

Presentation Matters: The Effect of Wrapping Neatness on Gift Attitudes

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While gift-givers typically wrap gifts prior to presenting them, little is known about the effect of how the gift is wrapped on recipients' expectations and attitudes toward the gift inside. We propose that when recipients open a gift from a friend, they like it less when the giver has wrapped it neatly as opposed to sloppily and we draw on expectation disconfirmation theory to explain the effect. Specifically, recipients set higher (lower) expectations for neatly (sloppily)-wrapped gifts, making it harder (easier) for the gifts to meet these expectations, resulting in contrast effects that lead to less (more) positive attitudes toward the gifts once unwrapped. However, when the gift-giver is an acquaintance, there is ambiguity in the relationship status and wrapping neatness serves as a cue about the relationship rather than the gift itself. This leads to assimilation effects where the recipient likes the gift more when neatly wrapped. We assess these effects across three studies and find that they hold for desirable, neutral, and undesirable gifts, as well as with both hypothetical and real gifts.

Keywords Expectation disconfirmation; Gift-giving; Gifts; Gift-wrap neatness; Wrapping paper

INTRODUCTION

"If you can't wrap presents well, at least make it look like they put up a good fight."— Unknown.

While the art of gift-wrapping has been around for centuries, Hallmark is credited with creating the modern wrapping paper industry (Spencer, 2017). In the early 1900s, gifts were typically wrapped in tissue paper or brown paper, but in 1917, the Hall Brothers' store in Kansas City ran out. Rather than turn away customers, they offered decorative paper intended for envelope lining as a replacement, and that was the beginning of wrapping paper, and Hallmark, as we know it. Today, Americans alone spend more than \$3.2 billion each year on

wrapping (Husted, 2015), yet we know little about the effect of how gifts are wrapped on expectations or attitudes toward the gifts inside.

Many people intend to wrap their own gifts (3M, 2009) and may set out with the best intentions, but the outcome is not always as planned. A primary complaint about wrapping gifts is that the appearance is often not as attractive as the gift-wraper envisioned (Niggulis, 2016). Given our national expenditure on gift-wrapping, it is reasonable to surmise that recipients have come to expect neatly wrapped gifts and will be disappointed with gifts that are not wrapped according to these high standards. We suggest, however, that while it may feel good to present a neatly wrapped gift, recipients may actually like the gift inside more if it is wrapped sloppily.

Specifically, we posit that recipients will use the gift-wrapping neatness employed by the gift-giver as a cue about the gift inside and set higher expectations for gifts wrapped neatly rather than sloppily. When gifts are subsequently unwrapped, these prior expectations influence recipients' evaluations of the actual gifts. When expectations are not met,

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disconfirmation occurs causing a contrast effect, with recipients liking gifts less (more) when a neatly (sloppily)- wrapped gift led to high (low) initial expectations. However, when recipients use the gift-wrapping neatness cue to make inferences about factors other than the gift, assimilation effects may occur. We suggest that the closeness of the gift-giver/recipient relationship affects the use of the gift-wrapping neatness cue. For friends, the cue is used to make inferences about the gift and contrast effects hold. For acquaintances, there is ambiguity surrounding the relationship so the cue is instead used to make inferences about the relationship status. Thus, assimilation can occur with positive (negative) relationship inferences spilling over to the gift inside, leading recipients to like gifts more (less) when neatly (sloppily)-wrapped.

We contribute to the gift-giving literature by highlighting that even when the same wrapping paper and embellishments are used, how gift-givers wrap gifts (i.e., wrapping neatness) plays a role in setting recipient expectations and ultimately influences attitudes toward the gift inside.

Theoretical Background

Gifts and Gift-Giving

When choosing gifts, gift-givers make choices they believe will please the recipient; however, recipients are not always as satisfied as the giver anticipated (Paolacci, Straeter, & Hooge, 2015). Gift-givers, for instance, incorrectly believe that the more money spent on a gift, the more it will be appreciated (Flynn & Adams, 2009). They also inaccurately believe it is better to give gifts that address recipients' interests instead of sentimental value (Givi & Galak, 2017). Gift-givers' inaccuracy may not stop at gift selection but may also extend to gift-presentation decisions.

