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Cultural and Creative Brand Narrative and Visual Image Construction Based on Design Aesthetics

-- Taking Shanghai Disneyland as an Example

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Abstract: In the dynamic landscape of the burgeoning global cultural and creative industry, the scientific rigor and operational efficiency of cultural and creative product development processes, alongside the distinctiveness and impact of brand cultivation, have emerged as decisive factors for the industry's prominence in the cutthroat market competition. This scholarly inquiry takes Disney, a vanguard in the cultural and creative domain, as the research subject, conducting an in - depth exploration of its cultural and creative development paradigm and brand - shaping strategies underpinned by design aesthetics. Through meticulous analyses of Disney's classic cases, this paper expounds upon the pivotal role of design aesthetics in aspects such as the generation of creative concepts for cultural and creative products, design manifestation, and brand image construction. It further unveils the mechanisms through which Disney elevates product quality and fosters a robust brand by optimizing its development processes, thereby offering valuable insights and inspiration for the advancement of the global cultural and creative industry.

Keywords: Design Aesthetics; Cultural and Creative Development Process; Brand Design; Disney.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

In the current epoch characterized by profound adjustments in the global economic structure and increasingly intense competition in cultural soft power, the cultural and creative industry, with its high - value - added nature, strong integrative capacity, and vast developmental potential, has become a crucial driver for economic growth and cultural dissemination across nations. From a macro - economic perspective, the value - added of China's cultural and related industries witnessed a remarkable surge, escalating from 1,105.2 billion yuan in 2010 to 3,873.7 billion yuan in 2018, registering an annual compound growth rate of 16.97%. Concurrently, its proportion in GDP steadily increased from 2.75% to 4.21%. In 2023, the scale of Shanghai's cultural and creative industry reached an impressive 2.34 trillion yuan, with a growth rate of 7%, further solidifying its status as a pillar industry. Evidently, the cultural and creative industry is evolving into a new engine for economic development and a key impetus for industrial structure optimization and upgrading[1].

At the policy echelon, substantial support has been extended to the development of the cultural and creative industry. Governments worldwide have successively rolled out a series of incentive policies, actively fostering a conducive industrial environment through multifaceted means, including financial subsidies, tax incentives, and the establishment of industrial parks. For instance, in alignment with the spirit of documents such as Several Opinions on Accelerating the Innovative Development of the Cultural and Creative Industry in this City, Shanghai allocated nearly 330 million yuan in municipal cultural and creative funds in 2023, supporting 983 projects. These efforts were further tilted towards small, medium, and micro cultural and creative enterprises, as well as emerging cultural and creative formats, aiming to cultivate a diversified cultural and creative industry ecosystem.

On the consumer front, with the enhancement of living standards, the public's consumption structure has undergone a gradual transformation from basic material consumption to spiritual and cultural consumption. Take the Taobao Tmall platform as an illustration: the scale of museum cultural and creative products in 2019 witnessed a three - fold increase compared to 2017, underscoring consumers' intense pursuit of the cultural connotations and aesthetic values embodied in cultural and creative products. This shift in consumption trends not only presents expansive market opportunities for the cultural and creative industry but also raises the bar for the innovation, cultural richness, and aesthetic appeal of cultural and creative products.

Against this backdrop, Disney, as a global pacesetter in the cultural and creative industry, has constructed a vast and highly influential cultural and creative industry ecosystem. Grounded in the concept of design aesthetics, it seamlessly integrates cultural elements with creative design throughout the cultural and creative development process, meticulously overseeing every phase, from creative conceptualization, design planning, product fabrication to market feedback and optimization, thereby shaping a distinctive and deeply - rooted brand image. A thorough dissection of Disney's successful model and an exploration of the core role of design aesthetics in optimizing its cultural and creative development process and brand shaping can not only furnish valuable practical experience and referential insights for domestic cultural and creative enterprises, enabling them to enhance their core competitiveness in the fierce market competition and achieve sustainable development but also hold significant theoretical value and practical implications for promoting the overall innovative development of China's cultural and creative industry and bolstering its cultural soft power.

