

Consumer Preferences for Flowers as Gifts: Age Segments, Substitutes and Perceived Risk – Actions to Improve Giver and Receiver Preferences

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BACKGROUND

Knowing consumer perceptions about one's product is very important when marketing. These perceptions assist a company in focusing advertising messages on important product attributes depending upon the needs of the target consumers.

It is also important to understand the viewpoint of recipients towards different gifts because inappropriate gifts can potentially damage social relationships. Through investigating perceptions about floral gifts from the receiver's perspective, the floral industry can alter their marketing mix to attract more customers and develop marketing programs to educate gift givers about recipients' preferences to decrease floral gift risk.

METHODOLOGY

To determine recipients' reactions to floral gifts, they were asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in a focus group discussion. This questionnaire solicited perceptions regarding different gift items (cut flowers, wine, gift cards, CDs/DVDs/books, and potted plants) to determine where floral gifts ranked among these options.

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.

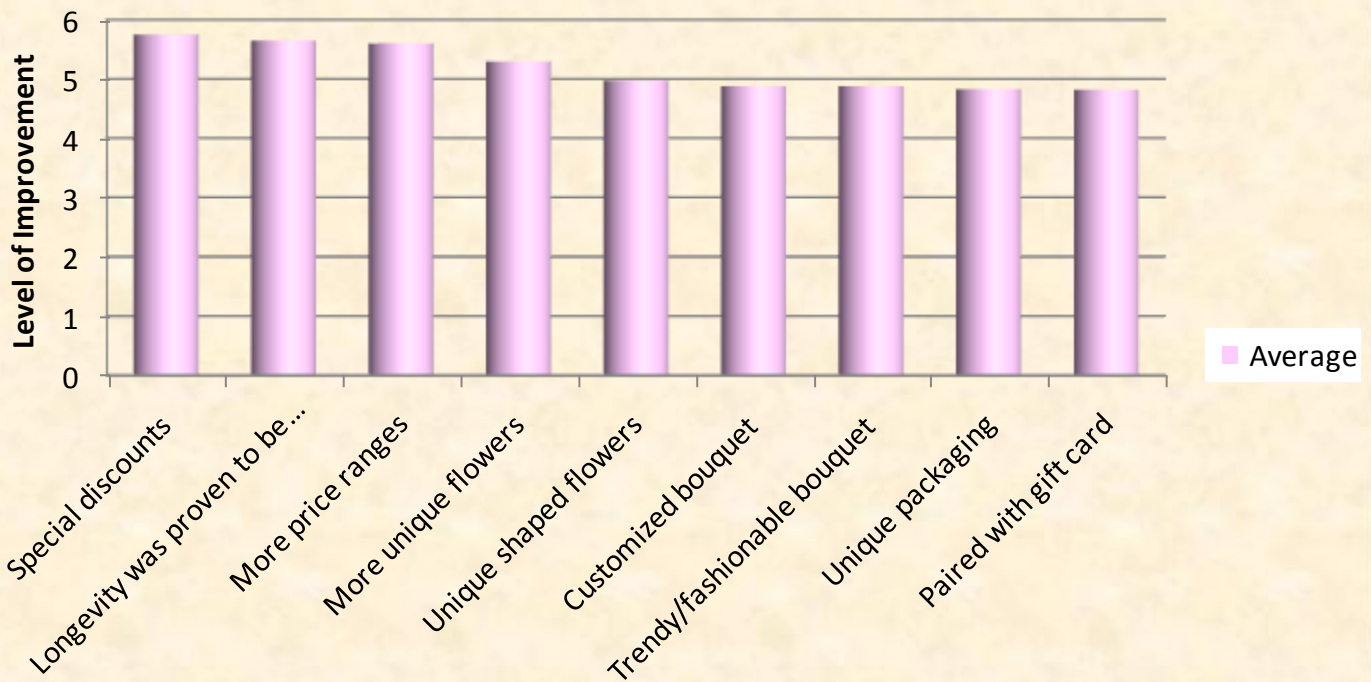
Participants were asked what actions the industry can take to increase their preferences for flowers as gifts, from the perspectives of both gift givers and gift receivers.

