

Content Characteristics and Dissemination Patterns of Consumer-Initiated Promotion in the New Media Era: A Case Study of Pop Mart

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Abstract

In the era of new media, user-generated content (UGC) has become a crucial medium for brand communication. Within the trendy toys industry, which thrives on strong emotional connections, consumer-initiated promotion plays an especially significant role. As a representative brand in this sector, Pop Mart's UGC ecosystem offers valuable insights into the patterns of spontaneous consumer promotion. This study combines literature review, case analysis, and data analysis to examine the content characteristics and dissemination patterns of Pop Mart's consumer-driven promotions. The research reveals a three-tiered structure in UGC development: emotional expression, knowledge sharing, and cultural co-creation. Platform-specific content adaptation proves particularly noticeable – Xiaohongshu primarily features practical long-form posts like storage guides, whereas Douyin specializes in emotional short videos showcasing unboxing experiences. Regarding dissemination mechanisms, content follows a cyclical pattern from demand stimulation to stratified diffusion, ultimately forming feedback loops. This process is jointly driven by platform algorithms and user interactions. This study clarifies the core features and operational logic behind consumer-initiated promotions in trendy toy marketing, providing practical evidence for similar brands to optimize their new media strategies.

Keywords

New Media Era; Consumer-Initiated Promotion; User-Generated Content (UGC); Pop Mart; Trendy Toy Industry.

1. Introduction

The deep integration of the internet and social media has fundamentally transformed the communication landscape. In traditional models, brands typically held a dominant role in communication. The delivered brand message to consumers through advertising campaigns and public relations initiatives. However, the New Media Era has redefined consumers' roles, transforming them from passive recipients into active creators, disseminators, and commentators of brand-related content[1]. Consumer-initiated promotion, driven by personal consumption experiences, emotional resonance, and value pursuits, represents an evolved form of traditional word-of-mouth communication in the digital age. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth that relied on verbal exchanges within personal networks, contemporary promotion leverages social media platforms to share multimedia content-including images, videos, and livestreams-generating far-reaching impacts. This approach transcends geographical and relational boundaries, enabling brand messages to circulate with unprecedented speed and scale.

As a leading enterprise in China's trendy toy industry, Pop Mart demonstrates highly representative consumer-initiated promotional behavior. The emotional appeal and collectible nature of trendy toys drive consumers to actively share their post-purchase experiences through social media, generating substantial user-generated content (UGC). This "consumer-driven brand advocacy" model not only reduces brand communication costs but also strengthens users' emotional connection with the brand, establishing a paradigmatic example of brand dissemination in the new media era.

2. Content Characteristics of Consumer-Initiated Promotion in the New Media Era

2.1. Features of Word -of- Mouth Promotion

Word-of-mouth promotion, a subset of word-of-mouth marketing (WOM), refers to a marketing strategy where businesses leverage interpersonal relationships during brand-building processes to encourage information exchange between existing and potential customers, thereby organically disseminating product information to broader audiences[2].

Traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) promotion remains one of the oldest, most primal yet effective marketing forms. It denotes direct, non-commercial, face-to-face communication between individuals regarding products, services, or brands. The essence of traditional WOM lies in its foundation of authentic interpersonal relationships and trust. While its manifestations have evolved in the digital era, the core characteristics of traditional WOM continue to embody brands' ultimate aspiration – transforming consumers into willing brand advocates through genuine endorsement.

The development of the internet and the emergence of social media platforms have transformed traditional word-of-mouth communication, giving rise to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This concept refers to the online sharing of brand-related opinions through digital channels. Compared to offline methods, eWOM enables significantly faster information transmission and reaches broader audiences[3].

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) primarily originates from online strangers and carries a certain level of objectivity. A significant number of consumers read online reviews before purchasing goods to reduce risks and uncertainties[4]. Consequently, consumer-initiated eWOM in the new media era exerts a stronger influence on brands.

