

Gift Giving Characteristics of Recipients and Function of Gifting Anxieties

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Abstract

Previous research suggests that gift giving is a form of identity presentation that enables givers to create a desired image of themselves for gift recipients. Sometimes, however, individuals experience anxiety when selecting gifts that best reflect this desired identity (Sherry et al., 1993). Furthermore, the influential power of the gift receiver can create mental stress for the giver. This stress may be reflected in greater physiological arousal and longer decision making time. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate physiologically the anxiety caused by gift giving to influential gift recipients. The results showed that the difficult recipient group registered the highest gifting anxiety as measured by electrodermal response. However, the amount of time spent making gift purchasing decisions was not influenced by either types of recipients or emotional importance. Within the category of difficult recipients, in-laws created the most stress on givers, whereas children and same-gender friends produced the least stress.

Gift giving is a universal social norm of human culture, and has been discussed from a theoretical perspective focusing on the functions and effects of giving (Belk, 1976). Previous research has found that not only do gifts help maintain our social ties, but also create and worsen interpersonal conflict. Gift giving anxiety is the givers' fear of being negatively evaluated by the recipients. This is part of social anxiety, similar to other anxieties such as test taking and public speaking (Leary & Kowalski, 1995). A few researchers have investigated this issue using qualitative research, however, no study to date has randomly assigned participants to be hypothetical gift shoppers and examined their physiological responses. Therefore, further research should be done to more accurately understand gift giving anxiety, including the measures of physiological responses.

Although there are many gift giving motivators, many gift givers wish to have a positive influence on recipients by presenting them with gifts they perceive as favorable while avoiding gifting perceived as being negative. Since gift recipient feedback emotionally affects the giver, the greater the influence the recipient has on the giver and the more difficult it is to satisfy him or her, the more anxiety the giver will feel about selecting gifts. In addition, givers use gifts to establish or maintain a positive impression with the recipient. For this reason, givers usually spend more time carefully selecting gifts for recipients who are influential and powerful as well as when the giver desires the recipient's approval.

The act of giving gifts can create mental stress by requiring an examination of the standards of propriety and negotiation of identity, which can produce inauthentic versions of the self, and subsequently, stress. In spite of advanced investigation of other forms of social anxiety existence, psychologists have not considered gift giving to be a salient research topic. Gift giving anxiety is a serious social phenomenon and deserves more attention by psychologists.

Literature Review

Gift giving is a central part of our behavior and culture as humans (Mysterud, Drevon, & Slagsvold, 2006). It has a great impact in maintaining social ties and serves as means of symbolic communication in social relationships (Ruth, Otnes, & Brunel, 1999). However, there may also be negative effects.

Power of Giving: Norm of Reciprocity

Throughout the gift giving process, individuals contribute to the general welfare of recipients, they hope to repay/receive something based on past generosity (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007), or expect to reap future generosity. Gift giving may create the obligation to reciprocate, which led Gouldner (1960) to classify the gift giving system as a norm of reciprocity. This is a mechanism to start and maintain a stable societal system by creating interdependency and strong relationships (Gouldner, 1960). Gift exchange plays an important role in the development and stability of society and culture (Lévi-Strauss, 1949/1969; Sahlins, 1972, as noted in Komter, 1997, p.747). Excluding pure gifts, where nothing is expected in return (Komter, 1997), givers expect some type of benefit from the gift giving activity. The benefits are directly related to the giver's personal intentions, which may include receipt of a gift from the recipient, the maintenance and/or improvement of a relationship, or the establishment of the giver's superiority. This social norm is so important that it may produce gift anxiety. Norms exist for people to follow, and if violated, it may result in individuals being directly punished by others and made to feel guilt, shame, embarrassment, anxiety, or some other negative feelings (Basu, 2001).

