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## КОМУНІКАЦІЙНІ СТРАТЕГІЇ КИТАЙСЬКИХ КОСМЕТИЧНИХ БРЕНДІВ НА СВІТОВОМУ РИНКУ КРАСИ

### COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF CHINA'S COSMETIC BRANDS ON WORLD BEAUTY MARKET

Протягом останнього десятиліття китайські косметичні бренди стали значними гравцями у світовій індустрії краси — явище, яке зазвичай називають “C-beauty”. Стаття досліджує фактори, що сприяють просуванню цих брендів за кордоном, виклики, з якими вони стикаються, та можливості, що відкриваються на дедалі конкурентнішому ринку. Матеріал статті заповнює прогалину як у китайській, так і в закордонній академічній літературі, яка переважно зосереджується на адаптації іноземних брендів до китайського ринку або внутрішньому маркетингу «гочао», залишаючи інтернаціоналізацію та закордонну діяльність C-beauty недостатньо дослідженими.

Метою дослідження є аналіз того, як китайські косметичні бренди конструюють, комунікують та адаптують свою ідентичність на зарубіжних ринках, як культурні й стратегічні фактори впливають на їхнє сприйняття у різних регіонах світу.

Ця стаття аналізує глобальну експансію китайських косметичних брендів (C-beauty) крізь міждисциплінарну призму ефекту країни походження та теорії культурної адаптації.

На основі аналізу вторинних даних і трьох ілюстративних кейсів — Florasis, Perfect Diary, Herborist — дослідження виявляє такі основні тенденції: конкурентні моделі ціноутворення, сторітеллінг про культурне коріння, використання цифрових каналів та швидкі інновації продуктів.

Результати дослідження свідчать, що сприйняття країни походження є стратегічною змінною: там, де ринки культурно сприйнятливі, бренди зміцнюють своє національне походження; там, де менш сприйнятливі, вони впроваджують космополітичну та культурно нейтральну комунікацію. Культурна адаптація стає центральною для балансу між оригінальністю бренду та резонансом, пов'язаним з ринком. Також наведено рекомендації, зокрема щодо важливості стратегічної комунікації у формуванні зарубіжної ідентичності китайської косметики (C-beauty) та м'якої сили Китаю через косметичний експорт.

**Ключові слова:** C-beauty, косметичні бренди Китаю, комунікаційна стратегія, зарубіжний ринок краси, ефект країни походження, культурна адаптація.

In the past decade, Chinese cosmetic brands have emerged as significant players in the global beauty industry, a phenomenon commonly referred to as “C-beauty”. This paper investigates the factors driving their overseas promotion, the challenges they face, and the opportunities available in an increasingly competitive market. It addresses a notable gap in both Chinese and foreign academic literature, which has predominantly focused on foreign brands’ adaptation to the Chinese market or domestic “guochao” marketing, leaving C-beauty’s internationalization and overseas performance underexplored.

The aim of the study is to explore how Chinese cosmetic brands construct, communicate, and adapt their identities in overseas markets, and how cultural and strategic factors influence their reception in different global regions.

This research analyses Chinese cosmetic brands’ (C-beauty) global expansion through an interdisciplinary prism of the country-of-origin effect and cultural adaptation theory.

Based on secondary data analysis and three illustrative cases — Florasis, Perfect Diary, and Herborist — the research uncovers the following major trends: competitive pricing models, storytelling of cultural roots, use of digital channels, and fast product innovation.

Results suggest that the country-of-origin perception serves as a strategic variable: where markets are culturally receptive, brands strengthen their original roots; where markets prove less receptive, they implement cosmopolitan and culturally neutral communication. Cultural adaptation becomes central for the balance between brand originality and market-related resonance. Recommendations follow in the report, including the importance of strategic communication in shaping an overseas identity of C-beauty as well as China’s soft power through beauty export.

**Keywords:** C-beauty, China’s cosmetic brands, communication strategy, overseas beauty market, country-of-origin effect, cultural adaptation.

