Emotional Value Marketing Affecting Consumer Purchasing Behavior: Evidence from POP Mart

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Abstract: In the experience economy, consumer decisions are increasingly driven by emotions rather than by functional or price considerations. This study examines how emotional value marketing influences consumer purchasing behavior, using Pop Mart as a case study. Based on flow theory, emotional value theory, and the cognitive–affective system theory, the research develops a model linking three dimensions of emotional value—emotional resonance, social interaction, and brand identification—to purchasing behavior through the mediating role of immersive experience. A survey of 600 Pop Mart consumers across major Chinese cities was analyzed using regression and mediation tests. Results show that emotional value significantly enhance immersive experience, which in turn drives purchasing behavior. Gender, age, and income further moderate these relationships. The findings enrich emotional value marketing theory by integrating emotional value and immersive experience into a unified framework, while offering practical implications for cultural and creative brands aiming to strengthen emotional engagement and consumer loyalty.

Keywords: Emotional Value Marketing; Immersive Experience; Purchasing Behavior; Pop Mart; Experience Economy

1. Introduction

In contemporary consumer markets, emotional drivers increasingly surpass functional or rational considerations in shaping purchasing decisions. Prior studies have documented a pronounced shift from utilitarian evaluation toward pleasure, resonance, and symbolic meaning, particularly among younger consumers whose consumption behaviors are closely linked to identity expression and emotional gratification (Morgan & Townsend, 2022; Ngo et al., 2025). This transformation has given rise to the broader phenomenon of emotional consumption, in which the value consumers derive from products is intertwined with psychological experience and affective engagement.

POP Mart exemplifies this trend as a leading brand in China's designer toy industry. Through its blind-box mechanism and distinctive collectible characters, POP Mart constructs a consumption environment characterized by anticipation, uncertainty, and emotional reward. The cyclical process of "expectation–discovery–gratification" generates strong affective responses and parallels the immersive, attention-absorbing states described in flow theory (Cobb & Gouda, 1997).

These emotionally charged experiences extend beyond product acquisition and form a central part of POP Mart's brand ecosystem.

Despite the growing attention to emotional value marketing, two major gaps persist in the literature. First, existing studies lack consensus on the multidimensional structure of emotional value, leading to inconsistencies in defining how different affective components shape consumer responses. Second, although scholars have emphasized emotional engagement and brand relationships (Crespo et al., 2023; Lee & Hsieh, 2022; Ma et al., 2022), the experiential mechanisms through which emotional value translates into purchasing behavior remain underexplored. In particular, the mediating role of immersive experience—how emotional stimuli evolve into behavioral intention through deep psychological absorption—has not been adequately examined.

To address these gaps, this study focuses on three key dimensions of emotional value—emotional resonance, social interaction, and brand identification—and investigates their relationships with immersive experience and subsequent purchasing behavior within the POP Mart context. By integrating flow theory, emotional value theory, and the cognitive–affective system theory, the study constructs a comprehensive
"emotion–experience–behavior"
framework to explain how emotional stimuli shape consumer actions.

This research contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it clarifies the multidimensional structure of emotional value and identifies immersive experience as a central psychological bridge linking affective responses with behavioral outcomes. Practically, the findings provide insights for cultural and

creative brands seeking to enhance emotional engagement, optimize experiential design, and strengthen consumer loyalty in emotion-driven markets. Through this analysis, the study advances current understanding of emotional value marketing and offers actionable implications for brands operating in experiential consumption environments.

2. Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

To examine how the three dimensions of emotional valu influence immersive experience in the POP Mart consumption context.

To test the mediating role of immersive experience in the relationship between emotional value and consumer purchasing behavior.

To explore the moderating effects of demographic characteristics (gender, age, and income) on the relationships among emotional value, immersive experience, and purchasing behavior.

3. Literature Review
3.1 Flow Theory and Immersive Consumption

Flow theory, introduced by Cobb and Gouda (1997), describes a state of deep psychological absorption characterized by focused attention, intrinsic enjoyment, and the temporary loss of self-awareness and time perception. Although originally applied to artistic and recreational activities, flow has become an essential concept in explaining experiential consumption in contemporary markets. Recent studies in digital branding and experiential retail demonstrate that emotional immersion sustains consumer engagement and strengthens brand–consumer relationships (Gokarna, 2021; Xuan Nguyen & Nguyen, 2026). Within the POP Mart context, the blind-box

mechanism evokes anticipation, uncertainty, and reward, mirroring the cyclical "expectation–discovery–gratification" pattern associated with flow experiences (Lou, 2025). Flow theory therefore provides a foundational lens for understanding how emotionally charged consumption environments contribute to immersive experience and influence downstream behavioral outcomes.

