

The Direct and Moderated Influences of Interpersonal Determinants on Trust in Gift Exchange: From the Giver's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Drawing heavily from interpersonal attraction and social exchange theories, the present paper explores the role of interpersonal attraction in the gift exchange process and investigates the antecedents of relational trust for the gift giver and recipient. Based on the literature review and the informants' inputs, this paper develops the measures for four independent variables: interpersonal similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity. The empirical results indicate that interpersonal similarity, reward, and reciprocity between the gift giver and gift recipient are statistically significantly associated with relational trust for both the giver and the recipient (as perceived by the giver) in gift exchange. However, interpersonal familiarity between gift giver and recipient is not found to be significantly related to superior relational quality in terms of trust. Both theoretical and practical implications are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Gift giving, Interpersonal attraction, Social exchange, Trust

INTRODUCTION

The giving and receiving of gifts is an important ritual in our society. Gifts are often used as a means to express the givers' appreciation, encouragement, solicitude, or comfort to the receivers. Existing consumer research suggests that gift exchange generates not merely substantial economic value (Caplow, 1982; Garner and Wagner, 1991; Levi-Strauss, 1965; Mauss, 1954; Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim, 1993; Ruth, Otnes and Brunel, 1999), but also consequential social value to both gift givers and receivers (Belk, 1976; Cheal, 1988; Joy, 2001; Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel, 1999; Sherry, 1983). Though it has been argued that exchange is the foundation of the marketing theory, there is a shortage of research in interpersonal exchange behavior regarding gift giving.

Gift giving serves as a symbolic communication tool for the reformulation of interpersonal relationships and social ties (Joy, 2001; Ruth, Otnes and Brunel, 1999; Ward and Tran, 2007; Clarke, 2008; Chan, Denton and Tsang, 2003). Previous studies have investigated the social relationship creation and reformulation of the classical gift exchange model developed by Sherry (1983). In particular, Ruth *et al.* (1999) initially examine the relational effects of gifts, contributing to the emerging field of relationships and trust in consumer research (Dholakia and Morwitz, 2002; Fournier, 1998; Luo, 2002). They identify six relational effects of gift receipt experiences and the realignment of the gift giver/receiver relationship over time. However, one noticeable shortcoming of Ruth *et al.*'s (1999) study is that their investigation of the relational quality of gift exchange ignored relational trust, which is an important measure of relational quality in gift exchange process.

In strategic marketing/management and direct marketing literature, trust has been examined as an important indicator of overall relationship quality and strength of social ties (Iacobucci and Hibbard, 1999). Indeed, trust is a core component of the relational exchange paradigm and the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Harridge-March, 2006; Zucker, 1986). The relational exchange paradigm suggests that exchange parties (including gift giver and receiver) should focus on long-term relationship as well as a series of transactions rather than short-term and brief transactional exchanges (e.g. Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Iacobucci and Hibbard, 1999). Similar to the relational exchange paradigm, social exchange theory states that exchange partners appraise and reward relationship in a long-term behavioral context. In other words, exchange partners tend to look beyond short-term inequities or risks, concentrating instead on long-term mutual and reciprocal gains (Blau, 1964; Fukuyama, 1995, 1996). It has been noted that trust in exchange may stimulate cooperation (Moorman *et al.*, 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994), create goodwill (Kumar 1996), enhance customer satisfaction (Anderson and Narus, 1990), and strengthen commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Furthermore, trust between seller and buyer may reduce participants' perceived risk (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Harridge-March, 2006) and decrease both fear and greed (Hwang and Burgers, 1997; Kumar 1996). Social psychologist Schneider (1976, p. 458) also notes the key role of interpersonal attraction and trust, stating "a great deal of a person's behaviors (e.g., gift giving, receiving, and reciprocating) takes place with or toward people he or she knows. The person not only interacts with these known others, but also has feelings toward them of liking, respect, and trust (these feelings generally refer to interpersonal attraction)." As such, this paper

attempts to contribute to the social interaction literature by identifying trust as an indicator of the relational quality and also investigating antecedents of perceived trust in the gift exchange process.

Another gap in the literature is the lack of studies on interpersonal gift giving. Most researches examine the gift exchange at the intrapersonal level and focus on one party - either the giver or the recipient in the gift exchange dyad (Caplow, 1982; Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993; Ruth et al., 1999). To fill this gap, this study investigates the interpersonal determinants of trust in gift exchange, including interpersonal similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity. In order to match the giver-recipient dyads in data collection, this study focuses on the dyadic relations of the gift-recipient's trust for the giver, perceived by the gift-giver (see a similar approach in Lowrey, Otnes and Ruth, 2004). It is noteworthy that the present study draws heavily from the interpersonal attraction theories in social psychology (Backman, 1981; Berscheid and Walster, 1978; Byrne, 1961; Festinger, Schachter, and Back, 1950) and posits that gift exchange behavior could be understood substantially by researching the role at the interpersonal level.

