

The Impact of Pop Mart on Consumers' Buying Ideas: Based on the Trillion-Yuan Trendy Toy Industry

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Abstract:

China's trendy toy market has grown rapidly and is expected to reach 87.7 billion yuan by 2025. As a leading company in this industry, Pop Mart has changed how people view buying and collecting through its "IP Pyramid" business model. Instead of focusing on practical use, Pop Mart highlights emotional value, symbolic meaning, and long-term collection. This study uses a mixed research method, including academic research, industry cases, and survey data, to explore how Pop Mart influences consumer behavior. The results show three main changes: consumers shift from functional buying to symbolic and meaningful consumption, from individual purchasing to socially influenced consumption, and from short-term spending to long-term collecting. These trends are strongly connected to technology, cultural identity, and Generation Z. Although the trendy toy industry supports creativity and emotional satisfaction, it also creates risks such as irrational spending and financial pressure. This study helps explain modern consumption changes and offers suggestions for sustainable industry development.

Keywords: Pop Mart; Consumption Concept; Trendy Toy; IP Operation; Symbolic Consumption

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

Since around 2016, China's trendy toy industry has entered a period of rapid growth, driven by rising disposable income, cultural confidence, and the increasing influence of youth culture. Trendy toys, also known as designer toys or art toys, are no longer simple children's products but have become cultural

commodities that integrate art, fashion, and emotional expression. According to industry forecasts, the total market size of China's trendy toy industry is expected to reach 87.7 billion yuan by 2025, accounting for approximately 25% of the global market.

Among all companies in this sector, Pop Mart has emerged as a dominant force, occupying nearly 30% of the domestic market share. In recent years, Pop Mart has also accelerated its international expansion, with overseas revenue achieving triple-digit growth. The auction sale of a LABUBU figure for 1.08 mil-

lion yuan illustrates the dramatic shift in how consumers perceive value, meaning, and price in the trendy toy market.

This phenomenon reflects broader changes in consumption concepts in contemporary society. Consumers are no longer guided solely by functional needs; instead, emotional satisfaction, cultural identity, and symbolic meaning play an increasingly important role in purchasing decisions. By applying symbolic consumption theory and cultural identity theory, this study explores how Pop Mart reshapes consumer thinking and behavior. In practice, this research can help consumers make more rational decisions, assist enterprises in balancing commercial interests with social responsibility, and provide policymakers with insights for regulating emerging cultural markets.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

Existing research on trendy toys primarily focuses on market size, marketing strategies, and business models, while relatively little attention has been paid to how these products influence consumers' underlying consumption concepts. This study aims to address this gap by exploring three key research questions:

1. Which aspects of consumers' consumption concepts are influenced by Pop Mart?
2. What social, cultural, and technological factors drive these changes?
3. What are the positive and negative consequences of these shifts in consumption concepts?

The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Pop Mart reshapes consumer behavior and to offer suggestions for promoting the sustainable development of the trendy toy industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Studies on Consumption Concepts

The concept of consumption has evolved significantly over time. Traditional economic theory views consumption as a rational activity aimed at satisfying practical needs. However, with the development of consumer society, scholars have increasingly emphasized the symbolic and emotional dimensions of consumption. Baudrillard's symbolic consumption theory argues that modern consumers purchase goods not only for their use value but also for their symbolic meaning, which reflects identity, status, and personal values.

In addition, emotional consumption has become a prominent trend in contemporary society. Consumers often buy products to relieve stress, seek comfort, or express individuality. This shift is particularly evident among younger generations, who place greater importance on self-expres-

sion and emotional experience than on material utility.

2.2 Studies on Trendy Toys and Pop Mart

Research on trendy toys has mainly focused on industry development and corporate strategies. Scholars have analyzed Pop Mart's blind-box marketing, IP incubation model, and channel expansion strategies, highlighting how these approaches stimulate repeated purchases and consumer engagement. Some studies point out that blind-box mechanisms increase uncertainty and excitement, which strengthens consumers' emotional attachment to products.

However, most existing studies stop at describing marketing outcomes and lack in-depth analysis of how trendy toy consumption reshapes consumers' values and attitudes. Although surveys indicate that Generation Z consumers purchase trendy toys for emotional satisfaction, few studies systematically explain how Pop Mart transforms consumption concepts at the psychological and social levels.

