

The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Blind Box Purchase Intention: A Case Study of Content Dissemination on Xiaohongshu and Douyin

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Abstract. The swift evolution of social media marketing has established platforms like Xiaohongshu and Douyin as pivotal conduits for disseminating product details and engaging with consumers. Concurrently, the inherent characteristics of blind box consumption—namely its unpredictability, entertainment appeal, collectibility, and emotional resonance—have garnered significant attention from young consumers in recent years. The convergence of the blind box economy with social media marketing strategies not only facilitates the transmission of fundamental product information but also ignites consumer curiosity. Factors such as heightened emotional engagement, elevated perceived value, and amplified social influence directly shape purchasing intentions. While existing literature predominantly focuses on individual determinants of blind box consumption or the broader landscape of social media marketing, there remains a notable scarcity of research addressing this topic. This study investigates the variations in how distinct categories of social media platforms impact consumer behavior regarding blind boxes, with a specific focus on comparing Xiaohongshu and Douyin. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, the research employs a mixed-method approach comprising literature reviews, case studies, and textual analysis to examine blind box-related content on these two platforms. By synthesizing the observed disparities, this paper aims to deepen the understanding of the psychological mechanisms driving blind box purchases within the context of social media marketing. Furthermore, the findings are intended to offer strategic guidance for blind box brands, enabling them to develop differentiated content marketing strategies that align with the unique characteristics of each social media platform.

Keywords: Blind Box Economy, Social Media Marketing, Purchase Intention, S-O-R Model

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

1.1.1. Development of the blind box market

With the continuous development of the global economy, people's desire for consumption and their demand for products are also increasing day by day. Under such market demands, some new marketing models have gradually emerged, and the blind box economy is one of the newly emerging marketing models. Within the Chinese market, blind boxes have gained significant traction among the younger demographic, largely due to their inherent element of unpredictability [1]. At the same time, from a global perspective, the blind box economy continues to grow [2].

1.1.2. Characteristics of blind box consumption

However, at the same time, blind box consumption also has its own characteristics. The blind box, in addition to surprise, also has the elements of uncertainty, experience, and scarcity [3]. First is the element of randomness: the consumer can not have a clear understanding of a specific style or type of product before he is going to purchase. Therefore, there is a sense of surprise and uncertainty in the process of consumption; consumers are often stimulated by the hope of an unknown result and the feeling of surprise, which is also the entertainment value. Next is the emotional value: during the purchasing process, the consumer not only gets the product, but also the emotion, such as surprise, happiness, excitement, and the desire to collect. Finally, there is the social aspect: the random nature of blind boxes has led to a community, in which consumers interact with others and build connections with each other by such ways of sharing photos of the boxes, trading, talking, and collecting. Finally, there are the factors of collectibility and scarcity, and also impulse buying and repeat purchase. The collectible and scarce nature of blind boxes, for example, series-based design, hidden edition, and limited edition, directly leads to impulse buying and repeat purchase of the same product.

1.1.3. Development of social media marketing

The past decade has witnessed the development of complex, multifarious, and intensified interactions between firms and by using the social media to get their customers [4]. This can be split into two lines of development. The first is the evolution from the media to social media. In the early days, the internet mainly served the function of information acquisition and spreading; in the case of consumers, that is to say, they could only passively get the information released by the company. However, with the continuous development and popular use of new media, the Internet market has gradually evolved from one-way communication to a mass market with the characteristics of interactivity, sociality, and mass. The second is the evolution from text-based social media to images, then to short video and live streaming, which means that, in the Internet market, consumers are no longer only "binge-watching ads," but they directly participate in the spreading of consumer information in the form of interaction, recommendation, review, unboxing video, likes, and comments.

1.1.4. The role of social media in blind box purchase intention

Given the characteristics of blind box consumption and the development of the social media market, the two are very compatible. If people focus on purchase intention, social media can magnify all kinds of characteristics of blind box consumption and have an impact on consumers' purchase intention. First, the unboxing videos that show the "unknown result" have magnified the characteristic of blind boxes that is random; it can make consumers' curiosity and increase the willingness to buy. Second, the emergence of online communities, where people comment, share, show off their collection, and even trade blind boxes on social media, strengthens the social acceptance and peer influence of consumer groups, which can also boost the willingness to buy. Next, the entertainment value of blind box purchases has been magnified by short unboxing videos and live-streamed unboxing on various social media, which can greatly enhance the entertainment experience for blind box consumers. Finally, people can also show the completeness of product series and hidden editions on new media, which can boost purchase intent by stimulating consumers' desire to collect.

