

Emotional Design and Audience Intimacy: Comparing Offline and Online Engagement Strategy by Pop Mart

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ABSTRACT

In saturated markets, brand-engagement drives customer's perception, purchase and brand loyalty. This study explores and compares the effectiveness of the offline and online strategy fostering emotional connection and audience's intimacy with the brand. While online engagement often involves high-frequency yet low-effort interactions, offline engagement provides deeper personal exchanges that may build stronger attachment. The study aims to identify which engagement mode—How do online and offline engagement strategies differ in fostering emotional intimacy and audience connection with the brand, and which engagement mode more effectively supports emotional design principles in building lasting brand relationships—Using a mixed-method approach combining quantitative descriptive-comparative surveys and qualitative expert interview, data were collected from participants familiar with Pop Mart to examine engagement patterns in both digital and physical brand environments. The case study of Pop Mart's market serves as a benchmark for evaluating emotional resonance and participant behaviour. Findings are expected to reveal that while online interactions efficiently enhance reach and frequency, offline interactions maintain superior depth of self-disclosure and non-verbal resonance, contributing to emotional intimacy. This study directly connects to the Visual Communication Design (VCD) context by proposing emotionally driven engagement design strategies that integrate storytelling and personalization and highlights effective engagement strategies that balance both online efficiency and offline emotional depth to create meaningful, lasting brand relationships.

Keywords: Emotional Design, Online and Offline Engagement, Audience Brand Intimacy, Cultural Influence, Brand Strategy

ABSTRAK:

Dalam pasar yang jenuh, keterlibatan merek menjadi faktor yang mendorong persepsi pelanggan, keputusan pembelian, dan loyalitas terhadap merek. Studi ini mengeksplorasi dan membandingkan efektivitas strategi offline dan online dalam membangun koneksi emosional serta keintiman audiens dengan merek. Sementara keterlibatan online sering melibatkan interaksi yang berfrekuensi tinggi namun berupaya rendah, keterlibatan offline menawarkan pertukaran personal yang lebih mendalam sehingga dapat membentuk keterikatan yang lebih kuat.

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi bagaimana perbedaan kedua mode keterlibatan tersebut dalam mendorong keintiman emosional dan koneksi audiens dengan merek, serta mode keterlibatan mana yang lebih efektif dalam mendukung prinsip desain emosional untuk membangun hubungan merek yang berkelanjutan. Dengan menggunakan metode campuran—menggabungkan survei deskriptif-komparatif kuantitatif dan wawancara ahli kualitatif—data dikumpulkan dari partisipan yang familiar dengan Pop Mart untuk menelaah pola keterlibatan di lingkungan merek digital maupun fisik. Studi kasus pasar Pop Mart digunakan sebagai tolok ukur untuk mengevaluasi resonansi emosional dan perilaku partisipan.

Temuan diharapkan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun interaksi online secara efisien meningkatkan jangkauan dan frekuensi, interaksi offline mempertahankan kedalaman pengungkapan diri dan resonansi nonverbal yang lebih unggul, sehingga berkontribusi pada keintiman emosional. Studi ini terhubung langsung dengan konteks Desain Komunikasi Visual (DKV) melalui usulan strategi desain keterlibatan berbasis emosi yang mengintegrasikan storytelling dan personalisasi, serta menyoroti strategi keterlibatan yang efektif dalam menyeimbangkan efisiensi online dan kedalaman emosional offline untuk menciptakan hubungan merek yang bermakna dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Desain Emosional, Keterlibatan Online dan Offline, Keintiman Audiens terhadap Merek, Pengaruh Budaya, Strategi Merek

INTRODUCTION

As the boundaries between online and offline brands blur, brands no longer differentiate merely by their products but by the emotional relationships they form with consumers. With audiences blended across both digital and physical platforms, the question of how intimacy and engagement are built and sustained has become a central challenge to survive. The ongoing phenomenon of consumers

maintaining daily interactions with brands through short-form digital content, influencer culture and use generated media has reshaped how emotional connection operates. Yet, while these online interactions offer frequency and accessibility, they may not achieve the depth and authenticity found in offline, face-to-face experiences that engage human sense and nonverbal cues.