2.2. Characteristics of Consumer-Initiated Promotion in the New Media Era

2.2.1. Definition of Consumer-Initiated Promotion

Consumer-initiated promotion refers to voluntary behaviors where individuals, without commercial incentives or direct economic rewards, create or share positive brand-related content via digital channels (e.g., social media, forums) driven by genuine preference, brand alignment, or personal motivations. Such actions organically influence social networks and public perceptions.

2.2.2. Characteristics of Consumer-Initiated Promotion

(1) Unlike paid promotions (e.g., KOL advertising), these communications originate from authentic consumption experiences and are entirely organic in nature.

(2) Distinct from traditional word-of-mouth exchanges limited to private conversations among acquaintances, such promotional activities occur on public digital platforms, expanding their influence from interpersonal networks to the entire internet community.

(3) The content demonstrates high levels of user-generated creativity and emotional engagement. Rather than mechanically regurgitating product information, consumers imbue promotions with personal narratives and stylistic originality. This authentic individualism

enhances content virality and credibility, fostering stronger resonance among peers compared to polished corporate advertisements.

2.3. Summary

Consumer-initiated promotion in the new media era represents an upgraded version of traditional word-of-mouth communication in the digital age. While retaining the core advantages of authenticity and trust inherent to its traditional counterpart, this evolved form now incorporates contemporary features such as creative self-expression and public dissemination across digital platforms.

3. Consumer-Initiated Promotion of Pop Mart through UGC

User Generated Content (UGC), referring to non-professional creators' self-generated content on digital platforms, was first formally proposed in 2005 by Jon Miller (executive of News Corporation) to distinguish from Professional Generated Content (PGC). This concept emphasizes content production by ordinary internet users (e.g., consumers) rather than commercial brands or media organizations.

With the rise of the New Media Era, UGC has become a dominant information dissemination model. Unlike traditional media constrained by content production costs and distribution efficiency, UGC leverages its inherent timeliness and broad reach to enable rapid information diffusion. This decentralized creation model significantly lowers content production barriers[5].

Pop Mart has established an exceptionally active user-initiated promotional ecosystem in the new media era, demonstrating exemplary UGC performance in both quantity and quality. In terms of scale, its private community "Fan Qu" generates 23,000 daily UGC posts, Labubu fan-created emojis have surpassed 1 billion views, and user-organized doll-exchange events take place across 50 countries globally. Regarding content depth, the UGC content spans emotional expression through unboxing experiences (58% on Douyin), practical knowledge sharing like storage techniques (32% on Xiaohongshu), and cultural co-creation, including IP adaptations. By aligning with the platform dynamics of Xiaohongshu and Douyin, this UGC-driven strategy has achieved global reach beyond traditional IP incubation paths, attracting organic endorsements from international figures such as Tim Cook and Rihanna.

4. Content Characteristics of Pop Mart's Consumer-Initiated Promotion

4.1. Core Content Carriers: Platform-Driven Differentiated Presentations

4.1.1. Xiaohongshu: "Graphics/Long Videos + Structured Narration" for Deep Product Seeding

(1) Scenario-Based Showcase

The core strategy centers on IP-character lifestyle integrations, demonstrated through multi-image collages or 3-5 minute short videos that showcase Pop Mart products in daily scenarios. Examples include practical displays like "Molly car accessories in actual use" and "Dimoo desk decor arrangements." Captions emphasize sensory immersion with phrases such as: "Each glimpse feels wrapped in gentle sunshine, citrus notes lingering in the air - who could resist these tangible mini-joys from blind boxes?" "Craft the Little Prince's universe in your entryway."

This contextual product placement lowers purchase hesitation by transforming blind boxes into daily-life enhancers rather than mere collectibles, aligning with UGC's discovery-to-purchase mechanism through Xiaohongshu's lifestyle-sharing framework.

