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The Influence of Brand Designing and Marketing Policies on Post-95 Consumer Psychology and Behavior - Take POP MART as an Example

Xiyu Gong ^{1,*}

¹ Jinan Foreign Language School, Jinan, Shandong, China

* Correspondence: Xiyu Gong, Jinan Foreign Language School, Jinan, Shandong, China

Abstract: The blind box economy has become a prominent trend in the consumer goods market, particularly in China, with brands like POP MART leading the way in its growth. Despite the increasing popularity of this business model, there is limited research on its psychological impact on consumer behavior. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the influence of POP MART's brand design and marketing strategies on consumer psychology and purchasing behavior. Using a case study approach, the research analyzes POP MART's blind box policy, IP design, and brand community to explore their effects on consumer engagement and loyalty. The findings reveal that POP MART's use of uncertainty and scarcity in its blind box offerings drives repeat purchases through gamification, while emotional attachment to its IPs fosters long-term consumer loyalty. Additionally, the creation of a strong brand community further enhances consumer engagement. This study contributes to the understanding of how psychological factors such as emotional branding and social influence shape consumer behavior. The practical implications of this research suggest that marketers can leverage these insights to strengthen customer relationships and drive sustained consumer engagement in emerging markets like the blind box economy.

Keywords: blind box economy; consumer behavior; emotional attachment; gamification; brand community

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the blind box economy has emerged as a unique and influential phenomenon in the consumer goods market, particularly in China. The blind box, a product packaged in a way that conceals its contents, offers consumers a sense of excitement, unpredictability, and surprise, making it a popular method for driving consumer engagement and sales. The development of this economy, driven by the rapid growth of brands like POP MART, has garnered significant attention from both academics and industry professionals [1]. As an innovative business model, it has transformed the way consumers engage with products, blending traditional retail with elements of gamification, emotional attachment, and social interaction [2]. However, despite the growing importance of the blind box industry, research into its underlying factors and their impact on consumer behavior remains limited. This paper seeks to address the gap in the literature by examining the influence of POP MART's brand design and marketing policies on consumer psychology and purchasing behavior, with a specific focus on how these elements contribute to the company's success in the blind box market [3].

The existing literature on consumer behavior and marketing strategies has explored the effects of product packaging, branding, and customer engagement on purchasing

decisions. However, few studies have delved into the specific impact of the blind box model, especially in the context of its psychological appeal and the role of IP (Intellectual Property) design in fostering consumer loyalty [4]. While marketing researchers have extensively discussed gamification, uncertainty, and consumer addiction in the context of digital gaming, these concepts have not been fully explored in the realm of physical product consumption, particularly in the blind box market [5]. Moreover, although the emotional attachment between consumers and products has been studied in various sectors, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on how specific product designs, such as those of POP MART's IPs, can cultivate deep emotional bonds with consumers [6].

This paper aims to fill these gaps by analyzing the marketing strategies of POP MART, a leading player in China's blind box market, and examining how its brand design and policies influence consumer behavior. Through this study, the research intends to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms that drive consumer purchasing behavior in the context of blind boxes. Specifically, the paper will investigate how POP MART's use of gamification, uncertainty, and emotional branding contributes to high consumer engagement and repeat purchases. By focusing on POP MART's IP design, this paper will explore how these strategies create a lasting emotional connection with consumers, turning products from mere commodities into symbols of identity and emotional attachment.

The main research methods employed in this study will include case analysis and comparative research. The case study will focus on POP MART, analyzing its marketing policies, IP design, and consumer engagement strategies. A comparative approach will be used to compare POP MART's strategies with those of other blind box brands, providing insights into the distinctive elements that contribute to its success. Through this approach, the study aims to uncover the underlying factors that influence consumer decision-making in the blind box market.

The academic significance of this research lies in its potential to expand the understanding of consumer psychology in the context of emerging retail models, such as the blind box economy. By exploring the intersection of gamification, branding, and emotional attachment, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on consumer behavior and marketing strategies. Practically, the findings of this research can inform marketers and brand managers in the blind box industry and beyond, offering valuable insights into how to design products and marketing campaigns that resonate with modern consumers, particularly the younger generations that are at the core of the blind box market. This study will also provide a foundation for future research into the broader implications of gamification and emotional branding in retail and consumer markets.

2. Literature Review

The rise of the blind box economy and its impact on consumer psychology and behavior has sparked considerable interest among researchers, particularly within the fields of marketing and consumer behavior. Several key studies have explored the advantages of incorporating elements like gamification, emotional attachment, and social engagement in product design and marketing strategies [7]. These elements are central to understanding the success of the blind box model and its appeal to consumers, especially among younger generations.