The Gift as Identity Builder

Another reason this social norm creates mental stress is that gifts may necessitate a negotiation of identity (Sherry, McGrath, & Levy, 1993). Gifts provide recipients with images that help build a giver's identity. Gifts represent the giver's feelings toward recipients and gift giving behavior is derived from a giver's perceptions of others. Cooley (1902, as cited in Schwartz, 1967) called gifts

“ideas of others”, suggesting that gifting is a way of free associating about the recipient in the absence of self and others.

Givers also exhibit social roles through gift giving. Social roles refer to sets of behaviors that individuals adopt within a group and are expected to perform during the gift exchange (Baron & Byrne, 2000). Individuals perform different roles in the groups to which they belong. The type and level of social roles of givers may affect their giving behavior differently. Throughout one’s life, a person plays several social roles. This collection of diverse social roles is called social identity. Social identity is a self-definition of how one conceptualizes and evaluates his or herself. It is one of the factors influencing gift giving behavior.

Attention and Impression Management Theories

Gift giving expresses one’s feelings to others. It also calls attention to a giver’s choice in selecting gifts relative to appropriate style and occasion as well as serves as a self-display of her or his generosity to others. To exchange of attention is an essential pleasure in our social life (Derber, 2000). Getting attention helps to satisfy fundamental human needs from respect to self-esteem. In today’s society, more individuals are seeking attention for themselves. This pattern seems particularly strong in individualistic cultures like that of the United States. Some gifting exchanges are used for getting attention while others are used to give attention to others. The choice of actions is influenced by one’s personality, social role (e.g. gender, professional role,) economic, and political power. For example, occupational roles such as a social worker or nurse are more attention-giving types while a movie actor or fashion model is more attention-getting. Gift exchange satisfies both attention-getting and attention-giving needs.

Effectively getting or giving expected attention is an aspect of good impression management. According to Sherry (1983, p.164), gift giving requires “preparation of the gift and self in the service

of impression management.” People go through this in their attempt to control the impression other people construct of them. It is also defined as self-representation, which refers to the activities used to influence the perception one has of her or his image. Since a first impression is very important for one’s future relationships with individuals and organizations, gift givers undertake a variety of efforts to establish and maintain a desirable recipient impression. Their efforts often become transparent under the pressure of satisfying recipients’ demands and desires. Concerned about how their gifts will be interpreted, they may even feel a lack of control over those interpretations which triggers social anxiety (Wooten, 2000). As a result, gifts have the power to control one’s emotions, attitudes, or behavior. For example, givers may feel the need to devote more attention and time to the selection of a gift for someone who is identified as being difficult to satisfy.

There has been discussion regarding whether or not reaction time (time to respond to each question) truly reflects “thinking time” needed for completing a task. Reaction time can be related to the time needed for thinking (premotor time) or for some secondary variable to indicate the response, such as the actual time needed to move one’s hand to make the response (motor time). Halpern (2000) concluded that the longer the mean reaction time, the more cognitive abilities used. Simply put, longer reaction time may indicate more mental involvement on the part of givers.

Social Influence through Gift Giving

People have power to influence others. The power to influence individuals to change their attitude, beliefs, perceptions or behaviors is called social influence (Cialdini, 1994, as cited in Baron & Byrne, 2000). People subconsciously use social influence in the gift giving process.

Wooten (2000) introduced social influence as an anxiety factor that relates to a relationship between the giver and receiver. The giver’s desire is to have a positive influence on recipients by presenting appropriate gifts and avoid a negative reaction from recipients. Fear associated with actually

presenting or imagining presenting a gift occurs when givers recognize recipients as “influential” and “important” persons in their personal life including romantic partners, close friends, favorite relatives, and in-laws. These recipients’ feedback is more likely to affect givers’ emotions.

