

The Impact of Blind Box Economy on Consumer Behavior in Social Media Networks

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Abstract. Blind box is a kind of non-transparent box, consumers can not know in advance of the specific product style of the goods, and this random form of consumption is being sought after by a large number of young people. With the continuous enrichment of blind box products, in the era of social media, the blind box economy is growing stronger. Blind box economy, as a special consumption model, has risen rapidly in social media networks in recent years. This paper aims to explore the definition, characteristics, and effects of blind box economy on consumer behavior. Firstly, the definition and characteristics of blind box economy are introduced, including aesthetic experience, emotional value, social value, and second-hand value. Secondly, the influence path of blind box economy on consumer behavior is analyzed, and the interest groups, purchasing process, consumption behavior and symbol consumption are discussed. Finally, the positive and negative effects of blind box economy on consumer behavior are summarized, and relevant suggestions are put forward to promote the healthy development of blind box economy and the reasonable choice of consumers.

Keywords: Blind box economy, consumer behavior, social media, aesthetic experience, second-hand value.

1. Introduction

In this era of digitalization and consumerization, social media has been deeply integrated into our daily lives, not only changing the way people communicate but also greatly influencing our consumption habits and attitudes. Among them, the blind box economy, as a new form of consumption in recent years, is especially popular among young people. Because of its unique characteristics of uncertainty, social attributes, collection value, and emotional comfort, it is unique among many young consumers and has gradually become a popular choice for a new generation of consumers.

Under the double influence of neoliberalism and the rapid rise of the mobile Internet, Chinese society is experiencing more and more uncertainty and self-reflection. In this context, teenagers are facing unprecedented pressure. At the same time, with the overall improvement of the national economic level, the quality of life of the people has been significantly improved, and "self-pleasing consumption" has gradually become the mainstream trend. People no longer only pay attention to the practicality and transaction value of commodities, but pay more attention to the cultural significance and personal emotional value behind it. As a typical representative of this new consumption model, the blind box is just in line with the needs of young people in the pursuit of spiritual pleasure under high-pressure environment.

The popularity of blind box economy not only reflects the pursuit of personalized and diversified consumption by young groups but is also a manifestation of emerging consumer culture. Social media, as the main platform for information dissemination and social interaction, has played a key role in the rapid spread of blind box culture. On the network, a variety of blind box opening videos, sharing posts, and trading platforms emerge endlessly, greatly stimulating people's desire to explore and buy impulse, promoting the vigorous development of the blind box market. Behind the boom, however, comes a series of problems. First of all, due to the randomness and uncertainty of the blind box goods themselves, may lead to consumers' "excessive consumption" or "gambling mentality", which will affect their rational consumption decisions. In addition, the current supervision of the blind box

industry in China is not perfect, there are more consumer fraud and infringement phenomena, which seriously infringe the legitimate rights and interests of consumers and disturb the market order. In this context, an in-depth study of the mechanism of the blind box economy's influence on consumer behavior is helpful in guiding consumers to rational consumption and promote the healthy development of the blind box market.

In this context, in-depth research on the mechanism of blind box economy's influence on consumer behavior is helpful to guide consumers to make reasonable consumption and promote the healthy development of blind box market. The purpose of this paper is to explore the specific influence mechanism of blind box economy on consumer behavior by combing the relevant content, in order to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for solving the current market problems.

2. Definition of Blind Box Economy

The so-called "blind box" is that consumers cannot predict the specific style of goods in the box before purchasing. The sales model, which dates back to Japan's Meiji era, used to entice customers by randomly placing goods in opaque boxes [1]. In recent years, with the increasing variety of goods exposed to consumers, blind boxes are no longer just a way of shopping but have also evolved into a novel marketing means. As early as the 1980s, the concept of similar blind boxes appeared in China, for example, the cards attached to the plain packaging can be collected in a set to obtain the corresponding prize. With the rise of fashion culture, the blind box is once again revitalized. Young people make up the majority of these products. Influenced by multiple factors such as entertainment mentality and social psychology, blind box products emerge in an endless stream and are loved by young groups such as "millennials" and urban white-collar workers. The "post-epidemic" era has brought new opportunities and challenges for the development of blind boxes [2].

Blind boxes are a cultural phenomenon that originated in the United States and Japan. The so-called "blind box" is a box containing all kinds of cute dolls, but the outside of the box does not have any logo or description, and its "limited" nature inspires consumers' strong desire to buy. According to industry experts, in the context of the current era of extremely rich material, the sales model has shifted from the simple sale of goods to the sale of a leisure experience, which is the fundamental reason for the rise of the "blind box economy".

