

A new name has cropped up on holiday shopping lists: Me!

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Even with the challenges of today's lagging economy, recent research suggests that consumers are spending more than \$500 billion in gifts, with gifting representing 10% of the total retail market and self-gifting projected to be the highest yet with participation from 59% of shoppers. Gift giving occurs in all societies and is a social exchange process involving a giver and a receiver. There are now many instances, especially in the United States where the giver and receiver of the gift are the same person (self-gift).

Self-Gifts are defined as 1) personally symbolic self-communication through (2) special indulgences that tend to be (3) premeditated and (4) highly context bound. This definition helps to differentiate self-gifts from other personal acquisitions. Self-gifts are a means to communicate with one's self and, in particular, to influence one's self-definition and self-esteem. There is also an aspect of specialness to self-gifting, referring to the notion that self-gifts often have special meanings for consumers as compared to common, every day, self-directed purchases. They can be any product, but they constitute a form of indulgence, making them different from a regular personal acquisition. Self-gifts also tend to be premeditated and are typically not spontaneous purchases. They tend to be done to reward oneself after a great accomplishment or to cheer oneself up after a disappointment, but can also occur under other contexts such as birthdays, anniversaries and holidays.

Many companies are now capitalizing on our self-gift propensities in their promotions and advertising messages. For example, J.Crew recently created a "Gift yourself" section on its website, along with the text "To: you, From: you." The diamond industry has also caught onto the new "me" mood, with slogans like "Your left hand says 'we,' you're right hand says 'me'," urging women to buy diamonds for themselves. And slogans such as "You deserve a break today" (McDonald's) and "The perfect little thank-me" (Andes candies) present indulgences as personal rewards.

Do you think this is an effective approach?

Do you engage in Self-Gift behavior?

When was the last time you bought yourself a special gift?

What did you buy?

Can you think of other companies that use self-gifting appeals in their messages?

P.S. To read more on the social-phenomenon of "gift-giving" visit the following article titled "Impact of Giving on Self and Impact of Self on Giving" by Dr. Suri Weisfeld-Spolter and colleagues Dr. Cindy B. Rippe and Dr. Stephen Gould:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.20760/abstract>

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