

Marketing Mix Factors Influencing Customer Satisfaction with X Brand Cosmetics in Nanning

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of China’s booming affordable beauty market and the transformation challenges confronting local DTC brands, this study takes Brand X—a representative local brand that experienced explosive growth followed by a sharp decline—as the research subject, carries out an investigation in the second-tier city of Nanning, and examines the impact of the 4P marketing mix on consumer satisfaction, so as to address the literature gaps in regional market difference analysis and brand trajectory-specific research. Adopting a descriptive-correlational quantitative design, the study collects valid data from 385 consumers who purchased Brand X products in the past 12 months via a structured questionnaire, and conducts descriptive statistics and simple linear regression analysis using SPSS 26.0. The findings indicate that the overall consumer satisfaction with Brand X in Nanning is at a medium-to-high level ($M = 3.711$), with the place dimension scoring the highest ($M = 3.743$) and the promotion dimension scoring the lowest ($M = 3.657$); all four dimensions of the 4P marketing mix exert significant positive effects on consumer satisfaction ($P < 0.01$), and ranked by influence magnitude in descending order, they are place ($\beta = 0.842$), product ($\beta = 0.787$), promotion ($\beta = 0.783$) and price ($\beta = 0.765$); meanwhile, the core advantages of Brand X are identified as efficient logistics and convenient online channels, while its weaknesses include inconsistent product efficacy claims, a low-end brand image and uncreative promotion forms. This study challenges the traditional perception that product factors dominate consumer satisfaction in the beauty industry, enriches the contextual application of 4P theory in second-tier city scenarios, and provides actionable strategic references for local affordable beauty brands to achieve the development transition from “traffic-driven” to “value-driven.”

Keywords: Affordable beauty; 4P marketing mix; Consumer satisfaction; Quantitative research; Second-tier cities; Brand transformation

Online publication: July 15, 2026

1. Research background

The global beauty and personal care market has maintained steady expansion in recent years, with the affordable beauty segment emerging as the most dynamic growth engine. In 2023, the global market size exceeded \$550 billion, with the affordable beauty segment recording a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.2%, significantly outpacing the 3.5% growth rate of the high-end market ^[1]. Amid persistent global inflationary

pressures and increasingly rational consumer behavior, “masstige” (mass prestige) has become the mainstream trend in global beauty consumption. Consumers no longer blindly pay for brand premiums but demand that affordable products benchmark high-end brands in terms of formulation, efficacy, and user experience ^[2]. The rise of “ingredient-focused” brands such as The Ordinary and CeraVe has propelled the affordable beauty market into a new competitive stage characterized by “clinical-grade professionalism.” Meanwhile, social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, combined with the DTC model, have drastically shortened the incubation cycle of emerging brands from the traditional 5–10 years to just 1–2 years, while significantly reducing intermediate costs ^[3].

China’s beauty market has exhibited even stronger growth momentum. In 2023, total retail sales of cosmetics reached 414.2 billion yuan, representing a year-on-year increase of 5.1% and becoming a key driver of growth in social consumer goods retail sales ^[4]. Driven by rising national confidence and supportive industrial policies, the market share of local beauty brands surpassed 50% for the first time, exceeding that of international brands ^[5]. As the fastest-growing segment in China’s beauty market, affordable beauty accounts for over 70% of sales from young consumers aged 20–39, who exhibit distinct characteristics such as high price sensitivity, heavy reliance on social media for information acquisition, and strong recognition of the “Guochao” (national trend) movement ^[6].

Against this favorable market backdrop, Brand X achieved explosive growth by positioning itself as a “cost-effective makeup brand for young consumers” and leveraging exceptional digital marketing capabilities. Between 2019 and 2021, its revenue surged from 3.031 billion yuan to 5.840 billion yuan, establishing itself as a phenomenal market entrant in China’s local affordable beauty sector ^[7]. However, since 2022, Brand X has encountered significant operational challenges, with annual revenue plummeting to 3.706 billion yuan—a year-on-year decrease of 36.5% ^[8]. This precipitous decline has been attributed to the concentrated manifestation of multiple contradictions, including long-term over-reliance on traffic marketing, severe product homogenization, low perceived brand value, and limited offline presence ^[9]. As consumer expectations for product quality and experience continue to rise, enhancing consumer satisfaction has become an urgent priority for Brand X to overcome its challenges and achieve sustainable development.

