Factors Influencing Customer Loyalty Cosmetic Products in Guangdong China: The Mediating Effect of Customer Trust Using the S-O-R Model

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ABSTRACT

Customer loyalty is a critical factor for the success of the cosmetic industry, particularly in highly competitive markets like Guangdong, China. This study examines the key factors influencing customer loyalty toward cosmetic products, with a specific focus on the mediating role of customer trust. Utilizing the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, the research explores how external stimuli, such as product quality, brand image, and promotional strategies, influence consumers' psychological states (trust) and, ultimately, their loyalty. A quantitative approach will be employed, collecting data from consumers in Guangdong through surveys. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for cosmetic brands seeking to enhance customer retention strategies. By understanding the role of trust as a mediator, businesses can develop more effective marketing and customer relationship strategies to sustain long-term consumer loyalty.

KEYWORDS: customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, customer trust, cosmetic products

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Profiling Cosmetic Product in Guangdong of China

Guangdong, China, is one of the leading hubs for the cosmetic industry, contributing significantly to both domestic and international markets. The province is home to numerous cosmetic manufacturing companies, research centers, and distribution networks, making it a key player in China's beauty industry (Zhang & Liu, 2022). The cosmetic market in Guangdong is characterized by a diverse range of products, including skincare, makeup, and personal care items, catering to different consumer demographics and preferences (Chen et al., 2021). With the rise of e-commerce and digital marketing, many brands have adopted online platforms such as Tmall, JD.com, and social media influencers to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement (Wang, 2023). Additionally, the growing demand for natural and organic cosmetic products has influenced manufacturers to

innovate and align with sustainable and eco-friendly practices (Li & Huang, 2020). The province's strong regulatory framework, guided by the National Medical Products Administration (NMPA), ensures quality control and safety compliance, further boosting consumer trust and brand reputation (Sun & Zhao, 2021). As competition intensifies, understanding consumer behavior and market trends in Guangdong remains crucial for cosmetic brands aiming for long-term success.

B. Customer Trust on the Cosmetic Product

Customer trust plays a crucial role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions in the cosmetic industry. Trust is built on several factors, including product quality, brand reputation, safety assurance, and transparency in ingredient disclosure (Chen & Wang, 2021). Consumers tend to develop higher trust levels in brands that prioritize ethical sourcing, comply with regulatory standards, and provide scientifically backed claims about their products (Li et al., 2020). The increasing awareness of product safety, particularly in markets like China, has led to greater demand for dermatologically tested and eco-friendly cosmetics, reinforcing trust among consumers (Zhang & Liu, 2022). Moreover, digital marketing strategies, including influencer endorsements and customer reviews, have a significant impact on trust formation, as potential buyers rely on peer experiences before making a purchase decision (Wang & Sun, 2023). Studies suggest that a strong level of customer trust not only enhances brand loyalty but also reduces perceived risks associated with cosmetic purchases (Huang & Zhao, 2021). As the market continues to evolve, companies must focus on transparency, quality assurance, and consumer engagement to maintain and strengthen customer trust in their products.

C. Study on the Gen-Y Costumer Loyalty on the Cosmetic Product

Millennials, also known as Generation Y (Gen-Y), represent a dominant consumer group in the cosmetic industry, with their purchasing decisions influenced by brand engagement, product quality, and digital marketing strategies (Chen & Zhang, 2021). Unlike previous generations, Gen-Y consumers are highly brand-conscious and value personalized experiences, making customer loyalty a critical factor for cosmetic brands (Wang, Li, & Xu, 2022). Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) play a vital role in shaping their preferences, as peer reviews, influencer endorsements, and interactive content significantly impact their purchasing behavior (Liu & Huang, 2020). Additionally, ethical concerns, including cruelty-free testing, sustainability, and organic ingredients, have emerged as key determinants of brand loyalty among Gen-Y consumers (Zhao & Feng, 2021). The implementation of loyalty programs, personalized marketing, and superior customer service further enhances their retention and engagement with cosmetic brands (Sun, 2023). Given the competitive nature of the cosmetic industry, understanding the behavioral patterns of Gen-Y consumers is essential for brands aiming to establish long-term loyalty and sustainable growth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory

Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) is a widely used framework in consumer behavior research that explains customer satisfaction based on the comparison between expected and actual product or service performance (Oliver, 1980). According to EDT, consumers form expectations before purchasing a product, and their post-purchase experience leads to either confirmation or disconfirmation of these expectations (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). If the product meets expectations, confirmation occurs, resulting in satisfaction, whereas if it exceeds expectations, positive disconfirmation leads to a higher level of satisfaction (Rust & Oliver, 2000). Conversely, if the product falls short of expectations, negative disconfirmation results in dissatisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). EDT has been applied extensively in various industries, including cosmetics, where customer satisfaction is influenced by factors such as product quality, brand image, and marketing claims (Kim & Jin, 2021). Understanding how expectancy disconfirmation affects consumer attitudes is crucial for businesses aiming to enhance customer experience and build brand loyalty.

