

# Consumer Responses to Gift Bundle Receipt in Business-to-Consumer Contexts

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**Abstract:** The current paper aims to examine the differential effect of the type of gift bundle (homogeneous vs heterogeneous) offered to consumers by brand (Study 1) and how the impact occurs (Study 2). Further, drawing upon the categorization theory and the semantic conflict theory, the current work tests how this effect vary by the customer mindset(connecting mindset vs separating mindset) in a business-to-consumer gift-giving context (Study 3) on this relationship, examining that homogeneous-products-bundle composition would be inferior to heterogeneous-products-bundle composition to convey effort in gift-giving context, thus it would be less effective in fostering favorable attitude and repurchase intention. Our findings offers substantive implications for both marketing research and gifting practice.

**Keywords:** Gift Bundle, Homogeneous Composition, Consumer Mindset, Brand Attitude

## 1. Introduction

Corporate gifting is a pervasive strategy in the commercial marketplace, aiming to enhance consumer engagement and brand perception. Despite its ubiquity, scholarly attention has largely concentrated on interpersonal gifting contexts<sup>[1]</sup>, with limited research examining how consumers respond to corporate gift bundle. While some studies have explored the effectiveness of gift bundle, they often emphasize gift promotion depth<sup>[2]</sup> or framing effect<sup>[3]</sup>, rather than the inner components relationship of the gift bundle.

This paper addresses this gap by introducing a gift composition framework based on homogeneity versus heterogeneity—that is, whether the gifted item is similar to or different from the focal product. Specifically, we examine how such composition formats influence consumer responses when economic value is held constant. Although homogeneous bundles (e.g., a milk purchase with additional milk) and heterogeneous bundles (e.g., a milk purchase with a custom towel) may be economically equivalent, we argue they differ in how consumers response.

We propose that homogeneous bundles, may be perceived as less thoughtful, failing to convey emotion value. In contrast, heterogeneous bundles may signal greater care and sincerity, fostering more positive emotional response and stronger brand attitude. We term this phenomenon as the “gifting homogeneity devaluation effect.”

Accordingly, our study addresses the following research questions: 1) When economic value is equivalent, do homogeneous and heterogeneous gift bundle elicit different consumer responses? 2) How does the perceived thoughtfulness of the gift mediate the relationship between gift composition and brand attitude? 3) Can consumer mindset (e.g., connective vs. separative) moderate this effect?

To answer these questions, we conduct a series of studies across multiple product categories and brand contexts. Drawing on literature from information processing and gift-giving, we demonstrate that composition format—independent of economic value—has a significant impact on emotional and attitudinal consumer outcomes.

This research contributes to the marketing and consumer behavior literature by highlighting the psychological mechanism of gift bundle. The findings offer nuanced implications for marketers: compared to economically equivalent homogeneous bundles, heterogeneous gift bundle are more likely to be perceived as thoughtfully curated, thereby exerting a stronger influence on consumer thoughtfulness perception and subsequent brand attitude.

## 2. Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis

Although prior research on gift-giving has predominantly examined interpersonal exchanges, relatively little attention has been paid to business-to-consumer (B2C) gift-giving contexts. Corporate gifting, as an integral component of marketing communication strategies, has been shown to buffer negative purchase experiences<sup>[4]</sup>, enhance customer satisfaction, and increase repurchase intentions<sup>[5]</sup>. However, corporate gifts may also backfire by triggering negative cost inferences or diminishing brand equity when perceived as overly promotional or insincere<sup>[6]</sup>.

Prior research has investigated how the functional characteristics of bundled items—such as hedonic versus utilitarian value or functional complementarity—affect consumer responses. Yet, less is known about how the structural composition of gift bundle (i.e., homogeneous vs. heterogeneous) shapes consumer perceptions and brand-related outcomes. We argue that the relational configuration of bundle components—beyond their individual characteristics—plays a crucial role in how consumers interpret the meaning of corporate<sup>[7]</sup>.