This issue has become particularly evident in the case of Pop Mart. Pop Mart, founded in 2010, is a Chinese cultural-entertainment brand that popularized the “blind-box” model—sealed collections of designer toys that combine surprise with collectible IPs (e.g., Crybaby, Labubu). The company operates a closed-loop platform covering IP incubation, product design, production, and both online (e-commerce, TikTok, Weibo, mini-apps) and offline channels. Its rapid expansion was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, Pop Mart’s success rests on three core competencies: a diversified IP portfolio, an omnichannel distribution network, and a highly active fan community that fuels user-generated content and repeat purchases (Ma, 2022).

Pop Mart’s success stems from cultivating both digital excitement and offline emotional experiences (Ling et al., 2023). However, Pop Mart’s case also exposes the gap between fast emotional stimulation by online platforms and deeper affective bonding offline—there must be some gap that exists; that are out of reach from one to another—highlighting a need to understand how both strategies complement or compete in fostering long-term brand relationships. To visualize this process, Figure 1 presents Pop Mart’s hybrid engagement framework, showing how digital and physical channels work together to sustain audience intimacy. This intersection of technology, community and design serves as a foundation for applying emotional design theory, which explains how aesthetic, behavioural and reflective elements shape human feelings toward a brand.



Figure 1. Pop Toy show Singapore

Source: Yeow, 2025

Digging deeper into design theory perspective, this research draws upon emotional design as conceptualized by (Norman, 2004) and further developed by (Radovanovic et al., 2022). This model defines three interconnected levels—visceral, behavioral and reflective design—that together shape human emotional responses to a product or experience. In online contexts, the visceral level is often dominant, driven by aesthetics, repetition and instant gratification. In contrast, offline engagement activities activates the behavioural and reflective levels, allowing for sensory satisfaction, memory association and identity projection. (Radovanovic et al., 2022) further argue that emotional design must now evolve to meet digital ethics and human well-being, calling for emotionally intelligent and inclusive experiences that support deeper psychological connection.

Building on these theories, this study investigates how online and offline brand engagement strategies differ in generating emotional intimacy and perceived connection. The research aims to identify which approach (high-frequency online interaction or high-effort offline experience—yields greater depth of engagement, and how each contributes to the creation of emotional meaning. Through a mixed-method approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with experts and users, this study will compare the emotional, behavioural and reflective outcomes of both engagement types.

The key of this research lies in bridging marketing engagement theory with emotional design principles within the field of Visual Communication Design

(VCD). Unlike prior studies that measure engagement through quantitative metrics alone, this study explores how emotional design frameworks can be used to interpret and enhance brand intimacy—transforming consumer engagement from transactional to affective. The findings are expected to offer new insights into how designers and brands can create hybrid engagement ecosystems that integrate digital efficiency with the emotional depth of physical experience, contributing to the development of empathetic, human-centered design communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Methodological Framework

The following methodology framework describes the overall process undertaken to investigate how emotional design operates within online and offline brand engagement. It outlines the study's focus, theoretical foundation, research approach, respondents, case study, sample size, and methods of data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Focus and Objectives

The present study focuses on comparing online and offline brand engagement strategies to determine how each influences emotional intimacy and audience connection within the context of Pop Mart, a cultural–entertainment brand known for its hybrid marketing system. The main objective is to identify which engagement mode—digital or physical—more effectively supports emotional design principles in fostering deep and long-term brand relationships. Additionally, the research explores how cultural values and market environments shape emotional perception and participation among audiences.

3.3 Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in Emotional Design Theory (Norman, 2024), which conceptualizes emotional experience through three interrelated levels:

1. **Visceral Level** - immediate aesthetic and sensory appeal (look, feel, smell and sound).