## Introduction

In the past decade, the beauty industry has seen an extraordinary transformation in market geography, culture, and competitive landscape. Long dominated by a small handful of Western transnational companies, the industry has continued to liberalize and welcome new participants from diverse cultural and economic sectors. Perhaps most noteworthy has been the appearance of Chinese beauty brands on the global radar — an ascendancy generally referred to as C-beauty [7]. While Korean (K-beauty) and Japanese (J-beauty) counterparts have long enjoyed their established reputations, C-beauty has recently begun to capture rising interest worldwide due to the blend of traditional Chinese cultural beauty perceptions, contemporary product innovations, and promotional campaigns [17]. Chinese beauty companies are now breaking into emerging and mature markets across Asia, in European and North American economies [30].

In 2023, China exported close to \$7.6 billion of cosmetic products, two times more than a decade ago [15]. In 2025, the cosmetics market of China was set to reach \$10.84 billion, and it was estimated to reach \$17.23 billion in 2030 [2]. Trade statistics data consistently positions China among the leading cosmetic exporters globally, and the domestic market as among the biggest and fastest-growing cosmetic domestic market worldwide [23]. In 2024–2025, China was the leading cosmetic importer (No. 1), importing cosmetics valued at about \$13.02 billion (17.4 % of the total import market share). The cosmetic export market of China continued to steadily increase (No. 6), reaching an absolute net of \$4.08 billion in export value and accounting for 5.5 % of global cosmetic exports [24]. This dual positioning signifies the transformation of China's involvement — and not only as an exporter but more and more as a consumer and beauty trends influencer.

The export of Chinese cosmetic brands to the rest of the world is a comparatively new phenomenon, gathering steam from about 2018 onward [26]. This coincided with some related changes. The first was an improvement in the formulary, packaging, and branding of domestic Chinese brands due to technological changes and increased competition in the domestic market. The second was an expansion of cross-border e-commerce sites like Tmall Global, JD Worldwide, Shopee, Lazada, and Amazon, which reduced barriers substantially and made Chinese products easily accessible to foreign consumers. The third was the expansion of social media — global sites like YouTube and Instagram, and regional sites like Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin — which offered Chinese brands cost-effective means

of reaching foreign audiences, avoiding traditional retail intermediaries [11; 10; 27].

A distinctive characteristic of C-beauty's foreign expansion is the infusion of cultural elements into branding and marketing. Some brands make overt use of traditional Chinese beauty perceptions, including elements deriving from classical Chinese poetry, folk culture, and ancient crafts in packaging and commercials. This tactic utilizes what scholars refer to as “cultural capital” to make product offerings stand out in an increasingly homogeneous global market [31]. Others are more global, engaging in trend-driven innovation and transnational collaboration to situate themselves within global youth culture, particularly Generation Z [29]. This continuum — ranging from overt cultural branding to culturally neutral global positioning — mirrors brands' strategic choices in negotiating the country-of-origin (COO) effect, in which consumer perception of product origin may affect reception of the brand.

Chinese beauty brands' appeal to overseas customers may further be attributed to universal consumer trends. Consumers increasingly demand beauty products, including fragrances and makeups, offering a blend of efficacy, aesthetic appeal, and an interesting narrative. The “national tide” (guochao) phenomenon, which has reinvigorated Chinese domestic pride in Chinese culture, may similarly appeal to overseas customers if communicated as exoticism or craft authenticity [6]. Furthermore, the affordability of most Chinese beauty and skincare offers them access to the emerging “masstige” (mass prestige) element of the beauty industry, where customers demand premium attributes with affordable prices [12].

From a communication and cultural studies standpoint, the success of C-beauty overseas has important implications in a few different dimensions. Firstly, it defies the current hegemony of Western and other Asian beauty cultures and injects new aesthetic codes and product ideologies into the global beauty market. Secondly, it illustrates the globalization of consumer culture, in which ideas, images, and commodities move in various directions, including multiple times and trajectories, instead of the unilinear West-to-East direction. Thirdly, it provides a rich context in which to explore the negotiation, representation, and consumption of cultural identity in a transnational arena. The tension between retaining cultural authenticity and accommodating to domestic market forces broader intercultural communication and the theory of branding debates.

