

Consumer Preferences for Flowers as Gifts: Age Segments, Substitutes and Perceived Risk – Floral Gift Imagery and Asymmetry Between Givers’ and Receivers’ Perception

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BACKGROUND

Understanding consumers’ mental imagery of products is essential when developing a marketing mix. Often consumers’ views are not identical to the business’ views which can be detrimental when marketing to consumers. By understanding how consumers view a product, the company can better position the product to fill consumers’ needs. To shed light on this occurrence we researched their preconceived notions regarding floral gifts.

Another area of interest was gift givers and receivers do not always view and select gifts similarly. Recipients view more luxurious, indulgent, and surprising gifts favorably. Givers are not always aware of this and do not always take recipients’ preferences into account. Instead, givers tend to associate higher price with stronger meanings and recipient satisfaction, which is not necessarily true from the recipients’ viewpoint. These differences in selection and perception may lead to recipient dissatisfaction. It is important to understand these differences in perspectives in order to correctly and efficiently market floral gifts to younger generations.

METHODOLOGY

To determine gift givers’ and receivers’ perception of flowers as gifts, over two years, givers and recipients were asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in a focus group discussion to determine their perspectives on floral gifts. Both studies analyzed different gift items (cut flowers, wine, gift cards, multimedia gifts such as a CD, DVD, or book, and potted plants) to determine where floral gifts ranked among these options.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Receivers’ Perception

To determine where different gift items are located in receivers’ mind, participants were asked to fill in several perceptual maps and participate in a focus group discussion. Each perceptual map consisted of an X and Y axis with descriptive words at each axis point. The descriptors were opposite – e.g. forgettable versus memorable. Participants placed each gift where s/he felt it belonged on the map compared to the other gift items.

Receivers felt cut flowers were the most memorable and personal gift out of all of the gift options (Figure 1A). Plants were the second most memorable and were considered personal gifts but not as personal as wine and CD/DVD/book gifts.

It is important to give gifts that are memorable and personal because they leave the recipient with a favorable impression of the giver.

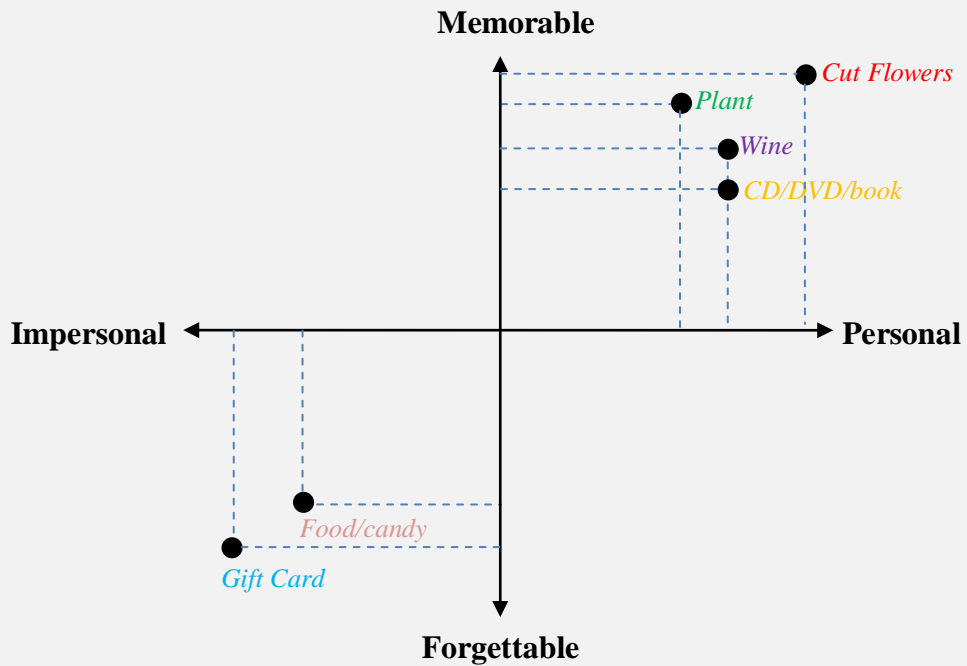


Figure 1A. Perceptual map indicating receivers' associations with different gifts

