

# Gender Differences in Perception of Utilitarian and Hedonic Gift Attributes among American Consumers

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## <Abstract>

본 연구는 두 가지 선물상황(생일, 크리스마스)과 선물수용자(가족, 친구)에서 성별에 따라 선물 속성지각에 차이가 있는지를 밝히 고자 하였다. 질문지를 이용하여 미국 남녀 소비자 97명을 대상으로 자료수집 하였으며, 자료분석을 위해 MANOVA(Multivariate Analysis of Variable)를 실행하였다. 분석결과, 가족과 친구를 위한 생일선물상황에서 성별에 따라 쾌락적 속성(독특한, 유행하는, 재미있는)의 중요성 지각에 차이를 보여 여성이 남성보다 선물의 쾌락적 속성을 더 중요하게 지각하였다. 또한 가족과 친구를 위한 크리스마스 선물상황에서도 성별에 따라 쾌락적 속성에 차이를 보여 여성이 남성보다 가족을 위한 선물로써 독특한, 유행하는 속성 을 더 중요하게 지각하고, 친구를 위한 선물은 독특한, 재미있는 속성이 더 중요하게 지각되었다. 그러나 실용적 속성(내구성있는, 실용적인, 비싸지 않은)에서는 두 가지 상황의 가족과 친구를 위한 선물지각에 대해 성별에 따라 유의한 차이를 보이지 않았다. 따 라서 본 연구결과, 소비자들은 선물구매상황에서 일반제품과 달리 쾌락적 가치를 더욱 중요하게 인식하고 있으며, 성별에 따라 선물 상황과 수용자에 대한 선물의 쾌락적 속성지각에 차이를 나타냄으로써 성별에 따른 차별화된 선물상품개발 및 이미지 포지셔닝 전 략을 통해 효과적 마케팅 관리가 이루어져야 할 것이다.

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▲ 주요어(Key words): 선물(gift) , 성(gender), 실용적 속성(utilitarian attributes), 쾌락적 속성(hedonic attributes)

## I. Introduction

Gift giving is a pervasive human behavior, especially in modern society, where people are more involved than ever

before in special occasions such as Christmas, weddings, birthdays, Mothers Day, Secretarys Day, and Valentines Day (Belk, 1979; Manikowske & Winakor, 1994). Moreover, expenditures on gift shopping are increasing as household incomes increase in American society. Expenditures for gifts represent more than 3 percent of the annual budget of the

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average household (Garner and Wagner, 1991). According to Ruth et al. (1999), over 100 billion dollars per year is spent on gift in the United State. Especially, the Christmas season is crucial for many retailers, often accounting for 40-50 percent of yearly sales and profits (Smith and Beatty, 1985). In recognition of this fact, researchers have characterized Christmas as the most complex gift exchange occasion in North America (Otnes and Woodruff, 1991; Otnes et al., 1993). Accordingly, gift giving is a topic of growing interest to researchers in several disciplines, including consumer behavior (Wagner & Garner, 1993).

Gift giving is defined as giving tangible resources (objects such as clothes or book) or intangible resources (i.e., love, concern, service) that represent symbols of a relationship and the identities of the giver and the receiver behavior (Sherry, 1983; Smith & Spiggle, 1990). This definition of gift giving can be linked to the components that constitute gift-giving behavior: giver, recipient, occasion, and gift attributes. Aside from purchases for self and family, gift purchases are the most frequent purchase activity conducted by consumers (Smith and Beatty, 1985). Sherry (1983) reported that differences in gift-giving occasions and the givers relationship to the recipient affect gift-giving behavior. Especially, it is suggested that the gender difference in shopping behavior could be important to information search and purchase heuristics used especially for gift shopping (Laroche et al., 2000). The idea that men and women exhibit different patterns of shopping behavior has over the years attracted considerable attention (e.g., Fischer and Arnold, 1994; Buttle, 1992; Qualls 1987; Darelly and Smith, 1995). Moreover, because gift shopping may represent a scene in which sex-role orientations are enacted (Buttle, 1992), it can offer potentially rich information to study difference in shopping behavior between men and women. Consumers are highly involved in utilitarian aspects which they devote considerable effort and more time to purchase the gifts (Fischer and Arnold, 1990) as well as in the hedonic value of gift attributes because the gift giving has a function as symbolic form of communication or celebration for important life events (Belk, 1979). The gift attribute perception also could depend on the variables of givers, gift-giving situation and recipients in utilitarian and hedonic aspects.

