

Impact of Consumption Experience on Purchasing Decisions of Blind Box Services in China: The Mediation of Consumer Needs

Yue Huang^{1*} and Lu Suo¹

Stamford International University¹, Bangkok, Thailand

*Corresponding Author: yue.huang@stamford.edu

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Abstract

Aim/Purpose: This paper investigated the impact of consumption experience on the purchasing decisions of blind box services in China. Blind boxes, which contain random products unknown to consumers until purchase, have become a significant trend, particularly among Generation Z. The study aimed to explore how the consumption experience of blind boxes influences consumer needs (both material and spiritual), and how these needs, in turn, affect purchasing decisions. The research sought to fill a gap in the literature by examining the mediating role of consumer needs in the relationship between consumption experience and the purchasing decision.

Introduction/Background: The blind box phenomenon, originating from Japan, has gained immense popularity in China, especially among younger consumers who value novelty, surprise, and emotional engagement. This paper addresses the lack of research on how the consumption experience of blind boxes influences purchasing decision, examining this topic through the lens of consumer needs. By focusing on both material and spiritual needs, the study provides insights into the psychological mechanisms driving blind box consumption.

Methodology: The study employed a quantitative research design, using a self-administered online survey to collect data from 518 Chinese consumers with prior experience purchasing blind boxes. The survey was distributed through popular blind box communities on platforms like WeChat and QQ. Structural Equation Modeling was used to analyze the data, with constructs measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The study tested hypotheses related to the impact of consumption experience on material and spiritual needs, and how these needs influenced purchasing decisions. Mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrap method to examine the role of consumer needs in the relationship between consumption experience and purchasing decisions.

Findings: 1. The blind box consumption experience positively influenced both material and spiritual needs. 2. Both material and spiritual needs significantly impacted purchasing decisions. 3. Consumer needs (material and spiritual) mediated the relationship between consumption experience and purchasing decisions. 4. The study confirmed that a satisfying blind box experience enhanced consumers' willingness to purchase, driven by the fulfillment of both material and emotional desires.

Contribution/Impact on Society: Many scholars have focused on analyzing the blind box economic market and marketing models (Lin, 2024). However, there has been a relative lack of research into the psychological mechanisms behind blind box consumption, with only a few studies exploring the influence of social support, emotional motivation, and customer experience on blind box purchase decisions. Moreover, even fewer have studied Means-End Chain Theory to blind box consumption.

This study provides deeper insight into the relationship between consumption experience, customer needs, and purchasing decisions. These empirical findings contribute to the growing body of literature on consumption experience and purchase behavior, particularly in the new context of blind boxes. Additionally, it provides empirical evidence that the consumption experience of blind boxes not only satisfies material needs, but also fulfills spiritual and emotional desires, which are crucial for driving purchasing decisions. The findings offer valuable insights for businesses in the blind

box industry, helping them design marketing strategies that cater to both the functional and emotional needs of consumers. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of emotional design and quality control in enhancing consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Recommendations: This study advances the understanding of blind box consumption by highlighting the role of consumer needs in mediating the relationship between consumption experiences and purchasing decisions. It provides practical implications for businesses aiming to capitalize on the growing blind box trend, while offering a foundation for future research in this emerging area of consumer behavior. Recommendations are as follows: 1. Businesses should focus on improving the quality and design of blind box products to meet consumers' material needs. 2. Companies should incorporate emotional and cultural elements into their products to address consumers' spiritual needs. 3. Marketing strategies should emphasize the surprise and novelty aspects of blind boxes to enhance the consumption experience. 4. Future research should explore the long-term effects of blind box consumption on consumer loyalty and brand engagement.

Research Limitations: This study had several limitations. 1. The study's sample was limited to consumers with prior blind box purchase experience, excluding those who had not engaged in blind box consumption. 2. The age distribution of respondents was skewed, with the majority being under 30 years old, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. 3. The study relied on self-reported data, which may have introduced bias. 4. The research focused solely on the Chinese market, and so findings may not be applicable to other cultural contexts.

