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## Practice and Exploration of Library Mascot Experiential Marketing: A Case Study of Jinling Library (Postprint)

**Authors:** Zhou Yingge, Wang Bei, Yang Zheng

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Taking the “Yue Mei Jia Yuan” mascot of Jinling Library as an example, this study explores marketing promotion models and strategies for libraries based on experiential marketing.

[Method/Process] This paper discusses the necessity of experiential marketing promotion for library mascots, briefly describes the design and development of the Jinling Library mascot from three aspects: design concept, copyright protection, and derivative product development, and elaborates on the experiential marketing practice of the “Yue Mei Jia Yuan” mascot from five dimensions: sense, emotion, thought, action, and relation.

[Results/Conclusion] Strategies for library mascot experiential marketing are proposed.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

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**Practice and Exploration of Experiential Marketing on Library Mascots: Taking Jinling Library as an Example**

**Zhou Yingge, Wang Bei, Yang Zheng**

Jinling Library, Nanjing 210019

**Abstract:** [Purpose/Significance] Taking the “YueMei Family” mascot of Jinling Library as an example, this paper discusses the model and strategy of library marketing promotion based on experiential marketing. [Method/Process]

The paper discusses the necessity of experiential marketing for library mascots, briefly introduces the design and development of Jinling Library’s mascot from three aspects—design concepts, copyright protection, and derivative product development—and elaborates on the experiential marketing practices of the “YueMei Family” mascot from five dimensions: sensory, emotional, thinking, action, and connection. [Result/Conclusion] The paper proposes strategies for library mascot experiential marketing.

**Keywords:** library; mascot; experiential marketing

**Classification Number:** G250.15

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On March 5, 2021, Premier Li Keqiang proposed in the government work report to advance the integrated construction of urban and rural public cultural service systems, innovatively implement cultural benefit projects, and advocate nationwide reading [1]. This marked the eighth consecutive year that “nationwide reading” had been included in the government work report since 2014. As the primary venue for reading promotion, libraries should actively enhance their social influence through marketing and promotion while providing quality reader services, thereby better driving innovation and sustainable development in the library sector.

## 1 Library Mascots

### 1.1 Overview

The term “mascot” originates from the Provençal language of France, with English equivalents including “Mascot” or “Character,” and expressions such as “Brand Mascot” or “Advertising Character” when referring to specific applications. Mascots amplify or extend the inherent attributes and characteristics of things—their practical value or physical features—to convey auspicious meanings and express people’s emotional aspirations.

Research on mascot design and application has rarely addressed libraries. Using CNKI as the search platform and “library + mascot” as keywords, only 24 relevant papers were retrieved. Based on category, mascots can be divided into three types: corporate mascots, product mascots, and social activity mascots. Mascots are widely used in children’s products, household goods, food, medicine, apparel, cosmetics, IT, entertainment, and social causes [2].

### 1.2 International Development of Library Mascots

American libraries predominantly feature mascots in university settings. Yale University was among the early adopters, with its mascot “Handsome Dan” becoming one of America’s most well-known university mascots [3]. Other institutions employ animal figures such as eagles, tigers, wolves, dogs, cattle, and

sheep; plant images like trees and okra; and various (cartoon or virtual) character figures and book images. These mascots frequently appear in campus athletic events, orientation promotions, and publications, forming an integral part of campus culture.

The University of California system comprises 10 campuses, each with its own mascot. The University of Baltimore and other institutions provide mascot visual identity (VI) materials on their official websites [4]. The Maine State Library's webpage details the origin story of its mascot "Baxter the Library Cat" and offers usage suggestions for various marketing occasions [5].

