

User Persona–Driven Precision Marketing Strategies for Korean Cosmetic Enterprises in China's Evolving Beauty Market

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Abstract. With the rise of domestic Chinese beauty brands, Korean beauty brands that previously depended on traffic generated by the Korean Wave have seen a decline in market share, and their traditional standardised marketing models are no longer suitable for the segmented and rational Chinese beauty consumer market. Precision marketing of Korean beauty brands in China is the research object of this paper, and the main problems identified systematically include coarse user segmentation, uniform channel content, and a lack of localisation trust. It proposes optimizing in three ways: data, touchpoints, and relationships; building dynamic multi-dimensional local user personas, implementing channel-specific scenario-based marketing, and establishing user trust through localised R&D, transparency, and cultural integration. Based on the above analysis, the optimized trust-based marketing model focuses on meeting local consumer demands and can effectively balance promotion efficiency with brand authenticity to address the development problems of Korean beauty brands in China. This study provides a practical reference for the localised operation of Korean beauty brands and similar overseas beauty brands in China, acknowledges the limitations of using only secondary data, and puts forward directions for future primary research and long-term quantitative impact assessment.

Keywords: Consumer Profiling, Precision Marketing, Korean Cosmetic Industry, Localization Strategy

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background and motivation

According to data released by the China Association of Fragrance, Flavor, and Cosmetic Industries in 2025, the total transaction amount of the beauty market across all channels in China reached 1.104245 trillion yuan, exceeding 1.1 trillion yuan, and thus maintained its position as the second-largest beauty market in the world. Korean beauty products, which once captured 22.1% of the Chinese market due to the Korean Wave for a long time, now make up only 4% of the market. Leading companies such as Amorepacific and LG Household & Health Care have seen a decline in revenue and exports to China. The reasons for this are as follows: Firstly, under the new structure of

the domestic market, Chinese domestic brands have been leading the way with good localisation strategies. Secondly, as the new main consumer group, Generation Z now prefers ingredient-based and niche-demand consumption over trend-following. As a result, the traditional broad-brush marketing model of Korean beauty brands is no longer able to reach the target consumers effectively, and the brand's premium value has been declining gradually. Given the above reasons, new types of personalised marketing based on user data have become a critical approach for Korean cosmetic companies to overcome this impasse. By creating all-encompassing user information modules to gather data from all parts of society on different lifestyle needs and demands for products, companies can then adjust R&D and marketing plans based on this information. This paper will consider the problem of how to provide strategic marketing ideas for Korean beauty companies in China, and also offer a feasible operational path for localised efforts by cross-cultural beauty brands that can serve both commercial purposes and industry reference needs.

1.2. Literature review and research gaps

Research has been done abroad and at home on how to use user profiles in beauty marketing. Qi has been studying how to use big data to create user profiles for more precise division of the consumer market and targeted marketing [1]. Yupelmi and others believe that the foundation for beauty entrepreneurship provided by social media is favorable. They proposed that companies expand the market through social marketing, such as collaborating with influencers and building communities, and reduce the risk of changes in platform policies, public opinion, and data security [2]. Laura found that due to the saturation of the Chinese beauty market and changes in consumer demands, foreign beauty brands need to change their aesthetics for the local market and adopt a local operation strategy, such as using social media, KOLs, e-commerce platforms, etc. [3]. Afwan and others applied the K-Means clustering algorithm to segment user profiles for beauty brands and identified a high-value customer group as the main target market. In addition, based on the features of the platform and the different areas and demands of the people living there, new media marketing can be tailored to boost sales and expand the market [4].

Most of the previous research has focused on general ways to build user profiles in the beauty industry or on large-scale strategies for localising the marketing of foreign brands, leaving notable research gaps. Most studies have not conducted an in-depth analysis of the construction and application of user profiles for Korean cosmetics enterprises in the Chinese market, and thus, there is a lack of research on the adaptability of Korean beauty brands to Chinese consumer needs. Most research has not investigated how to use user profiling to help Korean cosmetic companies solve problems such as a decrease in market share and inefficient consumer targeting. Therefore, the conclusions of previous studies are not specific or practical.

