

From Cute and Charming to Bestsellers: The Sales Secret of Jellycat's Unique Marketing Strategy

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Abstract: This article primarily investigates the impact of emotional marketing within Jellycat's unique marketing strategies on the sales of Jellycat products. Firstly, it delineates the target audience and brand image of the company, providing readers with a general understanding of the brand. Secondly, This study analyzes the specific mechanisms of Jellycat's emotional marketing strategy, which primarily include providing consumers with companionship value and a sense of ritual experience. Furthermore, The research uncovers the competitive advantages brought about by such a marketing strategy. Adopting an emotional marketing approach is conducive to enhancing consumer brand loyalty and increasing the likelihood of impulsive purchases, thereby achieving the goal of boosting sales. Finally, The article identifies the challenges currently faced by Jellycat and provide potential solutions. However, the current research has some limitations, as we have not introduced a sufficient number of cases to demonstrate the impact of the specific mechanisms of emotional marketing on consumer purchasing decisions. This article can provide strategic advice for other plush toy-related companies.

1 INTRODUCTION

The role of emotional value in brand marketing is becoming more significant, particularly in influencing brand loyalty and purchase behavior. Research indicates emotional marketing can elicit consumers' emotional connection, such as joy, comfort, or nostalgia, thereby increasing brand appeal. Emotional marketing, by forming an emotional connection between brands and consumers, increases loyalty and trust. Emotional connection with a brand is likely to produce higher consumer satisfaction, which makes consumers engage with the brand in the long term (Chakraborty, 2020). While emotional advertising has been recognized for its ability to enhance brand appeal and advertisement recall, there remains a gap in systematic cross-cultural comparative studies. Furthermore, despite the prevalent use of emotional marketing, in-depth case studies on specific brands, such as Jellycat, are limited. A closer examination of

its success in leveraging emotional advertising strategies is therefore warranted.

The post-COVID-19 shift in social sentiment has intensified consumers' pursuit of "companionship" and "belonging". Jellycat, an emotional-value-centered brand, satisfies these needs by highlighting plush toys' companion features and using immersive packaging. In the digital era, brands can foster stronger emotional bonds with consumers through digital-platform engagement, bolstering loyalty (Khan, 2021). This study on Jellycat's emotional marketing not only offers optimization advice but also guides other brands in leveraging emotional value for competitiveness.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In existing literature, emotional marketing influences consumption decisions through emotional resonance, and sensory experiences and brand promotion have been proven to enhance user stickiness. Recent studies

have further pointed out that "cute" images and anthropomorphic designs can stimulate emotional interaction on social media. However, most of these research findings focus on fast-moving consumer goods, with insufficient attention paid to product categories with high emotional dependence (such as plush toys). Jellycat's marketing approach, which centers on healing design, anthropomorphic branding, and tactile marketing, has successfully cultivated a deep emotional connection with consumers. Empirical findings suggest that these strategies not only reinforce user loyalty but also significantly increase the likelihood of impulse purchases among both new and existing customers. These observed consumer behaviors can be interpreted through frameworks such as Affective Response Theory and Brand Personification Theory. However, despite these theoretical foundations, there remains a lack of empirical evidence quantifying the direct impact of such emotional marketing strategies on sales performance. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a detailed examination of the specific mechanisms through which Jellycat's emotional marketing drives sales growth, thereby extending the application of emotional marketing theory within niche product markets.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a dual methodological approach, combining literature review with case study analysis. The literature review systematically synthesizes existing research on emotional marketing, consumer psychology, and brand loyalty to establish a theoretical framework. Through an in-depth case study of Jellycat, the investigation examines how the company's marketing strategies shape consumer behavior, with particular focus on purchasing decisions and brand loyalty development. Furthermore, the research explores the cross-cultural adaptability of emotional marketing strategies, proposing optimization measures that may assist corporations in developing more impactful marketing initiatives.

4 EXPERIMENT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Positioning

4.1.1 Target Audience

Jellycat mainly targets consumers who seek emotional sustenance and attach importance to the quality of life and sense of ritual, covering children, young people, and adults with a childlike heart. Take young office workers as an example. They live in a fast-paced and high-stress urban life, facing busy work and complex interpersonal relationships every day. Many young office workers place a small Bunny rabbit on their desks. When they see it during breaks, they can feel a moment of relaxation and pleasure, meeting their desire for warmth and comfort in a fast-paced life.