2. Research gaps

Against the backdrop of China’s booming affordable beauty market and local DTC brands’ transformation challenges, this study examines the impact of the 4P marketing mix on consumer satisfaction through a quantitative analysis of 385 valid questionnaires from Nanning, focusing on Brand X—a representative local brand that experienced explosive growth followed by a sharp decline. The results show that overall consumer satisfaction is medium-to-high ($M = 3.711$), with place scoring highest ($M = 3.743$) and promotion lowest ($M = 3.657$); all four 4P dimensions have significant positive effects on satisfaction ($P < 0.01$), ranked by influence as place ($\beta = 0.842$), product ($\beta = 0.787$), promotion ($\beta = 0.783$), and price ($\beta = 0.765$). This study challenges the traditional view that product factors dominate beauty industry satisfaction, enriches the contextual application of 4P theory in second-tier cities, and provides actionable strategies for local affordable beauty brands’ transition from “traffic-driven” to “value-driven” development.

3. Research objectives and questions

This study aims to investigate the relationship between the 4P marketing mix and consumer satisfaction with Brand X in the Nanning market. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

What is the level of consumer satisfaction with Brand X's beauty products across the four dimensions of the 4P marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) and overall satisfaction in Nanning, China?

How does each dimension of Brand X's marketing mix influence consumer satisfaction among consumers in Nanning, China?

4. Research contributions

This study makes two primary contributions to the existing literature and practice:

Theoretically, this study enriches the contextual application of the 4P marketing mix theory by examining its relative importance in the second-tier city affordable beauty market. The finding that place factors have a greater impact on consumer satisfaction than product factors provides new insights into the marketing laws of different tiers of city markets.

Practically, this study provides precise diagnostic results and actionable strategic recommendations for Brand X to improve consumer satisfaction in the Nanning market. The findings can also serve as a reference for other local affordable beauty brands facing similar transformation challenges in second- and third-tier cities.

5. Literature review

5.1. 4P marketing mix theory

The 4P Marketing Mix Theory, proposed by McCarthy^[10] based on Borden's^[11] 12-element framework, systematizes enterprise controllable marketing activities into four core dimensions: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. This framework has become the cornerstone of modern marketing management due to its clarity, controllability, and operability. Kotler and Keller^[12] further expanded the connotation of the 4P theory to adapt to the digital economy era: the product dimension has extended from a single physical product to a combination of "physical + digital services"; the place dimension has evolved into an omnichannel system integrating "online e-commerce + social e-commerce + offline experience stores"; and the promotion dimension has transformed from one-way advertising indoctrination to two-way interactive content marketing and KOL seeding.

Despite the subsequent proposal of extended frameworks such as 7P, 4C, and 4R, the 4P theory remains the most widely used analytical tool in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry. A meta-analysis by Zhang and Li^[13] showed that the comprehensive explanatory power of the 4P elements on consumer satisfaction in China's FMCG industry reaches 68%, making it particularly suitable for analyzing the core demands of the beauty industry regarding product efficacy, cost-effectiveness, purchase convenience, and promotional authenticity.

5.2. Expectation-disconfirmation theory

Proposed by Oliver^[14], the Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory reveals the psychological mechanism of consumer satisfaction formation from a cognitive psychology perspective. It posits that consumer satisfaction is not determined by the absolute quality of a product or service, but rather by the subjective psychological state resulting from consumers comparing their pre-purchase expectations with post-purchase perceived performance.

The theory consists of three core stages: expectation formation based on advertising, word-of-mouth, and KOL recommendations; perceived performance based on actual product use experience; and disconfirmation judgment resulting from the comparison between the two.

In the beauty industry, Zhao *et al.* ^[15] found that excessive promotion by KOLs significantly raises consumer expectations, and when actual product efficacy fails to meet these expectations, strong negative disconfirmation occurs, leading to a substantial decline in consumer satisfaction. Yang and Li ^[6] further confirmed that this is precisely the primary cause of declining satisfaction among local affordable beauty brands.

