A Comprehensive Model of Anxiety in Gift Giving

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Why so many givers become anxious in gift giving? Wooten (2000) provided an answer to the question by proposing a model of gifting anxiety. However, his model is lack of quantitative analysis to support its empirical adequacy. This study aims to expand Wooten's model with additional nine determinants of gifting anxiety and verify the expanded model by conducting quantitative analysis based on consumer surveys. The results show that givers' gifting anxiety arises when they are highly motivated to impress the recipient but doubt of success, which supports Wooten's hypotheses. The verified expanded model suggests that all additional determinants have significant effects on gifting anxiety.

Field of Research: Marketing, consumer behavior.

1. Introduction

People present gifts for various reasons. Wolfinbargar (1990) suggested that the motivation of givers could be categorized into (1) altruistic giving, (2) gift giving as a norm, and (3) self interested giving. Many other researchers have also shown interests in categorizing the motivation for gift giving (Wolfinbargar and Yale, 1993; Park, 1998; Goodwin, Smith, and Spiggle, 1990; Sherry, 1983). Although these studies are fruitful to examine what kind of rule gifts play, researchers have paid little attention to givers' emotion toward gift giving.

Some researchers have focused on givers' anxious feeling. Vreeland (1998) mentioned that gift giving has become a tortured moment because people pack a lot of psychological baggage into gifts. Sherry, McGrath, and Levy (1993) suggested that gift giving brought on high levels of anxiety among consumers because of several reasons such as

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the pressure from recipient and dissatisfaction with the gift. Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim (1992) proposed the characteristics of the recipients that were considered difficult to shop for. Although each of these studies revealed some part of the determinants which trigger givers' anxiety, all were limited in comprehensive explanation of gifting anxiety.

In contrast, Wooten's model (2000) of gifting anxiety is a relatively comprehensive model. Wooten's model applies the self-presentation based model of social anxiety proposed by Schlenker and Leary (1982). According to the model, a person becomes anxious when he/she is highly motivated and/or doubtful about his/her success. Wooten's study brought a new perspective to study of gifting anxiety, but it was somewhat limited in that (1) there may be other determinants of gifting anxiety, and (2) the model is low in empirical validity since not statistically being tested with data. The main objective of this study is to develop an expanded model of gifting anxiety based on Wooten's model (2000). A consumer survey is conducted to test the expanded model.

2. Literature Review

As mentioned above, Wooten (2000) employed the self-presentation based model of social anxiety. "Social anxiety" is defined as "anxiety resulting from the prospect or presence of personal evaluation in real or imagined social situations" (Schlenker and Leary, 1982, p.642). Self-presentation theory implies that people want to influence the audiences by generating particular images of themselves, and thereby achieve their goals. According to the self-presentation based model of social anxiety, people are socially anxious when (1) they want to make a particular impression on others, while (2) they doubt they will do so. Leary and Kowalski (1995) formulated the model as: $SA=M\ (1-\rho)$. The actor's level of motivation to make a desired impression (M) positively affects the social anxiety (SA), while the perceived probability of success (ρ) negatively affects SA. The perceived probability of the success is called "outcome expectancies" (Leary and Kowalski, 1995).

According to Schlenker and Leary (1982), people are motivated to make a good impression on talented, competent, and socially desirable people because they are often taken more seriously. They also suggested that the evaluation of high-ranking people will also be valued more. In addition, people are highly motivated when interacting with people of

opposite sex. Besides, the importance of the performance, the anonymity of the actor, the number of presenting co-performers present, and the size of the audience would also influence people's motivation to impress others, and therefore, elicit social anxiety (see also Leary, 1983; Leary and Kowalski, 1995).

They also argued that uncertainty has negative effects on outcome expectancies since people may doubt if they can accomplish the goal when they are uncertain about how to do so. It is suggested that social anxiety may be heightened when outcome expectancies are low and uncertainty is high. Uncertainty should be heightened in novel, unstructured situations, and when people encounter someone who are not familiar with or when something unexpected occurs. Moreover, people may feel socially anxious when they are unsure with their attributes, skills, accomplishments, or resources that are required to achieve the goal.

Characteristics of the person also affect social anxiety (Schlenker and Leary, 1982; Leary, 1983; Leary and Kowalski, 1995). People with high public self-consciousness, who expect for social approval, who are someone's directedness, and who are fear of negative evaluation, might be highly motivated to make desirable impressions on others and, therefore, become socially anxious easily.

