

The Explosion of Designer Toy IP Driven by Emotional Connection

Yiying Chen

Department of Financial
Management, Xi'an Eurasia
University, Shaanxi, China
Corresponding author:
C_1327710866@outlook.com

Abstract:

In recent years, the designer toy IP has achieved explosive growth based on the ‘emotional connection’ series of marketing methods, forming a business culture phenomenon worthy of exploration. Based on this growth phenomenon, this paper explores the deep logic of the success of designer toy IP and the impact of emotional connections on consumption. By analyzing the marketing model and consumer behavior of designer toy IP, this paper explores the emotional connection mechanism and verifies the relationship between emotion and consumer decision-making. The results show that the success of designer toy IP is not only due to its artistic design, scarce attributes, and fashion play, but also to its deep motivation to establish strong emotional fetters with consumers through personification, community interaction, and an emotional projection mechanism. Consumers use designer toys to gain identity, emotional comfort, and social belonging, making IP an ‘emotional container’ for personal memory and values. Therefore, this paper puts forward conclusions in clarifying the operation logic of emotional marketing of designer toy IP and explaining the role of emotion-driven consumption, and provides a key perspective for understanding contemporary consumer culture and emotion-driven business.

Keywords: Designer toy consumption; emotional connection; group attitude.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the consumer society with excess material. More and more young people find a sense of relaxation in life through interesting toys. In addition to its soft healing characteristics, a designer toy can also communicate emotions between people. It has certain social attributes and is a social curren-

cy for young people to express themselves [1]. The designer toy brand places its product value on plastic toys and creates a ‘comfort prescription’ to heal the tired hearts of adults. Random surprise of stimulating dopamine secretion from the blind box; to the round face, big eyes, ugly-cute, but unique image of the preference; then to the complete set of psychological satisfaction published on social media, each

step accurately touches the young people's demand for emotional value [2]. The consumer's purchase behavior is no longer just for the practical use of the product but is more considers with the product IP mapping and delivery of the psychological level of emotional empathy and satisfaction [3]. This research is of great significance to understand the emotion-driven business logic in contemporary consumer culture, explore the sustainable development path of designer toy IP, and provide theoretical support for relevant enterprise marketing decisions. This study mainly focuses on the relationship between consumers' emotional connection to the designer toy IP and their purchase intention, the mechanism of emotional connection affecting purchase and community participation through identity, and the influence of emotional connection on consumers' brand loyalty and tolerance. The literature analysis method is used to find and read relevant materials and literature. The advantage of this method is that it can systematically sort out the research context of the designer toy industry, the application of emotional connection theory, and the research basis of the combination of the two, which is conducive to clearly defining the research problems and directions. The ultimate goal of this study is to reveal the internal logic of emotional connection driving IP consumption, and to provide a theoretical basis for emotional marketing for the creation and operation of IP. To achieve the goal, based on the current situation of the growth of the tide game market and the core value of emotional connection, this paper focuses on the above three aspects of research questions, let the designer toy this still young market to maintain vitality and enthusiasm, and the 'emotional economy' is turned into a real 'golden track', so that the designer toy market does not deviate from the healthy track while it is booming [4]. With the popularity of digital platforms, cross-border e-commerce, and social media, the threshold of international communication of China's designer toy IP has been continuously lowered. The application of gamification marketing thinking and user co-creation mechanisms has not only promoted the rapid growth of the designer toy industry but also provided new models and opportunities for the export of China's original culture. How to effectively use symbolic capital and emotional value to promote the global spread of cultural products and enhance the soft power of Chinese culture has become an important issue that cultural and creative industries must face in the new era [5].

2. Literature Review

Zhou Yutong introduced AHP analytic hierarchy process to construct a hierarchical model in *'Based on the AHP analytic hierarchy process (AHP) of the designer toy*

