

USE AND DISPOSITION OF A GIFT AND THE RECIPIENT'S FEEDBACK IN A COLLECTIVIST ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The giving and receiving of gifts, due to its economic and social implications, has attracted the attention of different disciplines, Marketing and Consumer Behavior among them. The receiver as an important actor has aroused an increasing interest; however few studies have been oriented to study his/her behavior after the reception of the gift either in culturally individualistic or collectivistic environments.

In order to help fill the knowledge gap, this study was carried out in Ecuador, a country characterized as highly collectivistic. The research conducted was qualitative in nature, and involved in-depth personal interviews with 24 individuals who received a total of 90 gifts for Christmas the year before. Based on the receiver's satisfaction with the gift(s) and the freedom re: use/disposal of the gift(s) perceived to be permitted by the giver, four fundamental themes arose from the data: the gift as a (1) common; (2) special; (3) awkward; or (4) inadequate product. Within each of these themes, gift recipients revealed different attitudes and behavior concerning the use and disposition of their gift(s) and also of feedback to the giver.

INTRODUCTION

Giving and receiving gifts is a phenomenon present in every society and its consequences are important for different reasons: for example, for its impact on a country's economy; for its impact on the socio-cultural value system in a country. Although gifts are given at different times throughout a calendar year, Christmas in the West is by far the greatest season for giving. To illustrate: during the 2011 Christmas season, German families budgeted 286 euros for gifts, and French families budgeted 407 euros (Deloitte SL 2011). On the average, every

American adult budgeted \$712 U.S. dollars for this purpose (Gallup 2011).

Research concerning the giving and receiving of gifts began early in Anthropology (e.g. Mauss 1923) and some five decades later, it attracted the attention of scholars looking at the phenomenon from the perspective of consumer behavior (e.g. Belk 1976).

Early research was centered on the study of gift-giving in individualistic cultural environments. Subsequently, research concerning gift-giving was extended to the receiver and more recently to collectivistic environments (e.g. Gehrt and Shim 2002; Jolibert and Fernandez-Moreno 1983; Park 1998; Wang, Razzaque and Kau 2007). Nevertheless, research on the receiver's behavior either in individualistic or collectivistic environments has been sparse (Larsen and Watson 2001; Otnes, Lowrey and Kim 1993; Pieters and Robben 1998; Shuling and Yu-Huang 2006).

Both in individualistic and collectivistic societies, the receiver can be an especially important actor influencing the whole gift decision process: the purchase; the giving or delivery; the use; and the disposition. For example, in a large study that included various countries, it was found that 74% of the European givers planned to ask the targeted receivers what they wanted for Christmas (Deloitte SL 2010), in this way empowering the receiver as the principal information source during the decision making process. Studies carried out in collectivistic countries also reveal how important the receiver may be in the gift purchasing process. (Cruz 2010).

In the stages after the purchase and receipt of a gift, the receiver is the great protagonist. He/she is the one who uses and disposes of the products received and who provides feedback about his/her satisfaction to the giver; information that in turn influences subsequent purchasing processes and influences the future interpersonal relationship.

Due to the antecedents stated before and to the potential importance that research concerning the behavior of the gift receiver has for marketing managers, this study was designed to contribute to the knowledge base in collectivistic environments.

Thus, the current study focused on the stage after the reception of a gift. The cultural environment selected was Ecuador, a country characterized by high collectivism, a cultural characteristic shared with the majority of Latin American countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collectivism, Giving and Receiving Gifts in Ecuador

In societies defined as collectivist (in contrast to the ones denoted individualistic), the welfare of groups have primacy for the individuals that are a part of them. In such societies, people develop their self-concept in terms of the group. People generate strong interpersonal connections and additionally, they demonstrate a major tendency to conformity (Hofstede 2001).

Although gifts are given and received in every sort of society, in collectivist societies the givers not only give gifts but the tendency is to assign a major percentage of their incomes for this effort compared to the givers in individualistic societies (Jolibert and Fernandez-Moreno 1983; Park 1998). This is notable because it is true in spite of the fact that many collectivist societies are poor or under developed (Hofstede 2001). *In furthering the maintenance and enrichment of close relationships among individuals in collectivist societies, the gift is a central component.*

Collectivist societies are found all over the world, however, the few studies about the consumer's behavior regarding the giving and receiving of gifts in these environments come primarily from Asia, particularly from China, Korea and Japan (e.g. Gehrt and Shim 2002; Minowa and Gould 1999; Park 1998; Wang, Piron and Xuan 2001; Wang et al. 2007). These are all collectivistic societies which have been heavily influenced by Confucianism.

Ecuador is a Latin American underdeveloped country with a population of about 14 million predominantly Christian

inhabitants with cultural characteristics highly marked. Its index in the dimension of Hofstede's individualism is 8, whereas the United States, on the other hand, has an index of 91 (Hofstede 2001). Additionally, Ecuador is also a country integrated to ways of the West where the occasions for giving gifts such as Christmas, Saint Valentine's, Father's Day and Mother's Day, birthdays and anniversaries, among others, are completely embedded into its customs.

Triandis and Gelfand (1998) proposed a refined definition of individualism and of collectivism by classifying each one of them as horizontal (the equality each was emphasizing) as well as vertical (if the emphasis was in the hierarchies). Ecuador has a power distance index of 78, an index that reflects the way in which the members of a society with less power wait and accept the perceived inequitable distribution of that power (Hofstede 2001). An index of 78 suggests that Ecuador has taken on the characteristics more akin to vertical collectivism.

The Behavior of the Receiver of the Gift after its Reception

In studying the receiver after the reception of a gift, three types of behaviors are of central importance: the use of the gift; its disposition; and feedback provided to the giver.

The application of the concept concerning the disposition of gifts received presents certain complications due largely to the fact published research examining disposition has been conducted in societies culturally individualistic where the autonomy of the gift recipient concerning the disposition of a belonging is assumed.

Jacoby, Berning and Dietvorst (1977) when studying the disposition of products included three options: to keep the product (keep on using it according to its original purpose; to change it to another use or simply to store it); to temporarily dispose of it (rent it or loan it); or to permanently get rid of it (throw it away, give it away, sell it or trade it).

