

The Influence of the Rise of Chinese Feminism on the Marketing Strategy of Beauty Products

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Abstract. This research study is based on the realistic background of the rise of feminism in China, which noticeably influenced female consumers, specifically through the spread of the internet. Due to the high activation of the topic of feminism, this study plans to discover its influence on the beauty market in China, as female consumers occupy a relatively higher proportion in this market. This research has a deep background of the development of the Chinese beauty industry since reform and opening up in China. The marketing principles in the Chinese beauty market are then discussed and analyzed while supported by a questionnaire based on the "snowball" sampling method. It leads to Chinese consumer segmentation based on consumers' definitions of feminism. Throughout the research, consumers' willingness to see feminist elements in beauty advertisements and the variety of feminism that consumers have defined have been discovered. It hints at the future patterns of "how to market" to beauty organizations in the Chinese market. This research study can help widen the range of research in the academic marketing field and provide more ideas to academicians in future marketing coupled with a way to think from a new angle. It could also possibly help business people who work in the beauty industry in the Chinese market to have an idea of how to present consumers and potential consumers think and how to manipulate and reflect under the condition of fast development on feminism.

Keywords: Feminism, Chinese beauty industry, marketing, consumer segmentation.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, human society is in the post-truth era derived from the information age, where people's emotions for an event are more significant than the truth itself. The rise of Chinese feminism is a typical example. The awakening of female consciousness profoundly impacts Chinese female consumers' consumption habits and psychology, which is directly reflected in the media design and marketing design of beauty products. In recent years, the research on the development of Chinese feminism and various markets in China has gradually increased. However, there is still a lack of research on the segmentation of consumers centered on feminism, especially in beauty products focusing on female consumers. Presently, the influence of the rise of feminist thought on the marketing content of commercial brands is known, but the segmentation of female consumers in the commercial field centering on feminist thought is scarce. Therefore, based on the practical and theoretical background, this paper will discuss how the feminist trend of thought will affect the marketing content of beauty brands by subdividing Chinese female consumers with feminist ideology as the center.

Based on the process tracking method, this study first reviews the timeline of the development of beauty products in China and the rise of feminism. It extracts the critical nodes of the influence of the increase in Chinese feminism on beauty brand marketing. Based on the brand pyramid theory and feminist-related questionnaires, this study will discuss how Chinese beauty brands respond to consumers' feminist idea-centered segmentation and how these responses may impact beauty brand marketing and product sales. In the subdivision of consumers based on the questionnaire, psychographics and human characteristics in the market subdivision method are used to subdivide

the questionnaire participants. Finally, this paper will provide new marketing ideas for beauty brands in line with the current trend of the rise of feminism in Chinese society. The subdivided research on the definition of feminism among consumers can help Chinese beauty brands have a better understanding of Chinese consumers in the social background where feminism is prevalent and help Chinese beauty companies to accurately inspire consumers through the media to resonate with the brand, support the brand increase customer stickiness and improve the quality and quantity of sales. This study can also help the academic circle to fill in the missing section of the subdivision of consumers' definition of feminism and promote the research of the marketing circle on the changes of consumers.

2. The development of the beauty industry in China before and after the reform and opening up

Marketing Chinese beauty products have made flexible changes in line with the development of the Chinese economy and history [1]. In the early period of reform and opening up, the sales target of Chinese cosmetics was mainly the upper class of relatively wealthy women. At the same time, international brands still needed to be launched in the Chinese market [2]. In 1992, China's second round of reform and opening up began, and the economy developed rapidly. Consumers' pursuit of beauty and fashion has surfaced with the gradual introduction of the mind and the continuous increase in income. International brands such as Estee Lauder have rolled out on a large scale and at high speed in the Chinese market. It has met the demand of Chinese consumers for product functionality and gained the love of many Chinese consumers. Until 1997, China's cosmetics industry was in a period of rapid expansion. As an emerging industry at that time, disordered competition within the industry reached its peak. The quality of all kinds of domestic products could have been more satisfactory, and fake products from international brands emerged in an endless series [3]. However, most beauty products that could have been successfully developed at that time were only functional products for skin care because in the first decade after the reform and opening up, makeup products were still rejected by the traditional concepts of most Chinese people [2]. After entering the 21st century, the cosmetics industry in China has finally come to a period of stable development based on the gradual maturity of Chinese cosmetics consumers' pursuit of beauty and the reorganization of China's cosmetics industry. With the development of the Internet and the rapid rise of China's economy, various indicators, marketing, and systems of the cosmetics industry have matured, and cosmetics products have finally got rid of the "charge" of seduction. With the rise of feminism in China in recent years, the marketing of beauty products in China has also changed.