With these dynamics in mind, the main **research aim** is to explore how Chinese beauty

brands build, convey, and tailor their identities overseas and to what extent cultural and strategic elements impact their acceptability across various global regions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical basis of this research comes from two mutually complementary conceptual frameworks, namely the country-of-origin (COO) effect and cultural adaptation theory. Mixed together, they form a consistent lens through which we may try to explore Chinese cosmetic brands building, conveying, and adapting their identities overseas. The COO effect accounts for the way in which product origin impacts consumer perception, and cultural adaptation theory accounts for the way brands calibrate their communication and product strategies to fit locally prevailing cultural patterns and avoid diluting their underlying identity. They may help elucidate both the constraints and opportunities of C-beauty brands operating in a heterogeneous and highly competitive global beauty arena.

*Country-of-Origin Effect.* The COO effect has been widely discussed in consumer behaviour and international marketing literature. It involves the impact that a product's country of origin has on consumer assessments of the quality, reliability, and desirability of the product. The COO effect may appear positively as well as negatively, depending on the target market, the sector, and the past associations of the producing country. In Chinese cosmetics overseas, the COO effect acts as a strategic variable instead of an immovable determinant. Firms are free to accentuate their origin in order to create distinctiveness through cultural roots, or they may de-emphasize overt national links in order to appeal to consumers who have negative predispositions. Strategic management of COO identity entails an evaluation of national branding potential or risk in each market of interest and a corresponding adjustment of communication [1].

Notably, the COO effect combines with worldwide consumer demand for authenticity, storytelling, and cultural variety. In consumer economies where distinct, culturally deep products are demanded, COO may serve as a brand asset, communicating authenticity and providing symbolical added value in addition to functional product attributes. In less favourable economies, COO may be repositioned by quality assurance narratives, technological levels, or worldwide collaboration, thus buffering unfavourable perceptions without eliminating national identity altogether.

*Cultural Adaptation Theory.* Cultural adaptation theory forms the second pillar

of this research's analytical structure. It covers the way individuals and organizations adapt their behaviour, communication, and identity when faced with the cultural norms of another environment. In marketing, cultural adaptation means the intentional transformation of brand communication, product offerings, and visual identity to appeal to the values, preferences, and expectations of local customers [25]. Cultural adaptation of cosmetic brands has several dimensions. At the product level, this can mean the adaptation of formulations to local skin types, climates, or regulatory standards. At the communication level, this means adapting advertising images, storytelling, and ambassadors to cultural beauty ideals, lifestyle dreams, and social acceptability. At the symbolic level, this involves caution about the way cultural motifs are received overseas — as exotic, authentic, antiquated, or unknown [9; 21].

It is noteworthy that Chinese beauty brands range along a continuum of adaptation strategies. Some engage in extensive localization, drastically altering their product offerings in each market but upholding brand principles, while others engage in moderate adaptation, adjusting their product offerings in select aspects but preserving global uniformity in primary identity. Others go further and prefer minimal adaptation, seeking a single global identity extending across markets, which may suit “digital-first” environments but may alienate some consumer segments.

### **Trends in the Overseas Popularity of Chinese Cosmetic Brands**

Sequenced market entry is one such trend in which brands take culturally and geographically near-to-home markets before entering more competitive or culturally alien markets. The former are typically taken as the initial stepping-stone into Southeast Asia. Shared culture and understanding of beauty expectations in Asia altogether make such markets easier to transition into. A successful entry into Southeast Asia may then serve as a proof of concept before entering more challenging markets, such as Western Europe and North America. Thus, Japan has become an early target of choice due to the mature beauty culture and openness to new product launches, although competition is quite tough [13; 16].

