

Gift Experience in Marketing: A Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda



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This paper aims to synthesize empirical evidence on research related to gift experience and integrate this evidence into a framework. A systematic review of 62 peer-reviewed journal articles was performed. This review identifies the various components contributing to the gift experience (gift, giver, receiver, and situation) and their outcomes (Cognitive, affective, and behavioural), as influenced by components moderating (consumer, context, and situation-based) this relationship. This research bears practical and theoretical implications. Further, a research agenda for encouraging future research is formulated.

Keywords: Gift, Experience, Gifting and Gift Giving

1. Introduction

Today the gift market has spread over every sphere. According to Technavio Industry Analysis, the 2021 total gift market will reach around \$55.5bn by 2024 (Branco-Illodo et al., 2023) Gifts have always been considered as part of social systems through which people and companies create, maintain, and sustain relationships as they also serve as a means of symbolic communication (Cheal, 1987). Gifting has a prominent economic, social, and psychological significance (Hwang & Chu, 2019; Ganesh Pillai & Krishnakumar, 2019). Gifts also perform an important function of identification and differentiation of a company's offering to customers and other parties. People engage in gifting activities by associating different personal, social, and economic values (Sherry, Jr., 1983). Over the past decade, experiences have gained a lot of attention. In the gifting context, earlier studies focused on tangible products that may satisfy the customers and what strategies can be applied to promote offerings through gifts (Pizzetti et al., 2024; Hamby et al., 2023), as well as what gifts are more suitable for which occasions (Hwang & Chu, 2019). Further, to refine the gift-giving experiences, few studies highlight the importance of experiential gifts, which are better than material gifts (Clarke, 2008; Goodman & Lim, 2018).

However, "Pine and Gilmore (1999) made much of the experience economy when they argued that value was not just migrating from tangible products to services but from services to experiences. They propose a typology of experiences that is comprised of entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism. These are differentiated by the degree of participation (active vs. passive) and the degree of immersion (where you must actively absorb the experience) versus immersive (where you are part of the experience). The argument is that for firms to succeed in the 21st century, they must provide consumers with a memorable experience" (Schmitt, 1999).

Gifting literature has been studied from the gift-giving aspect, the gift-receiving aspect, and the self-gifting aspect (Liu, 2023; Lawry, 2022; van Tonder & Saunders, 2024). Within this literature, how all those gifts and their characteristics impact emotions, the relationship between giver and receiver has been studied widely, and how other psychological mechanisms affect gift-giving and receiving behavior. However, in the last decade, importance has been given to experiential gifts as they carry uniqueness and are those bundles of activities that a person lives within (Chan & Mogilner, 2017). From the relationship aspect, a plethora of research has been done, like what types of gifts (material vs. experiential) are suitable for close people and socially distant people and what values are associated with them.

Since so much attention has been given to the type of gifts, their impact, the receiver, and giver characteristics, and the situation, which plays a crucial role in the gifting process, which starts from gestation, presentation, and ends at the reformulation stage (Sherry, Jr., 1983), however, there is scant literature that considers overall experience in the gifting context. There is a large gap in the literature regarding the importance of the overall gift experience where different actors like the giver and receiver and surroundings interact, and on behalf of those experiences, from the perspectives of giving and receiving and making certain decisions are taken (Tian & Frank, 2024; Pizzetti et al., 2024).

The tacit ubiquity of the experience in gift marketing is evident from the fact that several concepts such as brand consumer decision-making, attitude development, emotional consequences, behavioural consequences, and relationship marketing are predicated on it. The tendency for consumers to perceive gift experience and its impact on them has significant implications in the gift marketing area (Branco-Illodo et al., 2020).

Prior literature has evolved from gift, gift-giving, and what type of gift is helpful in promoting the gifting practices by segregating the literature of gifts into material gifts and experiential gifts, recently the studies related to gift experiences have gained importance in various industries. It supports that gift experience elicits more positive emotional responses and greater attribution of defining the giver and receiver relationship and its impact on the Behavior elicited through those types of relationships formed (Ruth et al., 1999).It is a key factor for relationship formation as it provides quasi-social experiences and encourages affective associations. Although marketers have started to give more importance to the gift experience and how it can be enhanced to promote more engagement, which will result in gifting behavior, academic research in this area is just beginning to catch up (Tian & Frank, 2024). Especially in the context of interpersonal relationships and their related concepts, research on gift experience helps in addressing two major questions:

What does gift experience comprise, how does it impact the decision-making of the customers and what are the possible outcomes of those gift experiences?

