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## A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE DETERMINATION OF BALANCING FACTORS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCTS, CONSUMERS AND PACKAGE SCHEMA ON THE BASIS OF BALANCE THEORY<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The focus of the present study centers on the mismatch between a product and its packaging. The research delves into the reasons behind consumers' choice to purchase a product despite a disparity between the product and its packaging. Qualitative methods were employed for this investigation, with data collected through in-depth interviews. Twenty participants were interviewed, and the data from 13 participants underwent thorough analysis. The findings, interpreted through the lens of balance theory (Heider, 1946), shed light on the factors influencing consumers when faced with the decision to buy a product packaged in a manner that doesn't align with their expectations. The results illuminated the primary determinant in the purchase of mismatched packaging: "advice." According to the perspective of balance theory, consumers experience tension when acquiring a product with incompatible packaging. To mitigate this tension, consumers employ "balancing factors." These factors include, but are not limited to, "advice," "brand," "curiosity," "promotion," "trial desire," "addiction," "difference," "past experience," "need," "time pressure," and "obligation." The study revealed that these balancing factors play a crucial role in consumers' decisions to purchase products with incompatible packaging. The intricate interplay between these factors showcases the complexity of consumer behavior in such circumstances.

**Keywords:** Package schema, incompatible design, balance theory, consumption

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## DENGE KURAMI PERSPEKTİFİNDEN PAKET ŐEMATİĐİ, ÜRÜN VE TÜKETİCİ ARASINDAKİ İLİŐKİDE DENGELEYİCİ UNSURLARIN BELİRLENMESİ ÜZERİNE NİTEL BİR ARAŐTIRMA

### ÖZ

Ürün ile ambalaj arasındaki uyumsuzluĐa odaklanan bu arařtırmanın amacı, ürün – ambalaj uyumsuzluĐu durumunda tüketicinin ürünü satın almasına etki eden dengeleyici unsurları keřfetmektir. Yapılan arařtırmada nitel yöntemlerden yararlanılmıŐtır. Arařtırmanın verileri derinlemesine mülakat yöntemi ile toplanmıŐtır. Mülakatlarda toplam 20 katılımcı ile görüŐülmüŐ, 13 katılımcının verileri analize alınmıŐtır. Verilerin analizi sonucunda elde edilen bulgular, denge teorisi (Heider, 1946) bağlamında yorumlanmıŐtır. Denge teorisi ile tüketici, ürün ve ambalaj arasındaki çok yönlü iliŐki daha etkin bir Őekilde ifade edilmiŐtir. Sonuçlar, ürün ile uyumsuz olan bir ambalajın satın alındıĐı koŐullarda tüketiciyi etkileyen unsurları ortaya çıkarmıŐtır. Tüketicilerin uyumsuz bir ambalajı satın almasındaki en temel faktörün “tavsiye” olduĐu bulgusuna ulaŐılmıŐtır. Denge teorisi perspektifinden ortaya çıkan sonuçlar, tüketicilerin uyumsuz bir ambalaj satın aldıklarında, gerilime maruz kaldıklarını göstermiŐtir. Tüketicilerin bu gerilimi azaltmak için dengeleyici faktörlerden yararlandıkları bulgusu ortaya çıkmıŐtır. Dengeleyici faktörleri ise, “tavsiye”, “marka”, “merak”, “satıŐ özendirme”, “deneme isteĐi”, “baĐımlılık”, “farklılık”, “geçmiŐ deneyim”, “ihtiyaç”, “kısıtlı zaman” ve “mecburiyet” kavramları oluŐturmaktadır. Tüketicilerin uyumsuz ambalajları satın almalarına etki eden unsurların da bu bağlamda “dengeleyici faktörler” olduĐu görülmüŐtür. Dengeleyici faktörler ile söz konusu gerilimin kaybolduĐu belirlenmiŐtir. Tüketicinin “dengeleyici unsurlar” ile etkileŐime geçmesiyle “ürün – ambalaj uyumu” ve “ürün – ambalaj uyumuna etki eden faktörler” unsurları ile olan baĐını kopardıĐı tespit edilmiŐtir. Söz konusu bulgunun gelecekte yapılacak olan arařtırmalar için önemli bir arařtırma konusu olduĐu düşünölmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Paket ŐematıĐı, uyumsuz tasarım, denge teorisi, tüketim

## 1. Introduction

Packaging creates an emotional connection with a product that consumers perceive by addressing the senses of consumers (Harith et al., 2014). Thanks to the emotional relation created, a vital factor emerges in enabling the consumer to distinguish a product from other products (Scheffels and Lund, 2017). In his article published in 1973, Swartz considered packaging as an element of the marketing mix (Swartz, 1973; cited by Sümer and Eser 2006). However, packaging, which has the potential to affect all other elements of the marketing mix, is seen as a controllable variable (Bone and Corey, 2000). Properly designed packaging can increase the likelihood of a product being selected among alternative products available on the market. This makes packaging a concern for consumers. However, companies that want to draw attention to their products at purchasing points can provide ways to communicate with consumers by using packaging elements correctly (Underwood et al., 2001). The correct use of these elements seems possible through the harmony between product and packaging. The importance given by companies to packaging has increased with the understanding that packaging has a direct impact on sales. This reveals the fact that the concept of packaging is more intricately structured than previously thought, and this has led to the proliferation of research in this direction (Vazquez et al., 2003).

When the research is examined, it can be seen that many studies exist in the literature on compatibility between product and packaging and this can provide important clues for companies with regard to proper and effective packaging. Studies that focus on the harmony between the product and its packaging have shown that the colors used in the packaging affect purchasing behavior (Vanhurley and Lynn, 2007; Bezaz, 2014), increase brand recall and recognition (Bezaz, 2014), predict refresh (Zellner and Durlach, 2002; Wei et al., 2014), and create expectations through various perceptions of the product (Garber et al., 2000; Ares and Deliza, 2010; Mead and Richerson, 2018). Additionally, the images used in the packaging were employed to predict product content (Underwood and Klein, 2002), influence taste perception (Mizutani et al., 2010; Rebollar et al., 2016), and affect the message to be delivered to the consumer (Underwood et al., 2001). Morrin and Krishna (2008), on the other hand, highlighted the material used with the finding that touching the packaging gives confidence to the consumer. In the studies in which the packaging elements were handled separately, it was concluded that the elements created perceptions and expectations in the consumer. The findings of the research, in which packaging elements are addressed according to product categories, are in line with this (Wei, 2015; Fenko, 2016, Eldesouky et al., 2016; Simmond and Spence, 2017). In these studies, the effects of elements in packaging design on consumer perception were examined, and the importance of packaging elements was emphasized. The results obtained in this direction can provide important clues for companies in developing the right packaging. However, studies that have focused on product-packaging harmony

have led to results in findings related to consumer expectation. These findings are limited to the effects of preferences for packaging elements on the consumer. For this reason, it is striking that the product-packaging relationship should be investigated in a wider framework. The current study focuses on the mismatches in the product-packaging relationship, contrary to the literature, and examines consumer purchasing behavior despite the mismatch from the perspective of balance theory (Heider, 1946). The aim here is to contribute to the gap determined in the literature by presenting findings regarding the behavior of consumers in cases of possible mismatches.

## **2. Conceptual framework**

### **2.1. Packaging**

Packaging is widely described as a container that carries and protects a product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). It is known that packaging has the potential to affect sales strategies, marketing strategies and brand value rather than being only a container (Vazquez et al., 2003). Packaging, described as a “silent seller” by Dichter in 1957, resulted in creating an emotional bond with the consumer (Harith et al., 2014). This view of the package is considered to have the ability to strengthen and weaken (Underwood, 2003). All these effects and properties of packaging start from the moment of purchase of the product and last until the end of consumption (Krishna et al., 2017). These effects seem to be possible through direct communication with the consumer in this process (Siloyoi & Speece, 2007). The mentioned communication of the packaging (Siloyoi & Speece, 2007), which is defined as an element of the marketing mix by Swartz (1973), is achieved by distinguishing it from other products (Scheffels & Lund, 2010) using cues conveyed to the consumer (Vazquez et al., 2003). These distinctions are revealed by the level of consumer sensitivity regarding design elements and design elements themselves (Becker, 2011).