One prominent advantage of the blind box model lies in its ability to tap into the psychological mechanisms of uncertainty and reward. The random nature of blind box purchases, where consumers do not know the exact product they will receive, creates an element of excitement and anticipation. Research has shown that uncertainty, when coupled with a potential reward, can significantly increase consumer engagement and stimulate repeated purchasing behavior [8]. The concept of variable rewards, borrowed from behavioral psychology, posits that unpredictable outcomes, such as receiving a rare

or "hidden" item, trigger emotional responses that encourage further interaction with the product. This principle is frequently applied in digital gaming and has been successfully adapted in the blind box model to enhance consumer participation and satisfaction [9].

Another significant advantage highlighted in the literature is the role of emotional attachment in consumer behavior. Studies suggest that well-designed products, especially those with unique visual and emotional characteristics, can foster strong emotional bonds between consumers and brands. This emotional connection often extends beyond the product itself, creating a sense of belonging and identity for consumers [10]. The design of blind box items, with their emphasis on aesthetic appeal, emotional resonance, and collectability, plays a critical role in building such connections. Research has demonstrated that emotional attachment can transform a consumer's perception of a product, turning it from a mere commodity into an essential part of their self-expression and identity [11]. This is particularly evident in the blind box industry, where the design of characters and the stories they represent become integral to consumer loyalty and repeat purchases.

Despite these advantages, existing studies on the blind box economy often have limitations in terms of scope and depth. While much attention has been paid to the emotional appeal and gamification aspects of blind box models, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the long-term psychological effects of repeated blind box consumption [12]. Most studies focus on the immediate emotional responses generated by uncertainty and surprise but fail to address how these responses influence consumer behavior over time. Additionally, while the role of product design in creating emotional bonds is acknowledged, there is insufficient research on the specific design elements that are most effective in cultivating these emotional connections [13]. For instance, while many blind box products feature cute or quirky designs, the precise impact of different visual styles and themes on consumer engagement remains underexplored.

Further, comparisons between different brands and their marketing strategies in the blind box industry have been limited. While there are studies comparing the effectiveness of various marketing techniques in other sectors, the specific strategies employed by blind box brands, such as POP MART, have not been adequately compared to those of other brands in the same market [14]. This gap in research makes it difficult to identify the unique features of POP MART's approach that contribute to its success relative to competitors. A comparison of POP MART's marketing policies with those of other brands would offer valuable insights into the factors that differentiate successful brands in the blind box economy.

Despite the existing body of work, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the integration of gamification, emotional attachment, and social interaction within the blind box model. Although each of these elements has been studied independently in the context of consumer behavior, few studies have examined how they function together in a comprehensive marketing strategy [15]. Understanding how these factors interact and reinforce one another in the blind box market could provide deeper insights into consumer decision-making and brand loyalty.

This paper seeks to fill these gaps by analyzing the influence of POP MART's brand design and marketing policies on consumer psychology and behavior. Through a detailed case study, this research will provide a more nuanced understanding of the blind box model's effectiveness, focusing on how its unique combination of gamification, emotional attachment, and community engagement drives consumer loyalty. By comparing POP MART's strategies with those of other blind box brands, the study will offer valuable insights into the specific elements that contribute to a brand's success in this emerging market. The findings of this research will enhance the theoretical understanding of the blind box economy and provide practical recommendations for marketers seeking to capitalize on this trend.

3. Case Analysis

This chapter presents an in-depth case analysis of POP MART, a leading brand in the blind box industry, to explore how its brand design and marketing strategies have influenced consumer psychology and purchasing behavior. Through an examination of POP MART's blind box policy, IP design, and brand community, we can better understand the psychological mechanisms driving consumer engagement and loyalty. The chapter will also compare POP MART's strategies with those of other blind box brands to highlight the factors contributing to its success.

3.1. Blind Box Policy: Gamification, Uncertainty, and Addictive Consumption

One of the key elements that set POP MART apart in the blind box market is its unique approach to gamification and the use of uncertainty in product offerings. The blind box model inherently incorporates elements of chance, where consumers purchase a product without knowing its contents. This element of surprise, combined with the desire to complete a series of collectibles, creates a sense of excitement and anticipation. POP MART has leveraged these psychological principles to drive repeated consumer purchases.