blind box user demand research', transformed each user demand index into a judgment matrix and calculated the ranking, trying to find a breakthrough in the current stage of homogenization of the designer toy market, and provide ideas for this research from the perspective of trendy play design. In the process, we should pay attention to the emotional satisfaction brought by the product to the user, and grasp the preferences of the current young people [6]. He Huihui in *Research on ritualized consumption of contemporary youth under emotional empathy*, Taking POP MART as an example, this paper focuses on the key issues in the field of ritual sense practice. Through the systematic research and analysis of James Carey's ritual view, the essence and characteristics of the ritual view of communication are deeply explored, and the root causes and internal logic of POP MART's popularity are discussed [3]. However, the research on the reasons for not buying a designer toy is not comprehensive. This paper will start from the aspect of group classification, classify the consumer groups who have purchased designer toys and the potential consumer groups who have not purchased designer toys, and then refine the groups who have purchased them. The research on whether emotional connection affects consumption complements the existing research gaps. Jiang Junzhe, Liang Duanying in the *'Based on the Z generation, of consumers'*, fashion play blind box brand marketing strategy research, analysis of the blind box designer toy brand through outward indoctrination and internal attraction to touch the Z generation, consumers, to create a good environment for the implementation of the action and reduce the difficulty of its purchase action; by changing the reward to meet their psychological needs, and then the brand's goodwill into action, with rich product mechanism to trigger its repeated cycle of addiction model [7]. This paper provides a new perspective on the 'cause of purchase', but does not provide more answers to whether the continuous purchase behavior under the 'addiction' mechanism is still affected by this mechanism. Based on this, this paper will continue to discuss whether emotional connection is important for the formation of purchase on the basis of the formation of the 'addiction' model.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Questionnaire Design

3.1.1 Scale design and measurement methods

This study uses a questionnaire survey method for research, and the questionnaire design includes three forms: the Likert five-point scale, multiple-choice questions,

ranking questions, and open-ended questions.

Firstly, in the structured scale section, the questionnaire uses a Likert five-point scale for quantitative measurement, with a scoring range from 1 to 5, where 1 represents “strongly disagree / extremely not applicable,” and 5 represents “strongly agree / extremely applicable.” This design is used to measure respondents’ subjective attitudes toward emotional identification and sensory preferences regarding the collectible toy IP. For example, questions such as “Do you think this IP understands your emotions?” and “The design of this IP’s image is very cute/cool/unique, which gives me a ‘visual affinity’” aim to capture fans’ perceptions of the personification and visual appeal of the IP.

Secondly, to further explore behavioral characteristics and consumption motivations, the questionnaire includes multiple-choice and ranking questions. Multiple-choice questions are used to identify consumers’ engagement behaviors and information contact paths, such as “Which behaviors have you participated in? (Multiple selections): transactions on second-hand platforms / customizing toys / attending offline exhibitions, etc.” Ranking questions are used to explore the priority of different motivational dimensions in the decision-making process, such as “What is your primary motivation for purchasing this IP?”

Finally, to supplement the deep interpretation of quantitative results, this study also includes open-ended questions to collect respondents’ subjective evaluations and individual experiences of emotional phenomena related to collectible toy IPs, enhancing the qualitative depth of the research and providing solid textual material for subsequent analysis.

3.1.2 Classification of core variables

This study clearly distinguishes between independent and dependent variables in the questionnaire design to construct a clear analytical framework and support subsequent causal relationship validation. The independent variables include the respondents’ individual background, behavioral characteristics, emotional connection level, and external environmental factors, while the dependent variables primarily focus on the performance of purchase behavior, community participation, and brand attitude.

Regarding the independent variables, basic demographic variables are first set, including age, gender, identity, and the type of residential city, in order to examine the differences in collectible toy consumption across different social groups. Next, consumer behavior characteristic variables are designed, such as purchase frequency, total spending, and the types of IPs collected, which reflect the level of individual engagement in the consumption path. Additionally, to further analyze the psychological mecha-

nisms behind consumers’ attitudes toward collectible toy IPs, emotional connection dimension variables are included, such as the degree of emotional projection onto the IP and the level of involvement in relevant communities. Finally, external environmental factors are considered, including social media contact channels and the paths through which collectible toy information is obtained, aiming to reveal the potential impact of communication media on consumption perception.

