

Research Review on IP Marketing Strategies

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Abstract: In China's rapidly expanding IP market, driven by digitalization and youthful consumers, the immature licensing ecosystem poses challenges for maximizing IP commercialization. This study employs the 4R marketing theory (Relevance, Reaction, Relationship, Reward) to analyze strategies addressing IP's intangible nature. Through literature review and case studies (e.g., cross-industry collaborations, social media engagement), findings demonstrate that 4R principles enhance IP value by fostering emotional resonance (Relevance), agile market adaptation (Reaction), stakeholder networks (Relationship), and diversified monetization (Reward). Successful applications, such as fan-driven economies and iterative content, reveal that 4R-driven strategies balance cultural impact and profitability. This research offers a framework for optimizing China's IP commercialization in dynamic markets.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, intellectual property has become a pillar of global economic and cultural competition. China's IP landscape, shaped by decades of reform and innovation, reflects a blend of tradition and modernity. From early reliance on foreign IP imports to the rise of home grown phenomena like *Candle in the Tomb* and *The Wandering Earth*, China's IP ecosystem has transformed significantly. The synergy of a tech-savvy youth population, advanced 5G infrastructure, and thriving digital platforms has positioned China as a leader in IP-driven innovation. However, its IP commercialization rate lags behind global standards, revealing untapped potential and systemic gaps.

IP marketing in China holds unique significance due to its sociocultural and technological context. The "dual circulation" strategy emphasizes domestic consumption, with IPs acting as cultural bridges that connect generations and foster emotional engagement. For digital-native audiences, IPs are not just products but social currencies that shape identity and community. Advances in AI, blockchain, and the metaverse are revolutionizing IP creation and monetization, giving rise to virtual idols and digital collectibles.

Internationally, successes like *Genshin Impact* and *Palace Museum* collaborations underscore the need to navigate "cultural discounts" and craft globally resonant narratives.

Yet, traditional marketing frameworks fall short in addressing China's IP complexities. They often overlook fan-driven co-creation and the fluidity of cross-media adaptations. The clash between Western localization strategies and China's unique market dynamics highlights the need for tailored theories. This study explores the interplay between technology, culture, and commerce in China's IP ecosystem, aiming to harmonize cultural authenticity with global appeal. By doing so, it seeks to provide actionable insights for stakeholders while advancing the discourse on IP's role in shaping 21st-century soft power.

2 THE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF IP

Intellectual Property comprises legally protected creations (novels, games, logos) whose scarcity and uniqueness establish market monopolies, generating economic value and cultural influence through brand

equity. Its commercialization leverages flexible models like licensing and cross-industry collaborations animated characters. For example, extend in the applicability of the 4R theory to IP marketing lies in its ability to address the unique characteristics of IP as an intangible asset. Unlike traditional products, IP relies heavily on emotional connections and cultural resonance to create value. The Relevance dimension ensures that IP aligns with the preferences and values of target audiences, fostering emotional engagement.

The Reaction component emphasizes real-time responsiveness to market trends and consumer feedback, which is critical for maintaining the relevance of IP in a fast-changing cultural landscape. The Relationship aspect highlights the importance of building long-term partnerships with stakeholders, such as licensees, co-branding partners, and fan communities, to sustain IP vitality. Finally, the Reward dimension focuses on maximizing the commercial and cultural returns of IP through innovative monetization strategies, ensuring sustainable growth to merchandise, films, or tech products, transcending traditional industry boundaries. Unlike conventional sales focused on intra-sector competition, IP thrives on fan-driven economies, enabling co-branding and mutual value growth. By spanning diverse sectors (apparel, food, entertainment), IPs achieve broad market penetration, combining monopolistic advantages, brand power, and diversified revenue streams to underpin modern economic innovation.

3 IP MARKETING STRATEGIES BASED ON 4R THEORY

The 4R marketing theory (Relevance, Reaction, Relationship, Reward) provides a robust framework for analyzing value co-creation mechanisms in IP commercialization. By emphasizing dynamic interactions between enterprises and stakeholders, this theory aligns with the core demands of IP marketing, which develops emotional resonance, responding to market dynamics, building collaborative networks, and maximizing commercial returns.

