

A Study on Chinese High School Girls' Consumer Behavior Toward the Korean Cosmetic Brand 3CE

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Abstract: This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the consumption behavior of Chinese high school girls toward the Korean cosmetic brand 3CE. A structured questionnaire with 20 questions collected quantitative data on brand cognition, purchasing frequency, expenditure, and product preferences from a substantial sample of participants. The findings reveal that 75% of respondents exhibit strong brand awareness, with 65% purchasing 3CE products monthly, predominantly through online channels (82%). Qualitative in-depth interviews provided valuable insights into the emotional connections and motivations driving these behaviors, revealing that factors such as social media influence and peer recommendations significantly impact purchasing decisions. The analysis underscores the importance of effective marketing strategies tailored to this demographic and highlights potential risks associated with high consumer expectations, which can lead to dissatisfaction. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for 3CE to balance online and offline retail strategies, ensuring consistent product quality while promoting responsible consumption. These insights are vital for enhancing brand loyalty and maintaining a competitive advantage in the rapidly evolving cosmetics market.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Chinese High School Girls, Korean Cosmetics, Social Media Influence.

1. Introduction

Founded in 2009, 3CE is the cosmetics brand of Korean fashion brand STYLENANDA. As a popular brand for young consumers, the success of 3CE is inseparable from its unique product design, fashionable brand image, and keen grasp of market demand. The brand retains classic products, such as lip markers, lip pigments, giant lip glosses, pore-trimmed creams, and eye and lip moisturizing concealers, and adds under-eye glitter eyeliners and cream lip gloss. It aims to help consumers easily create the most fashionable and perfect Korean makeup.

The original intention of 3CE is to match the overall fashion design and is committed to providing consumers with fashionable and practical cosmetics. In 2018, the French beauty giant L'Oreal Group acquired 70% of 3CE's equity for 400 billion won. This strategic cooperation not only provides stronger financial and market support for 3CE but also makes the brand develop faster in the international market. In 2019, 3CE officially entered the Chinese market, laying the foundation for brand expansion.

In recent years, young consumers, especially high school girls, have gradually become the main force in the cosmetics market. With the improvement in living standards and the change in consumption concepts, the group's demand for beauty products is increasing. With its unique product design and fashion brand image, 3CE has successfully met the needs of this consumer group. Products are regarded as a symbol of fashion and self-expression. With the deepening of the "Korean Wave" culture, 3CE is becoming more and more popular among young people.

In China, the consumption behaviour of high school girls on the Korean cosmetics brand 3CE has gradually become an important research field. With the popularity of the Korean Wave and Korean drama, Korean culture occupies an important position among young Chinese people, especially high school girls. They are not only influenced by idols but also driven by social media and peer recommendations. In this cultural context, 3CE has successfully attracted the attention of this consumer group with its fashionable brand image and rich product line.

The importance of studying this consumer psychology is that it not only reveals the positioning of the brand in the target market but also helps us understand the potential motivation of young consumers in brand selection. Psychological factors such as self-expression, group identity, and aesthetic needs play a crucial role in their purchasing decisions. For example, high school girls may choose 3CE products because they help them establish a fashionable image and gain recognition among their peers.

In addition, exploring these psychological factors can provide guidance for brands' marketing strategies, help them better meet consumer needs, and improve brand loyalty. Market trends show that consumers' loyalty and participation in brands are constantly increasing, especially on social media. Product reviews and sharing have a profound impact on purchasing decisions. For example, many young consumers check product reviews and use experiences on social media before buying, which means brands must actively maintain their image and interact with consumers on these platforms.

This trend has promoted 3CE innovation, launched new products to meet market demand, and expanded sales channels through the combination of online and offline. By publishing product-related content on social media, 3CE not only improves brand exposure but also enhances brand loyalty through interaction with consumers. The brand has also further expanded its influence by cooperating with popular Kols and stars.

At present, there is an obvious trend in consumers' cosmetic habits - "mixing and matching". Research shows that 50% of consumers' daily purchases include high-end beauty products, professional cosmetics, and affordable mass-market beauty products. This means that in addition to 3CE, there may be Chanel, Armani, Bobby Brown, and other brands in their makeup bags. Therefore, for 3CE, this mixed consumption trend represents an important opportunity.