The dependent variables are focused on consumers’ behavioral responses and psychological attitudes. Firstly, from the perspective of purchase behavior, the study measures purchase decisions and intentions, such as the acceptance of premium pricing for hidden versions, the likelihood of future purchases, and the tendency to abandon collections when the IP’s character collapses. Secondly, community participation behavior, as an essential component of collectible toy culture, is explored by examining involvement in second-hand transactions, toy customization, offline exhibition check-ins, and understanding of collectible toy terminology. This captures the level of individual activity within the community ecosystem. Furthermore, brand loyalty and tolerance are key dimensions of focus, evaluated through respondents’ attitudes toward negative news about the IP and how they react when the IP is discontinued. This helps assess the stability and inclusiveness of their brand attachment. Finally, emotional resonance and value recognition are examined by assessing respondents’ subjective perceptions of the IP’s “personality” and “soul,” as well as analyzing the sources of the values they identify with, providing a theoretical basis for emotion-driven consumer behavior.

3.2 Data Collection

A total of 139 questionnaires were collected through the survey method. Among them, 107 respondents had purchased collectible toy products, accounting for 76.98%, while 32 respondents had not purchased collectible toy products, accounting for 23.02%. The majority of respondents were aged between 18 and 29 years, making up 86.92%, with 70.09% female and 29.91% male. Most respondents were from first-tier cities and provincial capital cities, and their occupations were primarily students and young professionals.

3.3 Data Analysis Tools

This study uses descriptive statistics, SPSS correlation analysis, and sentiment analysis (including word clouds). Descriptive statistics (such as frequency, percentage, mean, etc.) are used to present the basic distribution characteristics of the data. The structured data from the ques-

tionnaire can efficiently generate frequency tables, bar charts, etc., to clearly display the “core barriers to not purchasing collectible toys” (e.g., the proportion of barriers such as price factors and lack of emotional connection). SPSS is a commonly used statistical software in social sciences, particularly suitable for correlation analysis and regression models for quantitative data. For the “relationship between emotional intensity and purchasing power,” SPSS’s correlation analysis can quantify the degree of association between two variables (e.g., the correlation coefficient between “emotional connection score” and “total spending”).

Social media data is unstructured textual data, which requires extracting sentiment keywords and analyzing emotional tendencies. The core focus of users’ emotional output is identified, and the weight of sentiment keywords is visually presented through a word cloud. This provides empirical support for “specific forms of emotional connection” (e.g., whether “sense of companionship” or “sense of identification” is the most frequently mentioned emotional need by users).

4. Research Results

4.1 Questionnaire Results

Through the questionnaire survey, regarding the question “What is your primary motivation for purchasing this IP?”, 80% of consumers considered emotion to be the main motivation. For the question “What do you believe the primary value of this IP is?”, 79.44% of consumers believed it was the meaning they themselves assigned to the collectible toy IP. This preliminary finding helps verify the important role of emotional connection in the consumption of collectible toy IPs.

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 show that the average score for consumers’ emotional projection onto the collectible toy IP is 2.428, with a standard deviation of 1.127, indicating a moderate level. The average score for purchase frequency is 1.890, with a standard deviation of 1.145, indicating a relatively low level. The average score for total spending is 2.270, with a standard deviation of 1.062, indicating a relatively high level. Therefore, overall, consumers’ purchase willingness is at a moderate level.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of each variable

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
Emotional Projection	1	5	2.428	1.127
Purchase Frequency	1	4	1.890	1.145
Total Spending	1	4	2.270	1.062
Age	1	4	2.090	0.514
Gender	1	2	1.300	0.461

A correlation analysis was conducted on the variables. The results in Table 2 show that consumers’ emotional projection onto the collectible toy IP is significantly positively correlated with both purchase frequency ($r = 0.213$, $p < 0.05$) and total spending ($r = 0.272$, $p < 0.01$). Overall, consumers’ emotional projection onto the collectible toy IP is positively correlated with their overall purchase will-

ingness. In addition to the significant positive correlation between emotional projection and purchase willingness, gender is also significantly positively correlated with total spending ($r = 0.204$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that men have higher cumulative spending on collectible toy IPs than women.

Table 2. Correlations between variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emotional Projection	1				
2. Purchase Frequency	0.213	1			
3. Total Spending	0.272	0.423	1		
4. Age	0.003	-0.052	0.103	1	
5. Gender	-0.104	0.178	0.204	-0.072	1

Note: $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, represents $p < 0.001$

Table 3 shows the results of a linear regression analysis

with total spending as the dependent variable and the four dimensions of emotional projection as independent variables. The results indicate that “You consider this IP an important companion in your life” significantly positively predicts consumers’ total spending ($\beta = 0.284$, $t = 2.56$,

$p < 0.05$). However, the statements “You give the toy a name/set its personality,” “You feel that this IP understands your emotions,” and “You talk to the toy or imagine conversation scenarios” do not significantly predict consumers’ total spending.

