

# Analysis and Enlightenment of Blind Box Culture "Go Viral"

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**Abstract.** In recent years, "Blind Box Consumption" has set off waves in China. Blind box products quickly occupy the vast market and become a hot topic of public discussion. Behind the blind box trend of the blind box is the localized development of Japanese tide play in China, from which we can get a glimpse of China's popular consumption model and consumer mentality. The paper mainly analyzes the cultural characteristics and current situation of blind boxes from the following three aspects: The reason for the "explosion" of blind boxes in China; Consumer psychology and behavior analysis and the potential harm of blind box consumption. It is found that the blind box, as a new consumption model, brings short and varied emotional experiences to consumers. At the same time, the uncertainty of blind box products increases the repurchase rate of customers, allowing consumers to form emotional dependence during the purchase process, thus achieving the effect of "addiction", resulting in addictive spending beyond the consumption budget. Therefore, the development of the blind box industry urgently needs the government departments to refine and improve the industry laws and regulations, and the regulatory authorities need to supervise the merchants and establish a perfect after-sales service mechanism. Consumers should also be accomplished with open eyes, understand the publicity mode and potential harm behind the blind box, and establish a scientific and rational consumption concept.

**Keywords:** Blind box economy, Consumer psychology, Addictive harm.

## 1. Introduction

The blind box model can be traced back to the Meiji period in Japan, which was introduced by stores and department stores after the Spring Festival or the auspicious days of the opening of the store [1], and it later evolved into a separate sales model. The blind box products were widely popular after their launch. Combining with popular anime, independent fashion products are derived and welcomed by the Japanese people. The blind box soon spread as part of Japanese culture and became popular all over the world. The crazy consumption boom of blind box products has promoted the rapid development and growth of China's blind box market, and promoted the development of related industries, forming a complete industrial chain including design, production, and sales. Blind boxes are popular in the consumer groups which were born after 1995, triggering a new consumption boom, not only promoting economic development but also enriching people's social ways and becoming a new social carrier. The reasons for the rapid spread of the blind box and its "explosion", the psychology and behavior of consumers when buying the blind box, and the potential harm behind the blind box explosion need to be discussed from the academic aspect and given scientific guidance.

## 2. The Emergence of Blind Box Culture and its Development in China

Blind box, as the name suggests, refers to a toy box that consumers cannot know the specific product style in advance and has random properties. The blind box originated from the lucky bag made in Japan to increase the sales of candy, and later it was widely spread and developed into a new form. The emergence of blind boxes provides consumers with uncertain diversified choices, which not only arouses consumers' curiosity but also stimulates consumers to make repeated purchases in order to pick the desired products, thus increasing sales. A common means of promotion in department stores which put unequal goods into "fortune bags" that were sealed cartons for sale, often loved by consumers for excellent quality and reasonable price. In this way, department stores could

also obtain better sales while cleaning up the tail goods. This method soon became one of the successful promotion methods. In the 1880s, the Japanese model market was affected by the "Fukubagu", and a large number of model enthusiasts made and commercialized models. The gashapon machine came into being. The product content of the twisting egg machine is generally cartoon characters, food, or daily necessities, etc. After paying, the knob on the twisting machine will randomly drop a product, and the opaque outer packaging can be opened to know the product content. The gashapon machine created a market for blind boxes [2].

Compared with Japan's enthusiasm for blind box products, Chinese consumers' attitude toward blind boxes had experienced a period of twists and turns. From the brief popularity of the blind box when it entered the Chinese market, to the smooth and even low period, the industry of blind box has become a well-known fashion product and integrated develops with related industries now. These changes include the joint effect of culture and economy. From the perspective of culture, China's animation industry is weak, and there is no solid animation culture foundation. Most of the people's understanding of animation comes from TV and related video playback software, and they regard animation as leisure entertainment, and do not absorb and integrate it into national culture. From an economic point of view, the survey shows that among blind box players, female white-collar workers in first-tier cities and college students of Generation Z (refers to people born between 1995 and 2009) are the main force of blind box consumption. Professional white-collar workers accounted for 49.7%, and students accounted for 28.6%; Among them, people aged 18-24 accounted for the highest proportion, reaching 37.6%; The proportion of people aged between 25 and 34 is 37.3% [3]. It can be seen that most people who like animation are the younger generation, and the consumption structure of blind box products tends to be younger.

With the continuous development and maturity of fashion toy brands, fashion toy fairs, and fashion online communities, the idea of manifesting individuality and expressing oneself has been recognized by more and more young people, and Fashion play has gradually become a carrier for communication among young people. They love fashion play and express their pursuit of art and self through fashion play. The influence of fashion on them is also various [4]. Blind box products are relevant to the consumption concept that young people pay attention to emotional experience and are willing to pay for self-expression, providing consumers with emotional value and a new social scene, triggering a purchasing trend. In addition, the development of design has brought new opportunities to the blind box industry. Designers spend a lot of effort on the design of blind box products, from the listing of roles, background tones, scene layout, and other aspects of comprehensive matching to attract customers' attention. Consumers also enjoy the visual beauty of opening blind boxes and are willing to pay for good design. At the same time, there are different series of blind box products, taking "POP MART" as an example, including Molly series, Pucky genie family series, Skull Panda doll series, Dimoo space series, Pucky forest series, etc [5]. Through the vivid creation of the IP image, the brand provides consumers with a variety of role scenes, so that different consumers can find their favorite blind box series and enhance their consumption desire.