1.2. Research problem and gap

At this stage, social media marketing has been deeply integrated with the blind box economy. Different social media platforms are different in terms of communication environment, audience, and the dissemination model. As social media marketing and the blind box economy come together, different social media platforms may influence the decision of the consumer in different ways. But so far, the relevant studies mainly study the relationship between social media marketing and general consumers. There is limited research on the relationship with blind box purchase intention. There is also limited comparative research on how different content dissemination patterns on Xiaohongshu and Douyin influence blind box consumers.

1.3. Research questions and objectives

1.3.1. Research questions

- How do different types of social media content influence consumers' blind box purchase intention?
 - What differences exist between Xiaohongshu and Douyin in influencing blind box consumer behavior?
 - How do consumer psychological factors influence the relationship between social media content and blind box purchase intention?

1.3.2. Objectives

- To examine the influence of different types of social media content on blind box purchase intention.
 - To compare the effects of Xiaohongshu and Douyin on blind box purchase intention.
 - To examine the role of consumer psychological factors in the relationship between social media content and blind box purchase intention.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social media marketing and blind box purchase intention

The research shows that social media is a medium of interaction, not only as it is used in customer relationship management and sales execution [5]. Social media marketing is the term that this research is using for the method in which organizations use online media to interact with target consumers and customers, to market their products or services, to relate with others, to build relationships, and to build the community. Here, it is not one-way like in other media.

On the contrary, this domain is characterized by a large degree of engagement and interactivity. Consumers are not only passive receivers of corporate promotional materials, but also participate in spreading the information by doing actions, such as commenting, posting, liking, and producing, etc. The main elements of social media marketing are user-generated content (UGC), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), product reviews and recommendations, strategies with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs), and the initiative with short-form video format and live broadcasting [6-10].

At the fundamental level, the practice of using social media for marketing includes a scope that is larger than simple promos;

This is a good combination of creating content, interaction with the audience, and spreading of information to a wide range of people. There are some studies in academic work that show how these marketing tricks have a significant impact on purchasing behavior. In this respect, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is especially a key element. Indeed, eWOM is seen as an important source of information that influences human behavior. It is crucial in how a consumer makes buying decisions [7]. In other words, before buying, prospective customers often use social media in order to check peer evaluations, personal experience, and suggestions. These have a great influence on their final decisions and intent to buy. From the consumer's point of view, this type of user-created content is considered more reliable and convincing than regular corporate advertising.

The relevance of this information distribution model is particularly clear in the blind box sector. By watching unboxing videos, by looking at product reviews, and by talking about collection highlights, the consumer can make its perception of these products and makes the willingness to buy.

2.2. KOL, KOC and influencer

Apart from digital word of mouth, the KOLs and KOCs are another important part of social media marketing. They are able to create trust in the consumer [9]. Usually, they shape the attitude and views of the consumers concerning the product by giving recommendations, talking about their own experiences of using the product, and keeping interaction with the audiences. Therefore, the effect of social media marketing on purchasing intent is not only due to the contents of the promotion but also due to the trust, identification, and emotion of the consumer with the contents.

2.3. Social media content and consumer psychological factors

- Curiosity. In the case of buying blind boxes, which are defined by ambiguity, the will to buy is given by two elements: the curiosity of the consumer and the perception of the luck of the consumer [11].

- Emotional engagement. When people look at emotional engagement, it is an important intermediary mechanism. It is a channel through which the motivations of the individual and of society determine the way in which the customers will have an interaction with the viral marketing campaigns of the brands [12].
- Perceived value. The term perceived value refers to a global judgment of the usefulness of the product in the sense of the comparison one makes between the gains obtained and the costs incurred by the buyer. There are some important studies in the field of consumer behavior that show that this assessment is a basic force that directly affects the intention to purchase [1].
- Social Influence. The relation between social influence and the psychological ground of trust is difficult to find; for this reason, the change in the actions of the consumer is not due to one cause but to a nexus of different causes [13].

