

UNCERTAIN GLOBAL CONSUMER DEMAND AND THE PATH TO MARKETING INNOVATION FOR INTERNATIONALIZING CHINESE BEAUTY BRANDS

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Abstract: *Against the backdrop of rising uncertainty in global consumer demand, Chinese beauty brands face a strategic imperative to evolve from product exportation to brand value exportation during international expansion. Drawing on the latest practices in the internationalization of Chinese beauty brands from 2024 to 2026, this study employs a multi case analysis method to systematically examine the marketing innovations in channel selection, localization operations, science communication, and cultural narrative strategies of brands including Florass, Chando, Perfect Diary, and Mao Geping. The findings reveal that Chinese beauty brands have developed a dual channel strategy combining flagship store placements in premium locations with penetration of mainstream distribution channels, while implementing deeply localized country specific operating models. On the science communication front, brands are strategically engaging with international academic platforms such as the IFSCC to establish technological legitimacy. Culturally, the expression of Oriental aesthetics is evolving from symbolic representation toward deeper integration and value co creation with international intellectual properties. The study proposes that amidst persistent demand uncertainty, Chinese beauty brands must construct a dual driver marketing innovation framework powered by technology and culture to transition from short term traffic acquisition to long term brand equity building. This research offers both theoretical insights and practical implications for emerging market brands navigating global competition in a complex international environment.*

Key words: *global consumer demand uncertainty; Chinese beauty brands; overseas expansion; marketing innovation; localization; brand equity*

JEL classification: *M31, M16*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Since 2018, with the rapid development of cross border e-commerce, a growing number of emerging Chinese beauty brands have begun to venture into international markets.

Brands such as Florasis, Perfect Diary, ZEESEA, and Flower Knows have successfully achieved notable brand recognition in overseas markets by leveraging cross border e-commerce channels (Bai, 2025). According to data from the General Administration of Customs, China's cosmetics exports reached 4.85 billion US dollars in 2021, a year-on-year increase of 14.4%, compared with only 1.223 billion US dollars a decade ago (Jangjarat et al., 2026). In 2024, China's cross border exports of beauty and personal care products exceeded 42 billion US dollars, of which transactions completed through the TikTok ecosystem leapt from 6.7% in 2022 to 28.4%, becoming the fastest growing single channel (Jangjarat et al., 2026).

However, the internationalization journey of Chinese beauty brands is taking place against a complex backdrop of global economic turbulence. The post pandemic era is characterized by persistent inflationary pressures, fragmented consumer markets, and heightened geopolitical tensions.

These factors have created a landscape of profound consumer demand uncertainty. For emerging market brands, this uncertainty manifests as shifting consumer spending habits, increased price sensitivity, and a growing demand for authentic value propositions. This challenging environment forces internationalizing brands to move beyond simple product export and low-price competition, requiring them to build genuine brand equity based on trust, cultural resonance, and demonstrable quality.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing academic research on the internationalization of Chinese beauty brands has gradually expanded from general discussions of brand strategy to more specialized investigations. In the field of international marketing, scholars have examined the applicability of traditional marketing mix models to emerging market brands. For instance, research based on the 4P marketing model has analyzed the product, price, channel, and promotion strategies adopted by Chinese beauty brands in their overseas expansion (Li et al., 2023).

In the area of crosscultural communication, researchers have employed theoretical frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions to analyze the cultural distance between China and target markets along the Belt and Road, proposing that cosmetic enterprises should formulate differentiated high end, mid range, and low end brand strategies based on cultural distance indices (Liu & Liu, 2020). Studies have also explored the role of cultural symbols in shaping brand attitudes among foreign consumers, revealing that a brand's foreign cultural symbolism positively influences consumer evaluations of perceived quality, prestige, and uniqueness benefits, with the most significant direct effect observed on perceived uniqueness benefits (Meng & Fu, 2016).

