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The Psychology of the 'Pull': How Pop Mart's Marketing Influences Consumer Habits Among Young Adults

Daisy Mui Hung Kee[1], Ayumi Hayana Azhar[1], Shi Thing Aw[1], Amsyar Fahim Mohd Arif[1], Anushri Ragu[1]
[1]School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia
E43, Jalan Sasaran, Minden Heights, 11800 Gelugor, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
Corresponding Email: ayumihayana@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how marketing strategies and social influences create psychological "pull" factors that shape consumer behavior regarding Pop Mart blind box products among Malaysian young adults. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the research examined the direct effects of two independent variables; blind box uncertainty and peer influence on three primary outcomes: psychological engagement, impulse buying, and collecting behavior. A quantitative survey was conducted with 120 participants aged 18 to 25. Data analysis using SPSS indicated that both blind box uncertainty and peer influence significantly and positively predict internal psychological engagement, with uncertainty demonstrating the strongest impact on emotional immersion. Furthermore, regression modeling revealed that both factors are active transaction drivers, where peer influence acts as the most powerful predictor driving both immediate impulse buying and long-term collecting behavior. These findings highlight a dual-driven consumption mechanism where product gamification builds emotional attachment, but localized social validation serves as the ultimate catalyst for purchasing execution.

Keywords: Pop Mart; marketing strategies; peer influence; social media exposure; consumer behavior; impulse buying; collecting behavior; young adults

JEL Classification: For papers in the economics field only.

INTRODUCTION

A blind box is a type of "uncertain" commodity typically sold in opaque packaging bags or boxes, concealing its contents which generally include toys, models, stationery, or cosmetics. Blind boxes are systematically launched in cohesive thematic series; a standard series contains a fixed number of ordinary designs alongside a highly coveted "secret" or "hidden" style, with the secret figure featuring a substantially lower draw probability than its ordinary counterparts (Liao, 2024).

As a consumer product defined by unknowns and surprises, blind boxes have gained significant global popularity in recent years, particularly among young consumers (Wu, 2025). Even though Pop Mart has achieved massive global commercial success, the underlying "psychological pull" that effectively translates marketing stimuli into sustained consumer habits remains under-theorized. According to Tang (2025), Pop Mart's marketing strategy utilizes complex psychological triggers that transform a routine purchase into an emotionally charged experience. This is executed through specific market penetration strategies, most notably a "place strategy" that integrates online and offline channels to maximize global reach (Ling, 2023).

To systematically unpack this phenomenon, consumer research frequently relies on structural frameworks anchored by two primary environmental variables: blind box uncertainty and peer influence. Grounded in uncertainty marketing and information gap theory, unknown rewards and mystery contents systematically stimulate consumer curiosity, emotional arousal, and a sense of surprise (Zhang et al., 2022). Furthermore, Gunarian et al. (2025) stated that blind box purchases transcend mere economic exchanges, functioning as social signals that allow consumers to publicly express their personal preferences, niche interests, and social identities among their peers, effectively enhancing their social value within peer networks. As mentioned by Singh et al. (2021) that customers explore their happiness and resolution from the products, customers will use their experience and skills to select them. Furthermore, one of the important factors that can affect consumers' decisions is peer pressure (Chang & Nguyen, 2018). An increasing volume of modern research has sought to elucidate the underlying psychological and social mechanisms associated with blind box purchases (Gunarian et al., 2025). Unpredictable outcomes generate heightened states of psychological anticipation and hedonic value during the consumer journey (Zhang et al., 2022). According to uncertainty resolution theory, the act of purchasing and opening a blind box creates an emotional cognitive tension that is resolved only during the reveal, turning the mystery element itself into a structural psychological reward (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). Recent literature confirms that this uncertainty does not merely capture passive attention; it functions as a primary driver of sustained brand fascination, keeping younger consumers emotionally and cognitively anchored to the trial loop (Wang, 2025). These diverse marketing and social variables do more than trigger isolated sales; they cultivate a deep internal state of psychological engagement that acts as an emotional "hook," anchoring consumers to a brand community (Pandey et al., 2021). However, a critical empirical question remains: does internal emotional engagement automatically guarantee a physical, financial transaction?

A crucial tension exists between the ephemeral pleasure of discovery and the long-term habit of collecting. While traditional retail research focuses heavily on impulse buying; defined as spontaneous behavior triggered by immediate external stimuli, Pop Mart's sustained commercial footprint points toward a deeper psychological pull rooted in collecting behavior. As defined by Belk (2009), collecting is the passionate and selective acquisition of objects perceived as part of a nonidentical set. The core research problem lies in the increasingly blurred line between these two behaviors; consumers often initiate their journey through an initial curiosity loop but eventually transition into a systematic cycle of "collecting addiction." While existing literature extensively explores standard e-commerce impulse buying, significant gaps remain regarding how the "surprise economy" leverages psychological factors to convert passive admirers into lifelong collectors. We understand the theoretical mechanics of gamified branding, yet the specific behavioral bridges that turn emotional surprise into transactional execution require clearer empirical investigation.

