

Analysis of Young Girls' Eagerness to Spend for Disney Virtual Characters Based on Marketing Mix Theory

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Abstract. A virtual character is a design of a fictitious creature with distinctive characteristics created by people, and Disney virtual characters are those Intellectual Property (IP) images that appeared in Disneyland and Disney movies. This investigation aimed to explore why many younger females are keen to spend money on Disney virtual characters. This paper adopted the Marketing Mix Theory strategy (product, price, placement, and promotion) marketing mix theory, and the SWOT analysis method has been utilized. This paper investigated the relationship between the 4Ps and consumers' purchasing intentions, and it turned out that unique design and effective promotion in this Disney case would promote consumers' purchase intention, while the higher price and less accessible placements affect their purchase intentions. Thus, the high price and limited places somewhat inhibit customers' desire to buy, due to the attractiveness of the product itself and the promotion on the internet, the target consumers are still willing to consume.

Keywords: Marketing Mix theory; 4P; SWOT analysis; Disney; Virtual Characters.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Due to the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in 2019, people all over the world have experienced lockdowns, mandatory quarantines and so on, and Chinese people seemed to be under the strictest control. People are forced to stay at home, and spent loads of their time on the internet, flicking through short videos in Tiktok and watching live streams. Young women who are still at universities or just starting to work in particular were fond of killing time in such ways. As girls are always impressed by something cute, at that time, a super adorable avatar Lina Bell emerged in the spotlight, rapidly gained their affection and was getting a hit. Many of them have developed strong desires to go to Disney just to meet with her in person.

Lina Bell is the IP image Shanghai Disney released in September 2021. With big, starry blue eyes, a big, fluffy tail, and her lovely body movements, the pinky fox looks rather attractive. Even though Lina Bell has only emerged in recent years, there are several research on it due to its big and rapid success. Many researchers focus on the reasons why Lina Bell became a hit right from the start, Lina Bell in Disneyland is more like a living human being than a doll since it gives feedback to people's actions and words and carries their emotions [1]. The impact of COVID was also mentioned several times, as the boring and depressing feeling has increased people's desire for interacting in Disneyland with Lina Bell. Another paper analyzes the psychology of consumers, pointing out that many of them do not need and like Lina Bell, but when they see its popularity, they are eager to own the Lina Bell doll just like they desire a luxury [2].

1.2 Research Gap

Although there have been many studies on the reasons for Lina Bell's popularity, however, analysis of the perceptions and viewpoints of young women, in particular, has rarely been studied directly. A particular reason to analyze this is, according to Ju, over ninety percent of the consumers are youngsters below 30 and over seventy percent are women [2]. Consequently, this research is about why young girls (aged 16-30) are generally willing to consume Lina Belle, whether it's prompting them to go to Disneyland or paying for fluffy toys and other peripherals. And the motivation would be to get a better grasp of the psychology of consumers by exploring the main factors that influence

young female consumers. As a consequence, products or images that are more tailored to their needs induce consumption in the future, since young women have certain purchasing power and are more into consumerism to some extent.

1.3 Fill the Gap

There are many alternative methods available for solving these problems. This paper will focus on the marketing mix theory in the literature review, applying SWOT (Strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats) methodology to get results. Based on the results, this paper will then conduct a discussion that targets both the research subject which is Lina Bell, and the affected population which is young women aged 18 to 30, and finally conclude, about the reasons young girls are generally willing to consume for Lina Bell.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition & Development

A large and growing body of literature has investigated that virtual characters like Lina Bell raise people's will to consume. Over the past years, most of the research on the influence of avatars pays particular attention to the marketing mix theory. What is known about marketing mix theory is largely based upon empirical studies that investigate how business could gain more profit and prestige through marketing.

In 1953, Neil Borden introduced the term Marketing Mix in his inaugural lecture to the American Marketing Association, which means that market demand is to some extent influenced by the so-called "marketing variables" or "marketing elements" [3]. The concept of 4P then ensued. In 1960, Professor Jerome McCarthy of Michigan State University outlined these elements in general terms in his book 'Basic Marketing' into four categories, which are product, price, place and promotion [3]. By the 1980s, many theorists appealed to expand the 4Ps. Booms and Bitner suggested a 7P model that includes the former 4Ps plus process, people and physical evidence, which is more applicable in-service marketing [3]. Robert F. Lauterborn then proposed 4C in 1990, which emphasizes the importance of the customer to the business [4]. The 4Cs are Customer's needs and wants, Cost and Value to satisfy consumer's needs and wants, Convenience to buy, and Communication with the consumer. The 4Ps and 4Cs are complementary rather than substitutes, and the "4Ps" is still the most concise and clear interpretation of the marketing strategy mix so far, and this paper will analyze based on the 4P theory [4].