2. **Behavioral Level** - perception of product's usability, functionality and interaction quality.
3. **Reflective Level** - personal meaning, innate self-identity and attachment to the consumption of the product over time.

These theoretical layers provide a framework for analyzing emotional responses to both online and offline experiences.

Building upon Norman's model, (Radovanovic et al., 2022) argue that emotional design in digital media should create empathetic and psychologically engaging experiences. Further supporting works—such as (Richard C. Anderson, Yu-Min Ku, Wenling Li, Xi Chen, 2012) (Li, 2022) on emotional resonance in the 5G new media era and (Ling, et al., 2023) on hybrid emotional marketing—emphasize that emotional connection depends on sensory coherence, interactivity and continuity across digital–physical environments. Together, these theories guide the interpretation of how Pop Mart's hybrid ecosystem integrates emotional design to stimulate engagement and intimacy.

3.4 Research Approach

A mixed-method approach was employed to provide both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on emotional design in hybrid engagement.

- **Quantitative Research:** uses descriptive-comparative design to measure the perceived emotional engagement and satisfaction of Pop Mart's audience in online versus offline interactions
- **Qualitative Research:** employs semi-structured expert interviews to gain deeper insights into professional views on emotional design strategies, audience intimacy and cultural influence.

This approach allows the research to combine measurable audience responses with interpretive expert insights, ensuring a balanced understanding of emotional engagement in hybrid brand contexts.

3.5 Respondents and Case Study

The case study selected is Pop Mart, a Chinese cultural-entertainment brand that has successfully implemented a hybrid marketing system. Pop Mart's strategy integrates digital channels (e.g., weibo, TikTok, Instagram, Xiaohongshu) with offline experiences (e.g., pop-up stores, exhibitions, etc). to create consistent emotional storytelling. The quantitative respondents consisted of over 30 participants familiar with Pop Mart's products and social media presence. The qualitative respondents included two expert designers. Both were selected based on professional experience relevant to emotional branding, cultural marketing, and audience psychology.

3.6 Data Collection Techniques

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were collected through a Google Form survey, distributed digitally. The survey contained both multiple-choice and Like scale questions covering:

1. Awareness and familiarity with Pop Mart's brand
2. Purchase frequency and engagement preferences (offline or online)
3. Perceived emotional intimacy, satisfaction and resonance during each interaction.
4. Level of self-disclosure and attachment
5. Influence of social media storytelling on emotional connection.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and comparative analysis, identifying which engagement mode evokes stronger emotional attachment and how participants perceive the balance between convenience, effort and connection.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with two experts. The interview structure was divided into five sections:

1. **Opening Questions** - participant's background and personal connection with emotionally engaging brands.

2. **Emotional Design Understanding** - their perceptions and personal impression towards it.
3. **Online and Offline Engagement** - factors surrounding brand's success: engagement, cultural factors, brand loyalty, customer journey.
4. **Reflection and Future Outlook** - challenges in sustaining the emotional authenticity of the brand.

Each Interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and was captured with consent. The collected quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive data.

3.7 Data Analysis

The quantitative data and qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive comparative through thematic approaches e.g. digital consistency, behavioural satisfaction through interaction and reflective meaning through tactile experience and cultural identity to identify patterns in emotional engagement across online and offline contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings in response to the research questions regarding how online and offline brand engagement differ in fostering emotional intimacy and how these differences relate to emotional design principles. Digital touchpoints foster rapid emotional familiarity through consistent visibility and micro-interactions. (Y. Liu, Y. Tang, 2015 ; Liu, et al., 2024) However, offline experiences like booths, in-store, face to face interaction service, still outperform online engagement in terms of self-disclosure, emotional resonance, and non-verbal communication (Ling et al., 2023). Building on this, (Nyman, 2025) expands the discussion by demonstrating how multisensory cues—visual rhythm and ambient sound—translate emotional triggers from physical to digital context, strengthening the continuity between online and offline design experiences. Aside from those, storytelling acts as the emotional bridge between design functionality

and user identity, turning fleeting engagement into a meaningful, deep connection with the audience (Aidin Ardjomandi, 2025).

