

Integrated Marketing Communications Strategy for KIKO Make Up Milano: Expanding into the Chinese Market

Le Li & Jian Hua Zeng

Abstract:

This review paper examines the integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy for KIKO Make Up Milano as the brand seeks to expand into the Chinese market. Utilizing the SOSTAC framework (Situation, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Actions, and Control), the paper provides a comprehensive analysis of KIKO's current market situation, marketing objectives, and strategic approach. The analysis delves into the economic, social, and technological factors that influence KIKO's entry into China, highlighting the distinct differences between Hong Kong and mainland China. The paper identifies key marketing communication objectives, such as raising brand awareness and stimulating product trials, and proposes targeted strategies to achieve these goals. By leveraging both traditional and digital media channels, including social media and e-commerce platforms, KIKO aims to effectively engage Chinese consumers and establish a significant market presence. The review concludes with actionable recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of KIKO's IMC campaign in China, addressing potential challenges and optimizing the brand's outreach and impact in this new market.



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Introduction

KIKO MILANO, an Italian professional cosmetics brand, has established itself as a leader in the beauty industry since its inception in 1997 (The Brand, 2019). Founded by the Percassi Group, KIKO MILANO has redefined beauty standards by offering over 1600 skincare and makeup products through its extensive network of more than 700 stores across 14 countries, alongside a robust e-commerce platform available in 35 countries worldwide (The Brand, 2019; Ricotti, 2015). The brand's success lies in its commitment to providing high-quality cosmetics at affordable prices, catering to a diverse clientele that values both innovation and accessibility (Ricotti, 2015). KIKO MILANO embodies the Italian spirit of creativity and elegance, evident in its vibrant color palettes and revolutionary textures developed in collaboration with makeup artists and trendsetters from around the globe (The Brand, 2019). Furthermore, KIKO MILANO prioritizes product safety and efficacy, adhering to stringent quality standards enforced by European and US regulations. Each product undergoes rigorous clinical and dermatological testing to ensure superior quality and safety (The Brand, 2019). Looking ahead, KIKO MILANO continues to expand its global presence, with plans to further enhance its product offerings and retail footprint, including potential ventures into new markets such as the United States (Ricotti, 2015). In summary, KIKO MILANO represents a quintessential example of Italian excellence in cosmetics, blending innovation with tradition to meet the evolving needs of beauty enthusiasts worldwide.

As globalization continues to reshape the landscape of international business, companies are increasingly seeking to penetrate new and lucrative markets. KIKO Make Up Milano, an Italian professional cosmetics brand renowned for its innovative products and extensive global presence, is now poised to expand into the dynamic market of mainland China. Founded in 1997, KIKO has revolutionized the cosmetics industry by offering over 1600 products across skincare and makeup categories, emphasizing quality and affordability (The Brand, 2019). With a well-established presence in Hong Kong and a robust e-commerce platform serving 35 countries worldwide, KIKO aims to replicate its success in mainland China, a market characterized by unique economic, social, and technological dynamics.

This review paper examines KIKO's strategic approach to entering the Chinese market through an integrated marketing communications (IMC) lens. IMC plays a pivotal role in aligning a brand's communication strategies across various channels to ensure consistency and effectiveness in reaching target audiences (Kitchen & Schultz, 1998). By employing the SOSTAC framework—Situation, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Actions, and Control—this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of KIKO's current market situation, outlines its marketing objectives, and proposes strategic initiatives tailored to the nuances of the Chinese market. The decision to enter mainland China represents a significant strategic move for KIKO, necessitating a thorough understanding of local consumer behavior, preferences, and cultural nuances (Johnson-Hunt, 2020). The Chinese market, characterized by its vast size, rapid digitalization, and unique consumer trends, presents both opportunities and challenges for international brands seeking to establish a foothold (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021). Therefore, this paper explores how KIKO can leverage its strengths in product innovation and quality while adapting its marketing communications to resonate with Chinese consumers. Key objectives of KIKO's IMC strategy in China include enhancing brand awareness, fostering brand loyalty, and driving product trials among a diverse consumer base (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). By integrating traditional marketing channels with digital platforms such as social media and e-commerce, KIKO aims to engage Chinese consumers effectively and differentiate itself in a competitive marketplace (Smith & Zook, 2011). This paper proposes actionable recommendations to

optimize KIKO's IMC campaign, addressing potential challenges and ensuring a strategic approach to maximize brand visibility and market impact in mainland China. Moreover, this review paper underscores the importance of a robust IMC strategy for KIKO Make Up Milano as it embarks on its expansion journey into the Chinese market. By aligning marketing efforts with local market dynamics and consumer insights, KIKO seeks to establish a strong brand presence and achieve sustainable growth in one of the world's most dynamic consumer markets.

