

An Analysis of GO & STOP Signals in Chiikawa Consumption: A Behavioral Economics and Marketing Perspective

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Abstract. This paper employs an integrated analytical framework combining behavioral economics and marketing models to dissect the consumption drivers and barriers of the Chiikawa character intellectual property (IP). By synthesizing the GO/STOP signal framework, SWOT analysis, and the 4Ps marketing mix, this study moves beyond descriptive analysis to uncover the dynamic interactions between consumer psychology and marketing strategy. The findings indicate that Chiikawa's success is largely driven by potent GO signals—such as the "kawaii" aesthetic, emotional utility, and scarcity—amplified through strategic social media promotion. However, significant STOP signals—stemming from premium pricing, limited product utility, and complex distribution channels—hinder its market potential. Based on this diagnostic analysis, the paper proposes a series of targeted, evidence-based strategies. These include product diversification into high-utility categories, the implementation of a tiered pricing and membership system, and strategic global channel expansion integrated with anti-counterfeit technology. This study concludes that for emotional consumption IPs like Chiikawa, sustainable growth hinges on the systematic amplification of GO signals and mitigation of STOP signals through a coherent, model-informed marketing system. The framework presented offers a replicable paradigm for the economic analysis and management of character-based IPs.

Keywords: Chiikawa, GO/STOP Signals, 4Ps, SWOT, IP Management.

1. Introduction

The global consumer market is witnessing a paradigm shift towards "emotional consumption," where purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by affective and psychological factors rather than mere product functionality. Within this landscape, character-based intellectual properties (IPs) have emerged as powerful economic entities, capitalizing on their ability to offer emotional value, community belonging, and identity expression [1]. Rooted in the Japanese *kawaii* (cute) culture, which has evolved into a significant global economic force, IPs like Sanrio's Hello Kitty and Rilakkuma have demonstrated remarkable longevity and profitability.

A recent and potent addition to this field is Chiikawa, a manga and anime series created by Japanese illustrator Nagano. Featuring a cast of minimalist, endearing, anthropomorphic creatures navigating relatable daily vignettes, Chiikawa has rapidly amassed a substantial following, primarily through social media virality. Its transition from digital content to a merchandising powerhouse exemplifies the modern IP development trajectory. However, despite its success, Chiikawa faces intrinsic challenges common to emotional IPs, including market saturation, price sensitivity, and the complexities of global expansion.

This paper aims to conduct a systematic economic and behavioral audit of the Chiikawa phenomenon. The primary research objective is to deconstruct the facilitators (GO signals) and inhibitors (STOP signals) in consumer decision-making processes. To achieve this, this study integrates the behavioral economics lens of the GO/STOP framework with established marketing models: SWOT analysis and the 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) marketing mix. This multi-model approach allows for a holistic diagnosis that links micro-level consumer psychology to macro-level marketing strategy.

The central thesis of this paper is that Chiikawa's market performance is not a result of isolated factors but of a complex, dynamic system where marketing mix decisions directly amplify or mitigate

behavioral economic signals. The ultimate goal is to provide a set of data-driven, theoretically grounded interventions designed to sustain Chiikawa's growth and deepen its market penetration, thereby offering a replicable analytical framework for economists and marketers managing similar experiential products.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Economics of Emotional Consumption and Character IPs

The emotional consumption is characterized by purchases driven by the desire for experiential happiness, emotional satisfaction, and social identity [1]. Character IPs are quintessential products of this trend, functioning as vessels of affective value. The economic value of an IP like Chiikawa is derived not from the physical materials of its merchandise, but from the intellectual and emotional capital it embodies. This capital is built through narrative, aesthetic, and community, creating a "brand ecosystem" that encourages repeated and diversified consumption.

2.2. Behavioral Economics: The GO/STOP Signal Framework

Behavioral economics challenges the classical assumption of the perfectly rational *Homo economicus*. It introduces psychological realism into economic models, accounting for cognitive biases and heuristics. The GO/STOP signal framework is a pertinent model for analyzing consumption decisions. GO signals are internal or external cues that facilitate a purchase decision by triggering positive emotions, social desires, or cognitive shortcuts (e.g., scarcity, social proof). Conversely, STOP signals are cues that inhibit purchase by triggering negative emotions, financial concerns, or practical obstacles (e.g., high cost, complexity). These signals can be either reported (consciously articulated by consumers) or unconscious (influencing behavior without explicit awareness).