Sherry (1983), when applying the concept of disposition of gifts, implicitly assigned the decision before the acceptance of the gift (and therefore the possession of the product) and he postulated that a gift may have as options of disposition: rejection; consumption; display; storage; or exchange. Sherry, McGrath and Levy

(1992) also placed the decision in the moment when the gift is offered to the receiver and they found 4 ways of disposition: disposition by incorporation (to integrate to the receiver's life); disposition by lateral cycling (the gift goes to another person); disposition by destruction; and disposition by return (to the retail store).

However, there are scholars who believe that the decisions concerning the acceptance or rejection of a gift and those about the use and disposition of it are essentially different decisions. The acceptance of a gift is fundamentally accomplished on the basis of the evaluation of the giver's intentions and the message that the gift conveys (Belk and Coon 1993; Ruth, Otnes and Brunel 1999; Sherry 1983). Whereas the decisions concerning the use and disposition are carried out on the basis of additional factors, such as the space available at home, family and societal influences, the economic situation, and the characteristics of the gift itself (Hanson 1980). For these reasons, in the current study, it was decided to examine the decision about disposition *after* the acceptance of the gift and when the receiver already possessed it.

With regard to the theme of feedback, when this concept is applied to the giving and receiving of gifts, it may be understood as the evaluative information that the gift receiver delivers to the giver about his performance concerning the process of selection and delivery of the gift. The feedback in general may have either a positive or negative valence (Ilgen, Fischer and Taylor 1979) and it can be conveyed by means of verbal or nonverbal communication, or both. Sherry (1983) placed this behavior in the moment of the reception of the gift and postulated that this may be genuine or fake.

An interesting and relevant aspect of interpersonal communications in collectivist societies is that they are of high context (Hofstede 2001), meaning that they are characterized as being indirect, implicit, with a lot of information in the external or internal context of the people and typically involve more nonverbal communication than verbal (Hall 1976). This type of communication evidently is best understood and therefore fulfills its objective among people who develop close nexus or connections.

It being a society strongly collectivistic, Ecuador presents an excellent opportunity to study from a very different perspective than other

studies (e.g. Sherry, et al. 1992) the receiver's behavior concerning the use and disposition of a gift. Such a study should also contribute to a better comprehension of a poorly studied aspect of the dynamic, namely feedback toward the giver. It is expected that these behaviors will be particularly complex due to the nature of the connections that people develop in collectivist societies.

Research Problem

The present study was conducted primarily to answer a general exploratory question: In a collectivist society, what does a gift receiver's behavior after the reception of the gift consist of?

As the investigation was progressing, the general exploratory question underwent refinement, yielding the following more specific questions:

(1) In a collectivist society such as Ecuador, what does a gift receiver's behavior about the use and disposition of the gift consist of?

(2) What does the behavior of a gift receiver's feedback to the gift-giver consist of?

METHODOLOGY

The study was developed in two stages. The first one began during the Christmas Holiday season in 2009 when 25 participants were recruited from 3 universities in Quito, Ecuador. These students were screened and selected from a larger pool because they all came from middle and higher class families. Each student was an undergraduate, was not married, and depended heavily on their parents' financial support for pursuing their education. Given these attributes, it was reasonable to believe that these 25 participants were among that kind of group of people who receive a large number of gifts, many expensive. The 25 students who were selected and agreed to participate were between 19 and 26 years of age; 15 were women and 10 were men

Given the fact that the cultural value system is highly collectivist: when a person decides to purchase gifts, the first recipients are other members of the family (Caplow 1982; Garner and Wagner 1991); the gifts flow in an

intergenerational way from top to bottom (Caplow 1982; 1984; McGrath and Englis 1996); and the upper strata of society give more and more expensive gifts than the lower ones (Fischer and Arnold 1990; Garner and Wagner 1991).

In the first stage of the study, in-depth personal interviews were carried out during the days immediately following Christmas of the year 2009. The participants were asked about all of the gifts they had received that Christmas, if they had liked each gift or not, the type of relationship each felt that they had with the giver, the antecedents of gifts received and the way(s) in which they might have participated in the purchase process. This first stage had two purposes, first to study the receiver's behavior during the decision making process (Cruz 2010) and second, to generate the gifts base.

The research identified a total of 153 gift events. The 25 students were told that they would be contacted again after a year for a follow-up conversation. From the list of 153 gift events, 63 were excluded for the second stage of the study. Those eliminated were: intangible gifts; money gifts; gifts where there was high involvement of the receiver during the purchase process; and gifts which the participants would have felt embarrassed to talk about (e.g. underwear; lingerie). The reason for the exclusion of those gifts where the receiver revealed high involvement was due to the fact that the receiver filled most of the purchasing roles, making these gifts essentially the same as if they were bought by the receiver him/herself for personal consumption.

The second stage of the study was implemented during the days after Christmas of the year 2010 and in January of the year 2011. Twenty-four out of the original 25 participants participated in the in-depth personal interviews and the events regarding the 90 gifts received a year before were investigated. The interviewees read and signed an informed consent form and each one received \$50 U.S. after completion of the interview.

The election of the interview as a fundamental technique of the study was taken for its flexibility and for its capacity to generate considerable and rich volume of qualitative data. This qualitative approach to the collection of data is frequently viewed as the most suitable to finding the crucial elements of theories (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The interviews were of a semi structured type and lasted from 20 to 70 minutes, depending on the number of gifts identified and discussed. The interviewer had a summary of the first stage of the research and when it was necessary to jog an interviewee's memory, the data provided by the same interviewees a year earlier were read to them. Thus the interview was about concrete experience and not about abstractions (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). Important points ascertained during the interviews were the (dis)satisfaction with the product received, the impact that the gift had in the relationship between the giver and the receiver, the different ways the gift was used, and if it was, how the gift was disposed, and the ways in which feedback to the giver was transmitted. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed.

The analysis of the data was carried out on the basis of the interpretative thematic analysis which is a fundamental method of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) and it was divided into two stages, one technical and rigorous and the other one creative (Patton 1999).

In the first stage of the analysis taken in a systematic and rigorous way, 2 procedures were elected in order to guarantee the validity of the study: Triangulation of multiple analysts and validation of the participants (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick 2008; Patton 1999). For the triangulation of various analysts, two additional experts participated with whom the author established the following agenda: First a meeting in order to establish the methodology, then the independent codification, next another meeting to select the categories and finally the last codification.

