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The Impact of Pop Mart's Blind Box Marketing Strategy on Chinese Consumers Psychology and Behavior

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Abstract: *This study explores the impact of Pop Mart ' s blind box marketing strategy on Chinese consumers' psychology and behavior, focusing on the role of anticipated emotion as a mediator between various marketing stimuli and impulse buying behavior. The research integrates several key factors, including hedonic shopping value, product novelty, limited edition perception, and social media influence, examining how these elements trigger emotional arousal that drives impulsive purchase decisions. The study uses a quantitative research approach, employing structural equation modeling to test the relationships among these variables. Results show that hedonic shopping value, perceived scarcity, novelty, and social media influence all positively affect anticipated emotion, which in turn significantly increases impulse buying behavior. The study provides valuable insights for marketers on how to structure blind box campaigns that effectively engage consumers by leveraging emotional anticipation and reinforcing consumer behavior through social proof and novelty. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of emotional dynamics in experiential marketing, offering a clearer view of how emotions mediate consumer decisions in the context of novelty-based retail experiences.*

Keywords: Pop Mart, blind box marketing, impulse buying, anticipated emotion

I. Introduction

Pop Mart's rapid rise has taken place alongside a broader transformation in Chinese consumer culture, where purchasing is increasingly driven by experience seeking, emotional stimulation, and symbolic self-expression rather than by functional utility alone. Within this context, blind box consumption has emerged as a distinctive form of retail experience in which uncertainty itself becomes part of the product value. Mystery-based purchase mechanics intensify arousal and anticipation, allowing probability to be interpreted less as risk and more as entertainment (Yu, 2025). For digitally native consumer groups, gamified novelty also functions as a form of social display and identity expression, reinforcing collection norms, peer interaction, and visible participation in consumption communities (Chen, 2025). In such settings, perceived playfulness and immersive flow may weaken careful comparison and encourage episodic, affect-oriented buying decisions (Fan & Wang, 2023). Even packaging features such as foil texture, box weight, and color rhythm can act as semiotic cues that soften risk perception and support repeated trial behavior after mixed purchase outcomes (Li & Choi, 2023).

Pop Mart has successfully translated these tendencies into a recognizable marketing system by integrating uncertainty, scarcity, novelty, and social proof across both physical and digital channels. Design elements such as edition cues, visual hierarchy, and stated probabilities help calibrate perceived value at the moment of reveal, thereby increasing the likelihood of impulse purchasing under time pressure (Gao & Liu, 2025). Social media platforms further accelerate this process by turning unboxing into a performative activity and by circulating localized norms concerning rarity, collectability, and exchange etiquette (Huang, 2024). At the company level, brand scale, IP portfolios, and experiential retail formats transform anticipation into checkout behavior across malls, flagship stores, and vending networks (Li, 2025). Localized executions, including price ladders, festival-linked releases, and regional exclusives, help maintain freshness and symbolic appeal without weakening brand meaning (Haizhi, 2023). These developments suggest that blind box marketing is not driven by a single factor, but by the interaction of multiple market stimuli that shape consumer perception and action(Zhang, 2024).

Existing studies have generated valuable insights into several dimensions of blind box consumption, especially emotional arousal, scarcity perception, novelty appeal, and social amplification. Some studies also point to broader

concerns surrounding fairness under engineered rarity, behavioral responses across different product tiers, narrative attraction, culturally embedded consumption heuristics, compulsive tendencies, and the role of resale or swapping communities (Zhan, 2024). However, not all of these issues are examined within the present empirical model(Duan,2023). To maintain consistency between the introduction, research design, and reported findings, this study does not attempt to test fairness perceptions, regulatory questions, compulsive purchasing risks, or resale mechanisms directly(Liu,2023). Instead, these factors are acknowledged as relevant background conditions in the wider blind box literature, while the present research focuses more narrowly on the core variables that are explicitly included in the quantitative framework(Srisukwatanachai,2023). Such a narrower scope helps avoid overextension and allows the analysis to concentrate on a clearer explanatory path within the Chinese consumer context(Whyke,2023).

Accordingly, this study develops and tests a stimulus-organism-response framework in which hedonic shopping value, limited edition perception, product novelty, and social media influence are treated as stimulus variables, anticipated emotion is positioned as the organism-level psychological state, and impulse buying behavior is modeled as the behavioral response(Zhan,2024). This structure corresponds directly to the measurement model and hypotheses reported in the study(Huang,2024). Based on prior literature, it is expected that hedonic enjoyment, perceived scarcity, novelty, and social influence will positively enhance anticipated emotion, which in turn will increase the likelihood of impulse buying (Yu,2025). By concentrating on this more empirically aligned mechanism, the study aims to clarify how Pop Mart's blind box marketing strategy affects Chinese consumers' psychology and behavior without making broader claims that extend beyond the variables actually tested (Gao & Liu,2025).