Otnes et al. (1993) explored the meaning of *easy* or *difficult recipients* from the giver’s view in terms of gift selection. The informants of their study labeled their gift recipients as being *easy* or *difficult*. *Easy recipients* were described as those who had correctly interpreted the message in the gift exchange and offered little resistance as givers tried to express a specific social role such as the giver’s relationship with children and same-gender friends. On the other hand, *difficult recipients* tend to misinterpret gifts designed to express specific social roles and are likely to misread a giver’s attempt to express a particular role through gift exchange regardless of the giver’s conscious or unconscious intentions. *Difficult recipients* also tend to be older or more distant relatives.

Gift Message and Emotional Significance

As previously described, when giving gifts, givers take various factors into consideration such as norm of reciprocity, their relationship with recipients, social role/identity of givers/recipients, and influential power that recipients have toward givers. Because gift giving influences the relationship between giver and recipient, the giver’s emotions toward the recipient make a difference to the giver’s decision-making process. Therefore, gifts may or may not correctly reflect givers’ intentions. For the gift giving to be a successful event, receivers are challenged to correctly interpret the meaning. Although the giver does her/his best to attach personal meaning to the gift, it does not always result in a successful interpretation because receivers may possess their own assumptions about gift occasions, gift intent, and the social meaning of objects (Sunwolf, 2006).

The emotions of the giver toward the recipient play an important role in gift giving. No matter if it is positive or negative, closeness that the giver feels to the recipient may affect selection of the

gift, selecting time spent, and giver's anxiety while selecting and giving. Malinowski and Sahlins's idea, as discussed in Komter and Vollebergh (1997, p. 747), describes an association between the closeness of social relationships and the purity of the gift. They acknowledged the difference between pure/altruistic gifts (give something for nothing) and obligatory gifts (derived from the norm of reciprocity), and then empathized that the greater the emotional distance, the less pure the connected feelings of being disinterested, sympathy or involvement, and the stronger the feelings of reciprocal obligations and *quid pro quo*. In addition, Komter and Vollebergh (1997) found that gift giving to friends more frequently occurs with feelings of affection while gift giving to primary family members is accompanied by both feelings of affection and moral obligation. As the gift may carry the giver's message, emotional closeness can be one of the major causes of gifting anxiety.

Social Anxiety in Gift Giving

Schlenker and Leary (1982) indicated that social anxiety arises when people are motivated to make a positive impression on real or imagined audiences but doubt they will do so. The closer the relationship between the giver and the recipient and the more difficult the recipients are, the more anxiety givers feel about selecting gifts. Frustrated givers often blame *difficult recipients* who are hard to satisfy (e.g. picky ones) or hard to accurately determine their gift preferences (e.g. unfamiliar ones). They are difficult because they prevent givers' attempts to enact desired social roles (Otnes et al, 1992, as cited in Wooten, 2000). Thus, an unfavorable reaction by a recipient may humiliate not only the gift itself but also the giver.

Sherry et al. (1993, p. 229) showed that many of their respondents felt a strong pressure to "do the right thing" within gift giving situations. They also found that the wrong gift could be read as an "unfortunate mistake" but still "long remembered." The wrong gift can be a "waste, which disappoints, frustrates, annoys, upsets, embarrasses, hurts, and disheartens." Moreover, it is "thoughtless,

impersonal, useless or inexcusable.” Even worse, “it makes me feel unknown or does not contain caring.” On the whole, gifting anxiety can be categorized as social anxiety just like other forms of anxiety such as test and competition anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995, as cited in Wooten, 2000).

Physical Responses Caused by Social Anxiety

Social anxiety refers to an excessive concern about the prospect of being negatively evaluated by others (Schlenker & Leary, 1982, as cited in Wooten, 2000). Recognized social anxiety for the general public includes stage fright and audience anxiety, public speaking anxiety, and competition anxiety. People who feel socially anxious show clear evidence of sympathetic arousal. Episodes of social anxiety are associated with increased heart rate, respiration, galvanic skin response, blood pressure and decreased hand temperature (Houtman & Bakker, 1991). A person who arouses physiologically but who does not think worrisome thoughts would be characterized as agitated, aroused, or discombobulated, but not as anxious (Frijda, 1986). When anxious, people think about the source of their fear, such as interacting with one’s boss, taking tests, or speaking in public. Whichever dominates a person’s thoughts at a given time, these irritating cognitions may burden the anxious individual’s attentional capacity. Switching attention away from task-relevant information preoccupies her or his mind and causes self-presentational difficulties (Hamilton, 1975).

