
Personal Values and Gift-Giving Behaviors: A Study Across Cultures

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The linkage between gift-giving behaviors and personal values was investigated in this study. Two hundred and forty students from the United States and 82 Oriental students were surveyed, utilizing the List of Values scale and two gift-giving scales (amount of gift giving and effort involved in gift selection). The two hypotheses assessed were confirmed: Individuals in active, social value segments reported higher levels of gift giving, as well as greater exertion of effort in gift selection, than did individuals in passive, nonsocial value segments. These relationships existed in both cultures studied (the United States and the Oriental culture).

Introduction

Gift giving is an area of long standing interest to anthropologists and sociologists (cf. Levi-Straus, 1965; Mauss, 1954), as well as consumer researchers (Banks, 1979; Belk, 1976; Sherry, 1983). However, several issues in gift giving are in need of attention, including the consideration of the antecedents of gift-giving behavior and the development of better measures of gift giving.

Why does an individual give more or fewer gifts? Why does that person devote more or less effort to the selection of those gifts? Values have been found in the past to have a pervasive influence on individuals' behaviors and lives across a wide variety of areas, including gift giving (cf., Beatty et al., 1985; Homer and Kahle, 1988). We propose that one engages in behaviors such as gift giving in order to fulfill one's values in life.

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The objective of this article is to investigate the linkage between values and gift-giving behavior in a cross-cultural context. We address this issue by comparing U.S. students (from both Oregon and Texas) with Oriental students in Oregon.

Values and Gift Giving

In regard to gift-giving antecedents, several past perspectives are useful. Sherry (1988) talks about motives for gift giving being either altruistic (maximizing the pleasure of the recipient) or agonistic (maximizing the donor's personal satisfaction). He suggests that typically there is some degree of both of these working in a gift exchange. In addition, Lowes et al. (1971) published information on a gift-giving study in which the reasons for giving were identified. There were three primary categories: to give pleasure (e.g., show friendship), 42%; to obtain pleasure, 27%; or because it was expected, 15%. Thus there seem to be several major motives behind giving. Motives and values, of course, are closely related conceptually.

Value acquisition results from the abstraction of essential principles from life experience. Values abstract adaptive strategies from the past into generalized goals as they develop and solidify. As the abstractions become well articulated, the values influence attitudes, which in turn influence behaviors such as gift-giving behaviors (Homer and Kahle, 1988).

Measurement of Gift Giving

There has been little effort devoted to the conceptualization of a generalized gift-giving construct. Macklin and Walker (1988) define gift giving as the selection, transfer, and evaluation of material and immaterial (intangible) objects in fulfillment of an obligation or in a spontaneous mode. They developed a scale based on two dimensions—the joy of giving and the irritation of giving.

Belk (1979) has suggested that more effort be devoted to studying search effort in giving and factors affecting generosity. Thus, our conceptualization of a gift-giving construct includes gift selection effort (perceived effort involved in selecting a gift) and amount of giving (perceived amount of gift giving relative to one's peers and to tradition or reciprocation expectations).

The study of gift giving cross-culturally is still in its infancy (see Green and Alden, 1988), but offers rich avenues of additional inquiry. It would seem possible to develop gift-giving scales that would be relevant to different cultures. The goal of this research is to develop these scales and then to assess the relationship between values and gift giving.

Hypotheses

Gift giving strongly involves one's self and is a highly ego involving activity (Banks, 1979; Belk, 1982). It is theoretically reasonable and has been empirically shown in previous research (cf. Beatty et al., 1985) that one's values are reflected in important behaviors, particularly behaviors reflective of one's self. Thus, certain value segments are more likely to engage in gift-giving behaviors than are other segments, e.g., people more highly valuing warm relationships with others will

probably give more gifts and exert more effort in selecting those gifts than people who exhibit more self-centered or self-concerned values, e.g., fun and enjoyment in life, and excitement. That is, gifts are given and selected in order to fulfill certain values individuals have. Some previous findings (Beatty et al., 1986) indicate that value segments across cultures are consistent in their behaviors and attitudes on a relative basis within their cultures; thus, one's personal values may be more relevant than one's environment or culture in reported gift-giving behaviors. The following hypotheses are suggested:

- H1: Individuals in active, social value segments (e.g., warm relationship with others) will report that they *give more gifts* than individuals in passive, nonsocial value segments (e.g., fun and enjoyment in life, excitement, and security), regardless of their culture (Oriental vs. American).
- H2: Individuals in active, social value segments (e.g., warm relationships with others) will report that they *exert more effort in gift selection* than individuals in passive, nonsocial value segments (e.g., fun and enjoyment in life, excitement, and security), regardless of their culture (Oriental vs. American).

