

THE ROLE OF GIFT RECIPIENT PERCEPTION IN CHANGING BRAND ATTITUDES AND GIVER - RECIPIENT RELATIONSHIP - AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

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Introduction

Gift giving/receiving behavior have been defined as the process of gift exchange that takes place between a giver and recipient. The giving and receiving of gift is a ritual that takes place in all society although in different forms to build and strength relationship between the giver and the recipient. As a form of reciprocity or exchange, gift giving/receiving is one of the processes that integrate a society; Schieffelin (1980) views the giving of gift as a rhetorical gesture in social communication. (Belk 1976; 1979; Caplow 1982; Cheal 1988) consider gift giving is instrumental in maintaining social ties and serves as a mean of symbolic communication in social relationship.

Most of the researches before and after the appearance of Sherry's model in 1983 can be considered as the "giver centric" (Otnes, Lowery, Kim 1993). Up to now, there is only few studies focus on gift-recipient side. This study, therefore, tried to fill this gap by focusing on the recipient side to examine whether the recipient may change his/her attitude toward brand and the giver-recipient relationship realignment or not through recipient's ambivalence in different gift-receipt situations in order to find the useful implications for the marketing area.

1. Literature review

Gift-giving/receiving has been of interest to consumer research since late 1970 (Belk 1979; Sherry 1983), and up to

date, both Belk's (1976, 1979) and Sherry's (1983) model of gift exchange remain the most comprehensive literature in general. Since Sherry (1983) provided a framework that divided and described in details the stages of the whole gift-exchange processes, researchers have examined the influence of many variables within these stages. This model divides gifting activities into three stages: gift search and purchase (gestation), actual exchange (prestation) and gift disposition and realignment of the giver/recipient relationship (reformulation). Based on the suggestions made by Belk (1976, 1979) and Sherry (1983), aspects related to gift-giving/receiving theory can be organized into two lines of research that have implications for this current study: (1) various aspects of gift-giving behavior; (2) various aspects of gift-receiving behavior. Although this study focuses on gift-receipt experiences, the literature review of gift-giving behavior will discuss both gift-giving and gift-receiving as closely related phenomena in gift-exchange processes. In this processes, recipient ambivalence is the mechanism of attitude change. Unfortunately this matter has not been well researched so far. The current research focuses on. Before reviewing two lines of research mentioned above, we first clarify this concept.

1.1. Understanding Consumer Ambivalence

Although ambivalence may be little explored in consumer research, it has a

rich history in other disciplines – notably, psychology and sociology (Otnes, Lowery and Shrum 1997). Up to date, the research of Otnes and co-authors (1997) is the most significant study in consumer ambivalence area. In the research, these authors synthesized the four interpretations of ambivalence: psychological ambivalence; sociological ambivalence; cultural ambivalence; and consumer ambivalence as follows:

Psychological ambivalence is referred as the internal experience of mixed emotions toward an object or person. For example, the coexistence emotions of love and fear; happiness and sadness for the same object may occur simultaneously or sequentially is the distinct example of psychological ambivalence.

While psychological ambivalence focused on internal force, the *sociological ambivalence* focused on how external forces, such as the existing social structure can be sources of mixed feelings. Merton and Barber (1976) described the sociological ambivalence as follows: “..the ambivalence is located in the social definition of roles and statuses, not in the feeling-state of one or another type of personality” (p.6-7)

Whereas sociological ambivalence in conceptualized as resulting from conflicting social roles and norms, *cultural ambivalence* pertains to conflicts between cultural values. Because cultural values are often expressed through social norms, therefore, the boundaries between sociological and cultural ambivalence remain indistinct (Otnes, Lowrey, Shrum, 1997).

Considering ambivalence is the outcome of consumer behavior, Otnes, Lowery and Shrum (1997) offered the following definition of consumer ambivalence: “*Consumer ambivalence is the simultaneous or sequential experience or multiple emotional states, as a result of*

the interaction between internal factors and external objects, people, institutions, and/or cultural phenomena in market-oriented contexts, that can have direct and/or indirect ramifications on prepurchase, purchase or post purchase attitudes and behavior” (p.83)

Although ambivalence has been defined as the co-occurrence or sequential experience of multiple emotions (Ortony, Clore, & Collin, 1998; Otnes, Lowery, & Shrum, 1997), the term is sometimes interpreted as a synonym for **mixed emotions** between the positive emotion and negative emotion (e.g., Williams & Aaker, 2002).

