

RESEARCH ARTICLE



An integrative review of gift-giving research in consumer behavior and marketing

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Abstract

In recent decades, scholars across all areas of marketing have studied consumer gift-giving behavior. Despite the growing popularity of this research topic, no extensive review of the gift-giving literature exists. To that end, this paper offers an expansive review of research on consumer gift-giving, focusing primarily on work coming from within the marketing discipline, but also drawing on foundational pieces from other fields. We review extant scholarship on five of gift-giving's most important aspects—givers' motivations, givers' inputs, giver-recipient mismatches, value creation/reduction, and the greater gift-giving context. In doing so, we illuminate the literature's key agreements and disagreements, shed light on themes that traverse ostensibly disparate gift-giving findings, and develop deeper conceptualizations of gifting constructs. Moreover, we identify opportunities for improvement in the gift-giving literature and use them to create key agendas for future gift-giving research. In sum, this paper offers a single point of reference for gift-giving scholars, improves academia's current understanding of gift-giving, offers several theoretical contributions, and generates multiple paths for future research.

KEYWORDS

consumer psychology, gift-giving, multidisciplinary, prosocial behavior

INTRODUCTION

Gift-giving is a universal practice. Indeed, whereas many other consumer phenomena are limited to a specific group or setting—tipping servicepeople, for example (Ferguson et al., 2017)—gift-giving is not. It is practiced by the young and the old (Caplow, 1982), the rich and the poor (Garner & Wagner, 1991), in most cultures (Park, 1998), and across a variety of occasions, ranging from birthdays to holidays to celebrations of important accomplishments (Belk, 1979). The pervasiveness of consumer gift-giving in and of itself makes it worthy of investigation by consumer researchers and the scientific community at large.

Several other factors make it important for marketing scholars, and other social scientists, to study gift-giving. The psychology, sociology, and economics of gift-giving are complex, so studying it improves our collective understanding of consumer behavior more broadly. At its best, gift-giving brings consumers joy and happiness (Ganesh-Pillai & Krishnakumar, 2019; Goodman & Lim, 2014) and improves their relationships with friends and loved ones (Ruth et al., 1999), but at its worst, gift-giving does the opposite (Dunn et al., 2008; Sherry Jr. et al., 1993). Consumers in the United States alone spend hundreds of billions of dollars on gifts each year (National Retail Federation, 2021). Marketers devote a

Accepted by Lauren Block, Editor; Associate Editor, Craig Thompson

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great deal of money to an array of promotions, for example, commercials, billboards, direct mailings, and free samples, prior to the many culturally ingrained gift-giving holidays such as Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Mothers' Day. And gift returns severely negatively impact retailers' bottom lines (DiChristopher, 2015).

For these reasons, scholars across all areas of marketing and social science study consumer gift-giving. Within the field of marketing, gift-giving is explored by those who specialize in consumer culture theory (e.g., Otnes et al., 1993), consumer behavior (e.g., Grossman & Rahinel, 2022), and quantitative marketing/modeling (e.g., Wang & van der Lans, 2018). Outside the marketing domain, it is studied by researchers in the fields of anthropology (e.g., Mauss, 1925), sociology (e.g., Cheal, 1987), communications (e.g., Sunwolf, 2006), philosophy (e.g., Olson, 2002), psychology (e.g., Aknin & Human, 2015), management (e.g., Flynn & Adams, 2009), and economics (e.g., Waldfogel, 1993).

As this discussion hints, the gifting literature is diverse and explores a variety of gift-giving topics. However, no extensive review has surveyed the vast body of research comprising this literature. Instead, reviews of the consumer gift-giving literature have focused on providing thorough examinations of specific segments of the literature (e.g., Birg & Goeddeke, 2016; Galak et al., 2016). To that end, in the present work, we offer an expansive review of research on consumer gift-giving, pulling primarily

from work within the field of marketing, but also drawing on foundational pieces from other disciplines. Specifically, as Figure 1 depicts, we review extant research on five of the most critical aspects of gift-giving: (1) gift-givers' motivations, that is, what motivates consumers to give in the first place and to select particular types of gifts, (2) givers' inputs toward a gift, that is, whether the thought and money a giver puts into a gift is more important to givers or recipients, (3) giver-recipient mismatches, that is, discrepancies between the types of gifts that givers give and the types of gifts that recipients prefer to receive, (4) value creation/reduction in gift-giving, that is, whether gift-giving increases or decreases economic and social value, and (5) the greater gift-giving context, that is, cultural differences, the gifting occasion, the giver-recipient relationship, individual-level differences, and the degree to which the process is interpersonal.

In the first section of the paper, we evaluate relevant prior research on each aspect. In doing so, we highlight key agreements and disagreements across prior studies, identify themes that link apparently disparate gift-giving findings, and formulate deeper conceptualizations of gifting constructs. In the latter portion of the paper, we shed light on opportunities for improvement in the gifting literature and build on these opportunities to create key agenda items for future gift-giving research.

This paper makes five important contributions. First, given the scope of the research we cover, this review