While previous research mentioned above has paid little attention to anxiety in gift-giving situations, Wooten (2000) in the field of marketing is the first researcher to adopt the self-presentation based model of social anxiety to explore gifting anxiety. He introduced five major determinants affecting "Reaction motivation" (M) and "Gifting efficacy" (ρ). Two determinants of "Reaction motivation" are "Interpersonal stakes" and "Evaluative salience." Three determinants that affect "Gifting efficacy" are "Uncertainty," "Perceived gifting demands," and "Perceived gifting resources."

Wooten's survey interview indicated thirteen determinants that influence the five determinants mentioned above. They are classified into three groups: givers, recipients, and situations. "Influence," "Selectivity," "Affluence," "Unfamiliarity," and "Dissimilarity" are classified as characteristics of recipients; "Collectivity," "Importance," "Formality," "Mutuality," and "Novelty" are classified as characteristics of situations; and "Perfectionism," "Gifting capacity," and "Confidence" are classified as characteristics of givers.

However, Wooten's model was lack of quantitative analysis to support its empirical adequacy since he ended the study by establishing hypotheses without verification. Further examination supported by quantitative data is needed to test the model. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed to examine the empirical adequacy of his model:

H1: The empirical adequacy of Wooten's model is supported by quantitative analysis.

In Wooten's model, only three determinants refer to characteristics of givers; "Perfectionism," "Gifting capacity," and "Confidence". However, more determinants which relate to givers' characteristics may have effects on their "Motivation" and "Perceived gifting efficacy," generating greater "Gifting anxiety."

Schlenker and Leary (1982) defined "Self-attention" as "directing conscious attention in ward, toward rather than away from the self" (p.648), and suggested that people who are self-attentive are likely to focus attention on themselves and are highly motivated to make desired impressions. Schlenker and Leary also suggested "Other-direction" as a characteristic of people who are highly motivated to give good impressions to others, and argued that other-directed people may "more dependent on the rules and preferences of others" (p.651). "Fear of negative evaluation" and "Desire to gain approval/avoid disapproval" may also increase a person's social anxiety by heightening his/her motivation. Leary (1980) argued that the fear of negative evaluation is associated with a desire to gain approval/avoid disapproval positively. Thus, the two variables could be represented by just one variable "Need for approval." In essence, "Self-attention," "Other-direction," and "Need for approval" may have positive effects on givers' motivation to make a preferred impression. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Self-attention, other-direction, and fear of negative evaluation also have positive effects on reaction motivation.

Otnes, *et al*. (1992) investigated the "difficult" recipients and why they are perceived to be difficult, and found that givers will try to minimize either perceived social or psychological risk when giving the gift to the difficult recipients. It can be interpreted that givers manage to choose such strategies because the difficult recipients make them anxious in gift giving.

Therefore, some of the characteristics of the difficult recipient could be regarded as the determinants of givers' gifting anxiety. They categorized the reasons of people being perceived as the difficult recipients into nine groups: "Perceived lack of necessity or desire," "People with limitations in some aspects (e.g., lack of hobbies, ill, or elder)," "Different tastes or interests," "Unfamiliarity," and "Personality conflict with recipients" are listed as the characteristics of the difficult recipients. Not only the characteristics of recipients, but those of givers might be why recipients are categorized as difficult; "The giver's limitation in financial ability" and "Fear of being unappreciated." When "The gift proved to be inappropriate" (for example, a giver comes to know that the recipient do not like the present which the giver is going to present) and when the gift exchange with the recipient is perceived "Imbalanced," especially in gift spending, givers will also perceive the recipient as difficult one. Of the nine characteristics Otnes, *et al*. proposed, eight are synonymous with the determinants that have mentioned in Wooten's model. Only "Perceived imbalance" has not been mentioned in Wooten's model. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Imbalance also has positive effects on givers' uncertainty.

Additionally, Wooten (2000) mentioned that "Gifting capacity" consists both of productive resources such as "Money," "Time," and "Effort", and of cognitive resources such as "Creativity" and "Knowledge". Wooten implied that givers express doubts about the efficacy of their gift when at least one of those resources seems to be lacking. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Money, time, effort, creativity, and knowledge also have positive effects on gifting capacity.

Finally the hypotheses mentioned above are summarized in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the proposed model since SEM fits the analysis of causal relationship representing psychological process of givers becoming anxiety. Generally, SEM is suitable for analyzing the hypothesized relationship

among latent variables and confirmatory factors. SEM needs multi scale for each construct. We developed two or three scales for each construct. Questions about each construct were implemented on a seven-point Likert scale with 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. An online survey was utilized for data collection (417 respondents) as a part of the research conducted under the Keio University/Kyoto University Global Center-of-Excellence Program−−Market Quality Research Program. The structural equation was estimated with maximum likelihood criterion in CALIS procedure of SAS/Stat 9.1.

