I Made It Just For You! Building Attachment Via Self-Designed Gifts

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In two studies, we investigate attachment towards self-designed gifts over time. Our results show that 1) self-design increases initial attachment when choice is sufficient, 2) attachment decreases at the time of gift giving and 3) the decrease in attachment can be mitigated with the use of a relationship-focus during design.

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I Made It Just for You! Building Attachment via Self-Designed Gifts

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Creating or customizing a product on your own has become a popular past-time among consumers. Consumers can design everything from T-shirts and shoes to shelves on their own, and use toolkits of configurators that help them conduct such designs (e.g., Piller and Walcher, 2006; Franke and Piller, 2004; Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier, 2010). Self-designed products are popular among consumers because they tend to set greater value of products they have designed themselves (the “I designed it myself” effect) (Franke, Schreier and Kaiser, 2010).

A goal involved with self-design is that the products that are created would fit consumer better than products that are not self-designed. A product that is self-designed should create greater product attachment (i.e., greater product love) than products that are not self-designed, because when designing for oneself, one known what one likes and wants. By specifying the product to fit those personal parameters, one increases the likelihood of attachment and simultaneously decreases the likelihood of early product disposal (e.g., Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008).

Consumers can design products for themselves (Moreau and Herd, 2010; Atakan, Bagozzi, and Yoon, 2014a; Buechel and Janiszewski, 2014; Norton, Mochon, and Ariely, 2011), or for others (Moreau, Bonney, and Herd, 2011). Most studies in the self-design literature have emphasized designing for oneself. In this stream of literature, studies have found that when consumers design for themselves, the constraints imposed on the design process largely determine the outcome of the self-design (e.g., Buechel and Janiszewski, 2014). Moreau et al. (2011) investigated designing for others instead of for oneself, and found that when consumers design for others, they evaluate the process differently. They showed that when designing a gift for another person, consumers tend to consider the design process to be more effortful, because it is more difficult to know what another person would like than what oneself would like.

Moreau et al. (2011) did not focus on the constraints involved in the design process, presumably, because the constraints do not operate the same way in designing for oneself as in designing for others. In this study, we wish to address this gap by focusing on the role of constraints in designing products for others.

The goal of this study is to examine the influence of constraints in the design process when consumers design products for someone else, i.e., products that are intended to be given away as gifts. We refer to such products as self-designed gifts. With only a few exceptions, most studies on self-design focus on creating products for oneself (Moreau et al. 2011). This is surprising, given that mass customization companies increasingly position themselves as sources for unique gifts, and self-design enables consumers to create such gifts. As such, our main contribution to the literature involves focusing on designing or others (self-designed gifts), and examining the influence they have on the gift giver over time. In contrast from previous studies, we propose that designing for others takes the form of a multi-stage evaluation, in which the consumer first reacts to the self-design in terms of his/her own reactions toward it in terms of the emotions experienced, as well the degree of attachment experienced toward the self-designed gift. These reactions become re-assessed at the time when the gift is given away, in light of the prospect of the receiver’s reaction. Finally, based on the receiver’s feedback, the initial assessment is re-aligned.

To be able to examine this multi-stage model, we conduct two longitudinal investigations in which we measure the attachment toward self-designed gifts at four time points, over a period of time of six weeks. We investigate this pattern in two studies. In both studies, we focus on how input and process constraints on the self-design activity influence product attachment, and how such assessments may fluctuate over time.

Product Attachment and Self-designed gifts

Self-design refers to a consumer’s activity to create a product herself, a process which may include the configuration, assembly or even production of a product, as well as design choices that determine its utility (e.g. color, scent, shape) (Moreau et al. 2011). In this study, we focus on a self-design kit for soap-making, a set of materials and tools that the user can configure to her liking to produce a piece of soap.

In self-design activities, two kinds of constraints are commonly active: input constraints, referring to limitations inferred by pre-designed materials, instructions or goals; and process constraints, referring to limitations in the required activity by the user.

