LUISS

BI-LUISS Joint Master in Marketing

Course of Integrated Marketing Communication

Surprise is the prize itself: The strategic role of Influencer Marketing in the Blind box market

Prof. Stella Romagnoli

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Matteo De Angelis

CO-SUPERVISOR

Chiara Barrel - 791211

CANDIDATE

Academic Year 2024/2025

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In recent months, the trend of blind boxes has gained significant traction on social media platforms, particularly on TikTok.

What are blind boxes? Those are mystery boxes containing surprise items, often collectible figurines that belong to a series. These figurines can be inspired by existing themes such as cartoons, video game characters, or cinematic sagas, or they may feature original characters designed by artists and creators and often through collaborations with well-known brands.

What makes them unique and innovative? The central appeal lies in the element of surprise – the excitement of not knowing which character will be inside the box. This creates a sense of suspense and emotional involvement that transcends the simple act of purchasing a figurine. Blind boxes exemplify the concept of the "augmented product", where the value extends beyond the physical object to encompass the emotional and experiential aspects surrounding the purchase.
The unboxing process itself is an exhilarating experience that drives repeat purchases. Additionally, the scarcity of certain characters enhances their desirability, fostering a strong FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) effect. This mechanism fuels the culture of collecting, turning each purchase into a challenge to complete the series. The enjoyment derives not only from owning the final product but also from the entire process of unboxing and collecting, which establishes a deeper connection between the consumer and the product. In this way, the figurines take on the qualities of personalized works of art.

Who is the target audience? Blind boxes appeal not only to younger consumers but also to adults - referred to as "kidults" - who are drawn to the nostalgic appeal and the opportunity to rekindle their inner child. These products offer affordable entry points into the world of art toys, with prices typically ranging between €10 and €20, making them accessible to a wide audience.

Moreover, brands in this sector have adeptly leveraged the power of social media, seamlessly integrating social and digital dynamics into their strategies. Here, collecting is no longer just an individual activity; it has evolved into a shared and collective experience. Social media platforms, particularly TikTok, have become key venues for sharing discoveries with users, broadcasting live unboxings or showcasing their collections. This has created a self-reinforcing cycle of excitement, driving further purchases.

The phenomenon of unboxing sessions has grown into a popular content format, attracting millions of views and significantly increasing the visibility of these products. This enhances their perceived value, elevating each item to the status of a miniature work of art that can be displayed and shared within a community.
This trend capitalizes on the principle of social proof, generating both interest and trust. By adopting a "social-first" strategy, brands have transformed consumers into brand ambassadors, amplifying visibility and deepening engagement.
Blind boxes rely on the suspense of hidden contents, turning the purchase into an emotional experience that blends anticipation, uncertainty, and reward. Influencers amplify this experience by sharing unboxing content, further enhancing the emotional appeal.

The global blind box market is experiencing significant growth, driven by consumer demand for engaging and emotional experiences. For instance, Pop Mart (a Chinese brand of art figures sold through the mechanism of blind boxes) reported revenues of $810 million in 2023, highlighting the potential of this industry. For managers, the challenge lies in effectively leveraging influencer marketing to maximize emotional engagement and purchase intention triggered by the surprise element of blind boxes. Blind box brands rely heavily on emotional connections to attract customers, making it essential to understand how influencers can amplify the element of surprise to enhance marketing outcomes.

Despite the popularity of influencer marketing and blind boxes, organizations face several challenges. They need to identify the optimal strategies for influencers to highlight the

element of surprise in blind boxes. Necessity of understanding how emotional engagement, generated by surprise element and enhanced by the sense of urgency and community generated by the vision of influencer' contents, translates into consumer purchase intentions.
Without a deeper understanding of these dynamics, brands risk underutilizing influencer marketing and failing to capitalize on the emotional power of surprise element.
Despite the growing popularity of blind boxes and the documented success of influencer marketing strategies, existing literature reveals several gaps that merit further exploration. By addressing these gaps, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how influencer marketing and the element of surprise can be strategically leveraged to enhance consumer engagement and drive purchases. Specifically, it builds on existing literature while advancing knowledge on underexplored areas such as emotional engagement, consumer personality traits, and influencer content strategies.

In the first chapter, the research will cover in depth the element of surprise, analyzing it from a psychological perspective and from a marketing point of view. It will also analyze the specific product of blind boxes, contextualizing it in the history of collectivism, and discovering the birth of a big company that made it their core business climbing the steps of stock markets.

The second chapter will be focused on the analysis of social media and influencer marketing, considering their essential role played in the evolution and diffusion of surprise-based content, thanks to the power of community founded on engagement.

The third chapter will translate all the theoretical research into practice, conducting a field experiment in order to test the efficacy of surprise element, combined with influencer marketing as catalysts of engagement, which in turn stimulates purchase intention.
The analysis will be based on real data collected through a survey diffused to a sample of 250 people. Those are assigned to three different groups in order to asses the effect of each variable tested, differentiating the stimulus that they will be exposed to.
The analysis of these data is conducted with the software SPSS.

The final chapter will contain the conclusion and the main takeaways driven by this research. It will also include the limitations of this particular study framework and some further research field that will be useful to cover to discover more insights on this field. Finally, it will be displayed the managerial implications that businesses should keep an eye on in order to take advantage of the powerful marketing element of surprise.

CHAPTER 1: The Surprise element – a powerful tool for marketers

1.1 Roots and etymology

Surprise is the most fleeting of emotions, vanishing as quickly as it arises. It changes in time and can become something else almost fractions of a second: it can generate joy, if the unexpected event is pleasant; and sadness, if it is not. Like Proteus, the shape-shifting sea god, surprise is ever-changing, making us aware of our own evolving emotions.

The word *surprise* reveals its own nature. The noun *sorpresa,* taking it form Italian vocabulary comes from the past participle of *sorprendere*, a verb composed of "*prendere*" "to take" and the prefix "*sor-"*, meaning "to take from above". In Latin, a surprising event was called "*res nova"* ("new thing"), emphasizing its novelty, while the emotional response to it was often described as "*stupor"*. Our modern term "*sorpresa"* derives from the French "*surprise"*.
Many European languages share similar words for surprise: English and French, both influenced by Latin, use "*surprise"* differing only in pronunciation. Italian and Spanish use "*sorpresa"*, while Portuguese slightly alters it to "*surpresa"*. German, despite belonging to the same linguistic family as English, stands apart with "*Überraschung"*.

Few things bring more pleasure than receiving a gift. From childhood, we strongly await presents on special occasions like Christmas, where the act of wrapping gifts adds an element of anticipation and suspense.
This connection between surprise and joy is deeply ingrained in our psychology. Neuroscientists explain that surprise is closely linked to novelty, dopamine release, and overall well-being. According to Professor Alessandro Vercelli, director of the Neuroscience Institute Cavalieri Ottolenghi at the University of Turin, surprise arises from a misalignment between expectation and reality. While not all gifts are unexpected, the ones that truly surprise us increase our emotional impact.

Our ability to be surprised has ancient roots. It originates from our ancestors' need to detect environmental changes being an essential survival trait. Surprise enhances focus and increases alert mode, favoring those who respond well to new stimuli.
Beyond survival, surprise has a peculiar and unique cognitive effect: it captures our full attention, making, in that very instant, everything else insignificant. This explains why, even in difficult moments, an unexpected surprise can completely change our emotional state.

A surprise triggers physiological responses, and between them, some are directly linked to pleasure. The nucleus accumbens, a key brain region associated with reward and motivation, is activated when experiencing surprise. This reaction starts the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter, crucial and central for feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. This mechanism is well understood by marketers, who leverage the “wow factor” in order to enhance customer experiences. Consider the simple joy of opening a Kinder Surprise egg when you was a child. Even when the surprise inside is not what you expected, the act itself remains enjoyable.
Looking deeper we can see that the initial reaction to surprise is independent of whether the surprise is positive or negative. The disappointment that follows an unwanted surprise is a secondary, rational evaluation of its impact, rather than an immediate emotional response.

Another powerful effect of surprise is its ability to imprint experiences into memory. Novel events stand out against routine activities, ensuring stronger recollection. The brain has wired mechanism when talking about prioritizing new stimuli, making surprises more memorable than predictable experiences. As we grow up our dopamine levels decline, potentially reducing our capacity to experience surprise. This could explain why older individuals may show less enthusiasm for novelty compared to younger ones.

From a cognitive perspective, surprise does appear in two relevant ways.
First-Level Surprise: This occurs when reality deviates from prior expectations. A classic example is organizing a surprise party - where the emotional impact comes from the contrast between "No one is available to celebrate my birthday tonight" and "They are all

here for me!". This type of surprise is based on a discrepancy between past knowledge and new input.

Deep Cognitive Surprise: This is more complex and happens when an event contradicts deeply rooted beliefs. It forces a reassessment of long-held values and assumptions. The Goal-Oriented Agents Laboratory (GOAL) highlights how both types of surprise derive from a cognitive failure, where established beliefs are challenged by new information.

Psychologist Paul Ekman describes surprise as an emotion lasting only a few seconds, inducing a brief state of disorientation, necessary to update our mental state. From childhood, we engage with surprise through the act of play: games like peekaboo and hide-and-seek recreates the anticipation and resolution feelings, coherent to the experience of surprise.

Surprise has the potential to change and alter our beliefs and challenge our comfort zone. When talking about coaching and personal development, surprise plays a crucial role in fostering change. A coaching process often involves questioning belief systems and habits that are no longer useful for us. The surprise of discovering new perspectives or unexpected solutions alters the status quo, opening the door to personal growth.

By embracing surprise, we allow ourselves to experiment new ideas and possibilities. It represents often the first step out of our comfort zone.

Humans are automatically attracted to surprise because it often leads to joy. We can say that, by incorporating elements of surprise into daily life, it is possible to promote well-being. For those who thrive on structured schedules, deliberately introducing moments of spontaneity creates opportunities for growth and happiness. Allowing for the unexpected and welcoming unplanned experiences makes life more dynamic and fulfilling.

What could be more powerful than treating the unexpected as an opportunity?

What could be more empathetic than gifting a moment of surprise to someone we love?

Success, however one defines it, is built on planning, effort, and perseverance. But it always carries an element of surprise. Whether it’s an unexpected breakthrough or the joy of seeing hard work paid off, surprise fuels motivation and strengthens self-esteem.

"The moment lasted five minutes; then the door opened, and Angelica entered. The first impression was one of dazzling surprise. The Salinas held their breath; Tancredi felt as if the veins in his temples were pulsing. Under the sheer impact of her beauty, the men were incapable of noticing her many imperfections. Indeed, some would never be able to."
This passage from *The Leopard* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa captures the sheer, blinding force of surprise. The arrival of the beautiful Angelica stuns everyone in the ballroom, leaving them momentarily paralyzed by her radiance.
Surprise has the power to astonish, to enthrall, to leave its mark. It is up to us to recognize its shades to surprise, to marvel, to be stunned and to embrace each in turn, one by one.

1.2 Psychological studies

Surprise is a core psychological mechanism widely examined in psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience because of its critical importance in cognitive processing, emotional control, and behavioral adjustment. The sensation of surprise occurs when an event contradicts expectations, resulting in increased focus, cognitive reassessment, and memory strengthening (Noordewier, Topolinski, & Van Dijk, 2016; Reisenzein, Horstmann, & Schützwohl, 2017).
Surprise serves as a key mechanism for adaptive learning and decision-making, significantly influencing consumer behavior, including engagement, recall, and emotional ties to stimuli. The Cognitive-Evolutionary Model of Surprise views this phenomenon as a multi-step response. Starting with the detection of schema discrepancies, where the event is evaluated against established cognitive schemas, to gauge its level of unexpectedness, followed by the disruption of current cognitive processes, in which attention is involuntarily redirected to the surprising occurrence, halting other cognitive tasks (Reisenzein et al., 2017).
The next phase entails assessment and meaning assignment, where the person assesses the valence and importance of the unexpected event, resulting in emotional reactions either positive (e.g., happiness, enthusiasm) or negative (e.g., anxiety, bewilderment) (Noordewier & Breugelmans, 2013).

This leads to schema adjustment or strengthening, ensuring that if the incident is seen as pertinent, cognitive schemas are either updated or supported, promoting adaptive learning (Reisenzein et al., 2012). This ordered process illustrates that surprise is not merely a single response but a systematic series of cognitive occurrences, rendering it an influential force in shaping perception, behavior, and the creation of memories (Meyer et al., 1997).

The timing of surprise is vital for grasping its personal experience and resulting impacts. Noordewier et al. (2016) showed that surprise first appears as a neutral or negative emotional state because of the interruption of predictability. Nevertheless, the emotional tone of the experience is shaped by later cognitive evaluation. Favorable results, like an unanticipated reward, bring about happiness, whereas negative surprises, such as unexpected expenses, cause distress (Noordewier & Breugelmans, 2013).

Additionally, studies on facial expressions and neurophysiology suggest that the first response to surprise is consistent across different stimulus valences, with later distinctions arising from context and interpretation (Reisenzein, Bordgen, Holtbernd, & Matz, 2006), highlighting the biphasic quality of surprise, where an initial cognitive disruption is succeeded by an emotional evaluation and response adjustment.

Unexpected events greatly improve memory encoding and retention because they can trigger attention and neurophysiological arousal (Frank, Kafkas, & Montaldi, 2022). Functional MRI (fMRI) research demonstrates that surprising stimuli activate the hippocampus, midbrain dopaminergic system, and anterior cingulate cortex, areas linked to learning, prediction error identification, and memory consolidation (Kafkas & Montaldi, 2018).

The hippocampus is essential for updating schemas, making certain that new data is integrated into current memory (Frank et al., 2022), while the midbrain dopaminergic system regulates dopamine release when faced with surprises, improving learning effectiveness and the retention of information (Lisman & Grace, 2005).

Furthermore, high levels of engagement of the visual cortex and front attentional

networks emphasizes unanticipated stimuli, facilitating more profound processing and improved memory retention (Browning & Harmer, 2011).

These results indicate that unexpected occurrences have a unique neurological advantage in memory formation, highlighting their effectiveness in marketing and strategies for engaging consumers.

Astonishment serves as a spark for education. Based on Expectation Violation Theory, when people face an incident that goes against their expectations, they encounter a cognitive conflict that requires them to revise their schemas (Adler, 2008). This phenomenon is especially noticeable in educational contexts, where learners go through more profound cognitive processing when confronted with surprising outcomes, resulting in improved retention and shifts in understanding (Adler, 2008).

This mechanism is very relevant to consumer behavior, since surprising features in product design, marketing efforts, or online experiences can boost engagement, improve brand memory, and impact decision-making.

Surprise spreads socially, as people tend to share unexpected experiences more than those that are anticipated (Loewenstein, 2018). This social amplification is especially significant in terms of social media and influencer marketing, where unboxing clips, promotions, and product unveilings leverage the viral aspect of surprise (Loewenstein, 2018).

Research indicates that emotions with high arousal, like surprise, boost content sharing and social spread (Berger & Milkman, 2012), as influencers use surprise in their material to enhance consumer arousal and interaction, resulting in increased purchase intention and brand devotion (Reisenzein et al., 2012).

Surprise significantly influences consumer choices, mainly by increasing emotional arousal and providing justification for decisions (Reisenzein & Meyer, 2009). Surprising product encounters such as limited-run launches, interactive marketing, and surprise boxes, generate increased urgency and thrill, leading to repeat purchases and brand

loyalty.

Recent studies in psychology have underscored the reduction in the human ability to feel awe and surprise, which are essential components for emotional health and cognitive involvement. A study found that 48.7% of Italians have difficulty experiencing wonder in reaction to daily occurrences, which is a significant difference from earlier generations.

This occurrence, known as "drift syndrome" by Forbes, illustrates an increasing difficulty in finding happiness in life's minor delights. Multiple factors are responsible for this decrease, such as the pressures of adulthood, augmenting stress, and the fast pace of contemporary living. Although childhood is signed by ongoing learning and discovery, adulthood frequently results in cognitive habituation, diminishing the occurrence of awe-inspiring experiences. Regardless of this trend, scientific studies highlight the essential importance of wonder in cognitive adaptability, emotional strength, and general life contentment.

Astonishment is essential in this occurrence. As one of the six universal emotions recognized by Paul Ekman and Wallace Frieser, alongside with sadness, anger, happiness, fear, and disgust, surprise acts as a transitional emotion. When the brain perceives an unexpected stimulus, it activates an instant attentional and cognitive reaction, starting a process in which the event is assessed, and a new emotion arises from the situation's evaluation. Neuroscientific research indicates that surprise stimulates neural circuits linked to attention management and adaptive learning. When people face unforeseen stimuli, their brains produce a prediction error signal, resulting in cognitive reassessment and model modification. This procedure is crucial for adaptable behavior and flexible thinking. Moreover, feelings of awe and surprise trigger the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins, which improve positive reinforcement, emotional connections, and decrease stress. These neurochemical impacts play a role in mood management and reinforcing psychological toughness.

From an evolutionary perspective, surprise acts as a survival mechanism. In the initial phases of human history, any unexpected stimulus could indicate a potential danger or

opportunity, requiring an immediate physiological response. The facial expression associated with surprise, marked by wide eyes and an open mouth, links to enhanced visual field awareness and improved respiratory function, readying the body for a fight-or-flight reaction. Moreover, surprise is essential for recognizing mistakes and revitalizing cognitive functions. The brain continually builds internal models of the environment to predict future occurrences. When a prediction is wrong, the resulting surprise leads to a reevaluation of expectations and gathered data. If this error-detection system were to be removed because of habituation or overgeneralization, it would turn maladaptive, since it would disrupt the predictive functions crucial for survival and adaptation.

The Predictive Coding Theory, formulated by Rao and Ballard in 1999, provides a computational framework for understanding how the brain processes unexpected events This model indicates that the brain constantly creates internal forecasts concerning incoming sensory data. When the sensory information aligns with expectations, the model stays consistent. Nonetheless, when the input strays from anticipated results, an error alert is created, leading to cognitive adjustment. In neurophysiological studies, Mismatch Negativity (MMN) has been recognized as an electrophysiological indicator of surprise, detectable via EEG research. When a person encounters a series of anticipated stimuli followed by an unexpected one, a distinct neural reaction takes place, indicating that an expectation has been breached. This process forms the basis of learning, memory enhancement, and adaptable behavioral reactions. Research indicates that the strength of emotional reactions is shaped more by how much expectations are disrupted rather than the size of the event itself.
A study conducted by Villano et al. (2020) revealed that university students' emotional reactions to final grades were influenced more by the gap between their expectations and the real results than by the grades alone. This reinforces the notion that cognitive disconfirmation is essential in the processing of emotions.

Contemporary social transformations play a major role in diminishing awe. 54.4% of Italians state that, as they age, they have diminished their capacity to feel awe, mainly due to cognitive habituation and habitual thought processes. During early development,

humans exhibit a strong sensitivity to new experiences, as their brains are consistently engaged in learning and creating mental models. As people age, they often depend more on familiar cognitive shortcuts, leading to less attentional involvement with unforeseen stimuli. Economic stability, job-related stress, and family responsibilities also impact the ability to feel awe and surprise. When people are troubled by financial issues and job obligations, their attention turns to finding solutions instead of exploring and valuing experiences. This persistent emphasis on goal-directed actions reduces spontaneous interaction with new experiences. The culture of immediate satisfaction further intensifies this problem. Contemporary society is marked by instant access to information and material fulfillment, leading to a decrease in occurrences that provoke true astonishment. The capacity to get immediate answers to inquiries, make purchases, and access entertainment leads to fewer instances that elicit a strong emotional reaction. This change in behavior differs from natural cognitive processing, which needs time, patience, and foresight to completely immerse in new experiences.

To address the reduction in the capacity to feel wonder, psychologists suggest various strategies designed to reinstate attentional responsiveness to awe-inducing experiences. Practicing mindfulness and present awareness is a key tactic, as it motivates individuals to concentrate on the now and enhance their perception of new stimuli.

In doing this, they can avoid regular disconnection from unforeseen pleasures. Bringing new experiences into everyday habits is another efficient method.

Making little changes, like choosing an alternate path to work, tasting a new cuisine, or participating in unfamiliar activities, aids in breaking cognitive habituation and encourages curiosity and a willingness to explore. Maintaining a daily routine of unexpected delights enhances attentional awareness of moments of awe, redirecting cognitive emphasis toward the abundance of everyday experiences. Steering clear of predictability in experiences is equally important.

