

Research on the Mechanism of Game Brand Association on Consumer Purchase Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Brand collaborations have emerged as a marketing and brand communication strategy in recent years, with game collaborations becoming a key approach for the gaming industry to boost user engagement and brand awareness. This study investigates how collaborations between game brands and other organizations influence consumer purchasing behavior. The research model is constructed based on the ABC Attitude Theory and validated through correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis. Results indicate that brand awareness and collaboration compatibility significantly positively affect consumers' purchase intention, while emotional value partially mediates the relationship between these factors and purchasing behavior. These findings provide valuable insights for conducting user research before game-brand collaborations, thereby enhancing partnership effectiveness.

KEYWORDS

Brand association; ABC attitude theory; Emotional value; Consumer purchase behavior

1 Introduction

In recent years, the term "brand collaborations" has become a hot topic across major social media platforms. According to CBN Data, brand partnership activities have shown remarkable growth since 2020, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.75%. This upward trend reached its peak in 2023, as the number of case studies surged by 35.9% year-on-year.

Brand collaborations, a marketing strategy emerging with the development of internet technology in recent years, serve not only as a tool for brand promotion but also as a strategic partnership. Through joint ventures and product development, two or more brands collaborate to launch new products, services, or campaigns under their shared brand names. This approach connects consumers across different interest groups, enhances mutual brand value and recognition, ultimately forming a mutually beneficial partnership model. The significant growth in collaboration activities reflects how brands leverage strengthened cooperation to boost visibility, create innovative products, and achieve a "1+1 > 2" effect in the internet era ^[1].

With the rapid development of the gaming industry, an increasing number of food brands, fashion labels, and IP holders have recognized gamers as a massive potential consumer base. Frequent cross-brand collaborations with various games have become crucial for selecting suitable partners to expand their market presence. These collaborations unite multiple audiences, boost brand visibility, and leverage fan economy to drive consumption. Examples include "Black Myth: Wukong × Luckin Coffee", "Juequ Zero × McDonald's", and "Xinzhan Town × Line Dog"... Even museums, cultural tourism operators, and intangible cultural heritage organizations have joined this massive collaboration wave. These brand collaborations not only produce daily-use items like stationery, blind boxes, badges, and plush toys, but also provide consumers with a sense of participation and community belonging through purchases, further enhancing brand recognition. While numerous IP collaborations exist today, many suffer from mismatches between partner brands and their own image/products, flawed collaboration approaches, or products that fail to effectively combine both parties' characteristics... Truly groundbreaking brand collaborations remain far fewer than those participating in the trend. In this context,

This study employs the ABC attitude model, focusing on consumers participating in game-brand collaborations. By setting game brand awareness and collaboration compatibility as independent variables and consumer purchasing behavior as the dependent variable, it examines the mediating role of emotional value in the purchasing process. The ultimate goal is to provide theoretical support for game-brand collaboration strategies.

2 Theoretical basis and research hypotheses

2.1 theoretical principle

Attitude refers to an evaluation of a psychological object, which can be categorized into multiple dimensions such as good versus bad, pleasant versus unpleasant ^[2]. In the field of consumer behavior studies, attitudes are typically defined

as three cognitive dimensions: affect, cognition, and behavior ^[3-5]. The "ABC Attitude Model," proposed by Rosenberg and Hovaland in 1960, describes the relationship between these three aspects. The letters "A," "B," and "C" represent affect (emotional response), behavior (action tendency), and cognition (cognitive perception) ^[6]. This model's categorization is rooted in the consumer perspective: "Cognition" denotes consumers' views or understanding of the subject; "Affect" refers to their subjective evaluations and emotional inclinations toward the subject; while "Behavior" indicates consumers' tendencies and willingness to take action ^[7]. The ABC Attitude Model systematically summarizes this interrelationship.

