Do Managers Reciprocate?
Field Experimental Evidence From a Competitive Market

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Abstract

A substantive amount of lab experimental evidence suggests that the norm of reciprocity has important micro- and macroeconomic consequences. However, it is unclear whether the norm of reciprocity survives in a natural and competitive environment with experienced agents. For this purpose we analyze data from a natural field experiment conducted with sales representatives who were instructed to randomly distribute product samples as gifts to their business partners. We find that the distribution of gifts helps boosting sales significantly, which is consistent with the notion of reciprocity. Surprisingly, the distribution of gifts can be counterproductive and lowers sales success if buyers and sellers interact for the first time.