In line with these findings, (Li, 2022) emphasize that in the 5G new media era, emotional resonance between brands and consumers is increasingly shaped by interactivity, immediacy, and personalization across digital environments. New media acts not only as a channel for information dissemination but also as a carrier of users' emotions, preferences, and social belonging. Complimenting Li's argument, (Ling et al., 2023) highlights that digital emotional marketing achieves effectiveness when online and offline touchpoints maintain sensory and emotional coherence. Hybrid retail settings that combine digital storytelling with in-store sensory stimuli encourage users to form stronger affective brand associations. Similarly recent research on visual brand identity consistency (Haidar, 2024). Designs enriched with narrative coherence—through plot, character and thematic development—heighten users' emotional arousal and memory retention by over 30% underscoring how storytelling sustains long-term engagement (Aidin Ardjomandi, 2025).

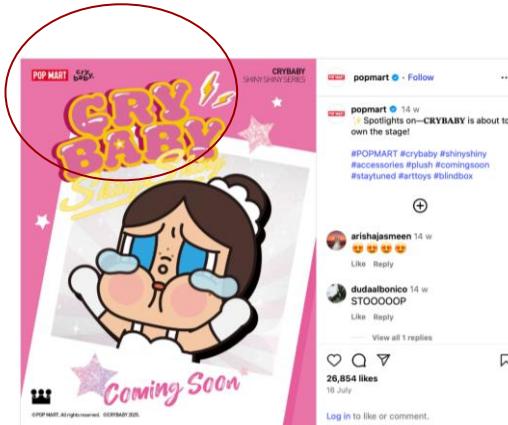


Figure 2. Cry Baby Typeface
Source: Pop Mart, 2025

Uniformly, (Hussein & Rashid, 2025) underlines that typography serves as expressive tools that bridge readability and emotional resonance in multilingual digital environments. As shown on the Figure 2 above, their findings show that typographic harmony across scripts enhances both clarity and affective engagement, reinforcing that even micro-level design choices like typeface and

hierarchy shape user's emotional perceptions. Correspondingly, sensory marketing elements—sounds, colors and visual rhythm—plays a critical role in strengthening consumers' emotional perception and brand attachment. Their findings suggest that when digital media successfully translate these multisensory experiences, it enhances both emotional and behavioral loyalty, reinforcing the affective bond between consumers and brands (Bauerová & Braciníková, 2021).

Furthermore, (Y. Liu, Y. Tang, 2015 ; Liu et al., 2024) expand this theoretical framework by introducing the concept of Digital Customer Intimacy (DCI)—a data-driven relationship model emphasizing closeness, empathy and responsiveness facilitated by digital technologies. Unlike traditional customer intimacy, DCI focuses on human-machine interaction and personalization through AI, chatbots and social media platforms, enabling brands to sustain emotional connection even without physical presence. Integrating DCI principles within Pop Mart's digital strategy demonstrate how emotions; design can evolve into a measurable form of intimacy that drives loyalty and engagement in the virtual ecosystem.

Hybrid retail settings that combine digital storytelling with in-store sensory stimuli encourage users to form stronger affective brand associations. Similarly, recent research on visual brand identity consistency— through unified logos, color schemes, and typography (Haidar, 2024) — suggests that coherent visual cues strengthen recall, emotional preference (Fikta Novia Ayu Safitri+, & Agus Sriyanto , 2025) consumer trust and long-term loyalty (Haidar, 2024). Likewise, (Thang & Iswanto, 2023) note that effective brand activation depends on the interactive, sensory-driven experiences that make brand identity tangible. Their findings reinforce how Pop Mart's hybrid engagement operates as both emotional design execution and activation strategy, deepening loyalty through experiential storytelling.