As long as the brand DNA is strong and attractive, cosmetics are solid, and effective marketing can attract a large number of potential consumers. If 3CE's products can be combined with other high-end brands to provide consumers with diversified choices, it will attract more consumers' attention. In addition, the brand can also create a theme by launching a limited edition or co-branded series to further improve the market attractiveness of the brand.

Finally, 3CE can also strengthen the emphasis on sustainability and social responsibility in its brand strategy. Modern young consumers pay more and more attention to environmental and social issues and often consider their social responsibilities and environmental measures when choosing a brand. By adopting sustainable production methods, using environmentally friendly materials, and participating in social interest activities, 3CE can enhance its brand image and attract young people who pursue social values and sustainable consumption.

In a word, 3CE has won wide recognition from young consumers, especially high school girls, with its unique products and strong brand strategy. By deeply understanding consumer psychology,

grasping market trends, and establishing emotional connections with consumers, 3CE will continue to maintain a leading position in the fiercely competitive cosmetics market.

2. Literature Review

As Korean beauty brands slowly penetrate the Chinese market, some researchers have also discussed consumer psychology. According to Wu Sixin's study, the integration of the original 3CE STYLENANDA team and the L'Oreal Group is more about taking advantage of each other's strengths [1]. 3CE official said: "We want consumers to enjoy a rich and exciting in-store experience, so the offline store concept and theme is no different, and we are committed to bringing shopping, photography, and entertainment into one to provide NANDA GIRLS with the first immersive brand experience" [2]. From Guo Suyan's study, she thinks 3CE has natural social e-commerce attributes, high-end brands can contribute profit margins, mass brands can contribute market share, and direct competitors are also focused on the mass market, and are looking for acquisition targets [3].

There are many studies on marketing consumption, in Wu Sixin's research, it is hard to define it purely as a makeup company or an apparel company because it is a combination of both. It is more accurate to say that it is a social electric goods brand that has grown up with the development of the Internet in South Korea. There are not many beauty brands that have natural social e-commerce attributes from the beginning of "birth", which is the value of 3CE and what L'Oreal Group values. Although the high-end cosmetics division has maintained rapid growth for several years in a row, L'Oreal has always increased its investment in the mass cosmetics business. After all, the market capacity of this business is larger, and its latest financial results show that even in a weak growth situation, the total profit generated by the mass cosmetics division is still about 560 million euros and 360 million euros higher than that of the high-end cosmetics division in 2017 and 2018. Local affordable brands are sinking faster into third - and fourth-tier cities, competing with foreign companies for mass consumers with a larger population base [1].

From a regional distribution perspective, Europe, North America, and Japan/Korea have traditionally been the main battlegrounds of the global beauty market, accounting for over 50% of the market size and maintaining significant market positions. However, in recent years, each regional market has shown different growth characteristics and trends. Since 2021, all regions have entered a recovery phase following the pandemic; in 2022, the European and Japan/Korea markets faced growth pressures, while emerging markets like Southeast Asia achieved rapid growth at a rate of 12.7%, becoming new forces in the global beauty market. By 2023, key global beauty consumer markets collectively experienced a wave of rapid growth, with the European and Japan/Korea markets rebounding significantly. In Europe, growth is primarily driven by a mature supply of international brands and high-end consumer demand, showcasing the region's deep-rooted background and growth potential as a traditional beauty market. Meanwhile, the Japanese and Korean market places greater emphasis on diverse innovation, providing broader growth opportunities for both new and established brands, as well as domestic and foreign participants [1]. For female consumers aged 18-25 years, women at this age are prone to impulse consumption. Among them, 45.77% did not have a reasonable arrangement when shopping and 54.81% of women were affected by the shopping mall environment and caused shopping behavior. 53.64% of women will buy because of the packaging or style of the product rather than the price. Therefore, for the products of this group of people, the design and appearance of the product are very important, and the environment and decoration of the store will also have a consumer effect [4]. From the perspective of geographical distribution, Europe, North America Japan, and South Korea, as the traditional main battlefields of the global beauty market, the market size accounts for more than 50% and still maintains an important market position. However, in the course of development in recent years, various regional markets have also shown different growth characteristics and trends [5]. Japanese and Korean brands are becoming increasingly

