

# Disseminating Miao new year culture via emojis: a Labubu-style trendy toy IP approach

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**Abstract.** As lightweight digital media such as social media and short videos have gradually become the primary channels for teenagers to access information and engage in social expression, the traditional offline-dominated dissemination of ethnic minority cultures has faced high barriers, making it difficult to effectively integrate into teenagers' daily life and resulting in a gradual decline in communication effectiveness. The Miao New Year, a vital traditional festival of the Miao ethnic group with profound cultural connotations, has low recognition among teenagers and has not yet formed a communication path adapted to the digital media environment. This study takes Miao New Year culture as the research object and explores the feasibility of using original IP emojis as a carrier for cultural dissemination based on teenagers' media usage habits. Through literature analysis, questionnaire surveys and design practice, the study developed the original IP image "Miao Nuo Zai" and a series of themed emojis, and conducted user tests on the design outcomes. The results show that most teenagers hold a positive attitude towards this communication form, believing that the emojis have a strong emotional appeal and usage intention, and can arouse their interest in Miao New Year culture to a certain extent. This study argues that integrating lightweight digital media with traditional cultural content helps lower the threshold of cultural dissemination and provides a feasible path for the contemporary expression and dissemination of ethnic minority cultures among teenagers.

**Keywords:** Miao New Year culture, original IP, emojis, digital cultural dissemination, teenagers

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## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of digital media technology, significant changes have taken place in the way teenagers access information and engage with culture. Compared to traditional cultural learning paths that rely

on family inheritance, festival participation, or classroom education, contemporary teenagers prefer to receive information and express emotions through lightweight digital media, such as social media, short videos, and emojis. However, most current ethnic minority cultures are still mainly disseminated through offline activities, textual materials and professional communication, which have high barriers and are difficult to integrate into teenagers' daily media usage scenarios, leading to a gradual decline in their visibility and participation among the younger generation.

As one of the grandest traditional festivals of the Miao ethnic group, the Miao New Year carries multiple cultural meanings, including commemorating ancestors, celebrating harvests, and offering sacrifices to ancestors, and is equivalent to the "Spring Festival" in Miao society. In the real-world communication environment, however, teenagers generally have a poor understanding of Miao New Year culture, and the relevant content has not yet taken a systematic digital form, making it difficult to reach the social platforms and cultural consumption scenarios commonly used by teenagers. Against this background, how to realise the contemporary expression of Miao New Year culture in a way that aligns with teenagers' media usage habits while ensuring the accuracy of cultural connotations has become a worthy design issue to explore.

Building on the background outlined above, this study takes the emojis of the original IP "Miao Nuo Zai" as its starting point, seeking to transform Miao New Year cultural elements into digital visual content suitable for everyday social expression. Using the glutinous rice cake of the Miao ethnic group as the prototype, Miao Nuo Zai integrates traditional visual symbols such as batik and silver ornaments to create a naive and lively character image, and its personality settings, such as "love to share" and "emotionally expressive", align with the social context of teenagers. Through design practice and user testing, this study explores a communication path for Miao New Year culture to integrate naturally into teenagers' daily communication scenarios, providing practical references for the youth-oriented dissemination of ethnic minority cultures.

## 2. Preliminary research

### 2.1. Literature review

#### *2.1.1. Intergenerational fault and communication dilemmas in the dissemination of traditional ethnic minority cultures*

The intergenerational transmission of traditional ethnic minority cultures is increasingly lacking among teenagers. As digital media becomes more widespread, the effectiveness of traditional cultural communication to the younger generation has steadily declined. Jenkins [1] noted that digital media has transformed how young people access information and engage with culture; compared to traditional methods such as family inheritance, festival activities, or structured learning, teenagers now prefer to obtain cultural content through user-friendly, visual digital platforms. This transition has resulted in many ethnic minority cultures, which relied on offline activities and sustained participation, appearing less frequently in teenagers' everyday lives.