1.2. Research Methods and Innovation Points

This study employs a comprehensive array of research methods to ensure the scientific validity and

comprehensiveness of the research. Through the literature review approach, it extensively gathers domestic and international literature materials pertaining to design aesthetics, cultural and creative development processes, brand shaping, and Disney - related research. By systematically sifting through relevant theories and research findings, it establishes a solid theoretical foundation for the study. The case - study method is adopted to conduct in - depth analyses of Disney's classic cases in cultural and creative product development, brand image construction, etc., summarizing its successful experiences and practical models. Additionally, the interview method is utilized to engage in in - depth dialogues with Disney - affiliated personnel, cultural and creative industry experts, and consumers, thereby acquiring first - hand information and gaining multifaceted perspectives on Disney's operational model and brand influence[2].

In comparison with previous studies, the innovations of this research are primarily manifested in the following aspects. Firstly, from the novel perspective of design aesthetics, it delves deep into the internal correlations and interaction mechanisms between the cultural and creative development process and brand shaping, unearthing the core role of design aesthetics in the development of the cultural and creative industry. Secondly, the research on Disney transcends the mere focus on its products and brands, delving further into the underlying strategies for development process optimization and brand - shaping trajectories, providing more actionable practical guidance for cultural and creative enterprises. Thirdly, in conjunction with the current digital and globalized era backdrop, it deliberates on the innovative evolution and adaptive adjustments of the Disney model in the new environment, offering forward - looking perspectives on the future development trends of the cultural and creative industry.

2. Overview of Design Aesthetics and Cultural and Creative Industry Development

2.1. Core Theories and Principles of Design Aesthetics

As an emerging interdisciplinary discipline, design aesthetics integrates multidisciplinary knowledge encompassing aesthetics, design science, and psychology. Its objective is to investigate the aesthetic phenomena and laws in design and explore ways to satisfy people's aesthetic needs through design, thereby enhancing the aesthetic value of products and environments. The core theories of design aesthetics include the principle of formal beauty, the theory of functional beauty, and the theory of emotional beauty.

The principle of formal beauty emphasizes the creation of aesthetically pleasing visual forms through the rational combination and coordination of design elements such as points, lines, planes, colors, and materials. Concepts such as symmetry and equilibrium, proportion and scale, rhythm and cadence are central to this principle. The theory of functional beauty posits that the beauty of a product should be intricately intertwined with its functionality; true beauty can only be actualized on the basis of fulfilling functional requirements. The theory of emotional beauty, on the other hand, focuses on how design can evoke emotional resonance among consumers, satisfying their emotional needs by endowing products with unique emotional connotations. In the design of cultural and creative products, the principles of design aesthetics mainly encompass the principles of innovation, cultural pertinence, practicality, and aesthetic quality.

2.2. Development Status and Trends of the Cultural and Creative Industry

In recent years, the global cultural and creative industry has exhibited a vigorous development trend. Developed countries, exemplified by the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and South Korea, hold a leading position in the global cultural and creative industry, leveraging their robust creative capabilities, advanced technological levels, and well - established industrial systems. Industries such as Hollywood movies and Disney theme parks in the United States, the creative design industry in the United Kingdom, the animation and gaming industry in Japan, and the pop culture industry in South Korea have not only generated substantial domestic economic benefits but also exerted extensive cultural influence worldwide through global dissemination.

With the advancement of the economy and the improvement of living standards, consumers' demands for cultural and creative products have shown a trend of diversification, personalization, and quality - orientation. Consumers are no longer content with the simple consumption of cultural products but place greater emphasis on the creativity, design, cultural connotations, and consumption experiences of these products. Simultaneously, the rapid advancement of digital technology has presented both new opportunities and challenges to the cultural and creative industry. The application of digital technology has not only revolutionized the production methods, dissemination channels, and consumption patterns of cultural and creative products but also expanded the boundaries of the cultural and creative industry, giving rise to new cultural and creative forms such as digital art, virtual reality, and augmented reality. Moreover, the diversity and integration of cultures have provided abundant creative sources for the development of the cultural and creative industry, facilitating the exchange and innovation of cultural and creative products across different cultural backgrounds[3].