The feedback toward the giver constituted one of the areas in which disagreements arose among the analysts; these were overcome when there was a consensus regarding subtle nuances. For example, the use of the product in front of the giver could be carried out in a natural way, it could be accompanied by strong positive emotions or it could be developed under pressure.

In seeking validation of the meaning of the opinions shared by each of the interviewees, the author prepared a summary of the interpretations of each gift event and this summary was sent to each respective interviewee requesting her/his opinion in terms of perceived accuracy or inaccuracy of the summarized interpretations.

In the second step of the analysis, viewed as creative (Patton 1999), the deep and holistic comprehension of the phenomenon was sought and scrutinized (Spiggle 1994). Here, the author, by means of the categories identified, looked for the connection among categories, by generating themes, models and theoretical structures.

RESULTS

Within the analysis of the interviews two aspects of vital importance were revealed to

define the behavior of the receiver after the reception of the gift: the relationships with the product and the relationship and interaction with the giver. Simply put, the receiver liked or disliked the products received and the giver either influenced or not the recipient's liberty in the use and disposition of those products. These two dimensions constituted the framework that supported the consistency of the themes (table 1).

TABLE 1

The Themes and their Principal Dimensions

		Liberty in the use and disposition of the product	
		High	Low
Satisfaction with the product received	Satisfaction	Gift as a common product	Gift as a special product
	Dissatisfaction	Gift as an inadequate product	Gift as an awkward product

The Gift as a Common Product

The name selected for this theme shows that the relationship between the gift receiver and the product received does not largely differentiate from the one the consumer may have regarding products resulting from normal purchases made by her/himself. The principal matters in this theme were the agreements of the products given with the likes of the receivers and the liberty in the use and disposition of the gift.

The gifts were valued principally according to their functional and social value, that is to say, either from the perspective of their physical or utilitarian performance or from the social image generated by its use (Sheth, Newman and Gross 1991). The gift as a common product was the most frequently reported, fitting to this

theme 62 events (68.9%) and did not have any special impact in the giver-receiver relationship, an effect already identified by Ruth et al. (1999). (However, in several cases it led to temporal improvements and to the relief of stress.)

David (male, 26) told about his sister's gift, a wallet that he liked and used for several months:

No, there was not any change in the relationship. I told her thanks a lot, that, indeed I needed it because the other (wallet) I had was quite old. I used it for about six months... seven months, for that time I did like it since I certainly

needed it, but after that time it did not attract my attention very much... I do not use it any more, I bought another wallet and that is the one I am using at the present time because it looks more youthful and the wallet that my sister gave me was getting old.

In David's report the emphasis was placed on the functional and social qualities of the product and the evaluation of its performance as the basis for stopping to use it. The gift's use or disposal did not generate any impact on the relationship with his sister.

In the same way, Johanna (female, 20) spoke about the gift from one of her classmates, a plush cow. It was a satisfactory gift, and Johanna's report focused on the qualities of the product, emphasizing the use she gave to it:

I opened the gift that very moment, he gave me the plush cow in a little case together with a card, I read it that very moment too. As I collect plush cows, it was a gift that I like to receive, then I did thank him. I have them on my bed or on a piece of furniture especially dedicated for plushes were I usually leave them, but this one is on my bed as decoration.

This kind of gift occurred in a wide range of relationships, both the distant and close ones and when the giver was present during the use and disposition of the gift, he/she did it without exerting any perceived pressure upon the receiver.

The sincere conversations and the spontaneous and intentional use of the product constituted the principal feedback toward the giver. Due to the satisfaction with the gift and the absence of pressure exerted by the giver, but also because of the little impact of the gift in the relationship, the feedback behavior was described by the interviewees as very natural actions, where the central message was that the product was

considered satisfactory and they were happy to receive it.

Rafael (male, 22) reported the feedback he gave to his grandparents for the gift of a cellular phone, as a mixture of spontaneous use of the product and sincere conversations:

I am closer to my grandparents, I am closer to them... all the time when I go to their home or they come to mine, I am almost always speaking on the phone, then they have seen me using it. They have also asked me if it is still okay, if it still works, I imagine they wanted to realize if I needed another for this Christmas or something like that.

It is interesting how in this gift event, Rafael's grandparents got interested in the gift to the extent they had intentions to replace the product if and when needed.

Another interesting type of feedback discerned was the intentional use of the gift in presence of the giver. Thus, Jose (male, 22) described how he intentionally wore one of the polo shirts and a necklace, his aunt's gifts.

I keep on wearing the polo shirts, I liked them very much... The next day she gave them to me, I wore one polo shirt with the necklace to show her that I liked them and they fit me well.

It is important in this narration how Jose used the product to convey a concrete message, his satisfaction for the gift.

The range of products given was also the widest of all the themes, and included decorations, accessories, clothing, cosmetic and hygiene products, books, electronic devices, sweets and chocolates. Another important fact discerned from the interviews was that the products and levels of quality given as gifts, in many cases, had

already been given within the history of the giver-receiver relationship.

In this theme, the range of possible dispositions was also the widest, doubtless the case because of the liberty the receiver enjoyed. Thus, the common state and the starting point for all the products was the active use (some products were still in use, others were wholly consumed and others were disposed). Within the identified types of disposition were the storage with similar products in possession and the transfer to third individuals mainly as a gift.

In Fernando's case (male, 21) described below, he used a perfume/cologne gift completely and not only that, he kept its case as an ornament.

I had the cologne until it finished, I had it in the case besides, I kept the container for some time, I kept it for a month or more...

On the other hand Karola (female, 20) reports how she used the product she received as gift from a friend, while it was satisfactory, later when her tastes changed, she disposed of it through donation:

We embraced each other for Christmas and nothing else; he was in a hurry because he had Christmas dinner at his university... I used the teddy bear to decorate my room, it was on my bed for the first months, later I did not like the plushes on my bed, then I together with my whole family collected the things that were in good condition, we sent them to the poor.

Both in Fernando's and Karola's case, it is interesting how the satisfaction for the products encouraged them to use those products. Any disposition carried out was exerted without having to support the burden of a difficult decision.