As previously mentioned, a few studies have discussed ambivalence as emotional outcomes behavior. More recently, studies of gift giving describe the mixed emotions that emerge both during dyadic exchanges (Otnes et al. 1994; Sherry et al, 1993) and self-gifting (Sherry et al. 1995). However, what is missing from the consumer behavior literature is an explication of the processes by which ambivalence may be generated and its effects to consumer attitude and behavior. Gift-receiving is the good context to see the emergence of recipient ambivalence, thus this study focuses on.

1.2. Various aspects of gift-giving behavior

Most gift-exchange research conducted before and after the appearance of Sherry's model could be described as “giver-centric” (Otnes, Lowery, Kim 1993). It is the most interest to marketers, because it culminates in a purchase. Related to giver-centric, many aspects were explored and can be considered as direct or indirect impacts on recipient's behavior, such as gift-giving motivation; gift-giving occasion; type of gift-giving; other important factors considered by giver in gift-selecting, which will be covered here after.

Gift-giving motivations

It is important to consider giver's gift-giving motivation as it links product category selection, making decisions about time and monetary constraints, the search and gift selection process, thus, impact on recipient's emotions. The specific issue of gift-giving motivations has generally been ignored across the literature, with the exception of three important studies. The *first* study is Wolfinbarger (1990) which analyses three motives: obligation, self-interest, and altruism. Self-interest involves gift-giving to ultimately improve the situation of the giver. The *second* study is conducting by Belk and Coon (1993)'s which focus on exchange theories associated to motivations, express through the economic, social and agapic (romantic love) exchange dimensions (p.398). The *third* study is Goodwin's one (1990). Goodwin did not mention about altruism. However, this study found gifts are only purchased with self-interest or obligation motives. Rather, Goodwin et al. (1990) suggested that there may be elements of self-interest and obligation as a joint motive of the gift-giver.

Gift-giving occasion

Gift-giving/receiving occasion will be related to gift-situation and recipient ambivalence. One area research in the gift-giving literature should interest about this issue: On what occasions do people generally give gifts? Belk (1973) examined the frequency of all gift-giving occasions in the U.S and found that the most popular occasion is birthday (35 percent) and the second one is Christmas (29 percent). The other occasions listed in his study are wedding, Mother's Day, Father's day, wedding anniversary and graduation. Bussey (1967), in a study in the U.K.,

found that the most popular occasion is Christmas, which is followed by birthday. This finding is just reverse of the finding of Belk (1973).

Ruth, Brunel, Otnes (1999) classified categories of gift-giving into public occasion (i.e., Christmas, Chinese New Year), individual occasion (i.e., birthday, wedding) and no-occasion (i.e., "just because", "thank you"). According to Ruth, Brunel, Otnes (1999), giver and recipient have mixed emotions in high-personalized occasion or in affirming farewell occasion, but still did not explain the reason systematically.

Type of gift-giving

Although not many researches mentioned, it has been found that consumers (givers and recipients) may have different level of ambivalence across different type of gift categories. The popular aspect attracted researchers is the types of gifts people generally prefer to buy. Lutz (1979) mentioned that the choice of gift is one of the most important decisions in the study of consumer in gift-giving behavior. Lows et al. (1971), in the British study, categorized the most relevant types of gifts given by occasions: personal gifts are the most popular gifts during Christmas. Novelties and household items follow this. During weddings and engagements, household gifts are usually given. Personal gifts are predominant on birthdays, anniversaries (see Othman, Lee, p.4)

Relating to the giver's and the recipient's ambivalence, some studies were conducted and indicated that with the different type of gift, givers and recipients have different emotions. Related literature mentioned 3 types of gift: instrumental gift, expressive gift (Joy 2001) and "pure" gift (Belk and Coon, 1993) in which "pure gift" often makes recipient ambivalence.

Gift giving situation

Gift situation might affect to recipient's emotions and attitude in different aspects. As a starting point for a definition, most theoreticians would agree that a situation comprises a point in time and space (Belk, 1975). By Belk (1979), the situational conditions of gift-giving may differ according to characteristics of the gift-giving occasion, whether the presentation of the gift is public, private, or anonymous, and whether the gift is conveyed directly or contingent upon some event or performance of agree-upon activities by the recipient (p. 96).

