

# ***The Analysis of the Development of the Chinese Market of the Tide Play Blind Box and the Social Thinking Triggered***

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**Abstract:** In the twenty-first century, research on the connection between aesthetics and psychology has become increasingly extensive. Human aesthetic activity is inseparable from psychology. In modern society, human consumption behavior largely reflects people's psychological activities, and thus research related to consumer psychology has received much attention. Consumption behavior is also an important way of embodying specific behaviors in people's aesthetic activities. In the Chinese market, the trendy toy blind box product industry has been sought after by consumers in recent years. In this industry, marketing and consumer psychology are particularly important, and the current state of the blind box industry shows many social issues, such as human aesthetics and consumer alienation. The article is an exploration of the psychology and aesthetics of mass consumption through research and analysis of the marketing and products of the blind box product industry. This paper may provide some implications for corporate managers, consumers, investors, and policymakers.

**Keywords:** Chinese market, Tide play blind box, Aesthetics, Marketing, Product Design, Consumer Psychology, Consumption Alienation

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, the word "blind box" is familiar ground, and the blind box economy is hot. Usually, the blind box industry refers to the blind box industry, such as the listed company "POP MART" and the outstanding industry leaders "Finding Unicorn", "Toy City", "52TOYS" and so on. In today's society, the blind box is also appearing in front of the public as a multi-industry marketing strategy. For example, the food and beverage, beauty and skin care, clothing and shoes, and even aviation services that everyone usually comes into contact with can be called all over the public life. "Spend some time" sending flowers in a week, the takeaway merchants' tangled package, the series of videos of "blind box unpacking of sneakers" displayed on the short video platform, and the Christmas countdown gift box of beauty brands, etc. have confirmed the status and popularity of blind box economy [1].

The blind box was first derived from the Japanese blessing bag to the twisted egg. To deal with unsalable goods, merchants put them in opaque bags, and stimulate consumers' curiosity by shaping the unknowns of products. Often, the total value of goods in blessing bags exceeds the purchase price of consumers. The original purpose of merchants is to promote consumption and clear inventory, which is also the commercial basis of blind box marketing. With the rise of the second

element in Japan, "egg twisters" containing various hand-made dolls also appeared. In the 1990s, this kind of "blind box" concept began to appear in the form of collecting cards in China, especially among students. It is not difficult to see that in the history of blind box development, all focus on consumer psychology.

Intra-bank data show that the market size of blind boxes for tide play in China expanded from 2.5 billion yuan in 2019-2021 to nearly 10 billion yuan in 2021, with an average compound annual growth rate of nearly 75%. According to the data of "Enterprise Check", in the past ten years, 79 tide-playing-related products in China have been financed, with 141 times financing, and the total disclosed financing amount exceeds 10 billion [2]. Among them, the above-mentioned blind box leader 'POP MART' has raised nearly ten times in ten years [3]. It can be seen that the blind box industry has a great momentum of development, but it is difficult for emerging enterprises to enter the market, and the status of the leader cannot be shaken, so it is an oligopoly market. Afterward, except for the special labeling, the tide plays blind box will be briefly named the blind box.

Since 2019, there has been a wave of the blind box in China, which has spread all over Weibo, friends circle, and other media. During that time, friends' VLOG videos of blind boxes can be seen everywhere in the circle of friends, so what is the blind box of tidal play? Compared with hand-made blind box, the model difference of blind box is that blind box can be mass-produced and has certain artistic value. The rule of the blind box game is to put small toys with different shapes in the same series into boxes with the same shape. So that each box in a group is different and contains toys of all shapes. This is one end. Consumers can freely choose single purchases or end-to-end purchases. In addition, in addition to the basic money included in each end, the manufacturer will set up another hidden money, and the winning probability is about one percent, which can be called surprise+purchase restriction. The blind box is different from the above-mentioned egg-twisting in that the blind box can be freely chosen by consumers so that consumers have more sense of participation and experience more fun from it.