It was found that the color used in packaging by Kauppinen-Raisanen (2014) attracted the attention of the consumer either voluntarily or involuntarily at the point of sale. In studies focusing on the harmony between product and packaging elements, the colors used in packaging affect buying behavior (Vanhurley & Lynn, 2007; Bezaz, 2014), increasing the level of brand recognition (Bezaz, 2014), freshness (Zellner & Durlach, 2002; Wei et al., 2014), estimates of flavor (Piqueras & Spence, 2012) and quality (Vanhurley & Lynn, 2007). Moreover, they generate expectations through various perceptions of the product (Garber et al., 2000; Ares & Deliza, 2010; Mead & Richerson, 2018). However, with the implications of the visuals used in packaging with regard to product content (Underwood & Klein, 2002), flavor (Mizutani et al., 2010; Rebollar et al., 2016) and health (Mizutani et al., 2010; Pires & Agente, 2011; Rebollar et al., 2016), it has been found that there are influences on the perception of the messages that are intended to be delivered to the consumer (Underwood et al., 2001). The shape being chosen in packaging

design also affects the perception of products (Fenko, 2016; Valesco et al., 2013), health (Fenko, 2016; Ooijen et al., 2017), satisfaction (Raghubir & Krishna, 1999), and creates expectations (Ares & Deliza, 2010). On the other hand, Morrin and Krishna (2008) highlighted the material element used and found that touching the packaging gives confidence to the consumer. In the studies in which packaging elements are handled separately, it is concluded that the elements constitute a perception and expectation in the consumer. Moreover, in studies that examine packaging as a whole (Cardello, 1994; Deliza et al., 2002; Smith & Taylor, 2004; Kotler et al., 2005; Becker et al., 2010; Mizutani et al., 2010; Simmond & Spence, 2017), similar results ensued regarding expectations and perceptions. Studies in which packaging elements are handled according to product categories (Wei., 2015; Fenko, 2016; Eldesouky et al., 2016; Simmond & Spence, 2017) also presented findings in the same direction. In the studies mentioned up to this point, the effects of the elements in packaging design on consumer perception have been examined, and the importance of the packaging elements has been emphasized. The study results elucidate the significance of selecting the appropriate packaging and assess the impact of packaging elements on consumer product preferences. However, the substantial influence of packaging underscores the necessity to approach the issue from diverse angles. Consequently, the present study hones in on potential mismatches between products and their packaging. Within this investigation, the factors influencing a consumer's product choice in instances of incongruity between the product and its packaging are delved into.

## 2.2. Balance Theory

Balance theory was presented to the literature by Heider in 1946. The theory has emerged as a social cognitive network analysis that expresses the state of balance formed for the focused individual (Adejumo et al., 2008). Heider discussed many aspects of interpersonal relationships using a language of symbols in the analysis (Horowitz et al., 1951). In the analysis, there is a structure consisting of P (person), O (another person), and X (a non-human being). POX analysis is accepted as the starting point of balance theory in the literature. Each relationship between units is designed as being dependent on the other (Cartwright & Harary, 1956).

Heider (1946) distinguished two kinds of relationships that are very important in the development of the theory. The links of these relationships are expressed using symbols and letters in the analysis. The first of the relationships emphasizes attitudes, behaviors, or similar. If the connection in question is positive, the letter "L" is used. A negative connection is represented by the letter and symbol in the form of "~ L." At this point, the meanings of the letters and symbols are as follows (Cartwright & Harary, 1956):

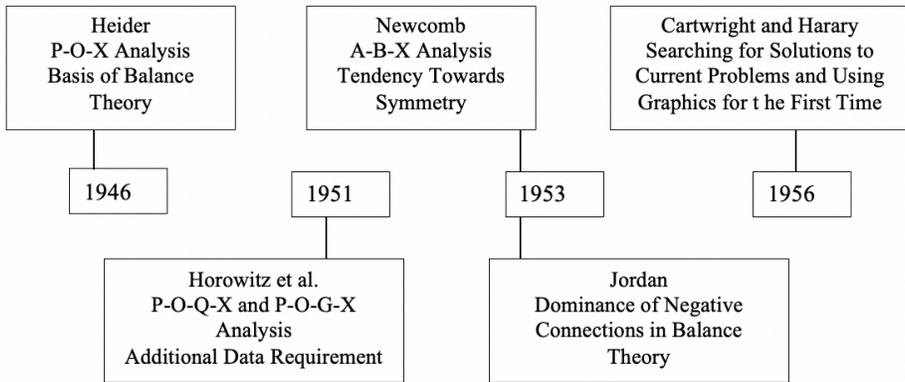
- PLO, the person who is expressed with the letter "P," "likes," or "values," the person who is expressed with the letter "O."

- $P \sim LO$ , the person expressed by the letter “P” does not “like,” “value,” or “approve of” the person expressed by the letter “O.”

The type of relationship shown above is called an emotional relationship in the analysis. Another type of relationship that Heider distinguishes is the cognitive relationship. Cognitive relationships focus on similarity, ownership, causality, physical proximity, or situations of belonging. As an expression, the letter “U” is used for positive connections, and “ $\sim U$ ” is used for negative connections. The meanings of the letters and symbols are as follows (Cartwright & Harary, 1956):

- PUX, the person who is expressed with the letter “P,” “possesses” the object or entity expressed by the letter “X.”
- $P \sim UX$ , the person expressed by the letter “P” does not “own” or “possess” the object or entity expressed by the letter “X.”

Due to the view that balance theory cannot be sufficient alone in explaining human relations because of the complexity of relationships, it has been proposed to use different theories simultaneously in balance theory (Yap & Harrigan, 2015). In addition to this prediction, studies stating that there are points at which the theory is lacking (Horowitz et al., 1951; Newcomb, 1953; Cartwright and Harary, 1956;) are seen in the literature. The theory, which is thought to have deficiencies at some points, has been subjected to some adaptations and changes over time, as seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** History of Balance Theory

In an experimental study, Horowitz et al. (1951) suggested supportive findings to reveal the balanced state in the POX analysis. This study seems to support Heider. However, when the social situation in a group is examined from the perspective of person P, it was found that it would not be only O person who affects person P. It has been revealed as a result of the study that a more complex structure is affecting this relationship situation. In other words, it is argued that the evaluation of person

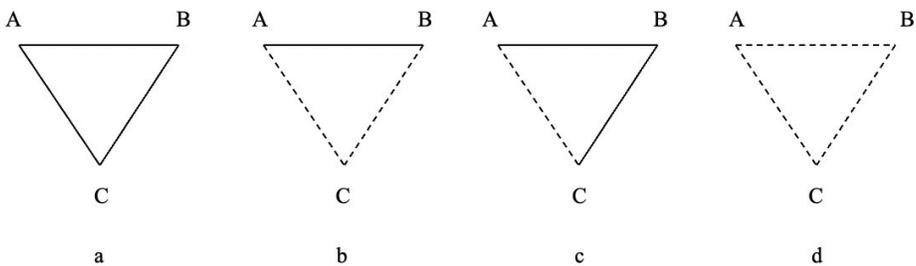
P against action X is due not only to person O. It is stated that the evaluation of person P for action X is also caused by person Q2 in the group. These findings have led to the development of the POQX model, which derives from the need for additional data. The others mentioned in the Horowitz et al. study are defined as “Q1, Q2, Q3.” However, Horowitz et al. mention that the perception of P remains psychological. In other words, people are affected by the situation, but they do not exhibit any behavior. The only difference for the POGX model, whose results are revealed in parallel with the POQX model, is that the perception of P is not only psychological but also as a response or action.

On the other hand, the importance of additional information was emphasized by Jordan (1953), who argued in his study that there was a negative connection with dissatisfaction in the state of balance. This dissatisfaction is sharper when an extension of P is negative (Cartwright & Harary, 1956).

Newcomb proposed an ABX model similar to the POX model in 1953. In response to Heider’s “tendency towards balanced” view, the model presents a notion of “tendency towards symmetry” (Cartwright & Harary, 1956). This view can be achieved by being in agreement or agreeing together (Yang & Bentley, 2017).

Cartwright and Harary (1956) identified five problems that emerged in the literature on balance theory. They also made suggestions for solutions to these problems. These problems are listed as “whether it is possible to design all the relations symmetrically, the probability of the units to contain more than three assets, whether all the relations have a negative connection, the situation in which the differences in the relationship types are not clear, and the need to characterize the distinction between cognitive field and social system.”

Cartwright and Harary (1956) focused on more general issues in line with Heider’s point of view. In addition to these problems, Cartwright and Harary (1956) synthesized the outputs derived from graphic theory with Heider’s balance theory in their study. In this context, straight lines represent positive, and dashed lines represent negative connections. They expressed the use of the balance theory with graphics, as in the following figures.



**Figure 2.** Explanation of balance and imbalance conditions  
**Source:** Cartwright and Harary (1956). Structural Balance: A Generalization of Heider’s Theory

### 2.3. Reflection of Balance Theory in Marketing Literature

Heider (1958) posited that attitudes toward an individual are influenced by the possessions they own, suggesting that the role of assets is pivotal in establishing balanced relationships. Concurrently, Solomon (1999) contends that balance theory is not only applicable to interpersonal dynamics but can also be effectively employed in developing marketing strategies and comprehending consumer behavior (Woodside & Chebat, 2001).

It is well-established that consumers seek information about products before making a purchase decision (Vanhurley & Lynn, 2007). This quest for information is driven by a desire to achieve balance, as consumers strive to substantiate their choices with additional knowledge, thereby averting potential post-purchase uncertainties (Woodside & Chebat, 2001).