(2) Unboxing & Reviews Category

This unboxing review format manifests through two content types. Image-text posts feature final unboxed items as primary visuals, with captions emphasizing tactile feedback cues like "100% strategy to get Star Bubble Blower" or "Blind box texture analysis." Video content includes tutorial-style demonstrations ("Dimoo Week 8 Hidden Edition texture guide - guaranteed mastery") and experiential shares ("Pop Mart new product unboxing"/"Immersive unpacking session"). By showcasing collection achievements, creators establish expert collector identities that resonate within enthusiast communities, aligning with UGC's community belonging mechanism through shared verification processes.

4.1.2. Douyin: An Instant Communication Platform with "Short Video + High-Interaction Design"

(1) Immersive Unboxing Content

Key Features: Focused on 15-60-second short videos, this format emphasizes visual impact and emotional triggers. Videos typically open with close-up shots of blind box packaging, followed by brief product introductions. The unboxing process is accompanied by rhythm-synced background music, while slow-motion effects and zoom-in highlights intensify the suspense of revealing collectible cards. Hidden edition discoveries are amplified with celebratory sound effects, enthusiastic captions, and dynamic editing to convey excitement.

Analysis: Douyin's immersive unboxing content leverages the fast-paced, bite-sized delivery to magnify the randomized allure of blind boxes. By creating instant emotional connections through suspense and surprise, these videos indirectly stimulate viewers' desire to purchase. This approach aligns with the principle of real-time emotional engagement dynamics in user-generated content (UGC).

(2) Creative Interactive Content

This format combines IP-based adaptations and audience challenges, primarily through three approaches. First, anthropomorphized blind boxes appear in content like Pop Mart cosplay videos, where creators replicate character designs through outfits. Second, unboxing challenges such as "10-box lucky draws" or "friend competitions" engage viewers through gamification. Third, AR-powered interactions animate IP characters (e.g., "Dimoo dancing with users") via Douyin filters. These videos frequently use hashtags like # PopMartChallenge or # Blind Box Hacks for visibility.

By simplifying production through pre-designed interactive templates and Douyin's algorithmic distribution, this model lowers content creation barriers while amplifying reach. Its effectiveness stems from transforming entertainment participation into viral marketing, embodying UGC's crowd-driven engagement mechanism.

4.2. Core Value Drivers: Emotional Bonds & Social Currency

4.2.1. Emotional Value: Aligning IP Nostalgia with Personal Sentiment

(1) Therapeutic Content Expression

Healing-themed narratives dominate short video platforms, with high-frequency keywords like "relaxing," "stress-relieving," and "mood-boosting" amplifying emotional resonance. Pop Mart strategically bonds its IPs with emotional comfort, framing UGC as a channel for emotional release. This positions its products as emotional anchors in marketing campaigns, where user-shared stories explicitly showcase "how blind box unboxing heals my anxiety."

(2) IP Nostalgia Engagement

Users share nostalgic stories about classic IPs like Molly and Dimoo, such as "Molly witnessing my growth," to evoke collective nostalgia among long-term fans. On Xiaohongshu, creators emphasize textual narratives and emotional details. Douyin focuses on visual contrasts (e.g., past vs. present IP designs) and sentimental background music. Both platforms use IP nostalgia to strengthen emotional resonance.

By lowering creative barriers through interactive templates and Douyin's algorithm-driven distribution, this content model transforms commercial IPs into symbols of lifelong companionship while driving user participation.

4.2.2. Social Currency Value: Identity Recognition & Community-Driven Engagement

(1) Scarcity-Driven Validation

Users showcase rare collectibles (e.g., "Limited to 500 units globally – secured one!" on Xiaohongshu) or film "full unboxing of the most wanted secret edition" on Douyin. Comments flooded with "So jealous!" or "Drop the purchase link!" create a viral chain: displaying exclusivity → triggering envy → driving impulsive purchases. By framing scarcity as social currency, UGC transforms blind boxes into tools for community status validation, mirroring the marketing principle of "socially fueled virality".

(2) Identity-Centric Community Building

Content reinforces niche labels like "Pop Mart Girls", "Blind Box Enthusiasts", or "IP Archivists". Xiaohongshu users declare "Molly superfan – daily unboxing updates" in bios, while Douyin creators end videos with "Fellow collectors, hit follow for more!" These strategies filter audiences into insider groups:

Xiaohongshu builds sustained communities through bio labels + mutual follows (e.g., fans discussing new releases).

