

# Emotional Marketing Strategy of Cotton Doll Industry Based on Female Consumption Psychology

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**Abstract:** The cotton doll industry, a cultural sector predominantly driven by female consumers, has been growing in recent years and has emerged as a new favorite in the trendy toy market. The study starts from the emotional marketing theory to study the psychological motivation of women to buy cotton dolls. Firstly, semi-structured interviews are conducted with players who have relatively rich experience in playing dolls, and then questionnaire surveys are conducted based on the interviews to further explore the emotional marketing strategy of the cotton doll industry in order to achieve better marketing effects. The study found that women attach great importance to the emotional experience brought by cotton dolls, including seeing them as emotional support, life companion, or finding self-identity through interacting with the dolls. Therefore, the cotton doll industry needs to carry out emotional marketing at the level of the whole industrial chain to meet the psychological needs of women for cotton dolls in terms of companionship and socialisation, so as to attract and retain more female customers.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Around 2019, accompanied by the domestic trendy play industry hot heating, the cotton doll industry ushered in the rapid development. Starting in the second half of 2020, Weibo super topic 'cotton beauty doll' has long occupied the top of the list of 'trendy toys' category. By the end of 2021, this super topic was nearly two million posts, the number of readings exceeded ten billion, and the number of notes related to cotton dolls on Xiaohongshu also reached 1.58 million+. According to the data released by Youshop, the head e-commerce platform of cotton dolls, the online turnover of cotton dolls has exceeded 1 billion yuan in 2021, and has grown at an average annual rate of 15% over the past five years.

More than 98% of cotton doll players are women, but the marketing strategy of the cotton doll industry fails to focus on women's needs, and there are fewer studies on women's consumption psychology in the past. Therefore, this study starts from the aspects that the cotton doll industry meets women's psychological needs, and how these consumption psychology can provide insights for the emotional marketing strategy of the cotton doll industry. The study uses semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to ensure the validity and reliability of the study from both

qualitative and quantitative aspects, taking into account the breadth and reliability of the data. The study not only provides an empirical basis for understanding the consumption patterns of female consumers but also provides useful references for the formulation of marketing strategies of the cultural industry targeting the female market.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional marketing was initially proposed by Professor Barry Feig of the United States, who believed that consumers' emotional needs should be stimulated to trigger their spiritual resonance and form purchasing behaviour and brand loyalty (Kim et al., 2009). There are two main directions of research on emotional marketing at home and abroad. One is to study the content and mode of emotional marketing itself. Li Jin believes that emotional marketing is a marketing method that sells products to meet the psychological needs of consumers. On the other hand, it is the study of its use in branding, such as Brand Design Emotional Marketing Research--Taking Coca-Cola as an Example published by Qin Yuanyuan. However, most of the studies still adopt the single-case study method, which lacks the consumer

perspective and does not explore what emotional marketing tactics are more useful (Pathak & Pathak-Shelat, 2017).

At the same time, the author searched for related materials on China Knowledge Network with 'female consumption psychology' as the search keyword, and counted a total of 326 papers, among which, Lv Haiping and others believe that female consumption psychology has the characteristics of emphasis on intuitive effect, easy to be influenced by emotions, and focusing on the convenience of using and purchasing, etc. (Lv et al, 2008). Su Shiwei believes that women's cultural background and cognitive differences will affect their consumption psychology (Millet, 2008).

### 3 RESEARCH METHODS

#### 3.1 Semi-Structured Interview

In this study, 23 eligible cotton doll players were selected for interviews through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The interviewees were between 16 and 25 years old and have rich experience in purchasing and playing cotton dolls. The interviews were used to understand the psychological motives behind their purchasing behaviour, to provide variables for questionnaire design, and to further analyse the means of emotional marketing to women.

#### 3.2 Questionnaire Survey Method

The survey questionnaire targeting the consumption psychology of female cotton doll consumers was designed based on the conclusions drawn from interviews and by referencing the established scales of previous researchers. The questionnaire was distributed through online channels from 22 November 2024, and the collection time lasted for 12 days, with a total of 133 questionnaires recovered, of which 133 were valid, with a valid recovery rate of 100%.

In terms of questionnaire content design, the questionnaire consists of four parts, the first part, using the Definitive Category Scale method to design measurement options for the user characteristics of the research object; the second part uses Likert scale to design measurement options for the three aspects derived from interviews - emotional experience, social needs, and perception of added value; the third part uses Likert scale to assess the audience's acceptance of certain emotional marketing tools.