II. Literature review

2.1 Impulse Buying Behavior

In the blind box context, impulse buying is not a single "loss of control" event but rather an emotion action chain amplified by uncertainty, scarcity, and community atmosphere. Countdown promotions and the probability of obtaining "hidden" editions heighten physiological arousal and focus, while the moment of purchase acts as an emotional release valve for tension and self-expression. Empirical studies reveal that reward cues and instant feedback trigger high-frequency repeat purchases and are intertwined with mild addictive tendencies among young consumers (Duan, 2023). Further analysis of the blind box effect shows that the triadic ritual of anticipation -reveal - display solidifies the "unboxing pleasure" into a repeatable consumption script, prompting individuals to reenter the emotional buildup and rapid decision loop before the next release (Zhan, 2024).

2.2 Concept and Theory

At the theoretical level, the blind box economy can be explained through a"triadic structure"of multi-dimensional value, uncertainty mechanism, and platform externality: emotional and symbolic values dominate utility assessment; probabilistic allocation and information asymmetry maintain suspense; and secondary markets and community circulation provide sustained price and emotional anchors (Liu et al., 2023). In the motivation - behavior transformation pathway, the Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that subjective norms (peer recommendations, community evaluations) and perceived behavioral control (difficulty of acquisition, time window) jointly affect purchase intention through attitudinal mediation. Anticipated emotional outcomes serve as the psychological hinge between intention and purchase decision (Liang, 2025).

2.3 Hedonistic Shopping Value

Hedonic shopping value is the core of blind box conversion efficiency: consumption meaning shifts from"function -use"to"emotion -narrative."Pleasure stems from a continuous experience of"anticipation -surprise -sharing,"rather than the utilitarian value of a single item. Psychological profiles of Generation Z consumers reveal that gamification, instant feedback, and socially shareable aesthetic worlds significantly elevate pleasure - arousal levels, shorten decision time, and boost repurchase rates (Chen, 2025). Pop Mart's serialized operation in China confirms this: thematic universes, co-branded storytelling, and release rhythms collectively construct an "immersive scene of re-entry," making emotional reward the direct basis for premium payments and repetitive draws (Wang, 2023).

H1:Hedonistic shopping value positively influences impulse buying through anticipated emotion.

2.4 Limited Edition

"Limited and hidden editions" magnify marginal emotional value through scarcity and identity differentiation. Numbered editions, probability labeling, and one-time release windows pre-embed "status rewards" into the purchasing moment, encouraging immediate high-intensity transactions (Li, 2025). Research also indicates that adult collectors' "

elastic prosumption" ecosystems (exchange, resale, group completion) extend the logic of scarcity into secondary markets. Price signals and performative displays transform individual possessiveness into collective hype and draw waves, reinforcing the closed loop of "limited-impulse -display" (Whyke et al., 2023).

H2:Limited edition positively influences impulse buying through anticipated emotion.

2.5 Product Novelty

Product novelty drives impulse through the mechanism of"expectation discrepancy": before the reveal, novel designs and themes elevate the imagined upper bound of outcomes, leading buyers to perceive immediate purchase as a rational act of"securing emotional dividends"(Gao & Liu, 2025). Research on the "blind box economy" shows that continuous product updates and cross-industry collaborations effectively counter aesthetic fatigue. Coordinated with multi-platform exposure and countdown mechanisms, these sustain high arousal thresholds and attention retention, significantly increasing conversion rates during release windows (Zhang, 2024).

H3:Product novelty positively influences impulse buying through anticipated emotion.

2.6 Social Media Influence

Social media translates "others' unboxing highs" into "action scripts" for the self. Recommendation posts, livestream unboxings, and influencer checklists use social approval and conformity cues to reduce subjective risk and rationalize immediate purchases (Huang, 2024). Simultaneously, packaging and visual storytelling act as "emotional containers" in information streams: character settings, color schemes, and material cues enhance screen-stopping power and shareability, amplifying emotional contagion and accelerating decision-making (Li & Choi, 2023).

H4:Social media influence positively affects impulse buying through anticipated emotion.

