

The Influence of Male Idols Endorsing Beauty Brands on Chinese Female Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Beauty brands have long favoured celebrity endorsements, hoping that with the help of celebrity effects, brands can gain high traffic exposure in a short period of time and attract more target groups to buy products. At present, the popularity of male idols has been steadily rising, and the fan economy has strong purchasing power. Therefore, the endorsement of male idols has become an important part of the marketing of beauty brands at present. The purpose of this study was to explore how a male idol endorsing a beauty brand affects the purchase attitude of Chinese female consumers. This paper reviewed celebrity endorsement theory to explore the basic ideas of the above questions. Adopting the qualitative analysis method-SWOT to comprehensively analysed the influence of male idols endorsing beauty brands. This research concluded that male idols' endorsement of beauty brands affects Chinese female consumers' favourable impressions of beauty brands, thus affecting the sales conversion rate of beauty products.

Keywords: Male idol, SWOT, celebrity endorsement, beauty makeup industry

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the Chinese beauty market economy, celebrity endorsement for brands has become an important means of marketing. In the past, brands tended to choose female celebrities to endorse cosmetics in order to show their beauty and the usability of the product to the public. However, in recent years, Chinese male stars have been quietly suppressing and harvesting the beauty and makeup industries, with male idols as the main ones, gradually occupying the endorsements of the beauty industry. According to Figure 1, in the distribution of newly added endorsements in the first quarter of this year, the beauty makeup and skin care industries ranked first with 29.06% [1], becoming the industry with the most signed spokespersons. Moreover, according to Figure 2, the number of male celebrity beauty endorsements increased more than fourfold between 2017 and 2020 [2]. This is a huge shift in the beauty industry. Male idols refer to stars with a youthful appearance, a young audience, high popularity, and many fans who have the characteristic of high loyalty. A male idol's backside has a beauty makeup consumption circle layer. According to the principle that opposites attract, male idols are more likely to arouse fans' desire to buy on

an emotional level. The practicality and cost performance of the product are not the keys. The most important thing is to spend money on the idol, let the brand see his commercial value, and support him to continue to spend money. Therefore, this kind of emotion and emotional influence is more likely to bring a significant sales increase. At the same time, the brand can achieve a lot of exposure and dissemination with the help of the popularity of male idols. Therefore, more and more beauty brands are choosing male idols as their spokesmen.

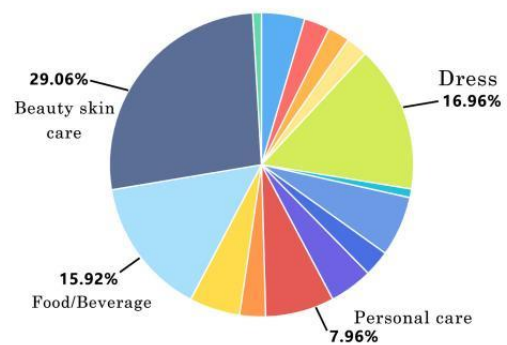


Figure 1 New endorsement statistics for Q1 2021 [1]

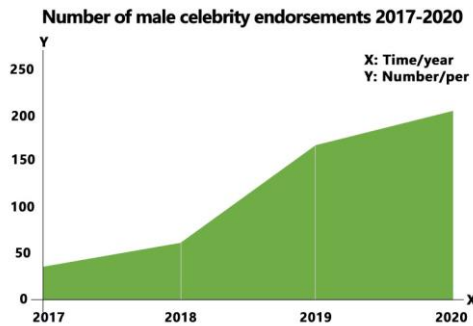


Figure 2 Trends in the number of male celebrity beauty endorsements (2017-2020) [2]

Brands and endorsers are influenced by each other. Since male idols in recent years have been born from talent shows, they are of uneven quality and face unpredictable risks at any time, resulting in the current mixed reviews of them. They can create huge profits for the brand, but also have the potential to make the brand a loss. Therefore, many beauty brands sign male idols to endorse them in a "seasonal" way, at the hottest time.

