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From Adoption Papers to Shopping Lines: Decoding the Cabbage Patch Kids Craze of U.S. shoppers in the 1980s



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Abstract

The phenomenon of the Cabbage Patch Kids Craze during the 1980s, focusing on the marketing strategies that ignited a shopping frenzy in 1983. Examining the marketing tactics employed by Coleco Industries, and seeking to uncover the underlying forces that fueled the craze and drove American shoppers to extraordinary lengths for a \$20 doll. Toy historian Jonathan Alexandratos, states **“At the top, I mean they are at the top of the toy fad phenomenon. That holiday season is the one that began the Black Friday craze that we see every year.”** As with most sociocultural issues it contains a multifaceted set of circumstances that contributed to the craze, exploring not only the manufactured shortage of supply and hyped-up demand but also the human element and strange sense of community that emerged amidst the chaos of consumer fervor. Melding together the psychological aspects contained within consumer frenzy and mob mentality mixed with nostalgic feelings and a sense of community, fostered these intense conflicts that arose during these collective pursuits for the ultimate holiday surprise. By exploring these social dynamics, we unveil the broader implications of consumer culture on societal cohesion.



Brilliant marketing strategies:

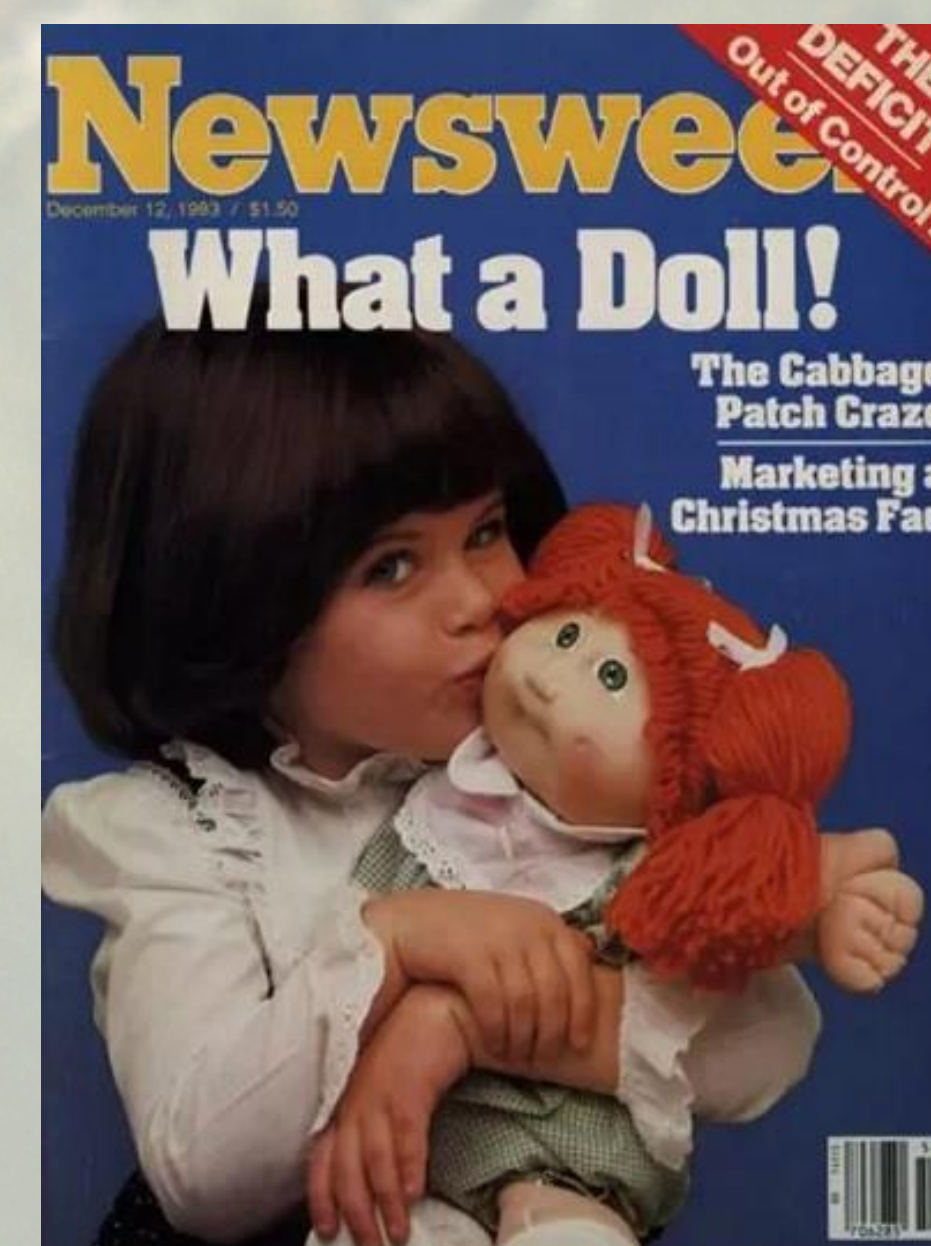
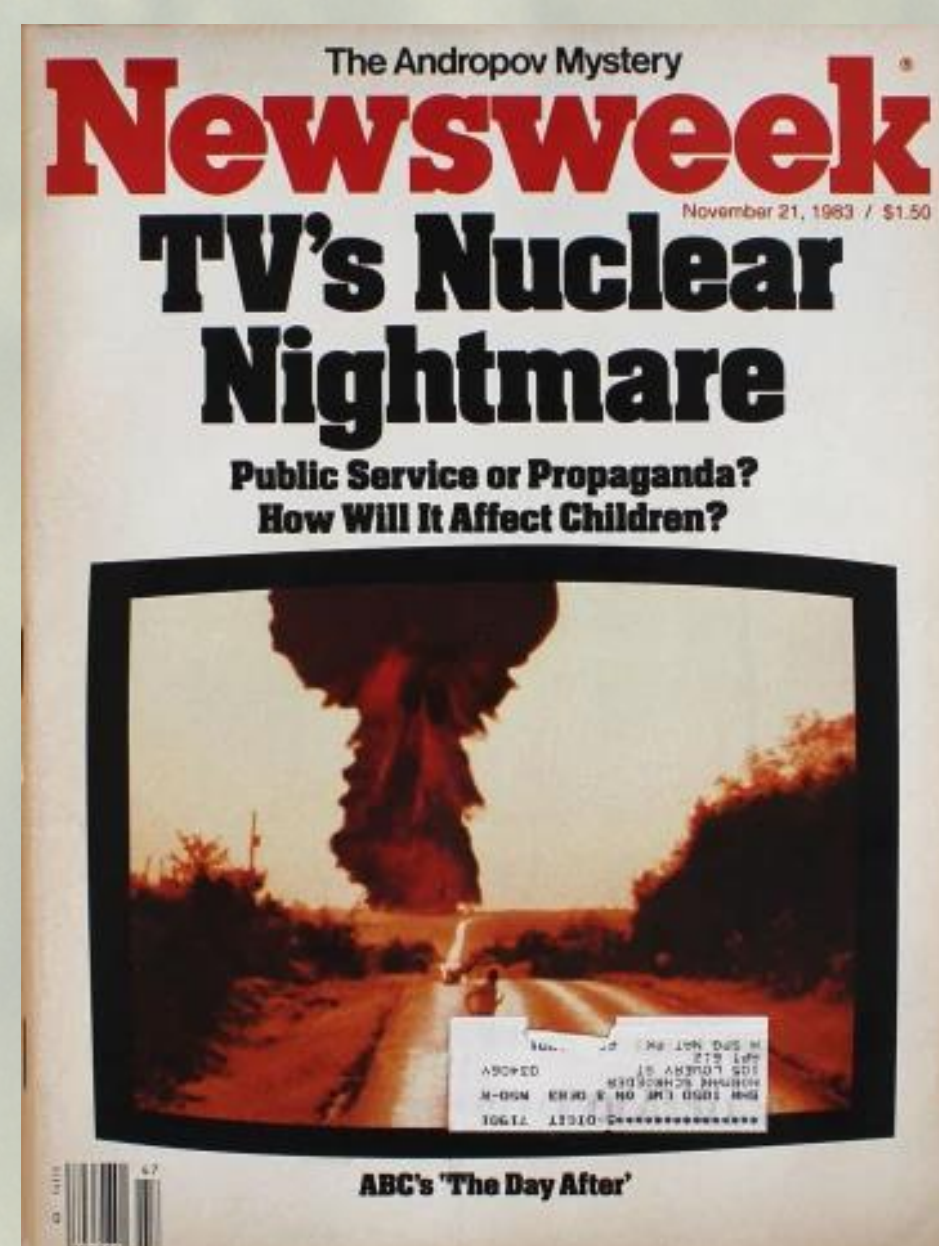
Throughout the Cabbage Patch Kids craze of the 1980s, Coleco Industries employed various marketing strategies to fuel demand and drive sales. One of the most notable tactics was the creation of scarcity through limited production runs and controlled distribution, which heightened consumer desire and led to widespread shortages in stores. Additionally, Coleco leveraged the emotional appeal of the dolls by emphasizing their unique adoption concept, complete with adoption certificates and birth names, which encouraged a sense of personal connection among consumers. The company also utilized extensive advertising campaigns across multiple media platforms, including television commercials, print advertisements, and even a made-for-TV movie, to generate widespread awareness and hype surrounding the dolls. Furthermore, Coleco partnered with retailers to create exclusive promotions and events. The company even went so far as to buy an actual hospital in Cleveland, Georgia and renaming it BabyLand General Hospital and staging it as a tourist destination for CPK enthusiasts, this was also the “birth” place for the CPK on their birth certificates.