2.4. S-O-R model (stimulus–organism–response)

The S-O-R framework was introduced by Mehrabian and Russell [14], who used it to explain the way the external environmental signals may affect the internal psychological condition of an individual and determine the behavioral results. The idea is based on three elements: stimulus, organism, and response. In this triad, the word stimulus mainly refers to those informational inputs and activities coming from the environment, while the word organism means the cognitive and emotional-psychological changes that an individual experiences with such an external trigger.

The term "response" means the actions and inclinations that people finally show in this process. In the study of consumer behavior, the S-O-R is a strong mechanism to explain the relations between the outside marketing stimuli and the mental conditions as well as the conduct of buyers. Thus, in the present investigation, the marketing materials and the campaigns on the social platform for the blind boxes are taken as outside stimuli. The internal psychological states that consumers have experienced after their exposure to such content (such as curiosity, collecting motives, emotional reaction, perceptual appraisal, and social pressure) are finally converted into the ultimate behavioral result, that is, one buys the blind boxes or his/her intention to buy the blind boxes. Obviously, the S-O-R model not only provides the theoretical basis for this kind of research but also helps to examine the logical relations and distinctions among the different variables under study.

2.5. Literature summary and research gap

Although the link between social media marketing campaigns and consumer behavior has been firmly established by previous investigations, the literature that is currently prevailing has mostly focused on standard commodities and services. Thus, there is a lack of scholarly attention to items that are characterized by their own intrinsic unobservability and appeal to emotional purchase motives. In addition, the current studies mostly consider social media as a unitary construct and do not investigate the different variations across different platforms in terms of the types of content, the way the content is shown, the way the users are involved, and the kind of users. Thus, using the general framework of "social media marketing" only is not enough to capture the heterogeneity and the different effects exerted by the specific digital channel.

In the particular context of blind box merchandise, the buying decisions are actually based on a mixture of elements that are not only on the physical aspect of these things. In particular, in the psychological drivers of the purchase, people can consider inquisitiveness, the need to have the complete collection, the like, the emotional bond, and peer pressure. Therefore, there is a need to investigate more in-depth the working of the content of the social networking sites in any way it

influences the willingness of these kinds of consumers to buy. It is also important to do a comparison to find different variations in the way in which the influence is done on different websites.

2.6. Methodology: literature review, case study, text analysis

In order to explore the relationship between social media marketing strategies and the behavior of consumers of blind boxes, as well as the differences between various marketing formats, this research takes a qualitative approach. The methodological design is a literature review, case studies, and text analysis. This research choose Xiaohongshu and Douyin as the main case platforms. With the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of both the literature and the marketing material of blind box purchases on these two sites, the study examines the differences in marketing content in this consumption domain.

3. Comparative analysis of Xiaohongshu and Douyin

3.1. Case background

3.1.1. Xiaohongshu

Xiaohongshu is also a social media platform, which is mainly characterized by sharing content, the discussion on lifestyle, the exchange of experiences, and the acquisition of consumer information. The users mainly share parts of their lives, product recommendations, and consumer experiences in text-and-image posts and videos. In addition, they like, comment, save, and share with other users. In Xiaohongshu, consumers can use it as an important channel to discover products, search for information, and make purchase decisions.

For brands, Xiaohongshu is not only a platform suitable for displaying products, but also a channel for brands to reach consumers and do content marketing to consumers. For the purchase of blind boxes, with the help of Xiaohongshu, the information about the product is combined with the personal experience of the consumer; the consumer is able to learn about and be interested in the products when browsing.

3.1.2. Douyin

Douyin is a social media platform that focuses on short-form video content and real-time interaction. It has kept short videos as its content and slowly expanded to many other features such as live streaming, creator marketing, and social interaction. The content is suggested by the content recommendation algorithm based on users' interests. Users can like, comment, share, and follow the content and help to spread the content.

For brands, Douyin is a place for brands to promote products and do marketing via short videos and other forms, and reach users with the same interests quickly. For content like blind box unboxing, which has a high degree of randomness and the look is more beautiful in itself, it also fits Douyin well and can also attract the attention and emotions of users with the same interests.