According to 2021, Jishen Ran conducted research on Cai Xukun, who is a Chinese male idol and was the spokesperson for Prada, using the survey method. The results show that the Prada brand needs to carefully select spokespersons according to the public aesthetic [3]. Ahmed et al. used a questionnaire and SPSS to analyze the results. This research concluded that the celebrity-endorsed advertisements are more attractive than the non-celebrity-endorsed advertisements [4]. Rehenuma Rahman conducted research through qualitative comparative analysis of fuzzy sets. The research findings showed that some of the attributes of a celebrity can enhance brand awareness [5]. In summary, all the above are partly similar to the research direction of this paper. But this paper will fill a gap: there has been no discussion of the logic of the beauty industry's choice of celebrities and no research on particularly male idols. And that's what we're focusing on.

The research question of this paper is to find the influence of male idols' endorsements of cosmetics on the purchasing behavior of Chinese female consumers. The motivation of this study is that more and more cosmetics brands choose male idols as product spokesmen, which has a positive or negative impact on female consumers. The positive effect is that most of the fans of male idols are highly compatible with cosmetics users, which makes many target consumers very willing to consume for their idols. However, there are a few male idols with low brand fit or male traffic idols themselves who have a poor reputation, leaving a bad impression on consumers, resulting in a negative impact.

This paper will review celebrity endorsement theory to explore the basic ideas of the above questions. Adopting the qualitative analysis method-SWOT, which

includes the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats This paper analyzes the cosmetics endorsed by male idols from these four aspects to find out the business logic, significance, and methods of brand selection. Finally, by validating the hypothesis and completing the research objective, this paper will provide recommendations to makeup companies on how to maximize the positive role of a male idol endorsement in the field of beauty makeup, as well as try to avoid the potential risk of celebrity endorsement by putting forward the corresponding countermeasure, allowing male idol endorsements to continue on the path of healthy development. Through this paper, let the brand realize the importance of carefully and reasonably choosing a suitable male idol to endorse.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A celebrity endorser is a panacea for all marketing woes. A celebrity endorsement addresses the consumer's needs from a psychological angle. Consequently, it influences his conduct and decision-making toward the promoted product or brand [6]. Marketers use the fame of celebrities to promote goods in advertisements. Celebrities appear in advertisements in order to entrust the brand to consumers. Hereafter, this research will summarize the development of star endorsement theory on the one hand and the influence of celebrity endorsement in different fields on the other hand, with underlying theories.

In 1985, Kahle and Homer began to look at the effectiveness of surveying different types of celebrities. Following the rapid growth of academic interest in the topic of celebrity endorsement, reaching a level that called for the first major literature review on the subject [7]. Whereafter, Kahle published four further literature reviews, each examining the phenomenon from a different perspective. It began in the eighteenth century and continues to the present day while witnessing drastic changes. Nowadays, it is one of the key promoting tools in numerous business fields. In a market where advertising plays a vital role in coordinating consumer purchases, effective advertising campaigns are used to influence customers, stimulate their desire to purchase, and inculcate their desire to purchase. Theory and practice have proved that using superstars in advertising generates a lot of publicity and attention [8].

In addition, products endorsed by celebrities will be bought more frequently, so the price will be higher [9]. In view of this phenomenon, many scholars are interested in the internal and external factors of celebrity endorsement, e.g. culture, psychology, society, family, educational background, and economy [10], such as Biswas [11], Amos, and others [12], who have all published literature that suggests purchase behavior and intention can be influenced by the image of celebrity endorsement. As time has evolved and consumer

purchase behavior has changed, marketers have realized that the presence of celebrities has consequences for consumers related to their perceptions of the brand, brand preferences, and purchase intentions [13]. Thus, advertising became a service to the image and brand of the endorser. Inviting celebrities to advertise has become a well-known practice for well-known companies and luxury brands [14]. In 2015, celebrity endorsements have long been used to successfully enhance the meaning of brands. Through research, Dwivedi and others have proved this celebrity effect, and spokesmen play an important role in influencing consumers' self-brand connection and the brand equity of spokesmen. In addition, they also found that the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumers' self-brand connection also indirectly mediated the influence of celebrity endorsement on brand equity [15].