Figure 3. Pop Mart collectible wall art cabinet
Source: Wong, 2025

Additionally, (Nyman, 2025) expands this perspective by illustrating how sensory-rich digital experiences can replicate the emotional depth usually reserved for offline environments. By translating the five human senses into visual, auditory and interactive cues, digital design evokes multisensory engagement and deepens emotional resonance even within online contexts. This highlights how emotional design's effectiveness increasingly depends on designers' ability to integrate sensory simulation and empathy-driven interactions across platforms. From Figure 3 is an example of an Influencer making UGC content that audience bond through the Visceral theory (Norman, 2004).

This study case complements the dynamic and is also consistent with (Radovanovic, et al., 2022) which also emphasize if emotional connection emerges from multisensory and reflective design experiences. In emotional design theory, (Norman, 2004) *three levels of design*—visceral, behavioral, and reflective—are activated differently in online and offline engagement. Online tends to fulfill the visceral level, stimulating quick emotional reactions and aesthetic pleasure through visual and repetition, whereas offline experiences engage the behavioural

and reflective levels, allowing consumers to associate meaning, pride, and self-image with the brand. (Nyman, 2025) also argues that emotional attachment online is enhanced when sensory metaphors—such as tactile visuals, rhythmic animations or ambient sound— are intentionally incorporated. This mirrors offline emotional triggers and reinforces (Norman, 2004) reflective and behavioral design levels in virtual settings.



Figure 4. Customer service at Pop Mart: focus on online service

Source: Tahira, 2025

This explains why online familiarity accelerates recognition, while offline intimacy deepens emotional belonging. As shown in Figure 4 above, This is consistent with the view with (Fikta Novia Ayu Safitri+ Agus Sriyanto 2025) findings that consistent visual branding elements—such as typography, tone and imagery— help sustain recognition and attachment across diverse contexts, further validating the link between visual coherence and emotional retention.

Building upon these theoretical perspectives, the Pop Mart case demonstrates how these principles manifest in real-world hybrid engagement design. Based on the literature review & desk research on the Pop Mart's hybrid marketing strategy, where online communities amplified awareness and reach, while offline exhibitions and in-store experience deepened affective bonds. Complementing this, (Fikta Novia Ayu Safitri+ Agus Sriyanto, 2025) research further underlines the strategic importance of design consistency in maintaining emotional trust and credibility, echoing the experts' emphasis on tonal coherence and brand storytelling continuity. Brand activation also requires consistent creative strategy across online and offline touchpoints. Their study found that while social media

storytelling drives awareness, offline experiences sustain emotional connection and brand recall.

Supported by each literature review; the interpretation of these findings, qualitative interviews were conducted with two design practitioners specializing in brand and visual communication. Their professional insights provide deeper understanding of how emotional design principles are implemented in hybrid engagement strategies like Pop Mart's. Both experts—Calvin, a brand designer and Nadya an illustrator and design educator—offered perspective on how emotion, culture and localization shape the effectiveness of online and offline design experiences. Their responses are summarized in Table 1.

