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Interpersonal Consumer Decision Making



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Interpersoonlijke consumptie beslissingen

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Consumption is not an isolated phenomenon; it often involves the direct or indirect presence of others. We often consume or make decisions regarding consumption together with, in the presence of, or in favor of others. Consequently, the people in our surroundings are likely to have an influence on our consumption decisions. Others can influence what consumption goods we buy (e.g., I need to buy a gift for a friend, thus possibly restricting my other purchases) and how we behave within consumption contexts (e.g., I pick up the dinner check today because my boss did it last time). In my doctoral research, I focus on such interpersonal consumption decisions examining the influence of our social environment on our consumption patterns to better understand interpersonal consumption occasions.

The influence of the presence of others on the behavior of consumers has interested previous marketing scholars too. For example, research has revealed that consumers spend more money in the presence of others (Goldberg, 2016), and that the presence of friends and significant others steer consumers' decisions for products that are both high and low on involvement (Salazar, Oerlemans, & Van Stroe-Biezen, 2013; Kuenzel & Musters, 2007). Close others influence people's sustainable consumption choices (Salazar et al., 2013) and online music purchases (Iyengar, Han & Gupta, 2009). In addition, teenagers are extremely susceptible to peer-pressure, potentially resulting in increased alcohol consumption and smoking at a young age (Evens, Rozelle, Mittelmark, Hansen, Bane, & Havis, 1978). People's consumption decisions are not only affected by personally relevant and close others (e.g., friends, family members, etc.); unknown others guide those decisions, too. Reviews written by unknown others can influence the decision process regarding a product or service (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chintagunta, Gopinath, & Venkataraman, 2010), and consumers in crowded areas have been found to more actively recommend or share information on social media (Consiglio, De Angelis, & Costabile, 2015). In addition, salesmen who are high in expertise and similar to the consumer appear to be successful selling their products (Woodside & Davenport, 1974).

The aforementioned selection of studies provides a short overview of some of the prominent research on the influence of others on individual consumption behavior. My dissertation positions itself next to this line of research and focuses on interpersonal consumption decisions that are influenced by and directed to a specific person. The research that I present can be best divided into two subcategories of interpersonal consumption decision making: decisions in the domain of the gift-giving ritual, and decisions related to the

initiation and receipt of various non-ritualized favors. Both domains address consumption decisions that are prosocial in nature: decisions that are not only influenced by the presence of others but are also targeted at them. In the next sections, I discuss these two domains and introduce the research questions that I address in my dissertation.

1.1 GIFT GIVING

Gift giving is one of the most studied prosocial consumption behaviors. This is not surprising given that people spend on average more than US\$700 per capita on Christmas gifts alone (Statista, 2016). The first research on gift giving dates back from the 18th century. Especially in the last decades, this area has received much attention, resulting in numerous insights into, for example, the motivations behind gift giving and the consequences of gifts. Gifts are given to a wide range of recipients, including romantic partners, family members, friends, and even business partners (Sherry, McGrath, & Levy, 1993; Lemmergaard & Muhr, 2011), and differ in function and form (Clarke, 2008; Webley, Lea & Portalska, 1983). Gifts are symbolic messages given on several occasions (Belk, 2010; Heeler, Francis, Okechuku, & Reid, 1979; Schwartz, 1967; Giesler, 2006; Wolfenbarger, 1990), and can potentially repair, strengthen, weaken, or create relationships (Ruth, Otnes, & Brunel, 1999; Schwartz, 1967; Sherry, 1983). More specifically, gifts are a signal of value and are considered a means by which consumers can tell another that they are significant (Cheal, 1987).

The gift giving process has been described by Sherry (1983), dividing the process into three different stages. The first stage, *gestation*, concerns the search for and purchase of the gift. During this stage, consumers planning to give a gift develop and transform the concept of a gift into the search and purchase of an actual gift. After the gift has been purchased, the gift-giving process evolves into the *prestation stage*. This stage reflects the actual gift exchange in which the recipient receives the gift and responds to both the gift and the giver. Here the recipient expresses his or her appreciation for the gift. Finally, in the *reformulation stage*, the recipient consumes the gift (e.g., uses, displays, rejects, or exchanges it), and the relationship between the giver and recipient is realigned.

In the gestation stage, givers frequently question what to purchase to make recipients happy. When thinking of a gift, consumers tend to look for brands with greater symbolic

value (Parsons, 2002), and they exert more effort in selecting gifts for relationship partners about whom they care (Beatty, Kahle, & Homer, 1991). Givers have been shown to successfully raise gift appreciation when they invest a considerable amount of effort (Flynn & Adams, 2009) or money (Pollmann, Nelissen, & Straeter, 2016) on the gift product. Gift evaluation is also higher for experiential gifts than for material gifts (Chan & Mogilner, 2016). Moreover, when there is a wish list and expressed desire for a specific gift, it is recommended to stick to these gift options because they will be more appreciated than a gift not on the wish list (Gino & Flynn, 2011). Apart from gifts that match the recipient's tastes (Gino & Flynn, 2011; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011), gifts that match the relationship between the giver and the recipient tend to enhance recipients' gift evaluation as well. Based on the existing literature, givers could rely on several strategies to purchase the right gift.

Nevertheless, there are potentially other gifting strategies that givers can employ. In Chapter 3, I investigate whether givers can enhance recipients' gift evaluation by matching a gift with their own tastes and identity (i.e., giver-matched gifts). Previous research has revealed that consumers tend to give to close others gifts that they themselves would pick for their own personal consumption (Heeler et al., 1977); however, so far, it has not been explored whether such giver-matched gifts are positively evaluated by recipients. This giver-oriented gifting strategy might be especially valuable for givers who are not knowledgeable about the recipient. Moreover, it is unclear how various gifting strategies relatively contribute to the givers' main goal of buying a gift that is well evaluated by the recipient. In Chapter 3, I will also focus on the comparison between two gifting strategies and investigate how giver-matched gifts are evaluated relative to recipient-focused gifts. The insights from this chapter could facilitate the giver's gift-giving decision process, for example, by indicating whether a recipient-matched gift is worth a potential identity threat (Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011), because givers have been found to have difficulties purchasing gifts that are in contrast to their own identity.

Whereas the gestation stage is mainly affected and governed by the giver's decisions, the prestation and reformulation stages depend much more upon the recipient, who interprets the giver's gesture. In consonance with the giver's aim to create positive affective reactions among recipients, gifts generally tend to be positively evaluated (Ruth et al., 1999). Nevertheless, research also shows that gift giving can go wrong. Although most research has focused on aspects of the gift that improve its evaluation, some studies also revealed that a gift

is not always positively evaluated due certain gift characteristics. Gifts can be given in various forms (Clarke, 2008), but gifts in the form of cash are less positively evaluated than a monetary-equivalent gift item (Webley et al., 1983). In addition, the value of the gift partially reflects the weight of the relationship. When the value is diminished and consumers give too little or too late, they can steer the relationship even to the point of dissolution (Sherry, 1983). The dark side of gift giving also depends on the recipient's disposition and reference point. Sherry et al. (1993) have shown that recipients' expectations are an important determinant of the gift evaluation. Gifts might be negatively evaluated when its substance, in terms of monetary value, does not match the sentiment of the relationship between the giver and the recipient. The packaging of the gift could also deceive the recipient because it could set high expectations about the gift, which are then not met. Finally, Waldfogel (1998) might have revealed the ultimate downside of gift giving, showing that the monetary value recipients attach to a gift product is not equivalent to the actual price paid for the gift.

Given that gift-giving can go wrong, the interesting question that arises concerns the circumstances under which recipients' evaluation of the gift improves or deteriorates. Emotions have been found to strongly steer behavior and therefore to potentially play a role in the gift-evaluation process. In Chapter 2, I focus on the emotions experienced by the recipient affecting the gift evaluation (prestation stage), the gift consumption, and the reformulation of the relationship (reformulation stage). More specifically, we investigate how a recipient's angry feelings towards the giver affect the recipient's evaluation of apology gifts and how such gifts insufficiently resolve those angry feelings. Based on the empathy gap literature (Van Boven, Loewenstein, Dunning, & Nordgren, 2013; Kurt & Inman, 2013), we argue that givers incorrectly believe that a gift would adequately resolve the angry feelings they have evoked. As a consequence of this mistaken belief, the unresolved angry feelings will imbue the gift with a negative connotation that will eventually affect the recipient's consumption decisions and perception of the relationship. Thus Chapter 2 reveals another dark side of the gift-giving ritual, discouraging consumers from purchasing gifts to apologize but encouraging them to consider other forms of apologies instead.

1.2 FAVORS INITIATED AND RECEIVED WITHIN RELATIONSHIPS

Gifts are not the only device for maintaining and strengthening relationships. Consumers can also favor another person through simple and non-ritualized behavior to maintain their relationship. The exchange of favors can take multiple forms, including through exchange or sharing of tangible goods (e.g., monetary donations or shared possessions; e.g. Belk, 2007; 2010; Sargeant, 1999) and intangible goods (e.g., giving advice or volunteering; e.g., Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Harvey & Fischer, 1997; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005). So although the domain of non-ritualized favors is very broad, I specifically focus on the exchange of tangible favors within relationships. For example, consumers could cover someone else's dinner expenses or share a travel book with someone.

Favoring others has been found to have positive effects on consumers' happiness (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008; Aknin, Dunn, & Norton, 2012; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). However, as relationships tend to be stable over time (Heider, 1958; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Fiske, 1991), the exchange of such tangible favors could potentially distort the relational balance. Adams' social equity theory (1965) reflects on balance fluctuations in relationships. According to this theory, individuals assess the ratio between their own inputs and outcomes against their relationship partner's input-output ratio. When the ratios are not equal, the relationship balance can be distorted either to one's advantage (i.e., overrewarded) or disadvantage (i.e., underrewarded). The greater the inequity perceived, the more distress individuals experience, and the stronger is their willingness to restore the relational equity (Adams, 1965; Huppertz, Arenson, & Evans, 1978). Similarly, research on the reciprocity principle has demonstrated that consumers often feel a strong obligation to return a favor (e.g., Gouldner, 1960; Regan, 1971; Beltramini, 1992; Falk, 2007), and because of these reciprocal feelings, they are more likely to comply with a request. Marketers try to apply this reciprocity principle and attract customers by favoring them.

Favors initiated in relationships are thus expected to distort social equity. This raises the question which factors, apart from the size of the distortion, influence the willingness to initiate favors and the response to those favors. One example of such factor is the consumers' equity sensitivity, which affects how they respond to the equity norm (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). These responses differentiate, on a continuum, benevolents (who prefer a social inequity in favor of the other person) from entitleds (who prefer a social inequity that favors

them). The similarity between relational partners also enhances the need for equity (Greenberg, 1978). Besides the moderating factors, other individual characteristics can also affect consumers' responsiveness to a favor. The cognitive framing and administration of a favor can potentially influence the consumer's responsiveness. First, research has shown that consumers vary in the mental accounts to which they assign their incomes and expenses affecting their decisions (Thaler, 1980). As a consequence a favor received from a friend could be attributed to the mental account of the specific relationship or to a more generic account of prosocial behavior. What influence then do these mental accounts have on the responsiveness towards a favor? A consumer's responsiveness towards a favor ascribed to a specific mental account, might depend solely on that specific unbalanced relationship with the other person; whereas a consumer's responsiveness to a favor ascribed to a more generic mental account might also be affected by the current status of the balance of other relationships. Second, a consumer's willingness to respond to a favor might also depend on one's perceived flexibility in responsiveness (i.e. need for similarity in type of favor). It could be the case that when consumers believe that a flexible response towards a favor is acceptable, then the chance of returning the favor increases because it offers consumers more possibilities.

Together with the potential moderating effects of individual differences, there may be interpersonal factors that impact consumers' responses to the receipt of a favor. Given that favors can be initiated in all sorts of relationships, it is very valuable to know whether consumers' responses to a favor are similar across relationships. Distinct norms and goals govern people's behavior in relationships, which also potentially affect their consumption decisions regarding the receipt of a favor. In Chapter 4, I will assess the potential influence of the type of relationship on consumers' responsiveness to a favor. More specifically, I will focus on existing relationships between consumers and between consumers and commercial partners as a source of influence. I am interested in how consumers respond to being favored (e.g., one's dinner expenses are covered by the other person) by another consumer or by a commercial partner. Do consumers feel compelled to reciprocate the favor, and will this depend on the relationship they have with the generous other? In line with previous research (Dahl, Honea, & Manchanda, 2005; Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994), I argue that consumers experience higher levels of discomfort when a friend, compared to a commercial partner, has given them a favor. Whereas friendships are built on mutual concern, the goal of

commercial relationships is to maximize one's own outputs. Therefore, I expect that the receipt of a favor is more threatening to the relationship goal in friendships than in commercial relationships, increasing the feelings of discomfort experienced by the favor recipient. This research not only extends the work on social equity and the reciprocity principle (Cialdini, 2009), but it also questions and contributes to the existing literature on relationship frameworks (e.g., Clark & Mills, 2011; Fiske, 1992). Whereas existing relationship frameworks rely on the overarching relational norms, I take the individual perspective and focus on the personal emotional experience of consumers initiating or receiving the favor.

In addition to assessing the relationship dynamics after the exchange of a favor, it is relevant to focus on a specific and widely practiced form of (non-ritualized) favor-oriented consumption behavior: sharing. Sharing, broadly defined, is "the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use, and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use" (Belk, 2007, p. 126). In line with the definition, sharing captures many different behaviors, including the sharing of food in households, the temporary sharing of possessions (i.e., lending a possession), and access-based consumption, such as toy libraries and car-sharing companies (Belk, 2010; Jenkins, Molesworth, & Scullion, 2014; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010; Meijkamp, 1998; Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2015).

Researchers started investigating this interesting and core aspect of our consumption society approximately ten years ago. Previous research revealed that sharing is driven by two different motivations (Belk, 2014). People sometimes have functional motivations to share such as their survival (Fine, 1980). For example, food sharing has shown to benefit people directly and also to indirectly improve people's security due to reciprocal obligations and enhanced status or mating opportunities (Belk, 2010; Gurven, 2006). Similarly, online shared-consumption platforms offer consumers economic gains (Hamari et al., 2015). Along with the functional benefits, people also share for altruistic reasons, as an expression of courtesy or kindness to others (Belk, 2014) and sustainable values (Hamari et al., 2015; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010; Donnelly, Lamberton, Reczek, & Norton, 2016). These altruistic motivations to share have even become imbedded in cultural norms, feeling natural to us (Belk & Llamas, 2011). For instance, most smokers do not refuse to share their lighters and people usually lend their cellphones to someone who needs to make an urgent call. Interestingly, in online platforms such as YouTube and Wikipedia consumers freely provide content without being

compensated (John, 2013; Reagle, 2010; Belk, 2014). Independent of the motivation, sharing can be an inclusive act that possibly makes the recipient part of the extended self (i.e., sharing in, if not sharing out; Belk 2010).

In my doctoral research, I am specifically interested in one type of sharing behavior, namely the temporary sharing of personal items (e.g., lending a travel guide to a friend for specific period of time). This type of sharing involves the temporary transfer of possessions and is encouraged in our sharing economy because it appears to be a sustainable form of consumption (Arkes, 1998). Temporary sharing gives people limited access to a product that has to be returned after a period of time. Importantly, it does not involve a transfer of ownership (Jenkins, Molesworth, & Scullion, 2014): the owner who lends the product to someone does not lose the ownership rights. Nonetheless, possessions that are central to the self are difficult for consumers to share (Belk & Llamas, 2011). Interestingly, when people share a possession that is central to their identity, the item may also become valuable for the recipient.

As two prototypes of prosocial consumption behavior the acts of (temporary) sharing and giving can be compared. Both prosocial acts generally strengthen relationships (Belk, 2010), but there are some clear distinctions too. Both gifts and shared items are (temporarily) in the possession of another right after the exchange. However a gift is to be permanently kept by the recipient, whereas a shared item has to be returned to the owner. As a consequence, sharing and giving could lead to different consumption responses. Despite their similarities, they have not been investigated simultaneously. In Chapter 5, I will take a closer look at how sharing and giving are perceived by consumers when they are presented as the two prongs of a dilemma. I will examine whether givers and recipients have similar preferences for either gifted or shared possessions and whether givers make optimal decisions when confronted with the dilemma to choose between the two gestures. Although consumers are averse to losing possessions (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1991; Ariely, Huber, & Wertenbroch, 2005), I hypothesize that consumers decide against their self-interest and give a personal object instead of sharing it with a friend. By giving away the possession, consumers aim to choose the option that is most beneficial to their friend, thus optimizing their friend's outcomes. I postulate that consumers' self-sacrificing decision to give the personal possession to the friend is not the preferred choice of the receiving friend. It is not only the owner, but also the recipient of the personal object, who cares about the other

person. As a consequence, friends would rather receive a shared possession than be given it. Chapter 5 extends the research on shared consumption and demonstrates that gifts, relative to shared consumption, are not necessarily the optimal choice. The chapter also gives some suggestions for improving consumer welfare and for developing business practices.

1.3 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This thesis contains four empirical chapters that can be divided into the two subdomains of interpersonal consumption decision making as explained above. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 examine consumption decisions in the domain of gift giving, and Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 analyze consumer decisions related to the initiation and receipt of non-ritualized favors.

In **Chapter 2** I address how a recipient's angry disposition towards a friend or family member affects the evaluation of products given as apology. In seven experiments I reveal that an apology setting negatively impacts the gift product evaluation and that such apology gifts given in response to angry feelings are not effective in two ways. First, there is a discrepancy between the giver's expectation and the recipient's actual evaluation of the apology gift product. Whereas givers expect the gift to be positively evaluated, recipients evaluate the gift less positively. Importantly, this effect does not generalize to all gift settings, and thus it can only be attributed to apology settings. Second, although givers aim to resolve angry feelings and restore the relational equity, the apology gift falls short on this goal. Besides these indications of the ineffectiveness of apology gifts, most importantly, the experiments repeatedly show that a gift-product evaluation is damaged when the gift-product is given in an apology setting. Holding the gift product constant, recipients value the gift product less when it is received as an apology gift than when it is received as a spontaneous gift. Chapter 2 is based on work with Ilona de Hooze.

Chapter 3 also explores the gift-giving domain and examines how gifts are evaluated when the giver applies a specific gift-purchasing strategy: giving a giver-matched gift. In the first part of the chapter, four studies reveal that a giver-matched gift is more positively evaluated than a gift that does not match the giver. This effect is not dependent on the motivational message expressed in such a gift or on the personal liking for the giver; the effect

only occurs for gifts that match core characteristics of the giver. In the second part of the chapter I compare the giver-matched gift strategy to the previously explored recipient-matched gift strategy. Although giver-matched gifts enhance the gift evaluation, recipients seem to prefer recipient-matched gifts. The combined findings of parts 1 and 2 demonstrate that giver-matched gifts become extremely valuable to givers who are not knowledgeable enough about the recipient to be able to select a great recipient-focused gift (e.g., distant acquaintances). The first part of Chapter 3 is based on work with Gabriele Paolacci and Ilona de Hooze published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

Chapter 4 addresses how consumers respond to situations in which they receive a favor, i.e., when the relationship with another person is distorted to one's advantage. This issue directly links to research on the reciprocity principle, according to which people feel pressured to return a positive gesture. In this chapter I explore whether this tendency to return a favor is constant across relationships or whether consumers are more likely to respond to a friend than to a commercial partner. Although relationship theories seem to suggest that people feel more inclined to restore the relationship balance in commercial relationships than in personal ones, I argue that the opposite is true and that people find it more important to respond to a favor given by a friend than to one given by a commercial partner. In seven studies I provide initial evidence for this claim and try to align these findings with the relationship literature to show that it is important to differentiate between advantageous and disadvantageous balance distortions. Chapter 4 is based on work with Ilona de Hooze and Stijn van Osselaer.

In **Chapter 5** I explore the prosocial decision dilemma whether to share (i.e., borrow/lend) or give a personal possession to friend. Although both sharing and giving are prosocial acts that are expected to result in warm feelings and relationship bonding, one of them potentially leads to better outcomes for both the giver and the recipient. In two studies I will show that consumers are more likely to give than to share a possession with a friend and that this is a suboptimal decision in two ways: first, the decision to give is contrary to the consumers' self-interest because it involves losing a product that they used to own; and second, the decision to give is opposite to the recipients' preference for receiving a shared possession to a given one. Chapter 5 is based on work with Ilona de Hooze and Stijn van Osselaer.

Finally, **Chapter 6** summarizes the findings of the different research projects presented throughout this dissertation. Here, I will elaborate on the contributions of my findings for industry, and I will discuss opportunities for research in the interpersonal consumption decision-making domain.

CHAPTER 2

Products as Apology Gifts: Evaluation & Effectiveness

Abstract

Products are often given within relationships as a way to apologize for harm done. However, it is not known how such an apology motive affects the product evaluation. Recipients generally positively evaluate the products they receive; however, the motivation behind the giving may influence the recipient's evaluation. In line with research on self-other differences, we propose that givers are likely to purchase apology gifts that do not meet the recipient's expectation of an adequate apology and thus do not resolve angry feelings, because givers underestimate the impact of the recipient's anger and of the evoked relational inequity. Using six studies, we demonstrate that apology gifts work insufficiently (i.e., they are not as positively evaluated as givers expect and they do not fully repair anger) and that such an apology setting can negatively affect product evaluations.

In the marketplace, consumers often buy products for others (Belk, 1976). These products are bought, for instance, to celebrate a special occasion (e.g., weddings and birthdays), to thank someone, or as a way to apologize for some harm done. The existence of a whole consumption market designed for products to be given as a way to apologize (so-called apology gifts) suggests that consumers purchase such gifts to make up for some harm they have done to another person. Research on gift-giving has demonstrated that both givers and recipients generally evaluate the given products positively (Ruth et al., 1999; Cheal, 1987). It then seems logical to assume that products that are given as apology will have a similar positive evaluation. However, the highly emotional setting for an apology gift is very different from other gift-giving occasions. Where celebrations and thank-you gifts are often motivated by positive emotions (Belk & Coon, 1993), apology gifts are often given as a response to anger, an intense negative emotion that evokes strong feelings of inequity (Averill, 1983; Frijda, Kuijpers, & Ter Schure, 1989; Van Doorn, 2014). Within the domain of consumer behavior, there is little research on the impact of anger and of the apology context on gift-product evaluations.

The present research suggests that products that are given as apology gifts do not share the positive product evaluations for gifts in celebratory or spontaneous settings. The recipient's anger has distinct, negative consequences for the evaluation of such products. Following literature that claim that consumers find it difficult to correctly anticipate emotions experienced by others (Nordgren, Basas, & MacDonald, 2011; Campbell, O'Brien, Van Boven, Schwarz, & Ubel., 2014; Dunning, Van Boven, & Loewenstein, 2001; Kurt & Inman, 2013; Loewenstein, 2005), we suggest that such a biased perception will also lead to an incorrect assessment that the purchase of apology gifts could solve the angry feelings and the relational inequity. Consequently, the receipt of an apology-gift product will have a negative connotation. This means that a product will be less positively evaluated when it is given to resolve angry feelings than when it is a spontaneous gift given without a specific motivation.

Besides the negative impact that apology settings can have on product evaluations, the current investigation also reveals that apology gifts work insufficiently in two manners. Both insufficiencies relate to our premise that givers find it difficult to anticipate the anger experienced by recipients and the influence anger has on the recipients' decisions and behavior (Loewenstein, 2005). We believe that the giver underestimates the impact of the anger experienced by the recipient. Consequently, the giver assumes that an apology gift is an

appropriate gesture to resolve the angry feelings. However, this appears to be a suboptimal gesture to resolve the anger experienced by the recipient. Therefore, first of all, an apology gift is likely not to fit the recipient's expectations of an apology, and it is perceived to be an insufficient gesture, affecting the gift product evaluation. Specifically, we hypothesize that the recipient's apology-gift evaluation does not meet the expectations of the giver. Second, because the apology gift is bought based on the underestimated intensity of the recipient's anger, the apology-gift product is expected to be suboptimal because it is not able to completely resolve the anger experienced by the recipient. Thus, we hypothesize that apology gifts insufficiently repair recipients' anger: angry feelings remain even after the receipt of an apology gift. By demonstrating the effects of apology gifts on both the product evaluation and the relationship level, we provide an elaborate perspective on the impact of apology gift giving.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Perceived Anger as a Motivator for Giving

Anger is an intense, negative emotion caused by the action or inaction of another person who could have prevented this negative outcome (Averill, 1983; Frijda et al., 1989). Anger can be aimed at oneself or at another person (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003). In the present research we focus on interpersonal anger. Importantly, when a person is angry with another, a relational inequity is experienced (Adams, 1965; Scherer, 1984; Van Doorn, 2014). Imagine a co-worker who steals the ideas of a colleague and pitches them as his own during a team meeting. As a result, the co-worker harms the relational equity between him and his colleague and receives credits for the work that is not his own. In contrast, the colleague, from whom the ideas were stolen, had spent a lot of time and effort coming up with those ideas without receiving any credit for them. Theoretically, relational inequity denotes a situation where an angry person perceives the ratio between his outcomes and his inputs to be smaller than the ratio between the outcomes and inputs of the other person (Adams, 1965). These outcomes and inputs can be material (e.g., a stolen bike) or immaterial (e.g., relationship commitment). Thus when people are harmed and feel anger towards another person, they

most likely feel deprived by the other person: the other person did not invest a relatively equal amount of resources in the relationship, thus reducing the harmed person's outcomes.

Anger can motivate all kinds of behavior (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1970; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006). Not only can the experience of anger direct our consumption behavior (Rucker & Petty 2004; Bougie et al., 2003), but also the perception of anger being experienced by another person can affect our consumer decisions. It has been shown that consumers who witness anger in another person consume more and are willing to pay a higher price for products (Winkielman, Berridge, & Wilbarger, 2005). Especially when a consumer has angered someone by causing harm, the consumer might be motivated to actively apologize. To reduce the other person's anger and to restore the relational equity level, the transgressor can either punish her own self or compensate the angry person (Darley & Pittmann, 2003; Walster et al., 1970; Van Doorn, 2014).

A product given to apologize – an apology gift – could be seen as compensation for the angry person and as a way to repair the inequity. The apology gift would then increase the giver's inputs and the recipient's outcomes. Therefore people who are the focus of the anger (from hereon, "givers") might reason that a gift could repair the anger experienced by the other person (from hereon, "recipient") and that it could resolve the inequity. Nevertheless, although givers try to symbolize their good intentions with the gift, it is the angry recipient who evaluates whether the gift sufficiently repairs the anger. Recent research (Haesevoets, Van Hiel, Reinders Folmer, & De Cremer, 2014) has suggested that consumers who want to resolve angry feelings and restore the relational equity have to offset the practical harm. For example, a consumer who has accidentally lost someone's favorite book can eliminate the owner's anger by giving a new copy of the lost book. Thus, it seems of utmost importance that the apology covers the actual harm. Whereas givers of apology gifts intend to repair the anger experienced and to resolve the inequity, we believe that angry recipients of an apology gift have a different perspective and that they perceive the gift as an insufficient repair.

Self-Other Differences in Emotion Appraisal

A large number of research suggest that consumers not only mispredict their own feelings and behaviors (Patrick, Macinnis, & Park 2007), but that they also find it difficult to value the emotions experienced by others. Consumers often underestimate the intensity of the emotions experienced by others (Nordgren et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2014; Jordan, Monin,

Dweck, Lovett, John, & Gross, 2011), and they mispredict other people's decisions and behaviors (Dunning et al., 2001; Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004; Van Boven, Loewenstein, & Dunning, 2005). Consumers underestimate the influence of another person's emotions, including anger, on his or her behavior when they are in a different emotional state (Loewenstein, 1996; 2000). This inability to correctly assess another person's feelings and behavior is referred to as an empathy gap (Van Boven et al., 2013). More specifically, consumers tend to presume that others feel and behave comparable to them (Dunning et al., 2001). Importantly, it is this empathy gap between consumers that can lead to the inaccurate appraisal of other people's affective versus cognitive states, and to self-other differences in evaluations (Kurt & Inman, 2013). Self-other differences caused by an empathy gap direct a wide variety of beliefs, consumption decisions, and behaviors. For example, consumers have been found to believe that others are more susceptible to the persuasive attempts of media and advertisements (Gunther, 1991; Youn, Faber, & Shah, 2000) and that they pay more for the services of news platforms (Chyi, Lee, & Holton, 2016). Moreover, consumers tend to make riskier (Stone & Allgaier, 2008) and less emotion-based choices for others (Albrecht, Volz, Sutter, Laibson, & von Cramon, 2011). Research on the endowment effect suggests that consumers are unable to anticipate the affective state of other people, generating a discrepancy between buyers' willingness to pay and sellers' willingness to accept (e.g., Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990; Carmon & Ariely, 2000). Relevant for the current research is that consumers seem to make suboptimal prosocial consumption decisions as well. Consumers purchase gifts that others would not buy themselves (Waldfoegel, 1993), and they focus on the wrong aspects of a gift (e.g., exclusiveness and costs) when purchasing a meaningful gift (Teigen, Olsen, & Solas, 2005; Flynn & Adams, 2009) or when engaging in prosocial behavior (Zhang & Epley, 2009). It thus appears that consumers experience an empathy gap when thinking about others, and as a consequence, they find it difficult to accurately predict how others will feel and how others will act upon these feelings.

The present research proposes that an empathy gap, which causes self-other differences, especially plays a role in the evaluation and effectiveness of apology gifts. In anger-evoking events, givers might be unable to correctly anticipate the influence of the recipient's angry feelings on her behavior and, as a consequence, they incorrectly assume that angry feelings can be resolved with a gift. It is therefore likely that the selected apology gift will not satisfy the recipient's idea of an accurate repair. Consequently, an apology gift is not

optimal for dispelling the angry feelings and the related relational inequity that affect the recipient's evaluation of the gift.

H1: *Apology gifts are less positively evaluated by recipients compared to givers.*

Not only do we predict that givers and recipients will differ in their evaluations of the apology gift, we also believe that, compared to a spontaneous-gift setting, an apology setting will have a negative influence on the recipient's product evaluations. When a product is given to apologize for harm done, the giver aims to resolve the anger and to restore the relational equity that was distorted to the disadvantage of the recipient. Such a distorted relational equity is nonexistent in neutral settings where a spontaneous gift is given. Based on the empathy gap literature, we reason that a gift product given as apology is likely to be considered by the angry recipient to inadequately repair the inequity. In contrast, a spontaneous gift does not have to repair any relational inequity and can even generate an advantageous relational inequity for the recipient. Therefore, we hypothesize that a product given as an apology gift will be less positively evaluated compared to a spontaneous gift.

H2: *Recipients evaluate apology gifts less positively than spontaneous gifts.*

Consumption decisions can be affected by consumer's product attitudes and product preferences (Bower & Turner, 2007). Consumption decisions regarding the gift product have also been found to depend on its evaluation. That is, gifts are more likely to be regifted to another person when the gift is negatively evaluated than when it is positively evaluated (Thomsen & Zaichkowsky, 2015). In line with this finding, we suggest that the predicted difference between the product evaluations of apology gifts and of spontaneous gifts also reflects the recipient's tendency to regift the product. More specifically, we assume that products given as apology have a higher chance to be regifted than products given as a spontaneous gift.

H3: *Apology gifts have a higher likelihood to be regifted than spontaneous gifts.*

Finally, we hypothesize that the decrease in product evaluations and the increase in regift intentions for products received as apology gifts, compared to spontaneous gifts, will depend on the insufficiently restored relational equity. As givers are predicted to underestimate the impact of the recipient's anger, it is likely that the recipient perceives the relational equity after the receipt of an apology gift to be still distorted to their disadvantage. This means that the apology gift does not meet the recipient's expectations of what constitutes an adequate apology. This will then generate negative evaluations of the gift product. In contrast, recipients experience a positive relational inequity after the receipt of a spontaneous gift. This will generate positive evaluations of the gift product. Thus we propose that, compared to spontaneous gifts, apology gifts insufficiently restore the relational equity and do not resolve all anger, which then motivates more negative gift evaluations and increased intentions to regift the gift product.

H4: *Apology gifts are less appreciated (than spontaneous gifts) because they are not sufficient for resolving the inequity created by the anger-evoking event.*

2.2 OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

In six studies, we investigate whether products given as an apology are ineffective and whether an apology setting can have a negative effect on the product evaluation. We test whether the insufficiently resolved anger and relational inequity explains this decreased product evaluation of apology gifts (compared to spontaneous gifts). We also investigate potential boundary conditions of this negative effect of apology settings on gift-product evaluations and alternative explanations to our process hypothesis. Studies 1 and 3 show that givers expect an apology gift to be more positively evaluated than what the recipients' actual gift-product evaluation reveals (Hypothesis 1). Studies 2A, 2B, and 3 test Hypotheses 2 and 3 and compare the gift evaluations and regifting tendencies for apology gifts and spontaneous gifts. Compared to products given as spontaneous gifts, products given as apology appear to be less positively evaluated and more likely to be regifted (Hypothesis 2 & Hypothesis 3). Study 2B specifically provides evidence that the effect depends on the predicted anger process and not on negative emotions in general. In Study 4, we examine whether potential boundary

conditions related to certain aspects of the gift (e.g., gift price) affect the decrease in product evaluation for apology gifts. Study 5 reveals that the inability of apology gifts to restore the equity level causes the decrease in product evaluation (Hypothesis 4). The study also suggests that a general dislike for all products linked to the giver is not the cause of the decreased evaluation of apology gifts. Finally, Study 6 provides extra evidence for our explanation that an apology gift is an inadequate restorer of the relational equity. This study shows that anger is not fully resolved after an apology gift, and that an apology gift combined with a spoken apology does not enhance this decrease in anger compared to a singularly spoken apology.

2.3 STUDY 1

The first study investigates whether there is a discrepancy in the givers' expectations about and the recipient's expressed evaluation of apology gifts. We assume that the givers' expected gift evaluations are higher than the recipients' expressed gift evaluations (Hypothesis 1). To test this assumption, we develop a recall study in which we manipulated the role of the participant.

Method

Participants. One hundred fifty-three American adults ($M_{age} = 33.61$, $SD_{age} = 10.64$, 49.7% male) participated in our online study on Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for \$0.60. The participants were randomly assigned to either the giver or the recipient condition.

Procedure. Depending on the assigned condition, the participants were requested to recall and describe either an occasion in which they made a friend/family member angry (giver condition) or an occasion in which they were angry at a friend/family member (recipient condition). The descriptions of two out of the 153 participants, both in the giver condition, lacked any indication of having caused anger and we therefore excluded them from the analyses. After the participants described their anger-evoking occasion, they indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very strongly) what emotions (anger, guilt, gratitude, pride, sadness, and satisfaction) the friend/family member (giver condition) or they (recipient condition) experienced in the described event.

The participants then imagined that shortly after the recalled occasion they (giver condition) or the friend/family member (recipient condition) gave the other/them an iPod as a gift to apologize. We measured how this product was (expected to be) evaluated using five items (Paolacci, Straeter, & De Hooge, 2015; Flynn & Adams, 2009; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011): “How much would you [X] appreciate X’s [your] gift?”, “How grateful would you [X] be for X’s [your] gift?”, “How thankful would you [X] be for X’s [your] gift?”, “How pleased would you [X] be about receiving X’s [your] gift?”, “How much do you [X] like X’s [your] gift?” (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; $\alpha = .97$, averaged to product evaluation score; see Appendix A). In addition, we measured whether the participants thought the gift would be used as a regift: “Would you [person X] consider person X’s [your] iPod as a regift for somebody else?” (1 = certainly not, 7 = definitely).

Results

Manipulation check. As expected, in both the giver ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.99$, $t(72) = 12.23$, $p < .001$) and the recipient conditions ($M = 6.03$, $SD = 1.17$, $t(77) = 37.84$, $p < .001$), the reported anger was different from one. We noted the difference in anger reported between the conditions. The participants in the giver condition, who had to anticipate emotions, reported less extreme emotions than the participants in the recipient condition, who reported on their own feelings. This difference is consistent with existing literature and our theorizing on the empathy gap that suggest that consumers underestimate other people’s emotions (Nordgren et al., 2011).

Product evaluation and intention to regift. As predicted, the givers had higher expectations regarding the product evaluation of the apology gift ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.87$) than the recipients expressed ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 2.10$, $t(149) = 2.48$, $p = .014$, *Cohen’s d* = 0.40). To explore whether the difference in product evaluation would also reflect behavioral intentions regarding the gift product, we examined whether givers and recipients differently believed that the iPod would be used as a regift for someone else. We found that both givers ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 2.00$) and recipients ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 2.22$) similarly considered the apology gift to be regifted, $t(149) = .79$, $p = .434$).

Discussion

Study 1 confirms our first hypothesis that apology gifts are not as effective as givers expect them to be. There is a clear gap between the givers' expected product evaluation and the recipients' expressed product evaluation. This suggests that apology gifts might not meet recipients' expectations of an adequate apology, thus imbuing the gift with a negative connotation. Consequently, a gift product is expected to be less positively evaluated when it is given as apology than when it is given in a neutral gift setting. We tested this second hypothesis in Studies 2A and 2B.

2.4 STUDIES 2A & 2B

Studies 2A and 2B test our proposition that recipients evaluate an apology gift less positively than a spontaneous gift. This will indicate that an apology setting can have a negative effect on the gift product evaluation. We employed two different study designs to further contribute to the reliability of the findings.

Study 2B also examines an alternative explanation for the decreased evaluation of an apology-gift product. We argue that the decreased evaluation is due to the recipient's angry feelings, which are insufficiently resolved by the gift. An alternative explanation is that a receiver evaluates products less positively when she is feeling negative in general, and not just angry. Negative emotions have been found to spill over on everyday behavior and consumption decisions (Bruyneel, De Witte, Franses, & Dekimpe, 2009; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Therefore, it is possible that any negative emotion would spill over on the gift and thus negatively affect the recipient's gift-product evaluation. This alternative account suggests that a decreased product evaluation is not unique to apology gifts, but applies to any gift given to a person who feels negative.

To exclude this alternative explanation, we included a condition with another negative emotion: sadness. Sadness resembles anger in many ways (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Both emotions have been found to be highly unpleasant, to motivate actions to resolve the feelings, and to be evoked by factors outside the control of the person. However, sadness and anger are different on at least one essential aspect: the factor responsible for the situation (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993). Whereas

sadness ascribes a negative outcome to situational factors, anger blames another person's intentional behavior. Therefore, sadness might not lead to a change in relational equity, but anger affects the relational inequity with the blamed person. Because we believe that the relational inequity is essential for the effects of apology gifts on product evaluations to occur, we expect that the predicted effects will not occur when recipients experience sadness.

Study 2A: Method

In Study 2A we aim to test our hypothesis that compared to a neutral setting, an apology setting negatively influences recipients' evaluation of the gift product. Using an autobiographical recall design, we manipulated the recall of an anger-evoking event and measured the participants' evaluation of a gift product received as an apology or of a spontaneous gift from the friend involved in the recalled event.

Participants. One hundred fifty-three American adults ($M_{age} = 37.37$, $SD_{age} = 11.70$, 47.7% male) participated for \$0.60 in an online study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. We randomly assigned the participants to either the apology-gift condition or to the spontaneous-gift condition.

Procedure. The participants in the apology-gift condition were requested to recall an anger-evoking event (see instructions for the recipient condition in Study 1). The participants in the spontaneous-gift condition were requested to recall a normal weekday when they saw at least one friend or family member. After this autobiographical recall-induction task, we asked the participants to indicate on a 7-point scale (see Study 1) which emotions (anger, guilty, gratitude, pride, sadness, and satisfaction) they experienced during the described event. These six items served as a manipulation check.

Next, the participants imagined that shortly after the recalled event, the friend/family member gave them a gift: a DVD of a recently released movie. Depending on the assigned condition, the participants read either that the gift served as apology (apology-gift condition) or that it was a spontaneous gesture (spontaneous-gift condition). After reading this piece of information, the participants were asked to indicate their evaluation of the DVD ($\alpha = .97$) and their intention to use the DVD as a regift for someone else (see Study 1).

Study 2A: Results

Manipulation check. Our manipulation showed to be effective. As intended, the participants in the apology-gift condition ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 1.12$), who recalled an anger-evoking event, reported a higher level of anger than the participants in the spontaneous gift condition did ($M = 1.48$, $SD = 1.18$), who recalled a normal weekday, ($t(151) = 25.15$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 4.07.)

Product evaluation and intention to regift. In line with our hypothesis, the DVD was less positively evaluated as an apology gift ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.84$) than as a spontaneous gift ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 1.26$; $t(151) = 8.63$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 1.40). Similarly, the participants who received a DVD as an apology gift ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 2.17$) were more likely to use the DVD as a regift for someone else than the participants who received the DVD as a spontaneous gift ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.89$; $t(151) = 2.50$, $p = .013$, *Cohen's d* = 0.40).