Under the theme of the gift as a common product, there were recurrent contents in the reports of the interviewees, the satisfaction for the product received, its use due to its functional and social values under liberty and naturalness and the

disposition without significant emotions. Additionally, the feedback provided to the givers did not require any great effort or any psychological cost and the essential message was the satisfaction with the product. The reports of the participants were centered on the product, while the giver and the relationship the receiver had with him/her occupied a secondary place of importance.

The Gift as a Special Product

These types of gifts followed in frequency to the former theme with 14 events (15.5%). The denomination of this theme placed an emphasis on the special nature of the gift which was incorporated due to the meaning and impact it had in the relationship. In this way, its principal value was emotional, that is to say, for the feelings associated to the product (Sheth et al. 1991), this value eclipsed the functional and social values of the product. ***The gift conveyed a message (Mick and DeMoss 1990) that assigned an important and positive change in the relationship of the giver and that of the receiver.***

Estefanía (female, 23) related how her fiancé's gift chain, became special due to the impact in the relationship:

I would say that it had a very big impact because it is the first time that someone has given me a piece of jewelry, as a couple, and it had a very big impact since it joined us more, it seems it has a nicer meaning. For him, I believe, it represents that he (it) will always be with me.

In Estefanía's report, the gift was an exceptional product, without antecedents of similar gifts in the couple context. The message conveyed was clear: the giver proposed to move the relationship into a higher level and Estefanía welcomed that change.

Mario (male, 23) also considered the watch given by his uncle as a special product. His report is follows:

My uncle gave me a watch and my father was about to give me another watch but he did not want to buy it, then I had a more emotional fondness to my uncle as if he were my father... it joined us more... I told him thanks a lot... you should not have done it. I opened the box and I said "What a nice watch!"

In this case, Mario contrasted his uncle's behavior with that of his father. The gift conveyed the message that his uncle was concerned about him as if he were his father and Mario felt that way and he reported it with emotion. Both in Estefania's and Mario's report, although the products were described; the givers and the relationship with them took a leading role.

Under this theme of gifts as special products, the feedback toward the giver was based on the reaction of the receiver when opening the gift, in the intentional use of the product and in the sincere conversations. Of particular importance was the reaction of the receiver in the very moment when the gift was opened and when almost always when the giver was present. Also notable was the intent of the giver that the gift would symbolize a commitment to stepping up the relationship between him/her and the receiver. In each instance, this intent did not annoy the receiver; on the contrary, the receiver actively demonstrated satisfaction with product and especially with the commitment to an enhanced state of the relationship.

Daniela's report (female, 20) revealed many aspects of the former reports. In her case a friend of hers, through the gift of a perfume, demonstrated to be interested in her and her tastes, the gift made possible that the relationship change from their friendship into their engagement:

It is a brand of perfume I like very much because it is super sweet. The gift did mark a target or a change, not because I am materialist but because he listens to me when I speak, because he got interested in knowing what I

liked. Then he surprised me with that gift that I did like it and now we are already engaged. He told me to open it in front of him, I opened it and I got excited a lot and I told him thanks a lot, that I had liked it very much.

It is revealing that the giver, in order to know the effect of the gift, asked Daniela to open the gift in front of him and she provided a meaningful feedback when getting excited because of the gift.

On the other hand, Kathy (female, 22) considered special the gift of clothes from one of her aunts, she felt that the gift united them more and in her reports she told how intentionally she used to wear the gift in order to demonstrate the giver her satisfaction and happiness:

I consider the gift special for the time we shared, also because of how things happened, the very fact that she asked me what I needed... then they are special gifts... I put them on almost always on weekends that we always see each other, we get together on weekends at my grandfather's house and there was my aunt, and almost all the times she was there, I was wearing the clothes.

Under this theme, the intentional use of the product as feedback for the giver has a different connotation than the one for the case of the gift like a common product. Here the use was accompanied by positive and intense emotions; whereas in the former theme, about the gift as a common product, its use was with pleasure and naturalness. The message conveyed was different too, under this theme, the giver not only knew the satisfaction for the product but also the happiness for the course that the relationship had taken.

The first common stage for all the special products was the use of the product and the tendency to keep it. The use of the product was located in two opposite poles: a lot or a little bit but always there was the fear of losing it. The

presence of the giver and above all the fear of the loss limited the liberty in the use and disposition of the gift.

Estefanía (female, 23) going on with the report of her fiancé's gift, a chain, reported:

...he gave it to me before Christmas and since then I have not taken it off... and I do not take it off any more, indeed I am afraid of losing it.

In the case of Mario (male, 23) also mentioned above, the use of the gift was placed the other end, he preferred not to take the watch out of the house so as not to lose it. He reported it this way:

I have never had a watch... and well, the habit of not having a watch made me not to take it out of home very often, I said "No, no, no, my uncle gave me this watch and I am never going to lose it.

The loss of a special object would be comparable to the loss of a part of oneself (Belk 1988, Delorme, Zinkhan and Hagen 2004). The ways of use of Estefanía's and Mario's gift, although totally different, they were alike because both of them strove to exert control over the destiny of the gift (not losing it) so as to generate psychological tranquility.

When a gift as special product was identified in the interviewees reports, the sentiments expressed were full of positive emotions, centered on the giver and the relationship that united them and how this stood to improve thanks to the message conveyed by the nature of the gift. References about the functional and social characteristics of the product were few. There was satisfaction for the product and above all happiness for the message it conveyed. The emotions had an important place in the feedback toward the giver and the tendency was to protect and keep the product very safe.

A final aspect about this theme is that the variety of products given was less extensive than the one in the former theme. Here, the predominant categories of products found were ornaments, clothes, perfumes/colognes and accessories.

The Gift as an Awkward Product

This type of theme was present in 8 gift events (8.9%) and it was a gift within an especially close giver-receiver relationship. The product was not congruent with the needs and tastes of the receiver who because of the close vigilance of the giver did not have the liberty to decide about the use and disposition of the product. In spite of the nuisance and the tension produced in the receivers, the receiver-giver relationships were not seriously affected, thanks to the receivers' apparent tolerance.

In her report, Diana (female, 22) detailed the close vigilance of her boyfriend regarding the use of a handbag, a gift that she did not like.