Psychological research shows that excessive anticipation diminishes emotional effects.

For instance, trying to forecast movie conclusions or dictate results lessens the enjoyment gained from expectation.

Letting experiences develop organically deepens emotional involvement. Additionally, it is essential to lessen reliance on materialistic alternatives for joy. An excessive dependence on consumerism, compulsive buying, and digital entertainment can create temporary enjoyment but ultimately does not deliver enduring satisfaction. Cultivating a sense of value for intrinsic experiences like significant discussions, creative pursuits, and personal accomplishments, improves genuine well-being.

For those facing emotional stagnation and discontent, psychotherapy can significantly help in rejuvenating their ability to experience awe. Therapists often come across situations where previous experiences or mental obstacles hinder people from enjoying happiness in the present. A systematic therapeutic method can aid in recognizing cognitive and emotional habits that hinder wonder, create mindfulness techniques to enhance involvement with novel experiences, and tackle root stressors that lead to emotional disconnection.

Research in science validates that the capacity to feel awe and astonishment is essential for mental health, cognitive flexibility, and emotional strength. Through predictive processing, error identification, and adaptive learning, individuals sustain a versatile and enhanced outlook on life.
The contemporary decrease in wonder is not merely a philosophical matter but also a neurocognitive problem with quantifiable effects. Psychological therapies and deliberate lifestyle adjustments can renew the ability to feel awe, resulting in increased life satisfaction, lower stress levels, and improved personal development.

Astonishment is a strong psychological process that affects focus, recall, education, and interpersonal behavior. Its impact is based on cognitive and neurophysiological mechanisms, rendering it a powerful asset in marketing and engagement tactics. The power to create surprise via influencer marketing, social media, and product design

enables brands to harness its psychological impact to enhance consumer engagement and loyalty.

As discussed in later sections, this mechanism is crucial to the blind box market, where excitement and uncertainty serve as essential factors in driving consumer involvement and repeat buying habits.

1.2.1 Attitude and personality traits

Individual differences in how people experience and react to surprise are deeply influenced by personality traits and cognitive frameworks.

Gilberto Gallopín (1981) distinguishes two archetypical attitudes toward uncertainty and surprise: the "safer" who views uncertainty as a threat and seeks predictability and the "gambler", who embraces novelty and unpredictability as opportunities for growth. These contrasting attitudes are rooted in psychological needs, especially those for safety and cognition: individuals with strong internal security and autonomy are generally more receptive to uncertainty and novelty, whereas those lacking self-confidence tend to seek rigid order and avoid surprises.

Empirical research supports this dichotomy by demonstrating how personality types correlate with surprise aversion. Analysts and Sentinels, who are associated with Thinking and Judging traits, show higher discomfort with surprise due to their preference for structure, control, and predictable environments. In contrast, Diplomats and Explorers, often linked to Feeling and Prospecting traits, are more inclined to view surprise as a positive emotional stimulus, with Explorers in particular thriving on spontaneity and unpredictability Surprises. These findings suggest that emotional reactions to surprise are not uniformly experienced but rather mediated by internal traits and cognitive tendencies.

Reisenzein et al. (2012) further deepen this understanding through their cognitive-evolutionary model of surprise, which describes surprise as the result of a schema-discrepant event—an unexpected experience that violates one's existing beliefs or expectations.When something unexpected happens, the brain quickly shifts its focus

to deal with the surprise. This often brings on a mix of emotional and physical reactions. How strong that surprise feels—and what it means—depends on how a person usually thinks. If someone's mental patterns are more fixed, they're likely to feel more thrown off, especially in a negative way.

From a behavior point of view, Paul Ekman explains that surprise doesn't last long—just a few seconds—but it's important. It grabs attention fast and gets someone ready for whatever feeling might come next, whether that's happiness, fear, or interest. Whether someone takes that shift in a good or bad way depends a lot on their natural emotional range and personality style.

Loewenstein (2019) also points out that surprise can be a powerful way to shape how people think or act, since it grabs both the mind and the heart. Still, people react to it in their own ways. Some—especially introverts or those who like to stay in control—might try to avoid it altogether. Others, like those who enjoy emotional twists or have more outgoing personalities, might go looking for it. All of this shows that surprise isn't just something that happens in the mind. It's an emotional experience shaped by how people see the world and relate to others.

1.3 Surprise and marketing

Surprise has become a smart move in marketing, used to spark strong emotional reactions and create more meaningful interactions with customers. At its core, surprise marketing means adding unexpected or uncertain moments into a shopper's experience to stir up emotions like joy, curiosity, or excitement (Guo et al., 2024). The logic behind it is simple: when something breaks the usual pattern, it grabs attention, making people more aware of the brand and more likely to stick with it (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2001).

There are two main ways this works: planned surprises and spontaneous ones. Planned surprises—like flash sales or secret rewards—build interest and keep people coming back, hoping for something new. They play off the idea of waiting for a reward, which makes it more satisfying. Unplanned surprises—like random discounts, thoughtful gifts,

or custom thank-you notes—tend to make customers feel seen and valued. These little gestures go a long way in building trust, often making shoppers feel better about the brand. Studies show that these surprise rewards activate the brain's pleasure systems, boosting dopamine and building stronger emotional ties to the brand. Still, surprise marketing can cut both ways. While it often draws people in, it needs to be handled carefully. If a surprise seems fake or sneaky, it can make customers feel anxious or tricked (Dong & Palmatier, 2024).

To avoid this, brands need to make sure their surprises match who they are—staying honest and offering value that feels real rather than just pushing sales. This approach isn't just about grabbing attention. Surprise can also shift how people see a brand, tell better stories, and create emotional bonds. Marketers use different methods, like guerrilla marketing, where unexpected public stunts create memorable moments. Then there's experiential marketing, which mixes surprise with hands-on experiences, helping customers feel more connected.

Loyalty programs that toss in surprise perks, like extra rewards or special access, strengthen how people feel about a brand. Limited-time product drops also create buzz by mixing urgency with exclusivity. Influencers add even more to surprise campaigns. Their real-time reactions, stories, and brand reveals help the surprise feel more genuine. Because they already have trust with their followers, their reactions shape how people see the brand. Research shows that these influencer-based campaigns make people feel more excited and likely to buy—especially for those who enjoy unexpected moments when they shop (Addis et al., 2018).

Social platforms like TikTok and YouTube are hotspots for this. Influencers share surprise-filled videos that tap into emotion, which often makes people want to share them, spreading the word fast. To really make the most of surprise marketing, brands need to match their tactics with what customers expect. Adding personal touches or making people feel like they're getting something special can make surprises more powerful.

Using games or challenges makes people more involved and more likely to return. Partnering with trusted voices adds emotional depth, while keeping an eye on how people react helps brands fine-tune their approach. When done right, surprise marketing draws

people in by using emotion, curiosity, and excitement. It helps build loyalty, drives sharing, and creates a richer customer experience. But for it to work, surprises have to feel real and reflect what the brand stands for. As digital spaces keep growing and changing, surprise will likely stay a go-to way for brands to connect and build lasting relationships.

1.4 Practical applications: Blind boxes

Blind boxes, also called mystery boxes or blind bags, have become a familiar and exciting part of how people shop, collect, and share experiences. What began as a small thrill with Japan's Gashapon machines has grown into something much bigger.
Now, across industries and around the world, these boxes offer not just random items, but moments of suspense, bursts of emotion, and opportunities to feel connected to something larger. You never know what's inside—that's the point. And that little dose of uncertainty? That's what people chase. There's something deeply satisfying about that moment right before opening a blind box. It stirs up anticipation, curiosity, and sometimes even a bit of hope. Will it be the rare one? The final piece of a set? Or just another double?

For collectors, it's rarely just about the object itself—it's about what it represents. That emotional rush, even when brief, sticks with people. It keeps them coming back, trying again, hoping for something new. The randomness makes each purchase feel personal, even when it's mass-produced. These boxes thrive in a time when experiences matter more than ever.
People want more than just things—they want stories, feelings, and ways to share their excitement. And blind boxes hit all those notes. They've found a natural home on social media, especially TikTok and YouTube, where unboxing videos turn individual moments into collective ones. Watching someone open a mystery box, seeing their reaction—good or bad—creates a shared emotional space. It feels communal, like we're all part of the same game. Brands like Pop Mart have turned that idea into a full experience. Their success doesn't come just from what's in the box, but how they present it. By working

with different artists and tapping into anime, pop culture, or original creations, they offer something for just about every taste. Their figures feel like tiny pieces of art—carefully designed, visually striking, and emotionally resonant. Each series tells its own story.

And for the people who collect them, owning one isn't just about what it is. It's about what it means. Part of what makes blind boxes so effective is how they straddle both physical and digital worlds. There's the hands-on fun of opening something in real life. And then there's the emotional storytelling that happens online. Influencers take these moments and turn them into short videos full of suspense and energy.

These clips do more than just show products—they make people feel something. They invite viewers into the moment, turning that feeling of surprise into something everyone can share. From a marketing standpoint, blind boxes hit a sweet spot. They build emotional connection. They turn a single moment into a memorable one. They feed into the kind of content that people naturally want to watch, comment on, and share. Limited-edition items or rare finds only crank up the excitement.

That sense of urgency—of not wanting to miss out—pushes people to act fast, to buy quickly, and sometimes even obsessively. In the end, what makes blind boxes so powerful is how they make people feel. It's not just a toy or a figure. It's the anticipation, the reaction, the community, and the story. These little surprises offer something bigger than what's inside—they offer emotion, connection, and a reason to come back for more. And in a crowded digital world, that kind of emotional experience is rare and valuable.

1.4.1 "Gotta catch 'em all!" – Collectionism over time

People have been collecting things for thousands of years. What started with rulers showcasing war trophies and rare items has become something deeply personal and emotionally charged. In ancient times, collecting was mostly about power and pride. Think Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon or Roman emperors: they would gather spoils from battle and put them on display for everyone to see. These public collections were statements, they weren't just showing off wealth. They were shaping how people saw authority, influence, and culture. Over time, collecting became less about empire and more about curiosity. During the Renaissance, people created "cabinets of curiosity": small private collections of rare, strange, or beautiful objects.

Image 1.2: A Wunderkammer or chamber of curiosity from Renaissance period

These cabinets weren't just for decoration. They were meant to inspire awe, conversation, and a sense of wonder about the world. By the 20th century, collecting took a different turn. It became something more casual, even playful. People started collecting comic books, action figures, baseball cards—all things tied to pop culture and personal memory.

One of the most well-known examples of this shift is Pokémon. What began as a video game quickly grew into a universe of collectibles. Pokémon trading cards, once just a childhood hobby, are now auctioned off for thousands of dollars. The cards aren't just about the game anymore they are about nostalgia, investment, and identity. When Pokémon Go launched in 2016, it brought the joy of collecting into the streets. People walked around, phones in hand, catching virtual Pokémon in real places. That same spirit is alive in Pokémon Pocket, a new mobile app released in 2024. It lets people collect digital cards by opening virtual packs.

Image 1.2: The new app Pokémon Pocket launched in 2024

The thrill of surprise, the joy of the hunt, it's all there, just updated for today's tech. Italy has its own legacy in this space. Since the 1960s, Panini football stickers have been a rite of passage for generations of kids. Each sealed packet holds a mystery—maybe a rare player, maybe a duplicate. The goal? Complete the album. But really, it's about more than that. It's about swapping stickers with friends, hanging out at recess, making deals. That simple act of collecting turned into a shared experience.

Image 1.3: New packaging of Calciatori Panini

Image 1.4: History of Calciatori Panini Albums

Even now, the same mechanics are alive in modern blind boxes: a sealed mystery, the chase for something special, and the buzz of getting others involved. Technology didn't just change what we collect—it changed how we collect. Digital collecting became a thing, especially with NFTs. These digital tokens let people "own" art or memorabilia that lives online instead of in a frame. But NFTs are just one side of it. What really caught on with everyday collectors are blind boxes. Born from Japan's Gashapon capsule toys, blind boxes are everywhere now. You buy one without knowing what's inside. Could be common, could be rare—that's the thrill. You open it, hope for the best, and maybe share that moment with friends or strangers online. And it's not just about toys anymore.

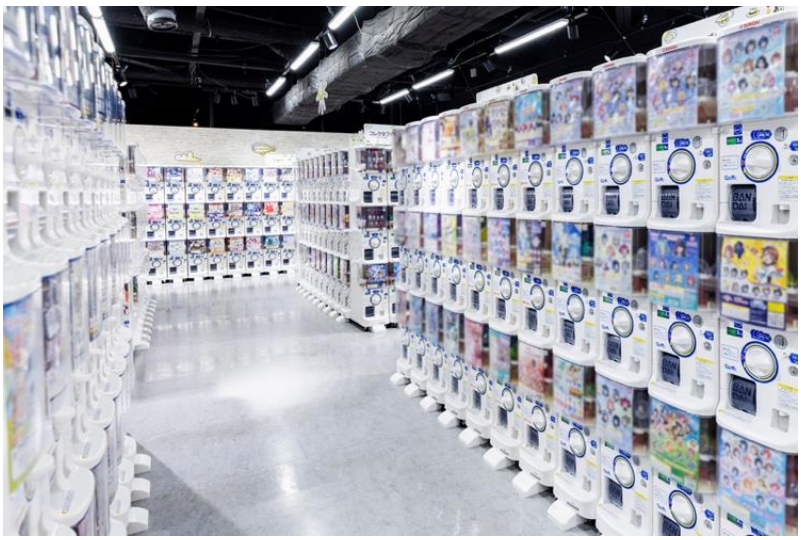


Image 1.5: A Gashapon gallery in a shopping center in Japan

Take the MasterChef-themed mystery boxes. They offer food-related items and surprises for fans of the show or people who just love cooking. It's that same feeling of "what's in the box?" but tailored to food culture. Blind boxes are flexible. That's part of the reason they have taken off, now they can fit into almost any niche. Social media kicked things into high gear.

Image 1.6: Masterchef TV format called "Mystery box"

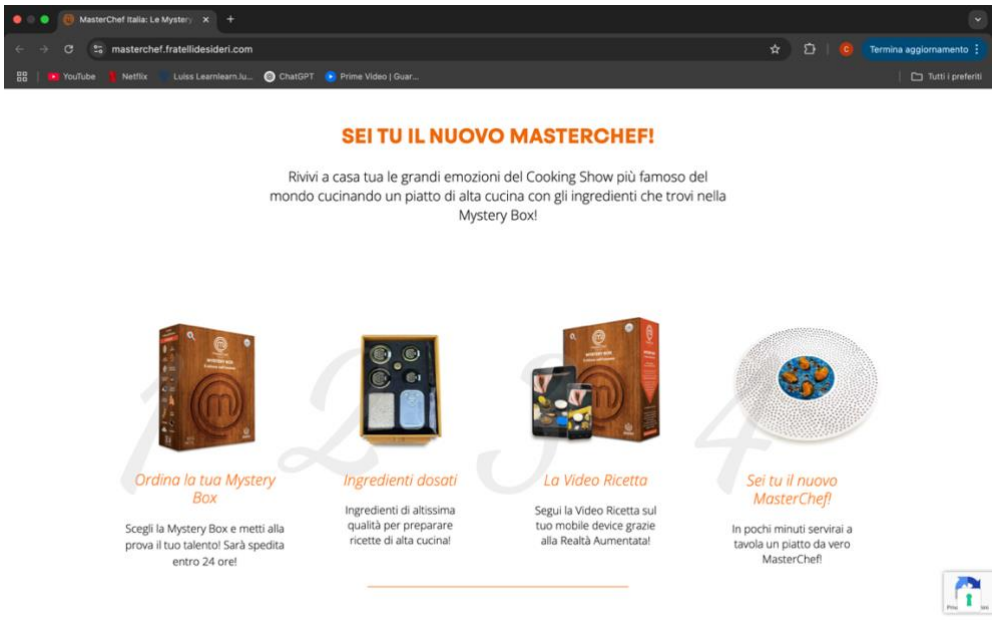


Image 1.7: E-commerce from Masterchef website to recreate the mystery box experience at home

TikTok and YouTube are full of people filming their unboxings. These videos aren't just about showing what they got—they're about sharing an emotional moment. The suspense. The reveal. The joy. Or the disappointment. People tune in because it feels real. It taps into something universal. Even watching someone else open a box can trigger a little spark of excitement. And for some, these unboxing videos have become careers. With enough followers, people can turn that moment of surprise into content that reaches millions.

Nostalgia is a big part of why this trend works. Collectors aren't always chasing something new. Often, they're chasing something old—something that reminds them of when life felt simpler. That's why LEGO minifigures are still huge. Sure, kids love them. But so do adults who grew up with them. These little figures are now tokens of memory. They are a link to childhood, to playing to imagination.

Image 1.8: A surprise-based line of product by LEGO labeled minifigures

Then there are brands like Funko Pop, KAWS, Sonny Angels, and Smiski. Each brings its own flavor. Funko rides on pop culture, KAWS leans into street art, Sonny Angels are cute and collectible, and Smiski—well, they're just odd in a good way. Glowing little figures in funny poses. Part toy, part art, all charm. They're usually sold in series, so you don't know which one you'll get. That makes collecting feel like an adventure. And when someone finds a rare one? It's a big deal. People even dedicate entire Instagram accounts or TikTok pages to their collections, gaining

thousands of followers in the process. The hunt becomes public, and that makes it even more thrilling.

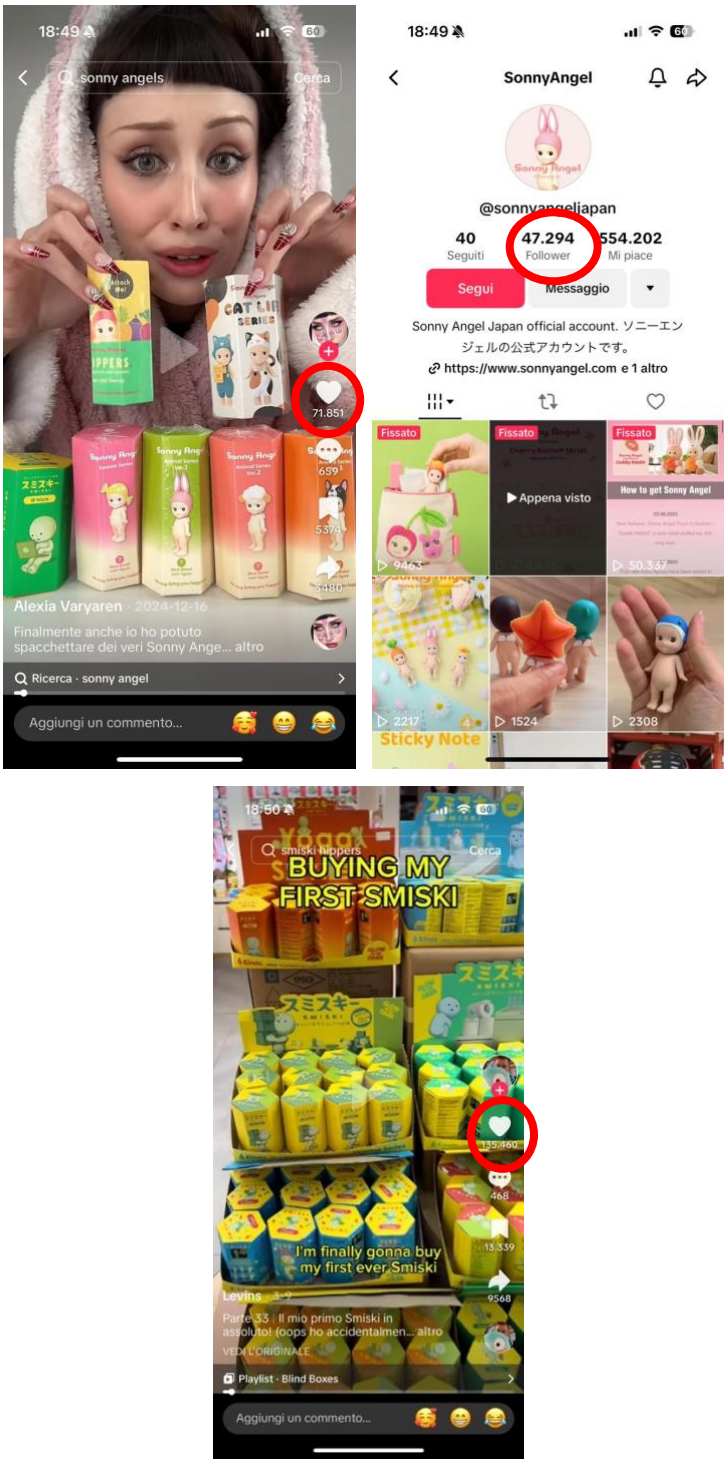


Image 1.9: Screenshot from TikTok from trending videos regarding blind boxes

Additionally, Kinder Surprise eggs are a classic example of how this has always been around. A chocolate treat with a toy inside—it's been around for decades. Recently, partnerships with Funko and Harry Potter have brought them back into the spotlight. A

simple idea that still works, especially when paired with familiar characters and a bit of magic. New formats keep showing up.