2.2 research hypothesis

2.2.1 The role of cognitive components in the ABC model

(1) Brand awareness

Brand awareness reflects consumers' understanding of specific brand products, referring to the brand impression or brand association that occupies a significant portion in consumer memory. Brand awareness consists of two components: user cognition and brand recall. Higher brand awareness typically enhances consumers' purchase intention. Yang Yanqun pointed out that consumers tend to prefer familiar brands, with highly recognized brands often taking priority in purchasing decisions ^[8]. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1a: Brand awareness has a positive impact on consumer purchasing behavior.

(2) Brand association matching

Scholars such as Chai Shousheng have defined brand collaborations as partnerships between two or more brands that form commercial entities to cooperate in technology, market, or production fields ^[9-10]. By integrating brand advantages, these collaborations jointly launch new products or services, typically occurring between brands with similar styles or complementary products. Brand fit refers to consumers' subjective perception of the collaboration, primarily regarding image similarity between participating brands and consistency in product associations ^[11]. Some scholars emphasize that fit is a crucial factor influencing the effectiveness of brand collaborations—When collaborative products align closely with a brand's personality or effectively combine strengths, they are more likely to gain consumer approval and drive purchases. Ning Changhui further notes that collaborations without clear positioning and complementary advantages may trigger negative spillover effects, potentially damaging brand equity ^[12]. Liu Yang et al. validated through structural equation modeling that brand personality alignment significantly positively influences consumer evaluation tendencies ^[13]. Based on this relationship, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1b: Brand association matching positively affects consumer purchasing behavior.

2.2.2 The role of emotional component in ABC attitude model

Perceived value, a concept developed in the 1990s through interdisciplinary research combining marketing and psychology, describes consumers' subjective judgments about product/service value. When comparing products with identical functions, similar appearances, or comparable services, consumers typically prefer those offering higher perceived value due to superior quality ^[14-15]. As a crucial cognitive foundation for online purchasing decisions, perceived value represents consumers' comprehensive evaluation of product utility through trade-offs. Sheth J N et al. established a detailed multi-dimensional framework from the consumer perspective, identifying five dimensions: social value, emotional value, functional value, cognitive value, and situational value ^[16]. Emotional value specifically addresses satisfaction with experiential elements like product features, packaging, and service attitudes ^[17]. Through examining how brand collaborations' recognition, compatibility, and emotional value fulfillment influence purchase intentions, this study demonstrates that game brand partnerships enhance consumer satisfaction and perceived value through improved subjective experiences. Notably, perceived value significantly mediates the relationship between brand collaboration engagement and purchase intent. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: There is a mediating effect of perceived value between the brand association awareness and consumers' purchase intention in games.

H2b: There is a mediating effect of perceived value between the matching degree of game brand alliance and consumers' purchase intention.

Based on the ABC attitude model, this study constructs a research model of the mechanism by which game brand association affects consumer purchasing behavior, as shown in Figure 1.

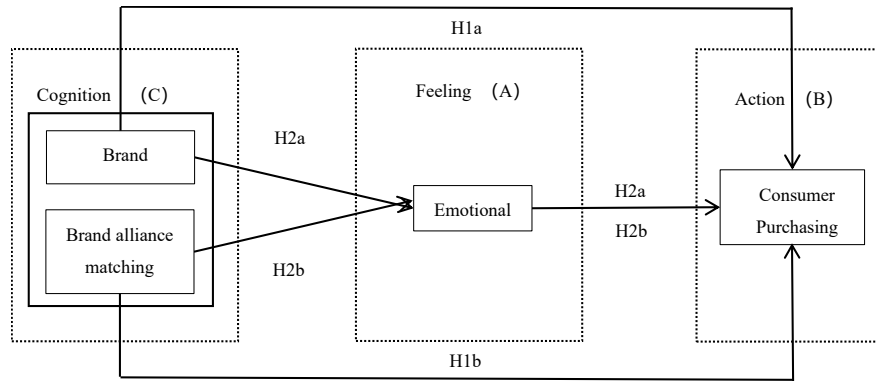


Figure 1 Research mode

3 Study design

3.1 Questionnaire design

Building on previous research findings and theoretical frameworks, this study developed an initial questionnaire by referencing established measurement tools from relevant academic literature. We systematically designed observation variables for each dimension of the model to ensure validity. A pilot survey was conducted through social media platforms including Xiaohongshu and Weibo, with 30 questionnaires distributed. After conducting reliability and validity analyses on the collected data, the questionnaire underwent multiple refinements before its official release.