3. Characteristics of Blind Box Economy

3.1. Aesthetic Experience of Blind Bbox

Aesthetic experience comes from consumers' subjective feelings of product beauty, including visual elements such as product color, shape, and material, as well as the overall atmosphere of the shopping environment. Factors such as a consumer's personal cultural background, personality characteristics, market preferences, and purchase motivation can all influence this experience. For young people and network families who buy blind boxes, aesthetic needs are a core demand in their growth process, which also hides their psychological demands and emotional drives. In their view, the aesthetic experience brought by the blind box can not only meet their spiritual pursuit, but also bring the sublimation of the soul, and make their personality fully displayed.

3.2. Emotional Value of the Blind Box

Emotional experience is an internal, pleasant, and beautiful positive mental state produced in the process of interacting with the brand. According to the in-depth interview survey, this emotional experience of consumers comes from the affinity and humanization characteristics displayed by the brand, as well as their deep emotion for the brand when they consume [3]. As a combination of "goods + experience", the blind box can not only provide practical functional values such as commodity appreciation, trading, and collection but also stimulate deep emotional resonance in the spiritual level of consumers. The satisfaction and value brought by this emotional experience, for many consumers,

has exceeded its functional value, which is why many people will continue to buy back the same brand blind box. For many consumers who are keen on blind boxes, the repeated expectation and sense of surprise when opening a blind box can effectively reduce the negative emotions brought by high pressure and fierce competition. When consumers experience the excitement and surprise brought by the blind box, their emotional needs are positively satisfied, as if they find the emotional support that is difficult to get in real life, filling the vacancy in family, friendship, love, and other aspects. These emotional needs correspond to higher-level needs such as social needs, respect needs, and self-actualization needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. A young customer once said: "Every time I see the exquisite and lovely doll image in the blind box, I feel that it is like my friend, it seems to be alive, I want to take it everywhere to play, as an old friend of mine accompany me all the time."

3.3. Social Value of the Blind Box

In real society, people's needs are not limited to the material level but also cover the spiritual level. Therefore, when an individual is under great psychological pressure, it is often accompanied by an emotional burden. At this time, the emergence of the "blind box" just provides an outlet for these people to release their emotions [4]. In addition, the rapid development of Internet technology has greatly reduced the cost and threshold of crowd gathering, forming a platform that the public can participate in, and the group of "blind box lovers" has thus emerged. Blind box lovers have a strong desire to shop and share information and have a strong desire to express. Their main motivation is to find a "sense of belonging" and to gain a sense of self-worth and presence by participating in the "community of blind box lovers". The "Blind Box" community was created to meet the spiritual needs of players, providing them with a space to express their emotions and stress, while also strengthening their identity. In addition, for these interest enthusiasts, their pursuit of identity is not limited to the individual level, the recognition of the group is also an important goal. Ultimately, they fulfill their inner needs through their individual and collective identities, fulfilling their ideals in the process.

In the blind box circle, players can be roughly divided into four categories according to their love for toys: "blind box little white", "exclusive baby friends", "big collector" and "baby change teacher". For "blind box novices", most of them are new to this field, often because they are attracted by the unique appearance of the blind box design and enter this circle. "Exclusive kids" have a preference for a particular IP, and they focus on collecting their favorite character series. "Big collectors" are veteran players in the field of blind boxes. They not only know the blind box market well, but also invest a lot of money and time in buying blind boxes, and even become opinion leaders in the circle [5]. In contrast, the group of "baby reformers" is more unique, and their definition is not limited to professional knowledge or skills, but relies more on personal artistic taste and manual ability. Therefore, anyone with a certain aesthetic and manual skills can try to become a baby reformer." Such players in the blind box circle are often known as "god level" figures, widely recognized and appreciated.

3.4. Second-hand Value of the Blind Box

As a novel consumption mode, the unique commercial characteristics of the blind box not only lie in the mystery and surprise brought by the purchase process but also in the fact that it has been extended to the second-hand trading platform, which is deeply loved by the majority of consumers and collectors. Under the influence of economic behavior and social psychology, the blind box shows the secondary value of diversification and its characteristics.

Because of the uncertainty of its product content, the blind box shows more complex characteristics and diversity in the second-hand market. When buying, consumers are often attracted by the unknown items inside the box, and this curiosity not only affects their initial evaluation of the purchased goods but also extends to the subsequent secondary resale process [6]. For example, animation or game-related peripherals, because the contained items are relatively rare, the value of the second-hand market will also increase. At the same time, blind box trading also reflects the

characteristics of social and interactive. On social networks, many people are happy to share their "unboxing experience" and "collection", which not only prove their consumption choices but also communicate with other users who have the same interest through social platforms, thus promoting the circulation of second-hand goods. Therefore, the second-hand blind box trading platform is not only a place for commodity circulation but also a space for users to share consumption experience and establish a sense of community.

