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## Unwrapping the Unknown: Exploring Novelty and Perceived Value as Mediators Between Uncertainty and Purchase Intention

Dimas Dimitralyani<sup>1</sup>, Weni Novandari<sup>2</sup>, Larisa Pradisti<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jenderal Soedirman University, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia, [dimas.dimitralyani@mhs.unsoed.ac.id](mailto:dimas.dimitralyani@mhs.unsoed.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup>Jenderal Soedirman University, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia, [weni.novandari@unsoed.ac.id](mailto:weni.novandari@unsoed.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup>Jenderal Soedirman University, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia, [larisa.pradisti@unsoed.ac.id](mailto:larisa.pradisti@unsoed.ac.id)

Corresponding Author: [dimas.dimitralyani@mhs.unsoed.ac.id](mailto:dimas.dimitralyani@mhs.unsoed.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This study investigates how uncertainty influences purchase intention for blind box products, with novelty and perceived value acting as mediating variables within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, quantitative data were gathered from 128 Indonesian consumers of Blokees blind boxes through structured surveys, while qualitative insights were derived from interviews with experienced collectors. The findings reveal that uncertainty has a direct and significant effect on purchase intention and also indirectly enhances purchase behavior through its impact on novelty and perceived value. Novelty, defined as the consumer’s perception of newness and surprise, was found to stimulate emotional engagement and interest, while perceived value—comprising functional, emotional, and social dimensions, reinforced the overall utility and meaning of the product experience. All proposed hypotheses were statistically supported. The qualitative findings corroborate these results, highlighting emotional excitement, exploration, and social recognition as key psychological drivers in blind box consumption. The study contributes theoretically by confirming the psychological mechanisms underlying uncertainty-based marketing and provides practical guidance for marketers to design compelling surprise-driven consumer experiences.

**Keyword:** Uncertainty, Novelty, Perceived Value, Purchase Intention, Blind Box

### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of blind box marketing has transformed consumer product experiences by introducing a unique element of uncertainty, a key driver of emotional and cognitive engagement. Popularized in East Asia, particularly in China and Southeast Asia, blind box products such as collectible toys and fashion items are sold in sealed packaging that hides their contents until after purchase (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). This randomness cultivates psychological tension and excitement, both of which are central to influencing consumer responses like impulse buying and elevated purchase intention (Ren & Ma, 2023; Jiang et al., 2022).

This study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), wherein uncertainty functions as the stimulus that

triggers internal psychological states (organism), which in turn influence behavioral outcomes (response). In this context, novelty and perceived value are identified as critical organismic mediators. Novelty refers to a consumer's tendency to seek new, unfamiliar, or unexpected stimuli, often resulting in curiosity, interest, or even arousal (Hirschman, 1980; Zuckerman, 2015). Within the blind box environment, novelty emerges as an affective and cognitive response to uncertainty, fueling a desire for exploration and self-reward (Sung et al., 2019; Sung et al., 2016).

Unlike simple product liking, novelty is associated with intrinsic motivation to experience something new and exciting, especially when consumers face unpredictable outcomes (Im, Bhat, & Lee, 2015). Such novelty-driven engagement enhances the perceived experiential value of blind box purchases (Tang & Lin, 2019). Alongside novelty, perceived value (functional, emotional, and social dimensions) plays a vital role in shaping consumer evaluation. Consumers assess blind box purchases not only by utility, but also by the joy of anticipation, emotional connection, and social meaning they provide (Zhang et al., 2022; Kim & Kim, 2022).

By integrating novelty and perceived value within the S-O-R model, this research seeks to explain how uncertainty enhances consumers' purchase intention. Specifically, this study aims to examine both the direct and indirect effects of uncertainty on purchase intention, using novelty and perceived value as mediators. Focusing on Blokees blind box products in Indonesia, this research addresses existing gaps in mystery-based marketing literature by reconciling previously inconsistent empirical findings. Theoretically, it contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer psychology under uncertain conditions; practically, it provides marketers with insights to design more engaging, value-driven marketing strategies that strengthen customer purchase behavior.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION**

### **The Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) Framework in Blind Box Marketing**

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model, introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), has become a foundational framework in consumer behavior research. This model posits that external stimuli (S) affect the internal emotional and cognitive states of individuals (O), which subsequently lead to specific behavioral responses (R). In marketing, the S-O-R framework is used to explain how environmental cues or product attributes influence consumers' psychological processing and purchasing behaviors (Eroglu et al., 2003).

