

The role played by social media behind Labubu's sudden popularity

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Abstract. Nowadays, "Blind box economy" has gradually emerged with the Internet. Labubu become an instant hit worldwide in a short period of time and has gained a large number of fans. The study focused on analyzing four roles that social media played in the sudden popularity of Labubu. Firstly, social media can facilitate the establishment of identity recognition, form a unique fan groups for Labubu, and turn Labubu into a new type of social currency. Secondly, it expand the emotional value carried by Labubu. Moreover, social media may provide Pop Mart with some unique marketing strategies to increase the attention and purchase of Labubu. Finally, recommendation algorithm creates an information cocoon identifying potential customers for Labubu and attracting new users' attention. This research is helpful for companies to use social media reasonably to promote their products and attract high attention, eventually making the products a huge hit. At the same time, it can also help consumers become aware of the trend of the "Blind box economy" and avoid economic losses caused by blindly following the trend in consumption. As a result, businesses and consumers jointly build a healthy consumption ecosystem.

Keywords: Labubu; social media; consumer behavior.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the Internet, the commodity value contains not only simple use value, but also often symbolic value representing trends, identities and cultures. A notable case, the "Blind box economy" has gradually emerged with the Internet. Labubu, as a series of IPs of Pop Mart, has become an instant hit worldwide in a short period of time and has gained a large number of fans. In previous studies, the factors that led to the sudden popularity of Labubu have been analyzed, including but not limited to: Firstly, its strong social attribute makes it a kind of "social currency" among young people. Secondly, the emotional value that the quirky image brings to consumers in daily life. Thirdly, the pleasure and excitement brought by the uncertainty during draw blind boxes. Fourth, the information cocoon formed by the algorithmic mechanism induces customers to consume [1]. At the same time, it also explores how consumers' psychological motivations influence the sudden popularity of Labubu [2]. In addition, relevant studies have analyzed the impact of the blind box economy on consumers [3]. By leveraging its sharing and social attributes, social media has further enhanced the promotion and dissemination of Labubu's symbolic value.

Based on the background, this paper aims to deeply analyze the role played by social media behind the sudden popularity of Labubu on following four aspects: how social media promotes the formation of identity among Labubu communities; how videos and posts on social media provide emotional value for customers; how social media in conjunction with Pop Mart's marketing strategy to enhance its influence; and how the unique algorithm mechanism of social media further strengthen the promotion of Labubu. Besides, this study hoped that effective strategies of Pop Mart's can be useful for other companies to market their products. At the same time, it is also hoped to guide consumers to consume rationally and avoid property losses caused by impulsive consumption.

2. Background

"Blind box economy", also known as mystery box economy, has recently emerged as a popular global marketing strategy. It is a consumption model based on random attribute toy boxes, which induces customers to keep expending with strong uncertainty. Currently, it has become a rapidly growing market phenomenon [2].

"Blind box" is a sealed box containing random toy characters, and consumers don't know which character they will gain before opening the box. Drawing "blind boxes" can bring a strong sense of excitement and anticipation to consumers. After opening the blind box, the toys inside the box carry extremely high social attributes and collection value. Therefore, blind box culture has become increasingly popular in modern society and is deeply attracted to young consumers. Drawing blind boxes has gradually become a way of daily entertainment for people [4].

Labubu is a series of characters designed by illustrator Long Jiaxing. They are monsters with big facial features, exaggerated expressions. Labubu was first launched in 2015. Since 2019, it has reached an licensing cooperation with Pop Mart and launched a series of decorative items. Since its commercialization, Labubu has first become popular in East and Southeast Asia, and then in Europe, America and even globally, becoming one of the iconic figures of Pop Mart and a significantly figure in the global blind box collection trend [1].

3. The role played by social media behind Labubu's sudden popularity

3.1. Self-identity

In the theoretical system of the consumer society, philosopher Baudrillard mentioned that goods distinguish different customer groups through symbolic differences. Consumers meet their personalized needs and demonstrate their status by choosing different "symbolic" goods [5]. The commodity value has surpassed simple exchange. Instead, it forms a specific identity through selecting symbolic commodities.