Input constraints

Moreau and Dahl (2005) conceptualized input constraints in terms of how much choice the participant has in the input for the creative process. They found that participants were more likely to employ creative processes when they had to use a set of pre-selected materials, and concluded that for creative outcomes, inputs are best constrained (the “we choose” versus “you choose” effect). In a similar vein, Troye and Supphellen (2012) found that self-preparation of a dish with a dinner-kit that offered no option for input selection lead to an increased liking of the self-made dish and the kit as well. They attributed this effect to increased self-integration, the feeling of relatedness with the self-made product, which also reflected on input evaluation. Further support for constrained activities comes from Norton, Mochon and Ariely (2012) who found that even product assembly without any design choice can enhance people’s attachment toward an object. They called this effect as “labor leads to love”, referring to the fact that labor itself, without any creative input, is sufficient for increasing people’s attachment toward an object. Based on these findings, it would seem as if just making an object (instead of buying it ready-made) would be sufficient for increasing attachment.

Process constraints

Process constraints refer to limitations in the required activity by the user. The activity required by a user can be minimal (e.g., in a demonstration set-up, in which the kit is demonstrated and the demonstrator makes the product for the consumer, no input is required by the user) or more involving (e.g., a workshop setting when the consumer designs and makes the product him/herself). Process constraints have been conceptualized as the degree of involvement of the customer in the design or production process. Buechel and Janiszewsky (2014) found that self-design activities were more enjoyable when more effort was required, indicating that constraining process involvement would lead to a decrease in enjoyment. This finding might be especially relevant in a gift-giving context: Moreau et al. (2011) discovered that customers designing a product as a gift tended to value their own effort to a greater extent than when de-
signing it for themselves, indicating that less effort would decrease product evaluation.

Consumers can also be involved in the actual production of a product. Troye and Supphellen (2012) conceptualize self-production as different from self-design in that the consumer is actively participating in the production process, instead of (only) the design process. In the case of self-production, consumers can perceive additional benefit from the learning derived by the activity (Ergör, 2008) or from the haptic cues received during the physical shaping of the product. Such activities have been found to level the attachment experienced toward the final product (Atakan, Bagozzi, and Yoon, 2014a).

We propose that when making a gift for someone else, consumers would prefer to have fewer process constraints, i.e., be actively involved in the production. Although the effort margin is minimized with more process constraints, it does not feel self-made unless the consumer is actively participating in the creation of the gift. Additionally, handmade products have been shown to transfer emotions perceived by the creator to the receiver, which could be especially valuable for handmade gifts (Fuchs, Schreier, and Osselaer, 2015). Thus, being actively involved in the self-making process, even when the end result might objectively suffer as a consequence, is likely to result in greater attachment toward the self-created gift. We propose:

Hypothesis 1: When designing a self-made gift, providing less (vs. more) input constraints (self-selected vs. pre-selected) and providing less (vs. more) process constraints (self-made vs. ready-made) increases product attachment (the love of one's labors) experienced by the gift giver.

Change in Emotions Between Time of Making and Time of Giving

In a self-design context in which the consumer keeps the result of her work for herself, evaluation of the outcome of her creative work will take place mainly when the result is finished. In a gift-giving context, however, the creative output will not only be evaluated by the creator after it is finished, but also again when the gift is handed over to the recipient. At the time of gift-giving, the receiver of the gift will likely express feedback to the giver with regards to the gift (Roster, 2006; Wooten, 2000). Such feedback has been shown to cause a consumer to re-evaluate and even re-design the product to match the taste of the receiver (Hildebrand et al., 2013).

The prospect of the recipient’s reaction is also likely to give rise to negative emotions. Support for this contention comes from Moreau et al. (2011), who found that when designing a product for another person (vs. for themselves), participants experienced greater levels of negative emotions. Negative emotions can also affect the giver’s evaluation of the gift, causing him/her to re-evaluate its quality and appropriateness (Moreau et al., 2011).