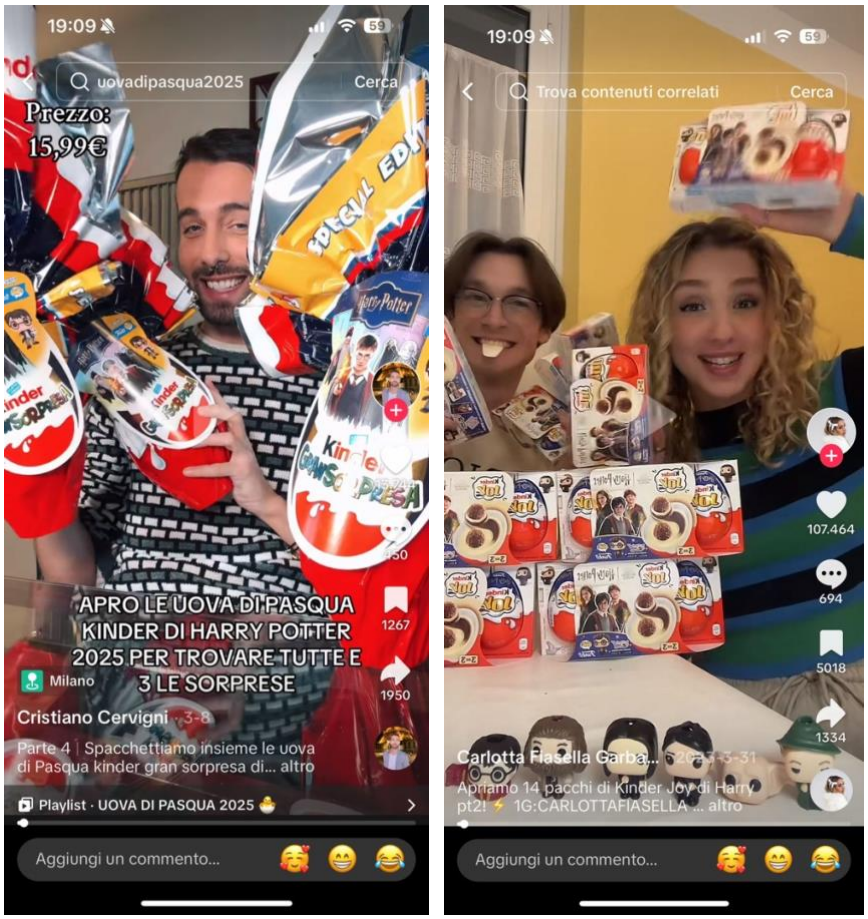


Image 1.10: Screenshots from TikTok from trending videos regarding Kinder Sorpresa easter eggs opening

The rise of “svuota spesa” (clearance sale) a content format, where collectors hunt for discounted collectible items, and use platforms such us TikTok to show their community what they have bought, further demonstrates the deep-rooted desire to accumulate and preserve items of value, often driven by financial speculation or the thrill of finding rare treasures at a bargain price. Similarly, Advent calendars have become a form of collectible item that taps into seasonal traditions. These calendars are often filled with small gifts or surprises, and collectors eagerly anticipate the daily unwrapping, with special editions often being highly sought after. In recent years, these types of calendars have extended beyond just the holiday season, with some brands creating them for birthdays or other special events, further driving the desire for limited-edition surprises.

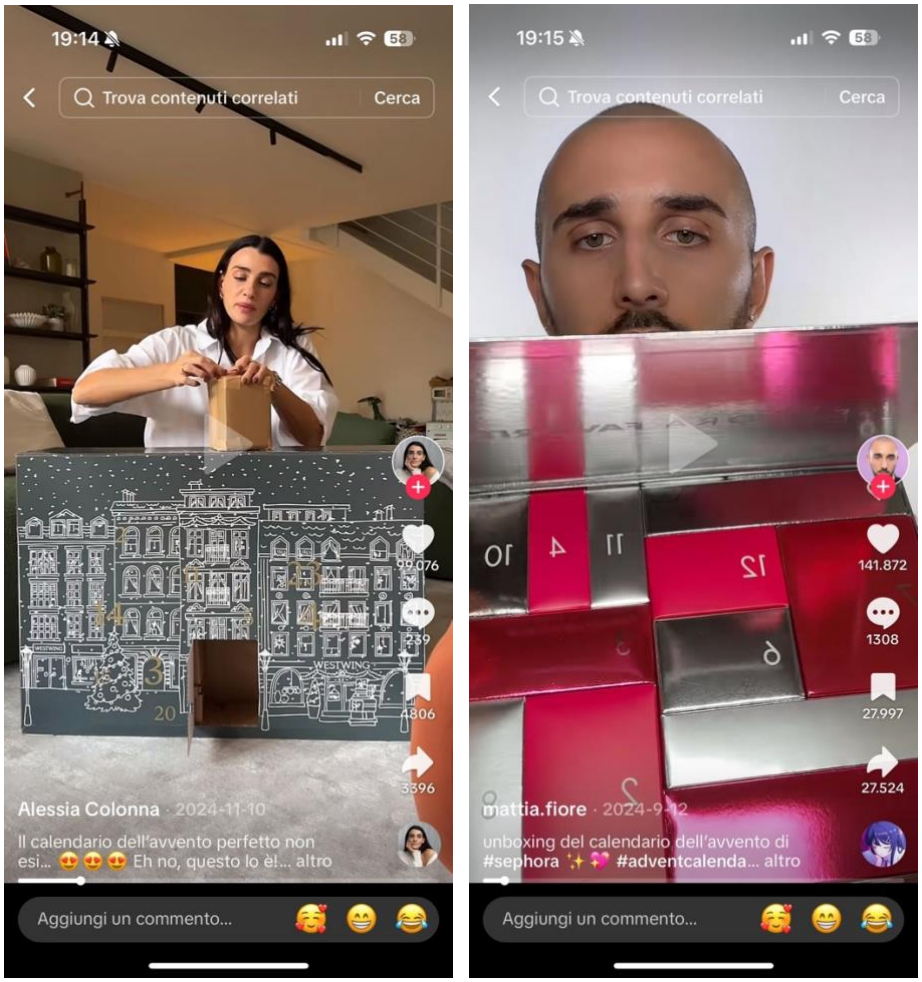


Image 1.11: Screenshots from TikTok from trending videos regarding Advent calendar unboxing

Collecting has become more social, more emotional, and more embedded in daily life. It's no longer just a hobby. It's a way to connect. To feel something. To remember. Online communities have formed where people trade, share, and talk about what they collect. Pokémon cards, once traded on school playgrounds, are now sold for thousands online. In places like Italy, they've even overtaken classic collectibles like coins and stamps. Unboxing has redefined how we relate to collecting. It's not just about the item anymore. It's about the reveal. About watching someone open that box and getting to feel a piece of that excitement. It creates connection—between the creator and their followers, between strangers who've never met but love the same things. The item might be rare, but what about the feeling?

That’s something we all understand. In the end, collectionism is no longer about owning things. It’s about experiencing moments. It’s about curiosity and surprise, about emotion and memory. From royal treasures to digital cards, the tools have changed, but the reason hasn’t. We collect because it makes us feel something. And with blind boxes, that feeling is right at the center. As long as people crave stories, joy, and a little bit of mystery, collectionism will keep evolving—more immersive, more connected, and more human than ever before.

1.4.2 The phenomenon of Pop Mart

Pop Mart, a Chinese collectible toy company, has become a global sensation over the last decade. From its early years as a small business to its current position as a dominant force in the blind box industry, the company’s success is deeply tied to the growing appeal of mystery boxes and the psychological and emotional engagement they generate. Blind boxes, which contain unknown collectible items, create a sense of surprise and excitement that keeps consumers coming back for more. Pop Mart has capitalized on these elements to build a billion-dollar empire, successfully appealing to “kidults”—adults who engage in collectible hobbies often driven by nostalgia, novelty, and artistry.

2010-2020: Founding and Early Growth

Pop Mart was founded in 2010 by Wang Ning, a former marketing professional who identified an opportunity in the collectible toy industry. The founder, graduated in Advertising, after a period of work as a dependent for a big Chinese digital company, wanted to create something on it own. After a trip to Hong Kong, he gets the inspiration from a shop of a retail chain called LOG-ON, which sold a mix of cosmetical product, stationery and toys, thinking that this format was suitable even for the mainland of China.

He manages to open the first Pop Mart in 2010, gathering fundings from its college fellows, and reproposing the model of variety shop. But this too vast range of product

did not come up to be a profitable model of business, so he selected the most selling product and eliminated gradually all the others, ending up selling just toys in 2014.

Image 1.12: Pop Mart CEO with some of his famous figures

Initially, Pop Mart's model was heavily influenced by the Japanese Gashapon system, where customers could purchase capsule toys containing random figurines. Ning was attracted by the element of surprise but wanted to upscale from the original packaging (a clear plastic ball) to elevate the perceived value of its offer. However, Pop Mart, thanks to the idea of the investor Mai Gang to switch to designer toys in 2015, differentiated itself by collaborating with artists to create limited-edition figures that were highly followed and recognizable by collectors. These collaborations with well-known artists and designers allowed Pop Mart to build a unique product offering that was not just about the toy itself, but about the art behind it.

The company's initial products gained traction within niche communities of collectors who appreciated the unique design and limited nature of the figurines. However, the breakthrough for Pop Mart came in 2016, when they launched Molly, a popular character designed by Kenny Wong that after the launch through Pop Mart, quickly became a fan favorite.

Here the sales begun to significantly increase, reaching $22 million in 2017, $73 million in 2018 and accounting for 27 % of the whole sales in 2019. In 2019 the

revenues reached $ 240 million doubling the result from the previous year, with a net profit of $63 million.

Molly, and other characters like Labubu and Skullpanda, tapped into the desire for cute, quirky collectibles that appealed not only to children but also to adults—the so-called "kidults". This shift allowed Pop Mart to expand its market beyond traditional toy collectors to include adult fans of pop culture and designer toys.

Image 1.13: Layout of a shop from Pop Mart

2020: IPO and Rapid Expansion

The global pandemic in 2020 represented a major turning point for Pop Mart. With people spending more time at home, Social Media platforms like TikTok and Instagram became key drivers of consumer behavior, particularly focusing on unboxing videos. These platforms allowed consumers to share the excitement of opening blind boxes, further fueling the FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) effect. This viral trend enhanced and stimulated Pop Mart's visibility, especially among younger audiences, who enjoyed the suspense and excitement of discovering which figurine would be inside the box.

Pop Mart's business model, driven by the element of scarcity, created an environment where certain limited-edition figurines became highly coveted, often reselling at

significant premiums. This secondary market, combined with the company's ability to gain access to social media dynamics, significantly boosted its appeal.

In 2020, Pop Mart went public with an Initial Public Offering (IPO) on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (HKEX), raising over $674 million. This move marked the company’s transformation from a local start-up to an internationally recognized market leader in the blind box and designer toy sector. It was at this point that the global expansion of Pop Mart truly began. With a strong presence in the Chinese market, Pop Mart targeted international expansion, especially to markets like Southeast Asia and Europe.

2021-2023: Expanding Globally and Gaining International Recognition

By 2021, Pop Mart had expanded into Southeast Asia and was keeping an eye on the European markets, where demand for designer toys and blind boxes was also on the rise. Collaboration with international artists, such as Kaws and Tokidoki, helped strengthen its brand presence in global markets. Pop Mart also increased its online presence, capitalizing on the success of online unboxing videos. The company’s stock price increased significantly, with analysts predicting further growth.

In June 2022 the first pop up store marked the entrance of Pop Mart in the U.S. market. This will be followed by many other flagship stores and Roboshops (a patented vending machine providing collectible blind boxes from Pop Mart).

Image 1.14: A Roboshop – the vending machine patented by Pop Mart

In 2023, Pop Mart's registered revenues for $810 million with a relative net profit of $165 million, marking a significant milestone for the company. This financial success reflected both the strength of the brand and the growing global appeal of blind boxes. The company continued to expand its portfolio and community of premium designer figures while also launching physical stores in key international markets. These stores became immersive experiences for fans, reinforcing the perception of Pop Mart's products as premium collectibles rather than just toys. Several studies have been conducted to define the optimal level of store formats and features such as correct height of display table or wattage of the lights.

During this period, Pop Mart's marketing strategy was heavily reliant on social media influencers, particularly focused on platforms like TikTok and Weibo, where unboxing videos became a viral element. These influencers helped Pop Mart's figures to gain cultural recognition, as they were associated with luxury and exclusivity.

Pop Mart's strategic partnerships with influencers and collaborations with well-known artists continued to fuel its growth in the global market. Pop Mart also started to diversify its offer to augment the level of engagement of its customers across several different fields. The company is planning to cover the markets of gaming,

animation and theme parks, as they did in September 2023 with the opening of Pop Land, the first theme park populated by the most famous figurines in Beijing.

2024: The U.S. Expansion and Rising Cultural Influence

2024 was a significant year for Pop Mart's expansion into the U.S. market reaching today's number of more than 20 physical stores widespread all-over North America.

Image 1.15: One of the shops op Pop Mart opened in U.S.A

As part of this push, Pop Mart opened flagship stores in most important cities and began collaborating with Western artists to further penetrate and dominate the designer toy market. This move signaled a shift in Pop Mart's strategy, from being seen primarily as a Chinese company to becoming an international brand with a diverse consumer base. At this time, Pop Mart also became a regular feature in fashion circles, with figures like Labubu being used as fashion accessories, appearing on luxury handbags and designer collaborations.

In November 2024, Pop Mart's CEO Wang Ning appeared on the cover of financial magazine Forbes, solidifying his position as a major figure in the global consumer goods and collectibles industry, and entering in Forbes China's 100 richest list with the ranking of #68 and a corresponding net worth of $5.5 billion. The company also earned a buy rating from several major banks, including Bank of America, which highlighted Pop Mart's strong financial performance and future growth potential.

Image 1.16: Cover of the magazine “Forbes” dedicated to the CEO of Pop Mart

July 2024 became a relevant milestone due to the opening of the first shop in Italy, specifically in Milan, and of the flagship store inside of the Louvre in Paris. The latter of the two was pushed forward by the presence of Olympic games and the launch of the exclusive collection of Labubu featuring signature artworks of the famous museum.

Image 1.17: Opening of the first Pop Mart shop in Milan, Italy

Image 1.18: Opening of the Pop Mart shop in Louvre Museum, Paris

The revenues of the first half of 2024 arise to $624 million (+2/3 compared to 2023), with the relative number of sales outside China tripled, reaching 1/3 of the whole number of sales.

2025: Cultural Mainstream and Luxury Fashion Integration

By 2025, Pop Mart figures had successfully crossed into the realm of luxury fashion. The “Labubu” phenomenon—the character Labubu became a global sensation, gaining cult status in the luxury fashion community, particularly in Milan, where figures were seen attached to Hermès bags. This luxury crossover reflected Pop Mart’s increasing ability to blend pop culture collectibles with high-end fashion. The TikTok community further strengthened this trend by showcasing Labubu figurines as exclusive fashion statements, boosting Pop Mart’s visibility and status as a lifestyle brand.

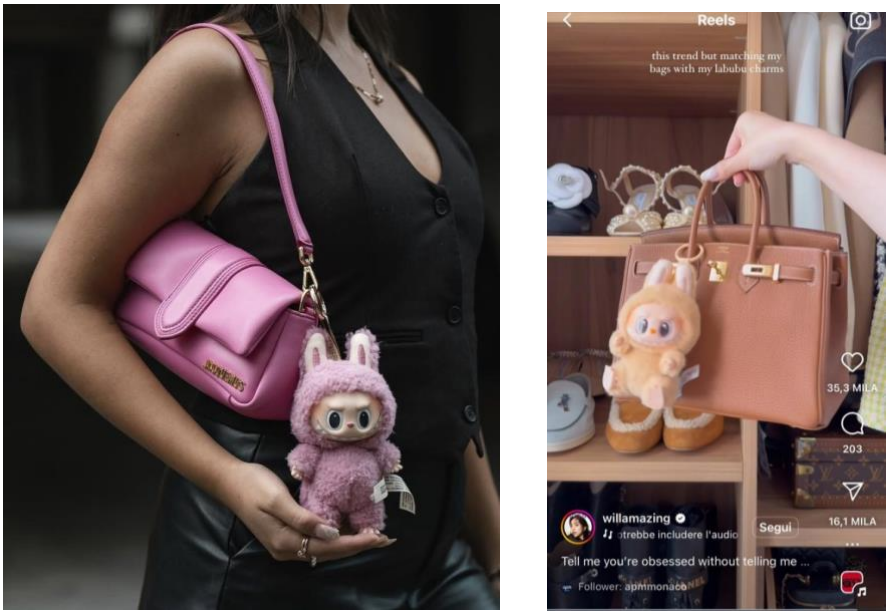


Image 1.19: Some UGC representing the how people attach their Pop Mart figurines on their bags from a fashion brand

Pop Mart’s ability to tap into influencer-driven content, combined with its strategic partnerships with high-end and famous brands, illustrates its success in transforming blind boxes from a niche collectible item into a cultural phenomenon. This shift also

demonstrates the power of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and driving demand for exclusive products.

Pop Mart’s trajectory from its turbulent beginnings in 2010 to its status as a multinational empire in 2025 exemplifies the extraordinary success of surprise-driven marketing. Through strategic use of scarcity, exclusivity, social media marketing, and artistic collaborations, Pop Mart has transformed the blind box market into a billion-dollar industry that continues to grow.

Looking ahead, the brand's luxury integrations, potential for NFT collectibles, and innovative marketing strategies suggest that the phenomenon of blind boxes will continue to evolve. Pop Mart’s success is a prime example of how consumer psychology, specifically the craving for anticipation, surprise, and community engagement, can be capitalized on to create lasting cultural shifts in consumer behavior.

CHAPTER 2: Social Media & Influencer Marketing – the eco effect

2.1 Evolution of influencer marketing

Influencer marketing has come a long way, morphing from the old-school celebrity endorsement model into something far more personal, dynamic, and intertwined with everyday life. What once revolved around famous faces on TV commercials or magazine spreads has shifted to a new kind of influence—more grassroots, more digital, and definitely more emotionally connected. That evolution traces back to the rise of digital influencers and finds its strongest pulse today on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. And if you've spent any time scrolling lately, you know just how powerful that shift has become.

