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The Influence of Social Media Content Marketing on Brand Awareness among Young Consumers: A Case Study of POP MART

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Abstract. Social media has become an important channel for brands seeking to build awareness among younger consumers. This study examines how social media content marketing may influence brand awareness of POP MART, a designer toy company known for IPs such as LABUBU, MOLLY, SKULLPANDA, and CRYBABY. Drawing on research on social media marketing, brand equity, recognition, and recall, the paper focuses on four content forms: IP storytelling, interactive content, livestreaming, and user-generated content (UGC). The case analysis suggests that these forms contribute to awareness in different ways. Consistent character design and storytelling may support recognition by making individual IPs easier to identify, while livestreaming and live unboxing may support recall by encouraging more active engagement. UGC can extend brand visibility beyond official accounts through unboxing videos, collection posts, reviews, and fan discussions. At the same time, the analysis identifies an important branding challenge: strong awareness of a popular IP does not necessarily translate into equally strong awareness of POP MART as the corporate brand. The effectiveness of social media content marketing therefore depends not only on visibility but also on how consistently popular IPs are connected back to POP MART.

Keywords: Social Media Content Marketing, Brand Awareness, Brand Recognition and Recall, User-Generated Content, POP MART

1. Introduction

Designer toys have become a visible part of youth consumer culture, particularly on social media. POP MART has built a large portfolio of character-based intellectual properties (IPs), including LABUBU, MOLLY, SKULLPANDA, and CRYBABY. At the same time, the company increasingly uses platforms such as Instagram, RedNote, TikTok, and Douyin to introduce new products, tell IP stories, livestream launches, and encourage user-generated content. POP MART's annual reports also show the growing role of livestreaming and content e-commerce in its digital strategy [1].

Compared with traditional advertising, social media allows brands to communicate with consumers in more interactive and participatory ways. Kim and Ko identify entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth as major dimensions of social media

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marketing activities. Chusnaini and Rasyid further find positive relationships between social media marketing, social media content, and brand awareness.

Brand awareness is a core component of brand equity. Aaker defines it as consumers' ability to recognize or recall that a brand belongs to a particular product category. This distinction is especially relevant to POP MART because young consumers may recognize a character such as LABUBU without immediately connecting it to the POP MART name. Although social media marketing and purchase intention have been widely studied, less attention has been given to how specific forms of social media content shape recognition and recall in the designer toy industry. This paper therefore asks, how does social media content marketing influence brand awareness of POP MART among young consumers? It focuses on IP storytelling, interactive content, livestreaming, and UGC [2].

2. Literature review

2.1. Social media content marketing

Social media has changed how firms communicate with consumers. Traditional advertising is largely one-way, while social platforms allow users to respond, share, and participate in brand-related conversations. Social media content marketing therefore depends not only on exposure but also on whether content is interesting, useful, timely, and shareable.

Kim and Ko identify five dimensions of social media marketing activities: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth. These dimensions create value in different ways. Entertainment attracts attention, interaction encourages participation, trendiness keeps a brand culturally relevant, and word-of-mouth allows messages to travel through consumer networks. Godey et al. similarly report that social media marketing efforts are associated with brand equity and consumer responses across luxury brands [3, 4].

These findings matter because social media does more than support immediate sales. Chusnaini and Rasyid find that social media marketing and social media content are positively associated with brand awareness. Repeated exposure to consistent imagery, messages, and values can make a brand more familiar, while interaction gives consumers more opportunities to process and remember brand-related information. This function is especially relevant for brands that rely heavily on digital culture to reach younger audiences [5].

2.2. Brand awareness: recognition and recall

Brand awareness is commonly treated as a foundation of brand equity. Aaker defines awareness through consumers' ability to recognize or recall a brand within a product category. Exposure alone is therefore not enough. Awareness depends on whether consumers can identify a brand when they encounter it and whether they can retrieve it from memory later [2].

Keller develops this distinction through the concepts of brand recognition and brand recall. Recognition refers to confirming prior exposure when a consumer is given a visual or verbal cue. Recall requires the consumer to retrieve a brand from memory without directly seeing it. Recognizing a familiar logo, for example, requires less active retrieval than naming a brand when thinking about a product category. Strong awareness therefore involves both familiarity and accessibility in memory [6].

Pagani and Xie operationalize awareness through consumers' ability to recognize a brand among competitors, recall its logo, and retrieve brand characteristics. Their results show that community,

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participation, hedonic, and informational experiences can contribute to brand awareness and associations, while purely transactional digital commerce does not produce the same effect. This distinction suggests that selling online by itself is not enough, engaging experiences may create stronger memory connections [7].

2.3. Repeated exposure and interaction

Social media can support brand awareness by increasing both the frequency and depth of brand contact. Repeated exposure to videos, livestreams, posts, and recommendations can strengthen familiarity, while interactive formats encourage users to spend more time processing brand-related information. Pagani and Xie similarly show that participatory and informational digital experiences are associated with stronger brand awareness and associations. Consumers who comment, share, or participate in communities may therefore develop more durable memory links than those who simply view a static advertisement [7].

2.4. User-generated content and the research gap

User-generated content extends brand communication beyond company-created media. Unboxing videos, reviews, collection posts, and fan discussions expose audiences to brands through peers and online communities. This can increase both the number and variety of brand encounters. However, existing studies often focus on broad outcomes such as brand equity or purchase intention rather than separating recognition from recall. They also rarely distinguish awareness of an individual character from awareness of the corporate brand behind it. This gap is particularly relevant to POP MART, where an IP can become highly visible online independently of the company name. The following case study therefore examines how storytelling, interactive content, livestreaming, and UGC may strengthen recognition and recall of POP MART among young consumers.