Literature review

Based on prior studies in integrated marketing communication (IMC), several key themes emerge. Pimentel et al. (2023) explore the paradoxes faced by for-profit social ventures in managing IMC, highlighting tensions between traditional marketing practices and social value creation. They emphasize stakeholder management and value co-creation as crucial for achieving marketing effectiveness and social impact. Ruswanti et al. (2019) empirically predict the influence of IMC tools on consumers' intention to buy organic products, finding that direct marketing significantly impacts purchasing decisions, underscoring the role of specific IMC tools in shaping consumer behavior in retail settings. Additionally, Finne and Grönroos (2009; 2017) advance customer-centric IMC models such as the Relationship Communication Model (RCM) and Customer-Integrated Marketing Communication (CIMC). These models advocate understanding consumer ecosystems and integrating diverse messages to enhance message reception and value-in-use, challenging traditional inside-out approaches to marketing communication. Collectively, these studies contribute to evolving IMC frameworks that integrate social value, consumer behavior insights, and customer-centric communication strategies, offering valuable insights for marketers aiming to navigate complexities in contemporary marketing environments.

KIKO's Journey and Adaptation in the Cosmetics Industry

In its journey since 1997, KIKO Make Up Milano has consistently upheld its commitment to innovation and quality in the cosmetics industry. Founded in Italy, the brand has become synonymous with cutting-edge makeup, skincare, and body treatments designed to meet the diverse beauty needs of women worldwide (The Brand, 2019). KIKO's emphasis on superior quality and safety is reflected in its rigorous production standards and commitment to using creative, high-quality ingredients (The Brand, 2019). By offering products that combine innovation with affordability, KIKO has not only challenged conventional beauty standards but also earned the trust and loyalty of discerning consumers globally. With a presence in over 14 countries through 700 physical stores and an expansive online presence spanning 35 countries, KIKO MILANO continues to expand its reach while remaining true to its mission of making high-quality skincare and cosmetics accessible to all (The Brand, 2019). Recent studies highlight KIKO Make Up Milano's strategic adaptability in response to global market dynamics, particularly as it explores entry into new markets like China. The brand's success in maintaining relevance lies in its ability to blend Italian elegance with international trends, a strategy that resonates with diverse consumer preferences (Johnson-Hunt, 2020). This approach not only underscores KIKO's commitment to innovation but also its agility in tailoring products and marketing strategies to meet local demands while maintaining global brand consistency (The Brand, 2019). By leveraging comprehensive market research and consumer insights, KIKO aims to navigate cultural nuances and regulatory landscapes in China, ensuring that its integrated marketing communications strategy effectively communicates the brand's core values of quality, creativity, and accessibility to a burgeoning consumer base (Johnson-Hunt, 2020).

KIKO's SWOT analysis

Strengths: KIKO Make Up Milano has solidified its position as a leader in the cosmetics industry since its establishment in Italy in 1997. Renowned for its commitment to innovation and quality, KIKO offers a wide array of makeup, skincare, and body treatments that cater to diverse beauty needs globally (The Brand, 2019). The brand's emphasis on creativity is evident through its cutting-edge formulations and trend-inspired collections, which resonate with a broad demographic of beauty enthusiasts. Furthermore, KIKO upholds rigorous production standards, using high-quality ingredients sourced from reputable suppliers, and abstains from animal testing, enhancing its ethical and corporate image (The Brand, 2019). This dedication has fostered strong brand loyalty and consumer trust, supported by a robust network of over 700 physical stores across 14 countries and an extensive online presence in 35 countries, ensuring widespread accessibility and consumer reach.