To address these empirical gaps, this study examines the direct effects of blind box uncertainty and peer influence on the psychological engagement, impulse buying, and collecting behavior of young adults (aged 18–25) in Malaysia. Utilizing a sample of 120 respondents, this research framework offers a clear distinction between the drivers of internal emotional immersion and external behavioral execution. Strikingly, the empirical findings reveal a distinct decoupling between internal states and purchasing actions, showcasing a critical "window-shopping" effect where high emotional engagement driven by uncertainty fails to independently generate transaction records. Instead, our framework highlights that external social validation and peer dynamics serve as the primary behavioral triggers required to convert brand engagement into active consumption habits. Ultimately, by interpreting this socially anchored psychological pull, stakeholders can better predict consumer trends in an era where the shared community experience is as vital as the physical product itself.

The significance of this work extends across the contemporary marketing landscape, providing a revised paradigm for value co-creation where social currency is the ultimate product. Therefore, by interpreting this socially anchored psychological pull, stakeholders can better predict consumer trends in an era where the shared community experience is as vital as the product itself.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Zhan (2024) found that Blind boxes enable young people to achieve a strong sense of belonging and identity. As well as to achieve a temporary withdrawal from the real world, under the craze of "everything can be a blind box", the consumption mechanism behind the gambling blind box can be sought after for a while, but when the youth group returns to rational consumption, the blind box boom will eventually recede, and the blind box market that relies on the pleasure of selling will inevitably be affected. In order to establish a foundation for the blind box economy's future growth, they examine the psychological and behavioral traits of consumers according to Pop Mart's marketing strategy.

Stimulus-Organism-Response Framework

In this literature review, we use **S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response)** flow. According to Xiyun et al. (2024), S-O-R framework proposed in environmental psychology, an individual's emotional state is directly influenced by physical or social environmental stimuli, affecting how they behave in that setting. The S-O-R framework illustrates a process in which an element of the external environmental component (stimulus) affects consumers' internal states, ultimately leading to their approach or avoidance behaviors or responses. In consumer research, this model has been adapted to account for the role of emotional and attitudinal responses in shaping purchase-related decisions (Cruz et al., 2025). The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework is widely used to explain how external stimuli such as uncertainty, scarcity, and visual branding affect consumers' cognitive and affective states before generating behavioral responses. At the organism stage, perceived value and emotional responses play an important role, whether through economic or symbolic value, or emotional satisfaction when obtaining a rare item (Akhmad & Astuti, 2026).

Marketing Strategy and Consumer Behaviour

Marketing strategy refers to the planned set of actions and decisions undertaken by firms to promote products, communicate value, and influence consumers' perceptions and purchasing decisions. Marketing creates long-term customer relationships that help the business to grow. It plays its role in the playing field with big name competitors for small to medium-sized businesses (Kee et al., 2021). It encompasses elements such as product positioning, pricing, promotion, and distribution, all of which are designed to shape how consumers interpret and respond to a brand in the marketplace. According to Sisodiya (2025), marketing strategies play a critical role in guiding consumer behaviour by creating awareness, influencing attitudes, and ultimately driving purchase decisions, particularly in highly competitive markets such as fast-moving consumer goods. Effective marketing strategies not only inform consumers but also persuade them by appealing to both rational evaluations and emotional responses, thereby increasing the likelihood of product adoption.

Similarly, Liu (2025) highlights that marketing strategies directly impact consumer purchasing behaviour by shaping preferences, perceptions, and decision-making processes. Through targeted promotional activities, branding efforts, and digital engagement, firms can influence how consumers perceive product value and relevance. The study further emphasizes that modern marketing strategies, especially those integrated with digital platforms, enhance consumer interaction and engagement, which in turn strengthens purchase intention and loyalty. This indicates that marketing is no longer limited to transactional communication but extends to building continuous relationships with consumers.

Furthermore, both studies suggest that marketing strategies function as external stimuli that trigger internal psychological processes within consumers. Sisodiya (2025) notes that exposure to marketing messages can alter consumer attitudes and create a favourable perception of products, while Liu (2025) argues that strategic marketing efforts can reduce decision uncertainty and encourage quicker purchasing decisions. This influence is particularly significant in contexts where emotional appeal, social influence, and experiential value are embedded in the marketing approach, as these factors can enhance consumer engagement and lead to both impulsive and habitual purchasing behaviours.

Beyond digital environments, foundational consumer perceptions regarding brand value remain vital in driving purchasing choices within the Malaysian marketplace. As demonstrated by Ng et al. (2025) in their study of a multinational consumer goods company in Malaysia, elements such as perceived quality, brand image, and perceived value function as key determinants that significantly shape overall consumer behavior. Crucially, their empirical findings highlight that perceived value acts as the single most dominant driver of consumer action. In the context of gamified consumption, this implies that while novelty features catch the consumer's attention, the underlying perception of the product's value whether economic or symbolic remains a crucial factor in cementing long-term behavioral habits.

