

Gift receiving: Happiness or disappointment?

An exploratory study into the impact and consequences of gift receiving from the gift receiver's perspective

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Preface

Dear reader,

In front of you lies my Master Thesis, which I wrote as my final product for graduating at the Radboud University Nijmegen. This research is not only the last part of my Master Marketing journey but also the final product of my whole study career.

I always thought that gifts would make everybody happy. But is that really true? Do people maybe hide their actual emotions from the gift giver? I was very interested in understanding how gift receivers actually feel, think, and experience gift receiving. So, when I had the opportunity to conduct this study, it was very easy for me to make a decision. After writing my Master Thesis, I can proudly say that I learned a lot about gift receiving and doing research. I also learned a lot about time management, analytical thinking, and perseverance. Writing a Master Thesis is tough and I would not have been able to write a Master Thesis without the unconditional support of others. Therefore, I would like to take some time to thank the people who helped me in this process.

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Csilla Horváth for her supervision. Her detailed advices, valuable feedback, and creative suggestions were indispensable. Without her help, my Master Thesis would not have been the same. I would also like to thank my second examiner, Dr. Herm Joosten, for his comments on my thesis. Moreover, I would like to thank all the informants for their contribution. It was very nice to talk to all of them. Furthermore, I would like to thank my parents. They were always there for me and supported all my choices. Also, I really want to thank my sister. Even though she moved to Minneapolis, she still helped me whenever she could. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends. The coffee breaks and lunch breaks were so much more fun with them. Also, their feedback and input was always very helpful. Thus, a big thanks to all of you! I could not have done this without your help.

Enjoy the reading!

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Lydia van Son".

Lydia van Son
Nijmegen, June 17, 2019

Abstract

There is still much unknown about gift receiving from the gift receiver's perspective. Especially the impact and consequences of gift receiving. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses of gift receivers. Furthermore, this study identifies the effects of gift receiving on the gift receiver's attitude and the relationship with the gift giver.

Considering the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative approach was chosen. In total 16 in-depth interviews were conducted. The data analysis was a combination of both inductive and deductive coding. In total seven main concepts were established with 19 subcategories, and 82 codes were developed and categorized.

Results revealed that gifts positively impact cognitive and emotional responses of gift receivers. The intensity and length of emotions depend on the type of gift, expectations and the meaning behind the gift. The behavioural responses depend on the type of relationship. Gift receivers have the need to reciprocate if the relationship is not strong and not family related. For strong relationships, gifts are seen as a confirmation of the relationship. Gift receiving has little or zero impact on changes in attitudes and relationships.

While the concept of gift giving from the gift giver's perspective has gained much attention from researchers, little research is done regarding gift receiving from the gift receiver's perspective. Therefore, this study contributes to the marketing literature by providing new insights in the gift receiving process from the gift receiver's perspective. Furthermore, this study contributes to several theories such as the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, theory of reciprocity, and the social exchange Theory.

Besides that, marketers could use these results as a basis to develop and implement strategies that influence consumer buying behaviour. Based on the results, a strategy could be to remind people about the positive effects they experienced of receiving a certain gift to trigger them to buy gifts. Another strategy that marketers could implement is to promote expensive gifts for both non-calenderial and calenderial occasions to make people aware when it is most appropriate to give these expensive gifts.

Lastly, this study contributes to the knowledge of gifts and relationships. Gifts are a helpful tool to strengthen relationships that still need to be developed and are not family related. For relationships that are perceived as strong, gifts are seen as a confirmation of the relationship.

Keywords - Gift receiving, cognitive appraisal theory, attitude, relationship

Paper type - Research paper

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1. Introduction

Today, gift giving is a broadly practised daily activity (Komter, 1996, p. 3) and is done in several contexts such as person-to-person (Komter, 2007; Teigen, Olsen, & Solas, 2015; Flynn & Adams, 2009), group-to-group (Sherry, 1983), and business-to-business (Millington & Eberhardt & Wilkinson, 2005). An increase in gift giving occasions such as Valentine's Day, gender reveal parties, and third Christmas Day, made gifts and social relations more closely related (Flynn & Adams, 2009). As a result, the act of gift giving is becoming a more important element of today's society (Komter, 2007). Nowadays, gifts act as a medium for developing, maintaining and strengthen relationships between two parties (Nomura, 2009). Subsequently, thousands of shoppers visit stores -both offline and online- to search for the perfect gift (Flynn & Adams, 2009). For this reason, gifts are becoming a more attractive product for businesses to sell. Last December, the Dutch people spent over €4.7 billion on gifts in digital payments, which is an increase of 15% compared to December 2018 (Betaalvereniging, 2019).

Accordingly, the concept of gift giving especially received much attention in research from anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, and economists (Ruffle, 1999). For example, anthropologists refer to gift giving as "the cement of social relationships" (Komter & Vollebergh, 1997, p. 747). According to them, gift giving is an important tool to manage relationships. However, sociologists perceive gift giving as a reflection of the how much the giver values the relationship (Belk, 1997). Therefore, gift giving is seen as a form of self-expression. According to economists, gift receivers perceive the monetary value of a gift as less valuable than the actual monetary value (List & Shogren, 1998; Waldfogel, 1993), which could negatively impact the the relationship. In fact, gift receivers would have spend less money on the received gift. Therefore, economists recommend gift givers to give cash instead of gifts (Waldfogel, 1993).

Although the concept of gift giving has gained importance in the field of consumer behaviour, literature only dives into the gift giving process from the gift giver's side. There is little research regarding the gift receiver's perspective. Only a few theories provide some insights regarding both the act of giving and receiving gifts such as the popular theory of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), which assumes that people receiving gifts automatically develop the need to reciprocate. Another theory that also relates to the concept of gift giving is the social exchange theory, which assumes that people only give if there is a valued return contingent upon it (Emerson, 1976).

However, both theories include the role of the gift receiver just to a certain extent since it misses a detailed description of the psychological consequences of gift receiving. There are a few studies that provide some insights into the concept of gift receiving from the gift receiver's perspective. For instance, Teigen et al. (2005) discovered that gift givers and gift receivers have different preferences for the type of gift. As a result, gift givers might unconsciously give an



unwanted gift. Moreover, Flynn and Adams (2009) found that expensive gifts are not automatically perceived as preferred gifts. Even though these studies examined the gift receiver's perspective, there is still much unknown. After all, these studies only investigated the perspective of gift receivers on the type of gift.

Given the fact that the main goal of gift giving is to create, maintain, and strengthen relationships (Belk, 1977; Ruffle, 1999; Komter, 2006; Flynn & Adams, 2009; Nomura 2009), it is important to understand to what extent gifts actually contribute to the development of relationships. Especially since gift givers wish to positively influence the feelings and thoughts of gift receivers to bolster relationships (Nomura, 2009), researching gift receiving through the lens of gift receivers is fundamental.

Taken together, the aim of this thesis is to investigate gift receiving from the gift receiver's point of view by identifying the gift receiver's cognitive, emotional, and possible behavioural responses upon receiving. Moreover, this thesis explores the effects of gift receiving on the gift receiver's attitude and the relationship between the gift giver and gift receiver. As a result, the following research questions have been formulated:

What are the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses of gift receivers? And, to what degree does gift receiving influence the attitude of gift receivers and the relationship between gift givers and gift receivers?

Since gifts are seen as a fundamental element of social relationships (Komter & Volleberg, 1997), understanding the feelings from the gift receiver's point of view will help gift givers to choose gifts that create satisfactory experience for gift receivers. The gift giver will also benefit from this since a pleasing experience will positively impact their relationship. Therefore, this thesis will help gift givers to develop and sustain relationships with gift receivers.

Furthermore, this thesis will help managers to better understand the feelings and thoughts of gift receivers. This will be useful for developing strategies that influence the buying behaviour of gift givers. For instance, making or presenting products that result in better responses from the gift receiver from which the gift giver could also benefit, might attract givers to buy their presents at these stores. Moreover, it will help managers to decide when to promote certain types of gifts, which could stimulate gift giving behaviour. These promotions might influence consumers' buying decisions such as choosing a gift and the amount of money to spend. In addition, selling favourable gifts will decrease the returns of unsatisfactory gifts of gift receivers.