3.2 Emotional Value in Consumer Behavior Research

Emotional value, as conceptualized by Özer (2025), refers to the feelings of pleasure, warmth, excitement, nostalgia, or belonging that consumers derive from a product or service. Subsequent multidimensional frameworks have expanded this concept, emphasizing that emotional value extends beyond satisfaction to include symbolic meaning, emotional resonance, and affective gratification (El-Adly et al., 2024). Emotional value has been widely recognized as a key driver of consumer–brand relationships, word-of-mouth advocacy, and loyalty (Wang & Yang, 2025).

In the POP Mart ecosystem, emotional value can be represented through three distinct but interrelated dimensions.

Emotional Resonance reflects consumers' affective responses to brand aesthetics, imagery, and storytelling.

Social Interaction captures community-based emotional rewards, such as sharing unboxing experiences or participating in brand conversations (Dinh & Lee, 2025).

Brand Identification refers to the extent to which consumers integrate the brand into their self-concept, using it as a symbolic resource for identity expression (Gaustad & Warlop, 2025).

Existing research underscores the importance of each dimension, yet few studies have examined how these dimensions jointly shape experiential states such as immersion. This gap motivates the present investigation.

3.3 Cognitive–Affective Systems in Marketing Contexts

The cognitive–affective system theory proposes that behavioral responses emerge from the dynamic interaction of cognitive processing and affective stimuli (Camacho et al., 2026). In marketing studies, this framework explains how emotional triggers influence consumer judgments, decision-making, and behavioral intentions (Sottolichio et al., 2025; Zahid et al., 2024). POP Mart's symbolic narratives, collectible characters, and aesthetic cues stimulate affective responses, while cognitive evaluations of rarity, collectability, and identity reinforcement shape behavioral outcomes (Gunarian et al., 2025). Recent research in social commerce further supports the interplay between emotional arousal and immersive states, suggesting that affective processing can deepen engagement and heighten consumers' experiential involvement (Azad Moghddam et al., 2024; Ngo et al., 2025).

3.4 Summary of Literature Insights

The reviewed literature highlights three critical insights.

First, emotional consumption increasingly governs consumer behavior in experiential markets, necessitating deeper analysis of underlying affective drivers.

Second, emotional value is multidimensional, yet existing studies rarely examine how its components collectively influence immersive experience.

Third, while the cognitive–affective perspective offers explanatory power, limited empirical evidence clarifies how immersive experience mediates the emotional–behavioral pathway.

These gaps justify the development of an integrated framework linking emotional value, immersive experience, and purchasing behavior in the POP Mart context.
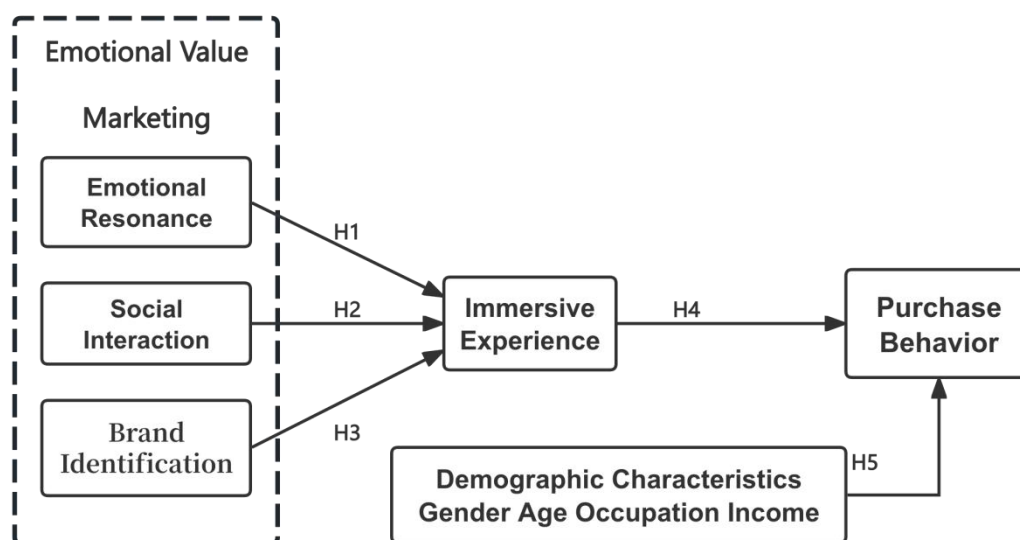
4. Theoretical Framework
4.1 Conceptual Framework

Building on the theories reviewed in the previous chapter, this study proposes a conceptual model linking emotional value dimensions to consumer purchasing behavior through immersive experience. The model integrates three major theoretical foundations: flow theory, emotional value theory, and the cognitive–affective system theory. Together, these frameworks illustrate how emotional stimuli shape experiential states and subsequently influence behavioral outcomes.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model (Source: generated by this research)

In this model, emotional value is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct composed of emotional resonance (ER), social interaction (SI), and brand identification (BI). These three dimensions serve as core affective drivers that shape consumers' engagement with POP Mart products and narratives. Emotional resonance reflects affective alignment with brand imagery and storytelling; social interaction captures community-based emotional rewards; and brand identification represents the incorporation of brand symbolism into consumers' self-concept.