The second trend is the fusion of cultural distinctiveness and universal appeal. Brands keep a sharp Chinese character and rely on cultural motifs as a basic element, but some of them take on an internationally neutral aesthetic to more insistently push through Western and Korean



markets. For culturally adventurous buyers in Asia and the West, such a narrative provides novelty and authenticity, which marks these products apart from the more standardized branding of many multinational brands [14; 22; 3].

Third is strategic use of social media ecosystems. Brands not only have a presence on worldwide sites like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube but also develop alliances with influencers in every target market to customize their message accordingly. In some instances, brands even customize the format of the content to suit domestic cultures digitally: short, funny skit style for the TikTok audiences of Southeast Asia and high-end production tutorials for European YouTube viewers. A multiple-platform and multiple-format approach allows wider coverage and customized interactions [19; 28; 4].

### **Challenges Facing Chinese Cosmetic Brands in Overseas Markets**

The ambivalence surrounding the “Made in China” label is arguably the most enduring barrier for Chinese cosmetic brands in some markets. In markets like Southeast Asia, where acceptance is facilitated by shared heritage, regional cooperation, and similar beauty ideals, the COO effect can be a useful tool. However, COO can arouse consumer scepticism in Western Europe and North America due to ingrained bias. Many Chinese brands have attained manufacturing and quality assurance standards that are on par with or even higher than those of their Western counterparts, so these perceptions are not based on current reality. However, perception lags behind performance, and unfavourable associations can affect consumers’ decisions to buy before they even interact with the product [8; 5].

Another issue involves extending brand storytelling and aesthetic perceptions across national lines. Elaborate packaging and luxurious storytelling so prevalent in China — and which tend to feature traditional paintings, historic allusions, and rich visual design — may be misinterpreted in markets with minimalist culture traditions. Even product attributes undergo adaptation: for instance, a product suited to humid tropical weather may not fare as well under dry, wintry conditions, and vice versa. Without proper adaptation, even good products are likely to stall due to a mere mismatch with regional use patterns and concepts of beauty.

There are many rules in the global cosmetics industry, and the standards, testing protocols, and labelling requirements vary a lot from one place to another. The European Union’s Cosmetics Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 sets strict rules

for product safety, ingredient disclosure, and proof of claims. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States has its own set of rules, with a focus on making sure labels are correct and not making claims that are not backed up by evidence. For Chinese brands that want to grow in these areas, following the rules can be time- and money-consuming, especially for small- and medium-sized businesses without their own compliance departments. Some markets also have highly specific rules that may require reformulation. Because of the differences in regulatory frameworks, a single product often needs several localized versions, which makes production and inventory management more difficult.

Finding consumer attention in overseas markets is difficult, and cosmetics are no exception, with shelf space — both virtual and physical — being highly contested. Long-standing multinational companies have established strong partnerships with key retailers and possess substantial marketing budgets, which enable them to dominate high-traffic retail spaces. For Chinese cosmetic brands, achieving similar visibility tends to necessitate huge expenditure on promo campaigns, displays at points of sale, and retailer incentives. In the online retail landscape, visibility relies on platform algorithms, paid-for posts, and user engagement metrics. Without continued investment in online ads and endorsement deals with influencers, good product offerings are lost under the competition of better-resourced opponents. This scenario presents a Catch-22: without visibility, sales are constrained; without sales, marketing budgets are limited.

### **Case Study Analysis: Communication Strategies of Selected Chinese Cosmetic Brands Abroad**

The globalization of Chinese cosmetic brands must best be comprehended via specific case analyses that demonstrate the working of theoretical frameworks such as the COO effect and cultural adaptation theory in practice. This section deconstructs three leading brands — Florasis, Perfect Diary, and Herborist — which exemplify diverse approaches to branding strategy, cultural positioning, and market adaptation. Analysing these cases extensively allows us to recognize the way in which brand identity gets negotiated amidst the compulsions of authenticity and the accommodation demands of the local market.