The concept of gift giving and gift receiving is particularly relevant and popular in the area of consumer behaviour in marketing literature. Thus, this thesis will contribute to the marketing literature by exploring the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses of gift receivers and how this impacts the relationship between the giver and receiver. This thesis starts to close the literature



gap between gift giving and gift receiving by exploring the full experience from gift receivers and the related consequences.

The next chapter of this thesis is a literature review, which covers several important concepts of this study. Firstly, it covers the general concept of gift giving. After that, emotion, cognition, and behaviour are discussed with the use of the Cognitive Appraisal Theory. Besides that, the two concepts attitude and relationship are examined. The third chapter provides the methodological approach for this thesis, which covers the data collection, data analysis, research ethics, and validity and reliability. Then, the results are analysed and described. From this, conclusions are drawn. Finally, the literature and results of this study are compared and discussed. From this, propositions are developed. This chapter also includes the theoretical implications, managerial implications, relational implications, limitations of this study, and recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gift giving process

Gift giving can be defined as “the exchange process in which one party buys a good or service and voluntarily provides it to another party” (Belk, 1977, p. 4). For any kind of gift giving to occur, four aspects need to be present, which are a giver, a receiver, a gift, and an occasion (Belk, 1977; Sherry, 1983). The giver and receiver could be individuals, families or organizations (Belk, 1977). “A gift is any intangible or tangible good or service, that symbolizes an existing or desired tie to somebody else, which transforms the object into a gift” (Komter, 2007, p. 94). Thus, a gift can take many different forms. To illustrate, a tangible gift could be a bottle of wine or bouquet of flowers. An example of an intangible gift would be hospitality such as offering to babysit. Well-known occasions are celebration days like weddings, Mother’s and Father’s Day, baby showers, graduation and Christmas (Komter, 2007).

While one major objective to perform gift giving behaviour is an occasion, sometimes people give gifts that are not associated with occasions (Ruth, Otnes, & Brunel, 1999). They give gifts just to express gratitude or to make the receiver happy. For both non-calenderial and calenderial occasions, gift givers try to positive influence the responses of the gift receiver to create, maintain, or strengthen the relationship (Ruth et al., 1999; Flynn & Adams, 2009; Komter, 2007). To achieve this, gift givers search for gifts that gift receivers perceive as favorable (Flynn & Adams, 2009). Researchers provide several recommendations to positively influence the responses of the gift recipients such as giving the gift the receiver asked for (Gino & Flynn, 2011), imagining the receiver using the gift (Baskin, Wakslak, Trope, & Novemsky, 2014), or giving a thoughtful gift rather than an expensive gift (Flynn & Adams, 2009; Chan & Mogilner, 2017). If a gift is perceived as favorable, the gift receiver develops a positive image about the giver and their relationship (Sherry, 1992). The gift giver sends a message to the receiver that they know and care about the gift receiver. As a result, the relationship between the giver and receiver is bolstered. Thus, the ability to predict the preferred gift is critical in predicting the success of many relationships (Gino & Flynn, 2011).

Still, picking out a gift can be extremely difficult. Researchers doubt whether people can actually predict other’s reactions on certain behaviour (Nomura, 2009; Flynn & Adams, 2009; Gino & Flynn, 2011). In fact, when people are asked to choose between gift items, gift givers and gift receivers show different patterns of preferences (Teigen et al., 2005). Consequently, givers might accidentally give the wrong gift without being aware of it. For instance, gift givers usually assume that gift receivers’ feeling of appreciation are closely linked to the amount of money spent on a gift (Flynn & Adams, 2009). The more expensive the gift, the stronger the feeling of appreciation. Despite these expectations, gift receivers do not share the same thought on the meaning of more expensive gifts (Flynn & Adams, 2009). Gift receivers perceive gifts more as an expression of the gift giver’s identity (Teigen et al., 2005). Gift receivers have a higher appreciation for gifts that match the characteristics



of the gift giver than for gifts that do not match the gift giver. This implies that gift givers would do well buying a thoughtful gift, rather than a more expensive one (Flynn & Adams, 2009).

2.2 Cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses of gift receivers

2.2.1 Cognitive Appraisal Theory

The above stated difference in preference is represented by the Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT). The CAT argues that two individuals could have very different emotional responses to the same circumstances (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). For instance, if two individuals receive the same gift for the same occasion under the same circumstances, one individual might experience positive emotions, while the other individual might experience emotions of disappointment. As a result, people make different decisions (Hoyer, Macinnis, & Pieters, 2016). The CAT helps to identify these differences through three dimensions, which are cognition, emotion and behaviour (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

2.2.2 Cognitive responses of gift receivers

The first dimension, cognition, consists of two dimensions, which are knowledge and appraisal (Lazarus & Smith, 1988). ‘‘Knowledge consists of cognitions about the way things are and how they work’’ (Lazarus & Smith, 1988, p. 282). Knowledge is a necessary factor since a situation can only be evaluated if there is a general understanding about a certain context. For instance, gift receivers need to have some sort of general knowledge about gift giving process within that particular context in order to evaluate the situation and react with certain emotions.

However, knowledge alone is not sufficient enough to develop emotions. Within the CAT both knowledge and appraisal are required to determine the cognitive responses since both are necessary in producing emotions. Appraisal is defined as ‘‘a form of personal meaning consisting of evaluations of the significance of this knowledge for well-being’’ (Lazarus & Smith, 1988, p. 282). Appraisal is essential to generate an emotion since events themselves do not cause emotions, but the personal meaning of the event does. ‘‘Personal meaning refers to a particular relationship between the person and the environment’’ (Lazarus & Smith, 1988, p. 284). In this case, the personal meaning is referred to the relationship between gift recipient and the total gift experience.

At the same time, an individual will not only reflect their own thoughts, feelings and actions when another individual is involved in the situation (Groen, 2006). Especially when the other individual plays an important role within the situation such as gift giving. To appraise a situation with another actor involved, an individual will unconsciously use their social cognition. Social cognition is defined as ‘‘thinking about social reality, that is about other people, about relationships between people and about rules in the movement between people’’ (Groen, 2006, p. 54). The focus of social cognition is the role of cognitive processes in social interaction. To illustrate, gift receivers will not

only evaluate the signals the givers sends, but also the signals they send to gift givers such as facial expressions.

2.2.3 Emotional responses of gift receivers

The second dimension, emotion, is defined as “an individual evaluation of an emotional relevant event” (Pêcher, Lemerrier, & Cellier, 2009, p. 1254) and is perceived as an influential factor in the exchange process of gift giving (Belk, 1977; de Hooze, 2014). There are different types of emotions such as positive or negative emotions but also more specific ones such as surprised, loved, and disappointment. The CAT argues that emotions can be defined and described with emotion appraisal dimensions (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Lazarus & Smith, 1988; de Hooze, 2014). These dimensions are: valence (the extent to which an emotion is positive or negative), activity (the degree to which one feels active or inactive), certainty (the degree to which the outcome of the event is certain or uncertain), power (the degree to which one feels powerful or powerless), and agency (the degree to which the emotion is caused by oneself or by other people) (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Only the dimensions that are relevant for the situation are appraised by individuals (Lazarus, 1988).

Still, emotions are difficult to determine. People can experience conflicting emotions at the same time (de Hooze, 2014), also known as mixed emotions. Mixed emotions are defined as “emotions that are positive and negative at the same time” (Aaker, Drolet & Griffin, 2008, p. 268). For instance, a gift receiver might feel surprised for receiving a gift but also experiences disappointment since the gift is not what the receiver expected or wanted. Even though gift receivers might experience mixed emotions, gift giving always brings some benefits to their relationship (Nomura, 2009; de Hooze, 2014).

Besides that, it might be difficult for gift receivers to express negative emotions. People who express negative emotions are perceived as less likeable (Sommers, 1984). Therefore, negative feelings such as disappointment or anger are most of the time managed internally (Sherry, 1983) and therefore hidden (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Thus, it could be that one might received an unwanted or unfavourable gift but not expressed these feelings to the gift giver. As a result, gift givers might receive false feedback that could negatively impact their relationship.

Although emotions and cognition are closely related to each other, there is still much disagreement about what this relationship entails. Some researchers argue that emotion causes changes in cognition (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Hoyer et al., 2016; Lawler & Thye, 1999) since emotions affect the way people think, how they make their choices, and the enjoyment of an experience (Hoyer et al., 2016). On the contrary, cognitive appraisal theorists argue cognition is needed in order to produce emotions (Lazarus & Smith, 1988). In this thesis, both dimensions are analyzed.

