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Entertainment Industry Marketing: From Traffic-Driven Promotion to Emotion-Driven Systematic Operations

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Abstract. Entertainment industry marketing has emerged as one of the most dynamic research domains in the digital era. Based on a systematic review of 14 frontier studies published between 2023 and 2025, this article constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework that integrates emotional mechanisms, content production models, and brand ecosystems. The findings reveal that: (1) emotional mechanisms serve as the core explanatory variable spanning three research pathways—fan economy, social media marketing, and brand crossover collaboration; (2) entertainment products, characterized by six fundamental features (hedonic, narrative, cultural, creative, innovative, and digital), demand distinctive marketing paradigms distinct from conventional goods; (3) content production is undergoing a structural shift from individual creativity toward systematic, industrialized, full-process control models; and (4) brand crossover collaboration has evolved from simple IP licensing into a complex mechanism encompassing cultural symbol translation, consumer identity construction, and ecosystem coordination. At the theoretical level, this article proposes an integrative framework built upon Behrens et al.'s six-feature model, synthesizing emotional capitalization, content industrialization, and brand ecologization. At the practical level, it reveals the timing effects of emotional appeals, the decisive role of content quality, and the boundary conditions of the fan economy efficacy. Research trends indicate that generative AI, immersive technologies, and cross-platform integration will become key growth areas, while the negative effects of fan economy, cross-platform comparative research, and longitudinal tracking constitute critical research gaps.

Keywords: entertainment marketing, fan economy, emotional mechanisms, brand crossover, content industrialization

1. Introduction

The global entertainment industry stands at a pivotal juncture. Streaming services have restructured distribution channels, social media platforms have redefined communication logic, and generative artificial intelligence has begun to permeate content production. In this context, marketing has evolved from a peripheral promotional function into a core competency embedded throughout the entire value chain of content production, distribution, and consumption [1].

Current entertainment marketing scholarship faces three interrelated tensions. First, practice outpaces theory: new business formats such as the "Guzi economy"—valued at 168.9 billion RMB

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in 2024 and projected to exceed 300 billion by 2029—fan community monetization, and transmedia IP operations are flourishing, yet systematic theoretical integration remains underdeveloped [2, 3]. Second, empirical findings are fragmented across disparate subfields—fan economy, social media advertising, and brand co-branding—lacking a unified analytical framework. Third, the discipline is undergoing methodological growing pains: while research quality has improved markedly with the adoption of large-sample empirical designs, dialogue between quantitative and qualitative traditions remains limited [4, 5].

A foundational framework to address these challenges comes from a comprehensive 40-year review identifying six defining features of entertainment products—hedonic, narrative, cultural, creative, innovative, and digital—that collectively distinguish entertainment goods from conventional consumer products [1]. This paper adopts this six-feature model as its analytical lens, systematically reviewing 14 core studies from 2023–2025 across three research pathways. By synthesizing fragmented findings into a unified framework, this review aims to provide both a theoretical roadmap for future inquiry and practical guidance for practitioners navigating the transition from traffic-driven tactics to emotion-driven, systematic marketing strategies.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The six features of entertainment products

Entertainment products possess six fundamental features that collectively distinguish them from conventional consumer goods. Hedonic nature is the most essential—consumers purchase entertainment to obtain emotional experiences such as pleasure, excitement, and emotional resonance. Narrative nature refers to entertainment products being built around stories as their core vehicle. Cultural nature embeds products in specific cultural contexts. Creative and innovative features jointly address supply-side characteristics. Finally, digital nature has profoundly reshaped production, distribution, and consumption [1]. Table 1 summarizes these features and their marketing implications.