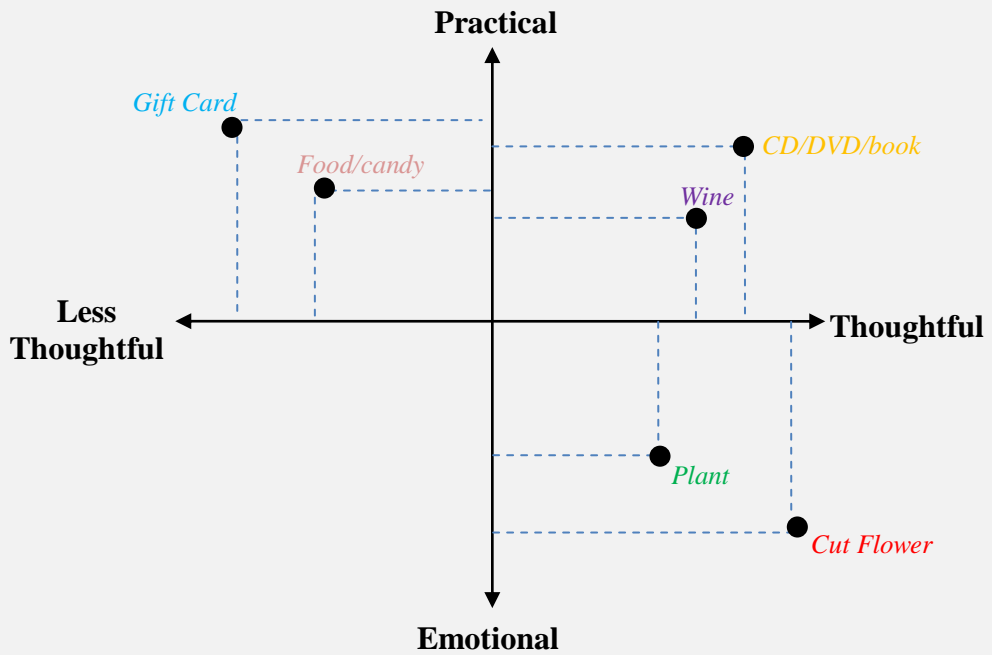
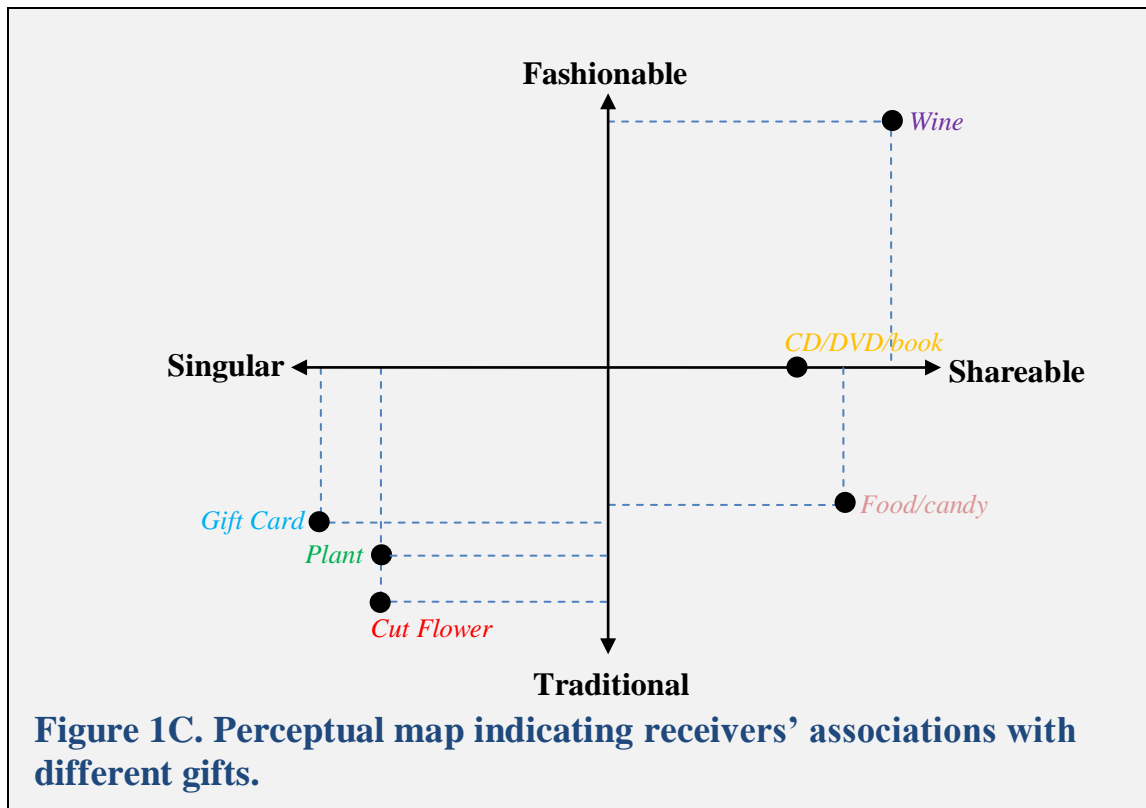