2.3. Role and Value of Design Aesthetics in the Cultural and Creative Industry

Design aesthetics plays an indispensable role and holds incalculable value in the cultural and creative industry. Firstly, it serves as the wellspring of creativity for cultural and creative products. Through the application of design aesthetics theories and principles, designers can draw inspiration from diverse fields, including culture, art, and life, transforming abstract cultural elements into concrete design concepts and infusing cultural and creative products with a unique essence. For example, the cultural and creative products of the Forbidden City integrate the cultural elements of the Forbidden City's architecture, cultural relics, historical stories, etc., with modern design aesthetics, giving birth to a series of highly creative and culturally - rich products, such as Forbidden City lipsticks and calendars, which have garnered immense popularity among consumers.

Meanwhile, against the backdrop of the digital and globalized era, the integration of design aesthetics and emerging technologies has opened up boundless innovative possibilities for the cultural and creative industry. For instance, the combination of virtual reality and augmented reality technologies with design aesthetics has provided

consumers with immersive cultural and creative experiences. The application of artificial intelligence technology in design has not only enhanced design efficiency but also broadened the frontiers of design creativity. The continuous innovation and development of design aesthetics propel the cultural and creative industry forward in a more advanced and dynamic direction.

3. Analysis of Disney's Cultural and Creative Development Process

While Chinese cultural and creative theme parks are experiencing rapid growth, they are concurrently confronted with a series of challenges that impede their long - term sustainable development. Chinese cultural and creative theme parks commonly face issues such as excessive IP dependence, a severe dearth of new IP creativity, and homogenized tourist experiences. Fangte, as a leading enterprise in China's cultural and creative theme park industry, epitomizes many of the problems prevalent in the sector. By capitalizing on its exceptional capabilities in intellectual property creation, acquisition, and full - lifecycle management, cross - business collaboration (the "flywheel effect"), and the creation of immersive experiences that harmoniously blend globalization and localization, Disney has constructed a robust and prosperous full - industry - chain model. The Disney model offers invaluable strategic inspiration and development pathways for China's theme cultural and creative parks, enabling them to achieve sustainable growth and enhance their international competitiveness.

3.1. Intellectual Property: Dilemma of Over - reliance on Single Blockbusters and Hurdles in New IP Incubation

Intellectual property (IP) constitutes the essence of theme parks. Fangte's remarkable commercial success is largely attributable to its flagship IP, "Boonie Bears". The "Boonie Bears" series has amassed over 350 billion online views, consistently ranking first in the Chinese animation index list. It has originally produced nine "Boonie Bears" series animated films, with a cumulative domestic box office exceeding 5.7 billion yuan, firmly establishing itself as a leading IP in Chinese family - friendly animation. Among them, the 2023 film Boonie Bears: Guardian of the Core achieved a total box office of nearly 1.5 billion yuan, securing the top position in the box office of animated films during the Chinese Lunar New Year period. The tenth "Boonie Bears" film, Boonie Bears: Reversal of Time and Space, grossed 1.983 billion yuan. This IP not only supports the theme park's amusement projects, animation content, and derivative products but also its film series has achieved remarkable box office results, effectively attracting a large number of park visitors. However, it is precisely this high degree of dependence that gives rise to a series of risks. In terms of incubating new IPs, such as the Adventure Diary of Zhao Lin series or Miracle Girl, Fangte has witnessed limited market response and commercial success. This is not a predicament unique to Fangte but a common challenge faced by China's theme cultural and creative industry - the scarcity of a recognized, highly original, and globally appealing IP portfolio. Although Fangte has recognized the issue and is actively engaged in creating and developing new IPs and expanding the new forms of "Boonie Bears" parks, the challenges remain formidable.

The ineffective incubation of new intellectual property is not merely a creative issue but also a profound reflection of the immaturity of the ecosystem for intellectual property incubation, market testing, and promotion within many Chinese cultural enterprises. Despite Fangte's establishment of a Creative Institute, a Research Institute, a Design Institute, a Metaverse Application System Research Institute, and a Digital Content Development Institute, the gap with globally renowned IPs remains substantial. Although Fangte's new IPs have received some initial feedback, their level of integration within the "creation, research, production, sales" integrated industry chain and theme parks is far less mature compared to that of Disney. This indicates that the entire process of IP incubation and commercialization is an area that Fangte, and indeed the entire Chinese cultural and creative industry, needs to focus on for improvement.