Mediation. Although the anger measure was not intended to serve as a mediating factor in this study, we ran a mediation analysis as a preliminary test of our process. To support our reasoning that the difference in product evaluation and regift intention was caused by the difference in reported anger, we conducted a bootstrapping analysis with 5000 samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We found that the difference in the product evaluation between apology gifts and spontaneous gifts was fully explained by the difference in anger experienced ($b = -2.04$, $-3.25 < CI\ 95\% < -1.02$), which sequentially also fully explained the difference in intention to use the DVD as a regift for someone else ($b = 1.19$, $0.75 < CI\ 95\% < 1.80$).

Study 2B: Method

The goal of Study 2B is to exclude the alternative explanation that a gift product is less positively evaluated when the recipient is in a generally negative mood. We hypothesize that a gift product is less positively evaluated when the gift product is specifically given in an apology setting in which the recipient feels angry towards the giver. To control for the alternative explanation, we include an additional condition in which the recipient experienced another negative emotion, sadness, towards the giver. Our hypothesis suggests that we will only find a less positive evaluation for received gift products when the recipient is angry with the giver and not when the recipient feels sad towards the giver.

Participants. Two hundred fifty-seven students from a European university ($M_{age} = 20.5$, $SD_{age} = 1.44$, 34.6% male) participated in our study in exchange for course credits. The

participants were randomly assigned to one of the following three conditions: the apology gift, sadness gift, and spontaneous gift conditions.

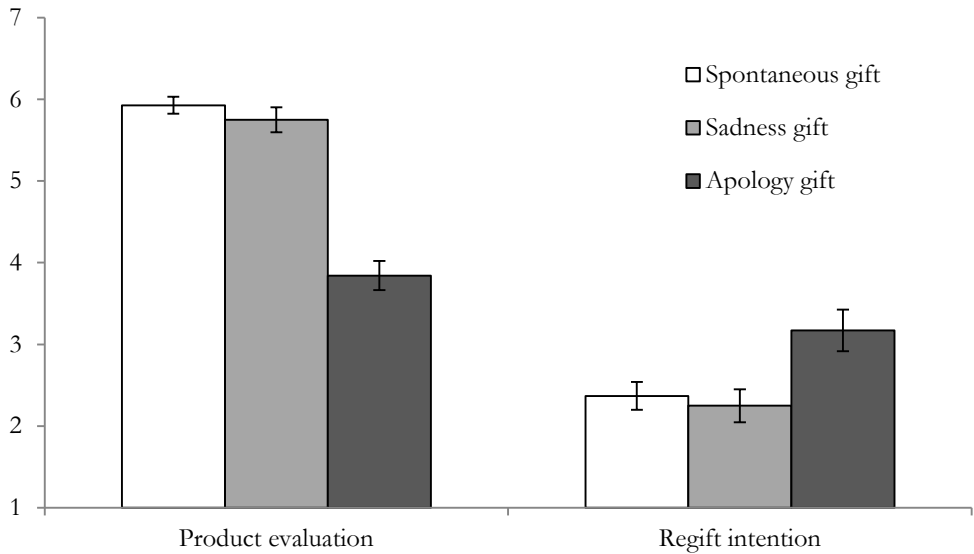
Procedure. We asked all the participants to read a scenario and to imagine that they were going to the cinema with a good friend named Alex. In the spontaneous gift condition, the participants read that they enjoyed a nice evening together, whereas in the apology gift and in the sadness gift conditions, the participants read that they waited for more than an hour but their friend Alex did not show up at the cinema. In addition, the participants in the apology gift condition found out that Alex was having drinks that evening with colleagues, evoking angry feelings; whereas the participants in the sadness gift condition found out that Alex abruptly needed to go to hospital for a medical checkup after a little accident, evoking sad feelings. All three scenarios ended with Alex bringing them a gift the next time they met. This was either a spontaneous gift (spontaneous gift condition), a gift to apologize for forgetting the appointment (apology gift condition), or a gesture because Alex could not make it last time (sadness gift condition). In all conditions, the gift was a DVD of a movie starring their favorite actor.

When the participants finished reading the scenario, they were asked to fill out the 5-item measure of product evaluation ($\alpha = .93$) and the one item that measures their intention to use the DVD as a regift (from Study 1.) Moreover, the participants indicated whether in the described occasion they felt angry, sad, or no specific feelings towards Alex. This measure served as an attention check to filter out participants who had not paid attention to the most crucial part of our manipulation. Seventy-eight out of the 257 students incorrectly answered the attention check and were therefore excluded from further analyses. The results did not change when we included all the cases.

Study 2B: Results

Product evaluation. We found an overall effect across the three conditions on product evaluation ($F(2, 176) = 64.56, p < .001$; see Figure 2.1). A simple contrast analysis revealed that this effect was driven by the apology gift condition. The participants who received the gift as a response to their anger ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.28$) evaluated it less positively than the participants who received the gift as a response to their sadness ($M = 5.75, SD = 1.09, t(176) = 8.96, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.77$) or than those who received the gift for no specific reason ($M = 5.93, SD = 0.91, t(176) = 10.73, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.93$). The participants in the

Figure 2.1: Product Evaluation and Regift Intention across Conditions of Study 2B



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

spontaneous gift and the sadness gift conditions did not evaluate the gift differently ($t(176) = -.91, p = .365$).

Intention to regift. We examined whether across the three conditions the participants differed in their intention to use the DVD as a regift for someone else. The results revealed an overall effect ($F(2, 176) = 5.43, p = .005$). In line with our findings on product evaluation, we found that the participants who received the gift as a response to their anger ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.83$) were more likely to use the item as a gift for somebody else than either the participants who received the gift as a response to their sadness ($M = 2.25, SD = 1.44, t(176) = 2.95, p = .004, Cohen's d = 1.77$) or those who received the gift for no specific reason ($M = 2.37, SD = 1.48, t(176) = 2.83, p = .005, Cohen's d = 1.93$; see Figure 2.1). A gift received in a sad state was equally likely to be regifted as a gift received for no specific reason ($t(176) = 0.40, p = .692$).

Discussion Studies 2A & 2B

Studies 2A and 2B demonstrated that a product given as apology will be less positively evaluated than a product that is given as a spontaneous gift. Similarly, apology-gift products

were also more likely to be regifted to another person than spontaneous-gift products. These findings reveal the negative influence that an apology setting can have on the product evaluations and regift intentions of receivers. In addition, Study 2B shows that this decreased evaluation is caused by the experience of angry feelings in particular and not by negative feelings in general. Recipients do not value a gift product less when they are in some general negative mood. This suggests that the decreased gift product evaluation is unique to the experience of anger within the apology context (i.e., it cannot be ascribed to negative moods in general), supporting our proposition that this effect is caused by the inability of an apology gift to resolve angry feelings and to restore relational equity.

2.5 STUDY 3

Study 3 investigate our hypotheses that apology-gift products are evaluated by the recipient less positively than the giver expects (Hypothesis 1) and that apology gifts are less positively evaluated than spontaneous gifts (Hypothesis 2). In a combined research design, we manipulate both the nature of the gift (apology vs. spontaneous) and the role of the participant (giver vs. recipient). Consequently, the study setup allows us to rule out an alternative explanation for the results of Study 1 that showed a discrepancy between the givers' expected and the recipients' actual product evaluation. It is possible that this gap between expected and expressed evaluations might hold for all gift settings, thus signaling an inherent tendency of gift givers to overvalue their gifts. Study 3 will control for this alternative explanation and will show that with spontaneous-gift products, givers adequately predict the recipients' evaluation of the gift product.

Method

Participants. Three hundred one American adults ($M_{age} = 34.48$, $SD_{age} = 11.62$, 49.5% male) participated in our online study on Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for \$0.50. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in our 2 (gift setting: apology vs. spontaneous) \times 2 (role: giver vs. recipient) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Depending on the assigned condition, the participants were requested in an autobiographical recall-induction task to describe either an occasion in which they made a

friend/family member angry (apology–giver condition), an occasion in which they were angry at a friend/family member (apology–recipient condition), or a normal weekday during which they saw at least one friend or family member (spontaneous–giver and spontaneous–recipient condition). After the participants finished the autobiographical recall-induction task, as a manipulation check, they indicated on a 7-point scale what emotions they (recipient conditions) or the friend/family member (giver conditions) experienced in the described event (see Study 1). Next the participants were asked to imagine that shortly after the described event, they (giver conditions) or the friend/family member (recipient conditions) gave an iPod as a gift to apologize. We measured how this product was (expected to be) evaluated ($\alpha = .97$; see Study 1).

Results

Outliers and incorrect recall descriptions. The descriptions of two out of the 301 participants, both in the apology–recipient condition, lacked any indication of an anger-evoking event, and thus we considered these as insufficient. The scores of both cases and the scores of one participant who was marked as an outlier¹ (spontaneous-recipient condition) were excluded from further analyses.

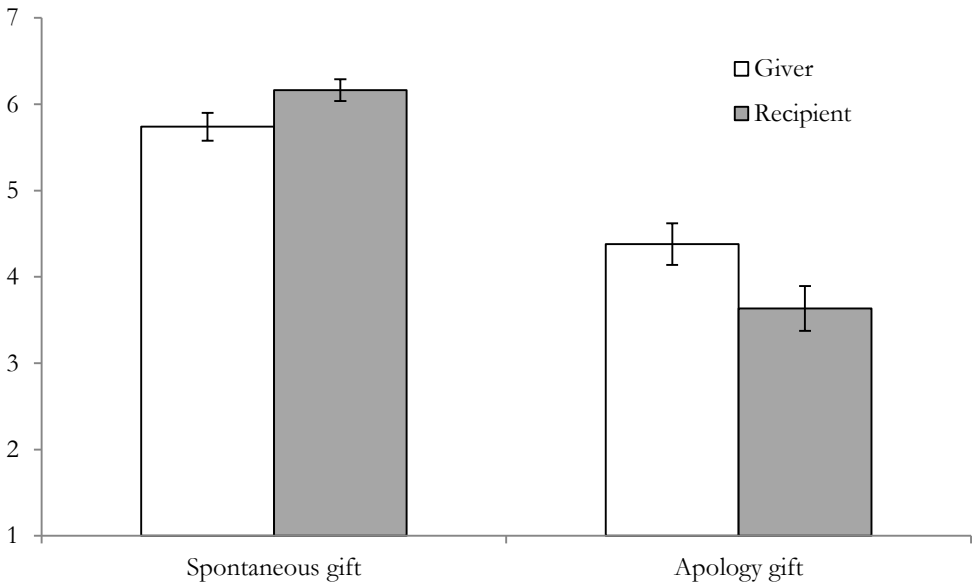
Manipulation check. A two-way ANOVA of gift setting and role on the anger manipulation check revealed two main effects (gift setting: $F(1,294) = 454.75, p < .001$, role: $F(1,294) = 38.443, p < .001$) and an interaction effect ($F(1,294) = 23.13, p < .001$). As expected, the apology–gift conditions ($M = 5.08, SD = 1.90$) differed from the spontaneous–gift conditions ($M = 1.54, SD = 1.21, t(294) = 21.33, p < .001$). Similar to Study 1 and in line with the empathy gap literature (Nordgren et al., 2011), we found that for the apology–gift conditions, the participants assigned to the recipient condition, who had to recall their own anger ($M = 6.04, SD = 1.12$) imagined a more intense level of anger than the participants in the giver condition, who had to recall a friend’s anger ($M = 4.20, SD = 2.03, t(294) = 7.64, p < .001$). Nevertheless, the anger levels reported in both the recipient and the giver apology–gift conditions differed significantly from those reported in the recipient ($M = 1.67, SD = 1.25$) and giver ($M = 1.43, SD = 1.17$) spontaneous–gift conditions ($t's(294) > 10.65, p <$

¹ All outlier analyses in this chapter are based on the Box-and-Whisker plots method (Tukey, 1977), excluding extreme values.

.001). The giver and recipient spontaneous–gift conditions did not differ ($t(294) = 1.00, p = 0.32$).

Product evaluation. A two-way ANOVA of gift setting and role on the product evaluation of the gift showed only a significant main effect of gift setting ($F(1,294) = 92.932, p < .001$) but not a main effect of gift role ($F(1,294) = 0.626, p = .429$). In addition, the two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(1,294) = 8.372, p = .004$). The difference between the expected and expressed product evaluations was smaller for spontaneous gifts than for apology gifts. Simple contrast analyses (see Figure 2.2) revealed that the givers of apology gifts ($M = 4.38, SD = 2.09$) had higher expectations regarding the gift product evaluation than the recipients expressed ($M = 3.64, SD = 2.14, t(294) = 2.556, p = .011, Cohen's d = 0.43$). In contrast, the givers of spontaneous gifts ($M = 5.74, SD = 1.46$) indicated slightly lower expectations regarding the gift product evaluation than the recipients expressed ($M = 6.16, SD = 1.07$). This small difference in the evaluation of a spontaneous gift was not significant, suggesting an accurate assessment of the gift product evaluation by the giver

Figure 2.2: Product Evaluation across Conditions of Study 3



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

($t(294) = 1.516, p = .130$). All other contrasts were significant (t 's $> 4.919, p$'s $< .001$), which meant that as expected, the recipients evaluated the iPod less positively when it was received in an apology setting than when it was received in a spontaneous setting.

Discussion

Study 3 confirms the findings of Studies 1, 2A, and 2B. Replicating Study 1, we found that in apology-gift settings, givers expect their gift to be evaluated more positively than the recipients actually do. This suggests that the apology gift is not as effective as givers expect them to be. Second, this effect can be ascribed to apology settings specifically and does not generalize to all gift occasions. Apology-gift givers thus seem to be trapped in an empathy gap, incorrectly assessing the influence of the recipient's angry feelings. Third, Study 3 again revealed that recipients evaluate a gift product less positively when it is received as an apology gift than when it is received as a spontaneous gift.

Apology gifts are not necessarily limited to one product category: givers can freely choose what to buy to apologize to recipients. Therefore, one might wonder whether apology gifts generally tend to be undervalued by recipients, or whether some products suit an apology setting better than others. Unique to apology-gift settings is the givers' goal to resolve the recipient's anger and to restore the relational equity. Certain gift characteristics might be more suitable than others to fulfill this goal. We could reason that two gift features particularly matter: namely, the relationship focus – the gift's symbolic contribution to the relationship – and the cost, which may impact the effectiveness of apology gifts. First, it could be argued that a gift that is centered on the relationship (e.g. a shared experiential gift, Chan & Mogilner, 2016), could increase recipients' evaluation of the apology gift. Relationship-centered apology gifts might enhance the restoration of the relational equity and the appeasement of anger. Second, recipients might be more sensitive to the cost of apology gifts than of other gift types. Whereas gift expenses usually have a positive effect on gift appreciation (Pollmann et al., 2016), an apology setting might lead to the opposite effects. Expensive apology gifts could be perceived as a ransom for the anger, thus causing a dislike of expensive apology gift products. Study 4 will test the influence of relational focus and gift cost as a moderator of the apology-gift product evaluations.

2.6 STUDY 4

The aim of Study 4 was to examine whether gift characteristics such as cost and relational focus, affect the evaluation of gift products given as apology or whether this is independent of such product variations. Relational focus refers to the extent to which a gift tries to contribute to the relationship itself instead of simply increasing the outcomes of the recipient. Gifts that signal an investment in the relationship might reduce the negative influence that an apology setting has on the gift-product evaluation. Additionally, the amount of money spent on an apology gift could potentially affect the evaluation of the gift product. Specifically, expensive gifts, relative to less expensive gifts, might worsen the recipient's evaluation of the received product. The recipient might perceive expensive gifts as easy payoffs that do not show clear remorse. However, if we find that both relational focus and gift expense do not influence the product evaluation, then this would indicate the strength that apology settings have on product evaluations, regardless of such product-related situational factors.

Method

Participants. Two hundred ninety-eight American adults ($M_{age} = 34.31$, $SD_{age} = 10.33$, 59.1% male) participated, for \$0.20, in our 2 (gift condition: apology vs. spontaneous) \times 2 (relational focus: high vs. low) \times 3 (costs: high vs. medium vs. low) mixed design at Amazon Mechanical Turk. The participants were randomly assigned to either the apology gift condition or the spontaneous gift condition (between subjects). Relational focus and costs were randomly assigned within participants.

Procedure. All the participants were asked to imagine that they would go to the cinema with their good friend, Alex. Depending on the assigned condition, the participants were told either their friend did not show up (apology gift condition) or they spent the evening together (spontaneous gift condition; see Study 2B). Next, the participants read that their friend wanted to give them a gift to apologize [give them a spontaneous gift]. The participants were presented with four gift options (random order) that varied in their relationship focus: a flower bouquet, a bottle of wine, concert tickets, and a dinner. We classified the flower bouquet and the bottle of wine as having low relational focus, and the concert tickets and the dinner at a restaurant as having high relational focus (Chan & Mogilner, 2016). In addition,

the participants saw the randomly assigned prices per gift option, varying between low, medium, and high prices (held constant across products; see Appendix B.) The participants then indicated their product evaluation per gift option using a shortened version of our previously used product evaluation measure ($\alpha = .96$): “How much would you appreciate Alex’s [gift option]?”, “How pleased would you be about receiving Alex’s [gift option]?”, and “How much do you like Alex’s [gift option]?” Manipulation checks tested whether the high-priced gifts were perceived as more costly (“In your view, how costly is X for Alex?” 1 = not costly, 7 = very costly) and whether the concert tickets and the dinner were seen as larger relationship investments than a flower bouquet and a bottle of wine (“How much does X signal that Alex cares about the relationship with you? 1 = not at all, 7 = very much”). As an attention check, the participants indicated whether they experienced angry feelings towards Alex in the described scenario. Sixteen participants incorrectly responded to the attention check and thus we excluded them from further analyses.

Results

Manipulation checks. The gift products that were priced higher were perceived as more expensive ($F(2,1125) = 373.54, p < .001$). Simple contrasts showed that all price levels differed significantly from each other. The products that we marked with a high price ($M = 5.90, SD = 1.30$) were perceived as more expensive than the products marked with a medium price ($M = 4.60, SD = 1.40; t(1125) = 12.40, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.91$), followed by the products marked with a low price ($M = 3.08, SD = 1.54; t(1125) = 14.85, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.07$). Similarly, the gift options were rated differently on the perceived relationship-investment manipulation check ($F(3,1124) = 38.45, p < .001$). Simple contrasts revealed that the concert and the dinner gift products did not differ from each other on perceived relationship investment ($t(1124) = 0.85, p = .40$), neither did the flower bouquet differ from the bottle of wine ($t(1124) = .60, p = .546$). All the other gift-product contrasts (concert–flowers, concert–wine, dinner–flower, and dinner–wine) differed significantly on the perceived relationship-investment measure ($t's(1124) > 6.83, p's < .001, Cohen's d's > 0.58$), indicating that the concert and dinner options were perceived as more relationship focused than either the flower bouquet or the bottle of wine.

Product evaluation. The results of a three-way ANOVA of condition (spontaneous vs. apology gift), gift product (flower bouquet vs. concert tickets vs. dinner vs. bottle of wine),

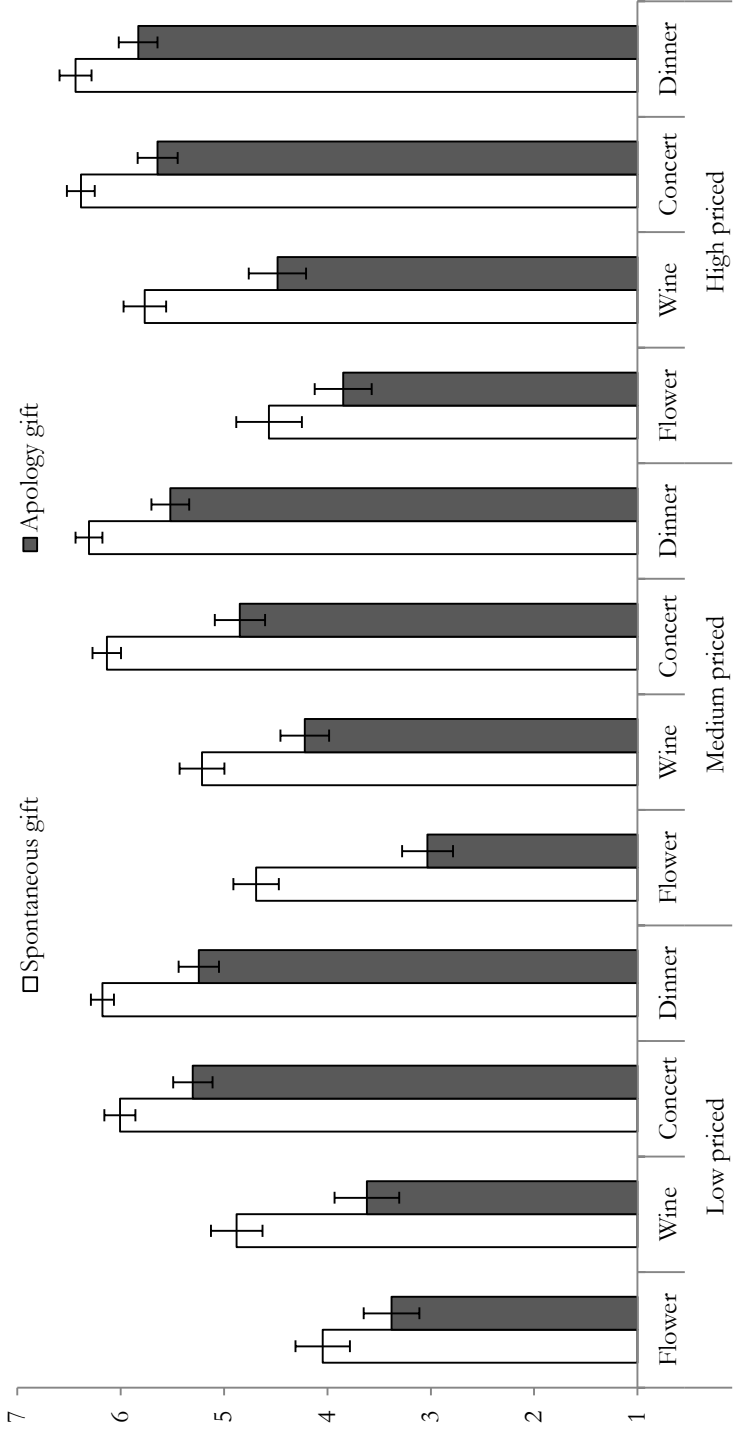
and price (high vs. medium vs. low) on the product evaluation of the gift revealed three main effects and no interaction effects (see Figure 2.3). Confirming our previous findings, gifts given as apology were less positively evaluated than gifts given without a specific motivation ($F(1,1102) = 116.99, p < .001$). Moreover, gifts were more positively evaluated when they were more costly ($F(2,1102) = 12.51, p < .001$) and when they were perceived as being an investment in the relationship ($F(3,1102) = 106.52, p < .001$). The absence of an interaction effect indicated that the negative effect of apology gifting on the product evaluation was not influenced by either the gift's price or its relationship focus.

Discussion

Study 4 confirmed our previous findings that a gift is less positively appreciated when it is given as apology. Interestingly, we did not find that the price or relational focus of the gift product moderated the difference in the evaluations between an apology gift and a spontaneous gift. Product evaluations increased for gifts in general when they were more expensive and when they contributed more to the relationship. Thus these findings suggest that the negative influence of an apology setting holds, independent of relevant aspects of a gift (i.e., its relationship focus and cost).

Studies 2A to 4 compared an apology gift with a spontaneous gift by evoking either anger or no specific feelings. The design for these studies did not control for the alternative explanation that anger increases the dislike for the apologizing giver in general. People who are angry with someone might (temporally) dislike this person, affecting their judgments about him or her (Paolacci et al., 2015). It could be suggested that it is the difference in the liking for a giver of an apology gift and for a giver of a spontaneous gift that drives the gift product evaluations. If this is true, then any gift given by the giver which is unrelated to the transgression should be equally negatively affected by the angry feelings towards the giver. Study 5 will test this alternative explanation and will show that a product is less positively evaluated when given as an apology gift than when it is given as a gift that is unrelated to the transgression or the anger-causing event (e.g., a gift received prior to the transgression).

Figure 2.3: Product Evaluation per Gift Product across Conditions of Study 4



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

2.7 STUDY 5

Previous research has emphasized that an empathy gap exists among consumers who have to anticipate other people's feelings (Jordan et al. 2011; Nordgren et al., 2011). Consumers tend to underestimate the impact of other people's feelings (Nordgren et al., 2011). Knowing that anger creates a relational inequity (Adams, 1965; Scherer, 1984), this means that consumers who have harmed another person might underestimate the influence that anger and the evoked relational inequity can have on the harmed person's behavior and decisions. An apology gift based on this biased perception is most likely to be perceived as an inadequate response that does not meet the feelings of the harmed recipient. The main goal of Study 5 was to test this process and show that it is the insufficiently restored balance, in the view of the recipient, that causes the negative connotation attached to the apology-gift product. Compared to an apology gift, a spontaneous gift does not have to restore a relational inequity and, therefore, it will result in a more positive evaluation of the gift product.

An additional goal of Study 5 is to rule out the alternative explanation that the decrease in product evaluation is generated by the angry person's temporary dislike of everything associated with the giver. Negative emotions have been found to color our perceptions of others, influencing our judgments about them and their behavior (Forgas & Bower, 1987). Indeed, recipients have been found to evaluate a gift less positively when they received it from a person they generally do not like than when they received it from someone they generally like (Paolacci et al., 2015). This alternative explanation suggests that anger can cause aversive reactions towards any product related to the giver (with whom one is angry). This means that an angry recipient should equally devalue any gift from the same offending giver, whether it is a gift that is unrelated to the anger-evoking event (e.g., a gift given prior to the transgression) or an apology gift. In contrast, our theoretical framework suggests that the decreased product evaluation for apology gifts, compared to spontaneous gifts, is caused by the inability of the apology gift to restore relational equity apart from the negative influence that anger may have on the evaluation of the giver in general. To test the alternative explanation, we included a condition in which participants had to evaluate a gift received prior to the anger-evoking event (i.e., a birthday gift). Based on our theory, we should expect that a product given as an apology would be less positively evaluated than a product received as a gift unrelated to the anger-evoking event.

Method

Participants. Two hundred ninety-seven American adults ($M_{age} = 33.29$, $SD_{age} = 10.60$, 56.6% male) participated for \$0.20 in an online study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. The participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: apology gift, birthday gift, and spontaneous gift conditions.

Procedure. In all three conditions, the participants read a scenario similar to the one in Studies 2b and 3. They had to imagine that they were meeting a friend named Alex at the cinema. The instructions in the spontaneous gift condition were similar to those in Studies 2b and 3, mentioning to participants that their friend Alex showed up and they enjoyed the evening together at the cinema. They then imagined that a few days later Alex gave them a spontaneous gift. In the apology gift and birthday gift conditions, the participants read that Alex did not show up at the cinema and that they found out that Alex was having drinks with colleagues instead. In the apology gift condition, the participants read that they received a gift from Alex a few days later as apology for his forgetting their appointment. In the birthday gift condition, the participants imagined that Alex gave them a birthday gift four months before the cinema event but none after the cinema event. In all the conditions, the gift received was a DVD of a movie that starred one of their favorite actors.

Next, the participants answered the 5-item product evaluation measure ($\alpha = 0.97$) and an item on the intention to use the product as a regift (both measures see Study 1). Then they answered two questions on the perceived equity level between them and Alex compared to before the cinema event: “Do you feel you received what you deserve in this relationship?” (1 = definitely less than I deserve, 4 = I received what I deserve, 7 = definitely more than I deserve) and “Do you feel similarly towards your friend Alex as before the described event in the cinema?” (1 = our friendship is worse than before, 4 = our friendship is very similar as before, 7 = our friendship is better than before, Spearman’s $\rho = .70$, $p < .001$). A low score on the averaged perceived-equity measure would indicate an inequity in which the recipient received relatively less than the giver of the gift, and a high score would indicate an inequity in which the receiver received relatively more than the giver of the gift. Finally, we included an attention check where the participants indicated whether they experienced angry feelings towards Alex in the described scenario. Eighteen participants incorrectly answered the attention check, and the responses of one additional participant were marked as an outlier. Therefore, we excluded 19 out of the 297 participants from the analyses.

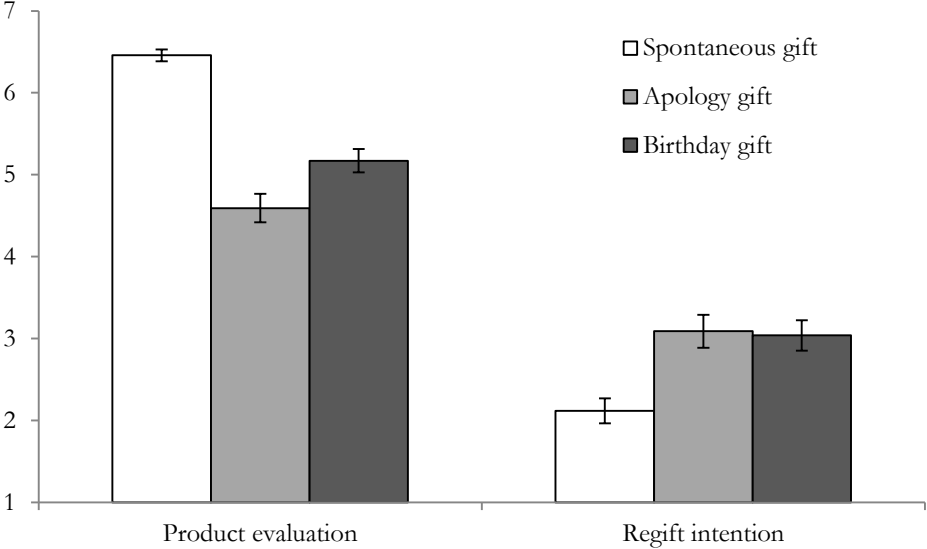
Results

Product evaluation. In all three conditions we found an overall effect on the gift product evaluation ($F(2, 275) = 49.70, p < .001$). The product received as an apology gift after an anger-evoking event was the least positively evaluated ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.62$), followed by the product received as a birthday gift prior to an anger-evoking event ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.41$), and then by the product received as a spontaneous gift after a neutral event ($M = 6.46, SD = 0.69$). All contrasts differed significantly from each other (t 's (275) $> 3.03, p$'s $< .003, Cohen's d$'s > 0.45 , see Figure 2.4).

Intention to regift. Across the three conditions we found an overall effect on the intention to use the product as a regift for someone else ($F(2, 275) = 9.37, p < .001$). The intention to regift the product received as an apology gift after an anger-evoking event ($M = 3.09, SD = 1.86$) was not different from the intention to regift the product received as a birthday gift prior to an anger-evoking event ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.83, t(276) = 0.20, p = .838$). However, both the product received as an apology gift after an anger-evoking event ($t(275) = 3.78, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.56$) and the product received as a birthday gift prior to an anger-evoking event ($t(276) = 3.70, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.53$) were significantly more likely to be regifted than the spontaneous gift received after a neutral event ($M = 2.12, SD = 1.48$; see Figure 2.4).

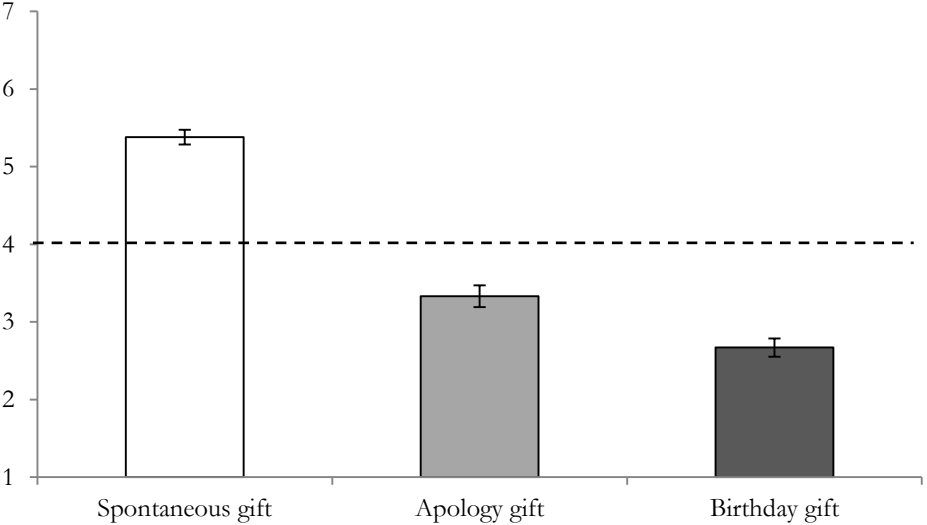
Perceived equity. We found an overall effect of perceived relational equity level across the three conditions ($F(2, 275) = 146.69, p < .001$; see Figure 2.5). As hypothesized, an apology gift did not sufficiently restore the perceived relational equity, indicated by a score below 4, the midpoint of the scale, ($M = 3.33, SD = 1.31$). Thus the participants in the apology gift condition perceived the relational equity to be to their disadvantage, which was different from the perceived relational equity expressed by the participants who received a spontaneous gift ($M = 5.38, SD = 0.92, t(275) = 12.10, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.46$). In the spontaneous gift condition, the participants perceived the relationship to be to their advantage. In line with our theory, the perceived relational-equity score was lower in the birthday gift condition ($M = 2.67, SD = 1.16$) than in the apology gift condition ($t(275) = 3.92, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.47$) and thus also lower from the score in the spontaneous gift condition ($t(275) = 16.52, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.99$). After all, in the birthday gift condition, the giver did not show to the recipient any sign of remorse.

Figure 2.4: Product Evaluation and Regift Intention across Conditions of Study 5



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Figure 2.5: Perceived Relational Equity across Conditions of Study 5



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Mediation. We hypothesized that the difference in perceived relational equity would drive the decrease in product evaluation of an apology gift compared to the product evaluation of a spontaneous gift. A multicategorical mediation bootstrapping analysis with 5000 samples (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) revealed that perceived relational equity partially mediated the effect of condition on the recipients' gift appreciation (spontaneous gift vs. apology gift: $b = -1.07$, $-1.44 < CI\ 95\% < -0.75$; spontaneous gift vs. birthday gift: $b = -1.41$, $-1.83 < CI\ 95\% < -1.04$). In addition, we found that gift appreciation sequentially fully mediated the intention to use the DVD as a regift ($b = 1.15$, $0.80 < 95\% CI < 1.58$).

Discussion

Study 5 replicated the findings of our previous studies, thus confirming that product evaluations decrease and that products are more likely to be regifted when they are given as apology than when given as a spontaneous gift. We showed that this finding is explained by the change in equity level before and after the anger-evoking event. The apology gift is unable to resolve the recipient's anger and to restore the relational equity.

The design of Study 5 also made it possible to test the alternative explanation of an increased general dislike of all objects related to the giver. If this alternative explanation was correct, then an unrelated birthday gift received prior to the anger-evoking event should have been as negatively evaluated as the apology gift. Our findings suggest that this alternative explanation does not account for the decreased product evaluation of apology gifts compared to spontaneous gifts. We find that an apology gift is less positively evaluated than a birthday gift that is unrelated to the anger-evoking event. Although an unrelated birthday gift is also less positively evaluated than a spontaneous gift, this could well be an artifact of our design. In our scenario study, we could never fully disconnect the birthday-gift momentum from the anger-evoking event. This is because both descriptions were read in sequence. In real life, however, the events are often distanced in time, a factor that we cannot include in a scenario design. Therefore, our scenario design could have caused a cognitive link between the birthday and the anger-evoking events, with anger also possibly exerting a stronger impact on the evaluation of the earlier-received gift. Nevertheless, if such a connection between the two events existed as an artifact of our design, then it should have only decreased the birthday gift evaluations and have narrowed the difference between the birthday gift evaluations and the apology gift evaluations. However, we still found that the product evaluation of an apology

gift cannot be sufficiently explained by the dislike towards the giver. This supports our reasoning that gifts are more negatively evaluated when they are given as apology because the gift product insufficiently restores the damaged relational equity. To provide additional insight into the anger restoration process, Study 6 directly focus on reported anger levels. Previous research indicates that anger is experienced when the equity level is damaged (Adams, 1965). Thus, when anger is still experienced after an apology gift has been given, it indicates that the relational equity has not been restored. Study 6 aims to demonstrate that recipients still experience anger even after they have received an apology gift.

2.8 STUDY 6

Based on our theoretical framework, an apology gift insufficiently repairs the recipient's anger and the relational inequity. The findings of Study 4 revealed direct evidence for this process by measuring the perceived relational equity. Study 6 aims to provide additional insight into the process by focusing on the reported anger level after receiving an apology gift. We assume that receiving an apology gift would insufficiently resolve the recipients' anger. In addition, Study 6 situates apology gifts in the context of other apology options by comparing an apology accompanied by a gift with a spoken apology. This comparison tests whether an extra monetary investment represented by the gift adds to the effectiveness of an apology.

Method

Participants. Two hundred ninety-seven American adults ($M_{age} = 34.70$, $SD_{age} = 10.67$, 49.5% male) participated for \$0.60 in an online survey on Amazon Mechanical Turk. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the following four conditions: apology gift, spoken apology, no apology, or control (no anger evoked) condition.

Procedure. In an autobiographical recall-induction task similar to Study 2A, the participants had to describe either an event when they were angry with a friend or family member (apology gift, spoken apology, and no apology conditions) or a normal weekday when they saw at least one friend or family member (control condition). After this autobiographical recall-induction task, the participants reported, as a manipulation check, to what extent they

experienced anger, satisfaction, relief, guilt, gratitude, pride, and sadness (1 = not at all, 7 = very strongly).

The participants in both the apology gift and spoken apology conditions continued reading and imagined that very shortly after the event, the friend/family member wanted to apologize. In the apology gift condition, this remark was accompanied by an apology gift: a DVD of a recently released movie. Next, the participants in the apology gift and spoken apology conditions again indicated the emotions they experienced using the same measure employed after the autobiographical recall-induction task. Finally, all the participants reported their relationship evaluation on two items: “How much do you appreciate your relationship with X [after the apology/after you received the gift]?” and “How much do you like X [after the apology/after you received the gift]?” (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; $\rho = .901$). The responses of six out of the 297 participants were identified as outliers and were thus excluded from our analyses.

Results

Manipulation check. We found an overall effect of condition on the anger reported after the described event ($F(3,287) = 328.83, p < .001$). More specifically, simple contrasts indicated that our manipulation was effective: the participants in the control condition reported less anger compared to the participants in the other three conditions (t 's (287) $> 25.98, p$'s $< .001$). The three anger conditions did not differ in the reported anger (t 's (287) < 1).

Anger comparison score. To compare the final levels of anger across the conditions, we combined the anger scores reported after the recall task for the control and the no apology conditions and the anger scores reported after the apology scenario for the apology gift and spoken apology conditions. An overall effect was found of condition on this anger comparison score ($F(3,287) = 95.09, p < .001$, see Figure 2.6). All the conditions differed from each other on this anger comparison score (t 's (287) $> 2.45, p < .015, Cohen's d$'s > 0.39). Anger was highest in the no apology condition ($M = 5.99, SD = 0.97$), followed by in the apology gift condition ($M = 4.10, SD = 2.15$), then in the spoken apology condition ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.88$), and in the control condition ($M = 1.35, SD = 0.86$).

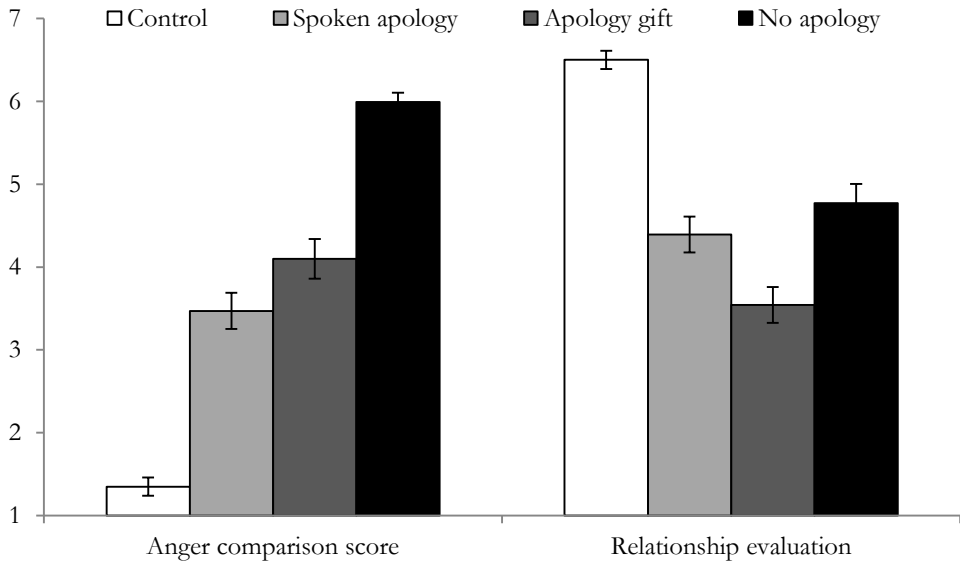
Relationship evaluation. We found that the relationship with the giver was differently evaluated across the four conditions ($F(3,287) = 32.62, p < .001$; see Figure 2.6). Relationship evaluation was lowest for the apology gift condition ($M = 3.54, SD = 1.93$), followed by the

relationship evaluation for the spoken apology condition ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.88$, $t(287) = 2.98$, $p = .003$, *Cohen's d* = 0.48), then for the no apology condition ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 2.03$, $t(287) = 1.30$, $p = .194$), and for the control condition ($M = 6.50$, $SD = 0.84$, $t(287) = 5.64$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.97). All other contrasts showed to be significant ($t's (287) > 4.31$, $p's < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.69). Thus our findings suggest that an apology accompanied by a gift leads to a less positive evaluation of the relationship than either a verbal apology or no apology at all. Furthermore, a multicategorical mediation bootstrapping analysis with 5000 samples (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) showed that the anger comparison score mediated the effect of condition on recipients' relationship evaluation (control vs. spoken apology: $b = -1.3052$, $-1.7047 < CI 95\% < -0.9386$; control vs. apology gift: $b = -1.6957$, $-2.1233 < CI 95\% < -1.2880$; control vs. no apology: $b = -2.8592$, $-3.3738 < CI 95\% < -2.3460$).