Future Research: 1. Future studies should explore the reasons why some consumers avoid blind box purchases, providing insights into potential barriers to adoption. 2. Research should include a more balanced age distribution to better understand how blind box consumption behavior varies across different age groups. 3. Additional moderating variables, such as consumer product knowledge or the purpose behind consumption, could be incorporated to enhance the model's explanatory power. 4. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess the long-term impact of blind box consumption on consumer behavior and brand loyalty.

Keywords: *Blind box, consumption experience, consumer needs, purchasing decisions*

Introduction

The widespread adoption of the Internet and the accelerating trend of globalization have gradually dismantled traditionally rigid consumer boundaries. In modern society, characterized by flexibility and the pursuit of instant gratification, conventional consumer preferences and habits have been disrupted. The new generation of consumers, having grown up in a favorable economic and technological environment, exhibits significantly different consumption behaviors compared to previous generations. Rather than focusing solely on fulfilling basic physiological needs, their spending is primarily directed toward leisure and entertainment, emphasizing subjective well-being and joyful experiences. These individuals, valuing personal expression, demonstrate highly diverse preferences and unique styles, prioritizing immersive experiences and intense sensory stimulation while holding strong expectations for the fulfillment of higher-order psychological and spiritual needs (China Daily, 2024). Currently, Generation Z has emerged as a dominant consumer force, exhibiting a strong preference for subcultural consumption, including virtual idols, blind boxes, designer toys, and online games (Gao & Chen, 2022). In response to this shift, some companies have integrated their products into the "blind box" model, extending its application beyond traditional collectibles to items such as stationery, clothing, airfare, and books. The blind box phenomenon resonates deeply with younger consumers, as it intertwines elements of excitement, unpredictability, and the thrill of surprise, contributing to a rapid expansion of the "blind box economy" (Hu, 2024).

The concept of a blind box refers to a small container that contains a variety of anime, movie, or TV-themed products, often including intellectual property (IP) dolls, all of which share similar external packaging and appearance. The defining characteristic of a blind box is its randomness; consumers are

unable to know the specific product inside until the box is opened, which adds an element of surprise. Originating in Japan, the blind box concept can be traced back to the Fukubukuro tradition, which dates back to the Meiji period. This concept served as a promotional tool designed to enhance the consumption experience by adding an element of unpredictability. In this context, the Fukubukuro's value often exceeded or matched its price, which contrasts with the modern "blind box" model that incorporates different consumption logic. Whether in online or offline settings, blind box consumption has established a novel consumer behavior pattern among younger generations (Li et al., 2023). In the first half of 2021, blind box toy sales on the Tmall platform grew by 62.5%, making it the fastest-growing product category. According to market research by Statista (2022), the Chinese blind box market has expanded rapidly, growing from 10.8 billion Yuan in 2017 to 34.5 billion Yuan in 2021. The market is projected to reach 110 billion Yuan by 2026.

From a business perspective, companies must cater to the unique preferences of young consumers—who crave fun, novelty, and distinctiveness—if they wish to remain relevant. As a result, many companies are launching targeted marketing campaigns and forming partnerships with blind box brands. For example, companies such as KFC, Holliday, Casio, and Bubble Mate have collaborated on co-branded products, while Tongcheng Travel has integrated blind boxes into their service offerings by launching air ticket blind boxes to diversify their portfolio. In today's experience-driven economy, consumers increasingly value the experiential aspect of consumption over the service itself. Thus, businesses that focus on enhancing consumer experiences are more likely to attract customers and gain a competitive edge.

Blind boxes, as a new trend in toys, feature various beautifully crafted surprises hidden inside an exquisitely designed exterior, making the process of blind selection full of excitement and uncertainty. This aligns with Generation Z's consumer desire for pleasure and instant gratification. The excitement surrounding the unboxing experience also leaves a lasting impression on consumers, encouraging them to share their experiences with others (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). In addition to addressing the functional requirements of the product, the blind box consumption experience incorporates the unknown, which heightens curiosity and meets emotional needs, thereby increasing consumers' willingness to purchase them.