5.3. Empirical evidence on marketing mix and consumer satisfaction

A large body of empirical research has verified the significant positive impact of all dimensions of the 4P marketing mix on consumer satisfaction across various industries. Product factors are generally considered the core determinant, with Zhang and Li ^[13] reporting an average influence coefficient of 0.47, significantly higher than other dimensions. Price factors primarily affect satisfaction through consumers' perception of "price-value" matching rather than absolute price levels ^[16]. In the digital era, omnichannel integration capabilities, logistics efficiency, and after-sales service quality have become critical place factors ^[17]. Promotion factors exhibit a double-edged sword effect: moderate and authentic promotions can enhance perceived value, while excessive and false promotions damage brand trust ^[18].

The beauty industry's unique product attributes and consumption characteristics give rise to differentiated patterns in these relationships. Liu and Zhang ^[19] pointed out that ingredient transparency and efficacy authenticity have surpassed packaging design and brand awareness as the primary factors affecting beauty product satisfaction. Although online channels dominate, offline stores' trial experiences and professional shopping guide services remain irreplaceable and can significantly increase repurchase rates ^[15]. KOL marketing, as the most mainstream promotion method in the beauty industry, exerts a particularly strong influence on young consumers, but excessive commercialization and false recommendations severely undermine its credibility ^[20].

6. Research hypotheses

Based on the 4P Marketing Mix Theory and existing empirical evidence, this study proposes the following research hypotheses:

H₁: Product factors have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction with Brand X beauty products.

H₂: Price factors have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction with Brand X beauty products.

H₃: Place factors have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction with Brand X beauty products.

H₄: Promotion factors have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction with Brand X beauty products.

7. Research design

This study employs a descriptive and correlational quantitative research design to examine the relationship

between the four dimensions of the 4P marketing mix and consumer satisfaction with Brand X in Nanning, China. This design is appropriate for addressing the research objectives as it allows for the systematic collection of numerical data to describe phenomena and test hypothesized relationships between variables.

8. Population and sampling

The target population of this study consists of permanent residents in Nanning, China who have purchased and used Brand X beauty products within the past 12 months. This population was selected because individuals within this group possess direct experience with Brand X's products and marketing activities, and their evaluations accurately reflect the effectiveness of the brand's regional marketing strategies.

Cochran's ^[21] sample size calculation formula for unknown populations was used to determine the minimum required sample size. With a 95% confidence level ($z = 1.96$), a conservative population proportion estimate of 0.5, and a 5% margin of error ($e = 0.05$), the minimum sample size was calculated as 384. Therefore, this study aimed to collect 385 valid responses to ensure the representativeness and reliability of the sample data.

A convenience sampling method was employed to select eligible participants. This method was chosen due to the unavailability of a complete sampling frame of Brand X consumers in Nanning. To enhance sample representativeness, questionnaires were distributed through dual channels: an online platform (Wenjuanxing, a popular Chinese online survey platform) and offline locations near Brand X counters and experience stores in major commercial districts of Nanning (including Mixc Mall, Hangyang International, and Chaoyang Square). A total of 387 questionnaires were distributed, and 385 valid responses were obtained, resulting in an effective response rate of 99.48%.

9. Research instrument

A self-administered structured questionnaire was developed as the research instrument, based on validated scales from existing academic literature and adapted to the specific context of the affordable beauty industry and Brand X. The questionnaire consists of three sections:

Demographic and Consumption Characteristics: This section collects information on respondents' gender, age, occupation, monthly disposable income, monthly beauty expenditure, and purchase frequency of Brand X products.

4P Marketing Mix Evaluation (Independent Variables): This section measures respondents' perceptions of Brand X's marketing mix across four dimensions, totaling 24 items. The product dimension (6 items) assesses quality, efficacy, packaging, and variety; the price dimension (6 items) evaluates pricing rationality, competitiveness, and cost-effectiveness; the place dimension (6 items) measures purchase convenience, logistics efficiency, and offline service; and the promotion dimension (6 items) assesses advertising attractiveness, KOL credibility, and promotional authenticity.

Consumer Satisfaction Evaluation (Dependent Variable): This section measures overall consumer satisfaction with Brand X using 5 items, including overall satisfaction, expectation matching, purchase experience, recommendation intention, and repurchase intention.

All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

10. Data analysis procedures

All data were entered into and analyzed using SPSS 26.0 statistical software. The following analytical techniques were employed:

Descriptive Statistical Analysis: Used to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and the mean and standard deviation of each variable.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis: Used to test the four research hypotheses by examining the relationship between each dimension of the 4P marketing mix and consumer satisfaction. The goodness of fit (R^2), F -statistic, and significance level (P) were examined to assess model validity, and the t -test of the regression coefficient was used to determine the significance of the relationship.

