



**FACTORS, MEDIATORS AND MODERATORS MITIGATING IMPULSIVE
BUYING BEHAVIOR OF BLIND BOXES IN CHINA**

By

GONG XIYUN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

September 2024

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2024

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In recent years, blind box products become the largest pop toy segment in China, particularly popular among young consumers, leading to increasing impulsive buying behaviors. These products resemble gambling items and present four key issues: First, questionable transparency in probability settings by merchants. Second, young consumers are curious and lack self-control. Third, the government's policy on blind boxes is currently lacking. Fourth, limited application of Dual-System Theory (DST) in understanding impulsive purchases. To date, the empirical research on blind boxes is still in its early stages and requires more research to fill the gap.

This study examines the mechanisms behind the impulsive buying behavior of blind box products in China to reduce consumers' impulsive buying behavior. Thus, this study mainly explores the impulsive buying behavior mechanism from two perspectives: curiosity and self-control. First, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model was applied to explore the relationship between curiosity and the antecedents of impulsive buying, and the effect sizes of the antecedents were compared. Second,

by integrating DST with the SOR model, this study examines whether curiosity mediates the relationships between fashion involvement, store atmosphere, perceived novelty, and surprise—each potentially diminishing self-control. Third, explore the negative impact of the cold system process centred on self-control on impulsive buying behaviour, use goals conflict, self-monitoring and mindfulness as a new innovative combination to fill the current gap with the antecedent of self-control. Meanwhile, compare the effect size relationship of these three antecedents. Fourth, the study tests whether self-control mediates the link between curiosity and impulsive buying behavior. The fifth and sixth objectives are to examine the negative moderating effects of price consciousness/low perceived luck on curiosity and impulsive buying and the negative relationship between self-control and impulsive buying by adopting the adaptation level theory and optimism theory, respectively. In addition, data was collected by the purposive sampling (most of the respondents from the online blind box topic searching way) approach through an online questionnaire to determine whether the Chinese consumers born after 1979 who purchase blind boxes at least annually. Responses from 487 participants were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Furthermore, this study yielded six noteworthy findings: 1) Fashion involvement is unrelated to curiosity; the main curiosity drivers are perceived novelty, surprise, and store atmosphere, with product characteristics as the dominant factor; 2) Among all the antecedents of curiosity, only fashion involvement cannot negatively affect self-control through curiosity; 3) Goals conflict is not an antecedent of self-control, as collectors show minimal conflict; self-monitoring influences self-control more significantly than mindfulness; 4) In the dual system based on this context, the hot

system is affected better than the cold system, and curiosity is negatively related to self-control; 5) and 6) Low perceived luck has a negative regulatory between curiosity and impulse buying behavior and positive regulatory effect between self-control and impulse buying behavior, while price consciousness has no effect. Apart from advancing the literature, this study offers significant contributions to consumers, merchants, the government, and scholars who study addictive behaviors.

Keywords: Blind Box, Buying, Curiosity, Impulsive Buying Behavior, Purchasing, Self-control

SDG: GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**FAKTOR, MEDIATOR DAN MODERATOR MENGURANGKAN
PEMBELIAN IMPULSIF KOTAK BUTA DI CHINA**

Oleh

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Dalam beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, produk *blind box* menjadi segmen mainan pop terbesar di China, terutamanya popular di kalangan pengguna muda, yang membawa kepada peningkatan tingkah laku pembelian impulsif. Produk ini menyerupai item perjudian dan mengemukakan empat isu utama: Pertama, ketelusan yang boleh dipersoalkan dalam tetapan kebarangkalian oleh pedagang. Kedua, pengguna muda ingin tahu dan kurang kawalan diri. Ketiga, dasar kerajaan mengenai *blind box* pada masa ini kurang. Keempat, aplikasi terhad teori dwi-sistem dalam memahami pembelian impulsif. Sehingga kini, kajian empirikal mengenai *blind box* masih di peringkat awal dan memerlukan lebih banyak kajian untuk mengisi jurang tersebut.

Kajian ini mengkaji mekanisme di sebalik tingkah laku pembelian impulsif *blind box* buta di China untuk mengurangkan tingkah laku pembelian impulsif pengguna. Kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka mekanisme tingkah laku pembelian impulsif dari dua perspektif: rasa ingin tahu dan kawalan diri. Pertama, model stimulus-organism-

response (SOR) digunakan untuk meneroka hubungan antara rasa ingin tahu dan anteseden pembelian impulsif, dan saiz kesan anteseden telah dibandingkan. Kedua, dengan menyepadukan teori dwi-sistem dengan model SOR, kajian ini mengkaji sama ada rasa ingin tahu mengantara hubungan antara penglibatan fesyen, suasana kedai, kebaruan yang dirasakan, dan kejutan-masing-masing berpotensi mengurangkan kawalan diri. Ketiga, terokai kesan negatif proses sistem sejuk yang berpusat pada kawalan sendiri terhadap tingkah laku pembelian impulsif, menggunakan konflik matlamat, pemantauan sendiri dan kesedaran sebagai gabungan inovatif baharu untuk mengisi jurang semasa dengan anteseden kawalan diri. Sementara itu, perbandingan hubungan saiz kesan ketiga-tiga anteseden ini. Keempat, kajian menguji sama ada kawalan diri menjadi pengantara hubungan antara rasa ingin tahu dan tingkah laku pembelian impulsif. Objektif kelima dan keenam adalah untuk mengkaji kesan penyederhanaan negatif kesedaran harga/tuah yang dirasakan rendah terhadap rasa ingin tahu dan pembelian impulsif dan hubungan negatif antara kawalan sendiri dan pembelian impulsif dengan mengguna pakai teori tahap penyesuaian dan teori optimisme, masing-masing. Selain itu, data dikumpul melalui pendekatan persampelan bertujuan (kebanyakan responden daripada cara pencarian topik kotak buta dalam talian) melalui soal selidik dalam talian untuk menentukan sama ada pengguna Cina yang lahir selepas 1979 yang membeli kotak buta sekurang-kurangnya setiap tahun. Maklum balas daripada 487 peserta telah dianalisis menggunakan *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM).

