



Go & Stop Signals in Gambling-like Consumption: the Case of Labubu Blind Box

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Abstract. As one of Pop Mart's most successful products, Labubu's marketing strategy, product quality and cultural inclusivity have all contributed to Pop Mart's unprecedented revenue. Based on the summary of previous studies in this paper, Labubu's success can be attributed to its effective use of a gambling-like blind box mechanism to create a desire to collect, celebrity promotion to popularise the product and eye-catching designs and IP to retain consumers. However, the current unreasonable replenishment mechanism and the departure of the core shareholder have created instability in Labubu's future market. Therefore, this study argues that stabilising consumer sentiment through public relations, stopping the exploitation of popular IP value and providing high-quality products is important. Research on the macro impact of social opinion and herd behaviour on consumer behaviour is currently well developed. Using the Go and Stop Signal Framework, this study will analyse Labubu's popularity from the perspective of consumer insight and behaviour. This will enable researchers to understand the impact of reported and unconscious signals on consumers, predict their behaviour, analyse potential risks, and contribute to the advancement of the relevant research field by providing ideas for future studies.

Keywords: Go and Stop Signal Framework; Consumers' behavior; Blind Box

1 Introduction

PopMart's financial report released on August 21, 2025, showed that the company's revenue in the first half of the year increased by 204.4% compared to the same period in 2024. Pre-tax profit surged by over 400%, reaching 401.2%, while operating profit grew by a staggering 436.5% year-over-year. From the data of the financial report's release to August 24, PopMart's stock price rose by 14.1 percentage points. The continuous positive trend in PopMart's revenue growth is closely tied to the global buying frenzy driven by Labubu (See Table 1).

Table 1. Pop Mart interim results announcement for the six months ended 30 June 2025(interim results highlights) [1].

	Six months ended 30 June		
	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	Change
	2025 <i>RMB'000</i>	2024 <i>RMB'000</i>	
Revenue	13,876,276	4,557,831	204.4
Gross profit	9,761,064	2,919,105	234.4
Operating profit	6,043,741	1,126,417	436.5
Profit before income tax	6,156,872	1,228,438	401.2
Profit for the period	4,681,713	964,142	385.6

Many existing research studies analyze consumer psychology and behavior from the perspective of businesses and companies, with most recommendations and strategies focusing on social psychology and mass communication. Current research studies mainly focus on the the social influence and popularity of Labubu like Collective Effervescence and benefit of the advertisement. Scholars and researchers have studied the shopping habits of Generation Z (Gen-Z) and concluded that the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is the main motivation for purchasing [2]. Businesses and companies take effective advantage of consumers mentalities in order to stimulate consumers' desire to purchase due to scarcity and time-sensitive offers. From mass communication perspective, the combined effects of social media and celebrity influence have propelled Labubu from a niche product into the mainstream spotlight. Simultaneously, some researchers like Hardianti, find out further information about digital platform like Instagram, making contributions to the Instagram users' attention when they saw the post of influencer named Lisa Blackpink. This behavior lead Labubu to potential consumers [3].

The significance of this study lies in analyzing the potential collaborative mechanisms of go and stop signals framework behind the Labubu case from the perspective of consumer insights and behavior. This approach aims to predict consumer behavior, thereby enabling companies and businesses to make more rational strategic adjustments. Furthermore, this study introduced a new angle and effective framework in the analysis of consumers' insights and behaviors, which is able to complement Labubu's research on the consumer behaviors and insights level, providing new possibilities for follow-up researches.

In this study, analysis tend to pay more attention to consumers themselves and clarify the connection between their insight and behavior through go & stop signals framework.

The primary goal of this study is to find out main go signals to explain Labubu's highlight, while point out potential risks according to significant stop signals and give some feasible suggestions.

2 Development of Go and Stop Signals

2.1 Overview of Go & Stop Signals

Progress and Usage of Go & Stop Signals in Consumer Behaviors.