The main contributions of this research are twofold. First, this research sheds new light on the relational outcome of the interpersonal gift exchange behavior. Specifically, the present study introduces perceived trust as an indicator of relational quality in the gift exchange process and relates the interpersonal attraction theory (Belk, 1976) to the gift exchange process. Belk mainly investigates the role of reciprocity in the dyadic relationship of the gift exchange. In contrast, our research tackles a comprehensive application by examining multiple interpersonal attractions' determinants such as similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity. Secondly, this study explores not only the direct influence of interpersonal determinants on trust, but also the moderating effect of group presence. It is posited that social facilitation due to the presence of others in the gift giving ritual (in addition to the giver and recipient) may strengthen the associations between interpersonal determinants and trust. As such, the research of gift exchange is extended from investigating simple, linear questions (such as "do interpersonal determinants matter in relational gift exchange?") to examining more practical, contextual, and moderated relationships (such as "how and in what ways do interpersonal determinants matter in relational gift exchange?").

DETERMINANTS OF INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION

Interpersonal attraction represents a central component of social relationships (Brehm and Kassin, 1993; Michener, DeLamater, and Schwartz, 1986; Penner, 1986; Schneider, 1976) in social psychology. Interpersonal attraction can be defined as a relationship development based on liking, loving, and trust (Backman, 1981), or the feelings of liking, trust, and respect (Schneider, 1976). Given the fact that gifts are "social tie signs" (Cheal, 1988) and that interpersonal attraction and trust are two components of social relationships (Backman, 1981; Brehm and Kassin, 1993; Schneider, 1976), the gift exchange process is essentially linked with psychological interpersonal attraction. As mentioned previously, four prominent determinants of interpersonal attraction are examined in this study: similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity.

Similarity

Similarity depends heavily on psychological relationships and it plays a powerful role in interpersonal attraction. People are attracted by individuals similar to them. Most studies have shown that people tend to form a strong positive perception toward a person if that person agrees with them on important issues such as religious beliefs, politics, and family. Evidence supports the proverbial wisdom that birds of a feather flock together (Byrne, 1961; Michener, DeLamater, and Schwartz, 1986).

Existing research on interpersonal similarity has tested the aforementioned wisdom mainly from key perspectives of similarity such as similarity in demographics (Newcomb 1961), similarity in personality (Byrne 1971), similarity in physical attractiveness (e.g., Berscheid et al., 1976; Feingold, 1988), and similarity in attitude (Byrne, 1961). Byrne's (1961) attraction-to-a-stranger paradigm states that attraction to a stranger is positively associated with the percentage of attitude statements made by a stranger agreeing with one's own attitudes. Attitude similarity leads to stronger attraction. According to reinforcement theory, interacting with others who share similar attitudes often results in positive reinforcement. Such reinforcement may be created through positive outcomes of interactions (Newcomb, 1961), validation and confirmation of our own view of the world (Lott and Lott, 1974), and corroboration of our expectations of approval from others (Santee and Jackson, 1978).

Reward

Gift giving and receiving can be rewarding for both giver and receiver. According to the interpersonal attraction literature, individuals are attracted to people whose presence is rewarding to them (Lott and Lott, 1974). Direct rewards include positive consequences such as the attention, support, understanding, and appreciation of others. Indirect rewards may encompass association with valuable commodities such as money, status, or information that we could not have secured on our own (Brehm and Kassin, 1993). The reinforcement-affect model (Clore and Byrne, 1974) and the balance theory by Heider (1958) could explain the association between reward and attraction.

The reinforcement-affect model suggests that positive feelings while in someone's presence increase attraction to that person, whereas negative feelings decrease attraction (Brehm and Kassin, 1993; Clore and Byrne, 1974). Attraction is determined by affect or emotion, which in turn is produced directly by the person or indirectly by the association. Direct or indirect rewards could trigger positive emotions, which would lead to motivation for approaching the person, and ultimately, an interpersonal response of attraction (Brehm and Kassin, 1993).

Alternatively, the balance theory describes that psychological balance may contribute to attraction. Heider (1958) notes that a balanced social relationship created by consistency in thoughts, feelings and values would reward the relationship itself. In other words, attraction is more likely produced by balanced and mutual reward, rather than by unbalanced, one-way reward.

Familiarity

Familiarity refers to the frequency of actual contact between the exchange parties. Most studies on familiarity suggest that familiarity does lead to strengthening of social bonding. One of the most important research on this topic is done by Zajonc (1968), who defines familiarity as mere exposure. It has been shown that people prefer words that occur frequently in their native language to rarely used words (Zajonc, 1968). The mere exposure hypothesis states that the more people are exposed to certain stimuli, the more they will positively evaluate the stimuli. As such, familiarity is theorized to increase interpersonal attraction and bonding.

The mere exposure view is supported by a variety of experimental investigations. For example, Grush (1980) finds that known politicians are preferred to unfamiliar ones. Interestingly, Cross *et al.* (1967) note that even rats raised on music by Mozart prefer new selections from Mozart to those by Shoenberg. For gift giving or receiving, familiarity between the giver and the recipient can be beneficial. The better the members of the gift giving dyad know one another, the more likely gift giving or receiving would be in a natural process. That is, less outside stress and thus, less anxiety are involved when the process becomes more natural.

Reciprocity

Social psychologists maintain that people follow norms or standard guidelines in responding to other's behavior and beliefs. The norm of reciprocity suggests that people should help those who help them in the first place. In other words, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Penner 1986, p.228). Reciprocity theory states that most people agree and expect that the relationship needs to be two-sided and reciprocal instead of being one-sided and win-or-lose situation (Backman, 1981). According to the balance theory, people are attracted to each other due to the existence of balance (Brehm and Kassin, 1993; Heider, 1958). A mutual, *quid-pro-quo* exchange between what one gives and what he/she receives is necessary for balanced and pleasant social bonding.