Kajian ini menghasilkan enam penemuan penting: 1) Penglibatan fesyen tidak berkaitan dengan rasa ingin tahu; pemacu rasa ingin tahu utama adalah dianggap kebaruan, kejutan, dan suasana kedai, dengan ciri produk sebagai faktor dominan;

2) Di antara semua anteseden rasa ingin tahu, hanya penglibatan fesyen tidak boleh menjejaskan kawalan diri secara negatif melalui rasa ingin tahu; 3) Konflik matlamat bukanlah anteseden kawalan diri, kerana pengumpul menunjukkan konflik yang minimum; pemantauan diri mempengaruhi kawalan diri dengan lebih ketara daripada kesedaran; 4) Dalam sistem dwi berdasarkan konteks ini, sistem panas dipengaruhi lebih baik daripada sistem sejuk, dan rasa ingin tahu berkaitan secara negatif dengan kawalan diri; 5) dan 6) Tuah yang dianggap rendah mempunyai kawal selia negatif antara rasa ingin tahu dan tingkah laku pembelian impuls dan kesan pengawalseliaan positif antara kawalan sendiri dan tingkah laku pembelian impuls, manakala kesedaran harga tidak mempunyai kesan. Selain itu, kajian ini menawarkan sumbangan yang besar kepada pengguna, peniaga, kerajaan, dan sarjana yang mengkaji tingkah laku ketagihan.

Kata Kunci: Blind Box, Membeli, Rasa ingin tahu, Tingkah Laku Membeli Impulsif, Pembelian, Kawalan diri

SDG: MATLAMAT 9: Industri, Inovasi dan Infrastruktur, MATLAMAT 12: Penggunaan dan Pengeluaran Bertanggungjawab

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“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade” – Elbert Hubbard

Whenever I face challenges, this quote inspires me to keep going. Pursuing PhD is a long journey with ups and downs. It is just like when life gives us lemons, we learn to make wonderful lemonade—turning the opportunity into success. After all, no challenge, no progress. However, hard work alone is not enough. Without the support of many people, I would not have been able to achieve this PhD. I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has been there for me throughout this journey.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ABSTRAK	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
APPROVAL	ix
DECLARATION	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xvii
LIST OF FIGURES	xix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xx
 CHAPTER	
 1 INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the Study	1
1.3 Problem Statement	8
1.4 Research Questions	14
1.5 Objective of the Study	15
1.6 Significance of the Study	16
1.6.1 Theoretical Significance	16
1.6.2 Practical Significance	18
1.7 Scope of the Study	20
1.8 Definitions of Terms	21
1.9 Organization of Thesis	23
1.10 Chapter Summary	23
 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	 24
2.1 Introduction	24
2.2 The Characteristics of Blind Boxes	24
2.3 Blind Box Brand Classification	26
2.4 Theories and Prior Research on the Similar Blind Boxes	27
Buying Industry and Reduced Impulse Behavior	27
2.4.1 Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Model	27
2.4.2 Information Gap Theory	30
2.4.3 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	32
2.4.4 The Dual Systems Theory (DST)	34
2.4.5 Key Highlights on Theories in the Toy Buying	37
Industry and Reduced Impulse Behavior	37
2.5 Impulsive Buying Behavior	38
2.6 The Concept of Mediating Variables	41
2.6.1 Curiosity	41
2.6.2 Self-Control	43
2.7 Stimulus Variables of the Curiosity	45
2.7.1 Fashion Involvement	45
2.7.2 Store Atmosphere	47

2.7.3	Perceived Novelty	49
2.7.4	Surprise	51
2.8	Predictors Variables of the Self-Control	53
2.8.1	Goals Conflict	53
2.8.2	Self-Monitoring	54
2.8.3	Mindfulness	56
2.9	The Concept of Moderator Variables	58
2.9.1	Perceived Luck	58
2.10	Price Consciousness	60
2.11	Research Gaps	61
2.12	Chapter Summary	62
3	RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT	65
3.1	Introduction	65
3.2	Underpinning Theory: Dual System Theory	65
3.3	Supporting Theories	66
3.3.1	Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model	66
3.3.2	Optimism Theory	67
3.3.3	Adaptation Level Theory	69
3.4	Research Framework	70
3.5	Hypotheses Development	74
3.5.1	Fashion Involvement and Curiosity	74
3.5.2	Store Atmosphere and Curiosity	75
3.5.3	Perceived Novelty and Curiosity	76
3.5.4	Surprise and Curiosity	78
3.5.5	Goals Conflict and Self-Control	79
3.5.6	Self-Monitoring and Self-Control	80
3.5.7	Mindfulness and Self-Control	82
3.5.8	Curiosity and Impulsive Buying Behavior	83
3.5.9	Self-Control and Impulsive Buying Behavior	84
3.5.10	Moderating Role of Perceived Luck	85
3.5.11	Moderating Role of Price Consciousness	86
3.5.12	Mediating Role of Curiosity between Fashion Involvement, Store Atmosphere, Perceived Novelty, Surprise and Impulsive Buying	88
3.5.13	Mediating Role of Self-Control between Goals Conflict, Self-Monitoring, Mindfulness and Impulsive Buying Behavior	90
3.5.14	Mediating Role of Self-Control between Curiosity and Impulsive Buying Behavior	93
3.5.15	Mediating Role of Curiosity between Fashion Involvement, Store Atmosphere, Perceived Novelty, Surprise, and Self-Control	94
3.5.16	Curiosity and Self-Control	96
3.6	Overall Proposed Hypotheses	97
3.7	Chapter Summary	99

4	METHODOLOGY	100
4.1	Introduction	100
4.2	Research Design	100
4.3	Population of Study	101
4.4	Sample Size	103
4.5	Sampling Techniques	105
4.6	Data Collection Method	107
4.7	Research Instrument	110
	4.7.1 Development of Question	110
	4.7.2 Demographic Questions	111
	4.7.3 Measurement Scales for Constructs	112
4.8	Pre-Test and Pilot Test	117
4.9	Data Analysis Method	124
	4.9.1 Preparation of Data	125
	4.9.2 Reasons for using PLS for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)	127
	4.9.3 Measurement Model	130
	4.9.4 Structural Model	133
	4.9.5 Assessment of Moderating and Mediating Impacts	137
4.10	Summary	138
5	FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS RESULTS	139
5.1	Introduction	139
5.2	Data Preparation	139
	5.2.1 Data Screening	140
	5.2.2 Common Method Variance (CMV)	140
5.3	Respondent Profile	142
5.4	Respondent Buying Brand and Frequency	143
5.5	Assessment of Reflective Measurement Model	144
	5.5.1 Assessment of Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity of Reflective-Item Model	145
	5.5.2 Assessment of Discriminant Validity	147
5.6	Descriptive and Multivariate Normality Analyses	149
5.7	Structural Model Analyses	151
	5.7.1 Assessment of Collinearity	151
	5.7.2 Assessment the Path Co-Efficient	154
	5.7.3 Assessment the Level of R^2	154
	5.7.4 Assessment the Level of f^2	155
	5.7.5 Assessment the Predictive Relevance (Q^2)	156
5.8	Assessment of Mediation Effect	156
5.9	Assessment of Moderation Effect	158
5.10	Overall Hypotheses Results	160
5.11	Summary	162
6	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	163
6.1	Introduction	163
6.2	Discussion of the Main Findings	163
6.3	Theoretical Contributions	174

