



The Effective Ways of Emotional Marketing: An Analysis of Communication Strategies Taking the Resurgence of Childhood Snack Brands as an Example

Yaxin Liu

Princeton University, Beijing City University, Beijing 100083, China

Cynthia5114@outlook.com

Abstract. In recent years, childhood snack brands have successfully regained popularity through emotional marketing. This study focuses on this phenomenon and aims to explore the differential effectiveness mechanisms and communication strategies of emotional marketing among the 90s and 00s generations. Using a questionnaire survey method, four dimensions including brand nostalgia cognition, communication channels, purchase motivation, and product evaluation were covered. A total of 129 valid questionnaires were collected. The study found that both generations generally have a high acceptance of the revitalized brands. 91% can clearly recall at least two childhood brands. Short videos are the main source of information for both groups. However, there are significant generational differences: 00s generation is more dependent on short videos and prefers joint products and limited editions, presenting a "social experience nostalgia"; 90s generation, on the other hand, values the original flavor restoration and brand reputation, demonstrating a "memory confirmation nostalgia". Although 00s generation's evaluation of the consistency between the product and childhood is lower (only 16.9% think it is "significantly better", lower than 26.5% of 90s generation), their repurchase intention and social sharing intention remain positive. Through intergenerational comparison data, this study empirically reveals that emotional marketing is not universally applicable and provides a differentiated strategy framework for the revival of old brands.

Keywords: Emotional Marketing Childhood Snacks, Brand Revival, Generational Differences, Communication Strategy.

1 Introduction

This study focuses on a remarkable market phenomenon that has emerged in recent years: numerous domestic Chinese brands of childhood snacks that carry collective memories, such as Big White Rabbit Milk Candy, Wahaha AD Calcium Milk, and Mimi Shrimp Crackers, have successfully regained popularity through marketing strategies centered on "nostalgia", and have once again become the focus of young consumers' attention. White Rabbit and Mejiaying jointly launched lip balm and perfume collaboration with Scent Library, which sold out immediately. Wahaha opened a "AD Calcium Milk Memory Theme Pop-up Store", attracting a large number of young people

to queue up for a visit. Weilong Spicy Strips have continuously dominated social media through retro packaging and "nostalgic kiosk" marketing. This phenomenon is not an isolated case but represents a market trend worthy of in-depth study. It is rooted in two important backgrounds: at the cultural level, the revival of "national trend" and the social collective nostalgia sentiment interweave and resonate, providing a rich cultural soil for the revaluation of old brands; At the media level, the popularity of digital platforms such as short videos and social media has enabled emotional and scenario-based content to spread rapidly, providing unprecedented communication efficiency for emotional marketing.

This research holds significant value both in theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, although there have been numerous studies discussing the emotional marketing mechanism, the effect of nostalgic advertisements, and the characteristics of short-video dissemination, most of these studies treat "young consumers" as a relatively homogeneous group, with little attention paid to the generational differences within them. The post-90s generation, as "digital immigrants," have experienced the media transition from offline to online, and possess genuine childhood memories; the post-00s generation, as "digital natives," have been immersed in the information environment of short videos and social media since childhood, and their perception of "nostalgia" often comes through secondary dissemination. This difference may profoundly influence the way they receive emotional marketing, but existing research lacks in-depth exploration of this. From a practical perspective, understanding these generational differences can help brands achieve more precise audience reach and more efficient communication conversion when investing a large amount of resources in sentiment marketing, avoiding the waste of resources.

This study is specifically carried out from the following aspects: Firstly, it reviews the core concept of emotional marketing and the existing research, clarifying the research gaps in the existing literature; Secondly, through questionnaire surveys, it compares and analyzes the emotional responses and consumption behaviors of the 90s and 00s generations towards the resurgence of childhood snacks from four dimensions: brand nostalgia cognition, communication channels, purchase motivation, and product evaluation; Thirdly, based on the survey data, the similarities and differences in nostalgia consumption between the two generations are summarized, and the concept of "social experience nostalgia" and "memory confirmation nostalgia" are proposed. Finally, combined with the research results, it provides differentiated emotional marketing strategies for brands.

