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A Study on Marketing Strategies of Domestic Cosmetics Brands from the Perspective of Emotion and Cultural Narratives

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Abstract. As Generation Z has become the primary consumer force in the cosmetics market, the domestic affordable makeup segment has become deeply mired in homogeneous price competition, with these brands often positioning themselves as "budget alternatives" to luxury brands. Relying solely on product performance, low-price promotions, and traffic-driven marketing strategies makes it difficult to build lasting brand barriers. Taking Judydoll as a case study, this paper adopts a case study method, examining its marketing initiatives such as "Iron Can Poetry Collection" and "Let Beauty Be Seen" from the perspectives of emotional and cultural storytelling. Drawing on STP, 4C and 5P marketing theories as well as consumer behavior theory, the study analyzes how Judydoll successfully shifts product consumption toward emotional identification and cultural engagement by focusing not only on individual user emotions but also on intangible cultural heritage values. This strategy enables the brand to transcend functional price competition and establish a distinctive cultural positioning. The paper further interprets Judydoll's marketing practices through three key frameworks, highlighting its strengths in emotional connection, cultural empowerment, and user communication. It offers optimization suggestions for emotional and cultural marketing in the domestic affordable cosmetics sector, aiming to provide insights for building long-term competitiveness among similar brands.

Keywords: Domestic cosmetics, Emotional marketing, Cultural narrative, Marketing theory, Judydoll

1. Introduction

In recent years, the market size of makeup products in China has continued to expand. According to Euromonitor data, the domestic makeup market size exceeded 63.9 billion yuan in 2025 [1]. In the first quarter of 2025, retail sales of cosmetics enterprises in China reached 114.9 billion yuan, representing a year-on-year increase of 3.20% and hitting a ten-year high [2]. Among the top 20 enterprises ranked by retail sales, foreign brands took 11 spots while domestic brands took 9. The sales of high-end brands all exceeded 2 billion yuan, indicating a pattern where international brands dominate the high-end market and domestic brands are concentrated in the low-end market [2]. Many affordable domestic makeup brands, whose core selling point is offering "dupes for luxury

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brands", adopt similar marketing strategies and product forms and have fallen into homogenization and cutthroat internal competition. At the same time, the emerging consumer group mainly composed of the Z Generation has emerged, and makeup is no longer just a grooming tool for them. The intergenerational group theory suggests that the behavior of each generation is shaped by the common experiences during the critical period of growth, psychological segmentation focuses on an individual's attitude, personality and values, which can help understand the motivations behind purchasing behavior [3]. This paper takes Judydoll as a case and applies STP, 4C and consumer behavior theories to explore the formation path and strategic advantages of the emotional and cultural narrative system of domestic makeup brands, providing references for similar brands.

2. Theoretical dissection of Judydoll's marketing strategy

2.1. STP strategy

2.1.1. Market segmentation: demographic and psychographic multi-dimensional classification of consumer groups

To clearly define its target audience, a company must first conduct market segmentation. Kotler et al. state that segmentation involves dividing the overall market into groups with similar needs based on geographic, demographic, behavioral, and psychographic differences [4], including four main categories: geographic, demographic, behavioral, and psychographic [3]. Although psychographic segmentation is difficult to quantify, it effectively explains purchasing motivations [3].

From a demographic perspective, Judydoll's users are concentrated: 96.91% are female, 40.05% are aged between 18 and 24, and they are primarily located in first-tier cities [2]. According to generational group theory, consumption patterns across different generations are shaped by their upbringing environments and shared experiences. Judydoll's primary target group is Generation Z, who grew up during periods of rapid economic development and widespread mobile internet adoption. For them, makeup consumption goes beyond basic needs and includes self-expression and emotional identification [5]. Based on this insight, Judydoll further refines its psychographic segmentation, identifying young consumers who value "emotional resonance" and "cultural identity" as key target segments [3].

2.1.2. Target market selection: focusing on the Z-generation seeking emotional value

After market segmentation, companies must assess market attractiveness and make strategic choices [2]. Judydoll has clearly defined its target market—focusing on young female consumers of the Z-generation. Among Tmall's 800 million users, around 200 million are post-95s, 40% of whom prefer aesthetically appealing, cost-effective domestic cosmetics [5]. The penetration rate of affordable Chinese beauty products exceeds 90%, and such products account for more than 60% of young consumers' makeup expenditure [5]. This indicates that the Z-generation shows strong acceptance toward domestic cosmetics and possesses significant purchasing power.

