Is It Just the Thought That Counts? Experimental Investigation Into the Gift Giving Effort Effect

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Even if consumer researchers have long contended that the effort put forth into a gift is vital, specific effects of gift-giving effort on one of its most important consequences – acts of reciprocity have not been examined. The purpose of this research is to investigate the phenomenon of perceived gift giving effort from the recipient’s perspective. In this research, we empirically demonstrate what we describe as the gift giving effort effect, the idea that perceived gift giving effort sparks acts of reciprocation by the gift recipient in an array of everyday life situations.

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In summary, participants who received the suggestion had higher confidence that the critical event happened to them. We also found changes in preference based on the false suggestion. This is the first study to examine utility derived from false memory in terms of both increases and decreases in preference in the same experiment. We demonstrated that utility derived from false memory of an experience can form the basis of the subsequent recollection of (Food History Inventory), and the subsequent anticipation of (Party Behaviour Questionnaire), experience.

References

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Abstract
Even if consumer researchers have long contended that the effort put forth into a gift is vital, specific effects of gift-giving effort on one of its most important consequences—acts of reciprocity have not been examined. The purpose of this research is to investigate the phenomenon of perceived gift giving effort from the recipient’s perspective. In this research, we empirically demonstrate what we describe as the gift giving effort effect, the idea that perceived gift giving effort sparks acts of reciprocation by the gift recipient in an array of everyday life situations.

If it is just the thought that counts, why have alongside the rows and rows of ready-made Hallmark greeting cards for any occasion a shelf with blank cards? Why offer consumers avenues to expand even more effort into gifts by providing countless gift selection workshops, online guides and tutorials, and even gift consulting services? If it is just the giving of a gift that counts, why do we see so many traces of consumers investing their emotional, psychic, and temporal efforts into the gift giving process? Why is the unifying theme of the effort in gift giving paradoxically important at the same time as the market parades more emphasis on gifts themselves? At least at the outset, it appears that a gift that reflects considerable amount of effort, not just the recognition of another person, is crucial to gift giving. The purpose of this research is to investigate the phenomenon of gift giving effort from the recipient’s perspective. In this research, we empirically seek to examine what we describe as the gift giving effort effect. With this term we intend to capture the idea that perceived gift giving effort sparks one of the most fundamental processes in gift giving, acts of reciprocation by the gift recipient in an array of everyday life situations.

Our research builds on the extant literature in consumer behavior that has repeatedly recognized the pivotal role of gift giving effort in processes of gift giving (Sherry 1983). We build on the idea that the effort put forth into a gift is vital (e.g., Belk and Coon 1993; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993). Gift giving effort is evidenced through multidimensional expansion of human energy, whether monetary or psychic in the form of giver’s emotional investment that is highly valued by the recipient of the gift (Robben and Verhallen 1994). The effort expended in a gift in terms of money, time, and emotional effort is important, according to some researchers, because it signals to the recipient that the giver has made a selfless sacrifice, a characteristic of a perfect gift (Belk 1996; Belk and Coon 1993). Such sacrifice expressed through thought and effort invested in the gift by a marital partner makes a gift favorite to the gift recipient (Wolfinger 1990). Consumers also tend to perceive gifts that manifest effort as more successful (Wooten 2000). Others recognize how the adding of a handwritten message converts a generic birthday card into a personal gift to the recipient (Dodson and Belk 1996). In romantic relationships, a gift that reflects the expenditure of personal time and effort is perceived by the recipient as a symbol of love and of transference of the giver’s self to the recipient (Belk and Coon 1993). Thus, while we learn from these studies that consumers associate emotional value with gifts imbued with effort, it remains unknown whether perceived gift giving effort impacts one of the most well-known consequences of gifts, reciprocation (e.g., Bodur and Ghromann 2005; Dorsch and Kelly 1994; Rynning 1989). The purpose of our research is to address this gap. We posit that the prevailing theory of gift giving grounded in reciprocity norm does not fully account for the gift giving effort effect.

In a series of experiments, we demonstrate that perceived gift giving effort affects the recipient in ways that cannot be explained by the prevailing theory of norm reciprocity. We examine a novel theoretical mechanism grounded in anthropological research by the seminal