In summary, marketing strategy serves as a fundamental mechanism through which firms influence consumer behaviour by shaping perceptions, stimulating emotional and cognitive responses, and guiding purchase decisions. As supported by Sisodiya (2025) and Liu (2025), the effectiveness of marketing strategies lies in their ability to integrate informational and emotional elements, thereby creating meaningful consumer experiences that drive both immediate and long-term behavioural outcomes.

Hypotheses

Blind Box Uncertainty refers to the structural marketing mechanic where the exact identity of the toy inside the packaging remains completely hidden from the consumer until after purchase. This unpredictability transforms a standard transaction into a gamified, experiential journey. As suggested by Cruz et al. (2025), the element of surprise and unpredictability creates emotional arousal that bypasses cognitive deliberation, leading to immediate purchase intentions.

As one of the purchase values, hedonic shopping value can be understood as the joy, enjoyment, and other emotional pleasures experienced by consumers in the shopping process, which can strengthen unplanned purchases. In the same way, uncertain rewards in the process of consumption experience can bring consumers a sense of surprise and stimulate subsequent purchase decisions. Therefore, it can be argued that uncertain products such as blind boxes can, to some extent, alleviate consumers' hedonic adaptation and trigger impulse consumption (Zhang et al., 2022). When uncertainty is related to positive events, consumers may prefer to choose uncertain products and services. According to the uncertainty resolution theory, players can solve the uncertainty after opening the box as a psychological reward (Zhang & Zhang, 2022).

The act of collecting is defined as "the process of actively, selectively and enthusiastically owning and acquiring things that have been removed from everyday use and seeing them as part of a series of different objects and experiences". Collectors collect specific things, or they collect in pursuit of a certain feeling (Liao, 2024).

Collecting behaviour has been linked to positive marketing outcomes such as brand loyalty and reduced price sensitivity. Whilst existing literature has established the repetitive cycle in consumer collecting behaviour, there is a research gap in examining the phenomenon when the acquisition of items is randomised and chance-based such as blind box collectibles. This uncertainty enhances the interest and appeal of consumption and strengthens the likelihood of repeat purchases (Wang, 2025).

According to Cruz et al. (2025), uncertainty priming induces a heightened state of arousal, leading to increased physiological responses that make emotions more intense. The uncertainty surrounding blind boxes can provoke imagination and sustain positive emotions. This imaginative engagement enhances emotional responses and increases the appeal of the product. The sense of surprise can activate the brain's reward system, release dopamine, and bring about a sense of pleasure, creating stronger psychological involvement (Wang, 2025).

H1: Blind box uncertainty has a positive effect on impulse buying.
H2: Blind box uncertainty has a positive effect on collecting behavior.
H6: Blind box uncertainty has a positive effect on psychological engagement.

Peer Influence represents the socio-cultural dynamics, normative pressures, and informational cues exerted by friends, colleagues, and immediate social circles. In youth subcultures, consumption choices are rarely made in isolation and are heavily dictated by group belonging (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989).

The influence of digital peers extends beyond simple transactions. Rosnerova et al. (2025) argue that Gen Z values "social validation" and "digital belonging" over product functionality. Consequently, when peers validate a product as a "must-have" digital social currency, the likelihood of an immediate impulsive response increase. Due to the existence of social media, people who buy blind boxes can get social rewards (such as praise and envy of others) by posting their blind boxes in their own social circles (Zhan,

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2024). Akhmad and Astuti (2026) findings mentioned that beyond individual aspects, blind box consumption is significantly influenced by social and cultural community factors. It highlights that social interaction through communities, shared symbols, and emotional energy encourage more intense purchases. Blind boxes often become a "symbolic language" that strengthens a sense of togetherness and social identity. When collectors communicate and display their collections, they gain self-affirmation and a sense of belonging (Liao, 2024).

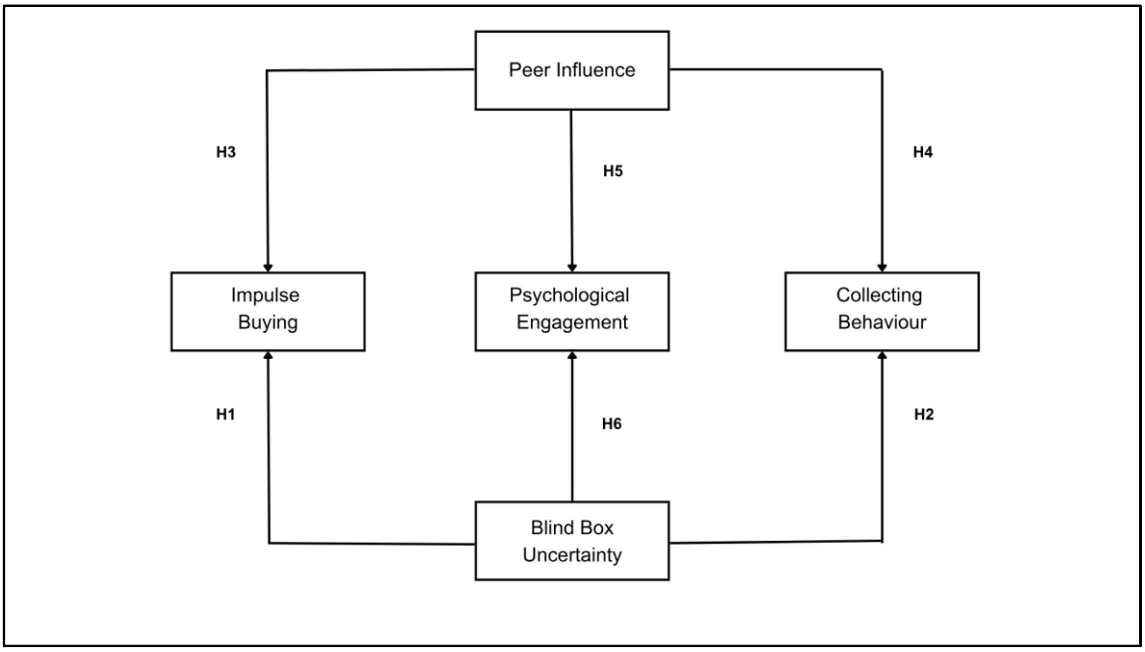
H3: Peer influence has a positive effect on impulse buying.
H4: Peer influence has a positive effect on collecting behavior.
H5: Peer influence has a positive effect on psychological engagement.