11. Sample characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the 385 respondents are presented in **Table 1**. The sample characteristics closely align with Brand X's core target consumer positioning as a "cost-effective makeup brand for young consumers." Females constituted 84.4% of the sample, reflecting the dominant consumer group in the beauty market. The age distribution was heavily concentrated among younger consumers, with 90.4% of respondents aged between 20 and 39 years. Occupationally, enterprise employees (45.7%) and college students (22.8%) were the largest subgroups, characterized by high digital literacy and openness to new products. In terms of economic status, 70.6% of respondents reported a monthly disposable income between 3001 and 8000 yuan, and 77.5% spent between 51 and 500 yuan monthly on beauty products, perfectly matching the consumption capacity of the affordable beauty market segment. Regarding purchase frequency, 70.2% of respondents purchased Brand X products at least once every three months, indicating a moderate to high level of brand engagement.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents ($n = 385$)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	60	15.6
	Female	325	84.4
Age	20–29 years	240	62.3
	30–39 years	108	28.1
	40–49 years	28	7.3
	50 years and older	9	2.3
	College students (20+ years)	88	22.8
Occupation	Enterprise employees	176	45.7
	Public institution & government staff	58	15.2
	Freelancers	40	10.3
	Others	23	6.0
Monthly Disposable Income	≤3000 RMB	70	18.2
	3001–5000 RMB	147	38.1
	5001–8000 RMB	125	32.5
	8001–12000 RMB	33	8.6
	≥12000 RMB	10	2.6

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Monthly Beauty Expenditure	≤50 RMB	48	12.6
	51–200 RMB	163	42.4
	201–500 RMB	135	35.1
	501–1000 RMB	32	8.3
	≥1000 RMB	7	1.6
Purchase Frequency	Once a month or more	110	28.5
	Once every 2–3 months	161	41.7
	Once every 4–6 months	82	21.2
	Once a year	32	8.6

12. Descriptive statistics of variables

The descriptive statistics for the four dimensions of the 4P marketing mix and overall consumer satisfaction are presented in **Table 2**. The results show that the overall consumer satisfaction with Brand X in Nanning is 3.711 points, which is at a medium-to-high level but still has considerable room for improvement.

Among the four dimensions of the marketing mix, the place dimension achieved the highest satisfaction score (3.743 points), with the item “logistics and distribution speed is fast, and packaging is intact” receiving the highest score of 3.919 points among all items. This indicates that Brand X’s online channels and logistics services have been widely recognized by consumers. The product dimension ranked second with a score of 3.706 points, with “rich product variety and sufficient choices” scoring the highest (3.803 points) but “consistency between products and promotional descriptions without exaggerated ingredients” scoring the lowest (3.644 points), reflecting a certain gap between product efficacy and promotional claims. The price dimension scored 3.681 points, with consumers showing high price sensitivity but giving the lowest score to “the positive impact of the low-price strategy on brand image” (3.571 points), indicating that the long-term low-price strategy has formed a low-end brand stereotype. The promotion dimension had the lowest satisfaction score of 3.657 points, with “creativity of co-branded products” scoring the lowest (3.631 points), suggesting that frequent co-branding activities have failed to effectively resonate with consumers.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Product	3.706	0.740	Agree
Price	3.681	0.602	Agree
Place	3.743	0.617	Agree
Promotion	3.657	0.561	Agree
Consumer Satisfaction	3.711	0.624	Agree

13. Hypothesis testing

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the four research hypotheses, with each dimension of the 4P marketing mix serving as the independent variable and consumer satisfaction as the dependent variable. The regression results are presented in **Table 3**.

All four regression models were statistically significant at the $P < 0.001$ level, as indicated by the F -values. The results show that all four dimensions of the 4P marketing mix have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction, thus supporting hypotheses H₁, H₂, H₃, and H₄.

Notably, place factors had the strongest impact on consumer satisfaction, with a standardized regression coefficient of 0.842 and an R^2 value of 0.708, indicating that place factors can explain 70.8% of the variance in consumer satisfaction. This finding challenges the traditional view that product factors are the primary driver of consumer satisfaction in the beauty industry. Product factors ($\beta = 0.787$, $R^2 = 0.620$) and promotion factors ($\beta = 0.783$, $R^2 = 0.613$) had moderate impacts, while price factors had the weakest impact ($\beta = 0.765$, $R^2 = 0.585$).