Figure 1B. Perceptual map indicating receivers' associations with different gifts

Cut flowers were also the most thoughtful and emotional gift (Figure 1B). Plants were also considered thoughtful and emotional. CD/DVD/books and wine were considered thoughtful and practical. Gift cards and food/candy were less thoughtful but still practical.

Cut flowers and plants were viewed as the most traditional gifts and were also considered singular (Figure 1C). Gift cards were less traditional and more singular than floral gifts but had decreased risk due to the recipient choosing his or her own gift.



From the receivers' perspective, it becomes apparent that floral gifts are considered memorable, personal, thoughtful, emotional, traditional and singular. Backing up these results, receiver focus group participants felt floral gifts were more genuine and meaningful than other gift options.

Givers' Perception

Givers do not always view floral gifts positively, especially younger givers who tend to view floral gifts more negatively than their older counterparts (Figure 1).

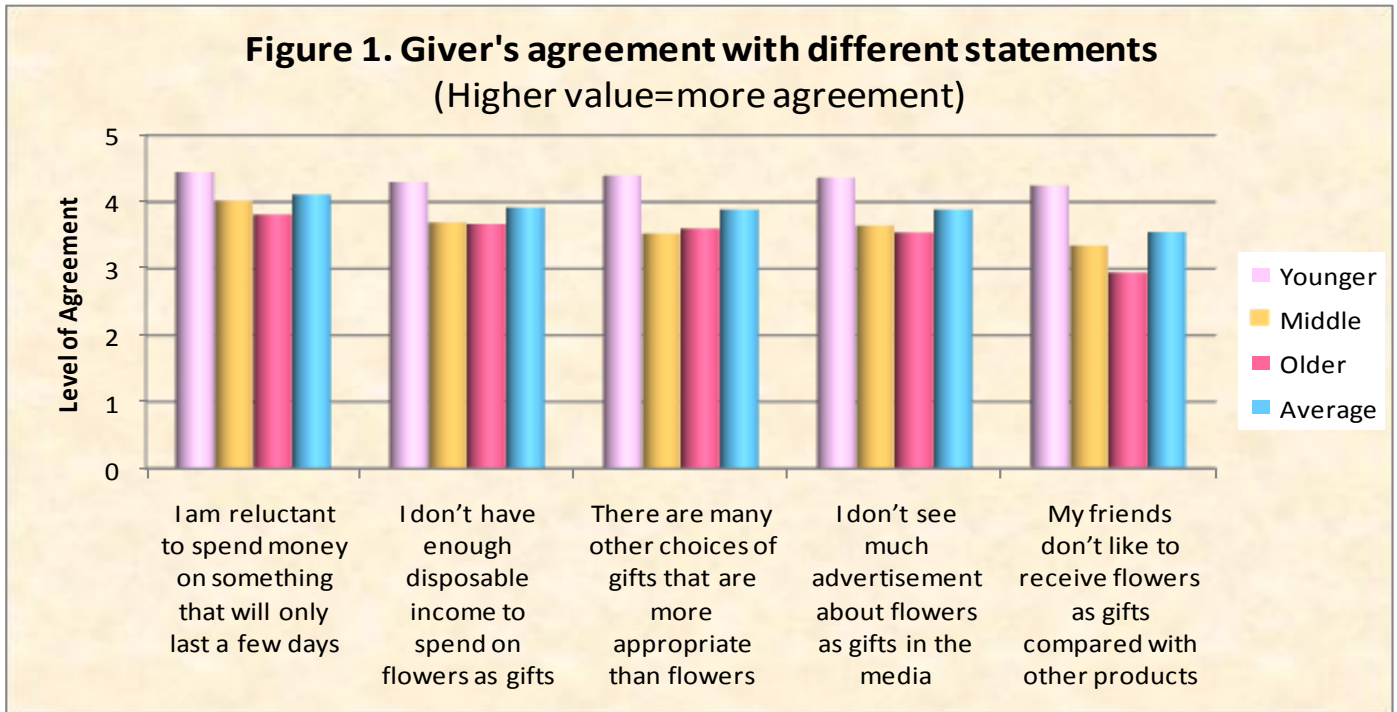
Givers are reluctant to spend money on things with short longevity. Givers are concerned they do not have enough disposable income to spend on a perishable luxury like flowers (Figure 1). Young gift givers do not think floral gifts are affordable due to not having as high incomes as their older counterparts. Furthermore, the recession has left many consumers price sensitive. They want to get the most out of their money, resulting in a desire for more practical items.