In Japan, the annual Library Mascot Competition, launched in 2015, establishes various awards based on on-site voting, online voting, and expert evaluation. In 2019, the second-place winner by on-site vote came from Samukawa Library, which created 12 mascot characters through fairy-tale expressions to help children understand library classification systems [6]. The mascots "Tobira-kun" and "Shiori-chan" from Toyokawa City Library in Aichi Prefecture are designed as cartoon figures of different ages and occupations based on books, exhibitions, and activity needs, demonstrating both flexibility and playfulness [7]. Chofu City Library in Tokyo [8] and Kazuno City Library in Akita Prefecture [9] have released mascot sticker sets featuring text such as "currently reading." The mascots "Kure and In-in" from Kyoto University Library are also used in student-oriented publications, library materials, and new student activities [10]. Additionally, Chung-Ang University in South Korea uses a "Blue Dragon" mascot, with various emoticons available for download on the school's official website [11]. The Hamilton Public Library in Canada features a book-accompanied mascot at its Locke Branch that attracts considerable attention [12].

Overall, international library mascots have an early start and benefit from a well-established design and application environment.

### 1.3 Domestic Development of Library Mascots

In recent years, Chinese libraries have become increasingly active in mascot design and application. In May 2014, the library of Central China Normal University designed a photo wall for graduates featuring the school mascots "BoBo" and "YaYa" (squirrels), which attracted many students. The mascot "Baobei Yu" (Baby Fish) of Beijing Language and Culture University, based on the koi fish, embodies auspicious meanings from traditional Chinese culture. Nanjing University's mascot "Little Blue Whale" remains a beloved cartoon figure for many student organizations and cultural creative design teams. Sun Yat-sen University's mascot "Zhongda Lion" features five forms, presenting five states of students' daily learning and life while embodying the spirit of the school motto. Yunnan Normal University's mascot "Potato Baby" reflects the university's contributions to the potato industry and agricultural development [13]. Qingdao University of Science and Technology's mascot "Petrel" has been incorporated into its visual identity system and displayed on its official website

[14].

Public libraries in China are gradually experimenting with mascots to advocate for reading. Weihai Library's mascot "Congcong" implies that "reading makes people wiser" [15]. Shunde Children's Library's mascot "Fengfeng" is vivid and lively, highlighting local cultural characteristics [16]. Guangzhou Children's Library's mascot "Xiao Yueyue" continues to play an active role in library signage, reading activities, and the transformation of intangible cultural heritage [17]. Jimo District Library's children's reading promotion brand activities, based on the mascot "Momo" through situational drama performances, stimulate children's reading interest, enabling them to share joy and gain wisdom in a relaxed and pleasant environment [18].

As a public cultural facility for social education, library mascots serve as symbols representing library culture, reflecting libraries' cultural concepts, service awareness, and social values while conveying the sacred mission of libraries in the new era. This cultural symbol needs recognition from the vast majority of readers while possessing artistic appreciation value. From anthropomorphic expression in initial design to affinity in appearance and interactive communication online and offline, mascots inject warmth and enthusiasm into reading, bridging the psychological distance between libraries and readers, enhancing readers' sense of identification and belonging, and helping to improve libraries' reputation and influence.

## 2 Library Experiential Marketing

### 2.1 Library Marketing

Philip Kotler believes that marketing is the art of creating genuine customer value. To truly excel in marketing, one must recognize the importance of understanding, serving, and satisfying customer needs and steadfastly implement this principle. He proposes that marketing is not merely the responsibility of the marketing department but affects every aspect of the customer experience [19]. In 2007, Ke Ping and Li Qiong suggested that effectively applying marketing theory to university libraries, combined with their unique characteristics, would be an effective approach to promoting digital resource utilization [20]. In recent years, Chinese libraries such as Tsinghua University Library, Beijing University of Science and Technology Library, Shanghai Library, Wuhan University Library, and Foshan Library have repeatedly won awards in IFLA International Library Marketing Award competitions. Nie Hua, a member of the Library Marketing Award jury, considers this a significant indicator of rapid progress in Chinese libraries' service innovation and marketing [21].

### 2.2 Libraries and Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing emerges in the context of the experience economy. The assertion that "the era of the experience economy has arrived" comes from Pine

II and Gilmore, founders of Strategic Horizons LLP, in their Harvard Business Review article. They argue that the evolution of economic value comprises four stages: commodities, goods, services, and experiences. With changing times, experiential marketing has gradually become well-known for its strong interactive qualities.