Regarding the channel dimension, researchers have examined how Chinese beauty brands utilize cross border e commerce platforms as primary entry channels. Studies have analyzed the marketing strategies of cross border C2C cosmetics on platforms like Taobao's global purchase platform, revealing the operational mechanisms of cosmetics cross border trade (Zhu & Cao, 2016). More recent research has investigated the integration of Chinese beauty cross border e commerce with social commerce platforms such as TikTok, identifying a new paradigm of content as shelf that has reconfigured traditional person goods place logic (Bai, 2025).

From the perspective of brand globalization and country of origin effects, studies have demonstrated that Chinese brand origin salience can positively influence brand evaluations by increasing global identity perceptions, with uncertainty avoidance playing a moderating role in this process (Zhou et al., 2024). Research has also examined the effect of perceived consistency between implied and actual country of origin on consumer purchase intentions, revealing that for first time consumers of emerging brands, perceived consistency interacts with functional value to influence initial purchase intentions (Zhou et al., 2024).

Notably, emerging research has begun to explore the intersection of science communication and brand internationalization. Comparative studies of Chinese and American beauty brand science communication have revealed that Chinese brands need to evolve from outcome expression to more complete and traceable scientific narratives to build long term brand trust. The path of Chando's XIMYIN has shown that the technology confidence of Chinese beauty brands needs to be gradually formed through long term R&D investment, core technology naming, and deep binding with brand narrative.

Case study approaches have been widely applied to analyze representative brands. Research on Florasis has examined its use of traditional ethnic culture to shape consumer stickiness, revealing that the brand deeply explores excellent traditional culture rather than simply replicating it, and cleverly integrates traditional culture into its own products to create unique cultural symbols (Tang, 2023). Studies on Perfect Diary have analyzed its online marketing strategies, identifying problems such as intensive marketing, unreasonable product structure, low brand positioning, and the impact of international brands (Xia, 2024). Research on Mao Geping has explored the causes of stereotypes about local cosmetic brands and innovative paths, analyzing the brand's marketing innovation in terms of cultural output, visual communication, and media empowerment (Shao, 2024).

Despite these valuable contributions, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, most studies have focused on individual dimensions of international marketing (e.g., cultural communication or channel strategy) rather than providing an integrated framework. Second, the specific challenges posed by global consumer demand uncertainty have not been systematically addressed in the context of Chinese beauty brand internationalization. Third, while case studies of individual brands are abundant, comparative analyses across multiple brands that reveal patterns and strategic differences are relatively scarce. Fourth, the emerging dimension of science communication as a strategic tool for brand legitimization in international markets has received limited attention.

1.3 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This research aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of the marketing innovation paths of Chinese beauty brands in the context of global consumer demand uncertainty. By integrating multiple dimensions including channel strategy, localization operations, cultural narrative, and science communication, this study contributes to both theoretical understanding

and practical guidance for emerging market brand globalization.

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2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

2.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study pursues three primary objectives. First, to systematically analyze the marketing innovation strategies adopted by representative Chinese beauty brands in their international expansion, specifically examining how these brands have adapted their marketing approaches to navigate global consumer demand uncertainty. Second, to identify the key success factors and persistent challenges in the internationalization process, including an assessment of how brands balance short term market penetration with long term brand equity building. Third, to develop an integrated framework that explains the marketing innovation paths of Chinese beauty brands, synthesizing findings across the dimensions of channel strategy, localization operations, cultural narrative, and science communication.

2.2 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature review and observed industry trends, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): In the context of global consumer demand uncertainty, Chinese beauty brands that adopt a dual channel strategy combining offline flagship presence with diversified online penetration achieve superior market entry outcomes compared to those relying on a single channel approach.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Deep localization strategies that adapt product formulations, pricing, and marketing content to specific target market cultural contexts positively moderate the relationship between brand internationalization efforts and consumer acceptance.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The integration of cultural narrative based on Oriental aesthetics with international intellectual property collaborations enhances brand authenticity perception and reduces cultural discount in cross cultural marketing contexts.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Active participation in international scientific and academic platforms positively influences brand technological legitimacy perception, which in turn enhances consumer trust and brand evaluation in markets characterized by high uncertainty avoidance.

