Exploring Consumer’s Reaction in the Bad Gift Situation Across Cultures

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated the impacts of bad gift giving across cultures, especially how individualistic (Western, American) vs Collectivist (Eastern, Asian) consumers react when they receive bad gifts and how it would affect their relationship with the giver.

We found that although people from the individualist culture felt the gift was more appropriate, they seemed to put an emphasis on reciprocating the bad gift. On the other hand, people from the collectivist culture still wanted to give something good to the giver even though they did not like what they received from them.

METHOD
To get data from both collectivist and individualist cultures, we partnered with a university in Thailand. In total, there were 257 participants in an online study from both the University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire and the University of Thai Chamber of Commerce.

Participants recalled a time in which they received an undesirable gift from a friend. They reported their perceptions of descriptive information about the gift, how the gift impacted the relationship they had with the giver, and what they wanted to do post receiving the gift through responding to a series of questions on the survey. The questions are listed below:

- How appropriate was the gift you received? (1=very inappropriate, 7=very appropriate)
- To what extent did you want to give the gift back to the giver? (1 = not at all, 7 = very much)
- To what extent did the gift show that the giver cared about you? (1 = very little, 7 = very much)
- What impact do you think the gift had on your relationship with the person who gave it? (1 = very negative impact, the relationship ended; 5 = very positive impact, the relationship became far closer)
- How much money would you spend to obtain a gift for the gift giver? (1 = very little, 7 = very much)
- How much time would you put into obtaining a gift for the gift giver? (1 = very little, 7 = very much)

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Appropriateness</th>
<th>Desire to Return</th>
<th>Showed Gift Care</th>
<th>Perceived Relationship</th>
<th>Time to Reciprocate</th>
<th>Money spent to reciprocate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Westerners</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>7.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**=p<.01       *=p<.05

INTRODUCTION
One of the most pervasive differences between collectivist culture’s and individualist culture’s social motivation and behavior is reflected in the manner in which individuals view themselves and their relation to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Asians have interdependent self-concepts that emphasize the connectedness between themselves and others. In contrast, North Americans are inclined to think of themselves independently (Shen et al. 2011).

Gift giving plays an important role in society. Individuals often give to charitable organizations in order to benefit victims of misfortune. Employers give gifts to their subordinates in appreciation for a job well done. Gifts are exchanged between family members and close friends on special occasions (birthdays, Christmas, etc.) and are given as tokens of affection to romantic partners (Shen et al. 2011).

Our research extends the understanding of gift exchange in different cultures, especially when consumers receive undesirable gifts. Existing studies in the gift giving literature mainly focus on desirable gifts. There is still a lack of research on undesirable gifts. Therefore, with the findings from this study, businesses can further create plans for international businesses on gift exchange and return policies.

FUTURE RESEARCH
Our research demonstrated that individualistic and collectivistic cultures view receiving an undesirable gift differently. However, our research is limited in that we only used the US and Thailand as representative of the individualist and collectivist cultures. Future research would be needed to determine if the results are found in other countries from individualist cultures (e.g., Western European countries) and collectivist cultures (e.g., China, Japan, Korea).

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