

The Impact Mechanism of Visual Consistency on Consumer Purchase Intention Based on Social Media: A Case Study of Pop Mart IP

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Abstract. This article is based on social media marketing theory and takes Pop Mart IP as a case study to explore the impact mechanism of visual consistency on consumer purchase intention. The research background stems from the core role of visual content in consumer decision-making in the era of social media. The rise of blind box economy has made Pop Mart a typical representative, but the visual consistency impact of its different IP styles (such as Molly's cute style and Skullpanda's cool style) has not been systematically studied. In terms of research content, this article compares two styles to analyze the direct effect of visual consistency (such as the uniformity of elements such as color and shape on social media) on purchase intention, and examines the moderating effect of style types. In terms of research ideas and methods, empirical design was adopted, combined with a questionnaire survey (sample of Pop Mart consumers), controlling variables such as brand identity and social interaction. Research has found that visual consistency significantly increases purchase intention, but the moderating effect of cute style (Molly) is stronger than that of cool style (Skullpanda), possibly because cute style is more likely to trigger emotional resonance. The research conclusion provides a theoretical basis for optimizing social media visual strategies for blind box brands, and suggests developing differentiated marketing plans for different styles of IPs.

Keywords: Visual consistency, brand resonance, purchase intention, Pop Mart.

1. Introduction

Social media has become a key platform for consumer decision-making, with visual content such as images and videos directly influencing purchasing behavior [1]. The blind box economy has experienced explosive growth in recent years. As a leading brand, Pop Mart's IP builds visual consistency through social media, that is, the brand's visual elements are unified across platforms [2]. However, the visual consistency effect of different styles of IP varies: Molly attracts emotional consumers with a cute style, while Skullpanda attracts rational consumers with a cool style [3]. This comparison has not been empirically tested. Current research mostly focuses on the universal effect of visual consistency, lacking exploration of style boundary conditions, resulting in theoretical gaps

and practical blind spots. Therefore, the core research question of this article is: How does visual consistency affect consumer purchase intention? Does the style type (cute vs cool) moderate this relationship?

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of visual consistency on purchase intention and to reveal the moderating mechanism of style types. The research approach is as follows: Firstly, an analytical framework is constructed based on the stimulus organization response theory (The stimulus organization response theory is a deepening of the traditional "stimulus response" model. This theory holds that external stimuli do not directly lead to behavioral responses, but must go through a key intermediary - the internal organization of the organism. This "organization" link includes all internal psychological activities such as perception, cognition, emotion, motivation, and past experiences. It is these internal states that uniquely screen, interpret, and evaluate stimuli, ultimately determining the explicit behavioral response. Therefore, this theory emphasizes human subjectivity and complexity, explaining why the same stimulus acts on different people to produce vastly different behaviors) takes visual consistency as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and style type as the moderating variable; Secondly, empirical methods will be used to collect consumer data from Pop Mart through questionnaire surveys to test hypotheses. The research features an innovative comparison between Molly and Skullpanda styles, breaking through the limitations of a single IP and introducing brand identity as a control variable to enhance endogeneity processing. Expected research findings include: visual consistency has a positive impact on purchase intention, but the moderating effect of cute style (Molly) is more significant. In terms of theoretical value, this study advances the boundaries of visual marketing theory and clarifies style as a key contextual variable; In practical terms, provide style customized marketing strategies for brands such as Pop Mart [4].

2. Literature review

The research on visual consistency originates from the field of brand management, and scholars believe that unified visual elements can enhance brand recognition and trust [5]. In the context of social media, visual consistency promotes purchase intention by enhancing information credibility and reducing cognitive load. However, there are differences in existing literature: some studies emphasize the universal positive effect of visual consistency, while others point out that its effect is regulated by product type, but there is insufficient discussion on style differences [6]. Domestic research has focused more on the consumer psychology of blind boxes and has not delved into the mechanism of visual consistency; Although foreign research involves style, it lacks IP specific background [7]. This article will focus on three aspects: visual consistency, purchase intention, and style adjustment. Through comparison, it points out a gap: existing research has failed to explain why the visual consistency effect of different style IPs is heterogeneous.

