

Willingness to Pay for Labubu Toys Among High School Students in China: The Role of Social Identity, Design Preference, and Budget Constraints

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Abstract:

Labubu toys have gained remarkable popularity among high school students in recent years. However, little relevant research has been conducted. Therefore, the study aims to investigate three key factors: social identity, design preference, and budget constraints. A sample of 100 high school students from high schools across Shenyang aged 16-18 participated in the sampling process. They completed a questionnaire on Wenjuanxing, measuring their social identity toward trendy toys, design preferences, monthly allowance, and their willingness to pay for Labubu toys. An ordered logistic regression was used to analyze the data. The results showed that only social identity had a statistically significant effect ($p < 0.05$). Design preference and allowance level showed positive but non-significant effects. These findings indicate that purchasing decisions of Labubu toys are mainly driven by social identity. This study contributes to the understanding of youth purchasing behavior and also provides practical implications for toy markets. The findings suggest that peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' spending habits on collectible toys. Labubu toys are produced by Pop Mart.

Keywords:

Willingness to Pay, Labubu Toys, High School Students, Purchasing Behavior, Social Identity, Design Preference, Budget Constraints

1. Introduction

Labubu toys are an increasingly popular toy among contemporary young people, especially among high school students. High school students are worth studying because they usually have a limited amount of allowance but they are strongly influenced by peer trends. However, little research has been conducted on what drives high school students' purchasing decisions toward buying Labubu toys. Thus, this study aims to investigate three factors that influence high school students' willingness to pay for Labubu toys:

First, social identity refers to the fact that students tend to buy Labubu toys to gain peer approval. Second, design preference means that students pay for Labubu toys due

to their appreciation of design of the figures. Third, allowance level reflects the fact that students' purchasing behavior is limited by economic conditions.

To investigate these factors, a questionnaire survey was conducted among high school students. An ordered logistic regression model was used to analyze the data. The aim of the study is to examine how social identity, design preference and allowance level affect willingness to pay for Labubu toys.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

A total of 100 high school students aged 16 to 18 from five public high schools in Shenyang, China, participated in this study. Participants were selected using convenience sampling.

2.2. Procedure

An online questionnaire was conducted using Wenjuanxing, a popular platform for creating online questionnaires in China. The link to the questionnaire was distributed via WeChat. Before completing the questionnaire, all participants were informed that their responses would be anonymous and used only for research purposes. The questionnaire took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

2.3. Measures

A self-reported questionnaire was used to measure the key variables. All statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).

Design preference was measured by the statement: "I find the design of Labubu toys very attractive."

Social identity was measured by the statement: "Buying Labubu toys gives me a strong sense of belonging in my social circle."

Willingness to pay was measured by the statement: "I am willing to pay a premium for my favorite Labubu designs."

Allowance level was measured by asking students to report their monthly allowance level in Chinese Yuan. Responses were categorized into 4 levels: 0-500, 500-1000, 1000-2000, and 2000+ RMB.

2.4. Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using Python with the Statsmodels library [2]

Descriptive statistics were calculated first to summarize the sample characteristics.

An ordered logistic regression model was used to examine the effects of design preference, social identity, and allowance level on willingness to pay for Labubu toys.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare willingness to pay for Labubu toys between students with high and low concern for hidden figures.

Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

A total of 100 high school students participated in this study.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of monthly allowance among participants. The majority of students reported that their allowance level exceeded 1000 RMB. Specifically, 35 students had allowance level between 1000 and 2000 RMB, and 36 students had allowance level above 2000 RMB, representing the highest proportion of students among the four groups. In contrast, only 15 students had allowance level between 0 and 500 RMB, while only 14 students had allowance level between 500 and 1000 RMB, which had the lowest proportion of students. This figure demonstrates that high school students usually have a higher level of allowance that could support their purchases, and different allowance level may be instrumental in high school students' willingness to pay for Labubu toys.

