Highlights in Art and Design
ISSN: 2957-8787 | Vol. 1, No. 3, 2022

Study on the path of shaping the visual image of "POP MART" blind box

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Abstract: In the background of the booming cultural industry, "blind box" as a form of cultural creation has become a craze among young consumers in recent years, and "POP MART", as a famous brand of blind box culture and creation in China, has occupied a place in the market. Based on the perspective of consumers, we explore the visual shaping path of "POP MART" blind boxes, discussing the selection of visual symbols, the shaping of cultural cores and the remaining problems of blind box shaping, and then analyze the development trend and innovation path of blind boxes in the future cultural and creative market. As a kind of cultural and creative carrier with diversified forms and rich contents, the blind box still has much room for development and innovation in the future, and also has the value of contemporary research.

Keywords: Blind box; Image shaping; Visual elements; POP MART.

1. Introduction

With the rise of Generation Z advocating the concept of self-pleasure and personalized consumption, "trendy play" has gradually entered the consumers' vision. In recent years, the rise and integration of various trendy cultures, the changing aesthetics of the times and the development of industrial technology have all contributed to the continuous updating of the form of trendy toys to better meet the needs of the consumers. The positioning of the tide plays also from the initial art toys and designer toys, and turn to a larger field - the art market. In recent years, the trendy game in the form of blind boxes in China has exploded, and the initial wind of blind boxes and bring it to the mainstream market is China's trendy game brand "POP MART", it caters to the contemporary youth aesthetic, in line with the trend of cultural development trend of visual design by the viewers, and continue to develop overseas markets. The explosion of "POP MART" blind box products is inseparable from its rich product visual shape, and its path of shaping blind box products also brings value reference for many brands, while inevitably causing the qualitative phenomenon caused by excessive imitation of brands.

"Blind box" in China as a popular form of trendy play, there is great room for expansion and innovation, with a broad market outlook. From the success of POP MART, we analyze the path of shaping excellent blind boxes, and reflect on the existing problems and make improvements, which can help China's blind boxes to get more diversified development in the future.

2. The rise of blind box toys background

The concept of "blind box" toys first began in the United States in the 1920s, the United States appeared in the form of toys packaged in plastic and sold in the machine, the 1980s this model was improved by Japanese manufacturers for capsule toys "Twister", widely used in In the 1980s, this model was modified by Japanese manufacturers as the capsule toy "Twister", which is widely used in the sale of anime and manga IP figures. Strictly speaking, "Twister" is the predecessor of "blind box" toys, creating a market for blind boxes.

In the 1990s, there was a similar nature of "card collection marketing" in China, such as the small raccoon dry noodles sold under the Unity Group, which came with a random card of the Water Margin heroes after opening the product, and since only after opening the package could we know which card we were getting, this kind of product with unknown attributes was quite attractive to consumers, which was also the classic snack product of that era. This is also the classic snack goods + card draw marketing model of the times.

Blind box tide plays only began to appear in 2012 in the country, at that time still not put into mass production, in the country only belong to the circle of niche enthusiasts' range, mostly introduced from abroad, IP content is mostly animation as well as film and television works.

In 2016, six years after its establishment, POP MART re-entered the public eye with a new brand image and began to focus on trendy blind box toys for young groups, and the concept of blind box began to be further recognized by domestic consumers. With the iteration of the marketing model and the growth of Generation Z's consumption power, POP Mart's trendy products successfully jumped from the niche market to the mainstream market. In 2020, POP MART 's Double Eleven Shopping Festival's total online turnover exceeded 142 million yuan, which led to the emergence of the buzzword "blind box economy".

3. "POP MART" under the blind box product visual shape analysis

In 2010, POP MART, which was just established in China, was only a creative collection store at first. In 2015, POP MART found business opportunities from Japanese blind box brand SONNY ANGEL, which is a kind of modeling goods that is a big fire in Japan. different products in the series. POP MART therefore redefined its brand positioning, based on which the exploration and development of blind box products, and in 2016 obtained the exclusive distributorship of the IP image "Molly" designed by Hong Kong designer Kenny wong, and took it as its own signature IP image, starting the development of IP culture business.

POP MART cooperates with many artists around the world around the brand core of "creating trends and delivering goodness", and uses their understanding of image symbols to shape the toys and deliver the product image, thus shaping the brand image.

