

Doctoral dissertation in Business Administration

**WHY WOMEN DESIRE CONSPICUOUS
LUXURY ROMANTIC GIFTS?
-THE MEDIATING ROLE OF “BEING LOVED” SOCIAL COMPARISON-**

Department of Business Administration, Major in Marketing

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August, 2018

Graduate School of Daegu University

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Business Administration

Department of Business Administration, Major in Marketing

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Confirming Tran Thi Tuyet’s doctoral dissertation in Business Administration

August, 2018

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Why Women Desire Conspicuous Luxury Romantic Gifts?

-The Mediating Role of Being Loved Social Comparison-

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(Abstract)

Can close friends' luxury romantic gifts (from romantic partners) affect other women's consumption of luxury goods? This study examines whether a woman's luxury gift affects her same-sex close friends' desire for luxury gifts. Besides, "being loved" social comparison (e.g., my friend seems to be more loved than I am) is a psychological mechanism that makes women compare their relationship to others'. Experiment 1 shows that a close friend (vs. stranger) who get a luxury (vs. non-luxury) gift from her romantic partner will trigger other women to make "being loved" social comparison. Experiment 2 finds that women expose to their friends' luxury (vs. non-luxury) gifts will desire conspicuous (vs. inconspicuous) luxury gifts via "being loved" social comparison mindset. Finally, a survey shows that women in a higher competitive social network (frequency of exposing to friend with luxury gifts) also have a higher desire for luxury romantic gifts. These results contribute to a better understanding of women's desire for luxury romantic gifts. It also illustrates that that evolutionary psychological approaches can be useful for understanding consumer behavior.

Keywords: women's desire, "being loved" comparison, luxury goods, evolutionary psychology

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Research motivation

Humans are a sexually dimorphic species, meaning that each sex behaves differently than does the other in many ways. For example, men and women act differently in risk-taking (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999), in aggression (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996; Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988; Salmivalli & Kaukiainen, 2004), in depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994) or in displaying blatant benevolence behavior (Griskevicius et al., 2007). Moreover, in marketing, marketers also use gender as an essential segmentation because men and women are different from consuming products. For example, men and women are different from responding to price, advertising, social influence while shopping or purchasing and reacting with internet advertising or in displaying loyalty to brand (Audrain-Pontevia & Vanhuele, 2016; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004; Kurt, Inman, & Argo, 2011; McMahan, Hovland, & McMillan, 2013; Melnyk, Osselaer, & Bijmolt, 2009). Thus, it seems that men and women are psychologically different.

Men and women are also different in gift-giving behavior. According to Sherry and McGrath (1989), gift giving is “work of women.” As compared to men, women offered more gifts than they received (Caplow, 1982; Fischer & Arnold, 1990), they paid more on average (Rucker et al., 1991) and were more satisfied with their gift selection (Fischer & Arnold, 1990). However, these findings have confined to contexts other than romantic relationships (such as gift giving during Christmas). In a romantic relationship, it has been found that it is men and not women that play a more significant role in gift giving in the context of courtship (Saad & Gill, 2003).

Gift giving could have evolved as a distinctly male courtship strategy (Saad &

Gill, 2003). According to Trivers' (1972) parental investment theory and Buss's (1989) mate preferences, men are less investing sex, men prefer sexual variety for increasing reproductive success, whereas women are high investing sex, their preference is generous men with resources. Therefore, men use gifts as a strategy to advance their fitness outcomes because men believe that gifts can be exchanged for sexual favors (Belk & Coon, 1993). Stating a differently, men are tactical for offering gifts to a romantic partner and will stop offering gifts once a woman confesses her love (Belk & Coon, 1993). In courtship context, men's motivations (functions) in offering gifts to female partners seem to be obvious, while women's motivations (functions) in receiving gifts from male partners remain unclear.

The purpose of this study was to investigate women's motivation in receiving gifts under dating context. For men, gift giving can serve as adaptive tactics in the courtship context. For women, there is a reason to believe that women's motivations to get gifts from romantic partners (romantic gift) might serve as an adaptive function which is beneficial for them and their offspring's survival strategy. It is because by seeing the number of money men spend on a romantic gift, women can make inferences on how much men desire (love) them and men commit to her. The more a man is willing to invest his resources in a relationship, the more commitment he makes, and thus the less he will leave the relationship (Buss, 1988) (mate retention strategy). Moreover, receiving a romantic gift can help a woman to boast how much her romantic partner commits to her. Thus, obtaining a romantic gift might help to ward off potential rivals (intrasexual competition) (discuss later). If these arguments are correct, women are not merely passive in receiving gifts (e.g., men give gifts and women receive). They might be active in receiving gifts (asking or requesting for gifts). By examining adaptive functions of women's receiving gifts from a romantic partner, we can understand