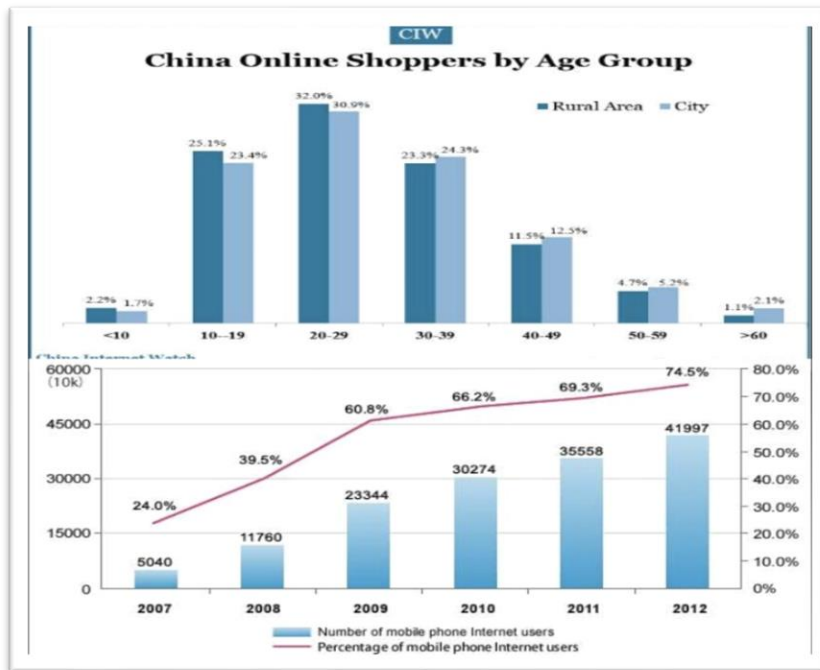
Weaknesses: Despite its strengths, KIKO faces certain weaknesses that could impact its competitive edge. One challenge is the brand's limited brand awareness in newer markets, particularly as it expands into regions like China (Johnson-Hunt, 2020). In these markets, KIKO encounters formidable competition from well-established local and international brands with stronger market presence and customer loyalty. Additionally, KIKO's reliance on fast-changing fashion trends for product innovation poses risks, necessitating continuous adaptation to consumer preferences and market trends, which could lead to inventory management challenges and fluctuating demand (The Brand, 2019). Moreover, entering diverse cultural and regulatory environments in new markets presents complexities, particularly in regions like China where understanding and navigating local consumer behaviors and governmental policies are crucial for success.

Opportunities: KIKO Make Up Milano is poised to capitalize on several opportunities to bolster its market position and growth trajectory. The burgeoning demand for cosmetics in emerging markets, especially in Asia, presents a significant growth opportunity for KIKO (Johnson-Hunt, 2020). Leveraging its reputation for quality and innovation, KIKO can introduce tailored products that resonate with diverse consumer preferences, particularly the rising trend of beauty consciousness among younger demographics. Moreover, the shift towards e-commerce offers KIKO avenues to enhance its digital marketing strategies and optimize online platforms, thereby expanding its customer base and driving sales growth (The Brand, 2019). For instance, tapping into China's vast e-commerce landscape, such as through platforms like Taobao, can facilitate direct access to Chinese consumers who increasingly prefer online shopping for cosmetics.

Threats: Despite its promising growth prospects, KIKO faces several threats that could impede its success. The cosmetics industry is fiercely competitive, with numerous global and local brands competing for market share through similar product offerings and competitive pricing strategies (The Brand, 2019). This competitive pressure necessitates ongoing innovation and differentiation to maintain relevance and appeal to evolving consumer preferences. Moreover, navigating diverse regulatory landscapes across different countries poses risks, as changes in regulations or trade policies could impact KIKO's operations and profitability, particularly in markets with stringent compliance requirements or political instability (Johnson-Hunt, 2020). For example, managing tax implications and financial regulations in China requires meticulous planning and adaptation to local business practices.

Moreover, while KIKO Make Up Milano enjoys strong brand recognition and a loyal customer base globally, addressing weaknesses and effectively capitalizing on opportunities while

mitigating threats will be crucial for sustaining growth and competitiveness in the dynamic cosmetics market.