Rosnerova et al. (2025) argue that Gen Z values "social validation" and "digital belonging". Peer Influence facilitates a deep internal state of Psychological Engagement where the consumer internalizes brand trends to satisfy a need for community identity. Being surrounded by an active peer group that constantly discusses, compares, and values a specific collectible ecosystem deeply solidifies an individual's emotional attachment. Divya, Deepika, Kaur, Kothari, and Kumar (2025) argue that active peer validation transforms consumption into a symbolic act of identity, reinforcing emotional attachment and belonging within collectible communities. Informational and normative peer interactions transform a casual purchase into a symbolic mechanism of identity. This social integration fosters long-term pride, vitality, and psychological engagement, directly embedding the hobby into the consumer's self-perception.

Conceptual Framework

The study framework model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Framework



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RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling

In this study, the major mode of data collection was an online survey to investigate the psychological pull and PopMart's marketing strategy that influenced customers' habits in blind box purchases. The intended research demographic includes young adults aged 18–25 years in Malaysia. The data for this study were gathered utilising a convenience sampling strategy, which provides for easy access to a large number of respondents in a short period. The ultimate sample size is 120 respondents, which is deemed appropriate for quantitative research with numerous variables. **Asiamah, Mensah, and Oteng-Abayie (2017)** conducted a simulation study and concluded that larger samples lead to more precise estimates.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was prepared with Google Forms and distributed over social media sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram, making it easy to contact a large number of potential participants. To ensure content validity and relevance to the study of the psychology of the 'pull': how Pop Mart's marketing shapes consumer habits, the survey questions were adapted from the works of **Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel (1989); Arbatani, Gholipour, Farzianpour, and Hosseini (2014); Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, and Morgan (2014); Rook (1987); Saridakis & Angelidou (2018); Baltas, Oghazi, and Hultman (2018)**.

The survey was divided into three major areas. The first section included two screening questions on age and whether the respondent had ever purchased a blind box product. The second section included three demographic questions on gender, monthly allowances or income, and the number of times of blind box purchases. The third section consisted of 20 questions that assessed the independent variables: blind box uncertainty and peer influence; and the dependent variables: psychological engagement, impulse buying and collecting behavior.

Measures

The third section items used a 5-point Likert scale which spanned from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The research document *Everything You Need to Know about Likert Scale* (2021) states that this measuring system enables consistent collection of respondent viewpoints. The reliability of each variable was confirmed through determination of Cronbach's alpha to measure item consistency among the questionnaire items. SPSS was used to analyse the collected replies once data collection ended. Statistical analysis of frequency distribution combined with correlation analysis and regression methods uncovered the link between variables as well as which elements most strongly affected consumer habits on Pop Mart's blind box product. (Field, 2018)
Blind Box Uncertainty (BU): Four items measured consumers' curiosity and excitement derived from the uncertain nature of blind box contents. Items were adapted from Sun et al. (2024). Example items include: *"I enjoy the surprise of not knowing which figure I will get"* and *"The mystery element increases my interest in buying blind boxes."* Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.75 to 0.88.
Peer Influence (PI): Four items assessed the extent to which friends and peers affect purchasing decisions. Items were adapted from Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989). Example items include: *"My friends influence my decision to buy blind boxes"* and *"Recommendations from friends increase my likelihood of purchasing blind boxes."* Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.80 to 0.92.

Psychological Engagement (PE): Four items measured emotional involvement, excitement, and anticipation when purchasing blind boxes. Items were adapted from Vivek et al. (2014). Example items include: *"Buying blind boxes makes me feel excited"* and *"I experience enjoyment when purchasing blind boxes."* Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.80 to 0.91.