Moreover, makeup consumption is increasingly intertwined with cultural and emotional needs. Research reveals that since the pandemic, younger consumers have developed stronger national pride and greater identification with "China-chic" trends [5]. Makeup has become a form of self-expression. Based on this insight, Judydoll targets young women of the Z-generation, catering to their desire for novelty and fresh experiences [2].

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2.1.3. Market positioning: moving beyond the "budget alternative" label to build a culture-driven beauty brand

Market positioning shapes a brand's unique identity in consumers' minds. Kotler et al. define positioning as "the process of designing a product and image to occupy a distinct place in the target market" [4]. The essence of positioning lies not in what the firm does, but in how consumers ultimately perceive the brand [6]. For Generation Z, who value individuality and experiential consumption, emotional resonance and cultural alignment serve as key differentiators.

In recent years, Judydoll has adjusted its positioning through emotional and cultural marketing. The "Iron Can Poetry Collection" integrates consumer memories into the brand narrative [7], while the campaign "Let Beauty Be Seen" incorporates She ethnic minority ribbon-making techniques into product design [8]. However, survey data show that the proportion of consumers who recognize Judydoll as a "domestic brand" remains low [2], indicating that the new positioning has yet to establish stable brand perception.

2.2. 4C theory

The 4C theory, proposed by Lauterborn, complements the traditional 4P framework. It emphasizes a consumer-centric marketing perspective, putting consumers at the core of marketing decision-making [4]. Its four core dimensions collectively lead to a fundamental proposition: the essence of marketing is to create value for consumers [6].

2.2.1. Consumer: uncovering users' emotional needs

The 4C theory requires businesses to center on consumers rather than products [9]. Judydoll has evolved from functional utility to emotional resonance: its early single-color eyeshadows priced between 15 and 49 yuan catered to budget-conscious consumers who desired vibrant color options [2], later, the brand shifted toward deeper emotional aspirations. According to Belk's extended self theory, consumers purchase items not only for their utilitarian value but also to construct and express their identity through possessions [9]. For instance, in the "Iron Tin Poetry Collection" campaign, the brand invites consumers to reflect on "who will use this eyeshadow palette with you?" [7], transforming the product into an emotional carrier. The "Let Beauty Be Seen" campaign is rooted in cultural identity [8], redefining purchase behavior as cultural participation [7, 8].

2.2.2. Cost: balancing monetary and psychological costs

In the 4C model, cost encompasses not just money, but also time, effort, and psychological burden [8]. Judydoll's single-color eyeshadows range from 15 to 49 yuan, while multi-palette sets remain under 100 yuan, easing financial pressure on Gen Z consumers [2]. Its collaborative lipsticks with Pop Mart are priced below 100 yuan, adopting blind-box formats to strengthen consumers' perceptions of superior value [10].

Psychologically, Judydoll reduces decision-making friction through emotional marketing. The "Iron Tin Poetry Collection" frames consumption as "recording personal stories," legitimizing purchases emotionally and alleviating guilt, collaborative emotional premium weakens functional scrutiny, making it more acceptable to "pay for emotions" [5].

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2.2.3. Convenience: online content dissemination and offline immersive experiences

The dimension of convenience covers both information accessibility and purchasing channels [10]. Online, Judydoll leverages multiple platforms: 2,583 posts on Xiaohongshu with 2.4 million interactions, 3,829 TikTok videos receiving 5.251 million likes [2]. The brand uses data-driven selection to collaborate with KOLs and ordinary users, achieving an interaction rate 1.8 times higher than industry averages [2]. Offline, by the end of 2023, the brand had expanded into 29 cities with 54 stores [2]. Stores are equipped with photo-worthy installations such as eyeshadow and blush display walls [11], store staff, who are close to customers in age, create a friendly, peer-to-peer atmosphere [11]. This integrated online-offline ecosystem reduces both information acquisition and decision costs.

