



Occasions and Motivations for Gift-Giving: A Comparative Study of Malay and Chinese Consumers in Urban Malaysia

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Accept in February 2005

Available online

Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to examine the occasions and motivations for gift-giving behaviour amongst urban Malaysian consumers. In addition, a comparison between the gift-giving behaviours of the two major ethnic groups in Malaysia, namely the Malays and the Chinese, will be made. The study utilized the survey approach. The sample consisted of 300 respondents. Findings showed that most of the respondents buy gifts during birthdays and weddings. When the motivations of gift giving were examined, the study found that the most preferred motivation for gift giving is for practical purposes. Comparing the behaviour of the two ethnic groups, significant differences were found. Some marketing implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour; Gift giving; Motivation; Cross-cultural comparisons

1. Introduction

Gift-giving behaviour has been of interest to consumer researchers since late 1970s (Belk, 1979; Sherry, 1983). However, very few researches have been done on cross-cultural differences of this behaviour. Researchers have suggested that due to differences in culture, the gift giver has to understand various cultural taboos before buying a gift. Arunthanes, Tansuhaj and Lemak (Arunthanes, Tansuhaj, and Lemak, 1994) found that due to historical animosity, it is a taboo to give gifts made in China to Koreans. In Latin America, the gift of a knife means the severing of a relationship. In Brazil, it is a taboo to give hand-made dolls as a gift, because it is associated with voodoo. Therefore, it is important for the giver to understand the cultural meanings attached to gifts.

In a multi-racial country like Malaysia, one may want to know whether different ethnic groups would prefer certain types of gift more than the other. Due to cultural differences, one would expect certain gifts to be preferred by some ethnic groups when compared to the others. For example, the Chinese will not give a clock to someone on his/her birthday because the pronunciation of "clock" in Mandarin is the same as "end" which means death (Ong, 1990). However, due to the process of acculturation, members of different ethnic groups are exposed to the cultural influences of other ethnic groups. Therefore, it would not be surprising if a Chinese consumer would actually give a clock to someone on his/her birthday. The giver might want to convey a message to the recipient to value time.

Previous research on gift-giving behaviour found that there are differences between ethnic groups with respect to some gift-giving behaviour. Jolibert and Fernandez-Moreno (1983) and Hill and Romm (1996), in their respective studies, found that there are differences in the gift-

giving behaviour of different ethnic groups. From the marketing point of view, marketers should understand the differences in the gift-giving behaviour of the consumers in their respective markets.

The main purpose of this study is to examine gift-giving behaviour amongst urban Malaysian consumers. Specifically, the present study endeavours to achieve the following objectives: (1) to identify major occasions for gift giving, and (2) to examine the motivations for gift giving. In addition, a comparison between the gift-giving behaviours of the two major ethnic groups in Malaysia, namely the Malays and the Chinese, will be made.

2. Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

Research in the past attempted to provide an understanding on the various aspects of gift-giving behaviour. This paper concentrates on reviewing the literature that are related to occasions people engage in gift-giving and motivations for gift-giving, which are consonant to the objectives of this paper.

Gift-Giving Occasions: One area of research in the gift-giving literature has to do with occasions of gift-giving. They include: gift and gift-giving, gift exchanges, functions of gift-giving and the gift-giving process. On what occasions do people generally give gifts? Belk (1973) examines the frequency of all gift-giving occasions in the U.S. He found that the most popular occasion is birthday (35 per cent). This is followed by Christmas (29 per cent). The other occasions listed in his study are wedding, Mother's Day, Father's Day, wedding anniversary, and graduation. Bussey (1967), in a study in the U.K., found that the most popular occasion is Christmas, followed by birthday. Lowes, Turner and Wills (1971) cite a series of British Gallup Polls conducted from 1963 to 1967. The

polls found that over 90 per cent of the adult population gives gifts during Christmas every year. Bussey (1967), in the British study, found that over 90 per cent of the respondents gave wedding and birthday gifts in 1966.

