

## ABSTRACT

Extant literature in marketing has found that several brands have gender perceptions associated with them (Avery 2012; Grohmann 2009). Consumers tend to place brands such as Gillette, Marlboro, and Hot Wheels in the masculine category and Rexona, Chanel, and Barbie in the feminine category (Ulrich 2013). At the same time, certain brands, typically associated with any one particular gender, extend into the opposite gender category using the same brand name. 'Dove,' which has traditionally been perceived as a feminine brand, extending to the men's segment with 'Dove for Men' is a classic example. This practice, called cross-gender brand extensions, clearly represents a departure from traditional branding practices of companies using two different brands to target the two different gender segments. The increasingly popular managerial practice of cross-gender brand extensions is the focus of this study.

We organise this thesis in the form of three essays. In essay 1, we studied the impact of a cross-gender brand extension practice on the consumer-brand relationship between the parent brand and its consumers. Essay 2 focused on consumer evaluations and purchase intentions towards a cross-gender brand extension and its parent brand. In essay 3, we investigated the moderating role of consumption visibility in the consumer evaluations of cross-gender brand extensions. We conducted five experiments to test our hypotheses. Following the experiments, we confirmed that the experimental results hold good in the actual market scenario through customer surveys.

We found that gender-congruence between a brand and its consumer is an important factor in strengthening consumer-brand relationships. As a result of this, when a brand extends to an opposite gender segment, the relationship with the customers of the parent brand weakens.

We observed a decline in brand evaluations and purchase intentions of a parent brand when it goes for cross-gender brand extensions. The direction of the extension is shown as a major factor in its consumer evaluations and in line with previous research, we found that a masculine brand extending to the feminine category receives more favourable evaluations, as compared to a feminine brand extending to the masculine segment. The visibility of consumption has a moderating role in consumer evaluations of cross-gender brand extensions.

The study advances the current understanding of cross-gender brand extensions, founded on the areas of consumer-brand relationships, dissociative reference groups, and consumption visibility. A brand's established gender identity meanings may be diluted by its appropriation by the opposite gender group. For those brands whose gender associations are actively used by consumers for their gender projects, a cross-gender brand extension could be a risky strategy. Past research has shown that there are several benefits to extending a brand. These benefits include an increase in the sales of the parent brand, as consumers' enhanced perceptions of brand values and image (Grime, Diamantopoulos and Smith 2002; Tauber 1988). However, we observe through our research cross-gender brand extensions as a contradictory case as the relationship strength, evaluations and purchase intentions towards the parent brands go down.

**Keywords:** Brand gender, cross-gender brand extensions, consumer-brand relationships, brand evaluations, dissociative reference groups, consumption visibility