

Research on the Mechanism of Emotional Marketing in China-Chic Brand Going Global: Taking Labubu as an Example

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ABSTRACT

Currently, against the backdrop of global consumption upgrading and enhanced national cultural confidence, China-Chic brands are accelerating their process of going global. However, cultural differences and barriers, coupled with insufficient recognition of brands, have become core challenges in their globalization process. At the same time, consumer demand has shifted from functional to emotional, and emotional marketing, with its characteristics of evoking emotional resonance and building differentiated competitiveness, is becoming a key force in breaking through the global market. The IP Labubu under the art toy brand Pop Mart is a typical example - it breaks cultural barriers with its unique "borderless cute monster" image and successfully enters the European, American, and Southeast Asian markets.

KEYWORDS

Fashion brand; Emotional marketing; Mechanism; Research

1 Introduction

Data shows that Pop Mart's overseas revenue accounted for nearly 40% in 2024, with a year-on-year growth rate of 375.2%, becoming a benchmark case for China-Chic brands leveraging emotional value to achieve cross-cultural sales. This study aims to deeply deconstruct the mechanism of emotional marketing in China-Chic brand going global. From a theoretical perspective, it focuses on the operational path of emotional marketing in a cross-cultural context, providing support for the current research on emotional strategies in the theory of China-Chic brand internationalization, and thus providing theoretical support for expanding cross-cultural marketing theory. From a practical perspective, by analyzing the successful experience of Labubu's global popularity, this study extracts a replicable path for emotional brand going global, providing practical strategic references for China-Chic brands to reduce "cultural discount" and enhance emotional loyalty among overseas users.

2 Literature review

2.1 Definition of core concepts

Emotional marketing refers to a marketing paradigm in which brands establish deep psychological connections by stimulating specific emotions in consumers, such as pleasure, belonging, and nostalgia (Holbrook&Hirschman, 1982). Its core lies in replacing functional values with emotional values to drive consumer decisions. In the context of globalization, emotional marketing needs to achieve cross-cultural emotional translation, that is, to explore the basis of human empathy (such as loneliness and curiosity) and weaken cultural specificity expression. China-Chic brand going global specifically refers to the process of Chinese local brands taking "cultural confidence" as the core, exporting oriental aesthetics through products, design and narrative, and participating in international competition (Li Kanghua, 2023). Its essence is the global circulation of cultural symbols, but it faces the risk of "cultural discount" -which means a decrease in acceptance among overseas audiences due to cultural differences (Hoskins&Mirus, 1988).

2.2 Current research status at home and abroad

In terms of domestic research, the localization application of emotional marketing has formed a mature system. Domestic scholars have verified its effectiveness in the Chinese market, such as verifying that nostalgia significantly enhances domestic consumption tendencies by awakening collective memory; Wang Dun (2020) used Webnovel as an example to systematically review its strategies for responding to cultural discounts and the insights it brings to efficient brand going global. Li Kanghua (2023) pointed out the importance of IP as an "emotional carrier".

The international academic community has put forward a forward-looking perspective on cross-cultural communication of IP. Some scholars pointed out that Disney achieves global empathy through universal emotions such as "family values", which provides an important reference for China-Chic IP. but western theories lack consideration of the particularity of Chinese cultural symbols. The current research still needs continuous research on the following three issues: there is an excessive focus on symbol output in the field of cultural communication, brand internationalization research focuses on channel expansion, while emotional marketing theory is limited to the local market, and the three have not been effectively integrated. This study hopes to conduct research on the basis of the above three issues, and provide some support for the construction of the theoretical framework and practical path of emotional marketing

enabling China-Chic to go to sea.