Go & Stop Signals Framework (GSSF) is not unique in market and market theory, while its operating principle is similar to some concepts in psychology and neuroscience control. According to psychology psychology definition, Go/No-go association task, it is essentially a race between the go process and the stop process [4]. To make interaction more real, the interactive race model allowed go process and stop process to interact, which was closer to nowadays Go & Stop signals operating methods. When the stop process outpaces the go process, behavior is inhibited; conversely, when the go process dominates, behavior is executed [5]. In order to find out those factors effecting consumers behavior and decision, some researchers found that the filed's focus should progress in discrete emotional states instead of demonstrating emotions, like cognition [6].

However, the interaction methods are not totally same with Go/No-go task, the most obvious difference is that GSSF operating system is able to be effected by many aspects from consumers, and most of these consumer-related impact factors vary depending on product changes. Moreover, although the GSSF and Go/No-go tasks ultimately exhibit similar patterns following signal suppression expression, the GSSF's inhibition system is different from Go/No-go task as the inner-connection of GSSF is complex especially those two signals. They can effect each other through consumer-related factors. Hence, when Go & Stop signals are used in consumers' behavior analysis, Go signals can be considered as "desirability" and Stop signals can be considered as "feasibility". The specific definitions of "desirability" and "feasibility" will be clarified in the section introducing the Go & Stop signals framework.

Impact of Go & Stop Signals.

In terms of individual consumers, emotion plays a significant role in consumers' purchase engagement, decision and experience [7]. Go & Stop Signals framework's reported and unconscious signals analysis can find out those Unremarkable emotion through consumers comments and behaviors.

In respect of businesses and companies, Go & Stop signals framework is widely used in consumers' behavior prediction. It can correctly unravel out complex relations between consumers behaviors and factors of influence with specific framework and effectively help companies and businesses find out potential risks and adjust their market strategy.

2.2 Case Study of Labubu

Regarding the Introduction to labubu, Labubu is a phenomenal doll brand under Popmart. Its series is called "THE MONSTERS", which is mainly divided into three product series: Zimomo (V1), Forest Concert (V2), and Exciting Macaron (V3). It was the V3 series that led this sales boom [7]. Labubu artist Kasing Lung successfully

established an emotional connection between the product and consumers by combining the image of forest elves from Norse mythology with his own ingenuity and childlike narrative [8,9]. In the analysis, the explosive popularity of Labubu cannot be attributed solely to a victory in marketing and promotion. Labubu's investments in IP incubation and artistic design, coupled with upgrades in rubber molding techniques and PVC materials which significantly enhance durability and make Labubu's facial expressions even more attractive, have elevated the product's overall quality and aesthetic level. Combined with innovative approaches to intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship, these factors have provided the material foundation for the product's viral success.

Pertaining to the sales volume of Labubu, it contributed the main sales volume during the last two years since the COVID-19 pandemic, and to some extent, this product had rescued Popmart's sluggish market performance. According to the annual results announcement and stock market of Popmart, after COVID-19 pandemic and Lisa's publicity, the revenue for the year ended 31 December 2024 showed good signals of increasing (See Table 2). The following annual results announcement, revenue (106.9%) demonstrated an upward trend, with pre-tax profit reaching 208.4% of the previous year's level. The most significant improvement was in operating profit, which surged by 237.6% compared to 2023. This number would rise rapidly in 2025 and reached another peak of operating profit (436.5%) and profit before tax (401.2%). Simultaneously, the variation of stock market of Popmart proved the same conclusion in annual result, which illustrated Popmart's stock price has experienced a significant rise since the start of 2024. This phenomenon was totally opposite to the downtrend of stock price of Popmart in 2023. Therefore, the sales volume of the series of Labubu, especially the V3, was definitely a significant success (See Figure 1). According to information released by Popmart CEO Wang Ning, the company's goal of achieving 20 billion yuan in revenue by 2025 will become a reality, and it may even reach the 30 billion yuan threshold this year [10]. Pop Mart annual results announcement was shown in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2. Pop Mart annual results announcement for the yearended 31 December 2024(annual results highlights) [11].