### 2.1 Gift Bundle Composition and Brand Attitude

A central goal of corporate gifting is to foster favorable brand attitudes<sup>[5]</sup>. Business gifts range widely in form and function, from practical items to more innovative or symbolic offerings<sup>[8]</sup>. By signaling care and investment, such gestures aim to strengthen the relational bond between firm and customer<sup>[9]</sup>.

We propose that homogeneous gift bundle may undermine this goal for three primary reasons. First, based on Gestalt principles and schema<sup>[10]</sup>, items in homogeneous bundles are more likely to be processed as commercial complements rather than as affect-laden gifts. As a result, these bundles may be perceived as transactional in nature, failing to evoke the emotional nuance typically associated with gift exchanges.

Second, homogeneous compositions may evoke schema incongruity. In gifting contexts, consumers often expect a symbolic departure from the focal product; overly similar gifts may generate cognitive dissonance, as they conflict with the implicit norms of thoughtful gift exchange<sup>[11]</sup>.

Third, homogeneous bundles may suggest a cost-saving motive or signal low effort, especially when free gifts resemble surplus inventory. Consumers may interpret such bundles as lacking thought and personal investment, which in turn can diminish perceptions of authenticity and elicit negative brand attitudes<sup>[12]</sup>.

H1: Compared to heterogeneous bundles, homogeneous gift bundle lead to less favorable brand attitudes.

### 2.2 Mediation of Thoughtfulness

Identifying the psychological mechanisms that underlie the effectiveness of corporate gifting is critical to understanding when such gestures foster positive consumer responses<sup>[13]</sup>. One central mechanism is the perception of thoughtfulness, which captures the extent to which a gift is seen as the result of deliberate effort and considerate intent<sup>[14]</sup>. When gifts are perceived as low-cost, redundant, or incomplete, they tend to be interpreted as lacking in thought and effort, thereby diminishing their symbolic and relational value<sup>[15]</sup>.

Homogeneous gift bundle may impair perceptions of thoughtfulness for several reasons. First, their uniformity may signal minimal effort or creativity on the part of the firm, undermining the emotional resonance that is typically expected in gift exchanges. Second, the lack of variety may reduce the perceived distinctiveness of the gift, weakening its ability to stand out as a meaningful gesture. Third, homogeneous compositions may generate schema incongruity, as consumers often hold implicit expectations that gifts should differ in nature from commercial offerings. This incongruity can trigger discomfort and cognitive dissonance<sup>[16]</sup>, leading to negative affective responses<sup>[17]</sup>.

Taken together, these factors suggest that homogeneous bundles are more likely to be perceived as impersonal, perfunctory, or even disingenuous. In contrast, heterogeneous bundles may signal higher effort, creativity, and emotional investment, thereby enhancing perceptions of thoughtfulness and, in turn, improving brand evaluations<sup>[18]</sup>.

H2: Perceived thoughtfulness mediates the relationship between gift bundle composition and brand attitude. Homogeneous bundles reduce perceived thoughtfulness, thereby diminishing brand attitudes relative to economically equivalent heterogeneous bundles.

### 2.3 Customer mindset

Consumers frequently engage in relational processing when evaluating product bundles, constructing holistic impressions based not only on the intrinsic characteristics of individual items but also on the perceived coherence among them<sup>[19]</sup>. Grounded in Gestalt psychology, this process reflects a fundamental tendency to integrate component parts into a unified perceptual whole, particularly when items appear categorically similar<sup>[20]</sup>.

Such gestalt-based processing can amplify consumers' affective and evaluative responses to bundled offerings—especially when bundle composition conflicts with normative expectations<sup>[21]</sup>. The cognitive integration of components can lead consumers to form global impressions that may either reinforce or undermine the perceived value and intent behind a gift.

We argue that consumer mindset—the cognitive orientation toward either integration or differentiation—moderates the effect of bundle composition on brand evaluation. A separating mindset, which prompts consumers to assess bundle components in isolation, may heighten the salience of homogeneity and thus exacerbate the perceived lack of thoughtfulness or symbolic intent. Conversely, a connecting mindset, which facilitates holistic interpretation, may buffer against the negative effects of perceived similarity by sustaining the bundle's overall symbolic coherence.