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3.1 Relevance

The "Relevance" component of the 4R marketing theory emphasizes the need for enterprises to establish deep emotional and cognitive connections with customers. This goes beyond superficial brand exposure, focusing instead on sustained interactions and collaborations to build mutual value. In IP marketing, relevance is cultivated through emotional resonance with consumers and cross-industry partnerships. By integrating resources and leveraging diverse platforms, IPs can amplify their influence and unlock broader commercial potential.

3.1.1 Establishing Multi-Dimensional Connections to Develop Fan Economy

Fan economy has become a pivotal force in modern marketing, with an IP's success closely tied to its fan base. Cross-industry collaborations enable IPs to expand their reach while enhancing fan engagement and loyalty. A notable example is miHoYo's partnership with PepsiCo for its IP Genshin Impact. The collaboration included co-branded beverages and merchandise, coupled with online-offline campaigns that strengthened emotional ties with fans. Limited-edition packaging and interactive events triggered widespread social media discussions, driving both brand visibility and fan participation. Such strategies demonstrate how IPs can transcend industry boundaries to create synergistic value, fostering a robust fan-driven economy.

3.1.2 Expanding IP Influence Through Cross-Brand Collaborations

Cross-industry collaborations are critical for extending an IP's influence beyond its original domain. Coca-Cola's partnership with Harry Potter exemplifies this approach. Limited-edition themed bottles and immersive campaigns deepened the emotional bond between the beverage brand and the film franchise. By aligning with Harry Potter's global appeal, Coca-Cola enhanced its youth-oriented brand image, while the IP gained renewed consumer attention. This synergy illustrates how cross-brand alliances can broaden audience demographics and elevate market positioning for both parties.

3.1.3 Resource Integration for Diversified IP Exposure

Platform-driven resource integration enables IPs to maximize commercial value through multi-channel exposure. Alibaba Pictures' promotion of *The Wandering Earth* exemplifies this strategy. By leveraging Alibaba's e-commerce, entertainment, and media ecosystems, the IP was amplified across merchandise, films, and digital content. Consumers could seamlessly access related products on Taobao, while cross-platform storytelling reinforced the IP's cultural impact. Such holistic integration transforms IPs into multi-dimensional commercial entities, fostering deeper consumer connections and sustainable revenue streams.

3.2 Reaction

The "Reaction" component underscores the imperative for brands to swiftly adapt to market dynamics and engage consumers through real-time interactions. For IP marketing, agility in responding to feedback and trends is essential for sustaining emotional resonance and loyalty. With the advent of digital platforms, consumer sentiment can shift rapidly, making real-time engagement and iterative content adjustments crucial for maintaining relevance. Brands that fail to react in a timely manner risk losing audience interest and competitive advantage.

3.2.1 Rapid Market Response to Strengthen Emotional Bonds

Timely adaptation to consumer feedback is vital for maintaining IP relevance. The success of *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* highlights this principle. The film's producers actively monitored social media discussions post-release, addressing fan inquiries through behind-the-scenes content and live Q&A sessions. By validating audience sentiments and incorporating feedback, the IP cultivated a loyal fanbase, laying groundwork for long-term commercialization.

3.2.2 Real-Time Engagement via Social Media

Digital platforms enable IPs to foster intimacy with audiences. Xiaomi's engagement with its "Mi Fans" community exemplifies this approach. Through platforms like Weibo and WeChat, Xiaomi's executives host interactive events and exclusive promotions, creating a participatory brand culture.

Annual "Mi Fan Festivals" celebrate user contributions while refining products based on feedback, forging a virtuous cycle of loyalty and innovation.

3.2.3 Iterative Innovation to Sustain IP Appeal

Continuous adaptation to consumer preferences ensures enduring market relevance. McDonald's limited-time offerings, such as holiday-themed menus or pop culture collaborations, exemplify this strategy. These campaigns capitalize on trends to spark social media buzz and drive urgency among younger demographics. By aligning innovation with consumer expectations, McDonald's maintains its position as a dynamic, youth-centric brand.