2.3. Integrated Marketing Models: SWOT and the 4Ps

To translate behavioral insights into actionable strategy, this study integrates the GO/STOP framework with two foundational marketing models. The SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning tool used to identify internal Strengths and Weaknesses, and external Opportunities and Threats, providing a static snapshot of the brand's strategic position. The 4Ps Marketing Mix is a foundational framework comprising Product, Price, Place, and Promotion, representing the set of tactical levers under the marketer's control.

The innovation of this paper lies in the synthesis of these three models. This study posits that the 4Ps are the mechanisms through which a company's Strengths and Weaknesses (from SWOT) interact with external Opportunities and Threats to either amplify GO signals or mitigate STOP signals (from the behavioral framework). This integrated approach allows for a more nuanced and dynamic analysis than any single model could provide.

3. Brand and Product Overview

Chiikawa, a portmanteau meaning "small and cute," centers on the daily lives of miniature creatures, including a rabbit (Usagi), a bird (Hachiware), and a bear (Kumasan). Its core value proposition is delivering comfort and relaxation through minimalist, wholesome storytelling and art style—a genre often termed "healing" in East Asian markets.

The IP's growth strategy is a textbook case of digital-first community building. It initially gained traction through easily shareable content on Twitter and Instagram, such as four-panel comics and emoji packs. This organic, user-driven propagation created a strong foundation of dedicated fans before significant merchandising began. The subsequent transition to physical goods was rapid and expansive.

Chiikawa's product portfolio is vast. It spans traditional collectibles like plush toys, acrylic stands, and figures. It also includes practical goods such as stationery, apparel, kitchenware, and accessories. The brand's marketing engine is fueled by limited-edition releases, seasonal collaborations (e.g., with Lawson or 7-Eleven), and pop-up events, which are tactics designed to create artificial scarcity and drive purchase urgency.

Despite its success, Chiikawa's economic model faces several challenges. The high price point of official merchandise creates a barrier to entry for many potential consumers. The limited practicality of some items can lead to post-purchase cognitive dissonance among buyers. Furthermore, a complex global distribution network, coupled with rampant piracy, often frustrates international consumers and damages brand integrity.

4. Integrated Model Analysis: GO/STOP, SWOT, and the 4Ps

This section presents the core analysis, dynamically linking consumer behavior (GO/STOP), strategic position (SWOT), and marketing actions (4Ps).

4.1. GO & STOP Signal Analysis

4.1.1. Reported GO signals

The primary reported GO signal is the intrinsic cuteness (Kawaii) of the Chiikawa characters. Nittono et al. [2] demonstrated that viewing cute images promotes careful behavior and narrows attentional focus, an effect linked to the activation of the brain's reward system. This neuro-economic response directly translates to increased purchase intention, making cuteness a primary economic driver. Another significant GO signal is product utility, where the dual function of products extends the IP's emotional value into daily rituals, enhancing its utility and justifying ownership [3]. Consumers also report that displaying and collecting Chiikawa merchandise serves as a social signal, granting recognition within the fan community and enabling identity construction [1]. Finally, limited editions leverage the "fear of missing out" (FOMO), a cognitive bias where individuals place disproportionately high value on scarce opportunities, which accelerates decision-making and can justify premium pricing [4].

4.1.2. Unconscious GO signals

Unconsciously, Chiikawa's relatable, low-stakes daily scenarios provide a form of escapism and self-projection for adults in high-stress societies, offering what some term a "digital analgesic" [5, 6]. Purchasing trending goods also satisfies a deep-seated, often unconscious, need for social belonging and conformity [7]. Additionally, the act of mentally simulating the joy of ownership—the "dream of self" with the product—can be a more powerful motivator than the actual consumption experience [5].

4.1.3. Reported STOP signals

Consumers explicitly cite high price points as a major barrier. The premium pricing strategy directly strains the disposable income of the core youth and young adult demographic, creating a significant economic barrier. Another reported issue is the limited practical functionality of many items, which see reduced post-purchase usage, leading to cognitive dissonance [3]. International fans face hurdles in accessing genuine goods, often resorting to proxy shopping services with high logistics costs and complex procedures. Physical storage constraints in urban living spaces also limit the capacity for collecting large plush toys or extensive merchandise lines.