2.3 RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a multi case qualitative research design. The case study method is particularly appropriate for this research because it allows for in depth, contextualized examination of complex phenomena such as marketing innovation in international expansion, where multiple factors interact in dynamic ways.

Case Selection: Four Chinese beauty brands were selected as primary case studies: Florasis, Perfect Diary, Chando, and Mao Geping. These brands were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) they have demonstrated significant international expansion activities, (b) they represent diverse strategic approaches to international marketing, (c) they have achieved notable market presence in target international markets, and (d) sufficient secondary data is available for analysis. Florasis represents the cultural differentiation strategy based on Oriental aesthetics. Perfect Diary exemplifies the digital first, social commerce driven approach. Chando represents the science and technology driven strategy with long term R&D investment. Mao Geping represents the professional and heritage based positioning.

Data Collection: Data was collected from multiple sources to enable triangulation and enhance validity. Secondary data sources included: (a) academic journal articles and conference proceedings published between 2016 and 2026, (b) industry reports and market analyses, (c) company annual reports and official brand communications, (d) social media content and public engagement data, (e) news media coverage of brand internationalization activities, and (f) trade data from customs authorities and industry associations.

Analytical Framework: The analysis was structured around four key dimensions derived from the literature review: channel strategy (examining distribution channel selection and integration), localization operations (analyzing adaptations to local market conditions), cultural narrative (investigating the use of cultural elements in brand communication), and science communication (assessing the role of scientific legitimacy in brand positioning). Within each dimension, the analysis focused on identifying specific marketing innovations, assessing their effectiveness, and comparing approaches across cases.

Analytical Procedures: The analysis followed a systematic procedure. First, case specific data was compiled and organized according to the fourdimensional framework. Second, within case analysis was conducted to identify each brand's distinctive marketing innovation patterns. Third, cross case comparison was performed to identify

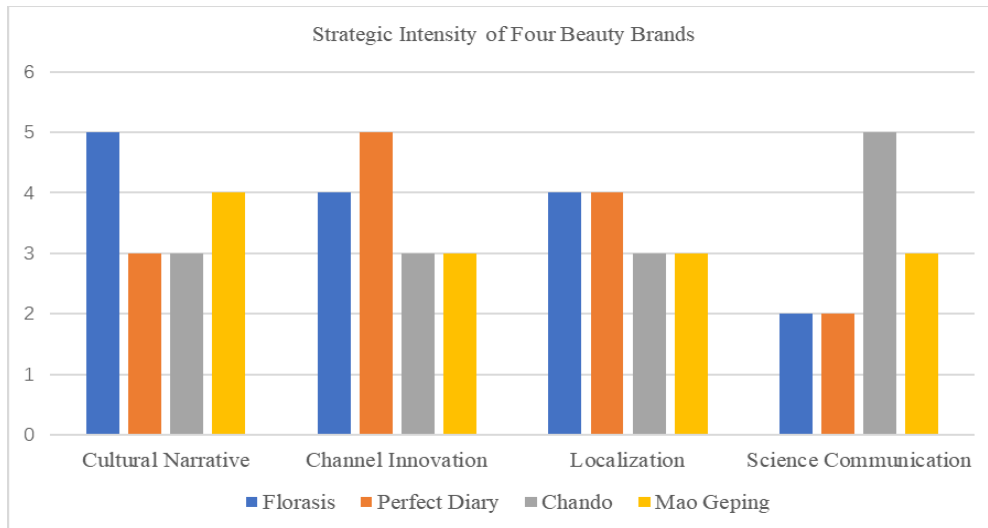
commonalities, differences, and emerging patterns across the four brands. Fourth, findings were synthesized to develop an integrated framework of marketing innovation paths.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS ANALYSIS

3.1 CHANNEL STRATEGY INNOVATION

The analysis reveals that Chinese beauty brands have developed a sophisticated dual channel strategy combining online and offline presence, adapting to both the digital native characteristics of emerging brands and the traditional retail expectations of international consumers.