These emotional stimuli are posited to influence immersive experience (IE), a psychological state in which consumers become deeply absorbed in the POP Mart consumption environment. Immersive experience is subsequently expected to drive purchasing behavior (PB) by strengthening emotional commitment and elevating consumption motivation.

Furthermore, the model incorporates demographic variables (gender, age, and income) as moderators to explore group-specific differences in emotional processing and experiential outcomes. These demographic factors may strengthen or weaken the affective and experiential relationships, offering nuanced insights into the effectiveness of emotional value marketing.

4.2 Hypotheses Development

Drawing from the conceptual model, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Emotional resonance positively influences immersive experience.

H2: Social interaction positively influences immersive experience.

H3: Brand identification positively influences immersive experience.

H4: Immersive experience positively influences purchasing behavior.

H5: Demographic characteristics (gender, age, and income) moderate the relationships among emotional value, immersive experience, and purchasing behavior.

Together, these hypotheses articulate the core proposition of this study: that emotional value drives consumer behavior through immersive experience, while demographic characteristics shape the strength of these relationships.

5. Methods
5.1 Research Design and Sample

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to empirically test the proposed theoretical framework. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to POP Mart consumers in mainland China between April and June 2024. To ensure diverse representation, both online and offline channels were used, including social media communities, retail stores, and designer toy exhibitions.

A total of 700 responses were received. After eliminating incomplete or invalid submissions, 600 valid samples were retained, yielding an effective response rate of 85.7%. The demographic composition aligned closely with POP Mart's core consumer base, ensuring strong external validity.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics of Respondents

Sample Characteristics	Category	Classification	Classification
Gender	1	Male	42.5%
	2	Female	57.5%
Age	1	18–25 years old	53.3%
	2	26–35 years old	36.6%
	3	Above 35 years old	10%
Occupation	1	Student	46.7%
	2	Young White-collar Worker	43.3%
	3	Other Occupations	10%
Education Level	1	Below College Level	25%
	2	Bachelor's Degree	58.3%
	3	Master's Degree or Above	16.7%
Income	1	Below 8,000 RMB	48.3%
	2	8,001–15,000 RMB	35%
	3	Above 15,000 RMB	16.7%

The sample consisted of 42.5% male and 57.5% female participants. Most respondents were young consumers, with 89.9% aged 18–35, consistent with POP Mart's dominant market segment. In terms of income distribution, 48.3% earned below RMB 8,000, 35% between RMB 8,001–15,000, and 16.7% above RMB 15,000. Occupation and education statistics further confirmed that the sample accurately reflected the brand's mainstream audience.

5.2 Measurement Instruments

All constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Measurement items were adapted from established scales in consumer behavior and emotional value marketing research and were refined to fit the POP Mart context.

The measured constructs include:

Emotional Resonance (ER): e.g., "I feel emotionally connected to POP Mart characters."

Social Interaction (SI): e.g., "I enjoy sharing my POP Mart experiences with others."

Brand Identification (BI): e.g., "POP Mart reflects my personal lifestyle."

Immersive Experience (IE): e.g., "I often lose track of time when exploring POP Mart products."

Purchasing Behavior (PB): e.g., "I am willing to pay a premium for POP Mart collectibles."

Reliability and validity statistics are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity of Measurement Constructs

Construct / Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO Value
Emotional Resonance (ER)	0.922	0.854
Social Interaction (SI)	0.897	0.749
Brand Recognition (BR)	0.898	0.752
Purchasing Behavior (PB)	0.935	0.836
Immersive Experience (IE)	0.917	0.848
All Items	0.981	0.976

All Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.85, demonstrating strong internal consistency. KMO values surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.70, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (p < .001), confirming sampling adequacy and suitability for factor analysis. An exploratory factor analysis further validated the structural integrity of the constructs.