Givers are also concerned that other gifts are more appropriate than flowers. Another barrier is that givers assume receivers do not enjoy receiving floral gifts as much as other gift options (Figure 1).

Giver – Receiver Asymmetries

Givers view floral gifts negatively and as impractical but receivers feel floral gifts are positive and memorable, impressive, thoughtful and personal (Table 1). Overall, receivers tend to view floral gifts positively (Table 1). Conversely, givers do not always perceive recipients as viewing floral gifts positively, especially among the younger group where first year’s research showed they felt their “friends do not like receiving floral gifts” (Figure 1).

Tied to givers thinking recipients do not want floral gifts, they also feel other gifts are more appropriate (Figure 1).



Previous research has shown that younger and middle group givers prefer giving CD/DVD/book and gift cards to recipients. The perceptual maps reveal that CD/DVD/book gifts are considered memorable, personal, practical, thoughtful and shareable to the gift recipients. Many of these images are comparable to floral gifts with the exception of CD/DVD/books being more shareable, fashionable and practical than floral gifts. Advertising can help to reposition floral gifts as having more of these attributes. Gift givers like to give gift cards since they think because gift cards are very practical, they must be great gifts. However, from receivers’ perspective, gift cards are considered impersonal, forgettable, less thoughtful, singular and traditional.

Overall, as gift givers, younger consumers are less positive and knowledgeable about flowers. For example, 29% of younger consumers could not name their favorite flower compared to 11% in the middle and older groups. These results highlight specific concerns about givers’ perceptions of receivers’ views of floral gifts. Furthermore, these results indicate that there is a knowledge gap between givers and recipients which educational advertising may help fill.

Other differences in attitudes were revealed in the focus group discussions. Giver focus group participants labeled floral gifts as “generic” but when receivers were asked they hesitated and clarified that they felt

floral gifts were more “traditional” for specific occasions such as courting, Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day and anniversaries. By receiving floral gifts only for traditional occasions, receivers continue to view floral gifts as traditional and only appropriate for traditional occasions. They mentioned gift cards were the most generic gift (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of asymmetries between givers and receivers.

Topic	Both	Giver	Receiver
Floral Gifts	Luxury items	Impractical	Not practical BUT memorable, impressive, thoughtful, personal
Gift Cards	Safe, easy, convenient	Practical, good gifts	Thoughtless, impersonal, forgettable
Reactions to Floral Gifts		Peers view negatively	Positive in many ways

Givers and receivers do not always view gifts similarly. This asymmetry can be detrimental if givers believe receivers feel negatively toward the product. To assist with countering negative imagery, we have compiled the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INDUSTRY

From the perceptual map results it becomes apparent to increase the use of flowers by young consumers, the floral industry can reposition floral gifts as fashionable. The industry can create the “trendy image” of flowers by featuring flowers in movies and fashion shows, etc. Furthermore, they can emphasize ways that floral gifts are shareable. For example, flowers as centerpieces of gatherings or parties could enhance the atmosphere that everyone can enjoy.

Additionally, the industry can educate their consumers that floral gifts are more meaningful and thoughtful than other gifts.

The industry can also eliminate the asymmetry between giver and receiver viewpoints through educational advertising. The floral industry can alter false assumptions regarding gift giving through education that lets givers know what recipients want and appreciate. Focus group participants felt that florists need to take additional steps to educate givers about what receivers like through social media marketing and in store displays.

Building off of educational advertising, focus group participants suggested positioning floral gifts as receiver specific with trendy or hobby oriented themes. Similarly, they felt improving customization options for the recipient by offering unique delivery (3 flowers every week for 4 weeks) was a good idea that also improved longevity.

Another problem occurs because givers are not always aware of what is important to recipients. However, they do seek gifts that reflect their knowledge of the recipient. Therefore, if the floral industry advertises recipients’ positive viewpoints of floral gifts and the important attributes of these gifts more givers will feel comfortable giving floral gifts.

Overall, this research will significantly assist the floral consumer by improving awareness of floral gift acceptability and by improving floral gift perceptions to givers and receivers in the future.

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