

Consumer Preferences for Flowers as Gifts: Age Segments, Substitutes and Perceived Risk – Birthdays

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BACKGROUND

Gifts demonstrate good will and build social relationships. Often floral gifts are viewed as socially acceptable for known holidays such as Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day. However, they are not necessarily thought of as gift options as often on non-calendar day occasions. We researched different non-calendar day occasions and found that birthdays were the top occasion in terms of both frequency of giving and willingness to pay. As a result, the following report focuses on birthday gifts. Specifically, participants were asked to rate different gift items as suitable birthday gifts and the relative importance of birthday gift attributes.

METHODOLOGY

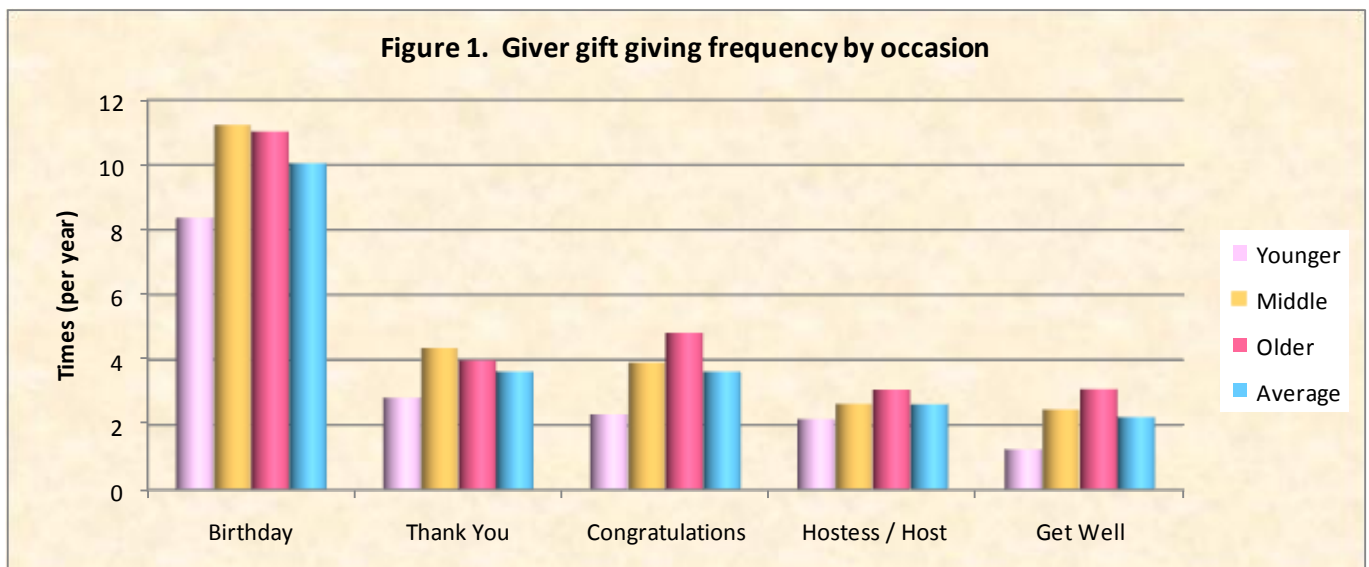
To determine consumer reactions to floral birthday gifts, they were asked about gift suitability and important birthday gift attributes using focus groups and a questionnaire containing different gift items (cut flowers, wine, gift cards, CD/DVD/books, and potted plants). Specifically, this study focused solely on the recipients’ viewpoint.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