Gift giving plays a role in status continuation and locomotion. Regardless of its importance, the difficulties that gift givers feel tend to be overlooked. The fact is that many givers face dilemmas which create fears of being evaluated, choosing a wrong gift, or being misinterpreted. This study attempts to demonstrate gifting anxiety not only psychologically but also at a physiological level. Therefore, this study will examine gift giving anxiety by measuring changes in physiological skin responses and duration of time spent selecting gifts.

The hypotheses of the present study were:

1. The givers with *difficult recipients* in a strong emotional importance setting will display higher states of anxiety than those with *easy recipients* in a weak emotional importance setting.
2. The givers with *difficult recipients* in a strong emotional importance setting will take longer to select a gift than those with *easy recipients* in a weak emotional importance setting.

Method

Participants

Participants were $N = 70$ undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Wisconsin-Stout (18 males, mean age = 21 years, 45 females, mean age = 22 years). Research participants were recruited from three undergraduate/graduate courses with some receiving course credit for their involvement.

Data from seven of the respondents was excluded because two of them did not have souvenir purchasing experience, one ignored the instructions, two provided data that was invalid, one had to retake the experiment three times due to her lack of understanding of the instructions, and one became extremely agitated and her physiological response was exaggerated to an abnormal, unusable level.

Research participants were randomly assigned to one of two imagined gift recipient groups: *easy recipients* or *difficult recipients*. Participants had a choice to pick one specific person in their life from the recipient lists so that they could easily relate to the actual existing person. If they did not have one of these people in their life, they were asked to imagine having a pretend recipient from these recipient options.

Materials

Gift Giving Instrument. Twenty-three stimuli were presented in this experiment. These stimuli were photographs of gifts from Florida that were found on the internet. In order to manipulate situations/rituals of gift giving (Christmas, birthday, etc.,) selected gifts were limited to souvenirs only.

Most gift items were neutral, appropriate for all ages and genders. Some gifts were more oriented for older ages, some were more for children, and some were more gender specific. Relative to price, a statement was included in the questionnaire indicating that the cost of all displayed gift items was similar. A sample of gift images is shown in Figure 1.



How likely would you choose this gift for the person?

1. Definitely would not choose
2. Might not choose
3. Might choose
4. Definitely would choose

Figure 1. A sample of stimuli and a rating question presented

The actual gift images were presented on a computer monitor, and were approximately 3.15-in. (0.08 m) × 3.9-in (0.09 m). Along with each stimulus, a 4-point Likert scale was presented ranging from 1 (“Definitely would not choose”) to 4 (“Definitely would choose”) (see Figure 1). Although the rating scale was used for the participant to rate the gift images, this study did not intend to analyze the rating scale results. Instead, the purpose of using the rating scale was to allow the participant to imagine shopping for a gift for the recipient so that electrodermal activity (EDA) and reaction time (RT) could be measured. Using those stimuli and the rating scale, the researcher created a stimulus presentation in SuperLab™ 4.0, which is software used for building experiments, implementing them, and collecting data. It is useful software for presenting visual stimuli on a computerized screen.

Demographic Questionnaire. Participants completed a three-item demographic questionnaire pertaining to their gender, age, and ethnicity.

Experimental Questions. Participants were asked if they had a souvenir purchasing experience prior to the experiment. After rating all gifts, they were asked to rate the difficulty of selecting an appropriate gift for their imagined recipient. Participants were then asked to indicate their real or imaged emotional closeness to the selected recipient.

