

## Gift Giving: The Interaction between Gender, Gift Recipient, and Group Identity Importance by Product Category

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선물증여: 선물 품목에 따른 성별, 선물 수령자,  
대상 중요도의 상호 관계

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between gender, gift recipient, and group identity by product category of Korean consumers. 672 usable questionnaires from South Korea completed a self-administered survey with a five-point Likert scale. This questionnaire evaluated the perceived importance of group identity when buying apparel and electronics as a gift for kin, nonkin, and co-workers. The interaction between gender, gift recipient, and group identity were statistically significant. The results suggest that the importance of group identity may vary when gender and gift recipient differ by product category. Recommendations for future research are discussed.

**Key words:** Gift giving, Group identity importance, Product category; 선물증여, 대상 중요도, 선물 품목

## I. Introduction

Gift giving is one of the most important consumption rituals(Saad & Gill, 2003). It is defined as the selection, transfer, and evaluation of material and immaterial (intangible) objects in fulfillment of obligation(Park, 1998). Researchers and scholars have proposed models of the gift giving process(Banks, 1979; Belk, 1976; Sherry, 1983), examined reasons for gift giving such as to influence relationships between the giver and the recipient(Belk, 1988; Caplow, 1982; Joy, 2001; Otnes et al., 1993; Ruth et al., 1999), reciprocity(Komter,

1996), and voluntary versus obligatory gift giving (Cheal, 1987, 1988; Goodwin et al., 1990), and gift giving as economic signals and social symbols(Belk & Coon, 1993; Camerer, 1988; Wolfinbarger, 1990). Others have examined situational influence on gift giving(Gehrt & Shim, 2002), the influence of gender differences and budget expenditures on gift giving motives(Saad & Gill, 2003), and the influence of cultural differences on gift giving(Beatty et al., 1991; Park, 1998).

### 1. Gift Giving Process

Sherry(1983) divides the gift giving process into three stages: gestation, prestation, and reformulation. It is considered to be a gift-giving transaction through

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which the donor and the recipient progress. The Gestation stage is when the gift is transformed from the actual to the material realm. This means that the giver considers the purchase of the gift to fulfill a particular condition, such as holiday gift or influence the relationship between the giver and the recipient, and proceeds to buy the item. During this stage the gift giver examines self internally involving a perception of self, others and the gift, and proceeds to conduct a search for places to shop for the gift.

The actual gift exchange occurs during the second stage called the Prestation. Sherry(1983) reports that during this stage the gift giver and the recipient are concerned with time, place and mode of transaction such as ritual or ceremonial ambience which may heighten the impact of the giving, or increase the value of the gift. The final stage of the gift giving process is called Reformulation. It is during this time that the recipient determines what to do with the gift. Sherry(1983) suggests that the gift may be consumed, displayed, stored, exchanged, or rejected. It is during this time that the bond between the recipient and the giver is either strengthened, affirmed, attenuated, or severed(Sherry, 1983).

## 2. Gender and Gift Giving

Another factor in gift giving, i.e., gender differences, also has been studied. Some studies suggest that male gift giving is not very different from that of females(Webster & Nottingham, 2000). Still, others reported that males' gift giving behavior is different from that of females: Areni et al.(1998) reported that males have been found to assume some expressive roles in gift giving. Otnes et al.(1994) reported that some males feel pressured to participate in gift giving activities, and others are simply not interested in the general topic of gift giving(Cheal, 1988). Fischer and Arnold(1990) reported that males who have more egalitarian gender role attitudes are more likely to be involved in gift giving than those men with more traditional gender roles. The researchers also reported that males who are not averse to "women's work" consider gift giving an appropriate activity for themselves.