H3: Consumer mindset moderates the relationship between bundle composition and brand attitude. The negative effect of homogeneous bundles on brand attitude is amplified under a separating mindset and attenuated under a connecting mindset.

## 3. Experimental Design

### 3.1 Study 1: Devaluation Effect of Homogeneous Package

The main objective of this study is to explore consumers' brand attitude toward gifting package composition. More specifically, it aims to examine their intuitive attitudes toward gifting format. and to understand the extent to which they take this criterion into account when they choose their grocery products.

#### 3.1.1 Method

A power analysis using G-power 3.1.9<sup>[22]</sup> with  $\alpha=.05$ (two-tailed) and power=80% indicated a required at least total sample of one hundred fifty-nine participants in the one factor three levels between-subjects experiment. We final recruited one hundred seventy-eight participants (52.2% female,  $M_{age}=22.22$ ) from Huanan Agriculture University for monetary compensation. They were randomly assigned to one of the three (heterogeneous vs. moderate vs. homogeneous) between-subjects conditions.

Participants were presented with a printed scenario of a gift bundle activity launched by Mentos during its brand anniversary celebration, which aimed to enhance brand market appeal. These three kinds of free gifts were of equal market value and attractiveness in the pretest. We chose these products based on pretests indicating that our respondent population was familiar with the Mentos brand and was frequent users of the product category. In the homogeneous condition, the three cans of tropical-fruit-flavor chewing gum was paired with the identical chewing gum. In the moderate condition, the paired item was a can of mint-flavor-chewing gum. In the heterogeneous-conditions, the paired item was a can of mint-flavor-chewing gum or a spoon, which we distinguished them as low-heterogeneous package and high-heterogeneous package.

Brand attitude was measured by four items (“low quality- high quality”; “bad-good”; “unfavorable-favorable”; “negative- positive”; Cronbach  $\alpha=.87$ ), which was adapted from Karataş and Gürhan-Canlı(2020).

#### 3.1.2 Results (Brand Attitude)

A one-factor three-level between-subjects ANOVA on gift bundle evaluation revealed a significant main effect of gift bundle type ( $F(2,177) = 4.54, p<.05$ ). Compared with the heterogeneous-condition ( $M=4.88, SD=1.37$ ), participants in the homogeneous-same-flavor-condition ( $M=4.23, SD=1.36$ ) and the homogeneous-different-flavor-condition ( $M=4.26, SD=1.25$ ) showed relatively lower brand attitude.

#### 3.1.3 Conclusion

This study provides initial prediction of hypothesis H1. It demonstrates that when free gift sourced

from the same brand would trigger negative consumer response. Homogeneous condition will lead to unintended negative brand attitude when compared to heterogeneous-condition.

### 3.2 Study 2: Thoughtfulness as a Mediator of the Devaluation Effect

The goal of this study was to examine the relative disadvantage of homogeneous-package compared to the heterogeneous-package in the utility product context. Besides, it is aimed to examine their perceptions and attitudes toward different gifting package compositions.

#### 3.2.1 Method

One hundred and seventy one participants ( $M_{age}=23.26$ ,  $SD=3.8$ , Female=53.2%) recruited from a comprehensive campus. They were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (homogeneous condition vs. heterogeneous condition) in compensation for a small reward. We also included a no-gift control condition.

Participants were instructed to imagine that Bic as a well-known pen brand undertake its reward customer campaign for a better marketing reputation at its anniversary celebration. In the heterogeneous package, focal product is a box of pens, the paired gift is a key ring. In the homogeneous package, the paired gift are two extra pens identical as in the box while hold the focal product constant. The stimuli included text descriptions and pictorial representation.

After reading the materials, participants reported their brand attitude on four semantic difference scales: "dislike-like", "negative-positive", "bad-good", "unfavorable-favorable" (Cronbach  $\alpha=.87$ ). Participants also indicated the extent to which they perceived thoughtfulness from the gifting brand on three items: thoughtful, thankful, considerate (1="not at all," and 7="strongly agree," Cronbach  $\alpha=.86$ ). In this study, we also measure the products perceived utility benefit, attractiveness, likability and quality, which aim to rule out the potential confounding.