This study's questionnaire comprises three sections. The first section serves as an introductory preface, providing a brief overview of the research background, content, and objectives to help respondents understand the survey context while minimizing measurement errors through case studies. The second section collects respondents' basic personal information using single-choice questions covering gender, age, educational background, occupation, and monthly disposable income. The third section measures factors influencing consumers' willingness to engage in co-branded purchasing through a Likert scale, assessing four dimensions: brand awareness, brand-co-branding compatibility, emotional value, and consumer purchasing behavior. Drawing from established measurement frameworks in related fields, the study identifies 12 observable variables across these dimensions, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Variable measurement scales and references

variable	number	Measurement items	reference documentation
brand awareness (A)	A1	I had heard of the brand before I bought the game co-op	Dang Yi et al. ^[17] , Yoo Compeau and Donthu (1998 2001 ^[18])
	A2	When I think of a game brand of its type, I immediately think of	
	A3	this game brand	
	A3	The moment I think of this game brand, certain features come to mind	
Brand association match (B)	B1	I think game brands and co-brands are complementary	Simonin and Ruth (1998 ^[20])
	B2	I think the products of game brands and co-brands are very good	
	B3	I think the game brand works better with other brands than it does with one brand	
Emotional value (C)	C1	It's exciting to have a partnership with a game brand or any other brand	Robert et al. (1982 ^[21])
	C2	It makes me feel good to have a partnership with a game brand or another brand	
	C3	I love when game brands collaborate with other brands	
Consumer purchase intention (D)	D1	When I buy a game co-brand, I will give priority to the game brand co-brand	Yoo et al. (1998 ^[18])
	D2	I will pay attention to the brand alliance of the game, so that I can buy it later	
	D3	I would recommend this game brand collaboration product to others	

3.2 Data collection and descriptive statistics

After excluding the answers with too short answering time and the options of not participating in the joint brand activity of the participating countries, the number of valid questionnaires was 215, and the effective rate of questionnaires was 95.56%.

After conducting descriptive statistics on the collected questionnaire results (Table 2), it was found that the respondents were mainly female aged 18-35, accounting for 76.28% of the total respondents. The majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree (72.56%), followed by those with a master's degree or higher. In terms of occupation, the majority of respondents were students (177 people, 82.3%). Regarding monthly disposable income, 154 respondents (71.6%) reported having a monthly disposable income between 1,001-3,000 yuan. From the perspective of purchase types, anime IP, China-fashion IP, and cultural IP were the most popular IP co-branded products among consumers. The descriptive statistical results indicate that the survey subjects align with the consumer characteristics of IP co-branded products.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the samples

variable	class	frequency	percentage (%)	accumulative perception (%)
sex	man	27	12.56%	12.56%
	woman	188	87.44%	100%
Age group	Under 18	1	0.47%	0.47%
	18-25 years	184	85.58%	86.05%
	26-30 years	27	12.56%	98.61%
	31-40 years	2	0.93%	99.54%
	41-50 years	0	0%	99.54%
	51-60 years	1	0.47%	100.01%
Education	Junior high school and below	0	0%	0%
	High school/vocational school	2	0.93%	0.93%
	junior college	21	9.77%	10.7%
	undergraduate college	156	72.56%	83.26%
	Postgraduate and above	36	16.74%	100%
Occupation	student	177	82.3%	82.3%
	office worker	23	10.7%	93%
	liberal professions	14	6.5%	99.5%
	other	1	0.5%	100%
Monthly disposable income	1000 yuan and below	14	6.5%	6.5%
	1001-3000 yuan	154	71.6%	78.1%
	3001-5000 yuan	25	11.6%	89.8%
	5001-10000 yuan	17	7.9%	97.7%
	10,000 yuan and above	5	2.3%	100%