I believe that he did realize that I did not like its color too much because when I put it on he told me, "Oh, yes, it suits you fine". He expected that I said something and I just said, "Oh, yes, it is nice" but I did not express anything else ... After that I went to buy a handbag for the university but it was black and white because that color matches the best, and I remember he told me, "Oh, you have bought another handbag!"

Diana's discomfort came from the permanent vigilance of her boyfriend regarding the use of a gift that she did not like and she had to hold and strap on her shoulder deliberately to calm him down. The handbag was unsatisfactory and Diana bought another handbag, but her boyfriend asked for an explanation. The solution to the problem was difficult; although she had

another handbag that she liked, she had to lie and keep the handbag she did not like.

Claudia (female, 23) on the other hand, reported what happened with her parents' gift, a bracelet:

Yes, they asked me about it too much, that is, I told them that I had liked it, my father does not remember it a lot... but my mother has told me, "Why don't you put on the bracelet?". During this year, to tell you the truth, I have not put it on very often because it is uncomfortable because it has those two triangles, it has sharp ends. I keep it in the bijouterie and bracelet box, I have not put it on a lot.

While her father had forgotten about the gift, her mother was very concerned about it. The product received as a gift was unsatisfactory and awkward, both in the physical and psychological sense.

In the former reports, the feedback provided to the giver can be readily observed. In this sense, the desire to maintain a positive relationship and not to affect it resulted in the principal ways of feedback under this theme be to lie, to pretend and to use inevitably the product on as few occasions as possible. What the receivers were looking for was to hide the dissatisfaction with the product and with the uncomfortable experience associated with receiving such a gift..

Claudia (female, 23) formerly mentioned, described how the surveillance of her mother made her wear the bracelet in order to quiet her down:

I have not put it on a lot. My mother has told me, "Why don't you put the bracelet on?" and in that very moment, I have had to wear it ... so that my mother can see it and she does not feel offended.

The intentional use of the product as a way of feedback toward the giver differed respect

to the other themes, being a key aspect the emotions produced. As was formerly indicated, the case of receiving a gift as a common product was almost without emotion, and in the case of receiving a gift as a special product, it was accompanied by strong, positive emotions; but in the present theme, negative emotions prevailed and the receiver nevertheless used (albeit sparingly) and refrained from the disposing of it due to the pressure he/she felt from the giver.

Another crucial moment of providing feedback to the giver was when the giver was present when the receiver opened the gift and the receiver pretended satisfaction (Ruth 1996; Sherry 1983). Not surprisingly, the interviewees were aware that it was hard to pretend and that the givers were capable of detecting their real feelings.

In this sense, Daniela (female, 20) told about the gift of a decoration doll for her bed given by her aunt:

That is to say, she gave it to me on Christmas night and I told her thanks and nothing else. I just said thanks, you look at the face when someone opens a gift and she likes it; this time it was not with the same enthusiasm as when I received the other doll, for example.

Daniela realized that she could not hide her dissatisfaction for the gift, and she compared the situation with a similar gift that was fully satisfactory.

Michelle (female, 21) reported how she had to lie and pretend positive emotion when she opened her uncle's gift, a bracelet and a pair of earrings:

The reaction when opening the gift was, "wow! How nice they are!" Not to make him feel bad, but indeed, I did not like them, he embraced me and thus...

Although her report was in a few words, it can be seen how awkward the situation must have been for her.

The products given under this theme were predominantly clothes and their accessories. The common state of disposition was the indefinite storage of the product, alternated with sporadic use in order to calm down the giver.

Both in the case of special and awkward products, a year later virtually all them were still kept by the receiver; however the reasons for keeping the gifts were totally different. The special products were kept for their meaning and emotional value, that is no doubt the reason why they became part of the extended self of the receiver (Belk 1988). On the other hand, the awkward products were kept by the receiver so as not to hurt feelings and damage the relationship with the giver.

It is quite clear that awkward products conjoined dissatisfaction with the product with dissatisfaction with the situation, and resulted in the receivers incurring considerable psychological cost. This can be inferred from the reports where the negative emotions are evident. In addition to placing a certain emphasis on the negative characteristics of the product itself, the reports of the receivers were centered on the surveillance of the giver and the lies and simulations which the receivers believed they must put forward.

The Gift as an Inadequate Product

This was the theme that revealed the fewest events, 6 (6.7%). The essence of this theme was the dissatisfaction of the receiver for the gift, but also the perceived freedom to dispose it. This type of gift was discerned only in cases where the receiver and the giver were involved in distant relationships.

The existence of a distant relationship prevented the giver from closely supervising the use and disposition of her/his gift. This became apparent either because of physical distance or emotional distance, both resulting in the giver's disinterest in the outcome. In these instances, the preferred feedback by the receiver was revealed to be silence (and in a few cases statements of satisfaction when in fact the truth was just the opposite) after reception of the gift.

Lissette (female, 21) spoke about the gift of some slippers given by her grandmother with whom she has a distant relationship:

The fact is that the slippers were somewhat dirty, that is because they are the ones which are usually on special offer (sale) where everybody in the store touches but doesn't buy them... she never asked about me, she does not remember me either, I do not talk with her either. I told my mother to give them to somebody else.

In this case the gift was unsatisfactory, Lissette spoke about how little importance was ascribed to the relationship with her grandmother ...a feeling that Lissette felt was reciprocated) and that she has the freedom to decide what to do with the product. She did not say anything to her grandmother about her dissatisfaction; neither of the two got interested in communicating.

Paola (female, 22) reported on the unsatisfactory gift that a cousin had given her, a polo shirt:

I unpacked it because it was wrapped and I folded it and I kept it and I... have not even remembered it ... the polo shirt is blue, it seems to me ... But it was a color I did not wish to wear, then I kept it, then she called my family up and asked if we had received the gift and she asked me if I had liked it, of course, I said yes, not to have problems.

Paola in her report ascribed little importance to the situation, expressed little concern with regard to the giver's telephone call, and the feedback she gave was full of lies that she used so as to avoid hurt feelings. The little –to-no interest in this gift she did not like led her to quickly forget about it.