#### 3.2.2 Results (Brand Attitude)

The overall effect of gift bundle types on participants' brand attitude is significant ( $F(2,170)=14.07$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\eta^2=.14$ ). Participants in the heterogeneous-condition reported a more positive brand attitude than in the homogeneous condition ( $M_{He}=5.97$ ,  $SD=.68$  vs.  $M_{Ho}=5.24$ ,  $SD=1.08$ ,  $F(1,113)=19.22$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=.82$ ). Moreover, heterogeneous-condition and homogeneous-condition did not differ on perceived gift likeability, attractiveness and quality, all these variables revealed  $p>.05$ .

#### 3.2.3 Perceived Thoughtfulness

Participants in the heterogeneous (vs. homogeneous) condition perceived the brand to be more thoughtful ( $M_{He}=5.45$ ,  $SD=1.04$  vs.  $M_{Ho}=4.37$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ,  $F(2,170)=14.$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $d=.51$ ).

We conducted a bootstrapping analysis which generated a sample size of 5,000 (Hayes, 2013) to test the mechanism. Mediation analyses confirmed that the effect of package type on brand attitude was mediated by perceived thoughtfulness ( $b=.75$ ,  $SE=.11$ , 95%CI: [.53, .98]), conceptual model was confirmed shown as Fig.1.

Besides, in this study, we also excluded the possible confounding explanation of the perceived utility value from the product compositions of mix brand. The difference in perceived utility of homogeneous-package and heterogeneous-package ( $M_{Ho}=5.02$ ,  $SD=.97$  vs.  $M_{He}=4.53$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ,  $p<.05$ ) is significant, the inferior perceived utility value of gifts from the heterogeneous-package suggest that the enhanced brand attitude were not driven by functional value of products variety. The results confirm that reduced brand attitude in same-brand-package cannot be explained by perceived utility, suggesting that thoughtfulness beyond utility perception may drive the brand attitude effect in corporate gifting context.

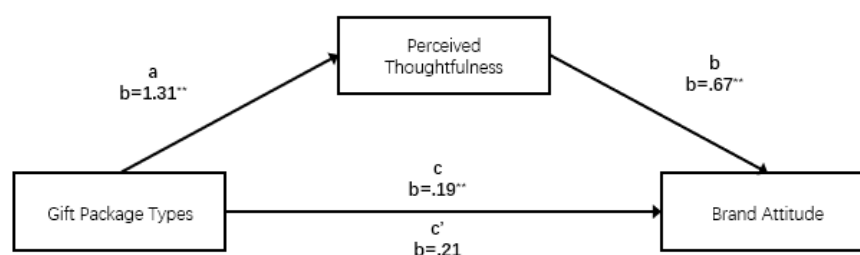


Fig.1 Conceptual Model.

### 3.2.4 Conclusion

This study supports Hypotheses H1 and H2, revealing that homogeneous gift bundle may trigger less favorable brand attitudes compared to heterogeneous ones. This effect is driven by perceived thoughtfulness rather than product utility. Our findings suggest that gift bundle composition serves as a cue for brand thoughtfulness, independent of economic value. When brands use their own products as gifts, it may be perceived as less genuine due to ease of access and inventory abundance. Conversely, sourcing gifts from external manufacturers is seen as more effortful and considerate, enhancing brand attitudes through perceived thoughtfulness.

### 3.3 Study 3: Consumer Mindset as a Moderator of the Devaluation Effect

Our theoretical framework suggests that when both free gifts and focal products originate from a same brand, they both are likely to be perceived as commercial goods due to source uniform. When the free gifts and the focal products sourced from the same brand, they would be perceived as a whole and sharing a common transactional essence<sup>[23]</sup>, serving as a holistic heuristic. If this theorizing holds true, then we may observe it could be attenuated in the separate mindset condition.