In a year, consumers encounter many gift-giving occasions, including holidays, rites of passage, and spontaneous events (Sherry, 1983). This means that people tend to give gifts not only to celebrate a special event, gifts may also be given to show their support on certain things. People tend to forget that gifts also perform the function of facilitating social exchange. According to Scammon, Shaw and Bamossy (1982), in many instances gift giving appears to be ceremonial, serving as a symbol of social support in various rites of passage from one life stage to another (for example, wedding, graduation, and funeral). In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in Asian gift-giving behaviour. Lotz, Shim and Gehrt (2003) examined the Japanese consumers' cognitive hierarchies, in a gift-giving context, in formal and informal situations utilizing a most-abstract to least-abstract cognitive hierarchical framework. They found that Japanese consumers' cognitive hierarchical flow from most- to least-abstract cognitions regardless of situations. Gifts were overt messages of love and understanding as well as notations of rite of passage and communications of the giver's wish that the recipient changed in some way (McGrath, 1995, p.388). We would expect that occasions such as wedding and birth are common occasions and we would expect a high percentage of Malaysian consumers involved in gift-giving. Indeed, events that are markers of life transitions usually involve gift-giving (Ong, 2003).

H1: Consumers tend to buy gifts on occasions that are markers of life transitions compared to those that are non-markers.

Motivations for Giving Gift: Motivation is an internal factor that arouses, directs and integrates a person's behaviour in a given set of circumstances in order to achieve some goals (Murray, 1964). Motives are often divided into utilitarian and hedonic motives. Utilitarian motives constitute desires to achieve functional benefits, while hedonic motives are those that are based on emotional, experiential and subjective rewards (Solomon, 1983).

Consumer researchers and other social scientists studying gift-giving behaviour have a tendency to infer motivations from behaviour, rather than to allow gift givers to express their self-perceived motivation. Wolfinbarger and Yale (1993) found three motivations for gift giving: experiential (or positive), obligated and practical. An experiential or positive attitude towards giving, or giving to show love, is primarily a hedonic motive while giving gifts out of obligation can reflect both hedonic (giving to avoid guilt) and utilitarian motives (giving to obligate someone else). The third motivation is the orientation towards giv-

ing practical gifts. Functional gifts are given in order to provide the receiver with practical assistance, and thus the motivation is primarily utilitarian (Wolfinbarger and Yale, 1993).

Wolfinbarger and Yale's study found that females are disproportionately involved in the 'moral' domestic economy and thus are more likely to have an experiential motivation for giving gifts. Older females, in their roles as keepers and teachers of tradition, are more likely to give gifts due to social obligation. However, the study found that motivation related to obligation was not gender bias.

With respect to practical gifts, McGrath (1995) and Cheal (1988) suggested that males are more likely to give practical gifts compared to females. A study by Caplow (1982) further supported this notion. Caplow found that males give more practical gifts than females. Tannen (1990) notes that males tend to play the role of problem solver with respect to interpersonal relationships, while females tend to provide emotional support. This notion is consistent with the idea that males are more likely to buy practical gifts. Previous study did not address the issue of ethnic differences with respect to motivations for gift giving.

Lowrey, Otnes and Ruth (2004) examined the influence of third party in gift-giving using the longitudinal approach. They found that givers allow themselves to be influenced by third parties when selecting gifts for recipients. Moreover, givers' motivations for incorporating these influences are not static, suggesting that gifts to recipients reflect givers' relationship with others in the social network. Their study has broadened the scope of gift-giving research by incorporating how social relationships impact on gift-giving or gift-exchanges.

Gift-Giving Behaviour and Ethnicity: Review of literature shows that in the past, very few studies attempted to examine the influence of culture on gift-giving behaviour. Beatty, Kahle and Homers (1991) believe that personal values influence gift-giving behaviour across cultures. They argue that gift giving is a highly ego-involving activity and that values influence gift-giving behaviour because one's values are reflected in important behaviours, particularly behaviour reflective of one's self. They suggest that gifts are given and selected in order to fulfill certain values close to individuals.

One of the few studies that examined ethnic differences in gift-giving is the study by Park (1998). Park compares the gift-giving behaviour of Korean and American consumers. He argues that Koreans are more likely to buy expensive gifts, place high priority on gift buying in their total expenditures, and spend a sizable proportion of their income on gifts. His results show that the Koreans spend a much higher proportion of income (6.2 per cent) on gifts than the Americans (2.6 per cent). Park also found that Koreans tend to buy prestigious name brands more frequently than Americans. Americans, on the other hand,

tend to give more weight on the quality of the gifts. With respect to gift items, Park (1998) found that Koreans would prefer practical and cash gifts more than the Americans. In a study by Jolibert and Fernandez-Moreno (1983) on French and Mexican consumers, they found that Mexican couples spent a higher proportion of their average monthly income on Christmas gifts when compared to the French couples. Ong (2003) found that the Malays and Chinese differed in terms of their behaviour in dealing with stress and life events although they do not differ significantly in terms of the level of stress and number of life events encountered. The Malays tend to have fewer changes in their consumption-related lifestyles than the Chinese.