## **2. Marketing Strategy Analysis of Tide Play Blind Box**

### **2.1. The Attraction of Product Design Toward Consumers**

The popularity of a product is inseparable from an excellent marketing team, but the most basic thing is the product itself. Behind the blind box, the explosion is closely related to its product design. People who are not trendy to play blind box often don't understand the popular phenomenon in this industry. Just one ornament has no practical use, and the price is not low. Why is it sought after by so many people? One of the most important reasons is the emotional design of blind box products [4]. The birth of a product is communication between designers and users, an artistic link, and an aesthetic resonance and cultural resonance between designers and users. Blind box products are temperature-sensitive, and their emotional design can not only meet the user's demand for product appearance but also meet the user's emotional and experience needs. In modern society, people's consumption view is not only on material pursuit but also on spiritual satisfaction. The design of the blind box's sense of experience coincides with consumers' desires and meets consumers' spiritual needs. The design of products is generally cocoa-loving or silly and interesting characters. This will arouse consumers' initial desire to buy [5]. We have to mention the packaging of the blind box. The designer of the packaging has filled in the painting of blind box marketing. The packaging of the product is extremely important for the first impression of the product. Some products may be extremely brilliant in themselves, but the packaging can't attract people's attention, and consumers often don't spend more energy searching for relevant information, resulting in the loss of consumers or a reduction in conversion rate. The packaging design of the blind box caught the attention of consumers. Its packaging often has a great visual impact, with exaggerated flower characters as

product names. It is a box printed with all hand-made products of the whole series. Users can see the trendy products they may get from blind boxes through the outer packaging, providing consumers with a simple and clear information chain. Moreover, the product itself of blind box tide play is consistent with its packaging example, even better. In the big environment where the modern packaging is inconsistent with the real thing when consumers unpack the box, they will often feel pleasantly surprised by the products themselves, and thus they love the blind box more. At the same time, the image of blind box products is usually produced and adapted in cooperation with popular IPs, such as well-known animation, national brands, or IPs created by tide play Blind Box Company. As the market gets larger and larger, for example, high growth and differentiated demand, allow new players to get on top. IP has more and more ways to be created. The operation of IP today is different from the traditional model of the past, and it no longer needs to rely on the story as the background of IP. As a result, some companies have managed to create many of their own IPs. For example, POP MART's Molly 'DIMOO' 'SKULLPANDA' series was created and launched by POP MART Company to cater to the market. Without the background of the story, it is still accepted, loved, and sought after by the public. A large number of consumers buy blind boxes because they love their IP, which also adds love to consumers' feelings about the appearance of blind boxes. The design of blind box products is exquisite in color, material, and quality, which makes it exudes its unique charm. They are often full of creativity, but at the same time, they have a sense of beauty. Make users feel novel and willing to spend for the blind box. Take "SKULLPANDA", the IP of POP MART for example. is designed and created by the female artist ABOUT ARTIST. SKULLPANDA is the designer's eponymous series of skeleton panda tide play. The original design image originated from the designer herself, but "she" has a stronger character color. SKULLPANDA can move through the universe and practice, she has tried many lives and reinvented herself. Pushing open the entrance to the new world, again and again, is also a journey for her to find herself again and again. Although successful IPs in today's society no longer rely on the support of a backstory and are free from the lengthy penetration time required to face the public, the artistic expression of the designers in them is not to be taken lightly. The public can feel the artistic expression of the creator himself in his works, which will further 'love' the IP.

## **2.2. Contribution of Marketing to Making Popular Blind Box Widespread and Famous**

With the rapid development of society, people are not attracted by the traditional marketing mode. Blind-box products didn't appear in recent years, but in recent years, they quickly became popular, which is closely related to the marketing strategy that conforms to the background of the times. As for the marketing of blind boxes, the author takes POP MART Company as an example and divides it into three aspects for analysis. They are advertising, public relations, and geographical location. Advertisement marketing of blind box