3.2. Comparison of Xiaohongshu and Douyin

Today, both Xiaohongshu and Douyin are major social media platforms. They are not only similar in the sense that both of them can be good tool to do social media marketing, but also in different terms

such as the content formats and the ways of disseminating the content. These differences provide the basic case studies and the research direction of this study, that is, to compare the roles of Xiaohongshu and Douyin in blind box consumption.

3.3. Social media usage and content exposure

Both Xiaohongshu and Douyin have some differences in user demographics and consumer characteristics. These differences are the background for this research to analyze the blind box marketing and communication on the two platforms at present. Firstly, regarding Xiaohongshu, the users on Xiaohongshu are much younger and more female. According to the data released by Qiangua Data, the current monthly active users of Xiaohongshu are more than 300 million, among which 71.98% are female, 80.69% are aged 18-34, and 66.36% are from the sum of first and new first-tier cities [15]. In other words, the platform of Xiaohongshu has strong reach among young women and urban consumers, and they in general pay more attention to product experiences of the product, lifestyle, consumer reviews, emotional value and resonance, and content that is suitable for their interests.

Douyin has a wider user base, but younger people, especially those born in the 2000s, are more active in short-form video content. According to QuestMobile data, users born in 00s are 37.1% of the total mobile video view time, and they are also more in demand for social interaction and the entertainment experience. And QuestMobile described that Gen Z is very important for new trendy toys and IP-based culture consumption, as much as 43.7% of the Pop Mart traffic is Gen Z [16]. So the users on Douyin are more in favor of the entertainment and the fun of real-time interaction.

3.4. Effects of social media content

Through the comparison of the content on social media and the influence it creates when research compare the content on, there are also some differences between Xiaohongshu and Douyin.

At first, the core content on the Xiaohongshu platform is product shares, reviews, experiences, and recommendations. Take the post about blind boxes, for example: the post may contain product images, the price, the series description, the result of unboxing, consumers' reviews, and so on. Most of the content above can reduce the cost for the consumer to get the product information, and by the use of other consumers' experiences, they can help the consumer to make a rational and objective decision on whether to buy the product or not.

The content in Douyin is mainly presented in the form of short videos, live streams, and visual stimuli. The content complements the highly visual and random nature of blind boxes very well. For users and consumers on Douyin, they do not have to know a great deal about brands and products in advance. While they are browsing short videos, they would be drawn in by the element of surprise, visual stimuli, and emotional appeal.