Bernd H. Schmitt defines experiential marketing in his book *Experiential Marketing* as a marketing approach that redesigns and redefines strategies from five aspects: consumers' senses, emotions, thinking, actions, and associations. This approach aims to transcend the traditional assumption of the "rational consumer," recognizing that consumers are a combination of rationality and emotion, and that their experiences before, during, and after consumption are key to purchasing behavior and brand consumption. Experiential marketing is ubiquitous, as marketers shift from traditional "features and benefits" marketing to creating experiences for customers [22].

For libraries, experiential marketing differs from sales, promotion, or advertising. Its goal is not to sell products or generate profit but to discover and satisfy readers' needs. As Professor Chu Jingli stated in his article "What Does Library Reader Recognition Depend On?", libraries must first excel in their services, complemented by appropriate promotion, to create positive interaction with society and generate favorable feedback effects, thereby creating a more conducive development environment [23]. Experiential marketing runs through every aspect of reader service and thus possesses rich connotations.

### 2.3 Jinling Library's Mascot and Experiential Marketing

As a national-level cultural and creative pilot unit and one of the initiators of the "National Library Cultural and Creative Product Development Alliance," Jinling Library has accumulated considerable experience in cultural and creative work since 2017 through developing collections and integrating resources, receiving attention and recognition from both industry and social media. Simultaneously, Jinling Library recognized that in various online and offline reading promotion activities and when building cultural and creative brands, a bridge for communication between the library and readers needed to be established to achieve positive interaction. Consequently, since late 2018, Jinling Library began developing and creating a warm and engaging mascot—the "YueMei Family"—along with its cultural and creative derivatives. Through carefully planned experiential marketing, the mascot's image has become deeply rooted in people's hearts, contributing to nationwide reading promotion.

## 3 Jinling Library's "YueMei Family" Mascot

### 3.1 Design Concepts

The core element of a library is "books." From the initial design stage, the Jinling Library team consistently centered on this core element while highlighting

three distinctive features: First, deeply excavating local culture. After research, the library selected a 5,000-year-old pottery mask unearthed at the Yingshanpan site in Pukou District, Nanjing, as the prototype for mascot design. Second, focusing on revitalizing the existing logo. Mascot design and logo design are both connected and distinct. The design absorbed the book shape from Jinling Library's logo, anthropomorphized it, and incorporated the Chinese character “金” (gold) from “金图” (Jinling Library) and the square and diamond structures from the initials “J” and “L” of “金陵” (Jinling), evolving these into facial and clothing features of the cartoon mascot. The main color scheme for all characters is the champagne gold from the Jinling Library logo, supplemented by bright colors to make them vibrant and energetic while facilitating differentiation. Third, committing to nationwide reading promotion. The “YueMei Family” mascot consists of six characters—Grandpa, Grandma, Dad, Mom, Older Sister, and Younger Brother—aiming to advocate for family reading and parent-child reading while expressing the library's intention to provide abundant spiritual nourishment for readers. [Figure 1: see original paper]

### 3.2 Copyright Protection

To protect intellectual property rights, Jinling Library submitted a trademark registration application in 2019 in accordance with the Trademark Law and its implementation regulations. In September of the same year, Jinling Library passed the trademark examination by the National Intellectual Property Administration, successfully registering the “YueMei Family” mascot trademark. The registered trademark categories include Class 9, Class 16, and Class 41, covering books, printed publications, magazines (periodicals), notebooks, drawings, printed matter, children's books with electronic sound devices, office necessities (excluding furniture), e-book readers, electronic sound devices with books, data processing equipment, electronic publications (downloadable), downloadable image files, and downloadable mobile application software. [Figure 2: see original paper]