Many of the actions that would improve *givers* use of floral gifts include obtainment related actions such as discounts and price (Figure 1). Gift givers feel floral gifts' market price as more unreasonable than other gift options. Additionally, many people are very price sensitive, reducing the amount they are willing to pay for gifts. By providing discounts and greater price ranges, more floral gifts will be within gift givers spending limits resulting in more purchases.

Longevity was also important to gift givers (Figure 1). Greater longevity means the recipient will be reminded of the giver longer and strengthen social ties. Furthermore, longevity is related to perceived quality - the greater the longevity the better quality the floral gift.

Unique and trendy bouquet, flower and packaging options are important to givers because young consumers like trendy things and unique and trendy features add value to the gift (Figure 1). They add value through improving the impressiveness of the gift which results in recipient satisfaction and giver remembrance. Uniqueness makes the gift more desirable and personal.

Figure 1. Actions that would improve giver's use of floral gifts
(1=No improvement, 7=Strong improvement)



Customization also makes the gift more personal. The gift giver wants the gift to reflect that s/he thought about what the recipient would want, this can be achieved if the giver customizes the gift to the recipient.

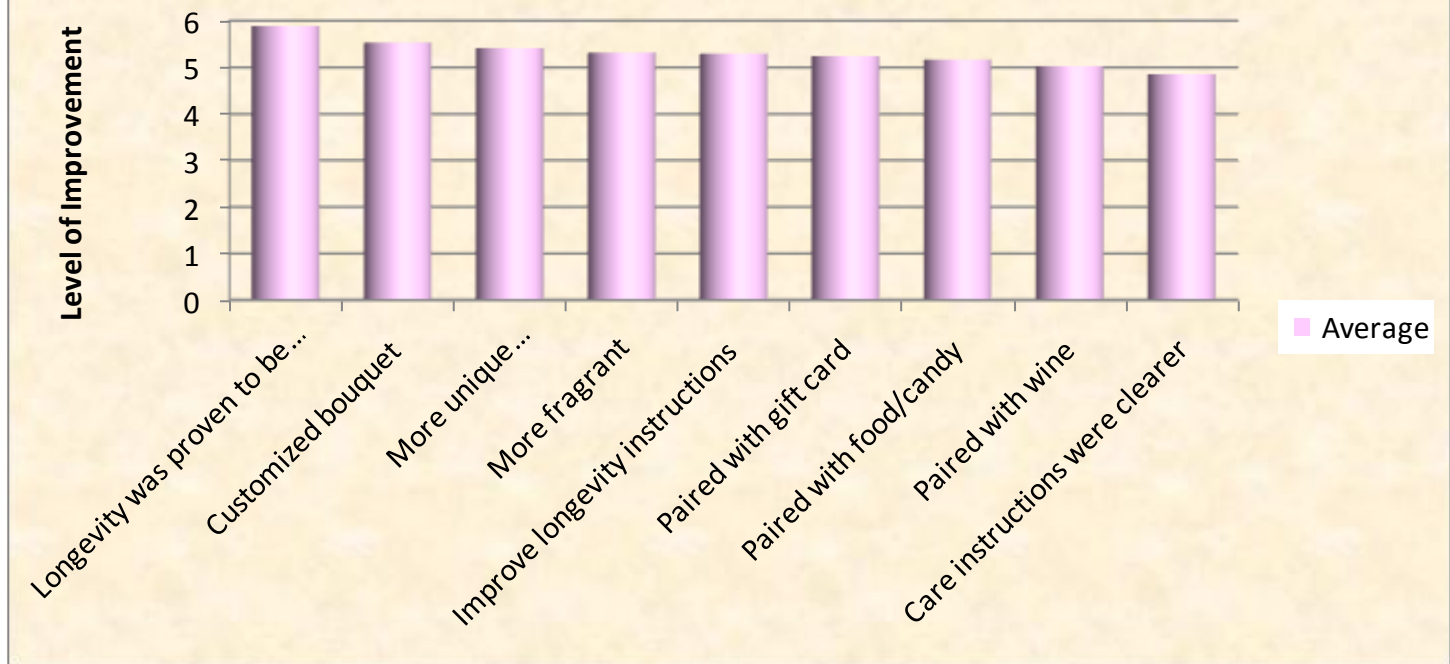
Givers also liked the idea of pairing floral gifts with gift cards. Gift cards greatly reduce risk because they allow recipients to choose their own gifts. By pairing with gift cards, the giver succeeds in giving the recipient exactly what s/he wants and values.