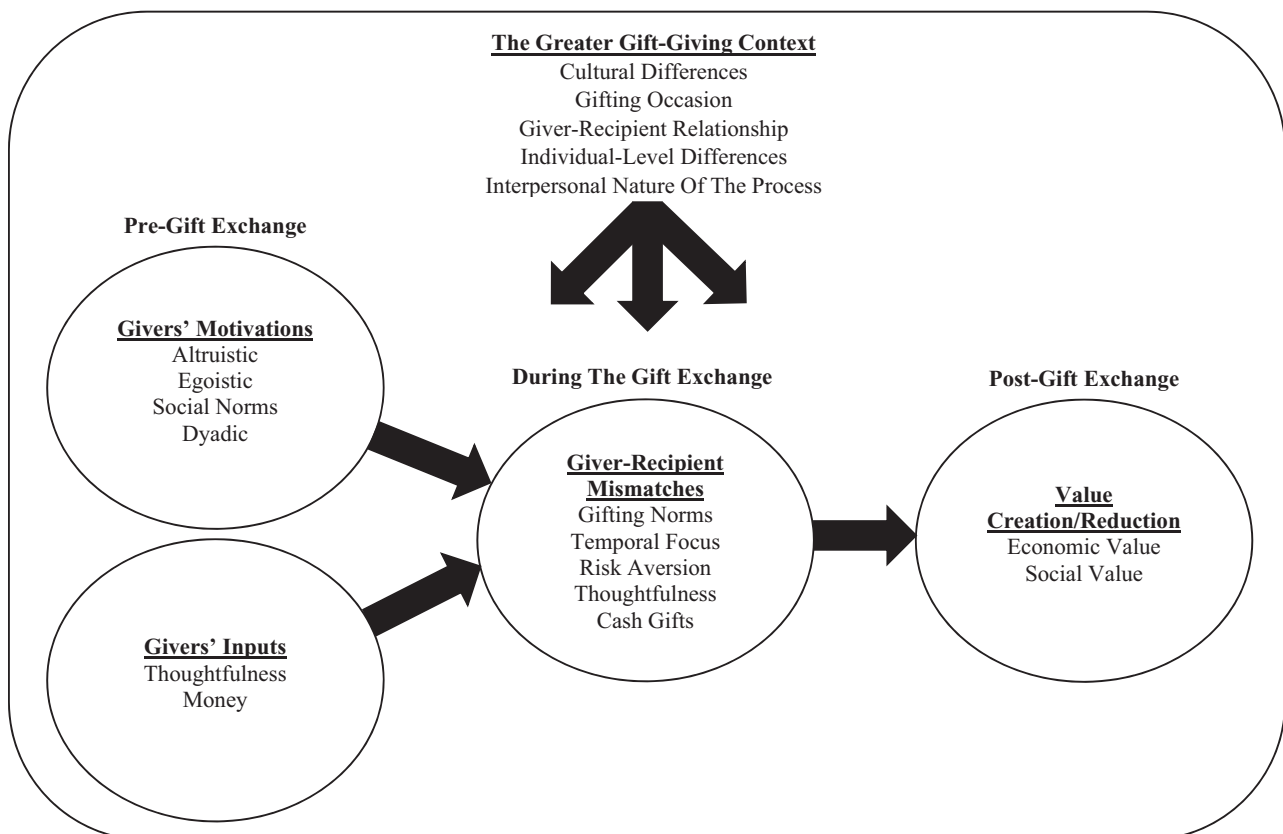


FIGURE 1 Graphic representation of consumer research on gift-giving

provides a single point of reference about gifting and receiving behavior for the variety of researchers interested in gift-giving. The review will be most relevant to those within the marketing discipline, but scholars from other fields should also find it beneficial. Second, in highlighting the agreements and disagreements across the gift-giving literature, this paper sheds light on what the field of marketing, as well as the broader scientific community, knows and does not know about gift-giving. This improves our immediate collective understanding of gift-giving and will help to augment it in the future. Indeed, the reassessment of knowledge is fundamental to scientific breakthroughs (Block et al., 2021). Third, by unearthing themes that unify prior findings and devising deeper conceptualizations of gifting constructs, this paper offers valuable theoretical contributions (see MacInnis, 2011). Fourth, this paper identifies key areas of improvement for the gift-giving literature and uses them to create an array of agenda items for future gift-giving research. Importantly, this is not a laundry list of narrow, one-off ideas; rather, we highlight a few directions that could help significantly improve the gift-giving literature as a whole. Lastly, again, given the scope of the research we cover, this paper helps integrate gift-giving as an area of study. More specifically, the consumer gift-giving research space can be broadly separated into three areas: (1) research rooted in anthropology and sociology (e.g., Caplow, 1984; Sherry Jr, 1983), (2) research grounded in psychology (e.g., Paolacci et al., 2015; Rixom et al., 2019), and (3) research based on economics (e.g., Camerer, 1988; Waldfogel, 1993). These three areas are somewhat isolated from one another both in terms of cross-citations and research collaborations. By drawing on research from each of these three areas, this review helps transform the consumer gift-giving research sphere from three fascinating, but relatively isolated, sectors, into a single, comprehensive area of study.

BOUNDARIES AND TERMINOLOGY

Before proceeding, it is important to first define the boundaries of this review. This paper will focus on extant gift-giving research that both relates to the five aspects of interest (see Figure 1) and is positioned in traditional, consumer-to-consumer gift-giving contexts. In other words, gift-giving research that is unrelated to these aspects and/or explores some other form of giving (e.g., firm-to-employee giving, self-gifting) may be touched on but will not be a focus. Relatedly, it is important to clarify why we chose the five aspects of gift-giving highlighted in Figure 1. To start, as Figure 1 shows, the first four aspects (givers' motivations, givers' inputs, giver-recipient mismatches, and value creation/reduction) provide complete coverage of the entire gift-giving process, ranging from pre-gift exchange to the gift exchange itself to post-gift exchange. We developed this conceptualization to

parallel the gestation–prestation–reformulation model in Sherry's foundational paper, which largely introduced the field of consumer research to gift-giving. Next, by including the fifth aspect (the greater gift-giving context), we acknowledge the importance of considering the larger environment in which gift-giving occurs. Last, these five aspects are (arguably) the ones that have received the most attention in the consumer gift-giving literature, suggesting that consumer gift-giving scholars see them as most important and thus worthy of review.

In addition, it is important to clarify terminology that will be used throughout this review. As mentioned, the literature on consumer gift-giving can be grouped into three areas. The first—which we call “anthro-socio-based research”—stems from several fields, but mostly from anthropology and sociology. Although it explores multiple facets of gift-giving, some of the matters that receive the most attention in this space are gift-giving's core social functions, givers' motivations, negativity in gift-giving, the reciprocity and exchange components of gift-giving, and the ritualized nature of the gift-giving process. The second—which we term “psychology-based research”—is grounded in the field of psychology. Although it, too, explores several features of gift-giving, the issues that are of most interest here are givers' decision-making, recipients' preferences, the mental processes of the two parties, the interpersonal effects of gift-giving, and givers' inputs. And the third area—which we name “economics-based research”—is rooted in the field of economics. Although it also examines several gifting topics, it is interested primarily in matters such as whether gift-giving is economically efficient, why givers willingly give up resources, gift-givers' motivations, the signaling function of gifts, and the stigma associated with cash gifts. Given their origins, these three areas differ in a number of ways: they make unique ontological assumptions, use distinct methodologies, see different issues as most theoretically interesting, view separate questions as of greatest practical importance, and have different strengths and weaknesses. As such, it is important to acknowledge which area a finding came from when reviewing the literature, as we do below. (Note, however, that in some cases—namely, when it comes to papers featuring qualitative studies [e.g., Otnes et al., 1993]—a paper may be considered as falling under multiple areas. For these sorts of papers, we made collective judgement calls to classify the paper.)

WHAT ARE THE KEY MOTIVES OF GIFT-GIVERS?

Gift-giving motivations are one of the most well-studied aspects of gift-giving. Although gifting motives are often treated as a single construct, we separate them into two distinct kinds: (1) motives that drive givers to give *in the first place* (i.e., why gift-giving emerges) and (2) motives

that drive givers to give *certain types of gifts* (i.e., why givers select the gifts they do once they are motivated to give). As will become evident, there is a multitude of gift-giving motivations—many of which seem quite disparate when considered on the surface. However, we demonstrate that these motivations can be categorized using four overarching themes: altruism, egoism, social norm compliance, and dyadic benefits.

Motives that drive givers to give in the first place

Some studies indicate that the gift-giving process can be motivated initially by a pure desire to bring happiness and/or utility to others, otherwise known as *altruism*. No ulterior consideration is in play when this type of giving occurs; the giver is inspired solely by a yearning to delight the recipient. Significant anthro-socio-based (Belk & Coon, 1993), psychology-based (Wolfenbarger, 1990), and economics-based (Becker, 1974) pieces delineate how gift-giving can be impelled by selflessness. Other scholarship in the three domains likewise documents the important role that altruism can play in motivating gift-giving (e.g., Belk, 1996; Kolm & Ythier, 2006; Minowa & Belk, 2018).

That said, the majority of scholarship on the drivers of gift-giving concentrates on *egoistic* gift-giving motives—or motivations that entail a desire to benefit the *giver*. For example, the two predominant models of gift-giving in anthro-socio-based scholarship are the economic exchange and social exchange models (Belk & Coon, 1993; Ekeh, 1974; Gouldner, 1960). Both rely heavily on the notion of reciprocity and posit that a gift is offered by a giver as a means of getting something (i.e., a gift) back from the recipient that is valuable to the giver, either because of its economic utilitarian value or its symbolic value. Economic utilitarian value encompasses a gift's market value and capacity to generate utility for a consumer, whereas symbolic value encompasses a gift's sentimental value and ability to enhance how connected a consumer feels with someone else. In economics-based research, selfish gifting motives are also quite prevalent. For example, research in this area indicates that gift-givers can be motivated to give by the “warm glow” (i.e., positive emotions) that consumers experience when they act in a charitable manner (Andreoni, 1989), by a desire to obtain social approval or status (van de Ven, 2002), and/or by a desire to internalize external effects; that is, when the recipient's consumption of a gift improves the giver's own welfare (Solow, 1993).