Table 3. Linear Regression Analysis Results (n = 100)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	Collinearity Diagnostics	
	B	Standard Error	Beta			VIF	Tolerance
Constant	1.397	0.285	-	4.908	0.000	-	-
1. You give the toy a name/set its personality	-0.105	0.115	-0.141	-0.914	0.364	2.21	0.452
2. You feel that this IP understands your emotions	0.194	0.114	0.252	1.7	0.093	2.019	0.495
3. You talk to the toy or imagine conversation scenarios	-0.061	0.126	-0.078	-0.484	0.63	2.388	0.419
4. You consider this IP an important companion in your life	0.284	0.111	0.361	2.56	0.012	1.832	0.546
R 2	0.176						
Adjusted R2	0.132						
F	4.052						
D-W Value	1.568						

Note: The dependent variable is total spending.

In summary, consumers’ emotional connection to collectible toy IPs is significantly positively correlated with their purchase willingness. Among the factors, the perception that “the IP is an important companion in life” is a key factor influencing total spending. Additionally, gender differences also have a certain impact on total spending.

4.2 Data Collection Results

Using Pop Mart’s Labubu as an example, web scraping of Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) notes effectively collects social media data, allowing for an understanding of public feedback and reducing time costs. The word cloud reflects the connection between personal aesthetics and community participation regarding the Labubu collectible toy IP on social media. Labubu, as a successful example of a locally created collectible toy IP in China, shows through the analysis of Xiaohongshu posts focused on “planting grass” (introducing or recommending products) that emotional keywords such as “cute,” “adorable,” and “healing” are frequently mentioned, with most consumers expressing their love for the IP. Keywords like “premium,” “out

of stock,” and “seeking to purchase” reflect the phenomenon of this IP’s popularity. This indicates that, from the public’s perspective, personal aesthetic preferences related to emotional connection can drive consumer spending, boosting the sales of collectible toy IPs.

Labubu’s journey from China to the world highlights the immense potential embedded in the international spread of Chinese collectible toy culture. This phenomenon tells us that when Chinese original IPs can cleverly combine symbolic capital and emotional value, and win global recognition through appealing character design and innovative communication strategies, they have the opportunity to become a medium for cross-cultural exchange and a new business card for Chinese culture [5].

Based on the questionnaire survey, the results of the scale for the question “Would you give up your collection if the IP’s character collapses?” show that only 6.8% of consumers chose to continue collecting, while more consumers opted to wait and see. For the question “What is your attitude when the IP faces negative news (e.g., plagiarism controversy)?” the responses show that almost no consumers continue to support or defend the IP, indicating

that if a collectible toy IP faces a crisis, there are few supporters and followers. Consumers are low, which could lead to consumer aversion and a loss of brand confidence.

For users who have never purchased collectible toy products, the reasons most likely to encourage future purchases are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency analysis results

Name	Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Encounter an IP character that I deeply like and resonate emotionally. (n = 19)	Did not select	7	36.84	36.84
	Selected	12	63.16	100.00
The price becomes more acceptable (e.g., promotions, lower-priced product lines). (n = 19)	Did not select	17	89.47	89.47
	Selected	2	10.53	100.00
Recommended by friends or seeing friends owning it. (n = 19)	Did not select	16	84.21	84.21
	Selected	3	15.79	100.00
Product design/quality deeply impresses me. (n = 19)	Did not select	13	68.42	68.42
	Selected	6	31.58	100.00
Has specific commemorative significance (e.g., holiday, birthday gift). (n = 19)	Did not select	10	52.63	52.63
	Selected	9	47.37	100.00
Believes it has potential for appreciation (investment and collection). (n = 19)	Did not select	18	94.74	94.74
	Selected	1	5.26	100.00
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From Table 4, it can be observed that regarding encountering an IP character that I deeply like and resonate emotionally, a relatively high proportion of the sample (63.16%) selected this option, while 36.84% did not. Regarding the price becoming more acceptable (e.g., promotions, lower-priced product lines), more than 80% of the sample did not select this option, with 84.21% choosing “did not select.” For the option related to having specific commemorative significance (e.g., holiday, birthday gift), over 50% of the sample did not select this option, with 47.37% selecting it. Regarding the belief that the IP has potential for appreciation (investment and collection), more than 90% of the sample chose “did not select.”

