

Exploring the Driving Role of Ideal Self-Image Congruence in Pop Mart Blind Box Purchase Intention

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Abstract

This study investigates the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer purchase intentions for Pop Mart blind box products through an integrated framework combining the Theory of Planned Behavior and self-congruity theory. The research findings demonstrate that three fundamental psychological factors, namely consumer attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, significantly strengthen ideal self-image congruence, which subsequently exerts a positive influence on purchase intention. Particularly noteworthy is the discovery that perceived uncertainty, traditionally considered an inhibiting factor in consumer behavior, manifests positive effects by concurrently enhancing both self-image congruence and purchase decisions. The theoretical contributions of this research are threefold. First, it establishes ideal self-image congruence as a crucial mediator connecting cognitive

evaluations with behavioral intentions in blind box consumption. Second, it reveals the direct impacts of emotional engagement and social influence on purchasing behavior. Third, it provides empirical evidence that perceived uncertainty can enhance purchase intention, thereby challenging conventional marketing theories. Building upon the theoretical framework of experiential consumption, this study advances current understanding by introducing the novel concepts of ideal self-congruence and perceived uncertainty, while elucidating their complex interplay with cognitive, emotional, and social factors in modern consumer behavior.

Keywords: Pop Mart Blind Box, Ideal Self-Image Congruence, Purchase Intention, Perceived Uncertainty, Theory Of Planned Behavior

Introduction

In the field of marketing, the advent of the experience economy has given rise to new phenomena and trends, such as consumers' deeper emotional investment, heightened emphasis on individuality, increased participation, and greater attention to the social functions embedded within purchasing behavior, which diverge significantly from traditional marketing practices (Mishra et al., 2024). In recent years, China's blind box market has experienced exponential growth, with Pop Mart emerging as a leading brand in the art toy industry (Wu, 2023). Among its collectible characters, *Labubu*, a mischievous yet endearing figure from the "Ziqi Culture" series, has become a cultural icon in 2025, dominating social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin (Li, 2025). Its immense popularity has resulted in scarcity at retail prices, with rare editions selling out instantly and commanding several times their original value in resale markets (Liu et al., 2023). Consumer tracking reports reveal that these intense purchasing intentions are often rooted in strong emotional connections tied to self-image expression (de Kervenoael et al., 2024).

The importance of examining this phenomenon lies in its complex psychological underpinnings, where identity expression, social influence, and uncertainty converge. Research indicates that self-image congruence significantly influences consumer decision-making, especially in preference-driven purchases in the era of social media (Sirgy, 1982). Macheka et al. (2024) emphasized that in markets characterized by product homogeneity, purchase decisions are increasingly determined not by functional attributes alone, but by the degree of alignment between consumers' self-concepts and the symbolic meaning of products. The *Labubu* figure, embraced by younger generations as a symbol of resilience, individuality, and emotional rebellion, appears to resonate strongly with the ideal self-image of consumers facing academic, social, and occupational pressures (Silva, 2024). Ideal self-image congruence, defined as the psychological alignment between brand perception and the consumer's aspirational self, has been shown to shape purchasing patterns and brand commitment (AlQahtani, 2025). In digital and social media spaces, consumers strategically select brands that reinforce their desired identity, merging self-expression with brand interaction (Rabbanee et al., 2023).

Although blind box purchases are often perceived as impulsive or emotion-driven, they are also informed by cognitive and socio-psychological processes (Hockin, 2023). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) posits that human action is primarily determined by three components: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; Zhao, 2025). In the blind box context, consumers form purchase

attitudes based on brand image, product design, and emotional resonance (Saputra et al., 2025), experience social pressure from peers or online communities (Qi et al., 2024), and assess their own resources and capabilities to obtain limited-edition items (Shi et al., 2021). These three factors collectively shape purchase intentions, providing a structured framework for understanding even highly uncertain consumption behaviors.