The blind box industry has made great efforts on the topic. In 2017, the statistics of Tmall Double Eleven Shopping Festival show that the sales volume of the whole tide play category is less than 2 million, which is just a niche hobby. For the first time, most of the people met with Tide Play Blind Box by media, such as Weibo, friends circle, Tik Tok, Bilibili, etc. It can be seen that the blind box industry has made great efforts in digital marketing. For example, POP MART started the official accounts of various online platforms. To better reach consumers, especially in the epidemic era, the online time of various media has reached a new high. POP MART took this opportunity to invest a lot of manpower and material resources, and at the same time launched the 'Blind Box Freedom' activity in cooperation with Tmall on Weibo, attracting consumers' attention with the contrast that more than 1,000 models are not enough to play blind boxes, gaining a big wave of traffic and a large number of onlookers. POP MART also invited popular stars as the brand's new product unveiling officer, and effectively shaped the brand's personality and label through the

image of stars [6]. When you have a lot of exposure, you can cooperate with big brands that consumers trust, gain the trust of consumers, make up for the defect of less offline contact, and give full play to the star's utility, which can't be called wonderful topic marketing. Since then, POP MART has led the blind box industry to complete the transformation from niche to mass. During this period, POP MART will be pervasive penetration into the lives of consumers, subconsciously leaving a deep impression on consumers. The cute and fun shape is no longer distant from the public [7].

### 2.3. Public Relationship Marketing of Blind Box

No matter the product or brand, the indispensable point in the market is good public relations, so it can be accepted by the public. Take POP MART Company, which is also the industry leader, as an example. When the epidemic came, POP MART combined public welfare with marketing to establish positive contact with users. Around its corporate mission of "delivering beauty", POP MART has carried out a series of activities to spread positive energy to society. When the epidemic first broke out, POP MART donated 10 million yuan to Wuhan, a severely affected area, for epidemic prevention and control. This makes POP MART Company a hot enterprise. In addition, POP MART joined forces with a group of trendy artists to create public welfare posters and drew various epidemic prevention tips with the IP image of the brand trendy. Close to the public life and provide warm power for the public. At the same time, United Newspaper drew public welfare posters with the theme of heroic occupations under the epidemic and combined with its popular IP 'Molly' to pay tribute to the retrograde people under the epidemic. At the same time, it also conveyed the brand culture to the public and carried out brand publicity. Unlike some brands that have lost their heart and gone downhill in recent years, a company that stands with the country and the people has already won the hearts of the public, whether successful or not, it's a brand with life. Blind box and consumers

### 3. Consumer Image of Blind Box

According to the survey data, in 2020, 31.5% of Chinese netizens heard about blind boxes slightly, 29.3% said they knew about blind boxes better, 16.3% said they knew about blind boxes well, and 22.9% said they didn't know about blind boxes. The core consumers of blind boxes are women in first-tier cities, among which white-collar workers and students account for a high proportion. More than 70% of consumers are aged between 18 and 34 [8]. Because they are more receptive to new things, they will pay for their interests. From a marketing point of view, in the process of spreading the blind box culture to the masses, its promotion chain reaches mostly users of that age group. From the perspective of its product design, it is in line with the aesthetics of the young public, its fancy and cute appearance in the early stages of design is not aimed at the elderly market. In terms of consumer psychology, a brand has to have its character, and often its users are people who have the same kind of character as this brand, or whose brand's character traits happen to be what users aspire to. The tide plays blind box industry will show this to the fullest, the brand and its users and even IP have a strong character color. For example, the IP 'Laura' under 'TOY CITY' was launched as a teenage girl, and its cute but rebellious image has resonated with numerous consumers and collected a large number of fans.

The cute appearance of blind boxes is the main reason why consumers buy blind boxes, followed by the excitement of smoking boxes. Compared with the reasons for buying at different ages, people under 18 are the easiest to follow suit, Most of the adolescent stage of the population's values and aesthetics are not yet fully formed, and teenagers are often under the pressure of studying to relax after the purchase of blind boxes, there is not much time and energy on the trend