From the perspective of the communication environment, Castells [2] argued that in the network society, information mainly flows rapidly through digital platforms, and content will struggle to gain widespread attention if it fails to enter these platforms. Traditional ethnic minority cultures are usually concentrated in specific temporal and spatial scenarios such as festivals, rituals or community activities. When such content is not transformed into forms suitable for online communication, teenagers can hardly access relevant information on the social media they use daily, thus affecting their cognition and understanding of these cultures.

In addition, the comprehensibility of cultural content is an important factor influencing communication effectiveness. Hall [3] noted that cultural meanings can be effectively communicated only through appropriate

expression methods. When the presentation of cultural content is far removed from teenagers' life experiences and media usage habits, young people often feel it is "incomprehensible" or "irrelevant to themselves", thereby reducing their willingness to learn more. It is evident that the communication dilemmas of traditional ethnic minority cultures among teenagers largely stem from the mismatch between expression methods and the contemporary media environment [4]. Therefore, this project attempts to use emojis, a digital medium close to daily social use, as the carrier to translate Miao New Year culture into an expression form more in line with teenagers' media habits.

### *2.1.2. Digital media and cultural dissemination*

In the digital age, the formation mechanism of cultural identity has undergone significant changes. Türkoğlu et al. [5] pointed out that the digital cultural environment features openness and decentralisation, enabling individuals to conduct more free cultural exchanges in virtual space, and its communication logic is significantly different from cultural practices in real life. Against this background, digital media have not only changed the way of cultural dissemination but also promoted the shift of cultural dissemination from one-way information transmission to a process centred on participation and interaction.

Trufanova [6] further pointed out that the development of digital media has promoted the transformation of cultural participation forms, making cultural dissemination gradually embedded in people's daily media usage behaviours. Digital technology has enhanced the possibility of communication between different cultures by providing interactive platforms, and has, to a certain extent, influenced the relationship between ethnic identity and the social digitalisation process. With the popularisation of mobile Internet, digital media such as documentaries, online news, games and social media have become important ways for people to acquire knowledge and understand the world.

Compared with the traditional communication methods mainly based on texts and offline activities, digital media have stronger emotional expression ability and sense of participation, making cultural content easier to integrate into daily life scenarios. This shift from "information transmission" to "daily participation" provides a new possible path for the dissemination of traditional cultures in contemporary society, and also lays a theoretical foundation for this project to disseminate Miao New Year culture through IP emojis.

## 2.2. Competitive product analysis

The competitive products selected in this study follow the principles of research relevance, style differentiation and representativeness of communication forms, including the Molly Miao Silver Ornament Series, the Hacıpupu Series and the Jellycat Series, which represent the cultural integration path of physical trendy toy IPs, differentiated IP styles and emotional expression, and emotion-oriented character narrative modes respectively. The experience of these three competitive product cases in visual expression, user interaction and communication methods provides a reference basis for the emoji design of the original IP and the dissemination of Miao New Year culture in this project.

### *2.2.1. Molly Miao Silver Ornament Series*

The Molly Miao Silver Ornament Series under Pop Mart is a typical case of trendy toy IPs integrating ethnic cultural elements. This IP incorporates Miao silver ornaments, enhancing visual impact and recognition, intuitively conveying cultural characteristics and boasting strong commercial value. However, this IP series mainly takes physical blind box figures as the carrier, with high costs; the product pricing has raised the communication threshold to a certain extent, limited the audience scope, and made it difficult to integrate into users' online social interaction. This case provides inspiration for this project in terms of extracting cultural visual symbols and character design, and also highlights the deficiencies of physical trendy toys in communication efficiency and social attributes.

### 2.2.2. *Hacipupu Series*

The Hacipupu Series under Pop Mart features a healing and gentle style, with the core image of an introverted child with a runny nose and double eyelids, whose expressions are mostly naive smiles, innocent blinks, shy blushes and other cute states. With healing, gentleness and universality as the core of design, it is more adapted to daily social scenarios and covers a wide range of people. This project draws on its achievements and experience in style positioning, emotional expression and social communication mechanism to create an original IP image with independent aesthetic characteristics. Similar to Molly, the Hacipupu Series also has obvious shortcomings in communication efficiency and social attributes.