Back in the day, advertising was all about big names. Brands hired celebrities—actors, athletes, musicians—to promote their products in front of the widest possible audiences. These endorsements showed up on TV, in glossy print ads, and on billboards in every major city. The strategy was simple: the more famous the person, the more trust they could inspire. And for a while, it worked. People saw their favorite stars using a product and figured, "If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for me." But there was always a catch. These ads felt distant. Scripted. One-sided. Consumers couldn't talk back, and celebrities weren't really part of their lives. Over time, that glossy image started to wear thin. People became more skeptical. They wanted realness—not just a polished smile in a product shot. (Adam & Radita; Selvakkumar, 2024)

That craving for authenticity grew louder with the arrival of Web 2.0. Suddenly, anyone with an internet connection could create content, share opinions, and build a following. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and eventually Instagram handed users the mic. And many ran with it. Out of this era came a new breed of influencers—people who weren't famous by traditional standards, but who knew how to connect with their audience. They didn't act like celebrities. They felt more like friends. And that personal connection was everything. (Santiago & Castelo, 2020; Leung et al., 2022)

Social media changed the rules completely. Instead of a one-way message from a brand to a buyer, we got something far more interactive. Influencers started sharing daily

moments—what they wore, what they ate, how they felt. And followers started paying attention. Platforms like Instagram made life look beautiful. YouTube made it possible to deep-dive into anything. TikTok made it instant and entertaining. These creators didn't need million-dollar deals or huge production teams. They just needed a camera, a story, and a reason for people to listen. (Shaikh et al., 2024)

What is the reason why this approach works? Trust. Influencers talk directly to their audience. They build relationships by showing up consistently, by responding to comments, by being just vulnerable enough. And when they recommend something, it feels less like a pitch and more like a tip from someone who gets you. (Joshi et al., 2023)

That sense of authenticity is the core of influencer marketing's power. These creators don't just flash a product for a paycheck. They fold it into their lives, show how they actually use it, explain why it matters to them. It's storytelling, not selling. And in a world where traditional ads are easy to skip, that kind of connection stands out. (Shaikh et al., 2024)

There's also something deeper at work—emotional engagement. Influencers are experts at creating content that makes you feel something. Maybe it's excitement over a new launch, maybe it's the comfort of routine, or maybe its nostalgia triggered by a favorite childhood brand. A great example? Unboxing videos. Watching someone open a mystery box taps into that universal thrill of surprise. We feel the anticipation right alongside them. That emotional reaction creates a memory. And that memory makes the product more likely to stick.

This kind of marketing also benefits from another powerful factor: eWOM, or electronic word of mouth. When someone shares a positive experience online—especially in a way that feels honest—it spreads quickly. People are much more likely to believe a friend or trusted voice than a brand's slogan. Influencers are perfectly positioned for this. Their followers value their opinions. So, when they rave about a skincare product or a tech gadget, it often carries more weight than a traditional ad ever could.

In the beginning, brands chased after influencers with massive followings. The logic seemed sound: the more followers, the more reach. But the game has changed. Now, many companies are more interested in micro-influencers—those with smaller, more focused audiences. These creators might only have 10,000 followers, but they know those

followers. They interact with them, respond to their messages, know their preferences. That closeness makes them incredibly effective. (Chen et al., 2024)

Micro-influencers also tend to have better engagement. Their audiences aren't just passive viewers—they're active participants. That kind of involvement makes a big difference when it comes to driving action. Whether it's buying a product, trying a new app, or joining a cause, people are more likely to take a leap when they feel connected to the person recommending it. (Vidani & Das, 2021)

Of course, influencer marketing isn't just about picking the right face. It's about the strategy behind the scenes. Modern campaigns aren't focused only on reach—they're built around storytelling, authenticity, and community. Influencers don't just say "buy this." They explain why it matters. They host livestreams to answer questions. They share their own challenges and wins, making the promotion part of a bigger, more relatable journey. (Vrontis et al., 2021)

One especially effective format is unboxing or product reveal content. These videos turn the ordinary into the exciting. Whether it's a limited-edition sneaker drop or a new phone, the process of unboxing adds drama and delight. That sense of discovery is addictive—and it helps cement the product in viewers' minds.

Still, for all its strengths, influencer marketing has its challenges. The biggest? Staying genuine. As more money flows into the space, the pressure to promote grows. Not every partnership feels authentic. And audiences are paying attention. They know when something feels forced. They notice when influencers push too many products too fast. And when that trust breaks, it's hard to earn back.

There are ethical questions, too. Transparency is key. If content is sponsored, that needs to be clear. Otherwise, what looks like a friendly suggestion starts to feel manipulative. Influencers walk a fine line between keeping their personal brand intact and meeting the demands of paid partnerships.

At the end of the day, the rise of influencer marketing reflects something bigger—a shift in how people interact with content, brands, and each other. It's not about shouting a message anymore. It's about creating a connection. The best influencers do more than sell. They listen. They share. They make their followers feel seen.

For brands, the path forward means staying flexible, staying honest, and choosing partnerships wisely. Because in this new world of digital word of mouth, the most effective message isn't the loudest—it's the most human.

2.2 Diffusion and virality of a content

The idea of content "going viral" has become one of the defining features of the digital age. Whether it's a dance trend, a meme, a heartfelt story, or a jaw-dropping product reveal, virality is what every marketer, creator, and brand hope to capture. But it's not just about luck or getting seen by enough people. The real engine behind content virality is a mix of emotion, strategy, timing, and platform dynamics. And understanding that mix is key to understanding how—and why—some content explodes while other posts fizzle out unnoticed.

At its core, virality is about speed and scale—how quickly and widely content spreads across digital spaces. It behaves, in many ways, like a virus: one person shares it, then ten more, then a hundred. But this doesn't happen in a vacuum. There's psychology at play, algorithms pulling the strings, and human emotion driving the momentum. In today's world, virality is less about visibility and more about how something makes people feel and what they're moved to do after experiencing it. (Wold, 2023)

Emotion plays a huge role. According to research by Berger and Milkman (2012), content that sparks strong emotional reactions—whether awe, laughter, anger, or anxiety—is far more likely to be shared than content that evokes mild or neutral feelings. The energy behind those high-arousal emotions pushes people to act. Think of the last time you shared something: chances are it made you laugh out loud, gasp, feel seen, or feel upset. That feeling was the trigger. On the flip side, content that makes people feel sad or low energy tends to stay still. It doesn't inspire action. That insight holds true across platforms—even when controlling for how visible a piece of content is on something like the New York Times homepage, the content that evokes strong emotional reactions still gets shared more.

But it's not just about whether an emotion is positive or negative. What really drives virality is how intense that emotion is. Excitement, outrage, or even joy gives people a reason to hit share. And more than that, it gives them a reason to connect. Sharing something emotionally powerful is a way to bond. It says, "This moved me—maybe it'll move you too." (Nikolinakou & King, 2018) People also use emotional content to express themselves, to show what they care about, or to send a message about who they are.

That said, emotion alone isn't enough. Certain features in the content itself matter just as much. Surprise is one of them. Humans are wired to notice the unexpected. When content breaks the norm—when it defies assumptions, reveals something unbelievable, or delivers an unexpected twist—it demands attention. That attention leads to memory, and memory leads to sharing. Practical value is another big one. Tips, hacks, advice, and insights that are genuinely useful tend to travel far, especially when they're packaged in a fun or surprising way. People love to be the one who found something helpful first. Sharing that kind of content boosts their social capital. (Berger, 2013; Tellis et al., 2019; Wojnicki & Godes, 2008)

Now, none of this exists in a vacuum. Social media platforms—especially TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube—are massive amplifiers. Their algorithms track behavior and reward engagement. Watch time, likes, shares, comments—all these signals tell the platform that people are interested. And when something shows signs of catching on, the algorithm pushes it out to even more people, fueling a cycle. TikTok has taken this to the next level with its "For You" page, which doesn't care how many followers you have. If your content connects, it spreads—fast. A single video can go from zero to millions of views in a matter of hours. (Taylor & Choi, 2022; Geyser, 2024)

From the viewer's perspective, certain types of content naturally stand out. Studies show that short, authentic, emotionally charged, and visually striking posts are more likely to go viral. This is especially true for Gen Z and younger millennials. They've grown up with social media, and they have finely tuned radar for what feels real versus what feels forced. They crave fast, visually appealing, emotionally direct content that's easy to engage with and easy to share. (Atayeva, 2024)

Unboxing videos are a perfect example. What started as a niche genre has become a major player in viral content. The appeal is simple but powerful: there's a mystery, a reveal, a reaction. It's part suspense, part satisfaction. The viewer gets to experience the thrill of discovery without ever touching the product. These videos pack multiple viral elements into one format—visual interest, emotional payoff, surprise, and authenticity. You see the box, you hear the rustle of packaging, and then you witness the joy or disappointment as the contents are revealed. It's an emotional rollercoaster in under a minute. That's compelling.

And then there are blind boxes—mystery products where the buyer doesn't know exactly what they're getting. The surprise is built into the product itself, making the unboxing even more dramatic. Influencers have turned blind box openings into performance art. They film themselves opening these packages, reacting in real time, letting the viewer share in the moment. That reaction—whether it's genuine excitement or dramatic despair—is what hooks people. The audience isn't just watching a product get opened. They're sharing an experience. That connection, even through a screen, creates trust. And that trust drives not just engagement but purchase behavior.

These blind box videos blur the line between content and marketing. They're entertaining, but they're also persuasive. A rare item, beautiful design, or even just the fun of the reveal makes people want to try it for themselves. And when viewers start creating their own unboxing content in response, you get user-generated content (UGC) loops—organic marketing on autopilot.

In the end, viral content doesn't just happen. It's designed—sometimes strategically, sometimes instinctively—around emotional triggers, human psychology, and algorithmic behavior. The best examples feel spontaneous, but they hit all the right notes: surprise, excitement, usefulness, and authenticity. Blind box unboxing videos are a masterclass in that formula. They entertain, they connect, and they spread—exactly what viral content is meant to do.

For creators, marketers, and brands trying to stand out in a crowded digital world, the lesson is clear: tap into emotion, lean into authenticity, and create content that feels like

a shared experience. Virality isn't just about numbers. It's about people—what they feel, how they connect, and what they're moved to share.

2.3 Unboxing, live streams, storytelling: how influencers interact using surprise element

In influencer marketing, there's a powerful blend that's proving especially effective: unboxing, live streaming, and storytelling. Together, these three formats create a unique emotional experience that draws people in and keeps them engaged. At the heart of it all? The element of surprise. Particularly for products that rely on unpredictability—like blind boxes—this combination taps into emotional responses that go far beyond surface-level excitement. It's not just about showing a product. It's about sharing a moment, building connection, and influencing buying behavior in a way that feels organic and authentic.

Unboxing as an Emotional Story in Itself

What started as a casual online trend—people filming themselves opening new purchases—has turned into a highly crafted form of digital storytelling. Unboxing videos now follow a clear emotional arc: the unopened box sparks curiosity, the reveal delivers a high point, and the reaction brings closure. This structure mimics classic storytelling, and it works because viewers don't just see the product—they feel the suspense and payoff alongside the influencer. That emotional investment is especially powerful with blind boxes, where what's inside is a mystery.

There's science behind this, too. Surprise interrupts our normal patterns of thinking. It grabs attention, strengthens memory, and makes experiences feel more intense. Add to that the visual and verbal cues influencers use—expressions of shock or joy, emojis, humor, nostalgic call-backs—and suddenly the video isn't just content. It's an emotional event. These expressive reactions don't feel superficial either. They're often interpreted as signs of honesty, making the content more believable and relatable. (Audrezet et al., 2020)

Social media platforms are built to make the most of this. YouTube, Instagram Reels, and especially TikTok are filled with unboxing videos for good reason. They're short, packed with emotion, and make excellent use of visual storytelling. YouTube, for instance, has dubbed the appeal of unboxing the "magic of the reveal," and it's no exaggeration. These videos combine personal narrative with brand exposure. The influencer isn't just reviewing a product, they're taking you on a journey. It can be defined intimate, exciting, and, when done right, unforgettable.

Live Streaming: Turning Viewers into Participants

Unboxing in live format takes everything to another level. Instead of a polished video with edited cuts and rehearsed commentary, live streams are raw, unpredictable, and communal. The influencer doesn't just share a moment—they invite others into it. Viewers ask questions, leave comments, and share guesses about what's inside the box. Sometimes they even vote or participate in polls during the stream. That two-way interaction creates a real-time bond. The experience becomes shared, almost like a digital event.

Psychologically, this kind of shared anticipation builds something called emotional contagion—viewers absorb and mirror the feelings of the influencer. If the person on-screen gets excited, the audience feels it too. That emotional alignment can lead to higher trust and, often, higher sales. People aren't just watching a product get revealed. They're completely immersed in the moment, and that feeling can be incredibly persuasive.

Live unboxings also encourage parasocial relationships, a type of one-sided connection where followers feel like they know the influencer personally. Even though the interaction is not fully reciprocal, it does create a sense of intimacy and loyalty. For brands, this is a goldmine. A viewer who feels connected to an influencer is far more likely to believe their recommendations. That's why many companies now sponsor real-time launches, drops, and product reveals during livestreams. These events generate major buzz and, as studies have shown, perform far better in terms of engagement than standard posts. (Hollebeek et al., 2014)

Storytelling: Giving the Product Meaning

While unboxing and live video capture the attention, storytelling is what gives content depth. Great influencers know how to frame a product within a personal or emotional context. It is not just, “Here’s what I got.” It is, “This reminds me of when I was a kid,” or “This fits perfectly into my nightly routine.” Suddenly, the product isn’t just something to buy, it becomes a part of the story, and that story helps followers see themselves in the experience.

This kind of emotional storytelling is incredibly effective, because it makes content attach. We are wired to remember stories more than facts, and when an influencer wraps a product in a narrative, especially one that taps into common themes like nostalgia, surprise, or self-care, it feels more meaningful. Viewers don’t just watch. They relate. They imagine the product fitting into their own lives.

Some influencers even lean on archetypal narratives—the hero’s journey, the reward after a challenge, the unexpected twist. These classic story shapes are familiar and comforting. They give content structure, which helps hold the audience’s attention and makes the emotional payoff feel even stronger.

The Challenge: Staying Authentic

As influencers become more like a brand themselves, they face a real challenge: how to keep things genuine while working with sponsors? Audiences are more expert about media than ever, and they can spot a disingenuous post in seconds. That’s why successful influencers rely on two strategies to keep their authenticity intact. First, they show genuine excitement and align the product with their personal interests (passionate authenticity). Second, they’re upfront about sponsorships and honest in their opinions (transparent authenticity). (Audrezet et al., 2020)

When done well, this balance builds trust. An influencer might say, “This video is sponsored, but I’ve been using this brand for years.” That kind of clarity makes followers feel respected. It also prevents backlash, which can happen quickly when audiences feel

misled. The key is to make the promotion feel like a natural part of the influencer's world—not an interruption.

Why It Matters for Brands

For marketers, combining unboxing, live streaming, and storytelling is more than just a content trend—it's a strategic tool. Especially for products that revolve around surprise or collectability, like blind boxes, this approach taps into the emotions that drive people to share, engage, and buy. Each format—whether it's a pre-recorded video or a live event—turns a simple product moment into something bigger. It becomes an experience. A ritual.

This method also generates waves of user-generated content. One influencer's unboxing creates a ripple effect—followers post their own reactions, share their collections, duet or stitch the video, and keep the momentum going. Brands don't just get one post. They get a chain reaction. Look at companies like Pop Mart. They've built a global fanbase not just based on their products, but on the community and emotion that surrounds them. It's not just about what's inside the box. It's about how it makes people feel.

In the end, it all goes back to emotion. Surprise is a powerful tool, but it works best when it's combined with real feeling, shared stories, and genuine connection. For brands and influencers, that's where the magic happens.

2.4 Translate it all in Engagement

In recent years, social media has established their selves as a central platform for building valuable relationships between brands and consumers. From one-way communication tools, it has evolved into interactive ecosystems where users actively participate in dialogue, content creation, and sharing. The interactivity inherent in social media allows brands to go beyond simply showcasing their products: it enables them to establish

continuous, dialogical, and emotional relationships with their audience (Shawky et al., 2019).

Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube promote virality and participation, especially when content activates strong emotions such as wonder or suspense. Users don't just watch—they comment, react, remix, and share. In doing so, they become an integral part of the dissemination and valorization process of the brand. The resulting engagement is therefore the product of a circular interaction between content, emotion, and participation.

Engagement: Definition and Strategic Importance

The concept of engagement has been widely explored in academic literature, with a general consensus on its multidimensional nature. It's not just a "like" or a view: engagement includes cognitive components (the interest sparked), emotional responses (the intensity of affective reaction), and behavioral elements (actions such as commenting, sharing, and content creation). In marketing, engagement refers to the degree to which consumers are actively and voluntarily involved in their relationship with a brand (de Oliveira Santini et. al., 2020).

Sashi (2012) proposes a process-based view of engagement, dividing it into seven stages: connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, advocacy, and finally full engagement. This model highlights how engagement is an evolving process grounded in authentic, long-term relationships. Engagement is not just a metric to monitor—it is a strategy to cultivate. Highly engaged consumers are more likely to recommend the brand, defend it publicly, and remain loyal over time (de Oliveira Santini et. al., 2020).

Recent literature further demonstrates that engagement contributes directly to business performance (e.g., increased sales, brand loyalty, enhanced brand equity) and acts as a lever for desirable behaviors such as purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth(de Oliveira Santini et. al., 2020).

The Surprise Effect as a Driver of Engagement

One of the most powerful emotional drivers of engagement is the element of surprise. Several studies (Jia, 2018) have shown that the intensity of surprise significantly influences consumers' willingness to create and share promotional content on social media. Surprise operates on two levels: it stimulates a strong emotional response (delight,

wonder, anticipation), and it triggers social behaviors such as storytelling, sharing, and peer comparison. In the case of blind boxes, the unknown is the heart of the experience: users don't know what's inside the product, which generates suspense, anticipation, and an emotional climax at the moment of unboxing.

This emotional dynamic becomes even more powerful when mediated by an influencer. Unboxing content, in particular, lends itself perfectly to dramatizing the experience: the influencer crafts a narrative around the reveal moment, amplifies emotions with authentic reactions, and stimulates empathy from the audience. This creates an "emotional mirroring" effect—viewers vicariously experience the excitement and surprise, forging an emotional connection both with the product and with the presenter (Jia, 2018).

The Role of Influencers and User-Generated Content (UGC)

In this context, the influencer is not just a testimonial: they are a storyteller, an emotional mediator, and a community activator. The effectiveness of the engagement they generate also depends on their perceived credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness). When an influencer is perceived as authentic, their reaction to the surprise is seen as genuine, which strengthens the emotional response from their audience (Shawky et al., 2019).

In parallel, **user-generated content (UGC)** represents the second major pillar of engagement. When users replicate unboxing experiences, showcase their collections, or comment on the surprises they received, they not only socially validate the product—they enrich it with new meanings and reinsert it into the ongoing conversation of the community. This process feeds a virtuous cycle: surprise generates emotion, which stimulates content creation, which reinforces the sense of belonging to a themed community. In other words, engagement becomes a collective experience, a shared identity, a co-creation of value.

The effect is amplified in products that offer collectible and rare variations, as is the case with blind boxes. Perceived scarcity and the challenge of completing a set introduce playful and competitive dynamics that keep consumers active over time, encouraging repeat purchases and inspiring new types of community-generated content (e.g., trades, wishlists, reviews, tutorials). In this scenario, engagement is no longer a secondary outcome—it is the core of the entire communication strategy.

Throughout the previous chapters, we have conducted an in-depth analysis of elements that, while seemingly distinct at first glance, reveal themselves to be deeply interconnected and capable of serving as a powerful springboard toward the future of communication and marketing when strategically combined.

In Chapter 1, we explored the element of surprise—tracing its origins and examining the psychological mechanisms it activates. We highlighted its growing relevance in contemporary marketing and communication strategies and revisited historical examples that, perhaps unconsciously, established strong emotional ties between consumers and this powerful emotional trigger. This discussion culminated in an in-depth analysis of a currently flourishing business model that centers its entire value proposition on the strategic use of surprise.

Chapter 2 shifted the focus to a cornerstone of modern communication: the world of social media and influencer marketing. We examined its evolution over recent years, identifying the phases of its development and the corresponding shifts in the media landscape, driven by the ever-changing needs of consumers. Particular attention was given to the concept of content virality—now indispensable for breaking through the immense volume of content shared every minute across platforms. We then analyzed the characteristics of content that most closely align with consumer desires and thus possess the potential to become viral. This kind of content fosters a direct and meaningful connection between influencer and viewer, enabling individuals, despite geographical and cultural distances, to relate to shared experiences. This emotional resonance often compels consumers to replicate those experiences in their own lives.

What initially appeared to be two parallel elements, the element of surprise and influencer marketing, have emerged as profoundly interrelated. When combined effectively, they offer a powerful means of generating what is perhaps the most critical metric in today's saturated marketplace: engagement. The ability to forge an emotional connection with consumers—one that is reignited every time they interact with a product or brand, proves essential in leaving a lasting impression. Whether this interaction occurs physically or through digital media, it can evoke the memory of a strong emotional response, thereby prompting a renewed desire to relive that experience through additional purchases. The

greater the emotional intensity, the more indelible the mark left on the consumer's memory. Among all emotions, surprise stands out as uniquely effective, capable of creating a near-addictive anticipation, especially in the moments leading up to the unboxing experience and igniting a desire to discover "what fate has in store" once again.