Other important factors considered by giver in gift selecting

An other aspect of interest in gift-giving literature is the factors, which people would consider when choosing a gift. Clark and Belk (1979) mention that product quality, appearance, brand name, and the store from which the gift is purchased are the important factors to the prospective buyer. However, price can sometimes be important in some situation when purchasing a gift. According to Clarke and Belk (1979), consumers frequently search for the "right" price to spend rather than the "best value for money" purchase. If the correct messages are to be sent, the giver should spend an appropriate amount, neither "too much" nor "too little".

Belk (1979) suggested that when people buy gifts they would consider much about the relationship between the giver and the receiver. By examining factors considered important when choosing gifts, Othman and Lee explored the priority of the 7 factors by urban Malaysian's gift-consumption: (1) relationship between the giver and the recipient; (2) gift that convey certain meaning/message; (3) product quality; (4) price range; (5) uniqueness of

the product; (6) time spent; (7) the store from which the gift is purchased (p.21). These results were the same if comparing between male and female behavior is the interesting finding of Othman and Lee's study.

Givers will pay different attitude to these factors when choosing gifts, thus, may lead to the different recipient's emotions. That is the main important reason for considering these aspects.

1.3. Various aspects of gift-receiving behavior

Surprisingly, little attention has been directed toward "recipient-centric" although recipients play an important role in gift-giving/receiving. This role can be expressed through givers' selection strategies vary, depending on the recipient for whom the gift is intended (Belk 1982; Caplow 1982; Cheal 1988). Although there are a few studies focusing on recipient-centric, reviewing the related literature, some main aspects can be categorized: (1) recipients' characteristic; (2) antecedents of gift-receipt related to the reformulation of interpersonal relationships.

Recipients' characteristics

In the existing literature, the most popular characteristics of recipients mentioned are "easy" and "difficult" recipients. According to Otnes, Lowery, Kim (1993), "an easy recipient was one who had, in the past, correctly interpreted the message that a giver, in the guise of a specific role(s), wished to convey", and in contrast, "our interpretation of difficult recipients is that, consciously or unconsciously, they thwart a giver's attempt to express a particular role through gift exchange. As a result, givers typically perceive difficult recipients as misinterpreting gifts designed to express specific roles" (p.231).

Otnes, Kim, Lowery (1992) offered nine reasons to explain why they categorized gift-recipients: (1) perceived lack of necessity/desire; (2) fear of being unappreciated; (3) different tastes/interests; (4) unfamiliarity with the recipient; (5) perceived recipient limitations; (6) imposed giver limitations; (7) imbalance; (8) personality conflicts; (9) thwarting of a gift selection.

These reasons are also considered as the main sources of givers' ambivalence in gift-giving, thus, may impact on recipients' experience in gift-receipt and emotions as Otnes, Lowrey, Shrum (1997) mentioned in psychological ambivalence that "objects would through experience become ambivalence" (p.81)

Antecedents of gift receipt related to the reformulation of interpersonal relationships

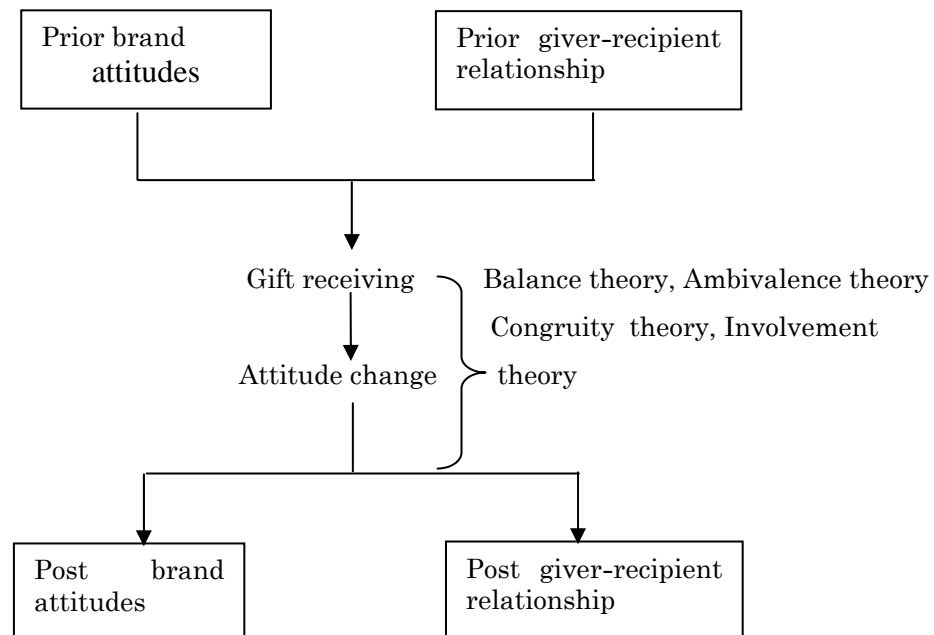
An other aspect interested in gift-receiving behavior in the previous literature is to explore the impact of some main antecedents on relationship realignment. Ruth, Otnes, Brunel (1999; 2004) explored 4 antecedents: (1) the perception of the existing relationship, (2) the gift, (3) the ritual context; and (4)