In the context of blind box marketing, uncertainty functions as the stimulus that activates internal states such as novelty perception and perceived value, the organism components, which then drive purchase intention, the response. The mystery embedded in blind boxes generates both cognitive appraisal and emotional arousal, making the S-O-R model a suitable theoretical lens to explore how consumers process and respond to uncertainty. By integrating this framework, the present study explains how the unpredictable nature of blind box products shapes consumer attitudes and decisions through psychological mediators.

### **The Role of Uncertainty in Enhancing Purchase Intention**

Uncertainty refers to a situation where consumers have limited information or face ambiguity in predicting the outcome of a product experience. In blind box marketing, uncertainty is created by concealing the product identity until after purchase, thereby inducing surprise, risk perception, and affective responses (Zhang & Zhang, 2022; Ren & Ma, 2023). According to uncertainty theory in consumer behavior, this unpredictability may increase psychological arousal and emotional engagement, which can positively or negatively impact purchase decisions depending on the consumer's traits and context (Zuckerman, 2015). In certain hedonic settings, such as collectibles and mystery products, uncertainty can serve as a compelling marketing stimulus (Tang & Lin, 2019).

*H1: Uncertainty has a positive effect on purchase intention.*

### **Uncertainty as a Trigger for Novelty-Seeking Behavior**

Novelty is defined as the degree to which a stimulus is perceived as new, unusual, or divergent from prior expectations (Hirschman, 1980). Within consumer psychology, novelty stimulates exploration and interest, especially when individuals seek stimulation beyond routine or familiarity (Zuckerman, 2015). In the context of blind box marketing, novelty arises from the unpredictability of the product and the unique unboxing experience, which can evoke emotional arousal and hedonic pleasure (Sung et al., 2016; Sung et al., 2019). Research suggests that novelty seeking consumers are drawn to products that offer surprise and creative presentation, increasing their engagement and purchase intention (Im et al., 2015; Tang & Lin, 2019).

*H2: Uncertainty has a positive effect on novelty.*

*H3: Novelty has a positive effect on purchase intention.*

*H6: Novelty mediates the relationship between uncertainty and purchase intention.*

### **Uncertainty and Perceived Value: Building Meaning through Surprise**

Perceived value is a multi-dimensional construct reflecting the customer's overall assessment of a product's utility based on what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). It includes functional value (performance and utility), emotional value (feelings and affective responses), and social value (identity expression and social approval) (Kim & Kim, 2022). In the context of blind boxes, consumers perceive value not only in the product itself, but also in the emotional thrill and social sharing experience that comes with unboxing a mystery item (Zhang et al., 2022; Im et al., 2015). Higher perceived value has been consistently linked to stronger purchase intention.

*H4: Uncertainty has a positive effect on perceived value.*

*H5: Perceived value has a positive effect on purchase intention.*

*H7: Perceived value mediates the relationship between uncertainty and purchase intention.*

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The primary data collection was conducted through a quantitative survey, while qualitative interviews were used to deepen the insights and validate the quantitative findings.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of this study includes consumers in Indonesia who have purchased blind box products from the brand Blokees. A total of 128 valid responses were collected through purposive sampling to ensure that respondents had prior experience with blind box purchases.

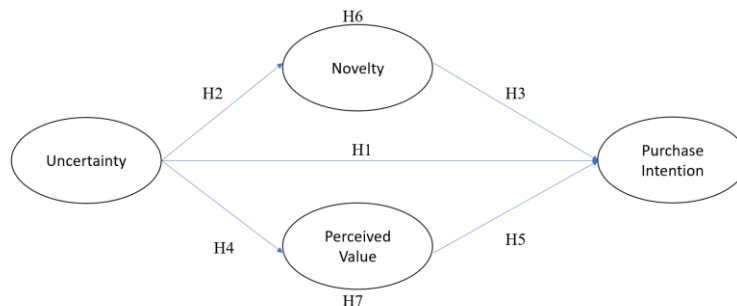
### **Quantitative Data Collection**

The quantitative data were gathered using a structured questionnaire distributed online. Respondents assessed statements using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The measurement constructs include Uncertainty (5 indicators), Perceived Value (9 indicators: 3 for Functional Value, 3 for Emotional Value, and 3 for Social Value), Novelty (3 indicators), and Purchase Intention (4 indicators).