4.1.4. Unconscious STOP signals

Unconsciously, adult consumers, particularly in Western contexts, may experience a subconscious shame or guilt for indulging in aesthetics culturally coded as childish, a phenomenon known as "Cute Shame" (Kawaii Hazukashisa), which conflicts with internalized social norms of maturity [8, 9]. The purchase of non-essential, emotional goods can also subconsciously clash with internal savings goals

or financial responsibility norms, triggering anxiety and reducing psychological security, thereby causing decision paralysis.

4.2. SWOT Analysis

Chiikawa possesses several key strengths, including powerful brand recognition and emotional connection, high-quality and aesthetically consistent design, masterful use of social media for organic growth, and a successful limited-edition and collaboration strategy. However, the brand also exhibits notable weaknesses, such as a premium pricing strategy that limits market reach, an over-reliance on fickle emotional drivers, a complex global supply chain, and a lack of practicality in some product lines.

Regarding external factors, Chiikawa faces significant opportunities, such as growing global demand for Japanese pop culture, untapped markets in North America and Europe, potential for digital product expansion and experiential services, and scope for diverse global brand collaborations. Concurrently, the brand must contend with threats including intense competition from established and emerging IPs, consumer fatigue from merchandise saturation, rampant piracy and counterfeits, and potential economic downturns reducing discretionary spending.

4.3. 4P Marketing Mix Analysis

The core product offered by Chiikawa is emotional fulfillment. The product life cycle is extended through continuous narrative development, and a key intervention point involves increasing the proportion of high-utility items. The brand employs a premium skimming pricing strategy, which aligns with its brand positioning but directly reinforces cost-related STOP signals, making a tiered pricing strategy a recommended intervention. Distribution channels represent a key weakness for Chiikawa, as its limited international physical and online presence creates access barriers, fueling the "complex channels" STOP signal, thus making strategic e-commerce and retail partnerships crucial. Conversely, promotion is a key strength, as the effective use of social media, user-generated content, and influencer collaborations directly activates GO signals related to trends and social identity.

4.4. Dynamic Model Interaction: A Chiikawa-Specific Synthesis

The true analytical power is revealed in the interaction of these models, which creates a dynamic system governing Chiikawa's market performance.

4.4.1. Amplification loops: strengths and GO Signals via promotion

A powerful virtuous cycle exists between the Strength (S) of "powerful emotional connection" and the Unconscious GO signal of "stress relief." This loop is activated by Promotion (4P) on social media. For example, official four-panel comics depicting characters facing mundane adult struggles encourage users to share and comment with personal anecdotes. This UGC-rich environment strengthens the brand community (S), which in turn amplifies the emotional GO signal, leading to further organic promotion and reinforcing the brand's strength [10]. This is a positive feedback loop central to Chiikawa's organic growth.

4.4.2. Mitigation strategies: weaknesses, STOP signals, and 4P adjustments

The models interact to prescribe precise strategic corrections. The Weakness (W) of "premium pricing" is a direct catalyst for the Reported STOP signal of "high price." This interaction explicitly dictates an intervention in Price (4P). A tiered strategy—offering small keychains alongside large plush toys—directly targets this STOP signal for budget-conscious segments. Similarly, the Weakness (W) of "complex global distribution" creates the STOP signal of "complex purchase channels." The solution, identified through the Place (4P) lens, is expanding official storefronts on global platforms, simplifying logistics and reducing consumer effort.

4.4.3. Strategic offensives: leveraging opportunities to amplify GO signals

Opportunities (O) provide pathways to proactively strengthen the marketing mix. The Opportunity of "growing global demand" allows marketers to leverage the Reported GO signal of "scarcity" through limited-edition global launches [11]. This Product and Promotion strategy capitalizes on the global trend while intensely activating the GO signal for international audiences. Furthermore, the Opportunity to "expand into digital products" strategically addresses the STOP signal of "physical storage constraints." Launching official NFTs or digital wallpaper collections (a new Product category) allows for collection and self-expression without physical clutter, directly mitigating this barrier.