2.2.4. Communication: moving beyond one-way advertising toward co-creation and two-way engagement

Communication in the 4C model emphasizes two-way interaction between brands and consumers [4]. Judydoll's communication strategy centers on user co-creation: all content in the "Iron Tin Poetry Collection" comes from 452 authentic submissions by everyday consumers [7], in "Let Beauty Be Seen," consumers participate in cultural dissemination through purchases and sharing [8], user-generated content boosts the brand's interaction rate to 1.8 times the industry average [2]. The communication logic can be summarized as shifting from "the brand speaking to users" to "users speaking for the brand." The brand provides only thematic frameworks and emotional touchpoints, while content creation is left to consumers—replacing persuasive advertising with authenticity. When users embed their personal stories into the brand narrative, the brand ceases to be an external commercial entity and becomes an extension of their self [9].

2.3. 5P marketing mix

The 5P marketing mix incorporates the "People" dimension into the traditional 4P framework, highlighting that all brand stakeholders who interact with consumers shape consumer perceptions [6].

2.3.1. Product: transforming abstract culture into tangible product carriers

The core of Judydoll's product strategy lies in translating abstract culture and emotions into tangible products.

The "Tin Poetry Collection" (Tiepi Shiji) compiles personal stories shared by ordinary consumers on social media, thereby transforming the eyeshadow palette into a "vessel of memories" [7]. Meanwhile, the "Let Beauty Be Seen" campaign integrates woven patterns of She ethnic ribbon craftsmanship into the embossed designs of its eyeshadows. Product names such as "Harvest Apricot" and "Career Pink" correspond to cultural symbols of the She ethnic group [8]. By moving Intangible Cultural Heritage patterns from display cases onto the product surface, the brand allows consumers to naturally engage with She culture through everyday use.

2.3.2. Price: affordable positioning enables inclusive cultural consumption

Judydoll maintains an affordable pricing strategy: single eyeshadows range from 15 to 49 RMB, while multi-shade palettes are priced under 100 RMB [2]. This pricing logic lowers barriers to entry,

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fostering inclusivity in cultural consumption. While traditional cultural consumption often entails high prices and significant barriers to entry, Judydoll integrates elements of intangible cultural heritage and emotional storytelling into affordable cosmetics, this allows Gen Z consumers to engage in "consumption with a cultural attitude" without incurring high costs [5]. Consumers pay not only for product value but also to express emotional support for intangible cultural heritage. In this way, affordable pricing reduces the participation threshold, turning cultural consumption from a privilege limited to a small elite group into a lifestyle accessible to the general public.

2.3.3. Channels: serving both sales transactions and cultural showcases

Judydoll's channels extend beyond mere transactions to encompass cultural showcasing and experiential functions. Online, the brand leverages both Xiaohongshu and Douyin for promotion [2], creating a digital window for displaying its brand culture. Offline, it operates physical stores across multiple cities [2] with curated displays, such as eyeshadow and blush display walls, forming visually appealing, Instagrammable spaces [11]. Store staff are of similar age to consumers, building peer-to-peer rapport. This non-authoritarian style reduces consumers' psychological purchasing barriers [11]. Consequently, the stores serve as spaces for experiencing brand culture, where transactions, showcases, and communication converge in a single location.

2.3.4. Promotion: a peripheral persuasion path driven by content marketing

Traditional promotion relies on celebrities and top-tier KOLs, utilizing "authoritative endorsements" to follow a central persuasion path. Judydoll, however, relies more heavily on user-generated content, representing a peripheral persuasion path.

The underlying logic shared by the "Metal Pan Poetry Collection" (Tiepi Shiji) and the "Let Beauty Be Seen" campaign is that consumers place greater trust in "people like themselves," and the persuasive power of authentic life experiences stems from sincere storytelling.

2.3.5. People: collaborative participation of diverse stakeholders in constructing the brand narrative

"People" refers to all individuals who interact with consumers or influence their perceptions [6]. Judydoll opens up its narrative to multiple parties: consumers generate content that the brand collects and showcases [7], intangible cultural heritage inheritors provide cultural resources that the brand translates into designs, while consumers complete the dissemination process through their purchases [8], and ordinary individuals build the brand's reputation through authentic experiences [2]. The core of this model lies in the brand shifting from being the sole storyteller to acting as a connector. As personal experiences are woven into the narrative, the brand becomes internalized as part of the consumer's self-identity [9].