Traditionally, uncertainty is framed as a deterrent, associated with psychological discomfort and avoidance behaviors (Chater & Loewenstein, 2023). However, recent marketing research reveals its paradoxical appeal, showing that controlled uncertainty can serve as an emotional catalyst (Kovacheva & Nikolova, 2024). Ambiguous outcomes may heighten engagement and purchasing motivation, particularly in experiential consumption where unpredictability enhances excitement (Yu, 2025). In blind box purchasing, uncertainty shifts from a perceived risk to a source of emotional arousal, creating a unique dynamic between risk and reward (Ding & Han, 2024).

This study therefore addresses the following problem: in a consumption context where identity expression and high uncertainty coexist, how do consumers form purchase intentions for blind box products? Specifically, it examines whether ideal self-image congruence is significantly influenced by the Theory of Planned Behavior's core constructs, whether perceived uncertainty impacts both congruence and purchase attitude, and whether congruence serves as a mediator between these predictors and purchase intention. By integrating Theory of Planned Behavior with self-congruity theory and uncertainty theory, this research aims to deepen theoretical understanding and provide actionable insights for identity-driven marketing strategies.

The relevance of this investigation extends beyond the blind box sector. For example, Zulhamri Bin Abdullah and colleagues, in their work on corporate social responsibility and brand advocacy, demonstrated that CSR initiatives can indirectly shape consumer behavior by fostering brand trust, a mediating psychological mechanism linking corporate actions to consumer loyalty (Zhu, Abdullah, Jkom, & Tham, 2022). Drawing a conceptual parallel, the present study posits that ideal self-image congruence can similarly function as a mediating bridge between Theory of Planned Behavior variables and purchase intention, highlighting the strategic value of aligning brand identity with consumers' aspirational selves. This approach underscores the theoretical and practical significance of understanding how cognitive, emotional, and identity-based drivers jointly shape consumer engagement in experience-oriented markets.

Literature Review

Theory of Planned Behavior

Theory of Planned Behavior assumes that human behavior is determined by the willingness to behave (Wang et al., 2024). In other words, behavioral intention directly affects whether a certain behavior of an individual occurs, and other potential factors that affect behavior indirectly affect behavior through behavioral intention (D'Arco et al., 2025). Scholars define behavioral intention as the subjective probability that an individual will actively engage in a certain behavior, which reveals the impact of brand experience on consumer purchase intention (Bushara et al., 2024). Under objective conditions, predicting behavior through

behavioral intention is the best way, because behavioral intention is highly correlated with behavior (Savari & Khaleghi, 2023).

The theory of planned behavior points out that behavioral intention is affected by three variables: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Li et al.,2023). Attitude is an individual's own psychological tendency and is an internal factor; subjective norms come from the interference and pressure of external information and are external factors; perceived behavioral control is the difficulty of an individual to achieve a certain behavior (Prachyakoon,2024). Most empirical studies using the Theory of Planned Behavior model attempt to explain or predict newly introduced behaviors (Fauzi et al.,2024).

It can provide a good theoretical framework for conceptualizing research, measuring, and determining behavioral intentions and actual contact empirical behavior (Wang et al.,2025). Such a theoretical framework has also been used to explain environmental-related behavioral areas, for example, and examined the behavior of American managers' preference for reducing pollution and the willingness of organizations to pay for forest resource regeneration (Udeagha et al.,2023). The Theory of Planned Behavior is widely regarded as a key framework for explaining how individual and social values influence behavior (Li & Zhang,2023). It suggests that a person's intention to act is shaped by their attitude toward the behavior, the influence of social norms, and their perceived level of control over the action (Qiu et al.,2025).

Perceived Uncertainty

Perceived uncertainty refers to a psychological state experienced by an individual when facing future events, and its core characteristics are the uncertainty and uncontrollability of the results (Buheji et al., 2020). From a traditional economic perspective, uncertainty is usually regarded as a negative factor, and it is believed that consumers will avoid uncertain choices related to income and results (Hapuwatte & Jawahir,2021). Therefore, many companies tend to reduce the uncertainty faced by consumers by providing clear information and reducing risks in order to enhance purchasing confidence (Al-Adwan et al.,2022).