### 2.2.3. *Jellycat Series*

Jellycat is a brand excelling in emotional value and character narrative. Jellycat sets a unique personality and background story for each toy, endowing them with their own identities, personalities and even hobbies, and regularly releases stop-motion animations and interesting videos featuring the toys as the protagonists, which enhances buyers' sense of substitution and their brand loyalty and long-term purchase intention. It provides methodological reference for this project in the construction of original IP personality and the way of emotional connection. However, the brand is positioned in the global high-end toy market with high product prices, and has not paid attention to the goal of disseminating Chinese ethnic minority cultures, resulting in limited reference value in terms of ethnic cultural dissemination and public welfare attributes.

To sum up, existing IPs generally have problems such as high communication threshold, overly physical forms or insufficient excavation of cultural connotations in ethnic cultural dissemination. In contrast, emojis, as a lightweight and low-cost digital communication medium, are more in line with the usage habits and communication paths of teenagers. On the basis of fully absorbing the visual expression and communication experience of relevant IPs, this project adopts original IP design, integrates Miao New Year cultural elements in the form of emojis, and explores a new cultural communication method with both in-depth cultural expression and high communication efficiency.

## 3. Innovative scheme design

### 3.1. Needs research

A total of 223 valid samples were collected in this questionnaire survey, with teenagers as the main respondents. Among them, people aged 16-18 and over 22 account for 75%, who have a high frequency of social media use and emoji usage habits, providing a reliable basis for the portrait of the target users of this project.

#### 3.1.1. *Teenagers have a high demand for frequent emoji use, and emojis are an important medium for social expression*

According to the questionnaire results, 83.66% of respondents use emojis frequently, and 11.66% use them occasionally, highlighting the universality of emoji use and the strong demand for them. Moreover, 79.82% of people use emojis to express their own emotions, which is consistent with our design direction. The proportions of static and dynamic emojis are 40.36% and 44.39%, respectively, indicating that emojis are an important medium for social expression.

#### 3.1.2. *Users have a low cognition of Miao culture, with obvious room for improvement*

The survey results show that 61.88% of respondents have heard of the Miao ethnic group but do not understand it, and 20.18% know only the name, highlighting the feasibility and necessity of disseminating Miao culture. Regarding the Miao New Year, nearly half (49.78%) of respondents have never heard of it, and

39.46% have heard of it but do not understand it, indicating that users have low awareness of this traditional Miao festival, with obvious room for improvement.

### *3.1.3. Teenagers generally recognize "IP emojis" as a way to disseminate Miao New Year culture*

Most teenagers show positive interest. Among the 223 teenage respondents, 19.28% expressed "very interested" in disseminating Miao New Year culture through original IP emojis, and 40.81% expressed "relatively interested", accounting for more than 60% (60.09%) in total; only 13.45% expressed "not very interested" or "not interested at all", reflecting a good acceptance foundation of teenagers for this communication form.

### *3.1.4. Users put forward obvious demands and concerns on design style and cultural expression methods*

In terms of design preference, users tend to the cute and bright style, and hope that traditional costumes and festival celebration scene elements can be integrated into emoji content. At the same time, users have raised obvious concerns: unclear expression of cultural connotations and worry about the entertainment of culture, as well as excessive commercialization of images. This shows that users do not reject the way of disseminating traditional ethnic minority cultures through IP emojis, but hope to strike a balance between relaxed expression and cultural accuracy.

Based on the comprehensive questionnaire results, teenagers use emojis frequently as a social expression medium and also recognize the dissemination of Miao culture through IP emojis, which provides a user and form foundation for the implementation of the project. In addition, users' low cognition of Miao culture reflects the necessity of disseminating Miao culture in this form, and users' demands and concerns on design style and cultural expression also point out the optimization direction for the subsequent specific design.

