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BEYOND FRIENDSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF COST IN GIFT CHOICES FOR ONESELF AND OTHERS

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Abstract

This study explores how social closeness and self-identification influence the monetary value of gifts chosen for friends and for oneself. Integrating the Self-expansion Model with Resource Scarcity Theory, we provide insights into consumer behavior in gift selection under varying social and financial contexts.

Introduction

Gift-giving is a crucial social activity, where the choice of a gift often reflects the giver's

relationship with the recipient. Traditional studies have focused on the expression of unselfish love towards close friends, leading to higher investment in their happiness. However, these studies often overlooked the nuances involved in choosing gifts for oneself and for different social situations. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring how social closeness and budget constraints influence the choice and value of gifts.

Theoretical Framework

Our study is guided by two main theories:

Self-expansion Model (Aron & Aron, 1986): This model posits that in close relationships, individuals incorporate aspects of others into their own identities, leading to a deeper sense of connection and self-development.

Resource Scarcity Theory: Suggests that under financial constraints, consumers prioritize fitting purchases within their budget, often leading to more cost-effective choices irrespective of the recipient.

Methodology

Two studies were conducted:

Study 1: Examined how the closeness of a friendship influences the choice of gift value.

Study 2: Focused on self-gifting behavior, particularly under varying budget constraints and individual differences in sensitivity to brand sales.

Data were collected through surveys and controlled shopping scenarios, with participants drawn from diverse demographic backgrounds.

Results

Study 1: Revealed a positive correlation between friendship closeness and the value of gifts chosen. Participants were more likely to choose higher-priced items for closer friends.

Study 2: Showed that individuals are inclined to select more expensive items for themselves, especially under higher budget scenarios. Additionally, lower sensitivity to brand sales correlated with the choice of more expensive alternatives.

Discussion

Our findings highlight the significant role of self-identification in gift-giving behavior. The Self-expansion Model explains the preference for more expensive gifts for close friends as a reflection of self-inclusion in those relationships. Conversely, when purchasing for oneself, consumer ego-centrism, as suggested by the Self-expansion Model, leads to selecting higher-priced items, reflecting a less pronounced loss aversion.

Furthermore, under tight budget constraints, the Resource Scarcity Theory explains the uniform preference for less expensive alternatives, regardless of the recipient. This indicates a fundamental shift in consumer priorities under financial pressure.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of consumer behavior in gift-giving by combining the psychological aspects of self-expansion with economic factors of resource availability. It suggests that in gift selection, social closeness and financial factors interplay, shaping the perceived value and choice of gifts for oneself and others.

Keywords

Gift-giving, Self-expansion Model, Resource Scarcity Theory, Consumer Behavior, Social Closeness.