However, recent psychological and marketing research has found that uncertainty does not always have a negative effect, and moderate uncertainty can become an important factor in stimulating consumer participation motivation (Zhu et al.,2022). For example, according to research, high levels of uncertainty have the potential to stimulate the brain's reward system, leading to improved learning capacity and increased motivation to act (Monosov,2020). Pizzagalli et al. (2008) also pointed out that uncertain rewards are closely related to hedonic ability and risk-taking tendency, and are important psychological mechanisms driving exploratory consumer behavior.

In marketing scenarios, uncertainty can particularly stimulate consumers' emotional responses and expectations. Heise et al. (2022) found that when individuals know that a certain result is positive but the specific form is unknown, uncertain rewards can bring more lasting and significant positive emotional experience. Romijn (2025) further confirmed that in emotion-driven purchasing situations, the "sense of surprise" and "fun" brought by uncertainty can significantly enhance consumers' pleasure, thereby promoting the improvement of marketing performance. Shen et al. (2015) proposed that when consumers pay more attention to the process of obtaining rewards rather than the results themselves,

uncertain rewards are more likely to trigger excitement and active investment, showing stronger behavioral motivation and resource investment tendency.

In addition, in the field of public donation behavior, Shi et al. (2021) found that uncertain rewards can reduce the psychological burden people feel in donation behavior and increase their willingness to donate. This shows that uncertainty not only has a behavioral incentive function, but also has the potential to relieve emotions and regulate risk tolerance (Wienkamp,2020).

Combined with the blind box consumption situation, consumers are facing highly uncertain results in the purchase process (that is, they cannot predict which product they will get). This uncertainty is significantly different from traditional purchasing behavior (Kim & Krishnan,2015). It may not hinder consumption, but may become an important source of psychological stimulation to drive purchasing behavior (Darrat et al.,2023). Therefore, as an important variable that affects consumers' cognition and emotional judgment, it is necessary to include perceived uncertainty in the extended Theory of Planned Behavior model to more comprehensively explain its role in the consistency of ideal self-image and purchasing attitude.

Ideal Self-Image Congruence

The concept of self-image congruence, originally proposed by Sirgy (1982), has evolved into a critical construct in consumer behavior, particularly in contexts involving symbolic consumption and identity expression. This concept refers to how well a consumer's self-concept aligns with the image of a brand or product, with a particular focus on the ideal self (Ayoubi et al.,2024). Ideal self-image congruence reflects the extent to which consumers view a brand as representing who they want to become, rather than who they are at present, as emphasized in previous research (AlQahtani, 2025).

In contemporary marketing research, ideal self-image congruence has been shown to play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes, preferences, and purchase intentions (Klabi, 2020). Particularly among younger consumers,identity construction and aspirational alignment have become central motivations for consumption, especially in categories like fashion, entertainment, and collectibles. In digital environments, individuals often express their ideal selves (Odiase,2021). When brands align with these aspirational identities, they are more likely to build stronger psychological bonds and foster deeper consumer engagement (Temitope et al.,2024).

The mechanism of ideal self-image congruence is often explained through self-congruity theory, which posits that individuals are more likely to prefer brands whose symbolic meanings match their own self-perceptions (Sirgy, 1982). In the case of blind box consumption, where the product is not fully known prior to purchase, consumers often rely on symbolic brand elements,such as character stories, aesthetics, and perceived values to assess congruence with their ideal self (Martynenko et al.,2023). Pop Mart's Labubu character, for example, is perceived by many young consumers in China as a symbol of emotional resilience, individuality, and rebellion against conformity, thereby embodying traits of their ideal selves.

Empirical studies have also demonstrated the predictive power of ideal self-image congruence on emotional brand attachment, willingness to pay a premium, and word-of-mouth behavior (Wiedmann et al., 2009). In uncertain consumption environments like blind boxes, where outcome ambiguity is inherent, the psychological comfort provided by self-congruent brand identities can offset perceived risks and enhance purchase motivation (Chinazzi, 2023).