### 3.3 Derivative Product Development

Through a combination of independent research and development and collaborative development, Jinling Library had developed 10 types of mascot-related products comprising 15 styles by October 2019, including postcards, fans, T-shirts, plush toys, refrigerator magnets, baseball caps, canvas bags, puzzle ornaments, and mouse pads for daily life, office, and entertainment purposes. In November 2019, at the “Family Reading Promotion Excellent Cases Exchange Conference” hosted by the Reading Promotion Committee of the Chinese Library Society and organized by Jinling Library, the mascot character “Tutu” transformed into an “Exchange Ambassador,” presenting canvas bags printed with the mascot image as conference material bags to participants, effectively enhancing the atmosphere. [Figure 3: see original paper]

## 4 Experiential Marketing Practice of the “YueMei Family” Mascot

### 4.1 Sensory Experiential Marketing

Sensory experiential marketing establishes readers’ memory of mascots through the five human senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Mascots possess distinctive visual brand power. As visual symbols, their cute and charming appearance creates a strong first impression. Jinling Library’s mascot resembles “toast”—a familiar, everyday image that effectively captures readers’ psychology. It can be understood as a “bread family” or “spiritual food,” with its simple expression enhancing visual recognition and diverse discussions boosting the mascot’s visibility to some extent. The mascot’s first impression on readers is visual familiarity, which then triggers associations and even expectations of other sensory experiences.

On the tactile level, the “YueMei Family” mascot made its debut on August 18, 2019. At this launch event, Jinling Library collaborated with China Post to prepare limited-edition mascot postcards for readers, provided postmarks for check-ins, and installed mailboxes. Readers gathered together that day to interact with the mascot through sharing, listening, and other forms of 零距离 contact.

### 4.2 Emotional Experiential Marketing

Emotional experiential marketing focuses on readers’ internal emotions and feelings, addressing their emotional needs to evoke resonance and integrate emotion into marketing. In this approach, librarians must understand what factors trigger certain emotions or infections in readers to create emotional resonance and immerse them in specific scenarios.

In January 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic swept across China. Jinling Library consistently monitored the situation, kept a close eye on Wuhan, and cared for the Wuhan Library at the epidemic’s center. On February 13, a letter conveying the concerns and blessings of the “YueMei Family” mascot and all Jinling Library staff was sent from the library’s WeChat official account. Subsequently, Sohu.com reported on it with the headline “Heartwarming! He Wrote a Letter from Nanjing to Wuhan Using 42 Book Titles!” [24]. The Chinese Library Society’s official WeChat post on March 6, “Standing Together Through Storms, Hand in Hand Welcoming Spring—Chinese Library Society Coordinates National Library Community Anti-Epidemic Actions,” noted: “Jinling Library specially wrote a letter titled ‘To the Heroic City: Ninghan Tutu Writes “Books” with You,’ using recommended book titles to cheer for Wuhan, with profound cultural heritage and touching words” [25]. This initiative, in the name of Jinling Library’s mascot “Tutu,” used the library’s collection titles to compose a poem for Wuhan Library’s mascot “Tutu,” aiming to encourage friends in Wuhan through humanistic care and emotional resonance. [Figure 4: see original paper]

Jinling Library's award-winning case "Visual Impact of Jinling Library in Your Social Circle: The 'Discover Jinling Library' Creative Poster Campaign" received first prize in the second Public Library Innovation and Creativity Collection and Promotion Activity. In January 2020, the mascot "YueMei Family" was featured as the protagonist to interpret core values. In that poster, all six family members wore masks, with the words "Wuhan Jiayou" (Stay Strong, Wuhan) appearing in the background, warmly and powerfully expressing dual meanings of welcoming the new year and united epidemic prevention. [Figure 5: see original paper]

### 4.3 Thinking Experiential Marketing

Thinking experiential marketing stimulates readers' intelligence, arousing surprise, interest, and concentrated or divergent thinking about problems through creative approaches, creating cognitive and problem-solving experiences for readers.