This paper identifies the various components contributing to gift experience (gift, giver, receiver, and situation) and their outcomes (Cognitive, affective, and behavioural), as influenced by components moderating (consumer, context, and situation-based) this relationship. Despite the pervasiveness of gift experience in the domain of gifting, there is a large gap in the literature regarding the process and conditions that may influence the degree to which people or consumers perceive gift experiences and their impact on themselves (Branco-Illodo et al., 2023). There is still much need for further contributions to literature. The area of gift experience still receives scant attention as most of the studies focus on gift giving and gift receiving aspects, and experience related to gifting has been studied from different perspectives in different settings like commercial settings, offline settings, and online settings under the interpersonal gifting context. (Ruth et al., 1999; Ruth et al., 2004; Taute & Sierra, 2015) with no paper focusing primarily on the overall gift experience as a promotional tool for building loyalty, engagement, and some relational effects.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Gifts

A gift can be defined as a "benefit that one person bestows to another and that is often both unexpected and unnecessary for the other's well-being"(Shen et al., 2011). A gift can be defined as a good or service voluntarily provided to another person or group (Belk & Coon, 1993). A gift is therefore some type of benefit conferred by a donor to a recipient (Sherry, Jr., 1983). From the previous studies, it can be concluded that gift has significant economic and social value. In the area of consumer research gifts have been studied from various aspects. Gift-giving and gifts receiving "a pervasive form of consumer behavior engaged in frequently by all members of modern society"(Clarke, 2008). "Gift-giving is viewed as a fundamental social system. Adding up to more than just an aggregate of dyadic exchanges, gift giving becomes a "total social fact" that affects the economic, legal, political, and religious spheres of society and fulfills important functions in their development and continuity"(Beatty et al., 1991).

3. Methodology

This paper has adopted a systematic approach for finalizing the articles for the study. Scopus and Ebsco host databases were used for shortlisting articles. The following figure depicts the search strategy for the selection of the journal articles.

3.1 Search Strategy

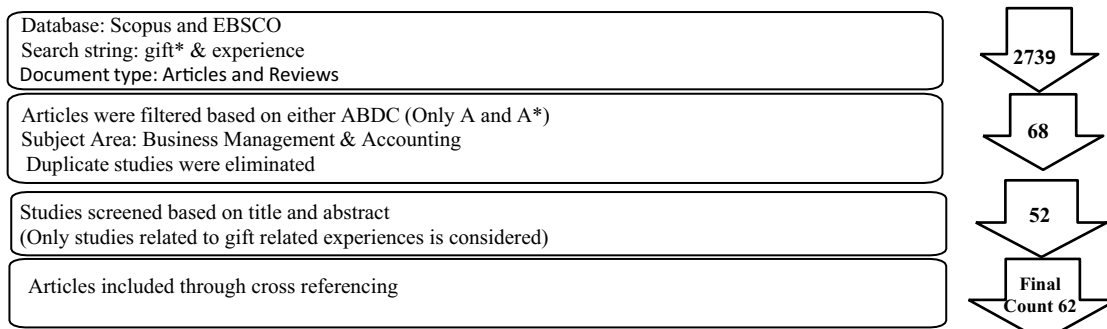
Following are the search strategy and key criteria for the literature review.

Table 1. Selection Criteria Selection Criteria

S No.	Parameters	Choice
1.	Review period	Irrespective of Publication date
2.	Databases	Scopus, EBSCO Business Source
3.	Search String	(Gift) AND (Experience)

3.2 Selection Process

The following figure shows the selection process of the studies:



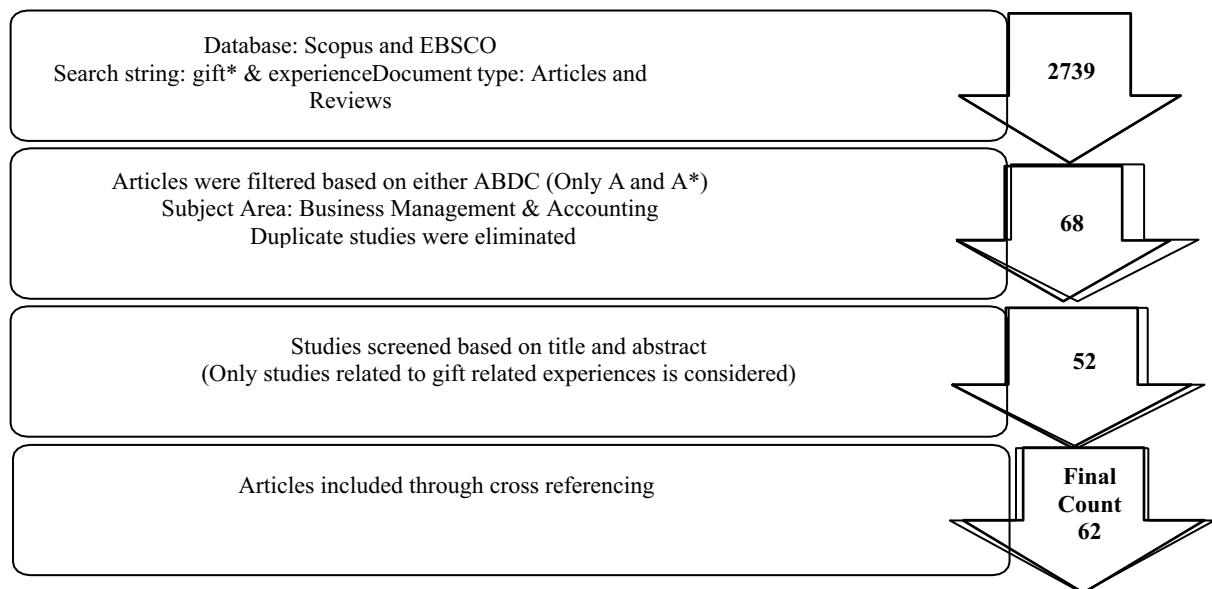


Figure 1 Selection Process

4. Findings

This paper aims to systematically review the marketing journals to find out what are the components that contribute to the formation of gift experiences, on what aspects gift experiences have been studied till date and what are the possible outcomes of such experiences related to gifting practices. There are three ways in which gift experiences can be studied which are as followed:

4.1 Gift Experiences Related To Personal Purchase and Consumption of Gifts

The literature on gift experience has been fragmented into various parts. The first part consists of studies that talk about the experiences people have during purchases of gifts in market settings and how those experiences impact gift selection and preference choices and their decision-making (Fan et al., 2024; Kumari et al., 2022; Lim & Ok, 2022; Lawry, 2022; Gupta et al., 2023) Few studies also discussed how personal purchase experiences are different from experiences of gifting to others and gifting for oneself (Gillison & Reynolds, 2016). However, some qualitative studies use narratives and introspection techniques to understand the gift experiences from their perspectives (Olsen, 2012). Several studies discuss the impact of gift in the purchasing and consumption experience in which the type of gift is the major contributor of the experience a person lives through and how the mismatches between giver and receiver eventually leads to bad experiences of the receiver or the consumer, if the gift is liked by the receiver and consumer, it will enhance the experience and also helps in strengthening the relationship. Therefore, a whole plethora of research discuss what type of gifts are liked by purchasers, receivers and consumers (Freling et al., 2024; Davies et al., 2010).

4.2 Lived Experiences of the Giver and Receiver in the Gift Exchange Process

These studies include how various components of gifting interact and create various experiences; It could be from the giver's perspective, and it could be from the receiver's perspective like some studies discussed the meaning derived from different gift-giving experiences and gift-receiving experiences in which a majorly experimental method, critical incident surveys, and in-depth interviews were implied to collect data (Ruth et al., 1999; Ruth et al., 2004; Clarke, 2008).

The next section of the paper describes in the chart the possible components which form the gift experiences, and which also act as antecedents impacting gift experiences, what are those moderators and related consequences i.e. (Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioural).

4.3 The following Framework is the Diagrammatic Representation of the Literature Overview

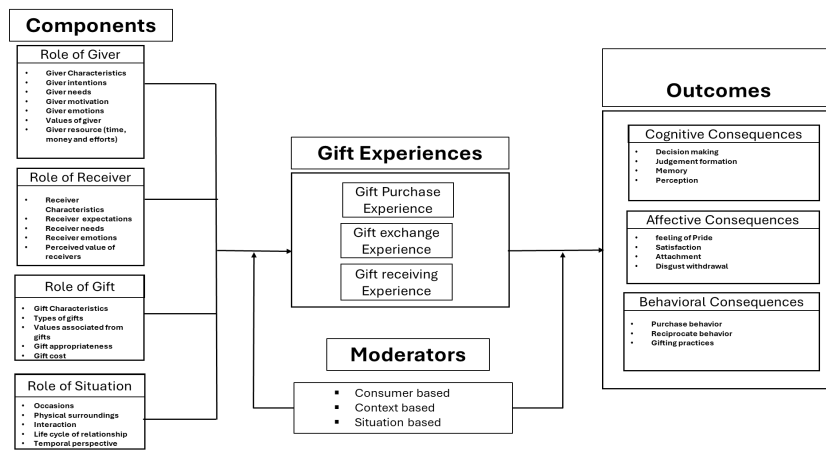


Figure 2 This Framework Depicts What Components of Gift Contribute to the Formation of Gift Experience