TRUST IN GIFT GIVING: AN INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION VIEW

This study attempts to explore the link between the trust involved in the gift exchange parties and the interpersonal attraction determinants. Trust is considered to be an important indicator of the overall relationship quality of the gift exchange dyad, measuring the strength of social ties and bonds (Iacobucci and Hibbard, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Schechter, 2006). For the giver, trust is the degree to which gift giving leads to a credible, loyal, and committed relationship with the recipient. For the recipient, trust refers to the extent to which the gift receiving results in a credible, trustworthy, and committed relationship. Both the relational exchange paradigm and the social exchange theory suggest that gift giver and recipient may build and expand the relationship on a long-term basis with a series of gift exchanges rather than on a short-term or one-time transactions (Blau, 1964; Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Iacobucci and Hibbard, 1999;

Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Zucker, 1986). Only through long-term, reciprocal, and balanced gift exchanges can the gift giving dyadic relationship be rewarding, trustworthy, and committed by both giver and recipient.

Direct Effects of Trust in Gift Giving

The classical study by Belk (1976) predicts that similarity plays an important role in gift exchange, as similarity creates greater interpersonal respect and trust according to Byrne's (1961) attraction-to-a-stranger theory. He predicts and validates that the gift giver selects a personally appealing gift for a similar recipient who is perceived to like the gift, when the giver's self-concept is positive. Following this observation, Wolfenbarger and Gilly (1996) theorize and validate the influence of similarity on the tendency to buy giver-congruent gifts during the gift exchange.

Notably, although interpersonal similarity may include similarity in demographics, personality, physical attractiveness, and attitude, the present study focuses on attitude similarity as it reflects an individual's lifestyle. In fact, the importance of attitudinal similarity has been well documented in the leader-member exchange (LMX) literature, suggesting that attitudinal similarity is an important factor on the leader and follower relationship (Graen and Wakabayashi, 1994). Shaikh and Kanekar (2001) use the survey approach to investigate the impact of attitudinal similarity and affiliation needs on interpersonal attraction. It has been found that attitudinal similarity had a significant effect on interpersonal attraction (indeed, the similarity effect accounted for 81% of the total variance).

According to the attraction-to-a-stranger paradigm (Byrne, 1961), Smith, Bell and Fusco (1988) posit that individuals with similar beliefs would attract and trust each other, and hence manage shared resource more efficiently. Using an experiment involving 135 college students, Smith, Bell, and Fusco (1988) find that "a high degree of attitude similarity can facilitate the preservation of a commons, and that perceived disagreement lowers attraction as well as coordination of the commons harvest" (p. 282).

Along these lines, attitude similarity in gift giving is important for interpersonally trusted and committed relationships in that it may create desired cognitive consistency of whom and what one likes and dislikes. Furthermore, attitude similarity leads to increasing trust between giver and recipient through the effect of reinforcement. Reinforcement theory suggests that interacting and exchanging gifts with others who share similar attitude often leads to positive reinforcement (Newcomb 1961). Such reinforcement may exist due to positive outcomes of gift giving such as appreciation, compliments, and verbal thanks. The above discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

H1. Interpersonal similarity between gift giver and gift recipient is positively associated with relational trust in gift exchange.

The tendency to present gifts to others is frequently motivated by the expectation that doing so will bring social rewards. Direct rewards to the giver include positive outcomes such as attention, support, understanding, and appreciation from the recipient to the giver. Indirect rewards to the recipient include the positive perceptions of the giver's thoughtfulness, care, and personal attachment from the giver to the recipient. It is

likely that a rewarding gift may lead to a trusting relationship for the giver and the recipient. A rewarding experience may further reinforce the positive feelings in the gift exchange through the involving parties' presence. According to the reinforcement-affect model (Brehm and Kassin, 1993; Clore and Byrne, 1974), rewards can trigger positive emotion. A positive emotion would then lead into a motivational approach of the person and ultimately an interpersonal response of attraction. This notion is also supported by the balance theory (Heider, 1958), which highlights the critical role of psychological balance in social exchange. If one party (either the giver or the recipient) is repeatedly over-rewarded or under-rewarded, the other party may likely perceive the imbalance and consider the relationship as unfair and/or unworthy. Thus, we contend that a higher level of reward that perceived by gift giving from giver and recipient is associated with a greater trust in the gift exchange.

H2. Reward from the gift exchange is positively associated with relational trust in gift exchange.

There is nothing quite like watching the expression on friends' faces when they unwrap a thoughtful gift. In social psychology, most empirical studies find that familiarity leads to mutual liking and strengthens the trusted social ties (Grush, 1980; Cross et al., 1967). Familiarity is likely to promote trust between giver and recipient in gift giving. Familiarity makes gift giving a natural, interesting, and exciting process rather than an obligated, mundane, or boring activity. Furthermore, a gift will be appreciated more while it comes from individuals with whom one is familiar. A gift giver would be pleased if that gift would be appreciated, as expected. By the same token, the recipient would return a gift that could similarly please the giver, therefore a positive gift cycle would continue. Thus, with a higher level of familiarity between giver and recipient, the gift exchange experience would involve little social and psychological stress. Accordingly, the level of anxiety related to the gift exchange would be reduced and the relational trust would be enhanced.