Discussion

The results of Study 6 confirm our suggestion that an apology gift is an insufficient repair of anger because it only partially reduces the experienced anger. These results

Figure 2.6: Anger Comparison Score and Relationship Evaluation across Conditions in Study 6



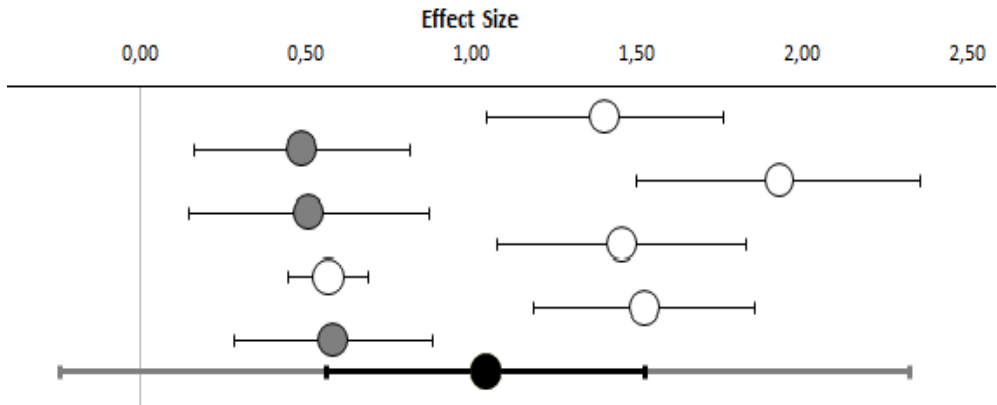
Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

correspond to the findings of Study 5 that indicate the inability of apology gifts to restore the relational equity that normally arises when anger is experienced (Adams, 1965; Scherer, 1984). Interestingly, a spoken apology seems to have more promising effects than an apology gift on both the anger experienced and on the evaluation of the relationship with the giver. The differences in anger experienced and the evaluation of the relationship between a spoken apology and an apology gift are remarkable because the latter is a costlier and more effortful gesture than the former; and these two characteristics are usually positively evaluated (Flynn & Adams, 2011; Pollmann et al., 2016). Moreover, our findings provide preliminary evidence that an apology gift leads to a decreased evaluation of the relationship with the giver compared to when no apology has been made.

2.9 GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although an apology-gift market exists, and many retailers advertise their products as a potential apology gift, our results demonstrate that it might be unwise to use products as a way to apologize. Apology gifts appear not to meet the expectations of the givers (Study 1 and Study 3), not to be able to restore a relational inequity (Study 5), not to be able to resolve anger experienced by recipients (Study 6), and not to enhance recipients' appreciation of the relationship with the giver (Study 6). In addition, products given as apology are less positively evaluated and are more likely to be gifted (Studies 2A, 2B, 3, and 5), regardless of the value and the relational focus of the gift (Study 4). This decreased product evaluation holds specifically for apology gifts but not for gifts motivated by recipients' negative emotions in general (Study 2b). We have tested across several experiments this hypothesized decrease in product evaluation when given in an apology versus spontaneous context. A meta-analysis based on Winer's method of pooling t 's (1971) of the effects observed across Studies 2a, 2b, 3, 4, and 5 validates the decreased evaluation for products received as apology gifts. Overall, we find a medium negative effect of apology setting on gift product evaluation ($z = 14.12$, $0.2934 < CI\ 95\% < 0.3881$, $r = 0.34$). This suggests that it is very likely that recipients do not optimally evaluate a gift product when it is received as an apology. Thus, an apology context has a direct negative effect on the recipient's product evaluations.

Figure 2.7: Meta-analysis of Studies 2A, 2B, 3, 4, and 5



Note: White dots reflect the effect sizes on gift evaluation, and grey dots reflect the effect sizes on the intention to regift. The black dot displays the overall estimated effect size.

As highlighted in the aforementioned conclusions, the results of Study 6 indicate that apology gifts can have detrimental effects on relationship appreciation and suggest that the absence of an apology would lead to a better evaluation of the relationship by the recipient. We are aware that this is a very strong claim but we do not want to draw too much attention to a finding for which we did not have a specific hypothesis. Nevertheless, the finding signals an opportunity for future research on how relationships evolve after an apology.

Importantly, our findings support our view that the insufficiently restored anger and the relational equity cause the negative evaluation of apology gifts (Study 5 and Study 6) and that two other alternative explanations do not account for the effects. First, although previous research has shown that affective states, including negative emotions, influence consumers' everyday judgments and decisions (Forgas, 1995; Judge & Illies, 2004; Bruyneel et al., 2009; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005), we found in Study 2B that a gift product evaluation is not negatively affected when people feel sadness towards the giver. This indicates that the decrease in gift product evaluation is unique to apology contexts in which angry feelings have been evoked, therefore, the decreased evaluation cannot be ascribed to recipients' negative emotions in general. Second, research has shown that consumers tend to dislike products related to people they dislike (Paolacci et al., 2015). Whereas this alternative explanation would

suggest that an angry recipient dislikes any product received from the apologizing giver, Study 5 revealed that a recipient evaluates an apology gift less positively than a birthday gift that was previously received from the same giver. Overall, our findings suggest that neither negative emotions in general (Study 2B) nor an increased dislike of the recipient (Study 4) accounts for the (full) decrease in product evaluation of apology gifts.. but that his effect is generated caused by the inadequacy of the gift product to resolve the recipient's angry feelings and to restore the relational equity.

We would like to remark all our studies all involve vignette and autobiographical recall designs. The findings supporting our hypotheses are thus based on self-reported expected valuations. Whereas research designs based on predictions and intentions have been found to translate well to actual behavior (Sheeran, 2002), we believe our current studies would be strengthened with a series of studies exploring actual anger-evoking events and the consequent behaviors. Therefore, to add value to the external validity of our research, a behavioral study in which we manipulate anger and the receipt of a gift has the highest priority in our research agenda.

Theoretical contributions and future research

The present research adds new insights to the literature on gift giving. Whereas previous research has emphasized the motivating aspect of emotions to engage in gift giving (Ruth, 1996; Wolfenbarger, 1990; De Hooge, 2016), our research explores the impact of gifts given as apology. Our results point out that gifts given as apology might not lead to the desired responses. Our research thus adds to the gift-giving literature by highlighting that gifts do not always have the positive intended effects (Sherry et al., 1993; Ruth et al., 1999; Schwartz, 1967). Future research should investigate under which conditions giving apology gifts could fully reduce anger and lead to appreciation. Anger seems best appeased when the transgressor directly repairs for the harm done (Haesevoets et al., 2014). Therefore it is possible that an apology gift might be successful when the gift matches the harm. A transgression can involve both material (e.g., someone lost or damaged one's possessions) and immaterial harm (e.g., hurt someone's feelings or mistreat someone). Although our research shows that an apology gift is not the right gesture to resolve angry feelings, an apology gift might be successful when it directly repairs the harm caused. More specifically, for material harm, this means that the apology-gift product should be an exact replacement of the original

object. It is probably more difficult to repair immaterial harm with an apology gift. After all, there are no direct product replacements for hurt feelings. Nevertheless, it could well be the case that for immaterial harm, an immaterial apology gift (e.g., taking someone for a day out) will lead to more positive gift-product evaluations.

Our findings are rooted in the social exchange theory (Adams, 1965) and empathy gap literature (Nordgren et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2014; Dunning et al., 2001). As consumers have been found to have difficulties predicting the feelings of others (Nordgren et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2014; Jordan et al., 2011) and the influence of those feelings on the decisions and behavior of others (Loewenstein, 1996; Dunning et al., 2001), we presume that the relational inequity that arises after an anger-evoking event (Adams, 1965; Scherer, 1984) are perceived differently by the transgressor and the victim. Although the transgressor believes an apology gift is an adequate apology that sufficiently resolves the anger and restores the distorted relational equity, the transgressed recipient of the gift feels otherwise. The findings of this chapter show that empathy gap can lead to inadequate behavior, especially in contexts characterized by anger. More specifically, the transgressor's underestimation of the influence of anger might lead to nonoptimal consumption decisions to repair the harm through inadequate purchases of apology gifts. Future research should investigate under which circumstances the giver's empathy gap can be reduced such that the giver could correctly assess the impact of the anger-evoking situation and thus apologize sufficiently.

Addressing apology gifts, this chapter focused on gift exchanges in personal relationships. We wondered how friends or family members evaluated a gift product that they received as apology for harm done to them. Feeling anger towards another person is not limited to personal relationships but could also arise in other types of relationships. In the marketing literature (Bougie et al., 2003; Bechwati & Morrin, 2003; Ward & Ostrom, 2006), consumers have been found to hold angry feelings towards companies who mistreated them. Companies potentially evoke angry feelings among its customers when the goods that the company delivers do not meet the set expectations (Folkes, 1984). When the product fails in the eyes of the consumer, companies might not always want or be able to replace the product. In such situations, companies could apologize and offer the customer an apology gift. The current chapter suggests that apology gifts do not necessarily lead to desired outcomes in harmed social relationships; however, we believe that these findings might not generalize to more commercial relationship settings. The relationships people have with companies are

drastically different from their relationships with friends or family members (Fiske, 1992; Clark & Mills, 2011; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005). The relationships differ in norms and expectations. As we will reveal in Chapter 4, the type of relationship people have with another person heavily influences the way they behave in consumption situations. Consumers respond differently to a friend than to a commercial partner. It would be interesting for future research to investigate whether it matters if an apology gift is given by a personal-relationship partner or by a commercial relationship partner, and how this would affect the gift-product evaluation process.

Practical relevance

Our research has important practical implications for both consumer and retailer well-being. Both for relational and economic reasons, consumers should think twice whether they want to give a gift to apologize. Our findings suggest that compared to a spoken apology, apology gifts insufficiently repair anger and relational inequity and do not lead to better results even though the gesture is costlier. Furthermore, because product evaluations suffer when products are used as an apology, companies could be inspired to increase their efforts to prevent the former. For example, they could emphasize their product as a self-gift (instead of a gift for another person) and avoid associations with their products as being a potential apology gift. In line with this reasoning, it would be relevant to research whether the negative connotation associated with and the decreased evaluation of an apology-gift product also holds for apology gifts that are a direct replacement for the harm. Similarly, future research should explore the reminding functions of gift products. More specifically, it might be possible that recipients relive or re-experience the angry feelings when they are confronted with the gift product.

CHAPTER 3

Evaluation of Giver-Matched Gifts²

² This chapter includes six experimental studies, four of which have been reported in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. For the current PhD thesis, an additional set of two studies was developed to put the findings into context.

Paolacci, G., **Straeter, L. M.**, & De Hooge, I. E. (2015). Give me your self: Gifts are liked more when they match the giver's characteristics. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *25*(3), 487-494.

Abstract

Gift giving is a widely studied phenomenon, and researchers have been specifically interested in understanding how givers could enhance recipients' gift evaluations. Whereas previous research demonstrated that gifts that match the recipient enhance the gift evaluation, we are interested in whether the gift evaluation is also positively enhanced when the gift matches the giver. Four studies reveal that recipients positively evaluate gifts when these figuratively match their givers (i.e., the gift contains references to the giver's characteristics), because recipients perceive such gifts to be more congruent with the giver's identity. This effect is not dependent on the expressed motivation behind such a gift or on the recipient's personal liking for the giver, but this effect only occurs for gifts that match some core characteristics of the giver. Two additional studies compare giver-matched gifts to recipient-matched gifts and demonstrate that whereas the giver-matched gift strategy enhances the gift evaluation, recipients prefer recipient-matched gifts to giver-matched gifts. Our findings improve the understanding regarding identity-based motivation, and demonstrate that consumers positively evaluate identity congruence in a gift-giving context.

On various festive occasions, such as birthdays and weddings, we bring a gift for the party host. In advance of the gift occasion we spend time wondering which gifts are desired and which can make the receiving friend or family member happy. Consumers may employ different strategies to purchase a gift for the celebrant, for example, by focusing either on some aspects of their relationship with the recipient or on the personality of the recipient. Past research support these strategies, by establishing that gifts that relate to the recipient's tastes (Gino & Flynn, 2011; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011) or to the relationship between the giver and the recipient (Belk, 1976; Ruth et al., 1999) have a positive effect on the evaluation of the gift. Nevertheless, we suggest that there is a third strategy that gift givers can employ to positively enhance recipients' gift evaluation. More specifically, we investigate how a recipient evaluates a gift that relates to the tastes and identity of the giver. Previous research has not examined the consequences of giving such giver-matched gifts. Therefore we might forgo fruitful insights on giver-matched gifts and how to successfully purchase gifts. We propose that recipients will evaluate gifts differently depending on whether the gift matches the giver and whether it contains references to some of the giver's core identity characteristics. Six studies show that recipients more positively evaluate gifts that contain aesthetic references to some characteristic of the giver's core identity. We reveal that the recipients' perceived congruency between the giver and the gift drives this increased evaluation for giver-matched gifts. In addition, we also try to put into perspective the giver-matched gifting strategy along with other strategies that can be adopted at the gift purchasing stage. More specifically, in the two final studies, we compare how a giver-matched gift is evaluated compared to a recipient-matched gift. According to the findings presented in this chapter, gifts that match the giver positively enhance recipients' gift evaluation. Although recipients appear to value recipient-matched gifts even more than they do giver-matched gifts, consumers do not always have the right information to meet the requirements of a recipient-matched gift. Therefore, we suggest that the giver-matched gift strategy is especially valuable to givers who are less knowledgeable of the recipient or uncertain about the gifts recipients would prefer. In addition, we suggest that marketers could adapt to this newly discovered gifting strategy, so they can optimize customer-tailored marketing messages and search engine algorithm when looking for gifts online.

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

People have an array of identities, including personal (e.g., traits and goals) and social identities (e.g., social roles and group memberships) (Howard, 2000; Oyserman, 2001; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). These identities often serve as a source of information to guide and steer people's decision-making process. According to the identity-based motivation model (Oyserman, 2007; 2009), people rely on their personal and social identities, which are either chronically accessible or cued by the situation, to make sense of the world and to determine their goals and actions. Decisions and behaviors that are consistent with the activated identities simply feel right for the person herself. Eventually people's identities also affect their consumption decisions. For example, consumers purchase products that reflect the community in which they belong (Belk, 1988; Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; 2005; Shavitt, 1990). For example, students wear sweaters that have their university's name or logo on them and music fans wear t-shirts with an image of their favorite band on them. It is not only for life-changing decisions (e.g., career choices; Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009) but also for less important purchases (e.g., detergents or museum visits; Forehand & Deshpande, 2001; Falk, 2006) that people choose options that correspond with their identity. In the same vein, consumers also find it difficult to purchase products that are incongruent to their identity (e.g., gifts; Ward & Broniarzcyk, 2011).

The preference for identity-congruent decisions is not strictly bound to people's own behavior. Individuals also interpret consumption choices of others to make identity inferences (Belk, 1988; Ferraro, Kirmani, & Matherly, 2009; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993) and expect the decisions and behavior of others to be also guided by their identities (Belk, Mayer, & Bahn, 1982; Berger & Heath, 2007; Calder & Burnkrant, 1977). Thus individuals seem to value consistency in the preferences and behavior of others and evaluate them accordingly (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Guadagno & Cialdini, 2010). Extending the identity-based motivation model, past research seem to suggest that consumers value identity-congruent decisions with regard their own decisions and their social environment.

Gifts are no exception to this identity-based motivation framework. The symbolic and self-expressing functions of gifts (Schwartz, 1967; Wolfenbarger, 1990) give people the possibility to express their own or others' identity. Belk (1979) even emphasized that the

giver's self-concept could be more predictive of the characteristics of a gift than the giver's concept of the receiver. In the current chapter, we explore whether people's preference for congruence in the way others express their identities leads to increased evaluation of gifts that match the giver's core characteristics. It should be noted that earlier gift-giving research did not completely neglect the influence of the giver; however, researchers only considered the influence of the relationship between the giver and the recipient (Belk, 1976; Ruth et al., 1999) and never the relationship between the giver and the gift.

Take the following examples of Ilona and Gabriele, who both have their own hobbies and preferences besides their foremost passion, consumer research. Ilona is very passionate about ballet and squash, and Gabriele used to play in a band and is very keen on progressive rock music. Given these core characteristics, we hypothesize that Ilona's and Gabriele's friends will particularly value receiving gifts that contain references to these characteristics (ballet and progressive rock music, respectively), because such gifts are perceived as being more congruent with Ilona and Gabriele. If these characteristics were only incidentally associated with Ilona and Gabriele (e.g., if ballet or metal and rock music were the hobbies of their sibling), getting ballet- and progressive rock music-related gifts would not result in increased gift evaluation among the recipients.

H1: *Gifts that figuratively match the giver (i.e., contain references to core aspects of the giver) are more positively evaluated than gifts that do not figuratively match the giver.*

H2: *Gifts that figuratively match the giver are more positively evaluated than gifts that do not match the giver, because recipients perceive the gift to be more congruent with the identity of the giver.*

We propose that gift givers can employ a new strategy to enhance gift evaluation, namely giving gifts that figuratively match their own core characteristics. Nonetheless, this leaves unanswered the question how a giver-matched gift strategy relates to other gift strategies. Previous research has explored other strategies to enhance gift evaluation, including giving gifts that match the recipient (e.g., Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011). The enhanced evaluation of recipient-matched gifts, as found in past research, is also consistent with the identity-based motivation framework. Where giver-matched gifts are perceived to be congruent with the giver's identity, recipient-matched gifts are perceived to be congruent with

the recipient's identity. Therefore, according to the identity-based motivation framework, both gifts increase recipients' gift evaluation. However, this framework does not say whether one of the two gift strategies is preferred to the other.

Although people can be selfless (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Lay & Hoppmann, 2015) and focused on other people's needs, self-interest is one of the basic values that guide our consumption decisions (McClintock, 1972; Gärling, 1999; Van Lange, 1999). Due to the automatic nature of self-interest, it easily affects our judgments, making it difficult to eradicate its influence (Moore & Loewenstein, 2004). Self-centered motivations evidently influence consumption decisions. People conspicuously consume for their own merits, e.g., driving a sports car or wearing red lipstick to look more appealing to the opposite sex (Griskevicius, Tybur, Sundie, Cialdini, Miller, & Kenrick, 2007; Hill, Rodeheffer, Griskevicius, Durante, & White, 2012). In addition, self-interested consumers are less likely to behave in an eco-friendly manner (Urien & Kilbourne, 2011) and are less likely to participate in a boycott of a product by some social group (Sen, Gürhan-Canli, & Morwitz, 2001) because the direct personal benefits are low or unclear to them and self-interested choices appear to bring them more utility (Beard & Beil, 1994). Besides that people tend to be intrinsically self-interested, situational circumstances can also trigger consumers to prioritize themselves in many of their behaviors and decisions they make (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011). Consumption choices that fit the self-view of consumers have been found to enhance affective behavioral responses and to create emotional attachments to, for example, a brand or a product (Aaker, 1999; Grohmann, 2009; Chaplin & John, 2005; Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011). In other words, consumers may make their own identity the central point of reference because it leads to more positive emotions. The gift-giving context offers a portal for self-interested motives, emotion-, and utility-maximizing principles, too, steering recipients' preference for and evaluation of gifts. As a consequence, we suggest that recipients prefer a gift that matches their own tastes to a gift that matches the giver's tastes because the former brings them more utility and happiness.

H3: *Recipients prefer and more positively evaluate gifts that figuratively match the recipient to gifts that figuratively match the giver.*

3.2 OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

First, the current chapter aims to provide insights on how people evaluate giver-focused gifts (i.e., gifts that contain a reference to a core characteristic of the giver's identity). We believe that consumers positively evaluate identity-congruent decisions and therefore value gifts that are congruent with the giver's core characteristics more than gifts that do not have this identity link. In four studies (Studies 1 to 4), we show that giver-focused gifts are more positively evaluated than gifts that are not linked to the giver, because the former are perceived to be more congruent with the identity of the giver. Additionally, in Studies 2 and 3 we show that this enhanced evaluation of giver-matched gifts does not depend on either the recipient's assumption about the motivation behind the giving (i.e., the giver wants me to like his/her interests, too) or on the recipients' liking for the gift-giver (i.e., the gift serves as a reminder of the giver), respectively. Study 4 indicates that the positive effect of giver-matched gifts only occurs when the gift matches a core characteristic of the giver and does not occur when the gift matches a non-core or none of the characteristics of the giver. Second, the current chapter puts the findings concerning giver-matched gifts within the context of other gift strategies. In Studies 5 and 6 we compare the evaluation of giver-focused gifts with recipient-focused gifts, and show that people tend to evaluate recipient-matched gifts slightly more positively than they do giver-matched gifts (Study 5). In Study 5 we also learn that a giver-focused gift that is contrary to the recipient's tastes cancels out the positive effect of the giver-focused gift. In line with these findings, Study 6 reveals that when recipients need to express a preference between a giver-focused gift and a recipient-focused one, they tend to prefer a gift that matches their own tastes.

3.3 STUDY 1

Study 1 is conducted to show that gifts that match the giver and contain references to the core identity of the giver are positively evaluated. We manipulate the level of relatedness between the giver and the gift (match vs. no match) by varying the description of the giver and holding the gift item constant. To control for quality inferences that recipients could make about gifts that match the giver, the gifts described in all studies differ on aesthetic

aspects (e.g. a mug with a picture that alludes to the giver's favorite movie). This rules out the alternative explanation that recipients value giver-focused gifts more because they infer higher quality from the giver's (presumed) expertise.

Method

Participants. Seventy-three students from the Erasmus University (69.9 % males, $M_{age} = 21.27$, $SD_{age} = 1.97$) participated in this study in exchange for course credits. The participants were randomly assigned to either the giver match or the giver no match condition.

Procedure. All the participants read a scenario in which they received a graduation gift from their good friend, Robin. The gift was a mug with a picture of "Cupid and Psyche, a painting that is part of the Louvre museum's collection in Paris." The scenario also included a description of Robin that varied across conditions. More specifically, Robin was introduced as a person who liked rock music and was passionate either about France, particularly Paris (giver match condition) or about England, particularly London (giver no match condition). After reading the scenario, the participants completed five items on how they would evaluate Robin's gift (adapted from Flynn & Adams, 2009; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011): "How much would you appreciate the gift?", "How grateful would you feel for the gift?", "How thankful would you feel for the gift?", "How pleased would you feel about receiving the gift?", and "How much do you like the gift?". The gift evaluation items were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) and were averaged into one evaluation index ($\alpha = .89$, see Appendix A). Furthermore, the participants also expressed the perceived congruence of the gift with Robin's identity. The participants responded to three statements, measured on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much, $\alpha = .88$): "The gift reflects Robin's interests," "The gift is related to Robin's personality," and "The gift resembles Robin."

Results

A one-way ANOVA tested whether the gift mug was differently evaluated depending on whether it matched the giver. In line with our hypothesis, we found that the participants valued the Louvre mug more when Robin was passionate about Paris ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.10$) than when Robin was passionate about London ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 0.97$, $t(71) = 2.33$, $p = .02$, *Cohen's d* = 0.54). In addition, the participants perceived the Louvre mug to be more congruent with the giver's identity in the giver match ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.04$) than in the giver

no match condition ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.52$, $t(71) = 4.151$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.97). To test whether the perceived congruency between the gift and the giver mediated the effect of condition on the recipient's gift evaluation, we conducted a bootstrapping analysis with 5000 samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). As predicted, the mediation analysis showed that the Louvre mug was more positively evaluated when it was received from Robin who was passionate about Paris (compared to when received from Robin who was passionate about London) because the Louvre mug was perceived by the recipients to be more congruent with Robin's identity ($b = 0.1970$, $.0002 < 95\% \text{ CI} < 0.4758$).

Discussion

The findings of the first study indicate that recipients like a gift more when it figuratively matches the giver's characteristics. This effect seems to arise because the recipient perceives the gift to be congruent with the identity of the giver. Studies 2, 3, and 4 will provide more process evidence. Given our identity-congruence framework, recipients should more positively evaluate gifts that figuratively embed the giver, independent of the motivations they infer from the giver giving such a gift. A giver might be motivated to give a gift that relates to one of her attributes (or interests) to inform the recipient about the giver's characteristics. Nevertheless, based on our theoretical framework, we suggest that recipients more positively evaluate giver-matched gifts even when these do not signal any benevolent motivation. To test this assumption, we develop Study 2 in which givers did not have a specific motive to offer a gift that matched their own characteristics.

3.4 STUDY 2

In Study 2, we rule out the alternative explanation that recipients value giver-matched gifts because they feel that the giver wants them to like it as well. We control for this alternative explanation by offering the participants a choice between two non-motivated gifts (i.e., gifts lacking any signal of benevolent motivations).

Method

Participants. Three hundred two American adults (60.3% males, $M_{age} = 29.65$, $SD_{age} = 8.84$) participated for \$0.20 in an online study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Via random allocation, the participants were assigned to one of three conditions (urban, landscape, or control condition).

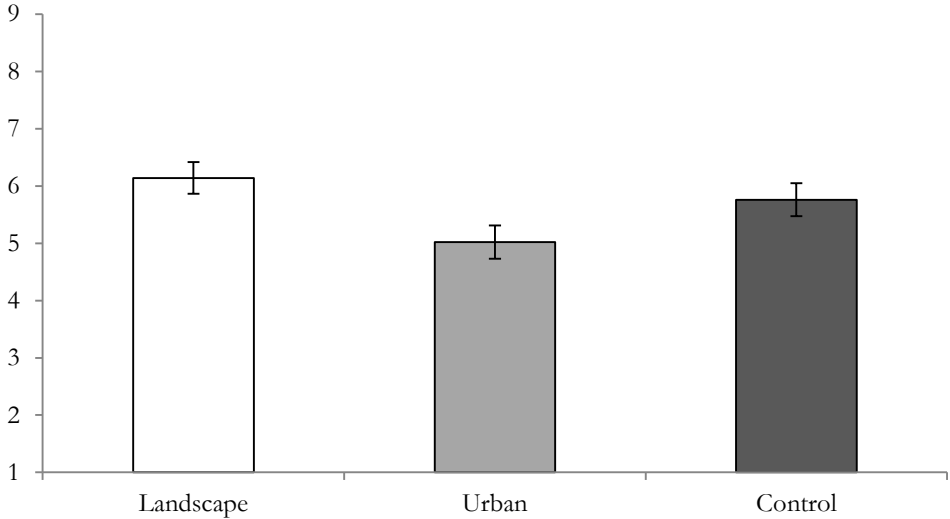
Procedure. The participants were asked to read a scenario about Robin, a good friend, who recently had to move overseas for his job. As a result of this move, Robin was not able to take all the belongings but left behind several items as gifts for friends. Among these items were a print of the photograph “NY – Towers and Spotlights (by Jerry Driendl)” and a print of the photograph “Sunbeams through trees (by Ross Hoddinott)”. Robin left behind one of the posters for the participants to have. Depending on the assigned condition, the participants read different descriptions of Robin. In the urban (landscape) condition, Robin was introduced as being passionate about photography, and in particular photographing urban sites (landscapes). Robin spent a lot of time taking photographs of urban areas (natural landscapes) and editing them. In the control condition, the description of Robin did not include any reference to photography.

After reading the scenario, the participants expressed their preference between the print of the urban photograph by Jerry Driendl and the print of the landscape photograph by Ross Hoddinott on a 9-point scale (1 = definitely Driendl’s urban photograph print, 9 = definitely Hoddinott’s landscape photograph print). The two prints were described using only words, without any pictures. The participants also rated to what extent the urban and the landscape prints were congruent with Robin’s identity (see study 1; $\alpha = .90$ and $\alpha = .89$, respectively). A congruency index for the urban print relative to the landscape print was computed by subtracting the urban print congruence rating from the landscape print congruence rating (landscape print congruence – urban print congruence = relative congruence index). A positive congruence index would indicate that the landscape print is perceived as being relatively more congruent with the giver’s identity than the urban print, and the opposite would hold for a negative congruence index.

Results

A one-way ANOVA of condition on the preference for the urban versus the landscape print showed that the conditions differed significantly from each other ($F(2, 299) = 4.00, p = .02$). As expected, the participants who read that Robin was passionate about landscape photography had a stronger preference for the landscape print relative to the urban print, compared to the participants who read that Robin was passionate about urban photography ($M_{landscape} = 6.14, SD_{landscape} = 2.79; M_{urban} = 5.02, SD_{urban} = 2.91, t(299) = 2.78, p = .006, Cohen's d = 0.39$). Compared to the participants in the control condition ($M = 5.76, SD = 2.87$), the participants in the landscape condition had a stronger preference for the landscape print relative to the urban print ($t(299) = 0.94, p = .348, Cohen's d = 0.13$), and the participants in the urban condition had a weaker preference for the landscape print relative to the urban print (i.e., the participants in the urban condition preferred the urban print ($t(299) = 1.83, p = .068, Cohen's d = 0.26$; see Figure 3.1).

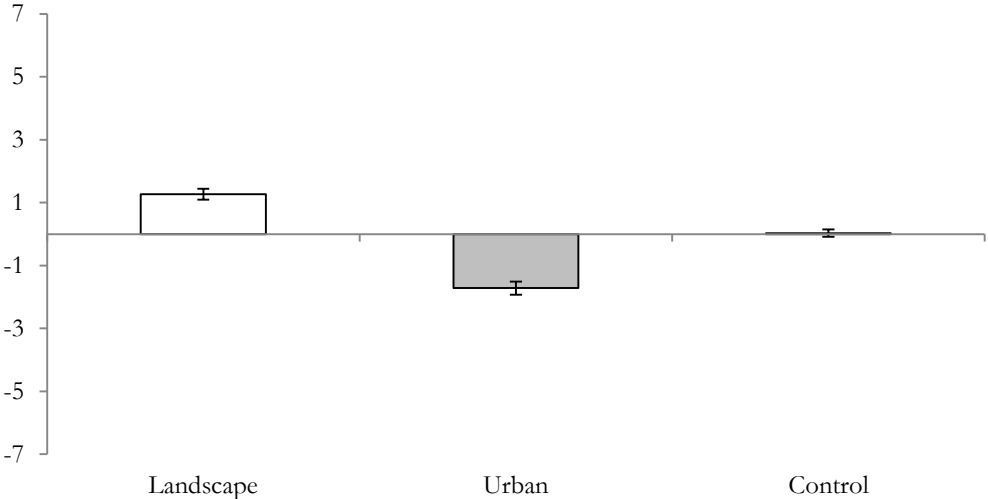
Figure 3.1: Gift Preference between the Landscape & Urban Print across Conditions in Study 2



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error. A score below 5 reflects a preference for the urban poster and a score above 5 reflects a preference for the landscape poster.

A one-way ANOVA of condition on the congruency index revealed a significant effect ($F(2, 299) = 76.27, p < .001$; see Figure 3.2). Simple contrasts showed that the highest congruency index, which indicated the perceived congruence with the giver’s identity of the landscape print relative to the urban print, was found in the landscape condition ($M = 1.27, SD = 1.78$), followed by the control condition ($M = 0.03, SD = 1.15, t_{landscape-control}(299) = 5.10, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.83$), and by the urban condition ($M = -1.72, SD = 2.11, t_{control-urban}(299) = -7.17, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.03$). A multicategorical mediation bootstrapping analysis (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) revealed that the congruency index mediated the effect of condition on the relative preference for the landscape print over the urban print (urban vs. control: $b = -0.5244, -0.9119 < CI 95\% < -0.1929$; landscape vs. control: $b = 0.3710, 0.1338 < CI 95\% < 0.6496$).

Figure 3.2: The Perceived Identity Congruency Index (Landscape Print Congruence – Urban Print Congruence) per Condition in Study 2



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error. A positive score reflects that the landscape print was perceived to be relatively more congruent to the giver’s identity than the urban print, whereas a negative score reflects that the urban print was perceived to be relatively more congruent to the giver’s identity.

Discussion

In summary, Study 2 confirms that recipients prefer a gift that matches the giver to a gift that does not match the giver because recipients perceive such gifts to be more congruent with the giver's identity. The scenario in Study 2, a friend who moved overseas leaving behind some objects as gifts, kept the giver's motives constant across conditions. Nonetheless, we found an increase in the evaluation for giver-matched gifts (compared to gifts that do not match the giver). This suggests that the preference for the giver-matched gifts is not conditional on inferences that recipients might make about the givers' motivations for giving such a gift.

Another potential alternative explanation for the attractiveness of giver-matched gifts is found in the reminding function of gifts, i.e., the gift serves as a reminiscence of the giver (Areni, Kiecker, & Palan, 1998; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989). If recipients prefer gifts that will remind them of the giver, then the observed evaluation for giver-matched gifts might depend on their particular strength as memory cues for the giver. In Study 3, we test the gifts-as-reminders account by manipulating the relationship with the giver and, consequently, the level of liking for the giver. If the alternative gifts-as-reminders explanation is correct, then recipients should evaluate giver-matched gifts more positively (relative to non-matched gifts) when the giver is a close friend than when the giver is a disliked person. Contrary to the gifts-as-reminders account, our identity-congruence explanation predicts that the valence of the relationship between the giver and the recipient has no influence on whether or not recipients positively evaluate gifts that match the giver. We predict that identity-congruence is a characteristic that consumers inherently value in their own behavior and in that of others. Therefore, recipients should more positively evaluate giver-matched gifts regardless of how they feel about the giver.

3.5 STUDY 3

Study 3 is developed to rule out the gifts-as-reminder account as an alternative explanation for the positive gift evaluation of giver-matched gifts. As in Study 1, the participants in Study 3 read a scenario about receiving either a gift that figuratively matched the giver or a gift that did not match the giver, and they evaluated the gift. We additionally

manipulate whether the giver was a close friend, an acquaintance, or a disliked person. If the gifts-as-reminder account holds, the positive evaluation of giver-matched gifts should depend on the bond between the giver and the recipient.

Method

Participants. One hundred eighty-three Dutch adults from the Rotterdam area in The Netherlands (45.9% males, $M_{age} = 35.96$, $SD_{age} = 15.48$) participated voluntarily in our online study. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions in our 2 (match: match vs. no match) \times 3 (liking for the giver: good friend vs. acquaintance vs. disliked person) between-subjects design.

Procedure. The participants were asked to imagine a situation in which they recently got promoted to a new job position. Because of this event, Robin brought them a small gift: a mouse pad depicting ancient tribal images of the South African Lemba tribe. Depending on the assigned condition, we manipulated whether the gift matched Robin's core characteristics. In the match conditions, Robin was described as "originally coming from South Africa and being passionate about African music." In the no match conditions, Robin was introduced as "originally coming from Scotland and being passionate about Scottish music." Next to manipulating the match between the gift and the giver, we also varied the relationship between the giver and recipient. The participants read that Robin was "a good and close friend," "an acquaintance," or "a person they really did not like." After the participants finished reading the scenario, they answered the items from Study 1 on gift evaluation and on the perceived congruence of the gift with the giver's identity ($\alpha = 0.94$ and $\alpha = 0.90$, respectively).

Results

A two-way ANOVA of match and liking for the giver on the reported gift evaluation revealed a main effect of match ($F(1, 177) = 15.09$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.59), indicating that the tribal mouse pad was more positively evaluated when it matched with Robin's South African roots ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.43$) than when it did not match with Robin's Scottish roots ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.57$). Moreover, we found a main effect of liking for the giver ($F(2, 177) = 14.40$, $p < .001$). The recipients' evaluation of the mouse pad was higher when it was given by a good friend ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.57$) than when it was given by an acquaintance ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.30$, $t(180) = 1.89$, $p = .06$, *Cohen's d* = 0.35). When the mouse pad was given by a

disliked person ($M = 3.51, SD = 1.47$), it was less positively evaluated than when it was given by an acquaintance ($t(180) = 3.56, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.68$). No interaction effect was found between match and liking for the giver ($F(2,177) = 0.553, p = .576$; see Figure 3.3).

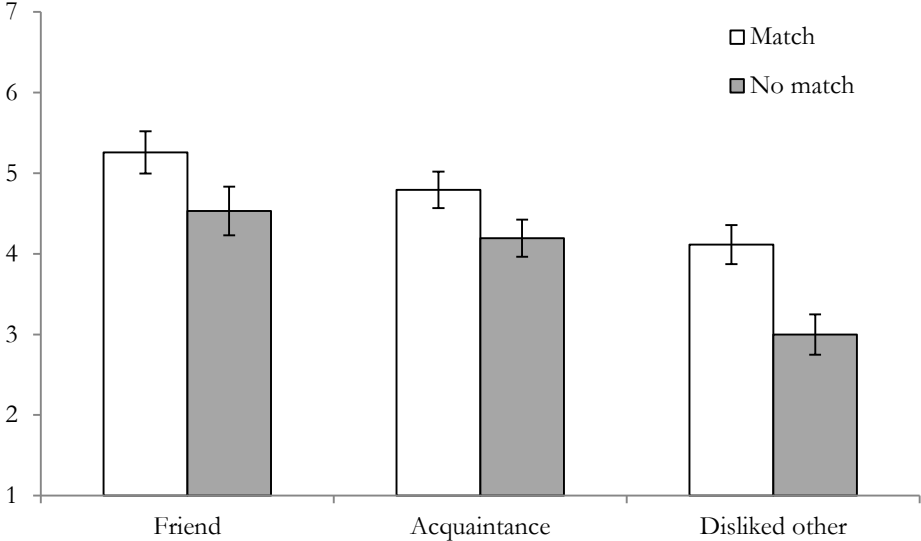
Another two-way ANOVA of match and liking for the giver on the perceived congruency between the gift and the giver revealed, as expected, only a main effect of match ($F(1,177) = 43.57, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.00$). The mouse pad was more positively evaluated when Robin had South African roots ($M = 5.40, SD = 1.18$) than when Robin had Scottish roots ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.79$). We did not find either a main effect of liking for the giver ($F(2,177) = 1.951, p = .145$) or an interaction effect ($F(2,177) = 0.459, p = .633$). To test whether the perceived congruency between the gift and the giver mediated the effect of the match on the recipient's gift evaluation, we run a 5000-sample bootstrapping mediation analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), controlling for the liking for the giver. Consistent with our previous findings, we again found that the perceived congruency between the gift and the giver's identity mediated the effect of match on recipients' gift evaluation ($b = 0.4117, 0.1603 < CI 95\% < 0.7270$; see Figure 3.4). Importantly, we found similar results when we did not include liking for the giver as a control.

Discussion

Study 3 replicated our previous findings that recipients value a gift more when it figuratively matches the identity of the giver. The findings revealed that this effect is not dependent on the recipient's liking for the giver: recipients evaluated a giver-matched gift more positively than a non-giver-matched gift whether the gift was received from a good friend, an acquaintance, or a disliked other. This finding demonstrates that the increased evaluation of gifts that match the giver is not evoked by a preference for gifts that remind recipients of givers they like. In line with our previous studies, Study 3 also confirms that the positive effect of a giver-matched gift on its evaluation is mediated by the perceived congruency between the gift and the giver's identity.