4.4.4. Defensive actions: using strengths to counter threats and protect GO signals

The model also informs defensive strategy. The Threat (T) of "widespread piracy" undermines the Reported GO signal of "authentic community recognition" and the Strength (S) of "high-quality design." A counterfeit plush lacks the precise embroidery that signifies authentic membership. To defend, Chiikawa leverages its design Strength (S) through Product and Place (4P) elements: incorporating hard-to-replicate holographic seals and partnering exclusively with authorized retailers. Promotional "how to spot a fake" guides educate consumers, protecting the GO signals tied to authenticity and social value.

5. Proposed Data-Driven Interventions

Based on the integrated diagnostic analysis above, the following targeted interventions are proposed.

5.1. Product Intervention: A "Chiikawa Life" High-Utility Product Line

The rationale for this intervention is to directly attack the STOP signals of "limited practicality" and "high price" by increasing perceived value and utility. Implementation would involve developing a sub-brand, "Chiikawa Life," focused on high-quality, functional daily items with subtle design integration. This line would include categories such as Office & Study essentials like ergonomic mice and desk organizers, Apparel such as high-comfort loungewear with small embroidered characters, and Kitchen & Dining items like insulated lunch boxes and reusable straws. The expected impact is an increase in purchase justification, the fostering of daily brand integration, and the attraction of a more pragmatic consumer segment.

5.2. Price & Promotion Intervention: a "Chiikawa Coin" and Tiered Membership System

This intervention aims to mitigate the Unconscious STOP signal of "financial imprudence" through mental accounting and to foster loyalty. Its implementation would involve two key components. First, the creation of "Chiikawa Coin," an official e-commerce currency allowing users to pre-purchase coins at a discount, thereby framing expenditure as "saving." Second, the introduction of a tiered membership system tied to annual cumulative spending, offering benefits such as early access to pre-orders, member-exclusive small gifts, and free shipping thresholds. The expected impact is that the mental accounting effect would segregate "fun money," reducing purchase guilt, while the tiered system would increase customer lifetime value and encourage higher average order values.

5.3. Place & Product Intervention: Global Channel Expansion with Integrated Anti-Counterfeit Technology

The rationale here is to directly attack the STOP signals of "complex purchase channels" and "authenticity concerns." Implementation would involve a two-pronged approach. First, channel expansion through establishing official storefronts on major global platforms like Amazon Japan, AliExpress Official Store, and the Crunchyroll Store. Second, the integration of anti-counterfeit technology, whereby every physical product includes a unique, scratch-off QR code on its tag that

directs to a dynamic verification page on the official website, confirming authenticity and potentially registering the product. The expected impact is the lowering of access barriers for global fans, building of trust, and direct combat against the economic threat of piracy by devaluing counterfeits.

5.4. Promotion & Product Intervention: Themed "Seasons" for Cross-Platform Storytelling

This intervention is designed to deepen the IP worldview to combat the Threat of competition and amplify the GO signals of social value and collection. Implementation would involve moving beyond one-off collaborations to launch quarterly thematic "seasons." Each season would include a short animated web series on YouTube, a coordinated limited-edition product line, and a dedicated hashtag for promotion to encourage fan art and discussion. The expected impact is the creation of a constant content stream, the transformation of collectibles into parts of an evolving narrative, and the enhancement of user immersion, leading to stronger brand loyalty.

6. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the market dynamics of an emotional consumption IP like Chiikawa can be effectively decoded through the integrated application of behavioral economics and marketing models. The analysis reveals that Chiikawa's success is propelled by a self-reinforcing system where its marketing strengths, particularly in social media promotion, effectively amplify key GO signals related to cuteness, emotional utility, and social belonging. Conversely, its commercial limitations are defined by negative feedback loops where weaknesses in pricing and distribution reinforce potent STOP signals related to cost and accessibility.

The proposed interventions—product diversification, a behavioral economics-informed pricing scheme, global channel simplification, and narrative deepening—are not isolated recommendations but are designed to work synergistically within this system. They aim to systematically enhance the positive loops and disrupt the negative ones.

For economists and marketers, the key takeaway is the critical importance of a diagnostic, model-informed approach. In the competitive landscape of emotional IPs, intuition is insufficient. Sustainable growth requires understanding the underlying behavioral economic system and deploying marketing mix levers with surgical precision to shape consumer decision-making. The integrated GO/STOP, SWOT, and 4Ps framework presented here provides a robust, replicable blueprint for achieving this, not only for Chiikawa but for the broader and increasingly important domain of experiential and emotional goods.

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