We propose that the constraints imposed on the creative process (self-selected vs. pre-selected; self-made vs. ready-made) will play a similar role here as in H1, meaning that we would expect the same type of outcome for the different conditions in H2 as in H1. In addition, we propose that product attachment will decrease at the point of gift giving, in anticipation of the receiver’s reactions. As such, we only specify the change in attachment we would expect to take place between the time of making and the time of giving the gift away. We propose:

Hypothesis 2: The influence of the constraints outlined in H1 contribute to a decrease in product attachment at time of gift giving across all conditions.

Emotional Repair Over Time

As stated in H2, gift-giving causes the giver to re-evaluate her gift when she gives it away. If the feedback one receives on the self-made gift is positive, it will likely result in a positive re-evaluation. This should result in a removal of the negative emotions experienced at the time of gift giving, so that the positive assessment of the gift will likely be restored. We propose that this is particularly the case when a gift is made with the receiver in mind. When a gift is made with a receiver in mind, it is more likely to fit the receiver’s taste, and increase the likelihood that the receiver will appreciate the gift. Also, when a gift is made with the receiver in mind, it will come across as being more thoughtful; the receiver knows that the giver has been thinking about them. As such, we propose:

Hypothesis 3: When a gift is made with the receiver in mind, that is, with a specific relationship-focus (vs. made without a specific relationship-focus) the attachment will increase after the point of gift giving.

Method

We conducted two studies for examining the proposed hypothesis. Study 1 focuses on H-H2. Study 2 is aimed at replicating the effects of H1 and H2 using a different operationalization of the proposed constraints, and also to test for H3.

Study 1

We chose soap-making as the creative experience in our studies for two reasons: (1) it consists of a simple creation process, that can be explained in a step-by-step manner, allowing for instant success, (2) it offers a sufficient degree of freedom to manipulate input constraints during the process and (3) the self-made soap requires one week of drying time before it can be used, allowing for a delay of gift-giving of one week after creation (similar to e.g. the deliver time after online customization).

The kit contained the following items sufficient to make one piece of soap: grinded soap, colorant, scent, glitter, mold(s). We manipulated the contents of the kits to manipulate input constraints: in the more input constraints condition the kit contained only one colorant and one scent. In the less input constraints condition it contained each three scents and three colors. In both conditions the kit contained only one mold.

Design and Procedure

The study was a $2 \times 2 \times 4$ mixed design with two between-subjects factors and one within-subject factor. 95 participants were randomly assigned to four conditions in a 2 (input constraints: self-selected vs. pre-selected) x 2 (process constraints: self-made vs. pre-made) study set up. In the self-made condition participants were allowed to create a piece of soap themselves with the kit provided and under the guidance of the workshop coordinators, who performed a step-by-step demonstration of the process. In the ready-made condition participants were not allowed to make the soap themselves, but instead were first asked to inspect the kit and then watched a step-by-step demonstration of the process by the workshop coordinators. After the demonstration, they received a ready-made soap that they were told has been made with the kit. In the “pre-selected” condition,
participants were only given the option of one color and one scent; while in the “self-selected” condition participants were allowed to choose between three different color and scent options.

At the end of the session, participants were asked to report their level of attachment toward the soap (we refer to this time point as time 1, t1). They were asked to give it away to a receiver of their choice after the week had passed (we refer to this time point as time 2, t2). After participants had given away the soap to the receiver, they were asked to fill in additional questionnaires after one week (we refer to this time point as time 3, t3) and four weeks (we refer to this time point as time 4, t4).

Measures
Attachment was measured using a 6-item scale using the items affect, love, connection, passion, delight and captivation and was computed to one attachment index. As a manipulation check, we measured perceived autonomy using the 4-item scale by Dahl and Moreau (2007) with 1 (=not at all) and 7 (=very much). I felt free to make choices”, “I felt free to express myself”, “I felt controlled”, “I felt pressured”, which we averaged to one autonomy index (α=.70).