3.3 Relationship

The "Relationship" dimension in 4R marketing focuses on building long-term, trust-based connections with consumers, partners, and communities. Unlike short-term transactions, it emphasizes loyalty, collaboration, and value co-creation, ensuring sustained brand growth and market adaptability.

3.3.1 Establishing a Multi-Stakeholder Long-Term Cooperation Network

In the commercialization of cultural IPs, the construction of a relationship network serves as the core mechanism for value co-creation and sustainable development. According to the "Relationship" dimension of the 4R marketing theory, cultural IP operations must establish long-term cooperative networks with multiple stakeholders, including governments, enterprises, consumers, and creators. A well-structured relationship network enhances resource synergy, strengthens market positioning, and ensures the longevity of IP influence.

3.3.2 From Short-Term Transactions to Long-Term Partnerships

Cultural IPs need to move beyond one-time collaborations and establish strategic partnerships with stakeholders. Value co-creation, cultural identity, and shared risk management are the core features of this network. For example, the Palace Museum's cultural products adopt a "minimum guarantee+revenue-sharing" model to ensure partner engagement while controlling risks. Similarly, Black

Myth: Wukong collaborates with Shanxi tourism, using the game's influence to attract visitors while scenic spots provide cultural settings, creating long-term synergy.

To ensure stability, trust mechanisms such as clear contracts for IP ownership and revenue distribution are essential. Additionally, co-creation platforms, such as blockchain-based licensing and user-driven secondary creation communities. However, cultural conflicts and profit-sharing disputes may arise, requiring dynamic evaluation and digital relationship management to optimize partnerships.

3.3.3 User Participation in Co-Creation

Fan engagement and UGC (User-Generated Content) are essential for IP sustainability, transforming consumers into active contributors. Online literature platforms often let readers vote on plot directions, enhancing emotional investment. Similarly, Bilibili's virtual idols thrive on fan-generated content, reinforcing the "creator-platform-fan" loop.

Besides boosting engagement, user content provides market insights for IP operators. However, challenges like copyright issues and quality control require structured governance, such as blockchain certification and content moderation policies. By integrating user creativity, cultural IPs can expand influence and ensure long-term vitality.

3.4 Reward

The "Reward" element in the 4R marketing theory emphasizes that while building relationships, engaging with customers, and delivering value, businesses must also focus on obtaining economic or non-economic rewards from these activities. Rewards are not limited to short-term profits but also include long-term brand loyalty, growth in market share, and sustained customer support. For IP marketing, the acquisition of rewards often relies on the enduring influence and commercial monetization potential of the IP. Through effective reward strategies, businesses can ensure the long-term development of the IP and achieve sustainable commercial value.

3.4.1 IP Licensing Derivatives Diversified Rewards

IP licensing and derivative product development are vital for maximizing rewards in IP marketing. Licensing allows IP owners to earn fees and expand reach through partners' resources, while derivative

products drive sales and meet diverse consumer needs. Disney's collaboration with Uniqlo exemplifies this: they launched apparel featuring Disney characters, distributed globally via Uniqlo's network. This generated licensing revenue for Disney, boosted the IP's visibility, and enhanced Uniqlo's brand appeal. Such partnerships enable diversified commercial success, leveraging partners' channels to amplify market influence and monetize IPs across sectors, ensuring long-term growth and global expansion.

3.4.2 Continuous IP Content Boosts Loyalty Rewards

Continuous output of IP content is essential for maintaining user engagement and securing long-term rewards. By consistently delivering new content, IP owners can sustain market relevance and deepen user connections. This approach not only generates direct revenue but also enhances brand value through ongoing user support. A prime example is Netflix's collaboration with Stranger Things. By regularly releasing new seasons, Netflix keeps the IP popular and engages users, sparking discussions and driving subscriptions. Fans also purchase merchandise and attend events, strengthening their emotional ties to the IP. This strategy provides Netflix with steady subscription revenue while boosting Stranger Things' brand value. Through continuous content delivery, Netflix achieves both short-term commercial gains and long-term IP growth, demonstrating the power of maintaining user loyalty and fostering engagement through fresh, consistent content.