Visual consistency is the concept of a brand maintaining a unified visual element (such as logo, color) on social media. Its research can be classified into two categories: one emphasizes cognitive pathways, that is, consistency reduces uncertainty and enhances purchase intention; Another type of focus is on emotional pathways, which enhance consistency and sense of belonging [8]. The disagreement lies in whether the role of visual consistency is universal, and this article speculates that it may be modulated by style variables.

Style, as an emotional attribute of visual elements, can be classified into two groups in relevant literature: cute style and cool style. Research on cute styles is mostly based on emotional theory, which suggests that they enhance consistency by evoking a sense of pleasure; The study of cool style focuses on cognitive theory, emphasizing its role in highlighting uniqueness. However, these

studies did not directly compare the style moderation effect, resulting in a gap. Through point by point discussion: Early research assumed no differences in style, but recent empirical evidence has found that cute styles are more likely to trigger social sharing, thereby amplifying the impact of visual consistency [9]. This article proposes a hypothesis based on this: the positive impact of visual consistency on purchase intention is moderated by style type, with the moderating effect of cute style being stronger than that of cool style.

3. Research methods

3.1. The core basis for method selection

This study focuses on the impact mechanism between "consumers' subjective perception of visual consistency on Pop Mart social media" and "purchase intention". The core variables (such as visual consistency perception, cognitive fluency, emotional identification, brand trust) all belong to the category of consumers' subjective psychology and attitude, and are difficult to measure directly through observation, experimentation, and other methods. As a classic tool for capturing subjective cognition, attitudes, and behavioral intentions, the survey questionnaire method can accurately match research needs: on the one hand, it can customize design questions for the unique scenarios of Pop Mart IP (blind box consumption, social media interaction, visual symbol cognition), directly reaching the research core; On the other hand, abstract theoretical variables such as "visual design consistency perception" and "repurchase intention" can be transformed into quantifiable measurement indicators to provide data support for hypotheses [10].

Existing research has optimized the language style, question scenarios, and distribution channels of questionnaires for segmented groups such as Generation Z and IP cultural and creative consumers. For example, targeting the young consumer group, adopting more concise expressions and visual auxiliary explanations (inserting visual case diagrams of Pop Mart IP) can lower the threshold for answering questions; Incorporating behavioral intentions unique to IP blind box consumption, such as "willingness to use end boxes" and "motivation to share on social media," into the item design to enhance the ecological validity of the questionnaire.

This study focuses on Pop Mart IP consumers and potential consumers, and distributes questionnaires through online channels, focusing on the 18-35 age group (Pop Mart's core consumer circle), taking into account audiences of different genders, regions, and consumption experiences to ensure the representativeness of the sample. The basic information of the research subjects is as follows:

The research focuses on Generation Z as the core group, with an age concentration of 18-25 years old (accounting for 87.10%). Among them, 18-22 years old (mainly students) account for 64.52%, and 23-25 years old (young white-collar workers who have just entered the workplace) account for 22.58%; The proportion of people aged 26-30 is 6.45%, the proportion of people aged 31-35 is 3.23%, and the proportion of people aged 35 and above is 3.22%. This distribution is highly consistent with the market characteristics of "young consumer group dominance" in Pop Mart, and can accurately reflect the cognition and attitude of the core audience.

Female respondents account for an absolute dominant position, with a proportion of 84.95%; Male respondents accounted for 15.05%. This result is in line with the current industry situation of IP blind box consumption - female consumers have a higher preference for cute and aesthetic IP, and are more concerned about the consistency and details of brand visual design, which is highly compatible with the core measurement dimension of "visual consistency perception" in this study.