2.2 Important Results

The function and appearance of the product seem to be put in the first place, the greater the value of the product itself, the higher the customer's intention to purchase. In 2020, Asdi and Putra found that the product's excellent functional performance benefits consumers. By analyzing the market for Samsung phones in Southeast Asia, they found that Samsung sales declined around 2015 due to the emergence of brands such as Vivo and Xiaomi. These emerging brands released similar products but with more attractive features [6]. Based on Nested Logit model, Kaliji et al. researched people's preferences for dairy products, and concluded that people tend to buy low-fat milk than whole milk, showing the importance of function in 'product' [7]. Paraschos employed Principal Component Analysis, Green consumerism, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modelling, Green certification of green product packaging encourages consumers of green products to choose green products [8].

Pricing is of vital importance in a business, and pricing that is lower than its similar competitors may capture a larger market. Generally, higher prices discourage customers from purchasing. As an illustration, according to a study conducted by Kaliji et al., using Nested Logit model on consumer preference for dairy products, the higher the price, the less likely people are to choose dairy products [7]. In the investigation of the market for Samsung phones in Southeast Asia, respondents gave

feedback that the high frequency and accuracy of promotions would drive them to choose to buy Samsung phones [6]. According to Maoludyo and Aprianingsih's research into the factors that influence consumers' intentions to buy a home in Dermok, the majority of respondents thought that house prices were very important, with even more respondents agreeing that house prices were very important than that interest rates were important [9].

The products can be sold in various distribution channels, mainly divided into online and offline sales. Multiple channels are very useful for market share of different products and services, and this paper will argue that a more accessible place could raise consumers' purchasing intention. According to research completed by Asdi and Putra on Samsung markets, respondents' Frequency Distribution illustrates that easy-to-get-to locations play a positive role in consumers purchasing Samsung phones [6]. Martensen and Jan stated that Consumers may have a slightly positive or neutral influence on brand attitudes if the product is in an easily accessible location at the time they need it [10]. In Wang's survey, more than 80 per cent of consumers went to the same shop as the last one they visited to buy household appliances, illustrating the acceleration of convenience of location on consumers' willingness to buy [11].

For a few decades, the marketing discipline has lacked a widely accepted definition of promotion and promotion covers many aspects [5]. The more high-quality promotions there are, the greater the customer interest. Among the wide circumstances in promotion, advertisements on various channels could raise the brand image and imply consumers' purchasing intention. Besides, temporary discounts can greatly increase customers' propensity to buy and induce trials for potential customers to have more purchase possibilities in the future [5]. Similarly, in an investigation completed by Kaliji et al. on consumer preferences for dairy products, they found that consumers were more likely to choose a lactic acid cheese called the Kaleh brand because of the promotion [7]. However, the situation was not quite the same in Maoludyo and Aprianingsih's survey on consumers' willingness to buy a house. Respondents' opinions vary, with a large proportion of them stating that the company's reputation was not that important [9].

2.3 Summary

Given all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that in general, the price is inversely proportional to people's desire to buy. However, this situation probably changes due to the specificity of the research subject Lina Bell and the target customers in this paper. Young girls are at a time when they seek to be different and value the feeling of beauty. For example, does having a Lina bell plush toy that no one else can have mean more to them than just the toy itself? Or in the case of the epidemic, the constant emotional depression and negativity need an outlet and a trip to Disney to spend time with Lina bell like a friend becomes more valuable. As a consequence, this paper argues that in this special circumstance, the high price still reduces the desire of some young girls to consume, but like the big luxury brands, some of them are keen to own one full toy and at that time the price seems rather unimportant.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

A variety of methods are applied to assess the impacts of virtual characters, each has its advantages and disadvantages. However, this paper is going to employ the qualitative method as the research method, applying SWOT analysis to analyze the research subject, which is the virtual characters of Disney (with Lina Bell as a representative). As an effective situational analysis technique, swot plays an important function in the field of marketing [13].