6.4	Practical Contributions	177
6.4.1	Consumers	177
6.4.2	Merchants	178
6.4.3	Government	179
6.4.4	Scholars Who Study Addictive Behaviors	181
6.5	Limitations of the Study and Recommendation	182
6.6	Conclusion	184
REFERENCES		186
APPENDICES		243
BIODATA OF STUDENT		248
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS		249



LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1.1 Revenue of the toys & games market worldwide by Top 5 countries in 2023 (in billion US dollars)	2
1.2 Pop toy market size from 2019 to 2022 and Total revenue of the global toys market (in billion US dollars)	2
1.3 The difference between pop toys and traditional toys	3
1.4 China Government policy about the blind boxes	9
1.5 Definition of the terms	22
2.1 Top 10 Blind Box Brands in 2023	27
3.1 List of hypotheses development	98
4.1 Age distribution of blind boxes products	101
4.2 Sample size power	104
4.3 Strength and limitation of non-probability sampling	106
4.4 List of measurement table for each variable	113
4.5 Relevance and clarity of the statement with each item by rating	118
4.6 Content validity index for the scale	120
4.7 Result of Reliability Test (Pilot Data)	124
4.8 Guidelines for (CB-SEM) and (PLS-SEM)	128
4.9 Conclusion of Indices for Measurement Model	133
4.10 Conclusion of Indices for Structural Model	136
5.1 Full collinearity assessment Results	141
5.2 Demographic profile (n=487)	143
5.3 Respondent buying brand	144
5.4 Respondent buying frequency each year	144
5.5 Assessment of measurement model	146
5.6 Discriminant validity (HTMT criterion)	148

5.7	Results of descriptive analysis	150
5.8	Structural model assessment	153
5.9	Assessment of mediating effect	157
5.10	Assessment of moderating effect	159
5.11	Summary of Hypotheses Testing	161



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1 Market size of the pop toy industry in China from 2017 to 2021 with forecasts until 2026, by product type (in billion yuan)	5
1.2 Market share of major pop according to brands in China in 2021	6
1.3 Customers stroll around the POP MART global flagship store on Nanjing Road in Shanghai on August 7, 2023	7
2.1 The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Model	28
3.1 Theoretical Framework	72
3.2 Proposed Framework	73
4.1 The present model statistical	104
4.2 The statistical model in PLS-SEM	130
5.1 Five-step structural model assessment	151
5.2 Curiosity*Perceived Luck focus interaction plot	159
5.3 Self-control*Perceived Luck focus interaction plot	160

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

S-O-R Model	Stimulus-Organism-Response Model
DST	Dual System Theory
FI	Fashion Involvement
SA	Store Atmosphere
PN	Perceived Novelty
SUR	Surprise
CUR	Curiosity
GC	Goals Conflict
SM	Self-monitoring
SC	Self-control
MD	Mindfulness
PL	Perceived Luck
IBB	Impulsive Buying Behavior
PC	Price Consciousness
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling
SPSS	Statistical Package of Social Science
CMV	Common Method Variance
CR	Composite Reliability
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of Correlations
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CVI	Content Validity Index
I-CVI	Item content validity index
S-CVI	Scale content validity index

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the context of creating blind box products, this chapter explores the factors that lead to impulsive buying behaviors in mediating variables like curiosity and self-control. Firstly, this chapter provides the study's context and suggests a problem statement, research statement, and objectives. Finally, a conclusion is reached after the study's scope and definitions of terms have been introduced.

1.2 Background of the Study

In terms of revenue, based on 2023 data of the entire global toys and games market, the United States ranks first globally with an annual income of USD 38.51 billion. China's revenue follows second with USD 17.31 billion. Although China's yearly revenue is less than half that of the United States, its growth rate exceeds that of the United States. Based on data from another report, the forecast revenue of the toys and games market in China and the United States in 2028 is USD 22 billion and USD 46.3 billion (Statista, 2023f). This implies that their five-year growth rates are 27.09% and 20.23%, respectively. Accordingly, the data predicts that China will have the highest growth rate.

Table 1.1 : Revenue of the toys & games market worldwide by Top 5 countries in 2023 (in billion US dollars)

Country	Toys & games market (billion US dollars)
United States	38.51
China	17.31
Japan	6.29
Germany	5.6
United Kingdom	5.21

(Source: Statista, 2024a)

At the same time, cultural and creative industries are increasing worldwide, and they play an increasingly vital role in world economic development. As Table 1.2 presents, from 2019 to 2022, the total toy market grew by USD 15.4 billion. However, the market size of pop toys has climbed from 21.52% (USD 19.8 billion) in 2019 to 29.05% (USD 31.2 billion) in 2022. From this, the increased revenue of the pop toy market size from 2019 to 2022 contributes 74% to the total toy market. In addition, this also suggests that the pop toy market has great development potential.

Table 1.2 : Pop toy market size from 2019 to 2022 and Total revenue of the global toys market (in billion US dollars)

Year	Pop toy market size (in billion US dollars)	Total revenue of the global toys market (in billion US dollars)
2019	19.8	92
2020	20.3	97.3
2021	25.9	105.8
2022	31.2	107.4

(Source: Statista, 2024b,2024c)

Pop toys and traditional toys have some differences, which will be discussed below in three aspects. Pop toys, also called art toys or designer toys, are toys and collectibles created by artists and designers and typically sold in limited editions (Xinhuanet, 2023a). It is based on a trend culture designed by designers and artists to integrate

paintings and sculptures. Meanwhile, the Frost and Sullivan Report defines pop toys as infused with trend culture and fashion content (Xinhuanet, 2023a). However, pop and traditional toys have some differences, which will be discussed below in three aspects.

Table 1.3 : The difference between pop toys and traditional toys

	Target Audience	Function and utility	Embedded Value
Pop toy	Trendy young crowd	Aesthetic attributes, collection value, social value and emotional value	Secondary sale and auction value
Traditional Toy	Children and Teenagers	Puzzle play	Low value-adding and generally sales one-time

(Source: Xinhuanet, 2023a)

First, the target audience is different. The target group of the pop toys is the trendy young crowd, while the target group of traditional toys is children and teenagers. Thus, traditional toys are primarily sold through large toy stores, shopping malls, and other places where children gather (Xinhuanet, 2023a). In contrast, pop toys are sold through exhibitions, company stores, unmanned vending machines, online, and other channels.