| Theme/ Focus Area | Key Findings (Expert 1 - Calvin Anugrah Wijaya, Designer) | Key Findings (Expert 2- Nadya, Designer/Illustrator) |
|--|--|---|
| Emotional Design Understanding | What matters is how brand sell themselves through brand's tone, sound, visual consistency, color | Emotional design combines various design elements (typography, color, layout) to evoke emotions. Essential for targeted markets, but less critical for neutral sectors like finance or institutions |
| Design Elements and Triggers | Visual and brand tone remain consistent; music and layout amplify emotional recall. Message and tone should never change even if visual adapts | The emotional trigger depends on the medium. For video: storytelling is key. For Poster/packaging: color and imagery matter most. Each target audience reacts differently—children to color/shape, adults to narrative or nostalgia |
| Nostalgia and Emotional Meaning | Emotional connection often forms through personal meaning—e.g., a fan started collecting Pop Mart after | Nostalgia builds long-term attachment (e.g. Disney, Pokémon, Insomnia). Strong emotional design lets people create their own experiences and identities within |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | receiving one as a gift, giving the brand emotional weight | the brand (“we buy toys we can’t afford as kids”). |
| Online vs Offline Engagement | Offline experiences can’t be replaced—“ humans need touch.” They build addictive emotional attachment. Online works best for reach and visibility through influencers. | Online spreads faster but must be supported by offline experiences for focus and memorability. Offline touchpoints are more immersive; online often suffers from information overload. |
| Pop Mart Hybrid Strategy | Successful because of localization through influencers and emotionally driven offline activations (rewards, events, unboxing). | Effective because online storytelling is followed up by tactile, in-person experiences. Each Pop Mart character has a story. |
| Cultural and Contextual Factors | Big cities prefer bold, aspirational tones, smaller cities prefer relatable, humanized messaging. Relatability builds connection. | Emotional engagement depends on exposure and habits. Localization should reflect what audiences enjoy, not necessarily mirror their culture. Overly specific localization can backfire |
| Challenges in the Digital Era | Maintaining authenticity is the hardest brands rely too much on influencers. Future success lies in humanizing brands. | Brand loyalty is difficult due to saturated new industries. Over-generalization risk dilution, but hyper-specific design may alienate others. Balance and tone consistency are key. |
| Future and Outlook | Engagement will become hyper-personalized and data-driven (especially because of AI, brands can access customer’s data more easily) focusing on niche communities. | Future emotional design will rely on localized campaigns interest (based on targeted audience on the specific location, not always the culture itself) blending online convenience with offline tangibility and storytelling. |

Table 1. Quantitative research to users
source: author’s documentation

The qualitative findings from Table 1 reveal that both experts emphasized the irreplaceable role of offline experiences in sustaining emotional connection and the importance of maintaining tonal consistency in emotional design. While Calvin highlighted tone, sound and influencer localization as key emotional triggers, Nadya underscored how nostalgia and culturally nuanced storytelling drive deeper engagement. Relating from (Norman, 2004) Emotional Design theory that he discussed, the Reflective Level of emotional design is a success when people can give personal meaning, innate self-identity and attachment to the consumption of the product over time—like both examples she mentioned: *Indomie, Pola Snack*. Both perspectives reinforce the hybrid emotional strategy observed in Pop Mart’s case, where online reach is amplified by tactile, meaningful offline encounters.

A significant finding from the data analysis concerns how social media ecosystems amplify engagement at the visceral level of emotional design. Pop Mart’s use of their mainland’s digital viral platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Zhihu, Instagram and TikTok demonstrates how consistent micro-interactions and aesthetic storytelling stimulate curiosity, joy and belonging within digital communities. Also expressed by (Isroni Isroni et al., 2025) that emotional branding among Generation Z consumers in Asia—particularly Japan and Indonesia—relies heavily on culturally attuned storytelling and digital participation. Japanese Gen Z audiences tend to resonate with subtle and visually balanced emotional cues, while Indonesian Gen Z consumers engage more with expressive and community-oriented narratives, especially through social media virality. This aligns with Pop Mart’s strategy of emotional storytelling and participatory content.

Through regulated updates, influencers collaborations, and user-generated content (UGC)—such as fan-made storytelling experience & testimony videos and unboxing clips—Pop Mart transforms passive consumers into emotional participants in their brand’s narratives. Cross-cultural meta-analysis by (Hu et al., Kim, C., & Kang, 2025) reveals that influencer-driven marketing yields stronger emotional impact when content authenticity, relatability and cultural alignment are prioritized. The study also emphasizes that influencer effectiveness varies

significantly across cultures, where collectivist societies (like Indonesia) respond more to relational warmth and narrative engagement; This mirrors Pop Mart's localized influencer strategy, which blends global appeal with culturally relevant storytelling to sustain emotional intimacy across diverse audiences (Ling et al., 2023). Similarly, (Li, 2022) found that brands leveraging new media interactivity and user-driven creation can strengthen emotional identity and long-term loyalty. The sense of "shared participation" and "mutual resonance" cultivated online mirrors Pop Mart's approach where emotional design becomes embedded in both visual and interactive brand experiences.