2. 7 Anticipated Emotion

Anticipated emotion in blind box purchasing manifests as pre-simulation of self-feelings under "winning" and "losing" scenarios. When individuals overestimate the pride and joy of winning a hidden item while underestimating disappointment, they are more likely to make rapid purchases under time pressure (Yu, 2025). Cross-platform studies also show that the satisfaction - trust - intention chain is strengthened by positive emotional anticipation: when brands or platforms consistently deliver "emotional peaks" at the moment of unboxing, consumers develop habitual choices and higher repurchase intentions, even when objective functional value remains unchanged (Myint, 2025).

H5:The impact of anticipated emotion on impulse buying behavior

III. Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

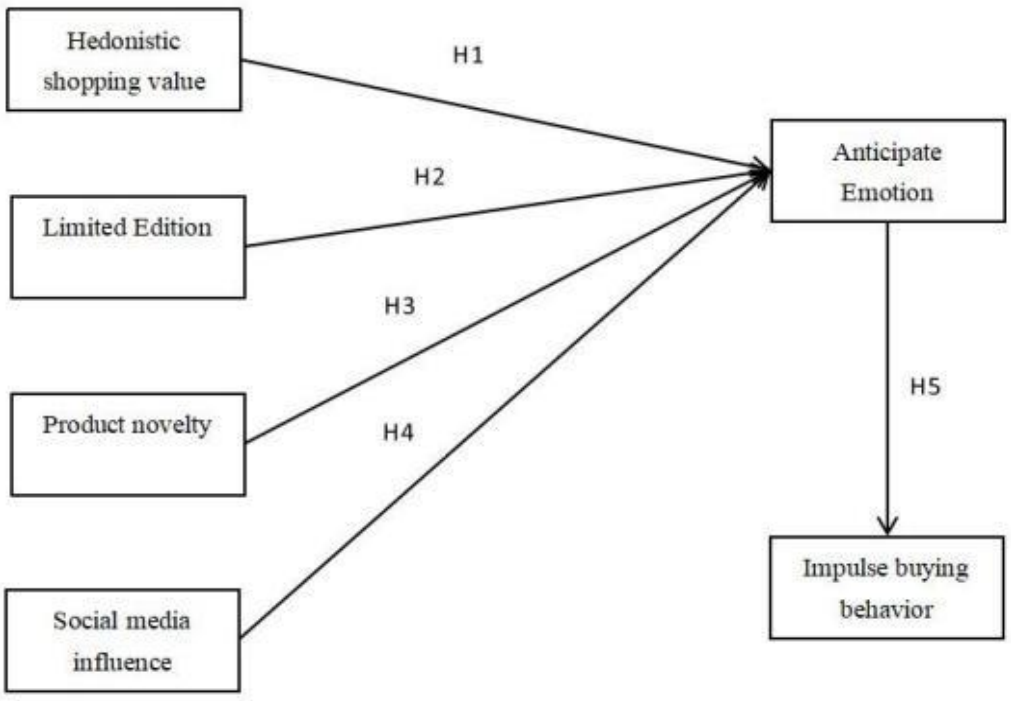

Figure 1. Conceptual model

IV. Research methods

This study adopted a quantitative research methodology, drawing on existing consumer behavior and marketing theories to construct a comprehensive analytical framework. The research aimed to examine the psychological mechanisms and behavioral responses of Chinese consumers toward Pop Mart ' s blind box marketing strategy, addressing identified gaps from previous literature. The empirical research was conducted in two phases: preliminary and formal investigations. The preliminary phase involved the development and validation of measurement scales to assess key psychological constructs, whereas the formal phase tested the conceptual model and hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM).

The quantitative approach allowed for objective measurement of relationships among multiple psychological variables including hedonic shopping value, product novelty, limited-edition availability, social media influence, anticipated emotion, and impulse buying behavior. Through statistical modeling and hypothesis testing, this study sought to provide robust empirical evidence on how emotional anticipation mediates the link between marketing stimuli and impulsive purchasing.

4.1 Research process

The first stage involved establishing the research framework, identifying relevant variables from established scales, and adapting them to the blind box consumption context. Based on prior research, the initial draft questionnaire contained six constructs and thirty measurement items, rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A panel of academic experts and market professionals specializing in consumer psychology and marketing reviewed the initial items for content validity and cultural relevance. Following their evaluation, items with a mean relevance score below 4.0 were revised or eliminated. After several iterations of expert discussions and translation verification, the second draft questionnaire was finalized for preliminary testing.

A pilot study was conducted online with 120 Pop Mart consumers in Beijing. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, employing Exploratory Factor Analysis. (EFA) and Cronbach's alpha, reliability testing. Results indicated satisfactory reliability (a > 0.7) . Also Items with factor lodgings above 0.5 indicated satisfactory results in a refined scale of 30 items.