PEST Analysis for KIKO Make Up Milano

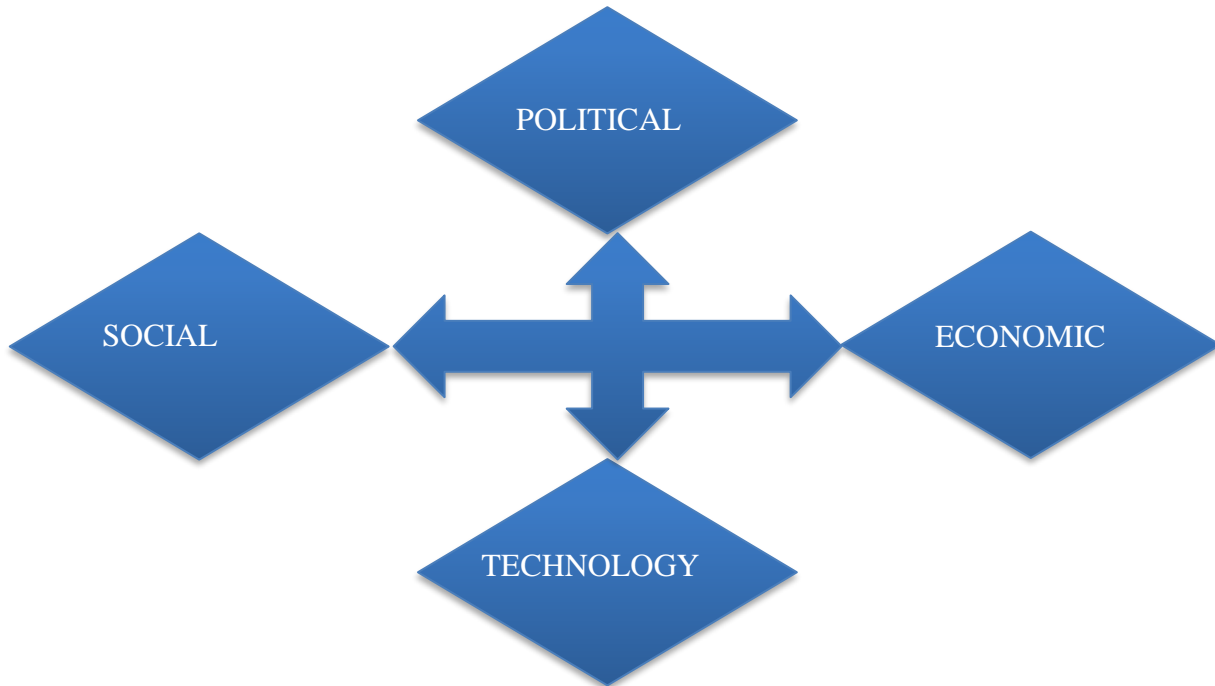
PEST analysis, which examines the Political, Economic, Social, and Technological factors affecting a business, provides valuable insights into KIKO Make Up Milano's strategic environment (Yip, 2004).

Political Factors: KIKO operates in a global cosmetics industry where political stability and regulatory environments significantly impact operations. For instance, entering markets like China necessitates navigating stringent cosmetic testing and regulatory frameworks (Johnson-Hunt, 2020). Compliance with international trade laws, particularly in regions governed by the EU and US, is critical to ensure product safety and consumer protection standards are met. KIKO's decision to establish a presence in Hong Kong, with its familiar legal environment, serves as a strategic gateway into the complex mainland China market.

Economic Factors: Economic factors such as GDP growth, inflation rates, and exchange rates profoundly influence KIKO's business decisions. In Hong Kong, characterized by a free-market economy and low taxation, KIKO benefits from favorable economic conditions that attract global brands seeking to expand (Cosmetics, 2015). Conversely, the mainland Chinese market offers vast potential due to its burgeoning middle class and increasing disposable incomes, despite differing economic systems between Hong Kong and the mainland.

Social Factors: Cultural preferences and societal trends shape consumer behavior in the cosmetics industry. KIKO adapts its product offerings to align with local preferences, leveraging cultural celebrations like the Spring Festival or Western holidays such as Christmas and Valentine's Day to introduce themed products that resonate with consumers (The Brand, 2019). Social media plays a pivotal role in KIKO's marketing strategy, facilitating direct engagement with younger demographics and enhancing brand visibility in dynamic markets like China.

Technological Factors: Technological advancements drive innovation and operational efficiency within KIKO. The brand invests in research and development to create safe, cutting-edge cosmetic formulations while adhering to ethical standards such as avoiding animal testing (The Brand, 2019). Digital platforms like Taobao and JD.com in China enable KIKO to capitalize on the country's robust e-commerce landscape, enhancing accessibility and consumer reach through tailored online experiences.



In summary, the PEST analysis underscores the importance of understanding external macro-environmental factors for KIKO Make Up Milano. By strategically navigating political, economic, social, and technological trends, KIKO can optimize its market entry strategies, adapt product offerings, and strengthen brand positioning in diverse global markets.