2.3 Research Gaps

Despite growing academic interest in trendy toys, several research gaps remain. First, there is limited research on the transformation of consumption concepts driven by trendy toy companies. Second, few studies examine the combined effects of technology, culture, and generational change. Third, the dual impact of trendy toy consumption—both positive and negative—has not been sufficiently explored. This study seeks to fill these gaps by providing a comprehensive and balanced analysis.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. This design allows for a more comprehensive understanding of both consumers' subjective experiences and objective behavioral patterns.

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure reliability and diversity. Industry reports and corporate documents from Pop Mart provided background information and market data. Social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin were analyzed to capture consumers' real-time opinions and emotional expressions. Approximately 2,000 social media posts related to Pop Mart were reviewed.

In addition, a questionnaire survey was conducted among Pop Mart consumers. A total of 523 questionnaires were distributed, and 498 valid responses were collected, re-

sulting in a response rate of 95.2%. The survey included questions about purchasing motivation, emotional experience, social interaction, and spending behavior.

3.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings. Quantitative data were processed using statistical methods to examine correlations and trends in consumer behavior.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Pop Mart's Three Main Impacts on Consumption Concepts

4.1.1 From Functional Buying to Meaningful Buying

Pop Mart transforms ordinary toys into cultural symbols by creating distinctive IP characters with unique personalities and stories. Characters such as Molly and LABUBU represent attitudes, emotions, and lifestyles rather than practical functions. Survey results show that 72% of consumers believe that owning specific IPs reflects their personal style and taste.

Unlike traditional luxury goods that emphasize social hierarchy, trendy toys emphasize "circle identity," allowing consumers to express belonging to a particular cultural group. This trend is especially evident in lower-tier cities, where the growth rate of trendy toy consumption reaches 25% annually.

4.1.2 From Personal Buying to Social Buying

Pop Mart has successfully built a strong consumer community through online and offline platforms. Social media plays a crucial role in this process. On Xiaohongshu, millions of posts related to Pop Mart showcase collections, unboxing experiences, and emotional stories.

According to survey data, 58.7% of consumers reported that collecting Pop Mart toys helped them make new friends. Offline exhibitions and fan gatherings further strengthen social bonds, turning consumption into a shared cultural activity rather than an individual behavior.

4.1.3 From Short-Term Buying to Long-Term Collecting

The blind-box mechanism encourages repeated purchases and long-term engagement. Many consumers aim to complete full series, which increases emotional attachment and perceived value. Pop Mart's high repurchase rate reflects this shift.

The growth of the resale market also shows that consumers increasingly view trendy toys as collectible assets. For some families, collecting toys has become a shared hobby across generations.

4.2 Driving Forces Behind the Changes

4.2.1 Technology

Technological innovation enhances the consumption experience. Digital blind boxes, blockchain authentication, and AR interactions blur the boundary between physical and virtual consumption. These technologies appeal strongly to young consumers who value novelty and interactivity.

4.2.2 Cultural Identity

The rise of "Guochao" reflects growing cultural confidence. Pop Mart's success with traditional Chinese IPs demonstrates how cultural identity influences consumption choices, especially among older consumers who prefer culturally meaningful products.

4.2.3 Generational Change

Generation Z dominates the trendy toy market. Having grown up in a relatively affluent environment, they prioritize emotional satisfaction and self-expression. Trendy toys serve as emotional companions and stress relievers in their daily lives.

4.3 Positive and Negative Effects

4.3.1 Positive Effects

The trendy toy industry contributes to cultural innovation, job creation, and international cultural exchange. Pop Mart's global expansion helps promote Chinese culture worldwide.

4.3.2 Negative Effects

However, excessive consumption, speculative behavior, and financial pressure pose serious concerns. Some consumers overspend or treat trendy toys purely as investment tools, which may lead to economic and psychological risks.

5. Conclusion and Future Outlook

5.1 Main Conclusions

This study finds that Pop Mart has fundamentally reshaped consumption concepts by emphasizing meaning, community, and long-term collecting. These changes are driven by technology, cultural identity, and generational values.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

By integrating symbolic consumption theory and cultural identity theory, this study enriches the academic understanding of contemporary consumption behavior.

5.3 Practical Implications

Companies should balance creativity with responsibility, governments should strengthen market regulation, and consumers should pursue rational and healthy consumption habits.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study mainly focuses on urban consumers and cross-sectional data. Future research can explore long-term trends, rural markets, and the development of virtual IPs. Achieving a balance between commercial success and consumer well-being will be essential for the sustainable growth of the trendy toy industry.

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