Method

Subjects

There were two separate studies conducted to assess the questions of interest. Each will be described separately. In the first study, the subjects were 150 students enrolled at the University of Oregon. To optimize heterogeneity of variance within such a homogeneous group, we drew the primary sample from foreign students who had at least 25 other citizens of their country also enrolled at the University. This limit was applied to ensure that the student at least had an opportunity for ongoing interaction with fellow representatives of his or her culture. We also drew a sample of U.S. citizens, again oversampling out-of-state students. Within these stratification parameters the sampling technique was a simple probability selection procedure. Students who failed to reply to the initial mailing received a reminder telephone call the following week and a replacement questionnaire the week after that, resulting in a response rate of 52%. As the focus of this study is on Oriental versus U.S. students, data from students from other countries are not included in these results. Furthermore, the sample sizes were too small to provide meaningful results. The final sample of interest contained 68 American students (35 male, 33 female) and 82 Oriental students (51 male, 31 female). The Oriental sample was composed as follows: Singapore 24, Japan 11, Malaysia 9, Indonesia 9, Thailand 9, Hong Kong 9, Korea 6, and Taiwan 5.

The second study was conducted at the University of Texas at Austin. Students in various business and communication classes were asked to fill out the same survey as above with virtually no nonresponse bias, but obviously a nonprobability sample. This procedure led to a U.S. student sample from Texas of 172 (60 males and 112 females).

When analyses indicated that there were no important differences between the U.S. students in the two states on the variables of interest, the data were collapsed and analyzed by comparing U.S. students with Oriental students. The final sample composition of 322 is as follows: U.S. students—95 male, 145 female; Oriental students—51 male, 31 female (total $n = 322$).

Measures of Values

Values were measured using Kahle's List of Values (LOV) scale, which has been used in a number of previous studies and shows reasonable reliability (Kahle et al., 1986).

This scale, which is composed of nine values, was administered by asking respondents to rank order the nine listed values from 1 to 9 so that 1 was the most important item to them in their life and 9 was the least important item. The number one value for individuals was used to form value segments. For purposes of analysis, two of the values, which tend to represent similar value segments and which otherwise would be underrepresented, were collapsed (fun and enjoyment in life and excitement) and one value (being well respected) was eliminated because it was only chosen as a top value by one individual in the sample. The other values are: sense of belonging, warm relationships with others, self-fulfillment, a sense of accomplishment, security, and self-respect.

Gift-Giving Measures

Seven gift-giving items, which were initially developed based on focus group interviews (Banks, 1980) and which have been used in a previous study (Beatty et al., 1985), were measured on a 6-point Likert-like scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These questions were part of a larger set of attitudinal measures. Some of the items required reversing before summing the items. Four items represented *perceived amount of giving* (coefficient alpha = .73, $n = 322$). These items were: (1) I almost never give gifts to people unless it is for a special occasion or holiday (reverse scored); (2) I show my friendship to others by giving them special gifts occasionally; (3) I consider myself someone who gives a lot of gifts; (4) I consider gifts to be an important way of communicating love or friendship to others. Three items represented *perceived effort in gift selection* (coefficient alpha = .69, $n = 322$). These items were: (1) Carefully selecting and giving gifts is an important tradition for me; (2) I almost always exert considerable effort to select or make special gifts for close members of my family; (3) I almost always try to give gifts that convey a very personal message to the receiver.

Results and Discussion

In order to assess the effects of values on gift giving, we first conducted an analysis of variance. The dependent variables were *amount of giving* and *gift selection effort* and the independent variables were culture (U.S. students versus Oriental students) and top value (the six value segments). Table 1 indicates that there was a main effect for top value but not for culture for both dependent variables. There were no interaction effects. Thus, it appears that there is a relationship between the value segments and gift-giving behavior. The evidence supports our two hypotheses.