Han et al. (2017) delve into imbalances arising from the juxtaposition of sustainable fashion and luxury consumption, elucidating the disparity between purchasing behavior and moral attitudes based on Heider's theory. The study explores scenarios aimed at restoring balance, including creating a negative association with sustainable fashion, disrupting the link between sustainability and sustainable fashion consumption, and fostering a more positive connection with sustainability. Despite participants' awareness of sustainability, reservations about engaging in sustainable fashion consumption persist, underscoring the ongoing imbalance in this domain.

While recognizing the positive impact of sustainable fashion consumption on consumers, it is evident that such behavior may not be consistently exhibited in every situation. Adapting balance theory to non-symmetrical propositions in consumption psychology proves invaluable (Woodside & Chebat, 2001), offering insights into how imbalances between elements can shape shifts in consumer attitudes and behaviors (Han et al., 2017). The predictive capacity of balance theory in delineating consumer reactions to situations of both balance and imbalance (Molet et al., 2015) holds significant implications for marketing professionals.

However, there appears to be a gap in incorporating Heider's substantial contributions into empirical and theoretical studies within consumption psychology (Woodside & Chebat, 2001). Bridging this lacuna is achievable by integrating balance theory into marketing science studies, thereby enhancing our understanding of consumer dynamics.

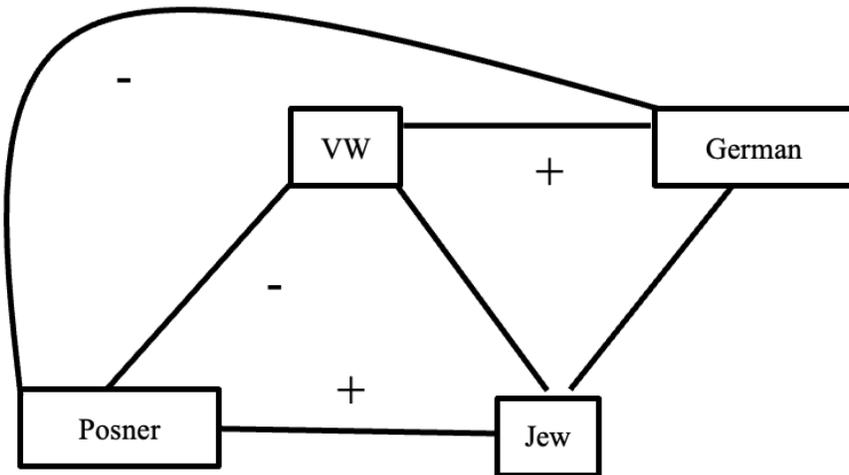
The New York Times featured a compelling story in 1998 by Posner recounting a columnist's unique experience with the Volkswagen brand (Posner, 1998). In this narrative, the author expresses a desire to purchase the Volkswagen New Beetle, a German-made vehicle. Intriguingly, the columnist had previously refrained from buying German products due to being a member of a Jewish family. This personal history of boycotting German products until that point adds a distinctive layer to the author's journey in considering the Volkswagen brand.

Should we prompt the author to craft a story about their encounter with the Volkswagen brand, it is plausible that the resulting narrative would closely align with the one published. The implications drawn from such a story offer valuable insights into the emotions and thoughts that influence consumer behavior (Kubacki & Siemieniako, 2017). Moreover, this narrative lends itself to analysis within the framework of balance theory (Woodside & Chebat, 2001).

Examining the story through the perspective of balance theory provides a nuanced understanding of how the author navigates conflicting sentiments, where the desire for the New Beetle clashes with historical reservations towards German products. The dynamics at play in this narrative highlight the delicate balance individuals strike in reconciling personal beliefs and purchasing decisions.

Incorporating this story into discussions on balance theory enriches our comprehension of how deeply ingrained attitudes can impact consumer behavior. The story becomes a case study, illustrating the intricate interplay of emotions and beliefs that guide choices in the marketplace and reinforces the relevance of psychological theories in understanding consumer decision-making processes.

The initial balance situation for Posner is as shown in Figure 3.

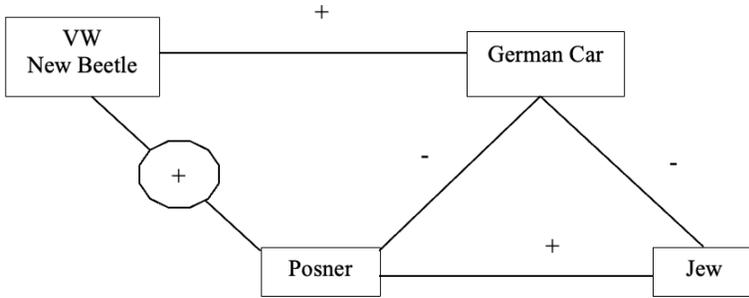


**Figure 3.** Original Balance State

**Source:** Woodside & Chebat (2001). A Jewish Couple Buys a German Car and Additional Buying- Consuming Transformation Stories

Upon encountering the New Beetle model, Posner finds himself in a cognitive dissonance akin to the unstable situation depicted in Figure 4 (Woodside & Chebat, 2001). The visual representation in Figure 4 from Woodside and Chebat serves as an apt illustration of the mental conflict that arises within Posner's mind as he contemplates the prospect of purchasing the Volkswagen model. This unstable

situation encapsulates the tension between his longstanding boycott of German products, rooted in his family's Jewish heritage, and the allure of the New Beetle that piques his interest. The visual depiction offers a compelling visualization of the internal discord and psychological intricacies at play in Posner's decision-making process.

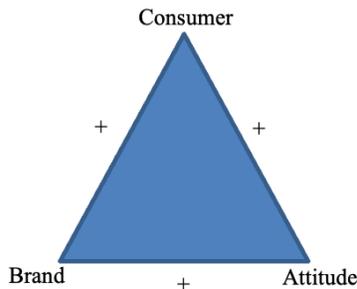


**Figure 4.** State of Imbalance in the Mind After Seeing Posner's New Beetle Model

**Source:** Woodside ve Chebat (2001). A Jewish Couple Buys a German Car and Additional Buying- Consuming Transformation Stories

Despite this unstable situation, Posner orders a Beetle. When he started driving the vehicle, whenever he thought of driving a German car, he directed his thoughts to the workers on the Mexican border working in the construction of this vehicle. This orientation reduces tension and acts as a balancing factor.

Where the connections may be quadruple or more complex, the relationships all stem from the consumer's subjective perspective. Although a brand will provide ownership or a benefit, if the consumer has a negative perception, a negative relationship will arise in terms of brand and attitude (Woodside & Chebat, 2001).



**Fig. 5.** Consumer - Brand - Attitude Relationship

**Source:** Woodside ve Chebat (2001). Updating Heider’s Balance Theory in Consumer Behavior: A Jewish Couple Buys a German Car and Additional Buying-Consuming Transformation Stories

In Figure 5, the assumption is that the individual has a preference for manual transmission cars. The connection between the brand and attitude is established based on the brand offering vehicles with manual transmission. Consequently, a state of balance is achieved among these elements, fostering a positive association between the person and the brand (Woodside & Chebat, 2001). Conversely, in a negative scenario analogous to the example presented in Figure 3, the consumer may opt not to purchase the product initially. However, the essence of balance theory, as articulated by Molet et al. (2015), lies in the restoration of balance when there is an imbalance. The balancing elements (Q2) play a crucial role in rectifying the situation.

The concept of a brand, defined as the combination of features distinguishing the producer or seller from competitors (Kotler & Gertner, 2002), transcends being a passive subject of marketing operations. Instead, it emerges as a pivotal element contributing actively to diverse and dynamic relationships (Fournier, 2013). This perspective underscores the brand's role in not just conveying product attributes but actively shaping connections with consumers, further highlighting its significance within the framework of balance theory.

Research based on marketing science shows that balance theory helps researchers understand consumer behavior. In the current research, it is planned to create scenarios based on balance theory, just like in Gerald Posner's story. Both balance theory literature and packaging literature were used to create the relevant scenarios. All this planning is explained in the research design section.