5. Deliberation

Behind the purchase of a designer toy by young people is the integration of multiple needs such as interest, emotion, and social interaction. In the eyes of young people, a designer toy is not only a decoration placed in the room, but also satisfies their pursuit of fresh and unique things. It is also the carrier of their emotional sustenance and satisfies their yearning and pursuit for a better life [8]. Emotional connection brings not only an increase in product market

value, but also the establishment of an emotional connection with users.

The research shows that emotional connection, as a marketing model, can enhance user stickiness in the field of designer toy consumption, so that consumers not only buy products, but also have deeper emotional input. Successful IP often gives anthropomorphic qualities, and users are prone to emotional dependence on the base, similar to friends or pets. Through these products, they can meet the self-expression of aesthetic preferences or the emotional sustenance of accompanying healing. A consumer successfully establishes an emotional relationship with a certain IP, and they are likely to repeat the purchase. This loyalty will not only drive sales, but also promote word-of-mouth, and then make IP more popular. Lao Yuling, a special researcher and director of the E-commerce Research Center of the Chinese Modernization Research Institute of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, said that designer toy artists integrate film, street art, hip-hop, fashion design and other multicultural forms into toy design, and accurately capture the current distinct aesthetic tendencies, so that designer toy is not only ornamental, but also carries a strong spirit of the times, thus causing wide-

spread resonance [9]. In addition, designer toys have a wide range of influence through social media, with unique social attributes. Disney's Disneyland and the offline exhibitions derived from POP MART transform individual consumers into a circle group with common interests, which meets the needs of consumers to exchange personal emotions based on social channels. When consumption and emotions are bound, the trend economy is not only a mirror image of the anxiety of the times, but also a testing ground for business innovation. Whether it's Jellycat's 'cure boom' or POP MART's global ambitions, the heart of it all lies in capturing consumers' emotional gaps. In the future, the sustainable development of this market may depend on whether the brand can find a balance between 'emotional premium' and 'value reality'. After all, the real emotional economy should not only be the carnival of capital, but also the resonance of the mind [10].

6. Conclusion

This study conducts research through questionnaires, social media data crawling and a variety of data analysis methods. The results show that in the consumption of designer toy IP, the degree of emotional connection of consumers to designer toy IP is positively related to their willingness to purchase the IP product; the emotional connection of consumers to the IP is to promote their purchase behavior and community participation by enhancing consumers' identity of the value and aesthetics represented by the IP; the survey of IP people's collapse and negative news shows that there are only a few consumers who have high loyalty and tolerance to the brand due to emotional connection. Therefore, it is concluded that emotional connection plays a key role in the consumption of fun IP, affecting purchase intention, behavior and community participation, but the current brand loyalty and tolerance coverage based on emotional connection are limited. This study provides a lot of valuable reference significance for the future research in this direction, clarifies the operation logic of designer toy IP emotional marketing, explains the mechanism of emotion-driven consumption, and provides a key perspective for understanding the emotion-driven business in contemporary consumer culture. For the tide play industry, it provides theoretical support for enterprises to explore the sustainable development path of designer toy IP and make marketing decisions, and helps enterprises to grasp the emotional needs of consumers and optimize IP creation and operation strategies. In terms of academic research, it supplements the research on the influence of emotional connection in the field of designer toy consumption, and provides empirical basis and research ideas for the follow-up discussion of the deep mechanism of

emotional-driven consumption and the expansion of the research boundary of emotional economy. Future research should focus more on expanding the scope of samples, including special groups such as 18-24-year-old people without higher education, 30+ people with families and enthusiasm for consumption, improving the universality of research, carrying out in-depth interviews, focusing on users who have never bought trendy IP but have other emotional interests, and conducting in-depth interviews with them to explore the underlying ideas, so as to more comprehensively and deeply explore the mechanism of emotional connection in consumer behavior, and improve the theoretical system of emotion-driven consumption. At the same time, we can explore the impact of technological upgrading on the construction of emotional connection of designer toy IP, study how to break the physical limitations with the help of new technologies, create a new emotional experience for users, and promote the innovation and development of the emotional marketing model of designer toy IP.

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