

Analysis of Blind Box Marketing Strategies Based on Consumer Behavior Research

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Abstract:

This paper aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the rationality of blind box economy marketing strategies based on consumer behavior research. As an emerging consumption model, the blind box economy has achieved explosive growth in recent years through its unique sense of surprise and collectibility. Blind box products have become highly sought-after consumption items due to their randomness, social attributes, and cultural value. Taking Pop Mart as an example, the company rapidly gained popularity by launching IP-based blind box products that capitalized on consumers' pursuit of novelty. However, the blind box marketing model has also raised concerns such as excessive consumption, competitive pressures, and product overpricing. This study employs the 4Ps framework of marketing, which includes product, price, place, and promotion to analyze how blind boxes apply strategies like IP empowerment, psychological pricing, omnichannel reach, as well as scarcity marketing. These strategies align with consumers' psychological motivations—including collecting, socializing, seeking novelty, and emotional attachment. All of these strategies contribute to the rapid expansion of the blind box economy. This paper identifies current issues within the blind box market and proposes optimization strategies, aiming to provide references for consumers' rational decision-making while offering theoretical support for the industry's healthy development and risk mitigation.

Keywords: blind box consumption, scarcity marketing, pricing strategy, consumption scenarios.

1. Introduction

“Blind boxes, whose contents are a surprise until opened, are becoming a major sales phenomenon in China.” [1]. As an emerging consumption phenome-

non, blind boxes have permeated various aspects of daily life, which include not only traditional sectors like toys and figurines but also some multiple consumer domains like apparel, cosmetics, and food. In the first half of 2019, the growth rate of blind

box toys reached a staggering 609% [2]. As blind boxes became popular rapidly, numerous blind box companies have earned substantial profits from the market. Among them, Pop Mart, the trendy toys company favored by young people in recent years, has experienced extraordinary growth. “When Pop Mart, known as the first “blind box” company, went public in Hong Kong on December 11, 2020, its stock price doubled on the first day. This huge success, which gave it a value of over HK\$100 billion, sparked a global “blind box” trend.” [3]. During the 2017 Double 11 shopping festival, sales at Pop Mart’s flagship store reached nearly ¥1.2 million; by the 2019 Double 11 period, sales skyrocketed to ¥821.2 million [4]. By precisely targeting consumer psychology, employing scarcity marketing, creating iconic IPs like Labubu and Molly, leveraging the addictive nature of blind boxes, and utilizing multi-channel sales, Pop Mart rapidly established its consumer market and cultivated a loyal user base. “In 2019, sales in Tmall’s fashion blind box category reached nearly 270 million yuan, a 240% year-on-year increase.” The biggest winner, Pop Mart, achieved a staggering 82.12 million yuan in sales during Double 11 alone, surpassing internationally renowned brands like LEGO to claim the top spot [5]. However, the rapid growth of the blind box economy also conceals numerous issues. These include impulsive and excessive consumption driven by the addictive nature of blind boxes, as well as market disruptions caused by scalpers reselling rare items at inflated prices. Young consumers, in particular, are more susceptible to irrational spending. Research indicates that the primary consumers in the blind box market are the younger generation. The development of the blind box economy relies heavily on the fervent spending of youth. Survey data indicates that within the blind box market, the 18–24 age group accounts for 32%, the 25–29 age group for 26%, and the 30–34 age group for 14.5% [6]. Yet academic research on blind box marketing strategies based on consumer behavior remains nascent, lacking systematic theoretical frameworks and empirical analysis of the underlying consumer motivations. Therefore, this study aims to deeply dissect the underlying logic of blind box marketing by analyzing relevant consumer behaviors and motivations using the ‘4P model’. Analyzing these marketing strategies not only provides theoretical support for young consumers to engage in rational consumption and understand the fundamental logic of blind box consumption but also offers guidance for related industries to mitigate risks and optimize marketing strategies.

Blind boxes originated in Japan. As their name suggests, they are boxes that may hold either surprise or disappointment [7]. Before opening the packaging, consumers don’t know what specific styles of the toy are inside. This sense of uncertainty and surprise pushes customers to purchase again and again. Blind box products not only satisfy con-

sumers’ material needs but also cater to their psychological desires. It satisfies their curiosity, social needs, and emotional attachment. The blind box marketing strategy has a strong connection with the underlying consumer psychology and purchasing motivations. The success of blind box marketing hinges on understanding these underlying consumer motivations and psychological dynamics.

