Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Economic Management and Green Development
DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.36789

Visual Aesthetics of Packaging, Emotional Attachment and Impulse Consumption: A Case Study of Chinese Cosmetic Brand Flower Knows

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Abstract. Fueled by the lookism economy fostered by digital media, aesthetic-oriented self-reward consumption has become a dominant consumption pattern among Generation Z. In the beauty industry, the aesthetic value of cosmetic packaging has gradually surpassed its fundamental practical functions such as product storage and protection. Packaging has evolved into a core element in shaping brand perception, establishing emotional bonding with consumers, and influencing instantaneous purchase decisions. Taking the domestic beauty brand Flower Knows as the research object, this paper adopts literature analysis and online questionnaire methods to explore the relationships among visual packaging attraction, consumer emotional attachment, and irrational impulse purchasing behavior. The findings indicate that Flower Knows constructs distinctive visual competitiveness through Rococo court-style and retro fairy-tale packaging, which precisely matches the aesthetic preferences and emotional compensation needs of young female consumers. Combined with the community communication effect of short-video platforms, collection-oriented and social check-in consumption frequently emerge. Nevertheless, the brand shows imbalanced resource allocation. It heavily invests in exterior packaging design and IP creation while neglecting core product performance, including powder texture, color rendering and durability. The significant gap between high aesthetic expectations and unsatisfactory practical experience weakens consumer loyalty and restricts long-term brand development. Based on empirical data, this paper summarizes the internal logic of appearance-driven consumption. It offers practical strategies for domestic cosmetic brands to balance visual marketing and product research, and provides theoretical references for guiding young consumers to establish rational consumption attitudes.

Keywords: Flower Knows, cosmetic packaging, visual aesthetics, emotional attachment, impulse consumption

1. Introduction

With the steady growth of residents' disposable income in China, profound shifts have taken place in public consumption values. Traditional consumption logic prioritizes practicality and cost performance, while contemporary consumers attach more importance to additional values delivered

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DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.36789

by commodities, such as aesthetic experience, emotional comfort and self-expression, expanding the market scale of self-reward consumption. Cosmetics are typical experiential consumer goods, and industrial competition has extended beyond core functional indicators including powder fineness, color rendering and durability. Additional emotional values represented by outer packaging visual design, unified brand aesthetic style and unboxing ritual sense have become core competition tracks for makeup brands targeting young consumers.

In traditional offline retail scenarios, cosmetic packaging merely serves as a container to hold products, avoid transportation damage and label ingredient specifications. Consumers make purchase judgments mainly based on application effect, price range and offline reputation. Along with the formation of new media communication ecology, Xiaohongshu, Douyin and other platforms have become major channels for beauty information dissemination and product recommendation. Packaging acts as the first visual symbol received by consumers during online browsing and offline shopping, directly determining initial brand impressions and attention duration. Distinctive, well-crafted and serialized high-value packaging can quickly capture young audiences, continuously output positive aesthetic feelings and gradually form stable brand emotional preference, ultimately prompting unplanned purchases exceeding daily makeup demands.

Generation Z constitutes the core consumer group of domestic makeup brands. Growing in an era with full internet coverage, this cohort holds diverse and inclusive aesthetic standards. Their purchase decisions are heavily influenced by social value and emotional compensation, susceptible to visual shocks, circle trends and personal romantic fantasies. Local makeup brand Flower Knows accurately captures aesthetic demands of young female consumers, abandoning the minimalist industrial packaging design prevailing in the industry and constructing a complete fairy-tale court aesthetic IP system. Relying on serialized customized heavy-process outer packages, the brand quickly gains popularity in the homogenized low-priced makeup track and accumulates a large group of young female consumers.

Market consumption data indicates that numerous buyers of Flower Knows cosmetics do not purchase products for daily makeup application. Their purchase motivations concentrate on full-set collection, social media photography and ornamental display, which represents typical appearance-dominated irrational impulse consumption. Such the phenomenon of "paying solely for packaging" intuitively proves tight transmission correlations among cosmetic packaging visuals, consumer emotional attachment and impulse consumption behaviors.