Next, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with top values as our independent variable and gift-giving behaviors as our dependent variables. The goal of these analyses was to determine which values were most strongly related to perceived gift-giving amount and effort. The results of these analyses are reported

Table 1. Perceived Giving and Effort by Culture and Top Value

Dependent Variable: Giving						
Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratios	F Prob.	ω^2
Main effects	7	22.67	3.24	3.57	.001	
Top value	6	21.24	3.54	3.91	.001	.05
Culture	1	1.40	1.40	1.55	.215	.00
Top value by culture	6	3.28	.55	.60	.728	.00
Explained	13	25.96	2.00	2.20	.010	
Residual	301	272.89	.91			

Dependent Variable: Effort						
Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratios	F Prob.	ω^2
Main effects	7	28.04	4.01	4.03	.000	
Top value	6	25.34	4.22	4.25	.000	.06
Culture	1	2.14	2.14	2.16	.143	.00
Top value by culture	6	6.32	1.05	1.06	.387	.00
Explained	13	34.25	2.64	2.66	.002	
Residual	302	299.87	.99			

in Tables 2 and 3 along with the mean contrasts (at $p \leq .05$), utilizing a Duncan multiple range procedure.

There is a high degree of similarity between the results for the two dependent variables. Generally, those individuals endorsing warm relationships and self respect perceive that they give more gifts and put more effort into gift selection, whereas individuals endorsing sense of belonging, fun, enjoyment and excitement, and security perceive themselves as giving less and exerting less effort in gift selection. Individuals endorsing self fulfillment and sense of accomplishment fall in the middle in these comparisons.

Some of these relationships fit our expectations, i.e., warm relationships versus fun, enjoyment and excitement, and security. Low giving and selection effort by those endorsing a sense of belonging was unexpected based on the social nature of giving. The passive aspects of it altered the situation, however. High giving and selection effort by those endorsing self respect, which is an active value in the sense of implying how to act in the world, indicates that these individuals derive self respect from these activities. This analysis suggests two basic types of heavy gift

Table 2. Perceived Giving by Top Value

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob.
Between groups	6	21.27	3.55	3.93	.0008
Within groups	308	277.58	.90		

Group	N	Mean	SD	Sign. Diff. From:
1. Fun, enjoyment/excitement	40	3.26	1.00	4,6,7
2. Sense of belonging	13	3.42	.88	7
3. Security	25	3.58	.89	7
4. Self fulfillment	84	3.67	1.00	1,7
5. Sense of accomplishment	34	3.74	.92	
6. Warm relationships	55	3.96	.86	1
7. Self respect	64	4.07	.96	1,2,3,4

Table 3. Perceived Effort by Top Value

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob.
Between groups	6	25.90	4.32	4.33	.0003
Within groups	309	308.32	1.00		

Group	N	Mean	SD	Sign. Diff. From:
1. Fun, enjoyment/excitement	40	3.97	1.03	5,6,7
2. Security	25	4.04	.72	7
3. Sense of belonging	13	4.08	.90	7
4. Sense of accomplishment	34	4.36	1.14	7
5. Self fulfillment	84	4.50	1.08	1
6. Warm relationships	55	4.52	1.00	1
7. Self respect	64	4.84	.89	1,2,3,4

givers: those who give and exert effort in selection because it feels good inside (i.e., endorsers of self respect) and those who give and exert effort in selection because it allows them to show and receive friendship (i.e., endorsers of warm relationships).

A final analysis was conducted to assess the effects of sex. A set of analyses of variances with sex and top value as independent variables and gift-giving amount and effort as dependent variables revealed that sex, as well as top value, was significantly related to gift giving. However, no interaction effects were found, suggesting that the findings in regards to values and gift-giving behaviors hold regardless of one's sex. This was also replicated in a set of three-way ANOVAs in which sex, top value, and culture represented the independent variables. No significant interactions emerged.

In a final set of ANOVAs, sex and culture were the independent variables, with again no interactive effects. The results of these analyses are reported in Table 4. The mean contrasts (at $p \leq .05$), utilizing a Duncan multiple range procedure, are reported in Table 5. As expected, females are the heavier gift givers.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study indicate that values are closely related to reports of behaviors in an area of high interest to researchers—gift giving. The findings were generally supportive of our hypotheses. The evidence suggests that certain values are associated with certain gift-giving behaviors across individuals from two diverse cultures and regardless of sex. This, of course, is only in reference to the two cultures studied.

