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A Research on the Diversity and Expandability of Kidult Culture

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Abstract

In modern society, many adults seek emotional solace by reconnecting with their childhood memories through "kidult" culture, especially as single-person households increase. This trend spans fashion, collectibles, movies, animations, games, and character merchandise, with Hollywood playing a significant role in its growth during the 1980s and 1990s. Kidult culture allows adults to relieve stress, foster creativity, and strengthen social connections, enhancing their quality of life. As this culture gains mainstream acceptance, companies are producing diverse products featuring beloved characters, appealing to a wide age range. The rise in single-person households has amplified the importance of personal expression and individuality, driving the popularity of kidult culture. Companies are leveraging this trend to create innovative designs that resonate with consumer preferences. This cultural expansion promotes new design forms and aesthetics, reflecting the evolving relationship between design and consumption. Kidult culture's growth underscores its significance in contemporary consumer and design culture, offering valuable insights into modern societal trends.

Key words: *Kidult Culture, Design Culture, Collage, One-Person Households*

1. Introduction

In modern society, many adults face challenging daily lives and seek emotional solace within themselves. As the number of single-person households increases, there is a growing trend of adults finding joy in reliving the pure and happy memories of childhood, a phenomenon known as "Kidult."

"Kidult," a blend of "kid" and "adult," reflects the desire of adults to revisit their childhood memories. This culture is expressed in various forms, including fashion and miscellaneous goods, and involves enjoying cute and fun things with childlike innocence. Although once considered immature, kidult culture has recently

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gained acceptance and become mainstream, celebrated for its positive and diverse aspects.

Kidult culture spans a wide range of fields, from collectibles to movies, animations, games, and character merchandise. Notably, Hollywood played a significant role in pioneering kidult culture during the 1980s and 1990s, with companies like Walt Disney producing animations and movies that appealed to adults as well. Theme parks created immersive experiences that allowed adults to fully engage with the kidult world.

Kidult culture, which has grown alongside the rise in single-person households, is a significant emotional and commercial phenomenon in modern society. Through kidult culture, adults can relieve stress, foster creativity, and strengthen social connections. It has evolved beyond a mere cultural trend to become a vital factor in enhancing the quality of life for modern individuals.

2. Main

According to the National Leisure Activities Survey conducted by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the primary reason for leisure activities among single-person households is personal enjoyment. This indicates that as the number of single-person households rises in modern society, kidult culture is also becoming more prevalent. This phenomenon can be seen as a blend of social changes and cultural trends. Kidult culture is gaining popularity across various age groups, particularly among those who prefer an independent lifestyle or live alone for different reasons. The growth of single-person households and the spread of kidult culture influence each other, reflecting shifts in lifestyle and values in contemporary society.

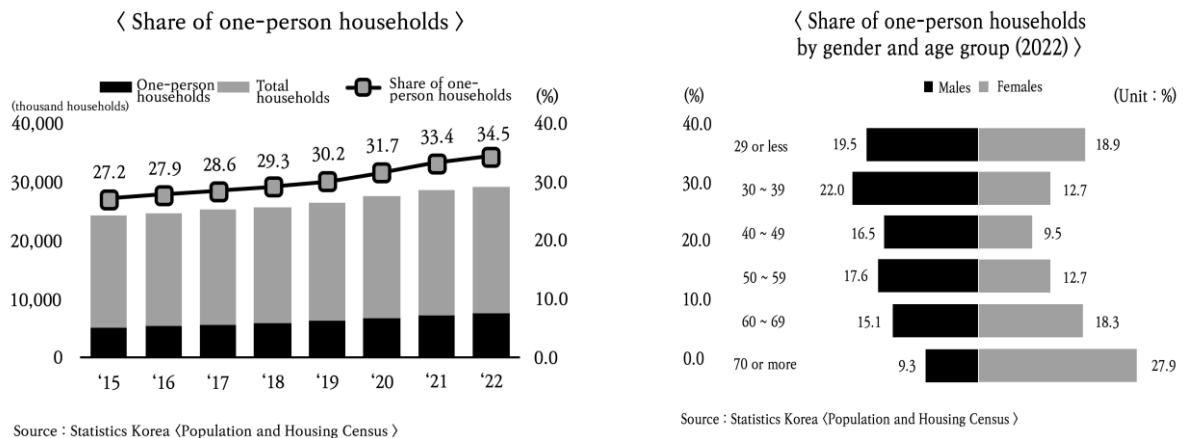
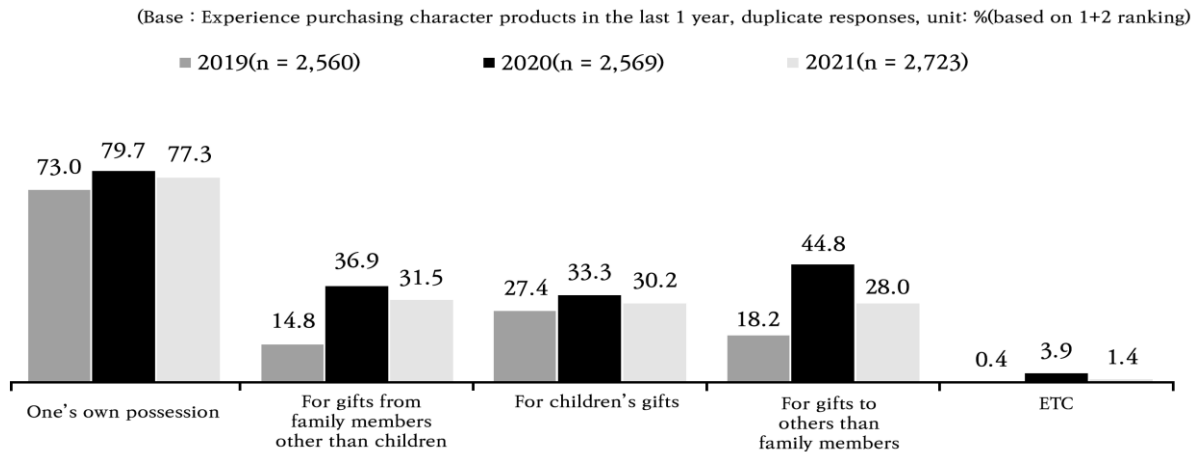


