

Excerpt taken from Carmen Anton, "The Culture of Gift Giving: What Do Consumers Expect from Commercial and Personal Contexts?" (2013)

The results to emerge show that satisfaction does indeed act as a mediating variable in the relation between value and intention, such that the greater the perception of a gift's economic, functional, social and symbolic values, the greater the satisfaction experienced by the recipient and therefore the greater the intention to give in return to an even greater extent. A stronger relational tie between giver and recipient leads to greater satisfaction with the gift received as well as greater willingness to give in return to the other person. Nevertheless, receiving a gift does not always imply giving in return. The context in which the gift is given may be commercial (Christmas presents or Saint Valentine's Day gifts), where everybody gives and expects to receive in return, or personal, where the gift is received by only one person, the process being sparked by an event of a private nature. These situations lead to differences in the effect of each type of value on intention to give in return. In commercial situations, receiving a gift whose main value is symbolic will cause satisfaction, yet lessen the intention to give in return. The positive effect to come from the satisfaction is cancelled out by the negative effect caused by the type of value received. Economic communication rules govern the gift-giving process for such occasions. Receiving a gift whose value is manifestly symbolic or expressive upsets the balance dictated by such rules and places the recipient in a position of "excessive" debt with regard to the giver. In order to prevent dependence damaging the relationship between giver and recipient and the fear of obligation leading to a desire to escape the commitment, recipients reduce their intention to give in return with a gift of similar or greater value, thus restoring harmony in the reciprocity of the process and safeguarding the relationship. By contrast, in personal situations, a gift whose main worth is the meaning value implicit therein boosts recipient intention to give in return. When the perceived value is utilitarian (economic, functional or social), its impact on the intention to give in return does not depend on the occasion. Its effect is always indirect, with the utilitarian value generating satisfaction, leading to the recipient being grateful and giving in return.

The results evidence the strong link between relational ties and the intention to give in return in Western culture. Individuals will always give in return when they receive a gift from relatives and friends, regardless of the gift's value or the gift

context. The relationship is key to understanding gift-giving experiences. In fact, in personal situations, relational ties and symbolic gifts—those that symbolize the relationship—are the main determinants of reciprocity.

Another interesting result concerns the role of satisfaction. Should givers seek to satisfy recipients with their gifts? Is satisfaction actually needed in the gift-giving process? Results show that satisfaction affects reciprocity, but that this effect proves more important in commercial contexts. In commercial situations, satisfaction is needed to convert a positive experience into a future commitment to give, satisfaction actually proving more important than the relational tie or the value of the gift.

Given the key role played by the recipient of the gift, firms in general, and the gift industry in particular, would do well to adapt their offer of products to ensure that they are seen as the best option depending on the circumstances that lead to the gift purchase. Sales clerks or online marketers might help consumers to make a decision and select an adequate gift. On personal occasions, gifts that contain a special message and a meaning within the relationship should be offered, as these contribute to ensuring the intention to give in return. It might therefore prove interesting to market products by taking account of the kind of personal message to be conveyed or the image that the giver wishes to project of himself or herself to the recipient. In these cases, marketers should help consumers to determine which feelings and messages they wish to convey and, consequently, the type of gift that might reflect such feelings and that might be sufficiently personal or personalized, and, ultimately move the receiver.

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