Whereas parts of the above discussion illustrate how givers can use social norms—in particular, the norm of reciprocity—to their advantage, the literature also indicates that norms sometimes force givers to give when they do not necessarily want to. In other words, according to anthro-socio-based (e.g., Caplow, 1984; Giesler, 2006),

psychology-based (e.g., Givi, 2021; Wolfenbarger, 1990), and economics-based (e.g., Gérard-Varet et al., 2000; Ruffle, 1999) scholarship, givers sometimes give to *comply with social norms*. For example, unwritten rules dictate that a giver should deliver a gift when someone close to them celebrates a birthday or previously gave them a gift. When givers do not comply with such norms, they can experience negative emotions and feelings, such as embarrassment, guilt, and discomfort (Givi, 2021; Ruffle, 1999; Wolfenbarger, 1990; Wolfenbarger & Yale, 1993).

Lastly, some of the motives documented in the literature relate to the potential for gift-giving to benefit the *giver-recipient dyad*. For example, anthro-socio-based research indicates that gift-giving can serve as a means of “reinforcing relationships that are highly valued but insecure” (Caplow, 1982, p. 383). Psychology-based research shows that gift-giving can be motivated by a desire to establish social identities, for instance, a sense of togetherness for a group or family (Klein et al., 2015), and/or by a desire to offer social support (Wiener et al., 2022). Along these same lines, economics-based work (in particular, game-theoretic research) indicates that gift-giving can serve to strengthen the future giver-recipient relationship (Camerer, 1988; Carmichael & MacLeod, 1997), clarify the current nature of the relationship between the two parties (Camerer, 1988; Prendergast & Stole, 2001), and/or lower overall search costs for a dyad through specialization, that is, allow each member of a dyad to specialize in specific product categories, thereby lowering cumulative search costs (Kaplan & Ruffle, 2009).

Motives that drive givers' choices

We now turn to the motivations that drive gift-givers' choices. Similar to the above, some of the literature indicates that givers' choices are guided by *altruism*, as they sometimes wish to select the gift that will bring the most happiness and/or utility to the recipient. For example, the agapic love model in anthro-socio-based research indicates that “the best gift that can be given is one that involves the sacrifice of personal pleasure in favor of the pleasure of the dating partner” (Belk & Coon, 1993, p. 410). In psychology-based studies, givers often rate a desire to select a well-liked gift as a central motivator of gift choice (Steffel & LeBoeuf, 2014; Teigen et al., 2005; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2016). In fact, much of the experimental research in this realm reflects the assumption that choosing a well-liked gift is the primary goal of givers. In addition, psychology-based research on the roles that givers assume suggests that givers' choices can be guided by altruistic considerations—such as when givers embrace the role of the “Pleaser,” the “Provider,” the “Compensator,” or the “Appreciator” (Otnes et al., 1993; Ruth, 2004). There is also evidence for altruistic motivators of gift choice in economics-based gifting research,

appearing initially in Becker's foundational paper. According to Becker's model, the altruistic "head" of a family redistributes resources (i.e., gives gifts) to maximize a utility function that takes into consideration the consumption of all family members. In other words, when redistributing resources, the head of the household's primary goal is to do so in a manner that proves optimal for the entire family. Lastly, note that in cases where givers are initially motivated to give by altruism (as discussed earlier), their subsequent choices will also typically reflect this motivation.

Once again, however, much research has documented *egoistic* drivers of gift choice. For example, in the anthro-socio-based realm, Sherry's model delineates how the motivation behind a gift choice can range from completely altruistic to completely agonistic—a notion supported by others in this area (Beatty et al., 1991). Psychology-based research demonstrates that givers may intentionally offer less-preferred goods, services, or experiences out of a consideration for their own sense of uniqueness (Givi & Galak, 2020), a desire to avoid feeling envious (Givi & Galak, 2019), and/or a yearning to feel thoughtful (Steffel & LeBoeuf, 2014). In other words, givers may choose a gift with their own best interest in mind as opposed to that of the recipient. Likewise, some of the roles that psychology-based scholarship demonstrates that givers assume—such as the "Socializer" and the "Manipulator"—motivate givers to make relatively selfish choices (Otnes et al., 1993; Ruth, 2004). Economics-based research similarly shows that givers may choose certain gifts to come across as generous (Ellingsen & Johannesson, 2011) or because they reflect the paternalistic preferences of the giver (Tremblay & Tremblay, 1995). Also, consider some of the previously discussed egocentric motives that economics-based research suggests propels gift-giving, such as a desire to experience a warm glow, wanting to internalize external effects, and longing to obtain social approval or status. When one of these motives initiates the gift-giving process, the giver's subsequent choice of gift will typically reflect the operating motive; for instance, someone who is giving out of a desire to internalize external effects will choose a gift that achieves this goal (e.g., someone initially motivated by a desire to internalize external effects may choose a perfume or a cologne for their partner because they themselves like the smell).

The literature also indicates that givers' choices can be guided by a desire to *comply with social norms*. In fact, as we will discuss in detail later, there is much evidence in psychology-based research that givers select socially normative gifts more often than recipients would prefer (Givi, 2020; Givi & Galak, 2020, 2022b; Teigen et al., 2005). Anthro-socio-based research also indicates that givers' choices can be guided by norms. For example, Caplow's foundational piece documents several "gift selection rules" that givers strive to follow, including rules related to surprise, knowledge of the

recipient, suitability, and price. Similarly, economics-based research shows that in some situations, givers follow social norms by scaling their gifts according to the average value of those given within their community (Bulte et al., 2018).

Finally, some drivers of gift choice documented in the literature reflect a desire to benefit the *giver-recipient dyad*. For example, psychology-based research demonstrates that givers predominantly choose material gifts instead of experiences (Chan & Mogilner, 2017; Goodman & Lim, 2014) because they see material gifts as facilitating bonding by serving as mnemonic devices (Yang et al., 2018). Some of the roles that psychology-based research shows that givers assume—such as the "Changer" and the "Humanizer"—can also drive givers to choose with the aim of selecting a gift that will categorically change and/or strengthen the relationship between the two parties (Ruth, 2004). Indeed, in the anthro-socio realm, Sherry describes how aspects of a gift such as price and quality can signify the giver's desire to strengthen or maintain the giver-recipient relationship. Lastly, economics-based scholarship likewise indicates that givers' choices can reflect a desire to aid the giver-recipient relationship (Camerer, 1988; Carmichael & MacLeod, 1997; Prendergast & Stole, 2001). In particular, this motive influences whether a giver chooses a cash gift or an in-kind gift as well as just how costly a gift they are willing to give.

DO GIVERS' INPUTS TOWARD A GIFT MATTER MORE TO GIVERS OR RECIPIENTS?

During any gift-giving endeavor, a giver must decide on their inputs vis à vis a gift—what they will invest into it. Below, we review work on the importance of these givers' inputs, partitioning the input construct into thoughtfulness (i.e., creativity, brainstorming, and effort) and money.

Thoughtfulness

At first glance, the various studies related to thoughtfulness in gift-giving seem to offer disparate conclusions. Some work suggests that recipients value thoughtfulness more than givers do (e.g., Givi et al., 2021), and some indicate the opposite (e.g., Zhang & Epley, 2012). We posit that a more nuanced conceptualization of thoughtfulness can reconcile these seemingly contradictory findings. Specifically, we suggest that recipients value thoughtfulness more when it is *relationship-oriented*, but givers prize it more when it is *non-relationship-oriented*.