Second, the functions and utility are different. Pop toys are closer to decorative arts. Therefore, consumers focus on these toys' aesthetic attributes and collection value. Occasionally, they use pop toy to express their personality and attitude and then share emotional value with people in society. Compared with pop toys, traditional toys have more playability and puzzle properties. They are often sold in large quantities with limited collection value (Xinhuanet,2023a). Since pop toys contain more value, from the view of company revenue, the profit margins of pop toys far exceed those of the

traditional toy industry.

Third, the design concepts are different. Pop toys usually have unique designs and aesthetics (Sun et al., 2024). They are based on cultural, and entertainment intellectual property created by artists or licensed from movies, animations, cartoons, and game characters. At the same time, Artists express art content via pop toy works and establish positive emotional connections with fans (Hu et al., 2024). Thus, intellectual property is one of the main factors that consumers consider when purchasing top toys.

In general, pop toys span various product categories, including blind boxes, action figures, garage kits, and adult construction toys. In particular, blind boxes have accounted for the largest share of toys in the detailed market classification of pop toys in the past three years.

Therefore, what is a blind box? Blind boxes are one of the pop toys. The concept of blind boxes originated in Japan. It refers to a toy box where consumers cannot know the product style in advance and has random properties (Duan et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022a). In addition, consumers are attracted by its cute appearance and randomness (Hill et al., 2016). Notably, blind boxes are increasing dramatically among people born in the mid-90s and early '00s, in which this generation of consumers pursues novelty and excitement (Zhang et al., 2022a).

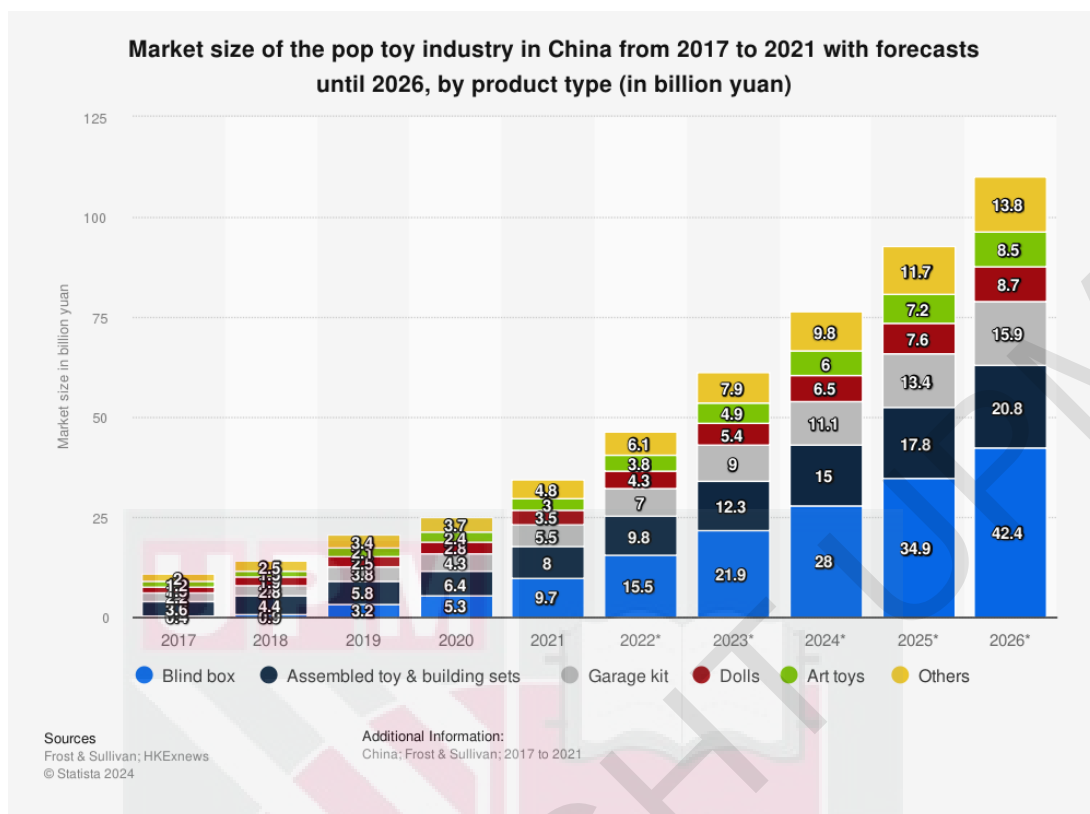


Figure 1.1 : Market size of the pop toy industry in China from 2017 to 2021 with forecasts until 2026, by product type (in billion yuan)
(Source: Statista, 2024d)

It can be observed from Figure 1.1 that the market size of blind boxes in the pop toy industry in China climbed is a leap from the last place among all categories in 2017 with RMB 0.4 billion yuan (USD 55.01 million) to first place among all categories in 2021 with RMB 9.7 billion yuan (USD 133.4 million). Furthermore, by the end of 2026, the market size will have nearly doubled compared with 2023. Judging from the growth trend in recent years, the blind box market will continue to expand and is expected to exceed RMB 42.4 billion yuan (USD 5890.36 million) in 2026.

The blind box strategy is frequently employed across various products to boost sales. Take luxury brand Lanvin, for example, launched a Valentine's Day campaign themed on the blind box concept on the Chinese social media platform WeChat. In particular,

the campaign attracted over 50,000 consumers within a month and garnered more than five times the average daily views of its articles on the platform (Mvondo et al., 2023). Similarly, Tmall, an Alibaba Group subsidiary spun off from Taobao and based in China, calculated that 200,000 customers spend more than USD 3100 a year on blind boxes (Mvondo et al., 2023).