of toys blind boxes for a deeper understanding, After the tide play blind box network boom, teenagers are mostly subject to the network around the idea and fishy taste is more obvious, its curiosity and social learning ability drives the eighteen-year-old consumers to follow the trend to buy tide play blind box, and tide plays blind box single pricing is acceptable to the student party which will drive teenage users to 'try' it. And those aged 25-34 are the easiest to buy impulsively [9]. People in this age group are often the most socially stressed. The excitement of playing with blind boxes often makes them feel 'decompressed', and the momentary pseudo-pleasure of opening them can temporarily detach young users from the pressure of real life, thus generating their regular 'impulsive consumption. Young users are often well aware of their inability to derive real pleasure from the blind box itself, but still, voluntarily sink into it. Due to the domination of labor alienation, living in a society controlled by capital, they have lost the real way to please themselves and are numb to pleasure and beauty. Blind box consumers have rich interests, and usually buying blind boxes is not the only hobby of their consumers. Apart from blind boxes, they are also Shopping people, social experts, and secondary houses.

### **3.1. Consumer Psychology Accounted for in the Blind Box Industry**

#### **3.1.1.Short Enjoying Feelings—Experience Economy**

What consumers pursue is no longer the most basic material consumption, but the deep spiritual pursuit, which is Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. When the lack of demand is met, consumers will pursue higher growth needs, such as self-realization and self-esteem. Blind box makes consumers happy in self-realization. If they keep buying, they will always be happy. That's why they keep buying blind boxes [10].

#### **3.1.2.Reasonable Single Goods Pricing—Anchoring Effect**

The pricing of the blind box is generally accepted by the public, and consumers' anchoring of the price makes them think that the price is within a reasonable range. If the hidden money can be opened, the income will be far greater than the cost, and the higher expenditure caused by the accumulation of many little things will not be considered. Psychologically, the purchase cost of consumers is greatly reduced, which leads to the purchase.

#### **3.1.3.Loss Avoidance Psychology is Caused by the Sunk Cost**

If consumers can't open the dolls they want, they will keep buying them. Especially when consumers invest time and money in the front, which makes them feel sad about what they have invested. As the name implies, people are risk-averse, but in essence, people just hate losses, and they hate risks because risks can lead to losses. So strong loss aversion makes people invest more and more until they get what they want, which makes consumers' previous investments worthwhile

#### **3.1.4.Investment Psychology – Cost-reversal Effect**

In the cost-reversal effect, in other words, people are more willing to take risks in the face of the losses that have already occurred. Everyone has the investment mentality of taking out the blind box of hidden money, and the demand is far greater than the supply, so it causes a high premium for hidden money, which is the same as the gambler's mentality. They often overestimate the probability of that little thing happening, hoping that 'luck' will befall them, but the general result of giving it a go is 'drawing water with a sieve.



### **3.2. Comparison Psychology and Conformity Psychology**

Playing blind box has become a social bridge and an emotional connection for a large number of consumers. Online blind box communication groups and offline blind box communication activities make them form a new social circle, namely a blind box circle. In this way, players can exchange and sell blind boxes. No matter what the consumer's social status looks like in reality, the blind box has become a symbol of its circle members' social status [11]. It allows some users to experience a false sense of identity and status, exchanging a relatively small cost for the satisfaction of their self-esteem, even if that satisfaction is false. For blind box consumers, the blind box is not only a kind of fun or hand-made for viewing, but also a functional medium for their communication.

### **3.3. Thinking Led by Tide Play Blind Box**

Through the previous analysis of the tide play blind box products and their marketing, as well as the study of the consumer psychology of the tide play blind box caused reflection, and obtained the following conclusions. Tide play blind box industry must not be called successful, successful marketing, successful among the market, successful appearance within the public view to be accepted by the public. But it reflects not a good and healthy society, but more the aesthetic alienation of the mass consumers and the problem of consumer alienation of the contemporary population.

## **4. Research Background Revisited**

From the perspective of economics, the outbreak of the financial crisis is a bubble crisis of virtual capital; from the perspective of philosophy, it is an economic process of alienation. Alienation permeates the very fabric of our lives and exists in various ways.