As a media symbol of the rise of feminism, Sister in the Wind and Waves has received much attention. By sponsoring this program, Estee Lauder guides and stimulates Chinese female consumers' empathy and female power in their hearts, thus winning strong support from Chinese female consumers [4, 5]. Overall, the development of China's cosmetics industry is a process from users' primary skin care needs to the increasing demand for cosmetics and then gradually back to the skin care level. There are many factors affecting it, including but not limited to the development of the economy, the spread of culture, and the rise of feminism. However, the rise of feminism is an indispensable factor.

In the decades since the reform and opening up, the status of women has been promoted continuously. For example, many women are hired as senior executives in enterprises, and schools are no longer only staffed by male teachers. In medicine, in the arts, women are becoming more prominent. All these indicate that women's social status is improving imperceptibly. At the same time, the rise of Chinese feminism has brought significant changes to China's cosmetics market. In response to the growth of feminism, many cosmetics companies have launched new marketing campaigns targeting gender equality in recent years. For example, in 2019, an analysis report titled "She Power continues to Rise, gender Balance Becomes an Opportunity for the development of the beauty industry" wrote that many beauty brands (such as L'Oreal, Unilever, Johnson & Johnson, etc.) had

conducted marketing for gender equality, and many beauty brands have also made some efforts for gender equality [6, 7]. There are many such reports.

For example, in 2020, domestic brand Baiqing cooperated with Zhou Dongyu to shoot a short film named Blooming for Oneself. The short film, in the form of dialogue with the audience, enables women to find their beauty and appreciate themselves and redefines their aesthetic attitude from the perspective of women's self-pleasing [8, 9]. It responds to the expectation that feminism is defined as an independent and confident consumer group. Another example is Ermuozui, a local beauty brand in China, working with XiaoHongshu to support Little Seagull's public welfare program, which helps female college students from low-income families find jobs.

Sincerely, into the heart of Chinese female consumers.

The third company is L'Oreal, which won the GEEIS SDG Trophy at the UN Headquarters on September 16, 2019, for its project to help women in rural China find employment. The award, the first to be given to an NGO, validates the major international company's efforts to achieve gender equality. It also shows the company's respect for Chinese women, which is recognized by a consumer group that defines feminism as equality. In addition, many overseas enterprises also target feminism. For example, Japan's Shiseido operates a nursery and then uses a childcare business. These cases can show that the current beauty market tends to develop benignly, and people will pay more attention to the ideas of feminism and clarify the definition of feminism in the future [10]. Enterprises will also make more and better marketing plans for beauty brands.

3. The Marketing Principles of Chinese Beauty Brands

In the context of the rise of feminism, the study will provide the following marketing ideas: actively generating positive consumer sentiment for the brand through media channels for women, increasing the number of female leaders within the organization, implementing concrete actions in the name of the brand to help feminism grow and eventually achieve consumers' resonance with the brand. An in-depth structured survey was conducted with a sample of 33 people in China, based on a 'snowball' sampling method to support the argument.

Table 1. segmentation according to the age of the consumers and the definitions of feminism

	Age Range			Totals
	20-25	25-30	Above 30	
Definition				
Equal	10	4	2	16
Independent + confident	6	1	2	9
No definition / cannot be defined	2	0	1	3
Multiple definitions (equal, independent, confident, strong)	3	2	0	5
Totals	21	7	5	33

In China, most women want to see feminist ideas in beauty product advertising. A significant number of women believe that the core meaning of feminism is independence and self-confidence, which can be associated with the fact that feminism-related issues are being discussed more frequently than ever on social media (as shown in Table 1); with the majority of consumers or potential consumers defining feminism as equality; the second highest number of participants described feminism as independence and self-confidence; a small number of participants illustrated that feminism should not be determined, as the definition itself may be a symbol of discrimination and inequality. Although it should be noted that younger Chinese consumers are more sensitive to

feminism, which may be due to factors such as increased education and the era in which they grew up.