influential in Western beauty culture and, in recent years have become a major driver of growth in many beauty product categories, their innovation trends and trends influence consumer attitudes and behavior around the world [6]. This brought more attention and awareness to the cosmetics industry, and it was countless cosmetics brands were born. With the development of the cosmetics industry, more and more cosmetics brands emerged at the same time and developed rapidly. For similar products such as in the foundation, there are countless brands developing their own products, which leads to intense competition in the cosmetics industry. Therefore, in order to better promote sales, make yourself it is necessary for merchants to stand out from countless other brands of similar products and use effective marketing strategies [7]. Consumer behavior focuses on how individuals make decisions to spend their available resources (time, money, effort) on consumption-related items, That includes what they buy, why they buy it, when they buy it, where they buy it, how often they buy it, how often they use it, how they evaluate it after the purchase and the impact of such evaluations on future purchases, and how they dispose it. Research in consumer behavior is a top priority for marketers in the third world [8].

3. Methodology

To investigate the consumption behavior of Chinese high school girls toward the 3CE brand, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior from multiple perspectives.

Initially, a structured questionnaire comprising 20 questions was developed to gather quantitative data. The questions covered various aspects of consumer behavior, including brand cognition, purchasing frequency, expenditure, and preferred product types. This data collection aimed to establish a baseline understanding of how high school girls perceive and interact with the 3CE brand.

Following the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with a select group of respondents. These interviews aimed to delve deeper into their attitudes, motivations, and emotional connections to 3CE. This qualitative data provides rich insights into the underlying factors driving their consumption behavior and helps to elucidate the complexities of their purchasing decisions.

Finally, a combination of statistical analysis and thematic analysis was employed to synthesize the quantitative and qualitative findings. Statistical analysis helped identify trends and correlations within the survey data, while thematic analysis facilitated a deeper exploration of the qualitative insights, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing consumption behavior.

4. Results

The findings from the questionnaire survey revealed several important trends in the consumption behavior of Chinese high school girls regarding the 3CE brand. A notable 75% of respondents reported having a strong awareness of the 3CE brand, indicating effective brand positioning and marketing strategies. Additionally, 65% of the respondents stated that they purchased 3CE products at least once a month, showcasing a consistent engagement with the brand.

When examining product preferences, the results showed that 62% of respondents favored lipstick, followed closely by eyeshadow at 45% and foundation at 40%. This preference for specific product types can inform future product development and marketing strategies. In terms of price sensitivity, 58% of respondents considered 3CE to be moderately priced, while 34% deemed it too expensive. This suggests a need for 3CE to evaluate its pricing strategy to better cater to this demographic, especially given their potential financial constraints.

The results also highlighted the dominance of online shopping as a purchase channel, with 82% of respondents opting for online purchases. This trend emphasizes the importance of e-commerce in reaching young consumers who prefer the convenience and variety offered by online platforms.

5. Discussion

The high level of brand recognition indicates that 3CE has successfully captured the attention of young consumers through targeted social media campaigns and influencer marketing. The brand's fashion-forward image, combined with the widespread popularity of Korean culture, has led to strong identification among high school girls. This identification fosters brand loyalty, making consumers more inclined to try new products and share positive experiences, thus generating valuable word-of-mouth marketing.

However, the risk associated with high brand awareness is the potential for inflated consumer expectations. If 3CE products do not consistently meet these expectations, it could lead to disappointment among consumers. To mitigate this risk, it is crucial for 3CE to maintain high product quality and innovation while transparently communicating product attributes and brand values. Engaging continuously with young consumers through feedback and community-building initiatives can also enhance brand trust and loyalty.

Promotional activities and social media advertising play a significant role in motivating purchases, particularly during holidays and special events. The frequency of purchases not only drives sales growth but can also enhance market share for 3CE. Nevertheless, a pattern of overspending may emerge among consumers, particularly among students who may lack financial stability. To encourage more rational consumption, 3CE could consider introducing a budget-friendly product line or offering educational content that informs consumers about prudent spending practices.