In terms of consumer experience, occasional buyers (once every 1-3 months) account for 63.44%, those who have never purchased but are familiar with Pop Mart account for 25.81%, frequent buyers (1-2 times a month) account for 3.23%, and high-frequency buyers (3 times a month or more) account for 7.52%; In terms of social media attention, 30.11% of respondents pay attention to accounts such as Pop Mart Red Book, Tiktok, and Weibo, while 69.89% do not pay attention but contact brand visual content through other channels (such as e-commerce platforms, friends sharing); In terms of IP preferences, Molly (19.35%), DIMOO (11.83%), SKULLPANDA (9.68%), LABUBU (9.68%). They are the four most popular IPs.

3.2. Data collection situation

The purpose of this questionnaire survey data collection is to analyze consumers' perception of brand visual consistency and its relationship with purchasing behavior. A total of 93 valid survey questionnaires were collected, covering participants' basic information, purchasing behavior, purchasing motivation, and product selection preferences. Through the analysis of these data, this article hopes to capture consumers' preferences and concerns when purchasing blind boxes for film and television IP, thereby providing valuable references for the development and market promotion of related products.

4. Research findings

4.1. Original IP preference and visual consistency

According to the data, in the question of "The consistency of visual elements in the character image of Pop Mart series products will increase my willingness to purchase their blind boxes", 66.67% of respondents clearly agreed, that is, they believe that the consistency of visual elements in character image (such as Molly's "pout" shape, DIMOO's soft color matching, IP iconic symbols, etc.) will positively drive their purchase intention; only 33.33% of the respondents hold a negative attitude, believing that visual consistency has no significant promoting effect on their purchasing decisions. The overall data shows a significant identification tendency, indicating that original visual symbols are a key factor in attracting consumers. In cross-analysis, it can be seen that among the user group who prefer original IP, 79.59% believe that visual style consistency is very important, far higher than other purchase motivation groups. Thus, it can be seen that there is a close relationship between original design and visual consistency, which together constitute the core of brand competitiveness.

4.2. The importance of IP role visual symbols IP

By analyzing the specific data of the most frequently purchased Pop Mart IP: The proportion of respondents who have not purchased blind boxes is 34.41%; Among the IPs with the highest number of purchases, Molly accounts for 19.35%; The purchase proportion of DIMOO is 11.83%; The purchase proportion of SKULLPANDA and LABUBU is the same, both at 9.68%; The proportion of individual IP purchases for the remaining IPs (including PUCKY, BUNNY, Xiaotiandou, etc.) is less than 8%, and the total proportion of such IPs is about 39.46%. It can be concluded that the visual symbol reproduction of IP roles in blind box products is crucial.

The most frequently purchased IP is Molly (19.35%), followed by DIMOO (11.83%), SKULLPANDA, and LABUBU (9.68% each). These top IPs all have long-term stable core visual symbols (such as Molly's "short hair+pout" and LABUBU's "sharp teeth+round face"), and their high purchase frequency reflects consumers' preference for "mature visual consistency IP".

Meanwhile, the survey data on "Which type of blind box would you prefer to choose when purchasing a blind box now" shows that 48.39% of respondents prefer to purchase blind boxes from the same character image series; 51.61% of respondents tend to purchase blind boxes with multiple character image series. The proportion of selecting multiple character images in a series and a single character image in a series is close, indicating that consumers are both concerned about the visual unity of a single IP (same character series) and accept the visual collaboration between multiple IPs (multi character series). This means that consumers' perception of "visual consistency" is not limited to a single IP, but may also extend to the coordination of the brand's overall visual system.

4.3. Analysis of consumer purchase intention

This study found that the 18-25 age group constitutes the core consumer group of Pop Mart, with 83.67% of their purchasing decisions stemming from a preference for original IP design, confirming the effectiveness of the brand's "design driven" strategy [11]. The data reveals two core contradictions: on the one hand, 66.67% of users recognize the promoting effect of visual consistency on purchase intention, especially among high-frequency consumers, 13% are willing to continue paying for the same character series; On the other hand, the acceptance of new IPs shows a rational wait-and-see trend, with only 16.33% of users clearly expressing strong purchasing intentions.

The overall purchasing intention shows a polarized feature, with 31.18% of respondents clearly stating that it is "impossible" to purchase Pop Mart blind boxes in the next three months, and 10.75% believing that it is "very likely" to purchase; The active understanding and willingness to purchase new IP blind boxes are lower, with an average score of 1.75. 29.03% said "impossible", and only 10.75% thought "very likely".