As can be seen in these reports, with this type of gift, the product was not used at all, not once; instead, the gift went directly to the disposition stage. The receiver's experience regarding the handling of similar unwanted products was crucial. When there was this experience, the storage was brief, the labels were left intact and the transfer to other people or "lateral cycling" (Sherry, et al. 1992) took place. When the receiver had not experienced this type of gift in the past, the gift's storage was negligent, and the loss or oblivion of the product was the outcome.

Erika (female, 22) reported what had happened with a blouse, an inadequate gift from a friend from whom she was separated for a great period of time.

The blouse was nice, but I did not like its color, no, I mean, no. At the beginning it was in a drawer, I never wore it... in a space of the clothing box that I do not use... I mean, I already knew that I did not like it and that I was not going to wear it; then as it was new I did not want to remove the labels because people are going to think that it has been worn, so I took it, I called my cousin up and I told her, "You know, I have a fuchsia blouse, I do not know if you like it and it is new". My cousin is an orphan, she has no mother, no father and obviously she does not have much economical solvency.

It can be inferred that Erika had experience in disposing gifts of this kind, complete liberty do to so and also a recipient already identified.

Jonathan (male, 22), on the other hand, reported about a monkey jug given by a distant brother-in-law who did not have any interest in the results of the gift either.

It is as if he had not bought the gift, it seems that my sister took him and told him, "This is to be given to my brother and that is it"... he never asked about the gift, he is not very expressive either, rather he is very distant from the family. I have no idea where the gift is... it used to be in my room but my nephew, I believe, took it because he liked it.

His words convey the lack of previous experience in the disposition of similar gifts or of a disposition plan; the unconcern for the final destiny of the gift was also evident. Jonathan's obvious negligence about storing the unwelcomed gift not surprisingly resulted in his failure to even remember where he put it.

The products received as inadequate gifts were predominantly clothes and home ornaments. Generally they are low price items, low in quality. Neither did they exhibit any particular functional value, nor did they cause any psychological cost, but the recipients nevertheless needed some time for their disposition.

TABLE 2
Identified Themes and their Principal Characteristics

	The gift as a common product	The gift as a special product	The gift as an awkward product	The gift as an inadequate product
Giver-recipient relationship before the gift	Wide range of relationships	Close relationships	Close relationships	Distant relationships
Impact on the relationship	No impact or temporal impact	High impact	No impact at all	No impact at all
The giver's role	From distance to moderately interested	Very interested	Very interested	Distant
Recipient's satisfaction with the product	Satisfaction	Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction	Dissatisfaction
Type of Products	Wide range of products	Ornaments, perfumes, clothes and accessories	Clothes and accessories	Clothes and home ornaments
Use and Disposition of the product	After an active use, storage as a product in stock or transfer to third individuals.	Use oriented to the preservation of the product.	Indefinite storage alternated with a sporadic use.	Absence of use. Temporary storage and then transfer/negligent storage.
Feedback to the giver	Sincere conversations/ spontaneous and intentional use of the product	When opening the gift/Sincere conversations/ intentional use of the product	When opening the gift/lies/feigned use of the product	Silence/lies
Central message received by the giver	Satisfaction for the product	Satisfaction for the product and for the new level of the relationship	False satisfaction for the product	No message at all / False satisfaction for the product

The reports of the interviewees under this theme tended to be cold and, when emotions were revealed, they were negative but of low intensity. The inadequate gifts were not satisfactory; however, this fact was not very important to the receivers. Matters such as the feedback toward the giver or the disposition of the gift were accomplished by means of the least investment of time and effort or simply they were not carried out at all. Table 2 summarizes the former exposition by presenting the four themes in accordance with the variables identified from the research.