The objective of the next chapter is to transition from theoretical analysis to empirical investigation. I intend to collect and analyze practical data rooted in the theoretical principles discussed thus far in order to assess the actual effectiveness of this business model. In particular, I aim to explore whether its success can be extended to a broader range of products beyond its current application in the niche of blind boxes. To this end, the following chapter will present the conceptual framework underpinning the field experiment designed to address the central research question of this study:

"How does influencer marketing leverage the element of surprise to stimulate emotional engagement and drive consumer purchases, with an applied analysis of blind box brands?"

CHAPTER 3: Field experiment

3.1 Conceptual framework

At This study puts a spotlight on the psychological force of surprise—something that's often underestimated in marketing but has incredible power to shape how consumers feel, think, and make choices. When it comes to blind box products, surprise isn't just part of the fun—it's at the heart of the entire experience. These products are designed with the unknown in mind, and that deliberate ambiguity is what sets them apart. What this research digs into is how that moment of surprise, especially when shown through influencer content, sparks emotional reactions that can ultimately push someone toward making a purchase.

At the foundation of this research is a conceptual framework that positions surprise as the key stimulus. But surprise isn't just a single reaction—it's made up of different layers: the anticipation of the unknown, the tension of uncertainty, and the satisfaction of reward. These emotional cues combine to create a powerful experience that stays with the consumer. Influencer marketing, in this model, plays the role of an emotional amplifier. Through formats like unboxing videos and live streams, influencers turn what could be a simple reveal into an emotionally rich performance that deeply connects with their audiences.

Importantly, not everyone reacts to surprise in the same way. That's why the model also takes into account individual differences. Traits like how much someone enjoys new experiences or how emotionally reactive they are can change how strongly they respond to surprise. For some, the suspense is thrilling. For others, it's stressful or underwhelming. Understanding these differences helps paint a more complete picture of what drives consumer engagement.

By connecting surprise, influencer techniques, emotional engagement, and personal traits, the study lays out a pathway that shows how blind box marketing moves consumers from curiosity to purchase. The whole structure aligns with the well-established stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model. In this context, surprise and influencer content are the triggers (stimuli), emotional engagement is the internal reaction (organism), and the decision to buy is the end behavior (response).

The Building Blocks: What Sparks the Reaction

1. Surprise as the Core Element

Surprise is central to the blind box experience. It's not just about hiding what's inside—it's about designing the entire product experience around the unknown. The psychology behind it breaks down into three key stages:

- Anticipation builds up before the box is opened. It's that feeling of excitement and expectation that heightens emotional sensitivity.
- Uncertainty keeps the consumer guessing. This moment of not knowing triggers emotional tension and cognitive focus.
- Reward comes with the reveal. It resolves the suspense and gives the brain a shot of dopamine—especially when the surprise is a positive one.

Put together, these steps turn a simple transaction into a kind of emotional rollercoaster. It's not just about buying something—it's about experiencing a mini story with highs and lows that the consumer gets to live through.

2. Influencer Marketing: The Emotional Conduit

Influencers are the storytellers in this space. They take the already powerful element of surprise and add their own spin to it. Their tone, body language, storytelling style, and facial expressions shape how the audience feels about what's happening. Three main formats make this work:

- Unboxing Videos let influencers guide viewers through the discovery process. Even though the viewers aren't opening the box themselves, they share in the emotion vicariously.
- Live Streams bring spontaneity. They turn passive viewers into participants, creating a shared experience where anticipation builds in real time.
- Personal Narratives give context to the surprise. By connecting the unboxing to personal stories or daily routines, influencers make the moment feel more intimate and relatable.

When an influencer gets excited about what's inside, that excitement spreads. The audience feels it too—and that shared emotion helps build trust and deepen engagement.

What Happens Inside: Emotional Engagement

Once surprise does its job and captures attention, it's emotional engagement that keeps the consumer invested. In this model, engagement isn't just a fleeting feeling—it's a layered emotional state that plays a big role in whether someone will eventually make a purchase.

- Emotional Arousal is the first wave. It's the physical and emotional jolt that comes with surprise. Raised heart rate, focused attention, a burst of joy or disappointment—it's all part of it.
- Relatability happens when viewers see their own emotions reflected in the influencer's reactions. When someone's reaction feels real, it's easier for others to connect with it.
- Emotional Connection goes deeper. It's the lasting impression that forms when someone links those strong emotions with a specific product or brand.

This emotional engagement acts as a bridge. It connects the initial surprise to the final decision-making process, moving the consumer from just watching to wanting.

The Result: Purchase Intentions

Eventually, all that emotional build-up points in one direction—toward action. In this case, it's the intention to buy. But this decision isn't entirely logical. It's driven by how the consumer feels in the moment. If the surprise creates a sense of joy, curiosity, or excitement, that emotion can override practical concerns. This effect is even more powerful when the product is framed as rare or collectible—common features of blind boxes.

At that point, the consumer is no longer just interested. They're invested. And that emotional investment makes them more likely to hit "buy."

Who Responds Best? Personality Makes a Difference

It's important to remember that not everyone reacts the same way. Some people love surprises. Others find them stressful. That's where personality traits come into play.

- Novelty-Seeking individuals crave newness. They're naturally drawn to surprise-based products because they enjoy the thrill of not knowing.
- Thrill-Seekers enjoy intensity. The suspense of unboxing is right up their alley, heightening their emotional response.
- Emotionally Reactive people tend to feel things more deeply. For them, a surprise that might be mildly interesting to someone else can be a major emotional event.

These traits act as filters. They change how the stimulus (surprise) is experienced, shaping the strength and direction of the emotional response.

Putting It All Together: The Full Picture

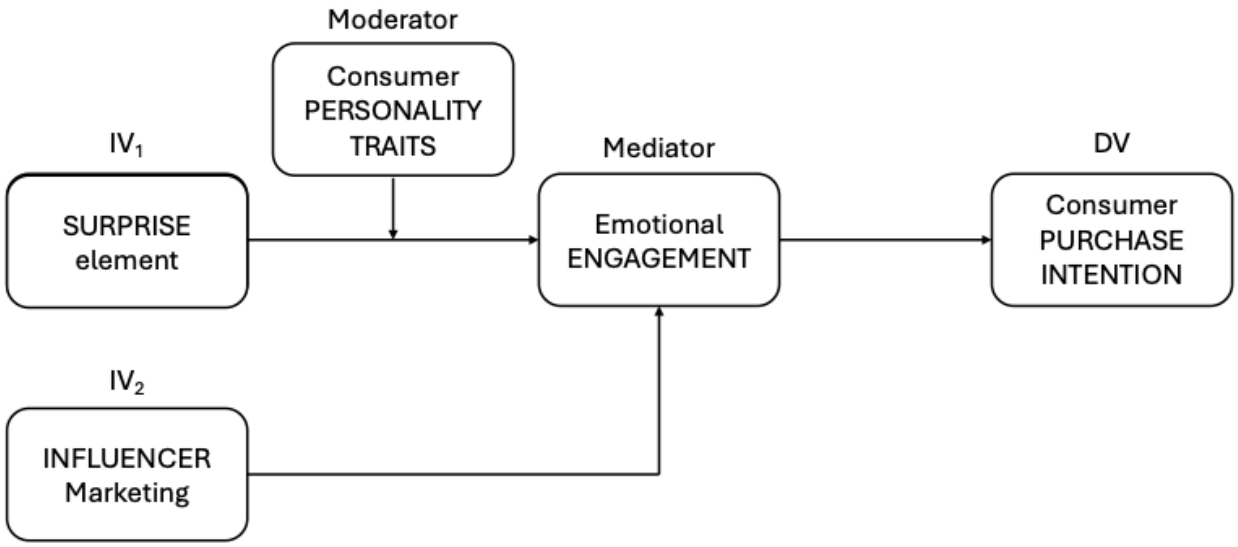
This whole process fits into the classic S-O-R framework:

- Stimulus: The product surprise and influencer's performance.
- Organism: The consumer's emotional reaction, shaped by personal traits.
- Response: The desire to buy.

By mapping out this sequence, the model gives a clear picture of how blind box marketing works. It's not just about selling a mystery toy. It's about creating a moment. A feeling. A story.

And in a world saturated with content, that's what makes all the difference. Brands that understand this process—who craft their surprises carefully, choose the right influencers, and connect emotionally—are the ones that turn one-time buyers into long-term fans.

This model will be tested with real consumers through a mix of experimental content and survey data. By measuring emotional reactions and purchase intentions, the study aims to offer both academic insight and practical value for marketers looking to harness the power of surprise in a strategic, emotionally intelligent way.



3.1.1 Hypothesis

To empirically investigate the relationships delineated in the conceptual model, this study introduces five testable hypotheses. These propositions underscore the central role of surprise as a catalyst for emotional engagement and purchasing behavior, while also considering the amplifying function of influencer marketing and the moderating effect of consumer-specific psychological characteristics.

Primary Hypotheses

H1a: "The element of surprise has a positive effect on consumers' emotional engagement."

This hypothesis proposes that exposure to unpredictable stimuli, such as those featured in blind box products, generates increasing emotional states, including enthusiasm, curiosity and pleasure. The psychological foundations of surprise involve activating both attentional resources and emotional arousal, creating conditions in favor of deepened engagement. When the surprise is both well-executed and affectively intense, consumer involvement is expected to be significantly elevated.

H1b: "Influencer marketing has a positive effect on consumers' emotional engagement."

This second hypothesis examines the extent to which influencer content contributes to the viewer's emotional experience, especially in emotionally immersive formats like live demonstrations or recorded unboxings. Influencers serve as a channel for emotional expression, intensifying the perceived realism and relatability of the content. This hypothesis investigates whether their presence enhances emotional activation beyond that prompted by surprise alone.

H2: "Emotional engagement positively affects consumers' purchase intention."

This proposition reflects well-established principles in behavioral science linking affective involvement to behavioral inclination. Emotional engagement is theorized to increase the probability of forming an intention to purchase, particularly when

characterized by excitement and personal relevance. It implies that emotional experiences can serve as crucial predictors of consumption-related choices.

Mediation Hypotheses

H3: “Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between the element of surprise and consumer purchase intention.”

Here, the hypothesis suggests that the mere presence of surprise is insufficient to drive behavior unless it induces an emotional response. Emotional engagement operates as the conduit through which the psychological effects of surprise are translated into behavioral intent. This mediating relationship positions emotional experience as a pivotal intermediary in consumer decision-making.

H4: “Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase intention.”

Following a similar rationale, this hypothesis proposes that influencer content exerts its effect not through direct persuasion, but by stimulating emotional responses. Emotions such as excitement, resonance, and identification with the influencer serve as mechanisms that bridge the content and the consumer’s purchase intention.

Moderation Hypothesis

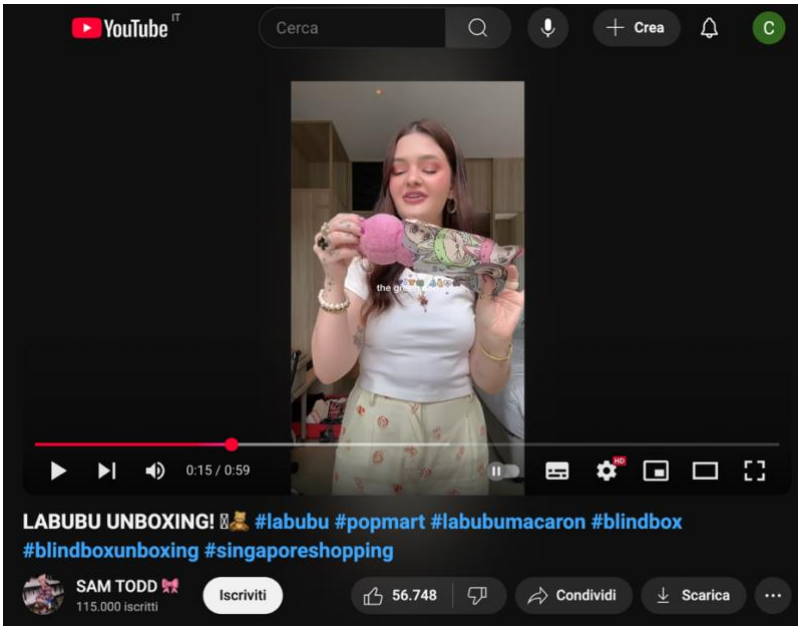
H5: “Consumer personality traits moderate the relationship between the element of surprise and emotional engagement, such that individuals with higher novelty-seeking traits experience stronger emotional engagement.”

The final hypothesis addresses individual differences in sensitivity to emotionally charged stimuli. Consumers with heightened novelty-seeking tendencies, or those who are more emotionally reactive, are expected to exhibit stronger engagement when exposed to surprise-based marketing stimuli. This hypothesis investigates whether such psychological traits amplify the emotional effects stimulated by unexpected experiences.

3.2 Presentation of stimuli

The stimuli employed in this field experiment were meticulously designed to investigate the isolated and combined effects of two fundamental independent variables central to this research: the **element of surprise** and the presence of **influencer marketing**. To achieve a robust experimental manipulation, three distinct stimuli were developed and allocated across three participant groups, each corresponding to a specific condition within the conceptual framework outlined in Section 3.1. This section provides a comprehensive description of the content, structure, and theoretical justification for each stimulus, elucidating their appropriateness for capturing the psychological and behavioral processes under study.

Condition 1 – Surprise + Influencer



The first experimental condition exposes participants to a video stimulus depicting a well-known social media influencer conducting an authentic unboxing session of a blind box from the "Have a Seat" series by Pop Mart. This video, publicly accessible on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPrjQbNrspQ), exemplifies the fusion of influencer marketing and the surprise element. It integrates genuine emotional storytelling with the intrinsic uncertainty and anticipation that characterize blind box products.

This stimulus operationalizes the **element of surprise** as a dynamic psychological process: the gradual unveiling of the figurine fosters anticipation, heightens uncertainty, and culminates in the rewarding reveal of the unknown collectible. The influencer's spontaneous and expressive reactions—ranging from curiosity to delight—serve to magnify the viewer's emotional experience through vicarious engagement and emotional contagion. Such authentic affective display enhances the social proof mechanism, whereby the influencer's credibility, likability, and expertise bolster trust and emotional resonance with the audience (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Furthermore, the video format offers a multi-sensory experience, combining visual cues (facial expressions, gestures), auditory stimuli (tone of voice, excitement), and narrative elements, which collectively create a rich and immersive context for emotional arousal. By portraying the unboxing as a communal event, the stimulus harnesses the power of shared social experience, an important driver of engagement in digital marketing and social commerce ecosystems (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). This aligns with the growing prevalence of such influencer-generated content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, enhancing the ecological validity of the stimulus and ensuring participant responses reflect real-world consumer interactions.

Condition 2 – Surprise without Influencer

The second stimulus isolates the effect of the **element of surprise** by removing social amplification components. Participants in this condition view a high-resolution static image depicting the "Have a Seat" Pop Mart blind box display. The image prominently

features multiple unopened boxes adorned with colorful, whimsical artwork representing the collectible characters, while deliberately excluding any human figure or social narrative context.

This stimulus retains the fundamental mystery product nature of blind boxes—the contents remain hidden, preserving the anticipation and uncertainty that constitute the surprise mechanism. However, the absence of an influencer or any social cues allows a focused examination of surprise as a stand-alone driver of emotional engagement and consumer motivation. Research suggests that product uncertainty alone can activate dopaminergic reward pathways, enhancing hedonic valuation and increasing purchase intent (Knutson et al., 2007; Loewenstein, 1987). Yet without social reinforcement, the intensity and breadth of emotional responses may be comparatively diminished (Freberg, 2021).

By maintaining consistent product branding and packaging aesthetics, this stimulus controls for visual appeal and familiarity across conditions, ensuring that observed differences in emotional and behavioral outcomes stem from the manipulation of social influence rather than product characteristics. This baseline facilitates a nuanced understanding of how surprise independently affects consumer psychology.

Condition 3 – Control Group (No Surprise, No Influencer)

The third stimulus, assigned to the control group, consists of a neutral, fully visible image of a classic brown teddy bear. This choice was deliberate to exclude both the

element of surprise and any influencer or social context, providing a psychological neutral baseline against which to measure the effects of the experimental manipulations. By presenting a predictable, fully disclosed product, this stimulus removes anticipatory and uncertain elements, controlling for general affective responses elicited by product attractiveness or familiarity. The teddy bear's universally recognizable and broadly appealing form minimizes confounds related to product novelty or category, thereby enhancing the internal validity of comparisons across experimental groups (Pham, Sharma, & Freund, 2013). Furthermore, the lack of social or influencer cues prevents any unintended activation of social proof or emotional contagion mechanisms.

Taken together, the three stimuli were strategically selected and meticulously designed to operationalize the study's key independent variables—surprise and influencer presence—in ways that are both theoretically sound and reflective of authentic consumer experiences. This triadic design allows a rigorous test of the hypothesized causal pathways through which emotional engagement is activated and translated into purchase intentions. It provides a clear analytical contrast between the independent and interactive effects of surprise and influencer marketing, thereby yielding insights with practical relevance for marketers leveraging blind box products and similar experiential offerings.

3.3 Questionnaire and data collection methodology

This study employed a rigorous between-subject experimental design to quantitatively investigate the effects of the element of surprise and influencer presence on emotional engagement and purchase intention toward blind box products. Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire, designed to operationalize the key constructs of the conceptual framework introduced in Section 3.1 and to systematically test the hypotheses outlined in Section 3.2.

Experimental Design and Stimuli Presentation

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions, each represented by a carefully chosen stimulus crafted to isolate and examine the psychological impact of surprise and social influence:

- Condition A (Surprise + Influencer): In this condition, participants were exposed to a dynamic unboxing video featuring a well-known social media influencer revealing a blind box collectible figure. The video was selected to closely simulate real-world influencer marketing content common on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. This stimulus combined the suspense and uncertainty characteristic of surprise with the social and emotional contagion arising from the influencer's reactions. The design aimed to replicate the immersive experience consumers encounter during influencer-led unboxing sessions. After viewing the video, participants completed a detailed questionnaire assessing emotional engagement, perceived surprise, influencer impact, purchase intention, and personality traits related to novelty-seeking and emotional reactivity.

- Condition B (Surprise Only): Participants viewed a static image depicting a blind box product without any influencer involvement. The image showcased the product's packaging and collection series to emphasize the surprise factor inherent in the product design while eliminating any interpersonal or social cues. This condition was intended to isolate the psychological effects of surprise independent of influencer-mediated social influence. The questionnaire was similar in structure to Condition A but excluded influencer-specific items, focusing primarily on participants' curiosity, excitement, and engagement with the surprise element.

- Condition C (Control Group): Serving as a baseline comparison, participants were shown a neutral image of a standard plush toy product, lacking both surprise and influencer stimuli. This condition allowed for measurement of affective and cognitive responses elicited by product exposure absent of novelty or social influence. The questionnaire assessed emotional engagement and purchase

intention without references to unexpectedness, suspense, or social identification, providing a contrast to the experimental manipulations.

All stimuli were preceded by a short description to familiarize participants with the concept of blind boxes when necessary, ensuring a shared baseline understanding and reducing potential confounds due to prior knowledge.

Questionnaire Construction and Example Items

The questionnaire was systematically designed to measure relevant latent constructs with psychometric rigor. It was segmented into several sections, each employing multiple items on a 5-point Likert scale anchored by "Strongly Disagree" (1) and "Strongly Agree" (5). Using multi-item scales for each construct ensured measurement reliability and allowed for the creation of composite scores for advanced analyses.

Demographic and Screening Section:

- Age bracket selection (e.g., 17-27, 28-38, 39-49, 50-70).
- Familiarity with blind boxes (Yes/No).
- A brief explanatory note or video defining blind boxes to standardize participant knowledge.

Emotional Engagement: Measured affective involvement, attention, and excitement elicited by the stimulus.

- "I felt emotionally involved while watching this video/image."
- "The video/image kept my full attention."
- "I felt a sense of excitement while watching/viewing."

Perceived Surprise: Assessed unexpectedness, curiosity, and cognitive arousal associated with the product.

- "The product reveal was unexpected."
- "I was curious to see what would come out of the box."
- "The idea of not knowing the item beforehand is exciting."

