

Consumer Preferences for Flowers as Gifts: Age Segments, Substitutes and Perceived Risk – Advertising & Awareness

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BACKGROUND

Younger consumers are less aware of floral gift options than their more mature counterparts. This may be why they do not regularly consider flowers as suitable gifts and do not purchase them as frequently. In this study, advertising awareness, lifestyle choices, and gift idea resources were explored. These results give insight into ways to improve consumer awareness of floral gift options.

METHODOLOGY

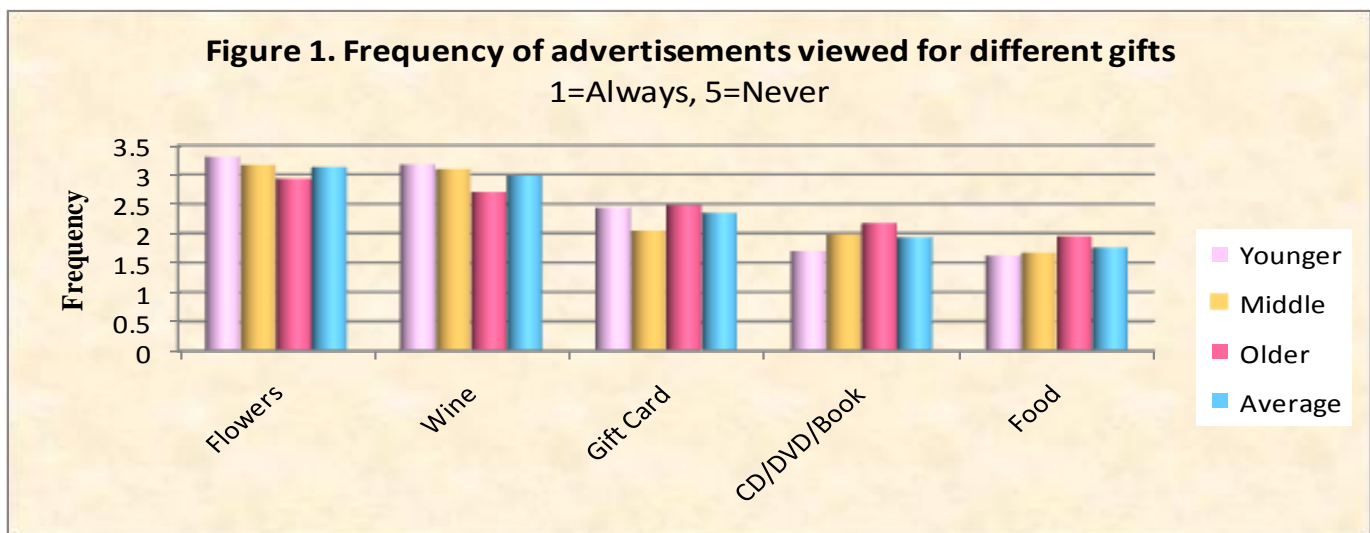
This study utilized focus groups and a questionnaire regarding different gift items including cut flowers, wine, gift cards, multimedia (e.g. CD, DVD, or books) and potted plants to determine where floral gifts ranked among these options.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The questionnaire was administered during April 2009 in Minnesota and June 2009 in Michigan. There were 109 respondents in Minnesota and 117 in Michigan for a total of 226 participants.

To gain deeper insight into different age segments, participants were divided into three groups: (1) a “younger group” consisting of 18-30 year olds, (2) a “middle group” of 31-40 year olds, and (3) an “older group” of 41-50 year olds. By creating concise age groups, more detailed differences were discovered among the groups.