Impulse Buying (IB): Four items assessed spontaneous, unplanned purchasing behavior. Items were adapted from Rook (1987). Example items include: *"I often buy blind boxes without planning"* and *"I tend to purchase blind boxes spontaneously."* Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.83 to 0.95.

Collecting Behavior (CB): Four items captured consumers' motivation and effort to complete sets of blind box collections. Items were adapted from (Saridakis & Angelidou, 2018). Example items include: *"I like to collect complete sets of blind box series"* and *"I am willing to buy multiple boxes to complete a collection."* Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.75 to 0.88.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demographic Information (N=120)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-21 years old	57	47.5
22-25 years old	63	52.5
Purchased a Blind Box Product		
Yes	120	100.0
Gender		
Female	90	75.0
Male	27	22.5
Prefer not to say	3	2.5
Monthly Allowances/Income		
Less than RM500	33	27.5
RM500 – RM1,000	50	41.7
RM1,001 – RM2,000	24	20.0
RM2,001 – RM3,000	8	6.7
More than RM3,000	5	4.2
Frequency of Purchased a Blind Box Product		
1-2	64	53.3
3-5	31	25.8
6-10	14	11.7
More than 10	11	9.2

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents (N = 120). In terms of age, the majority of respondents were aged between 22 and 25 years (N = 63, 52.5%), followed by those aged between 18 and 21 years (N = 57, 47.5%). All respondents (N = 120, 100.0%) had previously purchased a blind box product, indicating that the sample consisted entirely of individuals with relevant consumption experience. Regarding gender, female respondents constituted the largest proportion of the sample (N = 90, 75.0%), followed by male respondents (N = 27, 22.5%), while a small percentage preferred not to disclose their gender (N = 3, 2.5%). In terms of monthly allowances or income, the majority of respondents reported receiving between RM500 and RM1,000 per month (N = 50, 41.7%), followed by those receiving less than RM500 (N = 33, 27.5%). Respondents with monthly allowances or income between RM1,001 and RM2,000 accounted for 20.0% (N = 24), while those receiving between RM2,001 and RM3,000 (N

= 8, 6.7%) and more than RM3,000 (N = 5, 4.2%) represented smaller proportions of the sample.

With regard to blind box purchasing frequency, more than half of the respondents (N = 64, 53.3%) reported purchasing blind boxes between one and two times. This was followed by respondents who had purchased blind boxes three to five times (N = 31, 25.8%), six to ten times (N = 14, 11.7%), and more than ten times (N = 11, 9.2%). Overall, the findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly young adults, female, and moderate-income consumers with prior experience in purchasing blind box products.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Coefficients Alpha, and Zero-order Correlations for All Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Blind Box Uncertainty	.907				
Peer Influence	.427	.886			
Psychological Engagement	.739**	.483**	.859		
Impulse Buying	.352**	.430**	.440**	.814	
Collecting Behavior	.366**	.441**	.411**	.573**	.898
Number of items	4	4	4	4	4
Mean	4.13	3.23	4.03	3.26	2.83
Standard Deviation	0.86	1.04	0.81	1.06	1.18

Note: *N = 120; p < .01,* ***p*** *< .01,* ***p*** *< .001. The bold diagonal entries represent Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha.*

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and zero-order correlations among the study variables. All constructs demonstrated satisfactory levels of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.814 to 0.907, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating strong reliability of the measurement scales. Among the variables, Blind Box Uncertainty exhibited the highest reliability (α = 0.907), followed by Collecting Behavior (α = 0.898), Peer Influence (α = 0.886), Psychological Engagement (α = 0.859), and Impulse Buying (α = 0.814). The mean scores ranged from 2.83 to 4.13, suggesting moderate to high levels of agreement among respondents. Specifically, Blind Box Uncertainty recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.13, SD = 0.86), followed by Psychological Engagement (M = 4.03, SD = 0.81), Impulse Buying (M = 3.26, SD = 1.06), Peer Influence (M = 3.23, SD = 1.04), and Collecting Behavior (M = 2.83, SD = 1.18). Furthermore, all study variables were positively and significantly correlated with one another ($p < 0.01$), with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.352 to 0.739. The strongest relationship was observed between Blind Box Uncertainty and Psychological Engagement ($r = 0.739$, $p < 0.01$), while the weakest relationship was found between Blind Box Uncertainty and Impulse Buying ($r = 0.352$, $p < 0.01$). None of the correlation coefficients exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.90, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern in this study (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Table 3. Regression Analysis

Variables	Psychological Engagement	Impulse Buying	Collecting Behavior
Blind Box Uncertainty	.652***	.206*	.217*
Peer Influence	.205**	.342***	.348***
R^2	.581	.220	.233
F value	81.146***	16.488***	17.738***
Durbin-Watson Statistic	2.034	2.172	1.739

Note: *N = 120. p < .05,* ***p*** *< .01,* ***p*** *< .001. Standardized beta coefficients (β) are reported.*