Figure 1 Strategic Intensity of Marketing Innovation Dimensions for Four Case Brands



Note: 5 = highest strategic focus, 1 = lowest strategic focus.

Source: Analysis based on 2024–2026 brand practices.

Online Channel Penetration: Social commerce platforms, particularly TikTok, have emerged as critical channels for Chinese beauty brand internationalization. Research indicates that the emerging paradigm of content as shelf has reconfigured conventional person goods place logic (Bai, 2025).

The TikTok ecosystem has become the fastest growing single channel for Chinese beauty cross border exports, with transaction share increasing from 6.7% in 2022 to 28.4% (Jangjarat et al., 2026). This shift represents a fundamental innovation in how beauty products are marketed and sold across borders, moving from searchbased e commerce to interest driven social commerce.

Offline Presence Building: Beyond digital channels, successful brands have strategically established offline presence in premium locations. Florasis, for instance, has pursued a strategy of flagship store placements in high end shopping districts in Japan and other markets, using physical retail as a means of building brand prestige and providing tangible product experiences.

This dual approach addresses a key challenge for emerging market brands: overcoming the limitations of purely online presence, which may

be associated with lower quality perceptions, while leveraging the scalability and targeting capabilities of digital channels.

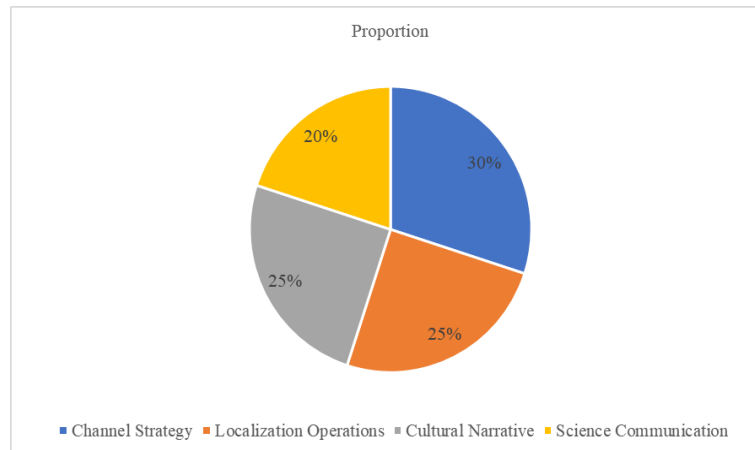
Channel Integration: The most successful brands have moved beyond simple multi channel presence to genuine channel integration, where online and offline channels work synergistically. Social media content drives traffic to both e commerce sites and physical stores, while in store experiences generate user generated content that fuels online engagement.

This integrated approach creates virtuous cycles of brand awareness, trial, and loyalty.

Target Market Selection: In terms of target market selection, most emerging Chinese beauty brands choose Japan or Southeast Asia as their first overseas destination, considering factors such as geographical convenience, product demand matching, and market growth potential. Some brands also target European and American markets (Si, 2023).

This strategic market selection reflects a pragmatic approach to internationalization, prioritizing markets with lower cultural distance or higher growth potential before attempting entry into more challenging Western markets.

Figure 2 Proportion of Four Core Marketing Innovation Dimensions



Note. Proportion is calculated from multi-case brand internationalization practices.

Source: Compilation based on Euromonitor (2025), Jangjarat et al. (2026), and General Administration of Customs of China (2025).

3.2 LOCALIZATION OPERATIONS INNOVATION

Localization emerged as a critical success factor, with brands adopting deeply contextualized approaches that extend far beyond simple translation of marketing materials.

