

Giving And Receiving Brands As Valentine's Day Gifts

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Abstract

This study outlines the relationship between giving and receiving brands as gifts on Valentine's Day. The occasion is a traditional time for declarations of love, adoration or intent that are expressed through a ritual of giving and receiving gifts or greeting cards. The exploratory research here attempts to remedy the shortcomings in the literature concerning brands and gift giving. The development of Valentine brand evaluation measure, when giving or receiving gifts is based on a factor analysis of 214 responses to a series of items in a survey completed by second year marketing students. Overall, the study contributes to the broad literature relating to consumer behaviour and increases the current understanding of the gift-giving phenomenon in general, and brands evaluation in particular. There is a significant, but small difference between giving and receiving brands as Valentine's Day.

Keywords: gift-giving, gift receiving, brands, Valentine's Day

Introduction

As well as an array of personal gift giving occasions such as Christmas, birthdays, graduations, and weddings, there is the one unique gift-giving occasion of Valentine's Day because it is an occasion for romantic gift giving (Otnes, Ruth and Milbourne, 1994, Polonsky, Donahay, Neal et al., 2000). Male gift giving has been a focus of Valentine research where the obligation motive and concept of mutual gain dominates the giving. Gifts are expected because partners are an object of adoration and are integral to the ritual gift exchange process (Rugimbana, Donahay, Neal et al., 2003). Therefore, St Valentine's Day offers a celebration of the spirit, and excess emotions where enjoying the essence of a consumption culture and material existence is elevated to the spiritual (Leslie, 2001). As in most gift research, the giving of brands as gifts has not been a feature of research and Valentine's Day offers an opportunity to gain insights into the evaluation of giving a popular brand name as a gift and more importantly, receiving a popular brand name as a gift.

Gift Giving

In modern western society, gift giving has become a complex psychological and sociological phenomenon that is a continuous, complementary process dealing with important relationships (Hill and Romm, 1996; Sherry, 1983). Giving a gift implies an intention to establish, develop, strengthen or maintain important social relationships or networks through the selection, transfer and evaluation of objects that fulfil an obligation or a spontaneous moment (Bell, 1991; Macklin and Walker, 1988). As such, the giver makes an effort to select an appropriate gift that would symbolise the occasion, the relationship and the emotions (Pandya and Venkatesh, 1992).

Sherry's (1983) gift giving model outlines the motives, strategies and intent of both givers and receivers within the ritual gift exchange process. In this model, the gestation stage incorporates motives, strategies, behaviours and activities that focus on gift selection and the giver, while during the prestation stage, the giver and receiver come together to focus on the exchange of the gift. The reformulation stage realigns the relationship because recipients give positive or negative feedback that affects the givers' feelings and any future gift exchanges (Wooten, 2000). The receipt of a highly ritualised and personalised gift is a strengthening experience that improves the quality of those feelings of connection and commitment, where shared meanings are validated and those relationships that lack meaning are weakened and severed (Ruth, Otnes and Brunel, 1999; Sherry, 1983).

Gift giving is a process of motives and strategies; however, gifts are selected and given for objective attributes and altruistic or agonistic reasons (Wagner, Ettenson and Verrier, 1990). Altruistic motives are selfless in seeking and maximising pleasure for the recipient (Goodwin, Smith and Spiggle, 1990). However, Wolfinbarger (1990) suggests that the recipient attributes the altruism to the giver. A gift only becomes altruistic because the receiver wants that gift rather than being the gift that the giver wanted to give. Thus, agonistic gift giving represents the self-interest of givers who seek some type of rewards and strategic or personal gains associated with giving (Belk, 1988, Curasi, 1999, Goodwin et al., 1990). In particular, male giving at Valentines appears to be a distinctly male courtship strategy for attracting and retaining mates. Women are aware of the reasons that men offer them gifts, yet males are seldom courted using gift giving as a tactic (Saad and Gill, 2003). Therefore, how a gift-giver perceives or evaluates a potential gift is likely to be different from how a gift will be received.

Gift Receiving

The recipient is involved in the all stages of the exchange process and there are effective outcomes of gift giving for both the giver and receiver that vary from satisfaction to disappointment (Sherry, 1983). In particular, the receiver comes with expectations of the occasion and the gift, decodes the instrumental and affective components of the gift and then responds to the giver by inferring intent and conferring judgment (Sherry, 1983). Evidence suggests that different gift giving occasions mean different gift selection criteria that leads to style, quality, usefulness, performance, price, and brand name comparisons (DeVere, Scott and Shulby, 1983, Heeler, Francis, Okechuku et al., 1979). However, Wooten and Wood (2004) suggests that a recipient is unlikely to evaluate a gift simply on size and financial aspects. Gifts are more likely to be evaluated on the basis of product associations and brand associations if a popular brand name is given. The giver wishes to pass on values to the receiver who may interpret their relationship in terms of brand associations such as durability and consistency (Larsen and Watson, 2001). However, recipients may be less impressed with a surprise gift because, because, as Heeler et al (1979) noted, brand decisions are a feature of wedding gifts because a number of these gifts are requested through direct approaches to the giver or through a bridal gift registry at a department store. Similarly, recipients of Valentine's Day gifts may hint or request specific brands as an expected or desired gift.