H3. Interpersonal familiarity between gift giver and recipient is positively associated with relational trust in gift exchange.

The norm of reciprocity suggests that people should give gift to those who had given them something of value. According to Mauss (1954), gift exchange involves three types of obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate. The obligation to reciprocate is important for the relational quality of the relationship. Failing to repay adequately a gift, the receiver may lose valuable assets such as social status or self-pride in social interactions. Therefore, a lack of reciprocity may cause the suspension of interpersonal relationship. Also, the interpersonal attraction perspective also focuses on mutual reciprocity and treats it as a necessary condition for a continued trusting interpersonal relationship. Belk (1976) studies the reciprocity of interpersonal attraction and finds support for the model of cognitive balance in gift giving. When balance does not exist, giver's dissatisfaction or unresolved tension will dominate his/her cognitive perceptions of gift giving. As such, this initial study provides some evidence of the importance of reciprocity in the gift exchange dyadic relationship. Reciprocity theory suggests that gift exchange should be two-sided and reciprocal, rather

than one-sided and unbalanced (Backman, 1981). Whether the return is a tangible gift or an intangible cue from the receiver, the action of reciprocity itself sends a positive confirmation to the other party and becomes a positive reinforcer of a trusted and committed relationship. Thus, the following hypothesis is formed:

H4. Interpersonal reciprocity between gift giver and recipient is positively associated with relational trust in gift exchange.

Group Presence in Gift Exchange

Although the factors of similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity between gift giver and gift recipient could influence trust in gift giving, we also suspect that these influences may vary in different social conditions, such as people may organize and present information about themselves and others in a different manner during the presence of a third party. One such condition is the presence of others in the gift giving ritual. We draw the social facilitation theory to develop a hypothesis of the moderating role of group presence.

Wooten (2000) looks at gift giving anxiety in interpersonal gifting and the situations themselves. He considers group presence a source of pressure and stress that may fuel one's anxiety. However, social facilitation theory (Triplet, 1897; Zajonc, 1965) suggests that interpersonal influences may be strengthened by the presence of others in a simple and ritual pattern of gift giving, receiving, and giving back. Theorizing the process of social facilitation, Zajonc (1965) notes that the presence of others increased arousal, which then affects behavioral outcome and performance in different ways, depending on the specific task. This mere presence hypothesis has been supported by experiments in social psychology. For instance, Triplet (1897) concludes that people performed better in groups or in front of audiences than being alone. People ran track faster when they had someone running right next to them. When an individual runs the same race by her/himself, he/she may be much slower.

Lowrey, Otnes, and Ruth (2004) report a longitudinal study related to Christmas giving practices of five female informants. They suggest that "givers strategically incorporate or allow themselves to be influenced by third parties when selecting gifts for recipients" (p. 547). Their study reveals ten characteristics of social and agapic influences on dyadic giving, and also provides further evidence to show that the third party played an important role in the gift exchange ritual. Yet there is little understanding of how the presence of others may moderate the impact of interpersonal determinants on relational gift exchange.

In short, the social facilitation theory suggests that the presence of others in addition to the gift exchange dyad increases arousal for both the giver and recipient. Such arousal may strengthen the dominant response to the stimuli of dyadic interpersonal determinants such as similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity of the gift exchange experience. Since trust can be reinforced by the presence of third parties (Doney and Cannon, 1997), it is our contention that social presence of others during the ritual of the gift giving presentation (e.g., in an event such as a baby shower where multiple participants present their gift to the recipient) would strengthen the associations between the interpersonal attraction determinants (similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity) and trust in gift

exchange. The following section explores the role of group presence between interpersonal determinants and relational trust.

Group Presence: Moderating Role of Between Interpersonal Determinants and Trust

Social identity theory suggests that any positive attributes that one person assigns to him/herself are transferred back to the giver with similar characteristics, while negative attributes are often discounted or ignored. Similar recipients share similar characteristics on salient dimensions (e.g., values, habits, interests). The interpersonal bond between similar giver and recipient is likely to be reinforced with the presence of third parties in that the personal adherence is observed and witnessed by others.

