



Your gift choice for your boss versus your subordinate would not be the same: The interplay of power and giver-receiver role on consumers' gift preferences



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ABSTRACT

Past research on gift-giving behaviors has presumed equal and horizontal relationships between givers and receivers; however, in the real world, giver-receiver relationships often vary in their level of power, such as parent-child and boss-employee relationships. However, little is known regarding how the difference in power in the giver-receiver relationship influences people's gift choices. Building on construal level theory, the present research proposes and confirms that differences in interpersonal power between givers and receivers can affect the desirability versus feasibility of gifts, which in turn influences individuals' gift preferences. By highlighting the role of power in the gift-giving/receiving situations, these findings contribute to research on gift-giving, while also providing practical implications.

Imagine that you are about to choose a gift for your boss, your friend, and your employee. Assuming that the budgets are equal, would each end up with a similar gift? Unlikely.

Gift-giving is a fundamental social activity that people often engage in. Usually, two disparate roles exist: giver and receiver. While prior research on gift-giving has recognized how these two roles differ (Baskin, Wakslak, Trope, & Novemsky, 2014; Yang & Urmitsky, 2015), the differences in power between a giver and a receiver have not been considered. Given the relationships of boss, friend, and employee mentioned above, their varying degrees of power in relation to you would influence your gift choice. These kinds of power differentials obviously exist in social relationships (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015), and gift-givers and receivers are often unequal in the amount of power they exercise over one another. Therefore, in this study we attempt to investigate the manner in which power affects givers'/receivers' gift preferences.

In social psychology, power has been defined as “asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations” (Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012, p.353). Power has been shown to shape consumer behavior in various areas, such as psychological distance from others (Lammers, Stoker, Jordan, Pollmann, & Stapel, 2011), perspective-taking (Galinsky, Magee, Ena Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006), and spending on others (Rucker, Dubois, & Galinsky, 2011). While many prior studies

have ignored the effect of unequal power between a giver and a receiver, we believe that it is apparent that the asymmetric power between a giver and a receiver would influence their gift preferences.

Specifically, to examine the interplay of power between the gift-giver and the receiver, we draw upon Construal Level Theory (CLT; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Recently, Baskin et al. (2014) examined the asymmetric distance from a gift depending on the giver-receiver role due to the difference in how the two parties construe gifts. They demonstrated that, although both gift-givers and receivers focus on receivers, by nature the psychological distances from gifts are asymmetric. Receivers imagine themselves as owning the gift; givers, on the other hand, evaluate the gift from a relatively longer social distance because they think about the receiver along with the gift. This asymmetric psychological distance induces different information processing in givers versus receivers. Givers' great psychological distance leads them to construe gifts at a high, abstract level, while receivers' shorter psychological distance leads them to construe gifts at a low, concrete level. As a result, givers give greater consideration to desirability-related aspects (i.e., the idealness of a gift) while receivers give greater consideration to feasibility-related aspects (i.e., the convenience of a gift). We extend this research by proposing that a difference in power between gift-givers and receivers will moderate the effect of giver-receiver roles on their construal level regarding gifts, and thus influence

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gift preference.

As several researchers have already acknowledged that differences in power can arouse different behaviors in various settings (Galinsky et al., 2006; Lammers et al., 2011; Rucker et al., 2011), we believe it is necessary to consider such a condition in the gift-giving setting. Below, we discuss the concept of power in consumer research and theorize that a difference in power between a giver and a receiver will result in different preferences for gift options.

1. Power in consumer behavior

Power is a fundamental aspect of everyday social life (Cartwright, 1959); yet, in consumer research, it has been a largely neglected construct (Rucker et al., 2012). Power can be defined as the capacity to influence others and is also a relational variable, indicating that power should be understood only in relation to another person or group (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Emerson, 1962; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Since power makes people perceive and act in a different manner, several recent studies have suggested that power affects people's cognition, affect, and behavior (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). For example, powerful individuals usually have greater control over self and others, and thus, greater influence on other people. Since powerful individuals grow accustomed to this situation, they are more likely to resist the opinions of others, preferring their own (Mourali & Yang, 2013). Accordingly, powerful individuals tend to rely on their own judgment and attitudes, feel more confident about these outcomes, and also feel more confident about potential partners (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Brinöl, Petty, Valle, Rucker, & Becerra, 2007). Consistent with these findings, Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, and Liljenquist (2008) also found that people with high power are less susceptible to influence by others.