Based on the literature discussed above, some differences between ethnic groups with respect to the occasions and motivations for giving gift are expected.

H2 (a): There is a significant difference in the behaviour between the Malays and Chinese with respect to gift-giving.

H2 (b): Motivations for gift-giving differed significantly between the Malays and the Chinese.

3. Research Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed in the study. The survey approach was adopted for this study. A description of the design of the research instrument, the sampling procedure, and the data collection method is presented below.

3.1 Research Instrument

The survey instrument was a five-page questionnaire divided into three sections. The first section measured the major occasions for gift giving. The occasions or celebrations listed were adopted from the study by Banks (1979). Some modifications were made to suit the Malaysian context. Malaysia's religious occasions, such as *Hari Raya Puasa* (celebrated by the Malay/Muslims), Chinese New Year (celebrated by the Chinese), and *Deepavali* (celebrated by the Indians/Hindus) were included in the list. In the previous research, Mother's Day and Father's Day were combined, whereas in this study, these two occasions were separated in order to obtain more specific information on the two gift-giving occasions. In the past, respondents were allowed to tick only one occasion while in this study respondents were asked to tick more than one occasion, if relevant.

Section II was designed to measure three different motivations for giving gifts (practical, experiential and obligated). The questions from this section were adapted from a research by Wolfenbarger and Yale (1993). This section consisted of 15 items. Seven items measured experiential motivations for giving gifts. Five items examined obligated motivations for giving gifts and three items investigated the

practical motivation for giving gifts. The respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement of each of the statement, from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 7 "Strongly Agree".

In the third section, personal and demographic data of the respondents were collected. Questions covering gender, age, ethnicity, highest completed level of education, marital status, occupation, and estimated monthly household income were asked.

The completed questionnaire was pre-tested through a pilot survey using 20 respondents. The objective of the pilot survey was to test the contents and clarity of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire was developed based on the feedback obtained from the pilot survey. The questionnaire was produced in two languages: English and Malay. The original English version of the questionnaire was translated into Malay using the back-to-back translation method (Zikmund, 1997). Translation into the Malay language is essential since the national language of Malaysia is Malay and the medium of instruction for education in Malaysia. However, some of those belonging to the older generation Malaysians and the highly educated Malaysians prefer to read and converse in English.

3.2 Sampling Procedure and Data Collection Method

The study was confined to the residents of Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya areas. Kuala Lumpur is the capital city of Malaysia. It is situated in the Klang Valley, the commercial, business and industrial center of the country. Petaling Jaya, also in the Klang Valley, is the largest satellite town outside of Kuala Lumpur. Klang Valley is the most developed region in Malaysia, with up-to-date and modern amenities and infrastructure. The area has the largest proportion of middle income population in the country.

The study utilized the mall-intercept method. Six shopping malls were chosen: three in Kuala Lumpur and three in Petaling Jaya. The shopping malls were: Sogo, The Mall, Sungei Wang, One Utama, Sunway Pyramid, and Jaya S14. In each shopping mall, about 50 questionnaires were distributed. As such, the target total number of respondents was about 300.

In terms of the data collection technique, the study utilized the self-administered questionnaire approach. Two research assistants were stationed in each shopping mall. They would approach shoppers while they were entering or exiting the mall. The research assistants would first introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the survey. If the prospective respondents agreed to participate in the study, the questionnaire would be given to them. The research assistants would collect the questionnaire from the respondents after the completion of the questionnaire.