Current domestic academia has accumulated certain research results regarding packaging design, emotional marketing and impulse consumption. Nevertheless, most existing literature focuses on macro analysis of the whole beauty industry. Empirical studies targeting a single domestic makeup brand that fully sort out the complete transmission mechanism of "packaging visual stimulus – formation of emotional attachment – generation of impulse consumption" remain scarce. This paper selects Flower Knows as a typical case and carries out empirical analysis supported by primary questionnaire data. It enriches segmented research on makeup visual marketing and Generation Z consumer behaviors, and optimizes the theoretical analysis framework of irrational consumption under the look-ism economy.

On the one hand, this paper summarizes strengths and developmental defects of Flower Knows' packaging emotional marketing model, delivering implementable ideas for other domestic makeup brands to balance exterior design and product quality, and optimize emotional marketing strategies, facilitating long-term sound development of local cosmetic enterprises. On the other hand, this paper deconstructs internal psychological logic of impulse consumption induced by exquisite appearances,

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.36789

offering practical references for families and campuses to help adolescents avoid blind following and hoarding consumption, and build rational self-reward consumption perceptions.

This paper consists of six main parts. The first part serves as introduction, elaborating research background, research significance and research framework. The second part is literature review, sorting out existing research findings in three fields: visual design of cosmetic packaging, emotional attachment under lookism economy, and visual stimulus and impulse consumption. The third part introduces two research methods adopted in this paper. The fourth part conducts empirical analysis based on questionnaire data, summarizing Flower Knows' packaging marketing mode and consumer behavioral characteristics. The fifth part dialectically analyzes advantages and defects of the marketing mode, and proposes optimized development paths for the domestic makeup industry. The sixth part concludes the whole paper, summarizing core research discoveries and pointing out research limitations.

Literature analysis: China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Wanfang Database are taken as core literature sources. Keywords including cosmetic packaging design, visual marketing, Generation Z consumption, emotional attachment, impulse consumption and lookism economy are retrieved to collect journal papers, dissertations and industrial research reports in packaging engineering, commercial economics, youth studies and design art disciplines. Core viewpoints, theoretical models and empirical conclusions of previous studies are systematically summarized to build the basic theoretical framework of this paper. Targeted theoretical adaptation analysis is combined with Flower Knows' operational characteristics to guarantee academic rigor of the research.

Questionnaire survey: Online questionnaires are distributed via Wenjuanxing platform targeting core consumers of Flower Knows, with respondents limited to young females aged 15 to 25, matching the brand's core audience profile. Multi-dimensional survey questions cover channels for consumers to know the brand, core purchase drivers, evaluations on packaging and product quality, willingness to collect full sets, experience of impulse consumption and long-term repurchase intention. Descriptive statistical analysis is conducted after collecting valid questionnaires to quantify the influence of packaging appearance on purchase decisions and sort out the complete formation logic of emotional attachment triggering impulse consumption, providing primary data support for research conclusions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on visual design of cosmetic packaging and brand marketing value

Product packaging acts as a visualized carrier of brands facing consumer markets, as well as the primary medium establishing psychological connections between consumers and brands. Early academic research on packaging mostly revolves around practical functions such as storage and protection, ignoring aesthetic communication and emotional empowerment values of packaging for a long time, with research perspectives confined to industrial manufacturing and material technology. With the rise of appearance consumption and social sharing modes, traffic conversion and brand communication values of packaging visual design have gradually become research hotspots.

Empirical research conducted by Liu et al. verifies that packaging craftsmanship refinement, special-shaped appearance, color matching and exclusive design scarcity can directly arouse positive consumer aesthetic emotions [1]. Comfortable visual experience shortens consumers' rational trade-off cycle and accelerates the generation of immediate purchase decisions. Within social media

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communication environments, packaging with unique modeling and high photographic output rate possesses natural user-generated content (UGC) communication attributes. Consumers independently shooting unboxing pictures and evaluation short videos can complete free brand fission communication, effectively cutting down brand advertising investment costs.