### **3. The Emotional Consumption of the Blind Box**

The behavior that modern people obtain emotional satisfaction through consumption is emotional consumption [6]. Wang Ning believes that the existence of emotion is social, and one of the ways to satisfy and vent human emotions in the current era is emotional consumption [7]. Blind boxes are typical emotional consumer goods. In addition to the product itself, consumers also get a variety of emotions, such as curiosity and expectation before purchase, nervousness and excitement when opening the blind box, and the joy or disappointment when seeing the role in the blind box, which lets consumers get rich emotional experiences. The blind box is not a necessity of life but an entertainment product that brings spiritual comfort to consumers in the ordinary daily interval.

At present, when material needs are basically satisfied, young consumers have no worries about food and clothing and pursue more spiritual self-consistency, so they are willing to spend part of their

money on emotional experiences and entertainment consumption. For most blind box players, when the blind box opens, what it presents is not a handmade model but an expectation. By randomly pumping blind boxes with great uncertainty, blind box players get instant enjoyment and emotional satisfaction, so the popularity of blind boxes is increasing [8]. Blind boxes are a way for consumers to release pressure and find themselves in the gap between monotonous and stressful work. At present, mental health is receiving increasing attention by society, and the existence of blind boxes is undoubtedly of great practical significance.

#### **4. Blind box addiction-related harm analysis**

The blind box can trigger the consumption trend, which is inseparable from the control of consumer mentality. Blind boxes possess unknowability and immediacy: consumers are uncertain about the products contained in the blind box, and there is a certain chance that they can obtain their favorite characters. The probabilistic characteristic sets the blind box apart from basic commodity trading and turns it into a trend product with similarities and integration with major IP, attracting consumer attention.

The thrill of purchasing a blind box lies in the moment of opening it and seeing the product. The joy of acquiring the desired character and the disappointment of not obtaining it cause fluctuations in consumer mood, stimulating them to make repeat purchases and thus increasing sales. Different companies and series of blind box products feature various themes and images, among which there are always a few relevant to different customer preferences. Simultaneously, blind box products are mostly sold as series, boasting exquisite shapes and craftsmanship to provide visual enjoyment to consumers. Diverse series and rich product images also fuel people's desire to collect a complete set.

The "Half Hour of the Economy" program of CCTV defines blind box sales as gambling, mainly because of the random uncertainty of the blind box purchase and the potential for multiple gains in the secondary market due to uncertain results [9]. Although it is necessary to carefully analyze whether the purchase of blind box products constitutes gambling behavior, such views also indicate that the allure and excitement of blind boxes can lead consumers to impulsive and repetitive consumption.

Furthermore, when merchants promote blind box products, they often use promotional terms such as "limited edition" and "hidden version," employing scarcity marketing to generate buzz around blind boxes. Simultaneously, the development of the Internet has provided opportunities for online promotion of blind box products, creating a buzz among trend followers, while the establishment of relevant communities has also provided a platform for blind box players to meet the social needs of consumer groups.

However, social platforms beautify people's lives to a certain extent, and what everyone sees through the screen is the content curated by netizens, often presenting a one-sided view of glamour. Netizens who fail to grasp this feature correctly are prone to comparison and seek to assert their "identity" by accumulating blind boxes based on their perceived value and quantity.

The fashionable appeal of blind boxes represents current trends to some extent, with prices slightly higher than those of other entertainment products yet within a reasonable range to attract the attention of fashion-conscious customers. Blind box products featuring a variety of characters and scenes easily trigger people's desire to collect entire sets, with the number and style of blind boxes purchased serving as indicators of the taste and financial means of blind box enthusiasts. In their quest to complete different series, consumers often find themselves caught in a cycle of repeated purchases, leading to expenditures beyond their budget.

In addition, in the current blind box market, there is still rampant growth, with a lack of effective supervision. Under the influence of businessmen's profit-seeking nature, operators are prone to abusing the unknown characteristics of blind boxes, violating consumers' reasonable rights, and placing already vulnerable consumers in a more disadvantageous situation [9]. Information asymmetry makes it possible for merchants to manipulate the probability of hidden money extraction

at will. Some businesses, in order to make huge profits, often include a very small amount of hidden money, making it difficult for consumers to obtain the style they desire [10].

Overall, blind boxes possess the randomness and surprise of commodity trading, appealing to consumer consumption psychology, and follow a "stimulus, pleasure, pleasure, reinforcement, and addiction" gambling model, inducing consumers to trade. Unlike ordinary goods and services, different categories of blind box products have varying quality standards.