## 4 EMPIRICAL STUDY OF FEMALE CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY

### 4.1 Semi-Structured Interview

This study adopts the affinity diagram method to summarise the interview data and extract key information about female cotton doll consumption psychology (Table 1). Through the interview data, this study classifies female cotton doll consumption psychology into three aspects: emotional experience, social needs, and perception of added value. The specific analysis results are as follows (Zhou, 2024).

#### 4.1.1 Emotional Experience

With the diversification of society and culture, the 'new women's group' in the pursuit of emotional satisfaction shows a more delicate and multi-dimensional face, they particularly value the emotional experience contained in the purchase of cotton dolls, which covers a variety of dimensions, including emotional support, life companion, self-identity, motherhood projection, and acquisition of a sense of achievement. Specifically, women tend to regard cotton dolls as the solace of the soul, that cotton dolls can help them relieve their personal daily life troubles, at the same time, the 'prototype' characters of cotton dolls and characters of emotional support is also an important aspect. In addition, cotton dolls are also indispensable companions for female players when they are happy or sad. In the dimension of self-identity, by customising or purchasing cotton dolls that meet their personal preferences, women not only express their unique personalities and aesthetics, but also identify themselves with their innocence, gentleness, and loveliness, which further strengthens the construction of their self-image (Long, 2023). Moreover, many women experience a sense of responsibility and satisfaction similar to that of motherhood in taking care of their dolls, which not only deepens their love for their dolls, but also brings an unprecedented sense of achievement (Chen & Xu, 2023).

#### 4.1.2 Impact of Social Demands and Media Interactions

As the main consumer who is keen on expression and sharing, the female group is often highly interested in cotton dolls that can enhance social interaction. From the perspective of social demand, women are influenced by the herd mentality, and the fact that

people around them own cotton dolls will make them eager to join the trend, while the recommendation of friends or communities is also a strong catalyst for purchase. From the perspective of media interaction, when women frequently swipe cotton dolls 'recommendation posts or videos on social media and actively participate in the interaction of cotton dolls' related communities, it will deepen their love for the dolls and greatly increase their purchase intention (Li, 2024). Finally, it is worth noting that the relatively closed and slightly exclusive nature of the Cotton Doll circle, a characteristic that rather enhances the sense of belonging and stickiness of the inner members, makes women within the circle more willing to purchase Cotton Dolls in order to integrate and maintain this unique social atmosphere (Sun, 2022).

#### 4.1.3 Perception of Added Value

Added value refers to the extra value or utility that consumers or users feel for a product or service beyond its basic function or use, and this extra value may come from a variety of aspects, such as product design, quality, branding, service, emotional connection, and personalised experience. Out of the common psychology, the cotton doll industry to improve customer perception of added value can increase the willingness of women to buy. When it comes to which value-added services can increase the willingness to buy, 20 respondents chose the after-sales service of 'free cleaning', and 18 respondents thought that 'giving away cotton doll clothes and accessories' would also be appealing to them. In terms of after-sales service, in addition to practical after-sales services such as 'rua tutorials' (kneading the doll's body and face to move the cotton to make it fuller and more adorable), after-sales services with a sense of emotion are also popular among female consumers.

#### 4.1.4 Although Deeply Tied to the 'Prototype', the Cotton Doll Is 'Independent'

Another very special point is that for some of the cotton dolls with attributes, female consumers have different ways of viewing them: as prototype itself, as a child born of oneself and prototype, and as one's own child with prototype attributes. This shows that cotton dolls with attributes are deeply bound to their prototypes, and most of the women who purchased cotton dolls with attributes also believe that 'the similarity between cotton dolls and their prototypes' is positively related to their willingness to purchase. This shows that as a product of the fan economy, the

character attributes and story backgrounds behind the cotton dolls are particularly important. However, even though cotton dolls are tied to their 'prototype,' when asked if the disappointment of the prototypes affects your feelings towards the cotton dolls, all the respondents said 'no.' This reflects the fact that the time, material, and emotional investment women make in the dolls themselves makes dolls somewhat separate from the 'prototypeal characters' or even be a living, independent entity in women's minds.

Table 1: Analysis of Consumer Psychology and Derivation of Emotional Marketing Tactics.