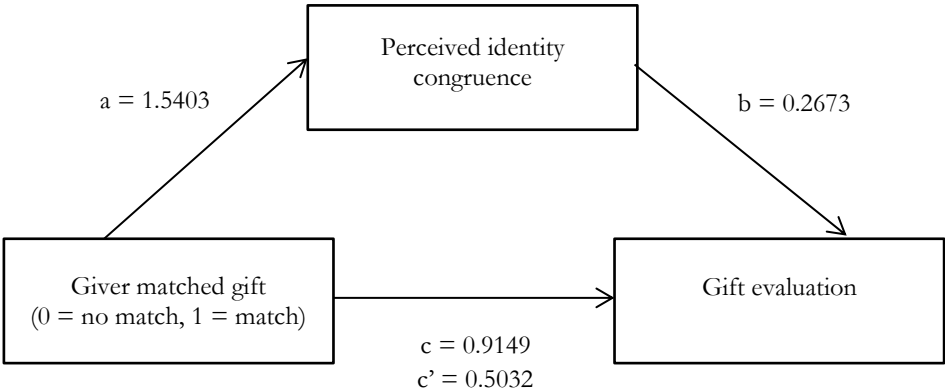
Together, Studies 1 to 3 consistently show that gifts are more positively evaluated when they match the giver's identity compared to when they do not. This raises the question whether this positive appraisal occurs under any circumstances in which there is a match (i.e., any match between the gift and the giver's characteristics, experiences, or traits), or whether it

Figure 3.3: Gift Evaluation across Conditions in Study 3



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Figure 3.4: Mediating Role of Perceived Identity Congruence on the Effect of Giver-Matched Gifts on Gift Evaluation



requires specific environmental factors to occur. Considering our identity-based theoretical framework, we reason that a match between the giver and the gift only positively affects gifts that are meaningfully congruent with the giver's identity, but not gifts that are only incidentally congruent. After all, the identity-based motivation model (Oyserman, 2007; 2009) states that consumers prefer identity-congruent behavior to make sense of the world. Therefore, we argue that the positive effect of a giver-matched gift only occurs for gifts that match core characteristics of the giver and define the identity of the giver in the recipient's eyes. We expect that the positive effect of a giver-matched gift will not occur for non-core and incidental identity-matched gifts. We test this theoretically and practically relevant boundary condition of the positive appraisal of giver-matched gifts in Study 4.

3.6 STUDY 4

Study 4 tests whether the positive effect of giver-matched gifts holds for all gifts that match the characteristics of the giver (including incidentally matched gifts) or whether it only holds for gifts that match core characteristics of the giver. We included an additional condition in which the gift matched an incidental and less defining characteristic of the giver. Recipients were expected to value giver-matched gifts more than non-giver-matched gifts but only when the gift matched a core characteristic of the giver. Moreover, in Study 4, the non-giver-matched condition was operationalized as a "lack of match" rather than as a "mismatch" (like in the previous studies.) This new operationalization of the no match condition rules out the explanation that our earlier findings were based on the perception that the no match gift conflicted with the giver's identity.

Method

Participants. Three hundred American adults (65% males, $M_{age} = 29.64$, $SD_{age} = 9.64$) participated in our online experiment on Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for \$0.20. The participants were randomly assigned to one of our three conditions: core match, non-core match, or the no match condition.

Procedure. Similar to Study 3, the participants were asked to read a scenario in which they received a "mouse pad with ancient tribal images of the South African Lemba tribe."

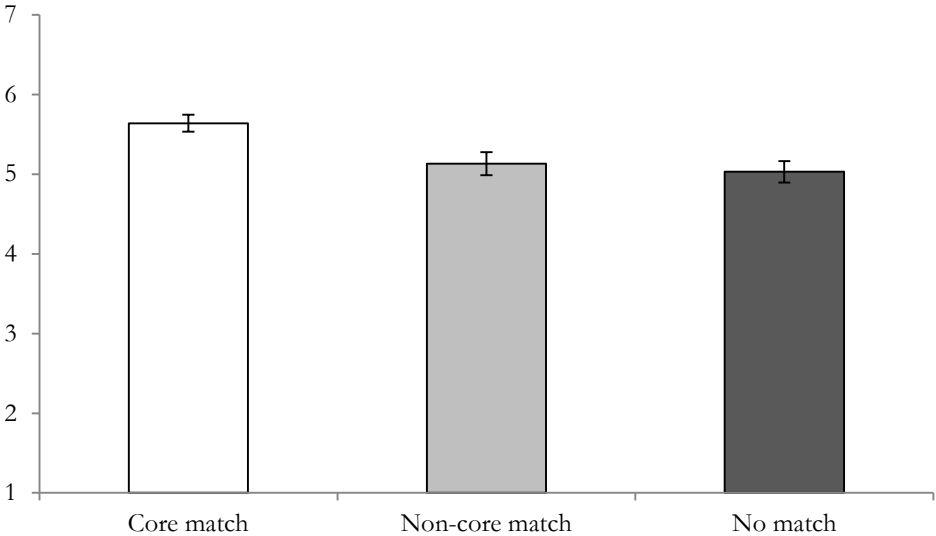
Robin gave them this gift because of their recent job promotion. In the core match condition, the participants read that Robin originally came from South Africa and was passionate about African music. In the non-core match condition, Robin was described as one who is passionate about soccer, looks forward to the next World Cup, and loves to talk about the last World Cup in South Africa. In the no match condition, the participants did not read anything about Robin's origins or passions, excluding any reference that could be perceived as (in)congruent with Robin's identity. Afterwards, the participants answered the same items from Study 1 on gift evaluation ($\alpha = .92$) and identity congruence ($\alpha = .89$).

Results

A one-way ANOVA of condition on gift evaluation revealed an overall significant effect ($F(2,297) = 6.41, p = .002$). Simple contrasts showed that the evaluation of the mouse pad was highest in the core match condition ($M = 5.64, SD = 1.08$) and significantly different from the evaluations of the same mouse pad in the no match condition ($M = 5.03, SD = 1.45; t(297) = 3.35, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.48$) and in the non-core match condition ($M = 5.13, SD = 1.34; t(297) = 2.76, p = .006, Cohen's d = 0.42$). Importantly, the evaluations were not different between the no match and the non-core match conditions ($t(297) = 0.554, p = .580$; see Figure 3.5).

Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA of condition on the perceived congruence of the gift with the identity of the giver indicated an overall significant effect ($F(2,297) = 21.04, p < .001$). The perceived congruence between the gift and Robin's identity was higher in the core match condition ($M = 6.16, SD = 0.97$) than in either the no match condition ($M = 5.11, SD = 1.14; t(297) = 6.36, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.99$) or the non-core match condition ($M = 5.45, SD = 1.38; t(297) = 4.245, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.60$). To investigate whether the difference in perceived congruence between the gift and Robin's identity across conditions drove the reported gift evaluation, we ran a bootstrapping analysis with 5000 samples based on a multicategorical approach (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). The analysis confirmed that the perceived congruence between the gift and Robin's identity mediated the effect of condition on the gift evaluation (core match vs. non-core match: $b = -0.1949, -0.3671 < CI 95\% < -0.0846$; core match vs. no match: $b = -0.2890, -0.4802 < CI 95\% < -0.1348$).

Figure 3.5: Gift Evaluation across Conditions in Study 4



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Discussion

In line with the previous studies, Study 4 showed that a gift that matches the giver is more positively evaluated than a gift that does not match the giver because such gifts are perceived to be congruent with the identity of the giver. However, Study 4 highlighted that such an increase in evaluation only occurs for gifts that match a core aspect of the giver’s identity but not for gifts that match a non-core or incidental aspect of the giver. Moreover, the results indicated that the findings of Studies 1 to 3 cannot be ascribed to the assumption that the gift conflicted with the giver’s identity in the no match condition. Taken together, Studies 1 to 4 provide consistent evidence for our hypothesis that gifts that match the identity of the giver tend to be more positively evaluated than gifts that do not.

So far, our research uncovers a new strategy that can be employed when consumers are purchasing gifts. Nonetheless, this is not the only strategy that can be applied to enhance the evaluation of a gift. Past research has demonstrated that gifts that aim to match the recipient’s characteristics also tend to be positively evaluated. This raises the question how a giver-matched gift is valued relative to a recipient-matched gift. In other words, is there a

difference between giver- and recipient-matched gifts in terms of recipient evaluation? Studies 5 and 6 compare gift evaluations of giver- and recipient-matched gifts (Study 5), and let consumers choose between these two gifts (Study 6). In addition, Study 5 investigates whether recipients' positive appraisals for giver- or recipient-matched gifts remain when the gift is contrary to the tastes of the other person involved in the gift exchange (recipient and giver, respectively).

3.7 STUDY 5

Study 5 compares the evaluation of giver-matched gifts and recipient-matched gifts. In line with previous research, we hypothesize that gifts that are congruent with either the identity of the giver or the identity of the recipient are more positively evaluated than gifts that do not match either the giver or the recipient. Together with their preference for congruency, people also hold self-interested motivations that guide their decisions and behavior (Moore & Loewenstein, 2004) and optimize their utility and happiness (Beard & Beil, 1994; Aaker, 1999; Malär et al., 2011). The recipient's self-interested motivations might not only lead to a more positive evaluation of recipient-matched gifts than of giver-matched gifts, but these motivations might also affect the recipient's responses to a giver-matched gift that is not congruent with the identity of the recipient. In other words, what we want to know is the extent to which the recipient's preference for giver-congruent gifts is affected by the recipient's self-centered motives when the giver-matched gifts do not correspond with the tastes of the recipient.

Method

Participants. Three hundred eighty-three American adults (41.3% males, $M_{age} = 36.52$, $SD_{age} = 12.14$) participated for \$0.15 in our online study at Amazon Mechanical Turk. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the 5 conditions in our 2 (gift match: giver-matched vs. recipient-matched) \times 2 (contrast: no contrast vs. contrast) and control condition between-subjects design.

Procedure. All the participants read a scenario in which they hosted a dinner on Christmas Eve and invited a couple of friends. Among them was their good friend Robin.

Robin, who was thankful for the hospitality, decided to bring the host a Christmas gift: an urban poster called “London Black and White,” a photograph by Will Barton. Depending on the assigned condition, the participants were given pieces of information about themselves and Robin. The participants in the giver-matched (recipient-matched) conditions read: “Robin is (you are) passionate about urban photography. In addition, Robin (you) enjoys traveling and among Robin’s (your) best memories is a trip to Europe five years ago.” We also manipulated whether the participants received information about the other person (i.e., themselves in the giver-matched conditions or Robin in the recipient-matched conditions). In the no contrast conditions, the participants did not receive extra information, whereas in the contrast conditions, it was mentioned that the participant (giver-matched condition) or Robin (recipient-matched condition) disliked city trips and urban environments and preferred to discover natural landscapes instead. The participants in the control condition did not receive any information about themselves or Robin.

After the participants finished reading the scenario, they were asked to fill out a short questionnaire that included five items measuring participants’ gift evaluation (see Study 1; $\alpha = .93$). In addition, six items measured both the perceived congruency between the gift and the giver (Robin) and the perceived congruency between the gift and the recipient (you) (see Study 1; $\alpha = 0.96$ and $\alpha = 0.94$, respectively).

Table 3.1: Overview of Conditions in Study 5

	Control	Giver-matched gift	Giver- matched gift	Recipient-matched gift	Recipient-matched gift
		No Contrast	Contrast	No contrast	Contrast
Robin's description	×	Passionate about urban photography	Passionate about urban photography	×	Dislike of urban areas
Your description	×	×	Dislike of urban areas	Passionate about urban photography	Passionate about urban photography

Results

Evaluation of the gift. Using a simple contrast analysis, we first tested whether our main hypothesis on the positive evaluation of giver-matched gifts and the findings of previous research on the positive evaluation of recipient-matched gifts were supported. Confirming our previous results, the findings showed that the participants in the giver-matched gift – no-contrast condition ($M = 6.01$, $SD = 1.04$) evaluated the gift poster more positively than the participants in the control condition did ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.42$, $t(378) = 2.298$, $p = .022$, *Cohen's d* = 0.32). Similarly, we also found that the participants in the recipient-matched gift – no contrast condition ($M = 6.36$, $SD = 0.81$, $t(378) = 4.281$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.69) evaluated the gift poster more positively than the participants in the control condition did.

Second, we ran a two-way ANOVA (excluding the control condition) of gift match and contrast on the gift evaluations to investigate whether a recipient-matched gift is more positively evaluated than a giver-matched gift, and whether these gift evaluations are affected by the information that the gift is in contrast to the other person involved (i.e., recipients in giver-matched gifts; givers in recipient-matched gifts). The two-way ANOVA revealed two main effects of gift match ($F(1,301) = 26.71$, $p < .001$) and other contrast ($F(1,301) = 10.23$, $p = .002$) and an interaction effect ($F(1,301) = 4.77$, $p = .030$). The difference between the contrast and no-contrast – giver-matched gift conditions was larger than between the contrast and no-contrast – recipient-matched gift conditions, meaning that the decline in the evaluation of giver-matched gifts when they were in contrast to the recipient's tastes was larger than the decline in the evaluation of recipient-matched gifts when they were in contrast to the giver's tastes. A simple contrast analysis, including the control condition, showed that the participants more positively evaluated a recipient-matched gift (not in contrast to the giver's identity, $M = 6.36$, $SD = 0.81$) than a giver-matched gift (not in contrast to the recipient's identity, $M = 6.01$, $SD = 1.04$, $t(378) = 1.948$, $p = .052$, *Cohen's d* = 0.31). This confirmed our assumption that recipients' value gifts that match their own tastes more than gifts that match the giver's tastes. In relation to the reported interaction effect, the simple contrasts showed that the participants in the giver-matched – contrast condition evaluated the gift poster less positively ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.24$) than did the participants in the giver-matched – no-contrast condition ($M = 6.01$, $SD = 1.04$, $t(378) = 3.435$, $p = .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.56). In contrast, the participants in the recipient-matched – contrast condition ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 0.97$)

evaluated the gift poster similarly to the participants in the recipient-matched – no-contrast condition ($M = 6.36$, $SD = 0.81$, $t(378) = 0.666$, $p = .506$; see Table 3.2 & Figure 3.6).

Perceived congruency of the gift. Two two-way ANOVAs of gift match and contrast on perceived congruence of the gift with the giver (Robin) ($F(1,301) = 15.38$, $p < .001$) and the recipient (you) ($F(1,301) = 26.41$, $p < .001$) revealed a significant interaction effect for both ANOVAs. Simple contrasts (including the control condition) on the perceived congruence of the gift with the *giver* (Robin) showed that all conditions ($t(378) > 3.98$, p 's $< .001$) were significantly different from each other except for the giver-matched – no-contrast and the giver-matched – contrast conditions ($t(378) = 0.288$, $p = .77$). Simple contrasts (including the control condition) on the perceived congruence of the gift with the *recipient* (you) indicated that all conditions were significantly different from each other ($t(378) > 2.44$, p 's $< .015$), except for the contrast between the control condition and the giver-matched – no-contrast condition ($t(378) = 0.433$, $p = .67$). See Table 3.2 for the means and standard deviations on both congruency measures per condition. We tested sequentially whether the interaction effect of gift match and contrast on the evaluation of the gift could be explained by both the perceived congruency of the gift with the giver and the perceived congruency of the gift with the recipient. A mediation analysis with 5000 bootstrapped samples (model 8; Preacher & Hayes, 2008) revealed that both the perceived congruency of the gift with the giver (no contrast: $b = -0.2868$, $-0.4584 < CI\ 95\% < -0.1566$; contrast: $b = -0.4813$, $-0.7661 < CI\ 95\% < -0.2619$) and the perceived congruency of the gift with the recipient (no contrast: $b = 0.5001$, $0.2872 < CI\ 95\% < 0.7773$; contrast: $b = 1.0899$, $0.8041 < CI\ 95\% < 1.4216$) fully mediated the effect of gift match on gift evaluation, moderated by contrast (interaction effect). The indirect effect of gift match (i.e., giver-matched gift vs. recipient-matched gift) on the gift evaluation via the perceived congruency of the gift with both the giver and recipient depended on whether the gift was in contrast with the other person (recipient in the giver-matched gift condition and giver in the recipient-matched gift condition).

Discussion

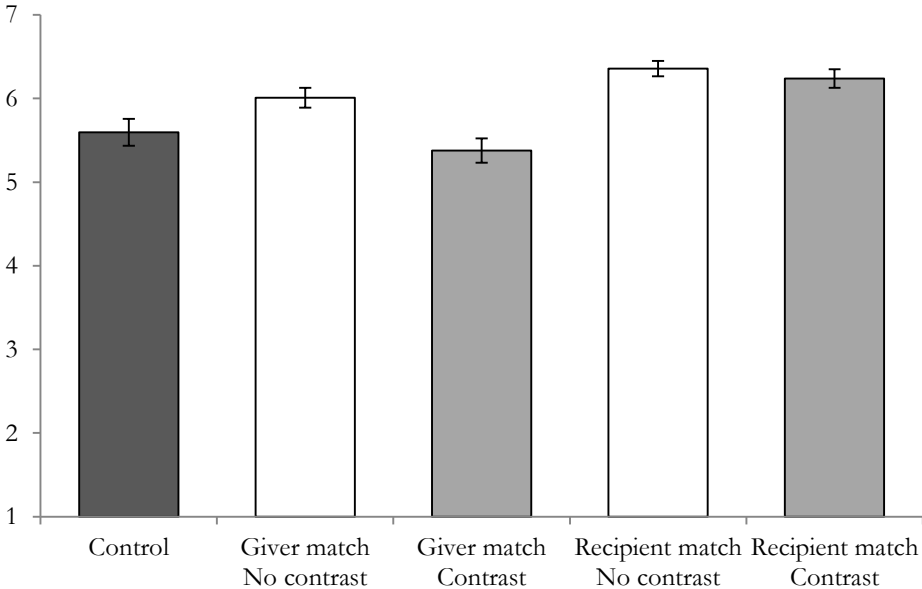
Study 5 was developed to compare the giver-matched gift strategy with the recipient-matched gift strategy and thus to put the findings of Studies 1 to 4 into perspective. First of all, the findings confirm the positive effect that a match between the giver and the gift has on the recipient's gift evaluation. Nevertheless, recipient-matched gifts tend to be more positively

Table 3.2: Means and Standard Deviations of the Evaluation of the Gift and the Perceived Congruency of the Gift with the Giver and Recipient per Condition in Study 5.

	Control	Giver-matched No contrast	Giver-matched Contrast	Recipient-matched No contrast	Recipient-matched Contrast
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Gift Evaluation	5.59 (1.42) ^a	6.01 (1.04) ^b	5.38 (1.24) ^a	6.36 (0.81) ^c	6.24 (0.97) ^{bc}
Perceived congruency with the giver	5.14 (1.11) ^a	6.07 (0.96) ^b	6.14 (0.93) ^b	4.05 (1.87) ^c	2.74 (1.87) ^d
Perceived congruency with the recipient	3.81 (1.81) ^a	3.69 (1.73) ^a	2.45 (1.35) ^b	5.29 (1.80) ^c	5.93 (1.43) ^d

Note: A different letter denotes a significant difference across conditions.

Figure 3.6: Gift Evaluation across Condition in Study 5



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

evaluated than giver-matched gifts. Importantly, the perceived congruency of the gift with the giver and the recipient again mediate the results.

Apart from doing the strategy comparison, Study 5 also investigated a potential boundary condition of the gift matching strategies. We wanted to know whether giver-matched and recipient-matched gifts would have the same positive effect on the gift evaluation if the gift were not in line with the personality of one of the two people involved in the gift exchange (i.e., either the recipient for giver-matched gifts or the giver for recipient-matched gifts). Based on our preference-for-congruency account, we suggested that the positive effect of both gift strategies would decline when the gift is incongruent with the other person involved in the gift event. The findings of Study 5 indeed show that the positive effects of giver-matched gifts on the evaluation of the gift decrease when the gift contradicts the tastes of the recipient. This detrimental effect is not present for recipient-matched gifts that contradict the tastes of the giver. This finding aligns with research on the importance of different motivational triggers, which suggests the self-interested disposition of consumers.

Although Study 5 shows slightly higher evaluation of recipient-matched gifts compared to giver-matched gifts, the study does not reflect upon recipients' true preference of one gift over the other. In Study 6 we aim to uncover recipients' preference between a giver-matched gift and a recipient-matched gift with the use of a choice paradigm. The question is whether the small difference in gift evaluation found in Study 5 maps onto a slight preference for recipient-matched gifts over giver-matched gifts or whether recipients actually have a strong preference for gifts that are in line with their own tastes.

3.8 STUDY 6

In Study 6 we test people's preference for giver- or recipient-matched gifts via a choice paradigm. Because of people's inherent self-focused cognitions and motivations, we hypothesize that recipients will prioritize a gift that matches their characteristics over a gift that matches the giver's characteristics when both gifts are available. However, this preference for a recipient-matched gift is nuanced by the presence of a giver-matched gift option.

Method

Participants. Two hundred ninety-nine American adults ($M_{age} = 36.41$, $SD_{age} = 11.63$; 37.8% males) participated for \$0.15 in our online study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions of our 2 (giver match: match vs. no match) \times 2 (recipient match: match vs. no match) between-subjects design.

Procedure. The participants were asked to read a scenario in which they invited a couple of friends for dinner on Christmas Eve. Among the invited people was Alex, a close friend who decided to bring a gift to thank them for their hospitality. Depending on the assigned condition, the participants received (giver match conditions) or did not receive (giver no match conditions) information about Alex. In the giver match conditions, the participants read that Alex was passionate about architecture, particularly historic buildings. Alex was also a sport fanatic, and one of Alex's best memories was the trip to London to attend the Olympic Games. Next to Alex description, we also manipulated whether the participants received information about themselves (recipient match conditions) or did not receive information about their own characteristics (recipient no match conditions). In the recipient match conditions, the participants were told that they were fascinated by African culture. More specifically, they visited South Africa on a safari trip two years ago and were intrigued by the beauty of the African savanna and the animals.

After the participants finished reading the scenario, they were asked to express their preference between two gift options: a poster of downtown London with the Tower Bridge or a poster of the African savanna at sunrise. Depending on our manipulations, the London poster matched Alex's (the giver) characteristics and/or the African savanna poster matched their (the recipient) characteristics. The participants expressed their preference for one of the two posters on a 9-point scale (1 = definitely the London poster, 9 = definitely the African Savanna poster).

Results

At the start, the answers of three out of the 299 participants were identified as outliers. The responses of these participants were excluded from further analyses.³ A two-way ANOVA of giver match and recipient match on the gift preference revealed a main effect of

³ All outlier analyses in this chapter are based on the Box-and-Whisker plot method (Tukey, 1977), excluding extreme values. The exclusion of the outliers did not change the results.

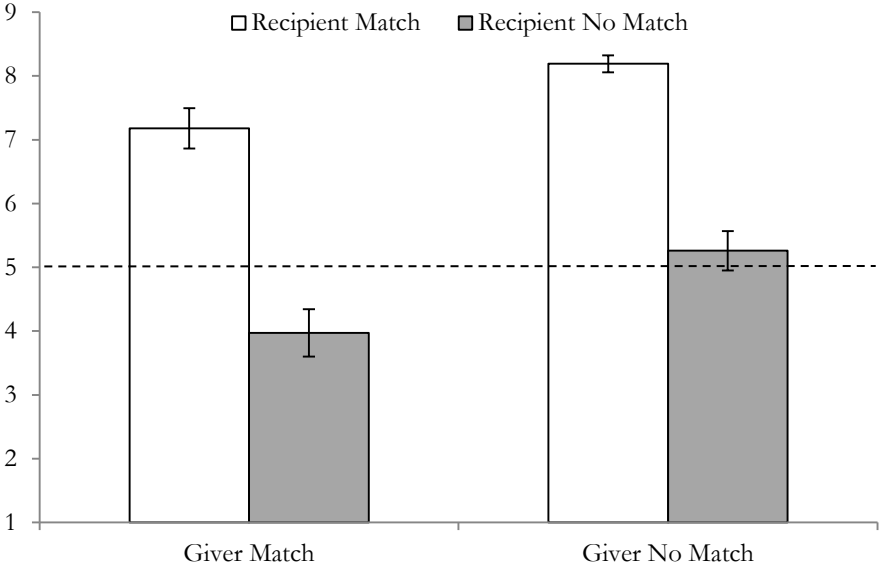
giver match ($F(1,292) = 15.03, p < .001$) and a main effect of recipient match ($F(1,292) = 107.44, p < .001$), but no interaction effect was found ($F(1,292) = 0.221, p = .638$). When the London poster matched the giver's identity (giver match conditions), the participants were more likely to express a preference for this poster than when the London poster did not match the giver's identity (giver no match conditions). Similarly, when the African savanna poster matched the recipient's identity (recipient match conditions), the participants were more likely to express a preference for this poster than when the African savanna poster did not match the recipient's identity (recipient no match conditions). Simple contrasts revealed that the expressed gift preference differed across all conditions ($t's(292) > 2.393, p's < .017$, *Cohen's d* > 0.40, see Figure 3.7). When both gift options did not relate to either the giver or the recipient, the participants were somewhat indifferent between the posters and only had a slight preference for the African savanna poster ($M = 5.26, SD = 2.70$). As expected, when the participants were only aware of the link between the London poster and the giver's identity and considered the African savanna poster to be a neutral gift option, they preferred the London poster to the African poster ($M = 3.97, SD = 3.18$). The opposite held true for the participants who were only aware of the link between the African savanna poster and their own identity and considered the London poster to be a neutral gift option. These participants preferred the African savanna poster to the London poster ($M = 8.19, SD = 1.16$). More importantly, the findings showed that when the participants had to choose between a giver-matched gift and a recipient-matched gift, they preferred the recipient-matched gift (i.e., the African savanna poster) to the giver-matched gift (i.e., the London poster) ($M = 7.18, SD = 2.69$). However, this preference was less strong than when the giver-matched gift was absent.

Discussion

The findings of Study 6 revealed that gift recipients prefer a gift that matches their own identity to a gift that matches the giver's identity. Nevertheless, this preference for recipient-matched gift over a giver-matched gift is less strong when a giver-matched gift option is available. This finding is in line with the results from Study 5. Study 5 revealed that recipient-matched gifts are more valued than a giver-matched gift; and a giver-matched gift, in turn, is also more valued than a gift that does not match at all either the giver or the recipient. Both Studies 5 and 6 also confirmed the findings of Studies 1 to 4, showing that recipients prefer a gift that matches the identity of the giver to a gift that does not. Given the current

findings, we suggest that gift givers should purchase gifts that match or reflect the recipient's identity or characteristics. When this is not possible, for example because the giver is not knowledgeable enough about the recipient, a gift that reflects the giver's own identity is a better purchase than a gift that does not relate at all to either the recipient or the giver.

Figure 3.7: Gift Preference between the London Urban Poster and the African Savanna Poster across Conditions in Study 6



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

3.9 GENERAL DISCUSSION

Giver-matched gifts

Forerunners of the gift-giving literature highlighted the ability of gifts to express the identities of the giver and the recipient (Belk, 1976; Schwartz, 1967). Although previous research investigated the influence of recipient comprising gifts (Gino & Flynn, 2011; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011), gifts containing references to the giver generally remained unexplored. In

this chapter we explored the consequences of this potential but neglected driver of recipients' gift evaluation. In four studies, we consistently showed across different gift occasions that gifts that figuratively match the giver (i.e., containing a core reference to the giver's characteristics) are more positively evaluated than gifts that do not match the giver. This difference cannot be ascribed to inferences about quality because all our studies manipulated the giver match on the aesthetic features of the gift, which were excluded from such quality inferences. Moreover, the effect of giver-matched gifts is also not conditional on motivational inferences, i.e., having the giver-matched gift intentionally selected for the recipient (Study 2), or on whether the recipient likes the giver (Study 3). However, we found that the effect only occurs when the gift matches with a core aspect of the giver's identity but not when the gift relates to incidental non-core aspects (Study 4). In addition, in all our studies we found mediation evidence that giver-matched gifts positively affect recipients' gift evaluation because these types of gifts are perceived to be congruent with the giver's identity. This mediating pattern concurs with previous research that suggests congruency is well evaluated and preferred by consumers (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Belk et al., 1982).

Our findings are consistent with the identity-based motivation framework (Oyserman, 2007; 2009). Consumers frequently feel motivated to express their actual or ideal identity in their consumption decisions. We showed that within a gift-giving setting, consumers' preference for identity-congruent product choices not only guides their own actions and expressions but also guides their evaluation of other people's actions and expressions. Future research should explore further how and under which circumstances consumers expect other people to act congruent with their identities. What are the consequences of observing (a lack of) congruence in others? How will this affect interpersonal judgments and relationships between the observer and actor? Perhaps it is important to understand whether consumers only expect others to act consistent with their constantly observable identities, and whether they also hold this expectation towards identities triggered by the situation.

Giver- versus recipient-matched gifts

Besides investigating the positive effect on recipients' gift evaluation of gifts containing a reference to the giver, it is also important to put this gift strategy into perspective by comparing its influence with the positive effect of gifts containing a reference to the recipient.

In Studies 5 and 6, we investigated how giver-matched gifts relate to recipient-matched gifts and which of these gifts recipients prefer. Recipient-matched gifts are found to be slightly more positively evaluated (Study 5) than and preferred to (Study 6) giver-matched gifts. Interestingly, we found that the positive effect of a giver-matched gift declines when it is in contrast to the recipient's identity, whereas this decline in gift evaluation does not occur for recipient-matched gifts that are in contrast to the giver's identity (Study 5). These findings not only signal a boundary condition for the positive effects of giver-matched gifts to occur, i.e., the gift should not contrast with the recipient's identity, they also signal that gift recipients find it most important to satisfy their own tastes. Moreover, whereas it seems to hurt recipients when a gift is contrary to their own tastes, it does not hurt them when a gift goes against the giver's tastes.

Given that our findings revealed that recipient-matched gifts tend to be more positively evaluated than giver-matched ones, it does not mean that our findings concerning giver-matched gifts are only theoretically relevant. We are convinced that consumers can successfully employ the giver-matched strategy to their advantage in their gift-shopping trips. Previous research has shown that egocentric biases could drive gift givers' decisions, potentially leading to suboptimal decisions and decreasing recipients' happiness when they privilege gift attributes like monetary value and exclusivity (Flynn & Adams, 2009; Teigen et al., 2005). However, the current chapter draws a picture in which gift choices centered on the giver can be beneficial. By giving gifts that match their own identity, givers can increase recipient's evaluation of the gift. This positive effect of giver-matched gifts has been found to hold across different relationships between the giver and the recipient (e.g., close friend, acquaintance, or disliked other). Therefore, employing the giver-match gift strategy is especially valuable when the giver is not knowledgeable about the recipient and lacks information about the recipient's tastes and preferences.

Given our assumption that giver-matched gifts can be very valuable to improve gift evaluations, it is worth investigating under which circumstances recipients prefer giver-matched gifts to gifts that match their own preferences and tastes. Although consumers seem to be inherently more self-oriented and egocentric rather than other-oriented and altruistic (Schaller & Cialdini, 1988; Moore & Loewenstein, 2004), there could be instances in which people will have different priorities. In the evolutionary psychology literature, the link between strong altruistic feelings towards kinship is well established (Belk, 2010; Maner & Gaillot,

2007). Also in the consumption domain, people have been shown to favor kinship ties. For example, people share resources freely with family members even without any expectations of receiving anything in return (e.g., care, sex, or salary; Belk, 2010). Future research should provide an answer to this unexplored potential boundary condition and compare recipients' preference for recipient-matched gifts over giver-matched gifts across kinship and non-kinship ties.

Gifting strategies across cultures

Consumers' preference for gifts that are congruent with the identity of the giver or recipient might be influenced by cultural factors. Previous research has emphasized that East Asians derive a positive self-concept through seeking interpersonal harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). This state of interpersonal harmony is more likely to be reached when consumers are flexible towards their environment than by being consistent with their personal identities (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Consequently, East Asian consumers seem to value consistency in other's self-concepts to a lesser degree than North American consumers do (Heine, 2001; Suh, 2002), which indicates that among East Asians, gifts that are matched with the giver may not be particularly valued or preferred to gifts that do not. In addition, recent studies have shown that Asians are more likely than North Americans to assign self-serving motives to gift giving (Shen, Wan & Wyer, 2011). Therefore gifts that are matched with the characteristics of the giver might even strengthen these attributive assumptions and potentially cause lower gift evaluation of giver-matched gifts. In such situations, the cultural qualifications of our proposition may be even stronger, because in certain cultures adjusting to others is normatively prescribed (e.g., East Asian, Markus & Kitayama, 1994).

Conclusion

Research on gift giving used to emphasize the importance of givers accurately predicting the recipient's tastes to enhance gift evaluation (Sherry et al., 1993). In this chapter, we have shown that gift evaluation is not only dependent on the accurate prediction of recipients' tastes, but also on the match between the giver and gift. Givers who focus on their own identity attributes and incorporate these in their gifts can increase their recipients' gift evaluation and happiness with the gift. Recipients value such giver-matched gifts because they are congruent with their mental image of the identity of the giver. Although in comparison,

recipient-matched gifts are slightly more positively evaluated than giver-matched gifts, purchasing a gift that contains references to the giver might be particularly valuable to givers who do not have the knowledge to correctly assess the recipient's tastes.

CHAPTER 4

Consumer Responses to Favors across Relationships

Abstract

Favors, which are unexpected gestures, are regularly initiated in all kinds of relationships, including personal and commercial relationships. A consumer might decide to treat a friend for dinner and a retailer might give his/her customers a small gift for Christmas. In the current chapter, we investigate how consumers respond to favors when these distort the relational balance across relationships. Contrary to current relationship theories, we reveal that consumers are more likely to respond to a favor received from a friend than one received from a commercial partner (e.g., buy a thank you gift). The feelings of discomfort and guilt caused by the receipt of a favor can evoke the differences in responsiveness across relationships. When receiving a favor, consumers appear to be more likely to feel guilty towards a friend than towards a commercial partner. We try to align our findings with the current relationship theories, and suggest that it is important to study responsiveness to a favor at the individual level, focusing on the individual experiences and emotions, instead of at the relationship level, focusing on the overarching relational norms.

People are involved in various kinds of relationships, ranging from friendships and romantic relationships to business and commercial ones. Relationships are governed by norms (Rumble, Van Lange, & Parks, 2010) that direct how one should behave towards another person and what one may expect from each other. Nevertheless, people sometimes decide to give another a favor. By a favor we mean a kind gesture that is not necessarily expected given the usual behavioral patterns of the relational partner. For example, a friend you went out with for dinner insists on picking up the check; or a car mechanic throws in the oil for free after doing the car repairs. In these examples, neither the friend nor the car mechanic was under obligation to do the other person a favor. Although the recipients of favors tend to be grateful in these situations, it is unclear how the favor affects their future consumption decisions. Do favor recipients happily accept the kind gesture without having the intention to reciprocate, or are they compelled to respond to the favor? In this chapter, we address the thoughts and feelings experienced when we receive a favor from another person and how this affects our future consumption decisions. We distinguish between two types of relationships – personal and commercial – and show that, contrary to predictions based on relationship theories, consumers are more likely to accept and return a favor in personal relationships than in commercial relationships. We also test a theoretical modification that tries to align our findings with these current theoretical accounts and that suggests the importance of the individual's cognitions and feelings in the study of relational balance. We propose that consumers who have received a favor are likely to feel differently about the distorted relational balance than consumers who have initiated a favor, which leads to opposing predictions on the importance of balanced relationships for favor initiators and recipients.

Favors are not limited to contexts of personal relationship (e.g., friendships and romantic relationships); they are also given in commercial and business settings. A banker invites his client to discuss the finances over dinner at a restaurant instead of at the office, or a retailer sends each of his regular customers a bottle of wine as a Christmas present. Although favors can appear in a wide variety of relationships, the question is whether it leads to similar responses among the recipients. Presumably, the type of relationship affects consumers' responses towards the person who initiates the favor and consequently has direct relational consequences.

The current research defines a favor as an unexpected gesture given to the other person in a relationship, which is beyond the expectations defined by the relationship. Due to

its unexpected character, a favor can easily distort the relational balance because the relationship does not demand or obligate the provision of the favor. A relationship is balanced when the amount of resources one gives is in accordance with the amount resources one receives (Adams, 1963). Whereas current relationship theories (Clark & Mills, 2011; Fiske, 1992; Heyman & Ariely, 2004; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005) suggest that a balanced relationship is more important in commercial relationships than in personal relationships, we argue that within the context of a relationship that is unbalanced to one's advantage, consumers attach more value to restoring the balance in a personal than in a commercial relationship.

We presume that consumers experience greater negative feelings of discomfort and guilt when they receive a favor from a friend than when they receive it from a commercial partner. This difference in negative feelings across personal and commercial relationships causes consumers' responsiveness and preference to restore the distorted relational balance after receiving the favor. In this chapter, we present seven studies that show that when a favor has been received and the relationship balance is distorted to one's advantage, consumers who receive a favor in personal relationships find it more important to be responsive to this gesture and to restore the balance than do consumers who receive a favor in commercial relationships. In addition, we show that this difference only holds for relationships that are distorted to the consumer's advantage (i.e., one receives the favor) but not for ones that are distorted to the consumer's disadvantage (i.e., one has initiated the favor). This insight tries to reconcile our findings with relationship theories, and contributes to a complete understanding of the importance of balanced relationships.

4.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Favors across Relationship Types

Consumers receive favors in all kind of relationships. In the current chapter, we focus on two common but distinct relational archetypes: friendships and commercial relationships. Friendships are part of our personal network and are seen as a very distinct type of relationship; they are considered to be high in closeness and naturalness and they exist without a contractual basis (Wiseman, 1986). Friendships are characterized by mutual liking (Annis, 1987). An example of a friendship would be the long lasting relationship with a person one

met in middle school. A friendship is built on mutual care, which means that one helps when one's friend is in need (Annis, 1987; Hays, 1989). This mutual care is not only about the care for the persons involved; it is also inherently about the care for the relationship with the other person. Thus the goal of a friendship is the relationship itself: friends aim to maintain the relationship itself (Hays, 1989; Rawlins, 2008).

Commercial relationships are different from friendships in many ways. Whereas friendships are focused on the relationship, commercial relationships are characterized by their contractual basis and by the individual goal of the parties to derive the maximum positive outcome from the relationship (Loewenstein, Thompson, & Bazerman, 1989; Chaffey, 2014). Thus the relationship is considered a medium for achieving one's goal. Examples of commercial relationships are the relationship between a hairdresser and the customer, between a banker and the account holder, and between a retailer and a producer. A commercial relationship can involve both business-to-consumer and business-to-business relationships. Although commercial relationships aim to last, the main driver to be involved in the relationship are the merits one receives from being in it. If a hairdresser fails to offer the expected quality of services or if the customer does not pay, then the relationship will be terminated. Thus the individual output relative to the input of both parties dictates the continuity of the relationship. A favor in commercial relationships concerns behavior that would not be expected based on the contractual basis of the relationship. For example, when your hairdresser gives you a free product that is actually not part of the services you paid for, e.g., a bottle of shampoo.

Relational Balance Distortion

Most relationships tend to be balanced over time (Heider, 1958; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Fiske, 1991). However, events that distort the relational balance often occur. A relational inequity arises when the ratio between a consumer's outcomes and inputs is not in accordance with the ratio between the outcomes and inputs of the relational partner (Adams, 1965). The inputs and outcomes in a relationship can be material (e.g., money or a gift) or immaterial (e.g., effort or a piece of advice). We believe that a favor, as an unexpected positively intended gesture, can distort the balance of all kinds of relationships (excluding those that are built on dependency, e.g., parent-child relationships) because when a favor is exchanged, the amount one gives to the other person does not correspond with the amount one receives from that

same person. The recipient of the favor has received more than (s)he has given, whereas the initiator of the favor has given more than (s)he has received. The favor is thus to the recipient's advantage: it positively affects his or her input/output ratio.

When a favor is received and the relational balance is distorted to their advantage, consumers might experience an increased level of discomfort and guilt (Dahl et al., 2005; Adams, 1965). Discomfort and guilt are two highly related negative feelings that consumers prefer not to experience (Fehr & Stamps, 1979; Jones & Kugler, 1993; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992), increasing people's intentions to restore the relational balance (Fong, Huang, & Offerman, 2007; Dahl, et al., 2005; Uehara, 1995). As a consequence, these negative feelings affect consumers' daily consumption. Guilt influences people's prosocial (Estrada-Hollenbeck & Heatherton, 1997; Xu, Begue, & Shankland, 2011; Carlsmith & Gross, 1969), sustainable (Khan, Dhar & Wertenbroch 2004), and ethical consumption behaviors (Steenhaut & Van Kenhove, 2005; 2006). For example, guilt has been found to increase donations (Basil, Ridgway, & Basil, 2006; Hibbert, Smith, Davies, & Ireland, 2007). Guilt can also enforce excessive eating and vice food consumption (Mishra & Mishra, 2011; Mohr, Lichtenstein, & Janiszewski, 2012). In general, guilt seems to activate behavior that resolves the negative feeling. Thus the discomfort experienced after having received a favor could potentially affect consumers' responses. However, the degree of discomfort and guilt experienced could depend on the person who gave the favor to the consumer (i.e. a friend or commercial partner).

As mentioned above, the main goal of friendships is very distinct from that of commercial relationships. Whereas friendships evolve around the maintenance of the relationship, in commercial relationships the main concern is to maximize one's individual outcomes and the relationship only serves as an instrument to reach this goal. Consequently, consumers might perceive a received favor to be more threatening to the goals of their friendships than to goals of their commercial relationships. We argue then that when favors are received, painful feelings of discomfort and guilt are more likely to be evoked in friendships than in commercial relationships. Previous research supports our reasoning, emphasizing that the experience of guilt is more likely to arise in close relationships (Dahl et al., 2005) and in relationships built on mutual concern (Baumeister et al., 1994). Thus we expect that when a relationship is distorted to the advantage of someone after the receipt of a favor, the advantaged person will experience greater discomfort and consequently, will be

more motivated to respond to this favor by restoring the balance when the favor is given by a friend than when it is given by a commercial partner. This effect exists independent of the type of favor: that is, when the favor is held constant, the favor causes greater discomfort among friends than among commercial partners who are advantaged.