Electrodermal Activity measures (EDA). EDA was recorded as a measure of autonomic arousal in response to stress. It is a measure of a change in skin conductance resulting from endocrine sweat gland activity, which is modulated by states of emotional stress (Lim, Edis, Kranz, Mendelson, Selwood, & Scott, 1983). EDA was recorded using a BiopacTM MP30 recording system (BiopacSystems, Inc., n.d.). The device measured small changes in electrical conductance across the skin using a noninvasive procedure. EDA was measured in the electrical conductance unit μmho , which is .000001 times the unit mho and the direct, reciprocal of the standard electrical resistance unit μohm . There is no harm to participants in this process of measuring EDA (Cacioppo, Tassinari, & Berntson, 2007). EDA was measured while the participant rated 23 stimuli (gift images). In those 23 stimuli presentation, the participant was asked to wait seeing the instruction: "Please wait..." for 6 seconds. This 6-second inter-trial period before going to the next rating question allowed the participant enough time for the level of EDA to return to baseline.

Reaction Time measures (RT). Reaction time is measured in thousandths of a second or milliseconds (ms). It may take 100 ms to withdraw our hand from the stove and 500 ms to read out loud a number printed on a piece of paper. The difference in reaction time occurs due to the different amount of time it takes for the central nervous system to process the sensory signals and to choose the appropriate course of action (Rothwell, n.d.).

In this experiment, reaction time was measured from the point where a stimulus was presented until the moment where the participant inputted the answer (see Figure 2) as duration of time in

selecting a gift. The BIOPAC™ STP100 is a device to measure the participant's responses to stimuli including reaction time. Participants were asked to manually press a keyboard as soon as they were ready to rate each stimulus. Then, the synchronization signals from the STP 100 directly went to the MP30 running on a first computer. A second computer where the SuperLab software and a Digital I/O card were placed received the signals for data synchronization and collection purposes (Biopac Systems, Inc., n.d.).

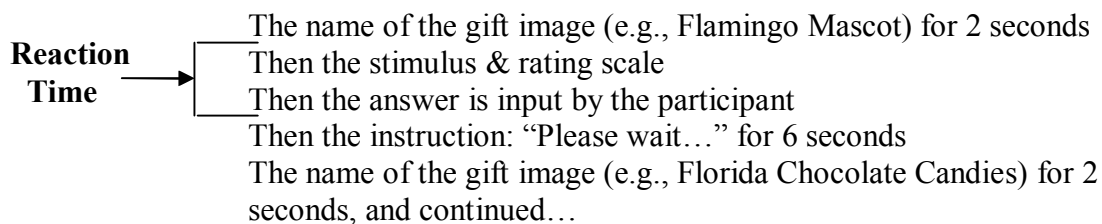


Figure 2. Recorded Reaction Time

Design and Procedure

This study was a 2×2 between-subjects factorial design with independent variables being the level of difficulty of the gift recipient (*easy* or *difficult*) and emotional importance that the gift givers felt toward these recipients (*close* or *not close*). Respondents rated emotion toward the imagined recipients on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = not close at all, 2 = not close, 3 = close, and 4 = very close. The dependent variable in the experiment was anxiety (EDA) and duration of time in selecting a gift (RT).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, *easy* or *difficult*, before they entered the experimental room. Each participant, with finger electrodes attached, was seated in a chair in a quiet room at normal ambient temperatures and instructed to look at the monitor situated in front of them. Participants began to read the written instructions. In the condition they were assigned, they