Relationship-oriented thoughtfulness seeks to grow the relationship and is altruistic in nature (i.e., born

out of consideration for the recipient). It can manifest in many ways, including selecting a special gift that commemorates or is symbolic of the giver-recipient relationship, devoting time toward a gift out of a longing to deliver the recipient something they will like, and ensuring that the gift will communicate love and care to the recipient. Much work indicates that recipients tend to value such relationship-oriented thoughtfulness—and do so more than givers. In psychology-based research, for instance, work on “memorable gifts” (Areni et al., 1998) shows that recipients see “sacrifice as value,” which is perhaps best depicted through one participant's anecdote about a blanket her grandmother knitted for her: “I can appreciate the time and effort involved in making it and what it means for her to do all of that for me” (p. 85). The value that recipients see in sacrifice is also apparent in the psychology-based conceptualizations of the “best gift ever” (Branco-Illodo & Heath, 2020) and the “perfect gift” (Belk, 1996). Relatedly, both anthro-socio-based and psychology-based research indicate that non-obligatory gifts—those given voluntarily, out of the blue—tend to be appreciated more by recipients than obligatory ones (Belk & Coon, 1993; Gupta & Gentry, 2018; Larsen & Watson, 2001), which also speaks to the utility that recipients derive from relationship-oriented thoughtfulness. Recipients also prize carefully chosen, sentimental gifts with deeper meanings—again illustrated in scholarship on “memorable gifts,” the “best gift ever,” and the “perfect gift” (Areni et al., 1998; Belk, 1996; Branco-Illodo & Heath, 2020)—and these seem to, indeed, foster stronger relationships (Ruth et al., 1999). The weight recipients place on relationship-oriented thoughtfulness is also evident in the anthro-socio-based explorations of the “dark side of the gift” (Sherry Jr. et al., 1993). Terms that recipients use to describe the “wrong gift” include “does not contain caring,” “impersonal,” and “makes me feel unknown” (Sherry Jr. et al., 1993, p. 229). Other work in this realm indicates that one of the main reasons a gift might be classified as negative by a recipient involves the giver's effort (Branco-Illodo et al., 2020; Sinardet & Mortelmans, 2005). In other words, “the gift is not appreciated because it is clear that the donor has put little effort into it” (Sinardet & Mortelmans, 2005, p. 263). Research in the psychology-based realm likewise demonstrates that when a recipient sees a poor gift as the result of a giver not caring enough about them to learn their tastes and preferences, the relationship between the two parties suffers (Ruth et al., 1999). Economics-based research also speaks to the value recipients extract from relationship-oriented thoughtfulness. For example, research in this area notes how it is possible that a recipient lacks information about the availability of all potential products and thus may not be aware of all the ones that they like. This means that searching by givers can result in the discovery of

novel products and, ultimately, in a recipient obtaining something they like tremendously but were not aware of beforehand (Kaplan & Ruffle, 2009). Relatedly, economics-based research posits that recipients see the time and effort a giver devotes toward finding an in-kind gift, rather than an equivalent cash gift, as a signal that the giver wishes to be closer to them (Camerer, 1988).

Non-relationship-oriented thoughtfulness is not aimed at advancing the relationship nor is it rooted in altruism. For example, a giver may act in a creative manner because *the giver* wants to feel thoughtful, or a giver may devote time toward a gift not because they genuinely wish to please the recipient but because of circumstances. Many findings in psychology-based research suggest that givers value non-relationship-oriented thoughtfulness more than recipients. For example, givers are more likely than recipients to value gifts that givers brainstorm on their own and give at the expense of gifts that recipients explicitly request and thus match their preferences (Gino & Flynn, 2011). Qualitative work in this area corroborates this notion by outlining how giver-recipient relationships can suffer “when recipients make their wishes known and givers defy them” (Ruth et al., 1999, p. 394). Relatedly, and as mentioned earlier, psychology-based research shows that givers sometimes knowingly choose less-preferred gifts when doing so allows them to feel thoughtful (Steffel & LeBoeuf, 2014). It also demonstrates that non-gift-giving observers—who are akin to givers in that they are predicting recipients' reactions—value thoughtfulness more than recipients do when it is caused by circumstances, such as when an experimenter instructs a giver to put much (vs. minimal) thought into a gift (Zhang & Epley, 2012). Similarly, participants who are required to customize a product as part of an experiment tend to value the product more when it is imagined as a gift for someone else as opposed to a product for themselves (Moreau et al., 2011).

Money

Turning now to the monetary aspect of givers' inputs, most of the evidence points to givers valuing the money spent on a gift more than recipients do. In psychology-based work, for instance, givers tend to overestimate the correlation between the price they pay for a gift and the recipient's appreciation of it (Flynn & Adams, 2009; Givi & Galak, 2022a). Moreover, research in this realm indicates that givers' fixation on gift prices can lead them to spend more when they fear or know that other people at the gift exchange will be giving expensive gifts (Givi et al., 2021; Wooten, 2000). But research in this area, along with anthro-socio-based research, also shows that recipients are not always overly excited to receive expensive gifts. For example, costly

gifts can be classified by recipients as negative gifts (Sinardet & Mortelmans, 2005), can make recipients feel needy and guilty (Ruth et al., 1999), can be perceived by recipients as too good for the nature of the giver-recipient relationship (Ruth et al., 1999; Sinardet & Mortelmans, 2005), can be seen by recipients as producing a power imbalance within the dyad (Ding et al., 2020), and, ultimately, can have unideal consequences for the relationship (Ruth et al., 1999).

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST MISMATCHES BETWEEN THE TYPES OF GIFTS THAT GIVERS GIVE AND THE TYPES OF GIFTS THAT RECIPIENTS PREFER TO RECEIVE?

Having reviewed research on pre-gift exchange aspects, we now turn to phenomena that emerge during the gift exchange—giver-recipient mismatches. Nearly, all the work on the differences between the types of gifts that are given and the ones that are preferred by recipients comes in the form of experimental, psychology-based research, so this type of work will be at the heart of this discussion. While this area demonstrates that givers err in several ways, we suggest that these various asymmetries can be largely accounted for by five broad themes.

Gifting norms

The first theme that encapsulates many of the gifting misses documented in psychology-based research is givers paying too much attention to gift-giving norms. That is, givers follow the informal “rules” for gift-giving more than recipients would prefer. For example, psychology-based research shows that givers are relatively likely to give traditional gifts (e.g., jewelry on Valentine's Day), whereas recipients are relatively likely to prefer to receive less traditional gifts (e.g., an e-reader on Valentine's Day; Givi & Galak, 2022b). Along these same lines, givers often avoid giving used products as gifts (e.g., a used, 100,000-word dictionary), even when such products are superior to the new products that givers opt for instead (e.g., a new, 50,000-word dictionary). In contrast, recipients are quite open to receiving used products as gifts (Teigen et al., 2005). Givers also err by refraining from gifting preferred gifts that have already been exchanged within the dyad, despite the fact that recipients often wish to receive them (Givi, 2020; Givi & Galak, 2020).

Temporal focus

Another theme that summarizes several of the asymmetries recorded in psychology-based scholarship is

givers concentrating too much on making sure the recipient will be happy the moment they open the gift, rather than on maximizing the long-term value the recipient will extract from the gift down the road (Galak et al., 2016). For example, givers typically give gifts that are completely finished (e.g., a \$50 dinner plate set) instead of incomplete gifts that will eventually lead to something more desirable (e.g., a \$50 deposit toward a \$100 dinner plate set). Yet, recipients are more open to incomplete gifts than givers anticipate (Kupor et al., 2017). Givers are also relatively likely to give fun gifts that are not very useful, rather than useful gifts that are not very fun; however, recipients are relatively likely to prefer useful gifts (Williams et al., 2022). In addition, givers too often—that is, more often than recipients would prefer—offer gifts that can be enjoyed immediately after they are given (e.g., a dozen rosebuds in bloom) over those that require recipients to wait to use but will ultimately provide more enjoyment (e.g., two dozen rosebuds not yet in bloom; Yang & Urminsky, 2018).