In addition, women's issues are being revealed in various fields, such as film, television, drama, and literature. Still, most beauty brands need to be present compared to the high activation on social media on this topic. On this basis, brands can be a bold voice for women. At the moment, the encouragement to break away from the traditional monolithic aesthetic within the range of China, coupled with the advertisements that support women to accept themselves as they are and build their confidence, still need to be added in contrast. There are many good examples abroad that could be learned from. For example, Olivia, the founder of the beauty brand Chantecaille, said in an interview: "we want to help women embrace who they are, how they look, and encourage them to appreciate themselves by enhancing their beauty. People embrace the light that shines through everyone, from freckles, wrinkles, and even scars, without hiding or disguising anything." Nowadays, women of the new age are no longer just about 'looking good for the ones who pleased them' but are more likely to choose to show off their unique beauty, also known as 'looking suitable for their own sake. Under the influence of feminism, Chinese women are becoming more independent and confident, and the connotations of beauty are becoming more varied.

Beauty brands can also benefit from having a highly individual and independent image of a female leader to help market their products. The presence of female opinion leaders in the beauty sector gives brands more options when implementing their strategies, as it appeals to more authority to speak to their female consumers. Brands could also make their media content more relevant to women's innermost feelings, thus leading consumers to empathize with the media and guide their consumption. Notably, only three of the top 20 beauty companies in the world have a female CEO, and there are even fewer female leaders in the beauty industry in China. If there is a company with a female leader as the backbone of its business, with a philosophy of serving women and "girls help girls," it is more likely to attract many women consumers due to the brand culture. The essence of marketing is to gain the trust of the customer. The new generation of Chinese female consumers is more likely to prefer a brand that is dedicated to women, specializes in women's beauty, and implements real help to women within the society, compared to the ones that create a pro-feminist brand image and do not act on it.

Most beauty consumers and potential consumers define feminism as "equality" and are willing to see feminist elements in beauty product adverts (summarized in table 1 and figure 1). In contrast, younger consumers are the majority, coupled with a few perspectives from male perceptions within the survey. Figures 1 and 2 show that only one female consumer in the age range of 25-30 prefers not to see feminist ideas in beauty advertising. At the same time, most questionnaire participants hold hopeful and neutral perceptions, even though most of them revealed their agreement on the considerable development of feminism in China (as shown in figure 2).

With more consumers seeing gender equality as a definition of feminism and more young women (20-25 years old) supporting this view (as shown in table 1), Chinese beauty brands can use this to create a brand position that speaks for women and makes a gender equality actor for the brand itself in the future. However, while a brand's product campaigns and social media appeals to gender equality can guide consumers' feelings to a certain extent, they do not necessarily resonate with them. To be an authentic voice for gender equality and gain consumers' trust requires valuable content. Beauty brands' marketing ideas should be supported by more concrete people, more realistic women's plight, and more practical actions.

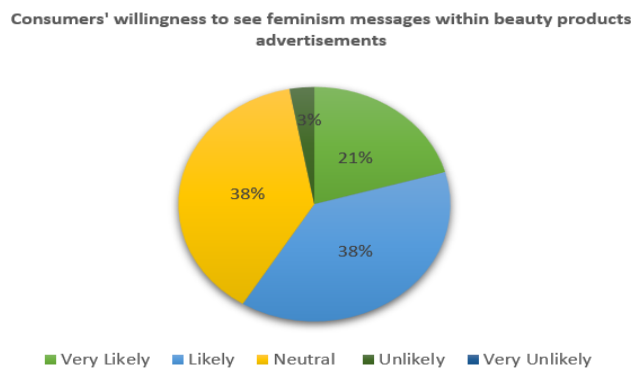


Figure 1. Consumers' willingness to see feminist messages within beauty products advertisements (Made by the author)