However, a review of existing literature reveals that there are relatively few studies on the novelty of blind boxes, most of which focus on two main areas. First, some research has examined the business model of blind boxes, particularly marketing strategies and product functionalities (Zhang et al., 2022). Second, there has been a significant focus on consumer psychology in blind box consumption (Zhang & Zhang, 2022; Woo & Ramkumar, 2018). Few studies have explored the consumer experience specifically in the context of blind boxes. Furthermore, few studies have investigated how material and emotional needs serve as mediating variables between consumption experiences and purchasing decisions, and fewer studies have studied the Means-End Chain Theory and blind box consumption. Understanding this mechanism is essential in identifying what drives repeated purchases and brand loyalty in the blind box economy. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate how the consumer experience of blind box products influences purchasing decisions, and whether material and emotional needs mediate the relationship between these two factors. These research findings may assist the retail industry in innovating marketing strategies and strengthening core competitiveness.

The objectives of the research were narrowed to ensure actionable goals by clearly outlining the analytical techniques used as follows:

1. To study whether the consumption experience affects consumers' purchasing decisions.
2. To test whether material and emotional needs mediate the relationship between consumption experience and consumers' purchasing decisions.

Literature Review

Means-End Chain Theory

Means-End Chain Theory (Gutman, 1982) explains how product attributes (means) are linked to consequences (benefits) and ultimately to personal values (ends). It posits a hierarchical connection

“Attributes → Consequences (Benefits) → Values”. In the context of blind box consumption, the blind box experience (a product attribute) leads to satisfaction of both material and spiritual needs (benefits), which in turn motivate the purchasing decision (value-driven outcome). Therefore, based on the Means-End Chain Theory, this study constructed its theoretical framework and variable relationships.

Blind Box Consumption Experience and Customer Purchasing Decision

The emergence of the blind box concept can be traced back to the Japanese Fukubukuro consumption model, which is a byproduct of the growth of the experiential economy. Blind box consumption refers to an experience in which the consumer is unable to specify the exact type or function of the product before making a purchase, and only learns about the item after receiving the goods. From a consumption perspective, the blind box experience satisfies customers' curiosity and offers an exploratory emotional experience throughout the entire process. From the viewpoint of emotional experience design, blind boxes are a quintessential product designed to fulfill the emotional needs of consumers, providing an engaging and enjoyable experience.

As a result, consumers are often drawn to products that offer the blind box experience, seeking to enhance their sensory and emotional engagement with the purchase. Yan and Wu (2021) empirically demonstrated a significant positive relationship between the blind box consumption experience and customer purchase behavior. Similarly, Chen (2022) concluded that the blind box experience aligns with emotional design principles, which encourage customers to enjoy a fashionable and joyful consumption experience. From psychological and economic perspectives, Zhang and Zhang (2022) found that the emotional design of blind boxes addresses the emotional needs of contemporary consumers, fostering customer loyalty and dependence on the consumption experience, thereby driving purchase behavior. Drawing from these theories, it can be argued that the blind box consumption experience not only stimulates curiosity, but also ignites customers' interest in shopping, ultimately exerting a positive influence on their purchasing decisions. In summary, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1 : Blind box consumption experience positively influences customers' purchasing decisions.

Blind Box Consumption Experience and Consumer Needs

From the perspective of the traditional retail industry, consumer demand is typically categorized into two types: material demand, driven by a product's basic functionality, and spiritual demand, which is influenced by emotional design. In the context of the rapid development of the digital economy, consumer demands have become increasingly complex, with heightened expectations for diverse product attributes. These evolving demands have spurred continuous innovation in consumption scenarios and purchasing modes. Based on the synthesis of these perspectives, this study categorized consumer needs into two dimensions: material needs and spiritual needs, and examined the relationship between the blind box consumption experience and these consumer needs.