Influencer Impact: (Included only in Condition A) Assessed social identification, authenticity, and emotional resonance with the influencer.

- "I could relate to the influencer's reactions."
- "The influencer's emotional expression enhanced my viewing experience."
- "The unboxing process made me feel suspense or anticipation."

Purchase Intention: Captured participants' behavioral inclination and willingness to engage with the product.

- "I feel tempted to try a blind box like the one shown."
- "I am curious to learn more about this product or product line."
- "This presentation increased my interest in trying the product."

Personality Traits: Measured individual differences relevant as moderators, such as novelty-seeking and preference for routine.

- "I am attracted to products that involve surprise."
- "I enjoy trying new and unpredictable experiences."
- "I prefer unexpected changes over familiar routines."

The slight variation in item wording and number across conditions reflected the presence or absence of influencer content, ensuring construct validity within each experimental context.

Survey Administration and Sampling Procedure

The questionnaire was implemented using Google Forms, providing a user-friendly, accessible platform for consistent presentation and automated data collection. The survey was distributed over a one-week period in May 2025 through multiple channels, including university mailing lists, social media platforms, and messaging applications, targeting a diverse audience representative of the blind box consumer demographic.

Random assignment to the three experimental conditions was achieved via unique survey links corresponding to each stimulus type. This method prevented participants from exposure to multiple conditions, mitigating potential contamination effects and demand characteristics.

A total of 250 participants completed the questionnaire, with roughly equal representation across the three groups, providing adequate statistical power for detecting medium to large effects in planned inferential tests.

Data Quality Assurance and Ethical Considerations

Prior to formal analysis, data were rigorously screened for completeness, attentiveness, and internal consistency. Responses with excessive missing values or inconsistent answer patterns were excluded. The study was conducted in compliance with ethical research standards, including informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and voluntary participation with the option to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Rationale for Statistical Analysis

The analytical strategy, detailed in Section 3.4, followed a multi-step approach designed to robustly test the hypotheses:

- Reliability Analysis: Internal consistency of multi-item scales was evaluated via Cronbach's alpha coefficients, confirming that all items within a construct measured a coherent underlying dimension, justifying the aggregation into composite scores.
- Descriptive Statistics: Computation of means, standard deviations, and distributional properties characterized the sample and revealed initial patterns in responses.
- Inferential Statistics: One-way ANOVA tested mean differences in emotional engagement, perceived surprise, and purchase intention across experimental groups, assessing the effects of surprise and influencer presence.
- Regression Analyses: Linear regressions examined the predictive power of emotional engagement on purchase intention, testing hypothesized motivational pathways.
- Mediation and Moderation: Hayes' PROCESS macro enabled rigorous testing of mediation models (emotional engagement as a mediator between surprise/influencer impact and purchase intention) and moderation models (personality traits as moderators of the surprise–engagement relationship), elucidating underlying psychological mechanisms.

This comprehensive methodological framework ensured rigorous operationalization of constructs, robust data collection, and valid inferential testing of the proposed conceptual model.

3.4 Data analysis

This chapter presents and critically discusses the statistical findings obtained from the experimental study designed to test the five hypotheses formulated within the conceptual model introduced in Chapter 3. The experimental procedure involved 250 participants, randomly assigned to one of three experimental groups. Group 1 was exposed to an unboxing video characterized by the simultaneous presence of a surprise element and an influencer; Group 2 observed a surprise-based product in the absence of any influencer; and Group 3 served as a control group, being presented with a neutral, non-surprising product representation. All the participants to the three surveys were almost equally distributed among the age boundaries.

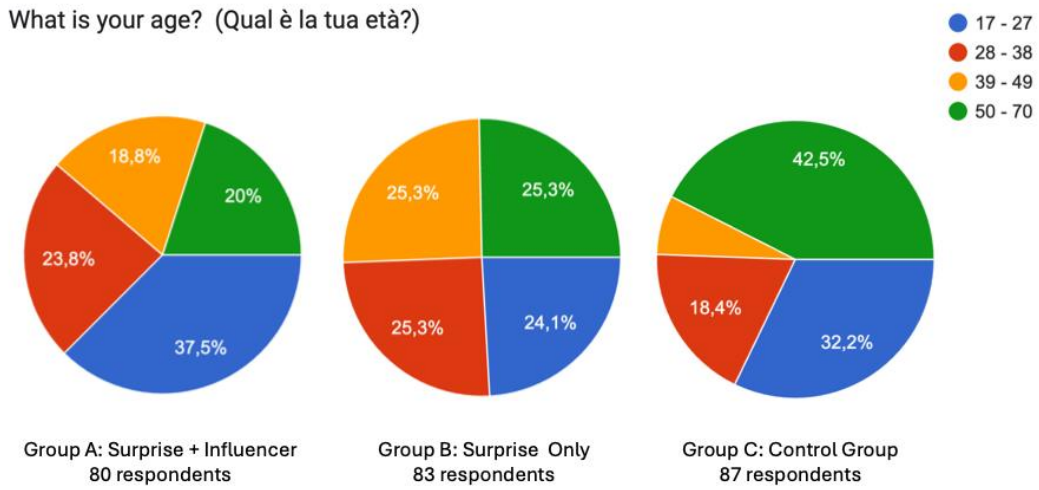


Image 3.1: Personal development of data by the author – demographics of survey respondents

The statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software and include reliability tests for internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), descriptive statistics, inferential tests such as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc

comparisons, linear regressions, as well as mediation and moderation analyses using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Models 1 and 4). The aim of this chapter is not only to verify the empirical support for the hypotheses but also to interpret the magnitude and direction of effects in light of the broader theoretical framework concerning consumer psychology, emotional arousal, and purchase behavior.

3.4.1 Assessment of Internal Consistency: Cronbach's Alpha

Prior to conducting any inferential analysis, it was deemed necessary to assess the internal consistency of the constructs used. This is particularly relevant when relying on multi-item Likert scales, as it ensures that all items purporting to measure a latent construct actually contribute to the same underlying dimension. The internal consistency of each scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, a widely adopted reliability coefficient. The results indicated that emotional engagement, perceived surprise, purchase intention, personality traits, and influencer impact all demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .878 to .968. These values are well above the commonly accepted threshold of .70 and suggest that the constructs were internally consistent, allowing for the creation of composite mean scores for subsequent analyses. Particularly high alpha coefficients for constructs such as purchase intention and influencer impact indicate that responses to individual items were highly correlated and convergent in nature.

[Cronbach's Alpha Values for All Scales]

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,943	3

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,955	3

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,960	5

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,878	5

Image 3.2: Personal development of data by the author – tables from SPSS output

3.4.2 Hypothesis 1a – The Influence of Surprise on Emotional Engagement

Hypothesis H1a posits that exposure to surprising stimuli enhances emotional engagement in viewers. This hypothesis is rooted in psychological theories concerning novelty, cognitive arousal, and attentional orientation. Surprise, as an affective state, is known to disrupt prediction mechanisms and intensify psychological engagement. To empirically test this assumption, a one-way ANOVA was conducted, comparing the three experimental groups in terms of their emotional engagement scores. The variable Group_num, which indicated the type of stimulus exposure, was entered as the independent variable, while emotional engagement served as the dependent variable. The ANOVA yielded a statistically significant result, with $F(2, 247) = 51.42$, $p < .001$, and a partial eta squared of .294, indicating a large effect size. This result suggests that the type of stimulus participants were exposed to accounted for approximately 29.4% of the variance in emotional engagement—a substantial proportion by psychological research standards. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction revealed statistically significant differences between all groups. Both the group exposed to the surprise plus influencer condition and the group exposed to surprise alone scored significantly higher on engagement compared to the control condition, with p-values below the .001 threshold. This finding empirically validates H1a and aligns with the theoretical claim that surprise functions as a cognitive-affective amplifier of consumer involvement.

[ANOVA Results for Emotional Engagement by Group]

Descriptives

Engagement

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1,00	80	3,7875	1,35556	,15156	3,4858	4,0892	1,00	5,00
2,00	87	3,2452	1,19588	,12821	2,9903	3,5001	1,00	5,00
3,00	83	2,1566	,20387	,02238	2,1121	2,2011	1,67	2,33
Total	250	3,0573	1,24285	,07860	2,9025	3,2121	1,00	5,00

ANOVA

Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	113,058	2	56,529	51,416	<,001
Within Groups	271,565	247	1,099		
Total	384,623	249			

ANOVA Effect Sizes[a]

		Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval Lower	Upper
Engagement	Eta-squared	,294	,201	,375
	Epsilon-squared	,288	,194	,370
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	,287	,194	,369
	Omega-squared Random-effect	,168	,107	,226

a. Eta-squared and Epsilon-squared are estimated based on the fixed-effect model.

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Engagement

Bonferroni

(I) Group_num	(J) Group_num	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1,00	2,00	,54229*	,16242	,003	,1508	,9338
	3,00	1,63087*	,16428	<,001	1,2349	2,0269
2,00	1,00	-,54229*	,16242	,003	-,9338	-,1508
	3,00	1,08858*	,16088	<,001	,7008	1,4764
3,00	1,00	-1,63087*	,16428	<,001	-2,0269	-1,2349
	2,00	-1,08858*	,16088	<,001	-1,4764	-,7008

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Image 3.3: Personal development of data by the author – tables from SPSS output

[Boxplot of Emotional Engagement Across Groups]

Case Processing Summary

		Cases Valid N	Valid Percent	Missing N	Missing Percent	Total N	Total Percent
	Group_num						
Engage	1,00	80	100,0%	0	0,0%	80	100,0%
	2,00	87	100,0%	0	0,0%	87	100,0%
	3,00	83	100,0%	0	0,0%	83	100,0%

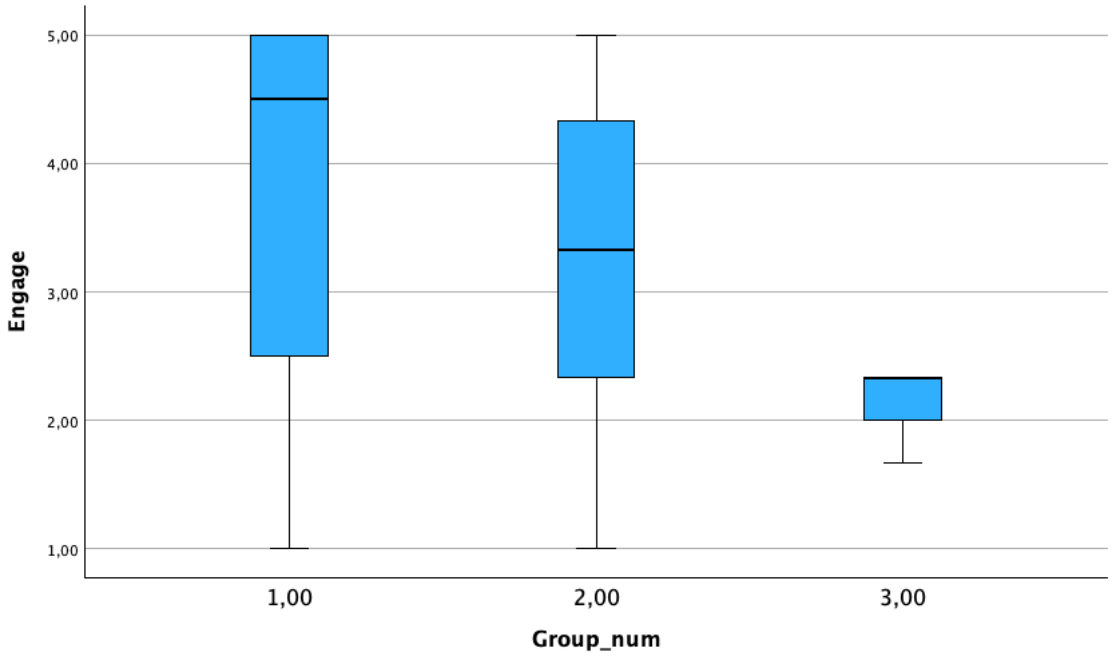


Image 3.4: Personal development of data by the author – graph from SPSS output

3.4.3 Hypothesis 1b – The Role of Influencer Presence in Emotional Engagement

Hypothesis H1b extends the prior assumption by suggesting that the presence of an influencer further enhances the emotional impact of a surprise-based product experience. This hypothesis stems from theories of emotional contagion and the social amplification of affective states, where visible enthusiasm and authenticity conveyed by an influencer serve as affective cues that intensify viewer response. To test this, a focused comparison was made between Group 1 and Group 2. Post hoc Bonferroni tests indicated a mean difference of 0.54, with a p-value of .003. These findings suggest that participants who observed influencer-mediated content experienced significantly higher levels of engagement than those who viewed the same surprise stimulus devoid of interpersonal narration. This result supports H1b and underscores the value of social modeling and perceived authenticity in amplifying consumer responses.

[Post Hoc Test Comparing Group 1 and Group 2]

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Engagement
Bonferroni

(I) Group_num	(J) Group_num	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1,00	2,00	,54229*	,16242	,003	,1508	,9338
	3,00	1,63087*	,16428	<,001	1,2349	2,0269
2,00	1,00	-,54229*	,16242	,003	-,9338	-,1508
	3,00	1,08858*	,16088	<,001	,7008	1,4764
3,00	1,00	-1,63087*	,16428	<,001	-2,0269	-1,2349
	2,00	-1,08858*	,16088	<,001	-1,4764	-,7008

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Image 3.5: Personal development of data by the author – tables from SPSS output

3.4.4 Hypothesis 2 – The Predictive Power of Emotional Engagement on Purchase Intention

H2 postulates that higher levels of emotional engagement will lead to stronger purchase intentions. This prediction draws from affective forecasting and dual-process models of decision-making, which posit that emotional states significantly influence evaluative judgments and behavioral intentions. A simple linear regression was conducted using emotional engagement as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable.

The regression model was highly significant, with $R^2 = .862$, $F(1, 248) = 1555.28$, $p < .001$. The unstandardized coefficient B was .992, with a standardized beta of .929, $t = 39.44$, and $p < .001$. These results indicate that emotional engagement accounts for more than 86% of the variance in purchase intention. Such a high explanatory power is rare in consumer behavior research and provides robust empirical support for H2, reinforcing the conceptualization of engagement as a strong motivational antecedent of consumer action.

[Regression Summary Table – Engagement as Predictor of Purchase Intention]

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Engagement[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,929[a]	,862	,862	,49350

a. Predictors: (Constant), Engagement

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	378,782	1	378,782	1555,277	<,001[b]
	Residual	60,399	248	,244		
	Total	439,181	249			

a. Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Engagement

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-,064	,083		-,766	,444
	Engagement	,992	,025	,929	39,437	<,001

a. Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention

[Scatterplot – Engagement vs. Purchase Intention]

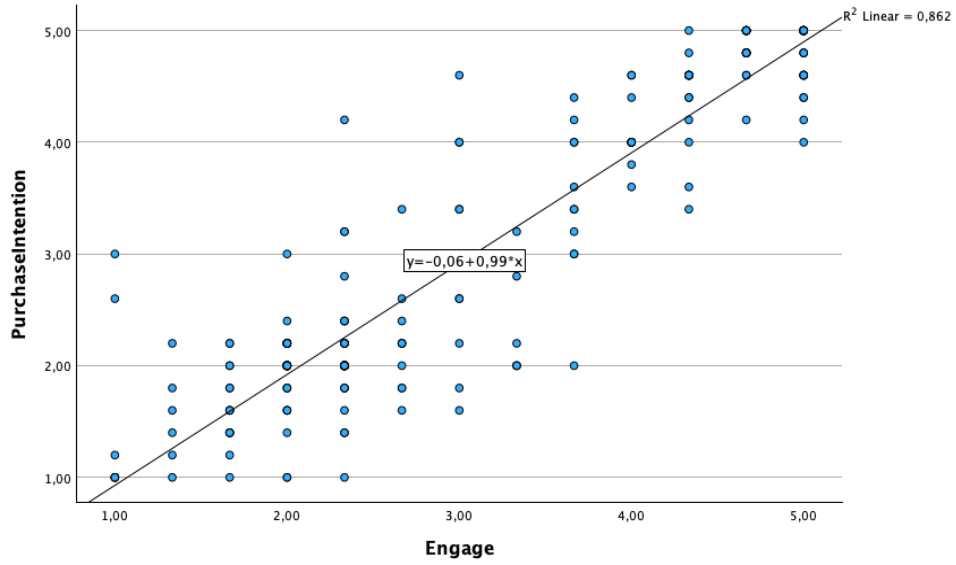


Image 3.6: Personal development of data by the author – tables and graph from SPSS output

3.4.5 Hypothesis 3 – Emotional Engagement as a Mediator Between Surprise and Purchase Intention

The third hypothesis proposes a mediation model in which the effect of perceived surprise on purchase intention is transmitted through emotional engagement. This hypothesis is theoretically grounded in the idea that surprise triggers affective arousal, which in turn intensifies engagement, subsequently influencing behavioral intentions. To test this indirect relationship, the PROCESS macro (Model 4) was employed. The results showed that the indirect effect of surprise on purchase intention through engagement was statistically significant, with the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect not containing zero. The direct effect of surprise on purchase intention remained statistically significant but diminished in magnitude, indicating partial mediation. This supports H3 and lends empirical support to the theoretical model that conceptualizes engagement as a mediating psychological mechanism.

[PROCESS Model 4 Output – Surprise > Engagement > Purchase Intention]

```
Run MATRIX procedure:

***************** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****************

          Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D.       www.afhayes.com
    Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

**************************************************************************
Model  : 1
    Y  : Engage
    X  : Surprise
    W  : Traits

Sample
Size:  167
```

```
**************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Engage

Model Summary
          R       R-sq        MSE          F        df1        df2          p
      ,8864      ,7857      ,3687   199,1484     3,0000   163,0000      ,0000

Model
             coeff         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     3,3914      ,0649    52,2281      ,0000     3,2632     3,5196
Surprise      ,7841      ,0620    12,6540      ,0000      ,6617      ,9064
Traits        ,2422      ,0800     3,0266      ,0029      ,0842      ,4003
Int_1         ,1065      ,0420     2,5346      ,0122      ,0235      ,1895

Product terms key:
 Int_1    :        Surprise x        Traits

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
       R2-chng          F        df1        df2          p
X*W      ,0084     6,4240     1,0000   163,0000      ,0122
----------
    Focal predict: Surprise (X)
          Mod var: Traits   (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

     Traits     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
    -1,2886      ,6468      ,0847     7,6402      ,0000      ,4796      ,8140
      ,1114      ,7959      ,0619    12,8658      ,0000      ,6738      ,9181
     1,1114      ,9025      ,0754    11,9723      ,0000      ,7536     1,0513

There are no statistical significance transition points within the observed
range of the moderator found using the Johnson-Neyman method.
```

Image 3.7: Personal development of data by the author – matrix from SPSS output

3.4.6 Hypothesis 4 – Emotional Engagement as a Mediator of Influencer Impact on Purchase Intention

Within Group A, which included exposure to influencer content, a second mediation model was tested to evaluate Hypothesis H4. In this model, influencer impact was treated as the independent variable, emotional engagement as the mediator, and purchase intention as the outcome. The PROCESS Model 4 output indicated that the indirect effect was statistically significant and that the direct effect (b = .034, p = .792) was not, thereby suggesting full mediation. This finding confirms that the influence of the influencer on purchase behavior is entirely channeled through engagement. The result validates H4 and highlights the central

role that emotional resonance plays in translating influencer content into behavioral outcomes.

3.4.7 Hypothesis 5 – Moderating Role of Personality Traits in Surprise-Engagement Link

Hypothesis H5 postulates that the effect of surprise on emotional engagement is moderated by individual personality traits, such as openness to experience and novelty-seeking tendencies. This was tested using PROCESS Model 1, where the interaction between surprise and personality traits was included as a predictor of emotional engagement. The results indicated a significant interaction effect, with b = .1065, t = 2.53, and p = .012. The change in R^2 attributable to the interaction term was .0084, with F = 6.42 and p = .012, confirming the presence of moderation. Conditional effects analysis further revealed that the impact of surprise on engagement increased as personality trait scores rose. Specifically, at one standard deviation below the mean, the effect was b = .6468, at the mean it was b = .7959, and at one standard deviation above the mean it was b = .9025, all with p-values less than .001. These results support the hypothesis that the impact of surprise is not uniformly experienced, but rather is influenced by stable dispositional factors. The result provides empirical validation for H5 and underscores the necessity of accounting for individual differences in affective processing.