Currently, POP MART has launched a number of popular IPs such as Molly, Dimoo, Skullpanda, etc. Each IP has rich visual elements, and the attractiveness of product appearance to consumers is a factor that cannot be ignored in the hot sales of POP MART.

3.1. Cute modeling design

According to POP MART management's user portrait and analysis of some e-commerce platforms and SNS platforms, both overseas markets and domestic users have a very similar feature, that is, women account for 75% of the user structure is, men only account for 25%. From the age structure, most of the users are 15 to 35 years old, with white-collar workers and students mostly. Its user portrait to a certain extent determines the nature of the brand's products - targeted product development for female consumers. For example, molly's IP is a cute blonde girl, dimoo's IP image is a baby-faced boy, and labubu's image is a non-humanoid elf, but its soulful eyes and rabbit-like long and pointed ears give the image a childishness. In addition to the appearance of the young and cute features, each product of POP MART is controlled in the size of an adult's palm, which makes it easy to collect, a common feature of the brand's products.

3.2. Expression of artistic and cultural symbols

POP MART's attraction to consumer groups cannot be separated from its IP shaping of tide play. Tide play is a kind of toy that integrates multiple concepts of art, design, painting, sculpture, animation, etc. Therefore, IP has been the core competitiveness in the tide play market at home and abroad. Therefore, to build an excellent IP, the integration of art and culture is essential. As a brand product, the audience will first receive the visual impression of the product, and at this level, they will understand the product and the brand.

3.2.1. Cultural Symbolic Expression

The embedding and expression of cultural symbols is a common technique in IP design, which can help the viewer establish an emotional bond with the product more quickly. Skull panda is one of POP MART's most popular four IPs, and its IP image is a playful girl with big eyes and a pouty mouth. For example, the skull panda "Life is a drama" series (Figure 3-1), which will be launched in 2021, has glimpses of famous movie characters in each image, such as the "physical manager" and the "gluttonous security guard". For example, the costumes and identities of the "Physical Caretaker" and "Gluttony Security Guard" refer to the young girl Matilda and Uncle Lee in the movie "LEON", while the hairdo of the "Rising Star" is easily reminiscent of Audrey Hepburn, a British actress from the 1950s. Through this borrowing and transformation of cultural symbols from film and television works, the designer makes people feel a cultural connotation from the IP images and feel a sense of affinity.

3.2.2. Cultural Symbolic Expression

The embedding and expression of artistic symbols is the visual expression that is presented outside the IP and brings the most intuitive visual experience to people. Molly launched the "Art Tycoon" series of IPs in 2019 (Figure 3-2), and its IP attributes are just like its name. For example, "Little Fan" is a reference to Van Gogh's image of wearing fur and an overcoat, making it instantly recognizable. The famous painter Frida's Mexican skirt corresponds to the modeling costume of "Xiao Ka", and the iconic polka dots of Yayoi Kusama's works are also used in the design of Molly's modeling. This series of IP not only makes artistic innovation and integration in the shape, but also retains the original characteristics of its artistic symbols, which is very recognizable. At the same time, from the perspective of IP connotation, each character archetype in the series has a humanistic value worthy of full appreciation, which also expands the depth of the IP itself.



Figure 1. Molly “Life is a drama”

3.3. Expression of traditional cultural symbols

With the rise of the "national trend" culture, the concept of "national trend" has penetrated into many fields of design and gradually become a common design expression style. National trend is a trendy phenomenon based on traditional cultural genes, with modern and fashionable characteristics, so it is more easily accepted by the public at present. Combining the modern character IP of POP MART with Chinese traditional culture is also a kind of national trend. Bubble Mart launched the Molly Palace Rui Beast series in 2018 Chinese New Year, the designer took the sculpture of the Forbidden City Museum as the source of inspiration and added creativity to shape 12 blind boxes based on this, recreating and revitalizing the traditional culture based on the modern trendy cultural perspective.

Take the "Golden Lion" of the "Palace Animals" as an example, the lion itself has the characteristics of majesty and fierceness, POP MART combines the IP image with the lion,

weakening the fierceness and intimidation of the lion's appearance, and turning it into a "cute" direction. The lion's head is shaped into a "cute" direction. The lion's head is shaped into a juvenile and cute form, and the eyes are exaggeratedly enlarged to make it look more adorable and gorgeous at the same time. In addition, the body parts are painted with gold lacquer, corresponding to the original material and color of the golden lion sculpture.