Marketing Communication Objectives for KIKO

Marketing communication objectives are a crucial component of overall marketing strategy (CLOW, 2010). For KIKO Make Up Milano, these objectives include creating brand awareness, fostering engagement, and generating interest in KIKO products (CLOW, 2010). Utilizing response hierarchy models helps to understand the stages of consumer response throughout the communication process, aiding in targeting specific market segments (CLOW, 2010). When entering a new market like China, for example, opening a new store in Shanghai, KIKO's communication objectives must first focus on building brand awareness among Chinese consumers (Dahlen, 2010). Establishing a cognitive map in the minds of Chinese female consumers is critical, as initial awareness needs to transition from short-term to long-term memory (Fill, 2009). Additionally, KIKO must develop market strategies tailored to diverse customer segments in China. Another objective is to stimulate interest among Chinese consumers in purchasing KIKO products. As awareness of KIKO grows among Chinese consumers, their curiosity and desire to explore the brand's high-quality, affordable products will increase. Ultimately, KIKO aims to increase its market share in China. Based on the situational analysis, the key points for KIKO's marketing communication objectives include aligning with media tools and market insights (Dahlen, 2010). Each objective must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed), utilizing traditional and popular social media channels to achieve KIKO's marketing goals in China. Implementing these objectives requires collecting data to assess progress in creating awareness. In summary, KIKO's

marketing communication objectives focus on three main goals to expand in the Chinese market:

1. **To Raise KIKO Brand Awareness:** Ensure that 10% of Chinese females aged 18-35 who purchase cosmetic products in Shanghai are aware of KIKO and its value-for-money products within a six-month period starting April 2017.
2. **Stimulate Trial of KIKO Products:** Encourage 10% of females aged 18-45 purchasing cosmetics in Shanghai to try KIKO products over a three-month period starting June 2017.
3. **Increase KIKO's Online Sales in China:** Achieve at least an 8% increase in KIKO's online sales among females aged 18-45 in China through platforms like Taobao within a 12-month period starting March 2017.
4. **Establish Appropriate KIKO Marketing Communication Strategies**

To achieve these objectives, KIKO needs to employ effective methods and various media tools to implement and achieve its marketing communication goals in China. This involves identifying target markets and understanding how cultural factors influence Chinese consumer behavior toward KIKO's product offerings. Furthermore, strategies should adhere to SMART criteria, ensuring they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. KIKO's communication strategy should focus on educating consumers about its products and key messages. This includes determining whether to use push, pull, or profile strategies to deliver messages to the target market and encourage purchases. Additionally, KIKO must select appropriate communication tools and media channels, considering frequency and sequencing for an effective advertising campaign aimed at the Chinese consumer.

Strategy 1 and Tactics:

The primary objective of the first marketing communication strategy is to increase brand awareness among Chinese females aged 18-35 purchasing cosmetic products. Understanding consumer psychology is key to crafting effective messages that resonate with this target audience. KIKO should emphasize its professional, high-quality, and affordable cosmetics tailored for Chinese consumers. Leveraging pull strategies through outdoor media such as billboards and bus stop posters in Shanghai, a bustling international city, can effectively communicate the quality and value of KIKO products. Packaging design should also appeal to Chinese consumers' aesthetic preferences, enhancing brand visibility and recognition.

Strategy 2:

The second strategy aims to stimulate trial of KIKO products among the target market. By building on initial brand awareness efforts, KIKO can engage consumers emotionally through effective messaging strategies. Utilizing push strategies with department stores and retailers can further promote product availability and encourage trial purchases. Strategic placement in major shopping centers and business districts in Shanghai, where there is a high concentration of potential customers, can amplify the impact of KIKO's marketing communication efforts. Events like cosmetic exhibitions can showcase KIKO products to Shanghai's female consumers during key shopping seasons or cultural celebrations, such as the Lunar Valentine's Day.

Tactics and Action Plans:

Aligned with Chinese cultural influences, KIKO can leverage the theme of romance and beauty during the Lunar Valentine's Day period. Hosting a creative beauty contest centered on summer love themes can engage young female consumers aged 18-35, whether single or married. This event not only enhances emotional connection with the KIKO brand but also offers practical demonstrations of product usage, enhancing consumer understanding and

interest. Providing roses and wine as Valentine's Day gifts further strengthens brand association with romance and beauty in the minds of Chinese consumers.