2. Analysis of the Psychological Mechanisms Behind Blind Box Consumption

2.1 Consumer Motivation and Underlying Consumption Logic

The motivation behind blind box consumption can be simply summarized as satisfying consumers’ (particularly young people’s) desire for collecting, social needs, and curiosity.” With sustained economic growth and the gradual improvement of living standards, human society has transitioned from a production-oriented society to a consumption-oriented society.” [4] As economies develop, people shift from basic functional consumption focused on material needs to experiential consumption centered on spiritual fulfillment. Having met fundamental living requirements, individuals now pursue emotional gratification and spiritual satisfaction. After satisfying material needs, they seek emotional anchors and spiritual enrichment. This process of self-fulfillment allows them to express individuality, alleviate anxiety, and gain a sense of belonging [8]. Blind boxes deliver visual enjoyment while satisfying consumers’ collecting urges. Typically featuring adorable designs and intricate craftsmanship, they offer aesthetic appeal and collectible value. Purchased blind boxes can be displayed at home for decorative purposes. Moreover, blind boxes have emerged as social currency among the new generation. Rare editions, hidden variants, and limited releases have become “hard currency” among collectors. Through exchanging, purchasing, and gifting blind boxes, consumers fulfill social needs while gaining group recognition and a sense of belonging. Having grown up alongside the internet, their use of social media has fostered small circles with similar consumption preferences. From a semiotic perspective, French sociologist Jean Baudrillard notes that in consumption spaces centered on symbolic consumption, “demand targets not the object itself, but its value; the fulfillment of demand primarily carries the meaning attached to these values.” Consumers purchase rare or hidden edition blind boxes to flaunt status and capital. Blind boxes have become a new-era consumption symbol, signifying a refined, high-profile, and niche lifestyle that embodies the owner’s unique personality and taste [9]. Furthermore, new-generation consumers pursue novelty and excitement, driven by intense curiosity and

a thrill-seeking mentality—qualities that align perfectly with the randomness and novelty inherent in blind boxes.

2.2 Blind Box Consumption Through Behavioral Economics

Uncertain rewards stimulate increased spending in blind box consumption. Typically comprising 12 base variants and one hidden variant, consumers randomly receive one figure upon purchase. The hidden variant boasts an extremely low appearance rate, making it rarer and commanding significantly higher prices on secondary markets than standard editions. “Humans possess an innate tendency toward optimism, interpreting uncertain events in a positive light and overestimating the probability of favorable outcomes.” [10] To experience the random reward—the joy of drawing the hidden variant—consumers often optimistically assess low-probability outcomes, driving repeated purchases. Furthermore, when purchasing blind boxes, as sunk costs accumulate, consumers tend to invest more to avoid loss aversion. Drawing unpopular or duplicate styles becomes a sunk-cost investment, leading consumers to believe subsequent draws will yield better results and prompt continued investment, thereby deepening the connection between users and products [11]. Sunk costs refer to the phenomenon where individuals persist in an endeavor due to previously invested resources like time, money, or effort [12]. The uncertainty of blind boxes also triggers consumers’ gambler mentality, leading them to mistakenly believe that the probability of obtaining a hidden variant increases after each ordinary draw. This heightens anticipation for subsequent draws and fuels further purchasing behavior.

The “sunk cost fallacy” describes how individuals become trapped by the effect when they persist in an endeavor solely because of prior investments like time, money, or effort [12].

3. Blind Box Marketing Strategies Based on Consumer Behavior.

3.1 Product Strategy.

The product strategy of blind box marketing lays its value heavily on IP through a unique approach for every link. These links include product design, production, marketing, area expansion, etc. All of this works together to build a commercial ecosystem based on IP. When you focus on the strength of the content in the development of the IP, the systematization of the incubation and the operation turns the IP itself into a content engine and an emotional connection engine. Let’s take Pop Mart as an example. The blind box-related companies all cooperate with over 200 artists from all over the world to create a dual track

of “new talent discovery + master collaboration”. This cultivates more creativity and freshness in the IP matrix. Brands such as LABUBU are subject to a direct investment and cultivation cycle of six years or more from signing to becoming a global IP, during which tiered management and differentiated operations will be implemented. The introduction of vinyl soft toy categories, offline shows and exclusive songs further boosts its uniqueness and vitality. At the same time, IPs are being endowed with character development and depth of emotion. By personifying IPs, they are elevated from mere images to something our users feel connected to. In the book *Purchasing Intimacy*, Zeli Ze notes that consumers who build intimate relationships are more willing to spend. Through their purchases, consumers are getting to know the beloved characters from their film/TV or blind box, and enhancing the feeling of virtual intimacy to combat loneliness. The unique IP characters (intellectual properties) created by blind box companies cater to consumer psychology. They act as psychological “marginal utility products” that boost customer attachment indirectly. Moreover, companies release new blind box series. This inspires consumers to collect them and stimulates desire for completing the whole set. Thus, they want to buy.

