

# The unwelcome gift: Marketing and cross-cultural differences

July 20 2009

---

Westerner consumers are more receptive to unexpected promotional gifts than their East Asian counterparts, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

People from diverse cultures react differently to the element of surprise, according to authors Ana Valenzuela (Baruch College), Barbara Mellers (University of California, Berkeley), and Judi Strebel (San Francisco State University). The research team explored different cultural responses to promotional gifts, such as [gift](#) cards, mugs, snacks, t-shirts, etc.

The authors conducted four studies in which participants received a gift as a token of appreciation for participating in a survey. Some of the participants knew about the gifts before participating, while others were surprised. Regardless of the gift, participants from the United States enjoyed the surprise more than participants in Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, and Hong Kong.

"Why does this phenomenon happen? For Westerners, an unexpected gift reinforces feelings of control over their environment. For East Asians, an unexpected gift indicates imbalance and prophesizes bad fortune," the authors write. "Our findings suggest that East Asians' experience of surprise is closely connected to their motivation to seek emotional balance."

The authors suggest that framing surprises as "good luck" or "good

fortune" will enhance East Asians' enjoyment of a shifting environment. Their final experiment involved approaching bookstore patrons in California and Hong Kong and asking them to participate in a short survey. People who accepted were told they would be given a gift as a token of appreciation. Half of the participants entered the "Lucky Game" to win the gift. The other half received the gift without participating in the game. East Asians' enjoyment of the gift increased when the gift was attributable to luck.

"Marketers often use pleasant surprises to influence consumers' brand evaluations and purchase decisions," the authors write. "Unexpected marketing activities must accommodate cross-cultural differences."

More information: Ana Valenzuela, Barbara Mellers, and Judi Strebler. "Pleasurable Surprises: A Cross-Cultural Study of Consumer Responses to Unexpected Incentives." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): February 2010 (published online July 15, 2009).

Source: University of Chicago ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: The unwelcome gift: Marketing and cross-cultural differences (2009, July 20) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-07-unwelcome-gift-cross-cultural-differences.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.