Focusing on segmented domestic makeup track, Li proposes that cosmetic packaging has broken away from the positioning of simple product containers, serving as concrete carriers of brand aesthetic concepts and youth subcultural connotations [2]. Differentiated exclusive aesthetic packaging represents an important path for domestic makeup brands to escape low-price homogenization competition and build irreplicable competitive edges. Wang supplements that aesthetic packaging acts as an effective tool to carry out low-cost emotional marketing [3]. Unified and coherent visual language shapes distinct brand personalities, narrows psychological distance between brands and Generation Z consumers, and lifts consumers' willingness of initial trial and brand favorability. Liu further improves relevant theories, stating serialized and IP-based coherent visual packaging systems can continuously strengthen consumer brand memory and accumulate long-term user stickiness, forming fundamental conditions for stable operation of domestic makeup brands [4].

Published in Packaging Engineering, Li puts forward that Generation Z consumers regard cosmetic packaging as visual symbols for self-expression and circle identity distinction. Differentiated packaging with elaborate craft, retro and fairy-tale styles can construct internal identity recognition within social circles [5]. Social premium attached to visual symbols forms core breakthroughs for domestic makeup brands to step out of low-price price wars, offering theoretical support for analyzing circle communication value of Flower Knows' packaging in this research.

2.2. Research on consumer brand emotional attachment from the perspective of lookism economy

Consumer emotional attachment refers to persistent psychological sustenance and stable emotional connections formed by audiences through long-term aesthetic perception, product usage and circle interaction. It serves as the core psychological foundation transforming one-time random consumption into long-term repurchases and loyal consumption. In traditional physical consumption scenarios, product efficacy, cost performance and offline services constitute primary factors generating emotional attachment. Under the trend of appearance consumption, continuous positive visual aesthetic experience has become a brand-new crucial channel cultivating brand emotional attachment.

From the perspective of emotional compensation and self-reward consumption, Zhao carries out empirical analysis and claims that youth consumption behaviors feature prominent self-pleasing attributes [6]. Emotional values such as aesthetic pleasure and stress relief brought by commodity appearances are more likely to shape deep psychological sustenance than basic product usage functions. For young female consumer groups, romantic and gorgeous cosmetic packaging can satisfy implicit psychological demands including girlish fantasy, ritual pursuit and full-set collection. Long-term stable positive visual stimulation gradually forms exclusive brand sentiment and emotional sustenance.

Zhang launches special surveys targeting Generation Z groups and concludes that brand loyalty of new-generation consumers derives more from aesthetic emotional resonance rather than product usage rigid demand [7]. When the overall brand aesthetic style highly matches personal aesthetic preference, consumers generate strong desire to collect full sets and take initiative to track new

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product releases of brands, forming exclusive emotional attachment. Such attachment acts as a precondition for subsequent irrational impulse consumption behaviors.

Published in Youth Exploration, Chen distinguishes function-oriented emotional attachment and aesthetic-oriented emotional attachment [8]. The paper specially demonstrates how continuous input of packaging visual aesthetics independently cultivates brand attachment separated from product efficacy, explaining internal psychological logic why some consumers keep purchasing even knowing existing defects of products, and perfecting the transmission analysis framework of emotional attachment in this paper.

2.3. Research on packaging visual stimulus and beauty impulse consumption behaviors

Clear distinctions exist between impulse consumption and rational rigid-demand consumption. Impulse consumption represents instant unplanned purchase behaviors generated by consumers influenced by external visual stimulus, immediate emotions and circle herd psychology beyond actual usage demands, featuring suddenness, emotion-driven nature and non-essential characteristics. Within online beauty recommendation consumption scenarios, strong visual shocks brought by packaging rank as the primary external inducement triggering impulse consumption among youth groups.

Through beauty consumption surveys, Chen confirms that visual attractiveness of high-value packaging constitutes the top inducement of youth makeup impulse consumption under social media environments, dividing irrational consumption into three typical forms: appearance collection consumption, internet celebrity following consumption and social check-in display consumption [9]. Zhou supplements the amplification effect of circle communication [10]. When high-value makeup products form trend popularity on short videos and beauty communities, consumers simultaneously bear dual emotional stimulus from aesthetic fondness and herd mentality, generating immediate ordering behaviors.