The validated questionnaire was distributed to 413 respondents in Beijing via online platforms (WeChat, blind box communities) and offline locations (Pop Mart stores, art toy exhibitions). Screening questions ensured all participants had prior purchasing experience. Systematic random sampling was employed to ensure demographic diversity. The survey (April - May 2025) yielded 400 valid responses, meeting the recommended 10: 1 to 15:1 subject-to-item ratio for SEM analysis.

Data processing included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0. This systematic approach ensured scientific rigor and internal consistency, laying a solid foundation for the study's findings.

V. Reliability and validity

The reliability analysis in Table 5.1 demonstrates strong internal consistency across all variables. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.851 to 0.918, well above the accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent reliability. Among them, Hedonistic Shopping Value (HSV) shows the highest reliability (α = 0.918), reflecting highly consistent responses in measuring emotional shopping enjoyment. Social Media Influence (SMI) and Product Novelty (PN) also show strong reliability with α values above 0.88, confirming stable measurement of external influences and innovative product perceptions. Limited Edition (LE), though slightly lower at 0.851, still represents solid internal consistency. Anticipated Emotion (AE) and Impulse Buying Behavior (IBB) both record α = 0.887 and 0.889 respectively, suggesting that emotional anticipation and impulsive purchase tendencies are reliably measured.

Table 5.1 Reliability analysis

Variable	Number Questions	α coefficient
Hedonistic shopping value(HSV)	5	0.918
Limited Edition(LE)	5	0.851

Product novelty(PN)	5	0.889
Social media influence(SMI)	5	0.910
Anticipate Emotion(AE)	5	0.887
Impulse buying behavior(IBB)	5	0.889

The results of the KMO test, as shown in the figure below, indicate a KMO value of 0.947, which suggests excellent sampling adequacy for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$), indicating statistical significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that the variables are sufficiently correlated. These results demonstrate that factor analysis is appropriate and the dataset is highly suitable for such analysis.

Table 5.2 Factor analysis

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	Communalities
SMI3	0.776						0,656
SMI1	0.771						0.624
SMI4	0.77						0.691
SMI2	0.752						0.667
SMI5	0.687						0.516
IBB5		0.863					0.596
IBB2		0.804					0.598
IBB4		0.796					0.634
IBB1		0.784					0.517
IBB3		0.764					0.472
PN5			0.795				0.63
PN1			0.748				0.626
PN4			0.748				0.608

PN2			0.734				0.591
PN3			0.697				0.445
HSV4				0.78			0.913
HSV1				0.748			0.806
HSV5				0.737			0.878
HSV2				0.719			0.581
HSV3				0.7			0.671
AE3					0.777		0.759
AE5					0.698		0.831
AE4					0.695		0.773
AE1					0.685		0.963
AE2					0.603		0.892
LE3						0.737	0.569
LE4						0.697	0.559
LE2						0.688	0.599
LE5						0.707	0.652
LE1						0.649	0.430
Eigenvalue	3.753	3.654	3.617	3.58	3.214	3.213	

VI. Results

According to the survey results, the gender distribution is relatively balanced, with females accounting for 51% and males 49%, offering a solid basis for analyzing gender differences in psychological responses and behavioral patterns regarding blind box purchases. In terms of age, the largest group falls within the 18 – 25 age range (37%), followed by those aged 26 – 35 (29.3%), indicating that young consumers form the core demographic, which aligns with the trend-driven nature of blind box consumption. Regarding education levels, individuals with a bachelor 's degree or lower make up 80.5% of the sample, suggesting that most consumers are either still pursuing higher education or are early-career professionals, likely influenced by popular culture and social media. Monthly income data reveal that the group earning between 3,000 – 6,000 RMB has the highest proportion (30.8%), followed by those earning 6,000 – 9,000 RMB (26%). Notably, a considerable portion (21.5%) earns less than 3,000 RMB, reflecting the mass-market affordability of blind box products. In terms of occupation, students dominate the sample at 33%, followed by self-employed individuals (19%), company employees (18.5%), and government workers (16.5%), highlighting that blind box purchasing behavior is largely driven by younger consumers and those with moderate income levels, revealing a clear correlation between consumption patterns and one 's socio-economic status.