In contrast to males, women are found to be more involved in the gift giving process, and gift giving is often referred to as the "work of women"(Caplow, 1982; Cheal, 1987; Saad & Gill, 2003; Sherry & McGrath, 1989). Cheal(1987) reported that gift giving was women's work because women are the gender that attends to the expression of kindred interactions and to involvement and connectedness with significant others. Gift giving is also a way of expressing personal care both within and outside one's family. Webster and Nottingham(2000) reported that women are the gift givers because of their social orientation toward maintenance both of their families and the qualities of their personal relationships. This is because women are taught to be concerned with personal relationships moreso than men(Shaffer et al., 1992).

## 3. Group Identity

Values are said to influence behaviors, such as gift-giving because one's values are reflected in important behaviors(Beatty et al., 1991). Values are used by individuals to classify themselves either as unique individuals and/or members of a specific group (McGarty et al., 1994; Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987). Individuals classify themselves into social categories to which they feel they belong, and this provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category or group (Hogg, 1995). These groups may include the nuclear family, co-workers, neighbors, political parties, religious groups, and fellow nationals(Triandis, 1988). Gift giving is also seen as a method of bridging the relationship between individuals and groups. Many believe that through the gift a gift giver attempts to communicate with the gift recipient the importance of their relationship(Wolfinbarger, 1990). Camerer (1988) states, "gifts serve many functions such as conveying identity, controlling and subordinating, conveying unfriendliness, reducing status anxiety, enforcing distributive justice, providing suspense or insulation, defining group boundaries, and atones for unseen social deviations".

Beatty et al.(1991) also suggest that personal values influence gift giving behavior across cultures. The

individualism and collectivism dimensions describe the extent to which an individual considers the requirements of a relevant group over his or her own individual requirements in making decision (Bond et al., 1982; Triandis, 1988). Collectivists view themselves as being interdependent and closely linked to one or more groups. Norms, obligations and duties to groups are collectivists' primary concerns, and they tend to place high value on group harmony and solidarity (Triandis, 1988). On the other hand, individualists view themselves as independent and only loosely connected to the groups of which they are a part (Triandis, 1988). Hofstede (1980) found that individualism was dominant in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, South Africa, and most of the countries in Northern and Western Europe. However, collectivism was dominant in the rest of the world.

Researchers have suggested that Korea is a Confucian collectivistic culture, one that strongly emphasizes interdependence, face saving and conformity to group norms (Hofstede, 1980; Lee, 1991). Lee (1988) defined face-saving as the perceived appropriateness of a particular behavior for a person's social status. Ho (1976) reports that social expectations are mutual and conflicts may arise from a discrepancy between what a person expects from others and what others expect from the person. The researcher also indicated that people in Confucian culture are pressured constantly to live up to others' expectations so as to preserve their face and to help preserve the face of others.

Because of the limited amount of research related to cross-cultural differences related to gift giving behavior, it is important to determine internally in other countries the concept of gift-giving. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the relationship between gender, gift recipient and group identity by product category of Korean consumers. Specific questions addressed included: 1) is there a difference in the importance of group identity between male and female Korean consumers when buying a gift for kin, nonkin and co-workers; and 2) are there differences between males and females as to the importance of group identity with kin, nonkin, and co-workers when gift category changes? Apparel and electronics were selected as the gift to be purchased in this study

because the items were among the top gifts given to others (Unity Marketing Report, 2005).

## II. Methods

### 1. Sample Selection

The sample included students, and faculty members and family from Seoul, South Korea. The respondents were given an incentive for participating in the study upon the completion and return of the questionnaire. A self-report survey questionnaire was used to examine the relationship between group identity, gift giving, and gender. A letter was attached to each questionnaire indicating that participation was voluntary and assured confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaire was double-blind translated into the Korean language for distribution in Korea. Persons not associated with the research project were employed to translate and back translate the questionnaire to ensure accurate translation and comprehension by participants.

### 2. Research Instrument

The questionnaire asked the respondents to consider the next time they would make a purchase of an apparel gift for kin, nonkin, and co-workers. The questions were phrased to examine the overall importance of group identity on gift purchase behavior. The question was: "You want to purchase an apparel gift for a relative (kin). Indicate how important it is to buy what the following people think you should buy when purchasing this gift." The same statement was phrased again using nonkin, and co-workers as the gift recipient. On a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements in relation to kin, nonkin, and co-workers. The participants were asked to respond to the same set of questions when buying an electronic gift for the same groups of recipients. Because the questions were single items, no reliability coefficients were computed.