Risk aversion

A third theme that traverses several of the mismatches documented in psychology-based research is too much risk aversion among givers selecting gifts. For example, givers too often shy away from sentimental gifts, which they perceive as fairly risky, and instead give gifts that match recipients' superficial tastes, which they think are safe bets to be liked to at least a minimal degree (Givi & Galak, 2017). Similarly, givers tend to choose material gifts (e.g., a watch) over experiential ones (e.g., opera tickets), because tangible goods are often perceived as relatively safe, since they typically require little information or knowledge about the recipient. By contrast, experiential gifts often require in-depth knowledge about the recipient and are fairly risky when the giver does not possess this information. Yet, when asked, recipients report feeling happier and closer to givers when they receive an experience, rather than a material item, as a gift (Chan & Mogilner, 2017; Goodman & Lim, 2014). As a final example of risk aversion, givers too often opt for gifts that are high in quality but low in quantity (e.g., a single bottle of high-end wine) as opposed to high in quantity but low in quality (e.g., two bottles of lower-quality wine). Givers perceive the latter as inherently risky from a social perspective, since low-quality gifts may insinuate that the giver has poor taste (Liu & Baskin, 2021).

Thoughtfulness

A fourth theme that covers many of the mismatches identified in psychology-based scholarship ties back to the thoughtfulness dichotomy discussed above. Givers

under-give gifts that are manifestations of relationship-oriented thoughtfulness but over-give those that are manifestations of non-relationship-oriented thoughtfulness. Regarding the former, recall that givers do not give sentimental gifts as often as recipients would prefer (Givi & Galak, 2017); sentimental gifts are typically clear manifestations of relationship-oriented thoughtfulness. Regarding the latter, many phenomena documented in psychology-based research involve givers over-delivering gifts that convey thoughtfulness but clearly leave the recipient worse off (thereby making them manifestations of non-relationship-oriented thoughtfulness). For example, givers too often give tailored but narrow gifts (e.g., a gift card to a single store) instead of more general and versatile gifts (e.g., a Visa gift card, which could be used at any store; Steffel et al., 2015). Similarly, they too often give nicely presented but less desirable products over more desirable items presented in a less extravagant manner (Yang & Urminsky, 2018) and new but inferior products rather than used but superior items (Teigen et al., 2005). Lastly, they too often give less-preferred gifts that have never been exchanged within the dyad instead of repeating preferred gifts that have a gifting history inside the dyad (Givi, 2020; Givi & Galak, 2020).

Cash versus non-cash gifts

A final theme in gifting mismatches involves the trade-off between cash and non-cash gifts. Both psychology-based and economics-based research indicate that givers are too pessimistic about cash gifts. For example, psychology-based research demonstrates that givers shy away from cash gifts more frequently than recipients would prefer both when choosing between a cash gift and an in-kind gift (Steffel et al., 2015) and when choosing between a cash gift and another intangible gift such as a gift voucher (Steffel et al., 2015; Teigen et al., 2005). Along these same lines, economics-based research demonstrates that givers hold a stronger belief than recipients that cash gifts are unacceptable (Burgoyne & Routh, 1991; Pieters & Robben, 1999), do not give cash gifts as often as recipients would like (Ellingsen & Johannesson, 2011), and compensate more than recipients expect them to when they give cash instead of an in-kind gift (Webley et al., 1983)—in other words, givers give cash sums that are higher in value than the in-kind gifts they avoided, whereas recipients do not think that this is necessary (Webley et al., 1983). Moreover, economics-based scholarship highlights how non-cash gifts have the potential to produce a dead-weight economic loss, whereas cash gifts do not (e.g., Waldfogel, 1993), suggesting that avoiding a cash gift may, at the very least, sometimes be a mistake—which brings us to our next query.

WHAT EFFECT DOES GIFT-GIVING HAVE ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL VALUE?

We next turn to post-gift exchange phenomena, namely the potential for gift-giving to create or reduce value. We divide the “value” construct into economic value and social value.

Economic value

From a strict economic perspective, gift-giving is a unilateral transfer of goods—a redistribution of resources. Thus, at first glance, gift-giving would seem to correspond to a zero-sum game. That is, the giver's loss (i.e., the money they spend) should equal the recipient's gain (i.e., the value they extract from the gift). However, this type of transfer can instead result in either an economic gain or an economic loss. A gain occurs when the recipient values the gift more than its price; a loss occurs when the recipient values the gift less than its price.

Much economics-based research seeks to understand whether gift-giving creates or reduces economic value (i.e., the net welfare effect of gift-giving). Waldfogel's (1993) paper was the first, incorporating two surveys. In one, participants indicated the (estimated) total price of all the winter holiday gifts they received and the price they would have been willing to pay (WTP) for the collection of gifts. In the other, participants indicated the price of each of the holiday gifts they received and the amount of money that would have made them indifferent between the gift and the money; that is, a willingness to accept (WTA) value. On average, a gift's price exceeded a recipient's valuation by 10–30% of the price of the gift, meaning that the net welfare reduction from gift-giving was approximately 10–30% of the amount spent by givers. Of note, the WTP methodology suggested larger losses than the WTA method.

Follow-up economics-based research has further illuminated the importance of methodology in this line of questioning. For example, one survey that utilized WTP found that gift-giving resulted in a net welfare reduction (Waknis & Gaikwad, 2011), whereas another that used WTA (specifically, participants indicated the amount of money that would have made them “equally happy”) found that it actually produced a net welfare gain (Solnick & Hemenway, 1996). Some studies have even directly compared different methodologies. Bauer and Schmidt (2012) used both WTP and WTA and found that the results varied greatly depending on which elicitation method was used. List and Shogren (1998) employed both hypothetical and real auctions. The former did not result in a net welfare loss or gain, whereas the latter—arguably a more ecologically valid method because real money was involved—resulted in a considerable net

welfare gain. Ruffle and Tykocinski (2000) utilized two forms of WTA. One used the term “indifferent,” and the other used the term “equally happy.” WTA values were much higher for the latter, demonstrating the importance of wording in gift valuation studies. Relatedly, others have noted that it is critical to ensure (via survey instructions and question wording) that participants are not integrating some other form of value (i.e., non-economic value) into their economic valuations of gifts (Benuyenah, 2018; Waldfogel, 1996).

Whereas most of the research aimed at understanding the net welfare effect of gift-giving comes in the form of economics-based research, anthro-socio-based and psychology-based scholarship also speak to this question. However, they both offer mixed conclusions. As aforementioned, research in the anthro-socio-based space indicates that one of the motivations for gift-giving is the creation of economic value (e.g., Belk & Coon, 1993). This suggests that gift-giving should have a net positive effect on economic value. However, multiple anthro-socio-based research programs have documented gift-giving failures (e.g., Sherry Jr. et al., 1993; Sinardet & Mortelmans, 2005), which implies that gift-giving can sometimes reduce economic value. Turning now to psychology-based work, as the prior section on gifting mismatches illustrates, much experimental research in this realm suggests that gift-giving is an inefficient endeavor from an economic standpoint. That is, since givers often fail to purchase the types of gifts that recipients want, net utility would increase if consumers stopped spending money on gifts and instead used it to purchase more products for themselves. Indeed, several research programs in the psychology-based area employing qualitative methodologies have also documented gift-giving failures (e.g., Branco-Illodo et al., 2020; Ruth et al., 1999, 2004), implying that gift-giving can sometimes reduce economic value. That said, multiple research programs in this realm have investigated gift successes, including the “perfect gift” (Belk, 1996) and the “best gift ever” (Branco-Illodo & Heath, 2020), suggesting that gift-giving may sometimes generate economic value.