3.2. Unbalanced Focus: Weak Content Expressiveness Resulting from Excessive "Showcasing of Skills"

Fangte advocates a "culture + technology" development model, leveraging advanced technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and dome - screen movies to showcase Chinese cultural themes and stories, successfully establishing eight major brands and more than 20 theme parks, including "Fantawild Adventure", "Fantawild Dreamland", "Fantawild Oriental Heritage", "Fantawild Water Park", "Fantawild ASEAN Heritage", "Fantawild Silk Road Heritage", "Fantawild National Color Spring and Autumn", and "Fantawild Oriental Dawn". Nevertheless, this model harbors potential limitations in terms of the visitor experience. When technology is employed merely as a means to attract attention rather than serving the compelling cultural narrative, the park risks becoming superficial and vulnerable to replication by competitors with similar technological prowess. True differentiation should stem from the depth of the unique cultural narrative, with technology serving as a facilitator rather than the dominant element.

An imbalance in the "culture + technology" model may lead to "technological spectacle" overshadowing "cultural dissemination". Fangte often highlights its technological advantages in market promotion, which are indeed strengths of its parks. However, the essence of the cultural and creative theme should lie in culture itself. If the narrative is weak or superficial, regardless of the sophistication of the technology, it can only offer short - term sensory stimulation and lacks the ability to evoke lasting emotional resonance, potentially exacerbating the issue of experience homogenization. Analyses have pointed out that many Chinese theme parks tend to focus more on the accumulation of "amusement facilities" rather than the organic integration of "theme, IP, and technology". Therefore, the key lies in ensuring that technology serves the expression of culture rather than merely providing more visual spectacle. With the widespread adoption of technology, this competitive advantage based solely on technological superiority will gradually wane.

The bottleneck in content innovation does not originate from a lack of cultural stories but rather from the challenge of effectively transforming these stories into engaging, interactive, and repeatable theme park experiences while fully unleashing the potential of integrated technologies. China boasts a rich cultural heritage, and Fangte is committed to "telling Chinese stories well". However, to transcend 4D movies or track - based simulations and create unique park

experiences requires intricate narrative design tailored to the park's theme. If some park projects merely package existing amusement forms with cultural themes, they may fall into the trap of insufficient innovation. True innovation lies in creating novel forms of interaction and immersion, enabling an inseparable integration of culture and technology within the experience[4].

3.3. Shortcomings in Tourist Experience Services: Homogenization Phenomenon and Lack of Interactive Engagement

Chinese theme parks, including some of the offerings from Fangte, are frequently criticized for their homogeneous experiences. Despite having diverse themes, many parks offer similar types of entertainment facilities and performance forms. In terms of interactive participation, the domestic park experience is predominantly one - way and passive, with tourists often acting as mere "story spectators" who have little influence on the plot progression or scene changes. The application of technologies such as VR and AR often remains at the level of providing sensory stimulation, without being deeply integrated with cultural narratives. For example, a "Dunhuang Flying Apsaras VR Experience" may only present three - dimensional visual effects but fails to incorporate interactive elements, such as mural - tracing activities, that require cognitive engagement and hands - on operation. Additionally, parks generally lack a user - generated content (UGC) mechanism, rarely guiding tourists to participate in content creation, which makes it difficult to unlock the value of their fan base.

Behind this phenomenon lies the limitation of the "industrial thinking" in experience design. In order to achieve rapid replication and implementation, the industry often adopts an assembly - line approach of combining "theme concepts" with "mature technology modules", prioritizing engineering efficiency over experience innovation. In terms of team composition, technical engineers account for an excessively high proportion, while there is a shortage of interdisciplinary talents who integrate knowledge from fields such as narratology, ergonomics, etc., resulting in a lack of in - depth design and analysis of emotional experiences.