4. Findings

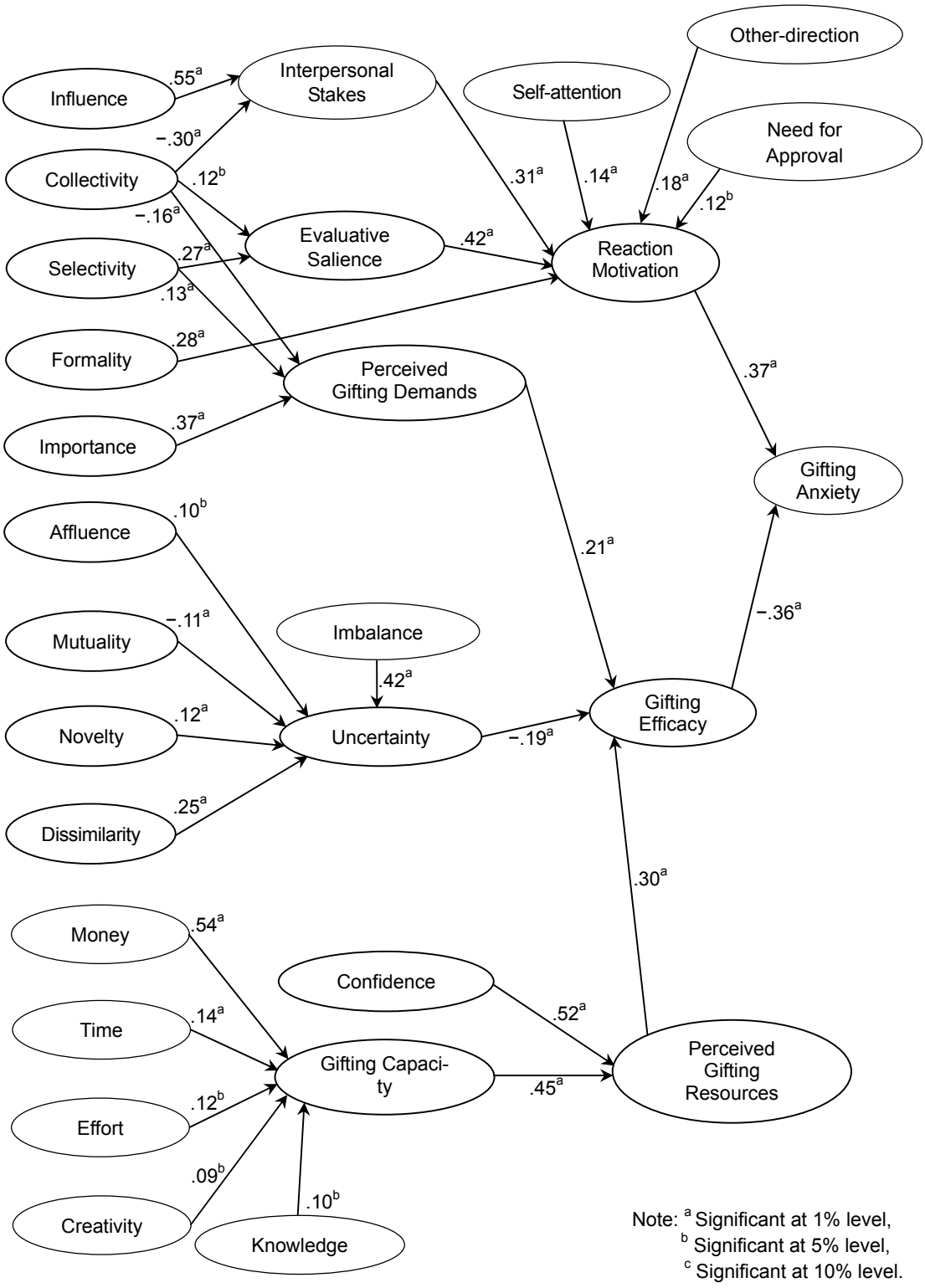
Primary analysis was conducted on the proposed model. The paths coefficient between "Perfectionism" and "Perceived gifting demands" and between "Unfamiliarity" and "Uncertainty" were not significant in 10 % level. Therefore, a modification of the model which removes "Importance" and "Unfamiliarity" was made.