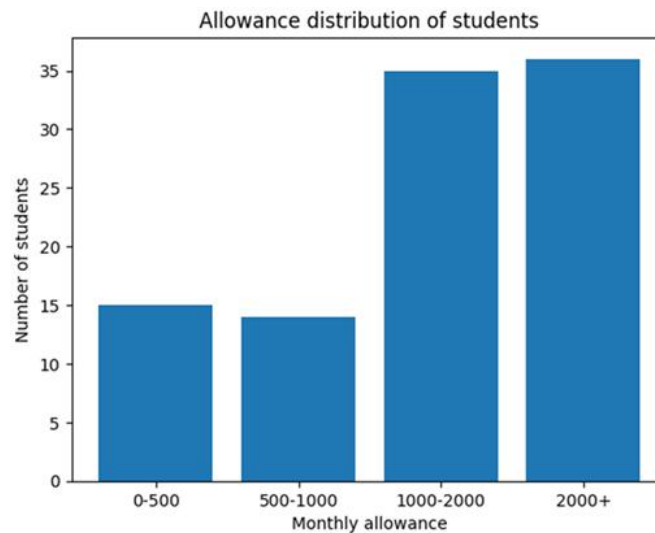


Figure 1. Distribution of students' monthly allowance.

Figure 2 shows reasons for purchasing Labubu toys (multiple choices allowed). According to the bar chart, most students chose cute design, which was the most frequently selected factor. Emotional investment and follow trend had relatively similar proportions of students. Investment was the least concerned factor for students who purchased them. Based on these analyses, students were more concerned about design appreciation, and few students regarded investment possibly due to a lack of understanding of investment concepts.

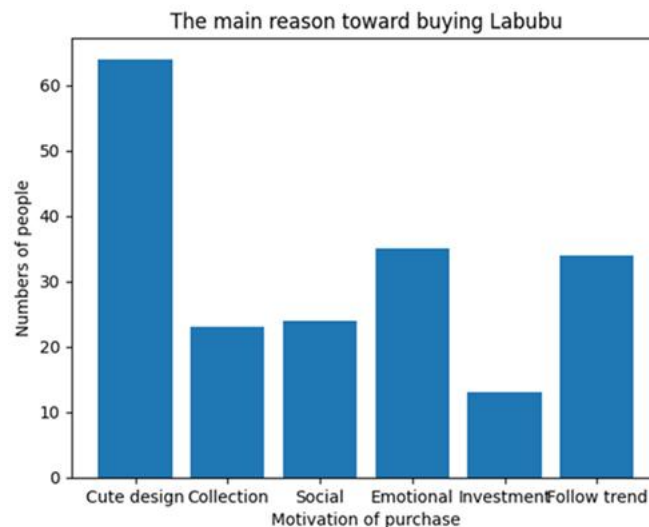


Figure 2. Reasons for purchasing Labubu toys (multiple choices are allowed).

Figure 3 shows the distribution of willingness among high school students to pay for Labubu toys. The distribution is skewed to the right, indicating that a majority of students reported a low willingness to pay for Labubu toys, while only a small fraction of all students had a higher willingness to pay for Labubu toys. The shape of the distribution shows that students tend not to spend their allowance on buying Labubu toys.