#### 3.3.1 Method

Three hundred and seventy five participants ( $M_{age} = 30.4$ , 56.3% female) recruited from online platform participated in the study in return for a certain reward. This experiment employed a 2(package type: homogeneous vs. heterogeneous) X 2(mindset: connecting vs. separating) between-subjects design.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. They were asked to imagine that they were preparing a birthday cake as a thoughtful gift for their relatives. And you happened to come across an anniversary celebration hold for Magree Bakery which provided its French Brown Cake with an extra free gift. In the homogeneous condition, the free gift was a small cake of the same kind. In the heterogeneous condition, the free gift is a mug of the identical economic value.

Following previous literature, we manipulate individual mindset in a similar procedure<sup>[24]</sup>. In the connecting mindset condition, participants were asked to think about their relatives at least three similarly shared characteristics that help them be a unified group relationship. In contrast, participants in the separating mindset condition were asked to write down the three unique characteristics that make them unique from their relatives.

#### 3.3.2 Results (Manipulation Check)

A 2((package type: homogeneous vs. heterogeneous) X 2(mindset: connecting vs. separating) ANOVA was run on relationship connection perception. The results revealed only a main effect of mindset, confirmed the success of mindset manipulation. To be specific, irrespective of package type, participants in connecting mindset condition were perceived as more connective in relationship than those in the separating condition ( $M_{co}=6.3$ ,  $SD=.77$ ,  $M_{se}=3.47$ ,  $SD=1.53$ ,  $F(1,371)=86.61$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\eta^2=.19$ ).

#### 3.3.3 Brand Attitude

We calculated a composite score of brand attitude index by averaging responses to the three items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). Consistent with our theorizing, a 2((package type: homogeneous vs. heterogeneous) X 2(mindset: connecting vs. separating) ANOVA on brand evaluation index revealed a significant main effect of package format and mindset, qualified by an expected interaction ( $F(1,371)=8.18$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\eta^2=.02$ ). Contrast analysis further showed that for the homogeneous condition, participants reported a less favorable brand attitude when holding a separate mindset versus connective mindset ( $M_{co}=4.16$ ,  $SD=1.59$  vs.  $M_{se}=4.53$ ,  $SD=1.52$ ,  $F(1,371)=4.11$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\eta^2=.04$ ). However, for the heterogeneous condition, the brand attitude was not significantly across the mindset types ( $M_{co}=5.79$ ,  $SD=.88$  vs.  $M_{se}=6.01$ ,  $SD=.89$ ,  $F(1,371)=1.24$ ,  $p>.05$ ,  $\eta^2=.003$ ).

#### 3.3.4 Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence in support of our hypothesis H3 that the effect of homogeneous devaluation can manifest under a connected mindset and may be mitigated in a separative mindset. It was observed that brand attitudes towards homogeneous packaging are less favorable compared to those towards heterogeneous packaging. Moreover, the disparity in favorability might be reduced when consumers engage in a separating mindset. Regardless of the primed mindset, heterogeneous packaging consistently evoked more favorable responses than homogeneous packaging, underscoring the detrimental marketing impact of homogeneous packaging within the context of

corporate gifting. The enhanced perception of brand thoughtfulness, in turn, yield positive consumer responses

### 3.4 Study 4: Moderated Mediation Analysis of the Devaluation Effect

This study explores the generalizability of our findings across different product categories and examines whether consumer attitudes translate into purchase intentions. If the above hypothesis hold true, we could expect that the devaluation effect of homogeneous packages is mitigated in a separating mindset due to interrupted associations between package items. We can observe that, within the same mindset, consumer reactions differ across different package types. Additionally, we test repurchase intention, as positive brand attitudes can drive both initial and repeat purchases.

#### 3.4.1 Method

Two hundred and twenty nine online subjects from Credamo participated in return for certain monetary reward. This experiment employed a 2(package type: homogeneous vs. heterogeneous) X 2(mindset: connecting vs. separating) between-subjects design.