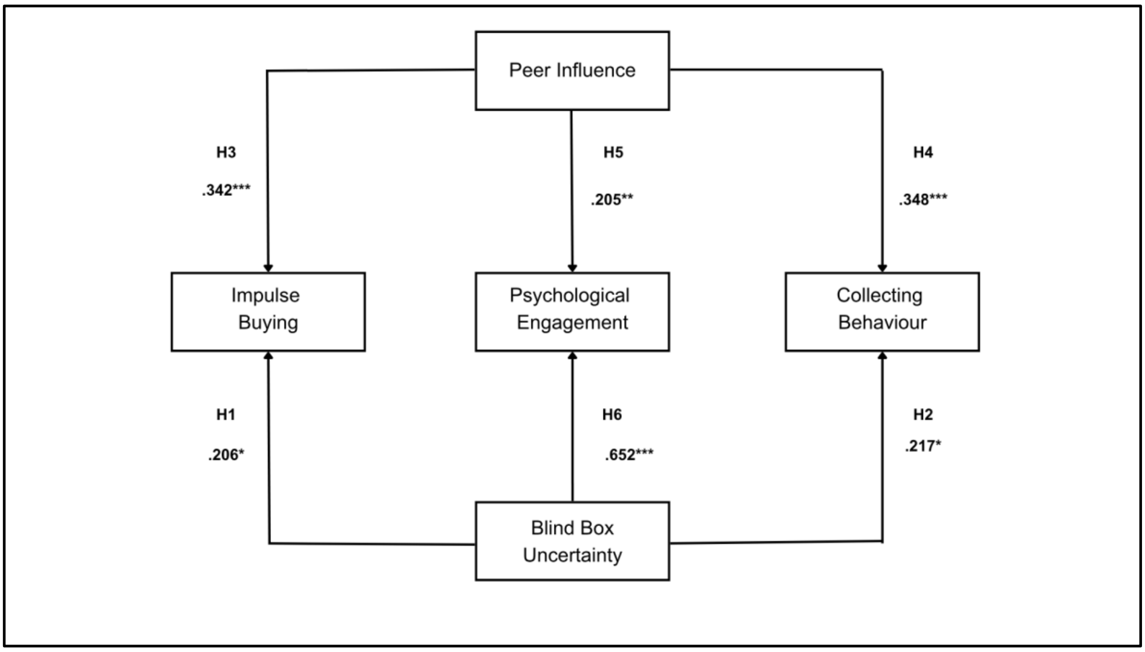
The regression analysis results are presented in **Table 3**. The model predicting Psychological Engagement was statistically significant and explained 58.1% of the variance in Psychological Engagement ($R^2 = .581$, $F = 81.146$, $p < .001$). H5 proposed that Peer Influence positively affects Psychological Engagement. The results indicated that Peer Influence had a significant positive effect on Psychological Engagement ($\beta = .205$, $p = .002$), suggesting that individuals are more psychologically engaged with blind box products when influenced by their peers. Therefore, H5 was supported. H6 proposed that Blind Box Uncertainty positively affects Psychological Engagement. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between Blind Box Uncertainty and Psychological Engagement ($\beta = .652$, $p < .001$), indicating that the excitement and anticipation generated by the uncertainty of blind box contents strongly enhance consumers' emotional and cognitive involvement. Thus, H6 was supported.

For Impulse Buying, the regression model was significant and explained 22.0% of the variance ($R^2 = .220$, $F = 16.488$, $p < .001$). H1 proposed that Blind Box Uncertainty positively affects Impulse Buying. The results showed that Blind Box Uncertainty had a significant positive effect on Impulse Buying ($\beta = .206$, $p = .024$), indicating that the mystery and unpredictability associated with blind boxes encourage spontaneous purchasing decisions. Therefore, H1 was supported. H3 proposed that Peer Influence positively affects Impulse Buying. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = .342$, $p < .001$), suggesting that recommendations, opinions, and purchasing behaviors of peers increase consumers' tendency to make unplanned purchases. Thus, H3 was supported.

For Collecting Behavior, the regression model was also significant and explained 23.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .233$, $F = 17.738$, $p < .001$). H2 proposed that Blind Box Uncertainty positively affects Collecting Behavior. The results indicated a significant positive effect of Blind Box Uncertainty on Collecting Behavior ($\beta = .217$, $p = .017$), implying that consumers are motivated to continue collecting blind box products due to the uncertainty and excitement of obtaining different items. Therefore, H2 was supported. H4 proposed that Peer Influence positively affects Collecting Behavior. The findings showed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = .348$, $p < .001$), suggesting that social interactions and peer encouragement play an important role in motivating consumers to build and complete collections. Thus, H4 was supported.

Overall, the results provide support for all six proposed hypotheses (H1–H6). Blind Box Uncertainty was found to significantly and positively influence Psychological Engagement, Impulse Buying, and Collecting Behavior, while Peer Influence also exerted significant positive effects on all three dependent variables. Among all relationships examined, Blind Box Uncertainty demonstrated the strongest effect on Psychological Engagement ($\beta = .652$, $p < .001$), highlighting the central role of uncertainty in shaping consumers' engagement with blind box products.

Figure Format
Figure 2. Overview Result



Note: Standardized coefficients are reported.