3.3 Test of reliability and validity

SPSS Statistics 27.0 was used to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire data, and the Cronbach (1951) α coefficient formula was used for reliability measurement:

$$\alpha = \frac{K}{K-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^K \sigma_i^2}{\sigma_{total}^2} \right)$$

The analysis results of reliability indexes in this study are shown in Table 3: The reliability coefficient of total table is 0.811, indicating that the reliability of total table is good.

In validity analysis, we first evaluated the suitability for factor analysis using KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The results are shown in Table 4: The KMO value exceeded 0.5, and the Bartlett's test P-value was below 0.001, indicating suitability for factor analysis. The KMO values for brand awareness and brand co-branding fit were 0.618 and 0.548

Table 3 Reliability analysis results of variables

variable	Cronbach's reliability coefficient	Heading
brand awareness (A)	0.614	A1
		A2
		A3
Brand association match (B)	0.423	B1
		B2
		B3
Emotional value (C)	0.631	C1
		C2
		C3
Consumer purchase intention (D)	0.492	D1
		D2
		D3

respectively, with Bartlett's test P-values both under 0.001. Similarly, the KMO values for emotional value and consumer purchase intention were 0.624 and 0.595 respectively, also showing Bartlett's test P-values below 0.001. These results demonstrate high reliability among the variables.

Table 4 KMO and Bartlett test

KMO sampling appropriateness measure.		.844
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approximate chi-square	585.353
	free degree	66
	conspicuousness	.000

The results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) are shown in Table 5 and Figure 2. Through total variance interpretation and scree chart, four principal components were extracted, and it is known that the four dimensions of brand awareness, brand co-branding matching degree, emotional value and consumer purchasing behavior can explain 60.29% of the information content of 12 research questions.

Table 5 Total variance explained

ingredient	Initial eigenvalues			Sum of extracted load squares			Sum of squared rotations and charges		
	amount to	variance per-centage	accumulate %	amount to	variance per-centage	accumulate %	amount to	variance per-centage	accumulate %
1	4.053	33.777	33.777	4.053	33.777	33.777	2.211	18.425	18.425
2	1.190	9.919	43.696	1.190	9.919	43.696	2.193	18.276	36.702
3	1.004	8.364	52.060	1.004	8.364	52.060	1.762	14.687	51.388
4	.988	8.234	60.294	.988	8.234	60.294	1.069	8.905	60.294
5	.832	6.937	67.231						
6	.760	6.332	73.563						
7	.630	5.248	78.810						
8	.614	5.114	83.925						
9	.569	4.745	88.670						
10	.519	4.322	92.992						
11	.442	3.686	96.678						
12	.399	3.322	100.000						

Extraction method: principal component analysis.

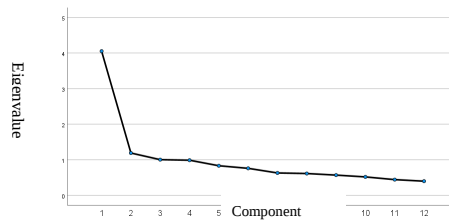


Figure 2 Scree plot

In confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), correlation analyses were conducted using AMOS software, yielding the structural diagram (Figure 3) as shown below. The overall fit coefficient table (Table 2.3.6) was obtained from the analysis. Regarding construct validity, the chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) = 2.153 for χ^2/df was below 3, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was <0.08, indicating acceptable results. All three indices—CFI, TLI, and IFI—all approached 0.9, demonstrating good fit. Collectively, these findings confirm that the model demonstrates satisfactory adaptability.