Timing is everything!

The timing of the release of Cabbage Patch Kids in 1983 coincided with a complex socio-political landscape marked by the heightened tensions of the Cold War and heightened anxiety surrounding global conflicts, such as the Able Archer military debacle and the release of the movie “The Day After”, portraying nuclear holocaust just weeks earlier. Amid this uncertainty, people took comfort in nostalgic sentiments, longing for simpler times. The wholesome nature of Cabbage Patch Kids provided a nostalgic escape, evoking memories of childhood and a perceived era of greater simplicity and security. Thus, the release of Cabbage Patch Kids during this period served not only as a commercial success but also as a cultural phenomenon that provided a nostalgic reprieve during a tumultuous era.



Flooding the shelves just two weeks apart with a very different message. Want simpler times, how about a 1930s style doll that fits within your budget during these hard economic times?



BUY! BUY! BUY!

Like a stock market frenzy, the dolls fly off the shelves!



The appearance of the dolls creating a scene of frenzied shopping and consumer chaos. As demand for the dolls skyrocketed, stores witnessed unprecedented crowds and long lines of shoppers eager to secure the coveted toys at any price. The combination of holiday shopping fervor and the scarcity of Cabbage Patch Kids resulted in memorable and often chaotic Black Friday.

The Cabbage Patch Craze

Ironically, the nostalgic peaceful times did not show its face once the doors opened; in some stores, chaos, fights, and in 5 documented cases all out riots. During the peak of the Cabbage Patch Kids craze, the fervor for the dolls led to numerous incidents of hospitalizations due to injuries sustained in crowded stores and an influx of police calls to manage unruly crowds.



Black Friday Beginnings

The frenzied scenes during the Cabbage Patch Kids craze of the 1980s are often cited as the beginnings of what would later evolve into the modern tradition of Black Friday, characterized by massive crowds and frantic shopping.

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