Therefore, it is crucial to rethink what Marx called the phenomenon of alienation. In particular, with the advent of the new scientific and technological era, the transition of Western society from a society of production to a society of consumption, and the new changes in human existence during the development of the Western capitalist economy, theorists are prompted to come up with entirely new theories to account for the changes in everyday life and the mainstream consciousness of thought and to reveal the changes in the structure of Western society. The modern critical theory of consumer society is a concrete application and deepening of Lefebvre's critical theory of his daily life, with a deep theoretical origin and broad social background [12, 13]. In particular, the use of the field of everyday life as a research platform is a development of Marxist alienation of consumption. For the ins and outs of his theory and the basis of reality [14]. To study the root causes of consumer alienation, this analysis is divided into four main points, which are material premise, ideological root, direct cause, and social root [15].

### **4.1. Material Abundance is the Material Premise of Consumer Alienation**

Before the capitalist industrial society, the natural economy was dominant. The mode of production was dominated by the smallholder economy and the family workshop. Due to the underdeveloped economy, the production of products was very limited, and most families were self-sufficient and did not have surplus items for exchange. With the sprouting of capitalist relations of production and the establishment of the capitalist system, capitalists created and accumulated a certain amount of social wealth. Prompted by the first industrial revolution, machine-based production changed traditional handicraft production, and hand workshops were replaced by factories. In the second technological revolution, the use of electricity led to more efficient and large-scale industrial production, the concentration of capital and production reached a certain level, and monopoly

capitalism emerged. This was manifested by the transformation of the factory system into a corporate system, where the ownership of the company was separated from the management; the development of productivity prompted the expansion of commodity production and the break between production and consumption, resulting in a crisis of relative overproduction.

#### **4.2. Consumerist Culture is the Ideological Root of Consumer Alienation**

Consumerist culture first emerged in capitalist society at the end of the 19th century, along with the rise of mass consumption. After the Second World War, consumerist culture spread rapidly. First emerged in the economically prosperous United States, and then expanded its core from the United States to other economically developed countries around the world, some developing countries have also been swept up in the wave of consumerist culture. Its emergence is the result of a combination of factors. To understand what consumerist culture is, we must start with the creation of consumerism.

The direct cause of consumer alienation is the false needs of people in modern society. Herbert Marcuse has proposed two kinds of needs: "real needs and false needs." A real need means that it does not carry social attributes, it gives a real sense of well-being and satisfaction, it is a free and spontaneous behavioral activity of the person, without compulsion, and the act of consumption is a creative experience. False needs, on the other hand, are inhibitory needs that have strong social attributes and are conditioned by social ideology [16]; these needs perpetuate repression, injustice, and hardship.

#### **4.3. The Social Root of the Alienation of Consumption Stems from the Social Domination Exercised by the Capitalists**

With the development of the economy and the enhancement of technological productivity, the boundaries between private and public life began to dissolve, and the consumption levels of all social classes gradually increased. For example, "a worker can enjoy the same television programs and visit the same places of entertainment as his boss; a typist can dress up like her employer's daughter", and all classes are accommodated in a political world. This capitalist society, which seems to have eliminated class distinctions, has transformed the political needs of society into the instinctive needs of human beings. To alleviate the economic crisis and maintain the legitimacy of capital's rule, Agger points out that the rulers' approach is to create a constant stream of false demand from the consuming public, paralyze the incentive to revolt by non-terrorist means, and curb negative thinking [17].

#### **4.4. The Metamorphic Path of Consumer Alienation**

Freedom is the most genuine and profound need of human nature, and the purpose of human activity is to pursue the conscious realization of freedom and the achievement of needs and desires. However, in the field of labor, alienation has transformed the attribute of labor from free and conscious to the compulsion of survival and accumulation. So, in a capitalist society, can consumption change the situation of people in the field of labor, restore the existence of subjectivity and achieve freedom? The answer is equally negative, as Marcuse argues that "the freedom to choose among a great variety of logistical services and products does not mean freedom; people simply relax and consume according to the options and advertisements constructed by capital".