Product Level Localization: Successful brands have adapted their product formulations, packaging, and pricing to local market conditions. Research on the internationalization of Chinese beauty brands emphasizes that brands must closely monitor target market cultures and consumption habits, adjusting product design and marketing strategies accordingly (Wang, 2024). For the European and American markets that favor natural and simple makeup, as well as the Southeast Asian markets that prefer delicate and ornate makeup, brands have made corresponding adjustments to their product lines (Si, 2023).

Cultural Adaptation of Marketing Content: Analysis of short video advertisements targeting the Japanese market by Florasis, Flower Knows, and Perfect Diary reveals that these brands adopt differentiated visual positioning, leveraging Eastern aesthetic cultural symbols, scenario transplantation, and celebrity endorsements to enhance advertising effectiveness (Zhou, 2025). However, each brand faces distinct challenges in cultural adaptation. Florasis's Eastern ritualistic expression, despite being highly distinctive, needs to balance cultural export and local adaptation. Flower Knows, while appealing to young Japanese consumers with dreamy elements, lacks cultural uniqueness. Perfect Diary's celebrity strategy, although efficient, risks homogenization (Zhou, 2025).

Operational Localization: Beyond marketing, brands have implemented operational localization including local warehousing, customer service in local languages, and partnerships with local distributors. The case of KANS, which topped Douyin's beauty GMV list for eleven consecutive months, illustrates how the brand replicated the loop of short drama seeding, KOL conversion, and private domain retention in Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia, raising quarterly repurchase rates in Southeast Asia to 42.7% and increasing average order value by 18.5% compared with legacy shelf commerce (Jiangsu Economic News, 2026).

Challenges in Localization: Despite these successes, significant challenges persist. Rapid expansion has been accompanied by a triad of tensions: regulatory uncertainty, cultural discount, and insufficient supply chain resilience. These factors have led to a 4.3 percentage point year on year increase in return rates in Europe and North America during the first half of 2024 and a repurchase rate 9.6 percentage points lower than that of Japanese and Korean competitors (Jiangsu Economic News, 2026). These challenges highlight the importance of continuous refinement of localization strategies.

3.3 CULTURAL NARRATIVE INNOVATION

Cultural narrative has emerged as a distinctive competency for Chinese beauty brands, enabling differentiation in crowded international markets.

Oriental Aesthetics as Brand Foundation: Florasis exemplifies the strategic use of Oriental aesthetics as a core brand differentiator. Research on Florasis reveals that the brand's reference to traditional culture is not a mechanical collaboration. Rather than simply replicating traditional culture, the brand deeply explores excellent traditional culture

that gradually disappears from the public's perspective. Starting from the nature and function of its own products, using modern craftsmanship and production technology, it cleverly integrates traditional culture into its own products and creates its own cultural symbol (Tang, 2023).

Evolution from Symbolic to Integrated Cultural Expression: The analysis reveals a progression in how Chinese beauty brands deploy cultural elements. Early approaches tended toward superficial symbolic use of Chinese cultural motifs. More sophisticated contemporary approaches involve deeper integration of cultural narratives into product development, brand storytelling, and consumer experience. Research on brand foreign cultural symbolism has shown that such symbolism positively influences consumer evaluations of brand quality, prestige, uniqueness benefits, and group belonging benefits, with the most significant direct effect observed on perceived uniqueness benefits (Meng & Fu, 2016).

International IP Collaboration: An emerging trend is the collaboration between Chinese beauty brands and international intellectual properties. This approach moves beyond purely China-centric cultural narratives toward value co-creation that resonates with global consumers. Such collaborations help brands navigate the tension between maintaining authentic cultural roots and appealing to diverse international audiences. Research on brand foreign cultural symbolism has demonstrated that brand source country image and consumer ethnocentrism respectively positively and negatively moderate the overall effect of brand foreign cultural symbolism on brand attitudes (Meng & Fu, 2016).