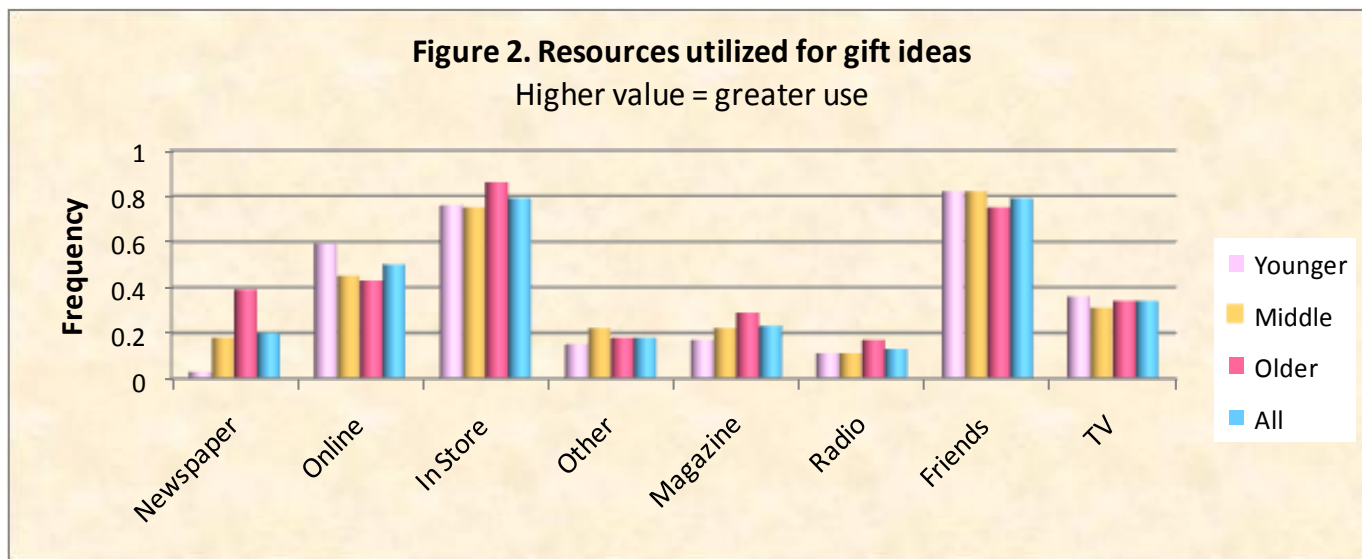
When asked how often they had seen ads for different products, all of the groups agreed that they saw ads for flowers the least (Figure 1). They saw ads for food/candy the most, followed then by multimedia, gift cards, wine and flowers. Most participants mentioned only seeing floral advertising for Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day. By advertising solely at these times, consumers’ perception of flowers being only holiday suitable and traditional gifts is reinforced.



The younger group felt that not seeing enough advertising of cut flowers/plants decreased the likelihood of their purchasing floral gifts. Also, compared with the younger group, the older groups seemed to notice more flower advertising. It could be that there was not as much advertising about flowers as other gifts, or even if there was, the advertisements reached the older groups more.

Consumers were also asked how many hours each week they participated in certain activities. Watching television and searching online were the most popular activities chosen. The main difference between groups is that the older group spent more time listening to the radio, driving, watching TV, and reading local newspapers and magazines in print. Many of the younger participants have iPods they listened to while exercising or driving. As a result, radio ads would not reach the younger group as well as the older groups. All groups were exposed to local newspapers, but the younger group viewed them online, resulting in them being able to skim the titles and selectively read the articles and ignore the ads. Another difference was that the older group read magazines more often which could result in the older groups being exposed to more floral ads than the younger group.

Supporting the lifestyle differences were the gift idea resources employed by each group. The younger and middle groups got their gift ideas through their friends, in-store POP materials, online, and from TV (Figure 2). The older group utilized in-store sources, followed by friends, online, and newspapers. The biggest difference here was that the older group got many ideas while shopping and from the newspaper. As a whole, this group paid more attention to print ads than the younger groups.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INDUSTRY

Considering the levels of advertising awareness, participants' lifestyles and gift idea resources, it becomes apparent that the floral industry needs to promote their products year around for all occasions with humorous, yet professional ads.

All age groups agreed that they viewed floral ads the least frequently out of all the gift choices. These results indicate a communication gap between the floral industry and its consumers. To assist in filling this gap, focus group participants felt an educational, aggressive advertising campaign would be beneficial. Similarly, connecting floral gifts to historical stories would peak their interest. By

advertising these stories, there will be more meaning behind the gift and a connection with the gift making it more personal and suitable for multiple occasions.

The primary idea resources results indicate that in-store and word-of-mouth (friends) advertising are important. The floral industry can utilize this information by developing attractive in-store signs and displays to remind customers about acceptable gifts. Additionally, they can partner with other businesses (bookstores, cafes, etc.) and have their products on display at the partners' locations. Having kiosks available in malls and frequently visited locations would be beneficial as well.

Online sources were also frequently utilized by participants, especially by the younger group. To improve exposure, the floral industry needs to be featured on frequently visited social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Similarly, florists need to have professional, fast and available websites to draw in internet savvy, on-the-go customers.

Depending on which age group is targeted, different media channels may be utilized. As mentioned, the internet is a great way to reach the younger demographic. Conversely, older participants paid more attention to print media (newspapers and magazines). The floral industry can use this information when targeting the older generations by developing high quality, colored print ads within frequently read media.

Overall, this research will significantly assist the floral consumer by improving floral gift awareness in the future.

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