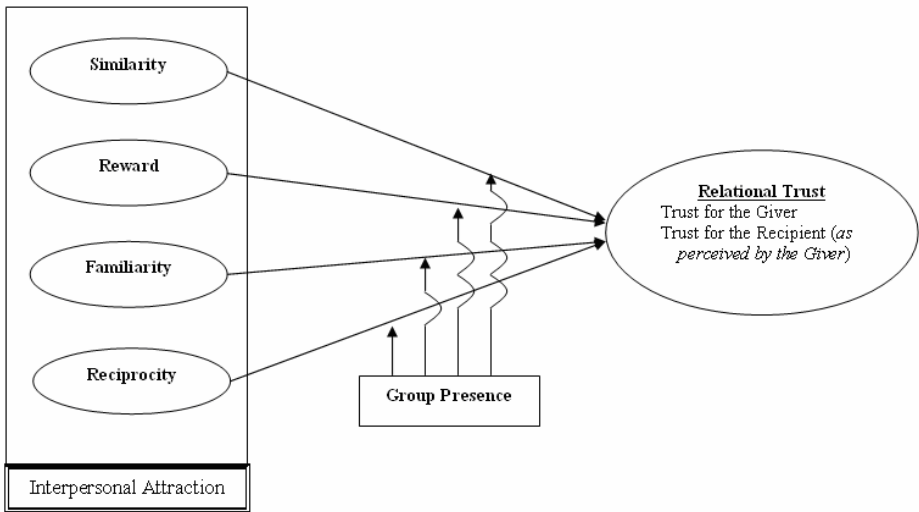
Gifting is an act of symbolic communication; therefore, the opportunity of obtaining a reward in return can motivate givers. Rewards mark an informational purpose and a target of signal such as willingness to invest in personal relationship. Recipients may be more willing to bestow valued rewards upon givers when third parties are present. Reinforcement-affect theory suggests that attraction is determined by affect or emotions. It is our belief that the presence of other participants in a gifting experience may strengthen a reward signal and may reinforce the effect of perceived reward from gift giving.

Also, familiarity improves the knowledge about the recipient's tastes, wants, or needs. This knowledge could facilitate gift choices (Caplow, 1984) and help reduce social pressure. Therefore, the number of people present when a gift is unveiled by a familiar recipient would not raise the giver's anxiety. Instead, additional participants during the ritual of the gift giving presentation are expected to strengthen the trusting associations between giver and recipient when giver knows recipient's tastes.

Bauer (1967) briefly discusses the role of group references as a source of influence. The involvement of multiple participants in salient aspects of gift experience may spark excitement and could augment the reciprocal dimension of interpersonal relationships. In the Internet era, buyers are able to build trust toward anonymous sellers on the basis of positive feedback they receive from other buyers (e.g., eBay). Likewise, the existence of third parties' presence in a gift experience could strengthen the reciprocity-trust relationship. That is, when additional participants are present, a reciprocal and balanced gift exchange is more likely to nurture trust. Based on the above discussion, we posit the following hypothesis (see Figure 1).

- H5. Group presence will positively moderate the associations between the interpersonal determinants [similarity (H5a), reward (H5b), familiarity (H5c), and reciprocity (H5d)] and relational trust in gift exchange.*

Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework



METHODS

Qualitative Phase within In-Depth Interviews

Prior to the research design of a field study to examine the hypothesized relationships, a qualitative phase of research was conducted to confirm the relevance and importance of interpersonal attraction theories in the gift exchange context. In-depth interviews were conducted with informants from two U.S. college campuses. A total number of nineteen semi-structured interviews with ten females and nine males were performed, each lasting approximately 35 minutes on average. The questions asked in the qualitative phase of this research were semi-structured. For example, this study probed from general questions such as “in the context of your last gift-giving experience, what was the dollar amount for the purchased gift, for whom, when?” “What are the important factors for a successful gif exchange?” “Tell us the factors that influence the gift exchange and why they are influential?” to narrowed ones such as “what do you think is the role of reciprocity in gift exchange? Why is it important or why not?”

General findings of these in-depth interviews indicate that interpersonal attraction theory-based determinants are important in gift exchange experiences. Interestingly, most informants agreed that similarity between giver and recipient is the most important factor for a successful gift exchange. One informant (White, female, 21) noted that “the more similar I am to friends, the more I can connect, relate and trust my friends. Similar morals and beliefs are important to make the gift exchange easier and less stressful...” Another informant expressed that “similarities are important (for gift exchange) since they create less tension of what to buy and get...one can trust and understand his friends to a greater

extent if they share the same religious beliefs.” Familiarity is also related to gift exchange, in that “the more one is familiar with a person, the more he cares for them and trusts them. Buying gifts becomes a joy rather than a pain; receiving gifts becomes also more enjoyable because most likely he would get something he likes and does not have to fake liking the gift to make them happy (Black, male, 24).” In addition, a reward is an essential part of the gift exchange experience, in that “gift giving shows appreciation. Watching someone you love open a present or watching them appreciate something nice that you did for them makes the effort worth it” (Asian, female, 23). Another stated that “the reward is important for both ends (giver and recipient). It can come from something bought, but it usually means more if it comes from the heart, hugs, kisses; and a simple thank-you can be enough. Appreciation from the gift exchange experience definitely can create a stronger bond and trust” (White, female, 19). Reciprocity seems to be highly related to the gift exchange, in that “if one person gives and never receives anything tangible or intangible, she will feel unappreciated, and will start to pull back, wondering why he does not do anything for her. She will also think he doesn’t love her as such and will not trust him” (White, female, 22). Another informant stated that “... Reciprocity shows people acknowledge their kindness and appreciate them” (Black, male, 21). In short, our in-depth interviews provided initial empirical evidence related to the relevance of interpersonal determinants in the gift giving experience and the importance of these determinants in building a mutually trusted relationship within a gift exchange dyad.

