

## **Consumer Preferences for Flowers as Gifts: Age Segments, Substitutes and Perceived Risk – Giver’s Perception of Risk**

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### **BACKGROUND**

When giving gifts, the person giving wants to give items that reflect well on themselves and enhances that particular social relationship. However, previous literature suggests that, if the gift is not suitable to the receiver, there can be negative consequences. To study this phenomenon more closely for floral-related gift giving, the risk of recipients not liking the gift was examined in both close and casual relationships.

Many studies have been conducted that demonstrate that risk plays a large role in gift preferences. Unsuitable gifts can cause embarrassment, threaten social ties, and can leave long-term negative impressions. Risk is increased when giving a gift to the opposite sex due to potentially greater feelings behind the gift. Anxiety over gift giving stems from placing high interpersonal stakes on recipient responses and the gift’s effect on social relationships. Overall, gift anxiety can be greatly decreased by being confident about the recipient’s gift preferences.

Being aware of perceived risk in floral gifts will assist the floral industry in taking corrective actions to mitigate risks often associated with floral gifts.

### **METHODOLOGY**

To determine givers’ reactions to gift risk, they were asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in a focus group discussion. This study utilized a questionnaire containing different gift items (cut flowers, wine, gift cards, multimedia such as a CD, DVD, or book, and potted plants) to determine where floral gifts ranked among these options.

### **RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

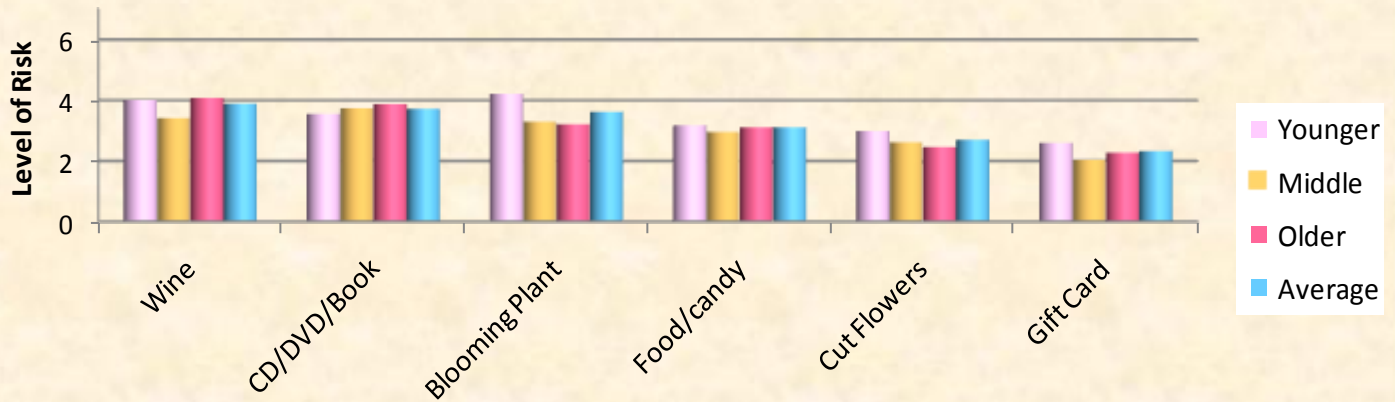
The questionnaire was administered during April 2009 in Minnesota and June 2009 in Michigan. There were 109 respondents in Minnesota and 117 in Michigan for a total of 226 participants.

To gain deeper insight into behavioral differences among consumers in selected 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.

In a close relationship, where the giver knew the receiver well, gift cards had the lowest level of risk, followed by cut flowers, food/candy, blooming plants, multimedia, and wine (Figure 1.) None of the gifts were considered as “very high risk”.

### Giver's perception of gift risk in a close relationship

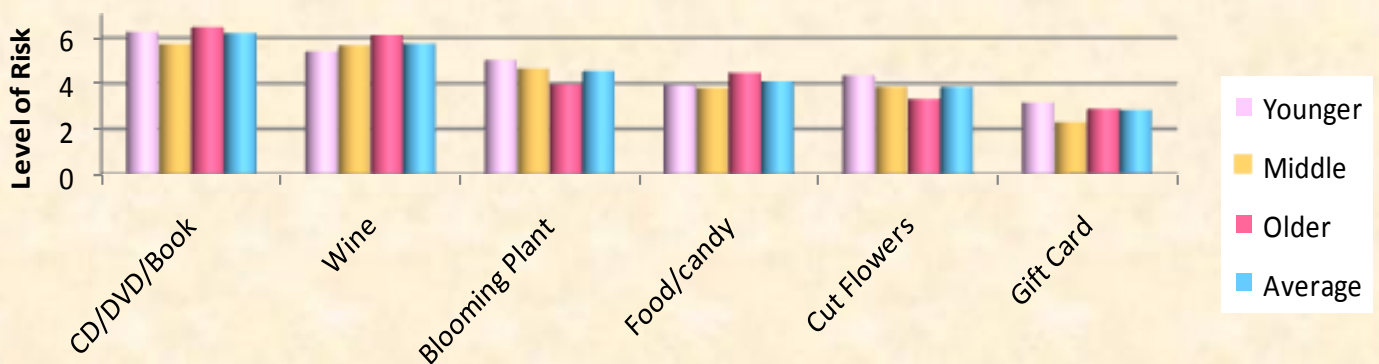
(1= "very low risk", 10= "Very high risk")



In a casual relationship, where the giver does not know the receiver well, gift cards had the lowest level of risk, followed by cut flowers, food/candy, blooming plants, wine and multimedia (Figure 2). Multimedia and wine gifts were considered "risky" because these are gifts with specific attributes; if the recipient is not well known, it is especially difficult to select the right gift item.

### Figure 2. Giver's perception of risk in a casual relationship

(1= "very low risk", 10= "Very high risk")



Additionally, for the younger age group, blooming plants were considered risky due to care requirements, lack of knowledge, and flower symbolism. For the younger group, floral gifts did carry some risk due to sentiments being attached to floral gifts resulting in misinterpreted social signals.

Gift cards carried the least level of risk due to the recipient being able to choose his/her own gift.

Overall, risk is low for cut flowers and blooming plant gifts in close relationships. In casual relationships, risk is low for cut flowers and blooming plants, except among the younger age group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INDUSTRY

Floral gifts are perceived to be low risk options, especially in casual relationships. The industry can promote these findings to make consumers more aware of that flowers are low risk gifts.

Additionally, a low/easy care line of plants (such as succulents) can be promoted for the younger age group. A low/easy care line of plants will encourage people who are unfamiliar with floral gifts to try them at minimal risk. This option also reduces risk by minimizing care requirements of the floral gift.

To further reduce risk in casual relationships, florists can pair flowers and potted plants with gift cards. Gift cards had no risk associated with them. By pairing them with flowers, the giver combines personality and thoughtfulness through the floral gift with the practicality of the gift card resulting in reduced risk.

Many young participants were hesitant about giving floral gifts because they were afraid of miscommunication concerning the sentiments behind the gift. To reduce mistakes in communication, attractive symbolism cards can be developed to go with the gift so the giver is clear about what the gift symbolizes.

In conclusion, floral gifts are considered as low risk gifts but riskier than some other gifts due to knowledge and care requirements, perceived recipient preferences, and potential miscommunication. By improving these areas, the floral industry can improve gift givers' confidence in selecting the correct floral gift for their recipients.

Overall, this research will significantly assist the floral consumer by improving their awareness of the low risk associated with floral gift giving in the future.

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