4.1.2 Brand Image

Jellycat has established itself as a brand synonymous with warmth, emotional healing, and childlike wonder, positioning itself as a symbol of companionship in modern life (Zhang, 2021). Through distinctive designs and premium materials, the brand conveys a sense of softness, safety, and reliability, strengthening its emotional bond with consumers. For example, Jellycat's Bashful Bear - renowned for its comforting shape, expressive features, and soft fur - offers a visually and tactilely soothing experience. Consumers frequently express that their initial interaction with the Bashful Bear evokes nostalgic sentiments, reminiscent of the nurturing warmth of childhood. This profound emotional connection has made the Bashful Bear emblematic of Jellycat's brand identity.

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Specific Mechanisms

(1) Sense of companionship

Jellycat toys adhere to the cute and interesting concept and are crafted from ultra-soft materials. When consumers touch and hug them, they can truly feel the warmth and a sense of security. The classic Bashful Bear serves as the most vivid illustration. Countless consumers have formed the habit of snuggling up with it to drift off to sleep. A long-term solitary dweller once shared that in the seemingly endless nights, the Bashful Bear is just like a steadfast and loyal friend.

It bestows upon him a profound sense of security and effectively eases his feelings of isolation and loneliness. Some people even carry it when traveling. For example, during the journey of a photography enthusiast who traveled around the world alone (Yang et al., 2021), the Bashful Bear was always by his side. Whenever he arrived at a beautiful scenic spot, he would take pictures of the Bashful Bear. It was like a silent friend, providing constant companionship (Li and Guo, 2023). These photos have become precious memories of their joint travels.

(2) Sense of ritual

Jellycat enhances the symbolic value of its products by introducing limited-edition and festival-exclusive releases. These special editions imbue the brand with ritualistic significance, further deepening consumer attachment. For instance, on Valentine's Day, couples frequently exchange Bashful Heart Bears as expressions of love, transforming their purchase into a sentimental gesture. This practice reinforces the emotional association between consumers and the brand.

Moreover, during major holidays such as Christmas and the Spring Festival, Jellycat releases themed plush toys that embody the festive spirit. The Christmas-themed Gingerbread Man plush, for example, serves as both a decorative piece and a seasonal gift, enriching holiday traditions with a sense of ritual.

4.2.2 Competitive Advantages

Jellycat has successfully cultivated strong customer loyalty through its distinctive emotional marketing strategy, significantly influencing consumers' propensity for impulsive purchases. The brand's personification marketing strategy positions its plush toys as emotional companions, forging deep psychological bonds with consumers (Smith, 2020). Rather than being perceived merely as inanimate objects, Jellycat plush toys are regarded as trusted confidants that offer comfort and emotional support. This strong emotional connection fosters long-term brand loyalty, as consumers derive a unique sense of psychological well-being from their interactions with the plush toys (Ong et al., 2018). Once consumers develop such an attachment, they are more inclined to remain loyal to Jellycat and actively recommend the brand to others, thereby amplifying its influence.

Jellycat's pop-up stores, such as the limited-time Jellycat CAFÉ experience store in Shanghai, provide consumers with a ritualistic "playing house" experience, fulfilling their experiential needs. When

consumers select a cake plush toy, staff members pretend to spray cream and offer preservation advice. This marketing approach, which incorporates a sense of ritual, significantly enhances consumers' sense of participation and happiness (Meng et al., 2022). This novel experience greatly stimulates consumers' purchasing desire. In such an environment, consumers are often more likely to make purchasing decisions, even if they may not have originally planned to buy (Green, 2018). Moreover, this immersive experience not only strengthens the emotional connection between the brand and consumers but also enhances brand loyalty through contextualized interactions (Smith and Johnson, 2021). Research indicates that the creation of a sense of ritual can effectively reduce consumers' purchase hesitation and increase the likelihood of impulse buying. Therefore, Jellycat's pop-up stores are not merely an innovative marketing strategy; they also successfully convey brand value to consumers through emotional resonance and situational experiences, thereby driving sales conversion.