In June 2019, Jinling Library published a WeChat article titled "2020 Jinling Library 'Naming' Essay (Mascot Volume)." The article stated: "As soon as the 2020 college entrance examination essay topics were released, netizens rushed to contribute ideas. Read the following graphic materials and write according to requirements. Requirement: Based on the six characters of Jinling Library's YueMei Family—Grandpa, Grandma, Dad, Mom, Older Sister, and Younger Brother—choose a good angle, freely develop, name each character, and explain the cultural meaning or literary story behind the name. The writing should be healthy in thought, clear in expression, and no less than 200 words. Once names are determined, this will become a reading family image belonging to Nanjing citizens. There are no standard answers or style restrictions. Send us your inspiration and creativity for the six mascots' names and their stories!" After publication, the article attracted attention and reprints from multiple media outlets. Within half a month, WeChat readership exceeded 60,000. Readers showed high enthusiasm and actively contributed submissions. Through thinking experiential marketing, Jinling Library ultimately selected the "YueMei Family" names: Jinshi, Linxi, Tianyue, Meiwei, Ningning, and Tutu—each name carrying a story and symbolizing the library's important role in promoting civilization, culture, and heritage.

### 4.4 Action Experiential Marketing

Action experiential marketing creates different experiential opportunities for readers to evoke their passion for experiences and promote reading. Its goal is to influence tangible physical experiences, lifestyles, and interactions, enriching readers' reading lives.

On April 20, 2020, the China Press and Publication Research Institute announced the results of the 17th National Reading Survey via live webcast. Data showed that in 2019, the contact rate of digital reading methods among Chi-

nese adult nationals reached 79.3%, up 3.1 percentage points from 76.2% in 2018 [26]. How to use digital means and lifestyle approaches to more vividly demonstrate the connotation and charm of library mascots became an important exploration direction for Jinling Library's creative team. After research, they found that WeChat emoticons—with their cute expressions, convenient downloadability, broad audience reach, and strong dissemination power—represented an excellent entry point for exploring fashionable mascot development. The creative team pre-selected multiple emoticon series, including internet-popular and middle-aged/elderly series, and from an all-ages perspective, selected office-themed emoticons and their accompanying text. On March 5, 2020, Jinling Library released the “YueMei Family” emoticon set, available for free download by WeChat users. The emoticons include both single images and series, making reading both interesting and warm through their 亲切易懂的形象. Subsequently, Jinling Library applied the mascot and emoticons to websites, Weibo, WeChat, TikTok, and other platforms, using digital services and multimedia communication to support nationwide reading and serve readers' lives. [Figure 6: see original paper]

#### 4.5 Connected Experiential Marketing

Connected experiential marketing synthesizes all experiential marketing strategies, encompassing sensory, emotional, thinking, and action elements. Through their interactions, it creates a coherent sensory, perceptual, emotional, and cognitive experience for readers, thereby attracting their attention [27]. Accordingly, Jinling Library conducted comprehensive planning both inside and outside the library.

In Jinling Library's environmental guidance system, the “YueMei Family” appears almost everywhere, effectively promoting mascot recognition and 趣味性. In regional cooperation, co-construction, and sharing activities, the mascot serves as a “librarian” spokesperson in WeChat posts, posters, and on-site materials, becoming increasingly familiar to citizens and readers. During the two sessions of the “Scholarly Jinling” Nanjing Public Library Readers' Festival, the “YueMei Family” mascot made multiple appearances, gaining widespread recognition from target audiences.

In the new era of cultural and tourism integration, Jinling Library collaborated with Xuanwu Lake Scenic Area in September 2019 to create Nanjing's first cultural-tourism integrated reading practice base. Reading resources accompanied by natural scenery received unanimous praise from Nanjing citizens. In 2020, on China Tourism Day and the first anniversary of Nanjing's successful application as a “City of Literature,” Jinling Library successively established its second and third cultural-tourism integrated reading practice bases at Muyan Scenic Area and Xinanyi Historical and Cultural Leisure Block. The mascot appears in credit smart borrowing cabinets, cultural-tourism digital reading machines, and various promotional leaflets, serving as the library's “image ambassador” to guide tourists, provide consultation, and assist with electronic

resource usage.