Gift recipient is defined as the person who would be receiving the gift. In this case we are examining kin, nonkin and co-workers as the gift recipients.

Group identity is measured as the importance a participant places on their acceptance into groups identified as kin, nonkin and co-workers. Product category is defined as variation in the type of product to be purchased for kin, nonkin and co-workers. In this case, apparel and electronics were used. Demographic information collected included gender, age, education, and income.

### 3. Data Collection and Analysis

A total of 672 usable questionnaires were collected for data analysis and a series of statistics (descriptive analysis, Multivariate analysis of variance: MANOVA) were performed utilizing SPSS 13.0 for Windows. MANOVA was used to test this hypothesis. Instead of a univariate F value, we obtained a multivariate F value (Hotelling's trace) based on a comparison of the error variance/covariance matrix and the effect variance/covariance matrix.

## III. Results

### 1. Sample Characteristics

<Table 1> reports the demographic information of

the sample which consisted of students, faculty, housewives, and others. The mean age of the overall group, males and females was 28 years. The mean age of the male participants was 31 years, and the mean age of the female participants was 26 years. The age range of the total sample was 17 to 59 years. The income range for males was \$10,000 to \$24,999 (25.6%) and \$25,000 to \$49,999 (25.6%), and 26 percent of the females had an income in the range of less than \$5,000, and 24 percent of the females had \$25,000 to \$49,999.

### 2. Multivariate Tests of Main effects and Interactions

<Table 2> reports the results of the repeated measures MANOVA with gender as the between subjects factor and gift recipient and group identity as within subjects' factor. Each person (male & female) had to respond to the questions separately for kin, nonkin and co-workers and reported the importance of group identity when buying apparel and electronic gifts for these groups. The results suggest that when buying an apparel gift, the interaction between gift recipient and gender was not significant ( $f=.221$ ,  $df=2.0$ ,  $p=.802$ ). The interaction between gift recipient (who the gift is

Table 1. Demographic variables

(n=672)

Variable		Man (% within variable)	Female (% within variable)	Total
Age	Mean age	31 year	26 year	28 year
	Student	144(64.6)	263(58.6)	407(60.6)
Occupation	Faculty	73(32.7)	112(24.9)	185(27.5)
	Housewife	0	70(15.6)	70(10.4)
	Other	6( 2.7)	4( 0.9)	10( 1.5)
	Total	223(100)	449(100)	672(100)
Income	Less than \$5,000	48(21.5)	116(25.8)	164(24.4)
	\$5,000-\$9,999	33(14.8)	80(17.8)	113(16.8)
	\$10,000-24,999	57(25.6)	85(18.9)	142(21.1)
	\$25,000-\$49,999	57(25.6)	107(23.8)	164(24.4)
	\$50,000-\$74,999	18( 8.1)	36( 8.0)	54( 8.0)
	\$75,000-\$99,999	7( 3.1)	13( 2.9)	20( 3.0)
	\$100,000-\$149,999	2( .9)	11( 2.4)	13( 1.9)
	\$150,000+	1( .4)	1( .2)	2( 0.3)
Total	223(100)	449(100)	672(100)	

being purchased for) and how important it is to the purchaser what the gift recipient thought of their apparel purchases for them(kin, nonkin, co-workers) was statistically significant( $f=44.77$ ,  $df=6.00$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The interaction between gift recipient, group identity, and gender was also statistically significant( $f=4.23$ ,  $df=6.00$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

When buying an electronic gift, the interaction between gift recipient and gender was not significant ( $f=.377$ ,  $df=2.00$ ,  $p=.686$ ). The interaction between gift recipient and how important it is to the purchaser what the gift recipient thought of their electronic gift purchases for them(kin, nonkin, and co-workers) was statistically significant( $f=35.94$ ,  $df=6.00$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The

interaction between gift recipient, group identity, and gender was also statistically significant( $f=3.39$ ,  $df=6.00$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