The resulting full model $\chi^2_{(2114)}$ was 7071.35, (p <.000) and the ratio of χ^2 to degrees of freedom (3.35) is within the acceptable range (Bollen, 1989). All composite reliabilities for the constructs were above .67. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was utilized to examine convergent validity. All the factor loadings and measurement errors were in acceptable ranges and significant in 1 % level. Discriminant validity among the constructs is examined stringently using the procedure recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Every pair of constructs passed this test, demonstrating discriminant validity between the latent variables.

GFI and AGFI are .62 and .59, respectively. Although they are lower than the recommended level (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), this could be due to the small sample size and the large numbers of constructs. In this case, useful index is RMSEA, a parsimony measure that accounts for potential artificial inflation due to the estimation of many parameters. The RMSEA is .08, which indicates a close fit of the data to the model (Browne and Cudeck, 1993).

As shown in Figure 1, all parameter estimates of the structural equations had adequate signs and were significant no more than in 5 %, except one in 10 % (γ_{77}: "Affluence" => "Uncertainty").

Figure 1 Proposed Model and Estimation Results



Regarding relationships between “Gifting anxiety” and its direct determinants, the estimated value of β_{12} (“Reaction motivation” => “Gifting anxiety”) is .37 (t=5.74, p<.01), while the value of β_{13} (“Gifting efficacy” => “Gifting anxiety”) is −.36 (t=−7.39, p<.01). Both of them have adequate sign and significant value. Thus, givers are likely to become anxious when the motivation to make a particular impression on recipients is high and/or gifting efficacy of the gift is low, which supports Wooten’s hypotheses. Low gifting efficacy may have stronger effects on givers’ gifting anxiety.

Regarding relationships between “Reaction motivation” and its direct determinants, the estimated value of β_{24} (“Interpersonal stakes” => “Reaction motivation”) is .31 (t=5.17, p<.01), while the value of β_{25} (“Evaluative salience” => “Reaction motivation”) is .42 (t=6.08, p<.01). Both of them have adequate sign and significant value. Thus, givers’ motivation to make a particular impression is likely to be heightening when interpersonal relationship is regarded as important and when the salience of interpersonal evaluation is high. “Formality, “Self-attention,” “Other-direction,” and “Need for approval” are also found to have significant, positive effects on “Reaction motivation” (γ_{26}=.28, t=4.67, p<.01; γ_{218}=.14, t=2.59, p<.01; γ_{219}=.18, t=2.87, p<.01; γ_{220}=.12, t=2.10, p<.05, respectively). “Formality” is highly associated with “Reaction motivation.” Thus, givers’ motivation may be heightening when the situation is formal. The givers who are self-attentive, other-directive and/or who desire to gain approval may also be motivated to elicit the recipient’s reaction and, therefore, become anxious in gift giving.

Regarding relationships between “Gifting efficacy” and its direct determinants, the estimated value of β_{36} (“Perceived gifting demands” => “Gifting efficacy”) is .21 (t=4.38, p<.01), β_{37} (“Uncertainty” => “Gifting efficacy”) is −.19 (t=−4.00, p<.01), and β_{38} (“Perceived gifting resources” => “Gifting efficacy”) is .30 (t=6.08, p<.01). All of them have adequate sign and significant value. Givers’ gifting efficacy is likely to be high when gifting demands is highly perceived and uncertainty is low. Note that “Perceived gifting demands” is associated positively with “Gifting efficacy,” which is contrary to Wooten’s hypothesis.

In essence, the results support Wooten’s hypotheses regarding the relationship between “Reaction motivation” and its determinants. In addition, four added determinants are

proved to have significant, positive effects on “Reaction motivation.” Two of the three hypotheses regarding the relationship between “Gifting efficacy” and its determinants were supported. The relationship between “Perceived gifting demands” and “Gifting efficacy” is positive, which is contrary to Wooten’s hypothesis. Wooten developed the determinant of “Perceived gifting demands” originally based on interview survey. The results indicate “Perceived gifting demands” may not fit the model due to the small sample size.

Regarding relationships between “Interpersonal stakes” and its direct determinants, “Influence” has significant, positive effects on “Interpersonal stakes” (γ_{41}=.55, t=12.62, p<.01). “Collectivity” has significant, negative effects on “Interpersonal stakes” (γ_{42}=−.30, t=−7.45, p<.01), which is contrary to the hypothesis. Thus, givers are likely to regard a situation with fewer participants as a more important chance to create interpersonal relationships. In the situation with low collectivity, perceived salience of interpersonal evaluation may be high and, therefore, gifting anxiety may be raised.

