

Path Of social media To Promote the Consumption and Brand Effect Building of Trendy Toys

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Abstract. In recent years, the trend of trendy toys has rapidly risen all over the world and become increasingly popular in Chinese market with explosive growth. With the development of digital communication technology, social media has gradually become the main promotion platform of trendy toy brands and the main communication channel of trendy toy consumers. Based on the background of trendy toy market, this paper aims to explore the specific effect of social media in the process of guiding consumer behaviour and building brand effect of trendy toys. Through the analysis of communication mechanism, interaction form and brand strategy of social platform, this paper summarizes the multi-dimensional path of social media in promoting the consumption and brand building of trendy toys. Firstly, Key Opinion Leader (KOL) and User-generated Content (UGC) content transmission builds a strong purchase motivation; Secondly, the interactive mechanism of social media stimulates users' willingness to participate and share and complete the closed link of consumption; Thirdly, brands enhance users' sense of identity and brand loyalty through IP symbols and emotional value in social media. This paper uses case study methods to compare and analyse the highlights and shortcomings of Pop Mart and Labubu's social media operation and consider the communication strategy of typical brands. The results of this paper show that social media can not only effectively improve the market penetration rate of trendy toy products but also help brands to establish emotional links and sustainable development.

Keywords: Trendy toys; social media; brand building; KOL; user interaction.

1. Introduction

Trendy toys are a new type of cultural product, which represents the comprehensive pursuit of young generation of consumers in individual expression, cultural identification and collection value. In the global market, trendy toy products such as blind box, hand-made doll, IP doare etc. is liked by consumers guided by millennial generation. Brands such as Pop Mart, Labubu, Dimoo and their derivatives gradually become the representative of trendy toy field, which leads to the emergence of a series of trendy toy culture phenomenon.

The popularity and rapid development of trendy toys cannot be separated from the characteristics of trendy toy market. On the one hand, trendy toys generally adopt limited edition. Through the means of "hidden models", "blind box" and other marketing mechanisms, it creates a sense of scarcity and niche psychology. Consumers can't predict the specific style at the time of purchase, which enhances the playfulness of the purchase process [1]. On the other hand, IP culture and storytelling carried by trendy toys also give strong emotional value to the product. By creating a unique background story and world view settings, it wins more audience groups and further stimulates the consumption motivation of users [2]. Besides, trendy toy brands generally adopt bundled sales and end-box mechanism to enhance consumers' collection impulses [3].

At the level of brand building, on the level of brand effect transmission, the popularity of social media also changed the traditional brand effect transmission route. Brand awareness and trust are no longer based on traditional media advertising, but more based on the interaction between social media and consumers. Especially in communication with KOL and Key Opinion Consumer (KOC), their evaluation and recommendation have a strong endorsement effect and can quickly affect consumers' purchasing decision [4].

In addition, differentiation strategy also used social media's visual communication advantages. By building a whole IP image and unique visual symbols, brands can make clear perceptions and differences to users in social platforms [5].

As social media is constantly interactive, it also can build long-term relationships with users. Different from traditional advertising's "one-way output", brand communication on social platforms should focus on "co-creation" and "companionship". And by serial stories, festival interaction, user solicitation, etc., it continuously strengthens users' attention and participation [6]. Weibo, Tiktok, Rednote, Instagram, etc. have their own characteristics, not only the number of user groups is huge, but also their algorithmic mechanism can push corresponding content based on user interests, so that the brand effect of trendy toy can continuously multiply [7].

In addition, social media also has a deep impact on consumers. In the process of consumers obtaining product information, browsing KOL's product review and participating in interactive topics on social platforms, in addition to accepting the brand concept, they are also unknowingly drawn into the consumer decision-making process [8]. Nowadays, social media is no longer a subsidiary link for brand promotion, but a direct link that affects consumers' awareness establishment, interest stimulation and purchase decision.

In summary, the prosperous development of trendy toy market can't be separated from social media. This paper will discuss the specific path of social media to promote the consumption and branding of trendy games from three aspects: content dissemination, interaction mechanism and branding, and further analyze the typical brands to reveal the communication logic and marketing strategy.

2. The Specific Path of Social Media to Promote the Consumption of Trendy Games and Brand Building

2.1. Path of Content Dissemination

Social media promoted the consumption of fashionable games by "grass-planting content" produced by KOLs and KOCs. KOLs usually have a stable fan base and high professional credibility. For example, the bloggers of "Unboxing.com" and "Blind Box Girl" produced the content value of the fashionable products by reviewing the unpacking process and introducing the methods of collecting hidden models, which can increase the consumers' interest in buying. The popular review video or graphic content can also bring hundreds or thousands of order conversion [1]. Compared with the advertisement, the content of KOL is closer to users' daily life, so that the potential consumers can accept the information in a relaxed and happy atmosphere and then improve the conversion efficiency.