4. Analysis of the Influence Path of the Blind Box Economy on Consumer Behavior

4.1. Interest Groups

In the blind box economy, the initial goal is to influence consumer buying behavior by building interesting communities. On social media platforms, people who love collecting blind boxes gather together because of a common interest, forming a unique community. Such communities not only provide a space for members to exchange ideas and share experiences but also enhance cohesion among members through community culture, rules, and identity. The rise of an interesting community has promoted the transformation of individual consumption behavior into a social consumption pattern, thus stimulating more consumption desire and participation [7].

4.2. Purchasing Process

In a blind box economy, consumers face a variety of uncertainties and expectations that have a profound impact on their shopping decisions. Before making a purchase, people are often influenced by social media sharing, recommendations, and brand marketing campaigns. In the actual purchase process, the sense of anticipation of selecting the blind box and waiting for the disclosure of the content brings psychological satisfaction and pleasure to consumers, adding a lot of fun to the entire shopping experience. In addition, the limited or hidden models in the blind box can stimulate consumers' desire and excitement to buy, further promoting their purchase decisions.

4.3. Consumption Behavior

The blind box economy has significantly changed the way people live. First of all, due to its inherent randomness and uncertainty, consumers are encouraged to purchase repeatedly to pursue their favorite items or rare styles. This "addictive" consumption pattern has influenced consumers' shopping habits to a certain extent. In addition, the blind box economy has stimulated consumers' desire to collect. Many people treat the goods inside the blind box as works of art or collectibles and satisfy their inner satisfaction by collecting, organizing, and displaying them. This approach not only improves consumer satisfaction but also promotes the continued development of the blind box industry [8].

4.4. Symbol Consumption

At the same time, it also reflects a unique characteristic of symbolic consumption. In this special shopping environment, the price of goods often exceeds the actual value, and more reflects the symbolic meaning and cultural connotation it carries. When people buy these goods, they are not only buying the goods themselves but also an identity, a sense of cultural identity, and emotional belonging. Limited edition or hidden edition goods, for example, are gradually becoming a sign of people's personal taste and social status. This symbolic consumption behavior not only satisfies the internal needs of consumers but also promotes brand differentiation competition, and image building.

5. The Impact of the Blind Box Economy on Consumer Behavior

5.1. Positive Impact

5.1.1 Promote personalized consumption experience

The blind box economy meets the individual needs of consumers by offering a diverse range of products and a random buying experience. Each blind box can bring surprises to customers, and this uncertainty stimulates people's interest and curiosity to explore, making the shopping process more interesting and full of expectations.

5.1.2 Enhance social interaction and sense of belonging

In the environment of social media, the "blind box" economy has gathered a large number of enthusiasts. They have deepened their social interaction by sharing "unboxing experiences" and exchanging "collection tips". This community culture not only enriches consumers' social lives but also enhances their sense of belonging and identity.

5.1.3 Stimulate creativity and design innovation

In recent years, the rapid rise of the blind box industry has stimulated the enthusiasm of merchants to develop novel and unique products to meet the growing needs of consumers. This fierce market competition has greatly promoted the development of innovative industries, opening up more business opportunities for enterprises and bringing more lucrative profits.

5.2. Negative Impact

5.2.1 Improved uncertainty and gambler's psychology

The blind box is unique in that it highlights the concept of "blind". Unlike most other goods, you can't predict what's inside the box, which adds a mysterious and attractive layer to the box. Generally, most commodities will follow the principle of diminishing marginal benefit, that is, after consumers buy a large number of the same goods, the freshness of the goods will gradually reduce, and then affect their desire to buy. Blind boxes, however, break this rule. Because the blind box purchase process is full of uncertainty, each time the blind box is opened, it can bring consumers a completely different experience. With the increase in the number of purchases, the freshness brought by the blind box will not fade, but will gradually strengthen, and achieve the growth of marginal utility, which is the biggest difference between the blind box and ordinary goods. In a market environment full of unknowability, people often get surprises, which stimulate the brain to release more dopamine, a physiological mechanism formed during human evolution. Psychological research shows that under the drive of uncertainty factors, consumers' repeated purchase behavior will get greater satisfaction. This is also an important reason for the blind box market to maintain rapid growth in recent years.