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

Initial Eigenvalues				Extraction Sums of Squared Loading's		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative%
1	15.197	72.365	72.365	15.197	72.365	72.365
2	0.757	3.604	75.97			
3	0.54	2.573	78.542			
4	0.498	2.37	80.913			
5	0.445	2.121	83.034			
6	0.34	1.618	84.652			
7	0.319	1.517	86.168			
8	0.311	1.481	87.649			
9	0.286	1.363	89.013			
10	0.283	1.346	90.359			
11	0.253	1.206	91.565			
12	0.241	1.148	92.713			
13	0.221	1.054	93.767			
14	0.213	1.013	94.78			
15	0.197	0.94	95.719			
16	0.187	0.892	96.611			
17	0.168	0.8	97.411			
18	0.164	0.78	98.191			
19	0.15	0.715	98.906			
20	0.126	0.601	99.506			
21	0.104	0.494	100			

5.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using standard statistical procedures consistent with

established recommendations in multivariate research (Hair et al., 2020). The analytical process included descriptive statistics, correlation testing, multiple regression analyses, and bootstrapped mediation and moderation analyses (5,000 samples). In addition, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to verify the structural validity of the measurement constructs prior to hypothesis testing. All analytical steps followed widely accepted methodological norms in consumer behavior and emotional value marketing research.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of respondents' purchasing behaviors and engagement with POP Mart products. Mean scores ranged from 3.5 to 4.2, with standard deviations between 0.48 and 0.76, indicating moderate-to-high levels of emotional involvement and no issues with extreme skewness.

In addition to demographic characteristics, purchasing frequency and channel preferences offer further insight into emotional consumption patterns. These data help contextualize the role of immersive experience and emotional value in shaping real-world buying behavior.

6. Results

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 4. Consumer Purchasing Behavior Characteristics of POP Mart Cultural and Creative Product Users

Purchase Frequency	User Percentage (%)	Consumption Characteristics Description
Once per Month	55%	ormed a stable collecting habit
Intermittent Consumption	45%	Mainly concentrated during limited-edition release periods
Online Purchase	68%	Accounted for the highest proportion
Offline Purchase	32%	Mostly concentrated in flagship stores located in major urban business districts, reflecting the influence of geographic factors on the consumption experience

As shown in Table 4, 55% of respondents displayed consistent purchasing behavior (buying once per month), while 45% reported intermittent purchases concentrated around limited-edition releases. Online purchases accounted for 68%, reflecting the influence of digital platforms on experiential consumption, whereas 32% preferred offline flagship store experiences.

6.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among emotional resonance (ER), social interaction (SI), brand identification (BI), immersive experience (IE), and purchasing behavior (PB). All constructs were significantly and positively correlated at the $p < .01$ level.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix of Constructs

Variables	ER	SI	BR	IE	PB
ER (Emotional Resonance)	1	0.45	0.58	0.75	0.62
SI (Social Interaction)	0.45	1	0.56	0.75	0.5
BR (Brand Recognition)	0.58	0.56	1	0.7	0.65
IE (Immersive Experience)	0.75	0.75	0.7	1	0.8
PB (Purchase Behavior)	0.62	0.5	0.65	0.8	1

Variables	ER	SI	BR	IE	PB
ER (Emotional Resonance)	1	0.45	0.58	0.75	0.62
SI (Social Interaction)	0.45	1	0.56	0.75	0.5
BR (Brand Recognition)	0.58	0.56	1	0.7	0.65
IE (Immersive Experience)	0.75	0.75	0.7	1	0.8
PB (Purchase Behavior)	0.62	0.5	0.65	0.8	1

Note. $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

Immersive experience demonstrated the strongest association with purchasing behavior ($r = .80$), suggesting that experiential immersion plays a central mediating role in linking emotional value to behavioral outcomes.

6.3 Regression and Mediation Analysis

Table 6. Regression and Mediation Results of Immersive Experience on Purchase Behavior

Predictor	Dependent Variable	β	t	p	R	R²	Adj. R²	Std. Error
ER → IE	Immersive Experience	0.139	3.04	< .01	0.883	0.78	0.779	0.297
SI → IE	Immersive Experience	0.07	2	< .05				
BI → IE	Immersive Experience	0.24	4.85	< .001				
IE → PB	Purchase Behavior	0.883	42.16	< .001				

Results indicate that:

Emotional resonance ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < .01$),

Social interaction ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < .05$), and

Brand identification ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < .001$)

all have significant positive effects on immersive experience.

Furthermore, immersive experience shows a strong and statistically significant effect on purchasing behavior ($\beta = 0.883$, $p < .001$), supporting its role as a key psychological mechanism that transforms emotional value into behavioral intention.

