The Effects of “Cute” Characteristics on Character Design Evaluation

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Abstract: The research aimed to the positive and negative characteristics of “cute” and the effects upon the character design evaluation, hoping to give designer a creation reference resource. The pilot experiment packed up the evaluation variables, the vocabularies about “cute,” then did evaluation of “cute” characteristics and character design. The experiment result showed that specialized background and age would influence the acceptance of negative characteristics, for example, designers and teenager would accept negative characteristics more, man like gentle and childish characteristics, woman prefer the character design pieces with dumb characteristic.

Key words: Character design, Cute characteristic, Design evaluation.

1. Introduction
On the basis of irresistible “cute” characteristics in latest culture product, this study aims to investigate how “cute” characteristics effect on character design. It means satisfactory in “A New Chinese Dictionary [1]”, lively and delightful in “Standard Chinese Dictionary [2].” In Japanese “cute” is “かわいい” (hiragana) and “KAWAII (Roman Pinyin)” that people often heard from every mass media, means innocent and pure, childish, sincere and need protection. In English, the word like cute, pretty, lovely and others has similar meaning as Chinese. In psyche, “cute” symbolized loving to play, fragile, helpless, curious, innocent, act like a spoiled child and other characteristics [3]. Japanese culture researcher Gorki Yomota thought the tradition of admiring “small and exquisite” things since 11th century “Makura no Soushi” to the present day and became the esthetics of today’s “cute [4].” The characteristics of “cute” were sorted as follow: 1) “cute” means all things that easily excited people’s common emotion. 2) “cute” is an immature esthetics, often causes of one’s fragile and inspires the cherish feelings, satisfied the desire of control. 3) small and old things easier bring people’s feelings of “cute.” 4) people like “cute” things by instinct and often attract to baby figure and other similar things.
The word “character” generally meant drama, movie, comic book, an imation and other writing works’ story figure in Chinese. In English “character” has other meanings like role, figure, mascot and other words. Japanese “キャラクター” is character, it means figure’s personality and trait [5]. Peter Trailer held that character design was a generally image language, character was independent in culture background and narration structure. They had complete self-imagination, owned their life and positive unusual personality [6].
2. Method

The word “Cute” has positive and negative characteristics. This survey aimed to evaluate the effects of “cute” characteristics and character design evaluation. There were 2 parts in the experiment, first, sorted the positive and negative characteristics of “cute” and discussed which characteristics would be more acceptable in character design; second, evaluated the effects of “cute” characteristics on character design. After analyzing, the experiment results could be figured out as the specific suggestions.

Based on the pilot experiment results [7], used high common rates (over half) as standard and got the vocabularies of “cute” characteristics, then divided them into 2 groups, as table 1 showed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>negative vocabulary</th>
<th>positive vocabulary</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>childish, fickle, insecure, fragile, dull, shy, evil, dumb, weird, violent, thoughtful, fearful, unreal</td>
<td>warm, harmless, soft, active, friendly, lively, frankly, new, relaxed, interesting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rating method experiment was evaluated in an effort to investigate how users perceive the messages and assess the “cute” characteristics and character design. Using multiple choices to evaluate “cute” characteristics and a five-point Likert scale was adopted at character design evaluation; the factors were set as table 2. A total number of 154 persons were recruited; among them, there were 102 male (66%) and 52 female (34%); while 78 of them were designers (51%) and 76 users (49%); then 49 of them (32%) were 10~20 years old teenager group, 67 of them (43%) were 21~30 years old youth group and 38 of them (25%) were 31~40 years old mid-life group. The experiment samples were commercial and popular pursuits like a spokesman character, character product and other goods. Not only used Taiwan local culture pieces, also picked up famous US and Europe (US and UK), Asia (Japan and Korea) character design works in Taiwan market. Figure 1 showed total 24 samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction Quest ion</th>
<th>Factor types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>evaluation of negative and positive “cute” characteristics</td>
<td>Please choose the negative vocabularies which can present “cute” from right column. fickle, insecure, childish, fragile, dull, shy, evil, dumb, weird, violent, thoughtful, fearful, unreal (multiple choices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please choose the positive “cute” vocabularies which can evaluate character design from right column. warm, harmless, soft, active, friendly, lively, frankly, new, relaxed, interesting (multiple choices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“cute” characteristics of character design evaluation</td>
<td>A. please base on the degree of “like” and evaluate the character design dislike a lot(-2), dislike(-1), no feelings(0), like(1), like a lot(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. please base on the degree of “cute” and evaluate the character design not even cute(-2), not cute(-1), no comment(0), cute(1), very cute(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. warm D. insecure E. harmless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F. fickle G. soft H. childish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. active J. friendly K. lively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. frankly M. new N. relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O. interesting P. dumb Q. delightful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Result

