

Newlyweds, be careful what you wish for

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A statistical analysis of the gift "fulfillments" at several hundred online wedding gift registries suggests that wedding guests are caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes to buying an appropriate gift for the happy couple. The details reported in the *International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing* suggest that most people hope to garner social benefits of buying an expensive gift that somehow enhances their relationship with the newlyweds while at the same time they wish to limit monetary cost and save money.

Yun Kyung Oh of the Department of Business Administration, at Dongduk Women's University, in Seoul, Korea, working with Ye Hu of the University of Houston, Texas, Xin Wang of Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, and William Robinson of Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, USA, explain how their Bayesian statistical analysis reveals a bimodal distribution of gift fulfillment that shows this push and pull across more than 500 [wedding](#) registries. The center of the distribution pivots on the average price available to the giver of the gifts requested by bride and groom. The higher than average-priced gifts are the target of those seeking greatest social benefit and the lower priced gifts by those hoping to save money. Very few people buy gifts of average price as these do not appeal in either regard, the team found. However, gifts of extremely high or very low price often remain unfulfilled too for similar reasons.

"Across vastly different social settings, gift giving is often an act of symbolism, large and small, of love, respect, and sometimes war. The economic importance of gift giving cannot be overestimated," the team

says, "think Trojan Horse and The Statue of Liberty for disparate examples." However, nowhere is the politics of gift-giving more sensitive than in the creation of a wedding registry by bride and groom and its fulfillment by their family, friends and other well-wishers. Gift giving is a multibillion dollar industry.

The team's study perhaps reinforces what one might suspect of wedding gift buyers that a gift giver seeking a social benefit will largely ignore the price, provided the gift does not exceed their budget whereas the gift giver looking to [save money](#) will buy something that is not expensive. The [statistical analysis](#) made possible by the real data from online wedding registries corroborates this notion. The team asserts that online gift giving presents a unique and significant marketing opportunity. Indeed, they conclude that, "A better understanding of this area offers practical recommendations to marketing practitioners to serve consumers better and to increase retailer profits."

Of course, in some cultural wedding [gifts](#) are purely monetary and there is no gift to buy, but presumably the same dichotomy exists for the giver with deep pockets in that situation too who hopes to enhance their relationship with the newlyweds at minimal cost.

More information: "How do external reference prices influence online gift giving?" in *Int. J. Electronic Marketing and Retailing*, vol 5, 359-371.

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