A Large-Scale Field Study with Surveys

A field study was then conducted to examine the hypotheses more rigorously. Research assistants were instructed to collect data through the administration of undisguised-structured questionnaires using in-home personal interviews. Interviewers were trained to ask for verbal consent from the respondents for their volunteered participation and also assured them that they could terminate the interview at any time. Each respondent recalled the very last gift-giving experience as the specific occasion (Lowrey, Otnes, and Ruth, 2004; Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim, 1993). Using an approach similar to Fisher and Arnold’s (1990) study, a multistage cluster sampling technique was adopted and twenty-four census areas were randomly drawn from the population in the U.S. geographical area. Based upon the number of households in a specific area, we determined the proportion of the sampled households from each selected area. Eligible subjects could be any adult within randomly selected adult respondents in 652 designated households (Fisher and Arnold, 1990). Participants were told that they could win a drawing of \$200, \$100, and \$50 gift certificates as an incentive for participating in this research project. They were encouraged to answer questions based on a specific occasion of gift giving experience through a critical incident technique. The participants were also asked to recall and describe their relationship with the receiver, and describe the gift itself. After one or two returned visits to all households, we contacted a total of 557 households, in which 206 households completed the questionnaire. The response rate of this survey is about 37 percent, which is comparable to those reported in the literature with field research designs (e.g., Fisher and Arnold, 1990).

Table 1: CFA Results of the Measures

Measurement Model Paths ^a	Standardized Weights	t values	Reliability Alphas (Composite Reliability)
<i>Interpersonal Similarity</i>			
Giving and receiving the gift with those sharing my beliefs and values is very much joyful and jubilant.	0.834 ^b		.81 (.85)
Exchanging the gift with people with similar attitude is very important to me.	0.766	5.241	
Giving and receiving the gift with others who share my opinions reinforces my own view of the world.	0.578	4.977	
<i>Interpersonal Reward</i>			
Gift giving and receiving may build my self-image and status.	0.574 ^b		.87 (.89)
Gift giving and receiving strengthen my social ties and networks with others.	0.897	14.393	
Gift giving and receiving create more interpersonal relational attachment.	0.761	12.023	
<i>Interpersonal Familiarity</i>			
I enjoy buying gifts for those I know better.	0.752 ^b		.75 (.78)
I am cheap when giving gifts to someone unfamiliar.	0.87	10.667	
I buy gifts suitable for the receiver's needs and wants.	0.635	8.475	
<i>Interpersonal Reciprocity</i>			
I expect that gift exchange should be reciprocal and balanced.	0.860 ^b		.91 (.93)
Mutual gift exchanging is important for a long-term pleasant relationship.	0.944	18.053	
Failing to return the gift would depreciate my self-pride and social status.	0.835	15.189	
<i>Trust for the Giver</i>			
Gift giving brings me trusted relationships with the receiver.	0.919 ^b		.96 (.97)
Gift giving brings me loyal relationships with the receiver.	0.968	26.819	
Gift giving brings me committed relationship with the receiver.	0.936	24.098	
<i>Trust for the Recipient</i>			
I believe the receiver perceives me more trustworthy because of the gift giving experience.	0.927 ^b		.94 (.96)
I feel the receiver perceives me more credible.	0.951	25.118	
I think the receiver is more committed to our relationship.	0.894	21.099	

^a Goodness-of-fit statistics: $\chi^2(120)=308.23$; $p=.000$; CFI = .936; GFI =.896; AGFI = .873; RMSEA =.068 ^b Fixed parameter.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

MacKenzie (2001) criticizes the unhealthy ignorance of measurement error in the consumer literature, noting that less than six percent of the papers published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* have tested latent variable(s) using the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. Notably, a rigorous SEM analysis, based on a CFA measurement model, may greatly benefit consumer research by providing scholars with the ability to control for measurement errors, to formulate a more scientific experimental design, and to enhance the testing of the theoretical structures. A potential pitfall for many consumer research lies in the fact that most measures used in the consumer literature reflect not merely the construct(s) they are supposed to represent, but also random measurement errors (e.g., incorrectly wording of an item in the scale) and systematic measurement errors (e.g., common method factor, or social desirability bias). Indeed, not taking the underlying measurement errors into consideration in a model may artificially attenuate the estimate of the slope of the relationship under consideration and reduce the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. Thus, this study employed the CFA approach to take the measurement errors into account. Subsequently, a hierarchical regression model (Sharma et al., 1981) would be used to examine the posited hypotheses.

Measures of Variables

Independent Variables: Similarity, Reward, Familiarity, and Reciprocity

The concept of “interpersonal attraction” is operationalized through four constructs (i.e. similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity). The measures for these four independent variables (e.g., interpersonal similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity) were developed in this study by following established scale development procedures that were articulated by Churchill (1979). In particular, we conducted a series of focus groups and pretests for scale item generation, scale purification, and scale validation. This paper also specified the domains of the four constructs by referencing theories in the area of interpersonal determinants (e.g., Byrne, 1961; Clore and Byrne, 1974; Heider, 1958; Michener, DeLamater, and Schwartz, 1986; Newcomb, 1961; Zajonc, 1968) and conducting qualitative interviews under a semi-structured and undisguised survey. In order to verify the internal consistency, reliability, and convergent and discriminant validities, this study adopted the method of confirmatory factor analysis. Great caution has been taken to achieve the construct validity of the studied constructs. The resulting measurement scales in the final questionnaire are reported in Table 1. The Cronbach’s alphas for similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity were .81, .87, .75, and .91, respectively, which indicated acceptable measures of internal consistency and reliability.