Douyin fosters ephemeral circles via hashtag collaborations (e.g., users joining #BlindBoxChallenge).

Both platforms weaponize identity alignment to accelerate UGC dissemination, proving that community resonance outperforms generic reach in niche markets.

4.3. Platform-Specific Interaction Mechanics

4.3.1. Xiaohongshu: Comment-Driven Dialogues + Direct Messaging Bonds

Users frequently ask product-related questions in comments, such as "Where to buy storage boxes?" or "Describe the texture." Creators typically reply publicly in comments or via private messages, forming a content-comment-DM interaction chain that aligns with Xiaohongshu's community-driven nature. This strategy enhances UGC retention and facilitates peer-to-peer transactions (e.g., peer-to-peer resale transactions), extending product lifecycle value.

4.3.2. Douyin: Instant Engagement + Viral Spread

Interactions focus on likes, comments, duets, and shares. Comments often express impulsive reactions like "Need this luck!" or "Gonna try now!". Users create duet videos replicating unboxing content and share posts with promotional captions, leveraging Douyin's viral-sharing rules. High engagement rates push content into larger traffic pools via algorithmic recommendations, achieving mass UGC dissemination.

5. Consumer-Initiated Promotion for Pop Mart

The spread of consumer-initiated advocacy follows a structured cycle with four phases: Demand Triggering → Platform Matching → Hierarchical Diffusion → Feedback Reinforcement. This logic is fundamentally tied to inherent emotional attributes of trend toys and algorithm-driven features of new media platforms, as analyzed through four key aspects:

5.1. Dissemination Trigger Mechanisms

Consumer advocacy stems from emotional impulses and functional needs, dictating differentiated content strategies across platforms.

On Douyin, the blind box's gamble mechanic fuels instant dopamine spikes – users flood feeds with hidden edition unboxing videos captioned "OMG! Hit the 1:144 jackpot!" This emotionally

charged UGC constitutes 58% of Pop Mart content, with 80%+ engagement spikes concentrated within the first posting hour.

Conversely, Xiaohongshu hosts knowledge-intensive content like "Blind Box Storage Solutions: 10 Disaster Avoidance Tips" and "Step-by-Step Cross-border Purchase Guide". These 800+ word guides tagged with #PopMartHacks demonstrate lasting relevance: 32% of platform content maintains search-driven traffic six months post-publication, proving utility value sustains long-term visibility.

5.2. Platform Adaptation: Platform-Specific Dissemination Features

During dissemination, UGC content actively adapts to the underlying logic of platforms like Xiaohongshu and Douyin.

On Xiaohongshu, the dissemination follows a search → recommendation → retention logic. Users create content focused on emotional connections with IPs and practical value, tagged with 2-3 precise hashtags. Such content achieves 3.5x higher exposure than untagged notes.

On Douyin, dissemination prioritizes visual impact + real-time interaction. Users integrate IPs with daily life scenarios, utilizing platform tools like unboxing effects and trendy BGM. Content enters Douyin's algorithm traffic pools:

Interaction rate >5%: 10k+ exposure pool

Interaction rate >10%: 100k+ exposure pool

5.3. Diffusion Pathways: Dual Mechanisms of Community Penetration and Algorithmic Amplification

The spread of user-generated content (UGC) systematically progresses from core user communities to broader audiences through distinct platform mechanisms. Core communities, composed of brand loyalists and avid toy collectors, demonstrate strong emotional attachment to IPs and proactively generate original content (e.g., detailed product analyses). This content gradually permeates to peripheral audiences—primarily casual users and general platform visitors—transforming niche interests into mainstream awareness.