H1: *Consumers are more likely to respond to a favor by restoring the advantageous distorted balance in friendships than in commercial relationships.*

H2: *Consumers experience a higher level of discomfort when they receive a favor from a friend than when they receive it from a commercial partner, mediating the greater need to respond to the favor and restore the advantageous distorted balance.*

Contrasting theories

We are not the first to be interested in the value people place on balanced relationships. Relationship theories have also looked at the importance of relational balance to develop relationship frameworks (e.g., Clark & Mills, 2011; Fiske, 1992). Although our hypotheses naturally flow from the literature on guilt and discomfort, they do not fit current relationship theories. Relationship theories suggest that a balanced relationship is strongly valued among commercial partners (Clark & Mills, 2011; Heyman & Ariely, 2004; Fiske, 1992), but that it is considered less important in personal relationships such as friendships. They argue that exchange norms motivate people in commercial relationships to keep track of what has been given and received in order to balance the relationship (Clark & Mills, 2011). Within commercial relationships “effort will be exerted according to reciprocity, and the amount of compensation directly influences individuals’ level of effort” (Heyman & Ariely, 2004, p. 788), and “exchange will be a commodity in proportion to what is received as a function of market prices or utilities” (Fiske, 1992, p. 694). Relationship theories also suggest that due to the communal orientation and social norms, friends are not obligated to repair a distorted balance (Clark & Mills, 2011), and that if friends are compensated, the amount of compensation is irrelevant (Heyman & Ariely, 2004). Applied to a favor-receiving context, these theories would thus suggest that consumers are expected to be more responsive to a favor received from a commercial partner than from a friend.

At first sight, the conflicting predictions between our account and the relationship theories seem problematic. However, we believe that this friction can be solved when the importance of balanced relationships is studied at the individual level (i.e., by addressing individual cognitions and feelings) instead of the relationship level (i.e., by addressing aspects of the relationships such as norms). Relationship theories discuss the importance of balanced relationships from the perspective of the relationship, describing in which relationships people (do not) value balance by using relational norms. Relationship theories assume that balance is more important in commercial relationships governed by a tit-for-tat strategy (Loewenstein et al., 1989; Clark & Mills, 2011) than in friendships governed by mutual care (Clark & Mills, 2011). A more detailed approach that focuses on the cognitions and feelings of the individuals within a relationship could be more informative to discuss the importance of a balanced relationship and predict the behavioral responses to a balance distortion. We hypothesize that consumers who have received a favor will respond differently to a distorted balance than consumers who have initiated a favor.

In this chapter, we mainly focus on consumers' reactions to the receipt of a favor and to an advantageous distorted relational balance. In the eyes of the recipient, a favor threatens the friendships' goal (i.e., mutual care and maintenance of the relationship) but not the commercial relationships' goal (i.e., maximizing one's own outcomes). Furthermore, we could also pay attention to the favor initiators' (expected) responses. Consumers who give a favor to another person distort the relational balance to their own disadvantage (i.e., the input of the initiator is larger than his or her outcomes). Such a disadvantageous distorted relational balance fits some relationship goals better than others. From the favor initiator's perspective, a favor does not threaten the mutual concern on which friendships are built or the relationship goal to prolong the friendship. More specifically, the initiator perceives the favor as contributing to the friendships' goal, investing and strengthening the relationship via kind gestures (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Schwartz, 1967). The kind gesture is viewed as a symbol of care. Unlike in friendships, a disadvantageous distorted relational balance might be less helpful for attaining the goals of commercial relationships. Both partners use the commercial relationship to maximize their own outcomes. Consumers who initiate a favor in a commercial relationship diminish their direct outcomes and distance themselves from their goal. Thus, from the initiator's perspective, giving a favor does not threaten a friendship's goal; it only threatens a commercial relationship's goal. Consequently, and consistent with predictions

made by current relationship theories, we suppose that the initiator finds it more important that a commercial partner, instead of a friend, responds to the favor and restores the relational balance.

Thus by studying the importance of balanced relationships at the individual level (i.e., focus specifically on the cognitions and feelings of partners), the friction between our position and that of relationship frameworks could potentially be solved. If we compare the favor initiator's and favor recipient's views on the distorted relational balance, this means that, on the one hand, in friendships, consumers who received the favor find it more important to restore the relational balance than consumers who initiated the favor because they are both concerned about the other person. On the other hand, the opposite holds true for commercial relationships. In commercial relationships, consumers who initiated the favor are expected to find it more important to restore the relational balance than consumers who received the favor, because they both want to maximize the own outcomes. In our view, it is crucial to study the importance of relational balance and its behavioral consequences at the individual level, focusing on the responses of both relationship partners, because they might differ when a favor has been initiated. This difference will not be detected when one studies the importance of relational balance at the relational level, which focuses on overarching relational norms to signal the importance of balance across relationships.

H3: *In friendships, people who initiate the balance-distorting favor find it less important that the relationship balance is restored than the people who receive the balance-distorting favor.*

H4: *In commercial relationships, people who initiate the balance-distorting favor find it more important that the relationship balance is restored than the people who receive the balance-distorting favor.*

4.2 OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Our research aims to clarify how people across relationships react upon receiving a favor that creates an advantageous distorted balance in relationships. In friendships, people feel highly uncomfortable after receiving a favor, thus evoking a strong need to restore the

balance; whereas in commercial relationships, this need is much lower or even not present. With the help of seven studies, we provide support for our hypotheses and show that feelings of discomfort drive the differences across relationships that are in need of restoration. The studies differ from each other in the type of commercial relationship they address and in the research methodology used (i.e., scenario studies and a behavioral experiment) to show the range and robustness of our findings.

Studies 1A to 1C test the basic premise that people differently want to restore a positively distorted balance across friendships and commercial relationships (Hypothesis 1). Where friendships are similar in nature, commercial relationships tend to differ from each other to a great extent. Therefore we tested our proposition in three commercial settings: commercial relationships with an accountant, with a hairdresser, and with a retailer. We manipulated the relationship but kept the balance distortion and all the other aspects of the context constant. The findings of the three studies point out that people feel a stronger need to restore the advantageous distorted balance in friendships than in commercial relationships. This first step supports Hypothesis 1 and signals that the need to restore the balance differs depending on people's relationship.

In Studies 2A & 2B, we again test our main hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) and investigate furthermore whether this higher need to respond to the favor and restore the distorted balance in friendships is caused by stronger feelings of discomfort (Hypothesis 2). We again find that people are more likely to restore an advantageous distorted balance in friendships than in commercial relationships. We also find initial evidence that an increased level of discomfort in friendships explains the differences found. In addition, we are able to dismiss an alternative explanation that Studies 1A to 1C did not control for: we showed that it is the positively distorted balance, and not a general disposition towards the favor initiator, which causes the differences between friendships and commercial relationships.

In Study 3, we investigate a moderator of our effect, revealing that the increased responsiveness to a distorted balance in friendships, compared to the responsiveness in commercial relationships, only holds when the relationship is distorted to one's advantage (i.e. when one has received a favor). When the relational balance is distorted to one's disadvantage (i.e. when one has initiated a favor) there are different results across friendships and commercial relationships. Friends who have initiated a favor do not expect the other person to respond to it.

Table 4.1: Means and Standard Deviations per Condition per Study of Chapter 4

Study 1A	Friendship	Commercial		
Responsiveness to favor	5.14 (2.18)	4.19 (2.17)		
Study 1B	Friendship	Commercial		
Responsiveness to favor	6.06 (1.98)	5.08 (2.71)		
Perceived costs	3.85 (1.65)	3.38 (1.50)		
Study 1C	Friendship	Commercial		
Responsiveness to favor	5.76 (1.39)	4.56 (1.72)		
Perceived costs	4.68 (1.75)	5.05 (1.43)		
Study 2A	Friendship		Commercial	
	Advantageous	Balanced	Advantageous	Balanced
Responsiveness to favor	6.41 (0.82)	4.24 (1.58)	5.06 (1.75)	3.58 (1.95)
Discomfort	5.64 (1.53)	3.42 (1.79)	4.58 (1.96)	3.45 (2.09)
Study 2B	Friendship		Commercial	
	Small advantage	Large advantage	Small advantage	Large advantage
Responsiveness to favor	6.80 (2.33)	5.90 (2.45)	5.24 (2.59)	4.34 (2.61)
Amount willing to spend (\$)	27.67 (22.21)	16.26 (13.87)	17.47 (14.39)	14.51 (16.94)
Discomfort	5.02 (2.34)	3.68 (2.11)	4.16 (2.36)	3.87 (2.25)
Study 3	Friendship		Commercial	
	Advantageous	Disadvantageous	Advantageous	Disadvantageous
Responsiveness to favor	7.68 (1.40)	5.50 (2.01)	5.71 (2.36)	5.43 (2.49)
Comfort <i>(lower scores represent higher discomfort)</i>	4.89 (1.85)	6.59 (1.46)	5.32 (2.13)	5.16 (2.37)
Study 4	Friendship		Commercial	
	Advantageous	Disadvantageous	Advantageous	Disadvantageous
Amount of tickets spend on other (%)	61.43 (28.30)	39.88 (27.78)	44.66 (22.17)	23.13 (26.54)

In Study 4 we investigate our hypotheses in a different methodological setting. Instead of using scenario studies, we test our premises in a behavioral laboratory experiment. Similar to our previous studies, we find that people restore a advantageous distorted balance more often when they are involved in a friendship than when they are involved in a commercial relationship.

4.3 STUDIES 1A – 1C

In Studies 1A, 1B, and 1C, we investigate Hypothesis 1, i.e., whether consumers feel a higher need to respond to the receipt of a favor and restore the advantageous distorted balance with a friend than with a commercial partner. Three different scenario studies show congruent results that confirm our prediction and indicate the robustness of this finding across various commercial settings. The dependent variables are similar across studies, with some minor adjustments based on the specific scenarios.

Study 1A: Method

Participants. One hundred three American adults participated in the study on Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for \$0.10 (60.2 % male, $M_{age} = 32.29$, $SD_{age} = 10.74$). The participants were randomly assigned to either the friendship or the commercial relationship condition.

Procedure. Depending on the condition, the participants were introduced to Alex, who was their hairdresser (commercial relationship condition) or their close friend working as a hairdresser (friendship condition). In both scenarios, the participants received a free bottle of a new professional brand of shampoo. In the commercial relationship condition, Alex gave the free bottle of shampoo at the end of the appointment (after payment). In the friendship condition, Alex gave the free bottle of shampoo to his or her friend when they got together.

After the participants finished reading the scenario, they were requested to indicate on three items whether they wanted to respond to this gesture and restore the advantageous distorted balance: “To what extent do you feel you should give something in return the next time you see Alex?”, “To what extent do you feel you are obligated to give something in return the next time you see Alex?” and “To what extent do you feel motivated to give

something in return the next time you see Alex?”). The three items were measured on a 9-point scale [1 = not at all, 9 = extremely] and were averaged into an overall responsiveness score ($\alpha = .918$).

Study 1A: Results

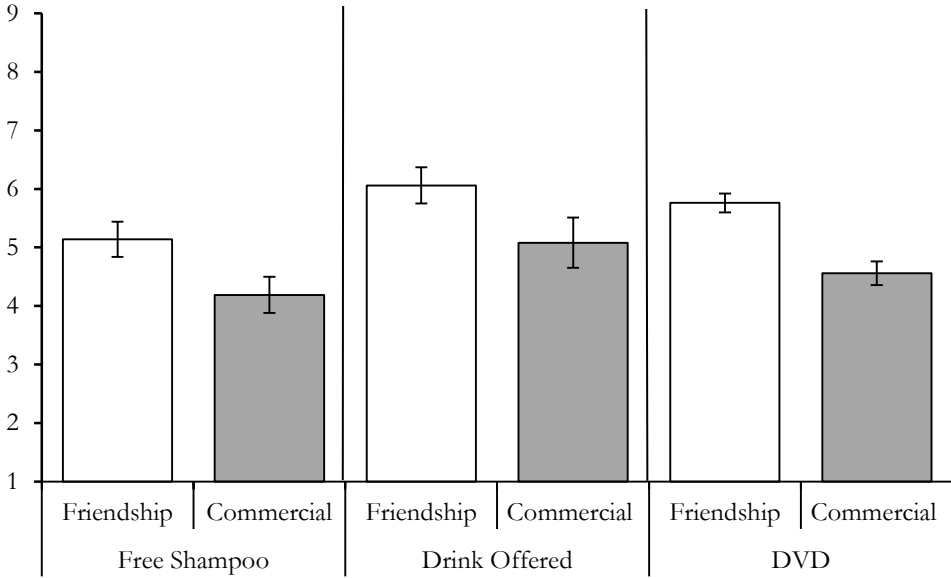
An independent t-test of relationship on the responsiveness score showed that the participants felt a larger need to respond to the received favor when the free shampoo was given by their friend working as a hairdresser ($M = 5.14, SD = 2.18$) compared to when it was given by a person who was only their hairdresser ($M = 4.19, SD = 2.17, t(100) = 2.219, p = .029, Cohen's d = 0.44$; see Figure 4.1).

Study 1B: Method

Participants. Eighty-one American adults participated in a scenario study on Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for \$0.10 (56.8% male, $M_{age} = 31.98, SD_{age} = 8.58$). The participants were randomly assigned to either the friendship or the commercial relationship condition.

Procedure. All the participants read a scenario in which they were out for dinner in a restaurant with their sibling, and another person sitting on the other side of the room offered them a drink. We manipulated whether the participants read they received this drink from a good friend (friendship condition) or their accountant (commercial relationship condition). Thereafter, the participants indicated to what extent they wanted to respond to the gesture and restore the advantageous distorted balance. Three items ($\alpha = .902$) measured this responsiveness to the favor on a 9-point scale [1 = not at all, 9 = extremely]: “To what extent do you feel you should return the gesture?”, “To what extent do you feel you are obligated to return the gesture?” and “To what extent do you feel motivated to return the gesture?” ($\alpha = .902$). Moreover, we supposed that depending on the assigned condition, the participants could interpret the gesture as either more or less costly. Thus, we asked the participants to estimate the personal costs of the gesture: “How costly was the gesture for your friend [accountant]?” [9-point scale: 1 = not costly at all, 9 = extremely costly].

Figure 4.1: Responsiveness Scores across Relationships in Studies 1A – C



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Study 1B: Results

A Levene's test for equality of variances showed that equal variances on the responsiveness measure could not be assumed ($F = 8.969, p = .004$). Therefore a t-test with unequal variances assumed was implemented to test whether the relationship type affected the participants' responsiveness score. The findings showed a marginal effect of relationship on the willingness to restore the positively distorted balance ($t(71.446) = 1.86, p = .067, Cohen's d = 0.41$; see Figure 4.1). The participants were more likely to respond and restore the advantageous distorted balance when they received a favor from a friend ($M = 6.06, SD = 1.98$) than when they received the favor from a commercial partner ($M = 5.08, SD = 2.71$). Importantly, these effects could not be explained by a difference in the perceived costs of the gesture across relationships. A t-test revealed that the participants in the friendship condition ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.65$) did not perceive the gesture to be more costly than the participants in the commercial relationship condition did ($M = 3.38, SD = 1.497; t(79) = 1.366, p = .176$).

Study 1C: Method

Participants. One hundred forty-two students from a Dutch university participated in a scenario study in exchange for course credits (61.3% male, $M_{age} = 19.19$, $SD_{age} = 1.78$). The participants were randomly assigned to either the friendship or commercial relationship condition.

Procedure. All the participants were asked to read a scenario and imagine that they recently got a subscription to a magazine and received an accompanying voucher for a season of their favorite TV show on DVD, which they could pick up at a local multimedia store. Together with a friend, they arrived at the multimedia store in the downtown shopping district to pick up the DVD box, and unfortunately they noticed that the DVD box was currently sold out. However, it would be on stock again the next day. The participants were told that that they did not live close by and that it would take them more than an hour to again visit the multimedia store the next day. In the friendship condition, the participants read that their friend, who lived next door to the multimedia store, offered to pick up the DVD the next day and to send it to them. In the commercial relationship condition, the participants read that the owner of the store offered to mail the DVD to them for free. In both scenarios, this was a gesture of goodwill on the part of the storeowner and the friend because the publisher of the magazine was the one responsible for the availability of the DVD box at the stores where the voucher was valid (see Appendix C for the detailed scenarios of Studies 1A to 1C).

After the participants read the scenario, they were asked to indicate on three items whether they wanted to respond to the favor and restore the advantageous distorted balance [1 = not at all, 9 = extremely]: “To what extent do you feel you should do something in return?”, “To what extent do you feel you are obligated to do something in return?” and “To what extent do you feel motivated to do something in return?”. We averaged the answers on these three items into one overall responsiveness score ($\alpha = .782$). Similar to Study 1B, the participants estimated the costs of the gesture. As the relationship manipulation in the scenario could lead to different perceptions of both the monetary and effortful costs, the participants were asked to answer two questions: “How costly was the gesture for your friend [the owner of the store]?” [9-point scale: 1 = not costly at all, 9 = extremely costly] and “How much effort did it require your friend [the owner of the store] to send the DVD?” [9-point scale: 1 = not much effort, 9 = extremely much effort]. The two items were averaged in an overall cost score ($\rho = .447$).

Study 1C: Results

An independent t-test of relationship on the responsiveness score revealed that when the DVD was sent by a friend ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.39$) the participants were more likely to respond to this favor than when the DVD was sent by the owner of the store ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.72$, $t(140) = 4.55$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.77; see Figure 4.1). In addition, the perceived costs of the favor did not differ across relationships. The participants in the friendship condition ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.75$) did not view the favor as more costly than the participants in the commercial relationship condition did ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.43$; $t(140) = -1.39$, $p = .165$).

Discussion Studies 1A to 1C

The findings of Studies 1A to 1C together confirm Hypothesis 1, indicating that consumers are more likely to restore an advantageous distorted balance and positively respond to a favor when it is given by a friend than when the favor is given by a commercial partner. This difference in responsiveness to a favor cannot be ascribed to a difference in the perceived costs of the favor across relationships. It could be reasoned that a favor, such as offering a drink, is perceived to be less expensive for a commercial partner than for a friend. However, we rule out this alternative explanation. In addition, the lower responsiveness scores in the commercial relationship condition can also not be explained as a payment for the existing partnership. It could be argued that for ongoing commercial relationships, the receipt of a favor is interpreted as a payment for the consumer's loyalty, and therefore it restores the equity in the relationship. However, in Study 1C, the commercial relationship (with the multimedia storeowner) did not exist prior to the consumer receiving the favor. This means that, if it were not true that consumers are less responsive to favors in commercial relationships than they are in friendships, then we should have found similar responsiveness scores across conditions in Study 1C.

The findings of Studies 1A to 1C are consistent with our theorizing that consumers are particularly responsive to a favor received from a friend and less responsive to a favor received from a commercial partner. We suggest that the advantageous distorted relational balance after receiving a favor threatens the friendship's goal (i.e., the aim to prolong the relationship) but not the goal of commercial relationships (i.e., maximizing one's own output). Therefore, consumers who are advantaged by a friend are expected to feel more discomfort than consumers who are advantaged by a commercial partner. We hypothesize that this

stronger feelings of discomfort at receiving a favor from a friend, compared to a commercial partner, drives the responsiveness of the recipient to restore the advantageous distorted balance. This mediating process, expressed in Hypothesis 2, will be tested in Study 2A and Study 2B.

Apart from testing the mediating process, Studies 2A and 2B also serve to exclude an alternative explanation for the difference found in Studies 1A to 1C. In Study 1A – C we compared an advantageous distorted balance in friendships with an advantageous distorted balance in commercial relationships. We attribute the difference found to the different responses of consumers toward an advantageous distorted balance in friendships versus in commercial relationships. Consumers experience more discomfort after receiving a favor in a friendship than in a commercial relationship. Nevertheless, one could also argue that consumers have a general disposition that is more positive towards friends than towards commercial partners evoking the difference in responsiveness across relationships. To test this alternative explanation, we included a balanced relationship manipulation in Study 2A. If the alternative explanation accounts for the findings of Studies 1A to 1C, then the participants in Study 2A should be similarly responsive to a friend (or commercial partner) who gave them a favor as to a friend (or commercial partner) who did not give them a favor.

4.4 STUDIES 2A & 2B

Studies 2A and 2B delve into discomfort as the underlying process that evokes the difference in consumers' responsiveness towards an advantageous distorted balance across friendships and commercial relationships. We study in two ways our predicted interaction between relationship type and advantageous balance distortion. Study 2A focuses on the existence of an advantageous distorted balance, whereas Study 2B looks at the size of the advantageous distortion. Based on our theory, differences in consumers' responsiveness to a favor between friendships and commercial relationships should not only be found when we compare receiving a favor to not receiving a favor but also when we compare a small favor to a larger one. We expect discomfort to grow when the advantageous balance distortion becomes larger, especially within friendships.

Study 2A: Method

Participants. Four hundred eight American adults participated in a scenario study on Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for \$0.15 (51.2% male, $M_{age} = 35.65$, $SD_{age} = 11.71$). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in a 2 (relationship: friendship vs. commercial relationships) \times 2 (balance: advantageous balance distortion vs. no balance distortion) between-subjects design. The scores of two participants in the friendship – advantageous balance distortion condition were marked as outliers and were then excluded from further analyses.⁴

Procedure. All the participants were asked to read a scenario about Robin Davis, a good friend or a bank representative, whom they met for lunch to catch up [friendship conditions] or to discuss their finances [commercial relationship conditions]. We ensured that all the participants read a scenario in which Robin’s gender was the same as the participant’s. The participants read that Robin offered to pay for the lunch. In the advantageous balance distortion conditions, the participants were told that Robin also paid for the entire lunch the previous time they met. In the no-balance distortion conditions, the participants were not told about a previous lunch encounter. Afterwards the participants indicated to what degree they would insist on paying for today’s lunch: “In response, how strongly would you insist that you pay for lunch for both of you today?” (1 = I would not insist on paying at all, 7 = I would very strongly insist on paying). In addition, they indicated their anticipated discomfort (“I would feel uncomfortable if Robin Davis would pay for lunch (again)”; 1 = not at all, 7 = extremely) and beliefs about impoliteness to reject the offer (“It would be impolite to insist strongly that I pay this time”; 1 = not at all, 7 = extremely).

Study 2A: Results

Willingness to pay. A two-way ANOVA of relationship and balance on the willingness to pay for the lunch revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 402) = 4.819$, $p = .029$; see Figure 4.2).⁵ A closer investigation revealed that all conditions differed significantly from each

⁴ All outlier analyses in this chapter are based on the Box-and-Whisker plots method (Tukey, 1977), excluding extreme values. This outlier detection method only revealed outliers in Study 2A and Study 2B. However, the inclusion of the outliers did not change any of the results.

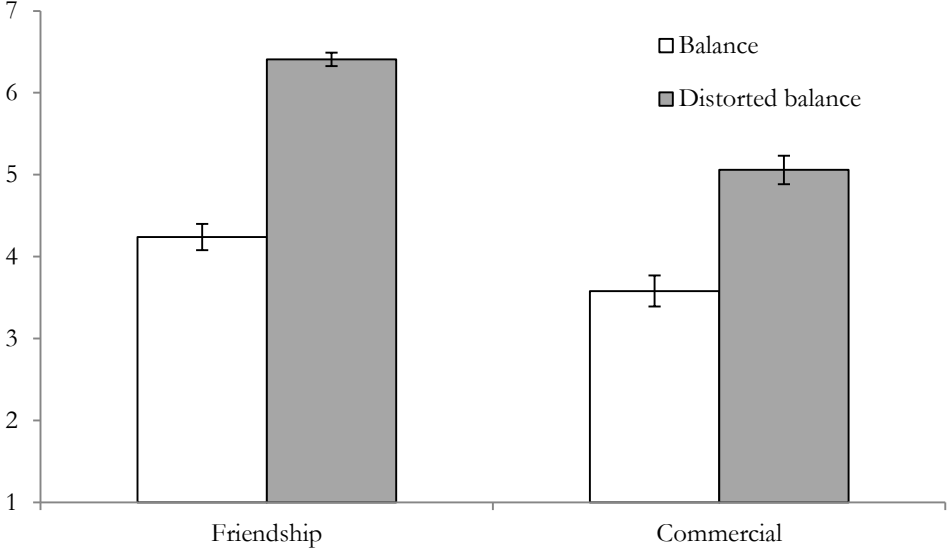
⁵ When we controlled for participants’ belief that rejecting the offer was impolite, we still found a (marginal) significant interaction effect ($F(1,402) = 3.031$, $p = .082$) on the willingness to pay for the lunch and on the level of anticipated discomfort ($F(1,402) = 8.288$, $p = .004$). For both measures, the conditions were found to display a similar pattern of results when we included impoliteness as control variable.

other (t 's (402) > 2.946, p 's < .003, *Cohen's d* > 0.42). The positive effect of an advantageous balance distortion on participants' willingness to pay depended on the relationship and was found to be larger in friendships than in commercial relationships. The participants in the friendship – advantageous balance distortion condition were found to be the most willing to pay for the lunch ($M = 6.41$, $SD = 0.82$), followed by the participants in the commercial relationship – advantageous balance distortion condition ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.75$), then by those in the friendship – no balance distortion condition ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.58$), and lastly, by the participants in the commercial relationship – no balance distortion condition ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.95$).

Discomfort. To investigate whether the participants expressed different levels of discomfort across conditions, we performed a two-way ANOVA of relationship and balance on the anticipated discomfort, which showed a significant interaction effect ($F(1,402) = 8.801$, $p = .003$; see Figure 4.3).¹ The positive effect of an advantageous balance distortion on participants' anticipated discomfort depended on the relationship and was larger in friendships than in commercial relationships. A simple effects analysis showed that all conditions differed significantly (t 's (402) > 4.099, p 's < .001, *Cohen's d* > 0.57), except for the contrast between the friendship – no balance distortion and commercial relationship – no balance distortion conditions ($t(402) = .118$, $p = .906$). The participants in the friendship – advantageous balance distortion condition anticipated to experience the highest discomfort after Robin paid for the lunch ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.53$), followed by the participants in the commercial relationship – advantageous balance distortion condition ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.96$), then by the participants in the commercial relationship – no balance distortion condition ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 2.09$), and by the those in the friendship – no balance distortion condition ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.79$).

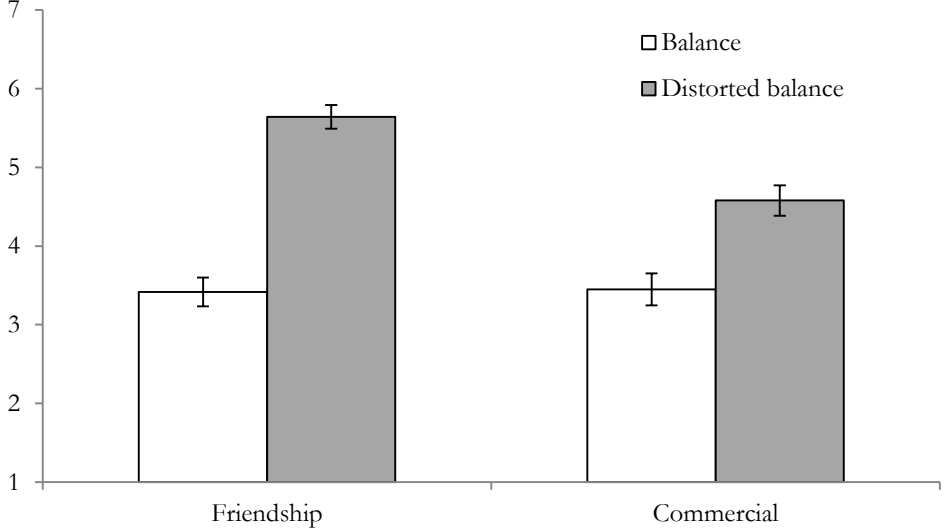
Mediation. A mediation bootstrapping analysis with 5000 samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) was run to test whether this anticipated discomfort could explain the differences in the willingness to pay for the lunch across the conditions. We revealed that discomfort indeed mediated the effect of balance on the willingness to pay for the lunch in both the friendship and the commercial relationship conditions (friendship: $b = 1.14$, $0.8338 < CI\ 95\% < 1.4878$; commercial relationship: $b = 0.5808$, $0.2875 < CI\ 95\% < 0.8849$; see Figure 4.4). Consistent with the interaction effect found on discomfort and willingness to pay for the lunch, we found

Figure 4.2: Willingness to Pay across Conditions in Study 2A



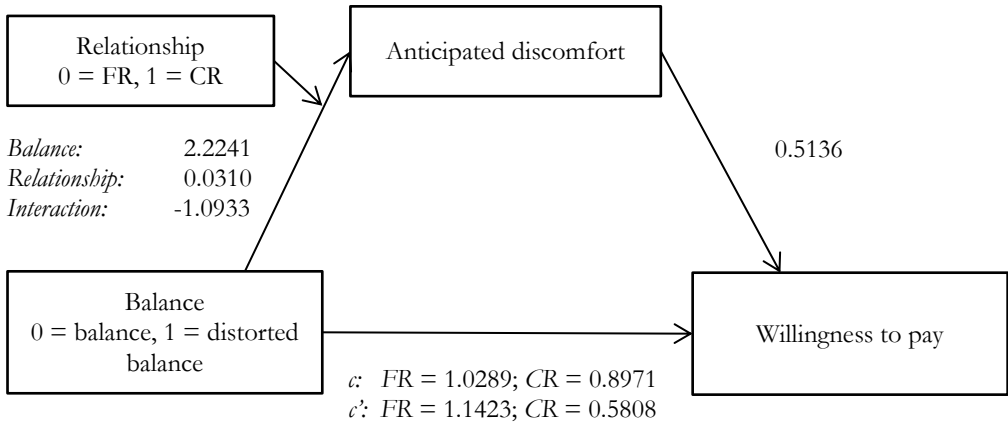
Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Figure 4.3: Level of Discomfort across Conditions of Study 2A



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Figure 4.4: Mediation Model as Tested in Study 2A



that the indirect effect of balance via discomfort is larger for friendships than for commercial relationships.

Study 2B: Method

Participants. Four hundred nine American adults participated in a scenario study on Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for \$0.20 (52.8% male, $M_{age} = 33.01$, $SD_{age} = 11.01$). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in a 2 (relationship: friendship vs. commercial relationships) \times 2 (balance: small-advantage balance distortion vs. large-advantage balance distortion) between-subjects design. The scores of eight participants across all conditions were marked as outliers and were excluded from further analyses.¹

Procedure. All the participants were asked to read a scenario about Robin Davis, similar to the one in Study 2A. This scenario manipulated the relationship with Robin as either a friend or a bank representative. In the small-advantage balance distortion conditions, the participants read that at the end of the lunch, Robin picked up the check and paid for both of you. In the large-advantage balance distortion conditions, the participants read that Robin picked up the check and paid for both of you, just like the previous time they met for lunch. Thus the difference between the small- and large-advantage balance distortion conditions was the size of the favor from Robin: i.e., : paying for lunch either once or twice. Next, the

participants were asked to indicate how they felt afterwards: “After Robin paying for lunch, I would feel ...” (uncomfortable, guilty, uneasy, happy, proud; 1 = not at all, 9 = very much). The first three items (uncomfortable, guilty, and uneasy) were included to measure discomfort ($\alpha = .906$), and the latter two items (happy and proud) served as filler items. After the participants indicated their feelings, they read that they would again meet Robin Davis in two weeks, which would give them the opportunity to purchase a thank-you gift. Subsequently, the participants were asked to complete two measures on their consumption intentions to purchase a thank-you gift: “How strongly do you wish to get a present for Robin Davis to thank him/her?” (1 = I do not care about getting a present for him/her at all, 9 = I find it extremely important to get him/her a present) and “How much money, in US Dollars, would you spend on a present for Robin Davis?”

Study 2B: Results

Intentions to purchase a thank-you gift. A two-way ANOVA of relationship and balance on the wish to purchase a thank-you gift showed a main effect of relationship ($F(1,397) = 39.110$, $p < .001$) and a main effect of balance ($F(1,397) = 12.986$, $p < .001$). Contrary to our expectations, we did not find an interaction effect ($F(1,397) = .000$, $p = .993$). A simple contrast analysis showed that all conditions differed significantly (marginal) from each other (t 's (397) > 1.876, p 's < .061, d 's > 0.26; see Figure 4.5). The participants in the friendship – large-advantage balance distortion condition most strongly intended to purchase a thank-you gift ($M = 6.80$, $SD = 2.33$), followed by those in the friendship – small-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 2.45$), then by the participants in the commercial relationship – large-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 2.59$), and finally by the commercial relationship – small-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 2.61$).

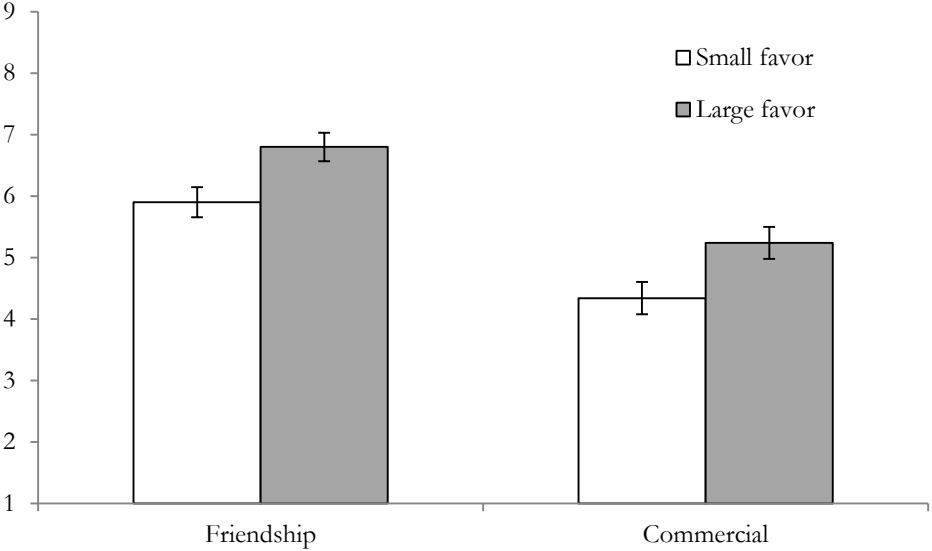
Amount of money willing to spend on a thank-you gift. Another two-way ANOVA was run to test whether relationship and balance had an effect on the participants' indication of the amount they were willing to spend on a thank-you gift. An interaction effect of relationship and balance was found ($F(1,397) = 6.064$, $p < .014$). Confirming Hypothesis 1, the positive effect of the size of an advantageous balance distortion on the indicated amount of money people were willing to spend on a thank-you gift depended on the relationship and this positive effect was found to be larger in friendships than in commercial relationships. A more

detailed investigation of the amount indicated per condition revealed that the amount indicated by the participants in the friendship – large-advantage balance distortion condition was significantly different ($t's (397) > 4.210, p's < .001, Cohen's d > 0.42$) from the amount indicated by the participants in the other three conditions, which were equal to each other ($t's (397) < 1.217, p's > .227$; see Figure 4.6). The participants in the friendship – large-advantage balance distortion condition indicated to spend the most money on a thank-you gift ($M = 27.67, SD = 22.21$), followed by the participants in the commercial relationship – large-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 17.47, SD = 14.39$), then by those in the friendship – small-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 16.26, SD = 13.87$), and lastly by the participants in the commercial relationship – small-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 14.51, SD = 16.94$).

Discomfort. To investigate whether the participants experienced different levels of discomfort, we conducted a two-way ANOVA of relationship and balance on the average discomfort score. As expected, we found an interaction effect ($F(1, 397) = 5.246, p = .023$), revealing that the increase in discomfort between a large- and a small-advantage balance distortion is greater for friendships than for commercial relationships. In line with the findings on the amount people were willing to spend on a thank-you gift, we found that the participants in the friendship – large-advantage balance distortion experienced more discomfort than the participants in the other three conditions ($t's (397) > 2.670, p's < .008, Cohen's d > 0.38$). The other three conditions did not differ significantly on the reported discomfort ($t's (397) < 1.485, p's > .138$; see Figure 4.7). The participants in the friendship – large-advantage balance distortion condition experienced the greatest discomfort ($M = 5.02, SD = 2.34$), followed by those in the commercial relationship – large-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 4.16, SD = 2.36$), then by the participants in the commercial relationship – small-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 3.87, SD = 2.25$), and lastly by those in the friendship – small-advantage balance distortion condition ($M = 3.68, SD = 2.11$).

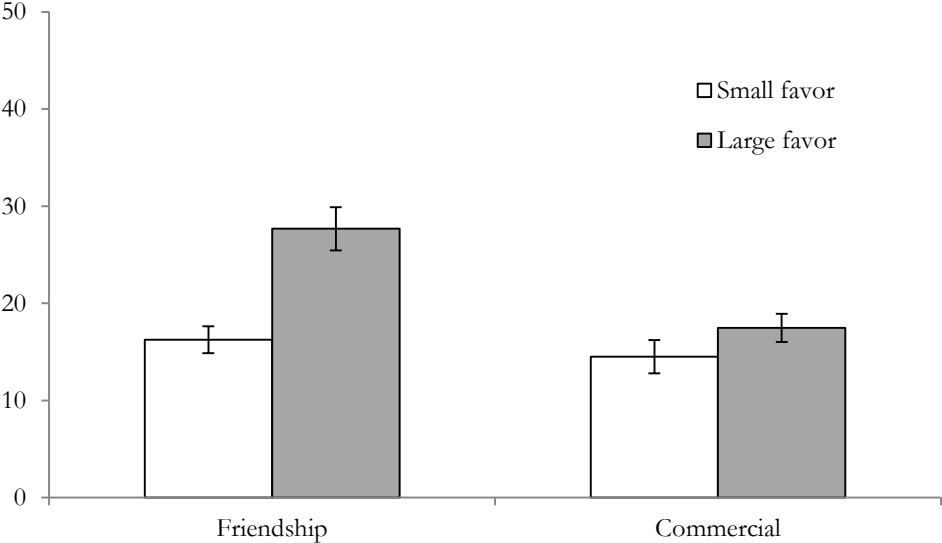
Mediation. Similar to Study 2A, a mediation bootstrapping analysis (5000 samples; Preacher & Hayes, 2008) was run to test whether discomfort explained the interaction effect of relationship and balance on the amount people were willing to spend on a thank-you gift. The results partially confirmed our expectations and showed that discomfort mediated the difference in the amount people were willing to spend on a thank-you gift between the small-

Figure 4.5: Intention to Purchase a Thank-You Gift across Conditions in Study 2B



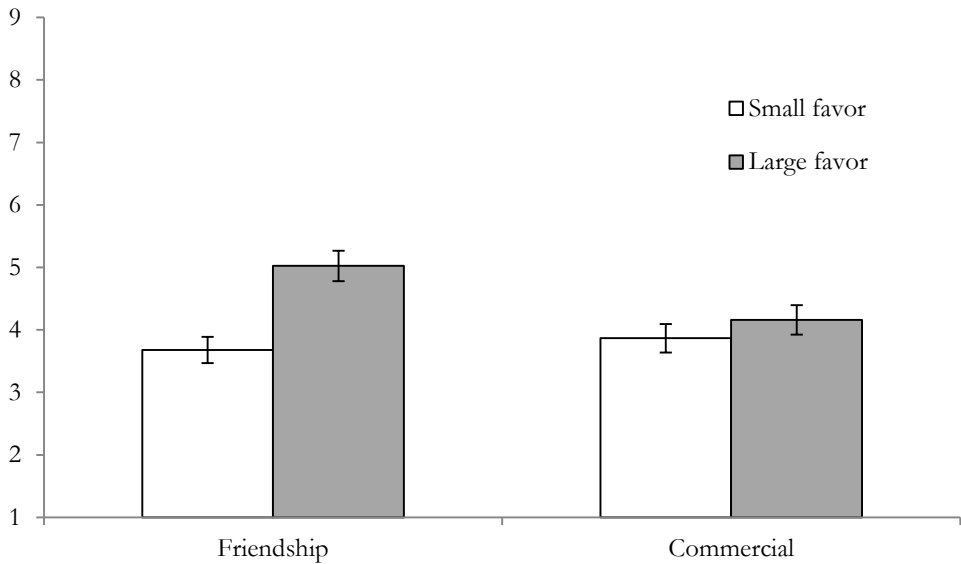
Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Figure 4.6: Amount of Money Willing to Spend on a Thank-You Gift across Conditions in Study 2B



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Figure 4.7: Level of Discomfort across Conditions of Study 2B



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

and the large-advantage balance distortions for the friendship conditions ($b = 0.44$, $0.2226 < CI\ 95\% < 0.7512$). However, this was not the case for the commercial relationship conditions ($b = 0.09$, $-0.1113 < CI\ 95\% < 0.3193$). Thus although we expected that discomfort would explain the differences found across both the friendship conditions and the commercial relationship conditions, the results only partially confirmed our expectations with regard the friendship conditions.

