

Will women take over the lead in marketing strategic planning and consumer decision-making? Does it matter?

Jean-Claude Tarondeau

Dominique Xardel

Under the influence of many factors which we will briefly discuss, the change in human societies is characterised by a questioning of the dominant patriarchy, the liberation of women and their growing influence in public and business life. Arguably, a movement is taking shape that could lead to matriarchal societies, even going so far as human societies where there are no men, as described in our philosophical tale *L'île des femmes*, Editions Persée, 2015.

Women have a clear sense of taste and a highly-developed instinct for interpersonal relationships. They could become the major actors in commercial trading relationships. In the future, women's influence could be decisive in formulating and implementing marketing strategies. Female influence, which is already acknowledged in household buying decisions, appears to be establishing its importance due to women's growing independence and the dissolution of family ties.

To use the language of economists, women could hold the keys to the marketing supply produced by businesses and organisations, and the demand from consumer-buyers.

These are the trends that will be analysed in this proposed paper. This paper is not "scientific" in the common sense of the word, it is only a support to think about the future.

Our paper comprises three parts. In the first, we briefly discuss changes in the role and influence of women in human societies, with some asides on developments concerning males in large domesticated animal groups.

In the second, we shall examine the change in the role and influence of women in the marketing departments of very large firms. We shall examine the hypothesis that the proportion of women in these departments is constantly growing, and also that it is now rising in the highest levels of the hierarchy. To do so, we shall refer to corporate statistics and

interviews about women's influence. How long will it be until we have a woman heading a company *by women, for women*, such as L'Oreal?

In the third section we present a short review of the literature on the roles and influence of women in buying and consumer behaviour. We show that growing female autonomy should lead to significant changes in behaviour. These changes, which are better understood and assimilated by women than by men, can be expected to reinforce their influence in marketing teams.

PART I

Changes in the role and influence of women

In marketing, women are distinguished from men by characteristics inherited from history. After a brief overview, we will ask whether these characteristics are permanent and inherent to the female sex, or subject to change, as components of the female gender. And if so, what factors could cause change and where might they take us?

Male-female specialisation can be considered as inherited. Women are physically weaker than men, give birth to children, and therefore play the dominant role in their upbringing, taking care of domestic activities in the home. Men seek or make the resources necessary for survival of the family unit, by working outside it. This specialisation engenders marked differences in attitude and behaviour. Men have a sharp sense of organisation and planning, of objectives to meet and the resources to use. They control time and the environment. Women are the keepers of the home, where they ensure harmony and cohesion. They control relationships and maintain communication inside the family.

Men have higher social status and generally a higher level of education than women. They are the "heads of the family" and its only representative in contacts with public and private organisations.

This model has been shattered in the 20th and 21st centuries, but still persists in certain contemporary societies.

Today, women have acquired a comparable level of education to men. A recent book has shown that boys underperform academically more often than girls¹. Women are no longer

“housewives”, but employees just like their husbands or partners. The public space is now open to them, as it essentially was throughout the 20th century but has been particularly since the end of the second world war. Georges Duby notes that in the middle ages, prostitutes were the only women who received pay and participated in the public sphere². Today, all the professions are open to women. They outnumber men in the education and health systems, and account for the majority of students in the most prestigious higher education establishments. Tomorrow’s elites will have a female majority.

Women have become economically independent of men, and have gained control over their bodies through contraception and medically assisted conception. The breakdown of the cement holding the family unit together, maintained for centuries by religions, is shattering that unit into single-parent families and “patchwork” families. Women, like men, must work outside the home; men, like women, must take care of the home. Systems of shopping and communication roles are being overturned as the male-female specialisation disappears before our eyes.

In the late 19th century, women actively campaigned for equality between men and women. Significant advances were achieved, without actually attaining equality. But the movement has started, and is gathering pace. It is possible to imagine a human society without men in the relatively near future.

Like a bovine society with no bulls.