Recent studies further indicate that ideal self-image congruence may serve as a mediating mechanism in broader psychological models. For example, when combined with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), ideal self-image congruence has been found to mediate the relationships between consumers' attitudes, perceived social pressure (subjective norms), and perceived control, and their behavioral intentions (Rao et al., 2022). This suggests that congruence not only influences direct preferences but also serves as a bridge between rational planning and emotional aspiration in consumption behavior.

Ideal self-image congruence emerges as a crucial factor in understanding modern consumption, particularly in domains where identity expression, emotional compensation, and brand symbolism intersect (AlQahtani, 2025). As symbolic brands continue to thrive in the age of social media and personalized marketing, aligning with consumers' ideal self-concept is becoming a strategic imperative for brand success (Temitope et al., 2024).

Conceptual Model

This research combines the theory of planned behavior and self-consistency theory to investigate the psychological factors that shape consumers' intentions to buy Pop Mart blind boxes. The conceptual framework emphasizes ideal self-image congruence, reflecting the perceived match between consumers' aspirational self-identity and the symbolic image represented by Pop Mart's brand, such as Labubu.

This congruence not only directly enhances purchase attitudes and intentions but also mediates the effects of Theory of Planned Behavior variables (attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) on purchase intention. Additionally, the model incorporates perceived uncertainty as a key influencing factor, recognizing that uncertainty in blind box outcomes can trigger emotional arousal and positively affect ideal self-image congruence and purchase attitudes.

This framework positions ideal self-image congruence as a psychological bridge connecting rational, social, and emotional factors to purchase intention. It extends Theory of Planned Behavior into identity-driven and uncertain consumption, offering valuable insights for emotional branding strategies.

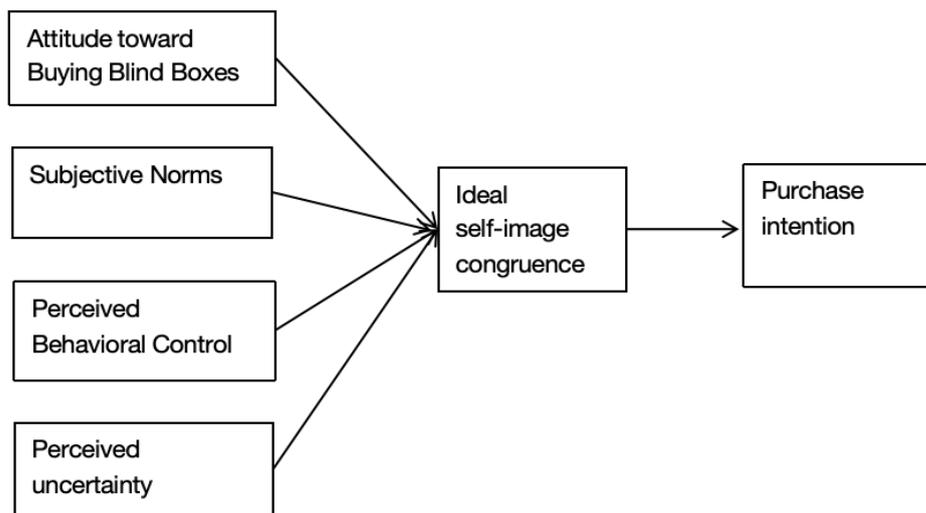


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

H1: Attitude toward buying blind boxes has a positive influence on Ideal self-image congruence.

H2: Subjective norms have a positive influence on Ideal self-image congruence.

H3: Perceived behavioral control has a positive influence on Ideal self-image congruence.

H4: Perceived uncertainty has a positive influence on ideal self-image congruence.

H5: Ideal self-image congruence has a positive influence on purchase intention.

H6: Ideal self-image congruence mediates the relationship between attitude toward buying blind boxes and purchase intention.

H7: Ideal self-image congruence mediates the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention.