All of the blind boxes in the series use the names of the court animals directly, including "Ba Xia", "Xing Shi", "Lurei" and other names that are not familiar to most people. It has interpreted the image of each of the court animals in a friendlier way in line with the current trend of aesthetics, giving a new look to traditional culture and giving it a more humanistic connotation. Through this co-branding, POP MART processed the traditional cultural symbols and changed some attributes in the traditional context, so that the "golden lion" was not intimidating in the original context but more intimate, bringing the distance between the viewer and the art of reinterpretation. It gives the image a new connotation. The new identity is used to form interaction and understanding with users. In the visual image of the product, through the artistic expression of symbols, POP MART and the traditional culture of "palace animals" build a win-win situation.

3.4. IP story content shaping

Skullpanda's designer Xiong Meow said in an interview that Skullpanda's name comes from a screen name she has used for a long time, in a sense, skullpanda is another self. Skullpanda is a cosmic symbiote that travels between universes, finding itself in the split, playing different roles and experiencing different lives. This sci-fi setting resonated with many users, and Skullpanda's "unrestrained" and "fearless" qualities appealed to users and brought them closer to each other.

A full story can provide more space for the continuation of the subsequent IP image, and become the source of power for the IP image to break through itself and make a new appearance, while a thin, vague story cannot support and enhance the role of the IP. Therefore, shaping a rich and empathetic IP story is an integral part of shaping IP.

4. Existing problems in shaping the image of "POP MART Blind Box".

4.1. Serious homogenization of image symbols

In 2020, the market size of Chinese hip-hop game is 29.5 billion yuan, with a growth rate of 44%, and the market size is expected to grow to 57.5 billion yuan in 2023, POP MART, as the leading domestic hip-hop game company, accounts for 8.5% of the domestic hip-hop game market, and while it "leads the trend", other domestic hip-hop game brands have also flooded into the market. market. After POP MART's Molly image exploded, other manufacturers have produced cute human-shaped blind boxes; after the launch of its co-branded products (such as the Forbidden City, Disney), other brands also set off the wind of co-branding, many brands in the process of imitation gradually lost their own product image, thus weakening the brand characteristics, POP MART's also lost audience because of the homogenization of the market products.

The homogenization of the blind box is also manifested in the use of visual elements of its outer official, certain visual elements to the viewer has been relatively fixed attributes, such as bows represent "cute", rivets represent "punk" and " Rebellion", the image of a girl represents "beauty", "innocence", etc. These visual symbols are repeatedly used in the design of toys, gradually causing aesthetic fatigue of the viewer. Designers choose the appropriate visual symbols into the design to give it a certain connotation, but the high degree of similarity of visual symbols is a brand personality erosion. In the short term, it can cater to the market's preference for a certain style, but in the long run, it will sap consumers' interest.

Figure 2 and 3 shows the comparison between Laura's "Trendy Fruit" series and Skullpanda's "Bear Meow Fever" series. Both series take "trendy" as the direction of visual expression, so they both adopt eye-catching high brightness colors in the expression of color language, and the elements of clothing are taken from modern popular clothing styles, such as street style and sports style. As we can see, while both parties take the human figure as the visual symbol and "trendy" and "fashionable" as the visual shaping direction, Skullpanda is richer in the shaping of individual shapes, and more diversified in the details such as the facial makeup and accessories of the characters. Although Laura has created an image of a cute and lovely girl that meets the aesthetics of the market, its formal language is superficial and does not give the viewer a deep impression. range of homogenization in multiple fields. In the round of product design, POP MART feeds the digital data of products collected by e-commerce and user portrait data to designers as the communication between the two parties. However, the brand will ask the designer to just refer to it, because designing according to the market feedback will only result in homogenization. Market tastes are lack of fixed and relatively lack of creativity, as a brand should go to dig user needs, to provide users with options and inspiration, the designer's creativity can drive users to dig and drive the new market, not to take the initiative to dig and create new market trends, but to cater to the user and to please the market, will eventually be eliminated by the market.