DISCUSSION

Main Findings

The study reveals that while modern marketing strategies can successfully attract attention and psychological engagement, the actual purchasing and collecting behaviors among young adults are predominantly driven by social dynamics, specifically peer influence. By examining the relationships between two independent variables and three dependent variables, the data highlights that the youth blind box consumption is dual-driven. While social dynamics (Peer Influence) represent the strongest motivational force, and the product's core gamified design (Blind Box Uncertainty) remains a statistically important factor. Unlike the existing studies' assumptions that gamified uncertainty and scarcity directly drive sales, this study demonstrates that Pop Mart's commercial success among youth is fundamentally a socially anchored phenomenon rather than an isolated, impulse-driven gamble. This aligns with recent observations by Zhou, Mu, and Yang (2025), who found that the "bandwagon" effect and the symbolic social attributes of blind boxes often overpower the initial attraction of uncertainty in driving continuous consumption.

The Dominant Role of Peer Influence on Impulse Buying and Collecting Behavior

The most attractive finding of this study is that Peer Influence acts as the strongest predictor for both Impulse Buying and Collecting Behavior. As the results shown, Peer Influence was the most powerful driver, significantly affecting both Impulse Buying ($\beta = .342$, $p < .001$) and Collecting Behavior ($\beta = .348$, $p < .001$). This indicates that Pop Mart's physical products have transcended the preferences of individual consumers and become an important social currency among young adults. This concept is supported by Zhao and Xu (2021), who argue that blind boxes function primarily as a social currency driven by the modern consumer's desire to share and interact within their social networks. Consumers are driven to make spontaneous, unplanned purchases not necessarily because of the blind box's inherent thrill, but due to the immediate social context such as participating in a shared activity with friends or seeking immediate peer validation. Besides, as Yee et al. (2025) found, influencer marketing significantly shapes consumer purchase intentions through social validation and perceived popularity, which reinforces the role of peer influence as a dominant driver of buying behavior. Similarly, the long-term and sustained habit of collecting is heavily dependent on community integration and peer recognition. The toys serve as a medium for social signaling, indicating the consumption habit is maintained by the desire for social belonging rather than an isolated psychological impulse to complete a set. Furthermore, Wan et al. (2024) emphasize that in the digital age, consumers' long-term purchasing intentions are highly correlated with the desire for self-exhibition and community integration, reinforcing the idea that collecting is fundamentally a social endeavor.

The Dual Catalysts of Psychological Engagement and Behavioral Outcomes

Beyond the dominant influence of social dynamics, empirical research also fully demonstrates that the inherent gamification mechanism of the product itself is a significant engine driving consumption. The uncertainty of blind boxes significantly predicts impulse buying ($\beta = .206$, $p = .024$) and collecting behavior ($\beta = .217$, $p = .017$), proving that the mystery of the product is not merely passive entertainment, but a direct driver of purchasing behavior. This direct transactional impact stems from the fact that blind box uncertainty, as a major shaper of consumers' internal emotional state, has a highly significant positive correlation with psychological engagement ($\beta = .652$, $p < .001$). From a psychological perspective, this indicates that Pop Mart relies on variable reinforcement mechanisms. The reward mechanism is the specific content of the reward is always hidden which does not merely provide fleeting digital entertainment or passive browsing. Instead, the strong curiosity, surprise, and high anticipation aroused by psychological engagement create an intrinsic tension that prompts consumers to take action. This aligns perfectly with the uncertainty principle of gamified marketing, which states that random reward mechanisms aim to induce higher emotional states and gamified experiences, thereby fundamentally accelerating consumers' willingness to buy (Xiang et al., 2023). Young consumers are not merely observing trends; the cognitive stimulation brought by the unknown actively interferes with deliberate decision-making processes, prompting them to make spontaneous, immediate purchases to satisfy their urgent needs (Gong et al., 2024). Furthermore, this gamified stimulation can provide long-term emotional satisfaction and hedonic value, thus maintaining continuous repeat purchases and directly promoting systematic collecting habits and long-term brand interaction (Lee et al., 2025). Therefore, product-level uncertainty and emotional immersion must be considered as proactive marketing tools. Behavioral catalysts, working in synergy with external social forces, transform passive interest into tangible transaction results.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study validates and extends the classic Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework outlined by Zhou et al. (2025) in the context of emerging youth consumer trends. In our findings, the gamified product design of Blind Box Uncertainty and environmental pressures of Peer Influence act as potent marketing and social stimuli (S). These stimuli heavily formulate the consumer’s internal organism state or the Psychological Engagement (O), while exerting direct and significant control over the final behavioral response (R). The results suggest that in contemporary youth consumer markets, internal emotional immersion behaves as a highly volatile state, while it is easily generated by product mystery, but a transaction requires active behavioral triggers. Therefore, consumer behavior models must be updated to position external social validation and peer dynamics not just as secondary influences, but as the primary behavioral triggers that convert engagement into consumption. In expanding the S-O-R framework, Zheng, Liu and Chen (2024) similarly assert that social presence is the felt presence of peers and an active community is the critical variable necessary to translate digital engagement into tangible transactional responses.