*Florasis* (花西子) is a Chinese beauty company whose brand identity was established by integrating cultural elements from ancient China with contemporary design for beauty products.

Its packaging was borrowed from Miao ethnic embroidery styles, classical Chinese poetry, and works of lacquerware painting. In China, its brand positioning is very compatible with this guochao movement that touches consumers' cultural sentiment and their need for eye-catching product offerings. With regard to the COO effect, Florasis celebrates its Chinese origin as a key component of its brand strategy. In culturally accepting markets like Japan and Southeast Asia, this identity serves as an indication of authenticity and artistic clout. However, in European luxury markets — where minimalist design and understated elegance often dominate — Florasis adopts a more nuanced adaptation strategy. While retaining its ornate packaging, the brand adjusts its advertising tone and visual presentation to emphasize concepts such as exclusivity, craftsmanship, and limited-edition artistry. Campaign visuals in France and Italy feature cleaner photographic compositions, drawing attention to the intricate detail of product designs without overwhelming the viewer with dense cultural symbolism. A strong COO identity and selective cultural alignment have helped Florasis sustain brand authenticity and branch out to different markets. It illustrates how, if properly managed, COO can be utilized and transformed into a source of potential strength.

*Perfect Diary* (完美日记) serves as a counterexample, opting for a cosmopolitan, trend-oriented positioning that reduces overt Chinese cultural cues in its overseas branding. Founded in 2017, the brand achieved success in China through rapid digital marketing, sponsorship via influencers, and rapid rotation of product launches. In China, it occasionally utilizes guochao, yet abroad, it emphasizes universality over cultural specificity. From a COO point of view, this strategy is a deliberate choice to counteract the potential biases present in certain Western markets. In North America and Western Europe, *Perfect Diary's* communications emphasize international pop culture collaborations — like themed product lines with Discovery Channel or National Geographic — and its packaging uses a minimalist, high-end look for product naming. Through this, the company is able to position its brand with Western mid-tier peers without causing any unfavourable COO linkages. On the cultural dimension, *Perfect Diary* is very adaptive. For markets in Southeast Asia, it adjusts foundation tones and blends of skin-care ingredients based on regional climatic environments and skin tones. For North American markets, it employs domestic promoters on TikTok and Instagram to create tutorial content, which

is consistent with the consumption behaviour of Western beauty consumers. Despite this action reducing the cultural uniqueness of the brand, its accessibility and adaptability to international beauty criteria are enhanced.

*Herborist* (佰草集) has a hybrid approach, publicly promoting its Chinese identity but framing its brand storytelling to correspond to international beauty and wellness trends. Its identity emanates from traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), with products that feature herbal elements like ginseng, goji berry, and peony. In China, *Herborist* brands itself as a contemporary keeper of ancient beauty knowledge, combining classical formulation with modern scientific proof. Internationally, the COO effect is addressed via a reinterpretation of TCM tradition as botanic science, an appeal that resonates with the «clean beauty» movement that dominates Europe and North America. *Herborist* product communications in those markets feature natural, dermatologically tested, and environmental-friendly products. European-market packaging uses soft pastel colors, minimalist typography, and careful botanic drawing, blending authenticity and contemporary style. Even its distribution strategy reveals *Herborist's* cultural awareness. In Europe, it collaborates with upscale shopping locations like Sephora France and upscale spa chains in Spain and Italy, positioning itself as an upscale wellness brand. This validates its legitimacy and is consistent with clients who seek holistic, plant-based treatments for their skin.

A comparative study of Florasis, *Perfect Diary*, and *Herborist* finds that none of their approaches follows any universal formula for internationalizing Chinese beauty brands, but all their successes hinge upon fine-tuning COO identity and cultural adaptability according to the unique circumstances of individual target markets. Florasis demonstrates that amplifying COO identity can be effective when cultural heritage is perceived as a source of value and differentiation. *Perfect Diary* illustrates that neutralizing COO associations can open doors in markets where biases persist, provided that brand identity remains coherent and competitive. *Herborist* shows that it is possible to maintain cultural authenticity while reframing heritage narratives in terms that align with dominant local trends.