3.2 Price Strategy.

The blind box’s main pricing strategy is psychological pricing and value anchoring. Platforms usually set an “impulse purchase range” or price point with a sizeable profit margin that is low enough not to cause significant payment pain. Using Pop Mart as an example, blind boxes typically sell for 69 or 79 yuan, thus lowering entry costs and further reducing the consumer decision-making cost. The item is priced at 69 yuan instead of 70 yuan as this ‘left-digit effect’ makes the price seem smaller than it really is. One reason why consumers are willing to pay for items that cost less than what they are actually worth is because they pay a fixed amount of money but do not know what they will get, which makes thrillers. The pricing strategy is one of the most sophisticated in the marketing model known as 4p’s. The method of setting the price is more than just a simple “cost plus profit” exercise. It is a holistic decision affecting consumer psychology, positioning and attributes of the product.

3.3 Place Strategy.

Blind box traders are coping with the trend of omni-channel selling. This is being done to create online and offline consumption scenarios. Consumers have become quite diverse in their purchasing ways. Therefore, the traders’ aim is to meet that diverse need now. It succeeds in comprehensively covering the purchasing channels, enhancing the entry threshold and increasing the willingness to buy.

Some companies, such as Pop Mart have a WeChat Mini program of their own. With the app, customers can sign up to pre-order and pay for the blind boxes they want. They can either pick it up from the premises or have it delivered at their doorstep. Furthermore, customers can shop on an online store developed in cooperation with an e-commerce site (e.g. Taobao). The first large-scale push-out “push-box machine”, in other words, blind box vending machine, by Pop Mart. It appeared mostly in large shopping malls. These tools produce various buying situations, thereby increasing blind box sales and market share. The brand has a multi-channel marketing strategy that meets consumer demands through its online and offline stores. Therefore, it improves the accessibility of its products. Through the association of physical shops, apps, and vending machines, it promotes consumption in various places.

3.4 Promotion Strategy.

Through hidden and limited-edition variants, the company uses scarcity-driven marketing tactics to increase consumer desire to buy blind boxes, thus enhancing their perceived value. Working with the likes of Coca Cola and Harry Potter lures in fans across varied domains that expand the consumer base while keeping everything fresh. Moreover, they put in a lot of money into unboxing videos for Douyin and product endorsement videos for Xiaohongshu. Collaboration with famous bloggers imitates celebrity endorsements, leading to a herd mentality. It drives new users into the market and sparks consumers' purchasing desire.

4. Challenges and Suggestions for Optimization of Blind Box Marketing.

4.1 Problem and advice.

The Blind Box market is experiencing rapid growth but some problems are unavoidable. On the one hand, the “gambling mechanism” embedded in blind box marketing is capable of causing minors, among other consumers, to over-consume impulsively. In the secondary market, high speculation for hidden and limited editions has pushed up prices exorbitantly. This has resulted in speculation and violation of consumer's rights. In light of these existing problems, and based on research on the 4P marketing model and consumer behaviour, some optimising suggestions are: First, blind box product strategy. It is recommended that blind box companies continue to increase IP value while pursuing consumer stories and designs.

4.2 Conclusion

By focusing on the marketing strategy of blind boxes and analyzing consumer behavior and psychology using the

4P theory, it was found that the success of blind box marketing and the continuous development of the blind box economy are highly correlated with the curiosity, collection desire, and strong social identity of consumers in the current new era; In terms of product strategy, the designers of blind boxes attract a continuous influx of people by forming IP and developing a series of products, especially the hidden design; In terms of pricing strategy, enterprises adopt tail end pricing strategies and other methods, while blind box pricing is on the edge of acceptable prices, which creates attractiveness to consumers; In terms of channel strategy, online platforms are laid out in the form of live streaming rooms and other e-commerce formats, while offline integration is combined with physical stores, blind box machines, etc. to effectively enhance purchasing convenience and immersive experience; The promotional strategy fully utilizes the role of social media to continuously increase the social value of blind boxes and maintain their popularity. Research has found problems with blind box marketing. Fixing them is key to the economy's long-term health.

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