## 3.2. User portrait

Based on the questionnaire survey results, the target users of this project can be summarized into three typical groups: culture-identifying teenagers, social-expressive teenagers and trend-interested users. First, culture-identifying teenagers are mainly aged 16~18, accounting for the highest proportion (33%), followed by those over 22, while those aged 12~22 account for a small proportion (about 20%). This group has a certain emotional identification foundation with Miao culture or the regional culture of Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan, and pays more attention to the authenticity and emotional value of cultural expression. Second, social-expressive teenagers are the core user group of emojis, mainly concentrated in the age groups of over 22 and 16~18 (both 33.18%), mainly senior high school students and new entrants to the workplace. This group highly relies on emojis for emotional expression in daily life, with a significantly higher proportion of females than males (56.95%), and pays more attention to the cuteness, emotional expressiveness and social practicality of emojis. Finally, trend-interested users have a low overall cognition of Miao culture: 61.88% of them only "have heard of it but do not understand it", and 49.78% have "never heard of" the Miao New Year, but they have a high interest in the style and design of the IP image itself. This group is mostly attracted by the visual style and character settings, and is an important potential user for the project to achieve cross-circle cultural dissemination.

## 3.3. Usage scenario analysis

From the perspective of usage scenarios, the questionnaire results show that emotional expression in daily chats is the core usage scenario of emojis. 83.86% of teenagers use emojis frequently in chats, 79.82% believe that emojis can express emotions more clearly, and 58.74% think they are interesting, indicating that emojis mainly undertake the functions of emotional transmission and relationship regulation in teenagers' social interactions. Therefore, in the design of Miao New Year culture IP emojis, priority should be given to meeting

teenagers' high-frequency emotional needs, such as "happy celebration", "looking forward to gatherings" and "warm reunion", and at the same time combine with distinctive Miao actions and symbols to make emotional expression have both cultural attributes. In addition, 44.39% of teenagers prefer dynamic emojis, indicating that dynamic forms have more advantages in visual appeal and emotional expressiveness.

In the festival communication scenario, the Miao New Year, as an important Miao festival, has obvious blessing and ritual attributes. In the survey, 66.82% of users hope that emojis can integrate Miao traditional costume elements, and 51.57% expect the presentation of festival celebration scenes, indicating that festival blessings are an important application scenario of Miao New Year culture IP emojis. The design can focus on classic customs such as pounding glutinous rice cakes, dancing the lusheng dance and visiting villages to pay New Year calls, and combine with blessing words such as "Happy Miao New Year" and "Smooth New Year". At the same time, create a festive atmosphere according to users preferred "cute and bright style" (73.54%) as well as "batik-style natural colors" and "bright festival colors".

In the social platform communication scenario, 47.09% of users prefer to disseminate Miao New Year culture through daily chat emojis, and 42.6% through short video platforms (such as TikTok and Xiao Hong Shu), indicating that emojis are both a private social tool and a public communication medium. For this scenario, a series of content can be designed, such as emojis of "Miaonian Customs Popular Science" with brief cultural notes attached, facilitating users to transmit cultural information while sharing; at the same time, combined with the visual preferences of social platforms, adopt the "fresh ins style" favored by 48.43% of users to enhance the communication appeal of emojis on public platforms.

### 3.4. Design scheme

In the character image design stage, with the core goal of "visual translation of Miao New Year cultural symbols", this project conducted multiple rounds of form exploration for the original IP image "Miao Nuo Zai". Taking the anthropomorphic form of "glutinous rice ball" as the prototype, the overall image builds an approachable and cute visual style through a round and plump figure and simplified proportions, making the character have strong emotional appeal and recognition at the first visual level.

In terms of appearance design, Miao Nuo Zai adopts a cartoon proportion of a big head and a small body, with a nearly circular body outline, emphasizing the images of "glutinous", "soft" and "reunion", echoing the dietary culture such as glutinous rice cakes and sweet rice wine in the Miao New Year festival. The facial design features round eyes and warm-colored pupils, with blush and exaggerated expressions to enhance the character's emotional expressiveness; the addition of small tiger teeth strengthens the character's naughty and lively traits, making the overall image more in line with the aesthetic style of contemporary trendy toy IPs.