Strategy 3:

The third communication strategy focuses on increasing KIKO's online sales in China. This involves employing conative messaging strategies aimed at prompting immediate customer action, such as purchasing decisions or sharing information with others. Collaborating with well-known barbershops or sponsoring television programs can increase KIKO's visibility and credibility among its target audience. Offering promotional incentives like discount coupons or buy-one-get-one-free deals on popular platforms like Taobao can drive online sales and encourage repeat purchases among Chinese consumers familiar with the KIKO brand.

Recommendations

Firstly, KIKO Make Up Milano should prioritize enhancing its market research and consumer insights capabilities tailored specifically for the Chinese market. By conducting thorough analyses of regional preferences, cultural nuances, and purchasing behaviors across different demographics, KIKO can refine its product offerings and marketing strategies effectively. Leveraging advanced analytics and social listening tools will provide real-time data insights, enabling KIKO to stay agile and responsive to evolving consumer trends in China. Secondly, it is crucial for KIKO to strengthen its brand localization strategies to resonate deeply with Chinese consumers on a cultural and emotional level. This involves adapting product formulations, packaging designs, and promotional activities to align closely with local tastes, traditions, and seasonal trends. Collaborating with influential local figures and leveraging culturally relevant storytelling in marketing campaigns will enhance brand credibility and foster stronger connections with Chinese consumers, ultimately driving brand loyalty and market penetration. Thirdly, KIKO should expand its digital marketing initiatives in China, focusing on optimizing its online presence and e-commerce strategies. Given the significant shift towards digital platforms for shopping and information consumption among Chinese consumers, KIKO should invest in enhancing its website usability, mobile app functionalities, and integration with popular Chinese e-commerce platforms like Taobao, JD.com, and Tmall. Implementing targeted digital marketing campaigns, including social media advertising, influencer partnerships, and interactive content creation, will amplify brand visibility and engagement, driving online traffic and conversion rates. Fourthly, to mitigate operational challenges associated with entering a complex market like China, KIKO should establish strategic partnerships with local distributors, retailers, and logistics providers. Collaborating with trusted partners who possess in-depth knowledge of the local market landscape, regulatory requirements, and consumer preferences will streamline market entry processes, distribution logistics, and supply chain management. This approach will enable KIKO to navigate operational complexities effectively while maintaining product quality and customer satisfaction standards. Lastly, continuous monitoring and evaluation of KIKO's integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy in China are essential for optimizing campaign performance and achieving long-term success. Implementing robust measurement metrics, such as brand awareness surveys, customer satisfaction indices, and sales analytics, will facilitate data-driven decision-making and allow KIKO to adjust marketing tactics in real-time based on performance insights. Regularly updating and refining the IMC strategy based on market feedback and competitive dynamics will ensure relevance and effectiveness in capturing market share and sustaining growth in the dynamic Chinese cosmetics industry landscape.

Conclusion

KIKO Make Up Milano's strategic endeavor to penetrate the Chinese market represents a pivotal move aimed at capitalizing on the country's growing demand for cosmetics amidst rapid economic growth and digital transformation. Through a comprehensive analysis using the SOSTAC framework, this review paper has highlighted critical aspects of KIKO's integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy tailored for China. KIKO's strengths lie in its rich history of innovation, commitment to quality, and a diverse product range that resonates with global consumers. Leveraging these strengths, KIKO aims to enhance brand awareness, stimulate product trials, and boost online sales among Chinese consumers. However, challenges such as fierce market competition, cultural adaptation, and navigating regulatory landscapes necessitate careful strategic planning and execution. The IMC strategy proposed for KIKO focuses on a blend of traditional and digital marketing channels, including social media platforms and e-commerce sites like Taobao. By aligning marketing communication objectives with market insights and consumer behaviors, KIKO seeks to establish a strong brand presence and foster lasting relationships with Chinese consumers.

Moving forward, KIKO must remain agile in adapting its strategies to evolving market dynamics while maintaining brand consistency and consumer trust. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the IMC campaign's effectiveness will be crucial to adjusting tactics and optimizing resource allocation for sustained growth in the competitive Chinese cosmetics market. In essence, KIKO Make Up Milano's expansion into China represents not only a strategic business opportunity but also a testament to its commitment to global excellence in cosmetics. By integrating innovative marketing strategies with local market nuances, KIKO is poised to carve out a significant niche and achieve long-term success in one of the world's most dynamic consumer landscapes.

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