

THE COSTS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR GIFT-GIVING AND SELF-GIFT

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ABSTRACT

Gifts are sent to others or oneself with imbedded meanings or functions. The delivery of the gifts requires senders to devote time, money, psychological, and physical efforts. They are regarded as the cost of the gift. This study investigates the factors influencing the costs the senders invest into the gifts and the expectations they hope to achieve under the gift-giving and self-gift. The results confirm our hypothesized antecedents of costs for both cases. As for the expectations for interpersonal gifts, when the costs get higher, the senders are more eager to achieve communication function, exchange function, and feel more satisfied with the action. A fourth function of specialness is achieved for the intrapersonal gifts case.

INTRODUCTION

Gifting behavior is a commonly seen exchange between people. Sherry [3] presented a model of interpersonal gift-giving, while the topics of self-gifts had stayed relatively unattended. Even though Mick and DeMoss [1] proposed three dimensions of communication, exchange, and specialness applicable to both inter- and intra-personal gifts, a direct comparison between the two gifting situations haven't been done on a large scale.

FACTORS INFLUENCING GIFT-GIVING COST

Wooten [4] thought that uncertainty came from four sources. They are mutuality, novelty, unfamiliarity, and dissimilarity. The last two items, dissimilarity and unfamiliarity, were more closely related to the uncertainty level than the first two. In the face of uncertainty, people tend to take diversified actions to reduce the possible loss. These strategies reflect the tendency that uncertainty will lead to low cost gift-giving to reduce the risk. Individual's resources usually set the limit of how much can be devoted to the gifting behavior [Robben and Verhallen, 2]. When an individual perceives the resources of time, money, psychological and physical effort to be abundant, it'll encourage spending more in the process.

H1: The higher the dissimilarity between givers and recipients, the more uncertainty the givers feel.

H2: The more unfamiliar of the recipient, the higher the giver's sense of uncertainty.

H3: High uncertainty will result in low gifting cost, including time, money, psychological and physical effort.

H4: More abundantly perceived resources will result in higher gifting cost, including time, money, psychological, and physical effort cost.

FACTORS INFLUENCING SELF-GIFT COST

Consistent with the self-presentational basis of social anxiety, Wooten [4] concluded the salience characteristics of recipients, such as collectivity, selectivity, perfectionism, and affluence, would induce the anxiety of the givers. These antecedents will also have analogous effects in self-gift decisions.

H5: The more selective a person is, the higher the self-gifting cost including time, money, psychological and physical effort.

H6: The more perfectionism a person aspires to, the higher self-gifting cost will be, including time, money, psychological and physical effort.

H7: The more affluent a person is, the higher self-gifting cost will be needed, including time, money, psychological and physical effort.

H8: The more abundant resources a person perceive of oneself, the higher the self-gifting cost, including time, money, psychological and physical effort.

EXPECTATIONS FOR GIFT-GIVING AND SELF-GIFT

In addition to the three dimensions - communication, exchange and specialness - applicable to both interpersonal gifts and self-gifts as proposed by Mick and DeMoss [1], we incorporate a fourth dimension, satisfaction, as the expectation of gifting behavior in our integrated model.

H9a: The higher cost the gift giver put into the gift, the more communication the gift conveys to the recipients.

H9b: The higher cost a person puts into the gift, the more communication the gift conveys to the self.

H10a: Higher cost invested by the givers will result in better exchange feeling from the recipients.

H10b: Higher cost invested by self-givers will result in better exchange feeling toward themselves.

H11a: The higher cost the givers input, more specialness context is conveyed in the gifts.

H11b: The higher cost self-givers input, more specialness contexts is conveyed in the gifts.

H12a: When gift givers put in more cost, they will feel more satisfied with the gifting.

H12b: When self-gift givers put in more cost, they will feel more satisfied with the gifting.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Gift-giving Model

Dissimilarity and unfamiliarity of gift senders to the receivers will contribute to givers' uncertainty feeling about the gifting behavior (H1, H2), which in turn will lower the effort the senders put into the gift. In other words, less time, money, psychological and physical cost will be exerted (H3). When the givers perceive to have more resources, they tend to use more time, money, psychological and physical costs to find good gifts (H4). As for the four expectations, two parameter estimates do not support our hypotheses. The coefficient from gifting cost to exchange (H10a) is significant but negative, and that from gifting cost to specialness (H10b) is not significant. The other two paths from cost to communication and satisfaction (H9a and H12a) are verified.

Self-gifts Model

The path coefficients from cost to communication, exchange, specialness, and satisfaction all are positive. When people devote more efforts into the gift, they are trying to convey a deeper self-expression, self-esteem, and self identification for the communication factor; they are saying more clearly that they think they deserve it, and there is a clearer sense of self contract or self bargaining for the exchange factor; it signifies a more perfect fit with higher importance with stronger sacred quality for the specialness factor; and, the senders are more satisfied with in the sense of the function and meaning for the satisfaction factor. The hypotheses H5, H6, H7, H8, H9b, H10b, H11b and H12b we proposed are supported by the data.

Comparing the four expectation factors common to both gift-giving model and self-gifts model, it is found that people emphasizes more on the communication and satisfaction factors when they devote a lot to the presents they send to others, while they emphasizes more on the exchange, specialness and satisfaction factors under the case of self-gifting. The differences in terms of the relative focus of pursuing of these two gifting styles could provide rich clues for marketers to set proper marketing tactics to serve the gift market.

For the future research, we speculate that people with different past experience of gift-giving or self-gift might exhibit distinct responses to the components of the model. One might also look at specific gift-giving situations like the gifting from subordinates to superiors, or from boyfriends to girlfriends.

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