Social value

Evidence suggests that gift-giving can have either a positive or a negative effect on social value, but the net effect seems to be positive. Qualitative, psychology-based research has identified six relational repercussions that can emerge (from the recipient's perspective) when a giver delivers a gift. Some of these are positive, some are negative, and others are relatively neutral, but the positive consequences are more common than the negative ones (Ruth et al., 1999, 2004). Similarly, experimental research in this realm shows that gift-giving oftentimes brings recipients closer to givers (Aknin & Human, 2015; Chan & Mogilner, 2017; Polman & Maglio, 2017; Rim

et al., 2019) but acknowledges that whenever a giver gives an indisputably poor gift, the recipient's outlook on the relationship can be harmed (Dunn et al., 2008), thereby decreasing social value. Interestingly, evidence in both this area and the anthro-socio-based realm suggests that gift-giving can lead givers to feel closer to recipients, either because of the gift they give (Aknin & Human, 2015) or because of the reciprocal gift they eventually receive from the recipient (Belk & Coon, 1993). Economics-based scholarship points to mixed conclusions. On the one hand, research in this area notes that gift-giving offers givers and recipients the opportunity to signal how close they are to each other and how committed they are to cultivating a strong relationship (Camerer, 1988; Carmichael & MacLeod, 1997; Prendergast & Stole, 2001). When sent, these signals can improve the relationship between giver and recipient. But on the other hand, economics-based work also acknowledges that gift-giving allows the two parties to send opposite signals (Camerer, 1988), which can harm the relationship.

In sum, it is unclear whether gift-giving is value-creating or value-reducing. For economic value, there are discrepancies within each area. For social value, most, but not all, of the evidence suggests that gift-giving has a net positive effect.

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACT GIFT-GIVING?

As with most consumption activities, gift-giving must be considered in the larger context in which it occurs. The five broad contextual elements that impact gift-giving are cultural differences, the gifting occasion, the giver-recipient relationship, giver and recipient individual-level differences, and the interpersonal nature of the process. We discuss each of these in more detail below.

Cultural differences

Culture is arguably the most important contextual variable to consider. Indeed, many papers investigate the important role that culture plays in gift-giving (e.g., Aung et al., 2017; Beatty et al., 1991; Giesler, 2006; Green & Alden, 1988; Joy, 2001; Laroche et al., 2000; Liu et al., 2010; Pusaksrikit & Chinchanchokchai, 2021; Qian et al., 2007; Waknis & Gaikwad, 2011; Wu et al., 2021). This should not be surprising, given the critical role culture plays in all aspects of consumer behavior more broadly (e.g., Shavitt & Cho, 2016). More specific factors that fall under the larger cultural variable include concepts such as cultural norms/rules (e.g., Joy, 2001), cultural orientation (e.g., Aung et al., 2017), and cultural values (e.g., Liu et al., 2010).

The gifting occasion

Another important contextual element is the gift-giving occasion, and the nature of this event. This contextual factor helps demarcate gift-giving from typical consumer behavior. That is, most gift purchases are prompted by a special occasion, whereas most non-gift purchases are not. Specific facets that fall under this umbrella include whether the occasion is formal versus informal (e.g., Wooten, 2000), happy versus sad (e.g., Hwang & Chu, 2019), important versus unimportant (e.g., Wooten, 2000), rewarding versus celebratory in nature (e.g., Pieters & Robben, 1999), unfamiliar versus familiar for the giver (e.g., Wooten, 2000), characterized by a social norm (e.g., Givi & Galak, 2022b), and characterized by an expectation of reciprocity (e.g., Belk, 1979), along with whether the gift-giving even involves a special occasion at all (e.g., Larsen & Watson, 2001).

The giver-recipient relationship

The giver-recipient relationship is another crucial contextual factor. This facet also helps distinguish gift-giving from typical consumer behavior. By definition, interpersonal gift-giving involves another person; this is not always the case for non-gift purchases. Some elements that fall under this category include whether the giver and recipient are socially close versus distant (e.g., Camerer, 1988), whether the two parties have different social statuses (e.g., Caplow, 1982), and whether one member is of higher or lower power than the other (e.g., Choi et al., 2018), as well as the categorical relationship between the giver and recipient (i.e., romantic partner vs. friend vs. close kin vs. distant kin; e.g., Waldfogel, 1993).

Giver and recipient individual-level differences

Important giver and recipient individual-level differences require consideration as well. Demographic variables, such as age (e.g., Caplow, 1982), gender (e.g., Dunn et al., 2008), income (e.g., Cheal, 1986), marital status (e.g., Ward & Tran, 2008), and number of children (e.g., Tremblay & Tremblay, 1995) all influence how gift-giving unfolds. Beyond mere demographic characteristics, differences related to personality and beliefs, such as dispositional envy (e.g., Givi & Galak, 2019) and power distance belief (e.g., Ding et al., 2020), also influence gift-giving choices and outcomes. Lastly, some differences can make the entire gift-giving process more challenging, such as the degree to which the giver is a perfectionist (Wooten, 2000), the pickiness of the recipient (e.g., Cheng et al., 2021), and the extent to which the recipient is “difficult” (e.g., Otnes et al., 1993).

The interpersonal nature of the process

Finally, the number of individuals involved can influence the gift-giving experience. In some cases, consumer-to-consumer gift-giving involves just two people, but in many cases, it involves several. For example, in any given exchange, there can be multiple givers (e.g., Wooten, 2000) and/or recipients (e.g., Steffel & LeBoeuf, 2014). In addition, outside parties can influence givers' decisions, such as when givers enroll the help of others, follow group norms, or ensure that their gift for a child will be approved by the child's parents (e.g., Lowrey et al., 2004). Perhaps the most influential work on this contextual variable is Giesler's (2006) paper, which delineates the notion of “consumer gift systems” and the importance of considering gift-giving as more than just a straightforward, one-to-one exchange.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND AGENDAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A primary goal of this paper is to provide direction for future research in the area of gift-giving. Before doing so, however, we summarize the insights from existing research in Table 1. This summary table shows how our review uncovers themes that characterize seemingly disparate findings, identifies agreements and disagreements across prior research, offers new conceptualizations that can reconcile apparent discrepancies, and highlights the need to separate certain gift-giving aspects into more specific sub-aspects.

Having covered *prior* gifting research, we now turn our attention to providing *future* gift-giving research with agendas that can help advance the consumer gift-giving literature and our collective understanding of gift-giving's key aspects. Specifically, we use the limitations of prior gift-giving research to identify key opportunities for improvement.