Figure 1. Share of one-person households, share of one-person households by gender and age group <Statistics Korea> Population and Housing Census

Additionally, the 2019-2021 character purchase survey by the Korea Creative Content Agency reveals an increase in character purchases among people in their 20s to 50s. More individuals are buying these products for themselves rather than as gifts for children or nephews. As the consumer base for kidult culture expands, a shift is evident: adults now have the financial means to buy and own character products they desired as children but couldn't afford. This trend highlights the growing inclination among adults to freely purchase and enjoy character merchandise.



Note) Changes from multiple responses in 2019 to 1+2 ranking in 2020

Figure 2. Purpose of purchasing character products
<KOREA CREATIVE CONTENT AGENCY> 2021 Character User Survey

However, not all expensive character products are strictly kidult toys. While more people in their 20s and 30s are buying these items for themselves, there has also been an increase in purchases made as gifts for children or nieces and nephews. Kidult culture, once considered niche, has diversified significantly. As it gained popularity across all age groups and became a culture that everyone can enjoy, a wider variety of new products has emerged.

3. Types of Toys

First of all, when it comes to kidult toys, people think of them as toys made with various characters. However, toys are largely categorized according to age and have different types and prices.

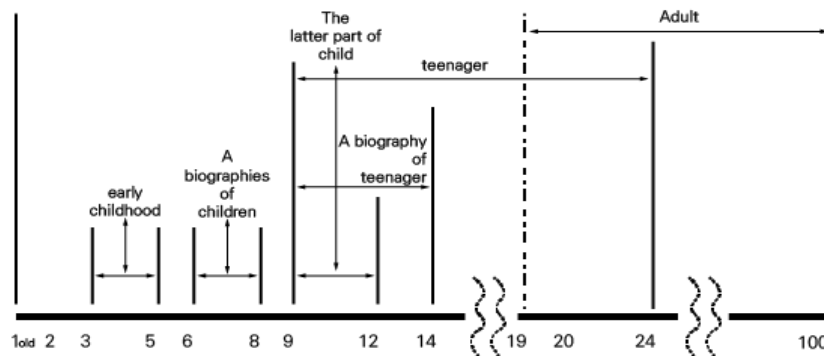


Figure 3. age classification table

The first toys for infants are often tactile books made of soft and safe materials, allowing babies to experience various textures and colors. They also use rattles to understand the relationship between sound and movement. As children enter early childhood, they enjoy role-playing with toys that stimulate their imagination, simulate various scenarios, and develop problem-solving skills through simple puzzles.

During early childhood, toys that foster creative problem-solving and an exploratory spirit are common. From late childhood until just before adulthood, toys often focus on developing logical thinking and creativity through complex puzzles and tabletop RPG games.

While the primary purpose of toys for children is educational, once they become adults, people often choose toys to relieve stress and pursue hobbies. Adults typically prefer toys that create enjoyable times with friends and family or models that involve detailed work. These toys provide concentration and a sense of accomplishment. Thus, the characteristics of toys vary depending on the age group, reflecting different developmental stages.