### **3. Research Design**

It is demonstrated in the packaging literature that packaging is an important stimulus that affects consumer purchasing behavior. It is also clearly shown in the literature which features of the packaging make the packaging a stimulus and how it has an effect on the consumer, and most of the studies in this direction have concentrated on packaging elements. These studies examine the packaging elements in terms of color, material, shape, other visual aspects, and label titles. A large part of the research examines consumer evaluations of packaging elements. These evaluations by consumers provide important data regarding the harmony between the product and the packaging. Studies in this direction in the literature can guide industry representatives in combining the most correct packaging elements for their particular product. In this fashion, consumer expectations for product-packaging harmony are understood by considering the product category. Then, a possible incompatibility between product and packaging can be avoided. Research from this perspective focuses on the product evaluation process carried out by the consumer and the impact of the correct and appropriate packaging choice at the time of purchase. However, it is known that there are separate lines and features for each product category in the packaging process. This situation has made it necessary to consider the possibility of making mistakes. For example, packaging elements that have been incorrectly selected for the product create a mismatch between the product and the

packaging. The resulting mismatch creates negative effects on the consumer. Damage caused by these negative effects is of great importance to companies. In cases of incompatibility, two possible forms of behavior arise, namely whether or not the consumer buys the product. In the related literature, it is seen that a wrongly chosen packaging element, in other words, the results of the incompatibility between the product and the packaging, are not sufficiently emphasized. In this context, studies on the incompatibility between product and packaging constitute an important gap in the literature. The studies generally focus on the perceptual relationships between consumer, product, and packaging. The results made it clear that these relationships were strongly influenced by each other. Moreover, the fact that this relationship between product and packaging contains a multi-faceted interaction requires that the subject be supported by a more effective research method. Based on all these factors, the aim of the research is as follows:

- To discover the balancing factors affecting the consumer purchasing the product in the mismatch between the product and its packaging.

The necessity of explaining the more versatile relationships among the consumer, product, and packaging more effectively increases the importance of creating a research design for this framework. The findings in the packaging literature show that this triple relationship consists of both emotional and cognitive relationships. Researching by making use of the science of psychology comes from the fact that relationships have emotional and cognitive characteristics. Heider discussed the relations between balance theory and units in many ways. For this reason, balance theory is deemed appropriate for the planned design of the current research.

To investigate the relationships among the consumer, product, and packaging based on the theory of balance, each sub-element of each element should also be examined. This review is based on research conducted by Horowitz et al. (1951) on the need for additional data affecting balance factors. As a result of the literature review of the links, which were initially seen to be composed of three elements, such as Heider's POX analysis, it is seen that it is necessary to separate the five basic elements as POQ1Q2X to achieve more effective results. These elements emerge as follows:

- Consumer
- Factors affecting the product-packaging harmony
- Harmony between product and packaging
- Balancing factors
- Purchasing behavior

The relations of the elements listed above within the scope of balance theory and their aspects are explained by using the packaging literature. Moreover, these relationships are supported by graphics, as Cartwright and Harary (1956) used for the first time in balance theory.

### **3.1. The Relationship Between Balancing Factors and Factors Affecting Product-Packaging Harmony**

It is known that a professionally prepared packaging design directly affects product or brand success. It is important to fulfill the requirements of packaging design and technology to achieve this success (Oladumiye, 2018). Marketers and packaging designers work simultaneously in the packaging design process. It is important for marketers to convey accurately the consumer experience, as well as the wishes and needs they have identified (Siloyoi & Speece, 2007). A successful design that has emerged as a result of this cooperation is possible by conveying the desired message to the consumer correctly (Oladumiye, 2018). The basis of a successful design is the correct use of factors (color(s), shape(s), material(s), visual(s), etc.) that affect product-packaging harmony. The effect of these factors may vary depending on the level of consumer participation, time pressure, or characteristics (Kuvykaite et al., 2009). For these reasons, the design elements of product packaging are not generalized to the specificity of a brand, experience, or other balancing factors.

Businesses can create their brand and brand identities. However, it is not possible for businesses to independently create packaging designs as different design lines and features need to be developed for each product and product category (Scheffels & Lund, 2017). In a study conducted by Sütütemiz et al. (2009), results supporting these findings were obtained. In the study, it was observed that consumers paid more attention to the packaging elements than the brand while buying packaged dairy products. The results showed that no structure connects between the balancing factors and the factors affecting product-packaging harmony. In other words, the features to which consumers pay attention in packaging elements differ not by brands but by-products (Sütütemiz et al., 2009). Vazquez et al. (2003) state that many brands in the market imitate the packaging design of the market leader. Vazquez et al. emphasize that this is a tactic.

Products may differ in terms of packaging elements according to consumer profiles. For example, dark colors are used in product packaging that appeal to high-income consumers and will be available at a high price. However, for a product that appeals to the general consumer, light-colored packages are preferred. If it is desired to create a guaranteed and safe perception for the product, the packaging color used would be red. While a thick, wide, and Roman character is used on a special product, serif and sans serif characters are used in an accessible product. In addition to this information, while the picture of the product is emphasized in elite products, human figures are preferred for inaccessible products (Ampuero & Vila, 2006). Studies emphasize that the factors affecting packaging elements may vary according to product and consumer category. However, the factor affecting any packaging element is not indispensable for any brand. For example, the Pepsi brand can use black and blue for sugar-free products. In the same vein, a brand does not adopt a single color, nor does it adopt a single shape. All findings show that there is no positive cognitive relationship between balancing factors and factors affecting product-packaging harmony.

### **3.2. The Relationship Between Balancing Factors and Purchasing Behavior**

Ooijen et al. (2016) found that the consumer does not care about the shape of the packaging when it tends to be a hedonic purchase. In this context, purchasing behavior occurs independently of the package schema. The relationship between balancing factors and purchasing behavior concerns situations where the consumer ignores the package schematic at the time of purchase. The balancing factors expected to be expressed more clearly with the possible findings of this study may vary according to the consumer's profile. Bone and Corey (2000) conducted a study concluding that the point of view of ethical values in packaging achieved serious distinctions between business people and consumers. Butkeviciene et al. (2008) found that consumers are more affected by visual stimuli in shopping under time pressure, while consumers who do not feel pressure are more affected by written stimuli. It can be seen that time pressure reduces the possibility of a holistic perception by the consumer regarding the package schematic. Another example of balancing factors is sustainability. Environmentally friendly packaging is increasing with smart packaging systems (Callaghan & Kerry, 2016). Thus, both the structural elements and graphic design of packages affect consumer perception of sustainability (Steenis et al., 2017). It is known that many consumers make purchases in this direction. In addition to all these factors, it attracts attention to the product many times in terms of brand and product preferences (Fournier, 1998). Regarding the above studies, it can be said that there is no positive relationship between balancing factors and purchasing behavior.

### **3.3. The Relationship Between Product-Packaging Harmony and Purchasing Behavior**

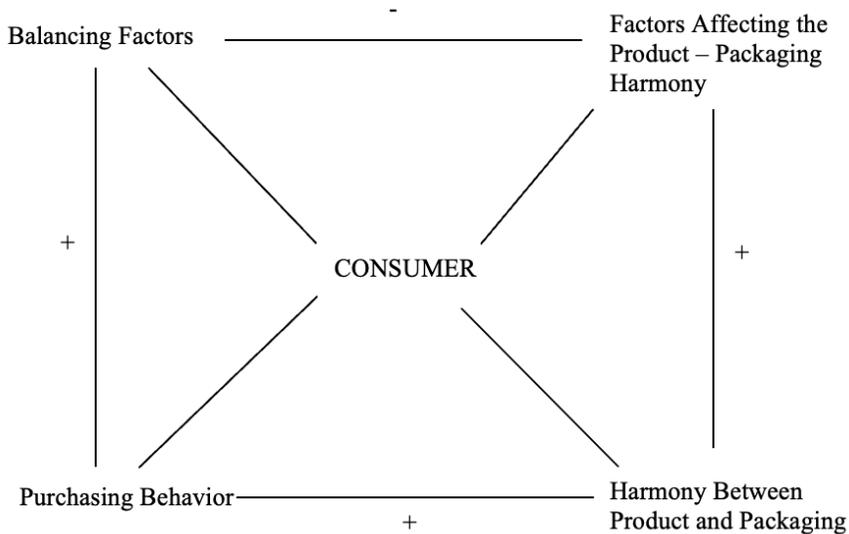
Thanks to its active role in the consumer purchasing decision process, packaging has become a strategic marketing tool (Vazquez et al., 2003; Silayoi & Speece, 2007). Although the first and most basic feature of packaging is to protect the product and deliver it to the consumer, consumers demand many different packaging requirements. In one study (Ooijen et al., 2016), the effects of product shape on health perception in packaging were examined. In the study, the features of a thin human body and a fat human body were transferred to bottles. The responses of the consumer in this context were examined. The slim body shape on the bottle affected the consumer who intended to purchase healthy products. According to the results of this study, thin bottles for consumers who prefer healthy products had product-packaging harmony, which positively affected their purchasing behavior. Another study revealed that consumers preferred packaging that was plastic and rectangular when buying cheese (Eldesouky et al., 2016). Moreover, there is a perception that the shelf life of cheeses may vary depending on the type of packaging material used (Callaghan & Kerry, 2016). These findings clearly show consumers' perception that the product and packaging may be in harmony. The correct use of factors affecting product-packaging harmony reveals product-packaging harmony. Packaging compatible with a product provides a significant competitive advantage (Rundh, 2005), which can also directly affect sales and product success.