Cultural Narrative and Brand Attitude: The strategic use of cultural elements has been shown to improve foreign consumer brand attitudes. Research indicates that Chinese brands can leverage cultural elements to enhance brand perceptions, with the effect particularly pronounced for perceived quality and prestige (Meng & Fu, 2016). This finding is particularly relevant for Chinese beauty brands seeking to overcome potential negative country-of-origin effects.

3.4 SCIENCE COMMUNICATION INNOVATION

Science communication has emerged as an increasingly important dimension of marketing innovation, particularly for brands seeking to establish credibility in markets characterized by high consumer sophistication and regulatory standards.

Building Technological Legitimacy: Research on the science communication differences between Chinese and American beauty brands has revealed that the technology confidence of Chinese beauty brands needs to be gradually formed through long-term R&D investment, core technology naming, and deep binding with brand narrative. This pattern reveals the highly coupled characteristics of science, brand, and communication in the Chinese market, while also providing an important reference for the differences in technological expression paths of global beauty brands.

Participation in International Academic Platforms: An emerging strategy is active participation in international academic platforms such as the IFSCC. This engagement serves multiple purposes: it provides third-party validation of technological capabilities, facilitates knowledge exchange with global industry leaders, and signals commitment to scientific rigor. This approach helps Chinese beauty brands transition from being perceived as low-cost manufacturers to being recognized as legitimate innovators in the global beauty industry.

From Outcome Expression to Traceable Scientific Narrative: A key insight from comparative research is that Chinese brands need to evolve from outcome expression to more complete and traceable scientific narratives to build long-term brand trust. This evolution requires not only investment in R&D but also the development of communication capabilities that can translate complex scientific information into accessible consumer messaging without sacrificing accuracy.

Science Communication as Trust Building: In markets characterized by high uncertainty avoidance, science communication serves as a trust-building mechanism. Research on the effect of Chinese brand origin salience has shown that uncertainty avoidance plays a moderating role, with the favorable effect of Chinese brand origin salience on brand evaluations attenuated among consumers with high uncertainty avoidance (Zhou et al., 2024). For such consumers, scientific validation and transparent communication about product ingredients, testing, and safety standards become particularly important.

3.5 SYNTHESIS: THE DUAL DRIVER FRAMEWORK

Synthesizing the findings across the four dimensions, this study proposes that successful marketing innovation for Chinese beauty brand internationalization is characterized by a dual-driver framework powered by technology and culture.

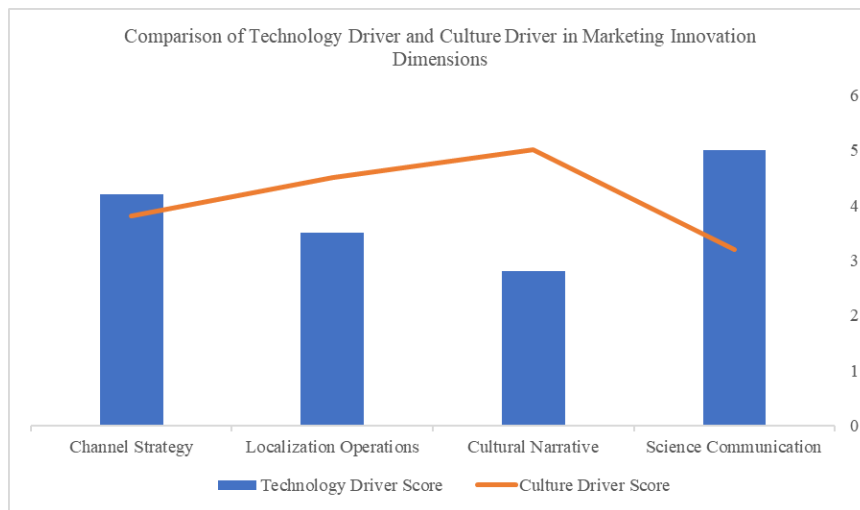
Technology Driver: The technology driver encompasses both product innovation (R&D investment, proprietary ingredients, advanced formulations) and science communication (transparent communication of scientific credentials, participation in academic platforms, third party validation). This driver addresses consumer needs for efficacy, safety, and trust, which become particularly salient in contexts of demand uncertainty where consumers may become more discerning about their purchases.

