# The use of disliked gifts from a consumer behavior perspective ☆

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

To use or not to use a disliked gift is a dilemma for recipients. Their choice will affect their relationship with the giver as well as marketing and business. However, the study of this topic is scarce in the consumer behavior discipline. Through a survey on 1269 adults in Ecuador, a Latin American country, this study identifies variables from the recipient, the giver, their relationship, and the gift. These variables provide the solution to the dilemma and, according to these findings, present implications for theory and practice.

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## 1. Introduction

Due to its commercial origin, gift-giving is a relevant topic within consumer behavior discipline. Gift-giving has two protagonists: The giver and the recipient, the latter receiving comparatively far less attention (Cruz-Cárdenas, 2012; Larsen & Watson, 2001; Liao & Huang, 2006).

Gift exchanges do not always satisfy receivers. Flaws may derive from gift's delivery or from the gift itself (Roster & Amann, 2003). Gift recipients face a dilemma of use when they do not like the gift. Their choice has important implications for marketing and business.

Using a disliked gift may provide feedback to the giver. While protecting the relationship, this behavior leads givers to repeat unsatisfactory purchases. Conversely, not using the gift would deteriorate the relationship and force the recipient to face what to do with the product (Jacoby, Berning, & Dietvorst, 1977), even exchanging or returning the gift to the retailer.

Despite the consequences of using (or not) disliked gifts are important, previous studies seldom address them. Therefore, current research identifies the variables that significantly predict this behavior. The study takes place in Ecuador, a developing and culturally collectivist Latin American country.

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses

Only a few qualitative studies address disliked gifts' use (e.g., Cruz-Cárdenas, 2012; Roster & Amann, 2003; Sherry, McGrath, & Levy, 1993). However, much research exists about the relationship between consumer behavior and gift-giving. Existing knowledge provides a basis for the hypotheses of this study, which follow the four crucial elements in Sherry's (1983) model of the giving and receiving of gifts: The giver, the recipient, their relationship, and the gift.

### 2.1. Hypotheses regarding the receiver

In this context, the most common tangible gifts are apparel and related accessories (Cruz-Cárdenas, 2014), which involve women rather men (e.g., O'Cass, 2004).

**H1.** Women recipients are less willing than men to use gifts that they dislike.

Individuals with higher-incomes can easily access a wider variety of products to satisfy their preferences, making the use of gifts (liked or disliked) less necessary.

**H2.** Higher-income individuals can access more products and have less need to use gifts, even those they dislike.

Collectivism involves caring about relationships from national and individual perspectives (Sharma, 2010).

**H3.** Highly collectivist individuals might prioritize their relationship with the giver, being more likely to use disliked gifts.

### 2.2. Hypothesis regarding the giver

Buying gifts involves women more than men (Fischer & Arnold, 1990).

**H4.** Women involvement will be constant in the gift-giving process and will indirectly pressure recipients, who will be more likely to use disliked gifts.

### 2.3. Hypotheses regarding the giver–receiver relationship

The presence of the giver indirectly forces the recipient to use a gift (Cruz-Cárdenas, 2012), thus:

**H5.** As giver–receiver relationship becomes closer, recipients may use disliked gifts.

According to Sherry (1983), gifts differently affect relationships. Thus:

**H6.** A gift's positive effect increases the probability for recipients to use the gift, even if they dislike it.

Gift giving is not common among givers who are far younger than receivers (Caplow, 1984). Thus:

**H7.** Givers who are far younger than receivers transmit the idea of great effort, increasing the probability for recipients to use a disliked gift.

### 2.4. Hypotheses regarding the gift

Distasting a gift inhibits its use at different levels of intensity (Cruz-Cárdenas, 2012). Thus:

**H8.** The less recipients like the gift, the lower the likelihood for them to use it.

Recipients use gift price to estimate not only the value of the product but also the value that giver attributes to their relationship. Product's monetary value activates an aversion to wastage (Arkes, 1996), whereas the relationship value activates an emotional response. Thus:

**H9.** Higher prices may increase the likelihood for recipients to use a disliked gift.

## 3. Methodology

Data comes from adult population (older than 18 years) in Quito, Ecuador, during October and November, 2013.

