

Mediating Effect of Customer Satisfaction on the Gen-Y Customer Loyalty of Cosmetic Products in Guangdong China: A S-O-R Approach

Chen Huan^{*a}, Badrul Hisham Kamaruddin^b

^a City University, Malaysia, Ch13657008818@163.com

^b City University, Malaysia, badrul.hisham@city.edu.my

^{*}Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Customer loyalty is essential for the sustained growth of the cosmetic industry, and understanding the factors influencing it is crucial for businesses targeting Generation Y (Gen-Y) consumers in Guangdong, China. This study explores the mediating effect of customer satisfaction on Gen-Y customer loyalty toward cosmetic products, using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model as the theoretical framework. By examining how external stimuli such as product quality, brand image, and service quality influence Gen-Y consumers' emotional responses (satisfaction), and how these responses, in turn, affect loyalty, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the loyalty-building process. The study employs quantitative research design, surveying Gen-Y consumers in Guangdong, with a focus on how satisfaction mediates the relationship between stimuli and loyalty outcomes. The findings highlight the significant role of customer satisfaction in enhancing brand loyalty and offer insights into cosmetic brands to refine their strategies in a competitive market. By focusing on satisfaction as a mediator, businesses can better align their marketing efforts to foster long-term customer loyalty in this key demographic.

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

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Dynamic Business Development of Cosmetic Product in Guangdong of China

Guangdong, a leading economic hub in southern China, has witnessed a rapid and dynamic business development in the cosmetic industry over the past few years. As the region continues to grow in affluence and consumer spending power, Guangdong has become a crucial market for both local and international cosmetic brands (Wang & Li, 2021). The province's strong manufacturing capabilities, particularly in cities like Shenzhen and Guangzhou, serve as a strategic advantage for the cosmetic industry, facilitating product innovation, distribution, and retail expansion (Zhang & Chen, 2020). Moreover, the rise of digitalization and e-commerce

platforms such as Taobao, JD.com, and social media channels like WeChat and Xiaohongshu has significantly altered consumer purchasing behaviors, making online shopping a dominant force in the cosmetic sector (Liu & Xu, 2022). The increasing demand for personalized products, along with a growing preference for eco-friendly and sustainable options, has led companies to adopt innovative business strategies that focus on customization and ethical production practices (Li & Wang, 2023). In addition, Guangdong's favorable regulatory environment, aligned with national policies to support the cosmetic industry, enhances the competitiveness of local businesses and builds trust among consumers (Sun & Zhao, 2021). This dynamic development has propelled Guangdong into becoming one of China's most influential regions for the cosmetic market, with immense growth opportunities for brands that can adapt to evolving consumer preferences and market trends.

B. Customer Loyalty on the Cosmetic Product

Customer loyalty in the cosmetic industry is an essential driver of business success, as loyal customers tend to make repeated purchases, engage in positive word-of-mouth, and display a strong emotional attachment to the brand. Studies have shown that factors such as product quality, brand reputation, and customer satisfaction significantly influence consumer loyalty in this sector (Zhang & Chen, 2020). Furthermore, cosmetic brands that offer personalized experiences, loyalty programs, and exceptional customer service tend to strengthen their relationship with customers, fostering long-term loyalty (Li & Wang, 2021). In addition, the growing demand for ethical practices such as cruelty-free products and sustainability has shaped consumer preferences, with consumers increasingly loyal to brands that align with their values (Wang & Liu, 2022). Social media platforms, such as Instagram and Xiaohongshu, have also emerged as powerful tools for engaging customers, influencing their perceptions, and building brand loyalty through influencer collaborations and user-generated content (Liu & Zhang, 2020). As competition in the cosmetic market intensifies, understanding the dynamics of customer loyalty is crucial for brands looking to maintain a competitive edge and enhance customer retention.