Moderating Variable: Group Presence

Group presence was measured by a five-level Likert item. Group presence identifies the context of gift giving experience, ranging from “no group presence” during gift giving to “high level of group presence” during gift giving (see Argo, Dahl, and

Manchanda, 2005; Dahl, Manchanda, Argo, 2001; Luo, 2005). The middle point (level-3) indicates that several other people were present in the gift giving ritual.

Dependent Variables

Relational trust is viewed as an outcome of successful gift-giving. Gift giving, in essence, could reinforce the interpersonal relationship between gift-giver and recipient. Our measures of “trust” for giver and recipient were based upon the established theories (Blau, 1964; Fukuyama, 1995; Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) through two contexts. For the giver, the trust measurement (see Table 1) has three items that assess the degree to which gift giving led to creditable, loyal, and committed relationships with recipients. For the recipient, the trust measurement consists of three Likert items that assess the degree to which the gift receiving resulted in a credible, trustworthy, and committed dyadic relationship as perceived by the respondent or the gift giver. The Cronbach’s alphas of the trust for giver and the trust for recipient were .96 and .94, respectively, which achieved a desired level of internal consistency and reliability.

The measurements of the perceived strength and quality of the gift exchange relationship (i.e., trust) were collected through questions regarding gift givers’ hypothesized perception of recipients’ perception regarding the quality of the relationship between giver and recipient. Ideally, the gift-giving dyad’s (i.e., both giver and recipient) perceptions toward relational trust would have been requested, but matching the responses between gift giver and recipient, especially in the context of a large-scale field study, was an overwhelming task. Another issue involved in obtaining answers from this study is that some gift exchange may have taken place beyond the selected geographical areas and thus present a practical challenge for obtaining a dyadic data set.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characteristics

The survey sample showed that approximately 46 percent were male, which is close to the region’s male population of 49 percent. In addition, the sample had an average size of 3.63 individuals per household, whereas the population of the region had an average of 3.41 individuals per household. Data in educational background showed that 36 percent of the respondents had education beyond high school, which is comparable to 30 percent of the region’s population. Data on annual income showed that \$35,000-\$49,999 was the median for both the sample and the population in this survey. It appears that there were no major differences between our sample and the region’s population.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Results

As shown in Table 1, the internal consistency of the constructs was examined through the composite reliability estimates from SEM, and Cronbach’s alphas were higher than the cut-off point of .70. The CFA was executed with the multi-item

constructs in the measurement model, including the dependent variables (trust for the giver and trust for the recipient) and the independent variables (similarity, reward, familiarity, and reciprocity). CFA results provided support for the unidimensionality, convergent, and discriminant validity of the full six-factor measurement model. All items loaded on their corresponding construct (see Table 1 for details) were significant at the .05 level, which demonstrates adequate convergent validity. Since the modification indices and the estimated residuals from CFA analysis were not significant, unidimensionality was achieved. In addition, discriminant validity of the model was validated by checking the pairwise correlations to examine if they were significantly different from the unit. This study also applied another approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to confirm the discriminant validity of constructs by means of parameter estimates, their associated *t* statistics, and the average variance extracted. Overall model's goodness-of-fit indexes also supported the validity of this overall measurement model, that is, $\chi^2(120)=308.23$, $p=.000$, comparative fit index (CFI)=.936, the goodness-of-fit (GFI)=.896, adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI)=.873, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA)=.068.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1 (H1) predicts that a higher level of interpersonal similarity between gift giver and recipient is associated with superior relational quality such as greater trust for both giver and recipient. As shown in Table 2, the estimated coefficient of similarity is .18 ($p < .02$ when trust for the giver is the dependent variable) and .16 ($p < .03$ when trust for the recipient is the dependent variable). Therefore, H1 is supported by the data.

Next, the regression results provide supportive evidence to H2, in which the coefficients of reward are .31 and .37 (both p values $< .01$). That is, a higher level of perceived reward is associated with superior relational quality in terms of greater trust between giver and recipient. However, H3 is not empirically supported by the data. In other words, interpersonal familiarity between gift giver and recipient is not significantly related to superior relational quality in terms of trust.

Furthermore, our test results indicate that a higher level of gift exchange reciprocity between giver and recipient is significantly associated with greater trust. The coefficients of reciprocity are .41 and .31 (both p values $< .01$), which represent the largest effects among the independent variables.

In summary, three of the four tested determinants (i.e., similarity, reward and reciprocity) are statistically significantly associated with the relational trust. The only statistically insignificant determinant is familiarity. This finding matches the argument of the backbone of the importance of familiarity, the mere exposure hypothesis (Zajonc, 1968) has been criticized in the literature. As noted before, it rules out the effects due to learning, reinforcement, or conditioning. In addition, the importance of familiarity may be totally moderated by contextual variables such as the attitude of the subject toward the experiment (Perlman and Oskamp, 1971).