UGC is also an important part of the communication of trendy toys. The videos, tutorials and collections uploaded by ordinary consumers on Tiktok, Rednote and other platforms not only reduce the threshold of dissemination but also achieve the effect of viral dissemination through "users to users". The broadcast volume of the topic "#blind box" has exceeded 50 billion times [2]. This kind of communication mode based on interest and interaction can increase brand exposure a lot. In addition, UGC can also improve the sense of identity and belonging of consumers, so that consumers do not feel that they are only buyers, but also part of the game and socialisation, which can improve the stickiness of consumption.

2.2. Construct a Complete Closed-Loop Consumption with the Online and Offline Linkage Mechanism

Initiate the interaction of booking, check-in and exhibition by launching activities on Weibo, Rednote and other platforms to guide users from online to offline consumption scenario and then stimulate the secondary dissemination of the content of offline experience to trigger more online discussion [3]. For example, the offline attendance rate of trendy toy exhibitions increased more than

30% by using the social platform booking function, which improved the brand's own promotion of the product and consumers' willingness to buy [4]. What's more, some brands also enhance users' repeated participation by rewarding points and interactive lucky draws.

2.3. Brand Intellectual Property (IP) Symbol Construction and Visual Identity Establishment

Social media improves the symbolic construction ability of the brand IP of trendy toys. Brands create a complete world for users through serial content (such as Dimoo's Forest Adventure) so that trendy toy is no longer a static toy, but a "story partner" with background and plot, which enhances the user's immersion and emotional linkage [5]. This kind of narrative content let the consumers feel that the toy is no longer a static toy, but a "story partner" with background and plot. This kind of narrative content enables consumers to not only buy a product but also buy a piece of emotion and story.

In addition, the consistency of visual symbols is also very important in communication with social platforms. For example, Molly's signature blue eyes, Labubu's sharp teeth, Poppypets' uniform drawing style and colour tone of the blind box character, etc. will give users a deeper impression during repeated communication, and enhance users' brand memory and recognition [6]. Only by maintaining the unity of style in visual design can the brand maintain its distinct difference in the complex information environment, so that consumers can quickly identify the brand in a short time and establish deep cognitive associations even when browsing for a short time.

2.4. Crossing Borders and Building Brand Loyalty

By leveraging the topic mechanism of social media, trendy toy brands often cooperate with film and television, games, clothing, luxury goods, etc. across the border. By co-branded products, they broke the circle of boundaries and enhanced the exposure of their brands. For example, Pop Mart cooperated with Disney to launch blind boxes, and created a topic named #PopMart×Disney on Weibo, Tiktok and other social platforms. In addition to attracting trendy toy fans, the topic also stimulated the wave of "digging the same model" among Disney fans [7]. This cross-border linkage strategy allows the trendy toy brand to enter a broader audience group, forming a "multi-community resonance" communication effect.

Emotional marketing is an important way of brand building. By social activities such as "My Trendy Toy Memories", "Graduation Gift Box", the brand can collect and spread the users' emotional stories, and establishes the emotional bond between the brand and users [8]. Special time points such as Valentine's Day, graduation season, birthday, etc. are also an excellent opportunity for brands to launch "commemorative fashionable games", reinforcing the brand concept that "fashionable games are companions". When consumers get the response and connection of brand's emotion at these special time points, the loyalty of consumers tends to increase significantly, and they will also focus on the brand story and even actively spread it [9].

3. Case Study

Labubu is an ambassador of the derivative products of the trendy brand. By creating sense of scarcity through limited edition and stimulating anxiety and show off the psychology of hiding on social platform [10]. In addition, the brand will give the limited-edition products to the celebrity team to form the communication chain of "artists' sunshine - fans digging for money" on Weibo, Tiktok and other platforms, and turn fan economy into actual purchasing power [11].

In 2024, the Thai girl member of South Korean girl group BLACKPINK - LISA, posted on her Instagram that she was a member of the group. LISA often posted Labubu posts on Instagram, and the fans also increased the popularity and sales of the products by "digging for the same model" [12].

Limited Quantity Strategy is not only restricting the quantity in a simple way, but also a kind of deep psychological consumer guidance. When consumers face the scarcity of "miss or lose", they will have an obvious purchase impulse, and this kind of feeling of anxiety is called "scarcity effect"

[13]. Labubu not only gains regular "hidden models" and "special editions" to create scarcity, but also intentionally adds to the nervousness of consumers through "irregular shelving". This makes many consumers do not necessarily be the fixed customers of trendy toys but participate in the frenzied buying because of "sheep mentality and fear of missing out", which expands the audience of Labubu [11]. At the same time, the brand intentionally creates the topic effect of "sold out is a hit" on social media, which makes the limited edition become the social buzz topic in a short time [14].