### 3.4. The Relationship Between Factors Affecting Product-Packaging Harmony and Product-Packaging Harmony

The aspects consumers prioritize in packaging, and their perceptions of packaging vary depending on the product (Sütütemiz et al., 2009). This distinction emphasizes that packaging cannot be assessed in isolation from the product. In essence, there exists a correlation between the factors influencing the harmony between the product and its packaging. Drawing on Heider's (1946, 1958) balance theory, one can argue for the existence of a cognitive relationship between these elements. Visual and written elements affecting product-packaging compatibility are discussed in detail in the packaging literature section of the study. In this section, the relationship between factors affecting product-packaging harmony and product-packaging harmony is discussed.

Ampuero and Vila (2006) studied the effects on the consumer of correct product design and positioning. In this study, the necessity of making sense of the consumer's perception of the packaging was examined. A successful design seems to be possible by using design elements correctly to deliver the desired message effectively.

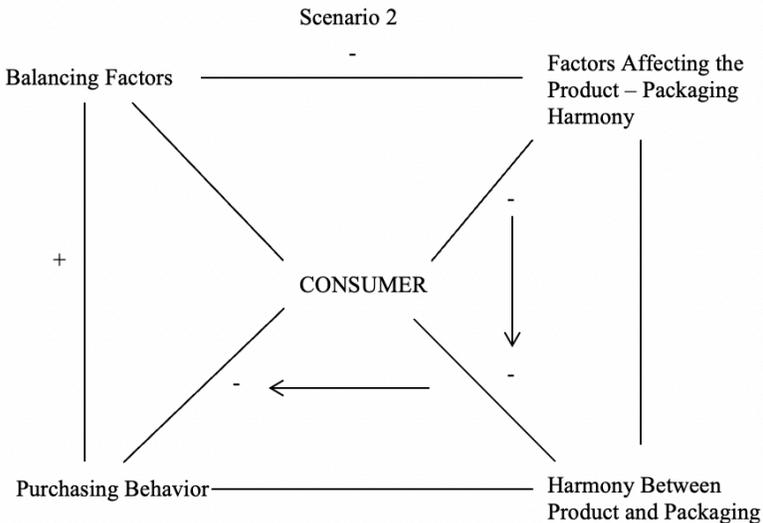
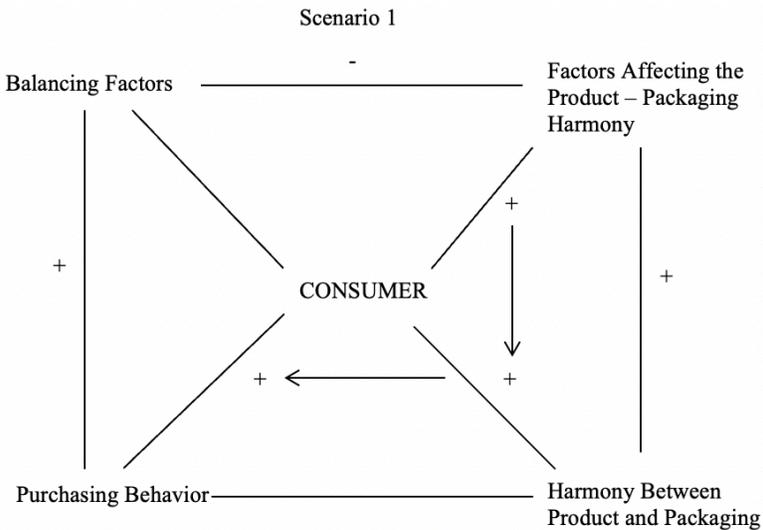
Although the elements and principles of the design are universally perceived, designers can add their comments to these elements and principles in an effective packaging design (Oladumiye, 2018). To create a correct perception in the mind of the consumer, the elements must be used in different combinations in the most correct manner (Ampuero & Vila, 2006). For example, selling a surface cleaner in a black glass jar may cause an undesirable result in consumer perception.



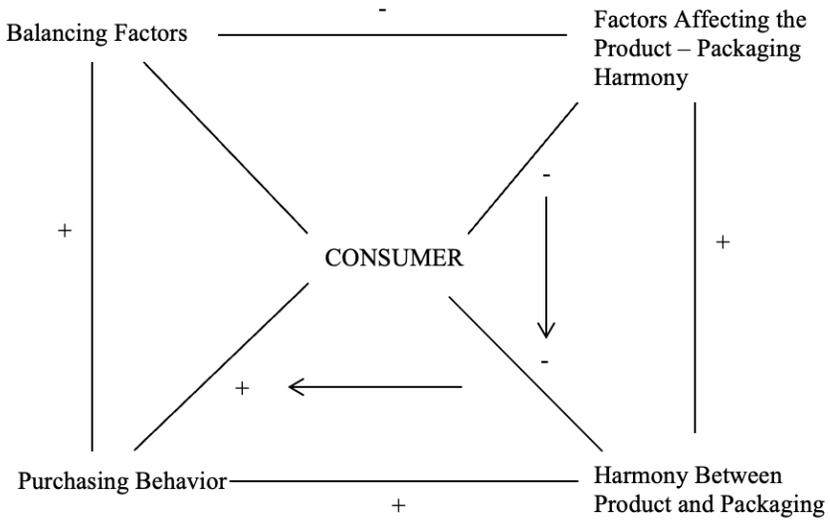
**Figure 6.** Connection aspects of the elements based on the packaging literature

According to the balance theory, the four factors associated above consist of cognitive relationships among themselves. Positive or negative representations of these elements have emerged in the context of the results of studies in the literature. The direction of these connections from positive to negative or negative to positive seems to be possible in the literature with the results of contrary studies. In other words, the direction of the rectangular connections is fixed, as shown in the figure.

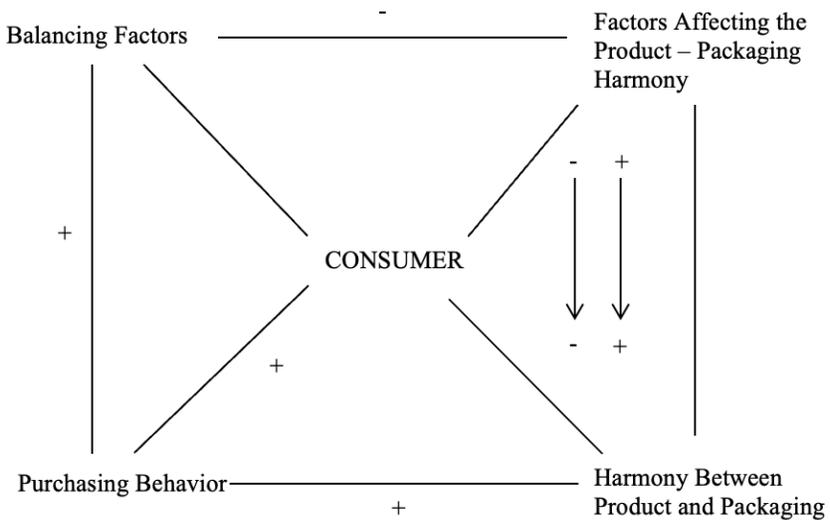
According to the balance theory, the consumer’s evaluations against the factors cause the emergence of balance or imbalance states. In this context, possible scenarios and solutions for the research are formed as follows:

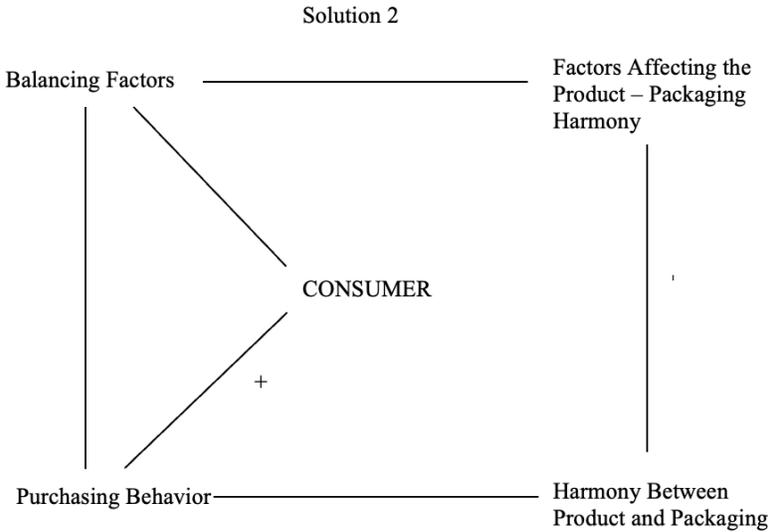


Scenario 3



Solution 1





**Figure 7.** Scenarios and solutions

In Scenario 1, the positive judgment of the consumer regarding the factors affecting product-packaging harmony ensures that the judgment against product-packaging harmony is also positive. In such a situation, balance occurs between the elements. This balance situation affects the consumer's attitude towards other elements close to these connections. That is to say, the consumer's liking of the color, shape, or other elements of the package leads to the perception of the product and the packaging as being in harmony. This harmony also positively contributes to the purchasing behavior of the consumer. Thus, two different balance conditions occur among the elements.