The gift-giving literature continues to grow, yet the role of wrapping paper remains largely under-explored. Howard (1992) is the notable exception. He sets the foundation for the importance of wrapping paper by addressing the question of whether wrapped (vs. unwrapped) gifts lead recipients to have more favorable attitudes toward gift ownership. Howard finds that recipients view wrapped gifts positively because wrapping paper elevates moods by activating memories of happy occasions. Building on this, our research highlights the importance of wrapping paper by showing that *how* the wrapping paper is used influences recipients' attitudes toward the gift inside.

Gift-giving involves a ritual presentation (Belk, 2005) that signals the gift-giver's feelings toward the recipient through both the gift itself and how it is presented (Camerer, 1988). Gift recipients use available cues to evaluate gifts. For example, Raghubir (2004) found that consumers use information about a promotional gift's source when assessing its value and infer greater value for gifts from expensive rather than inexpensive brands. The use of such gift-related cues suggests that a gift's presentation can also serve as an important source of information.

It is unlikely that gift-givers would put in the effort and potentially the extra expense of gift-wrapping services if they did not believe doing so was important. This suggests that gift-givers expect assimilation effects to occur with neatly wrapped gifts and wrap them neatly in an attempt to make the recipient like the gifts more. However, not all gift-givers wrap perfectly. Regardless of whether sloppy wrapping arises from a lack of time, ability, or other factors, it is important to understand how this visual cue affects recipients' attitudes.

Expectation Disconfirmation

People use available information to form expectations that will serve as reference points when evaluating products or experiences (Tse & Wilton, 1988). As Alba & Williams, 2013, p. 6) note, "expectations [. . .] determine the extent to which consumers eventually enjoy their outcomes." When there is a discrepancy between expectations and product perceptions, expectation disconfirmation occurs and contrast effects emerge such that negative (positive) contextual cues lead to positive (negative) evaluations (Schwarz & Bless, 2007). People experience satisfaction when expectations are exceeded (positive disconfirmation) and dissatisfaction when evaluations fall short of expectations (negative disconfirmation). In the context of gifts, Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel (1999) report that in order to avoid disappointment, recipients may lower gift-related expectations when receiving from someone known to give subpar gifts.

Influence of Visual Cues on Product Expectations, Value, and Usage

Visual cues from containers and packaging influence consumers' perceptions and interactions with the objects inside. Patrick, Atefi, and Hagtvedt (2017) find that unveiling products from opaque boxes compared to transparent boxes increases

perceived product value while Deng and Srinivasan (2013) show that a package's visual cues influence consumption amounts. Such visual cues also play an important role in setting consumer expectations (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). Alba and Williams (2013) find that consumers derive pleasure from a product's aesthetic features. When aesthetic qualities exceed expectations, consumers experience more excitement and become more loyal (Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2007). Consumers often rely on a package's aesthetic elements, such as font choice (Henderson, Giese, & Cote, 2004), shape (Raghubir & Greenleaf, 2006), and product image location (Deng & Kahn, 2009), to form expectations about the interior product. Just as consumers use packaging cues to form expectations about the product inside, we suggest that gift recipients use gift-wrapping neatness as a visual cue to form expectations about the gift inside.

Study 1

Study 1 aims to provide evidence that how gifts are wrapped—neatly vs. sloppily—influences recipients' gift-related attitudes. We use real, high-quality gifts that recipients find either desirable or undesirable. Some gift-givers may choose to wrap gifts neatly, with the hope that it leads recipients to like the gifts more. We anticipate, however, that once unwrapped, recipients will like gifts that had been neatly wrapped even less than their sloppily wrapped counterparts, making this an ineffective gift-giving strategy.