Guevarra and Howell (2015), in their exploration of the factors influencing consumption experience and consumer demand, proposed that there exists an inherent connection between the blind box consumption experience and consumer needs. Deng (2023) suggested that the museum blind box aligns with innovative concepts in creative products within the context of the "blind box boom," effectively addressing the spiritual needs of the public. Zhu (2023) further emphasized that the blind box consumption experience is a result of the combined influence of cultural embeddedness and emotional needs among young urban consumers. As consumers deepen their engagement with the blind box experience, their emotional needs are further amplified.

Building upon this literature, the blind box consumption experience can establish a connection between consumers' real and virtual emotions, effectively catering to their emotional needs, thereby driving purchasing decisions. Furthermore, as the blind box consumption experience intensifies, it significantly satisfies both material and spiritual needs, stimulating purchase behavior from multiple dimensions. Combined with the above theories, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H*_{2a}: Blind Box consumption experience positively affects material needs.

*H*_{2b}: Blind box consumption experience positively affects spiritual needs.

Consumer Needs and Customer Purchasing Decisions

Material needs serve as the fundamental basis for consumers to initiate shopping trends and is a prerequisite for the formation of purchasing decisions. When consumers align the functional attributes of a product with its practical application, material demand is created. A higher level of material demand typically results in an increased willingness to purchase, thereby driving purchasing decisions. Teixeira et al. (2024) defined consumer purchase behavior as encompassing all activities related to the purchase, use, and disposal of goods and services, including the emotional, mental, and behavioral responses that precede or follow these activities. This suggests that the material aspects of a product, such as quality and functionality, are integral to consumer decision-making processes. Liao (2023) concluded that consumers make online purchasing decisions based on the intrinsic demand for the product itself, and as material needs grow, the rate of purchase behavior significantly increases. Virgiawan et al. (2024) highlighted that, within the context of the rising trend of quality consumption, consumers' heightened demand for product quality effectively stimulates purchasing decisions. Based on the above description, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H*_{3a}: Material needs positively influences customers' purchasing decision.

Lin (2024) analyzed both the external characteristics and internal perceptions of the blind box consumption experience among Generation Z, using their preferences for blind box consumption as the entry point. Lin suggested that the blind box consumption experience of Generation Z primarily stems from the internal perception of spiritual needs, and that satisfying these spiritual needs is a key driver of their purchasing decisions. Furthermore, when choosing a product, consumers not only consider its functional attributes, but also its spiritual characteristics. If a product meets the potential spiritual needs of consumers, it is likely to influence their purchasing decisions. Similarly, Chen et al. (2022) observed that, amid the blind box craze, teenage consumers have created a new consumption scenario that triggers spiritual needs, exchanging blind boxes, which further promotes purchasing decisions. It can be inferred that the satisfaction of spiritual needs is crucial for enhancing consumer purchasing decisions. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H*_{3b}: Spiritual needs positively influence customers' purchasing decision.

