

Types and Characteristics of Blind Package Products

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Received: 21 March 2026

Revised: 11 April 2026

Accepted: 23 April 2026

ABSTRACT

Blind package products are items that accompany other purchases, such as food products, as bonus inclusions. These items, which can include toys, cards, or stationery goods, are hidden from view inside special packaging. In some cases, not only the bonus item but also the primary product itself is also packaged in a box or bag that conceals its contents. Consumers, therefore, cannot determine which specific item they will receive prior to purchase. However, items within a given series are typically distributed in roughly equal proportions. While blind-box items pose little concern when they are considered to have minimal value, this assessment is complicated by collector demand. Certain items are difficult to obtain or are intentionally produced in limited quantities, thereby increasing their rarity and value. Even items originally distributed free of charge may subsequently be traded or sold at high prices in flea markets and specialty stores. Consequently, consumers' acquisition of specific items can become a significant issue. This paper describes the types and characteristics of blind packaged products and discusses the issues associated with them.

Keywords: Blind packaging, Lottery, *Gacha-gacha*, Lucky bag, Surprise box

INTRODUCTION

Blind package products are items such as toys, cards, and stationery that are included as a bonus with food purchases and sold in a manner that conceals which of several possible variants is contained within^{1,2}. In some cases, the primary product itself is packaged in a box or bag that obscures its contents. Consequently, after purchase, consumers may discover that the item they receive is not what they wanted or that they already possess duplicates. The specific contents remain unknown until the product is opened. However, similar products are often distributed in equal quantities (e.g., cards of the identical size produced in equal numbers). For most consumers, the notion of a "bad" or "unsatisfactory" product simply does not exist. These products are referred to by various names, such as random items (when purchased as bonus items or main products), products with random bonus items (distributed as bonuses), trading items (sold as either main products or bonus items), *gacha-gacha* (capsule toys sold as main products), lucky bags (main products), surprise boxes (main products), and mystery boxes (offered as either main products or bonus items)¹⁻⁴.

In Japan, a well-known example is the toy included with boxed caramel (Glico Caramel), referred to as "*Glico no Omake*" (a bonus toy included with Glico products). Similar examples include stickers of animated characters included with wafer chocolates and collectible cards featuring professional baseball players or live-action heroes packaged with snack foods¹. Although products requiring a lottery draw are broadly grouped with blind packaged products (as their contents are not visible until purchase), they are considered different in a narrower classification. While blind package items may appear unproblematic when their individual value is considered minimal, this assumption may not hold in cases where collectors focus on specific items. Certain items are rare or produced in limited quantities, making them highly valuable. Even if they were originally distributed free of charge, they may be resold at high prices in flea markets and specialty shops. Therefore, the specific items consumers obtain can become a significant issue. The wide disparities in value among autographed trading cards of world-famous athletes provide a clear illustration of this phenomenon. This paper describes the types and characteristics of blind package products and analyses the issues associated with them.

Features of blind package products

First, let us discuss the differences between blind package products and lottery-based items in a narrower sense. In lottery systems, the outcome (winning/losing) and rarity are determined through a draw, and participants can typically identify the result immediately. There are clear differences in value, and sellers often assign ranks to these items, such as A–E prizes. The lottery can be for the purchased item itself or for an additional prize ("freebie") obtained alongside it. The probability of winning a rare item is

intentionally low, meaning that consumers are unlikely to receive their desired item. Lottery products are heavily reliant on luck, and in some cases, consumers suspect that outcomes may be influenced or controlled by sellers or manufacturers. As consumers must purchase products without knowing the exact contents, these lottery items may be broadly grouped with blind package products.

However, blind package products exhibit characteristics that differ from those of lottery products (refer to Table 1). For example, in the case of trading cards, each package contains the same number of cards of the same type. The products are therefore largely uniform in size, shape, and materials, and consumers are guaranteed to obtain one of them (there is no equivalent to a “losing” outcome). While some items may be rare because they are autographed or are personal items belonging to celebrities, this is similar to a lottery (with items often referred to as “secret” or “special”). Rather than manufacturers or sellers determining the rank or value of the prizes, it may be buyers or collectors who assign greater value to rare items or those featuring popular characters. Unlike lottery systems, these products do not include explicit prize rankings. For casual buyers, the differences between items may appear negligible. However, collectors often purchase large quantities in pursuit of specific items, and dissatisfaction may arise when they receive duplicates or items of lower perceived value. The defining features of blind package products are that consumers are guaranteed to receive an item of similar appearance and baseline value, and the perceived value of the item may vary considerably depending on the collector. Although the product is not visible before purchase, unlike in a lottery, the buyer’s choice is significant (or appears significant) as they select the product without the seller’s overt intervention.