Figure 2. Skullpanda "Bear Meow Fever"



Figure 3. Laura “Trendy fruit”

5. POP MART blind box shaping optimization path

5.1. Strengthen the connotation of cultural symbols

The brand image presented by POP MART is a blind box brand or a toy brand, but as a hip play company, it does not make users understand that the connotation of hip play actually comes from the IP content, and the blind box is just the expression form. Therefore, POP MART should be the educator of the brand culture image, and do a good job of spreading the brand culture image symbols, so that the audience's knowledge and taste can be gradually established with the growth and maturity of the market. In Baudrillard's view, "both in symbolic logic and in symbolic logic, objects are completely disconnected from a clear need or function. Rather, this is because they correspond to something else entirely - either the logic of society, or the logic of desire, which treats them as unconscious and unpredictable categories of meaning - and the same is true of the POP MART product as an ornamental object, which is not able to meet certain needs of the user or has a clear functional meaning. What it follows is social logic and desire logic, and these logics need to be established and guided by people, that is, POP MART should strengthen the connotation development of cultural symbols and highlight the figurative expression of cultural symbols.

Since the symbols can be "unconscious and unpredictable", the brand can build a bridge between symbols and connotation. "The connotation of "trend" needs to start from its original meaning, quoting Hong Kong scholar Liang Yancheng, "In a commercialized society, businesses will launch a series of popular mentality, language and various symbols to create some popular fashions. This shows that trends are phenomena created by businesses according to the current social situation. Therefore, to grasp the trend is to grasp the hot spots and changes of the times, the trend from society and the role in society. According to the "trend" symbol and down to dig the social situation, find the social logic and emotion behind, with the product symbol to interpret can really do "create the trend". The corporate culture of "transmitting beauty" also needs to combine the connotation of the times and re-assign a value to "beauty".

5.2. Expanding IP pan-entertainment industry

Looking at countries and regions where the IP pan-entertainment industry is more mature, such as the United States and Japan, the audience covers the whole age group, and the value of intellectual property is expanded by connecting and integrating the content side and the realization side. The domestic IP pan-entertainment industry is in the growth stage, relying on the consumption ability of young subjects, and the IP elements in the upstream of the industry chain have not formed a mature linkage with the downstream products, which needs to be adjusted and developed.

First of all, take Bandai Namco, a Japanese company with a mature animation IP industry chain, as an example. Since 2010, Bandai Namco has adopted the "IP axis" strategy, which focuses on the development of IP value and provides high-quality and high-level products and services in the vertical, spatial and horizontal directions of time to achieve the maximum value of IP development. Maximize the value of IP development. As Bandai's first licensed IP, Dragon Ball has created a commercial value of 134.9 billion yen over its thirty years of operation. The "Dragon Ball" IP has launched products and services in various fields such as computer/mobile games, online content, cards, and toys, etc. While expanding its product lineup and deepening its services, it is also directly or indirectly promoting the IP. Under this mechanism, the IP industry can develop and mature.

Disney's IP operation model is also very worthy of reference. Disney has entered the movie industry, not only occupying a place with high box office, but also acquiring Fox, enhancing the competitiveness of content and channels, greatly increasing the concentration of head effect and highlighting the leading effect. And in operation, the brand extends the life cycle of IP through derivatives, forming four major segments of the company's media, film and entertainment, parks and products, streaming media and international business. Disney's huge and mature industry chain is based on IP, and the company not only operates its own IP but also acquires several high-value IPs, which is similar to POP MART. But the difference is that the expansion of Disney's IP, its audience also expanded from children to adult groups, so the value of IP audience further increased. In terms of derivatives, Disney parks and retail peripherals have a strong ability to realize, taking the approach of extending the IP cycle and maximizing the value of IP.

6. Summary

POP MART seized the market in a short period of time, and can be a long-term position in the domestic tide play industry leader, cannot be separated from its brand image building strategy, and the brand image based on the product. Under the premise of using symbolic communication, product production and brand operation mode make it create consumer demand, guide and meet consumer demand. The author believes that the brand image of POP MART is shaped

by its unique and vital brand culture, which can shape the brand image. Therefore, POP MART's symbolic communication should be based on culture, so that the combination of product and culture, this culture is not only traditional culture, overseas culture or trendy culture, but also should be the traces of the times and the future outlook, advanced culture that can carry the spirit of the times. At the same time, based on the current social and cultural development connotation (socialist core values), cultural expression (Internet marketing) and the cultural background of the audience communication mode, leading the trend and transmitting the good.

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