4.3.1. Differences in purchasing intentions among different groups

Original IP design enthusiasts have the strongest purchase intention, with an average purchase intention score of 2.24. 16.33% clearly indicate that they are "highly likely" to purchase, significantly higher than the group that focuses on product quality (average score 1.2), popularity (average score 1.48), and cost-effectiveness (average score 0.67).

The purchase intention of those who prefer the same character series (average score 2.04) is significantly higher than that of those who prefer multiple character series (average score 1.48), with 17.78% of those who prefer the same character series reaching the "highly likely" purchase level.

4.4. Social media attention and brand stickiness

At the same time, the data also revealed the brand's operational weaknesses. The survey data on "whether to pay attention to the social media accounts of Pop Mart (such as Xiaohongshu, TikTok, Weibo, etc.)" are as follows: 30.11% of respondents pay attention to the social media accounts of Pop Mart; The proportion of respondents who did not follow Pop Mart's social media accounts was 69.89%.

About 70% of users do not follow brand social media accounts, but from data cross analysis, we found that 37.78% of following users are more inclined to purchase the same IP series, indicating the potential of social platforms in cultivating user stickiness. Brands can further deepen consumers' familiarity and trust in the brand by maintaining a coherent narrative of visual content and strengthening visual symbol memory points on social media.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated whether brand visual consistency has a positive impact on consumers' purchasing attitudes, further understanding consumers' visual demand tendencies for blind box IP, and the positive relationship between product design visual consistency and purchase intention. The 18-25 age group constitutes the core consumer group of Pop Mart, with 83.67% of purchasing decisions stemming from a preference for original IP design and a willingness to pay for the visual consistency of original IP character images; 66.67% of consumers recognize the promoting effect of visual consistency on purchase intention, especially among high-frequency consumers, 13% are willing to continue paying for the same character series. These data all suggest that visual consistency can effectively stimulate purchase intention by enhancing consumers' brand identity and emotional connection to IP. This article suggests that marketing can continue to strengthen the dissemination of brand visual consistency. For example, in response to top IPs such as Molly and DIMOO created by Pop Mart, we will continue to strengthen core visual symbols in product design, packaging, and social media content. At the same time, we will use short videos, graphics, and other forms to convey the value of visual consistency or brand concept to consumers who have not followed our accounts on social media, thereby increasing our reach rate.

This study provides valuable reference for future research in this direction, mainly influencing the research framework of "brand visual management and consumer behavior" in the field of IP cultural and creative industries — The mechanism of visual consistency in emotion driven products such as blind boxes has been clarified, and the transmission path of "visual symbol emotional connection purchase intention" has been verified, providing reference questionnaire design dimensions and sample screening criteria for subsequent related research; At the same time, it also provides empirical support for brand practice, promoting the transformation of IP cultural and creative brands from "symbol stacking" to "visual consistency system construction", and strengthening the brand competition logic of "original design+visual continuity".

Future research should focus more on the following directions for in-depth exploration: firstly, expanding the sample size and coverage, including groups with lower proportions in existing samples such as third - and fourth tier cities and male consumers, to further verify the universality of the impact of visual consistency; The second is to focus on the visual consistency differences of different types of IPs, and analyze the boundary and moderating factors of the impact of visual consistency of different styles of IPs on purchase intention; The third is to explore the comprehensive impact of the synergy and consistency between offline store visual presentation, product packaging, and social media visual on consumer behavior by combining multiple online and offline scenarios; The fourth is to introduce a long-term tracking perspective to study the long-term mechanism of visual consistency on consumer brand loyalty and repurchase frequency, as well as the impact of the balance between visual innovation and visual consistency on brand sustainable development; The fifth is to expand research methods, combining qualitative and quantitative methods such as eye tracking experiments and in-depth interviews, to further analyze consumers' perception process and psychological mechanism of visual consistency.

Authors contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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