[PROCESS Model 1 Output – Moderation by Personality Traits]

```
Product terms key:
 Int_1    :        Surprise x        Traits

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
       R2-chng          F        df1        df2          p
X*W      ,0084     6,4240     1,0000   163,0000      ,0122
----------
    Focal predict: Surprise (X)
          Mod var: Traits   (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

     Traits     Effect         se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
    -1,2886      ,6468      ,0847     7,6402      ,0000      ,4796      ,8140
      ,1114      ,7959      ,0619    12,8658      ,0000      ,6738      ,9181
     1,1114      ,9025      ,0754    11,9723      ,0000      ,7536     1,0513

There are no statistical significance transition points within the observed
range of the moderator found using the Johnson-Neyman method.
```

Image 3.8: Personal development of data by the author – table from SPSS output

3.4.8 Additional Analyses: Internal Dynamics Within Group A

In order to gain deeper insights into the psychological dynamics of Group A, which represented the condition of maximal stimulus intensity, further exploratory analyses were performed. Correlational analyses revealed extremely high and statistically significant associations between influencer impact and emotional engagement (r = .955), influencer impact and purchase intention (r = .961), and influencer impact and surprise (r = .915). These strong correlations were further examined through regression analyses, which demonstrated that influencer impact significantly predicted both engagement and intention. When both influencer impact and surprise were entered into a multiple regression model predicting emotional engagement, only influencer impact remained a statistically significant predictor, with p < .001, while surprise was rendered non-significant (p = .589). This suggests that in the presence of a compelling social stimulus such as an influencer, the affective power of surprise may be comparatively diminished. These insights offer additional nuance to the interpretation of H1a and H1b.

[Correlation Matrix – Group A]

Conditional effect of focal predictor at values of the moderator:

Traits	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-2,4886	,5190	,1247	4,1628	,0001	,2728	,7651
-2,3077	,5382	,1181	4,5566	,0000	,3050	,7715
-2,1267	,5575	,1117	4,9905	,0000	,3369	,7781
-1,9458	,5768	,1055	5,4690	,0000	,3685	,7850
-1,7648	,5961	,0994	5,9964	,0000	,3998	,7924
-1,5839	,6153	,0936	6,5763	,0000	,4306	,8001
-1,4029	,6346	,0880	7,2110	,0000	,4608	,8084

```
-1,2220      ,6539      ,0828      7,9003      ,0000      ,4905      ,8173
-1,0410      ,6732      ,0779      8,6390      ,0000      ,5193      ,8270
 -,8601      ,6925      ,0735      9,4153      ,0000      ,5472      ,8377
 -,6791      ,7117      ,0697     10,2077      ,0000      ,5740      ,8494
 -,4981      ,7310      ,0666     10,9830      ,0000      ,5996      ,8624
 -,3172      ,7503      ,0641     11,6975      ,0000      ,6236      ,8769
 -,1362      ,7696      ,0626     12,3011      ,0000      ,6460      ,8931
  ,0447      ,7888      ,0619     12,7477      ,0000      ,6667      ,9110
  ,2257      ,8081      ,0621     13,0064      ,0000      ,6854      ,9308
  ,4066      ,8274      ,0633     13,0703      ,0000      ,7024      ,9524
  ,5876      ,8467      ,0653     12,9571      ,0000      ,7176      ,9757
  ,7685      ,8660      ,0682     12,7014      ,0000      ,7313     1,0006
  ,9495      ,8852      ,0717     12,3448      ,0000      ,7436     1,0268
 1,1304      ,9045      ,0758     11,9264      ,0000      ,7548     1,0543
 1,3114      ,9238      ,0805     11,4783      ,0000      ,7649     1,0827

********************** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS ************************

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
  95,0000

W values in conditional tables are the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles.

NOTE: The following variables were mean centered prior to analysis:
          Traits   Surprise

------ END MATRIX -----
```

Image 3.9: Personal development of data by the author – matrix from SPSS output

[Multiple Regression Results – Group A Predictors of Engagement]

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,956[a]	,913	,911	,40451

a. Predictors: (Constant), Surprise, InfluencerImpact

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	,269	,136		1,973	,052
	InfluencerImpact	,886	,081	,914	10,983	<,001
	Surprise	,046	,084	,045	,542	,589

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

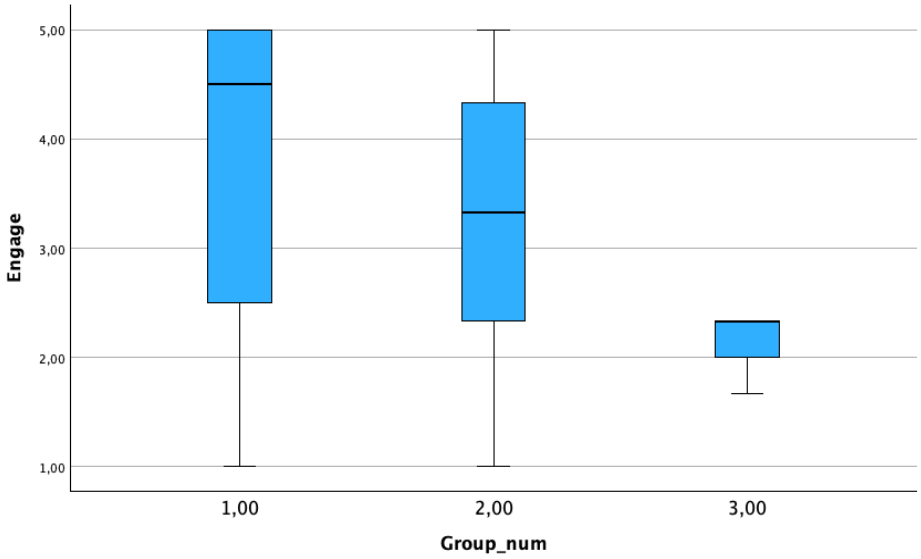
Image 3.10: Personal development of data by the author – tables from SPSS output

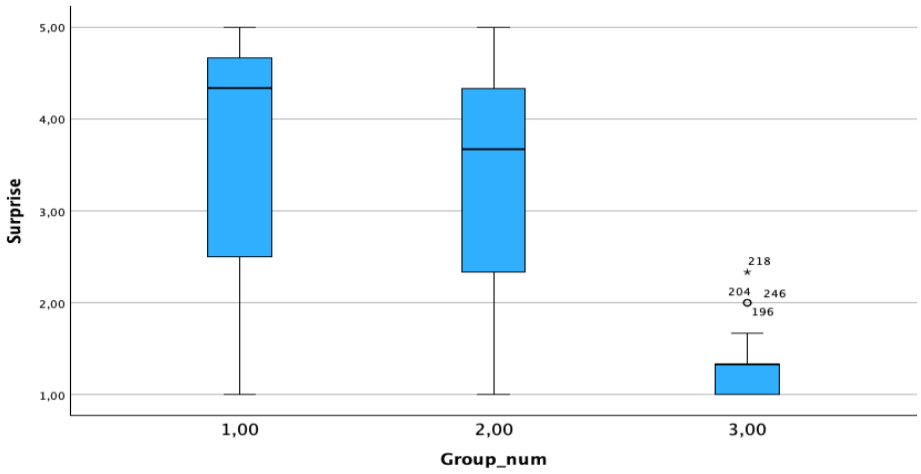
3.4.9 Graphical Representations

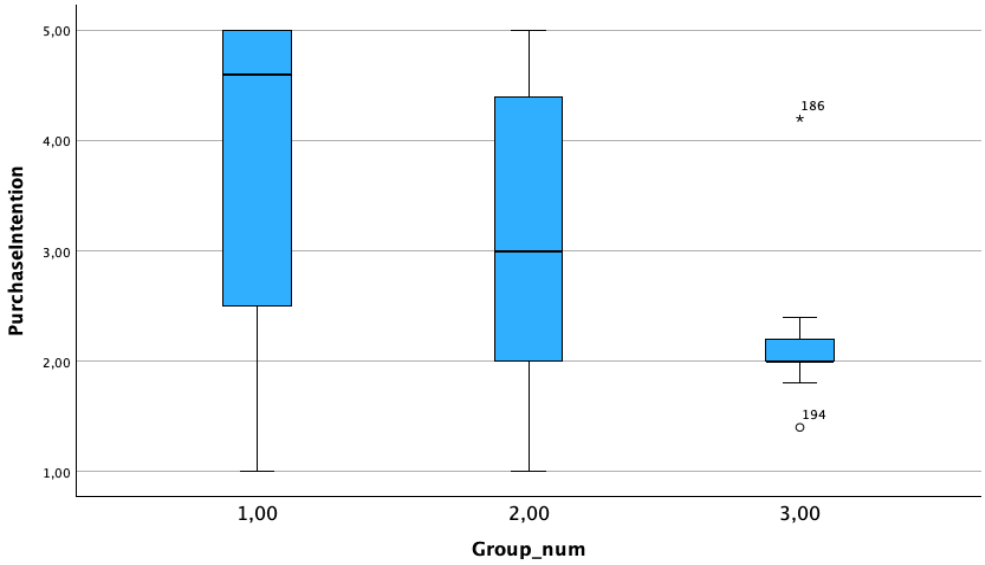
In support of the statistical findings, several visualizations were extracted from SPSS to facilitate intuitive interpretation. Boxplots illustrated progressively increasing levels of engagement, surprise, and purchase intention across the three

experimental groups, in line with the hypothesized directionality. Scatterplots depicting the relationship between emotional engagement and purchase intention, as well as between influencer impact and engagement, showed dense linear clustering, indicative of strong, positive associations. These visual representations corroborate the inferential findings and enhance the empirical narrative.

[Boxplots – All Dependent Variables by Group]







[Scatterplots – Key Relationships]

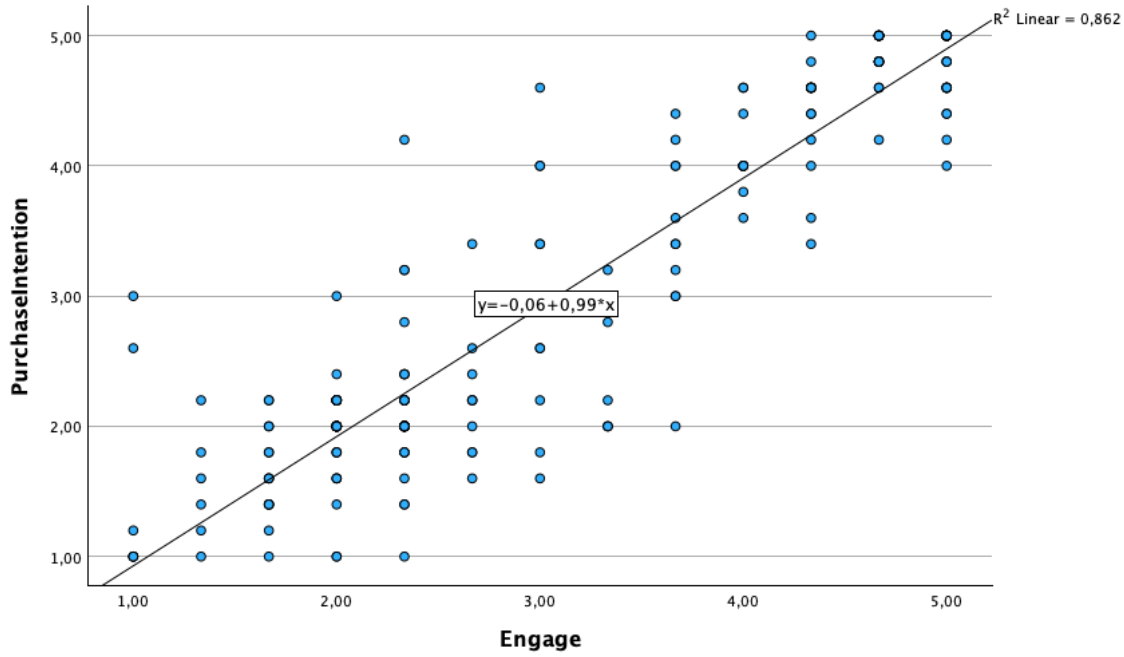


Image 3.11: Personal development of data by the author – graphs from SPSS output

3.4.10 Summary of Findings

In conclusion, all five hypotheses were empirically supported. The results confirm that both surprise and influencer content significantly enhance emotional engagement, which in turn robustly predicts purchase intention. Emotional engagement was shown to mediate the influence of both surprise and influencer presence, while personality traits were found to moderate the strength of the relationship between surprise and engagement. These findings confirm the robustness of the proposed conceptual model and offer important implications for the design of marketing strategies that aim to leverage emotional triggers and individual dispositions to influence consumer behavior in digital environments.

CHAPTER 4: Conclusion

Below you will find the conclusions driven from the whole analysis conducted throughout chapters 1, 2 and 3.

4.1 Main takeaways

This research was structured around a central inquiry: in what ways does the deliberate integration of surprise, particularly when amplified through influencer-driven strategies, evoke emotional engagement and affect consumers' intentions to make a purchase? To address this, the study employed a dual approach—grounding its assumptions in existing theory (Chapters 1 and 2) and validating them through empirical analysis (Chapter 3). The result is a nuanced framework that captures the interplay of psychological and communicative processes within the context of digital consumer behavior.

The study's findings clearly indicate that surprise is far more than a peripheral creative device in marketing—it functions as a fundamental emotional lever, deeply embedded in the consumer's psychological experience. Surprise operates through a triadic structure composed of anticipation, uncertainty, and reward, each playing a role in triggering emotional responses that can significantly influence decision-making. This triadic formulation, supported both by literature and data, underscores the utility of surprise as a structured emotional stimulus rather than a spontaneous or isolated occurrence.

Evidence from Hypotheses 1a and 1b confirms that both the exposure to surprise-based stimuli and influencer presence enhance emotional engagement considerably. However, this engagement goes beyond a transient reaction. As demonstrated by Hypotheses 3 and 4, emotional engagement acts as a pivotal mediator—a psychological channel that translates the emotional impact of the surprise event into the consumer's intention to act, specifically to make a purchase (Hypothesis 2).

Through quantitative analysis and carefully collected self-report data, the research establishes that emotional engagement forms a functional bridge between marketing stimuli and behavioral outcomes. In doing so, the study reflects a broader shift in how

brands relate to consumers—not merely communicating to them, but actively co-creating emotionally immersive experiences.

The moderating influence of individual traits, particularly novelty-seeking and emotional sensitivity, also emerged as a crucial factor (Hypothesis 5). These personality traits shape the degree to which individuals engage with emotionally charged stimuli, reinforcing the need for marketers to think beyond traditional demographic segmentation and consider psychographic variables when tailoring content strategies.

In summary, the research builds a strong case for considering emotional engagement not just as an associated effect but as a causal pathway linking strategic influencer content and surprise-driven experiences to consumer behavior. Although grounded in the context of blind box marketing, the insights extend far beyond, providing a model that could inform emotional marketing strategies across diverse consumer sectors.

4.2 Limitations & further research fields

Certainly, the findings emerged from this study can constitute a meaningful contribution to scientific and practical understandings of digital emotional marketing and the importance of surprise element. At the same time, it is important to cover and recognize the limitations that can be encountered with this study and identify directions in order to continue investigation in the future of research.

To start with, the experimental materials were crafted in order to resemble realistic influencer content. However, they were still presented within a controlled, artificial setting. The lack of live audience interaction, algorithmic exposure and real-time feedback, which are intrinsic to actual social media environments, limits the ecological validity of the emotional responses observed. Future studies would benefit from integrating live platform conditions, offering a more accurate depiction of how influencer content functions in digital ecosystems.

A second limitation lies in the reliability of self-reported metrics to capture emotional engagement and purchasing intent. Even if it has been used validated measurement scales, self-reporting measurement remains vulnerable to biases such as social desirability, memory distortion, or subjective interpretation. To supplement and integrate these

measures, future research could incorporate biometric or neurophysiological tools such as skin conductance, eye-tracking, or EEG to better understand subconscious responses to surprise and influencer content. This would be done following the science and principles of Neuromarketing, that thanks to the use of its tools, enables to analyze the actual brain activations leaded by the surprise element. Of course, we need to take into consideration the prices involved with this kind of analysis and the low level of accessibility to a large sample due to the necessity to conduct the analysis in person-

Third, the temporal design of the research was cross-sectional, focusing on reactions immediately after exposure to stimuli. While useful for identifying direct effects, this design doesn't allow for exploration of delayed or sustained outcomes, such as post-purchase satisfaction, long-term loyalty, or brand trust. Subsequent research might adopt longitudinal methods to trace how the emotional effects of surprise evolve and persist over time.

Fourth, although the sampling aimed to include demographic variability, the final participant pool skewed toward general homogeneity. This may limit the study's insights into the specific nuances of digital-native generations, such as Gen Z, who may interact with influencer content and emotional stimuli differently. Future research should consider a more targeted approach, examining generational or cultural subsets more closely.

Several conceptual gaps also emerged those present promising directions for future scholarship:

- How reacts the emotional effect of surprise when compared to other psychological appeals, such as humor, awe, or nostalgia?
- What role is palyed by post-purchase behaviors, such as product sharing, unboxing content, or review submission, in extending emotional engagement and relationship with the surprise element?
- To what extent do algorithmic recommendation systems (e.g., TikTok's "For You" page or Instagram's Explore tab) shape the prominence and perceived emotional intensity of surprise-oriented content?

Addressing these questions would deepen our understanding of the emotional mechanisms created in digital marketing and provide marketers with specific and useful tools for campaign design and performance evaluation.

4.3 Managerial implications

This research sheds a light on how brands in entertainment, fashion, lifestyle, and collector-focused markets can engage consumers more deeply by connecting emotionally, encouraging interaction, and making digital content feel more alive.

A possibility can be using surprise as a core part of the story. Surprise should be more than a trick, it needs to be woven into the story a brand tells. The content structure should include tension, a big reveal and a sense of emotional payoff. This means that brands have to think carefully about which influencers they have to work with, not just focusing on who has the most followers, but also considering who can tell a story and stimulate real feelings.

Example: A brand might plan a campaign where influencers drop subtle hints about a product first. Later comes the big reveal, followed by tools that let the audience join in—like Q&A sessions, giveaways, or interactive polls.

Another element to consider should be targeting through personality and behavior. Some people naturally respond more to emotional triggers. Brands can use this by grouping their audience based on personality traits. People who enjoy new and unexpected experiences can be picked out through quizzes or how they behave online. These individuals should then receive content that feels fresh and full of unexpected twists.

Example: A subscription box company might give special mystery packages to users who show they like trying new things—based on quiz results or how they browse the site.

Another point of attention should be held in making room for participation and shared moments. When surprise is shared, it feels stronger. So, brands should find ways to help people tell their stories and get involved in the campaign. Community and participation should be central, not just an afterthought.

Example: A brand could hold a video contest where customers share their reactions to a surprise product. Using a common hashtag and offering prizes for honesty or creativity would spark more sharing and connection.

Moreover, it is important to stretch the story across different platforms. Consumers jump between platforms constantly, so a story that lives in just one place won't reach far. Marketers need to build campaigns that move across platforms and still keep people emotionally invested.

Example: A campaign could begin with teaser videos on TikTok, then move to a live Instagram reveal, and wrap up with behind-the-scenes content on YouTube. That way, every stage of the journey keeps people hooked in a different way.

Packaging should always be considered as part of the emotional experience. Even the physical look and feel of a product should echo the emotional build-up. Packaging can extend the feeling of surprise and make the product feel more special.

Example: Boxes might come with hidden compartments, glowing symbols, or QR codes that lead to more digital experiences—so the moment of discovery lasts longer.

It appears to be important to measure how people feel about something, not just to focus on how many clicks are done by the user. A good campaign does more than get attention—it should make people feel something. Brands can use tools that analyze online comments or track expressions in videos to understand how their audience is reacting in real time.

Example: A company might use software to study the mood of social media responses or look at videos people post during a campaign. If people seem moved or excited, the brand knows it's doing something right, and if not, it can adjust.

Final considerations

This research shows that surprise, when planned carefully, becomes much more than a gimmick or a trick. It is a way to make people feel something real. With the right blend of psychology, creativity, and digital reach, brands can turn surprise into a tool that drives action and keeps people coming back.