H8: Ideal self-image congruence mediates the relationship between perceived behavioral control and purchase intention.

H9: Ideal self-image congruence mediates the relationship between perceived uncertainty and purchase intention.

Methodology

Data Collection

This study collected a total of 337 valid responses through structured online questionnaires, ensuring sufficient statistical power. The questionnaires were primarily distributed via social media platforms (such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin) and Pop Mart fan communities. All respondents were screened to confirm their prior purchase experience with Pop Mart blind box products. This sample size is appropriate for subsequent partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis.

Research Instrument

All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from prior literature, with modifications made to fit the context of blind box consumption. All measurement items were rated using a five-point Likert scale, with response options spanning from strong disagreement to strong agreement.

Part A of the questionnaire was designed to collect respondents' demographic and behavioral background information, including six items: gender, age, education level, occupation, monthly income, and frequency of blind box purchases. Part B, Attitude toward buying blind boxes, was measured using four items adapted from Loureiro & Araújo (2014) and Zhan & He (2012), which captured consumers' evaluative judgments and emotional responses toward engaging in blind box purchases. Part C, Subjective norms, was assessed using four items adapted from Ajzen (1991) & Fitzmaurice (2005), reflecting the perceived social pressure from peers, family, and online communities to participate in blind box buying behavior. Part D, Perceived behavioral control, was measured with four items adapted from Francis et al. (2004) and Shim, Eastlick, Lotz & Warrington (2001), evaluating the extent to which individuals feel confident and capable of performing blind box purchasing behavior.

Part E, Perceived uncertainty, was measured using three items adapted from Zhang et al. (2022), which assessed consumers' perceptions of unpredictability and lack of control over the outcomes of blind box purchases. Part F, Ideal self-image congruence, was measured with three items adapted from Loureiro & Araújo (2014) and Wiedmann et al. (2009), capturing the perceived alignment between the symbolic image of Pop Mart characters and the consumer's ideal self-concept. Part G, Purchase intention, was assessed using three items adapted from Madden, Ellen, and Ajzen (1992) & Ajzen (1991), measuring the likelihood and willingness of consumers to purchase blind box products in the near future.

Study location

This study was conducted in mainland China, where Pop Mart's blind box products have gained significant popularity, especially among consumers. China represents one of the world's largest and fastest-growing markets for designer toys and mystery box products, making it an ideal setting to examine the psychological mechanisms underlying blind box purchase behavior. In recent years, the Pop Mart brand, particularly its Labubu figure has become a cultural icon among Chinese youth, frequently appearing on social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin.

Given the brand's pervasive influence in urban Chinese consumer culture and the widespread phenomenon of emotionally driven blind box purchases, China provides a suitable and insightful setting to examine how ideal self-image congruence and perceived uncertainty influence consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Data collection was carried out online via platforms familiar to Chinese consumers, ensuring cultural appropriateness and broad accessibility for the target population.

Research findings

Descriptive Analysis of Sample Profile

The respondents of this study were Chinese consumers who had previous experience purchasing Pop Mart blind boxes. A total of 337 valid responses were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin. Screening questions ensured that only participants with actual purchase experience were included.

As presented in Table 1, the final dataset consisted of 337 valid responses. The proportion of males is 58.2% and that of females is 41.8%. The respondents were mainly aged between 18 and 30. In terms of educational attainment, the majority are master's degree holders. Their income is mainly between 3,000 and 1,000 yuan, and their occupations are mainly corporate employees and civil servants.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	196	58.2%
	Female	141	41.8%
Age	under 18 years old	10	3.0%
	18-25 years old	130	38.6%
	26-30 years old	125	37.1%
	31-40 years old	57	16.9%
	41-50 years old	12	3.6%
	Over 50 years old	3	0.9%
Educational	Under-university	17	5.0%
	University	111	32.9%
	Post-graduate	184	54.6%
	doctoral candidate	25	7.4%
Monthly income	Less than RM3,000	39	11.6%
	RM3,000–RM6,000	141	41.8%
	RM6,001–RM10,000	124	36.8%
	More than RM10,000	33	9.8%
Occupation	Student	27	8.0%
	Educator	52	15.4%
	Enterprise staff	95	28.2%
	Freelancer	99	29.4%
	Civil servant	48	14.2%
	Others	16	4.7%