In terms of costume and cultural symbol translation, the character wears a batik pleated skirt adapted from traditional Miao costumes, with the skirt pattern designed in a simplified way with reference to Miao patterns, presenting the imagery of traditional totems with geometric graphics; at the same time, it is decorated with silver headdresses, silver bells and other decorative elements, integrating the Miao silver ornament culture into the overall shape. The "butterfly" element is introduced into the headdress, derived from the mythological imagery of "Butterfly Mother" in Miao ancient songs, symbolizing the origin of life and ethnic memory, making the character not only have the attribute of visual cuteness but also bear certain cultural symbolic meanings.

In terms of style positioning, the character image strikes a balance between authentic ethnic costumes and cartoon IP style. On the one hand, it retains core cultural symbols such as batik patterns and silver ornament structures to ensure the clear identifiability of cultural sources; on the other hand, it lowers the threshold of cultural understanding through proportion simplification, color softening and expression exaggeration, making

the character more easily accepted by teenagers. In this way, Miao Nuo Zai not only maintains the basic identifiability of Miao culture but also conforms to the approachability and emotional expression characteristics required for emoji dissemination, laying a unified visual foundation for the subsequent design of a series of emojis.

### 3.5. Promotion plan

With teenagers as the core communication target, this project aims to improve the visibility and recognition of ethnic minority traditional cultures such as Miao culture among teenagers through the actual usage scenarios of IP emojis, and guide them to gradually establish emotional identification and understanding of ethnic minority cultures in a relaxed and daily media environment. Compared with the traditional culture dissemination methods mainly based on knowledge transmission, this project emphasizes achieving "burden-free" cultural access through emotional expression and social interaction, making cultural content naturally integrate into teenagers' daily communication behaviors.

In terms of communication channel selection, the project takes the platforms frequently used by teenagers as the main positions. In the initial stage, the emoji content will be transformed into short video forms and released on content platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Tik Tok and Bilibili, accompanied by a brief introduction to Miao and Miao New Year cultural information to enhance the cultural orientation of the communication content; in the subsequent stage, it will return to the actual usage scenarios of emojis, conduct dissemination on social software such as WeChat and QQ, and plan to launch the series of emojis on the WeChat Emoji Store to improve the sustainability and actual usage frequency of dissemination.

In terms of communication content and form, the project focuses on representative folk customs and cultural symbols of the Miao ethnic group, including antiphonal singing, lusheng dance, sun god silver ornaments, butterfly embroidery and other elements, and transforms them into emoji content close to teenagers' lives through contextualization. For example, combining Miao-patterned characters with contemporary online contexts such as "receiving good luck" and "praying for wealth", making traditional cultural symbols enter the daily social expression system and enhancing users' sense of substitution and usage motivation; at the same time, emojis are not only used as static or dynamic images in chats but also adapted into short video illustrations and character motion effect displays, forming a multi-form communication path of "usable - viewable - shareable", thus improving the communication efficiency and diffusion potential of Miao New Year culture in the digital media environment.

### 3.6. User testing

This user test adopted a semi-structured interview method, inviting 9 potential users (mainly teenagers) to provide experience feedback on the original IP image "Miao Nuo Zai" and the emoji sketches. The interview focused on three aspects: cultural identification and design acceptance of the IP image, practicality of the emojis in daily communication, and subjective preference and cultural communication potential of the overall design, so as to evaluate the performance of the design outcomes in terms of appeal, usage value and communication effect.

#### 3.6.1. IP image feedback analysis

Most users believe that the IP design has a strong recognizability of Miao cultural characteristics in terms of appearance. Most users are willing to learn more about the relevant cultural content because of the cute appearance of the character, indicating that the IP image has a significant advantage in attracting users' attention. Most respondents hold a positive attitude towards the character image, generally evaluating it as "round and chubby" and "cute and vivid", and believing that the blush, expressions and overall proportions

conform to the current mainstream cartoon IP aesthetics. In terms of the character biography, users generally think the story is easy to understand and interesting, and can initially understand the relevant elements of Miao New Year culture such as glutinous rice cakes, antiphonal songs and festival atmosphere through the character's personality and life plots, enhancing the cultural memory points.