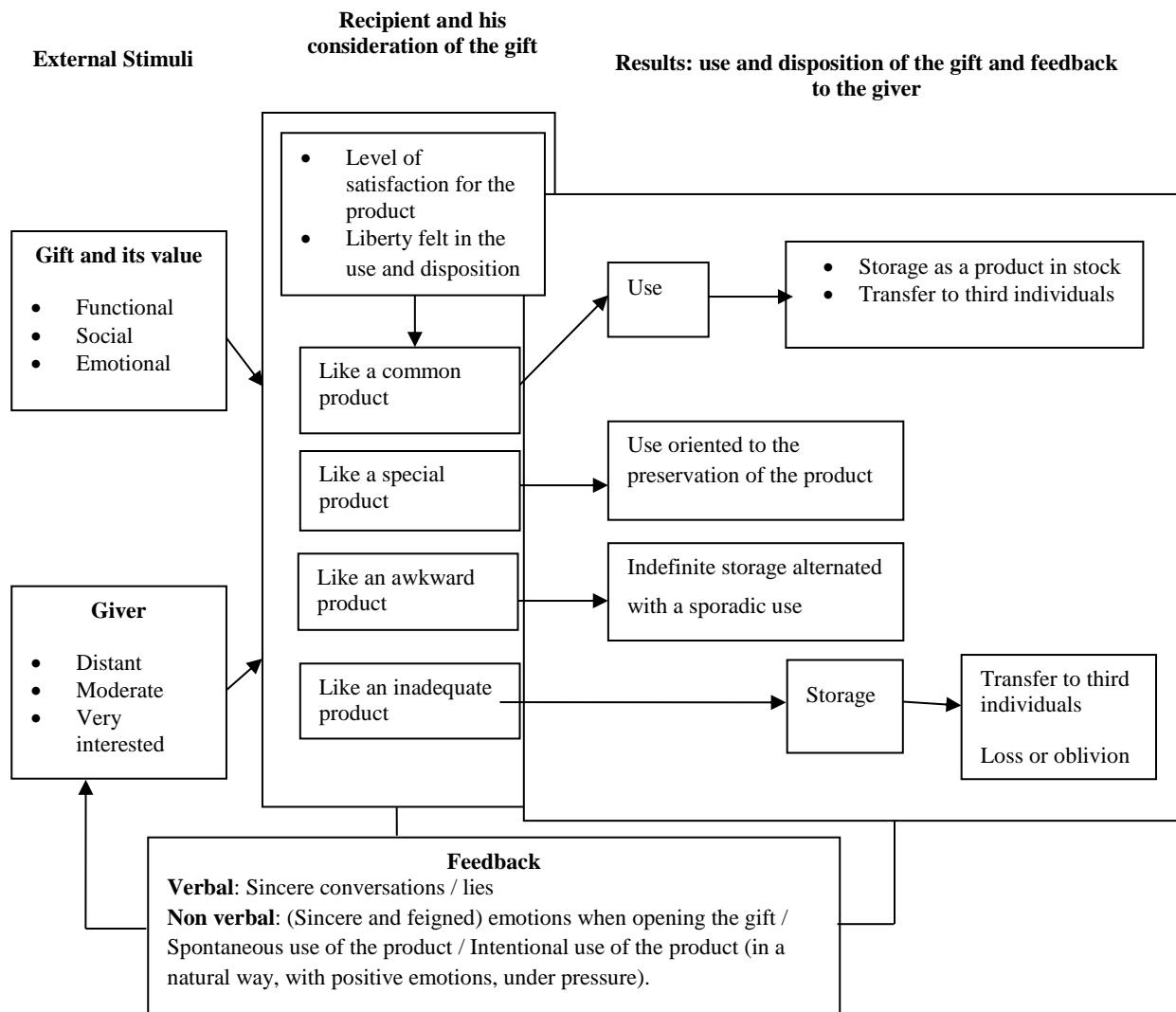
DISCUSSION

Model of Behavior

Based on the inferences drawn from the interviews, Figure 1 presents the model of behavior of the recipient of the gift after its reception.

FIGURE 1

Model of Recipient Behavior after the Reception of the Gift in a Collectivistic Environment



This is a model of the stimulus-consumer-response genre, very commonly used in describing a consumer's behavior (e.g. Belk 1975; Hanson 1980; Schiffman, Kanuk and Wisenblit 2010). Two important external stimuli were identified, the giver and the gift. Through the recipients who are the ones who see or feel the giver's behavior, it has been established that the giver: can be very distant; can subtly get involved; can be very interested; and can also smother or asphyxiate the receiver through his demeanor after bestowing the gift upon the receiver.

On the other hand, a gift can connote different types of values (Larsen and Watson 2001; Sheth, et al. 1991) and different types of messages about what the giver wants the relationship between him/herself and the recipient to be in the future.

These two things combine to determine the level of the receiver's (dis)satisfaction with the gift and the perceived liberty in its use and disposition. In short, the current study has uncovered four types of reactions that the receiver will give to a gift: treating it as a common product; as a special product; as an awkward product; or as an inadequate product. The particular reaction chosen by the gift recipient is of vital importance for the result of the model, that is, the different ways of use and disposition of the gifts and the feedback provided to the giver will vary as a function of which type of reaction is forthcoming.

Themes Found and Relational Models

Fiske (1992) proposed four general relational models: *communal sharing*, where the relationship among individuals is organized around equivalence and solidarity; *authority ranking*, where the relationship is characterized by the subordination of one to another; *equality matching*, where the relationship is based on the balance and reciprocity in the interchange; and *market pricing*, where the relationship is based on economic calculations concerning the benefits and the costs. When relating these relational models with the themes uncovered in the current study, interesting conclusions may be drawn.

When gifts are judged by recipients as common products, they can originate in a wide range of relationships and they may be localized in any relational model. However, when they are repetitive concerning the categories of the product

and quality levels, they convey the message of stability in the current relationship and, therefore, there is no obvious interest in modifying the receiver-giver relational model.

Gifts as special products do convey an invitation for a change in the relational model, generally moving toward the communal sharing model. In this way, for example, college classmates (equality matching or market pricing) turn to be close friends or sweethearts, or relatives who are looked at from the distance (authority ranking) turn to be close friends. This relational change is also wanted by the receiver and it implies a closer and more solid relationship.

In the case of gifts as awkward products, the giver's use of power and the control is perceived by the recipient. We have documented that this occurs when the recipient is given a gift from their authoritarian parents, relatives and controlling sweethearts. In some cases these gifts are given from a relationship already located in the authority ranking model and the giver's behavior is a ratification of the model. In other cases, it is the externalization of the giver's intentions in order to advance toward an unequal and authoritarian model.

Gifts as inadequate products are present in distant relationships and they are found in the market pricing model. Here a gift is considered by the recipient as inexpensive or of limited value, but the resulting dissatisfaction is not considerable due to the fact that the receiver is aware of the limited investment made by the giver.

It is interesting to note how the communal sharing model turns out to be the target of the changes to the relational model through the gift. Vodosek (2009) found that this model together with the authority ranking model were the favorite models of the individuals from societies of vertical collectivism.

Use and Disposition of the Gift

A first important issue is the behavior of the receiver of the gift when he/she lacked liberty to make decisions about the gift. In this situation use and disposition were intertwined. Under the theme "the gift as a special product" characterized by the satisfaction of the receiver concerning the gift and the heightened state of the relationship, the dilemma between using the product or storing it was part of the handling of the preservation of the product. Under the theme "the gift as an

awkward product” characterized by the dissatisfaction of the receiver concerning the gift, the dilemma (between using the product or disposing of it by storing it or by transferring it) was a consequence of the great concern of the receiver not to spoil the relationship with the giver.

Another important issue is the behavior of the receiver of the gift when he/she had liberty to make decisions. When the gift was satisfactory, it was always used, sometimes until depleting its principal function and then to be discarded. When it was disposed, it was generally done in two stages, first the storage and then its transfer to third individuals, usually relatives, friends and acquaintances. When the gift received was unsatisfactory, the receiver did not use it and the gift went directly to the storage stage, sometimes being careful with it and other times not. Later on, it was frequently given to relatives, friends and acquaintances.

Since the current study did not find evidence of disposition methods uncovered in other investigations carried out in individualistic societies [methods such as the return to the retailer; the gift’s destruction (Sherry et al. 1992) or the temporal disposition (Jacoby et al. 1977)], a more extensive discussion is warranted.

In a strongly collectivistic society which is also characterized as high context, to give a gift together with its invoice (to permit its return), makes the message of the value of the gifts explicit when to be consistent with the cultural value system, it should be implicit. Such a message would likely be interpreted as an invitation to go to another relational model such as “authority ranking” or “equality matching.”

The disposition through destruction also would be strange in a collectivistic environment where the standard of living is low. In addition to the fact that the acquaintances of most people would be pleased to receive any gift, in an environment like the one in Ecuador, to destroy a product that is still useful would be associated with extreme selfishness or with the lack of good sense.