This study employed the questionnaire survey method as the main research approach. Structured questionnaires were designed for the 90s and 00s generations, focusing on dimensions such as brand nostalgia cognition, communication channels, purchase motivations, and product evaluation. The questionnaires were distributed through online platforms in a targeted manner. The questionnaire design referred to the core measurement indicators of nostalgia marketing in existing studies and made targeted adjustments considering the special attributes of childhood snacks. The advantage of the questionnaire survey method lies in its ability to obtain primary data. Through a quantitative comparison system, it can reveal the differences in attitudes and behaviors

between the two generations, providing solid empirical evidence for the research conclusions. The ultimate research goal of this study is to reveal the differentiated effectiveness mechanism of sentiment marketing among the 90s and 00s generations and propose targeted communication strategy suggestions. To achieve this goal, the research proceeds through the following steps: Firstly, through literature review, the theoretical framework and research gaps of emotional marketing are clarified; Secondly, a questionnaire survey is designed and implemented to collect data on the attitudes and behaviors of two generations regarding the resurgence of childhood snacks; Thirdly, the data is subjected to systematic descriptive statistics and cross-comparison analysis to identify the commonalities and differences of the two generations in each dimension; Finally, based on the analysis results, the research conclusions are refined, the theoretical contributions and practical implications are discussed, and the research limitations and future directions are pointed out. Through the above research approach, this study aims to provide empirical evidence and strategic references based on generational differences for the rejuvenation of established domestic brands.

2 Literature Review

Shi Meng and Peng Yue confirmed in their paper *"An Empirical Study on the Impact of Nostalgic Advertising on the Purchase Behavior of College Students from the Perspective of Emotional Marketing"* that nostalgic advertisements have a significant positive impact on the purchasing behavior of college students, providing a quantitative basis for understanding the effectiveness of nostalgic advertisements. However, their sample was limited to college students and failed to cover the 90s generation who have already started working, as well as ignoring the possibility of generational differences [1]. Hu et al. explored the mediating role of emotional value in consumer behavior in *"Sustainable marketing and tourists' sustainable behavior in South Korea"*. The measurement method of its emotional value provides a reference for the questionnaire design of this study, but the research focuses on sustainable tourism behaviors, which are different from the snack consumption context [2]. Bajpai et al. studied the influence of emotional attention on purchase intention from a cognitive neuroscience perspective in *"Neurocognitive Mechanisms Underlying Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention"*, deepening the understanding of the mechanism of emotional marketing, but the experimental environment had a gap in ecological validity compared to the actual use of social media [3]. Luo proposed the "Functional-Emotional-Social" framework for short-video marketing in *"From Attention to Intention: A Functional-Emotional-Social Framework for Short-video Marketing in Food Brands"*, providing a theoretical tool for analyzing the strategies of nostalgic snacks' resurgence in the short-video context, but the research object was food brands and did not specifically target nostalgic content [4]. Liu and Deng revealed the moderating role of emotional contagion in the dissemination of short videos in *"How the Need for Cognition Influences Film Viewing Intentions through Narrative Transportation"*, emphasizing the key position of emotions in dissemination, but the research scenario was film trailers, which differed from the context of snack brand marketing [5]. Piccolo and Boero systematically reviewed

the emotional and experiential dimensions of modern marketing in *"Emotional and Experiential Dimensions of Modern Marketing"*, providing a theoretical framework for emotional marketing, but it is of a theoretical overview nature and lacks empirical data support [6]. Zhang explored the content dissemination model driven by KOC under the dominance of emotional consumption in *"The Code of Communication Power of New Media Content Under the Dominance of Emotional Consumption"*, which is enlightening for understanding why the 00s generation is easily influenced by KOC, but the research is mainly based on theoretical deduction [7]. Zhu analyzed the value-added strategy of emotional narrative in the marketing of second-hand products in *"The Value-added Strategy of Emotional Narrative in the Marketing of Second-Hand Products", and the concept of "emotional narrative"* provided insights for analyzing nostalgic content, but the research object was second-hand products [8]. Zihan, in the article *"From IP Co-branding to Emotional Resonance"*, used Disney as an example to study how IP co-branding can enhance consumer loyalty through emotional resonance, providing an analytical framework for understanding the co-branding strategies of brands such as White Rabbit [9]. In *"Research on the Joint Marketing Strategies of National Brands under the Background of the Rise of National Trends"*, Yan Naiyan systematically analyzed the strategic combinations of joint marketing under the background of national trends, providing practical references for the revival of domestic products. However, the research method was mainly case analysis [10].

In summary, the existing research has laid the foundation for this study in areas such as emotional marketing, nostalgic advertisements, short video dissemination, and IP collaborations. However, it generally treats "young consumers" as a whole and lacks empirical exploration of the generational differences between the 90s and 00s generations. Particularly, there is a lack of intergenerational comparative studies based on first-hand survey data. This study will fill this gap through a questionnaire survey and systematically compare the differences in response to emotional marketing between the two generations.

3 Research Methodology

This study adopts the questionnaire survey method as the core research approach. The main considerations are as follows: Firstly, the questionnaire survey method is suitable for quantitative comparative research, enabling the collection of attitude and behavior data from multiple groups simultaneously. Standardized questions ensure comparability. Secondly, the questionnaire survey method can cover a wide range of sample groups and break through geographical limitations. Thirdly, this method has been maturely applied in emotional marketing research, providing methodological references for this study [1, 2, 4].