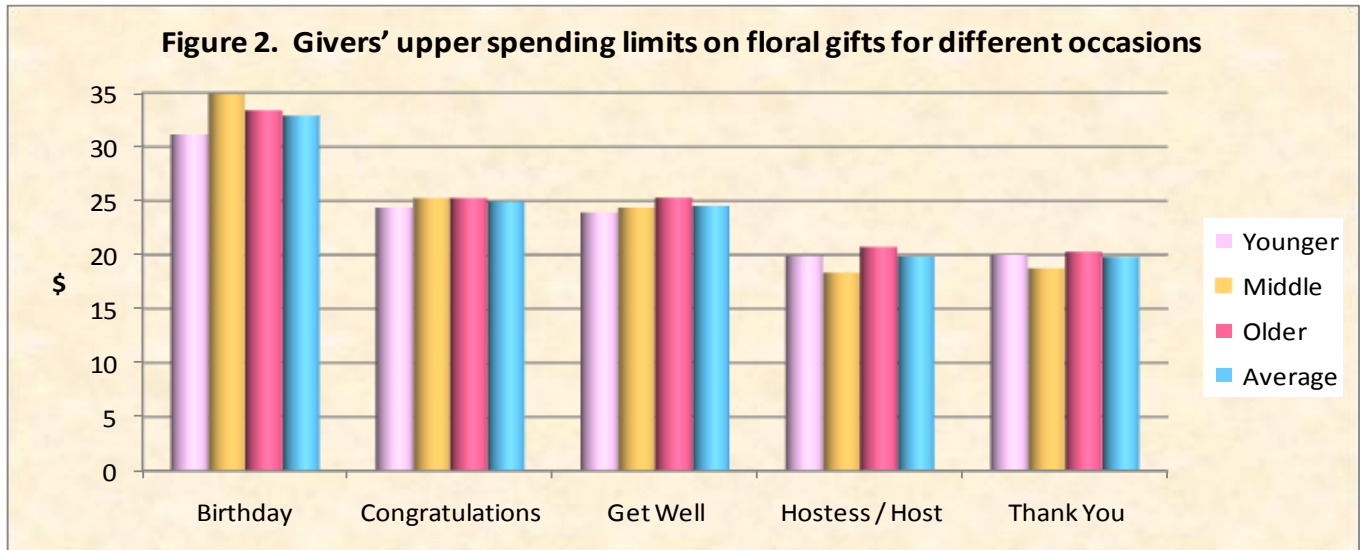
The questionnaire was administered during March 2010 in Texas and April/May 2010 in Minnesota. There were 118 respondents in Texas and 95 in Minnesota for a total of 213 participants.

To gain deeper insight into different age segments, participants were divided into three groups. The “younger group” consisted of 18-30 year olds, the “middle group” 31-40 year olds, and the “older group” 41-50 year olds. By creating concise age groups, more detailed differences were discovered among the groups.