Regarding relationships between “Evaluative salience” and its direct determinants, “Collectivity” and “Selectivity” have significant, positive effects on “Evaluative salience” (γ_{52}=.12, t=2.49, p<.05; γ_{53}=.27, t=5.10, p<.01, respectively), which support Wooten’s hypotheses. “Selectivity” has stronger effects on “Evaluative salience” than “Collectivity.” Thus, if recipients have some limitations and/or there are multiple participants, givers’ perception of being valued by others may be high and, therefore, givers may become anxious.

Regarding relationships between “Perceived gifting demands” and its direct determinants, “Importance” has significant, positive effects on “Perceived gifting demands” (γ_{65} =.37, t=6.93, p<.01), as Wooten hypothesized. “Selectivity” is proved to have significant, positive effects on “Perceived gifting demands” (γ_{63} =.13, t=6.94, p<.01). “Collectivity” is found to have significant, negative effects on “Perceived gifting demands” (γ_{62}=−.16, t=−3.32, p<.05). The results indicate that collectivity of the situation should lower perceived gifting demands, which is contrary to Wooten’s hypothesis. A situation with fewer participants may be more important for givers. Therefore, when collectivity is low, gifting demands may be highly perceived and, therefore, givers may not become anxious.

Regarding relationships between “Uncertainty” and its direct determinants, “Novelty” and

“Dissimilarity” are associated positively with “Uncertainty” (γ_{79}=.12, t=2.85, p<.01; γ_{710}=.25, t=5.38, p<.01, respectively), while “Mutuality” is associated negatively with “Uncertainty” (γ_{78}=−.11, t=−2.76, p<.01). “Affluence,” which was hypothesized to have positive effects of “Perceived gifting demands,” is associated positively with “Uncertainty” (γ_{77}=.10, t=2.24, p<.05). “Imbalance” also found to have significant, positive effects on “Uncertainty” (γ_{712}=.42, t=2.94, p<.01). “Imbalance” has stronger effects on “Uncertainty.” The results indicate that givers may be uncertain about what to give when the gift exchange with the recipient is regarded as imbalanced.

Regarding relationships between “Perceived gifting resources” and its direct determinants, both of “Gifting capacity” and “Confidence” have significant, positive effects on “perceived gifting resources” (β_{89}=.45, t=10.20, p<.01; γ_{813}=.52, t=10.51, p<.01, respectively). “Confidence” has stronger effects on “Perceived gifting resources” than “Gifting capacity.” Thus, if givers are confidential, they may have less gifting anxiety.

Regarding relationships between “Gifting capacity” and its direct determinants, “Money,” “Time,” “Effort,” “Creativity,” and “Knowledge” have significant, positive effects on “Gifting capacity” (γ_{913}=.54, t=11.07, p<.01, γ_{914}=.14, t=3.28, p<.01, γ_{915}=.12, t=−2.36, p<.05, γ_{916}=.09, t=2.04, p<.05, γ_{916}=.10, t=2.25, p<.05, respectively). Among those determinants, “Money” has the strongest effects on “Gifting capacity.” “Time” is also associated with “Gifting capacity” positively. The results show that givers lacking in money and time may be more likely to become anxious.

5. Conclusion

There has been a great discussion about gift giving in the field of consumer behavior. Although many researchers have shown an interest in givers’ motivation, few studies have focused on givers’ anxiety in gift giving. Wooten’s model of givers’ anxiety in gift giving gave a new twist to the study of gifting anxiety by introducing self-presentation based model of the social anxiety proposed by Schlenker and Leary (1982). However, Wooten’s study is limited in the lack of empirical data to support his hypotheses. His study also left room for the further discussion about new determinants of gifting anxiety.

In this study, quantitative analysis based on the consumer survey was conducted for

testing Wooten's model. The results of this empirical research suggest that givers become anxious when motivation to impress the recipients is high, and when the perceived possibility of success is low. This supports Wooten's hypotheses. The results also suggest that, as Wooten pointed out, gifting anxiety can be regarded as another form of social anxiety.

Nine determinants were added to reform Wooten's model. The results indicate that all of them have significant effects. "Money" is likely to be the most important factor which affects "Perceived gifting resources." Givers who are highly self-attentive and other-directed, and who hope for approval should easily become anxious in gift giving. Givers may also be anxious if the gift exchange with the recipients is perceived imbalanced.

This study is somewhat limited in the low reliability of the model. This limitation may due to the small sample size. In the future research, a large size of online consumer research will be investigated, so that the expanded model could explain givers' gifting anxiety much more inclusively.

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