Managerial and Practical Implications
For business managers and marketers, these findings imply a strategic pivot. While manufacturing scarcity and promoting gamified uncertainty generate brand buzz and digital engagement, they do not directly secure revenue from this demographic. Instead of over-relying on the gambler's fallacy or artificial scarcity only, brands should balance their resources toward facilitating peer-to-peer interactions, community-building initiatives, and group-based promotional strategies. Businesses should not stop creating mystery elements or blind box variations, because the data proves uncertainty directly secures revenue. Instead, they should embed gamified product designs into social spaces such as creating physical blind box swapping events at stores so Peer Influence and Blind Box Uncertainty interact together. Marketers must recognize that young adults purchase these products primarily to belong to a group. Therefore, strategies should focus on making the consumption and unboxing experience into shared community activities, thereby leveraging the powerful social currency that actually drives both impulse and habitual sales. As highlighted by the combined insights of Zhou et al. (2025) and Zheng et al. (2024), brands that shift from isolated marketing stimuli to building strong, interactive communities will be significantly better positioned to turn passive psychological engagement into active and long-term consumer habits.

CONCLUSION

This research gives an all-rounded insight into the factors that affect customers' experiences and behavior with regard to the designer toy industry, using Pop Mart as a case study. The results highlight how blind box uncertainty and peer influence significantly influence user perceptions, internal emotional states, and purchasing behaviors.

The results confirm that blind box uncertainty positively influences psychological engagement, impulse buying, and collecting behavior. The users enjoy the surprise and cognitive stimulation of not knowing which figure they will get, which effectively transforms a standard commercial transaction into a gamified, experiential journey. The mystery element acts as a strong driver of sustained brand fascination, maintaining a state of high emotional arousal and anticipation that encourages immediate, unplanned purchases. Furthermore, this gamified uncertainty mitigates hedonic adaptation and provides continuous emotional satisfaction, which encourages repeat purchases and reinforces systematic, long-term collecting habits among young adults.

Peer influence, on the other hand, emerges as the single most powerful determinant driving both internal psychological states and tangible behavioral outcomes. In youth subcultures, blind box products transcend their material functionality to serve as highly coveted social currency and a symbolic language used to publicly communicate personal identity. Social interactions through active community networks heavily dictate consumption choices. When peer groups discuss, compare, and validate collectibles, it intensifies the consumer's emotional attachment, deepens their pride and vitality, and directly increases their overall psychological engagement with the brand.

Crucially, peer validation acts as the ultimate catalyst required to convert passive brand immersion into transactional execution. Young adults are heavily driven to execute immediate impulse purchases to participate in shared social activities, secure digital belonging, and earn validation within their immediate social circles. Similarly, the long-term habit of completing sets and building a collection is heavily dependent on community integration and peer recognition rather than an isolated psychological impulse.

The study further confirms the dual-driven mechanism of contemporary youth retail, emphasizing that internal emotional immersion while strongly generated by the product's unknown rewards coexists alongside external social triggers to securely translate into transactional records. Ultimately, Pop Mart's massive commercial footprint is a socially anchored phenomenon, proving that consumer loyalty and active habits are successfully cemented when brands strategically shift from isolated retail marketing to building interconnected, community-driven architectures.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study provides a reliable model for understanding youth consumer habits, it is still necessary to acknowledge that it has some limitations. First, the quantitative sample was restricted to 120 participants aged 18 to 25 within a specific geographical and cultural context. Future research should expand this scope to include older kidult demographics aged 26 to 35, who possess higher disposable income and potentially different psychological coping mechanisms. Second, because this study relies on quantitative data, it captures behavioral trends but cannot fully analyze consumer's deep, genuine emotional experiences. Future studies should employ qualitative depth interviews or longitudinal ethnography methods to track how a collector's emotional attachment shifts over time as specific intellectual properties lose their popularity. Finally, cross-cultural comparative studies between Southeast Asian markets and Western economies would provide valuable insights into how different cultural values shape the global "pull" of designer toys.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

1st Author
Dr. Daisy Mui Hung Kee is an Associate Professor at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). She earned her Ph.D. from the University of South Australia and an MBA from USM. She has authored 90 Web of Science-indexed publications. Dr. Kee serves as the Country Director for the Association of International Business and Professional Management (AIBPM) and the STAR Scholars Network. Email: daisy@usm.my. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7748-8230

2nd Author
Ayumi Hayana Azhar is currently an undergraduate student at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Email: ayumihayana@student.usm.my. ORCID ID: 0009-0005-9071-5556

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3rd Author
Aw Shi Thing is currently an undergraduate student at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Email: awshithing@student.usm.my. ORCID ID: 0009-0007-5711-2926

4th Author
Amsyar Fahim Mohd Arif is currently an undergraduate student at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Email: amsyarfahimm@student.usm.my. ORCID ID: 0009-0006-4232-9308

5th Author
Anushri Ragu is currently an undergraduate student at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Email: anushrii37@student.usm.my. ORCID ID: 0009-0008-5016-6072