Types of blind package products

Table 2 summarizes the types of blind package products. The “blind package” (random item) category presented in this table represents the general form, while the remaining categories exhibit special properties. In common usage, blind package products refer to items—either sold as primary goods or included as bonus items—available in supermarkets and specialty stores, encompassing a wide variety of objects such as toys, cards, and stationery. The contents are not visible when purchased and can only be verified after opening. The types of products are consistent within the same blind package; therefore, for consumers who have no prior information or strong interest, it is impossible to identify which products are rare or valuable. Some consumers may also have no specific preference regarding which item they obtain. For collectors seeking to complete a full set (the total number of variants is usually publicly available), it is possible to end up with the same item multiple times, which leads to significant financial expenditure. These items, often adorned with gold embellishments, celebrity autographs, or embedded fragments of personal belongings such as clothing, are highly desirable for collectors, even at exorbitant prices. Even if the original retail price is approximately \$1, such items may be valued at over \$10,000 in secondary markets, occasionally giving rise to auctions or issues such as theft or transfers. In such cases, collectors mitigate duplication by exchanging items with other collectors or selling them through specialty stores or flea markets—a practice that was previously not possible as there were no specialty stores. In some cases, these activities foster the formation of organized collector groups that also interact in offline settings¹.

In addition to standard blind package products, related items employ unique sales or acquisition methods and are sometimes referred to using different names. *Gacha-gacha* (capsule toys) are obtained by inserting coins into a special machine, which are often transparent, allowing users to see whether a desired item is present. However, the arrangement of capsules inside the machine prevents buyers from determining a desired item can be obtained within a given number of attempts or budget. Lucky bags and mystery boxes consist of items packaged in opaque bags or boxes and sold through vending machines or retail outlets. Unlike *gacha-gacha*, the contents are unknown prior to purchase; however, multiple types are included and the type of item is consistent. Depending on the manufacturer and color, some items may be rare or of high value. Recently, some vending machines in Japan have incorporated lottery elements, allowing customers to randomly purchase items such as game consoles, meat, seafood, and blinded goods with widely varying price ranges. In such cases, the packaging itself varies, and the buyer cannot see the contents until the product is dispensed.

Products with random bonuses involve standard goods accompanied by random free items. For example, this may include CDs and DVDs that come with posters or photobooks; clear files or acrylic stands packaged with figurines; or toys and photo cards included with confectionery products. In some cases, consumers purchase the primary product primarily to obtain the bonus item, resulting in high levels of expenditure despite limited interest in the main good itself. From this perspective, the bonus item effectively functions as a blind package product. Recently, in some mobile game applications, users have been able to obtain items of varying grades such as SSR, SR, and R (where S likely stands for super and R for rare) through a lottery. These items, which exist solely within the game environment, may be acquired through both paid and free mechanisms; they can be considered a type of *gacha-gacha* or lottery.

Problems with blind packaging products

Blind packaging constitutes a system that readily encourages consumers to purchase multiple items in pursuit of a desired product⁴). However, a range of issues may arise depending on the buyer's psychology and social customs of the country or region where these products are marketed. In Japan, blind packaging is commonly used for promotional items and bonus goods, and is generally accepted as a normal retail practice. In contrast, in countries with different characteristics, such products are uncommon and may not be well received.

In multiple incidents in Japan, consumers have purchased large quantities of snack foods or wafer chocolate to obtain rare cards or stickers, only to discard the food items themselves. More recently, McDonald's in Japan ran a campaign offering anime character merchandise (toys) as complimentary items with set meals, which resulted in consumers buying and discarding the food, forcing the company to impose purchase limits and terminate the campaign prematurely.

A similar incident occurred at an American supermarket where a customer opened a package in-store to inspect the included bonus item before purchase, selectively buying only those containing desired items. In France, certain food products include magnets representing different regions; when all types are assembled, they form a complete map of the country. However, in this case, these items are visible from the outside and therefore do not constitute a blind package.