The questionnaire design focuses on the "effective mechanism of emotional marketing", covering four dimensions: (1) Brand nostalgia cognition: measuring the depth of respondents' memory and emotional connection to childhood snack brands; (2) Communication channel preference: exploring the path of information acquisition; (3) Purchase motivation and behavior: measuring the driving force for consumption and actual

purchase situations; (4) Product evaluation and repurchase intention: assessing satisfaction and future tendencies. All questions are in the form of closed-ended multiple-choice questions, and some core questions are set on a Likert five-point scale.

The data was collected from December 2025 to January 2026. It was produced through the "Tencent Questionnaire" platform and targeted distribution was carried out via the WeChat channel. A total of 133 questionnaires were collected, among which 129 were valid. The sample composition is as follows: 57 people born in the 90s (44.2%), 72 people born in the 2000s (55.8%); 69 men (53.5%), 56 women (43.4%), and 4 people who did not wish to disclose their identities (3.1%); the sample covers 21 provinces across the country, which is of certain representativeness.

4 Research Results

Data analysis has revealed the commonalities and significant differences in nostalgic consumption between the post-90s generation and the 00s generation.

4.1 Generational Commonality

First, from the perspective of brand recognition depth, the 90s generation has a deeper memory. Among the 90s generation, the proportion of those who "remember clearly (≥ 3 brands)" is 34.7%, which is higher than that of the 00s generation (23.4%). The 90s generation has more genuine childhood memories, while the 00s generation's cognition mainly comes from secondary dissemination.

Second, the perception of viral content is quite obvious. 57.1% of the post-90s and 57.1% of the 00s generation both stated that they "very clearly" noticed the phenomenon of viral content, and the dissemination coverage of emotional marketing is quite comparable.

Third, short videos are the core channel. TikTok and Kuaishou are the main sources of information for both sides - 63.3% are from the post-90s generation and 68.8% from the post-00s generation, which confirms the crucial role of short videos in emotional communication [4].

Fourth, the willingness to share socially is positive. In the question "I will share my purchase experience on social platforms", the average score of the post-90s was 4.08, and that of the 00s was 4.04, both showing a relatively high willingness to share.

4.2 Generational Differences

First, from the perspective of brand recognition depth, the 90s generation has a deeper memory. The proportion of the 90s generation who "remember clearly (≥ 3 brands)" is 34.7%, which is higher than that of the 00s generation (23.4%). The 90s generation has more genuine childhood memories, while the 00s generation's cognition mainly comes from secondary dissemination.

Second, from the perspective of information channel preference, the 00s generation is more dependent on short videos, while the 90s generation has more diverse channels.

The proportion of the 00s generation obtaining information through short videos (68.8%) is higher than that of the 90s generation (63.3%); while the 90s generation's proportions of using WeChat/Weibo (44.9% vs 00s generation 31.2%), offline supermarkets (36.7% vs 00s generation 27.3%), and recommendations from relatives and friends (26.5% vs 00s generation 18.2%) are all higher than those of the 00s generation.

Third, in terms of purchase motivation, the 90s generation values emotional recollection, while the 00s generation values novelty experience. The proportion of the 90s generation choosing "recalling childhood times" is 61.2%, which is much higher than that of the 00s generation (44.2%); while the proportion of the 00s generation choosing "curiosity about new packaging/new flavors" is 57.1%, which is higher than that of the 90s generation (53.1%).

Fourth, from the perspective of consumption behavior, the purchase frequency of the post-90s generation is higher, while the acceptance of joint product premiums by the post-00s generation is stronger. The proportion of post-90s who have made purchases due to nostalgia (91.8%) is slightly higher than that of post-00s (87.0%), and the proportion of their most recent purchase being within "the past month" (30.6%) is significantly higher than that of post-00s (18.2%). However, the post-00s generation shows a stronger willingness to pay for joint products.

Fifth, in terms of quality evaluation, the post-90s generation is more satisfied with quality restoration, while the post-00s generation has a lower evaluation but still intends to repurchase. The proportion of post-90s who consider it "significantly better" is 26.5%, higher than 16.9% of post-00s; the proportion of post-00s who consider it "slightly decreased" is 36.4%, far higher than 24.5% of post-90s. Although the post-00s generation has a lower quality evaluation, they are on par with the post-90s generation in terms of "increased brand favorability due to the re-release version" (4.10 points) and "sharing on social platforms" (4.04 points), indicating that their core consumption logic is social topics and participation experience.