Branding

Many purchase decisions for personal or for household use rely on brand names for more than functional attributes, and, as such, a brand name is a holder of meanings that encompass

elements of social approval, personal expression, and self-concept (Fournier, 1998; Keller, 1993). Hence, brand selection and giving as gifts have performance criteria of status, distinctiveness, style, quality, and usefulness that are being evaluated on hedonic, symbolic and functional features inline with Keller's (1993) model and the symbolic and functional positioning of brands (Bhat and Reddy, 1998).

While many brand decisions incorporate criteria related to awareness (Percy and Rossiter, 1992), attribute measures (Mantel and Kardes, 1999), brand equity (Cobb-Walgreen, Ruble, and Donthu, 1995) and brand personality (Aaker, 1997), the focus of this study is on the benefit associations outlined by Keller (1993). Brand benefit associations are applicable to describing specific brands or the comparison of nominated brands in a product category. If a study concentrated on individual, popular and well-promoted brands, then focal brands would be clearly defined and nominated. However, the extent of brand choice in a gift giving context would require a generic, encompassing description of brands that are available and popular to give as gifts.

This generic bundling or grouping of brands is evident in the literature. One study, by DelVecchio (2001), described 'private labels' as a group or bundle of brands rather than specific private brands. As a collective concept, private labels exhibited characteristics of social symbols and quality cues (Burton, Lichtenstein, Netemeyer and Garretson, 1998). In addition, the literature also refers to children's brands (McNeal, 1992) foreign brands, Australian brands or industrial brands, where each person would hold a perception of what being foreign, Australian or industrial means. Overall, bundles or groups of brands can be described in generic terms because brand benefit associations apply to one or many brands (Keller, 1993). Therefore, a popular brand name (PBN) is a non-exclusive classification that is defined as any brand name whether heavily promoted or not that people consider as popular with themselves or others to give or receive as gifts. As in most gift research, the giving of brands as gifts has not been a feature of research, and Valentine's Day offers an opportunity to gain an understanding of the evaluation of giving and more importantly receiving a popular brand name as a gift.

Since gifts are selected and given for objective attributes, and received gifts are evaluated for instrumental and affective components, it is hypothesized that

H1: There will be a significant difference between evaluation of brands given as gifts and evaluation of brands received as gifts.

The effects of gender are examined as an additional objective of this study.

Method

The format of the study incorporated a self administered survey, distributed one week after Valentine's Day. The questionnaire contained a series of Likert-style scales and Semantic Differential scales on a 7-point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 7 is strongly agree. The authors adopted the view of Nancarrow and Brace (2000) and the possibility of Social Desirability Bias was considered but not included.

The brand benefit evaluation scale is adapted from Clarke and O'Cass (2001) and modified to the Valentines Day occasion. The statements were then phrased to accommodate either a

context of giving or receiving popular brand names. Items, such as brand quality or guarantees relate to utility benefits while being well received and the best gift available describe social utility characteristics of the gift and are part of brand functionality. The hedonic element of pleasure is a social utility characteristic. “Giving a popular brand name as a Valentine's Day gift means I give a good quality gift” is an example of the question statement style that was adapted to either the giving or receiving contexts.

People of any age would be suitable as a sample frame because Valentines Day is a celebration of love and emotion (Leslie, 2001). A convenience sample was drawn from second year marketing students because university students are a traditional and acceptable age for participation in the Valentine's Day rituals. Males accounted for 39% of all the respondents and 61% were females, and 61% of the respondents were aged 25 and under. Furthermore, a romance profile of respondent indicated that 38% of students were single or unattached, 39% of respondents had either a boyfriend or girlfriend and 23% had a partner or they were either engaged or married. The final sample size consisted of 214 individual cases.

An exploratory factor analysis for both giving and receiving brands as gifts was conducted where factor solutions (Table 1) were based upon the generally accepted rule of selecting a factor solution with eigenvalues greater than 1 and disregarding values less than 1. The alpha reliability for each factor was 0.91 and the variance explained was acceptable at a level of 65% explained. The factors were also moderately correlated with a significant Pearson Correlation of 0.711.