Validity and Reliability of Constructs

Table 2 reveals that both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) scores surpass 0.7, confirming the measurement model's reliability. In addition, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all variables range from 1.293 to 2.216, suggesting no multicollinearity issues. All outer loadings are above 0.7 with no cross-loadings, further supporting the reliability of the measurement model. The average variance extracted (AVE) values are all above 0.5, demonstrating good convergent validity. Finally, according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion in Table 3, the correlations between constructs are all lower than the square root of their corresponding AVE, indicating that the measurement model has no issues with discriminant validity.

Table 2
Reliability and Validity Assessment of Key Constructs

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	VIF	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
ABB	ABB1	0.893	0.735	2.216	0.820	0.893
	ABB2	0.828		1.780		
	ABB3	0.850		1.755		
SN	SN1	0.848	0.667	1.659	0.750	0.857
	SN2	0.798		1.439		
	SN3	0.803		1.482		
PBC	PBC1	0.835	0.684	1.776	0.767	0.866
	PBC2	0.755		1.362		
	PBC3	0.886		1.990		
PU	PU1	0.860	0.697	1.605	0.784	0.873
	PU2	0.857		1.848		
	PU3	0.785		1.566		
ISC	ISC1	0.837	0.728	1.683	0.813	0.889
	ISC2	0.843		1.774		
	ISC3	0.879		2.014		
PI	PI1	0.749	0.609	1.465	0.702	0.823
	PI2	0.709		1.396		
	PI3	0.874		1.293		

Note: ABB = attitude toward buying blind boxes; SN = subjective norms; PBC = perceived behavioral control; PU = perceived uncertainty; ISC = ideal self-image congruence; PI = purchase intention

Table 3
Discriminant Validity Based on Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	ABB	SN	PBC	PU	ISC	PI
ABB	0.858					
SN	0.255	0.817				
PBC	0.249	0.275	0.827			
PU	0.223	0.204	0.221	0.835		
ISC	0.424	0.351	0.410	0.370	0.853	
PI	0.358	0.355	0.375	0.392	0.490	0.780

Note: The bolded diagonal values represent the square roots of the AVE for each construct, while the off-diagonal entries show the inter-construct correlations.

Structural Model

For the purpose of assessing the predictive power of the model construct in predicting the outcome variables, predictive power R² and predictive relevance were used (Hair et al., 2016). Figure 2 shows the measurement model with path coefficient values. The predictive power R² of Ideal Self-Image Congruence (ISC) is 0.357, and Purchase Intention (PI) is 0.240. Meanwhile, the factor loadings of the indicators for each construct ranged from 0.709 to 0.886, demonstrating strong item reliability.