In the connecting mindset condition, participants were indicated to think about their family members and to write down at least three points shared characteristics among them which help them be a unified family. In contrast, participants in the separating mindset condition were asked to wrote down at least three points unique characteristics. The scenario materials describe that Blue Diamond is a world-famous chocolate brand which is carrying out its anniversary celebration activity in different gifting packages. Next, participants entered into the evaluation task and reported their purchase intention for a shown gifting package picture either in homogeneity or heterogeneity format. In addition, we included an open-ended question asking their marketing price estimation for both packages. The package in the homogeneous (vs. heterogeneous) condition consisted of one big bag chocolate with smaller bags of the same kind (vs. chocolate with two bottle of milks). Finally, participants indicated their demographic variables. We manipulate whether consumers perceive package composition items in relation to each other or separate via the separating or connecting mindset priming<sup>[23]</sup>. Repurchase intention is measured by three items: When the gift giving activity is retracted after the end of anniversary celebration, would you consider a repurchase of the focal products at the same market price without free gifts? When the gift giving activity is retracted after the end of anniversary celebration, would you still consider buying the focal products of this brand priority to the other brands? When the gift giving activity is retracted after the end of anniversary celebration, would you repurchase the same focal products at the original market price when you are in need?

#### 3.4.2 Results (Repurchase Intention)

This study provides the extended marketing implication of our work. We calculated a composite repurchase intention score by averaging participant's evaluation on the three items (Cronbach's alpha=.79). A two-way ANOVA on it revealed a significant interaction of gifting packages type and mindset abstraction ( $F(1,224)=7.66, p<.01, \eta^2=.03$ ). Planned contrasts supported our prediction. When consumers were primed to adopt a connective mindset, they showed a lower repurchase intention for the homogeneous package than for the heterogeneous package ( $M_{Ho}=4.63, SD=1.32, M_{He}=5.64, SD=1.05$ ;  $F(1,224)=18.55, p<.01, \eta^2=.08$ ). In contrast, when consumers were instructed to consider in a separate mindset, participants reported equally higher repurchase intention ( $M_{Ho}=5.52, SD=1.20, M_{He}=5.65, SD=1.19$ ;  $F(1,224)=7.91, p>.05$ ).

Another set of contrast showed that for homogeneous package, separate mindset can increase repurchase intention compared to connective mindset ( $M_{Se}=4.63, SD=1.32, M_{Co}=5.52, SD=1.19$ ;  $F(1,224)=16.29, p<.01, \eta^2=.054$ ), thus attenuating the basic devaluation effect. In contrast, for heterogeneous package, consumers repurchase intention did not differ across connective- and separate mindset conditions ( $M_{Se}=5.64, SD=1.05, M_{Co}=5.65, SD=1.19$ ;  $F(1,224)<.01, p>.05$ ). These two packages were evaluated as equal repurchase intention.

#### 3.4.3 Moderated Mediation analysis

We ran a 2X2 ANOVA with gift bundle and mindset as the independent variables and thoughtfulness as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant interaction ( $F(1,225)=21.92, p<.01, \eta^2=.089$ ). Planned contrasts revealed that the homogeneity devaluation effect was replicated in the connective mindset condition, which revealed that repurchase intention was significantly weaker in the homogeneous-package compared to heterogeneous-package ( $M_{Ho}=4.5, SD=.91, M_{He}=5.09, SD=.83$ ;  $F(1,224)=14.87, p<.01$ ). However, when priming consumer's connective mindset, there was no

difference between the homogeneous-package and heterogeneous-package ( $M_{Ho}=5.29$ ,  $SD=.69$ ,  $M_{He}=5.27$ ,  $SD=.72$ ;  $F(1,224)=.01$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

To examine whether the thoughtfulness drives repurchase intention for participants in the connective mindset condition but not for those in the separative mindset condition, we run a moderated mediation analysis by using bootstrapping 5000 resampling tests<sup>[25]</sup>. In Hayes Model 7, consumer mindset served as the moderator for the effect of gifting package types and repurchase intention, and thoughtfulness perception served as the mediator. The results indicate the 95% confidence interval for thoughtfulness index excludes zero ( $b=.15$ ,  $SE=.07$ , 95% CI: .03 to .31) for participants in the connective mindset condition, whereas the 95% confidence interval for the thoughtfulness index includes zero ( $b=-.01$ ,  $SE=.04$ , 95% CI: -.09 to .06) for participants in the separative mindset. That is to say, the thoughtfulness perception mediates the effect of gift bundle types on repurchase intention for those in the connective mindset condition but not for those in the separative condition, which is consistent with our theorizing.