2.2.4 Behavioural responses of gift receivers

Ultimately, cognitions and emotions impact the behavioural responses of individuals (Hoyer et al., 2016, Bagozzi et al., 1999; de Hooge, 2014). While some cognitive and emotional responses triggers one into action, other times cognitive and emotional responses hinder or discourage action. In the case of gift giving, there are two theories that provide insights into the behavioural responses of gift receivers.

The first theory, social exchange theory, proposes that the relationships individuals choose to create or maintain are the ones that maximize the rewards and minimize the costs (Emerson, 1976). Relationships that give the most benefits for the least amount of effort are perceived as both the most valued ones and the ones to sustain on long-term (Nomura, 2009). For instance, the costs of a gift giver include searching and buying a gift, and the rewards are happiness and gaining appreciation. In this situation, both the giver and the receiver feel satisfied about the exchange. This could be a trigger for gift receivers to also give gifts.

The second theory, theory of reciprocity, argues that gift giving is seen as a mutual exchange or in return for another gift (Komter, 2007). Since the main purpose to perform gift giving behaviour is to create and maintain relationships (Komter, 2007), gift giving is a two-way interaction. A relationship will not endure if one party always gives and never receives a gift. It takes both parties to create, maintain, and strengthen a relationship. For this reason, gifts serve as an important communicative function, informing the recipient indirectly about intentions and expectations of the giver (Teigen et al., 2005).

2.3 Attitudes of gift receivers

Cognition and emotions form the basis for people's attitudes (Allen, Machleit, Kleine, & Notani, 2005). Attitude is defined as "a person's evaluation of the entity in question" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977, p. 889). Attitude can be described in terms of six main characteristics: favorability, attitude accessibility, attitude confidence, persistence, resistance, and ambivalence (Hoyer, et al., 2016). The first one, favorability, refers to the likeness of a product. Thus, the degree to which gift receivers like or dislike the gift. Attitude accessibility refers to the easiness of retrieving an attitude from memory. To illustrate, an attitude is more easily retrieved from memory if the gift exchange happened recently. Attitude confidence relates to the strength of the attitude (Hoyer et al., 2016). For instance, an uncommon or unexpected gift might result in a stronger attitude than a common or expected gift. Attitude persistence is the endurance of an attitude. For example, one gift experience might result in a long lasting attitude compared to another gift experience. Attitude resistance refers to the difficulty to change an attitude. For instance, gift givers might hold an attitude towards a certain gift as they might received this gift multiple times. Lastly, ambivalence relates to mixed evaluations of a product. In the case of gift receiving, a gift receiver might have a strong positive attitude towards one aspect of the gift but also holds a strong negative attitude towards a different aspect of the gift.



While people's cognition and emotions influence their attitudes, attitude indirectly affects behaviour (Hoyer et al., 2016). A stronger attitude is perceived as a more precise predictor of behaviour (Kim & Hunter, 1993). Although both cognitive and emotional responses influence attitudes, emotional responses have a stronger impact. Emotions play a central role in the concept of gift giving. Therefore, gift givers have the power to change gift receiver's attitudes (Nomura, 2009; Hoyer et al., 2016).

2.4 Relationships between gift givers and gift receivers

Consequently, gift giving impacts the relationship between the giver and receiver (Ruth et al., 1999; Nomura, 2009; Komter, 2007). Emotions are seen as a key element in the development and maintenance of relationships (Chan & Mogilner, 2017). While positive emotions bring people closer together (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006), negative emotions do the opposite (Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, 2008). Therefore, a positive gift experience should be beneficial for the relationship between the giver and receiver.

Although gift giving is seen as an important symbolic ritual in which gift givers show their willingness to invest resources in the relationship (Ruth et al., 1999; Nomura, 2009; Komter, 2007; Flynn & Adams, 2009), gifts could also harm or even destroy social connections (Komter, 2007). For instance, excessive gift giving or giving unwanted gifts negatively influences the relationship between the giver and receiver (Komter, 2007). Economists call this problem "the deadweight loss" (Adams, Flynn, & Norton, 2012), which means receivers would have not spend their money on these gifts or they would have bought a different gift with the same amount of cash (Waldfogel, 1993, p. 1328). In all cases, gift giving impacts the relationship between the giver and receiver (Ruth et al., 1999; Nomura, 2009; Komter, 2007).

3. Empirical analysis

3.1 Data collection

The aim of this study is to identify the gift receiver's emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses, and to determine the effects of gift receiving on gift receiver's attitude and relationship with the gift giver. As mentioned earlier, the gift giver's perspective received much attention in the marketing literature. In contrast, little research is done regarding the gift receiver's perspective, which makes this an unexplored topic. Understanding the total gift receiving experience from the gift receiver's perspective is fundamental to start discover the gift receiving concept. Therefore, considering the exploratory nature of this study, qualitative research is most applicable for this study.

Moreover, according to the CAT, multiple gift receivers could receive the same gift from the same giver for the same occasion, but each gift receiver might have different responses. Therefore, it is important to understand the underlying thoughts of gift receivers that might cause these different responses. Given the scarce literature of this topic (de Hooge, 2014), and the importance of understanding the experiences and in-depth processes (Kvale, 1994), semi-structured interviews are the primary data collection for this study.

3.1.1 Semi-structured interview

Several questions were developed based on the literature review. The interview guide, which can be found in Appendix A, covers the dimensions, cognition, emotion, behaviour, attitude, and relationship. Even though the interview followed the structure of the CAT, informants were allowed to describe their own experiences (Kvale, 1994). As mentioned in the literature, gift receivers need a certain level of knowledge in order to appraise the gift receiving experience and to produce emotions. Therefore, the first part of the interview was about recalling and describing the gift experience to determine the knowledge and appraisal of gift receivers. Furthermore, it makes the informant familiar with the topic. Probing technique was applied when information was missing or not clear during this stage.

To determine the emotional responses of gift receivers, questions were asked about their emotions during and after the gift experience. As mentioned earlier, gift receivers might use their social cognition. Thus, informants were asked to describe their expressions and explain these expressions. Furthermore, identifying the behavioural responses is done by asking questions that relate to the theory of reciprocity and the social exchange theory. Informants were asked to what the extent they felt the need to reciprocate after receiving the gift and to what extent they take the gift receiving history into account in future buying decisions. Besides that, questions were asked about the gift receiver's attitude towards the gift giver before and after receiving the gift. These questions were also asked to determine the relationship between the gift receiver and gift giver before and after receiving the gift.

When the researcher noticed that the informant felt comfortable talking about the topic, more in-depth questions regarding feelings, thoughts, and opinions were asked. At the end of the interview, the informant was asked for any additional information and remaining questions.

3.2 Sample

Due to time constraints, convenience sample was used by interviewing acquaintances. Therefore, the interviews were held in Dutch. Acquaintances were contacted via telephone. The interviews took place at requested locations of informants to make the informants feel comfortable. The interviews lasted about 20 minutes. Before participating in this study, an informed consent was contained by the researcher. Data was gathered until there were no new essential insights found (Bleijenbergh, 2013). As a result, the sample consisted of sixteen informants of which 75% female and 25% male with ages ranging from 23 to 27. Only one informant was 53 years old. An overview of the informants can be found in Table 1 of Appendix B.

3.3 Data analysis

The interviews were, with permission of the informant, recorded and later transcribed precisely. Thus, silences, pauses, and hesitations are included in the transcripts (Rubin & Rubin, 2019). This was necessary to determine the cognition and attitudes of informants such as the easiness of recalling the gift receiving experience. Before data analysis, multiple copies of the transcripts were made to ensure the original dataset is safeguarded.

The data analysis was a combination of both inductive and deductive coding. Deductive coding since there were some expectations regarding the results. The coding process consisted of several steps. The software Atlas-ti was used for this coding process, which was a helpful tool to work structuredly. Firstly, the transcripts were read several times to get familiar with the data (Bleijenbergh, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2019). Several fragments were coded to develop patterns in the transcripts. Secondly, fragments are categorized with other similar fragments and subcategories were developed. Later, these subcategories were categorized into the six established concepts of this study: gift giving, cognition, emotion, behaviour, attitude, and relationship. During the coding process, several fragments were identified that could not be categorized into one of these six main concepts. For these fragments, a new main concept was developed, which is called feelings. Therefore, inductive and deductive coding is applied within this study. In total seven main concepts were established with 19 subcategories, and 82 codes were developed and categorized.

