



How the "Blind Box Economy" Shapes Consumers' Purchase Desire and Behavior –The Case of Pop-Mart

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Abstract. With the continuous development of China's economy, people's consumption level has generally increased, especially the consumption of culture and entertainment has increased significantly. Blind Box Merchandise is one of those items that is very popular with the general public. This article studies the uncertainty and social value of blind-box products. First of all, the unknown nature of blind-box products brings a sense of stimulation to consumers, which helps consumers release emotions, thus prompting consumers to repeat purchases. Secondly, blind box products broaden the social circle of consumers. Through case analysis, this article takes 'Pop Mart' as the research object, and studies the marketing strategy of Pop Mart and the marketing mode of blind box, so as to further analyze the purchasing motivation of consumers. The emotional value that blind-boxed goods bring to consumers was found to be the main motivation that drove consumers to purchase them. In addition, the unique marketing model of blind box commodities has given rise to many problems, such as breeding abnormal consumption and disturbing the market order. It also gives suggestions for the development of China's blind box market.

Keywords: Blind box, consumer, "Pop Mart".

1 INTRODUCTION

Blind box marketing is different from the previous marketing model, traditional marketing focuses on channels, while Internet marketing focuses on traffic [1]. In traditional marketing, consumers tend to evaluate the function, price, style, and use of goods, whereas, in blind-box marketing, consumers are only aware of the type of style of goods and are not specific. This study focuses on the purchase motivation of blind box consumers and finds out the real reason why they are obsessed with blind boxes. And put forward suggestions for the healthy development of the blind box industry. This study is mainly carried out from the psychological aspects of consumers and uses the literature analysis method to find and read the relevant information and literature. The advantage of this method is that it gives a good insight into the psychology of the consumer and helps in the research. The ultimate goal of this study is to analyze how blind

box merchandise shapes the consumer's desire to buy, and in order to achieve this goal, the case study method was used to study Pop Mart as an example.

2 BACKGROUND

According to the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China on the per capita consumption expenditure and its composition of the national residents in 2022, education, culture, and entertainment accounted for 10.1%, about 2469 yuan. It can be seen that consumer spending on satisfying cultural and entertainment consumption is increasing, and it is generally recognized that improving the sense of well-being in life is more important than clothing, food, housing, and transportation. Under such a background, a large number of trendy toy enterprises (enterprises with independent IP and trendy attributes of toys) have been established one after another, the representative enterprises are Pop Mart, 52 Toys, and TOP-TOY, among which Pop Mart is the leading position in the industry. Pop Mart was founded in 2010 and has been involved in the trendy toy market since 2015. With its own IP, it is deeply loved by the majority of consumers, especially the 'Z generation' (The generation born between 1995 and 2009, who were seamlessly connected to the Internet information age at birth and are highly influenced by digital information technology and smartphone products).

Among the many cultural and entertainment projects established, the blind box economy (the economy driven by people vigorously purchasing blind boxes) is a form of consumption that has grown rapidly in recent years. The blind box (also known as the 'surprise box. "refers to a toy box with random attributes that consumers cannot know the specific product style in advance. The blind box culture originated in the United States and flourished in Japan. The so-called blind box, as the name suggests, is a box containing a variety of cute dolls. Still, the box does not mark which one is specific, with its limited hunger marketing, greatly stimulated the consumer's desire to buy and repurchase.) began to appear in China in 2012. The consumer group of the blind box is mainly young people, so the prospect of the blind box market is very broad [2].

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, blind boxes have developed rapidly. Scholars Che Cheng et al. pointed out in their research on consumer behavior that consumers classify goods into practical and hedonic types based on emotional mechanisms [3]. Blind box goods belong to hedonic products, which can make consumers emotionally pleasurable and satisfy their psychological needs, and the uncertainty of the blind box with its social value constantly stimulates consumers' purchasing behavior [4]. Consumers cannot know what they will buy before buying. It is precisely because of this curiosity that consumers are willing to rush and repeat purchases. Consumer behavior theory includes a hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow divides human needs into five levels: physiological needs, security needs, social needs, respect needs, and self-realization needs. These demands affect consumers' purchasing behavior. This study will analyze consumers' purchase motivation through consumer behavior theory.