	For the year ended 31 December		
	2024	2023	Change
	<i>RMB'000</i>	<i>RMB'000</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Revenue	13,037,749	6,301,002	106.9
Gross profit	8,707,765	3,864,071	125.4
Operating profit	4,154,272	1,230,646	237.6
Profit before income tax	4,365,812	1,415,755	208.4
Profit for the year	3,308,345	1,088,771	203.9



Fig. 1. The stock price variation of Pop Mart [10].

3 Case Analysis of Labubu

3.1 Introduction of Go & Stop Signals Framework

Before commencing the formal analysis and research, introducing the Go & Stop Signals Framework (GSSF) is crucial and valuable, as it will serve as a foundational framework to guide the planning and direction of this study's analysis of consumer insights and behaviors. This study will explain the operational mechanisms of the GSSF and illustrate them through specific related cases.

The following figure shows the operational mechanisms of GSSF, which illustrated beginning cues, information processing and decision making those three main parts (See Figure 2). Focusing on those key joints, approach and avoidance cues are mainly about consumers' aiming products and related service, like electronic devices, fashion items, etc. Then, Consumers will experience heuristic information processing, which means they tend to search for more details about products, like comparing comments, browsing social platform asking for search engines. This is followed by a wide variety of signals, which can be broadly categorized into Go signals and Stop signals. These signals collectively influence and ultimately determine consumers' purchasing decisions.

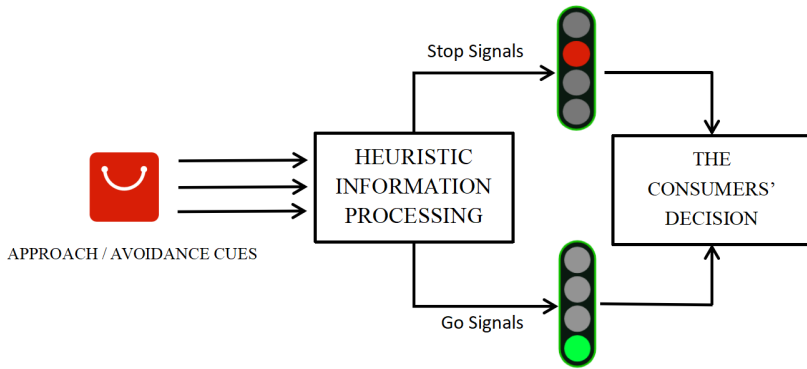


Fig. 2. Operational mechanisms line map (Picture credit: Original).

Therefore, taking Figure. 3 as an illustration, the main from a marketing strategy perspective, this study aims to enhance the strength of Go signals without amplifying Stop signals. This approach will stimulate consumer purchasing intent and elevate the product's market performance.

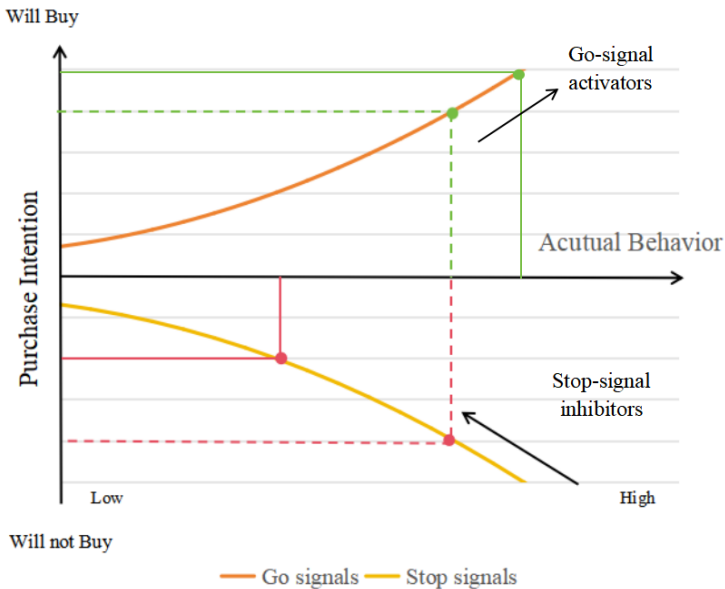


Fig. 3. Graphic illustration of GSSF variation (Picture credit: Original).