3 Analysis of Labubu's overseas case

Labubu, as the core IP under POP Mart, was designed by Hong Kong artist Kasing Lung. Its strategic positioning has always revolved around building a "borderless emotional symbol". This IP abandons traditional Eastern symbols such as dragon patterns and ink painting, and instead adopts a conflicting aesthetic of cute big eyes and sharp fangs, triggering human instinctive emotional resonance between cuteness and strangeness. The character background is set as a forest elf, replacing regional cultural expression with cross-cultural synesthesia narratives such as "loneliness" and "curiosity", laying the foundation for global dissemination. The globalization strategy focuses on "cultural proximity gradient penetration": in the first stage, it targets the Southeast Asian market (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand), relying on the Chinese cultural base and young population dividend to achieve rapid penetration, and quickly detonating the market through celebrity recommendations. This region contributed 47.4% of the total overseas revenue in 2024; In the next stage, it enters European and American trend hub cities such as New York and London, establish brand momentum through celebrity matching, luxury goods bundling, high-end art exhibitions, etc. The data shows that the brand's annual growth rate in the North American market reached 556.9% in 2024, and the year-on-year growth rate in Europe and Australia reached 310.7%, which confirms the cross-cultural penetration power of emotional IP.

In terms of emotional marketing strategy, Labubu has built a four-dimensional collaborative strategy system.

On the product design side, sharp ears, serrated teeth (usually 9), asymmetrical pupils, and twisted limbs are integrated into labubu design, blending the conflicting aesthetics of "strangeness" and "cuteness". Challenge mainstream aesthetics with an imperfect sense of strangeness, echoing the Z generation's thirst for individual expression. Using exaggerated expressions such as baring teeth, squinting eyes, and spitting out, conveying multiple personalities such as rebellion, mischievousness, and cuteness, and triggering emotional resonance. The narrative communication layer implements a strategy of removing cultural labels. The official website describes Labubu as a "mischievous elf in the Nordic forest, who loves to steal fruits and has a bad personality, but has a kind heart", replacing cultural indoctrination with contrast and pure goodness. At the same time, user generated content (UGC) was stimulated to realize story localization. For example, many overseas users spontaneously created secondary creative content such as "Labubu cross dressing show", "Labubu immersive unboxing", "Labubu roast conference", which formed a phenomenal communication effect. The number of broadcast of topic # LabubuHaul exceeded 1 billion times, forming a self recycling ecology of emotional narrative.

Experience scene creation focuses on emotional resonance between online and offline. Offline pop-up stores have become a hub for emotional transformation, such as Harrods in London building an offline pop-up store, paired with tactile plush walls to trigger comfort and attract a large number of consumers to immersive experiences. In the design of conventional offline stores, local cultural design is integrated, such as opening an offline store next to the Louvre in Paris, with European architectural style decoration, to evoke cultural resonance among local consumers; Online, a # Labubu_ adventure channel is established through communities to guide global fans to share and collect stories. The monthly average interaction volume has repeatedly ranked high on the charts, creating a sense of companionship across time zones. Scarcity operation precisely leverages FOMO (fear of missing out) emotions, combined with a blind box mechanism with a hidden probability of 1/144, allowing consumers to experience surprise and collection desire in uncertainty. The global limited edition "Labubu x Van Gogh collaboration" only sells 500 sets globally, with a high premiums in the European and American second-hand markets, while regional exclusive editions such as the Thai limited edition "good luck to you" labubu incorporate Thai clothing elements, triggering emotional identification among local consumers. Empirical data on consumer emotional response further validates the effectiveness of the strategy. In the analysis of overseas social media posts, positive emotions account for a higher proportion, and high-frequency keywords generally reveal three layers of emotional value: a sense of healing, such as expressed as "Labubu's smile saved my rainy day"; Companionship, as reflected in scene descriptions such as "She stays on my desk while I work "; The desire to collect, such as the strong demand for possession presented as "I need the whole series!". Emotional companionship, collection achievement, and artistic resonance constitute the core emotional value triangle for consumers to purchase Labubu. Some buyers bluntly state that "The designer understands cutting beyond cultures", which also confirms the success of emotional communication.

Labubu uses a closed-loop strategy of "borderless design, empathetic storytelling, immersive experience, and scarce operation" to transform Eastern aesthetics from a purely symbolic output into a perceptible and shareable human sensory experience. This process not only improved the acceptance of China-Chic brand in the global market, but also upgraded its communication logic from the representation of cultural symbols to the construction of emotional connection, thus effectively breaking through aesthetic differences and cognitive barriers in cross-cultural communication.