As for the offline activation, Pop Mart focuses on consumers in larger, first-tier cities displaying higher purchasing power, openness to trends and responsiveness to offline brand experiences. In contrast, consumers in smaller or lower-tier cities engage more through online influencers and localized storytelling (which also mentioned that the Pop Mart's tailored their blind box marketing to match their culture enhancing reliability), highlighting a geographic variation in how emotional engagement manifests. (Ling et al., 2023) notes that emotional connection deepens when digital narratives are extended into tangible experience. This shown in Pop Mart's physical spaces—exhibitions and blind-box installations—embodies this principle by translating online friendliness into multisensory immersion, where digital curiosity is rewarded through tactile discovery.

The survey respondents were selected purposely among audience's familiar with Pop Mart's products and social media presence; quantitative data from 30 respondent's familiar with Pop Mart's products and online presence. Respondents rated their emotional engagement across 13 key indicators on a 5-point 'like' scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

| No | Data collection techniques | Source |
|----|---|--------|
| 1 | I feel emotionally connected to the brand through its online storytelling. | 3.17 |
| 2 | Pop Mart's visuals and design aesthetics online appeal to me | 4.03 |
| 3 | Seeing Pop Mart online makes me more likely to buy their product | 3.53 |
| 4 | I felt more emotionally attached after visiting a Pop Mart store | 3.60 |
| 5 | The store design, lighting and atmosphere made the experience special | 4.13 |
| 6 | Offline experiences feel more memorable and personal to me | 4.30 |
| 7 | Online Interactions help me stay connected between offline visits | 3.47 |
| 8 | Both online and offline engagement are important to keep me loyal to Pop Mart | 3.73 |
| 9 | Pop Mart successfully blends digital storytelling with physical experiences. | 4.00 |
| 10 | Emotional design (visual, storytelling, aesthetic) influences how i connect with Pop Mart | 4.03 |

Table 2. Quantitative research to users
 source: author's documentation

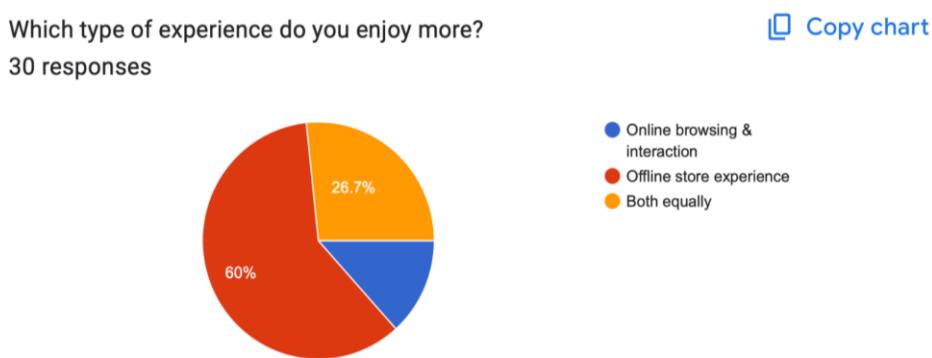


Figure 5. Google form Pie Chart
 source: author's documentation

Table 2 showed a clear pattern where offline engagement scored higher in perceived emotional depth (4.1-4.3) than online engagement (3.0-3.7). Also as shown in Figure 5 (pie chart) Offline engagement incurs a higher emotional and financial cost for consumers, reflecting greater intentionality and effort. Yet, online engagement remains essential for maintaining continuity and scalability of brand relationships; the consistency across brand touchpoints enhances consumer preference and perceived reliability, illustrating how uniform emotional design strategies reinforce loyalty across both digital and physical environments (Fikta Novia Ayu Safitri+ & Agus Sriyanto, 2025).