The dominance of online shopping channels reflects the preferences of the younger demographic, as the convenience and diversity of products available online align well with their lifestyles. However, an over-reliance on online shopping might lead to decreased sales in physical retail stores, impacting the brand's overall market image and consumer experience. To counteract this trend, 3CE should strive for a balanced approach, integrating online and offline sales channels. This could involve establishing experience stores in key cities to enhance consumer interaction and provide a tactile shopping experience, while simultaneously optimizing online shopping platforms for better customer satisfaction.

While frequent purchasing can be beneficial for brand growth, it also raises concerns about overconsumption, particularly among students with limited financial resources. The risk of overspending can lead to financial strain, potentially creating negative associations with the brand. To promote responsible consumption, 3CE could consider launching educational initiatives aimed at informing consumers about budgeting and smart purchasing decisions. Additionally, introducing a range of price points within the product line could help alleviate financial pressure on young consumers. By offering both premium and more affordable options, 3CE can ensure that its products remain accessible while appealing to a broader audience. This strategy not only encourages more sustainable purchasing habits but also enhances brand loyalty by catering to the diverse needs of its consumer base.

Although online shopping is favored, the importance of maintaining a physical retail presence cannot be overlooked. Experience stores and pop-up events can provide unique opportunities for consumers to interact with the brand in a tangible way, fostering a deeper connection and enhancing brand loyalty. Such physical spaces allow consumers to test products, seek personalized advice, and participate in beauty workshops or events, further enriching their brand experience.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the consumption behavior of Chinese high school girls towards the Korean cosmetic brand 3CE, revealing key insights related to brand awareness, purchase frequency, and preferred shopping channels. The findings indicate that a significant majority of respondents (75%)

possess strong brand awareness, with 65% purchasing products at least monthly, and 82% favoring online shopping. These statistics highlight the brand's robust appeal and market presence among young consumers. The high level of brand awareness among respondents signifies the effectiveness of 3CE's marketing strategies, particularly in leveraging social media and influencer collaborations. This strong awareness not only enhances the brand's visibility but also fosters a sense of trust and loyalty among consumers. As young consumers increasingly seek brands that resonate with their identities and values, 3CE's positioning as a fashionable and aspirational brand aligns well with the preferences of high school girls.

However, this relationship between brand awareness and loyalty is not without challenges. The potential for inflated consumer expectations arises when brands fail to consistently deliver quality products that match their promoted image. If 3CE cannot meet these high expectations, it risks alienating its consumer base and damaging its reputation. To address this, 3CE must prioritize transparency in its marketing and product development, ensuring that consumers feel informed and confident in their purchasing decisions.

The dominance of online shopping, with 82% of respondents indicating it as their preferred purchase channel, highlights a critical shift in consumer behavior, especially among younger demographics. This trend emphasizes the need for brands to invest in a robust online presence, offering a seamless shopping experience that includes user-friendly websites, engaging social media content, and effective customer service. The convenience of online shopping aligns with the busy lifestyles of high school students, who often juggle academics, extracurricular activities, and social lives. By providing a diverse range of products and easy access to information, 3CE can cater to the preferences of this demographic. Furthermore, implementing strategies such as targeted promotions, limited-time offers, and interactive online campaigns can enhance engagement and drive sales.

Balancing online and offline strategies is crucial for 3CE to create a holistic shopping experience. Integrating both channels effectively can enhance customer satisfaction and ensure that consumers feel valued regardless of how they choose to engage with the brand.

In summary, for 3CE to sustain its competitive advantage in the cosmetics market, it must remain adaptable to market changes and consumer preferences. By fostering strong online engagement, ensuring product quality, and balancing online and offline sales strategies, 3CE can continue to thrive in this dynamic environment. Understanding these consumer behaviors will be essential for the brand's ongoing success and relevance in the ever-evolving cosmetics landscape. By continuously refining its marketing strategies and product offerings, 3CE can effectively meet the demands of its target demographic while contributing to sustainable consumer behavior.

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