POP MART's blind box series consists of 12 normal items and one "hidden" or rare item. The hidden item is a limited-edition product that has a lower probability of being included in the box (7.7%), creating a sense of scarcity and exclusivity. This random selection model taps into the concept of variable ratio reinforcement, a principle derived from behavioral psychology, which has been widely applied in gaming environments. The unpredictable reward system, where the consumer does not know whether they will receive the hidden item or a regular one, encourages repeat engagement, making consumers feel both anticipation and excitement. According to the Skinner Box theory, when a consumer is exposed to intermittent rewards, the behavior becomes reinforced and sustained. As a result, consumers are motivated to continue purchasing in hopes of receiving the rare item.

Additionally, the prospect theory helps explain the psychological impact of this model. According to this theory, the emotional response to a loss (not receiving the desired item) is more intense than the pleasure derived from gaining an equally valued reward. Thus, when consumers receive an item they are not particularly fond of, the feeling of disappointment often outweighs the joy of obtaining a product they wanted. This disproportionate emotional response to loss explains why consumers may feel compelled to continue purchasing more blind boxes in an attempt to "correct" their prior purchase, creating a cycle of consumption that is hard to break.

This approach not only fosters excitement but also builds a habitual consumption pattern, with consumers regularly engaging with the brand in hopes of fulfilling their desire to collect every item in the series, especially the hidden ones. This creates a level of addictive consumption, wherein the act of purchasing becomes intertwined with the consumer's emotional state and gratification, reinforcing loyalty and increasing the overall lifetime value of the customer.

Table 1 below summarizes how POP MART's blind box mechanism utilizes psychological principles to influence consumer behavior.

Table 1. Psychological Mechanisms and Their Impact on Consumer Behavior in POP MART's Blind Box Mechanism.

Blind Box Mechanism	Psychological Mechanism	Impact on Consumer Behavior
12 Normal Items, 1 Hidden Item	Scarcity, Uncertainty, Surprise	Drives excitement, encourages repeat purchases

Random Distribution (7.7% Hidden)	Variable Ratio Reinforcement	Reinforces purchasing behavior, habitual consumption
Emotional Impact of Loss vs. Gain	Prospect Theory	Heightens emotional attachment, drives repurchase to "correct" losses

3.2. IP Design: The Construction of Emotional Attachment and Identification

POP MART's IPs, such as Molly, Skullpanda, and Dimoo, are not just products but emotional symbols for consumers. These designs, with distinctive features like large eyes and quirky details, are crafted to evoke specific emotional responses.

Emotional attachment theory suggests that consumers develop strong connections with products that reflect their self-identity and emotional needs. Characters like Molly and Skullpanda embody emotions such as innocence, nostalgia, and empowerment, making them resonate deeply with consumers. These products become part of the consumer's identity, enhancing loyalty.

By associating these IPs with emotional states, POP MART transforms the act of purchasing from a transaction to self-expression. Consumers see owning products like Molly or Skullpanda as a reflection of their personality, making the purchase an investment in their personal brand and identity. This aligns with extended self-theory, where consumers view products as extensions of themselves.

Additionally, POP MART's success in emotional branding is evident in its expanding product range. Beyond blind boxes, POP MART now offers figurines, clothing, and other lifestyle products featuring these beloved characters, deepening emotional attachment and reinforcing consumer loyalty.

3.3. Brand Community: Social Capital and Circle Affiliation

POP MART's success is also attributed to its ability to build a strong brand community. This community fosters a sense of belonging, enhancing consumer engagement and loyalty. POP MART's active presence on platforms like Weibo and TikTok encourages interaction, where fans share collections, discuss releases, and connect with like-minded individuals.

Beyond social media, POP MART organizes offline events and exhibitions, such as collectible toy exhibitions, to further solidify community bonds. These events provide an interactive space for fans, fostering social capital, the value derived from relationships and shared trust. By engaging consumers in this way, POP MART strengthens connections and attracts new customers.

An example of POP MART's successful community-building is its 2025 collaboration with the Louvre Museum. POP MART hosted an exhibition where children contributed to the continuation of *Le Petit Prince*. This interactive experience enhanced the emotional resonance of POP MART's IP and created deeper connections within the brand's community.

By leveraging social influence, where consumer decisions are shaped by community behavior, POP MART transforms purchasing into a social activity, driving repeat purchases and strengthening brand loyalty.

4. Discussion and Implications

This chapter provides a comprehensive interpretation of the findings from the case analysis of POP MART and explores their implications for both consumer behavior theory and practical marketing strategies. The chapter is organized into several key sections: interpretation of findings, implications for consumer behavior theory, practical implications for marketing, limitations and future research directions, and concluding remarks.