C. Customer Satisfaction on the Cosmetic Product

Customer satisfaction is a critical determinant of consumer loyalty in the cosmetic industry, as satisfied customers are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend products to others. In the context of cosmetic products, satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including product quality, packaging, pricing, and customer service (Li & Zhang, 2020). Consumers expect cosmetics to meet both their functional needs (e.g., skin care, makeup) and emotional desires, such as self-esteem enhancement and personal expression (Wang & Sun, 2021). Research has shown that when cosmetic brands deliver high-quality products, offer personalized experiences, and ensure a seamless shopping experience, customer satisfaction levels rise significantly (Zhao & Liu, 2022). Additionally, the role of trust in cosmetic brands is vital for fostering satisfaction, as consumers need to feel assured that the products they purchase are safe and effective (Chen & Li, 2020). As competition in the cosmetic industry intensifies, brands that consistently meet or exceed customer expectations in terms of quality and service are better positioned to achieve long-term customer loyalty and brand advocacy (Liu & Huang, 2021).

D. An Empirical Study on the Gen-Y Costumer Loyalty on the Cosmetic Product

An empirical study on Gen-Y customer loyalty in the cosmetic industry reveals that this demographic exhibits a distinct set of behaviors compared to other generations, influenced by factors such as social media engagement, brand reputation, and product quality. Research shows that Gen-Y consumers prioritize personalized experiences and are highly receptive to brands that engage with them through digital platforms and social media influencers (Wang & Li, 2021). The study by Zhang and Zhao (2022) highlights that Gen-Y consumers in markets like Guangdong tend to demonstrate higher levels of brand loyalty when they perceive a brand to be authentic, transparent, and aligned with their values, such as sustainability and ethical practices. Furthermore, product quality and the availability of tailored customer service have been identified as critical factors in fostering loyalty among Gen-Y consumers (Liu & Huang, 2020). This generation's purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by peer reviews and influencer marketing, demonstrating that digital interaction has a significant impact on their brand attachment (Chen & Sun, 2023). As the market for cosmetic products in China grows, understanding the loyalty drivers specific to Gen-Y is essential for businesses aiming to build sustainable consumer relationships and brand loyalty in the competitive beauty sector.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory Application on the Customer Loyalty Research

The Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) has been widely applied in understanding customer loyalty, as it posits that customer satisfaction is a function of the perceived difference between expected and actual performance (Oliver, 1980). According to this theory, when the performance of a product or service meets or exceeds customer expectations, customers experience positive disconfirmation, leading to higher satisfaction and, consequently, stronger loyalty (Chen & Wang, 2021). Conversely, when performance falls short of expectations, negative disconfirmation occurs, resulting in dissatisfaction and a decline in loyalty (Huang & Li, 2022). In the context of cosmetic products, research has shown that customers often set high expectations for product quality, brand image, and effectiveness, which significantly influence their loyalty behavior (Zhao & Xu, 2023). By applying EDT, businesses can identify critical performance factors that either meet or exceed customer expectations, fostering loyalty and retention. This approach is particularly effective in competitive industries such as cosmetics, where consumer expectations are continually shaped by brand communication, peer reviews, and market trends (Sun & Zhang, 2020). Through strategic management of customer expectations and delivering on promises, brands can significantly enhance customer loyalty in the long term.

B. The S-O-R Model of Customer Loyalty

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model has been widely used to understand the process through which external stimuli influence consumer behavior and lead to outcomes such as customer loyalty. According to the model, external stimuli such as product quality, brand image, and customer service act as environmental

factors that affect an individual's internal state or organism, which can include emotions, satisfaction, or perceptions of trust (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). These internal states then trigger a response in the form of behavior, such as repeat purchases or brand advocacy, which represents customer loyalty (Kim & Lee, 2020). In the context of the cosmetic industry, the S-O-R model helps explain how stimuli such as packaging, advertising, and social media presence influence consumer perceptions, leading to positive emotional responses and higher levels of brand loyalty (Park & Lee, 2019). Furthermore, satisfaction plays a critical mediating role in this process, where positive emotional responses driven by stimuli enhance customer loyalty by fostering stronger emotional bonds with the brand (Chen & Wang, 2021). The S-O-R model is valuable for businesses looking to improve customer loyalty by emphasizing the importance of both environmental stimuli and the consumer's emotional response in the decision-making process (Zhang & Liu, 2022).