3.1 Uncertainty of Blind Boxed Commodities

Blind boxes are probabilistic products, which are products that allow consumers to purchase one of a set of products at random under specific conditions. This is a unique product sales strategy. Many scholars believe that blind box consumption relies on its own sense of uncertainty and surprise to capture the psychology of consumers. Uncertainty affects consumers' purchase intention mainly through affecting their emotional value, which is one dimension of perceived value [5].

In 2022, Ji Ruyi analyzed the formation of "blind box fever" from three aspects: product, consumer, and market, as well as the consumption psychological mechanism behind "blind box fever," and pointed out that the blind box brings a series of psychological experience, which is in line with the psychology of the public's curiosity [6].

B. F. Skinner, a famous American psychologist, proposed the theory of reinforcement, which believes that human behavior is mastered by external factors. If the external stimulus is favorable to the person, the behavior will be repeated. The randomness of the blind box inspires consumers to buy, and for the buyer, the purchase of the blind box gains inner satisfaction, and it is this unique experience that stimulates repeated purchases and thus addiction. Consumers will be in high spirits when they pick up hidden styles. When the ordinary style is drawn, it will be depressed [7].

In 2023, Zhang Ziyao et al. investigated the addiction status of blind boxes, and the research results showed that out of 1028 respondents, nearly 838 respondents had purchased blind boxes, and 825 respondents chose to continue purchasing them when they didn't get the desired style. Both the sense of surprise and the sense of discrepancy that the blind box brings to the consumer will drive the consumer's desire to buy [8].

3.2 Social Value of Blind Box Products

Sociologist Jean Baudrillard states in *The Consumer Society* that "it is not the goods themselves that consumers consume, but the meanings they contain and the symbols they represent." The blind box market is popular with the "Z Generation" crowd, who consume the meaning of blind-boxed goods. Most of the "Z generation" are only children, with strong loneliness and a desire for a sense of belonging. According to the survey, 57% of Gen Z said they "have to have what others have and don't want to be disliked by their peers" [9]. It is precisely because of this sense of loneliness that blind boxes can easily become their social tools, and the blind box market has gradually formed its own social circle. From the two aspects of self-identity and mass identity, scholar Hu Jiawen studies the identity of the group of trendy players and points out that the group of trendy players shares emotions, thus establishing more connections and enhancing the identity of the group of trendy players [10]. Blind boxes also serve the function of softening the awkwardness of interactions in social situations as they are integrated into people's daily lives [11].

After reviewing the literature, it can find that the academic community's concern for the blind box market has increased, all from the perspective of blind box attributes to analyze consumer psychology, so as to conduct a large number of studies, but less research from the perspective of the price of the blind box to analyze consumer behavior.

4 CASE ANALYSIS

Pop Mart is a trendy cultural entertainment brand established in 2010. In the past ten years, it has built a comprehensive operation platform covering the whole industry chain of trendy toys around the five fields of global artist mining, IP incubation operation, consumer touch, trendy play culture promotion, innovative business incubation, and investment. Its self-created IPs include Molly, Dimoo, Pucky, etc. On August 22, 2023, Pop Mart released its first half of 2023 financial statements, showing that its first half of the company's revenue and net profit increased compared with last year, which is inseparable from Pop Mart's unique marketing methods.

4.1 Cross-Border Co-Branding Marketing

Pop Mart has co-branded with a number of brands, including beauty, food, anime, and daily necessities.

As an example of a restaurant brand, in January 2022, Pop Mart co-branded with Lays, launching a spring-only potato chip with three unique flavors made from high-end seasonal ingredients.

Take cosmetic brands as an example, in August 2020, Pop Mart cooperated with YSL, an internationally renowned beauty brand, to launch the Space Molly gift box. Both brands have a certain consumer base, and both can bring a new batch of consumers to the other brand, reaching a win-win situation.

In addition, Pop Mart's co-branding with China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) is extremely creative. the combination of MOLLY's cute image and CASC's serious technological image creates a novel contrast.

Pop Mart intermingles with unrelated brand elements to give consumers a new experience and stimulate purchases.