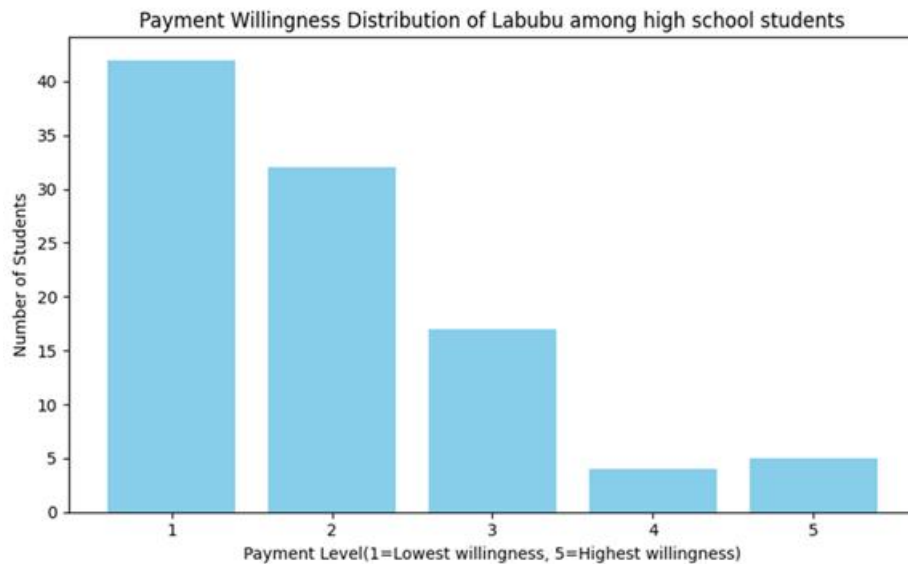


Figure 3. Payment willingness distribution of Labubu among high school students.

3.2. Regression Results

An ordered logistic regression model was conducted to examine the effects of social identity, design preference, and allowance level on willingness to pay for Labubu toys among high school students.

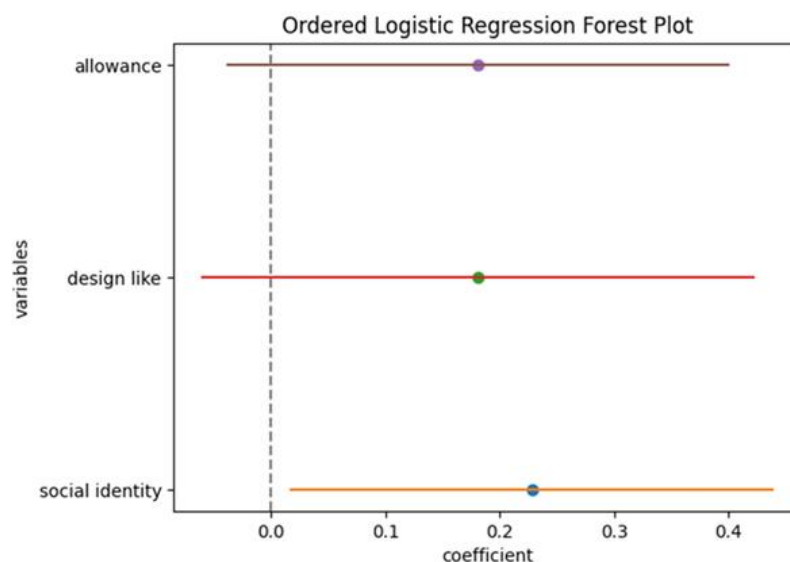


Figure 4. Forest plot of ordered logistic regression coefficients.

Figure 4 presents the forest plot of the ordered logistic regression coefficients, representing the effects of social identity, design preference, and allowance level on the willingness of students to pay for Labubu toys. As shown in this figure, only social identity had a statistically significant positive effect on willingness to pay

among students (coefficient=0.2278, $p < 0.05$). This positive coefficient indicated that higher social identity is associated with higher willingness to pay for Labubu toys. In contrast, design preference (coefficient=0.1807, $p > 0.05$) and allowance level (coefficient=0.1811, $p > 0.05$) showed positive but non-significant effects. Although both variables showed a positive direction, suggesting a potential positive relationship, their p -values exceeded 0.05, which means that they did not have statistically significant effects.

These results indicated that social identity is the primary driver for high school students' willingness to pay for Labubu toys, while design preference and allowance level did not significantly influence students' purchasing decisions. This finding highlighted the importance of social interaction among high school students and the driving force of peer decisions for high school students.