It is seen that the positive connections in Scenario 1 are affected by each other in Scenario 2 and turned into a negative. The negative emergence of the connections does not mean that the balance state has disappeared. In this scenario, the balance is maintained.

Unlike Scenarios 1 and 2, in Scenario 3, there is an imbalance between consumer, product-packaging harmony, and purchasing behavior. This imbalance is due to the consumer purchasing the product despite the negative judgment of the product-packaging harmony. It is known that in every imbalanced situation, the elements struggle for balance, which is the basis of the balance theory. In such an imbalance, the connections are expected to seek a solution for balance. Thus, two possible solutions are expected. However, the situation in Scenario 3 represents the research question of the study.

The first possible solution for removing the imbalance in Scenario 3 is that the consumer's judgment about the factors affecting the product-packaging harmony

changes after purchasing the product. As seen in Solution 1, the change from negative to positive against the factors affecting product-packaging harmony leads to a positive change in the judgment regarding product-packaging harmony. In this case, the balance state is recovered.

In Solution 2, it is observed that the consumer's judgment regarding the factors affecting the product-packaging harmony remains negative. The imbalance that occurs when the consumer buys the product forces the elements into a different solution. In this case, it is thought that the consumer bought the product influenced by different factors. These items are expressed as balancing factors. The positive connection of balancing factors with the consumer weakens the consumer's relationship with product-packaging harmony. Thus, a new balance is created between consumer, purchasing behavior, and balancing factors.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Recruitment and Participants**

In a qualitative study, a relatively small and purposively selected sample can be used to increase the depth of understanding (Campbell et al., 2020). This entails identifying and choosing individuals who possess significant knowledge or experience with a particular phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Thirteen participants, consisting of six women and seven men aged between 25 and 50, participated in the study. They were purposively selected based on the following criteria: i) purchasing packaged coffee products from coffee stores or retail outlets and ii) having awareness of product and packaging compatibility. Participants included in the study were contacted through the researchers' own contacts and snowball sampling.

In order to minimize the privacy risk of study participants, it was decided to publish the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants as group data instead of a table listing them line by line. This is because the number of demographic labels or identifiers associated with participants compromises confidentiality (Morse & Coulehan, 2015), and even if the names are changed, these labels make it possible for those who knew the participants in the study to identify them later (Morse, 2007). Thus, in instances where ethical issues arose during the research process (i.e., data collection, analysis, and reporting), participants were referred to by pseudonyms.

### **4.2. Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Using the in-depth interview method, it can be learned whether the connections of the elements that are related to the consumer are cognitive or emotional. Moreover, the positivity and negativity of the aspects of these relations have been learned. A guide was developed pulling primarily from packaging literature related to factors

influencing product-packaging compatibility. The aim of using an interview schedule was to facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participants, which will, in turn, enable them to provide detailed insights under study. The interview guide included ideal location, hypothetical, and interpretative questions, respectively. The participants' responses to the items were obtained during the interview using the previously prepared gap-filling method. Such questions were like, "The coffee packaging should be ..... colored.", "Coffee packaging should be ..... shaped" or "The shape of the coffee packaging cannot be .....". From the answers obtained from the gap-filling questions, the most compatible and incompatible evaluations of the participants regarding the coffee packaging were determined, and from the evaluations of the participants, a harmonious and incompatible description of the coffee packaging emerged for each participant. Other included questions were like "Do you notice product packaging in your shopping? What do you think is the most striking feature of a package?" or "How does the (in)compatibility between the product and its packaging affect your purchasing decisions?", which enabled participants to direct the focus of the interview. During the interview, an attempt was made to create the unbalanced situation that occurred in Scenario 3 in the mind of the participant. This situation was created by telling a story in which the participant included himself. In the story, the participant purchased a coffee product that had coffee packaging that he portrayed as incompatible. After his recounting, the focus was placed on the questions about the balancing factors that enabled the participant to purchase this product. In addition to this information, it was examined as to whether the participant had complied with Scenario 3 according to the answers given by each participant. The majority of interviews took place in cafes, with only two participants preferring to hold theirs on the university campus. Also, the duration of interviews averaged 40 minutes with no breaks and was audio-recorded.

During the interviews, the participants' voices were recorded and transferred to the *Microsoft Word* program. The transcriptions were first read simultaneously with the audio recording, and the researchers did repeated readings to familiarize themselves with the interview data. Then, the participants' interview data was analyzed in-depth, considering semantic content and language use. Noteworthy aspects were annotated on the right side of the transcription, aiming to highlight the content, topic, and key elements of the passage. During the analysis process, manual coding was performed. Following the analysis of the first participant, the researchers repeated the same process for transcribing another participant. The coded data was shaped in alignment with the theoretical framework, and subsequently, the themes were gathered and translated into results.

## **5. Findings and Discussion**

### ***Balancing Factors***

Despite the incompatibility between the product and the packaging, the factors

affecting the purchase of the product are expressed as balancing factors. In line with the answers received in the interview, the participants’ assessments of balancing factors are tabulated as follows.

**Table 1.** Participants’ responses regarding balancing factors

	Prevalence of balancing factors												
	Ertuğrul	Oğuzhan	Tuğçe	Emine	Meltem	Dilara	Gülcan	Bekir	Nil	Mehmet	Ömer	Tevfik	Hüseyin
<b>Advice</b>		✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Curiosity</b>				✓			✓	✓				✓	
<b>Brand</b>			✓	✓				✓					✓
<b>Sales Promotion</b>					✓		✓					✓	

It was seen that 11 out of 13 participants were affected by more than one factor. The answers received focused on 4 different balancing factors. Among the balancing factors, advice was the factor most focused upon by the participants. 4 participants described the recommendation as the first element, and 4 participants described the recommendation as a balancing element, second or third. Thus, 8 of the participants evaluated the recommendation as a balancing factor in the case of imbalance. Other prominent elements regarded included “brand,” “curiosity,” and “sales promotion.” “Brand” and “curiosity” were evaluated as balancing factors by 4 participants, while “sales promotion” was expressed as a balancing factor by 3 participants.

**Advice**

It is seen that the participants are in contact with balancing factors to move from an imbalanced state to a balanced state. The unbalanced situation that occurs in Scenario 3 also brings a risk factor that may occur before or after the participant purchases the product. A large number of the participants assumed that they may have reduced the risk with the recommendations. It is known that consumers tend to receive information from many people about untested and high-risk products (Arndt, 1967). The reasons for this trend, how the process works, and its structure can be expressed more strongly by examining the word-of-mouth communication as well as the responses received from the participants. Hajli et al. (2014) argued that for a new product or service to be successful, the consumer must have confidence in that product or service. In their study, they argued that the consumer provides a sense of trust in three ways: through recommendation, referral, and review. A trust mechanism for consumers is created

by the word-of-mouth communication factor, which is encountered in three ways in the social context (Hajli et al., 2014; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003; Lin & Yuh, 2010) and strongly influences the behavior of consumers (Dichter 1966: 155; Richins, 1983: 68; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Herr et al., 1991; Duhan et al., 1997; Buttle, 1998; Halstead, 2002; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003; Keller, 2007; East et al., 2008; Lin & Yuh, 2010). It was determined that the most important factor affecting the feeling of trust in the participants was the compatibility or incompatibility between the product and the packaging.

*“There must be harmony between the product it offers and the packaging, and it must be reassuring. For example, if it is a cheese, its preservation, hygiene, etc. If it is a biscuit product, there should be color harmony that shows its freshness. After that, the colors show that there is wheat in the biscuit.”* (Tevfik)

It is seen from the participants’ assessment that the product-packaging mismatch causes insecurity, and this insecurity comes with a risk factor. The perceived risk emerges as the main reason for the consumer encountering an unbalanced situation by stretching. To relieve the tension in question, it is insufficient to use only the product. This relief provides a restoration of balance, which occurs when the consumer receives recommendations from another person (Dichter, 1966).

*“If I have trusted friends around me, I consider their opinions. For example, when they say, “This brand is sold here; it’s really good,” I don’t even look at the packaging; if it suits my taste, I buy it.”* (Tuğçe)

*“As far as my sign goes, they say that Virgos receive a lot of advice but never implement it. Advice is important. When it comes to a product about which I have no idea, I always prioritize the recommendation of someone I trust before my own experience. That’s why it’s important. Because you know the taste of the person giving the advice, allowing you to indirectly infer an opinion. There can be mountains of difference between the recommendation of a stranger and that of someone you know. There should be, really. Trust comes into play again.”* (Hüseyin)

It is known that consumers are seeking advice that is commensurate with the level of risk perceived prior to purchasing (Arndt, 1967; Bangal & Voyer, 2000). The reasons for seeking advice are compelling due to the outcomes for consumers after the recommendation. Sweeney et al. (2008) found that consumers who received the advice decreased risk, the perception of the company improved, psychological relief occurred, and the possibility of purchase increased.