With the changes in the market and theoretical practice, more and more studies and practices show that celebrity endorsement is a powerful marketing tool, which is always the center of attraction for most people. Afsheen and others found that celebrity endorsement advertisements have an impact on consumers' purchase decisions. Since consumers consider celeb-backed advertisements to be more reliable than non-celebrities, they always try to choose products that match them. However, celebrities are not enough to influence them to purchase the same product again [16]. Therefore, celebrity endorsement only applies to the early stages of brand promotion.

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the relationship between celebrities and customers. The theory of celebrity endorsement provides some basic information about this relationship. According to Wan Yang' s research about the evolution of celebrity endorsements in 2017, the author reviewed much of the literature related to the fields of hospitality and tourism. Finally, the author summarized the definition of celebrity endorsers, the benefits and risks of celebrity endorsements on consumers and the method for selecting effective celebrity endorsers from lots of previous papers. The author points out that people should pay more attention to finding an appropriate way to select celebrity endorsement strategies [17].

In 2011, a study discovered some indirect links between celebrity endorsements and customer satisfaction. Miller and Allen discussed how celebrities influence the market and brand attitude, which indirectly influences customers' purchasing decisions. By using a micro-level model as well as evaluating conditioning procedures, they discovered the process of meaning transfer from celebrity affiliate to brand. After a few years, direct evidence has been proposed [18]. In 2015, Dwivedi and others found that not only will celebrity endorsers have an impact on brand equity, but also consumers' self-brand connection can be affected. A

cross-sectional survey was conducted to estimate the conceptual model to find the degree of consumer-perceived endorser - brand congruence and endorsed brand equity [19].

Later, research studied the process of celebrity meaning transfer deeper and came up with some factors that can moderate its effects. The research is done by Knoll and others in 2016. They want to find out how long the celebrity meaning transfer could last and also to explore the delayed effects. They use a propositional learning approach with an experimental repeated-measures design. As a result, they concluded that celebrity transfer effects were moderated by brand experience and celebrity liking. However, there is a gap in this paper: only one brand and two celebrity images were tested. Therefore, how to find more samples is one of the questions people should be concerned about [20]. In 2017, Adam and Hussain provided a perspective on a particularly industrial problem: finding the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer purchase behavior. This also gave us some inspiration to write this paper because they pay attention to the female segment of the consumer market in the field of cosmetics. The authors use three models, which are the source attractiveness model, the meaning transfer model, and the elaboration likelihood model [21].

Collectively, these studies outline a critical relationship between celebrity endorsement and customers. However, many studies have the same limitation, because they all lack samples or are conducted on a small scale. As a result, this paper will provide a new sample, which particularly focuses on the effects of male idols as celebrity endorsers on female consumers in China. Analysis are given below.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This paper uses qualitative analysis and SWOT analysis. Indrasari et al. in the paper "Analysis of SWOT Marketing Strategies and 7P Influence on Purchasing Decisions" use SWOT to study the level of loyalty of customers and the expectations of producers. It finally identifies the factors that influence purchasing decisions. The topic is relatively similar to this paper. SWOT analysis is a good choice for this paper. Using SWOT, Menekse Salar et al. compared the advantages and disadvantages of franchising. The strengths and weaknesses are mentioned in this paper. Therefore, SWOT analysis is definitely a suitable way to analyze the market for the beauty and makeup industry.

3.2 Beauty Makeup Industry

The beauty industry is an industry with diversified demand and high segmentation of product categories and

consumer groups. Broadly speaking, the development of China's beauty industry in recent years can be divided into the following four stages:

The first stage is the early stage of refinement processing (1990–2000).

In the 1990s, China officially entered the wave of reform and opening up, and the domestic cosmetics market was still in its infancy and consumer demand had just been excavated. With the emergence of mass media dominated by TV, many foreign companies represented by Procter&Gamble have brought brand awareness to the Chinese market. From then on, the era of beauty makeup consumption in China was opened.