Moreover, Anderson and Galinsky (2006) suggest that power increases optimism in perceiving risks, and thus encourages more risky behaviors. Powerful individuals usually have more material resources as well as social resources, such as positive attention, leading them to perceive fewer constraints of their behaviors. This situation activates the approach system rather than the inhibition system; consequently, powerful individuals are more likely to engage in risky behaviors than less powerful individuals. Interestingly, they demonstrate that high-power individuals' optimistic risk perceptions are attenuated when they feel a sense of responsibility. A recent study also reveals that people with high (low) psychological power tend to be more self-focused (other-focused), which results in less (more) charitable behaviors (Han, Lalwani, & Duhachek, 2017).

Power also influences what consumers value and buy. Rucker and Galinsky (2008) found that people with little power are more willing to engage in compensatory consumption than are those with great power. People without power believe that high-status products will enhance their sense of power. Motivated to maintain their powerful status, people with power are willing to save more than those without it (Garbinsky, Klesse, & Aaker, 2014). High power leads one to prefer utilitarian products; low power leads one to prefer visible/conspicuous consumption (Rucker & Galinsky, 2009).

Taken together, power exerts an influence on how people process information and on what they buy. Gift-giving, especially, is a situation where two distinct players influence each other; both parties consider their "relationship," which is the center from which power stems. Therefore, we believe that it is plausible that power affects the way gift-givers/receivers construe information regarding gift options and their gift preferences.

2. The current research

Past research has yet to elucidate whether a difference in power between a giver and a receiver exerts an influence on their gift choices. While Baskin et al. (2014) looked at the difference between givers' and receivers' preferences for desirable versus feasible gift options, they did

not take into account possible differences in power between givers and receivers.

Specifically, they found that when evaluating a gift, receivers tend to view the gift from a short psychological distance because they consider the situation in which they themselves are using the gift. This leads them to think about gifts in a concrete, low-level manner, and thus to attend more to the feasibility-related aspects of the gift. However, givers tend to view the gift from a substantial social distance, because it would not be themselves who would use the gift; therefore, they imagine a situation in which the receivers are using the gift. This prompts givers to think about gifts in an abstract, high-level manner, resulting in greater attention to desirability-related attributes. While these findings have acknowledged the asymmetric psychological distance from a gift depending on the role (i.e., giver vs. receiver), we further suggest that a difference in power between gift-givers and receivers will moderate the effect of giver-receiver roles on their construal level regarding gifts and thus influence gift preference.

Recall that powerful people are more likely to be self-oriented in information processing and less likely to take others' perspectives into account (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Galinsky et al., 2008; Han et al., 2017; Mourali & Yang, 2013). It is likely, then, that givers who are more powerful than receivers would not tend to consider the gift along with the receivers; rather, they would evaluate it from their own perspective, reducing the psychological distance from the gift. This, in turn, leads them to consider the feasibility-related aspects of the gift as more important than the desirability-related aspects. However, consistent with the literature, givers who are less powerful than receivers would construe a gift at abstract levels, thus considering the desirability-related aspects of the gift, because they are less self-oriented in information processing and are used to taking others' perspective in decision-making. Consequently, we hypothesize that givers with higher power than receivers will prefer feasible options, whereas givers with lower power than receivers will prefer desirable options. However, in line with Baskin et al. (2014), we do not expect to find this same inclination toward desirable or feasible options among receivers. After all, receivers will not perceive a distance between themselves and a gift since it is "theirs," which leaves no room for the influence of social power.

The goal of the current research is to clarify and extend the results of previous literature (e.g., Baskin et al., 2014) and incorporate the role of power in the giver-receiver relationship with their findings. In doing so, we hope to make both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, we contribute to the gift-giving literature by emphasizing that power is an important construct to be taken into account insofar as gift-giving is a social behavior in which the relationship between the two parties is a central factor. To the best of our knowledge, our research is the first to take into account the role of power in gift-giving. Although previous studies have presumed that the relationship between a giver and a receiver is horizontal, this is not true in many cases (e.g., parent-child, teacher-student, boss-employee, etc.). To the extent that a gift is a "total social fact" (Giesler 2006, p.283), givers and receivers recognize their power status in relation to each other and reflect this in their gift choices. In this regard, the current research provides novel findings showing the interaction effect of power and role. In doing so, we also expand the application domain of power. Moreover, we reveal the underlying process of how power moderates the effect of giver-receiver roles on gift preference, such that powerful givers consider *how* a gift is going to be used rather than *why* a gift is going to be used. Such a consideration leads to powerful givers according greater consideration to a gift's feasibility than to its desirability, which in turn influences their preference for feasible gift options over desirable ones.

Practically, by demonstrating the different effects resulting from varying levels of power, we will enable marketers to utilize diverse strategies appropriate for specific events. Events in which givers and receivers hold unequal portions of power include Father's Day, Mother's Day, and Teacher's Day. For such events, it would behoove marketers to heed the findings from this study and develop differentiated marketing

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