Manipulation Checks
The manipulation of input constraints was successful (F (1, 94) = 5.20, p < .05). Participants in the “pre-selected” condition reported a lower level of autonomy (Mpre-selected = 3.78) than participants in the “self-selected” condition (Mself-selected = 4.36).

Results
At time 1, planned contrasts showed that participants who had less (vs. more) input constraints and less (vs. more) process constraints (i.e., made the soap themselves could select the input themselves) reported a greater degree of attachment towards the self-made soap (M = 4.27) than participants in the other conditions (Mpre-selected, pre-made = 3.44, t(91) = 2.26, p < .05, Mself-selected, pre-made = 2.96, t(91) = 3.53, p < .01, and Mself-selected, self-made = 3.47, t(91) = 2.22, p < .05).

To examine H2, we compared the means for all the conditions across t1, t2, t3, t4. Paired-t-tests comparing t1 to t2 show that attachment decreased at t2 for participants in the pre-made self-focus condition (M = 3.54, Mt1=2.82, t = 2.98, p = .008); for participants in the pre-made relationship-focus condition (M = 3.78, Mt1=2.65, t = 5.61, p < .001); and for participants in the self-made self-focus condition (M = 4.12, Mt1=3.44, t = 3.16, p < .005). There was no significant decrease of attachment for participants in the self-made relationship-focus condition (M = 4.65, Mt1=4.43, t = 1.55, p = .138).

To test for H3, we compared attachment at t1 and t2. Paired-samples t-tests comparing showed that attachment significantly decreased at t2 for participants in the pre-made self-focus condition (M = 2.82, Mt1=2.28, t = 3.28, p = .004) and significantly increased for participants in the pre-made relationship-focus condition (M = 2.65, Mt1=3.20, t = 3.85, p = .001). The differences for the participants in the self-made self-focus condition (M = 3.44, Mt1=3.51, t = 0.61, p = .545), and the self-made relationship-focus condition (M = 4.43, Mt1=4.37, t = .50, p = .625) were non-significant. Note that because attachment decreased for all conditions between t1 and t2, but only decreased for one condition between t1 and t2, most participants experience emotional repair over time, as the expectation here would be continuously decreasing levels of attachment (Yang and Galak, 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion
The goal of this paper was to investigate the effect of self-design on product attachment in a gift-giving context. Other than in a context where consumers design a product for oneself, the evaluation of a self-designed product in a gift-giving context seems to take place in several steps over time. In this study, we therefore investigated outcome attachment at four time points (at initial evaluation, at gift giving, one week after gift giving and four weeks after gift giving).

At initial outcome evaluation, our results show that self-designing a gift can enhance initial attachment toward the outcome, but only when sufficient selection options are given during the process (less input constraints). Self-design was not favorable for initial outcome attachment when more input constraints were placed on the participants. This finding seems to be at odds with previous findings by Moreau and Dahl (2005) and Dahl and Moreau (2007) who state that limited choice options can increase creative processes and process enjoyment. However, in a gift-giving context choice options might be more relevant than when making a product for oneself, as consumers might want to match the receiver’s taste as good as pos-
sible. Given that gift givers are willing to put an extensive amount of effort into selecting the perfect gift for the receiver (Otnes and Kim, 1993), denying them this option by constraining choice options might foster negative emotions and decrease product attachment, diminishing the otherwise positive effect of self-design.

At the time of gift giving, we find a decrease in attachment. We attribute this effect to negative emotions caused by expected feedback from the gift receiver. Finally, and most importantly, our results show that this negative effect can be repaired over time when gift-givers focus on the gift-receiver while designing the gift. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first demonstration of such an “emotional repair”.

REFERENCES