5. Implications for Theory and Practices

5.1 Implications for Theory

Theoretically, this research is expected to offer a deeper understanding of the concept of gift experience also what and how components of a gift play an important role in the formation of gift experience, i.e. gift, giver, receiver, and the situation. The insights gained from detailed analysis of journal articles regarding gift experience offer notable implications for advancing theoretical understanding in the domain of the gifting market and the role of experiences in the gifting industry, what are the crucial other factors that play an important role in the gift exchange process and how it offers value to the customer in the context of self-gifting, to the giver and receiver in terms of interpersonal and intergroup gifting. Firstly, the identified factors influencing the gifting experience provide fertile ground for the development of a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that interact in the market in the gifting scenarios. These factors, spanning ritual, personal, social, and contextual dimensions, highlight the need for a multidisciplinary lens in theoretical exploration, where insights from fields like anthropology, sociology, psychology, and marketing converge to enrich the theoretical foundations of the gifting area. Moreover, the distinction between gift experiences and experiential gifting emphasizes the dynamic evolution of gifting over time, urging scholars to construct theoretical frameworks that accommodate the evolving relationship between components of gifts, the value associated with them, and how it impacts gift-giving behavior.

5.2 Implications for Practice

In terms of practical implications, the findings offer valuable and actionable insights for businesses using gifting as a strategic promotional tool in gifting practices and several gifting platforms in the market. Firstly, the strategic focus on experience plays a pivotal role. Businesses can use the above-mentioned insights to clarify which aspect they should be more focussed upon while designing the experiences in gifting practices, especially for the retail industries. Secondly, the identification of factors influencing the decision of gift receivers suggests the need for a tailored approach. Designing the outstanding gift experience also requires the addition of customized gifts which can offer unique experience to the receiver by fulfilling certain value through gifting. Thirdly, recognizing industry-specific strategies is crucial. Businesses should align their approaches with the expectations and norms of their specific sector and have a thorough understanding of the type of gifts and their suitability in a particular sector. Fourthly, aligning gift-promoting strategies with customer motivations is vital. Tailoring approaches to tap into customer desires for personalization, customization, or other motivations that drive deliberate engagement enhances overall participation and eventually leads to enhanced experience. This holistic approach aligns theoretical insights with actionable practices, contributing to the ongoing evolution of gifting practices and customer interactions in the exchange process.

Practically, gift experience as a strategic marketing tool can also help in relevant differentiation and offering unique value to consumers. Marketers will be able to gain benefits while working on the gift-related experience which will build engagement, and they will be able to create and design those experiences that will increase the gifting practices (Tian & Frank, 2024). By focusing on experiences brands can provide strong positioning in the minds of customers. Firms will benefit from this research regarding how they can increase gifting practices among the consumers and what aspect they can focus more upon to create unique experiences and stimulate their relationship with the customers.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current research, while drawing insights from a diverse set of articles spanning industries such as retail, Livestreaming, e-commerce, and entertainment, possesses certain limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, the broader context consideration related to gift experiences may lead to limited contribution in the industry-specific scenarios. The findings of the development of the theoretical framework, while valuable within the studied contexts, may not universally apply across various industries. Additionally, the dynamics of interaction among these factors may be different in different contexts. Furthermore, the research primarily explores factors in the broader sense and not within specific dimensions such as industry-specific variations, ethical considerations, customer (giver or receiver) motivations, and customer experience. This broader focus may not encompass all

potential influences on participation specifically from the marketing aspect while covering anthropological and sociological aspects as well which limits the practicality of working with gift experience specifically in the marketing domain. This paper provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the overall gift experience, but such a broadening aspect can restrict the usage of such a framework from the marketing sector. Future research could focus on assessing the gift experience specifically in the specific industry domain and context. This will provide future scholars an opportunity to delve into the research of industry and context-specific gift experience. Also, this conference of Twenty Second AIMS International Conference on Management studies tracking the evolution of customer behaviors over time in response to technological changes could contribute to a more dynamic theoretical framework that can be applicable in an online offline environment. Additionally, for a nuanced understanding of how experiences contribute to the gifting economy, a more comprehensive approach should be adopted to gain a deeper conceptual understanding of gift experiences. These future research directions aim to address the identified limitations and propel the theoretical discourse on customer or gift purchase or giver participation in gift experiences.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this research significantly advances our comprehension of understanding the concept of gift experience in a detailed manner moreover, the antecedents and outcome of gift experience along with the aspect on what behalf gift experience has been studied to date. The exploration of factors influencing gift experience not only sheds light on the way they interact in the market but also provides crucial insights for businesses aiming at gifting as the strategic tool in the buying process. The diversity in the context scenarios considered in this study underscores the relevance and applicability of the findings across various sectors and industries. By uncovering the dynamics of gifting experiences and how they impact the customer's various decision-making processes. Especially, in terms of receivers and givers who are involved in the gifting practices, this research serves as a foundational guide for businesses seeking to enhance their strategies and overall customer experiences within the rapidly evolving area of the gift market. Ultimately, the study contributes valuable knowledge and insights that are essential for businesses navigating the area of gifting and its transformative impact on purchasing exchanging, and consuming experiences.

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