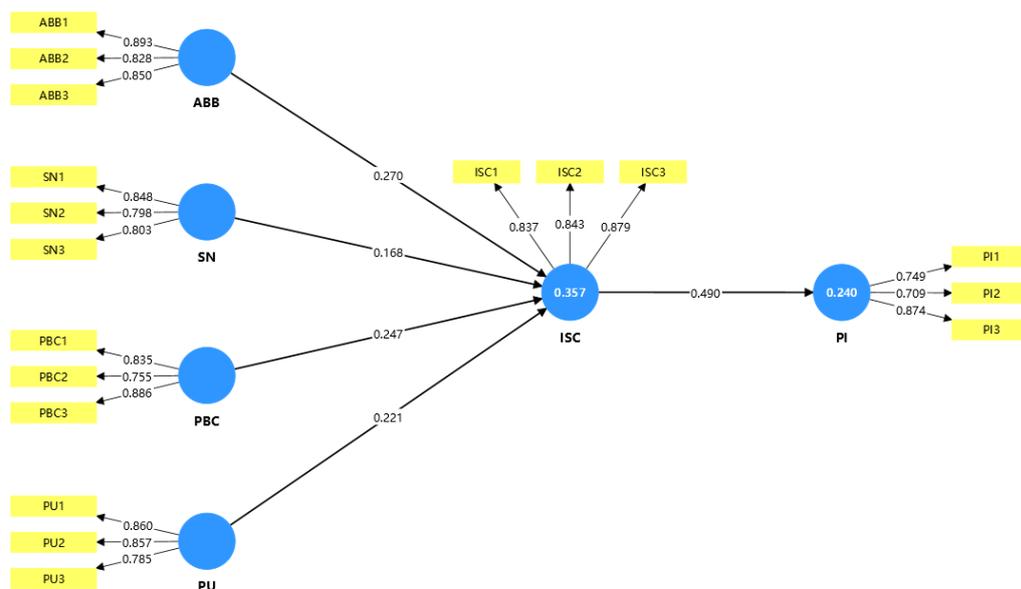


Figure 2: PLS algorithm path model

As shown in Table 4, attitude toward buying blind boxes ($\beta = 0.270$, $T = 4.903$, $p < 0.001$), subjective norms ($\beta = 0.168$, $T = 3.424$, $p < 0.001$), perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.120$, $T = 5.181$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived uncertainty ($\beta = 0.221$, $T = 5.135$, $p < 0.001$) all exert significant positive effects on ideal self-image congruence, supporting Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4. In addition, ideal self-image congruence significantly and positively influences purchase intention ($\beta = 0.490$, $T = 9.412$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H5.

The indirect effect paths— $ABB \rightarrow ISC \rightarrow PI$ ($\beta = 0.132$, $T = 3.884$), $SN \rightarrow ISC \rightarrow PI$ ($\beta = 0.082$, $T = 2.982$), $PBC \rightarrow ISC \rightarrow PI$ ($\beta = 0.121$, $T = 4.290$), and $PU \rightarrow ISC \rightarrow PI$ ($\beta = 0.108$, $T = 4.523$)—are all statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that attitude toward buying blind boxes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and perceived uncertainty each positively affect purchase intention through the mediating role of ideal self-image congruence. Therefore, Hypotheses H6, H7, H8, and H9 are supported. Table 5 presents the effect size (f^2) measures, which provide further interpretation of the strength of the supported hypotheses.

Table 4
Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient (β)	t-statistics	p-value	Decision
H1	ABB -> ISC	0.270	4.903	0.000	Supported
H2	SN -> ISC	0.168	3.424	0.001	Supported
H3	PBC -> ISC	0.247	5.181	0.000	Supported
H4	PU -> ISC	0.221	5.135	0.000	Supported
H5	ISC -> PI	0.490	9.412	0.000	Supported
H6	ABB -> ISC -> PI	0.132	3.884	0.000	Supported
H7	SN -> ISC -> PI	0.082	2.982	0.003	Supported
H8	PBC -> ISC -> PI	0.121	4.290	0.000	Supported
H9	PU -> ISC -> PI	0.108	4.523	0.000	Supported

Note: ***t-values = 2.33 (1%)

Table 5

Effect Size Estimation Using f^2 Values

Construct	ISC	PI
ABB	0.10	
SN	0.04	
PBC	0.08	
PU	0.07	
ISC		0.32

Note: According to conventional guidelines, an f^2 value of 0.02 indicates a small effect, 0.15 represents a medium effect, and 0.35 reflects a large effect.

Discussion

This study underscores the pivotal influence of ideal self-image congruence on consumers' intentions to purchase Pop Mart blind boxes, through an integrated framework combining the theory of planned behavior and self-consistency theory. The findings reveal that emotional and identity-driven factors, alongside rational decision-making processes, collectively influence consumer behavior in the context of uncertain and symbolic consumption.