Table 1 Factor Analysis of Brand Evaluations

Popular Brand Name	Given			Received		
	Mean	Std.Dev	Loading	Mean	Std.Dev	Loading
PBN quality	3.60	1.88	.863	4.05	1.75	.854
PBN Positive	3.01	1.76	.781	4.10	1.62	.853
PBN Pleasure	3.27	1.68	.842	4.17	1.52	.835
PBN good value	3.75	1.73	.850	3.90	1.64	.824
PBN well received	3.31	1.65	.701	4.55	1.64	.794
PBN guaranteed	3.08	1.66	.798	3.47	1.57	.752
PBN best gift	2.82	1.70	.800	3.09	1.60	.747
Variance Explained			65.05%			65.50%
Cronbach Alpha			.91			.91
Composite Mean	3.27	1.39		3.87	1.40	

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) can be used together because the EFA generates reliability measures and the CFA estimates the validity of the factors. The CFA requires fit statistics at a global, specific level, or error level. Modifications may be required to obtain a well performing model and the modification index gives regression weights that indicate factor items that appear to be similar. Following the approach of Thompson and Dinnel (2003), the process makes one modification at a time, evaluates the resultant fit and the modification indices at each step through the modification process.

The confirmatory model of giving behaviour adequately represents the sample data. After deleting item “positive”, and forming the covariate items of “quality” and “well received”, the results of the confirmatory factory analysis indicate an excellent and reasonable fit for adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI)=0.95 and root mean square error for approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06. Also, the p-value for the Chi-square statistic of 0.07 is not significant and

indicates a close fit between the model and the data. Regarding the factor loadings, the standardised coefficients for all the indicators are above 0.65 (0.85, 0.84, 0.78, 0.79, 0.68, 0.74 respectively), indicating construct validity. The confirmatory model of receiving behaviour also indicates satisfactory fit results. After removing the item “pleasure”, and addressing the covariate items “positive” and “well received”, as well as the covariate items of “quality” and “best”, the AGFI =0.95, RMSEA=0.05 model and the p-value for the Chi-square statistics=0.13, suggest a satisfactory fit with the data.

Analysis and Results

After conducting the CFA, a composite mean was calculated for giving brands (Mean 3.23, Median 3.33 and Std. Dev 1.47) and receiving brands (Mean 3.83, Median 4.0, and Std. Dev 1.39). These composite means are toward the lower end of the 7 point scale. Hence, it appears that brands are not highly evaluated when either giving or receiving. The two composite factors were then subjected to a paired sample t-test. There is a significant difference between evaluating popular brand names as gifts and evaluating brands when receiving gifts ($t=-7.717$, df 213, $p=.000$). Thus, support is found for the hypothesis (H1), i.e. givers and receivers do evaluate brands differently. An independent-sample t-test shows no significant differences between males and females in either giving brands or receiving brands as gifts.

Discussion

If brands are purported to play an influential role in day-to-day consumption practices, then expectations are that brands should play a significant role in gift giving activities. This study found that brands are only moderately evaluated for giving and receiving on Valentine’s Day. Overall, giving brands appears to be of minimal consideration. Possibly, brands appear as being a commercial gift rather than a message of love. Popular brand names may be limited because many Valentine’s gifts such as flowers, novelties, or jewellery may be purchased from specific well-known retail outlets that focus on non-branded stock rather than an array of promoted brands. If a romantic weekend or intimate dinner was arranged as a gift, then the resort location or the magnificence of the menu may supersede any brand associations. On the other hand, body grooming, perfumery, confectionery, and white or brown goods are generally well-promoted brands and are evaluated as such. However, since theory often describes brands as aspirational then possibly gift receivers may view popular brand name gifts as an expectation rather than a preference. Givers may buy a brand for a gift as an image of romanticism while receivers may interpret the gift as image congruent; any stronger brand associations may be related to tangible product categories rather than non-branded gifts. When giving brands as gifts, the pairing of quality and well received is a reasonable action as brands mean quality and gifts are given in the spirit of goodness. Receiving gifts is more complex an evaluation as the combination means that a branded gift is the best and positively well received, quality item that may maintain the emotion of the occasion more than the pleasure gained from the gift.

Future Research and Conclusion

Valentine's Day research has been spasmodic. This study takes a step toward understanding and measuring the giving and receiving of branded gifts for the Valentine's Day ritual exchange. Although the differences that exist appear to be small, receivers interpret brands more favourably than the givers, and there are no gender effects in giving or receiving brands. More research should favour involvement and evaluation as well as affordability. Other areas of future interest are the identification of brands that are traditionally associated with Valentines or the role of specific brands as gifts for Valentine's Day. One possible avenue of research concerns the view that a brand may not be an appropriate style of gift to express the occasion, the relationship, and the emotions.

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