Table 1. Types, features, and prices of toys

	characteristic	price	type
child	Tailored to your developmental stage and interests Simple and easy operation	10,000 ~ 70,000 won	Sensory books, LEGO Duplo, puzzles
teenager	Stimulating curiosity and exploration Focus on creative problem solving skills Emphasis on educational aspects A combination of fun and learning	50,000 ~ 200,000 won	Advanced LEGO, Electric RC cars, Science experiment kits
Adult	Relieve stress or promote brain activity Can be enjoyed as an individual or group activity	30,000~300,000 won	Board games, Hobby models, Outdoor activity toys

3.1 Classification and Recognition of Kidults

Kidults engage with a wide range of interests, including toys, character merchandise, console gaming culture, subcultures, theme parks, and experiential activities. With advancements in technology, retro games from the 1980s and 1990s have been ported or remade for modern consoles, while new installments of classic game series have been released. This trend evokes nostalgia in adults and introduces children to the latest versions. Playing old or new series games can spark interest in older game series, leading to cosplay activities where fans recreate character costumes and hairstyles from these games. Additionally, many people enjoy wearing character-themed clothing and participating in various activities such as visiting theme parks or character cafes.

Through these activities, people find stress relief from everyday life, experience joy, foster creativity, and express themselves, all while having fun. This contributes positively to cultural diversity and creates unforgettable memories for those who cosplay and visit theme parks. As these activities often serve as tourist attractions, they bring together people from various backgrounds, encouraging interaction and cultural exchange.



Figure 4. People enjoying costumes of movie characters at theme parks and cosplayers at gaming events

3.2 Diversity and Accessibility of Kidult Products

Recently, kidult culture has spread rapidly due to the accessibility provided by online distribution networks, offline pop-up stores, and specialty shops. As it gained prominence in the entertainment and fashion industries, the range of products diversified. With the culture's growth, companies began developing and launching new products, making familiar items more commonplace.

When people think of kidult toys, they often envision toys featuring various characters. Lottery-style games, which became a staple in mobile gaming, gained immense popularity. These games resonated not only with individuals in their 30s and 40s who have nostalgic memories but also with the primary user base of teens and young adults in their 20s. Capitalizing on this trend, many companies have introduced a wide range of food toys with popular characters and designs, highlighting their potential as an effective marketing strategy.



Figure 5. capsule toy

Companies have produced and sold practical and adorable capsule toys featuring their own characters or unique designs, which have become very popular among consumers who appreciate distinct aesthetics. People buy and use these toys to express their personal style or individuality, often creating small collage designs by combining various capsule toys, character products, and other collectibles. This trend has provided new insights into consumer motivations and usage, highlighting the importance of personal expression and unique design in purchasing decisions.

Currently, people often attach props like character dolls or keyrings to their bags, smartphones, and pouches. Amid this trend, "gacha pouches" are gaining attention. Consumers who prefer unique, palm-sized pouches seek out and purchase capsule toys or food toys with designs that match their dolls to express their

individuality. This allows them to create a personalized pouch that reflects their desired design and style, showcasing their unique tastes. Additionally, the repetitive process of hand-designing the inside of the pouch brings psychological stability. Companies are exploring the potential of strengthening emotional connections with consumers through kidult culture to secure sustainable market competitiveness. Ultimately, kidult culture reflects an understanding of design's social role and the formation of consumer identity. It has deepened and suggested new directions in modern design theory and practice. The growth of this culture offers new avenues for self-expression and the discovery of unique products. This cultural expansion is driving the development of new design forms and aesthetics, providing insight into the evolving relationship between design and consumption in modern society.



Figure 6. Collage design 'Gacha Pouch' using various capsule toys

4. Conclusion

In modern society, adults often seek to reconnect with their inner emotional lives amidst their demanding daily routines. With the rise of single-person households, kidult culture—which brings back the pure and joyful memories of childhood—has been spreading. This culture encompasses activities and items that adults can enjoy with childlike innocence. Once considered immature, kidult culture has recently gained positive mainstream acceptance.

Kidult culture has expanded into various areas such as games, theme parks, and subcultures. Companies are responding by releasing products featuring beloved characters and designs, which are becoming highly popular among consumers. As the number of single-person households increases, the importance of expressing memories and individuality, and finding joy in life, has grown. This shift has led to a greater tendency for adults to freely purchase and cherish desired items, making product accessibility more crucial than ever before. Consequently, a new design culture has emerged.

This trend is expected to continue evolving, creating new waves in consumer culture and the design industry. To foster further development and change, it is essential to analyze consumer preferences and develop products that resonate with modern tastes. As a cultural consumption channel for various demographics, it is crucial to understand the consumption of kidult culture, including its variables and people's preferences, and to create innovative designs that reflect the cultural role of cultivating human emotions through visual messages. This paper demonstrates that the rise in single-person households has increased and diversified the consumption class of kidult culture, expanding it into various areas. Notably, kidult culture has driven further development in design culture. To capitalize on this trend, companies should develop products by analyzing people's emotional connections and preferences.

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