**1) Pairwise Comparison of Group Identity Importance when Gift Recipient and Gender Changes(Gift= Apparel)**

<Table 3> reports the Pairwise comparison of the amount of change in group identity importance when the gift recipient changes. When buying a gift for kin, there was no significant difference in male and female group identity importance. Both males and females rated the opinion of kin as being more important than the opinion of nonkin and co-workers.

**Table 2. MANOVA: Multivariate test of main effects and interaction**

Product	Variable	Hotelling's Trace	F	df	P-value
Apparel	Repeated Measures				
	Gift Recipient* Gender	.001	.221	2.000	.802
	Gift Recipient* Group Identity	.434	44.774***	6.000	.000
	Gift Recipient* Group Identity* Gender	.041	4.235***	6.000	.000
	Between Subjects Effects				
	Gender	-	.347	1	.556
Electronics	Repeated Measures				
	Gift Recipient* Gender	.001	.377	2.000	.686
	Gift Recipient* Group Identity	.324	35.937***	6.000	.000
	Gift Recipient* Group Identity* Gender	.031	3.399**	6.000	.003
	Between Subjects Effects				
	Gender	-	.758	8.999	.384

\*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

**Table 3. Pairwise comparison of group identity importance when gift recipient and gender(Gift=Apparel)**

Gift Recipient	Group Identity Importance	Male		Female		Hotelling's Trace	F
		M	SD	M	SD		
Kin	Kin	3.56	1.02	3.74	1.06	.006	1.196
	Non-Kin	3.12	0.98	3.15	0.92		
	Co-Worker	3.07	1.01	3.05	0.98		
NonKin	Kin	2.91	1.21	2.53	1.20	.056	12.509***
	Non-Kin	3.26	1.32	3.45	1.31		
	Co-Worker	3.12	1.26	3.20	1.31		
Co-Worker	Kin	2.88	1.16	2.66	1.20	.022	4.834**
	Non-Kin	3.02	1.26	3.06	1.25		
	Co-Worker	3.40	1.27	3.58	1.38		

\*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

When buying a gift for nonkin, both males and females participants rated the importance of the opinion of nonkin as important, but females moreso than the males. When buying a gift for co-workers, both males and female participants rated the importance of the opinion of co-workers, but again, females moreso than male participants.

## 2) Pairwise Comparison of Group Identity Importance when Gift Recipient and Gender Changes (Gift=Electronics)

<Table 4> reports the Pairwise comparison of the amount of change in group identity importance when gift recipient changes. When buying a gift for kin, both male and female participants rated the importance of the opinion of kin as important, but females rated it higher than male participants. When buying a gift for nonkin, both male and female participants rated the importance of the opinion of nonkin as important but females moreso than the males. When buying a gift for co-workers, there was no significant difference in male and female group identity importance. Both rated it as being moreso important than the opinion of kin and nonkin.

## IV. Discussion

This study sought to determine if gender differences and product category influences whether a gift purchase decision is based on the importance placed on a consumers' relationship with kin, nonkin or co-

workers. According to the results of the apparel and electronics data analysis, gender alone did not influence Korean gift purchase decisions. However, further analysis showed that the interaction between gender, gift recipient, and group identity (opinion of others) reported significant differences between male and females.

One identifiable factor in the study was that both male and female seem to place the importance of group identity with each group (kin, nonkin, and co-worker) as being more important than any other group when buying a gift for each of the groups. This was true across both product category (apparel & electronics). In some instances, females placed greater importance on group identity than males. For example, the results showed that females place greater importance on group identity when buying an electronic gift for kin. However, when buying an apparel gift for kin, there was no significant difference between male and female group identity importance with kin. Both male and females rated kin group identity higher than any other group. This suggests that perhaps product category may be an important variant when buying a gift for kin between males and females. Such that males and females are equally sensitive to what type of apparel gift they should buy a relative, because it could affect their relationship.