2.4. Interpretation from the perspective of consumer behavior theory

2.4.1. Extended self theory: products as vessels for personal memories

Belk's extended self theory posits that objects transcend mere functional value once memories and emotions are projected onto them [9]. The consumer-submitted stories featured in the Tin Poetry Collection (Tiepi Shiji) attach fragments of personal life experiences to the eyeshadow palette, transforming it from a cosmetic tool into a memory vessel. By soliciting and showcasing these

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stories, the brand reinforces the product's emotional value, turning purchasing and ownership into expressions of self-identity [7, 9].

2.4.2. Social currency: satisfying the consumption motivations of young people

Social currency refers to the social validation and sense of group belonging individuals gain through sharing content or engaging in consumption. In the "Making Beauty Visible" initiative, consumers who purchase and share the She ethnic-themed collaborative cosmetics project a self-image of aesthetic appreciation and cultural consciousness to their peers. By showcasing their interest in intangible cultural heritage, Gen Z consumers demonstrate their cultural taste and sense of social responsibility. Consequently, the products transcend their role as mere makeup tools to become a medium for constructing social identity. The brand provides the conversational framework and emotional touchpoints, which consumers transform into social capital through purchasing and sharing, thus, brand communication and self-expression are achieved simultaneously.

3. Advantages of the marketing strategy

3.1. Emotional connection

The "Tin Poetry Collection" (*Tiepi Shiji*) campaign solicited authentic stories from ordinary online consumers, transforming the eyeshadow palette into a vessel of memories. This approach resonates with the "extended self" theory, turning the act of purchasing into a form of self-expression [9, 7]. Furthermore, the combination of an affordable price point and an emotionally resonant narrative lowers psychological barriers to purchase while fostering a sense of identification among consumers [2].

3.2. Cultural empowerment

The theme "Let Beauty Be Seen" integrates She ethnic ribbon patterns and culturally inspired naming conventions into the product. This allows consumers to engage with Intangible Cultural Heritage through daily use, effectively making the purchase an act of cultural dissemination that satisfies the cultural and emotional needs of Gen Z consumers [8, 5]. The accessible pricing lowers the entry threshold, promoting inclusive cultural consumption and allowing the brand to avoid the pitfalls of pure price-based competition [2].

3.3. User engagement

The brand replaces one-way advertising with user co-creation. Content for the "Tin Poetry Collection" originates from genuine consumer submissions, and the engagement rate of this user-generated content reaches 1.8 times the industry average [2, 7]. By providing topics for discussion, the brand empowers users to become its voice, users gain "social currency" through sharing, thereby aligning the spread of the brand message with personal self-expression [8, 9].

4. Conclusion

Judydoll's case shows that affordable domestic cosmetic brands need to break free from homogenized competition of simply serving as low-cost alternatives to luxury brands, success cannot depend merely on product performance and low prices. Through the "Tin Poetry Collection"

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(*Tiepi Shiji*) campaign, the brand infuses eyeshadow palettes with personal memories, turning purchasing into a form of self-expression [7, 9]. In addition, for the "Let Beauty Be Seen" campaign, the brand integrated She ethnic ribbon-weaving patterns into its products, enabling consumers to interact with intangible cultural heritage and take part in cultural dissemination in daily life [5, 8]. In terms of communication, the brand replaces one-way advertising with co-creation with ordinary consumers. By allowing consumers to speak for the brand, it achieves an engagement rate above the industry average [2, 7]. The synergy of emotional connection, cultural empowerment and user engagement has helped Judydoll build a unique cultural identity in consumers' minds.

Other domestic cosmetic brands can derive three core insights from this case: First, emotional storytelling should be rooted in authentic consumer experiences and avoid hollow sentimentality, to endow products with warmth and personal resonance. Second, cultural empowerment requires selecting intangible cultural heritage or local cultural elements consistent with the brand positioning and converting them into tangible product details, instead of merely attaching superficial cultural labels. Third, in terms of communication, brands should open up the brand narrative process, prioritize co-creation with ordinary consumers and adopt peripheral route of persuasion strategies. Meanwhile, maintaining affordable pricing reduces the participation threshold and makes cultural consumption an accessible lifestyle for the public. Only by adopting such strategies can brands shift from price competition to value competition and build sustainable brand moats.

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