Table 6. 1 Basic Information Statistics of Respondents

Demography	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	204	51.0
Male	196	49.0
Age		
18–25 years old	148	37.0
26–35 years old	117	29.3
36–45 years old	69	17.3
46–55 years old	42	10.5
Over 55 years old	24	6.0
Education Level		
Below Bachelor's degree	152	38.0
Bachelor's degree	170	42.5
Above Bachelor's degree	78	19.5
Monthly Income (RMB)		
Less than 3000 RMB	86	21.5
3000–6000 RMB	123	30.8
6000–9000 RMB	104	26.0
Above 9000 RMB	87	21.7
Occupation		
Student	132	33.0
Government Employee	66	16.5
Company Employee	74	18.5
Self-Employed	76	19.0
Retired	52	13.0

Table 6.2 indicates that the standardized factor loadings between the latent variables and their observed items are generally satisfactory, ranging from 0.628 to 0.852, with most values above 0.70, showing that the items can effectively represent their corresponding constructs. The CR values for all six constructs range from 0.852 to 0.918, all exceeding the recommended threshold, while the AVE values range from 0.536 to 0.692, confirming good internal consistency and convergent validity. Specifically, Hedonistic Shopping Value (HSV) performs best, with loadings from 0.815 to 0.852, CR of 0.918, and AVE of 0.692. Social Media Influence (SMI), Product Novelty (PN), and Impulse Buying Behavior (IBB) also show stable loadings, whereas Anticipated Emotion (AE) and Limited Edition (LE) remain acceptable overall.

Table 6.2 Factor loading coefficient table

Construct	Items	factor loading	CR	AVE
Social media influence	SMI1	0.820	0.911	0.672
	SMI2	0.829		
	SMI3	0.815		
	SMI4	0.847		
	SMI5	0.785		
Impulse buying behavior	IBB1	0.774	0.890	0.618
	IBB2	0.766		
	IBB3	0.741		
	IBB4	0.798		
	IBB5	0.846		
Product novelty	PN1	0.776	0.890	0.619
	PN2	0.773		
	PN3	0.726		
	PN4	0.825		
	PN5	0.828		
Hedonistic shopping value	HSV1	0.817	0.918	0.692
	HSV2	0.842		
	HSV3	0.815		
	HSV4	0.852		
	HSV5	0.832		

Construct	Items	factor loading	CR	AVE
	AE1	0.726		
	AE2	0.694		
Anticipate Emotion	AE3	0.826	0.878	0.590
	AE4	0.817		
	AE5	0.77		
	LE1	0.703		
	LE2	0.628		
Limited Edition	LE3	0.751	0.852	0.536
	LE4	0.799		
	LE5	0.767		

Table 6.3 Correlation Matrix

Construct	HSV	LE	PN	SMI	AE	IBB
HSV	1					
LE	0.596	1				
PN	0.565	0.518	1			
SMI	0.598	0.550	0.581	1		
AE	0.610	0.597	0.611	0.639	1	
IBB	0.435	0.398	0.275	0.372	0.270	0

Source:Author's own work

The correlation matrix indicates no multicollinearity ; however,discriminant validity was formally assessed using the fornell-Larcker criterion, which confirmed that all constructs are empirically distinct.

Table 6.4 Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Variable	HSV	LE	PN	SMI	AE	IBB
HSV	0.737					
LE	0.596	0.707				
PN	0.565	0.518	0.745			
SMI	0.598	0.550	0.581	0.752		
AE	0.610	0.597	0.611	0.639	0.714	
IBB	0.435	0.398	0.275	0.372	0.270	0.803

Note: Diagonal values (bold) represent the square roots of AVE.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. As shown in Table 6.4, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeds its corresponding inter-construct correlations. This indicates that all constructs are empirically distinct and confirm adequate discriminant validity.

Table 6.5 Model Fit Indices

Model	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA	TLI
Measurement model	1.598	0.910	0.879	0.922	0.969	0.969	0.036	0.039	0.951
Recommended value	<2	≥0.90	≥0.85	≥0.90	≥0.95	≥0.95	<0.04	<0.04	≥0.95

Measurement model fit is strong: X2 over df equals 1.598 indicating parsimony; GFI 0.910 and AGFI 0.879 meet recommended cutoffs, as do NFI 0.922, IFI 0.969, and CFI 0.969. Residual indices are small with RMR 0.036 and RMSEA 0.039, and TLI 0.951 reaches the target, supporting a well calibrated measurement structure. These diagnostics imply that items for hedonic value, limited edition perception, product novelty, social media influence, anticipated emotion, and impulse buying cohere with their intended factors, enabling valid tests of mediation pathways from marketing stimuli to anticipatory affect and behavioral response in Pop Mart blind box consumption in China.