*“I purchase the product either based on recommendations or in accordance with its ingredients. I mean, factors such as the proportion of coffee, the roasting method, and more should appeal to me. Why should I choose to drink this coffee? This coffee is soft, and its aroma lingers in your mouth.”* (Oğuzhan)

*“Someone around me bought a product from that packaging and recommended it to me. I might have taken it to follow his advice. That's an option, so.”* (Mehmet)

Sweeney et al. (2008) support the participants' responses, which see the recommendation as a balancing factor in the loss of this imbalance in the context of balance theory. One of the most important points of word-of-mouth communication is that rather than preventing the advised person from making a bad shopping purchase, it is seen as an act of presenting him with a substitution (Keller, 2007).

*“I might have bought it because it was recommended. I don't usually heed the advice, but I thought it could be worth trying, you know, for a change of taste. A different flavor.”* (Nil)

*“Everyone has a habit. People who have no habits do not accept this without reason. If there is a point of advice based on the experiences of the people around them, this might be it.”* (Ömer)

Word-of-mouth communication, defined as informal advice among consumers, creates positive effects for consumers in adopting new products offered (East et al., 2008). Moldovan et al. (2011) concluded that consumers for the most part recommend new products to each other. However, whether the discourse about the product will be positive or negative occurs after using the product. Consumers can make not only positive comments but also negative comments (Richins, 1983). However, deeming a comment as being positive or negative seems only possible by considering it from a marketing perspective. At this point, the attitude of the consumer is decisive. A recommendation deemed as being negative for the business can be received very positively by the consumer (Buttle, 1998). Negative word-of-mouth communication is regarded as an imbalance between expectations and perceptions (Buttle, 1998). It is not in the interests of the speaker to talk about his experience or expectations about a product or service. Recommendations made without earnings are seen as the main motivation of the listener (Dichter, 1966). There is a finding that consumers are most affected by friends or people who do not gain anything from advice (Dichter, 1966). These findings show that who gave the advice is also important. Dichter analyzed the advisors in seven groups. These emerge as commercial authorities, celebrities, experts, close friends, well-intentioned people, stakeholders of interest, and experienced owners. Consumers can be more affected by any of these groups. Brown and Reingen (1987) found that consumers are more affected by people with strong connections. Duhan et al. (1997) similarly concluded that strong and weak connections in the sources of advice differ in their power to influence the area of recommendation. Bangal and Voyer (2000) have suggested that, besides similar findings, the fact that the person giving the advice has more product information affects the purchase more strongly. The assessment of a participant also parallels these findings.

*"I may have bought a product that is not compatible with the packaging because someone recommended it. The adviser must be either a friend who produces that product or someone I trust."*(Gülcan)

In the above assessment, the participant has both a strong link with the person giving the advice and someone with a high level of knowledge. Speaking to the consumer like a friend or a neutral authority causes the consumer to relax and tend to accept the advice (Dichter, 1966). Therefore, the probability of purchasing also increases (Sweeney et al., 2008). Word-of-mouth communication is seen as an important source of information before or after purchase. This communication can occur spontaneously or is used by businesses as a proactive intervention tool. Famous uses of companies are shown as examples (Buttle, 1998). Word-of-mouth communication can influence customer expectations, brand image, future sales, and profitability (Halstead, 2002; Lin & Yuh, 2010; İsmail & Spinelli, 2012). In this context, it is seen as an important communication channel (Keller, 2007). Chan and Xie (2008) highlight that word-of-mouth communication is a new element of the marketing communication mix. The finding that customers acquired through the recommendation have two times longer communication with businesses compared with other business activities (Villaneuva, 2008) supports the previous results. In this context, the high level of credibility of word-of-mouth communication shows that it creates a serious alternative to traditional media channels (Keller, 2007). It is known that word-of-mouth communication is one of the most effective ways of gaining new customers (Matos & Rossi, 2008) and contributes to people learning the truth about a product (Dichter, 1966). Although consumers are positively or negatively affected by the recommendations, having a negative experience in the past reduces the effect of this recommendation. Halstead (2002) found that behaviors that create dissatisfaction are expressed more than behaviors that result in satisfaction. The satisfaction levels of consumers are also seen as being as important as the subject of word-of-mouth communication. The expression "the best seller is your satisfied customers" emphasizes the importance of satisfaction for businesses that aim to acquire new customers (Engel, 1969). The results of a study on health service quality, patient satisfaction, and word-of-mouth communication (Kitapcı et al., 2014) showed that the level of service quality and satisfaction affected mouth-to-mouth communication. Wengenheim and Bayon (2007) found that new customer acquisition is directly related to word-of-mouth communication. In addition to these findings, Matos et al. (2008) concluded that the concept of word-of-mouth communication and satisfaction is stronger than loyalty, and negative word-of-mouth communication has a stronger relationship than dissatisfaction and loyalty. All this information shows that consumers are strongly influenced by recommendations. Studies conducted in the past reveal that consumers benefit from recommendations in all sectors. Keller (2007) argued that the impact of word-of-mouth communication varies according to sector. Additionally, Keller emphasized that the most positive recommendations focus on packaged products. These findings and answers in the interviews reveal that *advice* is the most important factor that eliminates imbalance.

## **Curiosity**

Curiosity effectively supports purchasing decisions and enables them to turn into behavior. Curiosity enables the consumer to transform from a passive information processor to an active product information processor (Smith & Swinyard, 1988). In the evaluations below, it is seen that the incompatibilities in packaging created curiosity in the participants. It is understood that the feeling of curiosity led the participants to the buying behavior.

*"I may have bought it for my curiosity. Because the packaging is too unrelated to the product."* (Gülcan)

*"The packaging is extremely incompatible. This situation is intriguing."* (Tevfik)

*"I bought it out of curiosity, to experience something different. Curiosity is inherent in me; for instance, in terms of my astrological traits, Aries predominates. Aries is known for its innovativeness. For instance, I enjoy renewing, innovating, and trying new things in every aspect of my life. Therefore, curiosity equates to innovation for me. I enjoy experimenting with different flavors, visiting different places, and trying various products."* (Emine)

It is known that the sense of curiosity created in the consumer creates a positive situation for companies. Curiosity provides a direct motivation for buying behavior. There is a finding that consumers who act with a sense of curiosity at the time of purchase make more positive comments about the products they buy compared to consumers who act without curiosity (Hill et al., 2016).

*"I might have bought it out of curiosity to try. For instance, there might be a chance for it to be better, to reach for something better. Could the taste be different? For example, a brand called Şölen emerged. Ülker is a brand we've been familiar with for years in the chocolate market. You try Şölen; its taste is good. You can choose it as an alternative. So, just because Ülker has a very good image does not necessarily mean that we will buy Ülker."* (Bekir)

*"Because of my curiosity, that's the extent of it! Is there also a lack of harmony in taste, just as in packaging? (...) To what extent does the flavor differ? This piques my interest. I am curious about any subject matter I lack an opinion on and aspire to acquire knowledge of everything unknown to me."* (Gülcan)

Curiosity has been described in the literature as exploratory buying behavior, which is conceptualized based on behavioral and cognitive stimuli in psychological theories and consumer behavior literature (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1996). Dijk and Zeelenberg (2007) designed an experiment by offering participants two different options. In the first option, participants were shown packaging, and nothing was said about what was inside. However, if they were to accept this packaging as a choice, they would be able to open it and learn what was inside; then they would have its contents. In the second option, participants were given

15 euros, but no information regarding the packaging was to be given. Participants who opted for the money would never know what was in the packaging. The results of the study revealed that the participants opted to eliminate their curiosity. In this study, the participants were left in an unbalanced situation. It is possible to eliminate this imbalance and achieve balance by seeing the contents of the package. This seems to be similar to those who selected the concept of “curiosity” as a balancing factor to eliminate Scenario 3.

### **Brand**

The answers received in the in-depth interviews revealed that the participants were strongly influenced by the brand. For example, the following evaluation shows the loyalty of the participant regarding the brand. The participant's choice of the incompatible packaging is because he has past experience with the brand. Choosing a brand among alternatives is considered an important feature of brand loyalty (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973).

*“After all, why could I have bought it? Well, I mean the brand. I consistently use that brand, or it may have been offered to me at a place I previously visited without noticing the coffee packaging. When I eventually ask, ‘What is the brand of this coffee?’ and receive the answer, I become conditioned to the brand and continue purchasing it, even if the packaging is subpar. The taste of the coffee satisfies me greatly. Besides these reasons, there's probably no other influence that matters. In the first scenario, I wouldn't pay attention. If I encountered that coffee for the first time in the supermarket, with no prior knowledge of its taste, amidst numerous other options, I wouldn't choose a triangular and pink-packaged coffee. I'm familiar with that brand; I have some prior knowledge of it.”* (Hüseyin)

Another factor that has an important effect on brand loyalty is the trust provided by the brand. This trust is formed after the positive experiences of the consumer. Negative experiences also reduce consumer confidence in the brand (Jung & Soo, 2012). Şahin et al. (2011) found that brand trust significantly increased loyalty to the brand, which also increases the likelihood of buying. In the evaluations below, it is seen that the participants emphasize the “brand trust” factor. The relationship between brand and trust is clearly stated in Tuğçe's evaluation. However, Emine's evaluation states that the sense of trust was created by a positive brand experience in the past.