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

To complement the quantitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 participants who are active collectors and have purchased more than 30 blind boxes. The interviews aimed to explore deeper motivations, emotional experiences, and cognitive processes behind blind box purchasing behavior. The qualitative findings were analyzed using a narrative approach to enrich and triangulate the quantitative results.

## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1. Research Model**

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, utilizing SmartPLS 4 software. Reliability and validity tests, as well as hypothesis testing, were conducted to evaluate the proposed research model. The qualitative data were analyzed narratively to identify key themes and support the statistical findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Hypothesis Testing Results

The results of hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 1 and Table 2. All hypothesized relationships are supported by the data.

**Table 1. Structural Model Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Result
H1	Uncertainty → Purchase Intention	Accepted
H2	Uncertainty → Novelty	Accepted
H3	Novelty → Purchase Intention	Accepted
H4	Uncertainty → Perceived Value	Accepted
H5	Perceived Value → Purchase Intention	Accepted

**Table 2. Mediation Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	Result
H6	Uncertainty → Novelty → Purchase Intention	Accepted
H7	Uncertainty → Perceived Value → Purchase Intention	Accepted

## Qualitative Findings

The qualitative interviews with four experienced blind box Blokees collectors revealed that uncertainty stimulates curiosity and emotional excitement. Participants reported strong enjoyment from the surprise element, emotional satisfaction when obtaining rare items, and feelings of achievement. The repetitive nature of purchasing blind boxes was often described as addictive, comparable to gambling behavior. Furthermore, social interaction and recognition within the collector community played an important role in enhancing purchase motivation. These findings align with and support the quantitative results.

## Discussion

This study investigates the influence of uncertainty on consumers' purchase intention in the context of blind box products, with novelty and perceived value serving as mediating variables. The findings affirm that uncertainty plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in hedonic consumption experiences like blind boxes. The statistical results demonstrate that uncertainty has a direct and significant positive impact on purchase intention. This reinforces prior literature suggesting that when consumers are exposed to unpredictable product outcomes, such as concealed items in blind boxes, they are more likely to experience emotional arousal and cognitive engagement, which in turn leads to higher intention to purchase (Zhang & Zhang, 2022; Ren & Ma, 2023). In these contexts, uncertainty does not necessarily generate fear or avoidance, but instead, acts as a form of stimulation that enhances the consumer experience.

In addition to its direct effect, uncertainty also positively influences novelty, which in this study has been redefined as the consumer's perception of newness, surprise, and deviation from routine expectations (Hirschman, 1980; Zuckerman, 2015). The presence of uncertainty triggers a sense of discovery and exploration, as consumers face unknown outcomes that break away from their daily purchase routines. Blind box marketing leverages this dynamic by embedding novelty directly into the product design, each purchase is not merely a transaction but an adventure. The strong and significant relationship between uncertainty and novelty confirms that consumers cognitively and emotionally interpret uncertainty as a form of stimulation that enhances the appeal of the product.

Furthermore, novelty is shown to significantly influence purchase intention, emphasizing that consumers do not only seek satisfaction through product utility but also through affective-cognitive experiences. Novelty encourages consumers to engage with products in deeper ways, sparking intrinsic interest, curiosity, and the desire to explore. In the context of blind boxes, novelty makes the product journey feel personalized and emotionally rewarding. This is aligned with previous findings that interest, rather than just liking or brand familiarity, drives preference for novel products (Sung et al., 2016; Sung et al., 2019). The mediating effect of novelty suggests that while uncertainty initiates the psychological journey, novelty carries the consumer forward toward behavioral intention.