Method

We recruited 180 university students who participated for extra credit (60.6% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 25.71$, $SD = 6.40$). The study used a 2 (wrapping neatness: neat vs. sloppy) \times 2 (gift desirability: desirable vs. undesirable) between-subjects design. Participants entered the lab one-by-one and an assistant handed them a gift to keep that was pretested to be either neatly- or sloppily wrapped (see Figure 1).

Participants unwrapped the randomly assigned gift—either an official Miami Heat or Orlando Magic mug. Several months earlier, participants completed informational surveys, including questions about whether they were fans of various sports teams. We only invited participants who identified as Miami Heat but *not* Orlando Magic fans; thus, the Miami Heat mug served as the desirable gift and the Orlando Magic mug served as the

undesirable gift. A pretest confirmed that both mugs were of equally high quality, but the Miami Heat mug was significantly more desirable. Once unwrapped, participants indicated their attitudes toward the gift on five 9-point scale items (1 = dislike it very much/extremely unfavorable/undesirable/displeased/terrible to 9 = like it very much/extremely favorable/desirable/pleased/delighted). Items were averaged together to form a gift-attitude scale ($\alpha = 0.98$). Finally, participants rated the wrapping and answered demographic questions. See Appendix S1 (MDA) for additional details.

Results and Discussion

A pretest confirmed that the neatly wrapped gift ($M = 8.18$, $SD = 1.32$) was seen as neater than the sloppily wrapped gift ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.83$; $t(77) = 11.83$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.70$). Subsequent studies had similar pretest and manipulation check results.

A two-way ANOVA with wrapping neatness and gift desirability as the independent variables and gift-related attitudes as the dependent variable revealed significant main effects of wrapping neatness ($F(1, 176) = 8.24$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .05$) and desirability ($F(1, 176) = 122.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .41$). As anticipated, there was no significant interaction ($p = .968$), indicating that wrapping neatness significantly affected attitudes regardless of gift desirability. Planned contrasts showed participants had more favorable attitudes toward sloppily- than neatly wrapped gifts, regardless of whether gifts were undesirable ($M_{\text{sloppy}} = 4.92$, $SD = 1.74$ vs. $M_{\text{neat}} = 4.18$, $SD = 1.98$; $t(176) = -2.00$, $p = .047$; $d = 0.40$) or desirable ($M_{\text{sloppy}} = 7.82$, $SD = 1.30$ vs. $M_{\text{neat}} = 7.06$, $SD = 1.93$; $t(176) = -2.06$, $p = .041$; $d = 0.46$).

Finally, to test for potential mediators, we used Hayes (2013) PROCESS Macro (Model 4) to conduct a parallel mediation using three alternative variables (see Table 1 and MDA). Results suggest that while participants' own perceived wrapping ability did not influence actual gift-related attitudes, both stated expectation disconfirmation and pleasant surprise mediate the relationship between wrapping neatness and gift attitudes. This suggests both expectation disconfirmation and affect influence gift-related attitudes.

These results provide evidence that neat wrapping has a negative effect while sloppy wrapping has a positive effect on gift-related attitudes, regardless of gift desirability. Thus, wrapping gifts sloppily vs. neatly can be a more effective gift-giving strategy.



Figure 1. Wrapped gift images seen by participants (studies 2 and 3). Wrapped gift given to participants (study 1) used the same wrapping paper and ribbon with a smaller, square box. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Study 2

Study 2 explores whether participants' expectations before unwrapping the gift match their attitudes after unwrapping the gift and the role of expectation disconfirmation as the process underlying the effect of wrapping neatness. We anticipate that recipients of sloppily (neatly)-wrapped gifts will experience positive (negative) expectation disconfirmation, leading to more (less) favorable gift-related attitudes. We include a control condition where participants imagine receiving an unwrapped gift to examine whether the act of unwrapping gifts still leads to more favorable attitudes (see Howard, 1992). To increase generalizability, we use a neutrally desirable gift to examine whether wrapping gifts sloppily vs. neatly remains an effective gift-giving strategy.