Upon completing the transaction, consumers have the opportunity to understand specific product information, such as style and quality. There is also a lack of supervision in the production process of blind box products, making it difficult to trace and inspect their quality through random inspections or other means typically used for ordinary commodities. Consequently, the quality traceability and inspection system cannot fulfill its intended role. Illegal merchants exploit information asymmetry, engaging in practices such as fake sales and exaggerated probabilities of winning in blind boxes.

For instance, some businesses exploit the concept of "blind boxes" by placing unquarantined pets inside and directly mailing them. Negligence within the express industry's inspection procedures facilitates this practice, forming a complete industrial chain. However, this trade violates relevant mailing regulations, and the absence of live quarantine procedures allows live animals to potentially carry a multitude of germs, posing significant health risks to consumers.

Furthermore, including general pets in blind boxes under the guise of the concept, coupled with the addition of expensive pet labels, raises suspicions of fraud. Such actions are inconsistent with the concept of blind boxes and may lead to pet abandonment, thereby jeopardizing social security. Various cases highlight the flaws in information asymmetry within blind box series products, infringing upon consumers' right to know. This issue requires urgent attention and resolution [10, 11].

## 5. Suggestions

The blind box consumer market is in urgent need of relevant departments to formulate regulations and industry supervision. The existing regulations, such as the Product Quality Law and the Compliance Guidelines for Blind Box Business Activities in Shanghai, have made preliminary provisions on blind box sales, but there are still limitations such as insufficient precedents, lack of relevant detailed provisions, and no mandatory punishment measures. Regulations for the blind box industry can be refined to define whether blind boxes are classified as gambling activities. Law is the bottom line of morality and the beacon of the industry. Laws and regulations with clear rights and responsibilities can warn businesses and regulate the development of the industry.

At the same time, regulatory authorities need to carry out flexible supervision and management of the blind box industry. On June 15, the General Administration of Market Supervision issued the "Guidelines on the Conduct of Blind Box Business (Trial)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Guidelines") and implemented them. The "Guidelines" clearly standardized the problems existing in the blind box business, requiring blind box operators to disclose key information such as the commodity value of the items in the blind box, extraction rules, and extraction probability in a significant way to guide rational consumption.

Additionally, blind box operators are encouraged to guide rational consumption by setting the extraction time, the extraction amount ceiling, and the number ceiling, and consciously committing not to stockpile goods, not to hype, and not to directly enter the secondary market [12 13]. The "Guidelines" strengthen the compliance management of blind box business activities, and regulatory departments should also implement the regulations, actively supervise and visit, collect consumer evaluations, and severely punish businesses that falsely advertise and produce counterfeit and shoddy products to protect the reasonable rights and interests of consumers.

The majority of consumers should also establish a healthy and scientific consumption concept and correctly understand the hidden dangers and risks behind blind box products while meeting their own emotional needs. In the selection of blind boxes, they should also carefully consider the product's quality while setting a reasonable budget for purchase.

## 6. Conclusion

After the blind box was introduced into China from Japan, it underwent localization transformation and development according to national conditions, evolving from a simple lucky bag to increase candy sales into a fashionable play product with independent IP and rich image and scene. As an emerging consumer industry, the blind box conforms to economic development and the trends of the times, attracting many young consumers and obtaining a broad market. The blind box attracts consumers' attention with its exquisite packaging design and rich product image, enhancing the repurchase rate with its ornamental and collectible characteristics. The community model derived from the blind box industry provides a platform for consumer communication, and the development of the Internet also promotes blind box products to enter more people's vision. The process of selecting and unpacking the blind box is very fun and brings a rich emotional experience to the consumer.

At the same time, because of its unknowability and randomness, the blind box attracts consumers to repurchase and has a certain addictive quality. Merchants' exaggerated propaganda is also easy to lure consumers into the vortex of excessive consumption. Currently, the blind box industry is still in a barbaric state of development. The government needs to establish relevant policies to guide, and the supervision department should implement its supervision responsibility. Enterprises should also strictly control product quality and improve after-sales service. Consumers should establish scientific and reasonable consumption concepts so that the development of the blind box industry takes market benefits and consumer rights and interests into account.

Through the study of consumer psychology, the development of blind box culture in China is focused on to analyze the potential harm of blind box addiction and deeply explore the reasons and limitations of the blind box industry's development. Some limitations also exist in the research process: Firstly, in terms of research methods, literature reading method and case analysis method are mainly adopted, leading to a narrow and insufficient selection of cases. Secondly, the content of the research mainly focuses on theoretical research and is less combined with practice.

To address the shortcomings of this study, future development directions are proposed: Firstly, adding more offline visits and practical research. Secondly, under the blind box addiction theory, increasing intervention research on the harm of adolescent addictive consumption. Thirdly, paying attention to the improvement of industry-related laws and the implementation of monitoring programs.

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