were asked to pick one specific person in their life from the recipient options or to imagine having a pretend recipient. After they picked one specific person, they saw the questionnaire instructions and were asked to read a story on the next page. In both condition groups they were given a common scenario which asked them to imagine a situation of choosing a gift for a recipient. The questionnaire instructions told them to imagine they were on vacation at San Pompano Beach, Florida (which does not exist but was made up by the researcher in order to manipulate participants' travel/shopping experience.) They then envisioned themselves being at a local gift shop and buying a gift for the person they had just picked. The name of the gift came up on the screen for 2 seconds. Then a picture of the gift along with the rating question appeared. As an imagined gift giver, the task was to rate how likely she or he would select each gift for her or his imagined recipient. After rating each gift, the participant was asked to wait for 6 seconds by seeing an instruction: "Please wait..." After rating all gifts, participants were asked to rate the difficulty of selecting an appropriate gift for their imagined recipient. Participants were then asked to indicate their real or imaged emotional closeness to the selected recipient. For the final research activity, they filled out a computer-based questionnaire which included demographic information (age, gender, and ethnicity). After indicating their choices, the instructions told the participant to let the researcher know that they were finished with the experiment. In the end the participants was debriefed orally, given a printed debriefing form, thanked and dismissed.

Results

Data analysis

The collected data, which included participants' answer choices, electrodermal Activity (EDA) and reaction time (RT), was saved in a text-only file and exported to an Excel spreadsheet. The data was then converted into a *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS 15.1) format.

RT and EDA were analyzed to see if they were influenced by the types of recipients, *easy recipient* (child or same-gender friend) and *difficult recipient* (grandparent/elderly relative or in-law) from Otne et al.'s (1993) study. Participants in this study were asked to answer the question, "How easy or difficult was it to think about buying a gift for the person?" The answers were measured by RT and EDA. Next, more detail analyses were conducted on the recipient groups, each type of recipients, emotional significance groups, and every level of emotion significance.

Preliminary Analysis of Reaction Time and Electrodermal Activity Measures

Respondents who virtually purchased a gift for a recipient who they were emotionally close to were selected prior to the analysis. An independent samples t-test was then used to investigate whether the hypotheses were correct (Table 1). No difference of RT was found in the *difficult recipient* with a strong emotion, however as hypothesized the respondents who shopped for the *difficult recipients* with a strong emotion ($M = .3469$, $SD = .297$, $p = .042$) showed a greater mean EDA μmho change than those who purchased for the *easy recipients* with a weak emotion ($M = .1972$, $SD = .17808$, $p = .049$) at the .05 level.

Table 1

Reaction Time and Electrodermal Activity by Easy/Difficult Recipients of a Strong/Weak Emotion

	Recipient type	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Reaction Time	<i>Easy recipients</i> with a weak emotion	2290.84	625.35			
	<i>Difficult recipients</i> with a strong emotion	2125.65	468.70	1.07	47.30	.30
Electrodermal Activity	<i>Easy recipients</i> with a weak emotion	.20	.18			

<i>Difficult recipients of a strong emotion</i>	.35	.30	-2.12	34.80	.04
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Note: t = t-value; df = degrees of freedom; p = p-value

Descriptive Statistics for RT and EDA by Easy/Difficult Recipients

An independent samples t-test was used to see if there were mean differences of RT and EDA between *easy recipient* and *difficult recipient* groups. There was no difference between the recipient groups in RT. However as hypothesized, the type of recipient groups significantly influenced mean EDA μ changes, $t = -3.336$, $df = 41.69$, $p = .002$. Respondents who virtually selected gifts for *difficult recipients* ($M = .423$, $SD = .380$) were more likely to show higher levels of EDA than those with *easy recipients* ($M = .194$, $SD = .169$).

RT and EDA by Each Recipient

A one-way ANOVA was analyzed to determine differences of RT and EDA by types of gift recipients. Although no difference of RT was found in recipient groups, there was a statistically significant difference of mean EDA μ change in recipient groups, $F(3, 60) = 5.736$, $p = .002$. Since the significant difference was found by the one-way ANOVA, a Tukey HSD post-hoc test was revealed to see where the differences were. The significant difference was found in comparing two pairs: child and in-law and same-gender friend and in-law. The mean EDA μ difference between child and in-law was .515, and same-gender friend and in-law was .529.