3.4 Research ethics

For this study, research ethics were taken into account by applying the following principles. Firstly, participation was completely voluntary the whole time. Thus, informants could withdraw from the research at any time without giving an explanation. Furthermore, the informant was allowed to take a



break or stop at any time without asking for permission or to give an explanation. Anonymity was assured by changing the names into ‘Informant 1’, ‘Informant 2’, and so on. The identity of the informant can only be assessed by the researcher. Additionally, confidentiality is guaranteed by not spreading or discussing the information with others. Moreover, recordings and transcripts are saved in files that need a password (Rubin & Rubin, 2019). During the interviews, mostly open-ended questions were asked and the researcher tried to avoid leading questions. At all times, informants were allowed to speak openly and freely. Lastly, all informants are allowed to see and read their transcript at any time without giving an explanation. These principles were communicated to the informant before the interview. The informant had to confirm that they understood these principles.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

To increase validity a pre-test was done with an acquaintance to ensure that everything was clear, that appropriate questions were asked, and that the questions did not make informants feel uncomfortable. After the pre-test, one question was added that was requested by the acquaintance, which was “could you tell me more about the actual moment you received the gift?”. Moreover, it appeared that the interview took less time than the established time. Therefore, the established length of the interview was adjusted before approaching acquaintances. After the interviews, the researcher also checked whether the interpretations of informant’s answers were in line with what they really meant (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) to make sure there were no misinterpretations. Moreover, if there were any doubts during transcribing, the researcher contacted the informant. This happened once. Informant seven described several emotions and the researchers wanted to make sure the emotions were interpreted in the right way.

To increase reliability, an interview guide was developed to keep consistency in the interviews. Although the informant was allowed to speak openly and freely, the researcher always tried to keep the goal of the interview in mind. Besides that, the researcher used a checklist to make sure all topics were covered during the interviews.

4. Results

In this section the results of the interviews are presented. The interviews provide several insights into the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses of gift receivers. Moreover, it shows the effects of gift receiving on the attitude of gift receivers and the impact of gifts on relationship between the gift receiver and gift giver. This section starts with general information about the gift receiving experiences of informants such as the gift and occasion. After that, the results of the five main concepts of this study are presented in the following order: cognition, emotion, behaviour, attitude, and relationship. Lastly, a new concept is introduced that is discovered during the coding process, which is called feelings. Every paragraph has subcategories that were developed during the coding process to make the paragraphs clear and structured.

4.1 Gift receiving

Gift. Half of the informants (9) received a gift from family, some informants (3) from their loved ones, other informants (3) from friends and one from in-laws. All informants received tangible gifts, except for one informant. This informant received an invitation for dinner with in-laws. Most informants (5) received jewelry, such as a ring, a bracelet, or a watch. From the informants who received jewelry, the bracelet is categorized as the cheapest jewelry. Even though these gifts differ in their monetary value, jewelry was highly appreciated by the informants. The informant who received the bracelet knew the bracelet did not cost much. However, she really appreciated the gesture behind this bracelet, as she states:

“It is something very cute and small. Also, I think it did not cost anything. However, the gesture was really big. Like, so sweet that you thought of me. Even though the bracelet did not cost a fortune, it is all about the gesture. It was also handmade by a guy on the beach and my friends also bought the same bracelet, as a memory of our trip” (Informant 11, F, personal communication, May 14, 2019).

Besides that, two informants received a book: a travel guide for China and a cookbook. These books were also seen as expensive gifts. Other informants received tangible gifts such as a water bottle, cuddly toy, socks, gift voucher, board game, Rituals, wine glasses, card, and a plant.

Occasion. Most informants (10) received a gift for calenderial occasions of which most informants (8) received a gift for their birthday, one informant received a gift for her graduation and one informant received a gift for Christmas. Other informants (6) received a gift for non-calenderial occasions. Gift givers had several reasons to give gifts such as the gift receiver went through a break-up, the gift receiver was ill or the receiver did a favour for the gift giver. Furthermore, one informant received a dinner from her father-in-law, which he organized to have a moment with the whole family. Also, one informant received a gift because she might be evicted from her house within a few



weeks. The gift giver wanted to show her compassion by giving this gift. This appears from the following statement:

“... To show that she also finds this situation annoying for me. Just that she thinks of you, you know” (Informant 12, F, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

Interestingly, one informant received one gift for a calenderial and a non-calenderial occasion. She received a gift for her birthday and the gift giver also wanted to thank the gift receiver for her help. This appears from the following statement:

“She was very happy that I helped her with renovating and painting her new house. So this gift was something for my birthday but also a thank you for all my effort” (Informant 6, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

Some informants (4) highlighted the importance of occasions when choosing a gift. They expect to receive different gifts for different occasions. To illustrate, these informants expect to receive a bigger gift for their birthday than a gift they receive for a non-calenerial occasion. This appears from the following statement:

“For birthdays it is usually bigger like a weekend away or something like that. And a gift you receive just like that, it is more something like just Rituals, more materialistic gifts” (Informant 13, M, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

Expectation. Most informants (12) received a gift they did not expect and some informants (5) expected the received gift. One informant received both an expected and unexpected gift. The expected gift was a ring she asked for. Besides the ring, she also received wine glasses, which she did not expect to receive. She states:

“...And then he had two presents for me and he gave me the first one and then he said "Yes you probably already know what it is". I saw from the package that it was the gift that I suggested. So I knew exactly what I was going to get. But for the second gift I did not know what I would get. And he said it was a 'grown-up' gift. So I really had no idea what to expect” (Informant 1, F, personal communication May 1, 2019).

Some informants did not really expect to receive a gift in general, which appears from the following statements:

“No, not really. Sure I liked it but I certainly did not expect to get anything because of course we were still just dating” (Informant 16, M, personal communication, May 23, 2019).

“I did not expect anything actually. Maybe more after the holiday, a souvenir or something, whatever they gave to other friends. But not so during the trip. I really did not expect a gift



for this, certainly not at that time” (Informant 11, F, personal communication, May 14, 2019).

Intention. Informants were asked to describe the intended intention of gift givers. Even though results reveal little consistency, all intended intentions were perceived as positive. Some informants (3) thought the intention of the gift giver was to show she cared about the informant. Other informants (4) thought the intention of the gift giver was to surprise the informant. Informants (4) also state that the gift giver wanted to share an experience with the informant. Moreover, two informants argue the gift givers’ intention was to satisfy the need of the informant, which appears from the following statement:

“...Maybe there was an intention behind it by just to give me the gift I asked for. Because at least he already knew that I wanted that and he wants to fulfill that need” (Informant 1, F, personal communication May 1, 2019).

Moreover, some informants (2) thought that the gift givers’ intention was just to give a gift for their birthday. One informant thinks the intention of the gift giver was to show that they were proud of her achievement. She states:

“To show that they are proud of me. And that they are very happy that I have my bachelor's degree. They think it is quite an achievement” (Informant 2, F, personal communication, May 1, 2019).

Gesture. Interestingly, most informants (10) found the gesture behind the gift more important than the gift itself. The fact that the gift giver thought of the informant or that the gift giver put effort in the gift was highly appreciated. As one informant explains:

“...And especially the combination of something very small with a big gesture. Like, with a small gesture you still have a big gesture or something like that. But I do think, a gift does not have to be very big or very nice, it is more about the gesture and spontaneity that makes it so nice and fun” (Informant 11, F, personal communication, May 14, 2019).

Some informants (3) received a small gift such as a card or a cuddly toy. According to these informants, these gifts carry a meaningful message that made the gift receiving moment special to them. One of them argues:

“At a moment like that, it means so much even though it is something very little. It has a huge impact” (Informant 7, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

Results revealed that the appreciation of informants who received small and cheap gifts was sometimes bigger than informants who received big and expensive gift. Altogether, the gesture behind a gift is seen as a very important element.