1.3. Research objectives and framework

The three links in the logic of this paper are: problem diagnosis, model construction, and strategy formulation. First, this paper studies the current development situation and marketing problems of Korean cosmetics companies in China to identify the need for precision marketing. Second, based on the analysis of behaviour data for Chinese beauty consumers, this paper constructs a user-profiling model for Korean cosmetic enterprises and identifies core user groups along with their consumption characteristics. Thirdly, according to the profiles of the users, three kinds of target high-precision marketing strategies are proposed in this paper: product positioning, content

marketing, and channel selection. Finally, Amorepacific is taken as the research object to verify the practicality of the proposed strategies and offer a reference for other Korean cosmetic companies.

2. Case study: strategic evolution of Amorepacific in the Chinese beauty market

2.1. Corporate profile and strategic positioning

Amorepacific Corporation is a first-class beauty company in South Korea and entered the Chinese market in 1992. The company has several well-known brands, such as Sulwhasoo, Laneige, Innisfree, and Mamonde, and is one of the first Korean beauty enterprises to establish a base in mainland China.

2.2. Growth phase: Korean Wave-driven expansion (2010–2016)

From 2010 to 2016, Korean beauty products in China grew at a rapid pace due to the popularization of the Korean Wave. At this time, Innisfree was developing at a high speed and opened almost 100 new stores each year in second- and third-tier cities across China. By 2017, the company had more than 800 stores in China and annual sales of over 4 billion yuan. At the same time, China became the top-tier export destination for Korean cosmetics, and Amorepacific achieved one of its highest-ever results in China.

2.3. Decline phase: structural shifts and market erosion (2020–2025)

Since 2020, the structure of the Chinese beauty market has been changing significantly. Domestic Chinese brands have risen rapidly by offering high cost-performance ratios, locally tailored formulations, and precise marketing. Consumers are more reasonable now and no longer blindly follow overseas brands. With the decline in popularity of the Korean Wave and aging brand images, Korean beauty products have been steadily declining in China. Amorepacific's Greater China sales in 2024 reached 510 billion Korean won (about 2.35 billion yuan) and fell by 26.7% year-on-year, making it the region with the largest decline among the group's areas globally. Among its brands, Innisfree reduced the number of stores from more than 800 to 140 and had a store closure rate of over 80%. In March 2026, Mamonde announced that it would no longer be sold in China and shut down all channels by the end of June. According to industry data, in the first half of 2025, South Korea's proportion of cosmetic exports to China fell below 20% for the first time, and China dropped from being the top destination to the second-largest one for these exports.

2.4. Transformation phase: precision marketing and user profiling (2024–present)

Due to the mounting pressures of this decline, Amorepacific increased the speed of its digital transformation in 2024 and shifted to a user-profiled, personalised-marketing model. Based on consumer and behaviour data from Tmall and Douyin, the group created a high-precision user segmentation system according to attributes such as age, skin type, purchasing power, and content preferences. Amorepacific will change from mass marketing to customised content and product recommendations to achieve structural recovery and sustained growth in China.

3. Diagnostic analysis: the efficacy and limitations of user persona-based precision marketing

3.1. Strategic value and functional mechanisms of user persona-based precision marketing

3.1.1. Enhanced marketing efficiency and resource optimization

With the application of user profiling, Korean cosmetic companies have gradually moved from mass marketing to personalised marketing in China. By collecting many labels, such as age, area, skin type, and spending power, brands can understand the target audience more clearly and not waste advertising funds by targeting the wrong people. A high-end Korean skincare brand used profiling data to target urban women aged 30-50 with anti-aging concerns and, as a result, improved conversion rates at a lower marketing cost. Based on the industry data, after adding the user information, the cost per acquired customer dropped by about 32%, the advertising-to-conversion rate exceeded double the original, and both the repurchase rate and the new-product revenue share rose significantly. It is not sufficient to offset the overall decline, but it shows that higher efficiency in the use of data can be achieved. More research has shown that personalised marketing according to user personas can effectively increase the retention rate and monthly revenue of users in e-commerce in practice, and it is expected to become popular. For example, according to the user personas generated by IPSO-kmeans, the company has increased the retention rate of users and maintained stable month-on-month revenue growth [5].