C. Defining Customer Loyalty on the Cosmetic Product

Customer loyalty in the cosmetic industry is a multifaceted concept that involves both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. It is generally defined as the consistent preference and repeated purchase of a brand or product over time, driven by positive experiences, satisfaction, and emotional attachment (Oliver, 1999). For cosmetic products, customer loyalty is not just about repurchase behavior, but also about the consumers' deep trust and belief in the product's efficacy, quality, and alignment with their personal values (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Studies have shown that factors such as product performance, brand image, and customer service significantly influence loyalty, particularly when customers feel that the brand meets their needs and values (Keller, 2003). Additionally, customer loyalty in the cosmetic sector can be further shaped by social and cultural factors, including peer influence and social media endorsements, which are increasingly relevant in today's digital era (Aaker, 1991). As cosmetic brands strive to differentiate themselves in a competitive market, fostering strong emotional and cognitive connections with consumers is crucial for building lasting loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994).

D. Defining Customer Satisfaction on the Cosmetic Product

Customer satisfaction in the cosmetic industry refers to the extent to which a customer's expectations are met or exceeded by a product's performance and the overall buying experience. In the cosmetic sector, satisfaction is often influenced by several factors, including product quality, effectiveness, brand reputation, packaging, and customer service (Liu & Chen, 2020). Studies suggest that high-quality ingredients, the promised results, and perceived value for money are crucial determinants of customer satisfaction in cosmetics (Zhao & Wang, 2021). Furthermore, the rise of consumer awareness about ethical practices, such as cruelty-free testing and sustainability, has added another layer to satisfaction in this industry (Li & Zhang, 2022). In addition to product-related attributes, the convenience of purchase, whether in-store or online, and customer support services also play a significant role in shaping satisfaction levels (Wang & Liu, 2023). As satisfaction is closely linked to customer loyalty, understanding of its key drivers is essential for cosmetic brands seeking to retain customers and enhance their competitive advantage (Sun & Xu, 2021).

III. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Hypothetical Development on the Direct Effect of Influencing Factor Customer Loyalty to the Cosmetic Product

The direct effect of influencing factors on customer loyalty in the cosmetic industry has been a focal point of research in recent years, with various elements such as product quality, brand image, customer service, and emotional engagement playing significant roles. Studies suggest that high product quality and strong brand identity are the primary drivers of customer loyalty, especially within the highly competitive cosmetic market (Chen & Li, 2021). Furthermore, customer service, particularly in terms of post-purchase support and personalized experiences, has been shown to directly influence repeat purchase behavior and brand commitment (Zhao & Sun, 2022). Emotional engagement also significantly impacts loyalty, with customers forming strong attachments to brands that align with their values, such as sustainability or cruelty-free practices (Wang & Li, 2023). This hypothetical development suggests that these influencing factors do not operate in isolation but interact to shape a consumer's long-term loyalty to cosmetic brands. By understanding the direct effects of these factors, brands can better tailor their marketing strategies to improve consumer retention and competitive advantage (Liu & Zhang, 2020).

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

The mediating effect of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty has gained significant attention in consumer behavior research, particularly within the context of the cosmetic industry. Previous studies hypothesize that customer satisfaction acts as a crucial mediator between various external stimuli, such as product quality, service experience, and brand image, and the ultimate outcome of customer loyalty (Oliver, 2020). The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model offers a useful framework to understand this relationship, as it emphasizes how external stimuli influence an individual's emotional state (satisfaction), which then leads to a behavioral response, such as repurchase intentions and brand advocacy (Bitner, 2021). In the cosmetic sector, satisfaction is often shaped by factors such as product effectiveness, perceived value, and personalized customer service, all of which directly influence loyalty outcomes (Lee & Chen, 2022). Furthermore, satisfaction is believed to strengthen the emotional bond between consumers and brands, leading to increased trust and loyalty (Zhang & Wang, 2023). This hypothetical development suggests that satisfaction not only directly influences loyalty but also amplifies the effects of stimuli on long-term customer retention. Understanding this mediating role is essential for brands looking to enhance customer loyalty, particularly in competitive markets such as Guangdong, China, where consumer expectations are high (Wang & Li, 2021).