4 Strategic enlightenment for China-Chic brand going global

4.1 Emotional IP development principles: Anchoring human empathy and crossing cultural boundaries

China-Chic brand needs to reconstruct the IP development logic when going global. The core lies in "design without

cultural boundaries" - that is, to remove the dependence on regional symbols such as dragon patterns and ink painting, and to explore the basis of human empathy such as environmental protection, loneliness and courage. The success of Labubu confirms the feasibility of this path: its "cute and bizarre" design avoids cultural specificity and triggers global emotional resonance through universal narratives such as "forest explorers", thereby enhancing acceptance in overseas markets. In addition, brands should establish an "emotional gene bank" and screen universal elements through cross-cultural psychology experiments (such as eye tracking tests and emotional semantic analysis) to make IP a borderless emotional carrier.

4.2 Emotional marketing strategy

The efficient implementation of emotional marketing requires the integration of three classic strategies: hunger marketing to stimulate scarce emotions, celebrity marketing to graft emotional trust, and community marketing to deepen belongingness resonance, in order to construct multidimensional emotional impact.

Labubu's practice has confirmed the value of collaboration among the three: its blind box mechanism pushes hunger marketing to the extreme, hidden items have a 1/144 chance of triggering a frenzy of unboxing on social media, and FOMO emotions directly transform into purchase impulses. Celebrity marketing ignites emotional identification through top tier traffic - international top idol BLACKPINK member Lisa spontaneously shared her Labubu collection on Instagram, with a single post receiving over 3 million likes, directly driving a weekly surge in sales in Thailand; Singer Rihanna was caught hanging the Labubu Heartbeat Macaron collection on her LV handbag; British fashion genius Rahi Chadda walks the red carpet with labubu. This kind of non-commercial celebrity spontaneous behavior has more trust conversion power than hard endorsement. Community marketing further solidifies emotions into a sense of belonging: the official community design # Labubu_ adventure channel encourages users to share and collect stories, transforming consumers from "buyers" to "members of the emotional community".

The three form a closed loop: hunger marketing creates volume, celebrity marketing leads trends, community marketing solidifies loyalty, and ultimately transforms short-term emotional fluctuations into long-term brand assets.

4.3 Risk avoidance suggestion: Avoid cultural discounts and scarcity backlash

Beware of cultural stereotypes traps. In the early days of the Palace Museum's cultural and creative industry going abroad, there was an excessive emphasis on the element of "red and golden coiled dragons", which led to European and American consumers criticizing it as a "spectacle of Orientalism". China-Chic brand needs to break the situation through "emotional translation of cultural elements": for example, it can transform "landscape artistic conception" into "natural healing" values, rather than directly using ink and wash patterns.

Balance scarcity and accessibility. Although the blind box mechanism can activate FOMO emotions, excessive scarcity will lead to user churn. Labubu can resolve conflicts through a "pyramid shaped supply": top global limited edition manufacturing topics, central region exclusive products to maintain local emotional connections, and bottom regular sales to ensure basic needs. Besides, synchronize the establishment of a membership rating system, where core fans can lock in new products few days in advance to avoid irrational buying.

5 Conclusion

This study systematically demonstrates the core function mechanism of emotional marketing in the China-Chic brand going global. Research has shown that in the face of cultural barriers, replacing cultural output with emotional commonalities is the key to breaking through: Labubu triggers a shared sense of loneliness and curiosity among humans through its cute and bizarre universal design and "forest explorer" narrative, achieving a 375.2% increase in overseas revenue. The emotional marketing strategy adopted effectively dissolves cultural discounts and promotes overseas consumers to upgrade from emotional identification to brand loyalty. This practice confirmed the core paradigm shift of China-Chic's going global - from relying on the "identity output" of cultural symbols to anchoring the emotional connection of emotional coherence. Only by transforming oriental aesthetics into human empathy can we truly cross the fault line of civilization in the wave of globalization. From the perspective of emotional marketing, this research tries to extract replicable suggestions for going global, and provides some action guidance strategies for China-Chic brand to reduce the cost of trial and error and build global emotional competitiveness. In the future, it is necessary to further quantify the ROI of emotional marketing and see more directly observable measurement methods from emotional influence to rational data.

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