Method

Participants were 155 university students who participated for extra credit (42.6% female, $M_{age} = 19.98$, $SD = 2.25$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (wrapping: neat vs. sloppy vs. none). First, participants saw an image of a neatly or sloppily wrapped gift confirmed to be realistic in a pretest. Then, participants indicated their gift expectations before and actual gift attitudes after imagining opening the gift. Participants also inferred who wrapped the gift. The gift-wrapping neatness and attitude measures were the same as in study 1. Participants also completed a stated measure of expectation disconfirmation by indicating how well the gift matched their expectations (1 = far worse; 5 = matched; 9 = far exceeded). For the "no wrapping" condition, participants imagined receiving an unwrapped gift.

Gift expectations and who wrapped it were not asked, as participants did not have any wrapping to use as a reference for forming expectations. In all conditions, the gift was JVC earbuds. Participants indicated brand familiarity and previous ownership. Neither measure differed significantly between conditions in studies 2 or 3. See MDA for details.

Results and Discussion

In alignment with Diehl and Poynor (2010), we examined expectation disconfirmation using two measures (a) the change from gift expectations to actual gift attitudes and (b) participants' stated measure of expectation disconfirmation. Expectations in the neatly wrapped condition ($M_{neat} = 7.69$, $SD = 1.04$) were significantly higher than in the sloppily wrapped condition ($M_{sloppy} = 6.12$, $SD = 1.71$; $t(103) = 5.71$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.11$); however, actual attitudes were significantly lower in the neatly wrapped condition ($M_{neat} = 5.80$, $SD = 1.82$) than in the sloppily wrapped condition ($M_{sloppy} = 6.86$, $SD = 1.58$; $t(103) = -3.18$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.62$). See Figure 2.

To evaluate whether wrapping neatness leads to a contrast effect, a 2×2 mixed ANCOVA was conducted with wrapping (1 = neat, 0 = sloppy) manipulated between subjects as the independent variable. The repeated measure of expectations and actual gift-related attitudes served as the repeated-measure dependent variable. Participants' gift-wrapping inferences (1 = friend, 0 = someone else) were a covariate.

We find that wrapping neatness significantly influences who participants infer wrapped the gift (see MDA). However, the inferred gift-wrapping did not significantly affect expectations or actual gift attitudes in either wrapping condition. Importantly,

Table 1
Parallel Mediation Model for Neatly Wrapped vs. Sloppily Wrapped Gifts, Study 1

	Path a:						Path b:														
	b	SE	t	df	p		b	SE	t	df	p	LLCI	ULCI								
	Stated expectation disconfirmation						Own wrapping ability						Actual gift attitudes								
Wrapping neatness	-0.91	0.29	-3.11	177	.002	-0.59	0.29	-2.07	177	.040	-0.36	0.30	-1.23	177	.222	-0.31	0.19	-1.62	174	.108	
Gift desirability	1.78	0.29	6.12	177	<.001	2.06	0.29	7.20	177	<.001	-0.01	0.30	-0.04	177	.969	1.55	0.21	7.27	174	<.001	
Stated expectation disconfirmation																0.14	0.07	2.10	174	.037	
disconfirmation																					
Pleasant surprise																0.53	0.07	7.58	174	<.001	
Own wrapping ability																-0.01	0.05	-0.30	174	.761	
Indirect effect of wrapping - TOTAL																-0.44	0.19			-0.812	-0.051
Indirect effect of wrapping—stated expectation disconfirmation																-0.13	0.08			-0.293	-0.001
Indirect effect of wrapping—pleasant surprise																-0.31	0.16			-0.631	-0.007
Indirect effect of wrapping—own wrapping ability																0.01	0.02			-0.040	0.066