3. POP MART's social media content marketing strategies

3.1. Overall digital content strategy

POP MART combines product communication with entertainment, storytelling, and audience interaction. Its digital content includes product previews, IP narratives, short-form videos, livestreaming, and interactive unboxing across platforms such as Douyin, RedNote, TikTok, and Instagram. Ouyang and Xu identify product previews, IP storytelling, and interactive unboxing as important forms of POP MART's social media communication. These formats provide multiple opportunities for consumers to encounter the company's characters and brand-related cues [8].

The company's annual reports also illustrate the commercial scale of its digital channel. Douyin revenue reached RMB 283.3 million in 2023, representing year-on-year growth of 431.2 percent. By 2025, POP MART had further integrated IP communication, livestream interaction, and product presentation into its content-commerce model [9]. Although these figures do not directly measure awareness, they indicate the growing commercial importance of digital channels as consumer touchpoints. Repeated exposure to brand names, visual identities, and character-related content may help consumers become more familiar with POP MART.

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3.2. IP storytelling and brand recognition

IP storytelling is central to POP MART's marketing strategy because its products derive much of their appeal from distinctive characters and their associated identities. LABUBU provides a prominent example. In 2025, THE MONSTERS generated RMB 14.16 billion in revenue, and POP MART described LABUBU as a global sensation [1]. This commercial performance shows how strongly one character can travel across markets.

The appeal of LABUBU extends beyond individual product releases. Its distinctive appearance, personality, and continuing narrative make the character easy to identify among competing designer toys. CRYBABY and MOLLY use similar visual and emotional consistency. In this sense, storytelling acts as brand coding: repeated design cues give consumers a quick way to recognize an IP without processing a long promotional message.

Nevertheless, character recognition does not necessarily translate into corporate brand recognition. Wang argues that POP MART can face difficulty when consumers become attached to individual IPs without developing the same connection to the corporate brand. Character recognition therefore does not automatically equal POP MART recognition. A consumer may know LABUBU immediately but still have a weaker association with the company behind it [10].

3.3. Interactive content and brand recall

Interactive content provides another potential mechanism for strengthening brand awareness. Through livestreaming and live unboxing, viewers watch hosts introduce products, explain character concepts, open boxes, and respond to comments in real time. Compared with a static advertisement, these formats keep consumers involved with the content for longer and expose them repeatedly to brand names, IP names, and product information.

Such engagement may support recall because consumers are not only seeing an image, they are following a sequence of explanations, reactions, and interactions. It can also connect separate IPs back to the wider POP MART portfolio. A livestream may move from one character line to another while remaining inside the same branded environment, giving consumers more opportunities to remember POP MART as the system linking those characters together.

3.4. User-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth

Much of POP MART's online visibility is created by consumers themselves. Blind boxes and collectibles naturally encourage unboxing videos, rare-edition reveals, collection displays, reviews, and reaction posts. Wang notes that consumers share purchases and collecting experiences on social media, expanding the promotional effect beyond official channels. For younger audiences, this peer-based exposure may appear more natural than formal advertising because it is embedded in creator, friend, and fan-community content [10].

UGC can also create a network effect. One product release may lead to many secondary posts, hashtags, and collection pages, each exposing a new audience to the same IP. This can increase recognition and recall through repeated contact. Yet the same attribution problem remains: if consumers focus mainly on the character, UGC may strengthen awareness of the IP faster than awareness of POP MART itself.

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3.5. Global brand visibility

POP MART's international expansion adds a geographical dimension to its brand awareness strategy. In 2025, the company opened its first stores in several new markets and expanded flagship locations in major cities. In Europe and other regions, the number of retail stores increased from 14 in 2024 to 36 in 2025, while online-channel revenue increased from RMB 55.2 million to RMB 505.0 million [1]. These figures indicate the expansion of POP MART's international business and the growing opportunities for consumer exposure, although they do not directly measure brand awareness.

Digital and physical exposure can reinforce each other. Consumers may first discover an IP through TikTok and later encounter the same character in a flagship store, exhibition, or shopping district. Such repeated encounters may strengthen familiarity with the characters and the brand. However, international expansion also increases the importance of brand attribution. A character may gain popularity more quickly than the company behind it, making it important for POP MART to maintain a consistent association between its IPs and its corporate identity across markets.

The effectiveness of this strategy therefore depends not only on expanding the visibility of individual IPs but also on ensuring that consumers associate them with POP MART. This challenge may be particularly significant in international markets, where social media platforms, creator communities, and cultural references differ. Consistent brand cues across digital content and physical retail experiences may help strengthen the connection between popular characters and the corporate brand.

4. Conclusion

This paper examined how social media content marketing may influence brand awareness of POP MART among young consumers. The case analysis suggests that different content formats may support brand awareness through complementary mechanisms. IP storytelling can facilitate brand recognition through distinctive and consistent character cues, while interactive content may support brand recall by encouraging consumers to engage with brand-related information. UGC further extends exposure beyond official channels, while international digital and physical touchpoints create additional opportunities for consumers to encounter POP MART and its IPs.

The main challenge is converting awareness of individual IPs into corporate brand awareness. Visibility alone does not guarantee that consumers will connect LABUBU, MOLLY, or CRYBABY with POP MART. The long-term effectiveness of the company's social media strategy therefore depends on how consistently popular IPs are linked back to the POP MART name across platforms and international markets.

This analysis has an important limitation. POP MART's annual reports provide evidence of marketing activity, reach, and commercial growth rather than direct measures of consumer recognition or recall. The relationship between content and awareness should therefore be interpreted as a theoretically supported case analysis rather than causal proof. Future research could test the relationship more directly through surveys or experiments comparing recognition and recall across markets and age groups.

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