The survey was conducted during weekends from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Data was collected over a period of six weeks. To ensure that respondents came from different demographic backgrounds, an estimated quota based on

certain demographic variables was set. The study set a 50-50 quota for gender, 40-60 quota for ethnic group (Malay-Chinese), and a 30-30-20-20 quota for age group (under 20:, 20-29:, 30-39:, and 40 or older). Malaysia has three major ethnic groups. The Malays (inclusive of other indigenous groups) consists of about 60 per cent of the population. The Chinese constitutes about 30 per cent of the population. The Indians and other minority groups consist of about 10 of the population. For the purpose of this study, only the Malays and the Chinese were included. The ethnic quota of 40:60 (for Malay-Chinese) was set to reflect the composition of urban Malaysian population.

4. Research Results

This section presents the findings of the survey. It begins with a description of the general characteristics of the respondents. This is followed by a discussion on the major occasions for giving gifts. The results on the motivations for gift giving will then be examined. A comparison will also be made between the behaviours of the two major ethnic groups with respect to their gift-giving behaviours.

4.1 Characteristics of the Respondents

A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed. Out of which 18 sets of the questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete answers. As a result, the final questionnaires analyzed consisted of 302 respondents. In terms of gender, the sample consisted of slightly more female respondents (51.3 per cent) as compared to the male respondents. A high proportion of the respondents was within the 20-29 years old group (30.8 per cent). Slightly less than a third of the respondents (29.5 per cent) was from the "less than 20 years" age group. The sample comprised of 40.4 per cent Malay respondents. Almost 60 per cent of the respondents

were Chinese.

In terms of education, a high proportion of the respondents was university or professional degree holders. They accounted for 25.2 per cent of the sample. Another 22.5 per cent were SPM holders (equivalent to the O-level in the British education system), 20.9 per cent studied up to Form Three (Junior high school), 14.2 per cent were college diploma holders, and 11.9 per cent were STPM holders (equivalent to the A-level in the British system). The main reason for the high proportion of degree holders in the sample was probably due to the characteristics of urban population. The better job opportunities in capital cities attract graduates resulting in a high concentration of them in and around the capital cities.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents (60.3 per cent) were single. Slightly more than one-third of the respondents were married with children. When the occupation variable was examined, the largest proportion of the respondents (43.0 per cent) was students. More than one-quarter of the respondents (27.2 per cent) were employees in the private sector. In terms of monthly household income of the respondents, the study found that the largest group had an income in the range of RM2,000-RM3,999 (32.5 per cent). This was followed by the RM1,000-RM1,999 category (17.2 per cent).

4.2 Occasions for Giving Gifts

Table 1 shows the occasions that the respondents would be buying gifts for someone (in descending order of frequency). Almost all the respondents (99.0 per cent) would be buying birthday gifts for someone. A distant second was wedding (54.0 per cent), Mother's Day (45.4

Table 1. Occasions for Giving Gifts by Ethnic Group (in Descending Order)

| Occasions | Malay (%) | Chinese (%) | Total (%) | Significance* |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1. Birthday | 98.4 | 99.4 | 99.0 | 0.351 |
| 2. Wedding | 45.9 | 59.4 | 54.0 | 0.021 |
| 3. Mother's Day | 25.4 | 58.9 | 45.4 | 0.000 |
| 4. A Child's Birth | 41.8 | 38.9 | 40.1 | 0.612 |
| 5. Father's Day | 18.9 | 45.0 | 34.4 | 0.000 |
| 6. Valentine's Day | 23.0 | 37.8 | 31.8 | 0.007 |
| 7. Chinese New Year | 0.8 | 50.0 | 30.1 | 0.000 |
| 8. Christmas | 8.2 | 44.4 | 29.8 | 0.000 |
| 9. Congratulatory | 20.5 | 22.2 | 21.5 | 0.720 |
| 10. Hari Raya Puasa | 45.1 | 3.3 | 20.2 | 0.000 |
| 11. Wedding Anniversary | 13.1 | 17.8 | 15.9 | 0.277 |
| 12. Teacher's Day | 13.9 | 11.1 | 12.3 | 0.463 |
| 13. Sympathy/Condolence | 9.8 | 12.8 | 11.6 | 0.433 |
| 14. Graduation | 5.7 | 13.3 | 10.3 | 0.033 |
| 15. Deepavali | 0.0 | 3.3 | 2.0 | 0.042 |
| 16. Others | 0.8 | 6.1 | 4.0 | 0.021 |

*Level of significance using chi-square statistical test.

per cent), and a child's birth (40.1 per cent). About one-third (or 34.4 per cent) of the respondents would be buying gifts on Father's Day.