Descriptive Statistics for RT and EDA by Emotional Importance

Respondents rated emotion toward the imagined recipients on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not close at all) to 4 (very close). The respondents' answers were classified into two levels of

closeness. Very close and close were combined into close, whereas not close and not close at all were combined into not close. Of 51 in the close group, 20 selected close and 31 selected very close. No respondents selected not close at all.

An independent samples t-test revealed that there was a statistically significant mean EDA μ change between close and not close groups, $t(62) = 2.416, p = .016$. The respondents who used their imagination to purchase a gift for a recipient who they were close to were more likely to show higher states of anxiety than those who were not close to the recipients.

RT and EDA by Each Emotion

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine differences of RT and EDA by every level of emotional significance of respondents to the recipient. Although no difference of RT was found in the closeness group, there was a statistically significant difference of EDA in closeness group, $F(2, 61) = 3.416, p = .016$. Since the significant mean EDA μ change was found by the one-way ANOVA, a Tukey HSD post-hoc test was revealed to see where the differences were. The significant difference was found in comparing not close and close group and the mean difference between those groups was .262. Contrary to expectation, the respondents who used their imagination to purchase a gift for a recipient who they were very close to were less likely to feel anxiety than those who were not close to their proposed recipients.

RT and EDA by Level of Difficulty When Imagining Recipient

The respondents were asked, "How easy or difficult was it to think about buying a gift for the person?" Their answers were rated on the 4-point Likert scale (1 = very difficult, 2 = difficult, 3 = easy, 4 = very easy). Frequency distribution of the results was as follows. Nearly half of the respondents said it was difficult to think about purchasing a gift for the imagined recipient ($n = 34$,

48.6%). The next largest group was very difficult ($n = 20$, 29.9%). The rest of the respondents said it was easy ($n = 13$, 18.6%). Interestingly, of 67 respondents, none of them said it was very easy.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to see whether there was a difference in RT and EDA between levels of *difficult recipients*, but no significant difference was found.

Discussion

The literature review demonstrated that major functions of the gift exchange process contribute to individuals in society in both negative and positive ways. Only a few studies conducted in the past have discussed the negative side of gift exchange. This study investigated a physiological measure of a gift giver's anxiety which the researchers recognize as a negative aspect of gift giving. As a primary consideration, four types of recipients were used to manipulate this experiment. These recipients included children, same-gender friends, grandparents/elderly relatives, and in-laws. The two former were categorized as *easy recipients* and the latter two were labeled as *difficult recipients*, which is based on the Otnes et al. (1993) study.

Using a stimulus presentation and questionnaire, anxiety levels of the respondents were measured when selecting gifts. The respondents who virtually selected gifts for *difficult recipients* who were emotionally close to the recipient were more likely to feel anxious than those who shopped for *easy recipients*. Therefore, one of the hypotheses was confirmed. However, their virtual shopping time was not affected by the giver's levels of difficulty or emotional importance toward the recipients, which concluded that the second hypothesis was rejected. The participants' shopping experience was only in their imagination. No decision-making was needed for the participants about the gift's monetary value. Although all five senses (touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste) might be the important factors to attract customers' shopping experiences (Kim, 2002), the present research limited the

participants to only use their visual sense for a purchasing decision. Therefore, there could not be an appropriate setting to measure their virtual shopping time.

Although Otnes et al.'s (1993) study and this study have different sample populations, such as their age and gift giving experiences, respondents in both studies were similar in their agreement with who was easy and who was not, in terms of gift selection.

When looking at RT and EDA by *easy* and *difficult recipients*, and by emotional importance, the respondents who rated gifts for *difficult recipients* tended to show higher states of anxiety as well as those who shopped for emotionally not close recipients. The emotional stress demonstrated their physiological anxiety level.