The second stage is the incremental period of rapid development (2000–2012).

At this stage, the growth experience of local brands can be summed up in two aspects: learning and imitating, and even copying foreign brands in the initial stage. The national brand continues to deep cultivate the foreign brand channel blank area, beginning to grow larger and stronger from the sinking market. This phase of

expansion, spanning more than a decade, has been the development of the cosmetics industry's golden years.

The third stage is the re-emergence of Japanese and Korean brands (2012–2017).

Cosmetic production technology has developed to a relatively mature stage at this point. With the rise of e-commerce and overseas purchases, as well as the influence of Japanese and Korean fashion culture on the Chinese market, Japanese and Korean brands became popular among Chinese consumers, exerting significant influence on the Chinese consumer beauty market.

The fourth stage is the new retail phase of integrated development (2018–present).

In recent years, with the high-speed development of electrical business channels, many excellent Chinese beauty makeup brands have sprung up. China's beauty industry is stepping into a new retail stage of integration of online and offline development, reconstructing the basic three elements of people, products, and place, breaking the limitations of traditional consumption patterns and creating more possibilities for the development of the beauty industry.

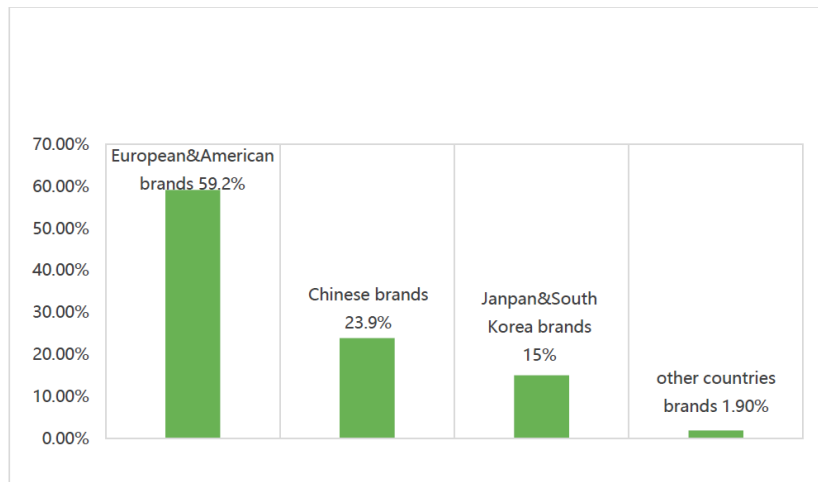


Figure 3 The quantity distribution and interaction of beauty makeup content of domestic and foreign beauty brands [22]

3.2.1 The Evolution of Male Celebrity Beauty Endorsement

The phenomenon of using male celebrities to endorse beauty products first appeared in Japan. In 1996, Kimura shot a lipstick advertisement for Kanebo that sold three million copies in two months, leading to several sell-outs and even subway posters being stolen by enthusiastic fans. With the success of Kimura Takuya's endorsement of beauty products, beauty products have gradually begun to experiment with using male celebrities. Kanebo also became a pioneer in the era of male brands.

Yang Yang in 2016 became the first Chinese male spokesman for Guerin France, and due to the strong

reaction, Guerin's Kiss series lipsticks directly defined color 344 Yang Yang Yang, which became one of the hottest lipstick products that year. From then on, the era of Chinese male celebrities endorsing beauty products officially began. Due to the popularity of various idol shows in China, using male idols to endorse beauty brands has become a trend.