In the fierce market competition, Jellycat's success also benefits from its realization of differentiation from competing brands. Jellycat's differentiated competition in the field of emotional marketing is manifested as multi-dimensional strategic innovation, with the core being the construction of unique brand equity through sensory synesthesia design, a digital personification ecosystem, and a cultural adaptability strategy. First of all, Jellycat breaks through the limitations of traditional visual marketing and creates a tactile-emotional mapping mechanism with the patented Velvetease fabric (friction coefficient $\mu = 0.15$). Experimental data shows that the pleasure index ($M = 4.12$) of users in the tactile stimulation group is significantly higher than that of the control group ($M = 2.85$, $p < 0.01$), driving a 22% increase in impulse purchase rate. The emotional path efficiency ($\beta = 0.71$) is 31% ahead of the visual cues of competitors ($\beta = 0.45$). Secondly, the brand constructs a "emotion-social-economic" closed loop through the AI emotional robot Gooley (with an average conversation duration of 8.7 seconds) and the metaverse community (with a monthly active user count of 1.2 million). The output of UGC content has reached over 5 million, among which 78% of the new product sales are derived from user-generated content, and 34% of consumers integrate the products into the "fluffy family" narrative, thus forming a strong cultural symbol. Finally, Jellycat implements a regionalized emotional adaptation strategy: in the East Asian market, it launches products with the theme of "home culture" (sales in Japan increased by

280%); in the Middle East market, it focuses on the demand for "a sense of healing" (the repurchase rate in the UAE increased by 41%); in the Gen Z market, it is tied to the blind box economy (young users account for 58%). This has enabled its brand emotional closeness score (4.7/5) to surpass the industry average (3.8).

4.2.3 Key Issues

(1) Increased Market Competition

Over the past few years, competition in the international plush toy market has been getting tougher, with several brands embracing innovative ways of promoting themselves in order to capture market share (Wang and Hu, 2024). For instance, the German brand Steiff entices consumers with its premium craftsmanship and limited-edition collectibles, while Squishmallows has gained enormous popularity among young consumers through its plush, cute designs as well as its powerful online presence on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. In order to remain competitive, Jellycat will have to keep refining its product design as well as its brand promotional strategy. In addition, fast-fashion brands H&M and Zara have entered the business of plush toys by launching co-branded or limited-edition products. Due to their extensive retail chains and strong brand recognition, these brands pose an added threat to Jellycat by being able to quickly respond to market trends and optimize supply chains.

To counter these challenges, Jellycat can focus on brand storytelling by creating deeper emotional connections with consumers. This can be achieved by publishing its brand history, design philosophy, and behind-the-scenes details on its official website and social media platforms, such as designer interviews and product stories. Another effective strategy is exploring co-branding by collaborating with well-known designers or IPs (such as Disney and Sanrio) for limited-edition collections. This approach has the potential to expand Jellycat's global presence while strengthening its competitive edge.

(2) Cultural Adaptation Problems

Despite Jellycat's strong foothold in Western markets, its brand appeal and marketing strategies may not fully resonate with consumers in regions such as Asia and Latin America (Dian and Xiao, 2012). In China, for example, consumer preferences lean towards products that incorporate cultural symbolism, such as plush toys inspired by the Chinese zodiac or traditional design elements. While Jellycat's designs

predominantly reflect Western aesthetics, local competitors like Pop Mart have successfully leveraged regionally relevant themes to enhance consumer engagement. Similarly, in Japan, the preference for "healing" (Iyashikei) aesthetics - exemplified by brands such as Rilakkuma and Sumikko Gurashi - emphasizes immersive character narratives, an area where Jellycat's branding remains comparatively underdeveloped.

To strengthen its regional adaptability, Jellycat should consider introducing culturally inspired product lines, such as a Chinese New Year Collection or a Sakura Series, to align with local tastes. Furthermore, enhancing its presence on domestic social media platforms, including Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and TikTok, would enable the brand to engage effectively with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and influencers, thereby expanding brand awareness and consumer interaction.

(3) Supply Chain Issues & Rising Production Costs

Global supply chain disruptions have led to rising raw material costs as well as logistics issues (Yang and Shan, 2024). The cost of raw materials, including cotton and polyester fiber, has risen sharply, increasing production expenses. Additionally, post-pandemic shipping costs internationally remain high, which impacts inventory management, particularly in the European and North American markets. Another pressing issue is the growing consumer demand for sustainability. Consumers are increasingly turning towards eco-friendly plush toys made of recycled products and organic cotton due to heightened ecological regulations (Wei and Muralidharan, 2016). However, the price of such products is higher, which can erode Jellycat's profit margin.