4.2 Cognition

Cognition knowledge. The knowledge of gift receiving moments depends on the occasion. Results reveal that for calenderial occasions such as Christmas or birthdays, informants expect to receive gifts. Gifts are seen as an indispensable element of these occasions. Therefore, they have a certain image about gift receiving on these days. This appears from the following statements:

“Yes, well, it was my birthday so you expect that day to receive gifts” (Informant 5, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

“...Because you know it is part of your birthday that you get presents...” (Informant 1, F, personal communication May 1, 2019).

For all non calenderial occasions gifts came unexpected. Results reveal that gifts are not seen as an important element of these days.

Cognition appraisal. All informants are part of the gift receiving process, which makes them able to appraise the gift receiving moment. Informants (16) appraised the gift receiving process as something positive. Most gift receiving moments are described as a nice memory, a sweet memory, or a special memory. Noteworthy, results show that informants evaluated the whole gift receiving moment instead of only the gift. To illustrate:

“It was my birthday and my birthday was on Sunday. On Sundays we often go for a more extensive breakfast. So, in the morning, I just came down and my parents were already there. Then we had breakfast and then I got that book before breakfast for my birthday” (Informant 5, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

Interestingly, it became clear that some informants started to realize and recognize the actual effects of the received gift when talking about that moment again. One informant states:

“In those difficult periods, I think that gifts really mean a lot. It doesn't even have to be very big, but just like a small gesture. Now, I will also do that more, I think. Now that I have experienced it and talking about it again, I realize that I found it so nice” (Informant 7, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).



Social cognition. Some informants (4) highlighted the importance of showing their appreciation towards the gift giver. They wanted to make sure that the gift giver knew they appreciated the gift. This appears from the following statements:

“I wanted to let them know that I thought it was very sweet of them. I don't really know how I reacted, but they should have seen it. Yes, I hope that they saw that I was really happy with it, because I really wanted them to know that” (Informant 11, F, personal communication, May 14, 2019).

“I wanted to show her that I liked it and that is why I reacted that way” (Informant 13, M, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

4.3 Emotion

Type of emotion. All informants experienced positive emotions during the gift receiving moment. Most informants (11) described they were happy during the gift receiving moment. Informants also described that they were surprised and touched. Some informants (5) experienced mixed emotions of which four of them received gifts such as jewelry or a dinner. They felt both happy but conflicted about the gift since the gift was perceived as expensive. One informant received a card and also experienced mixed emotions. The occasion resulted in mixed emotions. The following statements describe the mixed emotions these informants experienced:

“Yes no, I felt a bit guilty or conflicted about it or so. I thought it was such an expensive gift and I only helped like three times in that whole house so maybe not even equivalent or something” (Informant 6, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).”

“I found it very sweet but I also felt a bit conflicted about it. I was thinking like, should I accept this beautiful, big and expensive gift? I also really liked it because it is a very nice gift of course. But how do you say that, not conflicted or something. But maybe more like, is that really for me?” (Informant 10, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019)

“And suddenly I left and I was just like okay.. How do I go further and what will I do now? So it was a sort of farewell thing, but it was also a new phase or start or something” (Informant 8, F, personal communication, May 14, 2019).

Intensity and length emotion. In general, all informants described their emotions as intense at the moment of receiving the gift. After some time the intensity of these emotions decreased. The length of this intensity differs among the informants. Most informants experienced these intense emotions for just a moment, which appears from the following statement:

“I think that I experienced it for about 10 minutes and then it went back to normal again” (Informant 1, F, personal communication, May 1, 2019).



“I think for half an hour or an hour that I thought like it is super sweet, but then I continued with working on my thesis” (Informant 14, F, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

Other informants (5) felt these intense emotions for a few hours. Two informants experienced these emotions the whole day because of the meaning behind the gift. One of the two informants received a cuddly toy and still experiences the same emotion of that day to a certain extent. She states:

“I think I felt like this the rest of the day. I still feel it when I talk to other people about it and every time I see that thing, which is really ugly by the way. But it makes me happy and it still makes me happy. Even if it is two weeks later. A small gift has major consequences in a situation like this” (Informant 7, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

Expression. Informants expressed their emotions towards the giver in the form of verbal expression, nonverbal expression and physical expression. All informants used verbal expressions by saying “thank you”, or “I am so happy with this gift”, or “this is so sweet”. Some informants (5) also showed their emotions via nonverbal expression of which three informants smiled. The other two informants started to cry. One informant explained this expression:

“Tears of positivity that she had thought of me and my situation, and knowing that there is someone who is looking out for you” (Informant 7, F, personal communication May 8, 2019).

Besides that, half of the informants also physically expressed their emotions by giving the giver a hug or a kiss. One informant explains this expression:

“A hug because it is my brother of course, but I would also have done that with friends. Because yes, I think that is something extra than just say like: thank you for this gift” (Informant 1, F, personal communication, May 1, 2019).

4.4 Behaviour

Reciprocity. From the interviews, it appeared that half of the informants felt the need to give something back to the gift giver. From these informants, four informants would give something back in a materialistic form. The other informants (2) would reciprocate in the form of appreciation such as spending more time with the gift giver. One informant states

“Yes but more in the sense of appreciation. Not materialistic, but more in the sense of communicating something back to them and more personal” (Informant 10, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

The other half did not had need to give something back, mostly because of the occasion. For certain calenderial occasion informants expect to receive gifts. Therefore, some of these informants did not felt the need to reciprocate. One informant stated:



“No, it was my birthday. Maybe on another occasion, but not with my birthday” (Informant 5, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

Moreover, for some non-calenderial occasions there is also no need to reciprocate. One informant explains the reason why she did not had the need to reciprocate:

“That is actually so bad, but they have been able to do something fun all day long while I was sick. They gave that to me because they wanted to. So no, I did not necessarily have to buy something back for them now (Informant 11, F, personal communication, May 14, 2019).”

Gift giving elements. If informants would give something back to the gift giver, they would take several elements into account. Most informants (11) would take the history of received gifts into account. While some informants would give same gift back, others would try to put the same effort into the gift. For example, one informant stated:

“Yes, the fact that I received such a gift does impact my future decisions. You think a little bit more about it. My mom says of course: Mother's Day is not necessary. But now I will not let that pass by of course” (Informant 10, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

Besides that, most informants (14) would search for a gift that fits the interests of the gift giver. They argue that a gift should be personal. This appears from the following statements:

“Especially what she likes, what she would like to do or would like to have” (Informant 9, M, personal communication, May 13, 2019).

“...And I mainly try to think of what she would like, what she would appreciate” (Informant 8, F, personal communication, May 14, 2019).

“Yes, something she likes. Something she appreciates” (Informant 4, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

Some informants (4) would search for a gift that they could share with the gift giver such as dinner or a day trip. Other informants (3) would consider the monetary value of a gift. They want to give a gift that has the same monetary value as the received gift. Moreover, few informants (3) would try to remember any suggestions that the gift giver communicated to them in the past.

4.5 Attitude

Attitude. All informants hold a positive attitude towards the received gifts. Noteworthy, there was one informant who preferred a different gift. Even though he was satisfied with the board game that he received, he preferred and expected to receive a different gift such as a weekend trip. He explained:

“...But yes, I don't know if I wanted this gift in advance. But if you get it that way then yes, in retrospect it is nice of course. But I rather had a day trip or something or somewhere you know. Because I have given a day trip for her birthday and then you kind of expect that back I think? But this is still a nice surprise indeed” (Informant 9, M, personal communication, May 13, 2019).

The attitude of some informants (6) towards the gift giver has changed regardless of the gift. However, there is little consistency in these attitude changes and the type of relationships. Three of them received a gift from their girlfriend, two of them received a gift from family, and one of them received a gift from friends. Most of them developed a more open attitude towards the gift giver, which appears from the following statements:

“Yes, I think so. I think I have become a little more open” (Informant 10, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

“Definitely more positive. You get to know each other better and better” (Informant 9, M, personal communication, May 13, 2019).

For some of these informants (4) the received gift even contributed to this attitude change. For all other informants, the gift did not result in a change in attitude towards the gift giver. One informant states:

“I think because your attitude remains the same basically. You have a certain attitude in the friendship for a long period of time. Our friendship is steady and so is my attitude towards her” (Informant 7, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

“This gift did not contribute to this change. Because I think it is very sweet that she does it, but that it does not make everything right or not very good immediately you know. It does not change anything” (Informant 13, M, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

4.6 Relationship

Relationship. In the last few years, most informants (10) gained a stronger relationship with the gift giver. Especially romantic relationships became stronger as both parties want the relationship to grow. One informant states:

“Yes, you grow closer together. You feel more like you want to do more together and share more. So living together and so on (Informant 13, M, personal communication, May 16, 2019).”