Another interesting aspect captured in this study is the lack of temporal disposition in the sense of stopping to use the product for a while, whereas instead its use is ceded to another person. Again, the cultural environment is the key to the comprehension of this fact: The interviewees did report the use of the gift by other people such as

classmates, friends and relatives, but simultaneously the receivers kept using it too and because of that, this behavior is not consistent with a temporal disposition. Rather, this behavior is a manifestation of the “sharing” of the “communal sharing” model.

Feedback toward the Giver

The feedback provided to the giver is a communication regarding the aspects such as the performance in the purchase of the gift, the satisfaction for the product received and the degree of agreement with the type of relationship that the giver is perceived to have proposed. Verbal feedback was the principal way only for distant relationships; in close relationships, verbal was combined with nonverbal communication, the latter which has prominence in a high context society.

Although it was inferred from the reports of the interviewees that their nonverbal communication was given through a wide and usual range of resources such as gestures and facial expressions, body language and actions based on objects (Hulbert and Capon 1972; Knapp and Hall 2010; Ruesch and Kees 1956), the nonverbal communication of the participants was above all based on an object, the product received, with the only exception in the case of the theme concerning inadequate gifts.

The confluence of a collectivistic high context environment with a social and cultural phenomenon as for the gift’s delivery generates the peculiar characteristics of the feedback discerned in the study. The product received turns out to be the fundamental base through which the different ways of feedback are articulated and around which the emotions when opening or using the product are spread out. The use of the product turns out to be almost a synonym for satisfaction and when it is intentional, it can also be an example of courtesy or deference toward the giver. In this way, the use and disposition of the gift, in addition to being consumption behaviors, are also feedback behaviors toward the giver and because of that they are strongly linked.

The negative feedback presents complexities in any cultural environment due to the incompatibility of the two objectives sought with respect to the person to whom it is delivered: to improve his / her future performance and not to

spoil the existing relationship with him / her (Geddes and Linnehan 1996). In this study, in the case of awkward gifts, receivers tried not to externalize their dissatisfaction either by telling lies and / or by feigning positive emotions, in fact, there was not any case of intentional negative feedback. The concealment of the dissatisfaction was also found in other studies carried out in collectivistic environments (Green and Alden 1988).

In this way, two issues turn out to be central in the feedback aspect toward the giver in the collectivist environment studied: first, the entwining of this behavior with the use of the product, and second the primacy of the objective about preserving the relationship rather than improving the future performance of the giver.

CONCLUSION

This study represents an effort to better understand the behavior of a gift recipient in aspects rarely studied such as the use and disposition of the gift and the feedback toward the giver, within the frame of a cultural environment of increasing interest: collectivistic societies. In this cultural frame, it was found that not only the satisfaction for the product received, but also the giver's role and the liberty permitted by him were central influences within the behaviors studied.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The present study involved in-depth personal interviews with a very small sample of college students, all belonging to either a middle or upper socio-economic stratum. The study, therefore, is obviously one that is exploratory in nature. Additionally, the study was carried out in the frame of a Latin American country which might be considered a vertical collectivism of the West, one of the several ways of collectivism in the world.

A reasonable first recommendation is that future studies should be conducted to understand the behavior of gift recipients in other types of collectivistic environments. Even if qualitative in approach, triangulating the results of a number of such studies would permit the possibility of generalization of the results found. For example, on the basis of the evidence provided by the present study and other studies (Green and Alden 1988), it might be expected that both in Asiatic

and Latin American collectivism, the receiver avoids externalizing any dissatisfaction for the product received; however, it might be expected that the recipients from the Latin American frame do externalize their satisfaction in a more visible way (Fernández, Zubieta and Páez 2000; Tsuda 2001).

Another interesting matter is the study of the changes of status of the products received in order to provide a dynamic aspect to the themes identified in the present research. For example, a product considered awkward might in time be associated with the category of inadequate, either by the delivery of new gifts to be watched over by the giver or by the threat or reality of breaking off the previous relationship. In the same way, it is possible that as the relationships among people turn to be more durable and stable (for example married couples), givers are less concerned or interested in supervising the use and disposition of each gift. Such would suggest that inadequate gifts could also be present in close relationships without negative consequences.

The explanation about the use and disposition of a gift and the feedback toward the giver can be enriched through the study of the role of third individuals which can be significant in the collectivistic societies. Third individuals, for example, can share the use of the gift, they can be the new recipients of inadequate gifts, they can be an indirect channel of feedback toward the giver, or simply they can judge the receiver's behaviors. An investigation of this sort should take as a starting point both the giver and the receiver of the gift.

Although the feedback behavior has been widely studied in individualistic environments in different applications (e.g., in the management of human resources), precious little has been studied in its application to the gift-giving, gift-receiving theme. Such an investigation in the context of individualistic environments would be interesting. Would the low context communication style embraced by most Western cultures (Hofstede 2001) result in feedback involving communication that is fundamentally verbal (Hall 1976), and where there might be externalization of any dissatisfaction (Green and Alden 1988)? Is it also possible that the use and disposition of a gift does not become an important element of the gift recipient's feedback?

Finally, it is necessary to consider the great burden that the process of purchasing

Christmas gifts implies for gift givers in collectivistic societies, not only for the number and/or cost of gifts purchased but also for the quality of the feedback the givers may have from the receivers, especially in the case of unsatisfactory gifts. As we have found, in the case of inadequate gifts, givers, in general, do not receive feedback and in the case of awkward gifts, the feedback is based on lies and feigned positive behaviors. Therefore the heuristic frequently used by givers that consists of buying gifts similar to the ones already given in the past, although it helps to relieve the heavy burden, it can also have negative consequences.

Due to the situations and circumstances described in this article, gift givers from collectivistic environments need support in their purchasing decisions from employees of retail stores. Such employees must possess enough information concerning the likes and preferences of the different segments of the market and additionally, they must be aware of the existence of two types of satisfactory gifts, the special gifts and the common gifts. In the case of the special gift, a greater involvement should be expected from the giver in a purchasing task relatively new and of greater risk perceived (although oriented to a smaller number of gifts). In the case of the purchase of common gifts, although there would be smaller risk perceived, there would also be a burden due to the larger number of gifts that might be expected in this type of purchase.

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