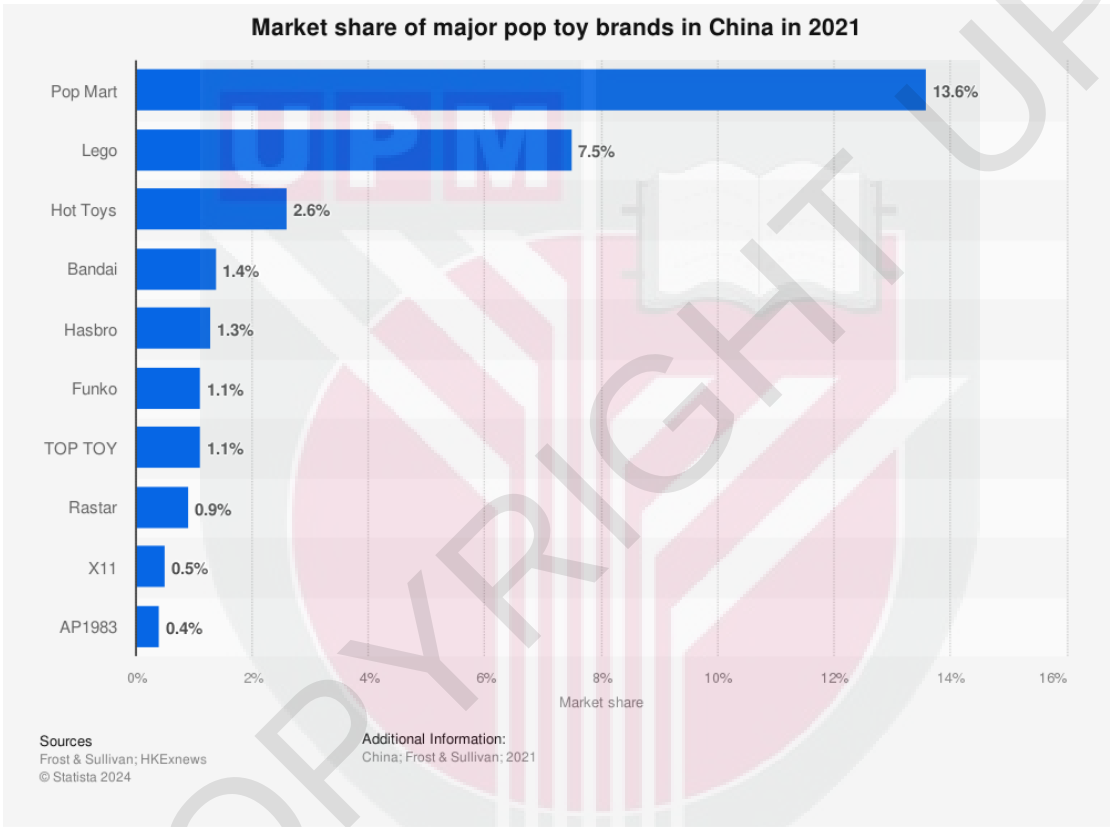


Figure 1.2 : Market share of major pop according to brands in China in 2021
(Source: Statista, 2024e)

POP MART has 340 offline stores in mainland China, 2,185 robot stores, 55 stores in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas (including joint ventures), and 143 “roboshops” (Xinhuanet,2023a). Remarkably, the number of cross-border e-commerce platform sites reached 28, and POP MART has become one of the most prominent and fastest-growing fashion toy companies in China (Xinhuanet,2023a).



Figure 1.3 : Customers stroll around the POP MART global flagship store on Nanjing Road in Shanghai on August 7, 2023

Regarding the consumer channel, POP MART has a complete sales network, including retail stores, robot stores, online channels, and trendy toy exhibitions, to name a few. It has also created an omnichannel membership operation. As such, the company's total number of registered members continues to expand. As of 2023, in June, the total number of registered POP MART members exceeded 30 million, contributing 92.2% of sales in the first half of 2023 (Xinhuanet, 2023a).

To sum up, pop toys currently generate at least one-fifth of the global toy market revenue. Among all countries, the Chinese market has the most significant growth rate, and blind boxes are expected to account for approximately 40% of the pop toy market in 2026. Among the blind box brand buyers, POP MART is the most representative. China's blind box market is representative and has great potential.

1.3 Problem Statement

The problem statement in this chapter will be developed into two perspectives: an industry perspective and a research framework.

From the angle of industry bottlenecks, in 2021, the China Consumers Association highlighted several issues in the blind box market. This includes excessive business marketing, the ease with which consumers become addicted to buying blind boxes, and allegations of false advertising, where the products consumers received did not match the promotional claims (CCTV News, 2021). Furthermore, some businesses deliberately lower the odds of winning certain products, continuously encouraging consumers to overspend. Blind box marketing taps into consumers' curiosity and desire for novelty (People's Daily, 2022a). However, even with a reduced probability of winning, consumers who feel lucky remain eager to keep purchasing the blind boxes. In addition, some businesses exploit the psychology of impulsive buying by exaggerating the appeal of blind boxes, leading some customers to fall into the trap of being "taken advantage of" (People's Daily, 2021a). According to China's daily report in 2021, one customer's most "extreme" blind box shopping experience occurred when, one time, she headed straight to POP MART blind box shop and picked out 80 blind boxes in one go, spending over RMB 4,000. However, she realized that the total amount she had spent on blind boxes could equal the cost of buying a mid-range car. Despite that, this is common among blind box enthusiasts (People's Daily, 2021b). As such, consumers are captivated by the uncertainty and surprise of the blind boxes, which promotes impulsive purchases (People's Daily, 2021c).

Furthermore, young people tend to have relatively weaker self-control and are more susceptible to being influenced by irrational spending. Some young consumers invest money in blind boxes purely out of curiosity or blind conformity, often ending up with products that do not match their expected value (People's Daily, 2021d). Notably, some adults also find it difficult to make rational consumption of blind boxes choices based on their financial capacity, needs, and interests (People's Daily, 2022a). Therefore, this is a concern that deserves attention.

In recent years, the Chinese government has implemented several policies to regulate the blind box market, as indicated in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4 : China Government policy about the blind boxes

Policy name	Date	Promulgating subject	Point
Compliance Guidelines for Business Activities of Blind Boxes in Shanghai	2022-01	Shanghai Municipal Administration for Market Regulation, PRC	No blind box can be sold to a minor below the age of 8.
Standardized Guidelines for Blind Box Business Activities (Trial) (Draft for Comments)	2022-8	State Administration for Market Regulation, PRC	Products sold in the blind box form of the stores must be comprehensively adjusted in terms of business qualifications, product content, sales formats, and sales targets and operated in compliance with regulations to promote the blind box economy from barbaric growth to healthy development.
Improve the regulation of the blind-box industry	2023-6	State Administration for Market Regulation, PRC	The document, released by the State Administration for Market Regulation, banned some items from selling in these boxes, including medicine, medical equipment, live animals, and flammable and explosive objects.

(Source: peoplecn,2022; Xinhuanet,2023b; Xinhuanet,2022a)

Even though the Chinese government has formulated a series of policies to deal with the blind box issues, reflecting the seriousness and urgency of the problem of blind box sales. However, these policies are far from sufficient. Hence, this research needs to be conducted more in-depth to explore from consumers', companies', and governments' perspectives into blind boxes impulsive buying mechanism on the reduced side.

Despite the fact that the Chinese government has formulated a series of policies to deal with the blind box issues, reflecting the seriousness and urgency of the problem of blind box sales, these policies are far from sufficient. Hence, this research needs to be conducted more in-depth to explore from consumers', companies', and governments' perspectives into blind boxes impulsive buying mechanisms on the reduced side.