This complementary dynamic suggests that online should not ‘replace’ but ‘support’ and extend offline emotional design strategies. This aligns with (Li, 2022) argument that new media’s ability to merge sensory, cognitive and emotional layers of experience allows brand design to transcend static communication, becoming a dynamic emotional interface. By integrating 5G media interactivity and personalized content, brands like Pop Mart can heighten consumers’ emotional recognition, foster a stronger sense of exclusivity and belong.

The findings from (Isroni Isroni et al., 2025) further suggest that emotional branding success is contingent on how well a brand aligns emotional tone with cultural expression styles—subtle in high-context societies and expressive in low-context ones. Pop Mart’s hybrid strategy implicitly balances these through its aesthetic storytelling online and tactile engagement offline, allowing emotional resonance to scale across markets. The consistency of emotional cues across hybrid channels—such as color palettes, storytelling tone, and sensory rhythm—creates psychological continuity that sustains brand intimacy. In hybrid environments, emotional design functions as both a narrative and experiential connector, ensuring that each touchpoint reinforces the same affective identity (Ling et al., 2023). This correlation underscores that visual identity coherence is not merely aesthetic but psychologically reinforces emotional recognition and preference, serving as the backbone of sustainable hybrid brand communication (Fikta Novia Ayu Safitri+ & Agus Sriyanto, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This research set out to analyze how online and offline brand engagement differ in producing emotional intimacy and how these differences relate to emotional design principles within Pop Mart's hybrid marketing strategy. The objective was to understand which engagement mode—digital or physical—more effectively strengthens emotional connection, audience intimacy, and brand loyalty through the lens of emotional design and visual communication strategy.

The results demonstrate that online engagement plays a crucial role in establishing rapid emotional familiarity through digital visibility, storytelling consistency, and micro-interactions, while offline engagement generates deeper affective resonance through tactile, multisensory and reflective experiences. Quantitative data from respondent's familiar with Pop Mart revealed that offline engagement achieved higher perceived emotional depth and memorability than online interactions, reflecting greater intentionality and emotional investment. However, online touchpoints remain essential in sustaining brand continuity and community participation. This complementary relationship supports the notion that effective brand intimacy relies on hybrid integration rather than isolated digital or physical strategies.

From a design perspective, these findings highlight the importance of integrating emotional storytelling, tone consistency and sensory design to build sustained audience intimacy. Designers must consider emotional coherence across hybrid platforms—ensuring that the visual identity—color, typography, music and narrative—evoke a unified emotional experience both online and offline. The implication is that emotional design is not a decorative layer but a strategic tool for shaping audience empathy, engagement and brand loyalty.

From a Visual Communication Design perspective, these insights imply that emotional design strategies must integrate digital efficiency with offline sensorial richness. The emotional depth from offline presence (texture, environment, personal attention) can be replicated digitally through personalized storytelling,

warm tonality, interactive feedback systems. The research reinforces that an effective brand engagement system is not optional between online and offline, but rather a synchronized ecosystem where each mode amplifies the other's emotional potential. The main purpose is to connect brand engagement theory with emotional design psychology, bridging consumer intimacy with multisensory and empathetic designs. Compared with prior research focusing solely on marketing performance, this approach positions emotional design as a measurable factor of brand intimacy and long-term loyalty.

Nevertheless, this study's limitations include its sample size (30 respondents), to a small sample size and the case context of Pop Mart, which may not fully represent other brand categories. Future research can expand by examining different industries or cross-cultural responses to hybrid emotional design strategies. Future research should expand to comparative studies across various brand categories or cultural contexts, incorporating larger samples and exploring how hybrid emotional strategies evolve with emerging technologies such as AI, AR and personalized data driven storytelling.

In conclusion, emotional design stands as the connective tissue and foundation between visual strategy and audience experience. The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative insights affirms that brand intimacy thrives when emotional design bridges online efficiency with offline authenticity—creating a coherent, multisensory ecosystem that transforms audiences from passive consumers into emotionally engaged participants. Though, it is essential to emphasize the importance of juggling brand's emotional design tone and principles and bridging the context of the audiences that involves any culture norms, interests, principles and emotional values.

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