Studies 2A & 2B: Discussion

The results of Study 2A and Study 2B partially confirm our expectations that consumers are more responsive to a favor from a friend than one from a commercial partner. More precisely, we find that receiving a favor of equal size, which affects the relationship balance, causes a greater responsiveness in the form of financial and consumption decisions (including paying the check and purchasing a thank-you gift) among friends than among commercial partners. These findings are in line with the findings of Studies 1A to 1C. However, whereas the findings in Studies 1A to 1C could also be ascribed to a general

disposition that is more positive towards friends than towards commercial partners, the inclusion of the balance manipulation in Study 2A rules out this alternative explanation. Regardless of the potential influence of the general disposition towards friends and commercial partners on consumers' responsiveness to a favor, we found that the receipt of a favor and the size of the favor affect consumers' prosocial consumption behaviors as a response.

Another goal of Study 2A and Study 2B was to test whether feelings of discomfort caused the increased responsiveness towards a received favor and an advantageous distorted balance. Together, these two studies suggest that discomfort drives the heightened responsiveness intentions after receiving a favor in friendships. Based on the findings of Study 2A, it could be suggested that discomfort also explains the effects in commercial relationships. However, the results of Study 2B do not confirm this suggestion. This difference in findings may be ascribed to the difference in balance manipulation across the studies. Study 2A compared a balanced relationship with one in which the balance was distorted to the recipient's advantage. In contrast, Study 2B compared relationships that were both distorted to the recipient's advantage but differed in the size of the distortion (i.e., small favor vs. large favor). It could well be the case that for commercial relationships discomfort explains the difference in responsiveness when we compare a balanced and an unbalanced relationship; however, it does not explain the difference in responsiveness to a small and large distortion of the balance. This would be in line with consumers' insensitivity to a large favor in commercial relationships. Nonetheless, this is a speculative thought that we currently cannot support with this research. In the general discussion section of this chapter, we will discuss more extensively our thoughts on the underlying processes

Supporting our hypotheses we consistently find through the studies discussed above that within friendships consumers are more responsive to a received favor and the accompanied advantageous distorted balance. This finding is in agreement with our supposition that an advantageous distorted balance in friendships is contradictory to the relationship goal and therefore it increases the recipient's level of discomfort. In commercial relationships, an advantageous distorted balance is not inconsistent with the recipient's relationship goal and thus is expected to cause less discomfort. Although the findings correspond to our theoretical framework, other relationship theories (Clark & Mills, 2011; Fiske, 1992) would suggest differently and argue that it is very important to repair a distorted

balance in commercial relationships but that this is much less important in friendships. To solve this theoretical friction between current literature and our theory and findings, we believe that it is necessary to take a closer and more careful look at balance distortions. Relationship theories studied the importance of a balanced relationship at the relationship level. In contrast, we think a narrowed focus at the individual level helps to better understand consumer decisions in relationships. We presume that this individual approach to study the need of balanced relationships will solve the friction with the, what seems to be at first sight, contrasting theories. We expect that when the focus is on the initiator of the favor, the one who experiences a disadvantageous distorted balance, the prediction of current relationship theories that balance will be less important in friendships compared to commercial relationships will be correct. After all, the goal in friendships (i.e., the maintenance of and care about the relationship and the other person) is not threatened by giving a friend a favor, and a favor may actually help accomplish this goal. In the case of commercial relationships, the goal (i.e., maximizing one's outcomes) is at stake when a favor is given to the commercial partner. The commercial partner who initiates the favor does not know whether it will pay off or decrease his or her outcomes. To summarize, we thus believe that the importance of a balanced relationship depends on whose perspective you take (giver vs. recipient), and predict opposite behavioral patterns in friendships and commercial relationships for the initiators compared to the recipients of the favor. Study 3 will test this moderating proposition.

4.5 STUDY 3

In Study 3 we investigate the moderating role of the position in the distorted relationship (i.e., advantageous vs. disadvantageous) on the difference in consumption responses to a favor across friendships and commercial relationships. We expect that in friendships consumers will feel a strong need to respond to a received favor and to repair the advantageous distorted balance but they will not feel that others should respond to a favor they themselves initiated and repair their disadvantageous distorted balance (Hypothesis 3). In contrast, in commercial relationships we expect that consumers will more strongly feel that others should respond to a received favor and repair their disadvantageous distorted balance but will care less about responding to a received favor and repairing an advantageous distorted

balance (Hypothesis 4). To test this hypothesis, we conducted a scenario study in which we not only manipulated the relationship but also the position in the distorted balance. More specifically, the participants either gave a favor to the other person (disadvantageous distorted balance) or received a favor from the other (advantageous distorted balance).

Method

Participants. One hundred sixty-two American adults participated in the study on Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for \$0.20 (58.6% male, $M_{age} = 32.55$, $SD_{age} = 11.07$). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in the 2 (relationship: friendship vs. commercial relationship) \times 2 (position in distorted balance: advantageous vs. disadvantageous) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Depending on the assigned condition, the participants read slightly different scenarios in which they went for lunch with Robin. Across the four conditions, we manipulated both the relationship with Robin (i.e., Robin being your “best friend” or a “bank representative”) and the position in the distorted balance. In the advantageous distorted balance conditions [disadvantageous distorted balanced conditions], the participants read that at the end of the lunch, Robin [they] picked up the check. After the participants read the scenario, they indicated to what extent they felt the need to respond to the favor and restore the distorted balance (advantageous distorted balance conditions) or thought Robin had to respond to the favor and restore the distorted balance (disadvantageous distorted balance conditions): “To what extent do you feel you [Robin] should pay for lunch the next time?” and “To what extent do you feel you are [Robin is] obligated to pay for lunch the next time?”. The items were measured on a 9-point scale (1 = not at all, 9 = extremely) and combined into an average responsiveness score ($\alpha = .739$). In addition, two items measured the level of discomfort in relation to the described situation (1 = very uncomfortable, 9 = very comfortable, $\alpha = .577$): “How comfortable do you feel about [Robin] picking up the tab for today’s lunch?” and “How comfortable would you feel about [Robin] paying for lunch for both of you again next time?”

Results

Intended/expected responsiveness. To test our prediction that the position in the distorted balance moderated the effect of relationship type on the intention/expectation of the recipient to respond to the favor, we conducted a two-way ANOVA of relationship and position in the distorted balance on the expressed intention/expectation of the recipient to respond to the favor. The results showed a significant interaction effect ($F(1,158) = 13.903, p < .001$), indicating that the variation in responsiveness to a favor between favor initiators (i.e., disadvantageous balance distortion) and favor recipients (i.e., advantageous balance distortion) is different across friendships and commercial relationships. A closer examination of the differences across the conditions showed that the friendship – advantageous distorted balance condition differed significantly from the other three conditions ($t's(158) > 4.209, p's < .001, Cohen's d > 0.94$). The other three conditions were similar to each other ($t's(158) < 0.610, p's > .543$). The participants valued responsiveness to a favor and a balanced relationship in the friendship – advantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 7.68, SD = 1.40$) much more than in the friendship – disadvantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 5.50, SD = 2.01$). In the commercial relationship conditions, the participants in the disadvantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 5.71, SD = 2.36$) valued responsiveness to a favor more than the participants in the advantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 5.43, SD = 2.49$; see Figure 4.8). This difference in responsiveness found across the commercial relationships conditions was remarkably smaller than the difference in responsiveness found across the friendship conditions. Thus consistent with the findings of our preceding studies, consumers showed to be particularly motivated to repair an advantageous distorted balance when they receive a favor from a friend but not when they receive the favor from a commercial partner. We also found that as expected, this strong need to be responsive to a favor only holds among friends who were in advantageous distorted balance position and thus received the favor. Friends who were in a disadvantageous distorted balance position and gave the favor to a friend showed to care much less about the repair of the relational balance.

Level of comfort. A two-way ANOVA of relationship and position in the distorted balance on the reported level of comfort revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(1,158) = 8.836, p = .003$), indicating that the variation in comfort reported in the advantageous and disadvantageous distorted balance conditions is different for friendships and commercial relationships. Whereas in commercial relationships consumers reported a similar level of

comfort both in the advantageous and disadvantageous distorted balance conditions, in friendships, consumers who were in a disadvantageous distorted balance condition considered themselves much more comfortable with the situation than the consumers in the advantageous distorted balance condition did. Simple contrasts were run to provide further insights into the differences in comfort level across the four conditions. The participants in the friendship – disadvantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 6.59, SD = 1.46$) reported the highest level of comfort, which was significantly different from all the other conditions ($t's(158) > 2.884, p's < .004, Cohen's d > 0.64$). The friendship – advantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.85$), the commercial relationship – disadvantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 5.16, SD = 2.37$), and the commercial relationship – advantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 5.32, SD = 2.13$) did not significantly differ in reported comfort with the distorted balance ($t's(158) < 0.975, p's > .331$; see Figure 4.9).

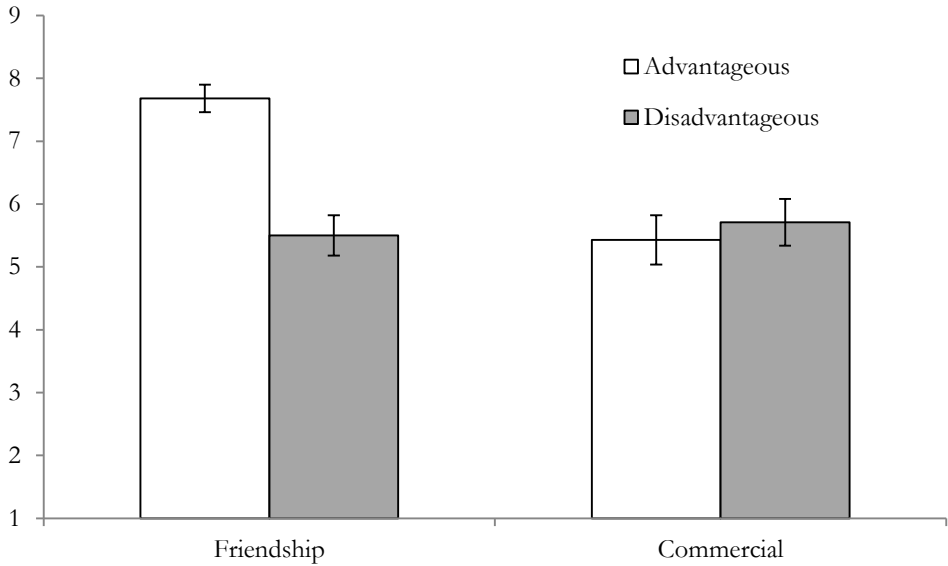
Mediation. To investigate whether the reported level of comfort explains the differences between the advantageous and disadvantageous distorted balance conditions across friendships and commercial relationships, we conducted a bootstrapping mediation analysis of 5000 samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We found that the level of comfort mediated the difference between advantageous and disadvantageous distorted balance in the friendship conditions ($b = 0.86, 0.4488 < CI\ 95\% < 1.3999$) but not in the commercial relationship conditions ($b = -0.08, -0.6297 < CI\ 95\% < 0.4138$).

Discussion

The results of Study 3 provide further evidence that consumers are more responsive to a received favor and willing to repair an advantageous distorted balance in friendships than in commercial relationships. In addition, we showed that this effect is moderated by the position in the balance distortion. When a friend initiates the favor, distorting the balance to his or her own disadvantage, the need to repair the distorted balance is low. This is in contrast to the receiving friend's inclination to respond to the favor and restore the distorted relational balance. Thus Study 3 suggests that research on the importance of balanced relationships should not be studied at the relationship level but at the individual level. Moreover, this study provides insight on how current relationship theories can be aligned with our current findings.

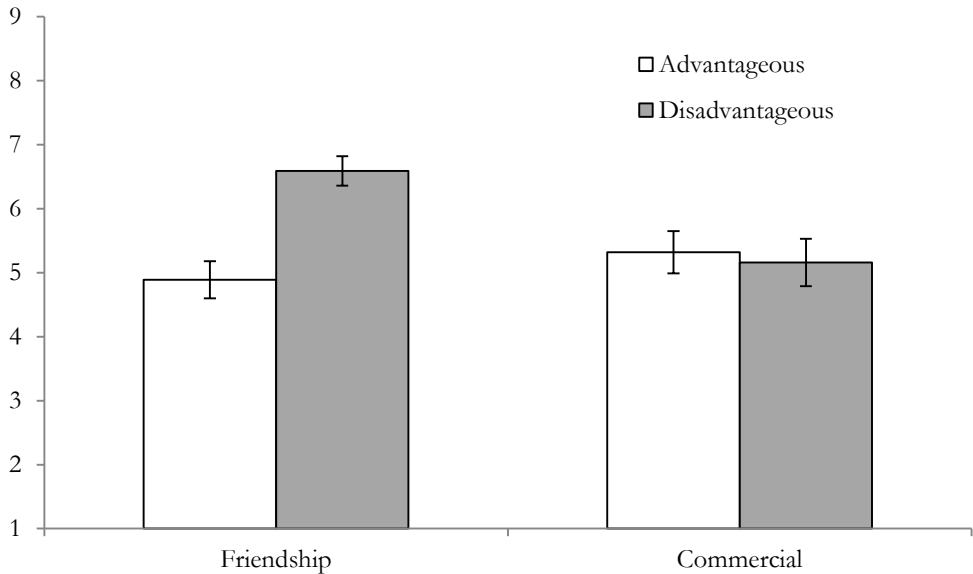
We have to acknowledge that Study 3 does not fully meet our expectations, and it does not account for the findings of earlier research. Study 3 did not reveal the hypothesized

Figure 4.8: (Expected) Responsiveness Scores across Conditions in Study 3



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Figure 4.9: Levels of Comfort across Conditions in Study 3



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

significant difference between friendships and commercial relationships in the need to restore a disadvantageous distorted balance. We believe this unexpected similarity in the need to restore the balance might be due to the specific settings of our experiment. For example, it could be due to the hypothetical methodological design or the size of the distortion (e.g. receipt of a small vs. a large favor, or single vs. multiple favors). In Study 4, we conduct a behavioral experiment to take care of the methodological artifacts of a hypothetical setting and to contribute to the external validity of our findings. In this study, we will manipulate both the relationship type (via role-playing) and the position in the distorted balance in an interactive lottery tickets division task.

4.6 STUDY 4

The aim of Study 4 is to test our hypotheses in a behavioral experiment. We asked students to come to the laboratory where we independently manipulated the relationship and the position in the distorted balance.

Method

Participants. Two hundred eighteen students from a Dutch university participated in the study in exchange for course credits (45.4% male, $M_{age} = 20.10$, $SD_{age} = 1.63$). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in the 2 (relationship: friendship vs. commercial relationship) \times 2 (position in the distorted balance: advantageous vs. disadvantageous) between-subjects design.

Procedure. At the start, the participants received an instruction about the experimental session. They were informed that they would participate in three independent studies, the first of which involved an interaction game. The participants were split in groups of two. When possible, the experimenter tried to form same-sex dyads and separated friends. After each participant was linked to another participant, all dyads were placed in a separate room. Each room contained two chairs on which was placed an instruction sheet regarding either the role of person A or B. In addition, the participants were notified of the microphone that recorded their conversation; however, unbeknownst to the participants, the microphone was actually not switched on. The participants in the friendship conditions were instructed to start a

conversation about general things in life (e.g., education, hobbies, etc.; see Sedikides, Campbell, Reader, & Elliot, 1999). The participants in the commercial relationship conditions were instructed to imagine they were running a commercial business and were about to start a negotiation with another company. This group was asked to share the instructed standpoint and arguments on several aspects of the negotiation, but they were explicitly asked not to start the negotiation itself. This is because a negotiation could potentially distort the relational balance manipulation that would take place after the first part of the experimental session. The commercial relationship manipulation was based on the Riggs-Vericomp negotiation case as developed by Wheeler (2008; see Appendix D for more details on the relationship manipulation). After 10 minutes, the interaction game ended and the participants moved into one of the individual cubicles. They were asked to first evaluate the interaction game on two measures (i.e., liking and perceived relationship): “How much do you like the other person?” (1 = not at all, 7 = very much)⁶ and “Is your relationship with the other person more like a friendship or a commercial relationship?” (1 = definitely a friendship, 7 = definitely a commercial relationship).

Next, the participants were asked to read the instructions for part 2, a lottery tickets division task (based on Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994). The participants were told that the second study was developed to study resource allocations via an interactive division task and for ease of process, we linked all the participants to the same partners from the first task. They were then told that they and their partner had 10 lottery tickets each that gave them the chance of winning 10 euros. The participants could enhance their chance of winning the 10 euros by dividing their tickets: each ticket they decided to give to their partner would be doubled, and, all the tickets they would receive from their partner would also be doubled. If both players would decide to allocate to the other person all 10 lottery tickets, then they would each receive 20 lottery tickets. However, if the participant would decide to give only five tickets and the partner would give all, the participant would then have 25 tickets and the partner 10 tickets. The participants were explicitly told that there was no possibility of interacting with the other person but that both players would be notified about the overall allocation. Clear examples were given to ensure the participants understood the instructions.

⁶ The results did not change when we controlled for the liking of the partner. Therefore, we will not discuss this measure further.

Following this, the participants indicated on a separate sheet of paper their allocation of the 10 lottery tickets and gave this to the experimenter. After a couple of minutes, the experimenter returned with the partner's allocation answer sheet and a general overview of the earned tickets for both players. This feedback was not the real response of the assigned partner. Depending on the randomly assigned distorted balance condition, the feedback showed a higher (advantageous distorted balance conditions) or lower outcome (disadvantageous distorted balance conditions) for the participant compared to the partner's outcome. When the participant's outcome was higher, it meant the partner allocated more lottery tickets to the participant than the participant allocated to the partner. A lower outcome meant that the partner allocated fewer lottery tickets to the participant than the participant allocated to the partner. Thus the lottery tickets overview displayed a distorted relational balance. More specifically, we could also register the size of the distorted balance after the allocation task (potentially ranging from -30, if one gave all tickets to the partner and did not receive any in return, to 30, if one received all tickets from the partner and gave none away).

After the allocation task, the experimenter turned on the computer for the final part that included some surveys. The first screen told the participants that the last part would take 12 minutes and that for every minute they would receive an extra lottery ticket that they could keep or give to their partner. The participants had to type in the number of minutes they wanted to spend on working for lottery tickets for themselves and for their partner (De Hooge, Nelissen, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2011). The percentage of minutes spent on working for the relational partner served as our dependent variable. After the participants answered a couple of unrelated survey questions, the experimental session was over. The experimenter carefully debriefed all participants.

Results

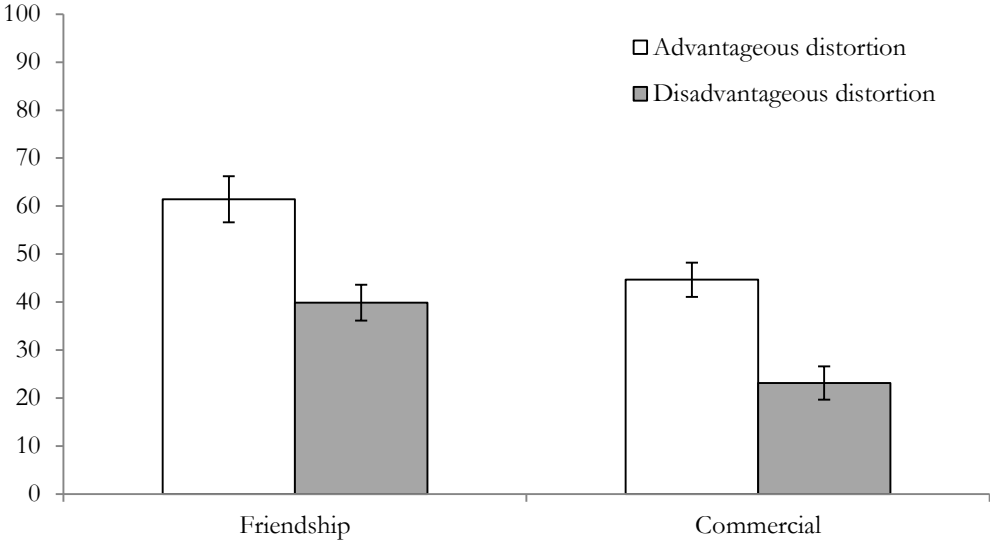
The scores of eighteen participants were excluded from our analyses for two reasons: either the participants did not follow our instructions and started working on the third part on the computer before they received the allocation outcome, or the participants in the commercial relationship condition indicated at the end of the experimental session that they were actually friends with their interaction partner.

Manipulation check. To test whether our relationship manipulation was successful, we ran a two-way ANOVA of relationship and position in the distorted balance on the perceived relationship. We found a main effect of relationship ($F(1,194) = 20.715, p = .007$) indicating that the participants in the friendship conditions ($M = 3.02, SD = 1.57$) perceived the relationship with their partner more as a friendship than the participants in the commercial relationship conditions did ($M = 4.25, SD = 1.77$). No main effect of the position in the distorted balance or interaction effect was found. It is important to acknowledge that in the commercial relationship conditions, the participants conservatively indicated that they felt more like commercial partners towards the other person. The score of the participants assigned to the commercial relationship conditions was slightly above the midpoint of the scale. Potentially this could have affected our results.

Lottery tickets spent on partner. We ran both a two-way ANOVA and a linear regression analysis to investigate whether the participants differently divided the 12 tickets earned per minute in the final computer task based on the assigned condition. In addition to assigning the participants to either the advantageous or disadvantageous distorted balance condition (categorical), we also registered the size of the distorted balance after the allocation task. Whereas the two-way ANOVA included the categorical distorted balance as an independent variable, the linear regression analysis incorporated the size of the distorted balance as an independent variable, taking into account the variance in the distorted balance manipulations. First, a two-way ANOVA⁷ of the assigned relationship type and the position in the distorted balance on the percentage of the 12 tickets spent on the partner revealed a main effect of relationship ($F(1,184) = 18.011, p < .001$) and a main effect of the position in the distorted balance ($F(1,184) = 29.742, p < .001$). No interaction effect was found ($F(1,184) = .000, p = .998$; see Figure 4.10). Simple contrasts showed that all conditions differed significantly from each other ($t's(184) > 2.725, p's < .007, Cohen's d = 0.63$), except for the friendship – disadvantageous distorted balance condition and the commercial relationship – advantageous distorted balance condition ($t(184) = 0.867, p = 0.387$). The participants in the friendship – advantageous distorted balance condition gave the highest percentage of their tickets to the other person ($M = 61.43, SD = 28.30$), followed by the participants in the commercial

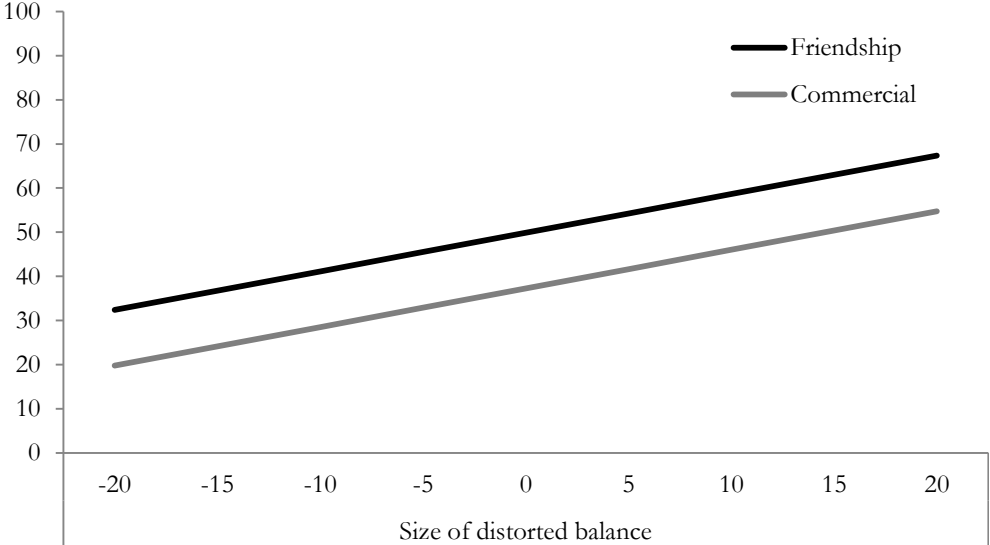
⁷ We excluded 12 extra participants whose distorted balance manipulation could not be performed because the participant decided to keep (disadvantageous distorted balance) or give away (advantageous distorted balance) all tickets, leading to a balanced relationship. We decided not to treat them as an extra category, because the group size was too small.

Figure 4.10: Average Percentage of Tickets Given to the Other Person per Relationship Type and the Position in the Distorted Balance in Study 4



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Figure 4.11: Average Percentage of Tickets Given to the Other Person per Relationship Type and Size of Distorted Balance in Study 4



relationship – advantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 44.66$, $SD = 22.17$), then by those in the friendship – disadvantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 39.88$, $SD = 27.78$), and lastly by the participants in the commercial relationship – disadvantageous distorted balance condition ($M = 23.13$, $SD = 26.54$).

Second, a linear regression model of relationship and the size of the distorted balance on the percentage of tickets given to the other person confirmed our results from the ANOVA analysis and revealed a main effect of relationship type ($b = 11.654$, $p = .007$), a main effect of the size of the distorted balance ($b = 1.007$, $p < .001$), but no interaction effect ($b = -0.277$, $p = 0.498$). The participants felt more inclined to give part of the extra 12 tickets to a friend (vs. a commercial partner) when the distortion was to their own advantage (vs. to their own disadvantage) (see Figure 4.11). Interestingly, the linear regression model revealed that in a balanced situation, friends were more likely to keep the relationship balanced (49.87% of tickets given to the other person) than commercial partners would (37.26% of tickets given to the other person).

Discussion

The findings of Study 4 mainly confirm our hypotheses. First and most important, our results confirm our previous findings and reveal that consumers are more likely to respond to a favor received from a friend than to a favor received from a commercial partner. This suggests that in friendships, more than in commercial relationships, consumers experience a strong need to restore an advantageous distorted balance.

Second, Study 4 also served as an indirect test of Hypotheses 3 and 4, suggesting that favor initiators (i.e., consumers who experience a disadvantageous distorted balance) find it less important that a friend responds to the favor and restores the distorted balance than that a commercial partner responds to the favor and restores the distorted balance. In line with these expectations, we found that favor initiators give little to a commercial partner who is in an advantageous position, but are much more generous to a friend who is already in an advantageous position. In our view, this reflects consumers' acceptance of a distorted balance and the importance that the relational balance is restored across friendships and commercial relationships. Nevertheless, we expected that the difference between being in an advantageous versus disadvantageous position would be larger for friendships than for commercial relationships. More specifically, we expected the commercial relationship – advantageous

distorted balance condition to respond to the favor by giving fewer tickets to their partner in the final task. The findings show that the reciprocal motivations of the favor receiving commercial partner played a larger role in our experiment than we had expected. These effects can be attributed to the relationship manipulation in our experiment. We recruited students from a Dutch university to participate in our experimental session. In hindsight, we understand it is difficult to create feelings of commercial partnership among students who study together. The fact that they were enrolled in the same program could have actually created a thin social connection. We think that friendship ties are more likely to arise among students than commercial ties. Therefore our commercial relationship manipulation might have been too weak to evoke realistic commercial feelings between students. The indicated scores in our relationship manipulation check support this conjecture. The average mean score on the relationship evaluation in the commercial relationship conditions was approximately at the midpoint of the scale, suggesting that the participants did not view their relationship with their interacting partner to be fully commercial. Thus we believe that the tie between the participants in the commercial relationship conditions did not approach the intended commercial relationship and was partially ruled by friendly feelings. Nevertheless, we believe that the findings are still valuable because they confirm our main hypothesis and reflect how consumers act when they give a favor to a friend.

4.7 GENERAL DISCUSSION

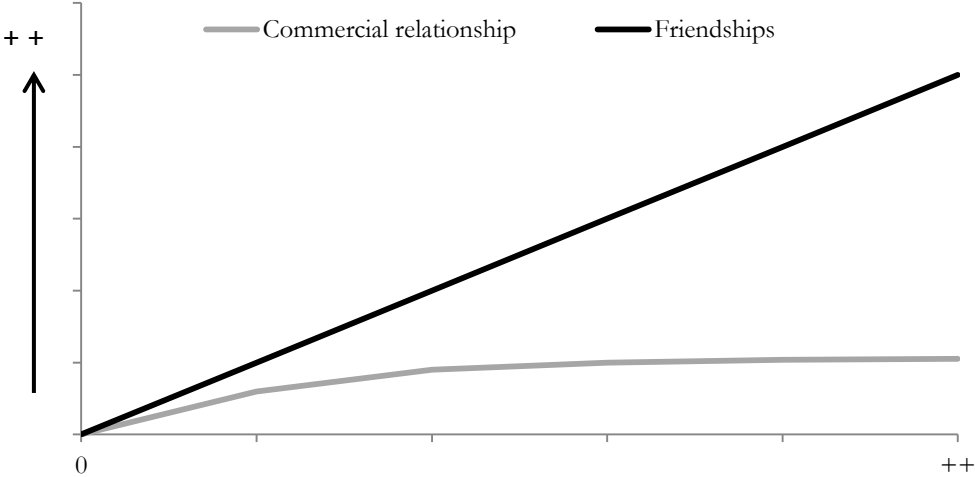
Favors are given and received in relationships. Although consumers tend to be appreciative of such positive gestures, we revealed that consumers are less responsive to favors when they receive them from a commercial partner than when they receive them from a friend. This means that when a commercial partner, compared to a friend, invests in a relationship by favoring the other person, it is less likely that the favor will be returned. We show that this effect holds across various commercial relationships (Studies 1A to 1C). In addition, we demonstrated that the difference in responsiveness after a favor has been received between a friend and a commercial partner is evoked by stronger feelings of discomfort experienced in friendships; this difference in responsiveness cannot be explained

by a more positive disposition and liking for friends than for commercial partners (Study 2A and Study 2B).

At first sight, the findings of Studies 1A to 1C and Studies 2A and 2B are in contrast with current relationship frameworks (Clark & Mills, 2011; Fiske, 1992) that suggest that people value balanced relations in commercial relationships more than they do in friendships. Nevertheless, we found the opposite when we focused on situations in which the relational balance is distorted to the advantage of one of the parties. We argue that our findings could be made to align with the relationship frameworks if balance distortions are investigated at the individual, instead of at the relationship, level. In Study 3 and Study 4, we revealed that among friends a balanced relationship is especially important when one receives a favor from the other person (i.e., one experiences an advantageous distorted relational balance). Friends care less about a balanced relationship when they initiate the favor (i.e., one experiences a disadvantageous distorted relational balance), and they even seem willing to favor their friend again. We expected that among commercial partners, a balanced relationship would be most valued by the person who initiated the favor and considered less important by the person who received the favor. However, we did not find this difference in expected and intended responsiveness to a favor among commercial partners. Thus the suggested level of analysis aligns our findings with the relationship theories for friendships but not for commercial relationships.

Besides the indifference between favor initiators and recipients in their (expected) responsiveness to the favor in commercial relationships, there were two other outcomes that we did not expect. First of all, we did not expect that consumers who received a favor in a commercial relationship would show to be sensitive to the existence of a balance distortion (Study 2A) but not to the size of the distortion itself (Study 2B). Whereas friends showed to be sensitive to the size of the advantageous distortion, the responsiveness of commercial partners to a favor did not seem to depend on it. This could suggest that the relation between an advantageous distorted balance and the responsiveness to return a favor is linear in friendships and concave in commercial relationships (see Figure 4.12). Given the threatening character of a favor to the friendship's goal, consumers could be sensitive to both small and large favors and thus they could be over responsive to the gesture. Favors tend to be less or non-threatening to the goal of commercial relationships. Favors actually help commercial partners derive a maximum output. Consequently, consumers might feel they should respond

Figure 4.12: Potential Responsiveness patterns to Favors Differing in Size across Relationships



Note: The X-axis displays the size of the favor starting at no favor. The Y-axis displays the responsiveness to favors with higher numbers displaying a higher responsiveness.

to the favor to maintain the commercial relationship and benefit from it in the future, but in their response, they want to optimize their own outcomes.

Second, we expected discomfort to explain consumers' responsiveness to a favor in both friendships and commercial relationships. We found confirmation for this explanation when we compared an advantageous distorted relationship with a balanced relationship. However, our hypothesis was not confirmed among commercial partners when we compared the size (small vs. large) of the advantageous distorted relationship. This might relate to the aforementioned insensitivity of commercial partners to the size of the favor. We reason that the extra discomfort that commercial partners could experience after the receipt of a large favor (compared to a small favor) might be overruled by the goal of the recipient to maximize his or her own outcomes. Nevertheless, this is an assumption that we have not tested yet. Therefore future research should investigate the motivations behind the responsiveness of commercial partners to a favor.

Theoretical contribution

Our research extends and subtly modifies the relationship literature (Clark & Mills, 2011; Fiske, 1992; Heyman & Ariely, 2004; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005). Relationships are governed by social norms (Rumble et al., 2010), which help consumers to attain the relationship objective. Previous research has indicated that commercial relationships are governed by a tit-for-tat norm (Loewenstein et al., 1989), which suggests that in these relationships reciprocal behavior is highly valued. Nonetheless, we show that the need to respond to a favor received from a commercial partner is not as strong as the need to respond to a favor received from a friend. Although reciprocal behavior is not normative in friendships, this does not imply that consumers do not strongly aim to restore a distorted friendship balance when it is to their own advantage.

Moreover, we suggest a modification of the current relationship frameworks (Clark & Mills, 2011; Fiske, 1992). These frameworks appear to form their predictions and analysis regarding the importance of a balanced relationship based on relationship level factors such as relational norms. We reason, however, that it is of great importance to differentiate between the favor initiator and the favor recipient in relationships to disentangle how consumers will behave when a relationship is distorted. We believe that as long as the distorted relational balance is not blocking the relationship's goal, people feel less inclined to return a favor (i.e., a disadvantageous distorted balance in friendships and an advantageous distorted balance in commercial relationships). However, if the distorted relational balance threatens the fulfillment of the relationship's goal, people will feel pressured to restore the relational balance and respond to a favor (i.e., an advantageous distorted balance in friendships and a disadvantageous distorted balance in commercial relationships).

We are aware that our results mainly reveal the opposite preferences of favor initiators and recipients in friendships and not so much the opposite preferences of those involved in commercial relationships. Therefore we consider it extremely important to further explore the dynamics in both commercial and personal relationships when the relational balance has been distorted. An investigation into the factors (e.g., type of response, relationship history) that could influence consumers' reactions towards a distorted relational balance will be useful. This would contribute to a fine-grained framework on how individual consumers respond to the receipt of a favor in relationships.

Besides the relevance of our research for the development of relationship frameworks, our work also contributes to research on the influence of emotions on consumption decisions. Our work is grounded on the guilt and discomfort literature that suggests that a social inequity creates tension and feelings of discomfort (Dahl et al., 2005; Adams, 1965). We have shown that when the social inequity is in the consumer's advantage (i.e., when the outcome/input ratio is larger than the outcome/input ratio of the relational partner after having received a favor), the consumer will experience higher levels of discomfort when a friend gives the favor than when a commercial partner gives the favor. When the social inequity is in the consumer's disadvantage (i.e., when the outcome/input ratio is smaller than the outcome/input ratio of the relational partner after having given a favor), then the consumer experiences similar levels of discomfort in both friendships and commercial relationships. This demonstrates that emotions of guilt and discomfort experienced in a relationship do not solely depend on the balance (or imbalance) that obtains within the relationship, but also on the type of relationship it is. Although we hypothesized that in a disadvantageous relational inequity setting, consumers who initiated the favor would feel higher levels of discomfort in commercial relationships than they would in friendships, our results actually indicate that there is a similar amount of discomfort experienced among the favor initiators in commercial relationships and in friendships. Future research should investigate the absence of increased levels of discomfort among commercial partners who initiate the favor. Factors such as the initiator's future orientation or personal involvement might play a role. Commercial partners might be more concerned with the long-term than with the short-term consequences, evoking lower levels of discomfort about the direct social inequity. In addition, commercial partners might only feel disadvantaged at the business level but not personally, which can lead to less strong emotional responses.

Practical relevance

Our research has direct implications for companies' customer relationship management. Companies often try to increase sales or loyalty via reciprocity-based marketing techniques. It is not uncommon for consumers to receive a sample or little gift from business organizations. Applying the tit-for-tat strategy, companies might reason that such a favor will benefit them because consumers are expected to positively respond to these favors. Based on the findings presented in this chapter, it could be argued that these techniques might not be as

successful as companies envision. Consumers might be appreciative of a favor but it may not actually affect their behavioral responsiveness.

Nevertheless, our research provides a suggestion where companies could improve their customer relationship management. We found that in friendships people are more likely to respond to a favor. Therefore we believe that favors from companies can be more successful when the consumer does not view the relationship with the company as being purely commercial but with a touch of friendship in it. Previous research has shown that over time consumers might perceive business-to-consumer relationships to be moving from a purely commercial relationship to a warmer and friendlier business relationship (Price & Arnould, 1999; Brown, 1950; Cassady, 1946; Grayson, 2007). Long-term business relationships or client-oriented service encounters could, for example, initiate such a transition (Price & Arnould, 1999). Besides a change in perception, consumers also tend to perceive some companies as friendlier than others. For example, charities or companies that contribute part of their revenue to a charity might be perceived as compassionate, warmer and friendlier (e.g., Tom's shoes vs. Sketchers; Bennett & Gabriel, 2003). We believe that a reciprocity-based marketing technique could more effectively increase customer loyalty and sales of companies that are not perceived to be purely commercial but are perceived as warm and friendly. Future research should further explore how companies can positively differentiate themselves to more successfully apply reciprocity-based marketing techniques.

CHAPTER 5

Sharing versus Giving Possessions

Abstract

When managing our social relationships, consumers can face a dilemma: should I share or give my book to a friend who needs it? On certain occasions, it is unclear to consumers whether they should share or give their possession to strengthen their friendship. In this chapter, we shed light on the kinds of situations in which consumers feel undecided about whether to share or to give personal possession. We show that the choice to give a personal possession to a friend is suboptimal: the giver's decision to give is incongruent with the giver's own self-motivated preference (Study 1) and with the recipient's preference (Study 2) for the possession to be shared instead. The reported incongruence between the giver's choice and the recipient's preference is steered by a shared relational motivation: to try to positively affect the relationship and optimize the outcomes of the other person. Our findings hold important implications for consumer well-being. Whereas in prosocial decisions people often focus on the outcomes of the other person involved, our research suggests that a more self-focused orientation helps to make more optimal decisions when deciding whether to share or to give a personal possession to a friend.

Social relationships form a considerable part of our network and they are one of our primary needs (Maslow, 1943). Accordingly, people try to strengthen their relationships and regulate the impressions they make on their social partners (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992), often via prosocial behavior, such as gift giving and lending possessions (Hartup & Stevens, 1999; Berndt, 2002; Ruth et al., 1999; Sherry, 1983; Schwartz, 1967). Previous research has thoroughly examined prosocial consumption behaviors in singularity (e.g., Ruth et al., 1999; Belk, 1976, 2010), but the choice process between different prosocial acts that consumers sometimes face has been left unexplored. In other words, the relative preference from among prosocial acts has not been investigated. Situations do not always have clear norms prescribing a particular prosocial act (e.g., bringing a gift at a birthday party), which leaves consumers unsure which prosocial behavior is most appreciated by others. It could happen that people would like to either share or give away some of their durable possessions (e.g., favorite novel, clothes, etc.) to a friend who needs them even though this intention or plan was absent at the time the possession was purchased. On such occasions consumers have to choose whether to share or to give that possession to their friend. We presume this decision is likely to be motivated by the aim to strengthen the friendship tie. In the absence of specific guidelines, consumers might be unsure whether the recipient prefers the possession to be shared with or to be given to them. At first sight, sharing and giving might seem to be two very equivalent types of prosocial behavior, but they differ in outcome (Belk, 2007). Giving has irreversible effects on ownership, whereas sharing concerns a temporary transfer of possessions. Therefore, sharing and giving have different implications for both the owner and the recipient of the possession. In this chapter we will provide insight into the decision and evaluation of the owner's choice between sharing and giving a personal item and whether this decision is optimal relative to him or herself and to the recipient. People who are unsure whether they should share or they should give their personal possession to a friend are more likely to act against their own initial preference to share the possession and instead choose to give it to a friend. We will show that, ironically, this greater likelihood for the owner to give does not correspond with the recipient's preference. Thus our research could contribute to the awareness among consumers that a greater investment in a friendship (i.e. giving a personal possession) is not necessarily better appreciated by the recipient and we hope to enhance consumer well-being.

5.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Both giving and sharing have been found to affect relationship quality. Research has shown that gifts mainly create and strengthen relationships (Ruth et al., 1999; Sherry, 1983). Belk and Llamas (2011, p.18) similarly observed that “it is by sharing that the feeling of friendship is built”. Boundaries vanish and relationships are fostered when people share their possessions (Belk & Llamas, 2011). Although giving and sharing possessions can have similar social effects, they are distinct behaviors.