Table 1. Behrens et al.'s six-feature model and marketing implications

Feature Dimension	Core Meaning	Marketing Implication	Research Pathway
Hedonic	Emotion-driven consumption	Appeal to emotion before rationality	Fan economy, social media
Narrative	Story as core vehicle	Construct secondary narratives and emotional engagement	Fan economy, crossover co-branding
Cultural	Embedded in specific cultural context	Modern translation of cultural symbols	Brand crossover collaboration
Creative	Content dimension of artistic expression	Resist over-standardization; protect creator autonomy	Content production
Innovative	Technical implementation dimension	Systematic enhancement through process optimization	Content industrialization
Digital	Digital technology reshaping entire chain	Platform strategy, format design, user participation	Social media, metaverse

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2.2. Analytical framework

Building on the six-feature model, this paper constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework integrating emotional mechanisms, content industrialization, and brand ecologization. The core logic is as follows: the six features collectively demand an emotion-driven marketing logic that fundamentally differs from information-driven approaches for conventional goods; this logic manifests differently across the fan economy, social media marketing, and brand crossover pathways; and these three pathways are undergoing a systematic transformation from standalone operations to ecosystem coordination. Figure 1 presents the integrated theoretical framework.

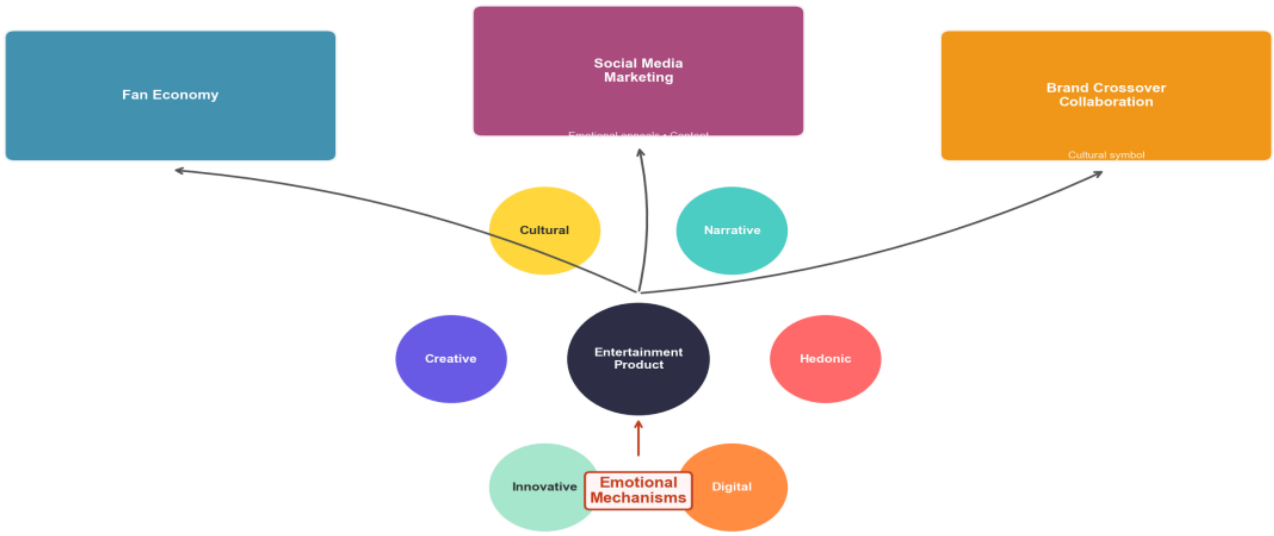

Figure 1. Integrated theoretical framework of entertainment industry marketing based on Behrens et al.'s six-feature model

The marginal contributions of this article are threefold. First, it is the first attempt to systematically connect Behrens et al.'s six-feature model with three empirical research pathways, constructing a mid-range theoretical framework. Second, it identifies "emotional capitalization" as a cross-scenario core mechanism, providing an integrative lens for fragmented research findings. Third, it proposes two emerging research agendas—content industrialization and brand ecologization—offering directional guidance for subsequent empirical research.