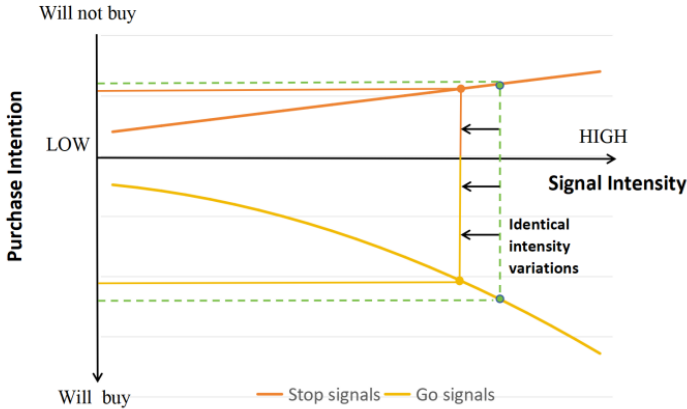


Fig. 4. Unequal situation of GGSF variation (Picture credit: Original).

Moreover, the features of different signals variation are various. In some special situations, both Go signals and Stop signals share the same variation in signal intensity, while the purchase intention is apt to decline like the illustration of Figure. 4 Taking Tata Nano as an example to explain this situation, Tata Company launched the Tata Nano, a model priced at just \$2,500, aiming to penetrate the Indian market and replace motorcycles. While this move effectively lowered the “price” barrier, the “world's cheapest car” diminished the social acceptance signals for many more Indian consumers. Ultimately, the product suffered a spectacular failure in the relevant market.

To illustrate signals more specific, signals will be divided into reported signals (design, packaging, pain of payment, etc.) and unconscious signals (self-signaling, social signaling, guilt, etc.). Go signals can be viewed as consumers' perception of a product's “desirability”, while stop signals can be seen as the “feasibility” consumers face when purchasing the product.

3.2 Blind Boxes and Gambling-Style Mechanisms (Unconscious Signals)

Talking about Pop Mart's sales strategy, sense of achievement derived from blind box collection is the main factors attracting and satisfying consumers, which is also a significantly unconscious go signal. Related study on spending on Pop Mart blind boxes showed that 54% of consumers spent between 100 and 500 yuan on blind boxes. This data indicates that more than half of consumers would repurchase blind boxes out of curiosity or other reasons [12]. Most of the time, consumers are inclined to pursue reported signals, like fashion items' beautiful designs, while the gambling-style strategy, blind boxes, tend to be ignored in many situations as it is not a highly related to those reported signals people purchasing for. In order to analyse this unconscious Go signal specifically, this study tend to divide it into self-signaling and social signaling parts.

In terms of social-signaling, The sense of accomplishment derived from collecting is the most significant form of self-signaling. For Pop Mart's die-hard fans, especially those of the Labubu series, completing the entire collection and obtaining the final hidden variant fully satisfies their sense of accomplishment. It also enhances their sense of achievement and recognition among other consumers equally passionate about the series.

In terms of self-signaling, the primary factor is a preference for the product's design or style itself, which also contributes to consumers' identity construction and the consumer-product connection. For consumers who learned about the V3 series through advertisements or online channels and developed an interest in it, their collection satisfaction primarily stems from acquiring their most desired items through blind boxes.