Ecuador is a developing Latin American country with a population of nearly 15 million whose official currency is American dollar. Ecuador, like other Latin American countries, is culturally collectivist (Hofstede, 2001).

From Quito's urban population close to 1.6 million, approximately 1 million are adults. Searching for a representative sample of this population this study randomly selects 109 census zones (over 448) and systematically selects 12 homes per zone. The study selects each household individuals according to population parameters.

This study hires a market research firm for fieldwork. Interviewers ask participants to focus on the most recent tangible gift they receive, but do not like. Interviewers also ask to exclude perishable gifts (flowers and candies), craft gifts, cash gifts, gift cards, and gifts from multiple givers. Interviewers collect 1269 usable questionnaires.

Regarding variable measurement, the distaste for the gift and the closeness of the relationship follow a scale from 1 to 7. Gift's effect on the relationship follows a scale from 1 to 5. Age difference results from subtracting giver's age to that of the recipient. Sharma's (2010) 4-item scale for interdependence measures collectivism at an individual level. Finally, the outcome variable is a dichotomous variable (using the gift vs. not using).

## 4. Findings

In the sample, the number of men (50.1%) and women (49.9%) is similar. The average monthly family income of US $962.8 (SD = 611.9) is close to that of the urban Ecuadorian population of US $1046. Similarly, 56.7% of respondents have secondary education, as most adult population of Quito and Ecuador (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, Ecuador. INEC, 2010, 2013). However, average age of respondents (36.0 years (SD = 13.1)) is somewhat lower than that of adult population of Quito and Ecuador, which is 40 years (INEC, 2010).

Recipients estimate the average gift price in US $27.7 (SD = 27.9). Moreover, the mean score for interdependence is 6.1 (SD = 0.8), with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.7 (after excluding item 4). Recipients only use 37.8% of all disliked gifts. Finally, apparel and related accessories represent the most common types of disliked gifts (59.1%).

This study tests the hypotheses through a binary logistic regression in SPSS 22 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Resulting values ($\chi^2$ = 237.20; df = 9; $p < 0.001$) demonstrate a significant improvement in the model's predicting capacity when including hypothesis variables. Furthermore, Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($\chi^2$ = 4.98; df = 8; $p = 0.76$) shows a good adjustment of the model. Additionally, the model has a Cox & Snell $R^2$ of 0.17 and a Nagelkerke $R^2$ of 0.23, acceptable for logistic regressions (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000).

Table 1 shows non-standardized (B) and partially standardized (B*) coefficients; the latter results from multiplying the B value of each variable by its standard deviation. Therefore, all hypotheses receive support, except H9 regarding perceived price effect on the use of a gift. Additionally, the strongest predictors (with the highest B*) are, first, the level of distaste for the gift, and, second, the closeness of the relationship.

**Table 1**
Binary logistic regression analysis.

|  |  | B (SE) | SD | B* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Did use[a] | Constant | −1.98 (0.62)[**] |  |  |
|  | Gender of recipient (female)[b] (H1) | −0.31 (0.13)[*] | 0.50 | −0.16 |
|  | Family income[c] (H2) | −0.02 (0.01)[*] | 6.12 | −0.12 |
|  | Interdependence (H3) | 0.22 (0.09)[*] | 0.80 | 0.18 |
|  | Gender of giver (female)[b] (H4) | 0.28 (0.13)[*] | 0.50 | 0.14 |
|  | Closeness of the relationship (H5) | 0.22 (0.05)[***] | 1.35 | 0.30 |
|  | Impact of gift on relationship (H6) | 0.25 (0.10)[*] | 0.69 | 0.17 |
|  | Age difference[d] (H7) | 0.01 (0.00)[*] | 18.79 | 0.19 |
|  | Dislike for the gift (H8) | −0.41 (0.04)[***] | 1.85 | −0.76 |
|  | Perceived price (H9) | −0.00 (0.00) | 27.87 | −0.00 |

SE, standard error; SD, standard deviation; B* is the partially standardized coefficient.
[a] Reference category: Did not use.
[b] Comparison category: Male.
[c] Monthly family income/100.
[d] Receiver's age minus giver's age.
[*] $p < 0.05$.
[**] $p < 0.01$.
[***] $p < 0.001$.