A Brief Analysis of the Marketing Strategies of Anipop

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Abstract: Anipop (Kaixin Xiaoxiaole) is a well-known mobile puzzle game in China. It has simple rules and easy-to-use operations to attract the attention of many people since being released. However, there are also marketing problems for the game, such as an unclear market position and a lack of long-term user interest. Based on modern marketing theories, this paper studies the Marketing Environment, Competition and Consumers of Anipop. It also presents some practical ways to enhance the product experience, pricing, distribution and promotion of the game. The purpose of the analysis is to provide a reference for marketing similar casual mobile games.

Keywords: Anipop; Online Games; Marketing Strategy

1. Introduction

Anipop has been released in 2014 and is now one of the popular casual games for many Chinese people. It has been well-received by the public due to a simple game model, charming graphics and sounds, and tasks that can be completed in a short amount of time. It is relatively simple for new players to learn in the beginning, and then there are still many other levels to unlock. The above features provide a good basis for exploring how to design a digital entertainment product in pursuit of marketing goals. To inform the marketing of comparable games, this paper uses the established concepts and frameworks from marketing studies to analyze Anipop [1].

Happy Elements developed Anipop in 2014 to bring joy and happiness to the lives of ordinary people. It has a simple interface, cute animal pictures, cheerful background music, and positive sound prompts after successful operations to create a pleasant experience for users [2]. The well-known expressions "unbelievable", "bonus time", "good" and "great" can all be used to express happiness. The first operation is simple, does not need a specific place or a long time for play, and is suitable for leisure time in daily life. Social functions have also attracted the interest of the public. At various times in its development, players have been given rewards for inviting friends, help with unlocking levels, opportunities to help each other obtain items, and holiday competitions. A climbing-vine display has also shown players how well their friends are doing and has exhibited the coordination of game mechanics and social functions [3].

Anipop rapidly gained the attention of many distribution platforms after being released. According to the product description posted by Happy Elements on the App Store, the iOS version was released in February 2014, and the listing uses the phrase "800 million players" to promote the game, as this figure has been provided by the publisher for promotional purposes, it should not be considered the number of current active users [4]. More recent market data are presented in the Mobile Match-Three Game Development Trends Report (2024 Q4) by Diandian Data. From January to October 2024, according to that report, Anipop was the top-earning match-three mobile game in China on the App Store. Although it is only for a particular store, area and time period, Anipop still has good competitiveness in this area according to the data [5].

Good market popularity does not mean that the game's marketing results cannot be enhanced. Players' needs change, new competitive games have appeared, and the original game features may no longer be new. Therefore, this paper will explore potential improvements in Anipop's marketing strategy from three connected aspects: the external and internal marketing environment, segmentation-targeting-positioning (STP), and the four elements of the marketing mix. Research on Game Design as Marketing provides a starting point for the above study [6].

2. Analysis of the Marketing Environment of Anipop

Online games are changing in an evolving

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market. Political and legal arrangements, economic conditions, social customs, and technological infrastructure all influence the opportunities for game operators and the desired experiences of consumers. At the same time, competitive behaviour, differences in player preferences, platform policies, suppliers, and public opinion affect the daily operation of individual products [7]. Anipop is also one. According to the 2025 China Game Industry Report, the domestic game market will have reached sales revenue of 350.789 billion yuan and about 683 million users by 2025. Revenue from mobile casual games was RMB 34.265 billion. The above industry data can provide a contemporary context for analysing the marketing environment of Anipop [8].

2.1 Macro-Marketing Environment

2.1.1 Political and legal environment

Recently, the government of China has issued several policies to promote the orderly development of its cultural industries, including the digital game sector. Therefore, the development of the gaming industry has been driven by market demand and related regulations for good governance and consumer protection. Regulation of minors' access to online games is also relevant. Game publishers and online platforms are to comply with the rules on real-name registration and anti-addiction, and promotional activities should not promote harmful patterns of play among minors. The requirements were listed in a notice released by the National Press and Publication Administration [9]. Therefore, compliance for Anipop is needed to continue the marketing effort and cannot be ignored.

2.1.2 Economic environment

Changes in income, urban life patterns and the whole-society digital economy are reducing people's access to mobile games. Urbanisation in China continues to advance; according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, by the end of 2025, the proportion of permanent residents living in urban areas will reach 67.89%, up from 67.00% in 2024 [10]. An increasing number of digital consumption scenarios are suitable for mobile leisure applications. For a light game like Anipop, a large number of potential users do not necessarily have the same spending power; therefore, when planning in-game purchases and promotions, different people will be willing to pay different amounts.