Bootstrapping analysis (5,000 resamples) confirmed the significance of the indirect effects:

ER → IE → PB = 0.123 (95% CI: [.062, .201])

SI → IE → PB = 0.071 (95% CI: [.018, .143])

BI → IE → PB = 0.168 (95% CI: [.102, .241])

These results support the premise that immersive experience partially mediates the effects of emotional value on purchasing behavior.

6.4 Moderation Analysis

Moderation tests were conducted to examine whether demographic factors (gender, age, income) influence the relationships within the proposed model.

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the effects of emotional value dimensions on immersive experience, and the subsequent influence of immersive experience on purchasing behavior.

Table 7. Moderation Analysis Results

Dependent Variable	PB	IE	PB
Independent Variable	Model1	Model2	Model3

ER	0.229	0.139	0.168
SI	0.064	0.087	0.046
BR	0.241	0.240	0.137
Immersive Experience			
F	455.993	527.828	472.485
R^2	0.785	0.809	0.826
Ad-R^2	0.783	0.807	0.824

Key findings include:

Gender: Female respondents exhibited stronger ER → IE and IE → PB effects.

Age: The BI → IE relationship was particularly significant among younger consumers (18–25).

Income: Higher-income respondents showed a stronger IE → PB link.

These results verify that emotional value marketing mechanisms vary across demographic subgroups, confirming support for H5.

7. Discussion
7.1 Key Findings

This study verifies that emotional resonance, social interaction, and brand identification each exert significant positive effects on immersive experience in the POP Mart consumption context. Immersive experience, in turn, strongly drives purchasing behavior, reinforcing its role as a psychological bridge that converts emotional stimuli into behavioral intention. These findings are consistent with recent evidence showing that immersive experiences enhance emotional commitment and purchase loyalty in experiential markets (Huang et al., 2022; Shahid et al., 2022).

Among the emotional value dimensions, brand identification emerged as the strongest predictor of immersive experience, highlighting the centrality of identity-driven motivation in designer toy consumption. POP Mart's symbolic characters and narrative aesthetics effectively strengthen consumers' self-expression and sense of belonging, intensifying their overall emotional engagement. This underscores the importance of identity-based emotional marketing strategies.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

This research makes several theoretical contributions:

Integration of emotion and experience theories.

By combining flow theory, emotional value theory, and the cognitive–affective system theory, the study develops a unified framework explaining how emotional stimuli evolve into experiential absorption and subsequent behavioral outcomes.

Identification of immersive experience as a mediating mechanism.

Empirical results confirm that immersive experience mediates the effects of emotional value on purchasing behavior, providing new insights into the psychological processes underlying emotion-driven consumption.

Contextual extension to cultural and creative industries.

The framework is validated using data from POP Mart consumers in China, contributing to a growing body of research that examines emotional value marketing in non-Western and experiential retail settings.

7.3 Managerial Implications

Several practical implications arise from these findings:

Strengthen emotional resonance.

Brands should invest in symbolic narratives, visual storytelling, and character development that evoke emotional alignment, nostalgia, and empathy.

Facilitate social interaction.

Designing digital communities, interactive brand activities, and shareable experiences can enhance emotional rewards derived from social participation.

Enhance immersive experience.
Both online and offline environments should be optimized to sustain consumer attention and deepen experiential involvement. Flagship stores, themed spaces, and digital platforms can be leveraged to create immersive touchpoints.

Segment emotional strategies by demographic groups.
Given the moderating effects of gender, age, and income, emotional marketing strategies should be tailored to specific audience segments to maximize engagement and behavioral impact.

Overall, the results emphasize that cultural and creative brands can significantly enhance consumer loyalty by integrating emotional storytelling, community-based engagement, and immersive experience design.

8. Conclusion

This study examined how emotional value marketing shapes consumer purchasing behavior within the POP Mart context by integrating emotional value theory, flow theory, and the cognitive–affective system theory into a unified conceptual framework. The findings provide empirical support for the proposition that emotional resonance, social interaction, and brand identification significantly enhance immersive experience. Immersive experience, in turn, exerts a strong positive influence on purchasing behavior, confirming its role as a key psychological mechanism that links emotional stimuli with behavioral outcomes.

The results also demonstrate that demographic characteristics, specifically gender, age, and income, moderate several relationships within the model. These moderating patterns highlight the importance of tailoring emotional marketing strategies to distinct consumer segments to maximize experiential engagement and purchasing motivation.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of research on emotional value marketing by clarifying the multidimensional structure of emotional value and identifying immersive experience as a central determinant of emotion-driven consumption. The findings offer actionable insights for cultural and creative brands seeking to deepen emotional engagement, strengthen identity-based connections, and enhance consumer loyalty in experience-oriented markets.

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