3.2.2 The classification of beauty spokesmen

A "brand spokesperson" refers to the special personnel who provide information communication services for the profit or public welfare goals of enterprises or organizations. Brand spokespersons are divided into global spokespersons, Asia-pacific

spokespersons, and China spokespersons by region. In addition to regional differences, they can also be divided into full-line spokesmen, regional spokesmen, series of products, and product spokesmen by product. The cooperation content of both sides will be different because of the different spokesmen.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

3.3.1 Strengths

First of all, reverse gender to create contrast. Gender selection reverse endorsement is an anti-traditional form of communication that is easy to attract the audience's attention and leaves a deep impression. When most people think that beauty products should choose female spokesmen, choosing male idols to represent them can break the fixed thinking of the industry and create a sense of contrast. Secondly, it generates traffic through the fan economy. It can be seen that male idols have a large number of fans behind them. They are more willing to support male idols than spend money on female idols, which is also an important reason for promoting cosmetics brands using male idols as spokespersons. At the same time, in this era of young and iterative consumers, popular male idols have a strong appeal to female consumers. They can not only detonate traffic through the fan economy, increase sales and realize success, but also effectively attract new fans and stimulate fans. Lastly, promote the growth of male consumption power. In the Internet environment, little fresh meat culture and bean idol programs have become very popular, making many men also start to pay attention to appearance. Therefore, the endorsement of male idols for cosmetics and skin care brands can not only attract female fans to pay the bill, but also be a big attraction for the growing male beauty consumer group.

3.3.2 Weaknesses

The first is the rupture of the image of the spokesperson. The popularity of male idols has been steadily increasing and has become an important part of the marketing of beauty brands. However, many male idols frequently appear in negative news, leading to a rapid decrease in the number of fans and a loss of confidence in the beauty brands represented by male idols, which directly affects consumers' purchasing power and seriously stimulates the decline of the consumer market. Furthermore, the beauty advertisements shot by male idols often cause controversy. As more and more male idols enter the field of makeup, there are many unaesthetic and greasy advertisements in the market, causing some passers-by to have a rebellious mentality. Greasy advertisements will not only fail to attract consumers to pay for products, but also affect consumers' favorable impression of beauty brands. Therefore, the atmosphere of makeup and modeling when male idols shoot beauty advertisements

directly affects consumers' attitudes and purchasing power. Finally, male idols with too much personal influence can override brand recognition. In the short term, inviting a popular male idol to endorse the brand can let consumers quickly learn about the brand and achieve the sales conversion of one purchase. However, in the long term, it will weaken the link between brand association and consumer purchasing attitude and even damage consumers' goodwill towards the brand, making it difficult for the brand to occupy consumers' minds, making consumers ignore the advantages of the brand itself, and making it difficult to clearly distinguish from other similar brands. Consequently, it is difficult to stimulate consumers to make secondary purchases, which ultimately leads to a low conversion rate of endorsement sales.

3.3.3 Opportunities

Male idols should first and foremost raise their professional standards and create more high-quality works in order to gain more exposure and expand their topics of interest and heat. The second is to pay attention to their own behavior, maintain good artistic morality, and establish an image of positive energy. Last but not least, the duration of idols' popularity is relatively synchronous with the duration of events. The longer the duration of hot events, especially works, the longer the popularity of stars' topics. Therefore, brands should seize the opportunity to make use of the flow effect generated by idol endorsement to improve their competitiveness in the beauty industry. In addition, young male idols can participate in more cross-border cooperation, especially the endorsement and cooperation of traditional brands. This can not only help the old brand image look younger, but also expand the popularity of male idols in different age groups.

3.3.4 Threats

Threats from female idols: Female talent shows have exploded in the third quarter of 2020, and female stars have gained more opportunities to cooperate with international beauty brands while increasing their exposure. In recent years, under the trend of male celebrity cosmetics endorsements, female celebrities have again attracted the market's attention. From the third quarter of last year to the first quarter of this year, the number of new cooperatives was higher than that of male stars [22].