Due to the effectiveness of commercial advertisements and promotions, more and more Malaysian consumers would buy gifts for someone special on Valentine's Day (31.8 per cent) and Christmas (29.8 per cent). About a third of the respondents (30.1 per cent) would be buying gifts on Chinese New Year, while 20.2 per cent would be buying gifts for *Hari Raya Puasa* (the Malay/Muslim religious celebration). Other less popular gift-giving occasions were wedding anniversary (15.9 per cent), Teacher's Day (12.3 per cent) and *Deepavali* (2.0 per cent). Celebrations like house warming and the celebrations on special occasion or anniversary were in the "Others" category with only 4.0 per cent of the respondents reporting as occasions for buying gifts.

Findings of this study partially supported hypothesis H1 as the two most common occasions for gift-giving are birthdays and weddings while birth of a child ranked fourth as occasions for buying gifts. From the five events that are most common for gift-giving, at least two are markers of life transition (wedding and child birth) since individuals experiencing the event would acquire new roles while, birthday, which is related to birth is seen as an important event, celebrating the birth of a person annually.

When the results of this study were compared to the study in the U.S. by Belk (1973), one will find that in Belk's study birthday and Christmas were the two most popular occasions for gift-giving. The present study found that birthday and wedding were the two most popular gift-giving occasions. This shows that celebrating birthdays are not culture bias. This finding is not surprising. Most Malaysians are non-Christians, as such, Christmas did not

emerge as a common occasion for gift-giving.

When the gift-giving behaviour of the two ethnic groups, namely the Malays and the Chinese, were compared numerous differences were found (see again Table 1). Findings showed that the tendency for Chinese respondents to buy gifts was more than the Malays. Only in one occasion the Malay respondents tended to buy more gifts than the Chinese, i.e. during the *Hari Raya Puasa* celebration, a Malay/Muslim religious festival.

Out of the sixteen occasions listed, ten occasions were found to be significant (at $p \leq 0.05$). As mentioned earlier, only during *Hari Raya Puasa*, the proportion of Malay respondents giving gifts was more than the Chinese. In the other nine occasions, the proportion of Chinese respondents giving gifts was more than the Malays. The results might indicate that the Chinese respondents are more open in accepting Western culture compared to the Malay respondents. Hence, we find that celebrations like Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas, and Valentine's Day which are essentially Western culture, are more common among the Chinese. Again findings of the present study supported hypothesis H2 (a), i.e., there is a significant difference between the Malays and Chinese in terms of gift-giving.

4.3 Motivations for Gift-Giving

In this study, the motivations for giving gifts of Malaysian consumers were examined. The respondents were asked to rate their levels of agreement and disagreement on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 indicating "Strongly Disagree" to 7 indicating "Strongly Agree". Factor analysis was performed on the 15-item scale to examine for dimensions in the scale. The factors were then assessed for internal consistency in reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The differences in the response of the two ethnic

Table 2. Factor Loadings of Motivation Items

| Variable | Factor | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| V01. Carefully selecting a gift is important to me. | 0.491 | -0.054 | 0.343 | 0.410 |
| V02. It is important to me to choose a unique gift. | 0.742 | -0.101 | 0.193 | 0.160 |
| V03. Choosing gifts brings out my creative side. | 0.843 | -0.062 | 0.025 | 0.046 |
| V04. I especially like to give gifts that are fun. | 0.772 | -0.112 | 0.016 | -0.058 |
| V05. I try to choose gifts that convey a personal message to the receiver. | 0.558 | -0.105 | 0.146 | 0.287 |
| V06. I think I do a better job choosing gifts than do most people. | 0.431 | 0.109 | -0.271 | 0.418 |
| V07. Gifts are an important way of communicating love and friendship to others. | 0.159 | 0.187 | 0.062 | 0.620 |
| V08. I often feel obligated to give gifts. | -0.077 | 0.729 | 0.073 | 0.108 |
| V09. I often give gifts because I would feel guilty if I didn't. | -0.052 | 0.876 | 0.015 | -0.024 |
| V10. I often give gifts because I am expected to give them. | -0.138 | 0.825 | -0.063 | -0.024 |
| V11. When I receive a gift, I feel that I am obligated to reciprocate at that time or at some time in the future. | -0.049 | 0.697 | 0.104 | -0.088 |
| V12. I often wait until the last minute to purchase a gift. | -0.032 | .247 | -0.021 | -0.760 |
| V13. I feel it is especially important to give gifts that are useful to the receiver. | 0.198 | 0.207 | 0.790 | -0.065 |
| V14. It's important to choose gifts that everybody needs, but don't yet own. | 0.066 | 0.023 | 0.747 | 0.119 |
| V15. I think it is important to give gifts that last a long time. | 0.032 | 0.031 | 0.792 | 0.007 |

groups with respect to the dimensions were then compared.