his/her emotional reactions. The convergence of these antecedents affects six types of relationship realignment outcomes: strengthening, positive affirmation, negligible effect, negative confirmation, weakening and severing. Although this research explored the antecedents of giver-recipient relationship realignment through gift receiving but still have not showed the psychological mechanism systematically, which determine the recipient's attitude change.

2. Research model and hypotheses

The literature pertaining to consumer ambivalence in gift giving/receiving as well as other aspects of gift exchange were presented above. It was concluded that no study had investigated the interaction among consumer ambivalence, attitudes toward a brand, giver-recipient relationship in gift-exchange. This study is therefore an attempt to fill this gap in the research.

The following research framework is built base on the gaps in the literature and the psychological mechanism explaining the attitudes change process and highlight the key variables and their relationships to be tested.



The relationship between variables in the research model can be expressed as follow. Recipient perception on incongruity or imbalance or ambivalence between prior brand attitudes and prior giver-recipient relationship may effect on post brand attitudes and post giver-recipient relationship to obtain congruity, or balance and or solving ambivalence between these two elements in recipient's psychology.

This phenomenon can be explained by the psychological mechanism based on the balance theory of Heider (1958). According

to Cartwright and Harary (1956); Anderson (1977); Feather (1964); Solomon (2002), the basic elements in Heider's balance theory is *P-O-X* triad, whose elements are the person *P* (*gift-recipient*), an other person *O* (*gift-giver*) and *X*, which may be a third person, an object, or a concept (in this context, *X* is considered as *rand attitudes*). Positive or negative affective relations among the elements characterized the triads. For example, if the receiver likes the giver, the giver has positive attitudes toward gift's brand, but the receiver do not have positive brand attitudes, then the triad is said to be unbalance. In this example, balance could be attained if the receiver changes to dislike the giver or having post favorable brand attitude. It is the primitive assumption of balance theory that unbalanced triads tend toward balance.

Although balance theory help to explain the change in recipient's post brand attitudes or giver-recipient relationship realignment but it does not allow to predict the exactly direction and magnitude of the attitude change. The

congruity theory of Osgood, Tannenbaum (1955) helps to explain this logic. Unlike the original formulations of balance theory in which only the direction of the relation is considered, congruity theorists consider both the direction and magnitude of the relation. Focusing on the strength of the relation also draw attention to the strongly held will tend to change less than one that is weakly held or changes in evaluation are always in the direction of increased congruity with the existing frame of reference (Osgood, Tannenbaum, 1955, p. 43). If the strong giver-recipient relationship dominated in the above example, base on the congruity theory, recipient's post brand attitudes should be more favorable after receiving a gift to solve the tension condition. But when recipient has high involvement with unfavorable brand attitudes, it may be more reasonable for recipient's changing attitude from prior neutral brand attitude to post favorable brand attitudes when receiving that gift from the strong trustworthy giver. The Low Involvement Theory of Krugman (1965) and Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty, Cacioppo, Schumann, 1983) help to explain this aspect. According to this theory, when evaluator has low personal consideration, cognitive response less likely to occur and attitudes change by peripheral route quickly but temporary and can not predict behavior.

Base on the foundations of the research model and the psychological mechanism, the proposed hypotheses will be tested based on different gift receiving situations which are expressed in the following table:

Gift receiving situations focus on recipient's perception of prior brand attitude and prior giver-recipient relationship

Prior brand attitudes Prior relationship	relationship		
	Favorable	Neutral attitude	Unfavorable
Strong	$\Delta R1$ $\Delta B1$	$\Delta R2$ $\Delta B2$	$\Delta R3$ $\Delta B3$
Weak	$\Delta R4$ $\Delta B4$	$\Delta R5$ $\Delta B5$	$\Delta R6$ $\Delta B6$

Note that: ΔRi indicates the degree of attitude change toward the giver-recipient relationship ($i = 1, \dots, 6$)

ΔBi indicates the degree of attitude change toward a brand ($i = 1, \dots, 6$)

Hereunder are the hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis 1: When the gift recipient's perception of prior attitude toward a brand is favorable and the prior giver-recipient relationship is strong, then the gift recipient's post-brand attitude becomes more favorable (H1.1); and the post giver-recipient relationship will be strengthen (H1.2).