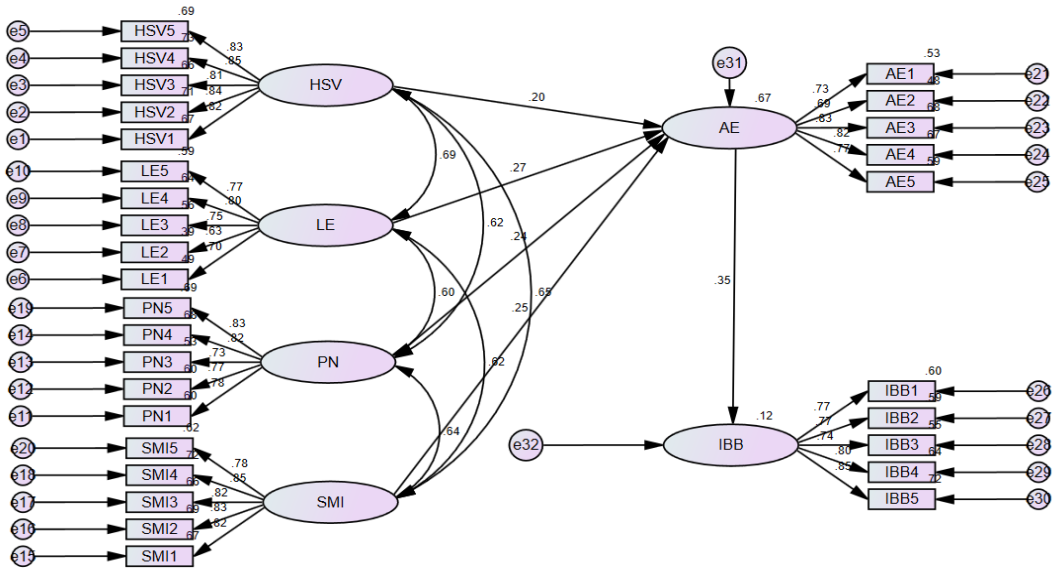

Figure 2 Structural Model Diagram

Table 6.6 Model Fit Indices

Hypothesis	Path	Standardised estimate	C.R.	P-Value	Result
H1	Anticipate Emotion←Hedonistic shopping value	0.201	3.451	0.001	Supported
H2	Anticipate Emotion←Limited Edition	0.272	4.284	0.001	Supported
H3	Anticipate Emotion←Product novelty	0.238	3.892	0.001	Supported
H4	Anticipate Emotion←Socia l media influence	0.246	4.023	0.001	Supported
H5	Impulse buying behavior←Anticipate	0.350	5.161	0.001	Supported

Emotion

VII. Discussion

H1:Hedonistic shopping value positively influences impulse buying through anticipated emotion.

Hedonistic shopping value significantly affects impulse buying behavior by influencing emotional anticipation. This study's findings suggest that consumers derive a substantial emotional payoff from hedonic shopping experiences, which in turn triggers impulsive buying decisions. The emotional excitement derived from engaging in such purchases becomes a key mediator between the value consumers place on the shopping experience and their spontaneous buying actions. These results underscore the pivotal role of emotion in hedonic consumer behavior, as individuals are more likely to make unplanned purchases when they anticipate emotional satisfaction from the process, rather than focusing solely on product utility or necessity.

H2: Limited edition positively influences impulse buying through anticipated emotion.

The limited edition strategy is a powerful tool in driving impulse purchases, particularly by creating a sense of urgency and exclusivity. The anticipation of owning a rare or unique item amplifies emotional arousal, making consumers more susceptible to impulse buying. The findings indicate that limited edition products increase perceived scarcity, which enhances the emotional reward associated with obtaining the product. As a result, the heightened emotional response drives rapid purchasing decisions, as consumers seek to secure a product before it runs out. This approach not only appeals to the desire for status but also triggers emotional satisfaction linked to owning something exclusive.

H3: Product novelty positively influences impulse buying through anticipated emotion.

Product novelty serves as a critical catalyst for impulse buying, with its impact being mediated by emotional anticipation. The introduction of new or innovative products taps into the excitement and curiosity of consumers, making them more likely to purchase on impulse. As consumers imagine

the potential enjoyment and fulfillment of owning novel items, they are driven by the emotions associated with discovery and surprise. This emotional engagement encourages impulsive behavior, as consumers rush to secure the product before it becomes more widely available or loses its novelty. The research supports the idea that novelty not only attracts attention but also strengthens emotional attachment to the product, fueling impulse buying.

H4: Social media influence positively affects impulse buying through anticipated emotion.