In a detailed analysis of each recipient, in-law was the most anxiety provoking gift recipient of the four types of recipients studied. Moreover, there was a great difference when comparing the in-law group to the child and same-gender friend groups respectively. Once again, the typical characteristic of *difficult recipients* was that this group tended to misinterpret gifts. They are likely to misread a giver's attempt to express a particular role through gift exchange regardless of his/her conscious or unconscious intentions (Otnes et al., 1993). In general, interpersonal relationships and social roles among family members are good predictors of family satisfaction and their emotional stress (Weigel & Weigel, 1990). Santos and Levitt (2007) identified in-laws as often causing strong emotional stress to their families. As for emotional importance, the respondents who selected gifts in their imagination for an emotionally close recipient showed higher levels of anxiety than those without close recipients.

Conclusions

A gift helps us to communicate our identity, express our feelings, and maintain our social relationships. Gift giving is a human social norm that every culture has, which plays an important role in keeping the society running more efficiently.

Givers aim to handle this significant norm well which often causes them emotional stress. Gift giving anxiety is an accepted topic of study among marketers, sociologists, and anthropologists. It was my desire to consider this issue from a physiological and psychological point of view and to show that many givers are literally stressed by this norm.

The purpose of this study was to examine gift giving anxiety by measuring changes in physiological skin responses and duration of time spent selecting gifts. Hypotheses of this study were created based on *easy/difficult* gift recipient tendencies from Otnes et al.'s 1993 research. In their study, *difficult recipients* tended to be older, such as grandparents or more distant relatives, while *easy recipients* were most commonly categorized as being children and same-gender friends, in terms of gift selection. However, these labels were tendencies in their study and not a generalized fact. Due to there being considerable differences between Otnes et al.'s (1993) research population and mine, my participants were asked to rate their levels of difficulty as givers as means of identifying and verifying their perceptions of difficulty in the gift giving process.

The results showed that the givers' levels of difficulty and emotional importance relative to the recipients did not affect their virtual shopping time. However, particular types of recipient group or social role caused more stress to the givers. The *difficult recipient* group showed higher gifting anxiety. Above all, in-laws stressed givers the most whereas child and same-gender friend caused the least stress.

In addition, emotional importance is also an essential factor in predicting gifting anxiety. The respondents who shopped for a gift for a recipient in their imagination who they were close to were more likely to show higher states of anxiety than those who were not close to the recipients. The findings from this study confirmed that people apparently had gift giving anxiety which was differentiated by the types of recipients and also by their sentiment toward gift receivers.

When combining two independent variables of types of recipients (*easy/difficult*) and emotional importance, the findings of this study supported the first hypothesis, “The givers with *difficult recipients* in a strong emotional importance setting would display higher states of anxiety than those with *easy recipients* in a weak emotional importance setting.” Yet, the second hypothesis, “The givers with *difficult recipients* in a strong emotional importance setting would take longer to select a gift than those with *easy recipients* in a weak emotional importance setting,” was not supported.

The findings confirmed that people apparently had gift giving anxiety which was differentiated by the types of recipients and also by their sentiment toward gift receivers. Gift consumers expect gaining rewards or avoiding punishments through gifts. A gift should come with a “premium” for their relationship.

Most marketers aspire to understand consumers, while psychologists aim to study human behavior in general. It would be a good collaboration for marketers and retailers to not just privately but dynamically work with psychologists to understand vital consumer insights about gift-buying customers. Gift giving does not exist to create stress or conflict between giver and receiver but to bring some benefits to their relationship. Marketers may be able to help gift consumers buffer their tensions by using a psychological perspective of consumers, such as providing more gift advisors who can give professional advice and guidance on gift giving. Thus, advertising gift advisors may foster awareness of their tensions that could stimulate further study and resolution for customers.

Gifts hold meaning for both the giver and the receiver, and as such, gifts should not be considered simple objects. Some individuals are very attached to the object in order to achieve their goals as a gift giver. I hope that the findings of this study will encourage others, including social psychologists, to further investigate the existing conflicts that people face when performing the traditional norm of gift giving.

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