The purpose of this study was to examine gender differences in perception of gift attributes according to gift situation (e.g., birthday, Christmas) and recipients (e.g., family and friends). This study will contribute to understand

consumers situation-specific behavior and create gift products and to promote market sales for a holiday or special events in gift markets.

## II. Literature Review

### 1. Gender Differences in Gift-Giving Behavior

Much of the research on gift-giving behavior has concluded that gift giving is primarily the domain of women in American culture. Moreover, many studies of gift giving have mainly employed women in their samples. However, several demographic trends (e.g., the rise of nontraditional families and the increase in single-person households) have caused men to become more involved in gift giving than they were in the past. Areni, Kiecker, and Palan (1998) also contended that, contrary to popular opinion, men are actively involved in gift giving and devote considerable effort to the task of gift giving. Limited studies that examined the relationship between gender and gift-giving behavior revealed that women were much more concerned than men with buying appropriate gifts and cards (Benney, Weiss, Meyersohn, & Reisman, 1959), that women devoted more time and effort to giving gifts (Fischer & Arnold, 1990), and that men gave fewer but more expensive gifts than women did (Caplow, 1982).

The notion that men and women exhibit different patterns of shopping behavior has over the years attracted considerable attention (e.g., Fischer and Arnold, 1994; Buttle, 1992; Qualls, 1987; Darelly and Smith, 1995). Shopping is still an activity in which the female plays a dominant role. Buttle (1992) argues that shopping is a scene in which sex-role orientations are enacted. His study found that while women do the majority of shopping for the family, in general, men could be described as specialist shoppers (e.g., for insurance, camping gear, and outdoor yard goods). Women have generally been thought to be more involved in the purchase sequence than men. Since women have traditionally been the family purchasing agents (Davis, 1971; Wilkes, 1975), and therefore perceive shopping as being associated with their role in the family (Slama and Tashchian, 1985). In addition, males and females have been postulated to employ significantly different information processing strategies. According to Zeithaml (1985), even for the same products, men and women often shop differently (in terms of the amount of pre-search activity and time spent in stores).

With respect to gift shopping characteristics, men and women display sharp differences. For example, female appeared to put more effort into selection, emphasizing the greater importance attached to gift shopping by female in U.S. (Beatty, et al., 1993). A recent survey also determined that women are more likely than men to say they have been influenced by marketing tactics aimed at getting them to buy holiday merchandise sooner than they had planned (Maritz Marketing Research, 1997). Especially, in Christmas situation, women appeared to be much more active Christmas shoppers than men. Laroche et al. (2000) found that males are less comprehensive searchers, and rely more on heuristic strategies such as consulting a sales clerk when shopping for a Christmas clothing gift, and that female are more comprehensive and systematic when shopping for such a gift. Beyond these descriptive results, it can be logically assumed that variations exist among women and among men in terms of their perceptions of important gift attributes.

## 2. Perception of Gift Attributes in Relation to Recipient and Occasion

Gifts are generally given to others in order to symbolize and celebrate important life events, religious history, and family relationships (Belk, 1979). According to Belk (1979), gift-giving has four different functions as: (a) a symbolic form of communication between the giver and recipient; (b) a form of social exchange, aiding in establishing, determining, and maintaining interpersonal relationships; (c) an economic exchange (a means of conferring material benefit on a recipient); and (d) a socializer (affecting the self-concept and behavioral patterns of the recipient). It is possible that perception of gift attributes in shopping strategies may vary as a consequence of these particular functions of gift giving.