Culture Driver: The culture driver encompasses both cultural narrative (Oriental aesthetics, traditional cultural elements, brand storytelling) and cultural adaptation (localization of marketing content, sensitivity to local cultural norms,

international IP collaboration). This driver addresses consumer needs for identity expression, emotional connection, and authentic brand experiences.

Synergy Between Drivers: The most successful brands demonstrate synergy between the technology and culture drivers rather than treating them as separate or competing priorities. Cultural narratives are supported by technological claims, while technological innovations are contextualized within compelling cultural stories. This integrated approach enables brands to build both rational trust (through science) and emotional connection (through culture), creating robust brand equity that can withstand market uncertainties.

Figure 3: Comparison of Technology Driver and Culture Driver in Marketing Innovation Dimensions



Note: 5-point Likert scale (1 = weak influence, 5 = strong influence). The column represents the technology-driven intensity, and the line represents the culture-driven intensity
Source: Analysis based on Euromonitor (2025), IFSCC (2025), General Administration of Customs of China (2026), Zhou et al. (2024),

CONCLUSION

4.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study systematically examined the marketing innovation paths of Chinese beauty brands under global consumer demand uncertainty through multi case analysis of Florasis, Perfect Diary, Chando, and Mao Geping.

Five key findings emerged. First, Chinese beauty brands have developed a dual channel strategy integrating online social commerce with offline flagship stores, leveraging the content as shelf paradigm on platforms like TikTok while establishing brand prestige through physical retail. Second, deep localization beyond translation including product adaptation, culturally sensitive content, and operational infrastructure is critical, though challenges such as regulatory uncertainty,

cultural discount, and supply chain resilience persist. Third, cultural narrative based on Oriental aesthetics has evolved from superficial symbolism to deep integration into product development and storytelling, with international IP collaboration helping balance authenticity and global appeal. Fourth, science communication through long term R&D, proprietary ingredients, and participation in academic platforms like IFSCC builds technological legitimacy, requiring a shift from outcome claims to traceable scientific narratives. Fifth, synthesizing these findings, the study proposes a dual driver framework where technology and culture function as complementary forces: technology addresses rational needs for efficacy and trust, while culture addresses emotional needs for identity and authentic experience.

4.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This research makes four theoretical contributions. It extends the literature on emerging market brand internationalization by identifying specific mechanisms for navigating consumer demand uncertainty. It integrates previously disparate research streams on channel strategy, localization, cultural narrative, and science communication into a coherent analytical framework. It introduces the dual driver framework as a conceptual tool for understanding marketing innovation in emerging market globalization. Finally, it provides empirical evidence from recent internationalization practices, contributing to the growing knowledge on C Beauty internationalization

4.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings offer five practical implications for Chinese beauty brands seeking to internationalize. Brands should adopt an integrated channel strategy that combines social commerce reach with offline presence for legitimacy. Deep localization requires sustained investment in market research and operational adaptation rather than superficial changes. Cultural narrative must be authentic and deeply embedded in brand identity, not merely decorative. Science communication capabilities should be developed alongside R&D investment, with attention to translating complex information into accessible messaging. Finally, technology and culture drivers should be developed synergistically to build robust brand equity that withstands market uncertainties.

4.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has five limitations suggesting future research directions. The multi case analysis is limited to four brands; future studies should expand the sample to include brands at different internationalization stages. The study relies primarily on secondary data; primary data collection through interviews with brand managers and consumers could provide additional insights. It focuses on marketing innovation strategies without systematically examining financial performance outcomes; future research could link marketing innovation to brand financial metrics. The study is set in the post pandemic context of global demand uncertainty; future research should test the findings under different macroeconomic conditions. Finally, cross cultural comparative research examining consumer perceptions of Chinese beauty brand strategies across target markets would offer valuable refinement insights.

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