Note. Variable Definitions:
 Wrapping Neatness = Participants received either a neatly or sloppily wrapped gift.
 Gift Desirability = Participants received a desirable or undesirable coffee mug.
 Stated Expectation Disconfirmation = To what extent did the gift match the expectations you had formed when it was still wrapped? The gift . . . [Is far worse than I expected (1), Matched my expectations (5), Is far better than I expected (9)].
 Pleasant Surprise = After you unwrapped the box, to what extent were you unpleasantly or pleasantly surprised by the gift? [Very unpleasantly surprised (1) to Very pleasantly surprised (9)].
 Own Wrapping Ability = Scale of perceived wrapping ability. The 3 items in the scale include: How would you rate your wrapping ability compared to other university students? [Well below average (1) to Well above average (9)]. How confident do you feel about your ability to wrap gifts? [Not at all confident (1) to Extremely confident (9)]. When you personally wrap a gift, how does the recipient typically respond to the wrapping? [Very displeased (1) to Very pleased (9)].

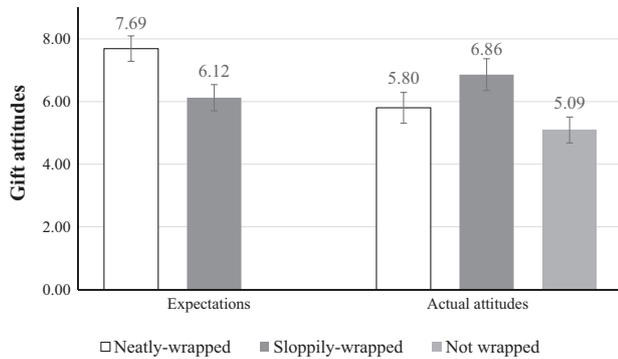


Figure 2. The effect of wrapping neatness on gift-related expectations before unwrapping the gift and actual gift-related attitudes after unwrapping the gift (study 2). Inferences regarding who wrapped the gift (friend vs. someone else) were included as a covariate. Participants in the “no wrapping” condition were not asked about their expectations as they did not have any wrapping to use as a cue. Error bars denote ± 2 standard errors.

the interaction of wrapping neatness and the within-subject expectation/attitude measures was significant ($F(1, 102) = 34.99, p < .001, \eta^2 = .26$; see Table 2), indicating that actual attitudes were improved in the sloppily wrapped ($F(1, 102) = 5.93, p = .017, \eta^2 = .06$) and worsened in the neatly wrapped ($F(1, 102) = 41.37, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$) conditions.

To assess that expectation disconfirmation underlies the effect of wrapping neatness on actual gift attitudes, we conducted a mediation analysis with PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2013). Wrapping neatness was the independent variable, the measure of stated expectation disconfirmation was the mediator, and actual gift attitudes was the dependent variable. Inferences regarding the gift-wraper and gift expectations prior to unwrapping were included as control variables (see Figure 3). Results revealed that wrapping neatness had a significant effect on stated expectation disconfirmation ($b = -1.13, SE = 0.47, t(101) = -2.41, p = .018$), such that sloppily (neatly)-wrapped gifts led to more positive (negative) disconfirmation (see Table 2). Next, the effect of expectation disconfirmation on actual attitudes was significant beyond the control variables' effects and the direct effect of wrapping neatness ($b = 0.50, SE = 0.07, t(100) = 6.69, p < .001$). Importantly, the indirect effect of wrapping neatness on actual gift attitudes through stated expectation disconfirmation was significant ($effect = -0.56, SE = 0.30, 95\% CI [-1.186, -0.020]$), indicating that neatly (sloppily)-wrapped gifts led to higher (lower) expectations that were more likely

to be unmet (met), resulting in less (more) favorable attitudes toward the gift—a contrast effect.

We also explore Howard's (1992) findings that gift-wrapping, as opposed to no wrapping, leads to more favorable gift-related attitudes. Our results show that both neatly- ($M = 5.80, SD = 1.82$) and sloppily wrapped gifts ($M = 6.86, SD = 1.58$) elicit significantly more favorable attitudes than unwrapped gifts ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.46; F(2, 152) = 15.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$). In concordance with Howard (1992), this suggests that regardless of wrapping neatness, wrapped gifts may elevate recipients' moods and positive affect, leading to more favorable gift-related attitudes relative to unwrapped gifts.