In the process of continuous consumption, the blind box not only provides people with psychological comfort but also inspires consumers' curiosity for unknown things. Driven by this "want to see what is inside" mentality, businesses gradually narrow the distance with consumers, enhancing their brand loyalty and stickiness. The satisfaction consumers get from such adventurous shopping, coupled with the clever guidance of merchants, makes them have a deep interest in specific styles of products. In this era of IP culture and quadratic culture, being able to draw a hidden model is itself a great satisfaction and stimulation, and then with a higher consumption frequency, it is almost difficult to resist. This buying experience is as fun as buying a lottery ticket, and the cost is lower, so it is easier to attract customers, and even can be said that this is a new era of "light gambling" behavior [9].

5.2.2 Enhanced the psychology of comparison and showing off

With more and more post-00s entering the workplace, the consumer group is gradually getting younger and has become the largest consumer group. Nowadays, there is a kind of comparison and conspicuous consumption behavior among students in Chinese colleges and universities. For example, if someone gets the latest blind box, it is likely to attract the attention of other students who are

interested in such products, prompting them to join the purchase. When these students share it in their social circles, it will further enhance the popularity of the blind box and attract more people's attention. This process from initial attempts to continuous cycles has injected lasting vitality into the blind box market. Over time, the blind box is no longer just a commodity, but gradually becomes a symbol of personal economic ability and cultural life taste. Its social significance has exceeded its practical value and has becoming a medium for young people to show off [10].

6. Conclusion

Blind box economy, as a new consumption model, has become popular among young consumers in recent years because of its unique charm and has significantly affected people's shopping habits. Through the analysis of the basic concepts and characteristics of the blind box economy and how it affects the decision-making path of consumers, this research draws the following conclusions:

The blind box economy is increasingly sought after by young consumers in the market due to its high degree of uncertainty, aesthetic experience, emotional and social value, and second-hand market value. It not only meets people's needs for novelty and personalization, enhances social interaction by building a fun community culture, but also enhances consumers' sense of belonging and identity. At the same time, it also promotes the development of many industries such as creative design and manufacturing and opens up new ways for China's economic growth. However, behind these positive effects, some problems cannot be ignored, such as excessive consumption and the gambling mentality that may be triggered, which need to be addressed and solved in the "blind box" economy.

In the post-epidemic era, how to continue to promote the application of blind boxes in a variety of scenarios is indeed a problem worthy of in-depth discussion. From the initial single toy blind box to almost any commodity that can be sold in a blind box, the blind box economy has been deeply integrated into our daily life. Here are some thoughts on how to promote the healthy development of a diversified blind box economy:

6.1. Focus on Consumer Psychology and Optimize Consumption Experience

Consumer psychology points out that consumers' psychological needs for shopping are deeply influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds. Bubblemart's recent Harry Potter blind box has been a hit in the market. The occurrence of this situation mainly stems from the desire of young consumers to collect when shopping and the psychology of seeking specific emotional experiences. "Harry Potter" carries a common memory for "post-90s" and "post-00s", so "Harry Potter" fans can find emotional resonance from these blind boxes, which is one of the reasons why many consumers are willing to pay for the IP. The essence of the blind box is its uncertainty, both producers and sellers should pay attention to and guide this possible irrational consumer psychology, especially in the post-epidemic era. From the perspective of user experience, enterprises can improve the quality of consumption employing innovative packaging design of blind boxes. For example, when many people are faced with a pile of express packages after the "Double 11" shopping festival, the process of unpacking itself can bring happiness. Sometimes, by carefully designing the unboxing experience, the user's sense of engagement can be further enhanced.

6.2. Determine Consumer Groups and Create a Consumption Environment

Nowadays, with the rapid development of network technology, "Generation Z" is gradually becoming an important part of society, and its huge consumption potential cannot be underestimated. Obviously, "Generation Z" has become the core consumer group of this product. Although this group is large, its economic capacity is limited. If young people are not interested in or even disgusted by the atmosphere created by the manufacturer, they may no longer buy "blind box +" products, which will cause some customers to lose. Therefore, in this case, it is crucial to create a good market environment. On the one hand, blind box goods should adopt a diversified pricing strategy, fully consider the purchasing power of consumers, and attract consumers at a more affordable price. On

the other hand, the sales channels of blind boxes should be broadened. In addition to the use of online platforms such as Taobao, Tmall, and WeChat public accounts, it can also be combined with offline physical stores to create a ubiquitous consumption scene. The diversification of the blind box is not only reflected in the material level of consumption but also includes the spiritual level and the experience level of consumption value. Through these measures, the diversified needs of young consumers can be better met and the healthy development of the blind box market can be promoted.

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