Social media significantly amplifies impulse buying behavior by enhancing emotional anticipation. Through social proof and influencer-driven content, consumers are exposed to the excitement and enthusiasm of others, which in turn generates similar emotional responses. The research highlights that social media platforms, with their ability to create emotional contagion through unboxing videos and product endorsements, increase the likelihood of consumers engaging in spontaneous purchases. The anticipation of experiencing the same positive emotions shared by others further encourages impulse buying, as consumers feel a heightened desire to align with the social experience and avoid missing out on trendy products.

H5: The impact of anticipated emotion on impulse buying behavior

Anticipated emotion plays a crucial role in shaping future emotional anticipation. When consumers engage in impulsive purchases, the emotions they expect to experience post-purchase (whether positive or negative) can influence their expectations for future buying experiences. This feedback loop, where emotional expectations from future purchases inform current decisions, suggests that anticipated emotions may heighten emotional anticipation for subsequent shopping experiences. For instance, if a previous impulse buy led to a sense of excitement and satisfaction, consumers are likely to expect similar emotional rewards in the future, increasing their likelihood of acting impulsively again. Thus, anticipated emotion reinforces the emotional dynamics that drive future purchasing behavior.

VIII. Conclusions

8.1 Anticipated Emotion as Mediator

This study investigates how Pop Mart ' s blind box marketing shapes Chinese consumers ' psychology and behavior, emphasizing the mediating role of anticipated emotion between key stimuli hedonic shopping value, perceived scarcity

in limited editions, product novelty, and social media influence and impulse buying. By testing the research propositions against multi-source literature, several conclusions emerge that are discussed below and contrasted with prior evidence.

1.Hedonic value elevates impulse buying through affective immersion.

Yu (2025) reveals that the uncertainty embedded in blind box consumption stimulates emotional arousal and sensory excitement, allowing pleasure-driven motivations to surpass rational evaluations. The anticipation of surprise and the thrill of discovery transform routine purchases into affective experiences that reinforce impulsive tendencies. Similarly, Chen (2025) argues that consumers of the " Z Era " pursue emotional satisfaction and playful interaction over utility, as blind box designs, narrative themes, and collectible aesthetics immerse them in hedonic enjoyment. This emotional immersion enhances short-term decision impulses and drives spontaneous, emotionally charged buying behavior.

2.Limited editions intensify urgency and heighten anticipated emotion.

Phonthanukitithaworn et al. (2023) demonstrate that exclusivity cues generate perceived scarcity that compresses deliberation windows and pushes consumers toward accelerated decisions, a mechanism amplified by time-bound drops and randomized allocation in blind boxes. Charoenwiwatchai (2024) documents fear-of-missing-out dynamics among Chinese buyers, showing that failure to secure rare pulls produces tension that feeds renewed participation, thereby creating an emotional cycle in which scarcity signals elevate expectation and propel spur-of-the-moment purchases.

3.Product novelty sustains arousal and catalyzes impulsive choice.

Wang (2023) notes that continual refresh of characters and artist collaborations maintains perceived uniqueness, which keeps attention high and primes purchase readiness even without prior plans. Saengchai, Thaiprayoon, and Jermsittiparsert (2022), using the S-O-R lens, show that novel visual and design stimuli act as external triggers that elevate internal arousal before rational evaluation, matching Pop Mart 's cadence of launches that link surprise aesthetics to quick ownership intentions.

4.Social media transforms excitement into action through contagion and validation.

Sun and Chen (2023) find that curated unboxing content and peer displays normalize emotion-driven purchase scripts among youth, who internalize others ' reactions as their own desired states, blurring observation and participation. Tan (2024) integrates TPB to show that influencer cues and peer recommendations not only inform but alter internal affect, creating tension between instant gratification and perceived value that resolves in rapid buying, which is then reinforced by sharing and feedback loops.

5.Anticipated emotion operates as the pivotal conduit from stimuli to behavior.

Zhang (2024) emphasizes that anticipated emotion serves as the psychological bridge linking external marketing stimuli to consumer action, as the uncertainty and scarcity of blind boxes elicit imagined excitement and reward before purchase. This mental simulation transforms curiosity into emotional preparedness, increasing the immediacy of buying responses. Similarly, Fan and Wang (2023) demonstrate that the expectation of positive emotional outcomes — such as joy, surprise, and satisfaction — significantly mediates the relationship between product appeal and impulsive purchasing. Their findings confirm that anticipated emotion functions as a pivotal mechanism converting marketing cues into rapid, affect-driven buying behavior.

