forms, and dispel consumers' cognitive misunderstandings and psychological concerns; At the same time, optimize the product layout, introduce cost-effective single products suitable for different consumer groups, and enrich categories to meet multiple use scenarios. The layout of offline channels needs to be strengthened, and display areas should be added in supermarkets and convenience stores to enhance product exposure, increase consumers' random purchase and trial opportunities, and form channel linkage between online and offline. At the market level, people should build an industry exchange platform to promote healthy competition between local brands and foreign brands, and force product innovation and price rationalization; At the same time, give play to the role of industry associations, formulate unified product popularization and promotion standards, guide the market to form a positive development atmosphere, gradually weaken the niche label of tampons, and promote the market to change from scene-based and fragmented.

4.3. Policy Implications

In view of the structural problems in the development of the tampon market, the policy level needs to exert its strength from the top-level design, break the culture and market barriers through multi-dimensional measures, and promote the benign development of the menstrual health industry. The

government should incorporate menstrual education into the national basic education system, add scientific menstrual nursing knowledge to the physical health courses of primary and secondary schools, popularize the common sense of various menstrual products including tampons, and eliminate menstrual stigma and cognitive misunderstanding from the root. At the same time, policies were introduced to support the development of local tampon industry, tax incentives and financial support were given to local enterprises in product research and development and production line upgrading, and enterprises were encouraged to introduce products with high cost performance and meeting local consumer demand, so as to enhance market supply capacity. In addition, relevant departments need to improve the guiding policies for the layout of offline retail channels, promote retail terminals such as supermarkets and convenience stores to ensure the basic display space of tampons, and open up product circulation links in the sinking market. People can also establish a popular science popularization mechanism for menstrual products in conjunction with industry associations, carry out public welfare popular science activities, strengthen market supervision, standardize product promotion and quality standards, and create a healthy and orderly policy environment for the large-scale development of the tampon market.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing the supply structure and consumption characteristics of the tampon market in China, combined with the dual perspectives of culture and economy, this paper finds that the lagging development of the market is the result of the interaction between the demand inhibition caused by cultural taboos and lack of education, and the supply constraint caused by the conservative strategy of enterprises and the imbalance of channel layout, and a single economic factor cannot explain this situation. The research shows that breaking the low demand balance in the market requires the concerted efforts of public health, enterprise management and policy formulation. Only by dispelling cognitive misunderstandings through popular science education, optimizing product supply through enterprise innovation, and improving the market environment through policy guidance can the tampon market move from niche to normalization. This study only uses qualitative second-hand research, lacks quantitative support of empirical research data, and does not deeply analyze the specific impact of intergenerational differences on consumer behavior. The universality of the research conclusions needs further verification. In the future, cross-regional empirical research can be carried out to quantitatively analyze the influence weight of each factor; At the same time, combined with the consumption characteristics of the new generation of women, this paper explores the role of intergenerational changes in promoting market development, and can also compare the development paths of Chinese and foreign markets to provide more targeted reference for the cultivation of local markets.

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