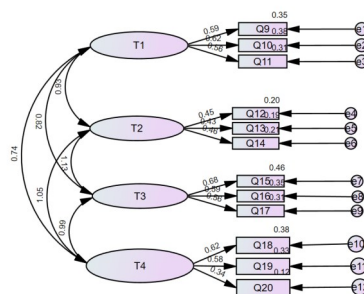


Figure 3 Structural diagram

As can be seen from the above table 7, the factor loadings of brand awareness, emotional value and consumer purchase intention corresponding to each item are all above 0.5, indicating that each item corresponding to the variables

Table 6 Overall fit coefficient table

χ^2/d	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	IFI
2.153	0.072	0.894	0.827	0.900

Table 7 Factor loadings Convergence validity

way			Estimate of factor loadings	AVE mean square variance extraction AVE mean variance extraction	CR Grouped reliability
Q9	<---	Brand awareness (T1)	0.590		
Q10	<---	Brand awareness (T1)	0.616	0.346	0.613
Q11	<---	Brand awareness (T1)	0.557		
Q12	<---	Brand association match (T2)	0.446		
Q13	<---	Brand association match (T2)	0.432	0.198	0.425
Q14	<---	Brand association match (T2)	0.456		
Q15	<---	Emotional value (T3)	0.675		
Q16	<---	Emotional value (T3)	0.590	0.372	0.638
Q17	<---	Emotional value (T3)	0.558		
Q18	<---	Consumer purchase intention (T4)	0.617		
Q19	<---	Consumer purchase intention (T4)	0.575	0.277	0.521
Q20	<---	Consumer purchase intention (T4)	0.344		

has high representativeness; AVE is low, CR is about 0.6, and the convergent validity is not ideal.

3.4 Relevance analysis

The correlation analysis of this study is shown in Table 8. Through Pearson correlation coefficient testing, the pairwise correlations between brand awareness, brand collaboration compatibility, emotional value, and consumer purchase intention all showed statistically significant differences from zero, indicating significant correlations among these four variables. Among them, the correlation between emotional value and consumer purchase intention was the most pronounced, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.554.

Table 8 Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for variables

variable		1	2	3	4
brand awareness	Pearson correlation	1	.466**	.508**	.406**
	Significance (two-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	Number of cases	215	215	215	215
Brand alliance matching degree	Pearson correlation	.466**	1	.598**	.464**
	Significance (two-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	Number of cases	215	215	215	215
Emotional value	Pearson correlation	.508**	.598**	1	.554**
	Significance (two-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	Number of cases	215	215	215	215
Consumer purchasing intention	Pearson correlation	.406**	.464**	.554**	1
	Significance (two-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	Number of cases	215	215	215	215

**. At the 0.01 level (double tail), the correlation is significant.

3.5 Regression analysis

Regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between independent variables and consumers' purchase intention. As shown in Table 9, brand awareness ($\beta=0.281$, $P=0.000$) and brand co-branding compatibility ($\beta=0.431$, $P=0.000$) demonstrated statistically significant positive correlations with purchase behavior. The P-values for both variables in the linear regression analysis were below the 0.05 threshold, confirming Hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b. Based on standardized coefficients, the ranking of these variables reveals that brand co-branding compatibility (0.352) has a greater impact on purchase intention than brand awareness (0.242).

In order to verify the multicollinearity problem of variables in this study, the values of tolerance and VIF were discussed. Since the value of VIF is less than 10 and the value of tolerance is greater than 0.1, there is no multicollinearity problem.