### *3.6.2. Emoji practicality feedback analysis*

Most users believe that life-oriented expressions such as "making a dazzling entrance", "receiving good luck" and "taking a big bite" are used frequently in daily chats and have strong practicality; while emojis with strong cultural context such as "starting the Miao New Year dancing mode" are considered to have limited usage scenarios and can only be used in specific situations.

### *3.6.3. Analysis of design preference and communication potential*

In terms of overall subjective preference, most users highly recognize the emoji design, believing that the character image is distinct, the details are rich, the style is unified, and they have the willingness to use it continuously. At the same time, many users mentioned that the "character image is novel" and "the combination with ethnic culture is very distinctive", believing that this form is easier to accept than traditional culture introductions. In terms of communication potential, users generally believe that the emojis have the possibility of entering the daily social context and can serve as a "cultural entrance" to arouse interest in relevant content of the Miao New Year. Although further in-depth understanding of the culture is still affected by personal interest, the cultural symbols and key words in the emojis have indeed aroused users' curiosity to a certain extent, providing a realistic foundation for the lightweight dissemination of Miao New Year culture.

### *3.6.4. Outcome analysis*

Based on the comprehensive user test results, the original IP image "Miao Nuo Zai" and the series of emojis in this project have received relatively consistent positive feedback on the overall design goals. Most respondents were able to generate clear emotional identification and aesthetic acceptance upon their first contact with the character image and emojis, believing that the character image has a strong affinity and a unified style, and has the basic conditions to enter the daily social context.

At the cultural dissemination level, although some users have a limited understanding of Miao New Year culture itself, through the emotional expression of the IP image and emojis, users can generally perceive its elements related to Miao culture and form a preliminary cognition of glutinous rice cakes, lusheng, festival atmosphere and other content. Many users clearly stated that this design form is more likely to arouse interest than traditional text or graphic introductions, and can serve as an "entrance" rather than a burden for cultural understanding. In terms of usage, users generally recognize the adaptability of the emojis in daily chats, especially the emoji content centered on emotional expression has high practicality and willingness to reuse. This indicates that the project's design strategy of "cute IP image + life-oriented emotional expression + lightweight cultural embedding" is effective, which not only meets the social expression needs of teenagers but also realizes the natural integration of Miao New Year culture.

Overall, the results of this user test verify the rationality and feasibility of the design idea of this project, proving that using original IP emojis as a medium to disseminate Miao New Year culture has positive effects in terms of emotional appeal, user acceptance and cultural access.

## **4. Discussion and conclusion**

This study takes original IP emojis as the communication medium and explores the question of "how to make traditional ethnic minority cultures more easily accepted by young people". By combining traditional cultural elements with emojis, a form frequently used by young people in daily life, this project attempts to find a

cultural communication method closer to teenagers' lives. Compared with the previous communication forms mainly based on classrooms, exhibitions or text introductions, emojis have the characteristics of low usage threshold, fast communication speed and strong sense of participation, and are easier to enter young people's daily communication scenarios.

In the research process, through preliminary literature analysis and questionnaire surveys, it can be found that young people currently have a low overall understanding of traditional ethnic minority cultures, but a high acceptance of emojis, dynamic images and IP images. This result verifies the actual phenomenon that "cultural content is difficult for young people to take the initiative to contact" in the market, and also shows that lightweight and visual processing of cultural content has certain practical demand and application space.

In specific practice, by developing original IP emojis, this project integrates typical elements of ethnic minority cultures into character images and emoji movements, making cultural content no longer appear in the form of "knowledge explanation" but enter users' chat scenarios in a more natural and relaxed way. In the user test, most participants stated that this type of emojis is easier to accept than traditional culture introduction forms and they are more willing to use them in daily communication, which indicates that IP emojis have certain feasibility and communication potential in cultural dissemination.

Of course, this study still has certain limitations. For example, the current number of emojis is small, the usage scenarios are not rich enough, and the sample size is limited. Future research can be further improved in expanding the types of emoji content, increasing interaction forms and conducting user tests on a larger scale. In general, this project verifies the feasibility of using original IP emojis as a cultural communication medium, has certain practical value, and also provides new ideas for cultural communication methods in the future digital context.

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