Code Level 1	Generalisation of Raw Interview Data	Derivation of Emotional Marketing Tactics
Emotional experience	Emotional sustenance, Emotional value, Prototype character, Psychological stress, Companionship, Childhood, Children, Contentment	Focus on emotional experiences for emotional marketing
Social demands and media interactions	Video, Community, Friends, Group Chat, Referrals	Use community attributes for emotional marketing
Perception of added value	Gift, Free, Customisation, After-sales	Increase perception of added value

The basic theoretical model framework of this study is proposed based on the current state of research on emotional marketing strategies and the results of the interviews (Figure 1).

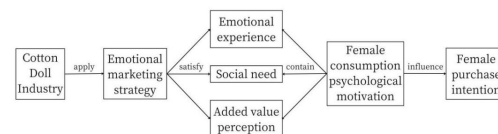


Figure 1: Theoretical Model Framework

The model highlights the importance of emotional marketing, and clarifies the process by which it influences female consumer behaviour, i.e. satisfying female psychological motivations by satisfying their emotional experience, social needs and perception of

added value, thereby stimulating their willingness to buy. The model can help the cotton doll industry use emotional marketing strategies more specifically and precisely to cater for the psychological needs of female consumers.

## 4.2 Questionnaire Survey Method

The questionnaire was divided into three parts: motivation to buy cotton dolls, female consumer psychology, and acceptance of emotional marketing tactics, and the options for each part of the question were on a five-point Likert scale, with options ranging from 1='strongly disagree', 2='disagree', 3='not necessarily', 4='agree', 5='strongly agree', and 6='agree'. 'not necessarily', 4='agree', and 5='strongly agree'.

The results show that more than seventy percent (78.95%) of women said that the quality of the material of the cotton doll is very important in the purchase, and nearly ninety percent (88.72%) think that the attributes of the doll are very important. It can be seen that the cotton doll purchase motivation, the doll attributes that cotton dolls whether it is a favourite IP or character and image fit the preferred conditions for women to buy, reflecting the cotton doll is a strong binding with the attributes of the tide of play category, its added value and popularity depends mainly on its linkage and representative of the IP or character, and the quality of the material, the design and style as the second and third considerations, reflecting the pragmatic tendency of women's consumer psychology. The quality of material and design style are the second and third considerations, reflecting the pragmatic tendency of women's consumption psychology.

In addition, women buy cotton dolls out of emotional experience of the consumer psychology of the mean value is above 3.5, that is, the overall more agreeable; social needs, social interaction affects the willingness to buy related to the question item mean value is relatively low, 3.5 or so, the video communication and media interaction, the community economy related effects mean value is relatively high, more than 4; added value perception of gifts and after-sales service mean value of more than 4, that is, relatively agreeable. i.e., relatively agreeable. It can be seen that the emotional experience is the variable with the strongest positive correlation with women's willingness to buy, and the community economy effect on women's consumption psychology is also more significant, in the community economy, there

are members within the circle who have the same interest in the same product and the same value orientation, which establishes a high degree of trust and a sense of belonging, thus increasing their willingness to buy something, and at the same time, the norms and exclusivity within the circle also help to maintain the purity and stability of the community, which further enhances the purchasing power of internal members.

## 5 IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 Cotton Doll Industry Overview

Cotton doll industry has a more complete industrial chain, only the upstream, midstream and downstream of the various subjects work together in the emotional marketing strategy, in order to promote the continuous development of the industry (Ding, 2023). Designers are responsible for the design of cotton dolls, including character setting, image design, and integration of emotional elements, manufacturers are responsible for the production of cotton dolls, and the marketing team is responsible for the promotion and marketing of cotton dolls, including branding, emotional marketing, and event planning. Each subject in the industry chain jointly implements the emotional impact strategy to maximise the effectiveness of the strategy (Figure 2).

### 5.2 Emotional Marketing Strategies for Each Subject

#### 5.2.1 Product Design and Manufacturing

Carry out emotional design, through the cute version and expression, unique dress up, highlighting the dual value of cotton dolls accompaniment and collection, catering to the aesthetics of female consumers. Conduct crossovers between cotton dolls and popular anime, games, films, television dramas or celebrities. These dolls are designed with extra attention to the similarity between the cotton dolls and the prototypal characters and try to recreate the characters themselves in expression. Soft, skin-friendly materials and fillers are made of high-quality cotton to ensure a soft feel and meet the needs of female consumers who use cotton dolls as a life companion (often cuddling cotton dolls).