## 5 Strategies for Library Mascot Experiential Marketing

Library mascots, with their strong public welfare attributes, generate 亲切感 that makes them more easily loved and recognized by readers. Whether for in-library services, outreach reading promotion for broader citizen readership, or new media publicity, mascots can achieve high reach with low investment. Therefore, designing mascots with library IP attributes holds significant strategic importance. Based on this, this paper recommends three strategies for libraries employing mascots in experiential marketing.

### 5.1 Integrate Concept and Application, Emphasizing Top-Level Design for Effective Communication

Mascots are inseparable from their era background, social environment, geographical location, cultural concepts, and historical development. Libraries' advantage in mascot development lies in their rich collection of literature resources. When creating mascots, libraries should adopt both macro perspectives and long-term vision while being grounded in reality. They should base designs on the overall environment, implement effective image design and long-term promotion, and use reader-friendly images and language to tell library stories well, enabling sustainable emotional resonance between mascots and readers for effective communication.

### 5.2 Combine Characteristics and Aesthetics, Using Innovative Expression to Showcase Traditional Culture

Library mascots must possess affinity, recognizability, and novelty, striving to be “simple but not simplistic” to adequately express their connotation and heritage. Currently, domestic library mascots show insufficient personalization in material selection, combination, content, features, and naming, with similar materials and repeated names that should be avoided. Library mascots can employ innovative expression methods and diversified design concepts to showcase the charm of excellent Chinese traditional culture.

### 5.3 Combine Two-Dimensional and Three-Dimensional Elements, Promoting Reading Through Integrated Development

Interaction distinguishes experiential marketing from traditional marketing, fostering closer connections between readers and library mascots. Interactive experiences should run through all aspects of library mascot marketing promotion. In marketing, libraries should integrate modern science and technology from perspectives of stimulating interest, staying close to life, creating highlights, and highlighting connotation. They should utilize new media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok for online-offline interaction, combining two-dimensional and three-dimensional elements to bring readers humanistic reading

experiences through mascots, enabling them to appreciate the beauty of reading and creating fond memories of reading and libraries.

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#### Author Contributions:

Zhou Yingge: Proposed the research topic and direction, determined the research framework, wrote and revised the paper.

Wang Bei: Proposed the research topic, refined the research framework, collected materials and revised the paper.

Yang Zheng: Proposed the research topic, refined the research framework, provided suggestions for paper revision.

## Book Announcement

*Academic Libraries and New Publishing*, edited by Professor Chu Jingli and authored by Zhao Yan and others, was published in hardcover by National Library of China Publishing House in April 2021. This book represents the final research outcome of the National Social Science Fund key project “Research on the Impact of New Publishing Models on Academic Libraries” (Project No.: 15ATQ001), chaired by Professor Chu Jingli. After five years of work, combined with the research team’s long-term dedication to both library science and academic publishing, and based on the intersection and integration of libraries and publishing—viewing publishing from a library perspective and libraries from a publishing perspective—the team completed this academically valuable research achievement.

Starting from the concept and basic understanding of new publishing, the book profoundly analyzes the impact of various new publishing models on academic libraries, examines the composition and evolution of elements in the academic communication ecosystem, the ecological relationship between academic libraries and publishing, and the development of academic libraries from an ecosystem perspective. From this ecological height, it clarifies the relationship between academic libraries and new publishing, then elaborates on the impacts of digital publishing, open publishing, data publishing, and semantic publishing on academic libraries. The book proposes that under the influence and promotion of new publishing models, academic libraries should accelerate the transformation of resource construction models, promote service model transformation, implement business management restructuring, strengthen core capacity building, participate in publishing and publishing services, and build a new ecology for academic libraries under new publishing models.

The book features a relatively novel research angle, systematic and comprehensive content, and a coherent academic thought system with high-level considerations. References are abundant and detailed, case analyses are accurate and appropriate, and surveys covering various groups including publishers, authors, readers, and libraries through multiple methods have broad coverage and strong professionalism, with reliable data collection and analysis. The book holds important guiding significance and practical application value for the future development of academic libraries.

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

*Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.*