In terms of social media communication, the limited edition of Labubu also formed a strong secondary diffusion effect. On the one hand, ordinary consumers further amplify the scarcity of limited edition through the sharing of unboxing video, posts and "grabbing tips". Many users will show their "second empty record" on Rednote or show their excitement of grabbing the limited edition with exaggerated reactions on Tiktok, so as to trigger more imitation and following from the audience. On the other hand, some fans even resell the limited edition on the second-hand platform like Idle Fish, which further promotes the discussion of Labubu on the public [14].

The influence of celebrities and KOLs makes it faster. Except for LISA, many domestic fashion bloggers, artists and variety show guests also publicly show their Labubu blind box collection, and with the help of fan power, Labubu broke through the original narrow niche and entered the mass fashion and popular culture field. The social media topic of #Labubu limited edition unboxing# and #Labubu same style digging# have gained hundreds of millions of plays in a short time, showing the strong power of the trendy brand "celebrity endorsement + fan diffusion". This shows the powerful communication power formed by the "celebrity endorsement + fan diffusion" of the fashion brand [15].

In addition to this, Labubu's social diffusion strategy is not limited to this one-way communication but also emphasizes "user co-creation" and "emotional interaction". For example, the brand once launched a "My Story with Labubu" campaign on Rednote and invited users to share their experience of buying, collecting or giving Labubu as a gift. Many users linked Labubu to their life experience, such as "graduation gift", "love anniversary", "friendship witness", and even forwarded the real experience of Labubu official. The real experience after being forwarded by the official can enhance the user's emotional identity, and at the same time, Labubu brought more temperature and companionship meaning [16]. This transformation from commodity to emotional symbol makes Labubu not only bring products but also bring more temperature in social diffusion.

More importantly, Labubu's limited edition strategy and social diffusion can also promote the formation of "community culture". Unlike traditional toy consumption, Labubu users are more willing to establish WeChat groups, Tieba or Weibo super groups to discuss buying techniques, exchange hidden models and show their own collection. This kind of spontaneous community interaction enhances users' experience and loyalty [17].

However, there is also risk in the limited quantity strategy. If the quantity is too limited, it will cause negative emotions of users. They will complain "not being able to grab them" and "high speculative prices", which will lead to consumers' dissatisfaction and even refusal of the brand [18]. Labubu responded to this situation by trying to launch more affordable collections or resident products gradually to improve users' loyalty. more affordable series or resident products to solve the conflict caused by limited edition. At the same time, the brand also responds quickly to users' questions on social platforms and establishes transparent rules for the release of products, which can reduce consumers' distrust and do not weaken the scarcity [18].

Overall, its limited edition and social diffusion still construct a general "scarcity-diffusion-scarcity" process. That is, the limited edition triggers the purchase anxiety of consumers, social diffusion (including multi-level communication of celebrities, KOLs and UGC on social media) creates the scarcity effect and enhances the brand exposure, and then community culture and emotional co-creation strengthen the long-term relationship between Labubu and consumers. Such strategy has not only helped Labubu to build an iconic image in trendy toy market but also provides a reference for other trendy toy brands.

4. Conclusion

This paper uses case study method to conduct in-depth research on the path of social media promoting consumption and brand building of trendy toy industry, taking Labubu's limited edition strategy and social diffusion practice as research objects. The study finds that social media promotes trendy toy industry in three ways: first, KOL and UGC content dissemination enhances brand exposure and consumers' purchase desire; second, interactive mechanism and cross-platform linkage enhance the closed loop of consumption and users; third, brand IP symbols and cross-border co-operation enhance consumers' emotional identification and loyalty.

First, through limited edition and social diffusion, Labubu builds scarcity effect and community culture, and then with the help of celebrities and KOLs' endorsement, its influence is not limited in small circle but breaks through the mass popular culture. However, limited edition strategy will also cause consumers' dissatisfaction, and brands need to balance the sense of scarcity and users' experience.

In the future, the following research can be further strengthened: first, compare the difference of role played by different social media (such as Tiktok, Rednote, Instagram) in the communication of trendy toy. Second, analyse the cross-cultural difference of trendy toy consumer groups, and explore the social media communication mode in different global markets; and third, combine the big data and AI technology to explore how to achieve more accurate consumer profile and personalised recommendation, so as to optimise the branding of trendy toy brands. Third, combining big data and artificial intelligence technology, this paper explores how to achieve more accurate consumer profiling and personalized recommendations, so as to optimize the social media operation strategies of trendy toy brands.

In short, social media is not only a marketing tool for trendy toy brands, but also an important part of its ecosystem. If brands can establish deep links in communication, interaction and emotion with users, they will help them win a sustainable competitive advantage in the face of market environment.

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