3.1.2. Data-driven product iteration and innovation

User profile analysis can help brands understand what Chinese consumers want from ingredients, textures, and other attributes of a product, thus adjusting the product according to local demands. By collecting search trends and comment data from popular platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin, Korean enterprises can promptly respond to changes in consumer demands. For example, based on the research that Chinese consumers prefer gift-ready sets, some Korean brands have released product sets that are popular, such as The History of Whoo's "Weather Queen" set; it has been a bestseller during the major shopping holidays. The brand can quickly adjust the product line and improve the adaptability of Korean cosmetics in China. Without the profile data, these local product configurations would not have been so likely to appear.

3.1.3. Lifecycle-based loyalty and customer retention

According to the profile of users, Korean cosmetic companies can use personalised marketing for new, current, and inactive users. Based on the consumption habits of all age groups and other consumers, brands can offer personalised product recommendations and exclusive discount promotions to increase satisfaction and purchase frequency, thus building a loyal user base for the brand in China's highly competitive beauty industry. Although the proportion of the market has been gradually declining, the lifetime value of customers has also increased. For example, a well-known Korean brand has used a life-cycle-based profile to launch a targeted marketing plan for inactive users and recovered some of the revenue that would have been lost (Figure 1).

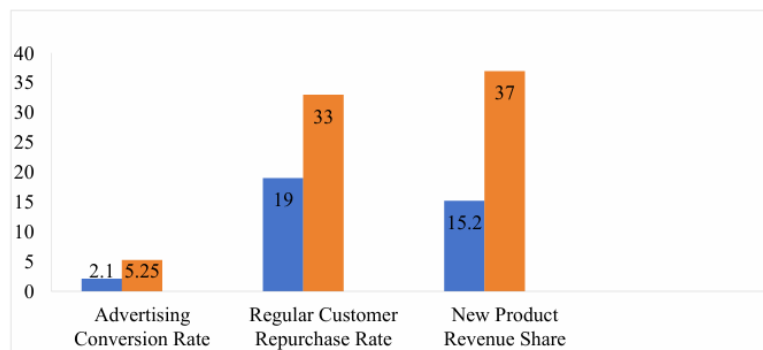


Figure 1. Changes in core indicators before and after precision marketing

3.2. Structural barriers and implementation deficits in user profiling practices

3.2.1. Cognitive lag: the prevalence of shallow and static profiling data

The first is that most Korean cosmetics companies in China have built their user profiles on excessively shallow and old data. Generally speaking, these profiles only contain basic demographic information (such as age and gender) and simple transaction data; there is little to no inclusion of in-depth lifestyle, culture, or psychology. Therefore, they can no longer meet the changing demands of Chinese consumers. In the past five years, Chinese beauty consumers, especially Generation Z, have moved beyond being "followers of the Korean Wave" to become "ingredient-conscious rationalists" who require actual scientific evidence for product formulas and are highly discerning. Now people are very conscious of ingredient lists, clinical trial data, and whether a product is suitable for sensitive or Eastern skin. Many Korean brands have not changed their old idea of a "K-pop fan" target group, believing that celebrity endorsements and Korean aesthetic trends will be enough to boost sales.

The lag in the diffusion of changes among consumers and the static nature of profile data lead to biased analysis. Marketing activities based on these profiles will likely fail to reach the target consumers or address the current reasons for purchase. As a result, the users have low engagement and a poor conversion rate; Chinese consumers have begun to feel that Korean brands no longer understand their needs and values. At the same time, domestic Chinese brands have been investing heavily in real-time consumer sentiment analysis and have successfully adapted to the "ingredient-first" trend, further widening the gap.

3.2.2. Ecological mismatch: standardized models in a fragmented channel landscape

The second problem is that the standardised user profiling model required by the Korean head office is not suitable for the fragmented structure of the Chinese digital ecosystem at the channel level. Most Korean cosmetic companies use a single, universal global profile and do not segment consumers in China at all. There are many different platforms for beauty in China, and each has its own user behaviour, type of content, and purchasing path. Xiaohongshu users desire in-depth, peer-reviewed content and detailed product comparisons. Douyin users respond well to short, entertaining videos and algorithm-driven recommendations. Live-streaming platforms create a sense of urgency through time-limited discounts and host charisma. Private traffic channels, such as WeChat groups and mini-programs, need to be built based on continuous relationships and exclusive member privileges. On the other hand, offline retail needs to provide people with an in-person experience