By evaluating an organization's strengths and weaknesses, and the outside environment's opportunities and threats, SWOT analysis can help a company find its niche, and distinguish it from its competitors [13]. Disneyland is known to be a remarkably unique place, and Disney's virtual characters contribute much to its uniqueness. Another feature of SWOT analysis is that it could be

used in differing analytical levels and aspects, not only national level but international level, multicultural levels and so on [13]. Disney's culture is world-oriented, with Disney theme parks all over the world and Disney's target customers all over the world. SWOT analysis has also been applied in studies examining the impact of virtual reality on older people, also utilized in virtual reality in the field of rehabilitation and therapy [12]. Therefore, it would be suitable to apply the SWOT qualitative method as the research method in analyzing the impacts of Disney virtual characters on young ladies' purchase intentions. SWOT analysis has also been applied in studies examining the impact of virtual reality on older people, also employed in virtual reality in the field of rehabilitation and therapy.

3.2 Disney virtual characters

This paper considers the virtual characters in Disney as the research subject, taking Lina Bell as a representation. Disney is an American multinational popular media and entertainment corporation headquartered at the Walt Disney Studios complex in Burbank, California. Beginning in the 1920s, Walt Disney and his partners adapted fairy tales into animated clips, creating the popular character Mickey Mouse and founding the Disney Company. After achieving great success in the early 1940s, the company diversified into live-action films, television and theme parks in the 1950s, and bought out Pixar, Marvel and other large companies. Disney remains a leader in the animation industry today [14].

Disney has many familiar characters. Alice the little mermaid, Belle, Rapunzel and so on in the princess series; Mickey Mouse, Lotso, Olaf, Stitch, Simba, Tigger, Winnie the pooh..... and Lina Bell. This paper will focus on the virtual characters in China's Disneyland. Each Disney character has its personality, hobbies and characteristics, but they all have the same slightly awkward and goofy appearance and a kind and pure heart. At Disneyland, the Disney virtual characters are played by humans who interact with guests, pose for photos and perform. When merchandised, they are a variety of peripherals. As plush toys, bags and keychains, they are less alive but still particularly cute. They are like good friends and catch the attention of people, especially young girls. They are often posted on social media by people who are fond of them, and this has been particularly prevalent since the advent of Lina Bell.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

Strength. Based on the 4P in marketing mix theory, the strengths of Disney's virtual character and Lina Bell in the particular would-be product.

Taking Lina Bell as an example, the variety of its peripherals is of high quality and has a unique design. Customers can purchase a wide range of toys at the Disney Store. As well as the dolls themselves, there is a comprehensive range of costumes and accessories to choose from and match. These costumes cover multinational cultures, situations, and themes, such as Chinese Hanfu designs, Halloween-themed designs, and uniforms, etc. As mentioned before, the target impacted subject are young girls aged 18 to 30, compared to teenage girls, who have a certain accumulation of aesthetics and are usually keen on the fashionable dressing. The fact that there are only the usual outfits in everyday life and fewer occasions to dress up causes a lot of young girls to have no place to put their energy in this field. The emergence of plush toys such as Lina Bell is a perfect opportunity for them to exploit their talent and passion for fashion. A single purchase is likely to be impossible, and when they feel the pleasure that comes with dressing the dolls, they are likely to place an order for a second and even a third doll outfit. Therefore, the unique design of the product boosts young girls' buying intentions.

Weakness. There is no denying that price in the marketing mix theory would be the weakness of this paper's research subject. Dolls in Disneyland are generally overpriced, with Lina Belle's prices being the most prominent, due to scalping some have even reached outrageous levels. Since manufacturing is well-developed in China, fakes are rather common, and many young girls choose to buy only from Disneyland or the official flagship shop in order not to buy fakes. In the online official channels, the most normal Lina Belle has been priced as high as 250 RMB, higher than the price of Jellycat, a well-known plush toy brand from the UK. The more designer Christmas version of Belle

costs even more than 650 RMB. People may argue that despite the design being impressive, for the same price, why not choose Jellycat, which is also high quality and has a subtle design? These extremely high prices are the result of a combination of hunger marketing, scalping and consumer herd mentality and so on. However, people can also buy Lina Belle at a relatively low price if it is acceptable for consumers to buy from unofficial sources. Also, other Disney dolls like stitch and Winnie the pooh which are not as big a hit as Lina Bell are available at more affordable prices. Consequently, the high price hinders young girls' buying intentions, but to a rather low level of degree.