Hypothesis 2: When the gift recipient's perception of prior attitude toward a brand is neutral and the giver-recipient relationship is strong, then the gift recipient's post-brand attitude becomes more favorable (H2.1); and the post giver-recipient relationship will be strengthen (H2.2).

Hypothesis 3: When the gift recipient's perception of prior attitude toward a brand is unfarorable and the prior giver-recipient relationship is strong, then the recipient's post-brand attitudes becomes more favorable (H3.1); and the post giver-recipient relationship will be less strong (H3.2).

Hypothesis 4: When the gift recipient's perception of prior attitude toward a brand is favorable and the prior giver-recipient relationship is weak, then the post brand attitude becomes less favorable (H4.1.) and

the post giver-recipient relationship will be strengthen (H4.2)

Hypothesis 5: When the gift recipient's percpetion of prior attitude toward a brand is neutral and the prior giver-recipient relationship is weak, then the post brand attitude becomes unfavorable (H5.1) and the post giver-recipient relationship will be weaken (H 5.2.)

Hypothesis 6: When the gift recipient's percpetion of prior attitude toward a brand is unfavorable and the prior giver-recipient relationship is weak, then the post brand attitude is more unfavorable (H 6.1) and the post giver-recipient relationship will be weaken (H 6.2.)

This research deeply focuses on marketing area than social one, therefore, brand attitudes change are more concerned and the following proposed additional hypotheses should be tested.

Hypothesis 7: Under the prior strong giver-recipient relationship, the recipient's post brand attitude change differ depending on the different level of recipient's perception of prior brand attitudes.

- Hypothesis 7a: The recipient's post brand attitude change is greater when receiving the prior neutral brand than the prior favorable brand.

- Hypothesis 7b: The recipient's post brand attitude change is greater when receiving the prior neutral brand than the prior unfavorable brand.

Hypothesis 8: Under the prior weak giver-recipient relationship, the gift recipient's post brand attitude change differ depending on the different level of recipient's perception of prior brand attitudes.

- Hypothesis 8a: The recipient's post brand attitude change is greater when receiving the prior neutral brand than the prior favorable brand.

- Hypothesis 8b: The recipient's post brand attitude change is greater when receiving the prior neutral brand than the prior unfavorable brand.

3. Research design

To understand recipient's emotions in different gift receiving situations and possibility change of brand attitude as well as post giver-recipient relationship, the study capture the lived phenomenology of gift receipt and seeks to understand how prior brand attitudes and prior giver-recipient relationship converge effect on recipient ambivalence and its subsequent effect on relationship realignment and changing brand attitudes.

To obtain this purpose, it is suitable to use the qualitative data collection method, in-depth interview. In addition, the experiment between subject factorial 2x3 (strong and weak relationship) x (favorable brand attitude, neutral brand attitude and unfavorable brand attitude) design will be conducted by using scenarios with

different gift receiving situations to test the above hypotheses.

4. Proposed managerial implications

In terms of marketing implications, this study offers practical ones if the hypotheses are accepted. It is often difficult to find direct implications for managers from most behavioral research, including this study. However, managers can gain insights by understanding the psychological mechanism of changing consumers' attitudes in gift receiving to establish appropriate marketing strategies. First, company can create, maintain or enhance the desired relationship through gift giving with expecting recipients will become closer with the company. Second, the hypothesis that when recipients receive the gift which he/she has prior neutral brand attitude, from the givers who has great commitment or strong relationship, recipients will easily change their brand attitude, may suggest an interesting implication for the new brand advertising strategy. Instead of focusing on the content of the message which only emphasizes the benefits of the new product itself, advertiser may use peripheral route to persuade consumers by considering new product as a gift for recipients who has strong relationship with givers in different appropriate gift-giving occasions. This type of advertising not only appeal the gift-givers buying gifts for closely partners in appropriate gift giving occasions, but also help the gift-recipient to be aware of the new product and has initial favorable emotion with its brand after receiving the gift.

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