For some informants (3) the received gift contributed to this bolstering. For half of the informants (8) the received gift did not change the relationship. Most of them (6) received gifts from family. One informant argues:



“Maybe if you get a gift from a friend that the relationship changes, but I do not think that the relationship with family changes through a gift (Informant 14, F, personal communication, May 16, 2019). “

Even though for most informants the gift did not contribute to the bolstering of the relationship, many informants (6) did see the gift is a confirmation or recognition of the relationship. As one stated:

“Just an extra confirmation. Then you know okay, I am not the only one who thought like I think our friendship is super nice, let’s keep it up” (Informant 8, F, personal communication, May 14, 2019)

4.7 Feeling

Feeling. Results show that informants (10) who celebrated their birthday, Christmas and their graduation already had a good mood and experienced positive emotions all day. Their mood even got better after receiving the gift. This appears from the following statement:

“You are already in a good mood because it is Christmas, and I am really a Christmas person. It was in the evening and everyone had given each other gifts so there was a good vibe anyway. But when I received this, I was extra happy of course” (Informant 4, F personal communication, May 8, 2019).

During the gift receiving process, all informants experienced positive feelings. The most common phrases were “ I really liked it” and “I found it really sweet”. Some informants (4) also felt special such as one informant who received a watch for both her birthday and as a thank you. She states

“...I thought it was such a special gift because I received it only my sister and not from my parents. So I felt really special” (Informant 6, F, personal communication, May 8, 2019).

Other feelings that several informants described were feeling warm, satisfied, and funny. Some informants experienced more specific feelings that were more related to their specific occasion. For example, one informant received a travel guide for China and she felt relieved. She explained that she felt nervous for her trip to China and this travel guide comforted her. Furthermore, one informant was invited for dinner and she felt connected with her in-laws. Lastly, one informant received a watch and she felt spoiled.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify the gift receiver's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses, and to determine the effects of gift receiving on attitudes and relationships. Based on a qualitative research with semi-structured interviews several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the knowledge of gift receiving moments depends on the occasion. Gift receivers expect gifts on calendarial occasions such as birthdays or Christmas. On these day, gifts are seen as an indispensable element. In contrast, gift receivers do not expect to receive gifts on non calendarial occasions. In general, gift receiving moments are appraised as positive memories. Some gift receivers experience social cognition as they are highly aware of the signals they send to the gift giver. Secondly, gift receiving has a positive effect on the emotions of gift receivers. Emotions are expressed through verbal expression, nonverbal expression, and sometimes in physical expression such as giving a hug. Gift receivers could experience mixed emotions when an unexpected gift is expensive. Thirdly, gift receiving also has an effect on the behaviour of gift receivers. While some gift receivers feel the need to reciprocate with gifts or to reciprocate in the form of appreciation, others do not feel the need to reciprocate. Another behavioural response of gift receivers is that they take the received gift into account in future buying decisions for the gift giver. Fourthly, gift receiving does not have a tremendous impact on gift receivers' attitude towards gift givers. Moreover, gift receiving does not impact the relationship between gift receivers and gift givers if the gift giver is family or when the relationship is perceived as strong. To conclude, gift receiving impacts emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses of gift receivers. Gift receiving has little or zero impact on gift receivers' attitudes and gifts only impacts relationships that are not strong or not family related.

6. Discussion

6.1 Discussion

As mentioned earlier, results revealed that gift receivers have different levels of knowledge about gift receiving contexts. Even though the knowledge about gift receiving differs per occasion, in all gift receiving moments there is a certain level of knowledge. As mentioned in the literature, both knowledge and appraisal are needed to produce emotions (Lazarus & Smith, 1988). Results show that gift receivers appraise the total gift experience instead of only appraising the gift. According to Lazarus and Smith (1988) this implies that gift receiving has a personal meaning for gift receivers. This might be explained by the fact that gift receivers are actively involved in their own gift receiving moment.

As shown in literature, cognition and emotions are closely related to each other. Results confirm this relationship to a certain extent. When gift receivers request a certain gift, they expect to receive this gift. As a result, they develop cognitions about the upcoming gift receiving moment. If the gift receiver receives the requested gift, the gift is not really a surprise anymore. Consequently, emotions are less intense and do not last for a long time. In contrast, if a gift comes unexpected, emotions are more intense and are experienced for a longer period of time. This results in the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Emotions are more intense and last longer when a gift comes unexpected.

Important to realize, the intensity and length of the emotions is also influenced by the type of gift. Even though gift receivers expect to receive a gift on calendarial occasions such as birthdays or Christmas, the type of gift can still impact the intensity and length of the experienced emotions. Some received a gift on their birthday that outstood their expectations. As a result, the emotions were more intense and experienced for a longer period of time. Whereas others also received a gift on their birthday that just satisfied them. This results in the following proposition:

Proposition 2: Emotions are more intense and last longer when a gift outstands gift receiver's expectations.

Another key point, not only the type of gift and the expectations impact the emotions of gift receivers, the meaning behind the gift is also seen as an influential factor. Even though some gift receivers received small and cheap gifts, their emotions were sometimes more intense than those who received big and expensive gifts. It appeared that the message behind the gift had a tremendous positive impact on the emotions of gift receivers. This together would mean that if a gift comes unexpected, has a meaningful gesture and is liked by the gift receiver, the gift receiver experiences more intense and positive emotions than a gift that comes expected, has a less meaningful gesture and is disliked by the gift receiver. This suggests the following proposition:

Proposition 3: Emotions are more intense and last longer if a gift has a meaningful gesture.

Moreover, the Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT) implies that two gift receivers could have very different emotional responses to the same circumstances (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). This can be confirmed with the results of the interviews. Some gift receivers received the same gift for the same occasion. However, their emotional responses were very different from each other. While one gift receiver experienced these emotions for days, the other one experienced the emotions for just a moment. Altogether, emotions are not only influenced by the cognitions of gift receivers but also by other factors such as the type of gift, expectations and the meaning behind the gift.

As mentioned in the literature review, individuals appraise emotions based on the most relevant dimensions of Bagozzi et al. (1999). It can be concluded that the most relevant dimensions for the gift receiving context are valence, certainty, and agency. Valence since emotions within the gift receiving process are appraised as positive or negative, certainty because a gift can come unexpected or expected, and agency as the emotions are caused by the gift giver.

As stated in the literature, gift receivers could experience mixed emotions (de Hooge, 2014). Results revealed that gift receivers experience mixed emotions when they liked the gift but preferred a different gift. An explanation could be that the gift receiver expected or hoped for a certain gift but received a different gift. Still, the gift receiver is satisfied with the received gift. Surprisingly, the results revealed also other mixed emotions. Mixed emotions in gift receiving contexts are more likely to be developed when an expensive gift comes unexpected. These unexpected gift receiving moments makes the gift receiver feel happy but uncomfortable and conflicted at the same time because of the monetary value. This results in the following proposition:

Proposition 4: Mixed emotions are more likely to be experienced when an expensive gift comes unexpected.

The CAT also suggests that cognition and emotion impact behavioural responses of gift receivers (Hoyer et al., 2016, Bagozzi et al., 1999; de Hooge, 2014). Although two gift receivers receive the same gift for the same occasion from the same giver, both gift receivers have different behavioural responses. One possible behavioural response is to reciprocate. The theory of reciprocity is relevant in gift receiving contexts to a certain extent since results show that only half of the informants want to give a gift back or reciprocate in the form of appreciation and communication. Interestingly, this theory claims that a relationship will not last if only one person gives gifts and never receives a gift (Komter, 2007). Results revealed that for a few informants the received gift actually had an impact on the relationship. Notably, these relationships were not perceived as strong. This implies that the theory of reciprocity can not be applied to situations where the relationship between the giver and receiver is strong and steady.

Although this may be true, results do reveal that gifts are seen as a confirmation of the relationship. This confirms the literature of Sherry (1992) that the gift giver sends a message to the gift receiver that they prefer the relationship, know the gift receiver, and care about the gift receiver. Surprisingly, this was only the case for friends and girlfriends. This implies that gifts do impact relationships but not the relationships between family members. This together leads to the following propositions:

Proposition 5: Theory of reciprocity is only applicable in relationships that are not very strong.