Together, study 2 results provide evidence that wrapping neatness affects recipients' gift-related expectations and attitudes. The higher (lower) expectations resulting from neat (sloppy) wrapping lead to less (more) positive gift-related attitudes. Consistent with Howard (1992), we find that wrapping, whether neat or sloppy, leads to more positive gift attitudes than no wrapping.

Study 3

Study 3 examines whether the closeness of the gift-giver and recipient relationship (e.g., friend vs. acquaintance) affects whether gift-wrapping neatness leads to assimilation rather than the contrast seen in our previous studies. Assimilation (contrast) occurs when contextual cues have a positive (negative) relationship with evaluations (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1993). We suggest that more ambiguity surrounds relationship status for acquaintances than for friends. Accordingly, pretests (see MDA) show that acquaintances use gift-wrapping neatness as a cue to infer how the gift-giver views the relationship more so than for setting expectations of the gift inside. However, for friends, the relationship is more established so rather than using the gift-wrapping neatness cue to evaluate the relationship, it is used to create expectations for the gift inside. Thus, with acquaintances, when gifts are wrapped neatly (sloppily), recipients use wrapping neatness as a cue that the gift-giver views their relationship as important (unimportant). With the focus for acquaintances being on gauging the relationship rather than on creating gift-related expectations, the positive (negative) relationship revelation spills over to the gift itself, which leads to an assimilation effect. Friends typically know where the relationship stands, so wrapping neatness is instead used

Table 2
Results of 2 × 2 Mixed ANCOVA and Mediation Model for Neatly Wrapped vs. Sloppily Wrapped Gifts, Study 2

	2 × 2 Mixed ANCOVA					Mediation analysis												
	F	df	p	η ²	η ²	Path a: Stated Expectation Disconfirmation			Path b: Actual Gift Attitudes									
						b	SE	t	df	p	b	SE	t	df	p	LLCI	ULCI	
Expectations-actual gift attitudes (within)	1.76	1, 102	.187	.02														
Expectations-actual gift attitudes (within) × who wrapped (between)	< 0.001	1, 102	.988	<.001														
Expectations-actual gift attitudes (within) × wrapping (between)	34.99	1, 102	<.001	.26														
Who wrapped (between)	0.58	1, 102	.449	.01	0.59	0.48	1.24	101	.217	-0.11	0.36	-0.32	100	.749				
Wrapping (between)	1.74	1, 102	.191	.02	-1.13	0.47	-2.41	101	.018	-0.72	0.36	-2.01	100	.048				
Expectations					-0.24	0.13	-1.76	101	.082	0.30	0.10	3.00	100	.003				
Expectation disconfirmation										0.50	0.07	6.69	100	<.001				
Indirect effect of wrapping										-0.56	0.30				-1.186			-0.020

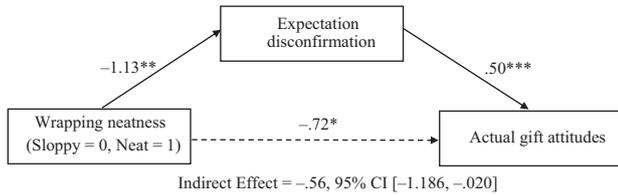


Figure 3. Expectation disconfirmation mediation model for sloppy vs. neat wrapping (study 2). The dependent variable is the composite measure of actual gift attitudes after unwrapping. Expectations and inferences about who wrapped the gift (friend vs. someone else) were included as control variables. Path coefficients represent nonstandardized regression weights. * $p \leq .10$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

to create more gift-related expectations, which leads to the contrast effects seen in our previous studies.