First, the findings confirm that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which are the core elements of the theory of planned behavior, have a positive impact on ideal self-image congruence. This aligns with prior research emphasizing the importance of psychological and social factors in consumption (Ajzen, 1991). Notably, the strong influence of attitude ($\beta = 0.270$) underscores the emotional appeal of blind boxes, while subjective norms ($\beta = 0.168$) reflect the social pressure exerted by peers and online communities.

Second, perceived uncertainty, traditionally viewed as a deterrent, emerges as a positive driver of ideal self-image congruence ($\beta = 0.221$) and purchase intention. This challenges conventional economic perspectives and supports recent marketing literature (Zhang et al., 2022), which posits that uncertainty can enhance emotional arousal and engagement. The thrill of unpredictability in blind box purchases thus serves as a unique motivator, reinforcing the interplay between risk and reward in experiential consumption (Yu, 2025).

Third, ideal self-image congruence acts as a critical mediator, bridging TPB variables and purchase intention. This finding extends self-consistency theory (Sirgy, 1982) by demonstrating how aspirational brand alignment amplifies the effects of rational and social factors. For instance, the mediation paths (e.g., $ABB \rightarrow ISC \rightarrow PI$, $\beta = 0.132$) highlight that consumers' desire to express their ideal selves through Pop Mart products strengthens their purchase intentions.

However, the study also identifies areas for further exploration. For example, while perceived uncertainty enhances engagement, its long-term effects on brand loyalty remain unclear. Additionally, cultural nuances in blind box consumption, such as regional differences in collectivism versus individualism, could deepen the understanding of subjective norms.

Future research might also examine the role of brand storytelling (e.g., Labubu's rebellious persona) in reinforcing ideal self-image congruence.

Conclusion

This study reveals that Pop Mart blind box purchases are driven by a complex interplay of emotional, social, and cognitive factors, with ideal self-image congruence serving as a pivotal mechanism. The integration of Theory of Planned Behavior and self-consistency theory provides a robust framework for understanding how consumers navigate uncertainty and identity expression in experiential consumption. This study demonstrates that consumers' purchase intentions toward Pop Mart blind boxes are shaped by a dynamic combination of psychological, social, and experiential factors. Three key findings emerge from the research.

First, the core components of the Theory of Planned Behavior, including attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, were all found to significantly enhance ideal self-image congruence. This validates the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behavior in symbolic consumption contexts by demonstrating how both rational evaluations and social influences contribute to consumers' self-concept alignment with brands.

Second, the study challenges conventional economic assumptions by revealing that perceived uncertainty positively influences both ideal self-image congruence and purchase intention. Rather than deterring purchases, the element of surprise inherent in blind box consumption actually serves as an emotional catalyst, creating excitement and reinforcing engagement. This finding aligns with emerging perspectives in experiential marketing that recognize the motivational power of controlled risk.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, ideal self-image congruence acts as a critical mediator between Theory of Planned Behavior variables and purchase intention. This psychological mechanism bridges consumers' aspirational identities with their actual purchasing behavior, highlighting how self-expression drives modern consumption patterns. The mediating role of congruence underscores that blind box purchases are not merely transactional but represent a form of identity negotiation and emotional fulfillment.

These insights offer valuable practical implications for marketers in the experiential retail sector. Brands can strengthen emotional connections with target audiences by emphasizing symbolic traits that resonate with consumers' ideal selves, such as Labubu's themes of resilience and individuality. Marketing strategies should leverage social media platforms to amplify peer influence and subjective norms, while limited-edition releases and strategic uncertainty can heighten anticipation and demand.

Theoretically, this study expands the boundaries of the Theory of Planned Behavior model by incorporating identity-driven motivations and uncertainty as key factors in contemporary consumption. Future research could build on these findings by examining cross-cultural variations in blind box consumption or investigating the long-term effects of uncertainty on brand loyalty. Ultimately, this work highlights the importance of aligning brand narratives with consumers' aspirational identities, providing a framework for understanding and engaging today's experience-driven consumers. The findings affirm that in an era of emotional

and identity-based consumption, successful brands must speak not just to what consumers need, but to who they aspire to be.

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