

2024

An Investigation of Social Media Discussion  
on Valentine's Day 2024 Trends:



# Money Can Buy Love & Chocolates



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# Researchers



## Dr. Jin-A Choi

**Assistant Professor, School of Communication and Media**

Dr. Choi received her PhD from the Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Choi's scholarship focuses on target advertising celebrity/social media influencer endorsements, digital advertising, text mining, and data analytics. Her research has been published in journals such as Journal of Global Marketing, Communication Studies, and others. Dr. Choi teaches a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses such as Social Media Analytics, Influencers and Opinion Leaders and Integrated Communications.



## Dr. Bond Benton

**Associate Professor, School of Communication and Media**

Dr. Benton's doctorate is from the University of Vienna with his dissertation focusing on the influence of culture on meaning. A particular focus of Dr. Benton's research is the interaction of media, branding, and cross-cultural communication as it relates to the values and decisions of constituencies. Dr. Benton's essays and research articles have appeared in journals and anthologies including The Journal of E-Learning and Digital Media, Public Relations Tactics, and many more. His first book, The Challenge of Working for Americans: Perspectives of an International Workforce, was released in 2014.



## Dr. Yi Luo

**Associate Professor, School of Communication and Media**

Dr. Luo has conducted research in the areas of organizational change, sensemaking, leadership, social media and communication management, activism, organizational justice, and global public relations. Dr. Luo received her Ph.D in Communication from the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. Luo's research has been published or accepted to be published in Public Relations Review, Journal of Public Relations Research, among many more. Dr. Luo teaches a variety of courses in organizational communication and public relations such as Cases and Campaigns, Communication Theories, Communication Research, Global Public Relations, Public Relations Ethics, New Media Applications in Organizations, and Digital Production.



# Overview and Study Focus

## Introduction

Valentine's Day, typically defined by expression of love and affection, has been celebrated as a symbolic day to exchange gifts among lovers. The capitalism of love in American culture is a sophisticated and ritualized marketing. The expression of love has been firmly tied with the act of giving material things, such as gifts. Flowers, chocolates, and cards are deemed as one of the most popular gifts on this holiday of love (Dutton, 2023). Roses are favored as the flowers of choice on the lover's holiday because they are a favorite flower of Venus, the Goddess of Love, symbolizing intense feelings of love (Zayas et al., 2017). Gifting roses to the loved ones thus represents a clear proclamation of deep affection. Dating back to the early 15th century, Charles the duke of Orleans composed a passionate poem for his wife when being imprisoned in the Tower of London on Valentine's Day (History.com, 2024), which inspired lovers to express their feelings of love and affection through exchanging cards with words of love. Additionally, chocolate has become an indispensable holiday icon for Valentine's Day. According to the National Museum of American History, after the Spanish explorers brought this sweet confection back to Europe in the 15th century, chocolate has become an edible declaration of love as well as being widely accepted as one of the most popular gifts to give on Valentine's Day.

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# Overview and Study Focus

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Over the years, discomfort and even anger has grown around the over-commercialization of Valentine's Day, creating a deep divide between those who gift and those who criticize and denounce the holiday as nothing but a "Hallmark card holiday" that celebrates just about every occasion invented to date to push consumerism. Not surprisingly, our center's study from the previous year indicated that over-commercialization of Valentine's Day found that love is not defined by materialistic consumptions (Choi et al., 2023).

However, the prospects for 2024 may be different. In light of the symbolic attachments given to the culture of giving gifts on Valentine's Day, this study seeks to explore social media users' sentiment and perceptions regarding the popular Valentine's Day gifts through the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the sentiments and themes expressed by social media users toward Valentine's Day?

RQ2: What are the sentiments and themes expressed by social media users toward Valentine's Day gifts?

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# Method

To explore the proposed research questions regarding social media users' general sentiments towards the practice of gift giving on Valentine's Day, this study utilized AI-driven social media analytics tool, *Brandwatch*, to collect and examine social conversations from various platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and others. This study examined over 2 million social media posts over a 10-day period (February 1 - February 11) prior to Valentine's Day 2024. Search queries related to Valentine's Day (e.g., #Valentinesday, flowers, chocolate, jewelry, etc.) were built to collect data.

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## Joy as the Dominant Sentiment

In the mere past 10 days from February 1st to February 11th, 2024, seven variations in keywords (e.g., #valentinesday, “Valentine’s Day,” etc.) relating to Valentine’s Day garnered 2 million social media mentions on platforms such as X, Instagram, and Facebook. Despite the fair share of hate that this holiday receives from single, anti-consumerist individuals, the 2024 Valentine’s Day is anticipated to be celebrated with much joy, love, and of course, gifts.

The discourse surrounding this holiday expressed almost four times more positive sentiment than negative sentiment. More specifically, the conversations surrounding Valentine’s Day were dominated by emotions of joy (85%) and a bit of sadness (8%). Although primarily dominated by messages driving consumerism such as promotions, gift ideas, restaurant and destination recommendations and giveaways, much of the social discourse that exemplifies “joy” included a theme of “love and relationships” where social media users shared messages of love and kindness, plans and ideas for how they will celebrate Valentine’s Day with their loved ones in a personal and meaningful way, asking someone to be their Valentine, fostering love and celebrating the holiday with children, and spreading kindness like a “Loveosaurus,” in reference to a children’s book on a dinosaur spreading love and kindness.