Method

Participants were 261 adults on Amazon Mechanical Turk (49.43% female, $M_{age} = 36.97$, $SD = 12.87$). The study used a 2 (wrapping neatness: neat vs. sloppy) \times 2 (relationship: friend vs. acquaintance) between-subjects design. Participants imagined being at a party with a secret gift exchange. In the friend (acquaintance) condition, their secret gift-giver was a friend (acquaintance) who they know (do not know) very well. Next, participants rated time and care spent wrapping the gift. The wrapping neatness images, gift-presentation description, gift, and attitude measures were the same as in study 2.

Results and Discussion

A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of gift-giver/recipient relationship, but a moderately significant main effect of wrapping neatness on gift-related attitudes ($F(1, 257) = 3.76$, $p = .054$, $\eta^2 = .01$; see Table 3). Most importantly, there was a significant interaction of relationship and wrapping neatness ($F(1, 257) = 159.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$). Consistent with our earlier findings, participants in the friend condition had more favorable

Table 3
Results of a 2 (Wrapping Neatness: Neat vs. Sloppy) \times 2 (Relationship: Friend vs. Acquaintance) ANOVA, Study 3

	F	df	p	η^2
Wrapping Neatness	3.76	1, 257	.054	.01
Relationship	1.42	1, 257	.234	.01
Wrapping Neatness \times Relationship	159.01	1, 257	< .001	.38

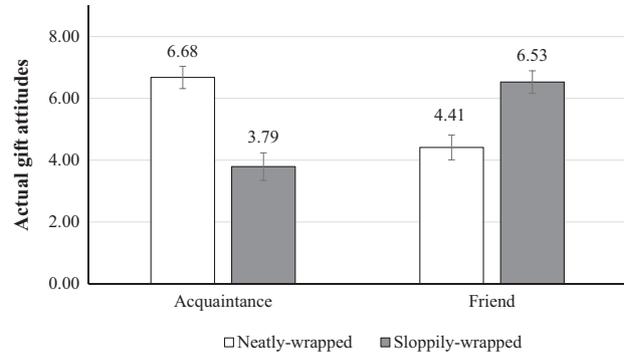


Figure 4. The effect of wrapping neatness when the gift-giver is an acquaintance vs. a friend on actual gift-related attitudes once the gift is unwrapped (study 3). Error bars denote ± 2 standard errors.

gift-related attitudes for sloppily wrapped ($M = 6.53$, $SD = 1.46$) vs. neatly wrapped ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.64$) ($F(1, 257) = 57.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$) gifts. As expected, the opposite pattern emerged in the acquaintance condition. Gift-related attitudes were more favorable for neatly wrapped ($M = 6.68$, $SD = 1.42$) vs. sloppily wrapped ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.83$) ($F(1, 257) = 105.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$) gifts. See Figure 4. Finally, perceived wrapping time and care were significantly higher for the neatly- vs. sloppily wrapped gifts but results of an ANCOVA with these variables as covariates (see MDA) are similar to those of the previously reported ANOVA.

These results demonstrate an important qualifier of sloppily wrapped gifts—relationship closeness. Specifically, gift-related attitudes are more favorable when a friend (acquaintance) gives a sloppily (neatly)-wrapped gift. Thus, when giving friends gifts, a strategy of sloppily wrapping gifts may be beneficial; whereas when giving acquaintances gifts, neatly wrapping gifts may be better.

General Discussion

Three studies demonstrate that how gifts are wrapped influences recipients' attitudes toward the gifts. Recipients' gift-related attitudes were more positive when the gifts were wrapped sloppily vs. neatly. This contrast effect holds for undesirable, neutral, and desirable gifts. We find evidence suggesting that the extent to which gift-related expectations are positively or negatively disconfirmed mediates this effect of wrapping neatness on gift attitudes. Furthermore, we demonstrate that this effect is contingent upon the relationship between

the gift-giver and the recipient, such that the contrast effect holds when the gift-giver is a friend, while assimilation effects occur when the gift-giver is an acquaintance. Specifically, sloppily (neatly)-wrapped gifts have a positive effect on recipients' gift-related attitudes when the gift-giver is a friend (acquaintance). Initial findings suggest that, unlike friends, when gifts come from acquaintances, a spillover effect occurs in which wrapping neatness serves as a cue to the relationship's importance rather than to the gift inside.