B. The S-O-R Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), is a widely used theoretical framework in consumer behavior research. The model suggests that external stimuli (S) influence an individual's internal state or emotions (O), which subsequently drive their behavioral responses (R). In the context of marketing and consumer psychology, stimuli can include product quality, brand image, advertising, and social influences, all of which shape consumers' cognitive and affective reactions, such as trust, satisfaction, and perceived value (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). These internal evaluations then lead to behavioral outcomes, including purchase decisions and customer loyalty (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001). Recent studies have applied the S-O-R model to digital marketing, demonstrating how online stimuli—such as website design, social media engagement, and influencer marketing—affect consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Kim & Lennon, 2013). As a flexible model, the S-O-R framework continues to be instrumental in understanding consumer decision-making across various industries, including the cosmetic sector, where factors like brand perception, product experience, and online reviews play a crucial role in shaping customer behavior.

C. Defining Customer Loyalty on the Cosmetic Product

Customer loyalty in the cosmetic industry refers to the long-term commitment of consumers to repurchase and advocate for a particular brand, often influenced by product satisfaction, brand trust, and emotional connection (Kotler & Keller, 2022). Unlike mere repeat purchasing, true loyalty involves an attachment to the brand, leading customers to choose it over competitors even when alternatives are available (Oliver, 1999). In the beauty sector, loyalty is often driven by factors such as product quality, brand reputation, personalized marketing, and consumer engagement through social media (Huang & Wong, 2021). Additionally, loyalty programs, such as

reward points, exclusive discounts, and VIP memberships, significantly enhance retention rates by creating a sense of exclusivity and appreciation (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Trust plays a mediating role in sustaining loyalty, as consumers are more likely to remain committed to brands that prioritize transparency, ethical sourcing, and customer satisfaction (Kumar & Reinartz, 2018). In today's digital age, brands that actively engage with their customers through personalized experiences and social media interactions foster stronger emotional bonds, reinforcing long-term loyalty (Nguyen et al., 2020). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for cosmetic brands seeking to cultivate a loyal customer base and maintain competitive advantage.

D. Defining Customer Trust on the Cosmetic Product

Customer trust in cosmetic products is a crucial factor influencing purchasing decisions, brand loyalty, and long-term customer relationships. Trust is primarily built through perceived product quality, brand reputation, and transparency in ingredient sourcing and safety standards (Chen & Wang, 2021). Consumers are increasingly concerned about the authenticity and effectiveness of cosmetic products, leading them to rely on regulatory certifications, dermatological endorsements, and third-party reviews to validate product claims (Liu & Zhao, 2020). Additionally, ethical considerations, such as cruelty-free testing, sustainability practices, and corporate social responsibility (CSR), play a significant role in strengthening customer trust in beauty brands (Feng et al., 2022). Digital platforms have also transformed how trust is established, as online reviews, influencer recommendations, and brand interactions on social media significantly impact consumer perceptions (Xu & Li, 2023). When brands maintain transparency, provide high-quality products, and engage in ethical business practices, they are more likely to foster strong customer trust, leading to higher brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth marketing (Sun & Zhang, 2021).

III. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Hypothetical Development on the Factor Influencing Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty in the cosmetic industry is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including product quality, brand image, price perception, and customer trust (Zhang & Liu, 2021). Hypothetically, higher product quality leads to increased customer satisfaction, which in turn strengthens brand loyalty (Wang, 2020). Brand image also plays a crucial role, as consumers are more likely to remain loyal to brands that align with their self-identity and social status (Chen et al., 2022). Additionally, price perception influences loyalty, as affordable yet high-quality products tend to create a stronger sense of value, leading to repeat purchases (Liu & Xu, 2021). Customer trust acts as a mediating factor in this process, as brands that demonstrate transparency in ingredient sourcing, ethical practices, and product efficacy tend to cultivate long-term consumer relationships (Huang & Zhao, 2023). The rise of digital marketing and social media further amplifies these factors, allowing brands to engage with consumers on a more personalized level and enhance brand affinity (Sun, 2023). Understanding these

hypothetical influences is essential for cosmetic brands aiming to formulate effective customer retention strategies in a competitive market.

B. Hypothetical Development on the Mediating Effect of Customer Trust on the Customer Loyalty

Customer trust plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between various influencing factors and customer loyalty in the cosmetic industry. According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, external stimuli such as product quality, brand reputation, and social influence shape consumers' psychological responses, particularly trust, which in turn drives their loyalty (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Trust is developed through consistent positive experiences, transparency, and perceived brand credibility, ultimately strengthening customers' commitment to a brand (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Studies indicate that customer trust mediates the relationship between brand engagement and loyalty, meaning that even if customers are initially attracted to a brand, their long-term retention depends on trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In the context of cosmetic products, where perceived risk and product authenticity are key concerns, trust significantly impacts repeat purchases and word-of-mouth recommendations (Ha & Janda, 2014). Therefore, brands that foster trust through ethical marketing, quality assurance, and strong customer relationships are more likely to achieve sustained customer loyalty (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008). This mediating role suggests that cosmetic companies should not only focus on external factors but also invest in trust-building strategies to enhance customer retention.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