and high-quality service. However, Korean brands often use the same content and advertising plan for all these platforms because their centrally designed profiles lack the required granularity to address the different demands of users on each platform. A campaign that performs well on Douyin may not be suitable for Xiaohongshu, and vice versa. Therefore, there is a serious lack of marketing diversity: only generic posts and repeated advertisements without platform-native creativity. Consequently, Korean brands are losing the interest of users who are accustomed to highly personalised and platform-optimised content from domestic competitors such as Perfect Diary and Florasis, which perform well in channel-specific personalisation.

3.2.3. Relational deficit: transactional instrumentalism versus trust building

The third and most serious problem is that Korean cosmetics enterprises currently use user profiling almost exclusively for short-term transactional sales, such as promotional bombardment and viral product promotion, and have neglected the deeper tasks of local adaptation and trust building. The primary purpose of user profiles is to determine which customers will be given discount coupons, which products have a high cart abandonment rate and require retargeting ads, or which keywords will have a high return on ad spend.

Chinese consumers, especially after the pandemic, have become more discerning and are less willing to accept foreign brands that adapt overseas products for the Chinese market without real localisation. They will focus on cultural connotations, safety of ingredients, full-ingredient disclosure, and verified suitability for the skin of people in Eastern countries and their local environments (such as humidity and pollution). User profiles that focus solely on past purchase behaviour and price sensitivity have failed to consider the following intangible but necessary factors: "anxiety about undisclosed or potentially irritating ingredients" and "distrust of foreign brands that ignore local climate and skin characteristics". Related studies have found that brand authenticity (including dimensions such as originality, reliability, consistency, and naturalness) significantly affects Chinese consumers' brand attachment, and at the same time, it positively impacts brand loyalty, the willingness to pay a premium, and brand forgiveness. Therefore, user personas that only focus on transaction conversion are insufficient for building deep brand authenticity and emotional connections with consumers [6].

If Korean brands only use profiling data to spread promotional messages, they may be perceived as intrusive and commercial rather than helpful or trustworthy. Proya and Winona are well-known local brands that have won the hearts of consumers by addressing specific local skin problems; for example, Winona focuses on sensitive skin relief in the face of pollution and mask-wearing, and conducts open, science-based communication recommended by dermatologists. With the fall of the former "imported halo" for Korean cosmetics, if these brands do not transition from a focus on "sales" to "service", they will be substituted by domestic companies. If user profiling continues to serve only a transactional purpose and fails to build relationships and trust with local consumers fundamentally, Korean cosmetic companies will lose the interest of Chinese consumers.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Strategic data governance: constructing holographic dynamic personas

4.1.1. Integrating psychographic and behavioral dimensions

Free from the traditional constraints of single-dimension age and gender labels, this study recommends establishing a user-tagging system according to skincare philosophies, ingredient awareness, and eco-conscious consumption attitudes. Instead of designating the user as "a 25-year-old woman", the brand could use a multi-dimensional attribute label such as "sensitive-skin ingredient enthusiast who seeks vitamin C and retinoid regimens" to reflect the user's actual reasons for purchase.

4.1.2. Breaking down data silos via omni-channel integration

This paper proposes to integrate content preferences from Xiaohongshu product posts, short-video interaction behaviour data from Douyin, and e-commerce transaction data of Tmall and JD.com to break down data silos across channels. NLP technology is applied to the comment area to analyze users' comments on texture, packaging, and fragrance, etc., to extract authentic consumer feedback instead of relying solely on star ratings to assess product reputation [7].

4.1.3. Implementing real-time adaptive weighting mechanisms

Given the fast-paced iterative process of the Chinese beauty market, this paper proposes setting time-to-live (TTL) cycles for user personas and using AI algorithms to dynamically adjust the weights of user tags. For instance, if a user repeatedly searches for anti-aging content, the system should reduce the weight of general moisturising tags and promptly adjust the focus of the user's main requirement; otherwise, marketing may be based on an outdated persona.