Our research makes important contributions to the gift-giving literature. First, we demonstrate that while what is inside the box is important, so too is how the box is wrapped. That is, our research supports the importance of considering the aesthetic presentation of the gift-giving process when assessing recipients' gift-related responses. Second, our work extends the role of expectations derived from external cues, in our case visual cues, into the realm of gift-giving. Specifically, we find evidence that expectations mediate this effect such that recipients set higher (lower) expectations for neatly (sloppily)-wrapped gifts from friends, making it harder (easier) for the gift itself to meet or exceed these expectations, ultimately leading to lower (higher) attitudes toward the gift once unwrapped. Finally, although we find that wrapping neatness influences perceptions of who wrapped the gift, time spent, and care taken during wrapping, these factors do not significantly influence actual gift-related attitudes.

Our research also has practical implications. While we find that desirable gifts are still liked more than undesirable gifts regardless of wrapping neatness, across studies, we also see that recipients view undesirable, neutral, and desirable gifts more positively if friends wrapped the gifts sloppily rather than neatly. This suggests that gift-givers may not need to expend undue effort on the crispness of each fold and the symmetry of each loop of ribbon when preparing gifts.

From a managerial perspective, relationship closeness should be taken into account when deciding on wrapping neatness since sloppily wrapped gifts positively affected friend's gift-related attitudes and negatively affected acquaintance's gift-related attitudes. This leads to our first avenue for future research—the gift-giver/recipient relationship in business settings. Companies typically have close relationships with some vendors, employees, and customers and distant relationships with others. It would be interesting to see whether the wrapping neatness cue is still used differently based on

relationship closeness in business contexts. If the cue is used similarly, a company with close relationships can potentially promise too much with neat wrapping and may want to use sloppy wrapping or match wrapping neatness to the brand's image. Retailers also may not want to offer gift-wrapping services for less desirable or low-quality gifts if the gift will be associated with their brand name. For acquaintance-level relationships, neat wrapping may be the best default strategy regardless of what is inside. However, when the recipient is not focused on assessing relationship status, gift-related expectations may be created, making contrast effects likely to occur. For example, with promotions such as mystery grab bags where consumers choose the product sight unseen, a neatly wrapped product may lead to more purchases but less favorable attitudes once the package is opened.

Another research avenue to consider is how a brand's image may influence which wrapping approach is best. For example, self-effacing brands may be better served using sloppy wrapping while self-enhancing brands may benefit from neat wrapping.

Further, while we find support that expectation disconfirmation is an important driver of how wrapping neatness influences gift-related attitudes, there are other factors that can have an effect. For instance, replicating Howard (1992), we find more positivity toward wrapped vs. unwrapped gifts, suggesting that elevated mood and positive affect are still relevant factors. Unwrapping gifts that fall short of (exceed) expectations can present an unpleasant (pleasant) surprise, further suggesting affect's possible role. Other potential factors are types of wrapping paper and embellishments. Using extremely expensive or beautiful wrapping compared to cheap or tacky wrapping could potentially moderate or exacerbate the effects found.

While we examined relationship closeness at the acquaintance and friend levels, there are many other types of relationships. Future research could explore whether more distant relationships such as anonymous gift-givers or closer relationships such as romantic partners affect how gift-wrapping neatness cues are used. Similarly, relationship formality could play a role. Another potential path is gift-giver age. Would sloppy wrapping be viewed differently if a child vs. an elderly person wrapped the gift? Also, we used sensibly priced gifts that would reasonably be given by a friend or acquaintance. Researchers could explore whether extremely expensive or inexpensive gifts influence the

experience of expectation disconfirmation and whether there is an interactive effect between expense and relationship. Given the limited research on the role of gift-wrap on the gift-giving process, we hope that our work inspires further exploration and study.

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Supporting Information

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Appendix S1. Methodological details.