Factor Analysis Results: The dimensions of the scale were examined by factor analyzing the items using the principal components analysis. Using eigenvalue of ≥ 1 , the analysis produced four factors, accounting for 59.3 per cent of total variance. Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1995) suggest that for social science studies, it is not uncommon to consider a solution of about 60 per cent as satisfactory. Factor 1 explained 23.3 per cent of the total variance. Factors 2, 3 and 4 explained 17.6, 11.3 and 7.2 per cent of total variance, respectively.

To facilitate easy interpretation, these factors were then rotated using the varimax criterion for orthogonal rotation. As the previous study by Wolfinbarger and Yale (1993) utilized minimum factor loadings of 0.40, the current study adopted the same factor loadings for the purpose of interpretation and comparison. Table 2 shows the factor matrix indicating the factor loadings of every variable on these four factors. Factor 1 comprised six items. Factor 2 and 4 had four items, whilst Factor 3 comprised of three items.

The result of the factor loadings of the motivation items in this study was almost similar to the Wolfinbarger and Yale's (1993) study. In both studies, variables V13 to V15 were loaded in one factor, i.e. Factor 3. All the variables in Factor 1 were the same with the Wolfinbarger and Yale's (1993) study, except for V07 that appeared in Factor 4 in this study. V12 in the previous study was loaded in Factor 2, whereas in this study, it appeared in Factor 4. In Wolfinbarger and Yale's (1993) study, there were only three factors. This study produced four factors.

Internal Consistency Reliability Assessments: The component items for each factor were tested for internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The acceptable level of reliability coefficient is 0.50 or greater as proposed by Nunnally (1967). Except for alpha coefficient of Factor 4 which had a negative value ($\alpha = -0.089$), the results showed that the alpha coefficients of the other three factors were more than 0.700. The alpha coefficients of Factors 1, 2 and 3 were 0.770, 0.808 and 0.730, respectively. In the subsequent analysis, Factor 4 was dropped from analysis. Furthermore, Wolfinbarger and Yale's (1993) study had inferred only three dimensions for the motivations of gift giving.

Naming the Dimensions: Based on the items that were loaded on each of the factors, the three factors were labeled. Each factor had loading of items having similar

conceptual attributes that largely described a unique gift giving motivation dimension. Factor 1, named experiential dimension, reflected the givers as giving a great deal of thought and efforts to gift selection, enjoyed choosing gift and felt that gifts were a way of showing love and friendship to receivers.

Factor 2 portrayed a situation in which giving made one felt obligated to give gifts, thus the factor was called the obligated dimension. This behaviour was motivated by compliance with the social norm of giving. Obligated givers experienced guilt if they did not give gift. They gave gifts because of the expectations of others and felt they must reciprocate when they received a gift.

The third factor, showed the practical dimension of gift giving, was reflected in the giver's perception. The giver believed that the best gift should be a useful gift. For practical gift givers, the primary motivation for giving was to provide practical assistance to the receivers.

Gift Giving Motivation by Ethnic Group: The motivations for gift giving for the Malay and Chinese respondents were analyzed using t-tests. Mean values of the two groups were compared. The results are presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, Malaysian consumers were strongly motivated by the practical dimension of gift giving. The mean score for the items in this type of motivation was 5.40. This shows that the respondents tended to give functional gifts in order to provide the receiver with practical assistance. According to DeVere, Scot and Shulby (1983), practical gifts were dominant during rites of passage such as weddings. However, there were givers who tended to give practical gifts, regardless of who the receiver was or on what occasion (Belk, 1979). Experiential reason for gift giving was the second most important (mean = 4.61). Obligated motivation was the least important (mean = 3.81).