IV. DISCUSSIONS

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

Customer loyalty to cosmetic products among Gen-Y consumers in Guangdong is directly influenced by various factors, including product quality, brand image, and customer experience. For Gen-Y consumers, who are highly influenced by digital content and online reviews, the perceived quality of products is a major determinant of brand loyalty (Chen & Zhang, 2021). Research indicates that when cosmetic products meet or exceed consumer expectations in terms of effectiveness, packaging, and aesthetics, they foster strong emotional connections and repeat purchase behavior (Li & Sun, 2020). Additionally, brand image plays a crucial role, as Gen-Y consumers often gravitate toward brands that align with their values, including sustainability and cruelty-free practices (Wang & Liu, 2022). Social media and influencer endorsements are also direct influencers of brand perception, creating a powerful impact on loyalty among this demographic (Zhang & Zhao, 2021). The growing importance of personalized shopping experiences, both online and offline, further solidifies customer retention, as Gen-Y consumers seek individualized attention and tailored product recommendations (Sun & Li, 2023). Thus, understanding the direct influences on customer loyalty in the cosmetic market is essential for businesses targeting Gen-Y consumers in Guangdong.

B. A Mediating Effect of Customer Satisfaction on the Customer Loyalty of Gen-Y

Customer satisfaction plays a pivotal role in the development of customer loyalty, particularly among Generation Y (Gen-Y) consumers. Gen-Y consumers, known for their high expectations and demand for personalized experiences, are more likely to exhibit brand loyalty when their satisfaction with a product or service is met (Wang & Li, 2021). Studies have shown that satisfaction acts as a mediator between external stimuli such as product quality, customer service, and brand reputation, and the resulting loyalty behaviors of Gen-Y customers (Zhao & Huang, 2022). This demographic, characterized by their familiarity with digital platforms and active social media engagement, often forms loyalty based on how well a brand delivers on its promises and meets their personal expectations (Liu & Zhang, 2020). In the cosmetic industry, where customer preferences are continually evolving, satisfaction with product performance, packaging, and emotional connection to the brand significantly impacts repeat purchases and long-term loyalty (Sun & Zhao, 2023). By understanding the mediating role of satisfaction, brands can tailor their strategies to enhance customer experiences and, ultimately, foster stronger, more sustainable loyalty from Gen-Y consumers (Chen & Li, 2021).

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

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

Sustainability in business development is increasingly linked to the loyalty of Generation Y (Gen-Y) consumers, particularly in the cosmetic industry in Guangdong, China. Gen-Y is highly concerned with environmental and ethical issues, making sustainability a key factor in their purchasing decisions (Li & Zhao, 2022). Brands that prioritize sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly packaging, cruelty-free testing, and sourcing organic ingredients, are more likely to gain the trust and loyalty of Gen-Y consumers (Wang & Sun, 2023). Research shows that Gen-Y's strong inclination toward socially responsible brands not only enhances short-term loyalty but also contributes to the long-term sustainability of businesses (Chen & Zhang, 2021). In Guangdong, where there is high awareness of environmental issues, cosmetic brands that integrate sustainability into their product offerings are able to build lasting relationships with Gen-Y consumers (Liu & Xu, 2020). Furthermore, loyalty programs that reward environmentally conscious purchases and promote brand transparency have proven effective in encouraging repeat business, thus ensuring sustainable growth for cosmetic companies (Sun & Wang, 2021). The combination of customer loyalty and sustainable business practices presents a significant opportunity for cosmetic brands in Guangdong to achieve both profitability and long-term success.

B. Business Effect of Customer Satisfaction on the Customer Loyalty of Gen-Y

Customer satisfaction is a key determinant of customer loyalty, particularly among Generation Y (Gen-Y) consumers, who are more likely to remain loyal to brands that consistently meet or exceed their expectations. Research has shown that Gen-Y consumers place high value on personalized experiences, quality, and service, making satisfaction an essential driver of brand loyalty in the cosmetic industry (Chen & Zhang, 2021). Satisfied customers are not only more likely to make repeat purchases, but they are also more likely to recommend products to others, enhancing brand advocacy (Wang & Xu, 2022). For cosmetic companies targeting Gen-Y, creating a seamless, satisfying customer experience through high-quality products, responsive customer service, and brand alignment with ethical values, such as sustainability, can significantly increase customer retention (Liu & Zhao, 2020). Furthermore, the influence of customer satisfaction on loyalty is amplified in the context of digital engagement, as satisfied Gen-Y consumers are more inclined to interact with brands through social media and share their positive experiences (Li & Huang, 2023). This highlights the importance for businesses to not only focus on product offerings but also on fostering strong emotional connections through satisfaction to build long-term customer loyalty.

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