Figure 1. Fantawild Logo,Source: https://www.fantawild.com/



Figure 2. Disney Logo,Source: https://www.disneyplus.com

4. Disney's Brand Shaping Strategies Based on Design Aesthetics

Disney's brand shaping strategy rooted in design aesthetics centers on a full-industry-chain immersive experience, forming an emotion-driven brand ecosystem through the organic integration of upstream content gene construction, midstream cross-media communication, and downstream physical scene implementation.

4.1. Upstream: Immersive Gene Implantation in the IP Universe

In brand visual design, Disney enhances recognition with its sleek, rounded "Disney" logo paired with the iconic Mickey Mouse ear symbol, using high-saturation colors like red, yellow, and blue to convey a joyful and dreamy emotional tone. IP storytelling deeply integrates universal values such as family, courage, and growth: the princess series has shifted from "waiting for salvation" to "female awakening" (e.g., Elsa's narrative of self-empowerment in Frozen), while the Marvel universe explores heroes' responsibility dilemmas through "technological humanism" (e.g., Iron Man's reflections on technological ethics), echoing the spirit of the times through narrative innovation. At the animation production level, from the dynamic sketching and camera language of traditional hand-drawn animation to breakthroughs in CG technology (such as the all-computer animation of Toy Story and the algorithmic simulation of 48 million ice crystals in Frozen), Disney continuously leverages technological innovation to enhance visual immersion, creating content genes that blend artistic beauty with emotional resonance.

4.2. Midstream: Matrix Layout of Diverse Communication Channels

The Disney+ streaming platform not only aggregates film and television content but also transforms users from passive viewers into active participants in IP narratives through "parallel universe roaming" interactions (personalized recommendations, behind-the-scenes documentaries, user-generated content sharing), strengthening emotional attachment. Meanwhile, it promotes cross-media extensions of IP into games, music, books, and other fields, forming a communication network of "one IP, multiple expressions." On social media, Disney encourages fans to participate in brand narratives through UGC content such as cosplay and plot adaptations, while the official team reciprocates through interactions (e.g., reposting works, hosting offline exhibitions) to build a symbiotic "brand-user" ecosystem. This communication strategy breaks down media barriers, allowing IP content to penetrate users' daily life scenarios and form a closed loop of "content viewing—emotional resonance—active dissemination."

4.3. Downstream: Construction of Immersive Experiences in Physical Scenes

Disney theme parks adhere to the concept of "theatrical existence," transforming visitors from "viewers" to "story participants" through architectural landscapes that replicate IP worldviews (e.g., the floating mountains in the Avatar-themed area), multi-sensory interactive projects (character parades, VR games, nighttime fireworks shows), and detailed service designs (staff role-playing as "cast members," unified signature styles for Donald Duck). Consumption scenarios

are also integrated into the narrative logic—for example, "magic bracelets" that link facilities and character-themed dining—turning shopping and rest into extensions of the IP experience. This transformation of virtual narratives into perceivable, interactive physical spaces not only realizes traffic monetization but also deepens brand loyalty through the pathway of "experience—emotion—loyalty."

From the aesthetic coding of cultural genes upstream, to the emotional activation of communication networks midstream, to the experiential closure of physical scenes downstream, Disney uses design aesthetics as a link to build a complete ecosystem covering "content production—user connection—value realization." Its core lies in using stories as the soul and experiences as the carrier, allowing users to feel the emotional warmth conveyed by the brand at every stage, ultimately achieving the leap from "consumption choice" to "emotional belonging." This is the underlying logic behind Disney's century-long brand vitality.