3.5. Effects of consumer psychological factors

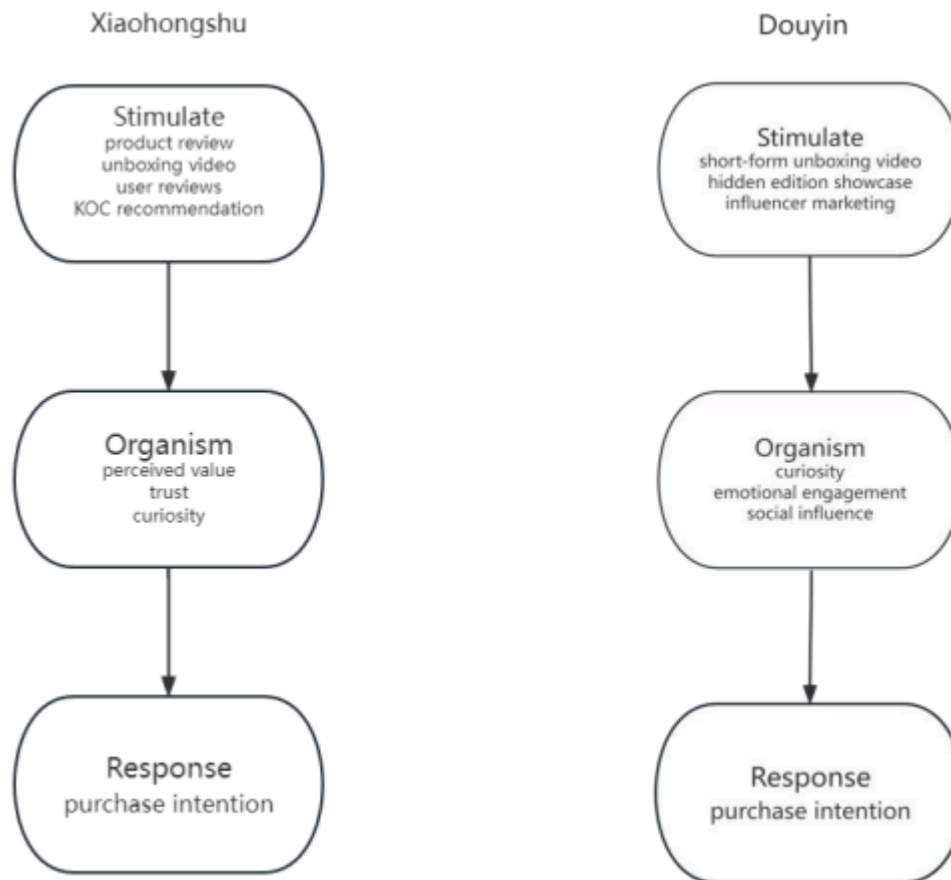


Figure 1. The SOR model on Douyin and Xiaohongshu

As shown in Figure 1, although both Xiaohongshu and Douyin can influence consumers' psychological states through content related to blind boxes, there are overall differences between the two.

Compared with other platforms, Xiaohongshu puts more emphasis on information reception, user experience, and consumption sharing; thus, the impact of Xiaohongshu on the consumer's psychology is more towards the field of social cognition and evaluation. The impact of the content of Xiaohongshu on the consumer is mainly at the level of rational perceived value and social influence. The consumer makes a rational judgment of the product quality, collectible value, and entertainment value of blind boxes based on the experience and reviews of other users, and then the purchase intent is driven.

But in consumer psychology, the influence of Douyin is more emotional and tends to be in terms of immediate stimulation. Blind box unboxing videos increase consumer curiosity by showing the process of unboxing, the probability of the result of the unboxing, and the edition of the hidden edition, and increase the emotional connection through the effects of the picture, the sound of music, the emotion of the producer, and the live stream with the people. To some extent, the atmosphere of the community also stimulates the willingness of the consumers to spend. The content of Douyin only influences the purchasing intention of the consumers to some extent through their curiosity, sensory stimulation, and emotion.

For the blind box, the unboxing reviews and the collections on Xiaohongshu are more convenient for consumers to know the information about the product and make relatively rational purchasing decisions, while for the douyin, it stirs consumers' curiosity and sense of participation in consumers through the visual appeal and the, entertainment, and targeted promotion. In general, the emphasis of Xiaohongshu is more on the user experience, product review, and the influence of consumers' interest, while for Douyin, the emphasis is on the short videos, the entertainment, and the visual stimulation. This also illustrates the difference in the organism stage this research observed in the S-O-R model, because of the different content forms people use to "stimulate" the user.

4. Discussion

4.1. Why different types of social media content influence blind box purchase intention

Given that the inherent attributes of the blind boxes are randomness, entertainment value, and collectibility, consumers' purchasing intentions are not only influenced by the product information itself, but also by curiosity, emotional experiences, emotional value, and the intentions of others. Different types of social media content would influence consumers' willingness to purchase blind boxes, because different content provides different external stimuli and gives different psychological response of the consumers.

On the one hand, specific types of content, which mainly talk about or provide information about the product itself, i.e., product reviews, unboxing videos, purchasing experience, etc., can also stimulate the consumers' perceived value of blind boxes directly, because they can provide information about the product, product quality, price, product lines, collectible value, etc., and they can guide the consumers' purchasing intention. On the other hand, specific forms of entertainment content, such as short-time unboxing videos, live streams, etc., can create entertainment and suspense by stimulating the visual, the immediate outcome of the things, the collective resonance, and the emotional value, which can make consumers curious and emotionally engaged, and can also influence the consumers' purchasing intention.

Besides, some types of marketing content (e.g., posts by KOLs and KOCs) can also show that the product is popular and accepted by most of the people on social media, which can use social influence to lead and stimulate consumers' purchase intention.