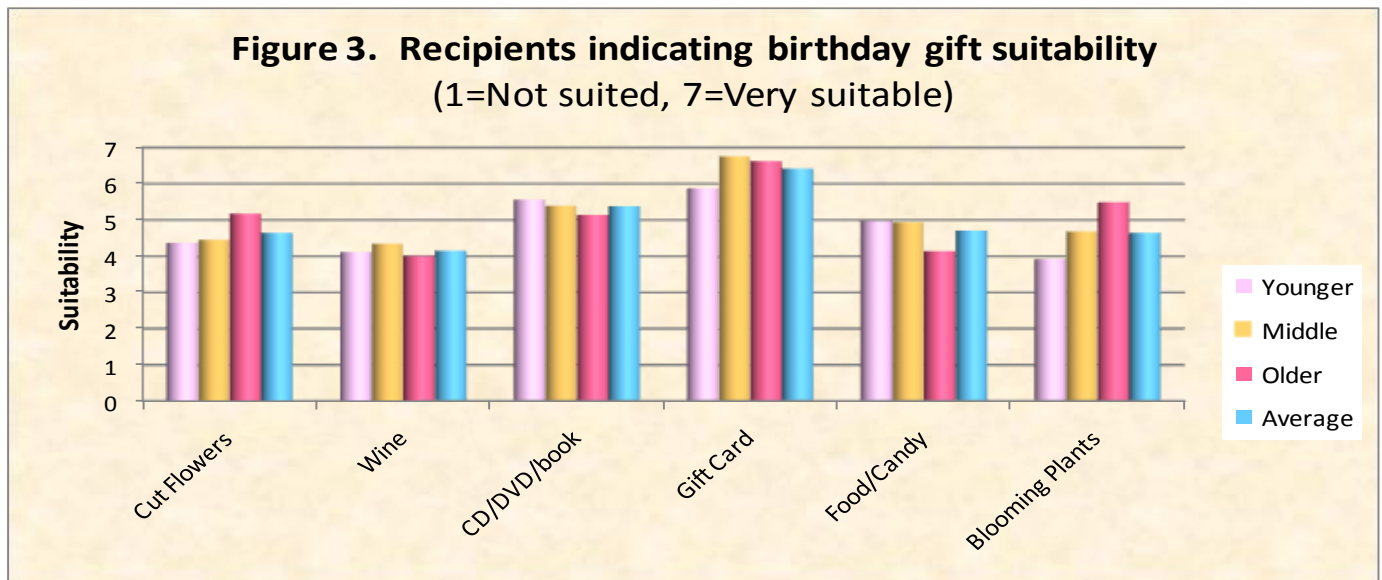
Our research validated the premise that people purchase birthday gifts the most frequently (Figure 1.)



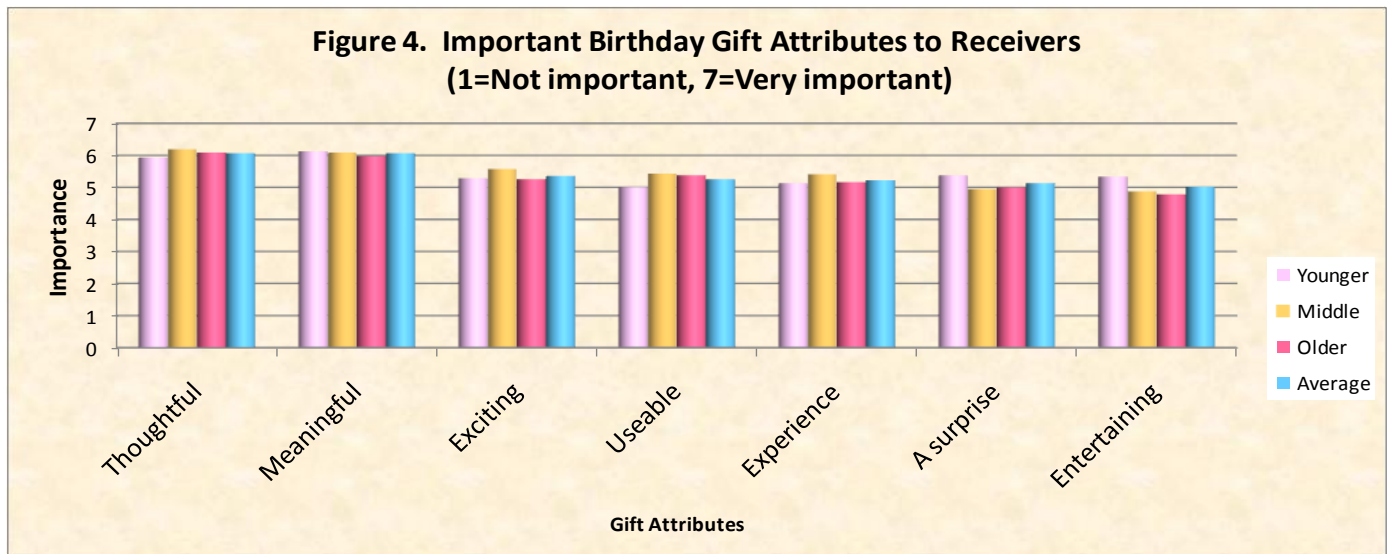
Additionally, among all gift options, gift givers were willing to spend the most money to obtain the ideal birthday gift (Figure 2). As a result, the floral industry can improve the demand for their products if floral gifts are repositioned to be acceptable birthday gifts.