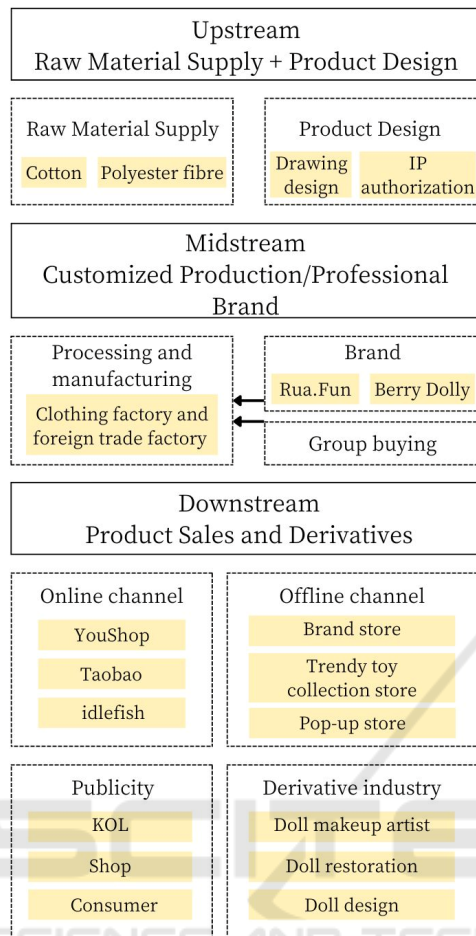


Figure 2: Cotton Doll Industry Chain.

### 5.2.2 Sales Promotion

Use social media platforms (KOL) to publish cotton doll-related news or videos, including cotton doll care methods, baby clothes show, unboxing video, DIY transformation and other practical teaching and situational drama, cotton dolls dancing, talking and other emotionally oriented video, to meet the dual needs of consumers. Through lucky draws, sunshine contests and other online activities to encourage consumers to share their cotton dolls and child rearing experience, providing them with a platform to showcase their hobbies and at the same time allow them to find like-minded friends in the community, enhance their sense of identity as cotton doll players, meet their sharing and social needs, form a word-of-mouth effect, and expand the scope of dissemination.

Cotton dolls with attributes are the main segment of the cotton doll market, so communicating the story of the 'prototype' behind the dolls is more effective in attracting female consumers who like this

prototype. The doll without attributes, you can touch the hearts of consumers through touching stories between cotton dolls and players, increasing the emotional added value of the product. The story content can emphasise the cotton dolls and female self-identity of the association, to strengthen its inspiration of female motherhood identity of the lovely qualities, or will buy the care of cotton dolls female consumer brave pursuit of self, to achieve self-worth linked to the dissemination of positive values.

Create official communities, such as Wechat group, QQ group, Weibo super topic, etc., regularly release product information, activity previews and community benefits, enhance the sense of belonging of users, encourage users to share their own child-rearing experience, stories and ideas, and form a positive and upward community atmosphere. Use the community effect to enhance internal stickiness. For example, setting up a membership system, shaping community culture, etc., but also pay attention to actively accepting new members and lowering the threshold of entry while maintaining the characteristics of the community.

Enhance the sense of added value for consumers by launching character-related peripheral products (e.g. cotton dolls' clothes, accessories, etc.) or setting up exclusive after-sales service points or online booking platforms to provide consumers with free cotton changing and cleaning services. Provide personalised customisation services to meet unique needs, providing an online customisation platform that allows consumers to choose the doll's skin colour, hairstyle, eye colour, clothing and other details according to their personal preferences, which can be customised or embroidered with player-exclusive embroidery based on the photos provided by the consumer to create a unique cotton doll. Adding vocal cords or an electronic pulse to a cotton doll satisfies the female consumer's sensual need to see the doll as a real living child.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are that the psychological motivation of female cotton doll players to buy cotton dolls has three aspects: emotional experience, social needs and perception of added value, so the cotton doll industry needs to carry out emotional marketing from the whole industry chain for these three aspects in order to achieve better sales results. The study provides a useful reference for the operation mechanism of emotional marketing, and future

research can focus more on the audience side to explore more efficient marketing tactics.

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