The news reports emphasize that curiosity and weak self-control drive impulsive purchases of blind boxes among young people. However, whether they have an impact is worth exploring from an empirical perspective. Moreover, whether these two aspects can inspire the government in policymaking is also unknown. In addition, it is worth exploring from an empirical perspective whether raising price awareness and reducing blind faith in luck could help mitigate impulsive consumer behavior. Thus, this study aims to double-check whether consumers and merchants who are in the reduced buying angle can obtain new thinking from these two perspectives. Therefore, we need to comprehensively study the mechanisms behind impulse buying and to reduce it.

To sum up, current research lacks the dual views of merchant promotions, and the government needs to regulate the impulse purchases of blind boxes to explore the mechanisms behind it comprehensively. This study combines the dual perspectives of self-control and customer curiosity to analyse and make specific expansions to the current research background.

Accordingly, the problem statement is discussed based on the research.

1. Research on blind box consumption is at its early stage. Most scholars analyze blind box impulse buying behavior from a phenomenal or theoretical point of view. However, the mechanism of blind box impulse buying must be supplemented by more empirical analysis (Zhang et al., 2022a). Additionally, there is a controversial debate regarding curiosity's origins, mechanisms, and goals as an exploratory behavior driven by intrinsic motivation (Kidd & Hayden, 2015; Murayama et al., 2019). Moreover, it remains unclear which has a greater impact, the influence of these factors or curiosity. Furthermore, studies of curiosity used in consumer behavior are scarce, and most current research focuses on how customers use curiosity to seek information (Hsee & Ruan, 2016; van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2007). Therefore, combining the characteristics of blind box products with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory to explore its stimulating front-end and back-end can fill the current gaps.
2. Loewenstein (1994) and Wiggin et al. (2014) believed that curiosity drives self-control failure. According to Bohannon (1896), curiosity is a sign of "defective self-control." Notably, curiosity can conflict with other intentions and desires, impair self-control, and make the decision-making process an additive hedonic modification of the appeal of alternative activities. Firstly, fashion involvement has been demonstrated to indirectly influence impulse buying through positive emotion (Joo Park et al., 2006; Han et al., 1991). Secondly, the atmosphere can motivate shoppers to shop longer and stimulate their exploratory shopping desires to satisfy customers' curiosity (Donovan et al., 1994; Triantafillidou et al., 2017; Yim, 2017). Consequently, there is the perceived novelty. Surprise

can stimulate curiosity, whether it is classic or contemporary research (Loewenstein, 1994; Vogl et al., 2019). Furthermore, when someone opens a blind box, they should first feel surprised, as this emotion is generated before curiosity (Berlyne, 1960, 1954; D'Mello & Graesser, 2012). In short, whether curiosity mediates between these driving variables and self-control warrants further research in the context of blind box impulse purchases.

3. The antecedents of self-control belong to the cold system part of the Dual System Theory (DST), which is more rational and slower than other fast and impulsive systems (Stanovich & West, 2000). Furthermore, goals conflict and self-monitoring are components of self-control, representing the standard and detection process of self-control, respectively (Baumeister, 2002). Note that consumers who lack clearer goals will more probability decrease self-control (Robert & Manilis, 2002). In addition, enhancements in self-monitoring will actively boost self-control capacities when self-control resources are limited, resulting in altered consumption behaviors (Baumeister, 2002; Carter et al., 2012). As for mindfulness, practicing mindfulness is often viewed as a form of self-monitoring emphasizing conscious awareness and focusing on the present moment to escape unconscious consumption behaviors (Cheng et al., 2020). However, there are minimal studies on mindfulness in consumer impulse buying, and most current studies are on food consumption (Flavian et al., 2020; Hunecke & Richter, 2018). Therefore, the area of self-control mediating the self-monitoring, goals conflict, mindfulness, and impulse buying relationship applicability in the context of blind boxes is a new exploration. Additionally, comparing the effect sizes of these antecedents of self-control can help fill the existing research gap.
4. In psychology, dual system models have been distinguished based on their presumed cognitive basis. Refer to “hot” and “cold” processes to highlight quantitatively automatic control and hot emotions versus the cooler rational basis of deliberation (Stanovich & West, 2000). Among them, the first system is impulsive and automatic and is a reflex system of the brain. Therefore, it works rapidly. Meanwhile, the second system is reflective, conscious, and rational. Likewise, it works very slowly. However, scholars are currently

debating whether Systems 1 or 2 have a more significant effect on impulsive buying. Some scholars attribute impulsive buying mainly to the failure of self-control, while others believe that impulsive buying is mainly due to the influence of consumer emotions. Therefore, further research must be conducted to evaluate the components of this argument (Strack et al., 2006; Vohs & Faber, 2007). The relationship between curiosity and self-control has only been theoretically and qualitatively examined by scholars. In the most famous marshmallow experiment, children felt deprived when the marshmallow was too close to them. Moreover, deprivation can also lead to reduced self-control in adults. This example illustrates well how curiosity is a deprivation that affects the failure of self-control. In addition, current research emphasizes self-control in many empirical studies based on work background (Marvin et al., 2020) and neurobiological background (Wojtowicz & Loewenstein, 2020). Thus, scholars have only verified the relationship between curiosity and self-control theoretically and qualitatively, and there is no literature to assess the relationship between the two quantitatively (Hughes-Warrington, 2019; Kirk & Logue, 1997). Moreover, it lacks the marketing background points to assess them.

5. Perceived luck is a new quantitative variable that has appeared in marketing in recent years, especially in blind boxes, lotteries, and other similar fields (Qin et al., 2023). Previous studies have demonstrated that a sense of luck can trigger positive self-emotions, generate illusions of control, and increase individuals' risk-seeking tendencies in uncertain situations. Notably, there are few studies on the effect of perceived luck on consumer behavior in deterministic situations (Zhao & Zhong, 2022). How does perceived luck affect individual consumption behavior? Does perceived luck have a similar positive effect on all goods? These are real problems for business managers and marketers (Zhao & Zhong, 2022). Currently, perceived luck has been proven to positively moderate the relationship between perceived uncertainty on impulse insertion under blind box impulse purchases (Zhang et al., 2022a). However, does it correspond to curiosity, self-control, and impulse purchases? It is still awaiting the result of this research.