Table 2: Standardized Regression Coefficients and T-Statistics for the Moderation Test

Independent Variables	Trust for the Giver ^a		Trust for the Recipient	
	Coeffi.	P-value	Coeffi.	P-value
SIMILARITY	0.18	0.02	0.16	0.03
REWARD	0.31	0.00	0.37	0.00
FAMILIRITY	0.09	0.15	0.09	0.13
RECIPROCITY	0.41	0.00	0.31	0.00
GROUP PRESENCE (GP)	0.06	0.32	0.12	0.05
GP * SIMILARITY	0.17	0.03	0.21	0.00
GP * REWARD	0.22	0.00	0.14	0.05
GP * FAMILIRITY	0.08	0.21	0.16	0.03
GP * RECIPROCITY	0.17	0.03	0.18	0.01
R ²	0.51		0.50	
Adjusted R ²	0.48		0.47	
F of Change of R ²	3.86	0.00	2.40	0.00
F	21.97	0.00	20.98	0.00

^a mean-centered variables used to minimize the effect of multicollinearity (VIF ranges from 1.30 to 1.79, less than the critical level 10).

H5 predicts that group presence could strengthen the associations between the interpersonal attraction determinants (similarity (H5a), reward (H5b), familiarity (H5c), and reciprocity (H5d) between gift giver and recipient) and relational quality in terms of greater trust. With the exception of the effect of familiarity, other hypothesized moderating effects are supported, as their coefficients of the product terms are statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 2). Following the method suggested by Sharma et al. (1981), we empirically identified a moderating effect of social presence in the relationship between similarity, reward, and reciprocity, in that (1) the coefficients of the product (ranging from .17 to .22 when the dependent variable is trust for the giver and from .14 to .21 when the dependent variable is trust for the recipient) are statistically significantly different from zero, and (2) explanatory power in terms of the changes of R-square from the second model to the third model are statistically significant at the .01 level.

LIMITATIONS

This study does not consider philanthropic gift exchange and religious donations that are altruistic in nature and symbolize “agapic love” (Belk and Coon, 1993). While the agapic theory of gift giving may fit into certain altruistic and prosocial behavior settings, this paper follows the notion of obligatory exchanges, such as gifts exchanged during

weddings, birthdays, baby showers, house warming parties, and business transactions among family members or friends. As noted earlier, gift exchange involves three types of obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate (Mauss, 1954).

Some research acknowledges that consumers are not always correct in predicting their spouse's preferences (Davis, Hoch, and Ragsdale, 1986). That is, observers may attribute others' behavior to dispositional variables and underestimate the importance of situational variables. Future studies should consider examining the ability (or lack of ability) to determine the other party's (e.g., gift receiver's) likely perception of the quality of the relationship between giver and recipient. For example, both the giver's and the recipient's (e.g., mother and daughter) perception of the trust from gift receiving should be studied in a truly dyadic manner.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study sheds lights on the relational outcome of gift exchange. The gift giving literature has seldom addressed an important aspect of the relational outcome of the gift exchange relationship (i.e., the perceived trust). To fill this gap, we examined the influence of interpersonal dynamics on relational trust. Statistical results indicate that similarity, reward, and reciprocity were significantly associated with gift giver's relational trust. In addition, we explored not only the direct influence of interpersonal determinants on gift exchange relationship quality measured by trust, but also the moderating effect of group presence. Empirical evidence shows that social facilitation due to the presence of others in gift giving rituals would strengthen the association between interpersonal determinants and trust.

The present study offers several implications for future gift giving research. First, drawing heavily from interpersonal attraction theories in social psychology, we argue that our understanding of gift exchange could be enhanced substantially by researching the role of interpersonal attraction in the gift exchange process and also by identifying the antecedents of gift exchange relational effects. We extend Belk's (1976) original application of the interpersonal attraction perspectives, where he investigates the role of reciprocity in the gift exchange dyadic relationship. In this regard, the present study represents a more comprehensive application by introducing multiple interpersonal determinants into such model. In addition, we extend Wolfinbarger and Gilly's (1996) work on similarity by clarifying the multi-dimensional concept of similarity in the gift exchange experience. Although Wolfinbarger and Gilly (1996) investigates the relationship between similarity and tendency to buy giver-congruent gifts, they fail to define the conceptual domain of similarity. Future research could apply the framework provided by the present study. Consequently, the scope of consumer research can be widened further to include the exchange relationship beyond two individuals, or even to the widely discussed customer relationship management.

Secondly, departing from previous studies focusing on individual level's analysis, this study indirectly responds to the call made by Bagozzi (2000) for more studies on "groups of consumers such as two-person dyads (including gift giver and receiver), or friendship groups" at the interpersonal level. In this context, we extend the application of interpersonal attraction theories from social psychology to gift giving behavior. The implications of interpersonal attraction theories for trust in consumer research are

developed. Determinants of interpersonal attraction and their influence on gift exchange relational outcomes are clarified.

Our research expands the theoretical basis of gift giving literature that previously focused on social exchange theory. While undoubtedly beneficial, social exchange theory is somewhat narrow in its focus on evaluating antecedents of trust in gift giving. It can explain only two (reward and arguable reciprocity) of the four determinants that we address using the interpersonal attraction theories. Thus, future research applying social exchange theory may consider interpersonal attraction views.

The direct influence of interpersonal determinants on gift exchange relationship quality that is measured by trust, as well as the moderating effect of group presence is explored in this study. This research contributes to the field by confirming the presence of others in the gift giving ritual, which may strengthen the association between interpersonal determinants and trust. As such, future research may extend our efforts by considering other potential moderators (e.g., the closeness of relationship). We suggest that future studies may give more attention to the interpersonal interaction of gift exchange from a contingency perspective, which may have implications in the setting of goals and plans devised to achieve them.

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