Proposition 6: Theory of reciprocity is only applicable in relationships that are not family related.

Proposition 7: Gifts are seen as a confirmation of relationships

A second behavioural response comes from the social exchange theory, which proposes that individuals search for relationships that minimize the cost but maximize the rewards (Emerson, 1976). The results of this study confirm this theory. As mentioned earlier, the meaning behind a gift has an immense impact on the emotions of gift receivers. This suggests that gift givers could maximize their rewards by giving small, unexpected, and likeable gifts with a meaningful gesture. Consequently, gift receivers who are positively affected by the total gift experience might be inspired or triggered into behavioural actions that also maximize their rewards. An example could be that the gift receiver would give a similar gift back in the future. Besides that, the above described results confirm the statement of Flynn and Adams (2009) that a more expensive gift does not necessarily result in higher appreciation. Gift givers will receive better responses from gift receivers when giving a meaningful gift than an expensive gift (Flynn and Adams, 2009).

The attitude of gift receivers towards the gift is not very different from each other. The attitude was positive for all gift receiving moments. In general, gift receiving is seen as a positive activity. Some gift receivers held a strong attitude towards the gift as this gift was seen as the perfect gift for that specific occasion. Their attitudes can be described with the six dimensions of Hoyer et al. (2016) in which the gift receiver liked the gift, easily recalled the gift receiving moment, held a strong attitude as the gift was uncommon or unexpected, still holds this attitude, resists to change the attitude, and has no mixed evaluations of the gift. This together confirms that cognitions and emotions form gift receiver's attitude towards the gift (Allen et al., 2005).

Within this research a new concept was discovered: feelings. Interestingly, cognitive appraisal theorists only look at cognition and emotion. In reality, not all described thoughts of gift receivers could be categorized into one of these two dimensions. Gift receivers described happiness as an emotion they experienced. Besides that, gift receivers described the gift receiving moment as

something sweet or nice. But these descriptions are more a reaction or consequence of the experienced emotions rather than an emotion itself. These feelings seem to be neglected by cognitive appraisal theorists. It looks like within the established relationship between cognition, emotion, and behaviour, feelings are missing. Therefore, the next proposition was developed:

Proposition 8: Feelings impact cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses

Surprisingly, the impact of receiving a gift is not fully recognised during the gift receiving moment. When talking with gift receivers about the whole gift receiving moment, gift receivers actually became fully aware of the positive impact and consequences of receiving that gift. An explanation could be that the positive impact of the gift receiving experience was hindered by the mood of the gift receiver or that the gift receiving moment happened really fast. It might also be that gift receiving is not something rare or special nowadays as it happens on a regular basis (Komter 1996; Komter, 2007; Flynn & Adams, 2009). Therefore, a new proposition is suggested:

Proposition 9: Gift receivers are not fully aware of the gift receiving experience.

6.2 Theoretical implications

As mentioned earlier, researchers only investigated gift giving from the gift giver's perspective. This study contributes to the marketing literature by providing new insights in the gift receiving process from the gift receiver's perspective by analyzing several consequences. Several well-known theories that provide some insights into the gift receiving context are analyzed to identify to what extent these theories are actually also applicable in a gift receiving context.

Firstly, results reveal that the Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT) might be the main explanation of gift receivers' responses. Even though two gift receivers receive the same gift for the same occasion under the same circumstances, both gift receivers will have different cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses. By being aware of the possible importance of the CAT within the gift receiving context, this theory should receive greater support in the marketing literature. The results of this study provide a basis for the CAT in the gift receiving literature.

Secondly, results contribute to the literature of the theory of reciprocity from the gift receiver's perspective. Even though this theory assumes that gift receivers automatically develop the need to reciprocate, results reveal that the theory of reciprocity might only be applicable in gift receiving contexts in which the gift giver is not family related. Furthermore, gift receivers have the need to reciprocate when the relationship is still developing.

As mentioned earlier, previous research only investigated the effect of the type of gift on the likeability of gift receiver. This research investigated the whole gift experience and the impact and consequences of gift receiving from the gift receiver's perspective. This study revealed that not only the type of gift impacts the gift receivers' responses but also the surprise effect, the effort, and the

meaning behind the gift. This together can be added to the gift receiving literature from the gift receiver's perspective. Also, gifts are perceived as an important tool to maintain and strengthen relationships. Results show that gift receiving is seen as a confirmation of the relationship between the gift giver and gift receiver, which contributes to this literature.

6.3 Managerial implications

Since this study provides insights into gift receivers' responses, marketers could use these results as a basis to implement strategies that influence consumer buying behaviour. A strategy could be developed based on the social exchange theory. As mentioned earlier, a meaningful gift positively impacts gift receivers. Therefore, a strategy could be to remind people about the positive effects they experienced of receiving a certain gift. This might trigger them to buy that same gift for somebody else. For example, results revealed that small gifts such as a card or a cuddly toy have an immense positive impact on the gift receiver because of the message behind these gifts. Accordingly, marketers could make people aware by reminding them to think of someone who is experiencing a difficult time or who is doing a great job at the moment. They could promote gifts that are appropriate for these non-calendrical occasions such as cards or a cuddly toy. Even though small and cheap gifts might not result in big financial results, these promotions might create awareness of the company and more non-calendrical occasions. Consequently, people might be triggered to buy gifts more often.

Important to realize, results also revealed that an unexpected expensive gift such as a ring has a tremendous positive impact on the gift receiver. If this expensive gift comes unexpected, it does not matter if it is for a calendrical or non-calendrical occasion. Noteworthy, expensive gifts on calendrical occasions should carry a meaningful message such as seeing a 25th birthday or a diploma as a milestone, to get favourable responses from gift receivers. Thus, marketers should promote expensive gifts for both non-calendrical and calendrical occasions to make people aware of when it is most effective to give expensive gifts to the gift receiver. This might be a trigger for people to buy expensive gifts for more occasions.

6.4 Societal and relational implications

This study contributes to the knowledge regarding gifts and the development of relationships. As mentioned earlier, gifts are seen as a more important element of today's society. Gift givers wish to positively influence the relationship with the gift receiver. As a result, people are performing this activity on a regular basis. Thus, it is important for gift givers to understand the impact of gifts on relationships. Results revealed that gift giving is most effective when relationships are not that strong or steady yet. Thus, gifts are a helpful tool to strengthen relationships that recently started. Especially in romantic relationships where both parties want to grow the relationship, gifts could be seen as a valuable investment. Gifts are a way to show their love to their girlfriend or boyfriend, which is highly appreciated by the gift receiver.

Nevertheless, there are also many relationships that are already strong and steady. For these relationships gifts are seen as a confirmation of the relationship. Thus, both the gift giver and gift receiver confirm that the current relationship is pleasant. Even though excessive gift giving is not analysed within this study, giving gifts in general will not negatively impact the relationship. Furthermore, in all cases gift givers positively influenced the emotions of gift receivers. Since emotions and relationships are closely related to each other, gift giving might always unconsciously and positively impact relationships.

Organizations such as hospitals could use these results to encourage people to give gifts. One informant of this study received a gift because she was ill. Even though this gift was small and not expensive, it made her forget her illness for a moment. In hospitals there are many individuals that experience difficult times due to illness. Hospitals could recommend or advise people to give gifts to them. They could communicate to potential gift givers that the positive emotions and feelings the gift receiver will experience from receiving these gifts, might overrule the negative feelings they are experiencing the whole day. A small gift with a valuable message has an immense positive impact.

6.5 Limitations

It should be noted that although this study contributes to the literature, it has several limitations. The limitations of this study should be carefully considered along with the conclusions. Firstly, there are limitations regarding the sample of this study. The sample of this study is biased since 12 of the 16 informants are women. Therefore, the sample is not representative for the rest of the population. Even though the results of every individual are different from each other, it would have been better if men and women would have been equally distributed. If more men would have been involved in this study, results might have been different. This unequal distribution is the result of collecting informants within the network of the researcher. Moreover, this study is a qualitative research with interviews as primary data collection. Therefore, the sample size for this study was small. As a result, the sample for this study is not representative for the population. Even though this study cannot be generalised, it can be used for further research (Bleijenbergh, 2013). Also, this study only contained informants within the age of 20-30 years old. There was only one informant who was many years older. The results of this informant was very different then the rest of the informants. This implies that older people might have different perceptions about gift receiving. Results might have been different if the sample was more diverse in age.