Recipients also had indicated actions that would improve their preferences for floral gifts. Longevity is important to recipients because they are able to enjoy their gift longer (Figure 2). Recipients are the ones who will ultimately take care of flowers so they feel care instructions as more important than givers. Concerns over care instructions indicate that recipients do not want their gift to die quickly which makes clear, accurate instructions important.

Uniqueness and customization features were also important to recipients (Figure 2). Unique gifts are more personal and have a “just for you” quality which receivers tend to remember for a longer period of time. Having a bouquet customized by the giver increases the floral gifts thoughtfulness.

Figure 2. Options that would increase recipient's preferences for floral gifts

(1=No improvement, 7=Strong improvement)



Recipients also preferred fragrance because it improves the floral gift sensory experience and adds uniqueness. The sense of smell is located near the emotional center of the brain and often can trigger happy memories and enhance mood.

Pairing gifts was another action receivers preferred (Figure 2). Gift pairings give the impression of greater longevity, practicality and customization which ultimately makes the gift more meaningful to the recipient.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INDUSTRY

To improve giver and recipient preferences for floral gifts the focus needs to be on improving the areas they felt were important. For longevity, florists can develop a longevity chart indicating which flowers last longer. Similarly, longevity instructions can be provided to assist customers.

To improve customization and unique options, the industry can develop user friendly design kiosks and software. Furthermore, many potential customers are unaware of florists' willingness to customize. To improve awareness, florists can advertise and promote unique, customization options. Developing a smart tag and iPhone apps could also assist with this.

Both givers and receivers also liked the idea of pairing gift items together. Florists can assist with this through partnerships with other gift companies and by providing suggestions. The floral industry can work with other industries to provide pairing options.

Further suggestions to improve giver preferences for floral gifts include offering discounts such as frequent purchasers clubs, first time buyers' discounts, and student discounts. These will help

encourage givers to give floral gifts more often and for more occasions than traditional holidays. Incentives such as value added techniques could also improve giver preferences for floral gifts. To improve perceived value, florists could provide “freebies” such as greenery, filler and vases. Florists could also give suggestions on ways to improve recipient enjoyment such as flower of the month clubs and customization options.

To improve recipient preferences for floral gifts, florist can offer fragrant options. Fragrance adds to the experience of receiving flowers and often stimulates a positive emotional reaction. The industry can enhance fragrance through developing natural compounds to spray on the blooms at purchase. Focus group participants want a fragrant flower section within the florist shop to improve ease of selection. To emphasize and promote fragrance, scratch and sniff stickers can be used in print ads to increase awareness of available fragrant flowers.

To further improve recipients’ preferences, recipients want customized care and longevity instructions. They want instructions that are specific for different types of flowers. Recipients feel these are essential in assisting them in caring for their floral gift and getting the greatest longevity possible. Consistency in information is important. To assist in care instructions, the floral industry can develop a single information website that provides instructions for each type of flower and direct customer to the site. Additionally, florists can have cards with the specific instructions for each type of flower. Florists also can provide plant food and instructions on use to improve longevity.

By improving available unique, interesting floral options and providing the opportunity to customize their arrangements, more receivers will be satisfied resulting in improved social ties, giver satisfaction, customer loyalty, and floral gift purchases.

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

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