

What is the key to survive? – Small independent stationery shops

Do you remember spending your childhood browsing through the latest stationery at small independent stationary shops, playing vending machines outside, or collecting various toys and board games? These shops were an integral part of our collective memory, especially during their golden age between the 1980s and 1990s. However, in recent years, they have faced a decline in popularity. In this article, we will delve into the reasons behind this decline.

One of the main reasons for the fall in the number of small independent stationery shops is globalization. With the rise of international collaborations and the development of Hong Kong into a world-renowned metropolis, many international brands have entered the market, including stationery shops and bookstores such as Muji and Eslite Bookstore. These retailers offer a vast array of fashionable and glamorous stationery, which is not available at small independent stationery shops. Moreover, their trendy and comfortable designs and furnishings attract young people. In contrast, small independent stationery shops have limited choices of stationery, and their areas are often crowded and messy, which turns off many customers.

Apart from globalization, the rise of technology has also affected the popularity of small independent stationary shops. Many schools are promoting e-learning, especially during the pandemic, and students are using tech products such as iPads and Apple pencils for revision. As a result, many students prefer tech products over traditional stationery for their convenience and environmentally friendly nature. With this trend, coupled with skyrocketing rental fees and increasing selling items, the cost of operating a small independent stationary shop is much higher than the revenue it generates, which forces many owners to quit the business.

Despite these unfavourable factors, it is my belief that small independent stationery shops can still survive. The location of these shops is often inside public housing estates, where they have built a strong bond with the residents. Therefore, the survival of these shops relies heavily on their relations with customers. For instance, international brands are often located in big malls like Metroplaza, which are far from public housing estates. Hence, students living in public housing estates may prefer buying stationery from local shops rather than going to Muji or Eslite. Furthermore, Gen Y's students who used to visit independent stationery shops have now become parents, and they may take their children to play with the vending machines outside these shops, creating a family memory.

In conclusion, small independent stationery shops have played an important role in our collective memories, and their decline is a cause for concern. However, with a strong customer base and a focus on community relations, these shops can still survive and thrive. Though the world is becoming increasingly driven by technology, there is still a human touch in Hong Kong, and I believe that small independent stationary shops will always have a place in our hearts and communities.