Sadness, although a small margin at 8% of the social mentions, discussed sadness about not receiving or participating in Valentine's Day activities such as flower arrangements, proposal stories, and lack of plans for celebrating the holiday. Furthermore, a theme of rejection and loneliness was expressed in the emotion of sadness as some social media users shared their status as being single or recently dumped as well as the feeling of being a "loser" without having any plans for the big day. However, some singles took a more humorous approach by making jokes about spending the day alone, while some mocked and criticized the holiday as nothing but a day of spending. At just 8% of the conversations, it looks that the 2024 Valentine's Day will not only be welcomed with positivity and joy but also an increase in subsequential spending.

## Valentine's Gifts Spending

The National Retail Federation and Prosper Insights & Analytics estimated that consumer spending will rise to a new record at \$25.8 billion on Valentine's Day this year in the US alone with an average spending of approximately \$185 per person (Grgich, 2024). According to NRF, consumers set new records on spending for jewelry (\$6.4 billion), flowers (\$4.9 billion), a romantic evening out (\$3 billion), and clothes (\$2.6 billion).

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# Findings

Likewise, our search on Google Trends found that the search for flowers and jewelry rose during Valentine's Day. However, the term "chocolate" was the most searched in tandem with "flowers" and surpassed "flowers" as one of the most popular search terms during the Valentine's season.

The absence of chocolate as a popular gift in the reported data for NRF could be attributed to the lower price point of chocolates as opposed to jewelry and flowers. However, to delve deeper into the discovery of the popularity of "chocolate" during the Valentine's season, we ran an additional query regarding social media conversations surrounding Valentine's Day and three gift categories, flowers, chocolate, and jewelry. A total of 118k social media mentions were collected with 72k unique social media contributors from February 1st to February 11th, 2024 using variations of keywords on "Valentine's Day" in conjunction with "flowers," "chocolate," and "jewelry." Despite a data collection entirely dedicated to gift ideas on Valentine's Day, the expressed sentiment was 2.5 times more positive than negative. Echoing this positivity, an overwhelming 83% of the social media posts expressed joy explicitly regarding the act of gift giving. As suspected, "chocolate" dominated a third of the social conversations, especially "chocolate covered strawberries" and a "box of chocolate" followed by "roses" and "flowers" and least mention of jewelry.

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Specifically, high demand and peak in cocoa prices, along with chocolate buying, was outlined in the first week and half of February. Mirroring the prediction of increased spending on gifts for Valentine’s Day 2024, social media discourse showed that women planned to spend more on chocolate this year than the previous year, indicating a trend of higher budgets for gifts. Along with being “gifts,” chocolate is discussed as a gift that creates romantic experiences. However, the gift giving game for flowers continued to be strong as there was an 89% increase for “flowers for Valentine’s Day” and 100% increase in #sendflowers during this data collection period.

## Expressing Love

Surprisingly “love” was also a prominent theme in the collection of data specifically on Valentine’s Day gifts. This theme emphasized the importance of expressing love and appreciation through thoughtful and heartfelt gifts. The act of gift giving was accepted as an important gesture of love, especially to highlight positivity in a chaotic world.



Unlike the typical love-hate relationship that stems from the intense commercialization of Valentine's Day, positive vibes and overwhelming themes of love and joy dominated the 2+ million social media discourse this Valentine's Day in 2024. The Joetta di Bella and Fred C. Sautter III Center for Strategic Communication's Valentine's Day study from last year (2023), revealed that the expression of love was manifested through discussions on self-love and self-care related to mental health, not materialistic consumption of Valentine's Day goods. Additionally, the linkage between romance and consumerism was found to have created a context that created mental health challenges (Choi et al., 2023). Such focus seemed reasonable given the negative toll from the global Covid-19 pandemic on mental health (Alfano & Guarino, 2023).

Notably in 2024, an ironically surprising theme of "love and relationship" and a strong sentiment of "joy" dominated social media conversations. Instead of mocking and criticizing the culture of gift giving in a sarcastic and negative way, the focus was the opposite.



Gift giving was actually found to be a personalized and meaningful way to say “I love you.” The expression of genuine love is expected to be accompanied by gifts such as chocolates and flowers. The practice of gift giving during Valentine’s Day is as normal as giving presents during Christmas. It’s undoubtedly become a societal expectation and norm, and this year’s Valentine’s Day study strongly exemplifies that fostering loving relationships means gifting. Similar to the NRF’s prediction that consumer spending will reach a new record at \$25.8 billion on Valentine’s Day 2024, our data mining study informs us that we can expect surging sales of Valentine’s Day goods, especially chocolate and flowers - all so we can say “I love you.”



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*Thank You!*

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## School of Communication and Media

About the School of Communication and Media: Founded in 2012, the School of Communication and Media offers a range of dynamic programs in communication and media to a talented and diverse student population of over 1,800. Offering degrees in film and television, social media and public relations, advertising, journalism and digital media, sports communication, communication and media studies, animation and visual effects, and an MA in public and organizational relations, the School prepares the next generation of communication and media practitioners and leaders. The School houses award-winning student programs that include WMSC Radio, The Montclarion newspaper, Hawk Communications Agency, the Red Hawk Sports Network, Hawk+ OTT streaming platform, and News Lab, as well as the Center for Cooperative Media, which serves the public by working to grow and strengthen local journalism. Student projects and programs have recently received national recognition from PRSSA's Bateman Competition, an Edward R Murrow Award, several Marconi Award nominations, and a College Television Award from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.

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