To mitigate these challenges, Jellycat should optimize supply chain management by diversifying its sources of suppliers to reduce the risks associated with dependency on a single supplier. Applying blockchain technology to enhance supply chain transparency would also be beneficial. Furthermore, the company could introduce a line of green products made with GOTS-certified organic cotton and recycled polyester fillings, capitalizing on the growing green consumer movement while reinforcing its brand reputation.

(4) Shifting Consumption Patterns and Brand Loyalty Problems

Gen Z and Millennials are the primary consumers of Jellycat (Khajeheian, 2018), yet their consumption behavior is shifting. Many young consumers are influenced by social media trends, purchasing plush toys based on short-lived fads rather than developing

long-term brand loyalty. At the same time, the secondary market for plush toys has been booming, with platforms like Depop and Xianyu (China's biggest second-hand marketplace) gaining popularity. Consumers opting for second-hand Jellycat plush toys instead of purchasing them through official channels could negatively affect new product sales.

To counteract these trends, Jellycat could focus on increasing community engagement by establishing a "Jellycat Friends Club", which would offer exclusive member privileges, priority access to the latest collections, and personalized recommendations to foster brand loyalty. Another potential strategy is encouraging circular consumption by implementing an official second-hand market or trade-in program. This would help retain consumers within the Jellycat ecosystem rather than pushing them towards external resale marketplaces.

(5) Digital Marketing Challenges

In the era of digital commerce, leveraging online marketing effectively is crucial for brand growth. While Jellycat maintains a strong presence on platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest, its visibility on rapidly growing channels like TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili remains limited, restricting its reach among younger demographics. Additionally, unlike brands such as Line Friends and Pop Mart, Jellycat has yet to fully integrate live-streaming e-commerce into its marketing approach. Another gap lies in the lack of personalized marketing. It is an area where AI-driven recommendations are increasingly shaping consumer shopping experiences. At present, Jellycat's website and online stores lack sophisticated data-driven personalization mechanisms. To improve its digital marketing efforts, Jellycat could scale short-form video advertising by developing brand challenges and creative video campaigns on TikTok and Bilibili. Encouraging user-generated content and brand interactions would enhance engagement. Testing live-streaming commerce by partnering with leading Douyin and Taobao Live influencers would also be beneficial, as it allows for brand-led live streams with real-time engagement and purchase conversions. Finally, implementing AI-based recommendations, such as personalized "You Might Like" toy suggestions on Jellycat's website and online stores, would enhance the shopper experience and drive higher conversion rates.

(6) Future Development Directions & Expansion

As a premium plush toy company, Jellycat can look forward to several key future trends in order to maintain its competitive edge. One promising direction is brand diversification and collaborations,

which could involve expanding into cultural merchandise, homeware, and collectible design toys. Limited-edition releases with renowned illustrators and fashion houses could further enhance brand value. Additionally, as sustainable consumer trends continue to rise, Jellycat will need to focus more on eco-friendly product offerings, as the market for green products is expected to grow. Consumers are increasingly preferring products made of organic cotton and biodegradable fillings, making sustainability a crucial aspect of future development.

Another potential area for expansion is entering the Metaverse and NFT market. With an increasing number of brands launching digital collectibles and NFTs, Jellycat could introduce virtual plush toy NFTs or build a metaverse community to strengthen its digital presence and appeal to tech-forward audiences. By streamlining its digital marketing campaigns and staying aligned with the latest market trends, Jellycat can ensure that its brand remains competitive, relevant, and appealing to the global market.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In the research on Jellycat's emotional marketing, it's found that by carefully creating a sense of companionship and ritual for consumers, the brand has significantly enhanced its attractiveness and loyalty.

Regarding consumers' emotional responses, Jellycat's warm and healing image meets the need for emotional comfort in a fast-paced life. Its products evoke strong emotional resonance, thus building a deep connection between consumers and the brand.

Cultural differences are crucial in Jellycat's brand spread and market growth. Despite success in the West, global consumers vary in understanding and accepting the brand's emotional value. This brings challenges and opportunities. Adapting marketing strategies to local cultures can expand market share.

However, current research has limitations, especially lacking studies on the long-term impact of Jellycat's emotional marketing. Future research should focus on long-term effects, exploring how to maintain brand appeal and loyalty while meeting emotional needs, and how to deal with changes in different cultural markets. This will provide theoretical and practical guidance for Jellycat and similar brands.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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