Theoretical perspectives

Opportunity

The three gift-giving areas vary considerably in their theoretical perspectives. They have different views on gift-givers, gift-recipients, and gift-giving, and make unique ontological assumptions. For example, treating gift-givers as rational, utility-maximizing agents, as in economics-based research, is different than treating them as satisficers, as in psychology-based research. In addition, seeing gift-giving as “a ritual that may be used not only to sacralize ... but also to maintain the sacredness of personal goods,” as in anthro-socio-based research (Belk et al., 1989, p. 27), is different than viewing it as a mere transfer of resources, as in economics-based

TABLE 1 Key takeaways and emphases for future research

Gift-giving aspect	Key takeaways	Emphases for future research
Givers' motivations	Motivations can be grouped into two, categorically distinct types: motives that drive givers to give <i>in the first place</i> versus motives that drive givers to give <i>certain types of gifts</i> . Each type is characterized by four themes: altruism, egoism, social norm compliance, and dyadic benefits.	Multi-perspective research Novel theoretical frameworks
Givers' inputs	Inputs can be partitioned into two categories: thoughtfulness versus money. The answer to the question “which party values givers' inputs more?” varies across these two categories. There is an apparent discrepancy in the literature regarding which party values thoughtfulness more. However, this discrepancy can be resolved when one considers that thoughtfulness can be divided into two types: <i>relationship-oriented</i> thoughtfulness versus <i>non-relationship-oriented</i> thoughtfulness. Recipients value relationship-oriented thoughtfulness more than givers do, but givers value non-relationship-oriented thoughtfulness more than recipients do. Givers value monetary inputs more than recipients do.	Multi-method research Cross-method, replication research. Novel research methods. Relationships between aspects. Contemporary issues. Deeper conceptualizations. Integrate findings under comprehensive theoretical umbrellas
Giver-recipient mismatches	Gift-giving mismatches can be summarized by five themes: givers over-following gift-giving norms, givers focusing too much on maximizing the recipient's experience during the gift exchange (vs. the ownership component of the gift), givers being too risk averse, givers under-giving gifts that are manifestations of relationship-oriented thoughtfulness and over-giving those that are manifestations of non-relationship-oriented thoughtfulness, and givers avoiding cash gifts too often.	
Value creation/reduction	Value can be grouped into two types: economic value versus social value. The answer to the question “does gift-giving create or reduce value?” varies across these two types. For economic value, it is unclear whether gift-giving has a net positive or net negative effect. For social value, gift-giving seems to have a net positive effect.	
The greater context	Five key contextual factors impact gift-giving: cultural differences, the gifting occasion, the giver-recipient relationship, individual-level differences, and the interpersonal nature of the process.	

research. Although having multiple perspectives across the consumer gift-giving literature is certainly a positive, at present, there is limited multi-viewpoint research within individual papers. To that end, we feel that the consumer gift-giving literature would benefit from more *multi-perspective* research.

Why is this important?

Such holistic work is preferable to single-perspective research because the former paints a more complete picture of the topic of interest and creates important points of theoretical comparison that can improve our collective understanding of the gift-giving aspects reviewed in this paper. As an example, Belk and Coon (1993) interpreted their data through the lens of the social exchange model, the economic exchange model, and the agapic love model. This allowed them to challenge the assumption that exchange (i.e., reciprocity) is an inherent component of all gift-giving activities, thus growing the field's understanding of gifting motives. As another example, Branco-Illodo and Heath (2020) compared and contrasted the “best gift ever” and the “perfect gift” (Belk, 1996), highlighting the similarities and differences across these two conceptualizations of gift successes. This assessment improved our collective understanding of what makes a gift successful, as “best gifts” drew on

participants' actual experiences, whereas the “perfect gift” was developed theoretically, representing more of a utopian ideal. More integrative work such as this would help build connections between perspectives, with the hope of providing more comprehensive frameworks from which to understand the entire gift-giving experience.

Opportunity

Related to this discussion of theoretical perspective, another opportunity for future research involves *applying new theories* to consumer gift-giving. Several prominent theories in the social sciences are readily applicable to gift-giving but are largely absent from the gift-giving literature. For example, optimal distinctiveness theory (e.g., Brewer, 1991), action identification theory (e.g., Vallacher & Wegner, 1987), dual process theories (e.g., Chaiken & Trope, 1999), and self-verification theory (e.g., Swann, 1987) could all be used to explain givers' and recipients' gift preferences. Along these same lines, recipients' reactions to gifts could be studied using frameworks such as error management theory (e.g., Haselton & Buss, 2000) and opponent-process theory (e.g., Solomon & Corbit, 1974). In addition, stress appraisal theory (e.g., Lazarus, 2006) could be applied to explain givers' thoughts and worries before the gift exchange (Wooten, 2000), self-perception theory (e.g.,

Bem, 1967) could be applied to account for givers' thoughts after the gift exchange, and learning theories (e.g., Schwartz, 1989) could be applied to study givers' decision-making across multiple gift exchanges.

Why is this important?

Applying new theories to gift-giving is important, both because doing so can extend the theory, and because doing so can improve our collective understanding of gift-giving's chief aspects. As an example, Baskin et al. (2014) applied construal level theory to the gift-giving context to understand givers' and recipients' preferences for desirable versus feasible gifts. This application broadened construal level theory by showing that it extends to interpersonal situations (prior work in construal level theory had been mostly intrapersonal). It also improved the field's understanding of gift-giving psychology and mismatches by showing that givers construe gifts from a higher psychological distance than recipients, which leads givers to choose desirable gifts over feasible ones more often than recipients would prefer. As this example highlights, the unique perspectives that come from applying novel theories to gift-giving can generate important and fascinating new insights.

Methodological matters

The three gift-giving areas also differ in their methodologies. Anthro-socio-based research uses interviews, observations, ethnographies, and other methods for collecting qualitative data. Psychology-based research uses both experiments and the aforementioned methods for collecting qualitative data. And economics-based research uses surveys, microeconomic models, game-theoretic models, and experiments. Once again, multiple methods across the literature are positive; however, we posit that there are multiple opportunities for future consumer gifting research that relate to methodology.

Opportunity

For one, the consumer gift-giving literature would benefit from papers that employ *multiple methods* to either test new hypotheses or attempt to reconcile discrepancies in prior findings. At present, few multi-method gift-giving papers exist (e.g., Guido et al., 2016), yet they would be beneficial for several reasons.

Why is this important?

When testing new hypotheses, a multi-method approach would allow for the weaknesses of any one methodology

to be overcome by the strengths of the other(s), for researchers to lessen the chances that they do not use the optimal method for their specific research question, and ultimately, for readers to have more confidence in the takeaways. Moreover, a researcher could strategically use different methods across different aspects of the research program in a way that makes the best use of those methods (e.g., Guido et al., 2016). For example, depth interviews could be used initially to uncover the possibility of a novel gifting mismatch, then a follow-up experiment could systematically test whether the potential mismatch consistently manifests.

Multi-method research that attempts to reconcile prior discrepancies would be beneficial because each prior research program that jointly contributed to the discrepancy (likely) only used a single method, so a multi-method approach would unveil whether methodological differences were responsible for the divergence. For example, and as reviewed earlier, both Bauer and Schmidt (2012) and Ruffle and Tykocinski (2000) used multiple methods/procedures when studying the net welfare effect of gift-giving. These analyses further refined the field's understanding of gift-giving's welfare effects and shed light on the critical role that methodology plays in this line of study.

Opportunity

In addition, the consumer gift-giving literature would benefit from using *new methodologies*. On the one hand, a new methodology could mean attempting to replicate a gift-giving finding using a method that is different from the one that was initially used to document the finding but that has already been used in the consumer gift-giving literature to answer other questions. For example, an experiment could be used to attempt to replicate a finding that was documented with an economic model. On the other hand, using a new methodology could mean employing a method that is completely novel to the consumer gift-giving literature. In other areas of marketing—and social science more broadly—researchers are using unique methods such as machine learning (e.g., Matz et al., 2019), eye tracking (e.g., Streicher et al., 2021), fMRI (e.g., Plassmann et al., 2012), EEG (e.g., Lin et al., 2018), and implicit association tests (e.g., Sussman et al., 2021). However, these methods are (largely) absent from the gift-giving literature.