6.Verification of Mediation Effects

Haizhi (2023) found that the release of new products can enhance consumers ' psychological simulation experiences, thereby increasing the sense of urgency and the level of satisfaction in their purchasing decisions. Zhu (2023) further pointed out that social media amplifies the joy and disappointment associated with blind box consumption into a form of public performance, transforming anticipation into a collective emotional state that sustains the foundation of impulsive buying behavior.

8.2 Theoretical implications

The study enhances consumption theory by proposing an affect-centered pathway where hedonic shopping values, credible rarity signals, product novelty, and social influence converge to create an anticipatory emotional state. This state, in turn, drives impulsive buying behavior. By linking appraisal-based emotional responses, affective forecasting, and the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model, the research offers an integrated, empirically verified account that connects market stimuli to consumer choice. The study shows that anticipated emotion mediates the impact of multiple factors, including scarcity, novelty, and social proof, on impulse buying, presenting a unified mechanism rather than separate, unrelated pathways. It also highlights the distinctiveness of constructs such as scarcity narratives and creator endorsements, which produce similar outcomes through the shared emotional mechanism. This theoretical framework contributes to experiential marketing by clarifying that pleasure-seeking, novelty, social proof, and limited edition preferences are not redundant but distinct factors that retain unique variance, even within a single consumption system. By addressing the nuances of cue competition theories, the findings suggest that scarcity efficiently triggers emotional

arousal, while novelty and social proof sustain attention and confidence, with hedonic mood setting the stage for a smoother decision-making process. This layered approach refines impulse buying models, promoting a view of emotional buildup as a sequence of stages rather than a singular moment of impulsivity.

8.3 Managerial implications

The evidence implies that firms outperform rivals not by piling on surprise indiscriminately but by curating an emotionally intelligent journey that begins with credible rarity, continues with narrative enriched novelty, is amplified by authentic social demonstration, and culminates in a conversion moment that is smooth yet safeguarded by trust preserving frictions, so managers should treat release planning as a seasonal arc that extends curiosity through artwork previews and behind the scenes diaries, synchronizes peak attention with timed creator sessions or city gatherings, and sustains payoff through collection quests and trading nights, while ensuring that probability disclosure, restock windows, and stock signals are accurate, auditable, and presented inside the purchase interface to prevent cynicism and regret. Creator partnerships deliver the largest return when selection favors domain expertise and community stewardship rather than exaggerated hype, which means briefing hosts on content guidelines that model responsible collecting, aligning thumbnails and captions with authentic product experience, and monitoring arousal and sentiment metrics to tune pacing rather than to inflate claims; platform data on wish lists, missing pieces, viewing duration, and sharing events can flow into relationship rules that surface timely nudges, bundle suggestions, and loyalty boosts, but the same system should trigger calm choice prompts, spend reminders, and optional cool down confirmations for younger or high risk consumers so that enthusiasm translates into durable attachment rather than short lived spikes followed by backlash. Operational teams can adopt experiment led governance in which cohorts receive different intervals of reveal, different mixes of creators, and different checkout safeguards, with uplift judged on repeat rate, reported regret, complaint incidence, and resale dispersion, and with a quarterly transparency brief that reports odds stability, integrity audits, and resolution timelines to strengthen legitimacy with regulators and

collaborators; design teams can intensify novelty through rotating artist collaborations and regional motifs anchored to cultural calendars while preserving fairness through reissue rights for common items and organized swap events for rare items, converting frustration into participation.

8.4 Limitations and future research

Although the evidence is informative, the study faces scope and method constraints: the sample was drawn from urban Beijing collectors and buyers, which narrows external validity across rural areas, older cohorts, and overseas markets, suggesting future work should incorporate multi city panels and cross cultural samples to test invariance. The cross sectional design cannot capture how anticipation rises and decays across release cycles, so longitudinal tracking and field experiments that randomize scarcity cues, reveal pacing, influencer exposure, and checkout frictions would sharpen causal inference. Measurement relied on self reports; linking surveys with transaction logs, unboxing uploads, and clickstream records would reduce bias, while biosignal or gaze based indicators could map arousal during key micro moments. The model centered on anticipated emotion; additional mediators and moderators including regret proneness, self control, materialism, scarcity skepticism, social identity, and price sensitivity should be tested to specify boundary conditions and heterogeneity. Future work could also examine ethical guardrails and policy transparency tools, estimating their effects on enthusiasm, regret, and loyalty within mystery merchandise ecosystems.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors confirm that there are no financial or personal interests that could have biased the outcomes ofthis study.

Data Availability

All data utilized in this research remain confidential and cannot be shared publicly.

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