3.4.3 Cross IP Collaboration Boosts Brand Market Share

Cross-industry collaboration is a vital strategy in IP marketing, enabling IP owners to leverage partners' resources and channels to expand market influence and enhance brand value. These partnerships yield direct economic returns and long-term benefits by elevating brand equity.

For example, Nike's collaboration with Star Wars produced limited-edition sneakers featuring iconic elements, generating significant revenue and boosting Nike's exclusivity. Simultaneously, Star Wars attracted a younger audience, expanding its market share. This model highlights how cross-industry partnerships amplify IP influence, drive economic returns, and enhance brand value through shared resources and collaborative branding.

In conclusion, modern IP marketing relies on diversified monetization strategies like licensing, content delivery, and cross-industry collaborations. Effective reward strategies ensure long-term IP development and sustainable commercial value. The "Reward" element of the 4R marketing theory, emphasizing diversified monetization and long-term returns, is crucial for success in contemporary IP.

4 DISCUSSION

This study validates the theoretical value and practical applicability of the 4R framework in addressing the commercialization challenges of IP in China. In the digital culture-driven new economic paradigm, the core tension in IP marketing lies in balancing the deep excavation of cultural value with the efficiency of commercial transformation. The 4R theory provides a structured solution to this tension by systematically integrating the four dimensions of Relevance, Reaction, Relationship, and Reward, revealing the dynamic mechanisms of IP value creation.

The Relevance dimension emphasizes the precise alignment of IP with the cultural identity of target audiences, building differentiated competitive advantages through emotional resonance. In China's culturally diverse market, IPs must transcend superficial symbols and embed themselves in social emotional structures to activate user loyalty. Reaction requires the establishment of agile market sensing and response mechanisms, leveraging digital technologies to transform real-time consumer insights into actionable strategies, ensuring IP vitality in a rapidly evolving cultural context. Relationship focuses on constructing collaborative networks, transforming one-way licensing into co-creative ecosystems that enhance the sustainability of IP development through resource integration and risk-sharing. The Reward dimension breaks through traditional monetization logic, advocating for multi-layered value release through derivative matrices, cross-media narratives, and long-term content operations.

The study further reveals the structural limitations of traditional marketing theories in explaining China's IP market: first, the neglect of fan communities as active co-creators of value; second, the underestimation of cultural discount effects on cross-market IP dissemination. The 4R framework addresses these gaps by emphasizing

The coupling of cultural genes and commercial logic, offering a theoretical pathway for the globalization of local IPs. However, its application must guard against the erosion of cultural authenticity by over-commercialization, suggesting the need for dynamic evaluation systems to balance short-term gains and long-term brand equity. Future research could explore the weighting relationships among the 4R elements and their applicability across different IP types, laying the foundation for a China-specific IP marketing knowledge system.

5 CONCLUSION

With the advent of the digital era, intellectual property (IP) has become increasingly prominent within the cultural industry, particularly in China, where IP licensing is entering a phase of rapid development. This paper, through the analysis of IP marketing strategies, finds that the 4R marketing theory provides an effective framework for the successful operation of IP. Through the four dimensions of "Relevance", "Reaction", "Relationship" and "Reward". IP marketing not only strengthens the emotional connection between brands and consumers but also enhances market value and commercial returns through cross-border collaborations, resource integration, and fan economy. Firstly, by collaborating with multiple brands and platforms, IP can expand its influence and further enhance user stickiness and activity through the fan economy. Secondly, promptly responding to market feedback and utilizing social media interactions can deepen the emotional resonance between the brand and consumers, maintaining the long-term appeal of the IP. Additionally, establishing long-term cooperative relationships and leveraging user-generated content (UGC) for co-creation are core pathways for the sustainable development of IP. Lastly, through IP licensing, derivative development, and cross-border collaborations, IP can not only bring short-term economic returns but also ensure long-term commercial success through continuous content output and brand value enhancement. In summary, the success of IP marketing is inseparable from flexible and diverse marketing strategies and deep market interactions. Brands should utilize the key elements of the 4R theory to maximize the value of IP and achieve long-term development in an ever-changing market environment.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

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

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