Why is this important?

Papers that replicate findings using new methods would be valuable, as they would provide further confidence in the original finding. Moreover, a replication using a new methodology would arguably be more convincing than

replicating via the same method. Also, for those who may be concerned about the publishability of replication-based papers, there is always the option of adding a new layer to the research question (which would also keep the researcher from potentially coming across as suggesting that the original method used to document the phenomenon was inferior). For example, Givi and Galak (2022a) used an experimental approach and both replicated the finding that non-occasion-based gifts are generally better received than occasion-based gifts (Belk & Coon, 1993; Gupta & Gentry, 2018; Larsen & Watson, 2001) and showed that this is contingent on the overall quality of the gift; that is, they identified a novel moderator.

Applying methods that are completely new to the gift-giving literature would be beneficial, because doing so could open doors to new insights about gift-giving that are unobtainable with the more traditional methods. For example, machine learning could be used to study the most efficient designs for gift registries and mobile gift-giving apps. As another example, text analytics could be used to analyze discussions of gift-giving on message boards, social media, and other online forums that provide big data about gift-giving in textual form, potentially revealing new insights about some of the key gift-giving aspects covered in this review. In both of these examples, the researcher would be able to enlarge the field's understanding of gift-giving in ways that would not be possible with traditional methods.

The multifaceted, ever-changing nature of gift-giving

Opportunity

Gift-giving is a complex, multifaceted activity, with many moving and ever-changing parts. As noted earlier, it is important to consider the greater context in which gift-giving occurs, as contextual factors can impact the other four aspects. However, the gift-giving process becomes even more complex when one considers that the four non-contextual aspects (i.e., motivations, inputs, mismatches, and value) are not only influenced by context, but they also impact each other. At present, there is limited work on *relationships between aspects*.

Why is this important?

Examining these sorts of relationships can provide a fuller understanding of the gift-giving endeavor by illuminating important nuances. For example, if a recipient assumes that a giver is giving because of an egocentric (vs. selfless) motivation, the recipient's preferences could change. As another example, the amount of thoughtfulness and/or money a giver devotes to a gift could influence whether social value and economic value increase

or decrease. By studying these relationships, scholars can shed unique light on gift-giving's key aspects. The aforementioned examples provide some concrete ideas for future work on this front, but a few others include examining the relationships between motivations and the importance of inputs, motivations and value creation/reduction, inputs and mismatches, and mismatches and value creation/reduction.

Opportunity

Related to this discussion of the multifaceted nature of gift-giving and the importance of context are research opportunities at the intersection of gift-giving and *contemporary issues*. Topics such as the COVID-19 pandemic, inequality, activism, sustainability, health and well-being, and technological advances have received much attention from marketing scholars as they pertain to non-gift-giving consumer behaviors (e.g., Lee & Goldsmith, 2022; Moreau & Wood, 2019; Ozanne et al., 2021), but gift-giving scholars are yet to fully explore these areas.

Why is this important?

Gift-giving, like all other consumer behaviors, intersects with and is influenced by the outside world. Consider, for example, how the pandemic has led to new gifting practices that were largely absent only a few years ago (Marinho, 2021), or how things such as e-gifts, Amazon wish lists, and Black Lives Matter gift cards were not around when scholars began examining gift-giving. Studying gift-giving with a contemporary focus is important both because doing so makes it most relevant to consumers and marketers in the here and now, and because doing so can produce new understandings about the gift-giving aspects covered in this review. For example, motivated in part by the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic made in-person gatherings quite challenging, Wiener et al. (2022) showed how gifts can be used as a substitute for offering in-person social support; that is, they identified a novel kind of dyadic motive.

With all this in mind, some examples of questions that could be explored on this front include: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted givers' and recipients' gift preferences? Has the pandemic's impact on the world economy lessened the stigma associated with cash gifts? How can gift-giving be used to support activism? How can activism lead to gift-giving? How do recipients react to gifts related to social movements? How might givers and recipients view cryptocurrency as a gift? How can consumers be encouraged to engage in more sustainable gift-giving practices, given the environmental cost of gift-giving (e.g., Root, 2021)? How can gift-giving help promote health and well-being? How can technological

advances such as artificial intelligence lead to more value creation in gift-giving? How do givers and recipients behave on unique online gifting platforms (e.g., Giesler, 2006)?

More nuanced conceptualizations

Opportunity

Another important agenda for future research relates to the need for more nuance when it comes to conceptualizing. That is, we suggest that the consumer gift-giving literature would benefit from papers that *more deeply conceptualize* constructs that have been examined from a somewhat general viewpoint.

Why is this important?

In some cases, too broad of conceptualizations could potentially lead to incorrect conclusions. For example, this review shows the importance of separating the “value” construct into economic value and social value, the importance of partitioning the “input” construct into thoughtfulness and money, the importance of further separating thoughtfulness into relationship-oriented thoughtfulness and non-relationship-oriented thoughtfulness, and the importance of separating the “motivation” construct into motives that cause gift-giving to arise and motives that drive givers' choices. Examining each of the larger components without considering their finer parts could result in the incorrect conclusion that there are multiple discrepancies in the literature. One idea for future research that stems directly from the present analysis is to test the notion that recipients value relationship-oriented thoughtfulness more than givers but givers value non-relationship-oriented thoughtfulness more than recipients. Another is to examine both economic value and social value in a single paper.

Opportunity

This review also shows how, in some cases, findings and phenomena can appear rather disparate but actually possess the same theoretical underpinnings. For example, we demonstrated how five broad themes encapsulate the numerous—and apparently distinct—gifting mismatches identified in the literature, and similarly, how four general themes summarize the countless—and seemingly disparate—gift-giving motivations documented in the literature. We believe that the literature would also benefit from papers that *integrate prior findings* that have been treated as distinct but actually fall under the same theoretical umbrella.

Why is this important?

Streamlining prior findings that were previously treated as unique is important because doing so offers a gestalt view of gift-giving and its key aspects. In other words, it helps researchers see the forest instead of the trees. For example, like in our review, Galak et al. (2016) showed how several, seemingly independent gift-giving asymmetries can be characterized as givers caring more than recipients that a gift be a hit immediately after it is opened and recipients caring more than givers that a gift be valuable to the recipient when they actually use it. This improved the field's grasp on gifting asymmetries by documenting an underlying factor that ties many gift-giving mismatches together.

CONCLUSION

Gift-giving is a valuable and captivating area of research, and we commend the scholars who have devoted their time to its study. This review intended to shine light on their work and to provide a single manual for those presently working in gift-giving. However, to aid both of these processes even more, we created a publicly available database of gift-giving research (see here: <https://tinyurl.com/2ckvm7re>). This database contains over a hundred gift-giving papers that have been published in 14 marketing journals since 1970, along with dozens of additional gift-giving papers that have been published in non-marketing journals in the same timeframe.

In addition to shining light on prior work and providing a single point of reference for gift-giving scholars, this review intended to meet a number of other objectives: refine the field's current understanding of gift-giving, unveil themes and commonalities that tie gift-giving findings together, merge gift-giving as an area of study, and offer valuable agendas for future work. To that end, we hope that scholars—both inside and outside the marketing discipline—answer our calls, as doing so will go a long way toward improving the field's collective understanding of the fascinating endeavor that is gift-giving.

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How to cite this article: Givi, J., Birg, L., Lowrey, T. M., & Galak, J. (2023). An integrative review of gift-giving research in consumer behavior and marketing. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 33, 529–545. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1318>