6. Price consciousness is defined as the extent to which customers are focused solely on obtaining low-priced goods or services. According to Choi and Kim (2007), as an effective promotional tool, price consciousness can improve consumers' price perception and has a moderating effect. Note that not all situations result in price consciousness controlling purchase intentions. Zheng et al. (2021) observed that price consciousness negatively moderates the relationship between purchase intention and actual purchase. Furthermore, Syahrivar et al.'s (2023) findings did not support the hypothesis that price consciousness mediates the relationship between purchase intention and the purchase of second-hand clothes. Based on the previous bottleneck in the industry, the government has currently controlled the price of blind box products. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this control is worth testing both theoretically and practically.

1.4 Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the mechanisms underlying triggers for blind-box impulse purchases to fill the research gaps mentioned in the previous section.

Accordingly, six distinct research questions were specifically addressed:

- 1a. Do fashion involvement, store atmosphere, perceived novelty, and surprise positively influence impulsive buying behavior via curiosity as the mediator?
- 1b. Among the positive relationships between fashion involvement, store atmosphere, perceived novelty, and surprise positively influencing impulsive buying behavior via curiosity, which factor has the greatest effect size?
2. Could curiosity mediate the relationship between fashion involvement, store atmosphere, perceived novelty, and surprise to inhibit self-control?
- 3a. Do self-monitoring, low goals conflict, and mindfulness positively influence impulsive buying behavior via self-control as the mediator?
- 3b. Among the relationships between self-monitoring, mindfulness, and goals conflict influencing impulsive buying behavior via self-control, which factor

has the greatest effect size?

4. Could self-control mediate the relationship between curiosity and impulsive buying behavior?
- 5a. Could low perceived luck weaken the relationship between curiosity and impulse buying?
- 5b. Could low perceived luck strengthen the relationship between self-control and impulse buying?
- 6a. Could high price consciousness weaken the relationship between curiosity and impulse buying?
- 6b. Could high price consciousness strengthen the relationship between self-control and impulse buying?

1.5 Objective of the Study

Therefore, the following objectives were created based on the information in the preceding chapters:

- 1a. To evaluate the positive correlation between fashion involvement, store atmosphere, perceived novelty, surprise, and impulsive buying behavior via curiosity.
- 1b. Among the positive correlations between fashion involvement, store atmosphere, perceived novelty, surprise, and impulsive buying behavior via curiosity, compare the effect sizes from large to small.
2. To evaluate curiosity as the mediator to inhibit the effect between fashion involvement, store atmosphere, perceived novelty, surprise, and self-control.
- 3a. To evaluate the positive correlation between low goals conflict, self-monitoring, mindfulness, and impulsive buying behavior via self-control.
- 3b. Among the relationships between goals conflict, self-monitoring, mindfulness, and impulsive buying behavior via self-control, compare the

effect sizes from large to small.

4. To evaluate self-control as the mediator between curiosity and impulsive buying behavior.
- 5a. To assess whether low perceived luck weakens the relationship between curiosity and impulse buying.
- 5b. To investigate whether low perceived luck strengthens the relationship between self-control and impulse buying, curiosity, and impulse buying behavior.
- 6a. To verify whether high price consciousness weakens the relationship between curiosity and impulse buying.
- 6b. To test whether high price consciousness strengthens the relationship between self-control and impulse buying, curiosity, and impulse buying behavior.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Theoretical and managerial parts of research that examine the purchase mechanism of blind-box impulse buying in China make significant contributions. The following subsections will provide additional details of each contribution.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This study advances theoretical viewpoints from four aspects.

First, this study regards DST as a supporting theory for exploring the mechanism behind blind box impulse buying behavior. As such, DST divides the entire framework into System 1, based on emotion, and System 2, based on rationality. System 1 combines the SOR model developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), explaining how environmental cues or psychosocial cues (also known as stimuli) cause customers

to experience emotional states (also known as organisms). This, in turn, leads to specific behavioral consequences (also known as reactions). Meanwhile, System 2 focuses on self-control to explore the operation process of System 2, a cold system. It was reported that System 1, based on emotion, is more dominant than System 2, based on rationality, in impulse buying behavior, which extends the DST.

Second, the SOR model explains how environmental or psychosocial cues (also known as stimuli) lead customers to experience emotional states (organisms). This, in turn, leads to specific behavioral consequences (also known as responses). In our study, store atmosphere, fashion involvement, perceived novelty, and surprise were employed as object organisms to trigger curiosity, and this curiosity was fully integrated into the organism's response to the first stimulus (i.e., objective stimulus). Furthermore, this research includes curiosity from psychology into the SOR model as the organism, consistent with the background of blind box impulse buying (Zhang et al., 2022a). In addition, it provides additional support for the study of the combination of psychology and marketing. Moreover, this study also provides some supplements to the ongoing debate on the basis, mechanism, and purpose of curiosity (Kidd & Hayden, 2015; Litman, 2005; Murayama et al., 2019).

Third, from the process of the cold system of System 2, the significance of antecedent variables related to self-control was studied. Previously, the relationship between mindfulness and self-control was mainly explored in psychology (Bowlin & Baer, 2012) and education (Suárez-García et al., 2020). However, only a few published materials on mindfulness and self-control in marketing exist. Thus, studying the relationship between mindfulness and self-control has contributed more to marketing.

Some studies have researched the relationship between goals conflict, self-monitoring, mindfulness and self-control separately. As such, the combination of these three variables provides some thoughts for exploring the antecedents of self-control and offers more perspectives on the current strength model of self-control (Baumeister, 2002).

Finally, the empirical research on blind box purchasing behavior is still in its infancy, and its impact has not yet been considered from the perspective of inhibition (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, most blind box research is examined from an enterprise viewpoint. Thus, this article offers adaptation level theory (Liu et al., 2023) and optimism theory (Zhang & Zhang, 2022) to explore the regulating effects of price consciousness and perceived luck, respectively, which have several advantages. First, it can further verify the feasibility of theoretical effects and backgrounds, such as theoretically testing the effectiveness of current price controls, and provide a certain reference for relevant governments and merchants. Second, it can assist researchers in considering the moderating variables that affect impulsive purchases from a negative perspective, filling the gap in blind box research.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

The following exposition's practical value will be revealed from four angles:

First, the impulse buying of the blind box provides buyers with some thinking. This study advises customers to learn about the mechanism behind impulsive buying behavior and similar gambling products. Furthermore, it helps to guide addicted-buying young consumers in terms of the self-control perspective and how consumers can improve their self-control, which is a meaningful perspective. In addition, this

study offers consumers more suggestions for thinking about similar buying behaviors from the perspective of perceived luck.

Secondly, this study also raises some questions for merchants. At present, there is a problem of over-marketing in the blind box market. From the perspective of DST, merchants should focus on attracting customers' curiosity and prioritize the quality of the product itself. In addition, some merchants deliberately manipulate the probability of winning a product, which can be considered from the perspective of perceived luck.