4.1. Interpretation of Findings

The case analysis of POP MART's marketing strategies, including its blind box policy, IP design, and brand community, revealed several key insights into consumer behavior. These findings highlight how POP MART has successfully utilized elements of gamification, emotional attachment, and social influence to drive consumer engagement and foster brand loyalty.

First, POP MART's blind box policy, characterized by the distribution of both normal and rare items, capitalizes on uncertainty and scarcity. This strategy taps into the psychological principle of variable ratio reinforcement, where unpredictable rewards, such as the rare "hidden" items, encourage continuous purchasing behavior. The success of this policy confirms the findings of previous research on gamification and reward systems, which suggest that such mechanisms create excitement and repeat engagement among consumers.

Second, POP MART's IP design plays a significant role in fostering emotional attachment between consumers and the brand. Characters like Molly and Skullpanda are not only visually appealing but also resonate emotionally with consumers, turning these products into symbols of identity and self-expression. The emotional connection between consumers and these IPs reinforces the idea that consumer loyalty is deeply tied to emotional bonds rather than just product functionality.

Finally, the development of a brand community through online and offline channels, including social media platforms and consumer events, has proven to be a critical factor in building social capital and enhancing consumer loyalty. POP MART's ability to engage consumers in meaningful social interactions has contributed to its success, as consumers feel a sense of belonging to a community that shares their interest in the brand.

Figure 1 below visually represents the relationship between POP MART's key marketing strategies and consumer engagement.

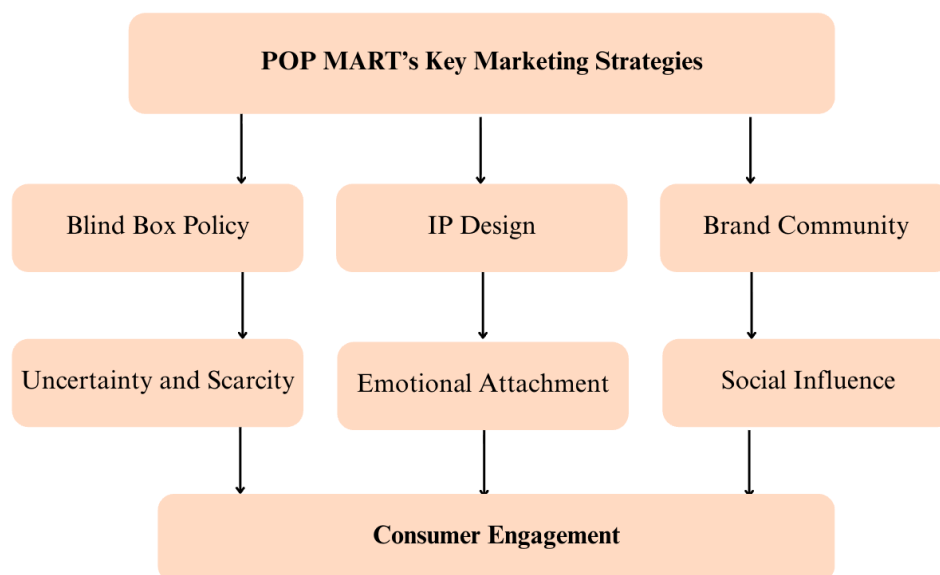


Figure 1. POP MART's Key Marketing Strategies and Their Impact on Consumer Engagement.

4.2. Implications for Consumer Behavior Theory

The findings from this case analysis offer significant contributions to consumer behavior theory, particularly in the areas of gamification, emotional attachment, and social influence.

Gamification is a central feature of POP MART's marketing strategy. By incorporating elements of uncertainty and surprise, POP MART effectively taps into the psychological mechanisms that underlie variable ratio reinforcement. This principle, widely studied in digital gaming, has now found its application in physical product consumption. This integration of game-like elements in retail models is an emerging field that extends existing theories on consumer engagement and habitual consumption.

Moreover, the emotional attachment theory provides a solid framework for understanding why consumers form strong bonds with POP MART's IPs. The characters designed by POP MART evoke specific emotional responses, turning the products from mere collectibles into symbols of self-expression. This aligns with extended self-theory, which posits that consumers incorporate brands and products into their self-concept. POP MART's characters, by reflecting emotions such as nostalgia, cuteness, and empowerment, allow consumers to define themselves through their connection with the brand.