Published in Packaging Engineering, Jiang and He propose that themed packaging with complete emotional narratives can build emotional communication bridges between brands and consumers [11]. Aesthetic narratives of cosmetic packaging can awaken internal emotional appeals such as romantic healing and stress relief, gradually accumulate emotional attachment and ultimately dominate unplanned purchase decisions. Xu and Lu put forward the emotional compensation theory. Contemporary youth generally face heavy academic and life pressure [12]. Instant psychological satisfaction provided by exquisite cosmetic appearances drives consumers to release negative emotions through consumption, further generating irrational consumption activities exceeding practical demands.

Comprehensive sorting of existing CNKI literature reveals that academia has widely recognized significant influences of packaging appearance on consumer psychology and purchasing behaviors. However, most current studies focus on macro overall analysis of the beauty industry. Segmented empirical researches targeting a single domestic makeup brand that completely connect packaging appearance, aesthetic emotional attachment and transmission logic of impulse consumption are relatively insufficient. This paper selects the phenomenal domestic makeup brand Flower Knows as the case to conduct empirical surveys, effectively filling research gaps in relevant segmented fields.

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3. Research data and analysis of survey results

3.1. Basic characteristics of survey samples

A total of 327 valid questionnaires are recovered from this online survey. Statistical results of survey data show that 250 respondents are young females aged 15 to 25, accounting for 76.5% of total samples, directly verifying Flower Knows' precise market positioning focusing on students and young girls. Consumers within this age group pursue romantic and delicate aesthetics intensely, attach great importance to unboxing consumption ritual sense, browse Xiaohongshu and Douyin short-video platforms daily with high frequency, and possess strong willingness to share nice goods and hobbies of collecting full sets, becoming core crowds of appearance-driven impulse consumption.

Flower Knows accurately grasps implicit psychological demands of this group, differing from minimalist low-cost packaging routes adopted by Orangepop, Perfect Diary and other domestic brands. It constructs an exclusive visual system combining retro Rococo and fairy-tale court maxima list aesthetics. Massive elaborate technologies such as three-dimensional relief, multi-layer gold stamping, imitation inlay jewelry, exclusive hand-painted fairy-tale illustrations and magnetic gift boxes are applied to outer packages of all product lines. Series including Unicorn, Teddy Bear, Swan and Strawberry Rococo are equipped with independent complete story narratives and unified visual color schemes, delivering extremely strong overall visual recognition. The products precisely hit emotional demands of young females for romantic fantasy and stress relief, capturing attention of target audiences at first sight relying on intense visual shocks. The brand continuously invests in custom mold appearance development and holds a large number of appearance design patents, forming visual differentiation barriers hard to replicate by competitors, enabling consumers to quickly identify products without viewing brand logos.

3.2. Driving effects of packaging appearance on purchase decisions

Quantitative statistical data of questionnaires indicate that 60.5% of interviewed consumers clearly state that delicate and unique outer packaging acts as the primary motivation for purchasing Flower Knows products. The influence of this factor is remarkably higher than other purchase elements including color matching adaptability, powder application effect, online evaluation reputation and product cost performance, fully proving that packaging appearance serves as the core engine driving market sales of the brand.

Contrary to the operational mindset of most domestic makeup brands prioritizing formula R&D while ignoring appearance design, Flower Knows takes IP-themed packaging construction as its core competition track. It maintains an update rhythm of launching 3 to 4 complete original fairy-tale themed series every year. Visual systems of eye shadow, blush, lipstick and gift boxes within each series remain fully unified, creating a full-set collection consumption atmosphere similar to blind boxes and figure toys. Massive questionnaire feedback reflects that most respondents do not buy products to satisfy daily makeup rigid demand, but merely to collect complete series, store delicate relief shells and shoot pictures for social media check-in. Such consumption behaviors are completely built on aesthetic preference and emotional collection demands, belonging to typical non-rigid impulse consumption induced by appearance visuals.