Table 3. Regression analysis results of marketing mix dimensions on consumer satisfaction

Independent variable	Unstandardized coefficient B	Standard error	Standardized coefficient β	t -value	P -value	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F -value
Product	0.664	0.027	0.787	24.977	.000**	0.620	0.619	623.847
Price	0.793	0.034	0.765	23.215	.000**	0.585	0.583	538.954
Place	0.851	0.028	0.842	30.503	.000**	0.708	0.708	930.461
Promotion	0.871	0.035	0.783	24.631	.000**	0.613	0.612	606.685

Note. ** $P < 0.01$. Dependent variable = Consumer Satisfaction.

A summary of the hypothesis testing results is presented in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Summary of hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Content	Result
H ₁	Product factors have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction with Brand X beauty products	Accepted
H ₂	Price factors have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction with Brand X beauty products	Accepted
H ₃	Place factors have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction with Brand X beauty products	Accepted
H ₄	Promotion factors have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction with Brand X beauty products	Accepted

14. Key findings interpretation

This study yields several important findings regarding the relationship between the 4P marketing mix and consumer satisfaction with Brand X in the Nanning market.

First, the finding that place factors have the strongest impact on consumer satisfaction is particularly noteworthy. This result is consistent with Wei ^[22], who pointed out that in regional markets with relatively insufficient retail resources, omnichannel integration capabilities and logistics service quality have a more significant impact on consumer satisfaction than product factors. Unlike first-tier cities where consumers have abundant offline shopping options and place greater emphasis on product efficacy and brand value, consumers in second-tier cities like Nanning are more sensitive to purchase convenience and logistics efficiency. Brand X's early investment in omnichannel construction and logistics partnerships has created a competitive advantage that is difficult for competitors to replicate in the short term.

Second, the moderate impact of product factors reflects the dilemma of Brand X's "wide but not refined"

product strategy. While rapid new product launches have met consumers' demand for novelty, insufficient R&D investment has led to severe product homogenization and weak core efficacy differentiation. The low score for "consistency between products and promotional descriptions" confirms the finding of Xiang and Zhou that local affordable beauty brands generally face the problem of excessive marketing, where exaggerated promotional claims raise consumer expectations that actual product performance cannot match, resulting in negative disconfirmation.

Third, the weakest impact of price factors indicates that simple low-price strategies are no longer the core competitive advantage of affordable beauty brands. Consumers' price judgment has shifted from "absolute price" to "price-value" matching. Long-term low-price strategies not only compress profit margins but also form a difficult-to-reverse low-end brand stereotype, which is consistent with the low score for the impact of the low-price strategy on brand image.

Fourth, the relatively low satisfaction with the promotion dimension reflects the diminishing marginal returns of the traffic-driven model. High-frequency advertising and live streaming have increased brand exposure in the short term but have also caused consumer fatigue and resistance. The low score for co-branded product creativity indicates that the current "traffic co-branding" model, which focuses on IP popularity rather than value matching, has failed to establish effective emotional connections with consumers.

15. Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted exclusively in Nanning, a second-tier city in southern China. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other regions or different tiers of cities with distinct demographic characteristics and market conditions. Second, a cross-sectional research design was employed, which provides a snapshot of consumer satisfaction at a specific point in time but does not allow for the examination of dynamic changes in satisfaction over time or the establishment of causal relationships. Third, the study focused exclusively on the four dimensions of the 4P marketing mix, while other potential factors influencing consumer satisfaction, such as brand image, perceived value, and consumer characteristics, were not included in the analysis.

Future research can address these limitations in several ways. First, comparative studies can be conducted across different tiers of cities in China to explore regional variations in the drivers of consumer satisfaction in the affordable beauty market. Second, longitudinal research designs can be adopted to track changes in consumer satisfaction over time and investigate the long-term effects of marketing strategy adjustments. Third, more comprehensive consumer satisfaction models can be developed by incorporating additional variables such as brand image, perceived value, and consumer involvement to enhance explanatory power. Finally, experimental research methods can be used to test the causal effects of specific marketing activities on consumer satisfaction.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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