Simultaneously, uncertainty is also found to positively impact perceived value, which in this study is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing functional, emotional, and social value (Zeithaml, 1988; Kim & Kim, 2022). Functionally, even though the outcome of the blind box is unknown, consumers perceive value when the product quality meets or exceeds expectations. Emotionally, the surprise of unboxing provides hedonic gratification that is valued independently of the product itself. Socially, blind box experiences often foster community engagement and identity expression, such as sharing rare finds on social media or participating in collector groups. The statistical significance of this relationship confirms that consumers evaluate their blind box purchases not just in terms of the tangible reward, but also based on the full experience embedded in the process of uncertainty and novelty.

Perceived value also significantly influences purchase intention, consistent with well-established marketing literature. When consumers perceive that a product delivers sufficient value be it emotional excitement, practical use, or social meaning they are more inclined to repeat the experience or recommend it to others (Zhang et al., 2022; Im et al., 2015). The dual mediation effects of novelty and perceived value confirm the theoretical proposition of the Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) model. Uncertainty, as a stimulus, activates psychological organismic responses (novelty and perceived value), which in turn shape the final response: the intention to purchase. This model not only explains consumer behavior in surprise-based marketing environments but also highlights the psychological richness of such experiences.



The acceptance of all hypotheses in this study strengthens the argument that uncertainty should not be dismissed as a risk, but rather embraced as a strategic experiential element in marketing. When managed carefully, it becomes a mechanism that heightens consumer engagement through perceived novelty and emotional-social value, ultimately leading to increased purchase intention. For both researchers and practitioners, this implies a shift in how uncertainty is framed, not as a limitation, but as a psychological lever that marketers can pull to build more immersive and meaningful consumer experiences.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that uncertainty significantly influences consumers' purchase intention for blind box products, both directly and indirectly through novelty and perceived value. The findings confirm the applicability of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework in explaining the psychological processes behind blind box purchasing behavior.

## Implications

This study contributes to the development of consumer behavior theory by validating the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework within the context of blind box marketing, emphasizing the mediating roles of novelty and perceived value. Unlike traditional views that treat uncertainty as a negative factor, this research shows that uncertainty can serve as a positive stimulus that elicits psychological responses, such as interest in novelty and the assessment of value. The introduction of novelty as a replacement for curiosity provides a sharper conceptual focus on consumer reactions to product unpredictability. Additionally, the multidimensional nature of perceived value (functional, emotional, and social aspects) is empirically shown to play a crucial mediating role, offering a comprehensive explanation of how consumers psychologically process and respond to uncertain stimuli in hedonic consumption.

## Limitations

Practically, the results emphasize that brands engaging in surprise-based marketing, such as blind box products, must go beyond merely offering uncertainty and instead design experiences that optimize novelty and perceived value. Since both variables mediate the relationship between uncertainty and purchase intention, marketers should focus on crafting emotionally engaging and socially meaningful unboxing experiences. Enhancing novelty through limited editions, thematic packaging, or narrative elements can heighten consumer excitement, while reinforcing value through quality assurance, community engagement, or reward systems can strengthen the overall experience. These strategic design choices not only increase purchase intention but also build long-term consumer satisfaction and loyalty in markets that thrive on emotional and exploratory consumption.

## Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should consider expanding the scope of this study by exploring additional psychological or behavioral variables that may also mediate or moderate the relationship between uncertainty and purchase intention. For instance, constructs such as emotional arousal, perceived risk, or flow experience could offer deeper insight into the affective mechanisms that influence consumer decision-making in surprise-based marketing. Furthermore, while this study focused specifically on novelty and perceived value, future researchers could compare the effects of these mediators across different product categories, such as digital goods, virtual collectibles, or subscription boxes, to assess whether the same patterns hold in various consumption contexts. Methodologically, incorporating longitudinal or experimental designs would allow future studies to investigate changes in perception over time or causal relationships with greater accuracy. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine

demographic or cultural variables as potential moderators, especially given the growing global interest in blind box marketing. Finally, qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews or ethnographic methods could be used to enrich the understanding of emotional and symbolic meanings that consumers attach to uncertain consumption experiences.

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