When the differences between the two ethnic groups with respect to the types of motivation were examined, the study found that only practical motivation was found to be significant (at $p \leq 0.05$). Chinese respondents (mean = 5.54) had a greater tendency to give practical gifts when compared to the Malay respondents (mean = 5.27). No difference was found for both the experiential motivation and obligated motivation. This indicated that the two ethnic groups did not differ with respect to the two types of motivations. Since no past research had been conducted on this issue, no comparison can be made. The study by

Table 3. Motivations for Gift Giving by Ethnic Group

| Type of Motivation | Malay | Chinese | Total | Sig.* |
|--------------------|-------|---------|-------|-------|
| Experiential | 4.52 | 4.70 | 4.61 | 0.113 |
| Obligated | 3.93 | 3.70 | 3.81 | 0.102 |
| Practical | 5.27 | 5.54 | 5.40 | 0.033 |

*Level of significance using t-tests.

Wolfenbarger and Yale (1993) did not attempt to make ethnic comparison with regard to this issue. Hypothesis H2 (b) was partially supported since the Malays and Chinese differed significantly for only one dimension of gift-giving, i.e., the practical dimension in which the Chinese were found to be more practical oriented than the Malays.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that birth-related occasions, such as birthday and a child's birth, are amongst the two most common gift-giving occasions. In addition, the study found that the Chinese respondents have a greater tendency to buy gifts on occasions such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Valentine's Day when compared to the Malay respondents. The Chinese respondents also have a greater tendency to give gifts compared to the Malay respondents.

The results of the factor analysis on the items of the gift giving motivation are consistent with the findings by Wolfenbarger and Yale (1993). This study found that practical motivation is the most popular reason for buying gifts. The result of this study also shows that the Chinese has a greater tendency to buy practical gifts when compared to the Malays.

5.1 Implications of the Study

The study has provided an in-depth understanding of some aspects of gift-giving behaviour in a cross-cultural context. The findings of this study have several implications, which would undoubtedly be beneficial to different people in the gift industry.

From the findings, it was shown that most urban Malaysian consumers would buy birthday (99.0 per cent) and wedding gifts (54.0 per cent) for someone. In the context of Malaysia, it is probably motivated by the norm of reciprocity or obligation. As such, marketers could develop products that are considered appropriate as items for gift-giving during these occasions. The market for gift giving during these occasions is bigger than on other occasions as they are the most common occasions for gift-giving.

The comparison between the two ethnic groups showed that Chinese respondents tend to buy gifts on legislated occasions (Mother's Day, Father's Day and Valentine's Day) and Christmas more than the Malay respondents. This study found that the Malays have a greater tendency to buy gifts on *Hari Raya Puasa* (the Malay/ Muslim religious celebration) when compared to the Chinese. As such, marketers could develop marketing strategies or promotional themes based on the different ethnic segments, depending on the occasions. Marketers could also try to attract more Malay consumers to buy gifts during the legislated occasions, especially during the Mother's and Father's Day, through aggressive advertising. Celebrating these two occasions is consistent with the religious beliefs of the Malays/Muslims.

Customers with different motives for giving gifts might have different gift preference. When giving was perceived as obligated, gifts were less likely to express the identities of the recipient or the donor and less likely to communicate the feelings. Thus, the giver would not spend more time and money in selecting the gift. The giver with practical motive would perhaps be more likely to choose less emotionally significant and individualized gifts. On the other hand, the giver with experiential motive would choose more emotionally significant and individualized gifts for the receiver. The study found that urban Malaysian consumers have a greater tendency to buy gifts for practical reasons. This is especially true for the Chinese. Marketers should pay attention to the motivations of giving gift and develop an effective strategy to reach the consumers.

In conclusion, different parties involved in the gift-giving industry should always track and monitor the gift-giving behaviour of their consumers so that the most effective and efficient marketing strategies could be developed in order to stay in this business.

5.2 Limitations and Direction for Future Research

The sample for this study was drawn from urban population in the most advanced cities of Malaysia. Other major cities should be included in future studies as respondents from other major cities may have different behaviour patterns in terms of gift-giving. Future studies could include more occasions of gift-giving by incorporating a distinct set of events that are markers of life transitions and those non-transitional events. In addition, the influence of other factors such as social relationships considered when giving gifts should be explored.

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