4.2 Exploring Consumer Behavior Based on the SICAS Model

SICAS model is a psychological change model of user consumption behavior under the environment of all-network, panoramic all-digital marketing, which is in accordance with the following process: Sence (build perception between brands and consumers) -Interest & Interactive (then consumers will be interested in the brand, so they will interact with the brand) -Connect & Communicate (with interaction, the brand needs to establish a connection with consumers and communicate at any time) -Action (through the above steps, consumers will be impressed, and then produce purchase behavior) -Share (after purchase, consumers will share their own experience).

Pop Mart comprehensively covers multiple media channels, investing more in WeChat, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and other platforms, updating product content in real-time to enhance consumers' perception of Pop Mart, so that they are interested in searching for the product and communicating with each other on various platforms, thus generating purchasing behavior. After the purchase, consumers actively share in social media, and from then on, a circular process is formed.

4.3 Build Marketing Channels in All Directions

Bubble Mart integrates online and offline sales methods and builds sales channels in an all-around way. Offline channels include retail stores, robot stores, etc. In retail stores, consumers can directly come into contact with products and increase the probability of buying their favorite styles. Robot stores are distributed in major shopping malls in the city to promote consumer behavior by using consumer fragmentation time. Online channels include major shopping platforms and second-hand trading platforms. In addition, as early as 2018, Pop Mart launched the layout of its overseas business and successively entered overseas markets with strong trends in Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia. In order to accelerate the globalization strategy, Bubble Mart chose Amazon Cloud Technology as a partner to quickly build a highly flexible and low-cost global digital business and operation system.

5 MARKETING MODEL AND POTENTIAL PROBLEMS OF BLIND BOXES

5.1 Marketing Model of Blind Boxes

The marketing model for blind boxes can be broadly categorized into two types, one is emotional marketing. With the arrival of the Z generation, the blind box gradually jumped from selling goods to selling emotions. The unknown nature of the blind box itself brings consumers a unique experience when dismantling the blind box, which helps consumers release their emotions [12]. The main consumer group of Blind Box is office workers or college students aged 18-35, who are often in a fast-paced life and study and need an emotional breakthrough, and the unknown nature of the Blind Box can precisely be this breakthrough.

The other is hunger marketing. Each series of blind boxes will have regular, popular, hidden, and customized models. When consumers purchase, the probability of picking up the four models is different, and the probability of picking up the hidden model is the lowest. The mode of fixed + hidden creates scarcity and stimulates consumers to buy.

Moreover, some of the blind boxes will also adopt a limited consumption model, leading to absolute scarcity of the product, increasing the sense of urgency in consumption, and further stimulating the consumer's desire to buy.

5.2 Potential Problems under Blind Box Marketing

The blind box economy is becoming more and more popular, but at the same time of development, it has also spawned many problems. The gambling model followed by blind boxes makes it extremely easy for consumers to become addicted and buy them in large quantities for so-called hidden money, breeding aberrant consumption. In particular, when the supply of limited editions exceeds the demand, buyers quickly turn into sellers and sell blind boxes, resulting in price increases. There are even many "scalpers" who sell at high prices, disrupting the market order. In the development of

the trend of toys represented by the blind box, if consumers pay too much attention to consumer pleasure, consumers will reduce the requirements of the quality of the products of the trend of toys, so that the business focus on enhancing consumer pleasure, thus ignoring the quality of the product control.

Under such guidance, the blind box market should strengthen supervision and guide the positive development of the 'blind box economy'. First of all, consumers should be encouraged to establish a correct concept of consumption, not dominated by pleasure, and moderately participate in it. Secondly, government departments can play a guiding role in standardizing the mode of operation of blind boxes to circumvent the possibility of large-scale profit-making by scalpers and other third parties.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper analyzes how blind boxes are marketed and how blind box marketing affects consumer buying behavior. Blind boxes stimulate consumers' curiosity and utilize their own uncertainty to constantly inspire them to buy. With the development of the blind box under the trend of the "Z Generation", it should break the inherent circle, broaden the consumer groups, and continue to push forward innovation. However, while progress is being made, the problems derived from the blind box economy should be equally emphasized so as to better serve consumers. This article only takes Pop Mart as an example and does not study other blind box tide play companies, future research can focus on more companies to analyze. From the perspective of research, this study is based on the perspective of blind box marketing strategy, but it does not take into account that the price perspective of blind boxes may also affect consumer behavior. Therefore, future research can also be explored from different research perspectives.

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