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3.3. Formation path of consumer emotional attachment shaped by packaging aesthetics

Flower Knows outputs consistent unified young girl court aesthetic visual symbols for many consecutive years, constructing exclusive brand visual labels in consumer minds. Continuous positive aesthetic experience brought by repeated exposure to new product releases, unboxing and full-set collection gradually transforms into deep emotional attachment towards the brand. Different from one-time functional consumption of ordinary cosmetics, numerous loyal consumers of Flower Knows actively wait for advance notice of online new products and purchase full products of different themed series, forming stable and exclusive brand aesthetic preference.

From the underlying logic of consumer psychology, highly atmospheric heavy-process packaging can continuously deliver emotional compensation value, relieve daily pressure from study and work and carry sustenance for young girls' romantic aesthetics. Long-term aesthetic matching and stable emotional satisfaction gradually shape consumer brand sentiment and aesthetic recognition, establishing solid emotional attachment. Such appearance-derived emotional attachment greatly lowers consumers' tolerance threshold for product defects. Even if cosmetic powder contains flaws, consumers still continuously generate impulse purchase behaviors following trends and collecting products.

4. Discussion

4.1. Competitive advantages of Flower Knows' appearance packaging emotional marketing mode

First, differentiated visual barriers are constructed to build exclusive brand identification symbols. Severe homogenized low-price competition exists within the domestic makeup track, with most low-priced brands holding similar packaging designs lacking memorable points. Taking high-value fairy-tale packaging as a differentiated breakthrough, Flower Knows establishes an exclusive domestic young girl Rococo visual system, rapidly gaining market attention among numerous domestic brands and forming high-recognition brand symbols to effectively avoid pure price competition.

Second, long-term stable user brand stickiness is consolidated relying on aesthetic emotional marketing. Through full-set aesthetic packaging and immersive unboxing ritual sense, the brand establishes deep aesthetic emotional resonance with Generation Z young female consumers, jumping out of the single cost-performance competition track and accumulating loyal users via stable emotional value. Emotional attachment built based on packaging can significantly lift users' repurchase willingness and brand tolerance, bringing continuous and stable revenue for the brand.

Third, communication logic of social media is adapted to compress brand promotion investment costs. Flower Knows' heavy three-dimensional packaging naturally possesses advantages of high content output. Hierarchical unboxing structures, delicate relief details and matched full-set gift boxes can easily produce exquisite pictures and short-video materials. Consumers spontaneously publish evaluations and collection sharing content on Xiaohongshu and Douyin, completing free UGC recommendation fission communication to expand brand circle popularity automatically and sharply cut down large-scale commercial advertising expenses.

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4.2. Existing developmental defects of the brand's operational mode

Combining negative feedback from questionnaires and real user evaluations across the internet, Flower Knows faces unbalanced resource allocation issues. Corporate capital is largely tilted towards custom mold development of outer appearances, relief craftsmanship production and IP-themed gift box manufacturing, while budget proportions allocated to cosmetic powder R&D, lasting formula improvement and color matching polishing are insufficient, leading to various obvious defects in core application layers of cosmetics.

Most respondents reflect identical product problems: multiple popular eye shadow series feature rough powder with severe flying powder, uneven color rendering of matte dark shades and cheap granular texture of shimmer glitter; blush pans are loose with short-lasting effects, lipstick paste causes dry lips and most limited color shades possess low practicability for daily use. The matched after-sales service system remains imperfect, with cumbersome supplementary procedures for damaged packaging during transportation, further lowering overall consumption experience. After being attracted by gorgeous appearance visuals to place impulse orders, consumers develop strong psychological disappointment due to gaps in practical product usage experience. Most buyers only conduct one-time collection consumption without continuous repurchases of new series. The long-term operational mode prioritizing appearances and overdrawing consumer emotional trust continuously consumes brand market reputation, severely restricting long-term sustainable development of the enterprise.

4.3. Optimized development paths for the domestic makeup industry

First, learn logical thinking of emotional visual marketing to deeply cultivate segmented youth markets of Generation Z. Domestic makeup brands can refer to Flower Knows' operational experience of IP-themed packaging. Combined with aesthetic preferences of their own target audiences, differentiated narrative-rich exclusive packaging visual systems can be created. Relying on high-quality appearance design, emotional communication bonds between brands and consumers can be built to open young segmented markets via emotional value. Meanwhile, full utilization of UGC communication advantages on short-video and Xiaohongshu platforms can activate circle consumption popularity with low costs.