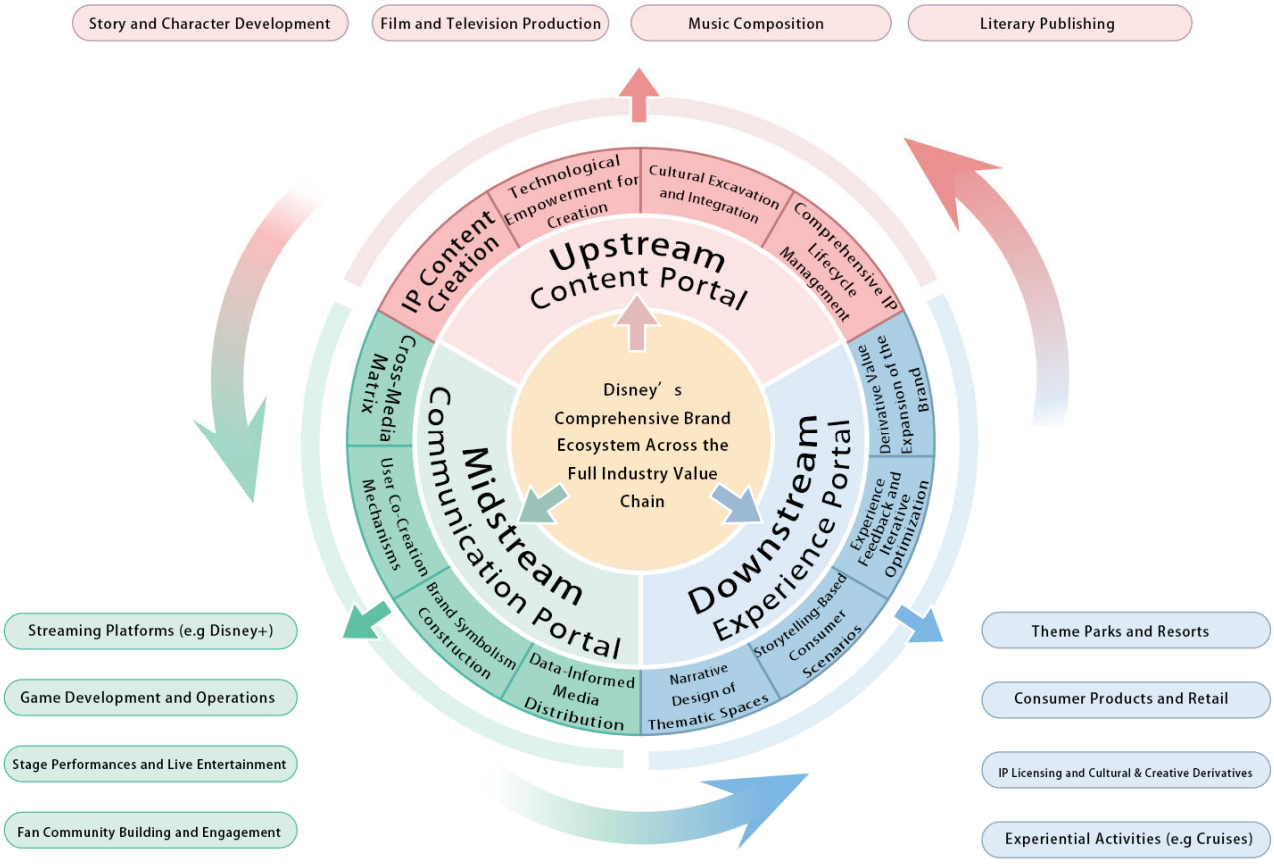


Figure 3. Disney's Comprehensive Brand Ecosystem Across the Full Industry Value Chain

5. Conclusion

Chinese cultural and creative theme parks, such as Fangte, face challenges including single IP structure, unbalanced development models, and homogeneous tourist experiences during their growth. These issues interweave and hinder the industry's overall complementarity and long-term development. Chinese cultural and creative parks need to break free from over-reliance on single IPs, building a credible and dynamic IP matrix through a combination of original creation and collaboration. Meanwhile, efforts should be made to break down business barriers, establishing a healthy ecosystem spanning content creation, park experiences, and derivative product development to maximize IP value. In terms of content, returning to cultural authenticity—centering on unique Chinese stories and integrating technology—will create truly differentiated and high-quality immersive experiences, effectively boosting in-park secondary consumption and visitor loyalty.

Disney's full-industry-chain model, with its robust IP creation, operation, and communication capabilities, synergistic effects across business segments, and extreme focus on visitor experience, offers reference value for Chinese cultural and creative brands and theme parks. This does not require simple replication but rather a deep understanding of its success logic, combined with the uniqueness of the Chinese market and rich cultural resources, to achieve creative transformation and innovative development.