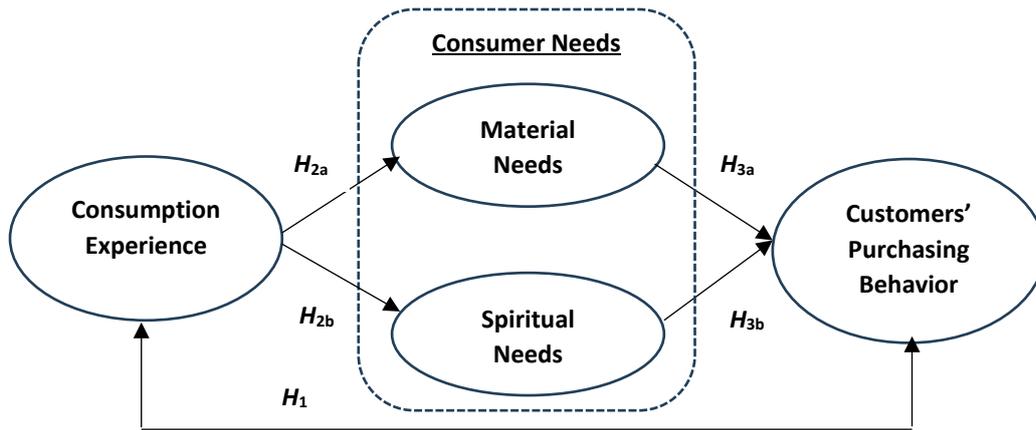
The Mediating Role of Consumer Needs

Research on the relationship between blind box consumption experience and customer purchase behavior has been conducted extensively, with most studies focusing on its direct impact. However, little attention has been given to the intermediary role played by consumer needs in this dynamic. The blind box consumption experience model is fundamentally rooted in the diverse shopping needs of customers. By deepening their emotional engagement with unknown products, it drives purchasing decisions. Furthermore, as this consumption model permeates through various channels and methods, it stimulates customers' material, spiritual, and latent needs, thereby enhancing purchasing efficiency. In the realm of experiential consumption, blind box consumption heightens customers' shopping experiences, leveraging personalization, enjoyment, and curiosity-driven marketing strategies. This, in turn, aligns closely with their multifaceted emotional needs, ultimately driving purchasing decisions. Based on the above description, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H*₄: Consumer needs play a mediating role in the process of blind box consumption experience influencing customers' purchasing decisions.

The study's conceptual framework is shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*



Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected in China in April 2025 through a self-administered online survey. As the study focused on the role of experience in blind box consumption, all participants were required to have prior experience purchasing blind boxes. Hence, the population of this study comprises Chinese consumers with prior experience in blind box purchasing. The questionnaire was distributed in popular blind box communities, including the Blind Box Exchange WeChat group, the Blind Box Player QQ group, the Douban POP MART group, and other related Chinese blind box communities, which have large numbers of participants. To ensure that all respondents had experience with blind box consumption, a screening question was included: "Do you have experience purchasing blind boxes?" Only those who selected "Yes" were able to proceed with the remaining questions.

Initially, we invited individuals with blind box purchasing experience to complete the online questionnaire using their mobile phones. We then asked respondents to share the survey link in their WeChat Moments and encourage their qualified friends to participate. Because the exact population size was unknown due to the dispersed and community-based nature of blind box consumption, the sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula, with a confidence level of 95% and an error term of 5% (Cochran, 1977), resulting in a required sample size of 385. Through a snowball sampling procedure, a total of 550 questionnaires were collected. After discarding invalid responses due to inconsistencies or unanswered questions, 518 valid responses were retained.

Instrument and Measures

The questionnaire was designed based on the study's framework to capture insights into each of the key constructs under investigation (Table 1).

Table 1 *Measurement Item*

Variable	Measurement	Source
Consumption Experience (CE)	The blind box purchase provided me with a fun and enjoyable experience.	Pine & Gilmore (1998)
	I felt absorbed and immersed when engaging with blind box products.	
	I gained new insights or knowledge through the blind box experience.	
	The visual design and presentation of blind boxes were aesthetically pleasing.	
Material Needs (MN)	I consider blind boxes valuable because of the physical items they contain.	Richins & Dawson (1992)
	Owning blind box products gives me a sense of satisfaction.	
	I feel better when I own more blind box items.	

Spiritual Needs (SN)	Blind box purchases help me express my personality or interests. I buy blind boxes because they bring me emotional satisfaction. Blind box items often carry symbolic meaning that resonates with me.	Richins et al. (2004)
Purchasing Decisions (PD)	I intend to continue purchasing blind box products in the future. I often choose blind boxes over other similar products. I am likely to recommend blind box products to others. I am willing to spend more to obtain blind box items I like.	Zeithaml (1988)

To ensure the reliability of the survey, questions were drawn from multiple studies that addressed each of the study's major constructs. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = *Strongly Disagree* and 5 = *Strongly Agree*. The consumption experience scale, developed by Pine and Gilmore (1998), comprised four items. Three items adapted from Richins and Dawson (1992) were used to assess material needs, and three items adapted from Richins et al. (2004), were employed to assess spiritual needs. Finally, a four-item scale developed by Zeithaml (1988) was used to evaluate purchasing decisions.