A. Factor Influencing Customer Loyalty to the Cosmetic Product among Gen-Y in Guangdong

In Guangdong, China, Gen-Y consumers are increasingly becoming loyal to specific cosmetic brands, with several factors influencing their purchasing behavior. First, product quality, including ingredients and effectiveness, is a primary driver of loyalty among Gen-Y consumers (Wang & Li, 2022). This generation is highly informed and seeks products that align with their personal needs, preferences, and ethical values, such as cruelty-free and environmentally friendly ingredients (Li & Zhang, 2020). Additionally, social media and influencer marketing significantly impact Gen-Y's brand loyalty in Guangdong, as they rely on peer reviews and influencer recommendations to make informed purchasing decisions (Zhao & Huang, 2021). The digitalization of marketing and e-commerce also plays a pivotal role in retaining customers, with online platforms offering personalized shopping experiences and exclusive deals (Chen, 2022). Trust in the brand, formed through transparent communication, consistent product performance, and customer service, is also crucial for fostering loyalty (Sun & Zhang, 2023). Finally, loyalty programs and reward systems have proven effective in encouraging repeat purchases, as they provide added value and recognition to Gen-Y consumers (Li & Xu, 2021). Understanding these

factors is essential for cosmetic brands aiming to build long-term relationships with Gen-Y consumers in Guangdong.

B. A Mediating Effect of Customer Trust on the Customer Loyalty of Gen-Y on the Cosmetic Product

Customer trust plays a pivotal role in shaping customer loyalty, particularly among Gen-Y consumers in the cosmetic industry. Trust is considered a mediator that influences the relationship between various stimuli (e.g., product quality, brand reputation, and social media presence) and customer loyalty (Zhang & Li, 2022). Studies suggest that Gen-Y consumers are more likely to remain loyal to cosmetic brands that foster a sense of trust through transparency, quality assurance, and ethical business practices (Wang & Sun, 2021). In this digital age, where online reviews, influencer endorsements, and brand communications shape consumer perceptions, the trust factor becomes even more crucial (Liu & Chen, 2020). Furthermore, the ability of a brand to engage Gen-Y consumers emotionally, coupled with providing consistent and reliable product experiences, strengthens trust and significantly enhances loyalty (Huang & Zhao, 2023). In essence, customer trust not only serves as an outcome of brand loyalty but also as a critical driving force that strengthens the bond between Gen-Y consumers and their preferred cosmetic brands (Sun & Zhang, 2022). Therefore, for brands targeting this demographic, cultivating and maintaining trust is essential for long-term success and retention.

V. CONCLUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Dynamic Business Development of Customer Loyalty to the Cosmetic Product among Gen-Y in Guangdong

The dynamic business development of customer loyalty to cosmetic products among Generation Y (Gen-Y) in Guangdong is influenced by several factors, including technological advancements, social media trends, and evolving consumer expectations. Gen-Y consumers in Guangdong are highly digitally connected, and their loyalty to cosmetic brands is increasingly shaped by online experiences and interactive engagement through platforms like WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok (Chen & Lin, 2021). As the purchasing power of this demographic rises, cosmetic companies are focusing on personalized experiences and targeted marketing strategies to build long-term brand loyalty (Zhang & Li, 2022). Key drivers of loyalty in this region include the appeal of innovative product offerings, the importance of brand transparency, and ethical practices, such as sustainability and cruelty-free testing (Wang & Yang, 2023). Additionally, the rapid adoption of e-commerce platforms, coupled with tailored loyalty programs and customer service excellence, has further strengthened brand attachment among Guangdong's Gen-Y consumers (Liu & Zhao, 2020). As competition intensifies in the Guangdong cosmetic market, businesses must continuously adapt their strategies to meet the expectations of this influential consumer group, fostering both short-term satisfaction and long-term loyalty (Sun, 2023).

B. Business Effect of Customer Trust on the Customer Loyalty of Gen-Y on the Cosmetic Product

Customer trust plays a critical role in the development of customer loyalty, particularly among Generation Y (Gen-Y) consumers in the cosmetic industry. For Gen-Y, who are often skeptical of traditional advertising and seek authenticity, trust in a brand is essential for fostering long-term loyalty (Zhao & Li, 2021). Studies show that when cosmetic brands effectively communicate transparency, provide high-quality products, and align with ethical values such as sustainability and cruelty-free practices, they can significantly enhance trust among Gen-Y consumers (Wang & Xu, 2022). The presence of trust positively impacts emotional attachment to brands, resulting in repeat purchases and increased brand advocacy (Liu & Zhang, 2020). Moreover, Gen-Y consumers in markets like Guangdong, where access to information is readily available, are more likely to research brands before making purchasing decisions, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a trustworthy online presence through authentic customer reviews, product information, and responsiveness to consumer concerns (Chen & Sun, 2023). As competition in the cosmetic industry intensifies, understanding the business effect of trust can provide brands with a competitive advantage by securing loyal Gen-Y customers who are willing to invest in and promote the brand over time (Li & Huang, 2021).

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