In conclusion, the uncertainty and gambling-like nature inherent in the blind box mechanism drives consumers to repeatedly purchase blind boxes or engage in exchanges with other collectors to achieve their goals. Observations and field research during the V3 series' peak period reveal that Labubu V3 blind boxes were perpetually out of stock in physical markets. Online platforms witnessed speculation and volatile price fluctuations, which is further not conducive to market trust and consumer confidence (such as the "ID" hidden edition). This demonstrates how the blind box mechanism's unpredictability not only fuels repeat purchases but also fosters a secondary consumer-driven market.

According to data from hobbyDB, the peak of ID's price was \$530, which was 24 times more expensive than the V3 blind box highlighting the speculative dynamics in secondary markets. This dynamic establishes new pricing benchmarks and extends the product's lifecycle reflecting principles of scarcity-driven value creation. ID's fundamental information and price in hobbyDB are shown in Figure 5.

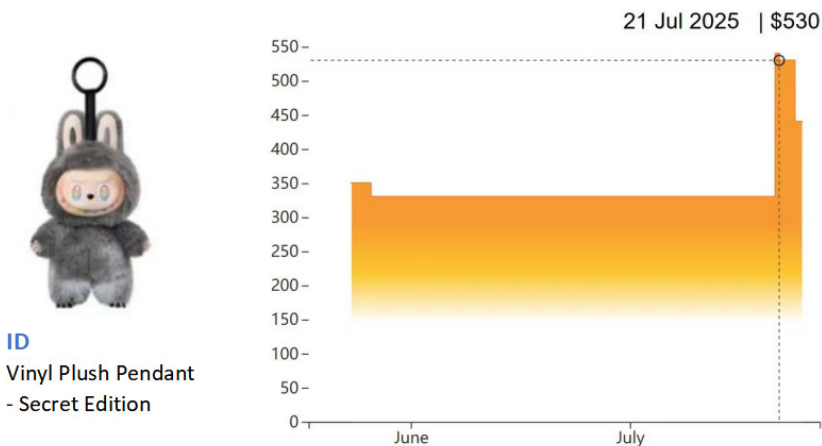


Fig. 5. ID's fundamental information and price in hobbyDB [13].

3.3 Eye-catching Design and Meticulous IP Cultivation (Reported Signals)

The phenomenal trend and mainstream appeal of the Labubu V3 series are not a fleeting success for Pop Mart's sub-brand. According to official data, Pop Mart boasts thirteen IP series generating over 100 million yuan in revenue, including highly acclaimed collections like MOLLY, SKULLPANDA, and CRYBABY. The Monsters series, to which Labubu belongs, contributes the most to revenue, generating 4.81 billion yuan—34.7% of total revenue. The launch of Labubu V3 has successfully drawn attention from consumers outside the core fanbase to the unique appeal of Pop Mart's fashion and trend-driven products.

From the perspective of reported Go signals, consumers' most immediate “desirability” for Labubu V3 stems from the product's eye-catching design and genuine affection for “THE MONSTERS” series IP. First, Labubu—meticulously crafted by artist Kasing Lung, inspired by Nordic forest elves and infused with Eastern aesthetics—resonates broadly with consumers reflecting a successful cross-cultural design strategy. Its pointed ears and jagged features subvert traditional cute doll design conventions. Media portrayals of Labubu as imperfect yet distinctively quirky perfectly align with Gen Z consumers' pursuit of novelty and emphasis on individual expression.

Secondly, Pop Mart's corporate philosophy—“To light up passion and bring joy” is perfectly embodied in the creation of the Labubu IP. Labubu's endearingly imperfect charm, combined with its diverse character designs, resonates with consumers of varying personalities. The brand stories and intentionally contradictory designs of its character series not only bridge the gap with young consumers but also forge a strong emotional connection. Particularly during this post-pandemic downturn, consumers resonate more deeply with Labubu. Pop Mart's endowment of this IP with inclusive and heartwarming traits serves as a key driver for consumer purchases.