2.1.3 Technological environment

With the development of mobile communication and smartphone technology, many mobile games are now convenient to use. With the spread of 5G and convenient digital payment, many games that need frequent updates or small-amount transactions are now easier to play. According to the 57th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development, by the end of 2025, there will be about 1.125 billion Internet users and an Internet penetration rate of 80.1% [11]. The above conditions will provide a good environment for Anipop to offer reliable services, communicate with players online, and reduce the inconvenience of legal operations. They also want a high-quality, secure and responsive interface [12].

2.2 Micro-Marketing Environment

2.2.1 The company

Happy Elements was founded in 2009 by Wang Haining and is now a well-known Chinese match-three game company. Its first business of Facebook was connected to social games, and products were distributed via Facebook before being expanded into mobile games in 2012. Mobile phones and other intellectual property have gradually become important parts of the company's business. In 2014, Anipop was released and has been one of the well-known match-three games since then. According to the Diandian Data report, Anipop was ranked first in estimated App Store match-three revenue in mainland China for January-October 2024. Happy Elements has also established a foreign office. In 2010, it established a Japanese office in Tokyo and began producing products for the Tokyo market, such as the idol-themed Ensemble Stars! series. Besides games, the company has also been engaged in intellectual property activities for merchandise, animation, music, live shows and cross-brand cooperation [13]. The above experiences have provided more resources for marketing and brand building.

2.2.2 Consumers

Chinese consumers are increasingly familiar with mobile games, but their reasons for playing these games are not the same. Adult students and office workers are also using mobile phones for leisure, chatting with friends, and getting some entertainment. With the spread of access to mobile games, people's demands for these games are also changing. Some players wish to buy the optional game items; others prefer not to spend

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any money. Therefore, in terms of marketing, different people have different usage habits and perceived values, so they will respond differently to difficulty, rewards and in-app purchase opportunities. Research on mobile game retention and continuous use of branded apps provides a reference for this study [14].

2.2.3 Competitors

Anipop is a typical match-three casual game. It has relatively simple rules and flexible playing conditions compared with other kinds of entertainment, but it is also among many other options. Directly competing products are Tiantian Xiaochu, Bingo Xiaoxiaoxiao and Gardenscapes; they are all types of puzzle-based casual games. Games of other genres, such as Honor of Kings, are also competing for consumers' free time in their spare hours. Due to different gameplay, target audiences and desired experiences, the competitive relationships of these products are also different. Therefore, the marketing of Anipop needs to present the value of this form of accessible entertainment.

2.2.4 Public opinion

With the development of online games, they have become more prominent in people's lives and are now subjects of public attention. Now that people enjoy games, attention has also been paid to their cultural value and proper commercial development for young users. These problems have affected the public image of the wider game industry [8]. Anipop's Good Name is that it is relaxed fun; therefore, to continue to enjoy it, one must be cautious about how it is run.

2.2.5 Suppliers and supporting partners

The operation of a mobile game relies on a network of partners, including technology providers, application stores, service platforms, and providers of business or financial support. Improvements to this ecosystem will enable publishers to release updates and maintain user services. At the same time, good facilities have not reduced the business need. According to a 2024 industry report, game development and customer acquisition costs have risen continuously [15]. Therefore, Anipop needs to manage its relationships with channels and service providers carefully to achieve good operating conditions at a reasonable cost.

3. SWOT Analysis of Anipop

A SWOT/TOWS framework can be used to organise the internal strengths and weaknesses of Anipop along with opportunities and threats in its external environment. The framework itself will not ensure the success of the marketing program. It is relatively simple to study the connection between the market environment and strategy selection [16]. The main factors identified in this paper are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis of Anipop

Internal / external factors	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Internal factors	1. Ranked first in estimated match-three game revenue on the mainland China App Store, Jan.–Oct. 2024. 2. Strong game-design capabilities. 3. Established customer relationship management. 4. Broad digital distribution channels.	1. Some levels may be excessively difficult. 2. The absence of an obvious end point may discourage continued play.
Strategic opportunities	SO strategy: Growth	WO strategy: Consolidation and growth
1. Policy attention to the game industry. 2. Growing public acceptance of digital games. 3. Progress in network technologies, financing channels, and payment systems.	1. Expand market reach while maintaining product quality. 2. Develop new markets and improve levels or game features.	1. Use an improving policy and operating environment to strengthen the business. 2. Use available technology and financing resources to support new features and products.
Strategic threats	ST strategy: Diversification	WT strategy: Risk reduction
1. Strong industry competition and increasingly differentiated segments. 2. Economic uncertainty following the COVID-19 pandemic. 3. Pressure on consumers' discretionary spending.	1. Use existing brand strength and referral marketing capabilities to respond to competition. 2. Use available operating resources to respond to economic pressure.	1. Reduce or redesign levels associated with poor user experiences. 2. Remove or improve unpopular features.