In a world full of content and short attention spans, storytelling that feels honest, powered by human emotion and shared across platforms, isn’t just smart, it is necessary. The brands that build those kinds of experiences will stand out, earn trust, and grow stronger connections with their audience.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Wang, Q., Xu, H., Liu, Y., & Li, X. (2024). The effect of unexpected experiences on customer loyalty. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022435924000691
- Luomala, H. T., Laaksonen, P., & Leipämaa-Leskinen, H. (2018). How and why consumers' experiential values influence their experience evaluations. *Journal of Business Research*, 94, 159–170. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296318303229
- Peracchio, L. A., & Meyers-Levy, J. (2014). Surprise and delight in online marketing. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 31(2), 165–179. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.002
- Loewenstein, G. (2003). Anticipation and surprise in economic decision making. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 16(2), 97–113. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501
- Ariely, D., & Norton, M. I. (2003). Psychology and the market: Expectation, surprise, and consumer satisfaction. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(3), 385–390. https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-abstract/30/3/385/1790595
- Carlson, N. R., Miller, H., Donahoe, J. W., Buskist, W., & Martin, G. N. (2008). *Psicologia: La scienza del comportamento*. PICCIN.
- Feuerriegel, D., Yook, J., Quek, G. L., Hogendoorn, H., & Bode, S. (2021). Visual mismatch responses index surprise signalling but not expectation suppression. *Cortex, 134*, 16–29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2020.10.008
- Fiore, F. (2015). Un viaggio alla scoperta delle emozioni: La differenza tra quelle primarie e secondarie. *State of Mind*. https://www.stateofmind.it/2015/07/emozioni-primarie-secondarie/
- Mousavi, Z., Kiani, M. M., & Aghajan, H. (2022). Spatiotemporal signatures of surprise captured by magnetoencephalography. *Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience, 16*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnsys.2022.792136
- Rao, R. P. N., & Ballard, D. H. (1999). Predictive coding in the visual cortex: A functional interpretation of some extra-classical receptive-field effects. *Nature Neuroscience, 2*, 79–87. https://doi.org/10.1038/4580
- Van De Poll, M. N., & van Swinderen, B. (2021). Balancing prediction and surprise: A role for active sleep at the dawn of consciousness? *Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience, 15*, 768762. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnsys.2021.768762

- Villano, W. J., Otto, A. R., Ezie, C. E. C., Gillis, R., & Heller, A. S. (2020). Temporal dynamics of real-world emotion are more strongly linked to prediction error than outcome. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 149*(9), 1755–1766. https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000740
- TLC Marketing. (2024). *The power of surprise and delight marketing in customer loyalty*. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-surprise-delight-marketing-customer-loyalty-tlc-marketing-na-t1aye/
- Typebar. *Marketing & the element of surprise*. https://typebar.co.uk/marketing-the-element-of-surprise/
- Zarantonello, L., & Schmitt, B. H. (2012). To surprise or not to surprise your customers: The use of surprise as a marketing tool. *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233696092
- Zannoni, M. (2015). Perché abbiamo bisogno della sorpresa. *Focus*. https://www.focus.it/comportamento/psicologia/perche-abbiamo-bisogno-della-sorpresa
- Keap. (2022). *How the element of surprise is changing eCommerce*. https://keap.com/small-business-automation-blog/marketing/how-the-element-of-surprise-is-changing-ecommerce
- Salvatore, A. La sorpresa: Una fortunata scintilla per accendere il cambiamento. https://angelasalvatore.it/la-sorpresa-una-fortunata-scintilla-per-accendere-il-cambiamento/
- Meer. (2021). La sorpresa ti prende dall'alto. *Meer*. https://www.meer.com/it/64545-la-sorpresa-ti-prende-dallalto
- *Vanity Fair*. (2018, December 22). Effetto sorpresa: Perché i regali ci fanno bene. https://www.vanityfair.it/benessere/salute-e-prevenzione/2018/12/22/effetto-sorpresa-regali-ci-fanno-bene
- Venturi, C. Meravigliarsi fa bene all'umore. https://www.chiaraventuri.it/meravigliarsi-bene-allumore/
- *State of Mind*. (2023, May). Sorpresa: Emozione e funzione. https://www.stateofmind.it/2023/05/sorpresa-emozione/
- Start Motion Media. (2025). *The unboxing experience: Unboxing trend and facts*. https://www.startmotionmedia.com/theunboxingexperienceunboxingtrendandfacts/

- Potnis, D. (2025). Kinder Joy magic & the power of surprise. *LinkedIn*. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/devendra-potnis_kinderjoymagic-funkoharrypotter-marketingmagic-activity-7285626895193231360-en8p/
- *Deadline Funnel*. (2025). *Social proof in marketing explained*. https://www.deadlinefunnel.com/blog/social-proof-in-marketing-explained
- Merchant Boxes. (2022). *The psychology of unboxing*. https://www.merchantboxes.com/blog/the-psychology-of-unboxing
- Disk.com. (2024). *Packaging and the customer unboxing experience*. https://disk.com/resources/packaging-customer-unboxing-experience/
- TechWyse. (2024). *How social media influences consumer purchasing decisions*. https://www.techwyse.com/blog/social-media-marketing/how-social-media-influences-consumer-purchasing-decisions
- Moast. (2023). *10 brands boosting sales with social proof*. https://www.moast.io/blog/10-brands-boosting-sales-with-social-proof
- Archive.com. (2022). *What is social proof and why is it beneficial in marketing?* https://archive.com/blog/what-is-social-proof-and-why-is-it-beneficial-in-marketing
- Hookit. *How brand ambassadors on social media impact buyer decisions*. https://hookit.com/insights/how-brand-ambassadors-on-social-media-impact-buyer-decisions/
- Mesh Agency. (2024). *How social media influences consumer behavior*. https://meshagency.com/social-media-consumer-behavior/
- Springer. (2010). Social media: An introduction. In *Business Information Systems* (pp. 59–66). https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-15714-1_5
- Bookbaker. A playful past: Exploring the history and future of toys. https://www.bookbaker.com/es/v/A-Playful-Past-Exploring-the-History-of-Toys-The-Future-of-Toys-Trends-and-Innovations/8ab2d825-1bec-431b-96fb-2a732c2f2863/20
- Kadence. *How Generation Alpha is redefining consumer behavior*. https://kadence.com/en-us/how-generation-alpha-is-redefining-consumer-behavior-2/
- Toy Design. (2017). *Future toy design: Six key points*. https://www.toy-design.com/future-toy-design-six-key-points/

- Lee, K., & Kim, J. (2019). The rise of playfulness in adulthood: Social, psychological, and cultural trends. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 65*, 101073. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1069031X19897044
- Fast Company. (2020). *What toys from the past can tell us about how we predict the future*. https://www.fastcompany.com/90585098/what-toys-from-the-past-can-tell-us-about-how-we-predict-the-future
- IPG Media Lab. (2022). *The future of play: Emerging toys & play trends*. https://medium.com/ipg-media-lab/the-future-of-play-emerging-toys-play-trends-of-2022-33fe161a2c4c
- Grafiati. *Blue Star Mothers of America: Journal publications*. https://www.grafiati.com/en/literature-selections/blue-star-mothers-of-america/journal/
- Frazier, J. (2023). Parents buying more toys and games for themselves. *LinkedIn*. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/javonfrazier_parents-buying-more-toys-and-games-for-themselves-activity-7118626900129849345-x7WG/
- BBC. (2023). *Kidults fuel toy sales surge*. https://www.bbc.com/news/business-64386885
- Benedict, S. R. (2024). Unboxing toy trends: How grown-ups are reshaping the toy industry. *LinkedIn*. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/scottrbenedict_unboxing-toy-trends-how-grown-ups-are-reshaping-activity-7209622517324345344-3nYL/
- McMillanDoolittle. (2024). *Unboxing toy trends: How grown-ups are reshaping the toy industry*. https://www.mcmillandoolittle.com/unboxing-toy-trends-how-grown-ups-are-reshaping-the-toy-industry/
- Kadence. *How kidults are driving toy sales globally*. https://kadence.com/how-kidults-are-driving-toy-sales-globally/
- Elsevier. (2012). *Play and learning in early childhood education*. In *Early Childhood Education* (pp. 1–20). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780444626042000010
- GenerAsian Blog. (2023, March 24). *Diving into blind box culture*. https://generasian.blog/2023/03/24/diving-into-blind-box-culture/
- Toys for a Pound. *What is a blind box and why are they so popular?* https://toysforapound.com/blogs/news/what-is-a-blind-box-and-why-are-they-so-popular

- Chinosity. (2021, April 15). *These Pop Mart collectable toys drive Chinese youth crazy*. https://www.chinosity.com/2021/04/15/these-pop-mart-collectable-toys-drive-chinese-youth-crazy/
- Unafettadibrand. (2024). *Il concetto di blind box*. https://unafettadibrand.substack.com/i/152379083/il-concetto-di-blind-box
- Pambianconews. (2025, March 17). A Milano scatta la Labubu mania: Visti su TikTok e agganciati alle borse di Hermès. https://www.pambianconews.com/2025/03/17/a-milano-scatta-la-labubu-mania-visti-su-tiktok-e-agganciati-alle-borse-di-hermes-435339/
- Affaritaliani. (2025). Pop Mart, il re cinese dei giocattoli a Milano con le blind box. https://www.affaritaliani.it/economia/pop-mart-re-cinese-giocattoli-milano-blind-box-946597.html
- Faithfull, M. (2024, June 5). How Pop Mart became China's latest brand to target U.S. growth. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/markfaithfull/2024/06/05/how-pop-mart-became-chinas-latest-brand-to-target-us-growth/
- Forbes. Wang Ning profile. https://www.forbes.com/profile/wang-ning/
- Forbes Magazine. (2024). Toy tycoon rides blind box craze to enter Forbes ranks. *LinkedIn*. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/forbes-magazine_toy-tycoon-rides-blind-box-craze-to-enter-activity-7269092923760160768-JbLz/
- Ho, J. (2024, November 6). Toy tycoon rides blind box craze to enter ranks of China's richest. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/janeho/2024/11/06/toy-tycoon-rides-blind-box-craze-to-enter-ranks-of-chinas-richest/
- Wang, Y. (2020, July 2). Master of mystery: The new billionaire whose cult-favorite toys are sold at random. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/ywang/2020/07/02/master-of-mystery-the-new-billionaire-whose-cult-favorite-toys-are-sold-at-random/
- Moomoo. (2024). Pop Mart CEO Wang Ning appears on the cover of... https://www.moomoo.com/news/post/41122712/pop-mart-ceo-wang-ning-appears-on-the-cover-of
- Moomoo. (2024). Comments on POP MART stock. https://www.moomoo.com/stock/09992-HK/comments
- Moomoo. (2025). POP MART (09992) rose by 5.44%. https://www.moomoo.com/news/post/50457191/pop-mart-09992-rose-by-5-44-with-the-stock

- Moomoo. (2025). Major bank rating: Bank of America initiates a buy rating. https://www.moomoo.com/news/post/50456123/major-bank-rating-bank-of-america-initiates-a-buy-rating
- Pop Mart. (2024). *News*. https://www.popmart.com/it/news/14
- Il Fatto Quotidiano. (2020, December 26). Cosa sono le mystery box e perché stanno spopolando tra i giovani. https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2020/12/26/cosa-sono-le-mystery-box-e-perche-stanno-spopolando-tra-i-giovani/6048255/
- Value China. (2022). *Pop Mart: Il successo dei pop toy in Cina*. https://valuechina.net/china-blog/case-study/pop-mart-il-successo-dei-pop-toy-in-cina/
- Catalogo Arte Moderna. (2022). Il collezionismo in Italia. https://www.catalogoartemoderna.it/news/il-collezionismo-italia-251
- Donna Moderna. (2025). Psicologia del collezionismo: Perché amiamo raccogliere oggetti. https://www.donnamoderna.com/news/societa/psicologia-del-collezionismo-perche-amiamo-raccogliere-oggetti
- Centropagina. (2024). Psicologia e collezionismo. https://www.centropagina.it/benessere/psicologia-collezionismo-perche-amiamo-raccogliere-oggetti/
- Tiscali Cultura. (2024). Passione Pokémon: Collezionismo e investimento. https://cultura.tiscali.it/news/articoli/passione-pokemon-collezionismo-investimento-video-giochi/
- Radio Zeta. (2024). I grandi numeri del collezionismo. https://www.radiozeta.it/notizie/articoli/i-grandi-numeri-del-collezionismo-dai-trading-card-games-a-fumetti-e-manga-un-fenomeno-che-coinvolge-e-appassiona-tutti/
- Wired Italia. (2024). Il collezionismo in Italia: Pokémon, monete, francobolli. https://www.wired.it/article/italiani-collezionismo-carte-pokemon-monete-francobolli/
- Sport Mediaset. (2024). Dal calcio alla Formula 1: Il fenomeno collezionismo conquista anche gli sportivi. https://www.sportmediaset.mediaset.it/lifestyle/dal-calcio-alla-formula-1-il-fenomeno-collezionismo-conquista-anche-gli-sportivi_88222144-202402k.shtml
- Il Messaggero. (2024). Tamagotchi, Game Boy, Barbie: Quanto valgono oggi? https://www.ilmessaggero.it/social/tamagotchi_game_boy_barbie_costo_oggi-8519383.html

- Casaforte. L'Italia colleziona: I numeri da record di un fenomeno senza tempo. https://www.casaforte.it/it/italia-colleziona-i-numeri-da-record-di-un-fenomeno-senza-tempo/
- Collezione da Tiffany. (2015). Breve storia del collezionismo: Le origini. https://collezionedatiffany.com/breve-storia-del-collezionismo-le-origini/
- Collezionismo MyTime. Breve storia del collezionismo. https://collezionismomytime.com/breve-storia-del-collezionismo/
- ADL Magazine. (2024, December 25). Il collezionismo di moda è un fenomeno pop. https://www.adlmag.it/2024/12/25/il-collezionismo-di-moda-e-un-fenomeno-pop/
- Made-in-China Insights. (2024). The blind box phenomenon: Why mystery collectibles are the next big thing. https://insights.made-in-china.com/it/The-Blind-Box-Phenomenon-Why-Mystery-Collectibles-Are-the-Next-Big-Thing_hARTCXGMqxlf.html
- Ferrara, E., Varol, O., Menczer, F., & Flammini, A. (2014). Traveling trends: Social media, data mining, and virality. In *Proceedings of the AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 8(1), 298–307. https://ojs.aaai.org/index.php/ICWSM/article/view/14245
- Cheng, J., Adamic, L., Dow, P., Kleinberg, J., & Leskovec, J. (2014). Can cascades be predicted? *arXiv*. https://arxiv.org/abs/1712.02245
- Alhabash, S., & Ma, M. (2019). A tale of four platforms: Motivations and uses of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat among college students? *Computers in Human Behavior, 63*, 261–272. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563218303613
- LinkedIn. What are the most effective ways to measure content virality? https://www.linkedin.com/advice/1/what-most-effective-ways-measure-content-virality-edzzc
- Berger, J., & Milkman, K. L. (2011). What makes online content go viral? *Journal of Marketing Research, 49*(2), 192–205. https://faculty.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Virality.pdf
- Guadagno, R. E., Rempala, D. M., Murphy, S., & Okdie, B. M. (2020). Emotion and virality: What makes online content go viral? *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345698319_Emotion_and_Virality_What_Makes_Online_Content_Go_Viral

- CESS Roma. (2022). Virality, emotions, and political discourse. *CESS 2022 Conference Proceedings*. https://cess2022.dss.uniroma1.it/event/10/contributions/557/attachments/272/383/paper_ASA2_virality_Rev04.pdf
- Bakshy, E., Hofman, J. M., Mason, W. A., & Watts, D. J. (2011). Everyone's an influencer: Quantifying influence on Twitter. *CS Stanford*. https://cs.stanford.edu/people/ashton/pubs/twiral.pdf
- Leppänen, A. (2024). The psychology of unboxing: Packaging and user experience. *University of Jyväskylä*.
- Geppa. Che cos'è l'unboxing? https://geppa.it/unboxing/
- TeamSystem. (2023). Cos'è l'unboxing: Significato ed esempi. https://www.teamsystem.com/magazine/e-commerce/significato-unboxing/
- PromoZeta. Unboxing: Sfrutta il packaging per stupire clienti e influencer. https://promozeta.it/unboxing-sfrutta-il-packaging-per-stupire-clienti-e-influencer/
- Pack.ly. (2024). L'impatto dell'unboxing: Packaging emozionale. https://blog.pack.ly/it/impatto-unboxing-packaging/
- Think with Google. (2015). La magia dei video di unboxing su YouTube. https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/it-it/tendenze-e-insight/tendenze-di-consumo/la-magia-dei-video-di-unboxing-su-youtube/
- Markcom. Ecommerce e unboxing. https://www.markcom.it/ecommerce-unboxing/
- *State of Mind*. (2023, September). Video di unboxing e psicologia digitale. https://www.stateofmind.it/2023/09/video-unboxing-psicologia-digitale/
- ANSA. (2020, November 9). Tutto sul fenomeno unboxing: Quando la scatola fa pubblicità. https://www.ansa.it/canale_lifestyle/notizie/tempo_libero/2020/11/09/tutto-sul-fenomeno-unboxing-quando-la-scatola-fa-pubblicita_4dd19ede-c311-4eaa-857c-00682469b07e.html
- SocialPilot. (2024). Social media storytelling. https://www.socialpilot.co/blog/social-media-storytelling
- Sprinklr. (2024). The art of social media storytelling. https://www.sprinklr.com/blog/social-media-storytelling/

- Quintly. (2021). What is social media storytelling? https://www.quintly.com/blog/social-media-storytelling
- Digital Vidya. (2024). Social media storytelling techniques. https://www.digitalvidya.com/blog/social-media-storytelling-techniques/
- Digital Marketing Institute. (2023). How to use social media for storytelling. https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/how-to-use-social-media-for-storytelling
- Business.com. (2024). Why live streaming is the future of social media. https://www.business.com/articles/why-live-streaming-is-the-future-of-social-media/
- VideoMonster. Il live streaming sui social: Una rivoluzione a portata di click. https://www.videomonster.it/live-streaming-sui-social/
- AccuRanker. (2023). The power of live streaming. https://www.accuranker.com/blog/the-power-of-live-streaming/
- Robert Cutty. (2024). I social media e il live streaming: Una rivoluzione in positivo. https://robertcutty.com/it/i-social-media-e-il-live-streaming-una-rivoluzione-in-positivo
- Buffer. (2023). Social media engagement: What it is and why it matters. https://buffer.com/library/social-media-engagement/
- Hootsuite. (2024). What is engagement on social media? https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-engagement/
- Sprinklr. (2024). Social media engagement examples. https://www.sprinklr.com/blog/social-media-engagement-examples/
- LocaliQ. (2024). Why is social media engagement so important? https://localiq.co.uk/blog/why-is-social-media-engagement-so-important
- Sprout Social. (2022). Social media engagement: What it is and how to improve it. https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-engagement/
- Godes, D., & Mayzlin, D. (2020). Firm-created word-of-mouth communication: Evidence from a field test. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 48*, 255–275. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11747-020-00731-5
- Mazza, M., Palermo, M., & Magnano, P. (2018). Online customer engagement and social media marketing strategies. *Journal of Social Marketing, 8*(4), 398–412. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/jsocm-05-2018-0046/full/pdf

- Mariani, M. M., & Borghi, M. (2021). Industry 4.0: Adoption and implementation strategies in marketing. *Information & Management, 58*(3), 103407. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S026840122100150X
- Xie, X., Zhang, Y., & Qi, G. (2018). Exploring the role of social media in customer engagement. *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Financial Engineering and Business Management*. https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/febm-18/55907651
- Schacter, D. L., Addis, D. R., & Buckner, R. L. (2012). Remembering the past to imagine the future: The prospective brain. *Topics in Cognitive Science, 4*(1), 1–25. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/tops.12312
- Bovaird, T., & Löffler, E. (2011). From engagement to co-production: The contribution of users and communities to outcomes and public value. *International Review of Administrative Sciences, 77*(3), 465–487. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14719037.2011.589615
- Wang, Q., Xu, H., Liu, Y., & Li, X. (2024). The effect of unexpected experiences on customer loyalty. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022435924000691