3.4 Celebrity Promotion (Unconscious Signals)

The impact of these unconscious Go signals from celebrity promotion on consumers is significant. Even though celebrity promotion is a very affective and strong driver, it is not a trait the product itself possesses. Consider the case of Lisa, a top Thai celebrity and member of BLACKPINK, who posted a photo with Labubu on Instagram in April 2024. Within three days, related topics garnered over 200 million impressions across Southeast Asian social media. Police were required to manage orderly queues outside the Bangkok flagship store illustrating the social impact of celebrity-driven consumer behavior, while the price of V3 surged from 99 RMB to as high as 512 RMB. Furthermore, examining the stock price trend of Pop Mart in Figure.1 reveals a pronounced upward trajectory during the corresponding period. Subsequently, as more A-list celebrities like David Beckham and Helena Bonham Carter promoted Labubu on social media, Pop Mart's stock price continued its rapid ascent.

Lisa's promotion played a significant role in popularizing Labubu across international markets and has completely ignited Thailand's collectible toy market. The success of the promotion hinges on the credibility and congruence, meaning that the

celebrity's image aligns with the brand identity, between the celebrity and the product [14]. As a member of BLACKPINK, Lisa's identity aligns perfectly with the trendy toy brand. Previous studies have utilized the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model to investigate the blind box mechanism. The results indicate that opinion leaders, advertisements, and user-generated content serve as stimuli that encourage consumers to make impulse purchases. This phenomenon aligns closely with the Collective Effervescence observed in the case of Labubu after it received a series of celebrity endorsements [15].

4 Discussion and Suggestion

4.1 The Potential Risks Analysis

The foremost threat lies in the realm of trust, especially regarding restoring strategy and the sense of financial insecurity among consumers. Firstly, Labubu's restocking strategy, while seemingly lowering product prices and effectively reducing price-level Stop signals, severely undermines the product's scarcity and perceived value - particularly for the hidden 'ID' items. For consumers who acquired V3 dolls at peak prices, this price reduction strategy constitutes a significant breach of trust. Secondly, for speculative consumers, the restocking strategy combined with significant share divestments by core shareholders has triggered financial insecurity among speculative consumers. Moreover, following the V3 series restock, most speculative consumers holding products for secondary market sale incurred substantial financial losses, further destabilized the secondary trading ecosystem among consumers.

4.2 Suggestion

Consequently, Pop Mart's sales strategy should prioritise innovative product development, while company need to deepen the sense of trust and connection with consumers. Phenomenal IP series warrant in-depth cultivation to create the next blockbuster collection, rather than over-extracting value from a single popular product. This is particularly crucial for collectibles where cultural and aesthetic design value predominate. When consumer trust in the company and its products erodes, it breeds negative perceptions of low manufacturing costs and "taxing consumers" intelligence'. Concurrently, Pop Mart must avoid replicating TATA's oversight in underestimating consumer psychological expectations when implementing price reductions. The solution lies in regional pilot testing of such decisions, which can effectively decrease companies' cost and minimize large-scale risks, refining approaches based on outcomes before rolling them out nationwide.

5 Conclusion

The phenomenal success of Labubu is the result of deliberate strategic planning and market alignment. This product leveraged celebrity endorsements to capture consumer

attention, retained customers through its superior craftsmanship and appealing aesthetic design, and attracted collectors with its blind box and gambling-like system. Labubu has strategically amplified its strengths - ingenious design and cultural inclusivity - to spearhead this phenomenal consumer craze. However, several latent threats have impacted the product's lifecycle. Core shareholders cashing out and ill-timed restocking strategies have eroded consumer trust in both the product and the company. Currently, the V3 series scores a mere 2.5 on Chinese review platform Hupu, while hidden variants rate 2.75 on hobbyDB. Pop Mart must implement strategic adjustments, such as publishing its quarterly financial report and its product-related IP development plan, to clarify Pop Mart's ability to continue operating and achieving its goals and counteract the current backlash, thereby restoring and enhancing product reputation. This requires greater innovation within existing product lines rather than exhausting the value of a single series.

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