3.3. T-test Results

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the willingness to pay for Labubu toys among students who were highly concerned about hidden figures (high concern group) and those who did not really value hidden figures (low concern group). The high concern group (mean=2.0, standard deviation=0.8402) consisted of 35 students, while the low concern group (mean=1.9692, standard deviation=1.2244) consisted of 65 students. The results showed no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) for the two groups, $t = 0.1327$, $p\text{-value} = 0.8947$. Since p -value was greater than 0.05, this result did not reach statistically significant level. Thus, there was no significant difference in willingness to pay between the two groups, that is, whether a student valued hidden figures did not significantly influence their purchasing decisions. This finding suggested that hidden figures was not the driving force for high school students to pay for Labubu toys. For students who valued hidden figures, they did not choose to pay a higher price for hidden figures according to the results of the t-test.

3.4. Discussion

This study concentrates on three possible factors that could affect high school students' willingness toward purchasing Labubu toys: social identity, design preference, and allowance level. According to descriptive statistics and significance inference, I conclude that only social identity has strong and positive influence on the willingness to pay for Labubu toys (coefficient=0.2278, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$). That is, students who had strong peer recognition will have a stronger willingness to buy Labubu toys at a higher price. In contrast, design preference (coefficient=0.1807, $p\text{-value} > 0.05$) and allowance level (coefficient=0.1811, $p\text{-value} > 0.05$) did not reach statistically significant level. Although the coefficients of the two variables are positive, the influence is not strong enough to generalize to the population. Additionally, t-test about hidden figures among two groups (high concern group and low concern group) shows that students who valued hidden figures (high concern group) and those who did not value hidden figures (low concern group) had no significant difference ($p\text{-value} = 0.8947$). Overall, social identity is the primary driver for high school students to pay for Labubu toys.

The reason why social identity becomes the driving force for high school students to buy Labubu may be ascribed to adolescent psychological development. High school students usually care about their peers' opinions and thoughts about them. In this stage, being accepted by the group is usually far more important than material

needs. Labubu serves as a symbol for social interaction between students. When students collect and discuss Labubu, owning these toys means that “I am part of the social circle”. However, if students do not have Labubu toys, they may feel excluded outside the conversation, even worried about being laughed or being ignored by other students. Therefore, to avoid social exclusion, many students are willing to pay a higher price for Labubu toys, even though that means they may spend a larger fraction of their allowance to buy Labubu.

In addition to being excluded, Labubu toys can provide positive social experiences, increasing the feeling of belonging to the students. Labubu toys are always sold as a blind box in the market. When students buy them, there may be numerous kinds of designs, which could really boost interaction between students since it can facilitate exchanges between students. Many students choose to show their Labubu collection in social media and platforms such as WeChat and Rednote, receiving likes and comments. This positive feedback strengthens and solidifies their purchasing behavior. Discussing about Labubu also becomes collective topics among students. High school students tend to discuss about which designs they prefer, which hidden figures are difficult to get. These interactions make students feel closer to each other, and boost their relations. From this perspective, purchasing Labubu is not only related to the toy solely, but also aims to participate a social activity and thus gaining the feel of belonging.

Contrary to expectations, this research found that design preferences do not significantly affect students’ purchasing behavior. One possible reason is that the designs of Labubu toys are attractive, nearly all high school students in the sample gave a higher score about the designs. According to the descriptive statistics, the mean number of design preferences was 3.6 (full-score was 5.0), and the difference between scores was not very large. That is, affinity for the designs is the prerequisite of buying Labubu toys, but if students love designs, this factor cannot differentiate which students would like to pay a higher price for Labubu toys. Thus, though the elaborate designs of Labubu attract students to pay attention to Labubu, it is not the key factor that determines students’ willingness to pay.

Another finding that is contrary to our expectations is that allowance level did not significantly affect our purchasing decisions. The reason may be that, for high school students, driving force due to social identity far exceeds constraints in allowance level. Even students with a lower allowance level, if they experienced stronger peer identity and higher social pressure, they would be willing to pay for Labubu toys. To buy Labubu, some students even choose to save money in other aspects such as snacks and clothes in order to purchase Labubu toys. In this context, Labubu becomes the necessity in social interaction among students rather than optional luxury items. Therefore, the amount of allowance is not a determining factor, the most crucial point is the degree of students’ willingness to integrate into peer groups.