Data Analysis

To ensure the reliability, validity, and compatibility of the variables with the core assumptions of analysis of covariance, several tests were conducted prior to evaluating the hypotheses. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 25 and AMOS 28. AMOS, a software program for testing theoretical models that utilizes covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM). It is particularly effective for examining complex interactions between latent variables.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Among these 518 valid respondents, 28.96% of the sample was male and 71.04% was female. The majority of respondents (57.14%) were between the ages of 18 and 25. Educationally, 52.90% of the participants were undergraduate or junior college students. Approximately 48.26% of respondents reported a monthly income of over 5,000 Yuan. Regarding occupational distribution, 35.91% of respondents were students, while 41.51% were employed in enterprises and institutions.

The Measurement Model

We analyzed and interpreted the model in two stages. In the first stage, we assessed the measurement model, and in the second stage, we tested the proposed hypotheses of the structural model. Prior to conducting the SEM analysis, we evaluated content, convergent and discriminant validity, reliability, and model fit indices. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) test was used to assess the content validity of measurement items by asking experts to rate how well each item matches the intended construct. Typically, each item is rated by 3 experts using a scale which is +1, 0 and -1. An IOC value $\geq .50$ is generally considered acceptable. All items in this study had IOC scores $\geq .67$, indicating acceptable to excellent content validity. In addition, according to Hair et al. (2010), the minimum thresholds for Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) are .70, .70, and .50, respectively. Furthermore, factor loadings should exceed .60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). As shown in Table 2, all indicators exceeded the recommended thresholds, confirming the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 2 Results of Validity and Reliability Analysis

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	Alpha
Consumption Experience (CE)	CE1	.816	.897	.686	.898
	CE2	.839			
	CE3	.817			
	CE4	.841			
Material Needs (MN)	MN1	.852	.881	.712	.882
	MN2	.844			
	MN3	.836			
Spiritual Needs (SN)	SN1	.866	.902	.754	.902
	SN2	.872			
	SN3	.867			
Purchasing Decision (PD)	PD1	.846	.911	.719	.913
	PD2	.853			
	PD3	.849			
	PD4	.844			

Moreover, as presented in Table 3, the square roots of AVE were significantly greater than the diagonal correlations, confirming the discriminant validity of the model at the level of the research constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

	AVE	CE	MN	SN	PD
CE	.686	.828			
MN	.712	.463	.844		
SN	.754	.489	.355	.868	
PD	.719	.534	.513	.426	.848

The Structural Model

After assessing the measurement model, the hypotheses were estimated. The goodness-of-fit indices indicate that the proposed model statistically fits the data well ($\chi^2 = 317.212$, $\chi^2/df = 1.179$, GFI = .941, AGFI = .929, NFI = .963, CFI = .994, IFI = .994, TLI = .993, and RMSEA = .021). All the fit indices met the recommended criteria for a good fit, as suggested by Browne and Cudeck (1993).

Hypothesis Testing

The results of the structural model analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	Unstd.	SE	CR	p	Result
H_1	CE→PD	.358	.381	.057	6.732	***	Accepted
H_{2a}	CE→MN	.344	.374	.058	6.450	***	Accepted
H_{2b}	CE→SN	.249	.255	.052	4.933	***	Accepted
H_{3a}	MN→PD	.310	.310	.051	6.056	***	Accepted
H_{3b}	SN→PD	.362	.392	.051	7.674	***	Accepted

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

As shown in the table, consumption has a significantly positive effect on consumer purchasing decision for blind boxes ($\beta = .358$, $p < .001$), thus supporting H_1 . Furthermore, consumption also significantly positively affects both material needs ($\beta = .344$, $p < .001$) and spiritual needs ($\beta = .249$, $p < .001$), supporting H_{2a} and H_{2b} . Additionally, both material needs ($\beta = .310$, $p < .001$) and spiritual needs ($\beta = .362$, $p < .001$) significantly positively affected consumer purchasing decision, thereby supporting H_{3a} and H_{3b} . In summary, all hypotheses were supported by the data.