The social influence theory also offers valuable insights into the success of POP MART's brand community. The brand has successfully cultivated a sense of belonging among its consumers by using social media and offline events to foster interaction and engagement. This strategy encourages consumers to share their experiences, creating a network of social capital that influences purchasing behavior. The social dynamics within the brand community contribute to higher levels of engagement and loyalty, reinforcing the importance of community-building in modern marketing.

Table 2 below summarizes the theoretical contributions of the findings in relation to consumer behavior theories.

Table 2. Theoretical Contributions of POP MART's Marketing Strategies to Consumer Behavior Theory.

Theory	POP MART's Marketing Strategy	Contribution to Consumer Behavior Theory
Gamification	Blind Box Policy (Uncertainty, Scarcity, Surprise)	Extends variable ratio reinforcement to physical product consumption
Emotional Attachment	IP Design (Molly, Skullpanda, etc.)	Deepens understanding of emotional branding and self-identity in consumer behavior
Social Influence	Brand Community (Social Media, Offline Events)	Highlights the role of social capital and community in fostering loyalty and engagement

4.3. Practical Implications for Marketing and Brand Strategy

The findings of this study have important practical implications for marketers and brand managers in the blind box industry and beyond. POP MART's marketing strategies provide valuable insights into how brands can use uncertainty, emotional attachment, and community engagement to drive consumer loyalty.

For Blind Box Brands: POP MART's success underscores the effectiveness of combining gamification with scarcity to create excitement and consumer loyalty. Other brands in the blind box industry can adopt similar strategies by designing products that offer a mix of common and rare items, making the purchasing process more engaging and rewarding for consumers.

For Emotional Branding: POP MART's use of IP design demonstrates how emotional attachment can turn a product into more than just a commodity. By creating characters that resonate emotionally with consumers, brands can cultivate brand loyalty that extends beyond transactional relationships. This approach can be applied to various sectors where consumers seek not just products, but emotional experiences.

For Community Engagement: POP MART's creation of an active brand community offers valuable lessons in fostering social capital. Brands should invest in social media platforms and offline events that facilitate consumer interaction, as these create a sense of belonging and deepen consumer engagement. By connecting consumers to a broader community, brands can enhance loyalty and foster word-of-mouth promotion.

4.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the blind box market and consumer behavior, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis is based on a single case study of POP MART, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider comparative studies between different blind box brands to explore whether the strategies observed in POP MART are applicable to other markets and brands.

Additionally, the study primarily focuses on the immediate emotional responses of consumers to the blind box model. Future research should examine the long-term effects of repeated blind box consumption on consumer behavior, particularly in terms of brand fatigue or consumer burnout. It would also be valuable to investigate the sustainability of emotional attachment in the long term, as trends in consumer interests can shift rapidly.

Further studies could also explore the cross-cultural application of the blind box model, as the psychological appeal of uncertainty and scarcity may vary in different cultural contexts. Comparing consumer responses in countries with different market dynamics could provide a broader understanding of the model's effectiveness globally.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the impact of POP MART's innovative marketing strategies on consumer psychology and behavior within the context of the blind box economy. By focusing on key aspects such as the blind box policy, IP design, and the development of a brand community, this research highlights the ways in which POP MART has successfully leveraged gamification, emotional attachment, and social influence to foster deep consumer loyalty and engagement.

The findings reveal that POP MART's blind box policy, which incorporates uncertainty and scarcity, effectively taps into the psychological mechanisms of variable ratio reinforcement. This strategy not only drives excitement but also encourages habitual consumption, creating a strong incentive for consumers to engage repeatedly with the brand. The emotional attachment built through the design of iconic IPs such as Molly and Skullpanda further strengthens this relationship, transforming products from mere commodities to emotional symbols of self-expression. Additionally, POP MART's cultivation of a robust brand community has created an environment where consumers feel a sense of belonging, further enhancing their connection to the brand and driving continued engagement.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study expands existing consumer behavior theories by integrating elements of gamification, emotional branding, and social capital in the context of physical product consumption. By doing so, it offers new insights into how these psychological principles can work together to influence consumer behavior in a novel and effective way. Practically, the study provides valuable lessons for marketers and brand managers looking to capitalize on the power of emotional engagement and community building to drive consumer loyalty.

While the study provides important insights into POP MART's success, it also highlights several avenues for future research. Exploring the long-term effects of blind box consumption, cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior, and comparative studies between brands could further enrich our understanding of this emerging market. Overall, this research contributes to both theoretical knowledge and practical marketing

strategies, offering a deeper understanding of how emotional and psychological factors shape consumer behavior in today's dynamic retail environment.

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