In each instance, cultural adaptation is no optional add-on but an integral component of the brand's international strategy. Whatever this adaptation manifests in terms of changing product formulation, visual design, or brand storytelling, this dictates exactly how far a brand can convert domestic success into sustainable international growth.

Table 1

## SUMMARY OF EACH BRAND'S POSITIONING

Brand	Core strengths	Main overseas markets	Communication strategies	Reasons for attractiveness
Florasis	Integration of traditional Chinese cultural aesthetics with modern cosmetics; advanced manufacturing technology.	Southeast Asia, Japan, selective distribution in Europe.	Cultural storytelling emphasizing heritage ingredients, ornate packaging; localized social media campaigns on Instagram and Tik-Tok.	Unique cultural identity; artisanal packaging; blend of luxury image and heritage narratives.
Perfect Diary	Affordable yet trendy products; strong digital marketing and key opinion leaders' network.	Southeast Asia, North America (USA, Canada), trial in Europe.	Influencer collaborations; co-branding with global pop culture entities; cosmopolitan minimalism abroad.	Price-to-quality appeal; rapid trend responsiveness; cross-market brand adaptability.
Herborist	TCM-based skincare combined with modern dermatology; mid- to high-end positioning.	France, Italy, Spain, broader EU market via Sephora and spas.	"Natural wellness" framing; botanical imagery; "clean beauty" positioning aligned with EU consumer preferences.	Alignment with global "clean beauty" trend; heritage in TCM; selective luxury positioning.

### Discussion

Internationalizing Chinese beauty brands entails a complex mix of economic prowess, cultural positioning, and communications strategy. A combination of the COO effect and the cultural adaptation model offers an effective interpretational framework to unravel noticed trends from case studies as well as comprehensive industry trends. For the purposes of this discussion, it summarily bundles the results within four thematic categories: COO identity management, level and span of cultural adaptation, digital platform-caused brand perception, and positioning outcomes of C-beauty in an already oversaturated international beauty marketplace.

Probably, the most obvious conclusion that comes out of analysis is that COO identity is neither an immutable constraint nor a fixed characteristic. Instead, it is an adaptive brand resource that can be positively constructed to either highlight cultural uniqueness or appeal to universal ideals of beauty. The example of Florasis shows that an overt adoption of COO identity — rooted in heritage storytelling — can be a strength in markets where beauty consumers prize authenticity, artisanal tradition, and cultural diversity. On the one hand, Perfect Diary's strategic downplaying of overt Chinese cultural signals across select Western markets shows how COO neutrality can be used to sidestep deep-seated biases and place a brand within prevailing ideals of global style. These alternative approaches all argue in favor of treating COO as a contextually dependent variable: its role depends upon prior associations retained through experience by each consumer market. In those cases, where associations are positive or neutral, extension can establish differentiation; in those

cases, where associations are still negative, strategic reduction can smooth out barriers to entry.

A cultural adaptation theory application to the case studies identifies that adaptation is multi-faceted, extending from surface changes to marketing collateral to deeper changes to product formulation, distribution methods, and brand storytelling. Herborist's repositioning of TCM as European botanical science is an example of deep adaptation, matching a culture-specific origin with international clean and natural beauty trends. Florasis uses a moderate adaptation strategy, keeping symbolic, ornate cultural designs but changing advertising styles to suit national luxury styles. Perfect Diary uses broad adaptation for Western markets, changing product presentation, influencer collaborations, and brand stories to suit cosmopolitan beauty standards. The variation in adaptation depth across cases suggests that there is no universal optimal strategy.