As shown in Table 1, the strengths of Anipop are its convenient operation, well-known brand, product design and user experience, and the ability to communicate with users. At the same time, these strengths should not cause the company to ignore frustration due to high difficulty or the feeling that there is no purpose to playing the game. Research the needs of players, regularly assess the playing experience, and modify the current functions to address these deficiencies. In the future, a growth-oriented strategy can be combined with selective diversification, and new levels and functions should enhance the consumer experience rather

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than simply increasing the quantity of content.

4. STP Analysis of Anipop

SWOT analysis provides the foundation for discussing segmentation, targeting and positioning of Anipop. STP in marketing is used to identify the differences among consumers and select a target market based on unique values for that group. Anipop needs to understand the habits and demands of mobile gamers to find a suitable group of consumers and present the product in an appealing way [17].

4.1 Market Segmentation

By dividing the market, many consumers who have similar needs, demands and behaviours are organised into groups. A typical division of the type of entertainment experience for mobile games in China is as follows: casual games, puzzle games, role-playing games and fighting games, etc. Segmentation can also be performed in the casual game area, and match-three, merge-and-clear, etc., mechanics attract different types of players [17]. Anipop can also learn how often users play, how long they play in a single session, what difficulty of challenges they are interested in, and their opinions on optional purchases, etc., in addition to genre tags. Behavioural Differences are particularly relevant to a product that needs to be used in daily life.

4.2 Target Market Selection

Given the current market conditions, Anipop is mainly for adults who like simple, pleasant games. These consumers are likely to be adult learners, employees, older adults, etc., who prefer short time and simple operation. According to data in the 2024 Dianjian report, about 66.9% of the users of Anipop in the sample or measurement scope were women. Users aged 35-44 made up 23.24%, and those aged 45 and over were at 38.72% [5].

The selection of this target market is due to a demand for entertainment that is not overly competitive or violent. Although some veteran players are fond of high-action games, others are simply seeking a short-lived sense of relaxation after work, study or chores. The End of a Puzzle Stage Gives One a Sense of Achievement. This is consistent with the long-standing focus of Happy Elements on enjoyment in the play experience. Anipop is not only available to a limited number of people but also offers a casual product for the general adult population with a desire for a relaxed and enjoyable way to play [13].

4.3 Market Positioning

Positioning refers to the position of a product in consumers' minds relative to other choices. Anipop hopes to be known as an easy-to-play, pleasant and uplifting game that offers light entertainment without the need for extensive preparation. Music cues, a friendly animal character and various obstacles are available in this edition. Positive reinforcement is a spoken response of "amazing" that shows progress and is emotionally rewarding. A climbing vine and characters can be used to reduce the tension of a game and avoid making it too serious. Given the current circumstances, new products and promotions should continue to meet the demand for convenient and affordable entertainment.

5. Analysis of Anipop’s 4P Marketing Strategies

5.1 Product Strategy

According to the positioning established by STP analysis, Happy Elements needs to offer a product that meets the expectations of people who use casual games for leisure. First of all, it should be simple to learn and enjoyable to play right away. Anipop can be used to add cute pictures, such as cartoon foxes, frogs, bears and chicks, and a fun way to show level-up progress. At the top of the map is a piece of fruit on a vine, and it is high up. Moving further down the vine can give the feeling of growth and achievement, and the map can be expanded with the addition of new levels. Changes in the level design and additions of obstacles can also prevent boredom for players. Based on the above factors, the game will be lighthearted and fun.

The overall product concept can be employed to gauge the effect of this strategy. Anipop offers people a way to connect with their hobbies and provides various multimedia materials, updates on their lives, and a social space. It is relatively simple to learn, but with the continuous addition of levels, the goal may be out of reach for new players. In practice, one can improve the player experience at various times in the player's life cycle. Newcomer onboarding, an even distribution of intermediate-level courses, and activities for returning users will be monitored via completion rates, exit data, and user feedback. Periodically organise special themed

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activities to keep the children interested in playing [12].