## 5. Suggestion

What is happiness? In Fromm's view, happiness is the highest purpose of all choices. It is full of self-sufficiency only for itself, and consumption is only an important means to achieve happiness. However, consumption alienation puts the cart before the horse, and consumption becomes the end itself. The richer people's material life, the poorer their spiritual life [18]. Even though this is also called "happiness", this kind of happiness is empty and pale, and the satisfaction of perceptual and physiological desires does not represent the real meaning of human existence. Fromm pointed out that people have two lifestyles, one is a lifestyle that emphasizes survival, and the other is a lifestyle that emphasizes possession. The reversal of these two modes is mainly reflected in the transformation of human-centered social life into material-centered social life. The so-called "survival-oriented" means people's lifestyle of pursuing love from the heart and being integrated with the world. It has a sense of independence and freedom, and people feel happy and happy from the heart. Just as Goethe, a poet, appreciates a flower, he doesn't want to pick it, but only hopes that it will continue to bloom. However, in modern society, most people are more inclined to take possession of their lifestyle. The word "possession" actually came into being with the appearance of private property. It refers to taking things as one's own as much as possible and using them creatively to show oneself. People not only take possession of things but also take possession of people, in turn, unconsciously turning themselves into goods ready to be sold, seeking happiness from their sales. Personal happiness is more of a function to improve the consumption level [19], which is specifically shown by the marketing workers' awareness of the importance of things. For example, most people buy more things even if they have no use value by taking time out of reading and exercising, almost without considering their taste. When they see Dove's advertisement, they'll buy' its exquisite packaging and' eat' its trademark. That's all. Maybe, they don't know how to appreciate it, just like people who collect many antiques, but they don't know how to appreciate it. Therefore, "consumption is just such a tower wheel, and everyone uses who comes first and who comes later to judge their position". However, contrary to expectations, the sources of real happiness-leisure time and social relations-are beginning to dry up on the road to wealth. Samuelson said that the greater the possessiveness of consumption, the less happiness you have.

Undeniably, in this era of information technology changing with each passing day, our lifestyle and consumption purpose are all dependent on the compilation of codes, and consumption exists under the cover of codes. As the purpose of consumption to meet people's basic living needs gradually weakens, consumption bears the significance of social membership construction, that is to say, people determine whom they are through consumption, rather than expressing who they are. So, how to specifically identify social identity? Therefore, people choose to indulge in the practical value of symbol consumption, and the more they can represent the consumption of successful people, even if they don't have these characteristics, they should try their best to include themselves in it, proving that they belong to this class, because the concentration of codes reflects the social status itself [20-22]. These consumers, who have obtained false identities, establish their consumption purpose symbolization in the code operation rules. From the sociological point of view, the consumption of all people's material and emotional products is just the setting of various symbols of social identity. TV media also vigorously promotes prestige economy, emphasizing the symbolic significance of symbols [23]. Nowadays, it is a common phenomenon that most families own a car. Those who don't own it will feel frustrated in self-esteem, and those who own it will keep up with the Joneses. People are constantly pursuing the metonymic pleasure of self-realization in the "wonderland" of goods created by capital, that is, buying goods to satisfy their inner emptiness [24].



## 6. Conclusions

In today's society, alienation is no longer only in the field of production, but also in the field of consumption, which has widely and profoundly affected and changed human society and people themselves. The present world, although not the world Marx faced, is a world that provides a solid theoretical basis for Western Marxist critique precisely because Marx sharply criticized the phenomenon of labor alienation that emerged in the field of production with a keen perspective, thus revealing the essence of capitalist social relations of production. Since Western countries entered the consumer society earlier, Western Marxism, based on inheriting and developing Marx's critical spirit and the idea of labor alienation, has gone deeper into various fields of consumer society to reflect on the root causes of the phenomenon of consumer alienation and put forward the Western Marxist critical theory of consumer alienation from the perspective of human ideology and survival and development, which has practical implications for getting out of the dilemma of consumer alienation. Although the Western Marxist school has reached a high level of research on the alienation of consumption in terms of scope and depth, the Western Marxist theorists not have found the root cause of the alienation of consumption, and not have analyzed the alienation of consumption from the capitalist system itself. In today's China, where the consumer society is approaching, it is also of great theoretical and practical significance to study and reflect on the Western Marxist critical theory of consumer alienation.

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