3. Fan economy: emotional capitalization

The fan economy represents the most direct manifestation of emotional capitalization in entertainment marketing. Drawing on an in-depth case study of an idol cultivation program, researchers have proposed the Idol Attachment–IP Loyalty (I-AIL) model, explaining how fans transform from passive media audiences into active IP co-creators across technological, social, and emotional dimensions [6]. This model engages productively with the six-feature framework: the hedonic feature drives initial attraction, narrative features sustain long-term engagement, and digital features enable the formation of a fan community.

At the capital end, panel data from Chinese film and television companies (2011-2023) reveal that fan economy financialization significantly improves the film and television ecosystem [5]. However, boundary conditions exist. A large-sample study of 1,032 Chinese theatergoers finds that while transmedia adaptations and social media marketing drive ticket purchases, idol starring alone

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does not significantly increase attendance [7]—suggesting fan economy effects are product-type dependent. Internet celebrity marketing research further enriches this picture across five dimensions [8].

4. Social media marketing: emotional strategies and content industrialization

The central question in social media marketing is not whether to use emotional content but when it is most effective. Grounded in the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM), analysis of 23,998 promotional posts for 356 films on Weibo (2014–2021) demonstrates that emotional appeals significantly increase user engagement, with the effect substantially stronger before a film's release [2]. When consumers lack prior knowledge, emotional cues trigger heuristic processing.

On the production side, research has introduced the concept of content industrialization, revealing that content creators have transitioned from individual artisanship to systematic manufacturing encompassing methodologization, auditing mechanisms, and industrialized workflows [9]. Complementary research demonstrates how productions strike a balance between youth subcultural expression and mainstream cultural norms [10]. A tripartite evolutionary game model shows that improving content quality is the only reliably guaranteed lever—when content quality doubles, viewer acceptance of ads rises from 32% to 84% [11].

5. Brand crossover collaboration: from IP licensing to systematic operations

Brand crossover collaboration has undergone a profound shift from simple IP brand-stamping to cultural symbol translation. Taking Chinese cultural IP co-branding cases as research objects, mixed-method analysis reveals that successful collaborations operate through three dimensions: modern translation of cultural symbols, emotional resonance in consumer experience, and community-driven dissemination [12].

The Guzi economy represents the industrialization of emotional consumption. Macro-level data shows China's secondary creative goods market achieved a CAGR of 52.7% from 2016 to 2023 [2, 3]. Game platforms are emerging as brand laboratories where brands appear as native forms embedded in virtual worlds [13]. In the post-pandemic era, theatrical films are advised to reposition as premium cultural experiences, emphasizing experiential quality and cultural scarcity [14].

6. Conclusion

This systematic review yields three principal conclusions. First, emotional mechanisms constitute the core explanatory variable across all three pathways [1]. Second, the research paradigm is shifting from describing phenomena to explaining mechanisms, with large-sample empirical designs becoming dominant [4, 5, 9]. Third, systematic operations—content industrialization, IP ecosystem development, and full-process management—are replacing fragmented single-point tactics. On the quality assurance front, three reminders merit particular attention. One is avoiding the trap of excessive assetization—when fan emotions are completely quantified into click rates, conversion rates, and GMV, the authenticity and durability of emotion itself may be compromised. The second is that digitalization is not synonymous with progress—upgrading technological tools without a corresponding understanding of consumers' deeper needs may result in more sophisticated "pseudo-marketing." The third is methodological balance—in pursuing the precision of causal inference, the depth contribution of qualitative research to mechanism understanding should not be abandoned.

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However, significant gaps persist: negative externalities of fan economy, cross-platform comparative studies, longitudinal tracking of brand crossover effects, and AI–entertainment marketing intersections remain under-researched. Future research should develop emotional mechanism typologies, conduct cost–benefit analyses, execute cross-platform comparative studies, and establish foundations for AI-driven entertainment marketing. The entertainment industry stands at the threshold of an AI-driven transformation. Only by maintaining theoretical openness and methodological pluralism can researchers make substantively meaningful contributions to this rapidly evolving domain.

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