With the popularity of social media among the "Z generation", Labubu maintains its popularity and spreads rapidly through common and popular social media platforms such as Tiktok, Rednote, and Weibo Super Topics. All kinds of users, for example, clerks, bloggers and customers on the platform helped to keep the popularity of Labubu by sharing their life-like purchasing feelings, unboxing, reselling. At the same time, they have attracted more users with different purchasing experiences and insights from playing to share.

For customers, these ordinary-looking small boxes do not have special appeal. Getting "hooked" might be due to accidentally browsing other players' purchases, shares, and reviews on social media. When some new blind boxes are released, players do not have a strong desire to purchase them at first. However, as more and more players post blind box information on social media platforms, they will gradually become interested and try to follow the trend. Ultimately, an online Labubu fan community was formed. Labubu has a strong social attribute so that gradually becoming the "social currency" of young people. Social media provides a showcase platform for celebrities, influencers and even ordinary customers. Players can show their personal taste in social groups by displaying the Labubu they own and collect on social media [6]. Meanwhile, players can discover and follow Labubu enthusiasts at home and abroad, conduct online transactions, and make friends on social media with them.

3.2. Emotional value

Labubu has won huge popularity with its "cute and ugly" image, narrative story background and strong social attributes, strongly aligning with the consumption psychology of young people. In Rednote posts, Labubu's big ears and eyes are more prominent, creating a sense of closeness to small

animals and awakening players' "caregiving instincts", and thus attract a large number of female consumers who usually have a higher sensitivity to cute images to purchasing [6].

3.2.1. Relieve pressure

Labubu's sharp teeth and untidy appearance break away from the traditional cute image of doll, making it easier to form a specific emotional connection with players. It can effectively help players relieve the irritability and tension caused by psychological pressure. On social media like Tiktok, many players have shared their experiences of bringing Labubu into various scenarios such as workplace and travel. Besides, Labubu has been endowed with specific identities, such as "Work Partner", "Healing Companion", and "Fashion Assistant". Therefore, Labubu truly generates a warm and healing mood, helping players relieve the stress and unease brought about by interpersonal relationships, work and study.[7]

3.2.2. Sense of Achievement

Furthermore, Labubu can also bring players a strong sense of achievement. With the continuous release of new Labubu, players have begun to aim at collecting all the characters in the series or drawing limited quantity. While drawing a Labubu, consumers would obtain a small accomplishment, from which they can gain a sense of satisfaction. Moreover, seasoned collectors satisfy their vanity by showcasing their "collection walls" and their collection journey to win likes and followers. This not only brings a sense of achievement to seasoned players and keeps them collecting Labubu, but also brings joy to other players and sets an invisible "collection goal" [1].

3.3. Marketing strategy

3.3.1. Uncertainty

Drawing blind boxes is similar to gambling and gain a strong sense of uncertainty. When drawing blind boxes, what players pursue is not only the items inside the blind boxes, but also the thrill brought by thinking, hesitation and anticipation. This can greatly satisfy people's desire for "immediate satisfaction" in fast-paced society currently. Even if the character drawn is not the one they like or the limited quantity, it will still make the player more eager to start the next draw, thus constantly repeating this process [3]. With the rise of live-streaming sales on social media platforms, the model of drawing products in the live-streaming and then delivering them directly to customers home has matured. Live streaming can meet players' demands to draw blind box products like Labubu without leaving home, providing them with a more convenient shopping experience and leading to a dramatically increase in the order volume of blind box products. Meanwhile, the live-streaming hosts repeatedly and frequently use brainwashing oral advertisements and display astonishing sales volumes, luring customers order Labubu and even causing players to continuously repurchase without realizing it [8].

3.3.2. Brand story

Labubu is a series of stories created by Hong Kong illustrator Jiaxing Long, inspired by Nordic folk tales and myths. Labubu stories are not narrated in traditional text or picture books, but are released in the form of animations on social media platforms such as Tiktok and Bilibili. Animations are simpler and more understandable, thus helping Labubu attract the interest of younger groups, such as children. Moreover, animations will leave players with a deeper impression of the characters' personalities and help them establish profoundly emotional connections with the Labubu family. Therefore, animation may help boost Labubu's sales and popularity.