*“If they have come up with something different, there is one they know.”* (Tuğçe)

It is believed that such an evaluation emerged with an unconditional sense of trust from the participant.

*“I may have bought it because it is the product of a brand I trust. I use Mehmet Efendi. I buy it from Mehmet Efendi's own point of sale, which is in Eminönü. However, since I don't have such an opportunity in Isparta, I buy it from the market.”* (Tuğçe)

*“Brand, trust, and quality. It takes time for the brand to establish itself. The prolonged consumption of a product is attributed to its quality and safety. A product of poor quality is not used for an extended period.”* (Bekir)

The brand is defined as the name, sign, symbol, design, or combination of all these elements that differentiate a manufacturer or seller from its competitors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). It is known to be the feature that consumers pay attention to most when they do not have brand awareness. On the other hand, there is a finding that consumers who are aware of a brand have little interest in the packaging (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Brand awareness can be created by advertisements, word-of-mouth communication, or sales promotion efforts that the consumer has previously encountered. This awareness can also support the consumer's previous purchases (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995). In this case, the sensitivity of consumers regarding packaging decreases, and the brand becomes the most important stimulant that affects the consumer. The fact that another majority of the answers given to remove the imbalance created in Scenario 3 is that the brand is supported by these findings. Packaging is expressed as the most basic element that visually and structurally brings together a brand's logo, colors, fonts, and materials. In this context, the brand has a close relationship with the elements of the packaging (Underwood, 2003). In other words, the brand is known as an important part of the product, which has an impact on customers' purchase of the product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

*“If it is a famous brand, I may have bought it. If they came up with something different, there is one they know (...) There's effort behind it; they've put in years, and therefore, if it's truly preferred, there's service quality, product quality. For me, quality is important, years are important, and experience is important. I'm also motivated in my own life when I enter such branded places because when I see success, when I immerse myself in this success, and when I acquire something from there, whether it's related to the work I do or in different situations, there's actually an intrinsic motivation for me.”* (Emine)

The brand, which is perceived by consumers as an important indicator of quality and decreasing risk (Rubio et al., 2013: 295), is seen as an important factor that the consumer connects to reach a balance in cases of imbalance. Participants who expressed the brand as being a balancing factor in the in-depth interviews, as Petty and Cacioppo (1986) stated, saw the brand as a controlled thought element that reduces the tension of the mind.

### ***Sales Promotion***

Three of the participants stated that they might have purchased the product due to the effect of sales promotion activities.

*“Why might I have purchased this product? I may not have had alternatives; it might have been discounted, or there could have been a promotion. I've considered*

*these reasons because I'm currently focused on the price and thought, 'Let's give this a try.'"* (Meltem)

In the above assessment, the participant mentioned a sales promotion activity regarding the price. The price reductions used in sales promotion activities are thought to be the most influential option for the consumer (Alvarez & Caiselles, 2005; Hawkes, 2009). In addition to price reductions, activities, and items, such as sweepstakes, gift coupons, reward distributions, and many other efforts, are included in sales promotion activities. (Alvarez and Caiselles, 2005). In addition, businesses can implement a variety of incentivization efforts for different purposes. For example, a product test at a point of sale for a new food product can yield very positive results for businesses. Consumers who have not tasted a new product before and have had no other opportunity to try it tend to purchase the product (Hawkes, 2009). Tevfik evaluated the situation in question during the interview as follows.

*"It is the advice of the department staff; I may have taken it from him; it tasted tasting, I may have bought it."* (Tevfik)

The effectiveness of sales promotion activities may vary depending on the product, type of activity, and consumer (Hawkes, 2009). For this reason, it is necessary to determine the purpose of a sales promotion activity to be selected for companies. Alvarez and Caiselles (2005) mentioned that goals may differ, goals such as increasing the number of visitors to a retail store, creating brand loyalty in the consumer or increasing sales. They suggested that these activities should be examined in two different ways, namely based on products and stores. On the other hand, Blattberg and Briesch (2010) have argued that sales promotions may have different strategic reasons. These reasons are shown as temporarily taking over market share, protecting market share, or preventing any competition caused by new entrants. It is known that the "sales promotion" concept, which is shown among the promotion activities of the marketing mix, directly affects sales (Tıĝlı & Pirtini, 2003). This effect plays an important role in reaching the sales targets of producers and retailers by strongly affecting sales (Alvarez & Caiselles, 2005). In this context, new methods and strategy requirements have emerged as it is frequently used by researchers and industry professionals (Low and Mohr, 2000). These requirements have made the concept of "sales promotion" the most researched subject of the marketing mix (Blattberg & Briesch, 2010). The finding that sales promotion activities affect the product preferences of consumers at the points of purchase (Alvarez & Caiselles, 2005) is supported by the findings from in-depth interviews conducted in the current research.

## **5. Conclusion**

In the literature, it is evident that the product is a primary factor influencing consumers' judgments about packaging elements. Hence, it would be reasonable

to assert that consumers' evaluations of packaging arise from the relationship between the product and its packaging. Consumers perceive these evaluations as either positive or negative depending on the meanings attributed to the elements of both the product and its packaging. While positive statements from consumers regarding packaging indicate harmony between the product and packaging, negative statements signify incompatibility.

In this study, the factors influencing consumer product purchases in the context of product-packaging mismatches were investigated within the framework of balance theory. According to balance theory, an imbalanced situation is anticipated in purchase scenarios that occur despite incompatible packaging elements. In cases of imbalance, consumers are expected to restore balance by reducing tension. In such instances, the purchasing motivations that arise are considered as balancing factors. The findings, analyzed through the lens of balance theory, shed light on the multidimensional relationship between consumers, products, and packaging. When consumers acquire products with incompatible packaging, they experience tension. Our study concludes that consumers employ balancing factors to alleviate this tension. Notably, 'advice' emerges as the most crucial factor in choosing an incompatible package. Additional factors encompass 'brand,' 'curiosity,' 'sales promotion,' 'desire to experiment,' 'addiction,' 'difference,' 'past experience,' 'need,' 'time pressure,' and 'obligation.' The study's results indicate that when consumers engage with these 'balancing factors,' the connection between 'product-packaging harmony' and 'factors affecting product-packaging harmony' diminishes. This disappearance suggests that balance is restored in the relationship between the consumer and the 'product-packaging harmony,' as well as the 'factors affecting product-packaging harmony.'

## **7. Managerial implications**

Packaging is considered an important cost element for companies. A wrong decision during the packaging process can lead to the emergence of incompatible packaging. For a company that has not been able to manage the process and has put the product on the market, the collection of products is seen as a serious loss. The presence of incompatible and incorrectly designed packaging on the market necessitates the creation of different strategies for industry experts. At this point, the current study is expected to shed light on the role of professionals in the creation of strategies.

Product packaging creates a sensory connection with consumers, subjecting them to an influence that persists throughout the stages of purchase, consumption, and disposal. This aspect of packaging is evident in businesses' marketing strategies. Therefore, it is crucial to devise the optimal packaging for the product being marketed. Crafting accurate packaging designs for businesses relies solely on choosing the appropriate elements. Literature highlights studies focusing on the alignment between product and packaging, providing valuable insights into suitable

packaging selections and evaluating the influence of packaging components on consumers' product preferences.

### **8. Limitations of the study and future directions**

It is acknowledged that there are several limitations that require consideration in this study. The first limitation is the researcher's subjectivity and bias. It is thought that the researcher's beliefs, past experiences, and understandings might influence the research process (e.g., data collection, analyzing, and reporting). Consequently, participants' responses might be affected by the researcher, thereby influencing the direction of findings. The second limitation is the coding of data and the interpretation of findings, which may lead to different conclusions about the same data. The third limitation is limited generalizability. Given the study's focus being restricted only to coffee products, it may not be possible to generalize of findings to other categories. Hence, more research is needed to fully understand how incompatibility between the product and its packaging affects individuals' purchase behavior across different product categories. Another issue regarding generalizability is the sample size. Due to the nature of the qualitative research approach, it is normal to recruit a small sample size, which in turn may lead to findings that are not generalizable to larger populations. Therefore, it is essential to conduct additional research with larger samples to obtain a better understanding of the compatibility between the product and its packaging. Finally, the study was qualitative; however, to gain a more comprehensive understanding, further research using diverse methodologies is essential.

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