3.1 The positive and negative characteristics of “cute”

In the negative characteristics part, significant difference only existed in the degree of “childish” and that of gender (p=0.031). It could be noticed that female accept negative characteristic “childish” more than male, but
other vocabularies showed no gender difference. Designers had strong feelings about “shy and dumb”, teenager group accepted the word “violent and unreal” as cute. Based upon the results, designers and teenager groups accepted negative characteristics more than other groups.

3.2 The character design evaluation

The experiment results were analyzed through T-test, whether significant differences exist in character design variables was examined. In addition, variable “soft” from male group received specific higher evaluation than female; it showed more sensitive of “soft” male was. According to the evaluation results from the degree of like and cute, the degree of cute received higher evaluation than like. It could be noticed that subjects easier felt the cute characteristics and made evaluation. The samples which received high evaluation from the degree of like and cute almost the same, both were samples with positive characteristics more. According to the evaluation results of every group, users preferred product character having high exposure rate by the mass media. Males liked cartoon character having fight ability more, females preferred spokesman character and teenager group especially liked regular cartoon character. Further, the purpose of each character showed that spokesman character received “friendly” variable higher evaluation and it probably because this characteristic was important for spokesman character.

3.3 Correlation coefficient

The correlation coefficient of each characteristic was calculated to see if they represent significance. The high correlation was found between the degree of cute and that of like, it showed the intimate related to both characteristics. Additionally, high positive correlation was noticed in the degree of like/cute and characteristics of warm, harmless, soft, friendly, relaxed, interesting and delightful. Older people received higher correlation between the degree of cute and that of childish, younger people was found between the degree of cute and dumb.
3.4 Factor analysis

There were 15 “cute” characteristics in the survey, used principal component to do factor analysis for observing the influence factors. According to the principal component analysis, the “cute” characteristics was sorted to three main factor groups, first factor group received highest measurement which were fickle, soft, warm, insecure, harmless, friendly and relaxed; Second factor group received secondly measurement which were frankly, lively, active, delightful and interesting; Third factor group received lowest measurement which were childish and dumb. The cross match results of the three factor groups and correlation coefficient was found that higher correlation between first factor group and the degree of like and cute.

4. Conclusions

According to the survey on “negative and positive cute characteristics,” and “the each cute characteristic effect on character design evaluation,” the conclusion can be made as follows.

1) “Cute” characteristics

Based upon the positive characteristics of character design survey result we can find: interesting, new, delightful, lively and friendly are regular been thought as positive characteristics. The positive characteristics, like warm, harmless, soft, friendly, relaxed, interesting and delightful, and the evaluation of like and cute were closely linked.

According to the character design analysis results of negative characteristics, we could find: dumb, shy and childish can be accepted to “cute.” And shy, evil, fickle can be accepted to “like,” among them, “shy” also can be accepted to “cute.”

2) The evaluation of “cute” character design

According to the factor analysis results, the characteristics of “cute” character design were sorted to three factor groups. The first group’s factors were warm, relaxed, soft, harmless, friendly and insecure, above vocabularies were both positive and negative. At the same time, the degree of like and that of cute were intimate related.

5. References and Citations

[7] In “cute” characteristics vocabularies survey, a total number of 16 graduate student subjects were recruited; among them, there were 9 females and 7 males.