The literatures on gift-related studies (Belk, 1979; DeVere, Scott, & Shulby, 1983) provided a comprehensive list of attributes of tangible gifts, which can be grouped into two dimensions: utilitarian attributes and hedonic attributes. Utilitarian attributes (e.g., durable, inexpensive, convenient) are associated with those providing functional or practical benefits to the user; hedonic attributes (e.g., exciting, fun, prestigious) provide emotive, expressive, and experiential benefits to the user (Hirschman, 1984; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Despite the significance of the two dimensions of product attributes noted by several consumer researchers (e.g., Hirschman, 1984; Holbrook & Hirschman,

1982; Midgley, 1983), gift attributes have not been studied in this context.

Researchers pointed out that, compared to personal use, gift giving has symbolic meaning rather than functional attributes (Belk, 1981; Smith & Spiggle, 1990). However, other researchers have argued that gift attributes depend on the type of receiver. For example, Smith and Spiggle (1991) supported that gifts to less familiar friends, such as casual friends and business associates, tend to have utilitarian attributes, while expressive gifts are given to those with whom one has a close relationship.

Several studies also suggested that the occasion for which a gift is given also can influence the perception of important gift attributes. In Belk's study (1979), birthday gifts were found to be more personal, fun, and less expensive than wedding or Christmas gifts; wedding gifts were more practical; and Christmas gifts were more fashionable and lasting and had higher quality. Similarly, in an investigation of desired gift attributes for birthday and wedding gifts, DeVere et al. (1983) found that consumer perceptions toward the important gift attributes varied by the gift-giving occasion. For birthday gifts, enjoyability and uniqueness were perceived as the most important attributes, whereas durability and usefulness were identified as the most important attributes for wedding gifts. Additionally, in Belk's (1981) study, different gift-giving conditions in terms of recipients and occasions were manipulated to find the interactions among these variables. He discovered that the birthday gift for a close friend was seen to call for less expensive gifts and less time and effort than the wedding gift for a close relative. In addition, females frame the exchanges significantly more often in the context of formal celebratory ritualized gift exchange occasions than males. Males inject more fantasy into series of gift exchanges than females (McGrath and Ann, 1995).

The aforementioned evidence suggests that perceptions of gift attributes vary according to the relationship between recipient, giver, and occasion. An additional contribution to the literature can come from conceptualizing gift attributes in terms of their utilitarian and hedonic attributes.

## III. Methods

### 1. Research Objectives

This study explores whether female and male consumers differ in their perception of important gift attributes in terms of utilitarian and hedonic attributes. Furthermore, this investigation will be extended to two recipients (a family member and a friend) and two occasions (birthday and Christmas). The specific objective of this study is to determine whether female and male consumers differ in their perception of utilitarian and hedonic gift attributes for two types of recipients (a family member and a friend) on two gift-giving occasions (birthday and Christmas).

## 2. Instruments

A self-administered questionnaire is designed to use for the study of gift-shopping behavior. The independent variables are giver, recipient, and occasion. Females and males are compared as gift givers. Recipients include a family member and a friend, who have been reported as the most frequent recipients of gifts (Garner & Wagner, 1991). The occasions include Christmas and birthdays, which account for the majority of gift giving (Horne & Winakor, 1991). Also, these two occasions are quite different in that Christmas is a calendar event that is a religious and/or cultural celebration involving large group gatherings on the same date, and a birthday is a recurring, culturally indifferent event celebrating personal or special feelings in a smaller group than for Christmas (Hyllegard & Fox, 1997; Sherry, 1983).

The dependent variables are two dimensions of gift attributes: utilitarian attributes (i.e., durable, practical, and inexpensive) and hedonic attributes (i.e., unusual, fashionable, and fun). Gift attribute is operationalized as the degree of importance of each gift attribute when gifts are purchased for each of the two occasions (i.e., birthday, Christmas) for each of the two recipients (i.e., family member, friend) and is rated on a 5-point rating scale (1 = very important, 5 = not important). The measurement scales of gift attributes encompassing both utilitarian and hedonic attributes were selected from the lists of DeVere et al. (1983) and Belk (1979). As for content validity, the merchandising faculty examined the appropriateness of the measurement.

The descriptive information was obtained from demographic characteristics including age, gender, income, and marital status. In addition, respondents were asked to rank order gift items they would like to choose for a family member and a friend as birthday gifts or Christmas gifts.