This study has both theoretical and practical significance.

At the theoretical level, this study complements the literature on adolescent consumption behaviors of non-essential goods. Past research focused on adult consumption behaviors or other practical products, this research only focused on high school students. This study showed the instrumental role of social identity in adolescent consumer behaviors. For Labubu purchasing decisions, social interactions factor was far more important than individual preference and economic ability. This finding also challenged the traditional “price-demand” model. For high school

students, Labubu consumption is mainly driven by social psychological factors, rather than simple relation between price and income. At practical level, toy merchants can design marketing activities around Labubu social attributes, such as offline exchange fair, encouraging students to share their favorite toys in social media, thus can strengthen users' feeling of belonging. For parents and educators, understanding students' purchasing decisions is conducive to better communicate and guide. Rather than simply criticizing children for spending money recklessly, it is better to understand the social needs behind their purchasing behaviors, which can help build more reasonable consumption behaviors for students. Overall, this study not only enriches the academic literature, but also provides practical reference for relevant practitioners and parents.

This study has the following limitations:

First, this study only had a sample size of 100 high school students. Although a small sample size can meet basic statistical analysis requirements, smaller sample size may influence the stability and generalizability of the results. Second, all participants in this study came from high schools in Shenyang, not covering other cities or rural areas in China. Thus, the results in this research cannot fully represent and generalizable to whole situations in China. Third, data was collected using self-response questionnaires. When student filled out this questionnaire, they may not write down their true feelings due to the influence of social approval, tend to write down accurate or reasonable responses, not their true feelings and thoughts. Fourth, this research only focuses on social identity, design preference, and allowance level three factors. Actually, there are other variables that could affect their purchasing decisions, such as parenting style and the frequency of using social media, and so on. These limitations warn us that we should be careful when interpreting these conclusions. Despite these limitations, the study offers meaningful insights into the role of social identity in youth consumption.

Based on the study's findings and limitations, future research can be carried out in the following ways.

First, future research could enlarge sample size, covering different cities and rural areas in China to increase the validity of the results. Second, we can introduce other potential influencing factors, such as the frequency of using social media, parenting styles, and the family income level, exploring the relations between these variables and the willingness to pay for Labubu toys among high school students. Third, future research can try to conduct longitudinal research, tracking the change of consumption behaviors on specific time interval to the same array of students, observing whether they still purchase for Labubu after entering into university and graduation. Fourth, in addition to writing questionnaires, the ways of collecting data can be diversified. Future research can use in-depth interviews and focus groups, deeply understanding the reasons and motivation for students to buy Labubu toys. Via this research, we can fully understand and comprehend adolescent consumption behaviors.

4. Conclusions

The main conclusion for this study was that social identity is the primary driving force for high school students to purchase Labubu toys. Compared with design preference and allowance level, peer recognition and social belonging played a significant role in students' consumption decisions. This conclusion shows that for high school students, consumption behaviors for non-essential goods are not only

individual preferences, but also a form of social interaction. Additionally, this study found that design preferences and allowance level did not play a significant role in influencing students' purchasing decisions. Although the designs of Labubu are attractive to students, this alone could not predict the willingness of students to pay for a higher price. Additionally, the amount of allowance is not a determining factor, even though students with economic constraints are willing to pay for social identity. The analysis of hidden figures did not find statistically significant effects, meaning that hidden figures were not the main motivation for students to pay for Labubu.

The findings of the research have both theoretical and practical significance. At theoretical level, it supplements the literature on adolescent consumption behaviors, showing the instrumental function of social identity in non-necessity consumption, challenging the traditional price-driven model. At practical level, toy merchants can emphasize social identity in Labubu toys and develop marketing strategy, parents and educators can better understand the true social needs behind their children's purchasing behaviors, which can help them guide students effectively.

To sum up, high school students' behavior of purchasing Labubu toys is more driven by the pursuit of peer recognition and social belonging rather than personal design preferences or economic capability. Understanding this point helps people take a more comprehensive view of contemporary teenagers' consumer culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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