Autographed trading cards of celebrities may command high prices and are frequently auctioned. While they may originally cost only a few dollars, some cards feature photos of the celebrity in their prime or have gold, silver, or holographic borders, giving them a sense of exclusivity. In some cases, cards signed by prominent athletes have been sold for tens of thousands of dollars during auctions. The existence of specialized retail outlets for trading cards has also been associated with incidents of theft and illegal trading.

Recently, "unboxing" videos of blind package have been uploaded to social media platforms such as YouTube, serving diverse purposes; some are well intentioned, sharing the joy of obtaining rare items, while others emphasize negative aspects, such as failing to acquire special items or encountering extremely low probabilities of success²). Moreover, when surprise items are revealed in such unboxing videos, the excitement experienced by the consumers when purchasing the product may be diminished.

CONCLUSION

This paper outlines the types and characteristics of blind package products and discusses their distinguishing features and associated challenges. Products whose content remain unknown until after purchase have long existed in Japan, where they are widely accepted. However, problems may arise when Japanese confectionery or similar products are exported overseas or replicated in markets where their underlying logic is not well understood. In particular, when these blind package products command high prices from collectors, issues may arise when the secondary-market price exceeds the original purchase price by tens of thousands of dollars. Such situations are difficult to resolve in today's world, where collectors are spread globally, and transactions can be conducted via social media. One solution is to publicly disclose the value of a product in specialty stores. However, options for practical interventions (e.g., such as stopping transactions) remain limited, and continued examination of this issue and its potential solutions is necessary.

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Table 1 Characteristics of blind package products

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Excitement of opening the package (anticipation and prediction)</p> <p>Joy derived from receiving an unexpected prize (positive affect)</p> <p>High collectability</p> <p>Increased desire to complete the set</p> <p>Social interaction through exchange and trading with others</p> <p>Effective promotional tool</p> <p>Product advertising through circulation of information about the contents</p>	<p>No guarantee of obtaining the desired item (potential for negative emotional responses)</p> <p>Occurrence of duplicate items (receiving items already owned)</p> <p>High costs associated with completing a full set</p> <p>Encouragement of impulse buying</p> <p>Variation in the value of contents</p> <p>Increased risk of returns and complaints</p>
<p>Neutral or ambivalent characteristics:</p> <p>Uncertainty regarding which item will be obtained and when (element of chance)</p> <p>Changing confidence in the product and levels of satisfaction as revealed content may be undesired</p> <p>Tension anticipated with opening the package</p> <p>Overlap with trading practices</p> <p>Convergence with elements of gambling and entertainment</p>	

Based on data from references 1)-4).

Table 2 Primary types of blind package products

Name	Example product	Description	Free bonus item or paid product
Blind packaging (random item)	Figures, acrylic stands, cards, plush toys, badges, etc.	Items with random content and multiple variants. Number of variants is known, which stimulates the desire to complete the collection.	Both
Product with random bonus item	Posters, clear files, etc.	Random bonus items (“freebies”) are included when purchasing CDs, books, or merchandise.	Bonus item
<i>Gacha-gacha</i> (capsule toy)	Toys, ornaments, erasers, etc.	Items dispensed from vending machine after insertion of \$0.1-\$10 coins to obtain items inside capsules. Machines are usually transparent, allowing visibility of possible items, but not guaranteeing acquisition of a specific item.	Paid product (occasionally offered as promotional bonuses)
Lucky bag, surprise box, mystery box	Branded goods, precious metals, game consoles, high-quality meat, high-quality seafood, etc.	Purchased from vending machines or displayed in stores (the former being more common). Contents are not disclosed and may vary in type and value. Buyers often receive items of value higher than the purchase price; lottery-like element to some extent.	Paid product

Examples of items listed include a variety of goods such as sports-related merchandise, character goods, anime- and game-related products, and in-game items.

Duplicate items can be exchanged with others, effectively transforming them into trading goods.

Even items originally distributed as free bonuses may attain perceived high value and be traded at elevated prices.

Based on data from references 3) and 4).



How to cite this article:

Jun Kobayashi et al. *Ijstrm.Human*, 2026; Vol. 29 (5):94-98.

Conflict of Interest Statement: All authors have nothing else to disclose.

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