4.2. Why Xiaohongshu and Douyin may have different effects on blind box purchase intention

Because the mainstream content formats on Xiaohongshu and Douyin are different, and since they stimulate consumers in different ways, of course the psychological response is also different, and of course the willingness to purchase of the consumers will be affected.

On the Xiaohongshu platform, the content is more about product information; it stimulates consumers by emphasizing the perceived value and make the consumer tends to make more rational purchases. On the contrary, Douyin depends more on entertaining photography, emotion, and immediate stimulation to stimulate the consumer to have the curiosity and emotion of the visuals, and make the consumer make more impulsive purchasing decisions.

4.3 How consumer psychological factors explain the relationship between social media content and purchase intention

Social media marketing triggers consumer awareness through external information. So when consumers are faced with different kinds of blind box contents, they will have different psychological reactions, and these psychological reactions will affect the ultimate purchase intent of

the consumers. This also shows that consumer psychology is the bridge between social media content and purchase intent.

In this study, the factors of curiosity, emotional engagement, perceived value, and social influence stand for the different psychological reactions that consumers show after being exposed to the blind box content on social media. Meanwhile, these psychological responses affect consumers' interest in blind box products, their value judgment, and their purchase tendency; thus, they are taken as factors and intermediate bridges through which social media marketing will affect consumers' purchase intention regarding blind box products.

5. Implications

The significance of this study lies primarily in its practical implications, which can be explained from three perspectives.

First, this study can also be used as a reference for the social media marketing strategy of the blind box brand. For other social media platforms on the market, such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin, they will have some differences in the characteristics of content dissemination; the brand should not use exactly the same content strategy on all social media. For instance, on Xiaohongshu and Douyin, the strategies for marketing should be different for the fact that the emphasis on product information and entertainment value is different in these two.

Second, from the perspective of consumer psychology, this study can also help the marketer to know whether social media marketing is effective or not. Meanwhile, if one is going to do social media marketing, the brand should not only pay attention to the number of views, likes, and reach of the content itself, but also whether the content can make consumers feel whether the content can stimulate consumers' curiosity, feelings, perceived value, and social influence. For instance, Marketers can give out "mystery things" and show the unboxing result to stimulate consumers' curiosity, and marketers can mark the IP story and character present to evoke consumers' feelings.

Finally, this study can also help with content distribution and allocation of marketing resources for the different social media platforms. Brands can have differentiated strategies according to the characteristics of the users and the content dissemination of each platform, and deploy the content formats that are suitable for each platform according to the marketing strategies and the goals of the brands. For instance, when the brand wants to make consumers interested in a new product line, it can make consumers curious by creating suspense or showing a random result.

6. Conclusion

Focusing on the blind box economy, this research investigates social media marketing practices specifically within the contexts of Xiaohongshu and Douyin. The study delves into the variations in promotional tactics employed across diverse social media environments, while also scrutinizing how distinct stimuli evoke unique psychological reactions that subsequently influence final purchasing decisions. Grounded in the S-O-R framework, the analysis utilizes a combination of literature reviews, case studies, and textual analysis to compare the nature of blind box content and its dissemination patterns on these two platforms.

Research outcomes indicate that diverse categories of social media channels can provoke distinct psychological reactions in buyers by means of varied content stimuli, yet these pathways ultimately converge to generate identical purchasing intentions. Within this context, the two platforms examined in this investigation, namely Xiaohongshu and Douyin, demonstrate notable divergences. Specifically, Xiaohongshu enhances users' perceived value by providing informational and

experiential materials, which facilitates a rational evaluation of blind box merchandise. In contrast, Douyin leverages entertaining content to induce impulsive buying behaviors, primarily driven by sensory arousal and emotional involvement.

In summary, the research indicates that no universal content format exists that is superior across all digital platforms. Instead, the effectiveness of content in driving purchase intention depends on how well its specific attributes resonate with consumers' psychological states. The influence of social media materials on the willingness to buy blind boxes is not a straightforward phenomenon. Rather, the primary function of social media marketing is to trigger diverse psychological reactions by employing varied content styles. This insight clarifies why distinct content strategies on different platforms can alter consumer purchasing desires for blind boxes, offering valuable direction for brands aiming to craft tailored marketing approaches for each specific channel.

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