This study shows that variation in the importance of the opinions of others across product category seems to surface between males and females when buying for nonkin. When buying an apparel and/or

Table 4. Pairwise comparison of group identity importance when gift recipient and gender (Gift=Electronics)

Gift Recipient	Group Identity Importance	Male		Female		Hotelling's Trace	F
		M	SD	M	SD		
Kin	Kin	3.46	1.31	3.79	1.38	.021	4.608**
	Non-Kin	3.00	1.26	3.02	1.30		
	Co-Worker	2.95	1.24	2.88	1.31		
NonKin	Kin	3.09	1.17	3.09	1.35	.032	7.141***
	Non-Kin	3.35	1.27	3.64	1.38		
	Co-Worker	3.13	1.24	3.02	1.34		
Co-Worker	Kin	2.99	1.21	3.02	1.29	.009	2.036
	Non-Kin	3.11	1.21	3.15	1.31		
	Co-Worker	3.44	1.32	3.68	1.39		

\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

electronic gift for nonkin(neighbors, friends, etc.) both male and female participants seem to place more importance on group identity with nonkin. However, females seem to care more than males about what nonkin think of their gift selections. The results also show that product category is an important variant when buying a gift for a co-worker. For example, the results suggest that females place greater emphasis on group identity with co-workers when buying an apparel gift. On the other hand, when buying an electronic gift for a co-worker, there was no significant difference between male and female group identity importance with co-workers. This suggests that both males and females were equally concerned with group identity with co-workers when buying an electronic gift.

Some previous studies(Cheal, 1987; Helgeson, 1994; Otnes & McGrath, 1994; Shaffer et al., 1992) support the idea that males' gift giving behavior is different from that of females. This study also implies that there are differences in the gift giving behavior between males and females. It also implies that product category may be an important factor to consider when attempting to identify group identity importance. It emphasizes the existence of potential cultural differences as it relates to consumer gift purchase behavior. As businesses seek to function in other markets, it is important to understand the relationship between values and gift giving as it relates to purchase behavior.

The findings of this study offer marketing constituents information that is useful in the understanding of consumer group conformity and its influence on gift selection. Since this study supports the idea that Korean consumers tend to allow the importance of group identity to influence their gift choices, then advertising and other promotional strategies could be developed to emphasize how the purchase of a particular product would enhance that relationship.

## V. Future Research

The sample evaluated the importance of group identity when buying electronic and apparel as a gift for kin, nonkin and co-workers. Some differences

were found between male and female consumers. This study suggests that gifts are chosen to communicate the importance of the relationship between the buyer and the receiver. However, it did not focus on how the product is chosen. That being whether specific characteristics of a particular product is necessary to convey the importance of group identity with kin, nonkin and co-workers. Future research should address how the gifts are chosen and what product attributes are considered when buying a gift for each of the groups(kin, nonkin, and co-workers). That would mean focusing on product attributes as a function of gift choice for kin, nonkin and co-workers. This would give marketers a better understanding of what factors should be used to promote their products to the consumer.

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## 요 약

본 연구의 목적은 한국 소비자의 선물증여의 과정에서 품목에 따른 성별, 선물 수령자, 대상 중요도의 상호 관계를 밝히고자 함이다. 한국의 소비자를 대상으로 5점 리커트 척도를 이용한 자기응답식 설문지가 사용되었다. 총 672부의 설문지가 데이터분석에 사용되었으며, 친척, 친구, 동료를 위한 선물 구매시, 의류나 전자제품을 구입하고자 할 때, 대상의 중요성에 따라 구매 행동에 어떤 차이가 있는지를 측정하였다. 연구결과, 성별, 선물 수령자, 대상 중요도간에 통계적으로 유의한 상호작용이 측정되었다. 연구결과에 따라 후속연구를 위한 제안이 논의되었다.

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