Furthermore, this study relies on self-reported data since informants are asked to describe their experiences. However, self-reported data contains potential sources of bias. For instance, recalling a gift experience means the experience occurred in the past. This could be a long time ago. Someone who received a gift two weeks ago could recall the gift experience easier than a gift that is received six months ago. Also, it could be that an informant might forgot the last time they received a

gift. As a result, they might took a different gift receiving moment that happened earlier or they might have chosen a gift receiving moment they liked.

6.6 Further research

Aforementioned, there is a lot to discover within the gift receiving context. This study provides several interesting areas for further research. Firstly, it appears that emotions play an important role within the gift receiving context. Results revealed that the intensity and length of emotions are caused by the meaning behind the gift, expectations, and to what extent the gift is a surprise. Proposition 1, proposition 2, and proposition 3 are developed based on these outcomes. Further research is needed to investigate whether these factors indeed influence the intensity and length of emotions. Additionally, previous research found that gift receivers experience mixed emotions when they like the gift but preferred a different gift (de Hooge, 2004). This study revealed that mixed emotions also arise when an expensive gift comes unexpected as stated in proposition 4. Further research should look at the effects of receiving unexpected expensive gifts on the emotions of gift receivers.

Moreover, it appeared that the theory of reciprocity, which provide insights into the behavioural responses of gift receivers, is applicable to a certain extent. As proposed in proposition 5 and proposition 6, the strength of the relationship and the type of relationship seem to be important factors within this theory. Further research is needed in order to draw conclusions about the connection between the strength of relationship and the need to reciprocate, and the connection between the type of relationship and the need to reciprocate. Furthermore, results revealed that gifts are seen as a confirmation of relationships that are already strong and steady. In order to confirm this proposition, further research is recommended.

The results of this study revealed a new concept, which seems to be an important influential factor within the CAT. It seems that feelings influence the three dimensions of the CAT. Gift receivers described certain feelings that could not be categorized in one of the CAT dimensions. However, it seemed that these feelings were based on cognitions and emotions. Further research is needed to find out if feelings could be incorporated in the CAT.

As previously mentioned, gift receivers became fully aware of the gift receiving experience when talking about the emotional consequences of the received gift. Some gift receivers realized how meaningful the gift experience actually was, how good the relationship with the gift giver actually is and how original the gift was. Further research is advised to find out to what extent gift receivers are actually aware of the gift receiving experience.

Lastly, even though the attitude of gift receivers towards the gift giver did not change after receiving the gift. In some cases the attitude towards the gift giver was already changing. In these cases the received gift contributed to the attitude change. However, the reason for this contribution remains vague. Therefore, more research should be conducted towards the impact of gift receiving on the attitude change towards the gift giver.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

1. INTRODUCTION

- Introduce myself (*Mijn naam + studie*)
- Short explanation of the aim of the study: to determine the reactions of gift receivers. (*Doel studie: het vaststellen van de reacties van cadeau ontvangers*)
- Thanking the informant for participation (*Bedank respondent voor meedoen aan onderzoek*)
- Interviews are
 - Anonymous (*Anoniem*)
 - Tape-recorded (if the informant does not mind), and no one will learn later about the identity of the informant. (*Opgenomen met tape recorder*)
- The name will be re-coded when entering the dataset, so no one will be able to identify her back. (*Naam wordt hergecodeerd om anonimiteit te waarborgen*)
- The interview is voluntary. the informant is allowed to stop at any time without giving any explanation (*Interview is vrijwillig, respondent mag ten alle tijde stoppen*)
- Results will be analysed in a more general framework.
- Questions? (*Vragen*)

2. COGNITION - KNOWLEDGE

- Can you think of the last time you received a gift? (*Kun je aan de laatste keer dat u een cadeau hebt ontvangen denken?*)
- Could you describe this experience? (*Kan je deze ervaring voor mij beschrijven?*)

[PROBING QUESTIONS]

- Could you tell me more about the occasion? (*Kan je me meer vertellen over de gelegenheid?*)
 - How important was this for you? (*Hoe belangrijk was dit voor je?*)
- Could you tell me more about the gift? (*Kan je me meer vertellen over het cadeau?*)
 - Looks (*Uiterlijk*)
 - Size (*Grootte*)
 - Monetary value (*Waarde*)
 - Package (*Verpakking*)
- Could you describe your relationship with giver (*Kan je jouw relatie met de gever hebt omschrijven?*)

- Could you tell me more about the moment when you received the gift? (*Kan je mij meer vertellen over het moment dat je het cadeau kreeg? Zoals hoe werd het cadeau gegeven en zei hij/zij er iets bij?*)
 - Begin till end

- Why did you receive a gift? (*Waarom heb je een cadeau ontvangen?*)

3. EMOTIONS

- What did you feel when you received the gift? (*Wat voor gevoel kreeg je toen je het cadeau kreeg?*)
 - Why? (*Waarom?*)
- Did the gift change your mood that day? (*Heeft het cadeau jouw humeur verandert die dag?*)
 - Why (not)? (*Waarom (niet)?*)
- How long did you experience these emotions? (*Hoe lang heb je duurde deze emoties?*)
 - Why? (*Waarom?*)
- How did you express your feelings towards the gift giver? (*Hoe heb je jouw gevoelens geuit naar de gever?*)
 - Why? (*Waarom op deze manier?*)

4. COGNITION - APPRAISAL

- What do you think was the intention of the giver? (*Wat denk je dat de intentie van de gever was?*)
 - Why? (*Waarom?*)
- What do you think about the gesture? (*Wat vind je van het gebaar?*)
- How do you think about the gift experience now? (*Hoe denk je nu over de ervaring?*)
- To what extent was this gift in line with what you wanted? (*In hoeverre was dit cadeau wat je had gewild?*) [Mixed emotions]
- To what extent was this gift in line with what you expected? (*In hoeverre was dit cadeau wat je had verwacht?*) [Mixed emotions]

5. BEHAVIOUR

- Did you had the feeling to reciprocate? (*Had je het gevoel dat je iets terug moest geven?*)
 - Why (not)? (*Waarom (niet)?*)
- Do you give gifts to this person? (*Geef je ook een cadeau terug?*)
 - Why (not)? (*Waarom (niet)?*)

[IF YES]



- What do you take into account when buying a gift for this person? (*Welke aspecten neem je mee als je een cadeau voor deze persoon koopt?*) [Social exchange theory]
 - Why? (*Waarom?*)
- To what extent do you thank the history of received gifts into account? (*In hoeverre neem je mee wat deze persoon aan jou heeft gegeven in het verleden?*)

6. ATTITUDE

- Did your attitude change towards the gift giver? (*Is je houding ten opzichte van de gever verandert?*)
 - Did this change due to the gift? (*Is dit veranderd vanwege het cadeau?*)
 - Why (not)? (*Waarom (niet)?*)

7. RELATIONSHIP

- Did your relationship with the giver change? (*Is je relatie met de gever veranderd?*)
 - Did this change due to the gift? (*Is dit veranderd door het cadeau?*)
 - Why (not)? (*Waarom (niet)?*)

7. FINAL WORDS

- Are there still things you would like to tell about this experience? (*Zijn er nog dingen die je graag wilt vertellen over deze ervaring?*)
- Do you maybe have questions? (*Heb je misschien vragen?*)
- Thank you for your time (*Bedankt*)

Appendix B: Overview informants

Table 1
Overview sample and informants

Informant	Gender	Age	Gift	Date of receiving gift
1	F	23	Ring & Wine glasses	April 2019
2	F	24	Ring	February 2019
3	F	24	Dinner	April 2019
4	F	23	Drink bottle	December 2018
5	F	24	Travelguide China	April 2019
6	F	24	Watch	October 2018
7	F	24	Cuddly toy	April 2019
8	F	25	Card	April 2019
9	M	24	Board game	December 2018
10	F	25	Ring	April 2019
11	F	25	Bracelet	May 2019
12	F	24	Plant	May 2019
13	M	24	Rituals	May 2019
14	F	24	Cookbook	May 2019
15	M	53	Gift voucher	April 2019
16	M	27	Happy socks	March 2019