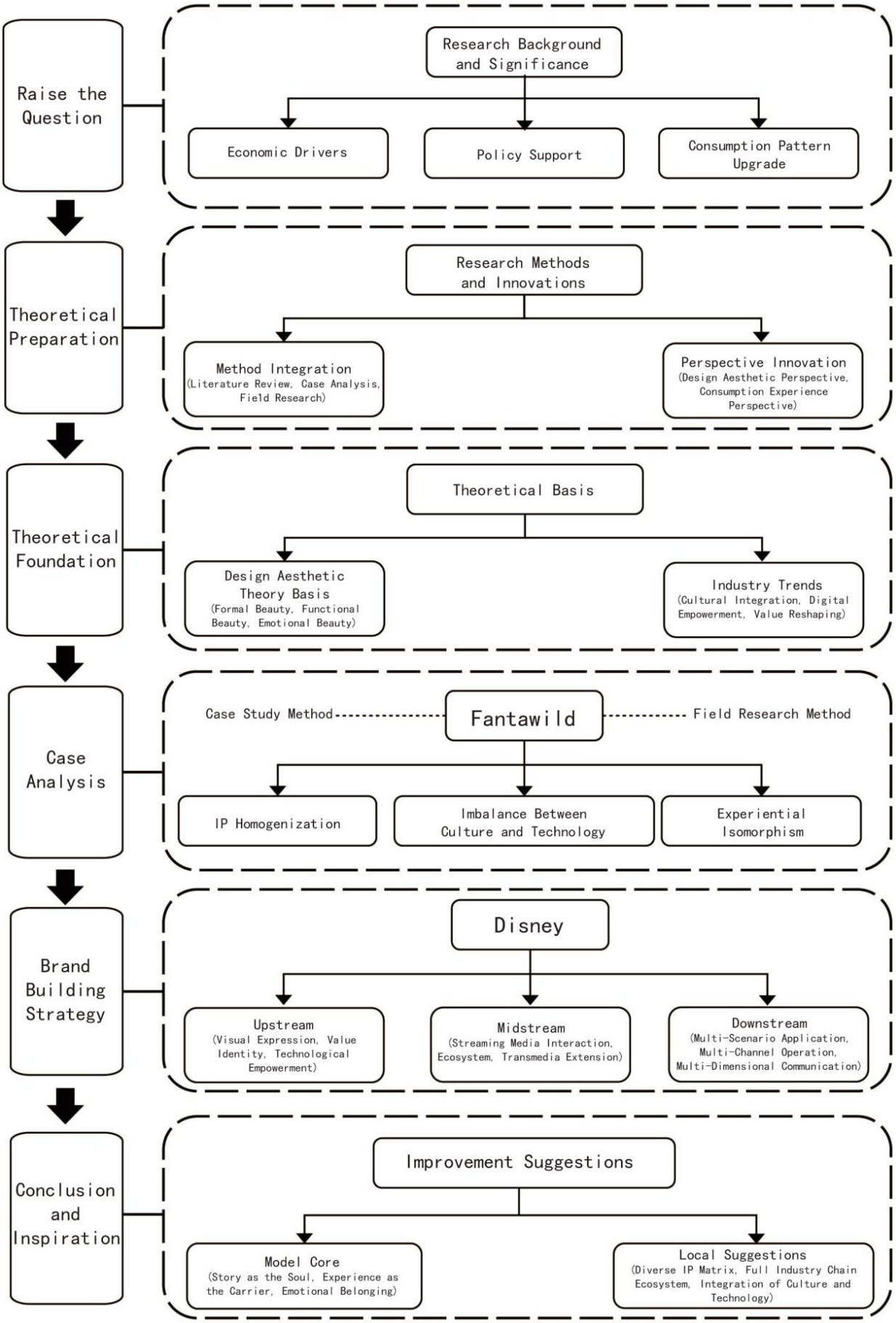


Figure 4. Analytical Framework of the Study

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