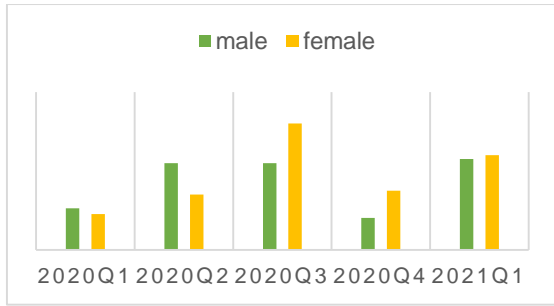


Figure 4 Gender distribution of stars' new international makeup cooperation [22]

Threat from virtual idols: With the rise of the meta-universe, virtual idols, as a manifestation of the meta-universe, are favoured by more and more brands. Since virtual idols are economical and practical without having to bear the high brand endorsement fee and will not take the initiative to produce negative news, they are more stable and controllable compared to real-life celebrity endorsements, and many brands have started to cooperate with popular anime characters or even create their own virtual idols to become their own spokespersons and shape the images in a relevant way. Therefore, virtual idols are gradually taking over the market of real-life celebrity endorsements. In addition, the cute pet endorsement has a certain weakening effect on the real-life male celebrity endorsement. At present, young people's love for interacting with other people's cats and dogs online has promoted the rapid development of the pet economy, and the beauty cosmetics represented by pets have become a new trend.

4. RESULT

Male idol endorsing beauty brands can rely on gender influence to better promote the consumption of opposite sex consumers. By endorsing beauty products, male idols can help brands build their image, drive popularity and sales by virtue of their celebrity influence, so as to stimulate the market through fan effect. At the same time, although the male idol has a strong ability to carry goods, managers should pay attention to whether the temperament of the male idol is consistent with the brand concept. The inconsistent endorsement of the male idol and the brand will leave a bad impression on consumers and cause fatal damage to the brand image and the idol itself. In addition, the high popularity of male idols can overshadow the recognition of beauty brands.

5. DISCUSSION

There are several things that male idols and brands need to do if they want to maintain and develop their advantages together. For male idols, they should have artistic ethics by establishing a positive public image, having the right values, and clearing their own positioning. They should only accept their image and temperament consistent with the brand endorsement.

While maintaining their own endorsement advantages, they can try endorsing traditional brands to expand their popularity among different age groups. To guide consumers to consume rationally. For brands, it is important to choose male idols in line with brands' temperament, not just high-profile idols. Brands should always pay attention to the dynamics of celebrities and seize the opportunity to use the flow effect generated by idol endorsement to reverse the current competitive situation in the beauty industry. In addition, when male idols shoot cosmetics advertisements, the product does not need to be applied on their faces, and male idols can hold it and display it. This can avoid the greasy image of male idols.

In the future, celebrity endorsements in the beauty industry may increasingly play down gender differences. Celebrity endorsements may not be limited to "male celebrities" or "female celebrities," but to use big data to select celebrities who can best reach consumers. When the consumer group is no longer limited to female consumers, the endorsement style of "male star masters" will also change accordingly.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper sorted out the development process of the beauty industry and male idol endorsement, using SWOT analysis to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of choosing a male idol for the development of beauty companies as well as the impact of consumer purchasing decisions. The following conclusions can be drawn: First, male idol endorsement affects Chinese female consumers' purchase attitude. Second, as long as the commercial value and fan support continue, future male idol endorsements will be on the rise. The strong purchasing power of fans is the best way to realize the transformational effect of the idol endorsement effect.

The SWOT analysis validates the hypothesis that male idols' endorsement of beauty products influences the purchasing attitude of Chinese female consumers. This is similar to previous studies. Furthermore, this paper find a new conclusion that the strong personal influence of male icons can override brand recognition. This is an important finding for understanding the impact of idol endorsements on consumer purchase behaviour. From the above discussion, the paper makes the following suggestions: When choosing beauty spokesmen, managers should not only consider the overall fit between male idols and brands, but also consider factors such as popularity and reputation.

This paper has some imperfections. First, this paper has a personal perspective and a summary analysis. Therefore, future researchers are needed to explore new ideas derived from this paper with more data research and practical verification. Second, the paper is limited in that it only studies male idols, a particular type of celebrity,

therefore this will very much be the key component in future attempts to study additional types of celebrities, like the elderly, athletes, and comperes. This allows the conclusions to be more widely studied and applied to find similarities and differences between each celebrity. Moreover, this paper only focuses on the beauty industry. As a result, future research must look into other industries to find more correlations.

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