3.3.3. Co-branded

Labubu collaborates with other brands and gains traffic support and promotion resources through e-commerce platforms. At present, e-commerce platforms require consumers to share product links on social media and invite friends to help them purchase goods at a lower price. On the home page of e-commerce platforms, splash screen advertisements often feature collaborations between Labubu and

other products. On the other hand, the limited-time discount activities, coupons, reward methods of e-commerce platforms and the low-price sales during shopping festival have made consumers even more enthusiastic about purchasing products like Labubu that are relatively expensive but offer less discount in regular offline purchases [1].

3.3.4. Celebrity

Celebrities, actors and influencers have played a role in accelerating the spread of Labubu on social media. For instance, when Blackpink member Lisa shared Labubu pendants on Instagram, it not only made her fans rush to purchase the same fashionable items, but also made users browse them inadvertently and spread posts quickly. Other celebrities such as Rose and Emma Roberts have also successively shared Labubu-related products on social media platforms, expanding Labubu's popularity while enhancing the brand's reputation and acceptance.

3.4. Information cocoon

E-commerce platforms through data analysis and precise algorithmic recommend products that match users' previous attitudes and preferences to consumers based on their browsing history and purchase records [9], thus forming an information cocoon. E-commerce platforms analyze users' browsing records, information so that push Labubu-related information to potential consumers. In this case, a large amount of Labubu-related information present to consumers. It has greatly influenced the purchasing judgment and final decision of potential Consumers [9], at the same time, it has also driven the attention of users on the edge of the Internet. Due to small amount of Information that consumers received, the narrow scope of information that conforms to interests, ideas and preferences of consumers are likely to form a rapid thinking mode for users [9]. Therefore, the exposure rate and order placement rate of Labubu have been further enhanced.

4. Suggestion

For brands to become an instant hit, they need to attach great importance to the powerful social and communication attributes of social media, and make full use of these attributes to meet customer needs, forming a unique "identity" and establish a specific fan community. At the same time, making good use of the expanded emotional value of social media can increase the sales volume of products and expand their influence and reputation. Besides, it is necessary to combine the features of company products with the technological development in order to identifying potential customer groups and attracting new users. In addition, to expand the target audience for products, it maybe effective that promote products by using e-commerce platforms and live-streaming by celebrities and influencers on social media.

Players should also consider their true needs before purchasing goods, rather than blindly following the trend, receiving limited information so that buying non-ideal products and being unconsciously manipulated by capital. It is also necessary to pay attention to blindly purchasing products just to follow favorite celebrities or influencers, and enhance subjective judgment ability. To avoid blind consumption, players should set a reasonable budget in advance before purchasing, which may avoid a large amount of economic losses.

5. Conclusion

The study analyzed four roles that social media played in the sudden popularity of Labubu. Social media can facilitate the establishment of identity recognition and form unique fan groups for Labubu. Making Labubu a new type of social currency. Meanwhile, social media can expand the emotional value of Labubu, such as providing companionship and promoting social interaction to help players relieve pressure of life and work. Similarly, social media has effectively helped Pop Mart implement its marketing strategy, increasing the attention and purchase volume of Labubu through e-commerce platforms, advertising placements, live streaming, and posts by influencers and celebrities. Finally,

the effective application of algorithmic to form an information cocoon on social media, which can help potential customers for Labubu and attract new users' attention.

This research is helpful for companies to use social media reasonably and effectively to promote their products and attract high attention, eventually making the products a huge hit. At the same time, it can also help consumers become aware of the trend of the "Blind box economy", enhance their subjective judgment ability, and avoid economic losses caused by blindly following the trend in consumption. Businesses and consumers jointly build a healthy consumption ecosystem.

However, this study only conducted research and analysis on the Labubu IP under Pop Mart. More cases should be analyzed to obtain a more universal conclusion. Moreover, this article is only a qualitative study. Subsequent research should obtain relevant data through quantitative research to verify the conclusion and analyze the specific mechanism involved.

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