Opportunity. Promotion in the marketing mix theory may be considered to be an opportunity in terms of the exploration of Disney virtual characters. In an era of digitalization, short videos are growing at a rapid pace, with platforms such as Tiktok becoming an inseparable part of many people's daily lives, and the young women who are the influenced consumers studied in this paper are also users of these short video software. Lina Belle and other Disney characters are frequently posted on various social media platforms, attracting an increasing number of consumers. If the marketers had seized such an opportunity, for example, by posting videos of the virtual characters interacting with guests at Disneyland, this would have increased the interest of the target consumers and increased the likelihood of their spending.

Threaten. Placement in the marketing mix theory may be stated as a threat. The background of this paper is that there are currently only two Disneyland parks in China, one in Shanghai and one in Hong Kong, and mainland customers need additional documentation to travel to Hong Kong. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, controls are quite strict and it becomes particularly difficult for customers to go on business trips and to visit friends and family, let alone travel. Disneyland is the only place where people can interact with Disney characters. In the promotion section mentioned above, customers are likely to be very eager to purchase a Disney ticket after watching videos posted on the internet of others interacting with Lina Bell for example, but the distance makes this unrealistic. At the same time, unlike buying online, the physical shops in Disneyland are more motivating, therefore the placement is a factor that limits consumers' intentions to buy the Disney virtual dolls that are the subject of this research to a great extent. Therefore, if marketers could build Disneyland in more cities, these threatens may be alleviated.

4. Results & Discussion

The results demonstrate two things. First, product and promotion in the marketing mix theory are the strengths and opportunities of the virtual characters of Disney. Second, price and placement would be the weakness and threats. This shows that products with high quality and unique design accelerate customers' purchase intentions; high price impedes their purchase intentions; less accessible placements limit consumers' purchase intentions, and finally, promotion helps to boost their buying willingness.

Based on the investigation result, this paper would advise the marketers to open up new Disneyland in other large cities like Beijing and Guangzhou, lower the price appropriately, at the same time build on the strengths, design innovative products with quality assurance, and keep posting fun videos of the virtual characters on social medial. This paper also suggests that consumers do not have to stick to official channels to purchase, let go of obsessions and spend wisely.

Here this paper compares the results of the proposed method with those of the traditional methods. The findings of this paper are generally in line with those in the literature review section, namely the high quality and unique design, an affordable price, a more accessible place, as well as effective promotion could all increase consumers' buying intentions and vice versa.

5. Conclusion

This article investigates why, in recent years when China has been engulfed by COVID-19, reasons for younger female consumers are fond of, and keep purchasing the Disney virtual characters and

Lina Bell particularly. By collating the theoretical aspects of the marketing mix theory of 4P (namely product, price, placement and promotion) and using the SWOT method to analyse the relationship between the four aspects of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of these virtual characters and consumers' intentions to buy, the paper concludes that Disney's reputation combined with strong publicity has prompted many purchases.

By combing through the relevant literature, this paper validates the relationship between the 4Ps in marketing mix theory and consumers' purchase intentions in general. The exploration in this paper also implies that especially in the market for virtual characters, unique design and style are of paramount importance. An enduring image that is recognized by the public is the key to success. At the same time, the exploration reaffirms the importance of publicity, which has been emphasized in the marketing mix theory. Especially in today's era of big data, high exposure and effective exposure can lead to unlimited business opportunities.

However, this paper also has some limitations. As Lina Bell has not been around for very long, it is debatable whether it will continue to be so popular in the future. Apart from that, based on the analysis conducted by the author completely, some of the views may have a subjective influence and might be personal opinions and assessments. And some of the suggestions made in this article based on the situation in the SWOT analysis may be difficult to put into practice, such as the location, the high latitude of Beijing is not conducive to business in winter, and then the price, which is speculated by scalpers to a certain extent, all of which need to be studied more carefully and specifically.

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