5 Discussion

The results show that the popularity of childhood snacks is effective through the dual paths of "retro symbols" and "social communication", but for the post-00s, it is more like social experience, and for the post-90s, it is closer to emotional pursuit. This finding confirms the fundamental effectiveness of emotional marketing and deepens the neglect of audience segmentation in existing research [6]. Specifically, as digital aborigines, the post-00 generation's nostalgic consumption is driven more by the topicality, visual impact and KOC recommendation on social platforms. Even if they do not have a high degree of identity with the original taste of products, they are still willing to participate and share, which echoes Zhang's discussion on the KOC communication mode dominated by emotional consumption [7]. However, as digital immigrants, the post-90s generation's nostalgic consumption is more dependent on real memory awakening and quality restoration. Their dedication to the original taste and emphasis on brand reputation are consistent with the research on the emotional arousal mechanism of nostalgic advertising by Shi Meng and Peng Yue [1].

It is worth noting that the post-00s have lower quality evaluation but still maintain a high willingness to repurchase. This seemingly contradictory phenomenon actually reveals the essence of "social experience nostalgia" : consumption is not only the product itself, but also the process of participating in a cultural topic and obtaining social capital. This provides important enlightenment for brands: feelings marketing must be customized for generations -- for the post-00s, it should strengthen short video content, joint innovation and social interaction; for the 90s generation, focus should be on original replica, brand history narrative and quality commitment.

However, this study has certain limitations: the sample size of 129 is limited, which may affect the universality of the conclusion; at the same time, the research period is short, and the long-term stickiness of nostalgic consumption has not been tracked. Future research can expand the sample size, cover more regions and occupational groups, and combine in-depth interviews to deeply explore the formation mechanism of nostalgic emotions and the cultural roots of generational differences.

6 Conclusion

The research results of this study show that the post-90s and post-00s generations generally have a high acceptance of the revival of childhood snack brands, but there are significant generational differences in emotional drive and behavioral logic - the post-90s generation pays more attention to the authenticity of emotional restoration and the consistency of nostalgic product quality, reflecting "memory confirmation nostalgia". The post-00s are more dependent on the interest and topic participation of social communication, and prefer joint innovation. Even if they have a low evaluation of quality, they still maintain a positive willingness to buy again, reflecting "social experience nostalgia". Thus, it can be further concluded that emotional marketing is still effective among the younger generation, but it is not a universal strategy that applies all at once. Its effective mechanism varies from generation to generation. Brands need to carry out differentiated operations according to the core demands of different generations -- focusing on short video interaction and co-branded innovation for the post-00s, and emphasizing original flavor reproduction and brand historical narrative for the post-90s.

References

1. Shi, M., Peng, Y.: An Empirical Study on the Impact of Nostalgic Advertising on the Purchase Behavior of College Students from the Perspective of Emotional Marketing. *Journal of Sanmenxia Vocational and Technical College* **23**(1), 1 (2024).
2. Hu, D., Samad, S., Mahmood, S.: Sustainable marketing and tourists' sustainable behavior in South Korea: The roles of emotional value, connectedness to nature, and green consumption values. *Acta Psychologica* **262** (2026).
3. Bajpai, M., Pandiya, S., Mishra, P., et al.: Neurocognitive Mechanisms Underlying Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement with Reference to Emotional Attention, and Cognitive Appraisal. *Annals of Neurosciences* (2025).

4. Luo, J.: From Attention to Intention: A Functional–emotional–social Framework for Short-video Marketing in Food Brands. *Journal of Economic Research* **2**(6), 29–34 (2025).
5. Liu, L., Deng, W.: How the need for cognition influences film viewing intentions through narrative transportation: the moderating role of emotional contagion in short-video marketing. *Frontiers in Communication* (2025).
6. Piccolo, R., Boero, M.: *Emotional and Experiential Dimensions of Modern Marketing*. IGI Global Scientific Publishing, Hershey (2025).
7. Zhang, Y.: The Code of Communication Power of New Media Content Under the Dominance of Emotional Consumption -- Examining Short Drama Marketing and KOC-Driven Product Recommendations. *Research and Commentary on Humanities and Arts* **3**(10) (2025).
8. Zhu, Z.: The Value-added Strategy of Emotional Narrative in the Marketing of Second-Hand Products. *Journal of Business and Marketing* **2**(5) (2025).
9. Zihan, H.: From IP Co-Branding to emotional Resonance-Research on Disney Brand Marketing Strategy Innovation Model and Consumer Stickiness. In *2025 2nd International Conference on Language Research and Communication*, vol.220, pp.7. EDP Sciences, Les Ulis(2025).
10. Yan, N.: Research on the Joint Marketing Strategies of National Brands under the Background of the Rise of National Trends. Huaqiao University, Quanzhou (2023).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