As for gift suitability, gift cards were deemed the most suitable gift, followed by CD/DVD/book, food/candy, cut flowers, plants and wine (Figure 3). Results indicate that older recipients appreciate floral gifts more than younger recipients. Additionally, younger groups exhibited a strong preference for practical, long term gifts. Furthermore, the middle group preferred gift cards more than other gifts indicating that this group is probably more budget conscious.



Younger participants find other gifts more suitable than floral gifts, resulting in important birthday gift attributes being explored. Different attributes were given to participants and they were asked to rate their importance (Figure 4).



The following are the top attributes:

1. Thoughtfulness

This sentiment reflects how much the giver thought about the recipient and what s/he would like. As a result, the recipient gets a gift that s/he enjoys more than a less thoughtful gift. Focus group participants added that floral gifts from grocery stores were less thoughtful because they were quick, easy and prearranged. Additionally, gift cards were not considered to be thoughtful due to being easy, readily available and not recipient specific.

2. Meaningful

Symbolism and meaning can lend value to a gift and improve social ties. This is an important gift attribute that the floral industry can use to promote floral gifts because there are often meanings attached to floral gifts. However, some of the preconceived meanings are not always birthday appropriate – such as love/romance. Similar to the birthday stones in the jewelry industry, the floral industry can promote birthday flowers.

3. Exciting and Surprising

People like to be surprised and want to feel special about their gift. Focus group participants felt that the gift presentation could add a lot to these elements. For example, present the gift in a unique, personal way that fits the receiver's personality.

4. Useable

Focus group participants (especially the younger group) mentioned being short on cash and wanting to receive gifts they could use or are needed, such as new tires. They appreciate gifts in general; however, when financially or time stressed, living essentials are considered much more important than luxury items. However, participants did mention that receiving something they would not buy themselves was nice.

5. Experience or Entertaining

The middle group preferred experience-oriented gifts (family activities, tickets to movies, theatre, etc.). This group mentioned wanting to do things with their families making this an attractive attribute. As for the entertainment aspects, this was most important to the younger group, indicating they want to have something that will entertain themselves and their friends which is supported by the fact that they appreciated CD/DVD/book gifts.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INDUSTRY

By knowing suitable birthday gifts and important birthday gift attributes to recipients, there is potential to improve consumers' preference for floral birthday gifts by promotions and positioning floral gifts as birthday appropriate.

To improve *thoughtfulness*, focus group participants suggested advertising floral gifts as thoughtful gifts. Many receivers consider flowers as very thoughtful gifts, but givers do not know this. The industry can use educational advertising to educate givers about receivers' perception. Participants felt promoting customization options as well as providing personalized vases would also improve floral gift thoughtfulness.

In terms of meaningfulness, flowers do have a competitive advantage because flowers have symbolic meanings. To enhance floral gift *meaningfulness* the industry can promote birthday month flowers, similar to what the jewelry industry is doing on birthday stones. Similarly, participants felt florists could incorporate symbolism, folklore, legends and traditions into the bouquets and provide cards explaining these items.

To generate greater *excitement* and *surprise*, focus group participants wanted more creative, unique presentation styles.

To improve *usability*, the industry can offer the opportunity to pair floral gifts with practical gifts. For example participants felt pairing with local economy baskets, restaurant gift cards, or birthday cake would improve floral birthday gifts' usability. Focus group participants also felt floral gift benefits need to be promoted to improve floral gift practicality.

Finally, to incorporate more *experience* and *entertainment* into floral gifts, focus group participants mentioned pairing with hobby related items and partnering with experience/entertainment industries (sports events, movie tickets, etc.)

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

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