These findings suggest that individuals who report that they give more and exert more effort in giving can be roughly divided into two important segments—those who give to others so that they will feel better about themselves (self-respect givers) and those who give to others so that they may maintain or enhance relationships (relationship givers). These findings are consistent with Sherry's (1983) two motives (altruistic versus agonistic) and with the two primary reasons for giving reported in the Lowes et al. (1971) study (to give pleasure or to obtain pleasure). However, rather than having two, neat, non-overlapping segments, we would suggest, as Sherry did, that givers give for both motives (or values) rather than indicating that

Table 4. Perceived Giving and Effort by Sex and Culture

Dependent Variable: Giving						
Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratios	F Prob.	ω^2
Main effects	2	18.11	9.06	10.22	.000	
Sex	1	16.81	16.81	18.98	.000	.05
Culture	1	.10	.10	.12	.735	.00
Sex by culture	1	1.75	1.75	1.97	.161	.00
Explained	3	19.86	6.62	7.47	.000	
Residual	316	279.90	.89			
Dependent Variable: Effort						
Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratios	F Prob.	ω^2
Main effects	2	24.27	12.13	12.41	.000	
Sex	1	22.36	22.36	22.86	.000	.06
Culture	1	.19	.19	.19	.663	.00
Sex by culture	1	2.68	2.68	2.74	.099	.00
Explained	3	26.95	8.98	9.18	.000	
Residual	316	309.09	.98			

truly pure segments exist. We suggest this applies because, in fact, all values are positive to individuals to some degree.

Thus, in terms of implications marketers should try to appeal to both values or value segments—self respect and warm relationships. Furthermore, since fun and enjoyment, excitement, and security are less associated with giving, this suggests that these may be similar to objections marketers must address. For example, if gift selection is made fun and exciting by the retail environment then perhaps more giving would occur. Additionally, security might be addressed by providing secure buying situations, e.g., home catalog purchasing.

This study is not attempting to suggest that gift-giving behaviors or net amount of giving is equivalent in both groups of students. On the contrary, other studies have suggested major cultural differences between gift-giving behaviors in Oriental versus Western cultures (cf., Green and Alden, 1988). For example, a strong tradition of reciprocation and moral obligations exist for gift giving in Japan. None-

Table 5. Mean Contrasts of Giving and Effort by Sex and Culture

Independent Variable: Giving				
Group	N	Mean	SD	Sign. Diff. From:
1. U.S. Females	143	4.00	.95	3,4
2. Oriental Females	31	3.76	.90	3,4
3. Oriental Males	51	3.55	1.03	1,2
4. U.S. Males	95	3.44	.89	1,2
Dependent Variable: Effort				
Group	N	Mean	SD	Sign. Diff. From:
1. U.S. Females	144	4.75	.99	3,4
2. Oriental Females	31	4.44	.99	
3. Oriental Males	51	4.22	1.00	1
4. U.S. Males	95	4.09	.98	1

theless, our gift-giving measures focus more on friendship and nonobligatory giving and effort exerted in the selection process. These are less tradition-bound aspects of gift giving. Furthermore, we attempted to measure perceived amount and effort of giving relative to one's own frame of reference (i.e., one's own culture). Thus, we believe we succeeded in investigating what leads to *more or less* giving and effort, regardless of one's culture. Thus, it appears possible to examine relationships between values and behaviors cross-culturally, even if behaviors in those countries are considerably different. Other researchers, however, suggest more in-depth approaches due to the cultural differences (Green and Alden, 1988). We believe there is room for a variety of approaches to these issues.

We should acknowledge the limitations of this study. We examined the statements of nonrepresentative samples of U.S. students at two universities and Oriental students at one university. The degree to which Oriental students in this country are different from Oriental students in general is not known but they could be significantly different. Nonstudents could be significantly different from students as well. Additionally, the degree of generality to other cultures is unknown. Finally, we cannot claim that we have causality in these findings since the data are only correlational. However, the direction of effect from values to behavior is one logically grounded in theory and past studies. This area of research deserves greater attention and should provide even greater insights in the future.

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