The disparity in platform infrastructure manifests through distinct content propagation mechanisms. Xiaohongshu prioritizes community cohesion through dual strategies: Core members' expertise establishes credibility chains that guide general users' content creation patterns. Hashtag frameworks systematically organize dispersed contributors into searchable knowledge ecosystems

Douyin operates via interaction-triggered distribution: Algorithmic sorting allocates content to exposure tiers based on real-time engagement metrics. Instant interactive features ("Duet Unboxing", "Co-Creation Templates") dismantle community barriers through participatory content iteration.

Both systems fundamentally optimize:

Xiaohongshu: Vertical penetration through structured knowledge preservation

Douyin: Horizontal amplification via algorithmic responsiveness

5.4. Feedback Loop: Dual Reinforcement of User Engagement and Brand Response Drives Sustained Dissemination

Within Pop Mart's consumer-driven promotional ecosystem, UGC dissemination isn't a one-way process where "user-generated content ends upon posting." Instead, it relies on the two-way interaction of "positive user feedback" and "proactive brand responses" to build a dynamic, recyclable, and reinforcing closed loop. This loop not only instantly incentivizes individual promotional actions but also injects sustained momentum into subsequent dissemination, serving as the core foundation for the long-term vitality of Pop Mart's UGC ecosystem.

From the perspective of positive user feedback, its essence lies in the transmission of recognition within shared interest communities, directly awakening users' desire for secondary creation. The majority of Pop Mart's UGC audience consists of collectible toy enthusiasts who naturally resonate with blind box content. When users post unboxing videos or storage guides and receive positive comments, likes, saves, or other interactions related to their content, they tangibly feel their contributions valued. Data indicates that users receiving such positive interactions subsequently post UGC 4.2 times more frequently than those without engagement. This simple feedback mechanism not only boosts user interaction metrics but also fulfills deeper needs-integration into shared interest communities and emotional validation. It transforms one-off UGC posting into a habit driven by seeking recognition and continuous sharing, providing a stable content supply for ongoing dissemination.

From the perspective of proactive responses at the brand level, the core lies in official endorsement and incentive-driven guidance, which further amplifies the reinforcing effect of the feedback loop. Pop Mart actively engages with feedback through multiple channels. On one hand, official accounts curate and repost high-quality UGC, enabling ordinary users' content to reach the brand's million-follower accounts. This official recognition serves as a powerful incentive for users. On the other hand, the brand regularly hosts UGC collection campaigns offering rewards like raffles and limited-edition merchandise. During these events, user promotional activity surges to three times the usual volume. Brand engagement creates a demonstration effect: witnessing other users' content gain official recognition encourages more potential users to actively join the creative process. This shifts participation from individual feedback to collective engagement, significantly expanding the scale of dissemination.

Ultimately, achieving a dynamic cycle where positive user feedback triggers proactive brand responses, forming a "creation-feedback-recreation" loop. This not only addresses the challenge of repetitive UGC content but also transforms Pop Mart's organic promotion from scattered actions into a sustained ecosystem, providing continuous momentum for the brand's long-term communication efforts.

6. Summary

6.1. Key Findings

This study examines the content characteristics and dissemination patterns of consumer-generated promotion within the trendy toy industry during the new media era, using Pop Mart as a core case study. It addresses how the trendy toy sector can leverage user-generated content to enhance communication effectiveness amid the rise of UGC as a pivotal force in brand dissemination. Throughout the research process, we clarified the theoretical foundations of UGC dissemination through a literature review. By deconstructing and analyzing the content hierarchy of Pop Mart's UGC, supplemented by platform data and industry reports to validate dissemination patterns, we established multidimensional research support.

6.2. Research Value

On one hand, this study fills a research gap in the UGC segment of the collectible toy industry, clarifying the unique logic behind users' spontaneous promotion of emotionally charged product categories. On the other hand, it provides actionable, practical references for similar brands-such as designing differentiated content for different platforms and building closed-loop communication through managing topic hashtags and responding to high-quality UGC. However, the study focuses solely on the Pop Mart case and does not include a comparative analysis of other collectible toy brands. Future research could expand the case scope to explore the distinct characteristics of UGC dissemination across brands with different positioning, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

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