For both types of recipients and both occasions, clothing was ranked highest. This finding is consistent with those of previous researchers, who reported that clothing is a popular gift for various occasions (e.g., Belk, 1979; Caplow, 1982; Wagner & Garner, 1993). The other gift items included books, cash/gift certificate, cologne/perfume, record/tape/CD, sporting goods, and home furnishings.

## 3. Sampling and Data Collection

The sample was composed of consumers aged 18 or above, but limited to Anglo-Americans, based on the argument that gift-giving behavior varies across cultures (Hyde, 1979; Park, 1998). Respondents were selected via snowball sampling, which involves identifying a set of initial prospective respondents who, in turn, refer other potential respondents (Hair, Bush, & Ortinau, 2000). Respondents participated voluntarily and were assured that their responses would be anonymous. A total of 101 questionnaires were collected. Excluding nonusable, 97 questionnaires were used for data analyses.

The respondents were composed of 47 males (48.5 %) and 50 females (51.5%). The sample distribution in terms of age was 13 (18-20 years), 41 (21-30 years), 18 (31-40 years), 11 (41-50 years), and 12 (older than 50). More than half of the respondents earned less than \$30,000. As to marital status, 46% were single, and 44% were married.

## 4. Data Analysis

To accomplish the research objective, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed separately for three utilitarian attributes and three hedonic attributes. This set of MANOVA was repeated for two occasions (birthdays and Christmas) and two recipients (family and a friend).

## IV. Results

### 1. Gender difference in perception of gift attributes for family

Table 1 shows the results of MANOVA tests regarding important gift attributes for family. The importance of hedonic attributes revealed significant differences between females and males, both for birthdays and Christmas, suggesting that hedonic gift attributes are more highly important to females for their family in birthday and

Christmas. However, females and males did not differ in perception of utilitarian attributes for either birthdays or Christmas (Table 1).

<Table 1> Gender Difference in the Importance of Gift Attributes for Family

	Birthday			Christmas		
	Female	Male	F	Female	Male	F
<u>Utilitarian</u>						
Durable	2.34	2.59	1.09	2.26	2.46	.82
Practical	2.80	2.39	3.17	2.87	2.71	.38
Inexpensive	3.08	3.17	.16	2.91	3.30	2.92
<i>Wilkes Lamda</i>			2.59			1.63
<u>Hedonic</u>						
Unusual	2.53	3.09	4.95*	2.45	3.02	5.65*
Fashionable	2.73	3.24	3.90*	2.59	3.33	9.18**
Fun	1.65	2.20	7.04**	1.85	2.09	.90
<i>Wilkes Lamda</i>			3.35*			4.54**

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

The scores are based on a 5-point rating scale  
(1 = very important, 5 = not important )

Univariate analysis revealed further details all three attributes (unusual, fashionable, and fun) for birthdays and two attributes (unusual and fashionable) for Christmas. In the context of birthday gift for family, females perceived three hedonic attributes more importantly than did males. Also, the fun attribute was perceived the most importantly, followed by the unusual attribute and the fashionable attribute, suggesting that female consumers are more likely to chose fun items for their family birthday gift than are male consumers. In Christmas situation, two hedonic attributes (e.g., unusual, fashionable), except for fun, were significantly differed by gender. That is, female consumers were more likely to perceive unusual or fashionable gift attribute importantly than were male consumers for Christmas gifts.

This result implies that for family both in birthday and Christmas, male and female exhibit different patterns in gift-buying behavior. That is, female consumers are more involved in hedonic values for gift shopping than are male consumers. This result supports the discussion (Beatty et al., 1993; Sherry & McGrath, 1989) that gift shopping is related to gender role that female appears to put more effort into selection that is emphasizing the greater importance attached to gift shopping situation than male.

## 2. Gender difference in perception of gift attributes for friends

Table 2 illustrates the perceived importance of gift attributes for a friend and occasion. As presented in Table 2, MANOVA tests revealed significant results for hedonic attributes. In both gift situations, hedonic gift attributes were more important to females than males, while utilitarian attributes were not perceived differently by gender (Table 2).