Thirdly, this study provides specific suggestions to the government. There are more than 20,000 complaints about blind box products in China in 2022 (Xinhuanet, 2022b). Although regulators have opened their eyes to China's blind box problems, some illegal practices in blind box sales persist. Thus, the government can start from the source of curiosity in the prohibition part. In addition, they can increase the intensity of management and control for the sources of blind box items. Moreover, they could include impulsive buying behavior blind box cases in television commercials, newspapers, and websites. This is to educate people about the trap behind probability products and be more rational about consumption.

Finally, this study offers insights for scholars studying impulsive or addictive buying behavior. Previous studies combined the dual system theories in the SOR model to explain the moderator variable. This research, which makes it innovative, includes the whole framework in up-and-down structures and uses dual system theories to explain the cold system part. Therefore, in the future, scholars could conduct more interdisciplinary research, such as mathematics, physics, and biology. In addition, it

can combine them with the latest metaverse theme and conduct more exciting explorations.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The primary scope of this study is to explore the mechanism behind blind box impulse buying from a consumer perspective. Note that blind box impulsive buying behavior explosively grew pre- and post-COVID-19 (Statista, 2024d). Prior to 2020, all blind box-related research was qualitative, and the number of empirical studies in the field of blind boxes was less than ten digits in 2023. Therefore, the blind box products field is completely new. The China Consumers Association highlighted issues such as excessive marketing by sellers and the tendency of consumers to become addicted in its report on the blind box market in 2021. Young people, with relatively weaker self-control, are captivated by the uncertainty and surprise of the blind boxes and, in high curiosity, are more prone to being influenced into irrational consumption. Although the government has introduced a series of policies to regulate blind boxes, it is insufficient. Based on the above information, there is still a need to explore reducing impulsive buying behavior and assessing the antecedents for curiosity and self-control. Hence, this study examines the environmental and psychological factors driving impulsive blind box purchases within the Chinese context. Notably, China ranked second globally in total toy industry revenues in 2023, with the pop toy market experiencing the most rapid growth. As the world's most populous nation, combining the former toy background with China's huge population has significantly contributed to the surge in impulsive blind box-buying behavior. As such, these factors are why this study selected China as the context for this research.

Data collection was conducted using a purposive sampling method. The respondents were blind box consumers who purchased at least once yearly. Meanwhile, most respondents have posted the time moment about their blind box purchases in physical stores on social media within the past six months by the collect day. Furthermore, 12 audiences were collected by intercepting them in shopping malls. Notably, researching individuals with blind box purchasing experience can offer valuable insights into the mechanisms behind impulsive blind box buying behavior. The respondents are between 15 and 44 years old in China. According to relevant literature, more than 200,000 consumers spent tens of thousands of yuan (USD 1390.96) on blind boxes in 2020, of which the post-1995 generation comprised the largest share (Zhang et al., 2022a). As for the post-90s, consumers' material conditions offer them more personalized consumer demands for novelty and stimulation (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, this work integrates DST (the hot and cold dual system) with the SOR model to explain the mechanisms behind impulsive blind box purchasing behavior. As explained by the SOR model, the hot system focuses on external mechanisms, primarily objective environmental factors and product characteristics, while the cold system emphasizes internal mechanisms. The findings of this research offer significant contributions to consumers, merchants, government bodies, and scholars, particularly in reducing impulsive blind box purchases.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

Altogether, 13 main concepts were applied throughout this study. Each term was operationalized based on meanings most appropriate for the context of blind box impulsive purchasing behavior. The detailed definitions are presented in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5 : Definition of the terms

No	Construct	Definition	Source
1	Blind box	A blind box refers to a toy box in which consumers cannot know the product style in advance and has random properties	(Zhang et al.,2022a)
2	Curiosity	Curiosity is an individual's psychological desire to explore novelty or the unknown things in the blind box.	(Zhang et al.,2022a)
3	Fashion Involvement	Fashion involvement is an individual variable and also a psychographic trait that affects customer processes by making the experience of co-creation emotionally appealing.	(Frasquet-Deltoro et al., 2019)
4	Store Atmosphere	It defined as the conscious effort to design retail environments (such as ambient or design) to produce specific emotional effects in the consumer that enhance purchase probability.	(Chang et al., 2014)
5	Perceived Novelty	Perceived novelty is defined as users' perception of the newness and freshness of the product that satisfies people's curiosity.	(Dang, 2020)
6	Surprise	Surprise is the feeling which arises from or is associated with unexpected things.	(Sharma&Nayak, 2019)
7	Self-control	Self-control is a personality trait driving individuals to convert from what they “want” to what they “should”	(Nghia et al., 2022)
8	Goals conflict	The pursuit of one goal begins to interfere with other goals.	(Roberts&Manolis, 2012)
9	Self-Monitoring	Self-monitoring is about the tendency to notice cues for socially appropriate behavior and modify one's behavior accordingly.	(Van Tonder&Petzer.,2022)
10	Mindfulness	Mindfulness is a receptive attention to and awareness of present events.	(Zeshan et al.,2022)
11	Impulsive buying behavior	Impulse buying is referred to as unplanned purchases, and this buying habit is a sudden decision.	(Rook&Fishert, 1995)
12	Perceived luck	Perceived luck reflects how someone feels about luck and is the customers' perception of luck in winning.	(Zhang et al., 2022a)
13	Price Consciousness	Price consciousness is defined as the degree to which the consumer focuses exclusively on paying a low price.	(Liu et al.,2013a; Alford&Biswas, 2002)

1.9 Organization of Thesis

There are six chapters in this thesis. In Chapter 1, the researcher discussed the research background and the problem statement for the study. Six research questions and six research objectives are proposed, along with the significance and scope of the study. In Chapter 2, the researcher conducts a comprehensive review of the literature related to the supporting theory and research of the framework. Next, the variables in the framework are explained, and research gaps in the existing literature are highlighted. Subsequently, the researcher develops the hypotheses for empirical testing and draws attention to the study's theoretical framework in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 elaborates the research methodology, with the researcher describing the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods used in this study. Consequently, Chapter 5 presents the findings and analysis. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by discussing the findings and their contributions (theoretical and practical) as well as future research directions.

1.10 Chapter Summary

In summary, this study introduces the contextual circumstances that trigger the blind-box impulse buying mechanism. This chapter provided a clear blueprint for the research's following chapters. Specifically, this chapter elaborates on research questions, purpose, significance, and key terms. Furthermore, it introduces the whole thesis structure. The next chapter will provide an in-depth literature review of specific theories and variables as well as gaps in the literature that remain unanswered.

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