### 3.4.4 Conclusion

The interaction between gift bundle type and consumer mindset significantly influences perceived thoughtfulness and repurchase intention. Thoughtfulness perception mediates the effect of gift bundle type on repurchase intention only for consumers with a connective mindset. The homogeneity devaluation effect was observed in the connective mindset condition, with weaker repurchase intention for homogeneous packages compared to heterogeneous ones, but this difference disappeared when consumers were primed with a connective mindset.

## 4. Total Discussion

This research makes several significant theoretical contributions to the literature on corporate gifting, brand attitude formation, and consumer perception.

Prior research on sales promotions has predominantly emphasized their short-term transactional benefits while underestimating their strategic potential in shaping brand equity and consumer attitudes<sup>[26]</sup>. The current study advances this stream of research by shifting focus from the economic utility of gift-giving to the compositional characteristics of the gift bundle itself. Specifically, we identify and empirically validate the dual effect of gift composition on brand attitude. Contrary to the common assumption that gifts inherently enhance brand perception, our findings reveal that poorly matched or homogeneous gift compositions may, in fact, elicit negative brand evaluations. This nuanced insight enriches the branding literature by highlighting the importance of alignment between gift bundle composition and brand identity, consumer expectations, and the gifting context. Thus, we conceptualize corporate gifting not as a uniformly beneficial branding mechanism, but as a context-dependent strategy capable of generating divergent outcomes based on its design.

This study contributes to the emerging literature on nonverbal brand communication by conceptualizing gift composition heterogeneity as a subtle heuristic cue for perceived thoughtfulness. Drawing on consumer inference-making research, we argue that heterogeneity in gift basket composition—independent of monetary value—acts as a salient signal of intentionality and care. Consumers process these visual and structural cues with minimal deliberation, forming intuitive judgments about brand thoughtfulness. In contrast, homogeneous gift bundles are more likely to be perceived as generic or perfunctory, thereby diminishing the brand's perceived thoughtfulness. These findings extend heuristic cue theory into the domain of corporate gifting, revealing how design elements embedded in gift composition shape consumer interpretations and brand evaluations through affective and intuitive pathways. Our study also advances understanding of the mechanism of thoughtfulness perception in corporate gift-giving. Existing literature has primarily focused on price and effort as proxies for thoughtfulness<sup>[27-28]</sup>, often overlooking how components relationship cue unrelated to value may contribute to this perception.

We fill this theoretical gap by demonstrating that the composition format—particularly the use of homogeneity versus heterogeneity—can differentially evoke perceived thoughtfulness, even when economic value is held constant. This mediating mechanism significantly informs branding theory by linking package design aesthetics and structural variation with downstream consumer attitudes. Our results underscore that corporate gifts are not only functional offerings but also symbolic expressions of relational intent, transmitted through thoughtful packaging.

Finally, this study introduces a novel application of Gestalt theory to the domain of corporate gifting, offering a cognitive explanation for consumer responses to packaging. We show that consumers process

gift baskets holistically, perceiving the gift as an integrated whole rather than a sum of discrete parts. This gestalt processing tendency influences how gift composition (e.g., uniformity vs. diversity) is interpreted at the perceptual level. Homogeneous packages, due to their lack of perceptual contrast and differentiation, may be interpreted as lacking thoughtfulness, whereas heterogeneous compositions are more likely to engage consumer interest and be construed as carefully curated. This insight bridges cognitive psychology with marketing strategy and opens new avenues for research on how visual and structural coherence affects brand perception.

## 5. Limitation and Future Prospect

Our research is limited by the specific context of corporate gifting and the binary classification of gift bundle. Future studies should explore additional gift bundle types and broader consumer contexts to generalize our findings. Additionally, our study relies on self-reported data, which may introduce biases. Future research should consider alternative data sources, such as behavioral metrics, to validate our results. Besides, researchers are also encouraged to investigate the impact of other cognitive cues on consumer perceptions in gift giving context. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of gifting strategies on brand loyalty and consumer outcomes.

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