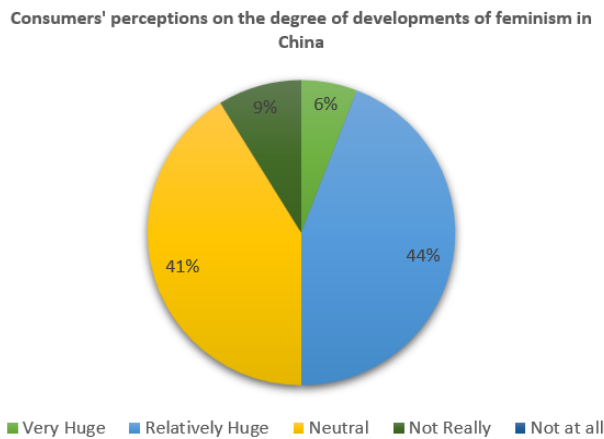


Figure 2. Consumers' perceptions on the degree of developments of feminism in China (Made by the author)

4. Where to Go: The Future of Marketing of Beauty Products

Beauty products need to focus on the following two changes in the future:

On the one hand, expand the scope of publicity, not only do some beauty publicity and brand concept publicity in product promotion but also shoot some short films or documentaries on the theme of gender equality. Impress consumers with real women's stories and new female images, show the incredible power of women after breaking the shackles and use such media clips to show the brand's position. This kind of propaganda may be more touching and direct to reality than traditional propaganda methods. For example, in this year's Women's Day advertisement, Tmall, based on the insight that "sellers show goods, buyers show life," with "buyer show" as the starting point, brought the warm brand film "Paper Short Love Long," telling the life story of four ordinary girls and showing the charm of four women, the movie starts with the "autographed letter" written by Tmall. It begins with the dialogue with four girls, from Anita, who gave her grandmother a hand-scrolled piano, a convenience store girl who likes Ultraman, to a quarantined girl who sets up camping equipment in a hotel. Then to the girl who received the cloud collection manual, the film uses small objects of life to witness the sparkling energy of the girls. At the same time, it uses delicate emotional expression and pyrotechnic scenes to arouse the audience's deep emotional resonance. In addition, the film ends with an honest buyer show, further showing the glitter of life that objects and consumers build together.

On the other hand, create a more real economy to promote brand concepts and product sales. In addition to the most basic concept promotion, beauty brands can sponsor some "feminist keynotes" or themed exhibitions and expos for women. By promoting the brand and making a call to action for consumers, gender equality needs to be seen and discussed, and learned. For example, Proya PROYA has launched a themed exhibition area for books on gender equality and feminism. Men are also

invited to join the action of gender equality, and teacher Liang Yongan explores the dilemmas faced by contemporary women in their lives from literary works.

5. Conclusion

There are few studies on the combination of feminism and marketing in China, so this study combines the timeline of the rise of feminism and the development process of beauty products to extract the critical nodes of the increase in Chinese feminism affecting the marketing of beauty brands. To further demonstrate the research theory, the study launched a deeper questionnaire survey on what feminism is. The research questionnaire also presents a certain degree of contemporary Chinese women's understanding of the definition of feminism.

This study believes that in the future, beauty brands will develop more affluent and targeted beauty products, and the original categories and quality will be more meticulously improved, which is more in line with the evolving consumer needs of consumers. Based on good theoretical reviews and questionnaires and the history of beauty development, the study also puts forward two marketing ideas and marketing methods that are very likely and practical in the future, such as making short videos on the theme of gender equality to change the way of publicity, increasing offline exhibitions to expand the scope of advertising, in general, upgrading the brand concept and increasing the size of promotion is the marketing concept that Chinese beauty brands can try to do in the future.

The research questionnaire cannot fully represent the views of contemporary Chinese women on feminism, and due to the conditions, the audience of the questionnaire is not comprehensive enough, the age group is not wide enough, and the number is insufficient. Thus it cannot fully represent contemporary Chinese women. The study still needs some practicality, the content of the marketing concepts and means proposed by the study has yet to be practiced, and it is still in the theoretical stage. Although some companies have been trying, the specific effect has yet to be discovered. The theory of the study still needs to be improved, and the marketing concept and means still have some shortcomings and much room for improvement.

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