<Table 2> Gender Difference in the Importance of Gift Attributes for a Friend

	Birthday			Christmas		
	Female	Male	F	Female	Male	F
<u>Utilitarian</u>						
Durable	2.34	2.73	3.15	2.38	2.58	.68
Practical	2.75	2.57	.66	2.83	2.67	.62
Inexpensive	3.00	3.20	.76	3.08	3.32	1.17
<i>Wilkes Lamda</i>			2.23			1.59
<u>Hedonic</u>						
Unusual	2.40	2.93	5.02*	2.28	2.91	7.89**
Fashionable	2.67	3.25	5.21*	2.72	2.98	.97
Fun	1.67	2.20	6.37**	1.71	2.13	4.27*
<i>Wilkes Lamda</i>			3.60*			2.73*

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

The scores are based on a 5-point rating scale  
(1 = very important, 5 = not important )

Compared to male, female rated higher all the three hedonic gift attributes (unusual, fashionable, and fun) for friends birthdays and two hedonic gift attributes (unusual and fun) for friends in Christmas. This finding implies that consumers depend on a gift-specific situation in order to purchase gifts for their friends, even if the perception of hedonic gift attributes is differed by gender. Interestingly, for a friend in birthday and Christmas, the fun gift attribute was perceived the most importantly, suggesting consumers are more likely to consider gift recipients than gift-specific situation while purchasing gifts for their friends.

Consequently, the result of this study suggests that females and males differed in their perceived importance of hedonic gift attributes, either for a family member or a friend, both for birthdays and Christmas. Females are more involved in a specific purchase situation such as gift shopping, and they are more likely to perceive hedonic values importantly than are males. Compared to Christmas gift, for birthday gifts, consumers tend to perceive various hedonic

attributes such as fashionable, unusual, and fun. The perception of unusual and fun attributes are sensitive to gift recipients, especially, in the situation of Christmas. That is, the unusual gift attribute is important to the situation when a recipient is family, whereas the fun gift attribute is significant to friends. Therefore, this study provides that gift attributes are salient to the gender of the giver as well as the recipient, and gift-giving occasion in gift-giving decision.

## V. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, gift-giving behavior was examined in the context of a birthday or Christmas gift to be given to either a family member or a friend. The results demonstrate that the perceived importance of gift attributes differed in two dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic attributes. It is hoped that the similarities or differences in gift attributes perceived for different gift-giving recipients and occasions will provide retailers with specific strategies to be developed and consumer researchers with interactive relationships among different variables related to gift-giving behavior.

It is apparent that consumers are attributing important perceptions to hedonic gift attributes, especially the "fun" attribute for a friend in birthday and Christmas. Female consumers perceived hedonic attributes more importantly than did male for gift shopping, implying consumer behavior is potentially influenced by gender role (Buttle, 1992; Fisher & Arnold, 1990). Over the perspective of consumers, gift giving behavior is symbolic and social function for maintaining interpersonal relationships (e.g., friendship and family relations) via hedonic values that provide emotional benefit to the recipients.

For the marketer of birthday- or Christmas-associated gift items, part of the communications strategy, especially for advertising should be devoted to informing potential buyers of the hedonic values (e.g., fun, unusual, fashionable) of the gift product. Unusual, fashionable, and fun products should be emphasized when they target female consumers for birthday gifts; unusual and fashionable items should be developed in targeting family for Christmas gifts; unusual and fun products should be developed in targeting friend as a recipient for Christmas gifts. Because females and males did not differ in their perception of utilitarian attributes, the marketer may use the utilitarian attributes as a common factor for developing strategies targeting both genders.

The results need to be interpreted with caution because of several limitations. In the present study, a convenience sampling technique was used, which limits any conclusions to the sample studied and should not necessarily be generalized. Only three items in utilitarian and hedonic attributes were used in this study; however, a more elaborate list of items is necessary to establish the utility of the scale. The resulting findings will provide an empirically sound framework to explain the linkage of giver, recipient, occasion, and gift attributes.

Further research might focus on whether closeness of relationships among family members (e.g., spouse, children, siblings, parents) or friends (e.g., girlfriends, female friends) affects the perception of gift attributes. This study is limited to Anglo-Americans; however, the study of gift-giving behavior across cultural groups (e.g., African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans) presents intriguing possibilities.

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