Second, avoid the developmental misunderstanding of "valuing packaging while neglecting quality" to balance appearance design and core product R&D. Appearance visual marketing can only bring short-term traffic and one-time impulse consumption, while hard strengths including powder texture, lasting performance and formulas serve as fundamental roots for brands to maintain long-term industrial footholds. While polishing packaging aesthetics and shaping brand visual tonality, domestic makeup brands must increase capital investment in cosmetic R&D to improve core indicators such as powder fineness, color matching practicability and lasting performance. Practical application experience of products should match high psychological expectations brought by outer packaging, converting short-term impulse consumers into long-term loyal repurchasing users.

Third, balance commercial emotional marketing and positive consumption guidance to construct a healthy industrial development ecology. While attracting young consumers with high-value packaging and emotional value, brands ought to reduce excessive marketing means deliberately creating scarcity and inducing full-set hoarding. Complete transmission of product merits and drawbacks to consumers can be realized through objective product measurements and unfiltered real evaluation content, guiding teenagers to distinguish collection hobbies from daily makeup rigid

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.36789

demand and realizing two-way balance between brand commercial operation and rational self-reward consumption orientation.

5. Conclusion

Taking domestic makeup brand Flower Knows as the empirical research case and combining the era background of lookism economy and social media recommendation consumption, this paper completely deconstructs internal transmission relationships among cosmetic packaging visual appearances, consumer emotional attachment and youth impulse consumption behaviors, drawing the following core research conclusions:

First, within the domestic makeup consumption market dominated by Generation Z groups, packaging visual perception acts as the most critical external inducement stimulating consumers' unplanned purchasing behaviors. Supported by exclusive heavy-process Rococo fairy-tale packaging forming strong visual attractiveness, Flower Knows precisely matches romantic aesthetic and emotional compensation demands of young girls aged 15 to 25, constituting core competitive advantages for the brand to seize traffic of low-priced makeup tracks and expand market share in a short period.

Second, high-value themed packaging continuously delivers aesthetic pleasure and emotional compensation for consumers. Long-term accumulation can form stable aesthetic-oriented brand emotional attachment, generating fixed consumption psychology such as full-set collection, brand sentiment and following circle trends, laying precondition psychological foundations for irrational impulse consumption. Superimposed with communication amplification effects of recommendation circles on Xiaohongshu and Douyin, large quantities of collection and check-in oriented impulse consumption behaviors exceeding daily makeup rigid demands are easily triggered.

Third, Flower Knows' current marketing mode contains prominent structural defects. Corporate resources are excessively concentrated on outer packaging IP and appearance craftsmanship construction, ignoring R&D of core product strengths including cosmetic powder, formulas and color matching. This results in huge gaps between practical product usage experience and high psychological expectations brought by packaging appearances, continuously consuming consumer emotional trust and brand market reputation, hindering long-term brand operation and sustainable development.

In summary, differentiated high-value packaging helps domestic makeup brands escape low-price industrial homogenization competition, develop young segmented markets and build low-cost emotional marketing advantages. However, operational modes solely relying on visual appearance attraction and overdrawing user emotional trust lack long-term sustainability. Domestic makeup brands in the new era should absorb available experience of visual emotional marketing and simultaneously deepen R&D of product formulas, coordinating three-dimensional coordinated development of packaging aesthetics, product quality and matched after-sales services. On the one hand, unique appearance design satisfies aesthetic and emotional self-reward demands of youth groups; on the other hand, stable high-quality products retain long-term consumers to promote high-quality sound development of the domestic makeup industry. Meanwhile, the internal logic of impulse consumption induced by appearance consumption sorted out in this paper also provides theoretical support for schools and families to guide teenagers to get rid of blind following and full-set hoarding irrational appearance consumption and establish moderate and rational self-reward consumption concepts.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.36789

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