4.2. Contextualized channel strategy: from homogenization to differentiation

4.2.1. Platform-native content ecosystems development

On Xiaohongshu, focus on ingredient analysis and real-user product tests, and use KOCs to build professional credibility [8]. Douyin should focus on visually appealing product demonstrations and simple skincare tutorials, use algorithm-driven recommendation mechanisms to create popular short videos, and spread them widely. Instead of just offering a discount on a live-streaming platform, a dermatologist can be invited to provide a scientific explanation and answer the audience's questions about the safety of the ingredients directly [9].

4.2.2. Designing seamless consumer journey funnels

This study recommends designing cross-platform user journey funnels. For example, attract the attention of users with review content on Xiaohongshu to complete the first stage, then use Douyin short videos to show the application effect visually and enhance the user's impression, and finally connect with one-on-one skincare consultants in WeChat groups for user conversion and long-term retention, thus achieving seamless traffic interoperability across all channels [10].

4.2.3. Lifecycle value management in DTC private domains

Leveraging the WeChat ecosystem, this paper proposes introducing personalised skincare plans for various user groups based on complete user personas, moving away from mass-market advertising. For segmented groups such as the "late-night routine users" and "sensitive-skin users", separate repair package promotions should be offered for each group to increase their repurchase rate and brand loyalty.

4.3. Trust-centric localization: shifting from traffic harvesting to co-creation

4.3.1. Geo-specific product adaptation and user co-creation

Brands should develop specific product lines according to the water quality, climate, and diet of different areas in China, and release high-moisture-retaining and nourishing series for the north, as well as light oil-control products for the south. Additionally, brands should add a user co-creation program to recruit domestic consumers to participate in new product trials and formulation adjustments, involve consumers at all stages of product development, and reduce the psychological distance towards foreign brands.

4.3.2. Mitigating ingredient anxiety through scientific endorsement

To ease consumers' "ingredient anxiety", this paper proposes to fully disclose the list of ingredients and clinical trial data for the products in their detail pages and promotional materials. It is also recommended to strengthen cooperation with dermatologists at leading domestic hospitals or other top institutions to establish a "Chinese standard" verification system for product safety and reduce the anxiety caused by unfamiliarity with Chinese regulations.

4.3.3. Cultural symbiosis beyond the Korean Wave paradigm

The main marketing idea should move away from a single focus on the Korean Wave and embrace "Asian aesthetics" and "Eastern botanical extracts". Based on this study, limited-edition co-branded products can be released in conjunction with China's 24 solar terms and traditional festivals to integrate deeply into local culture and convey a localized attitude that respects the Chinese market, rather than just implementing a one-way cultural export.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key findings

Through research, three main issues in the marketing of Korean beauty brands in China have been identified: shallow segmentation of users, homogeneity of channel content, and a lack of brand localisation trust. In response, this study has constructed an all-encompassing optimisation system at the data, touchpoint, and relationship levels, built upon dynamic multi-dimensional user personas, platform-specific scenario-based marketing content, and building long-term user trust through localised R&D, transparent scientific communication, and cultural integration. The framework above can help Korean companies move from mass marketing to targeted local operations based on trust, and solve problems such as a lack of awareness of the needs of local Chinese consumers, inflexibility in cultural production, and poor data utilization.

5.2. Theoretical and practical contributions

This paper has certain applications in the industry and can provide a specific marketing strategy for Korean cosmetic companies in China. In recent years, as domestic Chinese beauty brands have gained popularity through an in-depth study of local conditions, and with the influence of the earlier momentum of the Korean Wave gradually declining, the multi-level optimisation strategies put forward here can help Korean brands meet the specific demands of Chinese consumers more effectively, enhance their brand image, and increase the efficiency of marketing investment. At the same time, this study also provides a generalizable reference system for the cross-cultural localisation operations of overseas beauty brands and fills a research gap in the refined local user operation of foreign beauty brands.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

This study mainly uses secondary data from social media platforms and lacks first-hand questionnaire or in-depth interview data of offline retail consumers; thus, it cannot present the personas of offline consumers. In the future, special consumer questionnaires will be distributed and one-on-one interviews conducted with users to gather primary data for refining persona attributes. In addition, it is recommended to extend the collection period for data on the strategy of Korean beauty brands to quantify the long-term effect of the new optimisation system on sales and repeat purchases.

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