Digital commerce and social media ecosystems have become pivotal enablers of Chinese beauty brands' global expansion. Cross-border e-commerce platforms not only lower the financial barriers to market entry but also provide opportunities for iterative learning through the continuous analysis of consumer data. At the same time, social media operates as both a marketing channel and a cultural adaptation tool, enabling brands to tailor content for local audiences in real time and to track engagement directly. The case studies further show that digital platforms can help counteract COO-related biases. By emphasizing user-generated content, influencer endorsements, and tutorial-driven product demonstrations, brands can shift consumer attention away from origin-based stereotypes and toward the tangible performance,



quality, and experience of the products. In this way, digital storytelling acts as a bridge between COO perception and consumer trial, with well-executed campaigns capable of redefining brand identity in a matter of months.

Despite their strategic advantages, Chinese brands still face challenges from established K-beauty and J-beauty brands, which have spent decades building strong international brand positioning. Both have created aesthetic codes that are immediately identifiable and widely accepted. In order for C-beauty to carve out an equivalent position, it should present a unique value proposition that is not easily subsumed within current beauty categories. Three possible positioning pathways emerge from this analysis:

1. Differentiation of cultural heritage — taking advantage of China's deep storytelling and pictorial traditions to develop a unique and high-end brand identity.

2. Technological leadership — emphasizing manufacturing agility, quick innovation cycles, and state-of-the-art formulation science.

3. Sustainable and ethical leadership — being dedicated to sustainability, clean beauty, and corporate social responsibility as brand pillars.

Each of these approaches will be comparatively successful depending on market conditions, but all require perpetual execution and thoughtful alignment across brand identity, COO communications, and domestic consumer expectations.

### Conclusions and perspectives of research

These results indicate that COO identity, instead of being an unchangeable driver of brand perception, is a strategic resource that can be amplified or downplayed depending on the cultural climate and consumer mindset in each target market. In receptive regions, celebrating Chinese heritage — through design, storytelling, and traditional ingredients — can create meaningful differentiation and reinforce authenticity. In markets where skepticism exists, softening COO signals allows brands to blend seamlessly into global beauty norms, avoiding potential bias. The choice between these strategies depends on a sharp reading of market perceptions and competitive dynamics. Cultural adaptation is equally vital — and it goes far deeper than changing packaging or ad slogans. It involves rethinking product formulations, brand

stories, and distribution strategies. The brands that manage to balance authenticity with local appeal — without losing their identity or clinging rigidly to domestic formulas — are best positioned for lasting international success.

Digital channels now serve as both gateways to new markets and tools for shaping perception. Cross-border e-commerce reduces the cost and risk of expansion, while social media enables brands to tailor content and connect with consumers in real time. Through influencers, user-generated content, and targeted ads, Chinese brands can shift the focus from origin-based stereotypes to product performance, brand values, and customer experience. The ability to quickly adapt a brand narrative is a major advantage in a world where public opinion can change overnight.

From a theoretical perspective, the present research reiterates that COO and cultural adaptation should not be treated as independent constructs but as complementary strategic levers. COO creates the first perceptual lens through which consumers understand a brand, and cultural adaptation adjusts and possibly redefines that lens over time. Their interaction is intermediated via digital channels, which facilitate quick brand awareness and consumer responses.

From a practical point of view, the study emphasizes the value of pre-entry market-specific brand audits, continual adaptation based on data, and intentional expenditure on reputation-forming activities that tie COO identity to domestic consumer values. Brands that conceive COO and adaptation as fluid processes, not fixed judgments at the time of international entry, are better equipped to realize sustainable international growth.

From a cultural and communication perspective, the rise of C-beauty also functions as a form of soft power. By exporting high-quality products enriched with cultural storytelling, Chinese brands can influence global perceptions of China beyond the beauty sector. Strong international branding can break stereotypes, inspire cross-cultural appreciation, and build a more complex and positive image of the country. Expanding the sample of brands, gathering primary insights from both consumers and managers, and tracking strategies over time will not only refine the theory but also reveal how Chinese — and other emerging market — brands navigate the complexities of global consumer culture.

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