Giving involves the provision of an item that does not have to be returned. The object that is given will not be returned to the original owner (giver) and the ownership rights of the product will be transferred from the giver to the recipient. Nevertheless, reciprocal norms, although not made explicit, guide consumers’ giving behavior (Mauss, 1967; Belk, 2010; Sahlins, 1972). Many researchers have investigated consumers’ responses to the giving of new purchased objects that often has a ritualized character and is related to specific events (e.g., birthday, Valentine’s Day, engagement; Rugimbana, Donahay, Neal, & Polonsk, 2003). We are particularly interested in the giving of owned objects (i.e social recycling; Donnelly et al., 2016), and not in the giving of objects purchased as gifts.

Sharing is a very rich concept, referring to a multitude of behaviors (Belk, 2010; Belk & Llamas, 2011), such as co-consuming (e.g., food sharing), joint usage (e.g., watching a movie together), permanent sharing (e.g., sharing with your partner your cooking utensils that are considered part of the household furniture) and temporary sharing (e.g., lending your friend your travel guide). In this research we specifically look at the latter type of sharing: the temporary sharing of objects. We do not suggest that these different types of sharing cannot be considered sharing, but in our explorative research we are interested in the behavior that we call temporary sharing or lending. Thus when we refer to sharing it can be defined as the provision of an object to a recipient, with the expectation that the object will be returned to the giver at some point in the future. In general, sharing provides the owner and the recipient the benefits that flow from possessing an object (Belk, 2007) without imposing reciprocal obligations (Belk, 2010; Belk & Llamas, 2011).

The key concept that differentiates giving from sharing is the transfer of ownership involved in the former (Belk 2007; 2010; Jenkins et al., 2014). When an object is given, ownership is transferred from the giver to the recipient: the recipient becomes the owner of

the object from the time of the giving. Such a transfer of ownership does not take place when an object is shared. In sharing, the giver remains the owner and the recipient is temporarily allowed to use the object. Thus the recipient has to return the object after a certain time frame. Phrased in terms of costs for the owner, gifts are high in opportunity costs (i.e., the owner loses the ownership rights) whereas shares are relatively low in opportunity costs (i.e., the owner does not lose the ownership rights). However, the recipient's benefits are also higher from gifts than from shares.

The owner's dilemma

In situations where giving or sharing is not enforced by norms or traditions and where both behaviors are appropriate, consumers need to decide which of the two behaviors they will adopt. This consideration can be driven by various self- or relationship-focused motives. When considering whether to give to or share some personal possessions with a friend, self-interested motives can make one choose the most advantageous option for oneself. Although giving is tied to reciprocal norms, which enhances the likelihood of receiving a gift in return, we believe that self-interested owners would rather share than give away a possession. As extensively discussed in the decision-making literature, consumers' fear of losing something is greater than the anticipated pleasure of gaining it (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Kahneman et al., 1991; Ariely et al., 2005). Kahneman and Tversky (1979) showed with their Prospect Theory that the negative experience of these loss-averse feelings heavily affected consumers' decisions and behaviors. For example, the anticipation of losing a possession increases the owner's value of the product and consequently its selling price (Kahneman et al., 1991; Van Dijk & Van Knippenberg, 1998). Consumers are even afraid of losing a product that they have considered but do not own yet (Carmon, Wertenbroch, & Zeelenberg, 2003). Therefore, when consumers are facing the dilemma of whether to share or give away a possession to a friend, the anticipated pain of giving it away is larger than the anticipated pain of sharing it. This is because giving away a possession involves a permanent loss, whereas sharing it involves only a temporary loss for the owner. Therefore consumers might prefer to share, rather than give, a personal possession to a friend when self-interested motives are at play. At the same time, consumers might prefer to give rather than share a possession when their decision is driven by relational motives. We define relational motives as the drive to attain the largest positive relational outcome and to maximally serve the other person's

interests. In friendships, consumers try to maintain and strengthen the relationship (Hays, 1989). To do so, they engage in all sorts of behavior. Friends not only undertake activities together but they also like to favor each other and to give each other gifts (Ruth et al, 1999; Sherry, 1983). To strengthen the friendship, consumers have been found to display costly and effortful prosocial behavior (Flynn & Adams, 2009; Robben & Verhallen, 1994). Giving away a possession involves a larger investment than sharing it because of the aforementioned transfer of ownership. Sharing implies a temporary change in possessions without losing the right of ownership, whereas gifts are a permanent change involving a transfer of ownership (Belk, 2010). Giving an object thus reduces the giver's possessions, which could be considered more costly and effortful than sharing the object. Based on this knowledge, consumers might anticipate that giving, compared to sharing, leads to more appreciation among recipients. Thus when facing the dilemmatic choice between sharing and giving a possession to a friend, consumers who hold strong relational motives are likely to choose giving over sharing a personal object to a friend to attain the largest positive relational outcome.

H1a: *Based on self-interested motives, owners are more likely to share a possession with a friend rather than give it to him or her.*

H1b: *Based on relational motives, owners are more likely to give a possession to a friend rather than share it with him or her.*

Self-interested and relational motives could potentially steer the decision process of people who are facing the aforementioned give-share dilemma. Self-interested (i.e., optimizing one's own outcome) and relational motives (i.e., strengthening the relationship and optimizing the other person's outcome) lead to opposing preferences, thus creating tension in the decision maker. Previous research has indicated that for (pro)social decisions, consumers are rather guided by social motives instead of egocentric ones (Van Lange, 1999). Consumers with a prosocial orientation not only donate more money (Van Lange, Bekkers, Schuyt, & Van Vught, 2007), they also behave genuinely fairer in bargains (Van Dijk, De Cremer, & Handgraaf, 2004) and are more willing to sacrifice in close relationships (Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997). In line with this research, we believe that the initial goal of giving and sharing – strengthening the social relationship – will guide people's choice in ambivalent

situations where they could either give or share an object with a friend. Given that people expect recipients to appreciate gifts more than shares and thus to find gifts more generous, we expect that people are more likely to give their possession (and ignore their loss aversive feelings) in such ambiguous situations.

Consider the following example. Joe recently told Robin about his plans to travel to Brazil. A couple of years ago, Robin also made a trip to Brazil and bought a travel guide to bring with him. Because Robin does not expect to make a trip to Brazil anytime soon, she considers either sharing or giving the travel guide to Joe. Based on Robin's self-interested motivations, she should lean towards sharing the travel guide with Joe (assuming he has no storage problem.) In this case, Robin will get the travel guide back after Joe's trip and will be able to use it in the future even if she doubts right now that she will go to Brazil again. Based on her relational motivations, Robin could also consider giving away the travel guide to Joe. This will benefit Joe the most and will maximize his outcomes (i.e. Joe becomes the owner of the travel guide and can use it whenever he wants). Thus Robin's self-interested and relational motives lead to opposing preferences. Nevertheless, we hypothesize that due to the prosocial character of the dilemma, Robin's preference will be guided by relational motives and will choose to give rather than share her possession. .

H2: *Steered by relational motives, owners are more likely to give a possession to a friend rather than to share it with him or her.*

The recipient's preference

Given the assumption that people give because they believe recipients will appreciate a gift more than a temporarily shared object, the question arises whether this is actually the case. Are people able to predict the appreciation of recipients and make the best decision when they are confronted with a choice between giving and sharing a personal object with a friend? Do recipients indeed prefer gifts to shares? Or is the decision to give away a personal object not in line with the recipient's preference and does the recipient actually prefer a shared instead of given personal possession? A recipient's personal gain is highest in the latter situation. Getting an object as a gift expands the recipient's possessions: the recipient becomes the owner of the given object. This reasoning is supported by previous research that suggests that the size of the giver's investment (e.g., effort, time, or money) positively affect appreciation among

recipients (Flynn & Adams, 2009; Pollmann et al., 2016). Gifts, for example, have been found to be more appreciated when they are more thoughtful, effortful, and costly. So it could be reasoned that giving, compared to sharing, is more appreciated by recipients. However, previous research on gift giving has not compared a costly gesture with another socially advantaged option such as in our social decision dilemma where we compare giving and sharing. Being aware of other socially advantaged options might affect recipients' preferences.

Besides the appreciation for effortful and costly behavior from a self-interested point of view, from a relational perspective, recipients might prefer the gesture that is least costly for their friend. As argued in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, people might feel uncomfortable when a friendship is positively distorted to their advantage. Friends could feel guilty when they receive a favor from another person and the relationship is not balanced. In line with these findings it could be argued that receiving a product as a gift could lead to a greater imbalance in the relationship and to more discomfort for the recipient compared to receiving a shared product. Consequently, we could expect recipients to prefer a shared object to a given one.

H3: *Recipients prefer shared possessions to given ones.*

Integrating the points of view of both the owner and the recipient, the decision of owners to give is thus incongruent with recipients' preference to share the same personal item. The decision of owners to give a personal possession is thus not optimal in two ways. First, this act does not fulfill the owner's wish to obtain the highest appreciation from recipients because given recipients' preference, they appreciate a shared good more than a gifted one. Second, by choosing to give, owners pick the option that is less optimal for them. They not only give away a personal possession and lose the right of ownership over that object. By giving instead of sharing, owners act against their own preference to optimize the recipient's appreciation, but they also fail to meet this recipient-minded ambition. This failure seems to partially originate from the owners' misinterpretation of how recipients perceive the act of giving. Owners overestimate the positive effects of the more costly gesture of giving.

H4: *Owners' decision to give a possession, instead of sharing it, is incongruent with recipients' preference to share the product.*

5.2 STUDY 1

In the first experiment we test our hypotheses (1a and 1b) regarding the incongruence between the owners' decision to share or give a possession when they focus on their own versus on recipients' priorities. We expect that owners who are asked to make a decision based on their own interests to more likely choose sharing over giving, whereas owners who are asked to make a decision based on recipients' interests to more likely choose giving over sharing.

Method

Participants. Eighty-five students⁸ (44 males, $M_{age} = 20.68$, $SD_{age} = 1.95$) from a Dutch university were randomly allocated to one of the two conditions (orientation: own vs. other) of our between-subjects design. All the participants received course credits in exchange for their participation.

Procedure. At the beginning of the experimental session, the participants were placed behind a computer in individual cubicles. We asked the participants to imagine that they were the owner of an Indonesian cookbook bought five years ago. The Indonesian cookbook contained a lot of tasty recipes and although they used it frequently in the past, they did not use the cookbook in the last couple of months. The participants were also told that Alex, a close friend, recently returned from a holiday in Indonesia. Alex was super enthusiastic about Indonesia and especially loved the local food. Therefore, they considered either giving or sharing the Indonesian cookbook with Alex. The participants were explained that they would have two options: 1) they could decide to give Alex the cookbook such that Alex could then keep it. This would mean that they would no longer own the cookbook and they would not be able to use it should they want to prepare some Indonesian food for themselves; or 2) they could decide to share the cookbook with their friend Alex, who could then use it anytime. This would mean that they would still own the cookbook and would be able to use it in the future (see Appendix E for the exact instructions).

⁸ In Experiments 1 and 2, we collected 24 and 12 additional data points, respectively. These participants were left out of analyses, because we found an error in the scales of the Choice while running the experiments (Experiment 1 and Experiment 2) and the scale of Motivated Orientation (Experiment 2). These could not be compared to the scores of other participants. Nevertheless, the results of Study 1 and 2 do not change if all data points are included.

After reading the scenario, the participants were then asked whether they would share or give the cookbook to Alex. Depending on the assigned condition, they were asked to make this choice based either on their own or on Alex's interests: "If you would only look at what is best for you [Alex], what would you choose to do in this situation? Would you choose to share or give the book?" The item was measured on a 7-point scale (1 = definitely share, 7 = definitely give), and the labels were counterbalanced to control for demand effects. Next, as a manipulation check, the participants indicated for whom they cared most when they made the decision (1 = what was best for me, 7 = what was best for Alex). Both dispositional and situational social desirability were measured. Dispositional social desirability was measured by the validated shortened version of the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale (SDS; Fischer & Fick, 1993). Situational social desirability was measured by three items: "When answering the previous questions, did you think about what the researchers wanted you to answer?", "Did you make your choices based on what the researcher wanted you to answer?", and "I think the researcher expected me to indicate that I would..." The first and second question had a yes-or-no format ($q = .485, p < .001$), and the third question was measured on a 7-point scale [1 = definitely share, 7 = definitely give]. Finally, the participants filled out a 9-item social value orientation scale (Van Lange, De Bruin, Otten, & Joireman, 1997). The social value orientation scale offers participants the choice between three monetary divisions that categorize the participants' initial disposition to be either prosocial (> 6 items depicting the prosocial choice) or proself (> 6 items depicting the self-interested or competitive choice).

Results

Manipulation check. A *t*-test showed that our manipulation was effective ($t(83) = 2.600, p = .011, Cohen's d = 0.56$). The participants in the own-orientation condition ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.43$) were more likely to make a choice based on what was best for them than the participants in the other-orientation condition ($M = 4.07, SD = 1.52$).

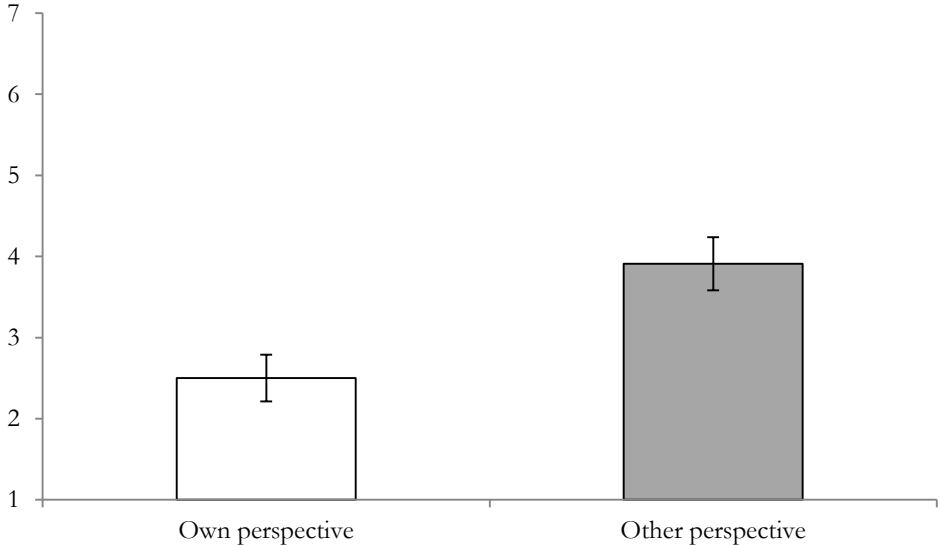
Preference between sharing and giving. To investigate whether the manipulated motivated orientation of the owner affected the decision to either give or share the Indonesian cookbook, we executed a *t*-test with orientation as independent variable and choice as dependent variable. As we have hypothesized, the findings showed that the owners who were focused on their own priorities were more likely to share rather than give ($M = 2.50, SD = 1.86$) compared to owners who were focused on Alex's priorities ($M = 3.91, SD = 2.15; t(83)$

= 3.228, $p = .002$, *Cohen's d* = .70; see Figure 5.1). Social desirability, social value orientation, and the labeling of the choice measure did not affect the results and therefore are not discussed (t 's < 1.142, p 's > 0.26)

Discussion

The results of the first experiment showed that people make different decisions regarding their possessions depending on whether they focus on their own or on their friend's priorities. Individuals who are focused on their own priorities are more likely to share a personal possession with a friend than to give it to him or her. In contrast, individuals who are focused on their friend's priorities are more likely to give a personal possession to their friend than to share it with him or her. This indicates that the motivated orientation of the owner, who is considering whether to share or to give, affects the decision process. However we do not know whether owners usually decide based on self-focused or on other-focused motivations.

Figure 5.1: Preference between Sharing (1) and Giving (7) the Indonesian Cookbook across Conditions in Study 1



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

We test this in Study 2 and compare the owner's decision with the recipient's preference when the owner faces the dilemma whether to give a possession to or share it with a friend.

5.3 STUDY 2

In our second study, we test Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 by comparing the owner's decision to share or to give a personal item with the recipient's preferred action. We hypothesize that both owners' decision and recipients' preferred actions are steered by relational motives and are focused on the other person. Thus we expect owners to decide based on the presumed recipients' interests, and we expect recipients' preferences to be likely affected by the presumed givers' interests. Consequently, we theorize that owners are more likely to decide to give than to decide to share a personal product (i.e., maximizing recipients' outcomes), whereas recipients are more likely to prefer that the possession is shared with them than that it is given to them (i.e., limiting owners' costs). This behavioral pattern signals an incongruence between recipients' preferred action and the actual action taken by owners.

Method

Participants. One hundred eight students¹ (54 males, $M_{age} = 20.37$, $SD_{age} = 1.979$) from a Dutch university were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (role: owner vs. recipient) of our between-subjects design. All the participants received course credits in exchange for their participation.

Procedure. The design of this study was similar to that of Study 1. After the participants were seated in individual cubicles, they were asked to read the scenario about the Indonesian cookbook from Study 1. The participants allocated to the owner condition read the same scenario described in Study 1. The participants assigned to the recipient condition read a scenario that was adjusted to the role of the recipient of the cookbook (for more details see Appendix E). More specifically, the participants in the recipient condition read that their friend Alex owned a cookbook and was hesitating between sharing and giving it to them. All other parts of the scenario were held constant. Importantly, in the Owner and Recipient condition the consequences of both decisions were explicitly mentioned to participants (see Appendix E for the detailed instructions).

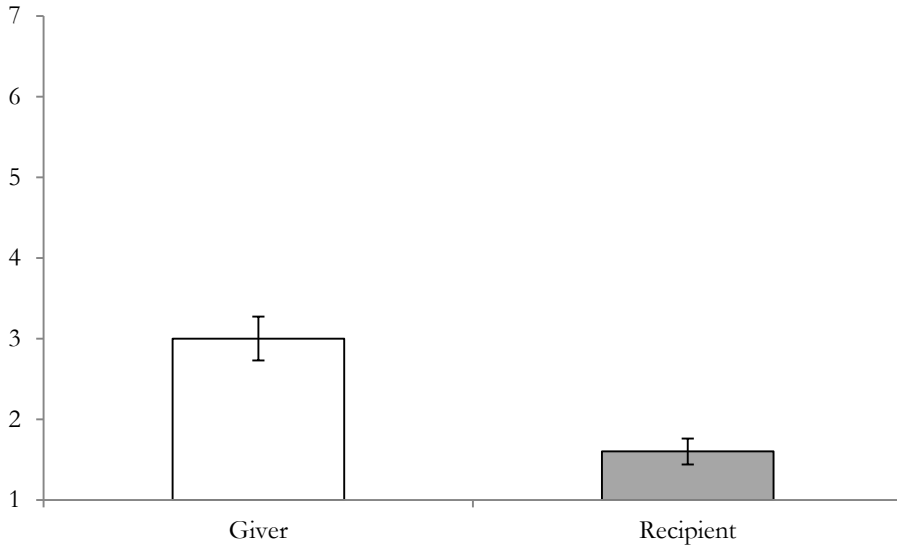
After reading the scenario, the participants had to indicate which option they would choose (owner condition) or which option they would prefer their friend Alex to choose (recipient condition). Similar to Study 1, the choice/preference was measured on a 7-point scale (1 = definitely share, 7 = definitely give) and the labels were counterbalanced to control for demand effects. Next, we measured the motivation behind the decision. The participants indicated on a 7-point scale whether their decision/preference was based on: (1) what was best for them or (7) what was best for Alex (counterbalanced). The participants also filled out a dispositional and situational social desirability scale and a social value orientation scale (see Study 1). Finally, an attention check asked participants to indicate whether they were the owner or recipient of the cookbook in the described situation. Sixteen participants incorrectly responded to the attention check and were thus excluded from the analyses. The exclusion of the sixteen participants did not change the findings.

Results

Choice and preference. We conducted a *t*-test to calculate whether the role of the participants (owner vs. recipient) affected the decision [preference] to give or to share a personal item. As expected, the results revealed that the recipients' preference was different from the owners' decision to either share or give a personal object ($t(90) = 4.253, p < .001, d = 0.89$.) Whereas recipients showed a strong preference for having a personal item shared with them ($M = 1.60, SD = 1.037$), owners were more likely to give ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.917$, see Figure 5.2). It should be noted that owners also had a slight preference for sharing, but this preference was smaller than the recipients'. Social desirability and the social value orientation measure did not affect the results and therefore are not discussed ($t's < 1.704, p's > 0.093$).

Self-interested vs relational motivation. Furthermore, we investigated whether owners and recipients differed in the motives on which their choice or preference was based. Although we expected both owners and recipients to be steered by relational motives and to be oriented towards their friend's priorities when making the decision, we found a significant difference between the two groups. Recipients ($M = 4.88, SD = 1.310$) were more strongly focused on the other person than owners were ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.994; t(90) = 5.576, p < .001, d = 1.17$). However, this unexpected difference could account for the slight preference among owners to share instead of to give.

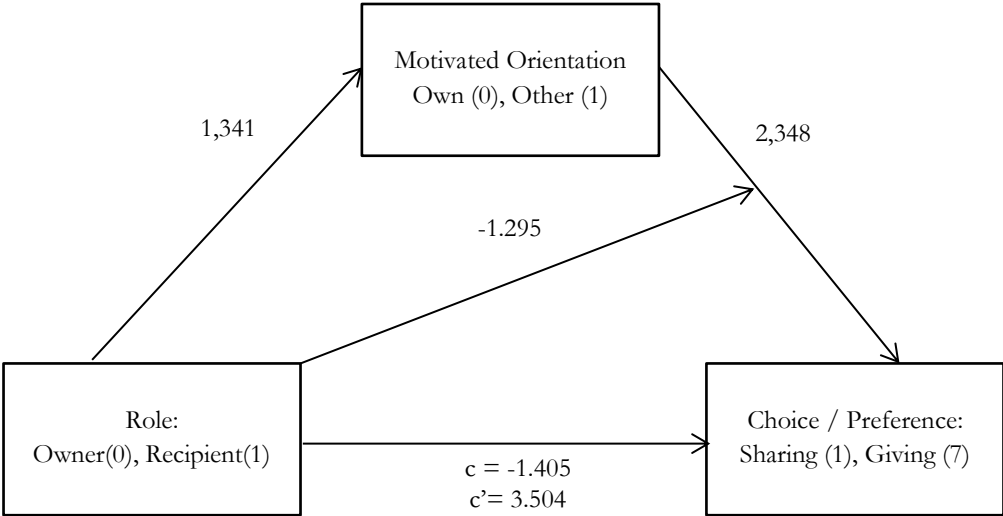
Figure 5.2: Preference between Sharing (1) and Giving (7) the Indonesian Cookbook across Conditions in Study 2



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

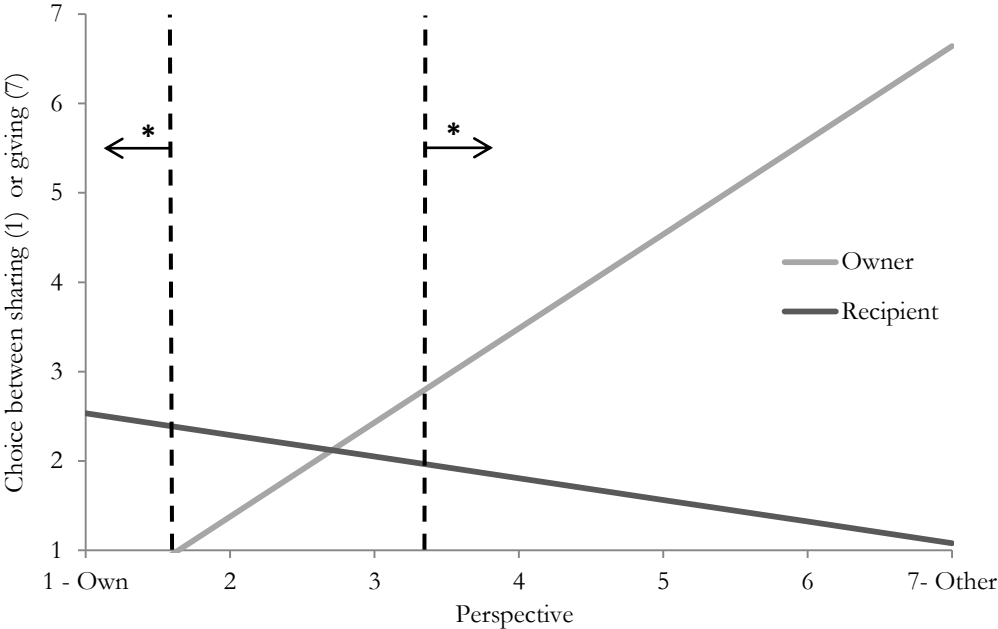
Mediation. To test whether the participants' motivated orientation could account for the differences found in the choice [preference] to give or to share a personal object across conditions, we performed a 5000-sample bootstrapping moderated mediation analysis (model 74; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The findings revealed a moderated mediation of motivated orientation on the effect of role on the choice [preference] expressed. The effect of motivated orientation on the choice [preference] to give or to share the personal object was moderated by the role of the participant (see Figure 5.3). As hypothesized, the motivated orientation, varying across conditions, influenced the owner's choice and the recipient's preference between sharing and giving a personal product, but in the opposite direction. Among recipients, a strong focus on the other person's priorities increased the preference to share, whereas among owners, a strong focus on the other person's priorities increased the decision to give. This moderated mediation confirmed our expectations ($b_{owners} = 1.4124, 0.7218 < 95\% \text{ CI} < 2.3791; b_{recipients} = -0.3242, -0.6370 < 95\% \text{ CI} < -0.1283$; see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: Mediating Role of Motivated Orientation on the Effect of Condition on the Preference Between Sharing (1) or Giving/Receiving (7) the Indonesian Cookbook



We ran a linear regression and a floodlight analysis to understand the moderated mediation in more detail and to disentangle for which values of motivated orientation owners and recipients differed regarding their choice/preference to share or to give a personal product (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013). In line with the mediation analysis, a linear regression revealed a significant interaction between the role of participants and the motivated orientation ($\beta = -2.750, p < .001, R^2 = .179$) on the expressed decision/preference. A floodlight analysis using the Johnson-Neyman technique (Spiller et al., 2013) revealed the ranges of the motivated orientation in which the simple effect of the role of participants was significantly different. The analysis identified two Johnson-Neyman points. There was a significant difference between owners and recipients in the decision/preference they expressed, with a motivated orientation score equal or below 1.6 ($B = -1.432, SE = .720, p = .050$) indicating a strong self-focused perspective. Taking a strong self-focused perspective, recipients were more likely to prefer a given possession to a shared one than the owners did. Additionally, owners and recipients also differed in the decision/preference expressed, with a

Figure 5.4: Floodlight Analysis Using the Johnson-Neyman Technique Indicating the Moderating Influence of Motivated Orientation on the Effect of Role on Choice/Preference in Study 2



Note: Asterisks (*) denote the values of motivated orientation in which the owner and recipient conditions differ significantly on the choice/preference.

motivated orientation score above 3.3 ($\beta = -0.770$, $SE = .390$, $p = .052$; see Figure 5.4), signaling a moderate to strong other-focused perspective. When owners and recipients applied a moderate to strong other-focused perspective, owners were more likely to choose to give the possession than to share it compared to recipients. Thus we found that our mediating factor, motivated orientation, had different effects for owners than for recipients with regard the decision/preference they expressed depending on whether one of them had either a strong self-focus or a moderately to strong other-focus.

Discussion

The findings of Study 2 confirmed our assumptions about the incongruence between the owner’s decision and the recipient’s preference when faced with the dilemma whether to

share or give a personal product to a friend. Owners are more likely to decide to give possession to a friend, whereas the friend is more likely to prefer having a possession shared with them than having it given to them. So the decision the owner makes does not correspond with the recipient's preference. We found that the decision and the preference expressed by both owners and recipients are caused by the orientation they apply during the decision process. Recipients fully focus on the owner's priorities, whereas owners take an intermediate approach. This difference in perspective taking potentially explains why owners do not more strongly decide to give away their personal product. Although we hypothesized that owners would focus on the recipient's priorities, it makes sense that owners could not completely let go of their own feelings. Research has shown that individuals find it difficult to let go of products to which they are attached (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, Carmon et al., 2003).

5.4 GENERAL DISCUSSION

It is not uncommon to share with or to give one's possessions to a friend who could very well use them. Sharing or giving a possession means that one has to distance him or herself from that object. Giving necessitates permanently distancing oneself from the said object and acknowledging one's friend as its new owner. When confronted with the dilemma whether to share or to give one's possession to a friend, the decision will have direct consequences for both the owner and recipient. Will owners give a personal product to a friend such that (s)he can maximally benefit from it? Or will they share this object so as not lose the associated rights of ownership? Although both decisions will likely lead to appreciation on the part of the recipient, the decisions have different effects for the owner.

In this chapter we gave insights into the decision process when owners are faced with the give-or-share dilemma. In two studies, we provided evidence for our claim that the owner's choice is nonoptimal in two ways. First, we showed that owners tend to make different decisions when focusing on their own or on their friend's priorities (Study 1). When focusing on their own priorities, owners tend to temporarily share a personal object. However, they are more likely to give it away when they are focusing on their friend's priorities. We found that when people have to decide between sharing and giving a personal object, they moderately rely on their friend's perspective and tend to give away the personal object (Study

2). This decision could thus be seen as suboptimal relative to the owner's own preferences. Second, the tendency of owners to give a personal object and to benefit the recipients' well-being contrasts with recipients' strong preference to only temporarily share their friend's possession (Study 2). This means that the owner's attempt to satisfy the needs of a friend by giving away a personal object contradicts both the owner's and the friend's preferences.

Theoretical contribution

The findings of Chapter 5 contribute to the literature on prosocial decision making. Whereas many scholars have looked at various forms of prosocial acts (e.g., gift giving, sharing, and donating; Belk, 2010; Ruth et al., 1999; Sherry, 1983; Fischer, Arnold, & Gainer, 1996), they generally studied them in singularity (i.e. are not compared with other prosocial gestures). Nevertheless, we reason that people often are confronted with a dilemma in which they can employ two (or more) prosocial acts in the same situation. Our research provides insight into the decision-making process involving multiple prosocial behaviors. We show that such decisions are not the easiest to make and that sometimes they lead to suboptimal choices. Future research should explore other situations in which consumers have to make a choice between prosocial acts and how they can make the better decisions in such choice dilemmas.

Moreover our findings relate to research on the empathy gap bias that shows that people are unable to anticipate other people's preferences and feelings because they rely too much on their own (Loewenstein, 2005). For example, people have been found to underestimate the impact of social pain, such as ostracism among others (Nordgren et al., 2011). Whereas previous research mainly focused on emotional events and consumption decisions (Van Boven, Dunning, & Loewenstein, 2000; Loewenstein, 2005; Sayette, Loewenstein, Griffin, & Black, 2008), we add to the line of research that shows that a similar bias is prevalent in the domain of prosocial decisions (Waldfogel, 1993; Teigen et al., 2005; Flynn & Adams, 2009; Zhang & Epley, 2009). Our findings suggest that although prosocial behaviors are generally focused on the other person's well-being, consumers are still not able to correctly predict the best way to satisfy the needs of another person.

The findings presented in this chapter are a first attempt to disentangle the decision process involving two prosocial behaviors (i.e. sharing and giving). Our research is preliminary and needs to be extended because many situational aspects could potentially influence the decision-making process. We believe it is important to further explore how the decision to

either share or give a personal possession is affected by environmental cues. For example, it is likely that the closeness of the relationship and the type of possession will influence the choice consumers make in this situation. The incongruence between the owner's choice and the recipient's preference might increase when the owner and recipient are close friends. After all, the friendship's closeness could enhance the owner's relational motivations to improve the relationship and the recipient's discomfort when receiving a friend's possession. Furthermore, it is possible that owners and recipients find it more difficult to give and receive, respectively, a hedonic product than a utilitarian one because these types of products are expected to differ in emotional attachment. Besides the importance of researching situational aspects that could serve as a moderator of our effect, it is important that future research should also contribute at a methodological level. Because our research involves an initial investigation into the social dilemma to share or to give a personal possession, we used simple, clean, and low-cost designs. Ideally, future research should employ different methodologies, including behavioral laboratory experiments and field studies because this will add to the external and ecological validity of the findings.

Practical relevance

Currently, Western societies place increasing emphasis on new forms of consumption. People move away from the idea that ownership is an individualistic affair, and they find it reasonable to share or give their own possessions to others. Our research has important implications for consumers involved in this popular consumption trend. To enhance consumers' well-being, we propose that it is important that consumers are made aware of the positive evaluation of shared possessions. We have shown that consumers tend to permanently give a possession to a friend when they want to satisfy that friend's needs. Nonetheless, consumers are not aware that a friend would rather receive a temporarily shared possession than be given it. Thus we believe it is important to raise awareness among consumers about this preference among friends, given that sharing a possession is less painful for the consumers as well.

Moreover, our research can serve as a source of information for practitioners. Given that consumers are considering sharing or giving possessions to friends, it could be of interest to retailers and salespersons to extend the product range and services that they offer. The re-use of shared and given possessions creates a higher demand for products and services that

are linked to the maintenance and personalization of the received possession. Take for example Anna, who decides to give her MP3 player to her friend Jessie. Jessie might find it important to buy her own headphones instead of using Anna's that accompanied the MP3 player. In addition, Jessie might decide to get the broken button fixed instead of buying a new MP3 player and she might buy a new shock cover that she particularly likes and fits her identity. Thus we suggest that retailers should exploit the demand for product accessories and services to compensate for the drop in sales as a consequence of the sharing and giving of possessions.

CHAPTER 6

General Discussion

Daily consumption experiences often involve the presence or influence of others. As a consequence, people's consumption decisions are steered by their social surroundings. Consumers make not only decisions influenced by others but also ones that are in favor of others. This dissertation concerns interpersonal consumption phenomena including gift giving and the exchange of non-ritualized favors, such as sharing. My research contributes to the interpersonal consumption domain by providing insights into the gift-giving and favor-giving process and developing relationship frameworks oriented on consumption. In this final chapter, I will summarize my findings, provide managerial recommendations, and explore future research directions.

6.1 SUMMARY AND INSIGHTS

Do apology gifts work?

Consumers who have hurt a friend's feelings might consider apologizing by giving a gift. This motivation to purchase gifts has been noticed by retailers who adapted to this trend by positioning products as an adequate apology gift. For example, products may receive names that refer to this repair function of gifts (e.g., the "chocopoly" chocolate bar; www.chocstar.nl). In Chapter 2, I discussed whether an apology gift actually meets the aim of consumers to resolve the observed angry feelings of a friend. Whereas givers expect an apology gift to be positively evaluated, the actual recipient's evaluation does not meet this expectation. I showed that gifts inadequately repair the recipient's angry feelings (i.e., the anger does not dissolve), negatively affecting the valuation of the gift product. A product is less positively evaluated when it is received as an apology gift compared to when it is received as a spontaneous gift. Moreover, Study 4 in Chapter 2 revealed that relationship appreciation is not enhanced after the receipt of an apology gift and that spoken apologies (compared to apology gifts) are more successful in the reduction of angry feelings.

The further exploration of our hypotheses in real apology settings would strengthen our conclusions. However, despite this, our set of studies has clear implications for both consumers and retailers. Since our findings do not speak in favor of giving apology gifts as adequate repair for angry feelings, consumers should reconsider how they should properly apologize to an angry friend. Our findings suggest that a low cost (i.e., low monetary

investment) spoken apology is more effective in anger reduction than an apology gift that requires monetary investment. A spoken apology might be perceived as a more genuine gesture than an apology gift. However, if in the end, consumers decide to give an apology gift, they should be aware of the empathy gap between them and the recipient so that they do not set their expectations too high regarding the anger-restoring potential of the apology gift. Besides the recommendations for consumers, our research also has implications for retailers. Given that products are less valued when received as an apology gift compared to a spontaneous gift, this raises the question whether retailers should position their products as an adequate apology. Although the positioning of a product as an adequate apology gift could increase sales, it might backfire in the long term and negatively affect the product and brand value. Because recipients attach a negative connotation to the product, this negative effect might spill over to the brand itself. Future research should further investigate the conditions under which different types of apologies, including apology gifts, would be effective remedies for resolving angry feelings. This would further improve consumers' well-being, showing how we can adequately apologize. For example, will an apology gift that directly replaces the material damage lead to more positive evaluations or will it also contain the negative connotation from the transgression?

What gift features do we like?

My dissertation is not the first research that explores which gift features positively enhance recipients' valuation of a gift. For example, previous research has shown that recipients are especially appreciative of effortful (Flynn & Adams, 2009), experiential (Chan & Mogilner, 2016), and costly gifts (Pollmann et al., 2016). In Chapter 3, we contribute to the debate on the evaluation of gifts that are congruent with one of the partners involved in the gift transaction. Whereas research has shown that gifts matching the recipient's tastes are valued (Gino & Flynn, 2011; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011), it has not been shown how recipients evaluate gifts that match the giver's tastes. In four studies, I have shown that a gift that matches the giver's core characteristics are more positively evaluated than gifts that do not match the giver's core tastes. This positive effect does not depend on the bond between the giver and recipient and thus it discloses a valuable gifting strategy that all kinds of givers can employ. In addition, I compared the valuation for giver-matched gifts with the valuation

for recipient-matched gifts. Relative to giver-matched gifts, recipients tend to prefer gifts that match their own tastes.

Gift giving is focused on the strengthening of relational ties (Sherry, 1983), and as a consequence, consumers are concerned with the purchase of a gift product that satisfies the recipient. My research informs consumers how they could enhance the gift product evaluation. Although the results suggest that consumers should focus on gifts that match the recipients' tastes, consumers have been found to sometimes find it difficult to take the perspective of another person (Teigen, et al., 2005; Stone & Allgaier, 2008; Epley et al., 2004). Even when they know a person quite well, it can be fairly difficult for consumers to anticipate recipients' tastes. When consumers are not knowledgeable of the recipient's tastes, we recommend focusing on their own identity and purchasing a gift that is related to them. After all, giver-matched gifts are more positively evaluated than non-giver-matched gifts.

Marketers could act upon the new proposed giver-matched gift strategy. Especially in the online retail market, marketers can take advantage of the information collected online on customers. Companies could adjust their holiday-season email marketing messages, advertising products that relate to previous purchases of the consumer instead of usual holiday gift products. Similarly, marketers could adjust website algorithms that determine the outcomes of the product search engine for customers who actively search for gifts. Gift products displayed on top of the search could relate to previous purchases made by the customer.

How do consumers respond to a favor received from a local retailer (or a friend)?

Favors are given and received in all kinds of relationships, including personal (e.g., friendships) and commercial relationships (e.g., retailer-customer relationships), to maintain and strengthen the relational ties. Nonetheless, it is not very likely that consumers' responses to a favor received from a commercial partner are similar to the responses to a favor received from a friend. These relationship archetypes are after all very distinct in relational norms and goals (Rumble et al., 2010; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005). Existing relationship frameworks (Clark & Mills, 2011; Fiske, 1992) predict that consumers are especially responsive to favors received from commercial partners, which discloses a potential fruitful marketing strategy for commercial companies. In contrast, in Chapter 4 of this dissertation I revealed the opposite and presented evidence that consumers are particularly responsive to favors received from friends compared to favors received from various commercial partners. The increased feelings

of discomfort and guilt experienced by consumers when a friend favors them seem to explain these results. To align the findings of Chapter 4 with existing relationship theories, I suggested a potential modification of the framework distinguishing between responses to an advantageous (i.e., favor receiving) and disadvantageous (i.e., favor initiating) distorted relational balance. However, in future research, I aim to fine-tune my research and address the small fluctuations found across our studies.

Companies have employed reciprocal marketing techniques to attract and retain consumers and to increase sales. However, the findings of Chapter 4 suggest that such techniques might not be as fruitful as companies assume. Consumers do not explicitly feel compelled to return a favor received from a commercial partner. I am not suggesting that reciprocal marketing techniques are a waste of marketing budgets. Specific circumstances might alter consumers' responses to commercial favors. In line with the findings of Chapter 4, the impression that consumers have of the company might play a role. Some companies are perceived as warmer and friendlier as other companies (Bennett & Gabriel, 2003). The findings of Chapter 4 suggest that favors are more likely to be restored in friendships; thus, companies might want to create a friendlier relationship with their customers. This assumption, based on the findings of Chapter 4, needs to be explored further in future research.

Should we share or give a personal possession?

Consumers own various durable goods that are not used on a frequent basis. Some possessions actually end up in a cupboard or the storage space, leaving the products untouched for a while. Although people find it hard to dispose of possessions (Thaler, 1980; Kahneman et al., 1991), they might consider giving it away or sharing it with a friend, especially since the reuse of consumption products has become popular in our sustainability-oriented society. In Chapter 5, I addressed the dilemma that consumers face when they own an object that could benefit a friend. Both sharing and giving the personal object will enable the friend to use the product in question. However, these prosocial behaviors have different implications for the owner of the product. Whereas sharing involves a temporary loss of the product, giving requires permanent distancing from the product. So although sharing seems a more attractive decision for owners, I found that owners are prompted to give their personal object to their friend to attain the best outcome for the friend (i.e., the friend can keep the

product). This finding shows the prosocial aspect of society: consumers are willing to prioritize the needs of their friends. Nevertheless, I showed that this prosocial decision is suboptimal and contrary to both the owner's self-interest and the recipient's preference. Future research on the social dilemma between sharing and giving personal possessions to others should highlight under which circumstances owners tend to be more self-interested in their choice or how consumers could be made aware of the preference of friends during the decision process.