5.2 Pricing Strategy

Anipop is a freemium model; it is free to download the game and use some functions, but some additional items can be purchased within the application. If a level is too hard or a player has run out of energy, they can choose to buy tools or extra resources in the game. The actual prices and discounts of the various editions and promotions will differ. Therefore, cases of a one-yuan offer or a 70% discount should not be regarded as the usual terms of trade. A relatively low purchase threshold may be more attractive to consumers for a first-time purchase; however, at the same time, the price should be clearly displayed and consumers need to be well-informed before buying [18].

Perceived customer value and price fairness are used to explain the effect of this method [18,19]. A player is not motivated by the listed price of an optional purchase, but rather by its convenience and the fairness of the transaction rules. Therefore, the game should distinguish between the main playing experience and paid add-ons, and present the purpose, price and validity period of each offer clearly. Do not display the purchase prompt after several failures. Offer reasonable choices for adult users with different spending habits, track conversions and repeat purchases, and monitor complaints to assess the revenue performance and player trust of Happy Elements.

5.3 Distribution Strategy

Anipop has utilised all the above channels to spread information about itself and contact potential users, such as the mobile app, online game services and official social media. Most smartphone and tablet users still use application marketplaces to find and install games for their phones and tablets. Promotion through digital platforms can further attract the attention of consumers with similar interests and gaming habits to the product at the game's position [20]. Therefore, an effective distribution strategy should provide users with easy access to the application and offer convenient ways for them to find, download, and get help with the game after installation.

Channel Management and the Consumer Touchpoint Perspective Clarify the Cooperation Among These Functions. App stores are for discovery and installation; official accounts and game communities are used to obtain information, ask questions, etc. The experience should be the same at all these places. Happy Elements can create various creative materials and store descriptions and campaign content for different platforms according to the audience without losing the brand's visual system and core ideas. Promptly address the comments and ratings of users, announce improvements, and provide convenient reporting functions. Based on download conversion, acquisition cost and next-day retention, allocate promotion funds, and do not rely solely on exposure numbers [20].

5.4 Promotion Strategy

Anipop has frequently had players participate in the organisation of promotional activities. A typical feature of this way is that it motivates people to talk about the game voluntarily through in-game rewards. The two ways to talk about the communication behaviour of players are contact via digital media and social sharing.

5.4.1 Promotion through online media

During the game, free items or other incentives may be provided to users of the official communication channels. Thus, the operator can spread the activity information and keep in touch with the interested user after they have downloaded the product. For example, as shown in the official presence on TapTap on October 20, 2026, the number of followers was approximately 14.9 million; the total has since increased and is displayed by the platform [21]. The advantages of these channels are not only in their size but also in the quality of continued participation.

5.4.2 Community-based and viral promotion

Social Interaction has also been a way to spread awareness. At different times of the game, users have been motivated to invite friends for joint-unlocking of levels, mutual help, and other activities related to holidays and special occasions. In this way, the experience of the current players can introduce the game to new players [22]. At the same time, the incentives should still be attractive and not feel mandatory.

Integrated Marketing Communications and Relationship Marketing propose that the evaluation of promotion should go beyond short-term acquisition. It should also be associated with the game and motivate people to play it again. A joint calendar of holiday events, community discussions and in-game tasks can be

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used to achieve this, especially when there are optional collaborations among friends and suitable rewards for returning players. Do not disturb others by asking for their materials or giving too many alarms. Participation, referral conversion, retention after a campaign, and qualitative user feedback can then be analyzed together to adjust messages according to the needs of players at different stages of their relationship with the game [14,23].

6. Future Development of Anipop

Anipop has a large number of fans and continues to be popular among them, but some parts of the gaming experience need to be improved. The vine-shaped level map of the game has been expanding with the addition of new content. According to the official update notice on October 15, 2026, levels 13,336-13,380 will be available on October 16, and the main-level count will reach 13,380 [24]. Although many new problems have been added for the veteran players, the large number of levels may have discouraged some users who were hoping to feel a sense of achievement at the end. Testing and player surveys can help us find the problems in difficulty. Raise these levels to a slightly higher one; then, the children will be more motivated to keep playing the game out of a sense of achievement.

7. Conclusion

Analysis of the Marketing Environment and SWOT of Anipop, STP Strategy, and 4P Tactics Shows How an Accessible Product Can Build a Well-Known Brand Through Consistent Design and Communication. Simple operation, pleasant sound and picture, and a sense of community have drawn people in. However, in a competitive casual gaming market, continuous differentiation of users is needed according to their different needs for challenges and fun, retention, and fairness of paid options. Therefore, the suggestions provided by this study will enhance the daily gaming experience of customers help the game maintain its identity and improve the long-term marketing effect.

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