

Reasons for Teenagers' Consumption of ACG Products

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Abstract:

With the rapid development of internet technology, teenagers today can access various cultures from around the world through online platforms. Originating from Japan, the ACG (Animation, Comic, and Game) culture has gained immense popularity among teenagers, permeating every aspect of daily life. The derivative consumption behaviors surrounding this subculture have gradually evolved into a thriving industry, with adolescents constituting a major portion of its consumers. This paper aims to explore the underlying motivations behind teenagers' consumption of ACG products, revealing the emotional logic and psychological demands behind such behaviors.

Keywords: ACG culture, teenagers, consumption behavior, consumer psychology

1. Introduction

Teenagers' consumption of ACG products is the inevitable result of the combined influence of economic, technological, cultural, and psychological factors, reflecting their lifestyle and spiritual pursuits in modern society. The term 'ACG' originates from Japan and refers to a fantasy world created through animation, games, and comics that reflects people's desires. Growing up in the internet age, today's youth can easily and cheaply access ACG content through online platforms such as streaming services, official manga and novel apps, and gaming communities. The improvement of online payment systems has further lowered consumption barriers—whether purchasing game skins, virtual gifts, or merchandise, transactions can be completed instantly via fingerprint or facial recognition. This 'painless payment' experience objectively encourages impulsive and fragmented micro-consumption.

Facing academic pressure, competition, and uncertainty about the future, many teenagers find the ACG world to be an idealized, controllable utopia. For numerous fans, ACG culture represents purity, self-expression, and an escape from stress—a psychological 'harbor' that provides comfort and identity. Paying for such an experience can be understood as an investment in emotional well-being. This research seeks to reveal the genuine emotional motivations and social functions behind teenagers' ACG consumption, encouraging families and society to adopt a more empathetic perspective and improve communication with young people.

2. Current Situation of Teenagers' ACG Consumption

2.1 Consumer Group Size

According to the 'Statistical Report on the Develop-

ment of the Internet in China,' the scale of internet users continues to grow, with teenagers forming the primary audience for ACG cultural consumption. Studies show that by 2024, China's pan-ACG user base exceeded 500 million, with adolescents being the most dynamic and influential consumers. Their purchasing behavior is easily influenced by fashion trends, peer groups, and consumption habits, while also impacting family purchasing decisions. This youth-dominated consumer group demonstrates strong willingness, purchasing power, and loyalty toward their favorite ACG intellectual properties (IPs). Fan-oriented 'Otaku' consumers pursue ACG content for identity construction and belonging, showing high loyalty and preference for official products. This vast user base provides fertile ground for the ACG industry and positions youth as its core market segment.

2.2 Market Scale

In recent years, China's ACG industry has entered a period of rapid growth. With a strong user base, increasing original content, and supportive policies, the market has seen significant capital inflow. The 'China Animation Industry Development Report' indicates that from 2016 to 2023, the market expanded from 18.9 billion to 221.9 billion RMB, a compound annual growth rate of 42.2%. The derivative goods market—such as figures, badges, and blind boxes—grew from 5.3 billion to 102.4 billion RMB, with a 52.7% annual growth rate. Teenagers not only form the core audience for animation content but also the main consumers of derivative merchandise, significantly contributing to market expansion. The success of character-based economies, exemplified by Disney and Hello Kitty, demonstrates the critical role of youth-driven ACG consumption in the global cultural industry.

2.3 Main Forms of Consumption

Teenagers' ACG consumption can be categorized into three main types: (1) collectible merchandise, such as figures, badges, and acrylic stands; (2) apparel-related products, including cosplay costumes and anime-themed clothing; and (3) digital content consumption, such as paid streaming, memberships, and virtual goods. These three categories fulfill multiple needs—collection, identity expression, and emotional experience—forming a multi-layered consumption structure.

3. Motivations Behind Teenagers' ACG Consumption

3.1 Emotional Attachment and Compensation

The ACG world is often viewed as a refuge from real-life pressures. Many teenagers facing academic and social

stress find psychological comfort and emotional fulfillment through immersion in fictional narratives and characters. ACG consumption serves as a form of emotional compensation, providing an outlet for unmet desires or restricted behaviors in real life. For those who struggle with belonging or social identity, ACG offers an idealized world where they can connect with characters possessing distinct personalities and values. Collecting related merchandise allows them to keep their favorite characters close, creating a sense of companionship that alleviates loneliness and provides emotional support. For introverted individuals, these characters often serve as symbolic 'friends,' offering stability in an unpredictable world.

Under the pressure of a rapidly changing society, some teenagers feel discontent with their current circumstances. Unable to achieve full independence, they often seek emotional release through ACG-related engagement, which serves as a means of escape and self-expression. Thus, ACG consumption can be interpreted as a coping mechanism that fulfills both emotional and psychological needs.

3.2 Commercial and Marketing Influences

In the consumer market, derivative ACG products have become essential profit drivers within the entertainment industry. The convergence of capital and media has intensified the social identity of teenagers in this cultural context. Companies leverage the entertainment economy by turning characters and idols into commodified cultural symbols. Online platforms use ranking systems and data-driven fan engagement mechanisms to stimulate consumption behaviors, where fan participation directly translates into platform traffic and commercial value.

3.3 Role of Social Media

Social media platforms—such as Bilibili, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu—have amplified the visibility and appeal of ACG products. Through unboxing videos, product reviews, and fan communities, teenagers are constantly exposed to peer-driven consumption trends. In this participatory media era, fans are no longer passive recipients but active curators of content. The desire for group belonging often compels individuals to engage in ACG consumption to integrate into shared communities, even when such purchases are not personally necessary.

4. Strategies for Guiding Healthy ACG Consumption

4.1 Family and Education: Strengthening Communication and Financial Literacy

Parents should avoid prohibitive approaches and instead communicate with their children to understand their in-

terests, helping them differentiate between ‘needs’ and ‘wants.’ Enhancing financial literacy can foster rational consumption habits. Families should provide care and guidance to adolescents, preventing excessive idolization or emotional dependence on fictional characters. Schools, on the other hand, should offer targeted educational programs to improve students’ media literacy and promote responsible online behavior.

4.2 Industry and Corporate Responsibility: Promoting Value-Oriented Development

Enterprises should prioritize developing ACG products that combine cultural significance with practical value, moving away from exploitative marketing practices. A healthy marketing model should enhance social responsibility while minimizing manipulative consumer inducement. Online platforms must also regulate fan activities, promote rational spending, and implement age restrictions to prevent minors from irrational financial behaviors. By focusing on innovation and quality, companies can deepen the cultural appeal of ACG content and foster sustainable industry growth.

5. Conclusion and Prospect

This study finds that teenagers’ ACG consumption has become a significant component of cultural spending, characterized by a large user base, rapidly expanding market, and diverse consumption forms. Motivations stem from

both internal psychological factors—such as emotional attachment, identity formation, and social needs—and external influences like social media and commercial marketing. Fan culture, as a double-edged sword, brings both positive and negative impacts. While it fosters creativity and belonging, it also risks encouraging impulsive and irrational spending. Thus, guiding teenagers toward rational consumption and promoting healthy industry development should be a shared responsibility among families, corporations, and society. Looking ahead, the ACG economy is expected to develop in a more standardized and diversified manner, offering youth greater cultural enrichment and emotional nourishment.

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