Consumers are willing to permanently distance themselves from possessions and give them to friends who need them. This prosocial consumption trend – giving possessions a second life – changes the business priorities for product category managers. Product category managers might even more want to shift their focus from the sales of new products to the supply of product parts or the maintenance of the consumer goods. As people also like to express their identity thru consumption, managers might also want to seize the accessories market that enables consumers to create a product that fits their tastes and interests (e.g., smartphone covers).

Relevance and contribution to the interpersonal consumption domain

The research presented in this dissertation articulates that the influences of others on our decisions related to them are numerous. In personal relationships (e.g., friendships), mutual care steers consumers to behave in such a way that it is to the advantage of the other person and promotes the other's outcomes and happiness. Unfortunately, consumers are sometimes unsuccessful in realizing this aim in the area of gift giving and non-ritualized favors (e.g., sharing). My research indicates that to become more successful in realizing this goal, people sometimes should be more self-oriented when making interpersonal consumption decisions directed to a friend. In contrast with personal relationships, consumers in commercial relationships appear to distance themselves from the aim of prioritizing the other person's benefit, and instead, they act in accordance with their own needs, leading to less cooperative behavior. It is important for consumers to be aware of these consumption trends across relationships because these will help them better understand and predict the behaviors of others. Consumers should be aware of the vicious circle involving the influence that another person has on their own behavior directed towards that other person and the influence of their behavior on the responses of the other person.

My research also shows the impact of social equity in people's interpersonal consumption decisions (e.g., responsiveness to a favor) and opinions (e.g., valuation of gifts). Interestingly, through the chapters of this dissertation, we find that various emotions can arise in consumption contexts characterized by social inequity. Consumers feel angry in situations in which another person intentionally disadvantages them, whereas consumers seem to develop feelings of discomfort and guilt in situations in which others intentionally have given them a favor. Distinct consumer responses to the social inequity and to the evaluation of the relationship can thus arise.

Every day consumers make consumption decisions that are directed towards another person. This dissertation investigated how these face-to-face interpersonal consumption decisions directed towards a specific person are influenced by various factors, including the relationship with the other person and the emotions experienced by both parties. The new insights into interpersonal consumption behavior are quite relevant in light of digital advancements and the rise of social media. For example, many social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter) offer consumers opportunities to access information about others that could be valuable for purchasing recipient-matched gifts. Nonetheless, relationships on social media platforms might be prone to social inequity. Because Facebook "likes" have never been as important to consumers as they are now, online friendships might easily get distorted if a person is less active on social media than their friend. Given the rapidly changing digital and online environment, interpersonal consumption will develop fast too. New interpersonal consumption phenomena might arise that require further investigation.

6.2 FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR INTERPERSONAL CONSUMPTION RESEARCH

In the previous section I reviewed my findings and placed them in context, signaling opportunities and pointing out implications for both consumers and business. I will now discuss future research directions on interpersonal consumer decisions that will contribute to the development of the subdomains presented in this dissertation, i.e., gift giving and non-ritualized favors, followed by a suggestion of a new line of research on interpersonal

consumer decision making related to the sharing economy. This research domain recently started to emerge and needs further development.

Gift-giving

The second and third chapter of this dissertation addressed the gift giving domain. The presented research pointed out that gift giving does not always evoke the same warm feelings among recipients when the gift aims to resolve angry feelings (Chapter 2). This shows that givers should be careful in their gift selection and underlines the importance of selecting the right gifting strategy. Next to the recipient-matched and relationship-matched gifting strategies, I also established that a giver-matched gifting strategy also positively affects recipients' gift product evaluation. Future research should investigate what kinds of motivations fit the gifting strategies. Gifts serve a symbolic function, expressing the motivations and ideas of the giver (Heeler et al., 1979; Schwartz, 1967). Hence, a gift might be well received when the motivation fits the gifting strategy. For example, giver-matched gifts might be especially appreciated when it serves as a memory cue of a special occasion; think of gifts received for attending a wedding or gifts given to the doctoral committee members after a public defense. Similarly, recipient-matched gifts might be especially valuable to congratulate recipients for their unique accomplishment (e.g., graduation), or to apologize to them. In apology settings, the gift should not only symbolize the intention to resolve the recipient's angry feelings, but it should also communicate that the friendship is valuable and that the giver will not again ignore the recipient's needs. A recipient-matched gift seems to symbolize this message well.

Besides the suggestion for future research to investigate the gift motivations that match the various gifting strategies, there are many opportunities to develop the knowledge about the gift consumption process. Whereas it is informative to explore what other gift features are valued by recipients, I focus on three topics that are worthy of attention. First, I believe it would be of interest to investigate how third parties influence the first stage of the gift-giving process, when gift selection takes place (gestation). Givers might change their gifting strategy if they are knowledgeable about the other people who are invited to a celebrative occasion and will also be giving gifts to the same recipient. Some givers might group together, and others might become competitive. Gifts are symbolic gestures (Heeler et al., 1979; Schwarz, 1967) that provide givers the opportunity to express the importance of the

relationship with the recipient. A giver who is very close with the recipient might feel pressured to show this closeness and would want to outperform others by giving the nicest gift.

Second, I believe it is important to focus on the third stage (reformulation) of the gift-giving process, when the gift product is consumed and the relationship is realigned. Not all gifts meet the expectations of the recipient, and therefore they might end up being regifted to another person. The little research on regifting behavior show that recipients believe it is an inappropriate response to the receipt of a gift (Adams, Flynn, & Norton, 2012) and that the sentiment of a regifted item can both be positive and negative (Swilley, Cowart, & Flynn, 2014). Since regifting could either go wrong or right, it is important to know under which circumstances the initial giver and the new recipient find regifting acceptable and positively evaluate it. For example, the appreciation for the regifted object by the new recipient might depend on the identity relevance of the gift. In Chapter 3 we compared the positive effect of giver-matched gifts next to the positive effect of recipient-matched gifts (Gino & Flynn, 2011; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011). An initial recipient-matched gift will turn into a giver-matched gift when regifted, and this could still enhance the gift evaluation of the new recipient. However, an initial giver-matched gift could appear to be an unrelated gift when regifted, thus diminishing the final gift evaluation of the new recipient.

Third, it is of interest how gift givers behave during the reformulation stage. Objectively, the gift has been given and therefore the giver has distanced herself from the gift. However, it is relevant to know whether givers actually feel that they are no longer in charge of the gift product. According to previous research, people find it hard to let go of products that they have not even possessed yet (Carmon et al., 2003). Is it possible that givers feel strongly entitled to use gifts that they have given to a friend? Do recipients feel obliged to allow givers to use of the gift product? Addressing these questions will extend our knowledge of the gift-giving process and its long-term consequences next to the relationship maintenance.

Initiation and receipt of favors

Chapters 4 and 5 provided new insights on the consumers' willingness to initiate and respond to a favor, like the unexpected coverage of dinner costs or the sharing of personal items. The studies demonstrated that consumers' responsiveness to the receipt of a favor is

very distinct across personal and commercial relationships (Chapter 4). Consumers are more concerned with reciprocating a received favor in personal than in commercial relationships. This mutual preference among friends to act in a way that is best for the other person is also visible in other social occasions. When consumers consider giving a possession to or sharing it with a friend, the receiving friend prefers to share (i.e., borrow) the item than to receive it as a gift (Chapter 5). Nonetheless, if recipients do not inform their friend about their preference for the less costly option, the giving friend may choose to act more generously and give the possession instead of just sharing it. Future research in the domain of the initiation and receipt of favors can focus on the long-term consequences of different forms of favors (e.g., borrowing, co-consumption, donations, and costs coverage) across different relationship types. What effects do they have on the quality of the relationship and on the identity of the consumers involved? Some types of favors are built on trust, like borrowing/lending. Consumers have to trust that the borrowed product is returned in good shape. Trust-related favors (compared to favors not built on trust) could then have stronger negative effects on the relationship, for instance, when the object is not returned in a good condition and the consumer's trust is damaged. Moreover, Belk (2010) suggested that the receipt of favors affect consumers' perception of the (extended) self. The question then is whether this holds for favors received in all types of relationships. Are consumers equally receptive to an extension of the self-concept when favors are received from either a personal or commercial partner?

Next to the suggestion to explore the general consequences of various favors in future research, there may be more specific favor-oriented consumption occasions that need to be further investigated. Companies sometimes fail to deliver the right product, and thus they try to compensate the consumer (Folkes, 1984; Kelley, Hoffman, & Davis, 1993). Various strategies could be applied to increase consumers' satisfaction after a product failure, including replacing the product or giving store credit (Kelley et al., 1993). Whereas consumers believe they are owed an apology (Folkes, 1984; Laufer, 2002), companies might decide to apologize via a favor, overcompensating the consumer. Are consumers willing to accept an extra favor, or will their acceptance depend on the type of overcompensation? For example, a company could offer an additional favor that requires future purchases at the store (e.g., extra store credit) or an additional favor that is not conditional on the consumers' return (e.g., sending an extra free product). On the one hand, it could be argued that consumers perceive a favor conditional upon a new purchase as less genuine than an unconditional favor, leading to lower

favor acceptance rates and lower levels of loyalty. On the other hand, the conditional favor allows customers to pick their most desired product, which can lead to higher favor acceptance rates and higher levels of loyalty. Different factors could be at play that influence consumers' preference for the (un)conditional favor. Besides consumers' future need for products of the company, the preference for the unconditional or conditional favor might also depend on the relatedness of the unconditional favor to the repaired or replaced product. In addition, the consumers' preference could also depend on their decision-making style (i.e., maximizers vs. satisficers; Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lyobomirsky, White, & Lehman, 2002; Parker, De Bruin, & Fischhoff, 2007). Maximizers probably prioritize the conditional favor because it allows them to pick a favor that best fits their tastes or interests.

Sharing economy

Next to the many future research opportunities on interpersonal consumption phenomena studied in this dissertation (i.e. gift giving and favor exchange), a relatively new interpersonal consumption domain has appeared on the research horizon. The sharing economy has made some types of ownerships more prominent in our consumption society. I will briefly address this new domain and suggest future research directions as I believe that this will be a highly interesting research domain for consumer researchers.

In current Western consumption societies, consumers do not only buy brand-new products for individual usage. Consumers also love to shop at vintage stores and community initiatives such as toy libraries are also on the rise, stimulating the usage of the same product across multiple consumers. At the business level, the sharing economy also brought about shared-based companies such as Uber, Airbnb, and Couchsurfing. Next to these community and business initiatives, consumers have also become interested in relatively new types of ownership. Next to individual possessions, consumers have started to consider joint-ownership (i.e., consumers purchase and own a product together) and shared ownership (i.e., consumers rent from or lend a product to other consumers). Given the different nature of these new types of ownership compared to private ownership, it is quite likely that the former affect consumers' perceptions of products and their related consumption behaviors. It could, for example, be emphasized that the new types of ownership – oriented on shared consumption – especially enhance sustainable consumption. Joint ownership and sharing one's possession lowers the demand for products and, as a consequence, might reduce the

waste of resources. Nevertheless, this assumption might be too rosy and unrealistic. I suggest that consumers might dispose of and replace joint or shared purchases sooner than private purchases.

Age is an important indicator of the value and physical state of a product, and it affects our attitudes and decisions regarding the product (Cervellon, Carey, Harms, 2012; Mortara & Ironico, 2011; Perla, 2016). On the one hand, an aged product could signal quality, as in the case of port wine and cheese (e.g., Tao, Garcia, & Sun, 2014), or authenticity, as in the case of vintage clothes and old timers (e.g., Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). On the other hand, age can also attach a negative connotation, for example, to technology and fresh food products. In consumption contexts, we can distinguish between the objective age and perceived age of a product. Objective age refers to the real number of days, months, or years after the item's production date. The perceived age of a product I define as the consumers' subjective interpretation of the potential age of the product. For example, the subjective age might be influenced by the usage frequency. A television used every day might be considered older than one used only once a month. Although the objective and perceived age can be equivalent, I believe this often will not be the case. Situational factors (e.g., usage frequency, product maintenance) are likely to increase the variance between the objective age and estimated perceived age.

I am specifically interested in how different ownership styles (i.e., individual, joint, or shared possessions) affect consumers' perception of the age of the product and their subsequent behavioral decisions (e.g., the disposal and replacement of the product). Do consumers perceive a private possession as younger than a jointly purchased or a shared possession (independent of the usage frequency)? Or does this gap in perceived age only appear between private possessions and jointly purchased possessions but not between private possessions and shared possessions? Based on the contamination literature (e.g., Argo, Dahl, & Morales, 2006; Loersch & Payn, 2012), it could be suggested that both jointly purchased possessions and shared possessions are more likely to be judged as filthy, and therefore are perceived as older than private possessions because the former have been handled by more people. This contamination explanation would suggest that the use of a product (private vs. shared) affects the perceived age: the more users, the higher the perceived age. A different hypothesis could be drawn from the comparative optimism literature (Chambers, Windschitl, & Suls, 2003), which emphasizes that people believe they are better off than others. It could

be argued that consumers explicitly believe that the products they own are better than the ones that they do not (fully) own, and thus they perceive the age of these privately owned products as younger. Contrary to the contamination explanation, the comparative optimism theory would suggest that the ownership level (individual vs. shared) determines products' perceived age.

In sum, for future research, I am very motivated to disentangle how new interpersonal types of ownership and possession affect consumers perception and decisions. I believe this will substantially contribute to the current literature on interpersonal consumer decision making by providing insights on the phenomenon of the sharing economy and its potential outcomes in terms of sustainable consumption.

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APPENDIX A

Items and Factor Loadings of the Gift Evaluation Index for Chapter 2 (Studies 1, 2a, 2b, 3, 4 and 5) and Chapter 3 (Studies 1, 3, 4 and 5)

Chapter 2

Item	Study 1	Study 2A	Study 2B	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5
1. How much would you appreciate the gift?	.96	.98	.90	.95	.93	.94
2. How grateful would you feel for the gift?	.96	.95	.93	.97	-	.95
3. How thankful would you feel for the gift?	.95	.92	.91	.93	-	.93
4. How pleased would you feel about receiving the gift?	.94	.96	.85	.96	.97	.95
5. How much do you like the gift?	.88	.90	.67	.88	.92	.87
Eigenvalues	4.53	4.53	3.92	4.52	2.77	4.46
% of variance	90.51	90.59	78.35	90.45	92.21	89.18
Reliability (α)	.97	.97	.93	.97	.96	.97

Chapter 3

Item	Study 1	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5
1. How much would you appreciate the gift?	.85	.89	.88	.80
2. How grateful would you feel for the gift?	.87	.93	.90	.75
3. How thankful would you feel for the gift?	.74	.93	.88	.81
4. How pleased would you feel about receiving the gift?	.80	.88	.87	.79
5. How much do you like the gift?	.79	.74	.74	.57
Eigenvalues	3.62	4.06	3.92	3.96
% of variance	72.47	81.25	78.46	79.27
Reliability (α)	.89	.94	.92	.93

APPENDIX B

Stimuli of Study 4, Chapter 2

	Low priced	Medium priced	High priced
Flower bouquet	 \$ 8	 \$ 30	 \$ 68
Concert tickets	 \$ 12 Per person	 \$ 35 Per person	 \$ 70 Per person
Dinner at a restaurant	 \$ 16 Per person	 \$ 36 Per person	 \$ 72 Per person
Bottle of wine	 \$ 9	 \$ 33	 \$ 74

APPENDIX C

Scenarios of Studies 1A – 1C, Chapter 4

Study 1A (Shampoo)

Friendship

Alex is one of your closest friends and works as a hairdresser. Last time you met each other, Alex gave you a bottle of shampoo of a new professional brand for free.

Customer relationship

Alex is your hairdresser. Last time at the end of your appointment, Alex gave you a bottle of shampoo of a new professional brand for free.

Study 1B (Drink offered)

Friendship

You are out for dinner and drinks together with your sibling. After dinner the waitress tells you that a person on the other side of the room offers you a drink. When you look around you notice that one of your best friends is sitting on the other side of the restaurant.

Customer relationship

You are out for dinner and drinks together with your sibling. After dinner the waitress tells you that a person on the other side of the room offers you a drink. When you look around you notice that one of your best friends is sitting on the other side of the restaurant.

Study 1C (DVD)

Friendship

It is a Saturday afternoon and you and a friend are in the downtown shopping district. You recently got a subscription to a magazine and received an accompanying voucher for a season of one of your favorite TV shows on DVD. When you arrive at the multimedia store you notice that the DVD box is currently sold out, but will be in stock again the next day. Unfortunately you do not live closeby and it will take you more than an hour to travel to the store. Your friend, who lives almost next door to the multimedia store, offers to pick up the DVD the next day and send it to you. This is a gesture of goodwill; after all it is the publisher of the magazine's responsibility to ensure that the DVD is available at the stores where the voucher is valid.

Customer relationship

It is a Saturday afternoon and you and a friend are in the downtown shopping district. You recently got a subscription to a magazine and received an accompanying voucher for a season of one of your favorite TV shows on DVD. When you arrive at the multimedia store you notice that the DVD box is currently sold out, but will be in stock again the next day. Unfortunately you do not live closeby and it will take you more than an hour to travel to the store. The owner of the store offers to send you the DVD for free. This is a gesture of goodwill; after all it is the publisher of the magazine's responsibility to ensure that the DVD is available at the stores where the voucher is valid.

APPENDIX D

Social interaction game instructions across conditions of Study 4, Chapter 4

Friendship role A

In this first part of the experimental session we are interested in how people interact with each other. You will interact with the other person in this room. Please follow the instructions set below. After about 5-10 minutes the experimenter will stop the interaction and tell you about the next part. For study purposes the interaction will be recorded.

Please read the instructions carefully.

You are **PERSON A**, the person in front of you is PERSON B.

PERSON A

You are an ambitious student who is fond of sports. You follow almost all big sport events such as the soccer world championship, the super bowl, and Wimbledon. Your favorite event is the Olympic Games, because it includes a wide variety and high amount of games. Your interest in sports is thus very broad. In your personal life, you practice tennis. You play tennis twice a week, indoor or outdoor depending on the season. In addition you like photography. In the past you took a beginners course on photography. You like to take pictures of people and urban areas in your daily life. When you go on holidays you always bring your camera to capture the beauty of the country in new pictures. Next to these hobbies, you like to hang out with friends and go for a drink. Although you often end up in your favorite bar you like to explore new venues as well.

PERSON B

You recently became friends with PERSON B, whom you met via a common friend. You haven't met each other often, but the times you chatted it seemed that you had a lot in common. Today you and PERSON B, your new friend, grab a lunch together.

Shortly introduce yourself:

What is your name, age and nationality?

Please talk about both your and PERSON B's interests and hobbies. Take the descriptions as a guideline, but you are allowed to use your own experiences as well.

Make sure you get to know the following about PERSON B.

- Name, age, nationality
- What does (s)he study?
- Does (s)he like sports? If yes, which kind of sports? Does (s)he play?
- Does (s)he like music? If yes, which kind of music? Does she play or sing?
- What other hobbies does (s)he have?
- What is his/her favorite dish?
- What would (s)he like to do after graduating from university?
- If (s)he could travel anywhere in the world, where would (s)he go and why?
- What is one habit (s)he'd like to break?

Friendship role B

In this first part of the experimental session we are interested in how people interact with each other. You will interact with the other person in this room. Please follow the instructions set below. After about 5-10 minutes the experimenter will stop the interaction and tell you about the next part. For study purposes the interaction will be recorded.

Please read the instructions carefully.

You are **PERSON B**, the person in front of you is PERSON A.

PERSON A

You recently became friends with PERSON A, whom you met via a common friend. You haven't met each other often, but the times you chatted it seemed that you had a lot in common. Today you and PERSON A, your new friend, grab a lunch together.

PERSON B

You are an ambitious student who is fond of music. You listen to all kinds of music, ranging from jazz to rock. You regularly go to concerts and festivals to listen to great musicians and discover new ones. Your favorite festival is Sziget in Budapest, Hungary. You especially like this festival because of the wide variety of music. Your interest in music is thus very broad. You play guitar and piano yourself and try to write your own songs. In addition, you like to travel and discover new countries. The best way you find yourself doing this is by taking photographs of all kinds of unique things and irregularities in different countries. You always bring your camera with you when you travel. Next to

these hobbies, you like to hang out with friends and go for a drink. You like to explore new venues but you also often end up in your favorite bar.

Shortly introduce yourself:

What is your name, age and nationality?

Please talk about both your and PERSON A's interests and hobbies. Take the descriptions as a guideline, but you are allowed to use your own experiences as well.

Make sure you get to know the following about PERSON A.

- Name, age, nationality
- What does (s)he study?
- Does (s)he like sports? If yes, which kind of sports? Does (s)he play?
- Does (s)he like music? If yes, which kind of music? Does she play or sing?
- What other hobbies does (s)he have?
- What is his/her favorite dish?
- What would (s)he like to do after graduating from university?
- If (s)he could travel anywhere in the world, where would (s)he go and why?
- What is one habit (s)he'd like to break?

Commercial relationship Role A

In this first part of the experimental session we are interested in how people interact with each other. You will interact with the other person in this room. Please follow the instructions set below. After about 5-10 minutes the experimenter will stop the interaction and tell you about the next part. For study purposes the interaction will be recorded.

Please read the instructions carefully.

You are **PERSON A**, the person in front of you is **PERSON B**.

PERSON A

You represent Riggs Engineering. Your company manufactures and services sophisticated recycling equipment for the computer industry. PERSON B, from Vericomp has shown interest in acquiring one of your systems to reprocess solvents that it uses in cleaning the computer chips that it produces. Today will be your first meeting. In this meeting you will both discuss your standpoint.

You, as representative of Riggs Engineering, find it important that the following criteria are met.

Price:

The minimum price you ask for the system Vericomp is interested in is 7.000 dollar. But you are a commercial company who wants to maximize profit. So with additional service packages you aim to sell the system for 10.000 dollar. You are flexible in price asked for the system and its additional services. However, the price depends on the amount of services you provide to maintain the system.

Service Provision:

Operation and maintenance of your equipment requires constant services by highly trained technicians. Although there is a basic package of service provision (level 1), you would advise Vericomp to purchase a higher level of service during the contract (level 2 – 4). Your goal of course, would be to make an appropriate amount of profit on this added service.

Payment Schedule:

There are three options for payment. Level payments in which regular installments are made over the life of the contract. Front-loaded payment in which the customer pays more at the beginning of the contract than the end. Back-loaded payment in which the customer pays less at the beginning than at the end. You are willing to reduce the price somewhat (~500 dollar) if Vericomp would agree to accelerate its payments, though you would not want to give too deep a cut.

Delivery date:

Riggs Engineering prefers to install the equipment as soon as possible. In the past the company had an important job with another customer which was cancelled before the installation. You can give Vericomp a small discount if they choose to immediately install the equipment, but you rather do not want to give this discount.

Please introduce yourself and discuss Riggs Engineering's and Vericomp's wishes regarding the deal with PERSON B. Important: You should not start a negotiation. Just inform the other commercial party about your criteria. Discuss the following aspects of the deal.

- Price
- Service provision
- Payment schedule
- Delivery date

Commercial relationship role B

In this first part of the experimental session we are interested in how people interact with each other. You will interact with the other person in this room. Please follow the instructions set below. After about 5-10 minutes the

experimenter will stop the interaction and tell you about the next part. For study purposes the interaction will be recorded.

Please read the instructions carefully.

You are **PERSON B**, the person in front of you is **PERSON A**.

PERSON B

You represent Vericom. Your company makes specialized computer chips in a process that requires the use of expensive and potentially toxic cleaning solvents. You are interested to close a deal with PERSON A from Riggs Engineering. Riggs sells and services sophisticated equipment for recycling such materials. Their system would significantly reduce production costs and potential environmental liability.

You, as representative of Vericom, find it important that the following criteria are met.

Price.

The amount you are willing to pay depends on how much service Riggs agrees to provide. You maximally can pay 8.000 dollar which should include full maintenance of the equipment. Of course you do not want to pay too much and receive a sharp offer.

Service Provision.

Operation and maintenance of your equipment requires constant services. Although there is a basic package of service provision, you know you need more service. You do not want to pay excessive prices for the highest level of service of Riggs, because it might be financially more advantageous to outsource the maintenance to another company. Thus you would like to extend the service provided by Riggs, but only if it does not cost you too much.

Payment Schedule.

There are three options for payment. Level payments in which regular installments are made over the life of the contract. Front-loaded payment in which the customer pays more at the beginning of the contract than the end. Back-loaded payment in which the customer pays less at the beginning than at the end. You prefer a back-loaded contract. You would consider accelerating payments only if Riggs is willing to give you a significant discount of at least 1000 dollar.

Delivery date.

You prefer to get the equipment installed in six months. But you do not mind to adjust your planning and let Riggs install it in three months from now.

Please introduce yourself and discuss Vericomp's and Riggs Engineering's wishes regarding the deal with PERSON A. Important: You should not start a negotiation. Just inform the other commercial party about your criteria. Discuss the following aspects of the deal.

- Price
- Service provision
- Payment schedule
- Delivery date

APPENDIX E

Giver Scenario Study 1 and Study 2, Chapter 5

Five years ago you bought an Indonesian cookbook in a local bookstore. The book contains a lot of tasty and easy-to-follow recipes of traditional Indonesian dishes. The purchase was a hit and over the past few years you prepared many dishes from the book. In the last few months, however, you haven't used the book.

Recently one of your closest friends, Alex, got back from a holiday trip to Indonesia and (s)he has really fallen in love with that country. Alex especially loved the spicy Indonesian cuisine.

Due to Alex' enthusiasm about the Indonesian cuisine you are considering to either give or share your Indonesian cookbook. You realize that you loved to cook from the book, but you also know that Alex will love to use it.

You have two options:

- 1.) You can decide to give your friend Alex your book for him or her to keep. This means that you will not have the book anymore to prepare some Indonesian food yourself.
- 2.) You can decide to share your book with your friend Alex, allowing him or her to use it whenever (s)he wants. This means that you will still be able to use it in the future.

Recipient Scenario Study 2, Chapter 5

Five years ago one of your friends, Alex, bought an Indonesian cookbook in a local bookstore. The book contains a lot of tasty and easy-to-follow recipes of traditional Indonesian dishes. The purchase was a hit and over the past few years Alex prepared many dishes from the book. In the last few months, however, Alex hasn't used the book.

Recently you got back from a holiday trip to Indonesia and you have really fallen in love with the country. You especially loved the spicy Indonesian cuisine.

Due to your enthusiasm about the Indonesian cuisine Alex is considering to either give or share his/her Indonesian cookbook. You will love to use it, but you realize that Alex also loved to cook from the book.

Alex has two options:

- 1.) Alex can decide to give you his/her book for you to keep. This means that Alex will not have the book anymore to prepare some Indonesian food him or herself.
- 2.) Alex can decide to share his/her book with you, allowing you to use it whenever you want. This means that (s)he will still be able to use it in the future.

SUMMARY

Consumption is not an isolated phenomenon, but often involves the (in)direct presence of others. People often consume or make consumption decisions together or in the favor of others. Consequently the people in our surroundings are likely to have an influence on our consumption decisions. They influence what consumption goods we buy (e.g. I need to buy a gift for a friend and therefore I cannot purchase myself a new pair of shoes) and how we behave in consumption contexts (e.g. I order a starter and main dish because my boss also orders it). In this dissertation I explore various interpersonal consumption occasions and the influence of others on consumers' decisions. In the first two chapters I focus on an archetype of interpersonal decision making, namely the gift giving domain. In the other two chapters I shift my attention from the gift giving context to the domain of less ritualized favors and address how these favors are initiated and received.

In Chapter 2 I propose that an apology setting negatively affects the gift product evaluation and that such apology gifts, given in response to angry feelings, are not effective with regard to the giver's expected evaluation and the aim to resolve the angry feelings. In line with these predictions we find that a gift product is less positively evaluated when received as an apology gift compared to a spontaneous gift. Furthermore I show that givers' expected gift product evaluation is higher than the actual evaluation that recipients express after having received the apology gift. Finally, we reveal that the apology gift product serves as an inadequate repair of the angry feelings, explaining the negative influence of apology settings on the gift product evaluation.

In Chapter 3 I explore a new gift strategy that givers can employ to enhance gift evaluation. Gifts that contain a reference to the giver's characteristics are more positively evaluated than gifts that do not contain such a reference. This positive effect of giver matched gifts on the product evaluation is evoked by recipients' perceived congruence between the gift and the giver. Subsequently I compare the valuation of giver-matched gifts with recipient-matched gifts and reveal that recipients prefer recipient-matched gifts over giver-matched gifts. Consequently the giver-matching gifting strategy shows to be especially valuable for consumers who do not know the recipient well.

In Chapter 4 I move away from the gift giving domain and investigate the responses of consumers to non-ritualized favors received from various relational partners. I compare

consumers' responses to favors received from a friend and a commercial partner and predict that consumers are more responsive to a favor received from a friend. Existing relationship frameworks have implied the opposite, stating that a balanced relationship is more important in commercial relationships. I suggest a nuancing of the existing theoretical frameworks, differentiating between consumer responses to an advantaged distorted balance (i.e. receiving a favor) and a disadvantaged distorted balance (i.e. initiating a favor).

Finally, in Chapter 5 I address how consumers behave when confronted with the prosocial dilemma between sharing (i.e. lending) and giving a possession to a friend who is in need of it. Both sharing and giving are prosocial acts expected to result in relational bonding. Whereas giving (compared to sharing) involves a more costly behavior from the owner, it also leads to a greater outcome for the recipient. I demonstrate that due to relationship oriented motivations consumers are more likely to give than share a possession to a friend and that this decision is incongruent with owners' self-interest and recipients' preference for sharing the possession.

In sum, my research contributes to the awareness among consumers and practitioners about the role of (significant) others in our consumption decisions. Concrete recommendations are made to consumers regarding the gift giving and favoring process and to retailers regarding customer relationship management strategies and product positioning.

SAMENVATTING

Consumptie is geen geïsoleerd fenomeen, maar is vaak een sociale aangelegenheid die door de (in)directe aanwezigheid van anderen wordt beïnvloed. Mensen consumeren vaak samen met anderen of maken consumptie beslissingen die anderen bevoordelen. De mensen in onze omgeving hebben daardoor automatisch een invloed op onze consumptie beslissingen. Anderen beïnvloeden welke aankopen wij doen (b.v. ik koop een cadeau voor een vriend en daardoor kan ik mij zelf nu geen nieuw paar schoenen veroorloven) en hoe wij ons gedragen in verschillende consumptie contexten (b.v. mijn baas bestelt een voor- en hoofdgerecht, doe ik dit ook?). In deze dissertatie verken ik verschillende interpersoonlijke consumptie aangelegenheden en de invloed die anderen hebben op onze consumptie keuzes. In de eerste twee hoofdstukken focus ik op een archetype van interpersoonlijke beslissingen, het geven en ontvangen van cadeaus. In de andere twee hoofdstukken verplaats ik mijn focus naar het domein van de minder ritueel georiënteerde gunsten en bestudeer ik hoe deze gunsten worden geïnitieerd en ontvangen.

In Hoofdstuk 2 veronderstel ik dat de waardering voor een product negatief wordt beïnvloed wanneer deze wordt gegeven als een verontschuldiging. Ik verwacht dat dergelijke goedmaak cadeaus, gericht om woede te verminderen, niet het gewenste resultaat hebben met betrekking tot de verwachte waardering van gevers en het verminderen van woede gevoelens. In overeenstemming met onze voorspellingen vinden we dat een product minder waardering ontvangt wanneer dit is ontvangen als een goedmaak cadeau dan als een spontaan cadeau. Daarbij laat ik zien dat de verwachting van gevers over de waardering van het cadeau niet overeenkomt met de werkelijke waardering van ontvangers. Tot slot toon ik aan dat een goedmaak cadeau wordt beschouwd als een inadequate reparatie van de woede gevoelens, welke de mindere waardering voor goedmaak cadeaus verklaart.

In Hoofdstuk 3 verken ik een nieuwe strategie die gevers kunnen toepassen om de waardering van cadeaus te verbeteren. Cadeaus die een verband hebben met eigenschappen van de gever blijken beter gewaardeerd te worden dan cadeaus die dit verband niet leggen. Dit positieve effect van gever georiënteerde cadeaus op de product evaluatie komt voort uit de congruentie die de ontvanger waarneemt tussen het cadeau en zijn of haar perceptie van de gever. Naar aanleiding van dit resultaat vergelijk ik de waardering voor gever georiënteerde cadeaus met ontvanger georiënteerde cadeaus. Ontvangers blijken een voorkeur te hebben

voor cadeaus die met de ontvangers overeenkomen. Dit laat zien dat de gever georiënteerde strategie specifiek waardevol kan zijn voor consumenten die de ontvanger niet of minder goed kennen.

In Hoofdstuk 4 laat ik het cadeau domein achter mij en richt ik mij op de reacties van consumenten op gunsten ontvangen van een vriend of commercieel partner. Ik verwacht dat consumenten vaker wederkerig zijn naar een vriend dan naar een commercieel partner van wie zij een gunst hebben ontvangen. Bestaande relatie theorieën lijken echter het tegenovergestelde te voorspellen en suggereren dat de relationele balans belangrijker is in commerciële relaties dan in vriendschappen. In dit hoofdstuk stel ik een nuancering voor van de bestaande theoretische voorspellingen door een onderscheid te maken tussen de reacties van consumenten op een bevooroordeelde disbalans (m.a.w. het ontvangen van een gunst) of een benadeelde disbalans (m.a.w. het initiëren van een gunst).

In Hoofdstuk 5 bespreek ik hoe consumenten zich gedragen wanneer zij worden geconfronteerd met het pro sociale dilemma tussen het delen of geven van een persoonlijke bezitting aan een vriend. Zowel delen als geven zijn pro sociale gedragingen die leiden tot het versterken van relaties. Hoewel geven, in vergelijking met delen, een kostbaarder besluit is voor de eigenaar, vergroot het ook de uitkomsten van de ontvanger. Ik toon aan dat, op basis van relationele motieven, consumenten geneigd zijn eigendommen aan hun vriend weg te geven in plaats van deze met hen te delen. Deze keuze blijkt incongruent aan het eigen belang van eigenaren en de voorkeur van ontvanger om de eigendommen te delen.

Kortom, mijn onderzoek draagt bij aan het bewustzijn van consumenten en marketeers over de invloed van anderen op onze consumenten beslissingen. Concrete aanbevelingen worden gemaakt aan consumenten over het geven van cadeaus en het proces omtrent gunsten en aan marketeers over klant management strategieën en product positionering.

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In front of you lays my dissertation, summarizing a chapter in my life that I proudly present to my colleagues, friends, and family. I will finish these final months of writing by putting my own name on the front page. However, this dissertation is everything except of a one-woman show. Many people have contributed to its development, either with some wise words or some refreshing beers. In this section I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the people who have contributed to my development as an academic researcher and as a person.

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Thank you!!

Laura

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Straeter was born in Leimuiden (The Netherlands) on the 25th of June 1987. She received her Bachelor degree (cum laude) in social psychology and her Research Master degree in Social and Behavioral Sciences from Tilburg University. Between her Bachelor and Research Master degree Laura took a gap year to go on a student exchange to La Trobe University, Australia, and worked at Blauw Research, a market research company based in Rotterdam, where she extensively analyzed the Net Promoter Score. In 2012, Laura started her Ph.D. research in Marketing Management at the Erasmus Research Institute of Management and the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Under the supervision of Prof.dr. Stijn M. J. van Osselaer and dr. Ilona E. de Hooge she worked on various projects related to interpersonal consumer decision making. Currently, her main research interests concern pro-social consumption behavior, the sharing economy, ownership and agent decision making. One of her research projects got published in the prestigious Journal of Consumer Psychology. Laura has presented her work on multiple national and international conferences, including the Association for Consumer Research, Society for Consumer Psychology, European Marketing Academy Conference and the Dutch Conference for Social Psychologists.



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Paolacci, Gabriele, Straeter, Laura M., & De Hooge, Ilona E. (2015). Give me your self: Gifts are liked more when they match the giver's characteristics. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 25(3), 487-494. Impact factor 2.021

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Monique Pollmann, Rob Nelissen & Laura Straeter. "Money Matters: The Influence of Gift Price on Appreciation."

SELECTED RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Quid Pro Quo? The Role of Relationship Type in Balancing Interpersonal Consumption Decisions

Laura Straeter, Ilona de Hooge & Stijn van Osselaer

Impact bias in Gift Giving

Laura Straeter & Ilona de Hooge

Subjective Age and Ownership

Laura Straeter

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Laura M. Straeter & Ilona E. de Hooge. "The Bittersweet Symphony: Decreased Evaluations and Effectiveness of Products Given as an Apology"

University of Amsterdam (2016, September)

University of Groningen (2016, February)

Laura M. Straeter, Gabriele Paolacci & Ilona E. de Hooge. "Give me your self: Gifts are liked more when they match the giver's characteristics"

Judgment and Decision Making Camp (2014, January)

AWARDS

Excellence scholarship, Tilburg University (2009)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University

- Lecturer, Marketing
 - Research Training and Bachelor Thesis, Spring 2015
(Rated 4.6 out of 5)
 - Research Training and Bachelor Thesis, Spring 2014
(Rated 4.2 out of 5)
- Co-reader
 - Master thesis Marketing Management, 2014 – 2015
(No ratings available)

Department of Social Psychology, Tilburg University

- Teaching Assistant, Social Psychology
 - Introduction to and History of Psychology, Seger Breugelmans, Fall 2009 and Fall 2010
 - Attitudes and Communication, Kate Ratliff, Fall 2009 and Fall 2010
 - Social Cognition, Joris Lammers, Spring 2010
 - Social Cognition, Yoel Inbar, Spring 2011
 - Consumer Behavior, Loes Janssen, Spring 2010 and Spring 2011
 - Personnel and Organizational Psychology, Peter Van De Berg, Fall 2009
 - Personnel and Organizational Psychology, Niels Van de Ven, Fall 2010
 - Group Dynamics, Masanori Takezawa, Spring 2010
 - Group Dynamics, Marielle Stel, Spring 2011

SELECTED COURSEWORK

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| • The Psychology of Consumer Decision Making | Stijn van Osselaer |
| • Consumer Behaviour | Rik Pieters |
| • Behavioural Decision Theory | Peter Wakker |
| • Mediation and Moderation | Paul Jose
Alex Schoemann |
| • Experimental Methods in Business Research | Maarten Wubben |
| • Multilevel Analysis in SPSS | Jeremy Dawson |
| • Meta-analysis for Theory Advancement | Marc van Essen |
| • Web-based & Mobile Survey Research | Niels van Quaquebeke |
| • Workshop on Structural Equation Modelling | Guido Berens |

SERVICE TO THE FIELD

Reviewer for Conferences:

- Association for Consumer Research
- Society for Consumer Psychology

- Marketing Science
- European Marketing Academy
- Association for Dutch Social Psychological Research

SERVICE TO THE SCHOOL

- ERIM Research Participation System Administrator, 2012-2013, 2014.

AFFILIATIONS

- Association for Consumer Research (ACR)
- Society for Consumer Psychology (SCP)
- European Marketing Academy (EMAC)
- Association for Dutch Social Psychological Research (ASPO)

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Consumption is not an isolated phenomenon, but quite frequently involves the (in)direct presence of others. For example, people give gifts to, share possessions with, and favor others. In this dissertation I explore how others influence people's decisions in different interpersonal consumption occasions. The goal is to gain a better understanding of interpersonal consumption decisions that people make to benefit others, to enhance consumer well-being and to provide recommendations for marketers.

The first part of this dissertation addresses gift giving. In particular, it focuses on the motivations of consumers to give a gift and on the strategies that guide gift selection. An apology motive (i.e., the aim to apologize for harm done to the gift recipient) is consistently found to negatively affect the recipient's gift product evaluation and to fall short on the giver's goal to resolve the recipient's angry feelings. Moreover, recipients like a gift that resembles the giver – even when they dislike the giver.

The second part deals with other non-ritualized gestures, addressing how favors are initiated and received. Although the opposite has been suggested, consumers feel more inclined to return a favor received from a friend than a favor received from a commercial partner. Consumers are generous towards friends and give away their possessions. Nonetheless, friends find it difficult to accept such kind gestures and would rather borrow instead of receive a possession from a friend.

Overall, the interpersonal consumption research presented in this dissertation provides insights for both consumers and marketers and challenges them to improve their practices in the domain of gifts and non-ritualized favors. Marketers should reconsider the positioning of products as apology gifts. They could also optimize their search engine algorithms to recommend gifts that relate to previous purchases of their customers. In addition, marketers should be aware that a favor given to a customer might not lead to the aimed reciprocal benefits for the company.

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