3.6 Mediating effects

The ABC Attitude Model referenced in this study specifies that the independent variables are brand awareness (C1) and brand co-branding compatibility (C2), with emotional value (A) serving as the mediating variable, while consumer

Table 9 Regression analysis results of independent variables on dependent variables

coefficient a		Uncorrelation coefficient		Standardization factor	t	conspicuousness	Correlation statistics	
model		B	Standard error	Beta			tolerance	VIF
1	(constant)	.804	.336		2.392	.018		
	brand awareness	.281	.077	.242	3.627	.000	.783	1.278
	Brand alliance matching degree	.431	.082	.352	5.269	.000	.783	1.278

a. Dependent variable: consumer purchasing behavior

purchase intention (B) is the dependent variable. Regression analyses were conducted using SPSS 27.0's Processv5.0 plugin to examine the relationships between independent variables C1 and C2 and dependent variable B.

As shown in Table 10, brand awareness directly influences consumers' purchase intention. The upper and lower bounds of the 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the mediating effect of brand co-branding compatibility on purchase intention and emotional value are both non-zero, indicating that brand awareness and co-branding compatibility not only exert direct effects on purchase intention but also mediate it through emotional value. In the model, the direct effects (0.41) and mediating effects (0.36) of brand awareness and emotional value account for 53.25% and 46.75% of the total effect (0.77), respectively. For brand co-branding compatibility and emotional value, their direct effects (0.64) and mediating effects (0.29) contribute 68.82% and 31.18% to the total effect (0.93), respectively.

Table 10 Moderating effect tests

model	type	Effect value	standard error	BootLLCI lower limit	BootULCI upper limit
Brand awareness-emotional value-consumer purchase intention	gross effect	0.77	0.12	0.52	1.02
	direct effect	0.41	0.17	0.07	0.74
	mesomeric effect	0.36	0.12	0.15	0.62
Brand association matching-emotional value-consumer purchase intention	gross effect	0.93	0.13	0.68	1.18
	direct effect	0.64	0.24	0.17	1.11
	mesomeric effect	0.29	0.17	-0.10	0.56

Regarding the analysis of the mediating effect range for emotional value, the interval between brand awareness and consumer purchase intention was [0.15,0.62], with both upper and lower bounds excluding zero ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant partial mediation. However, the mediating effect range for emotional value between brand co-branding compatibility and purchase intention was [-0.10, 0.56], where the bounds included zero ($p < 0.05$), suggesting no significant mediating effect.

4 Concluding remarks

Based on the ABC Attitude Theory, this study constructs a conceptual model with brand awareness and brand co-branding compatibility as independent variables, consumer purchase intention as the dependent variable, and emotional value as the mediating variable, thereby proposing relevant research hypotheses. Through questionnaire design and distribution, data collection, and correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation effect analysis using SPSS software, the following conclusions were drawn: ① The positive impact of brand awareness on consumer purchase intention is greater than that of brand co-branding compatibility, and both factors exert significant positive effects on purchase intention. ② Emotional value partially mediates the mechanisms through which brand awareness and brand co-branding compatibility influence consumer purchase intention.

Based on the findings, we propose the following recommendations for game brand collaborations: ① Select brands with high recognition or those closely aligned with your brand's personality. Game collaboration decision-makers should enhance brand screening through internet information dissemination to identify gamers' primary interests, choosing well-known brands for partnerships. ② Partner with brands/IPs sharing relevant characteristics. When selecting collaborators, prioritize brands targeting similar consumer demographics to boost player acceptance and spark deeper engagement. ③ Enhance product attributes and services. From the consumer perspective, collaborate with previously well-received brands. Successful past collaborations can amplify brand reach and achieve "crossover" effects. ④ Ensure personality alignment between the original game brand and its partners. Partners should maintain consistent style in collaborative products to ensure brand identity coherence.

The study has certain limitations and shortcomings: ① The survey primarily focused on female college students aged 18-35, failing to include consumers from other age groups or income brackets. Future research could expand the scope to investigate gamers with diverse income levels, providing more reliable insights for brand collaborations and marketing strategies. ② With a limited number of questionnaires, the sample may not cover all consumer demographics, and the validity of all responses cannot be guaranteed. ③ Some analytical results do not fully align with established metrics,

necessitating further refinement of data collection and analysis methods in subsequent studies.

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