Mediation Testing

The bootstrap method, developed for nonparametric resampling tests, was employed to examine the mediating role of consumer needs (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). When conducting the mediating effect test using the bootstrap method, the basic work of using the confidence interval (CI) is indispensable (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The CI for the indirect effect is constructed by repeatedly resampling the data and calculating the indirect effect for each resample. If the CI does not contain zero, the indirect effect is considered significant (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). A total of 5,000 bootstrapping procedures were conducted. As shown in Table 5, the mediation analysis revealed that the confidence interval for the path from blind box consumption experience to material needs to customer purchasing decision did not contain 0, with a range of [.217, .409]. This indicated that material needs mediated the relationship between blind box consumption experience and customer purchasing decision, thus supporting H_{4a} . Similarly, the confidence interval for the path from blind box consumption experience to spiritual needs to customer purchasing decision did not include 0, with a range of .113 to .245. This suggested that spiritual needs also played a mediating role in the influence of blind box consumption experience on customer purchasing decision, thereby supporting H_{4b} .

Table 5 Analysis of Mediating Effect

Paths	Effect	Bootstrap 95% CI		Result
		Lower	Upper	
H_{4a} : CE → MN → PD	.241	.217	.409	Supported
H_{4b} : CE → SN → PD	.325	.113	.245	Supported

Discussion

Based on the Means-End Chain Theory, this study investigated the path differences in how blind box consumption experiences influenced customers' purchasing decision. The findings from empirical research are summarized as follows:

First, the results demonstrated that the blind box consumption experience positively influenced customer purchasing decision. Consumers who had a more favorable experience with blind boxes were more likely to engage in purchasing decisions. This aligns with the findings of Yan and Wu (2021) and Chen (2022). Second, a significant positive relationship was found between consumption experience and material needs, indicating that enhancing the blind box consumption experience increased consumers' material needs for these products. A more satisfying consumption experience led to higher material demands for blind box products, such as quality, appearance, and packaging. This result is consistent with the studies by Deng (2023) and Zhu (2023).

Furthermore, the study confirmed that blind box consumption experience also fulfills consumers' spiritual needs. Extended exposure to the same emotional stimuli can lead to fatigue and satiation. Blind boxes, with their element of surprise, provide a novel experience, fulfilling customers' spiritual need for adventure. This aligns with Virgiawan et al. (2024). The study explicitly distinguished between material and spiritual needs, whereas previous researchers might have lumped them together, or only emphasized one aspect (usually material needs). This dual-focus on material and spiritual needs presents a more holistic understanding of consumer behavior than past studies, which may have only focused on material attributes like product quality or aesthetic value.

Additionally, the research reveals that consumers' material needs positively influenced their purchasing decision. The higher the material needs, the greater the likelihood of making a purchase. This supports the findings of Lin (2024). Moreover, the study demonstrated that consumers' spiritual needs also positively affected purchasing decisions. The attractive external appearance of the blind box grabs consumers' attention and satisfies their aesthetic desires. Furthermore, the unique "unpredictable and hidden models" gameplay generates suspense and stimulates strong emotional experiences, which in turn drive purchasing decisions. The more blind boxes satisfy these spiritual needs, the more likely consumers are to make a purchase. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Chen et al. (2022).

Finally, the study found that the blind box consumption experience influenced customers' purchasing decision positively, with both material and spiritual needs playing a significant mediating role. While earlier studies have shown direct relationships between consumption experience and purchasing behavior, this study innovatively introduced the mediating role of consumer needs. By demonstrating how material and spiritual needs mediate the effect of the blind box consumption experience on purchase decisions, the study offers a deeper understanding of why and how consumers engage in blind box purchases. This is a more dynamic approach compared to previous studies, which treated consumption experiences and purchase decisions as direct relationships.

In conclusion, the blind box consumption experience is rooted in the diverse shopping needs of consumers, who through the purchase experience, deepen their emotional connection to the unknown aspects of the product, thereby driving their purchasing decisions.

Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated the path differences in how blind box consumption experiences influence customers' purchasing decision through their needs. The results indicated that the blind box consumption experience positively affected customer needs, and that both material and spiritual needs promote customer purchasing decisions. Furthermore, both material and spiritual needs play positive mediating roles in the relationship between blind box consumption experience and customer purchasing decisions.

Upon reviewing the existing literature on blind box consumption, many scholars have focused on analyzing the blind box economic market and marketing models (Lin, 2024). However, there is a relative lack of research into the psychological mechanisms behind blind box consumption, with only a few studies exploring the influence of social support, emotional motivation, and customer experience on blind box purchase decisions (Yan & Wu, 2021). This study, however, provides deeper insight into the relationship between consumption experience, customer needs, and purchasing decision. It highlights that customer needs play a mediating role between consumption experience and purchasing decision in the context of blind boxes. These empirical findings contribute to the growing body of literature on consumption experience and purchase behavior, particularly in the new context of blind boxes.

Moreover, the study uniquely applied the Means-End Chain (MEC) Theory to understand how blind box consumption experiences influence customer purchasing decisions. MEC theory helps trace the chain of effects from the product attributes (blind box experience) to consumer values (material and spiritual needs), and ultimately to purchasing behavior. This application of MEC theory to blind box consumption is a novel approach, given that prior studies on MEC generally focused on traditional retail products or services. The study emphasizes that consumers are not only buying a physical product, but also seeking a deeper emotional experience (spiritual need), thus aligning the theory with the context of experiential consumption.

Additionally, the study offers several management implications for businesses in the current market environment. First, companies must strengthen quality control of blind boxes to meet customers' material needs. Suppliers should collaborate with retailers to standardize production processes, continuously optimize manufacturing procedures, and implement quality verification methods to ensure product quality. Whenever possible, manufacturers can invite retailers to conduct on-site inspections, allowing for rigorous supervision of production and quality control processes. The use of new media to promote brands and increase customer recognition can help address customers' material needs. Moreover, businesses should emphasize emotional design to enhance customers' perception of their spiritual needs. Beyond meeting the basic functional attributes and application scenarios of products, suppliers should focus on the cultural and emotional value of the products, incorporating diversified designs and packaging to address customers' spiritual needs.

Retailers can incorporate cultural elements into their brand marketing, enriching the customer experience and enhancing their perception of the product's spiritual value. Furthermore, retailers can invite their target audience to participate in blind box packaging design, ensuring the product aligns

with customers' emotional experiences. This strategy can increase customer engagement and, in turn, drive purchasing decisions. In summary, while past studies have looked at blind box consumption from the perspective of the product itself, this study introduces the idea that the social context and online communities also play a significant role in shaping the consumer's emotional and psychological experience with the product. This insight is critical in the digital age, where virtual communities contribute to shaping purchase behaviors.

Limitation and Recommendations for Future Research

This study had several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, this study used a questionnaire survey method to collect data, where consumers without prior blind box purchase experience were excluded from answering most of the questions. While this approach allowed the study to focus on consumers with experience, it overlooked the reasons why some individuals do not engage in blind box consumption. Understanding the factors behind the reluctance to purchase blind boxes could provide valuable insights for enterprises and help tailor marketing strategies. Future studies could include more questions aimed at exploring these reasons in greater detail.

Second, the age distribution of the sample was not balanced, as the majority of respondents were under 30 years old, with only a small number of participants being over 30. This imbalance in the age distribution may have skewed the results, as consumer behavior across different age groups can vary significantly. Future research should aim to expand the age range of the sample to ensure a more balanced representation across different age groups, thereby enhancing the findings' generalizability of the findings.

Finally, while the study highlights the importance of blind box consumption experience and consumer needs in influencing purchase behavior, future research could explore additional moderating variables, such as consumer product knowledge or the specific purpose behind consumption. Incorporating these factors into the model could improve its explanatory power and provide deeper insights into the factors that drive consumer behavior in the context of blind box consumption.

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