The ox disappeared when it was replaced in the fields by machines. The bull is confined to a function as reproducer, there to enhance the race. With the development of artificial insemination, it is estimated that a bull can impregnate a hundred thousand cows a year. The ratio between the numbers of males and females has thus fallen from equal numbers ten thousand years ago, to one to one thousand today. Male calves are not immediately eliminated at birth because their meat is popular and profitable, but their lifetime is limited to a few days or weeks. Female calves are only sent to the abattoir after they have supplied the human race with calves and milk, to end their existence, so to speak, at the butchers’ shop³.

¹ Auduc, Jean-Louis and Cécile Rivière, Sauvons les garçons, Paris, Descartes et Cie, 2009

² Duby, Georges, Les trois Ordres ou l’imaginaire du féodalisme, Paris, Gallimard, 1978

³ Tarondeau, Jean-Claude and Dominique Xardel, L’île des femmes, Editions Persée, 2015

Without going that far, current changes offer a glimpse of a matriarchal society where men's and women's roles could be reversed: making men "househusbands" or placing them in subordinate functions or low-skilled jobs, in a society dominated by women.

PART II

Women in top marketing management

People who are not observing them closely believe that women with power in business life, but also social and personal life, are increasingly acting and behaving like men. The presence and influence of women is constantly being reinforced in companies, especially in the many aspects of the marketing function concerned with research, creativity, communication and sales force management.

The gender revolution, or the great role redistribution

Over the last half century, female emancipation combined with technological advances have seriously influenced ideas, behaviours, attitudes and management styles in many companies, affecting structures and organisation – at all levels of the hierarchy. The gradual downsizing, disappearance or relocation of head offices, and the number of presidents' and general managers' titles, responsibilities and functions given to women, are all on the increase⁴. The dominant presence of women in the many fields of communication, publishing, tourism and healthcare are obvious examples.

More than ten years ago, researcher Pierre Lorigny⁵ noted this tendency to mix the genders and cross identities. In this small "gender revolution" that can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the field of strategies, women play an often dominant role. This was already the case in sectors as varied as cosmetics, luxury products, wines and spirits, and fast-moving consumer goods. As Pierre Lorigny observed at the time, "the current movement means breaking the rules"⁶.

Over time, the change in the traditional rules specific to marketing strategies has not escaped the attention and ambitions of many women working in a number of companies. The marked

⁴ Mamadou Toé, Diversité du genre et gouvernance des entreprises, *Revue Française de Gestion*, Vol. 40, 2014

⁵ Lorigny, Pierre, "Masculin-Féminin, les codes se rebiffent", *Marketing*, No. 85, 2004

⁶ *La mouvance actuelle veut qu'on casse les règles.*

tendency for active female input in marketing strategies has doubtless been encouraged by the development of self-employment and freelance work.

In less than 10 years (from 2004 to 2013), the number of freelance workers in Europe rose from 6.2 to 8.9 million. According to the Hopwork study, an 85% increase was observed in France over the same period.

More and more women are working under various forms of freelance status. Many studies show that their numbers, and the importance and quality of their work, have risen substantially in recent years. This is certainly because in this type of work they find greater independence, more opportunities for creativity, and a better balance between work life and family life without adversely affecting performance. It may also be further proof of women's ability to earn more than a female employee in a regular salaried job.

In 2014 the Harvard Business Review noted in a study that 50% of women working in a technical sector will leave their job due to a hostile environment. In other words, in many cases women are still unwilling to accept different or unequal treatment in the world of work.

The clearest examples are found in the sectors of luxury goods, services of all kinds and tourism and hospitality.

Luxury goods

The luxury goods industry has registered particularly remarkable growth in the last few decades (the market has tripled in the last twenty years). In a market worth more than €850 billion in 2014, products known as “personal luxury goods” or “the core of the core” of luxury, together with luxury hospitality and tourism products, accounted for most of the business, with €373 billion of sales. These areas of business reflect the influential role played by women in the general marketing functions of companies such as LVMH and L’Oreal, and the luxury goods segments of the Accor group.

At LVMH, a female executive, Chantal Gaemperle, has been in charge since 2007 of Group-wide coordination of methods and decisions concerning selection of the best talents for all the Group's 65 or so brands, which are one of LVMH's strongest assets. Companies such as Hermès, Chanel, Christian Dior and L’Oreal whose 25 brands are classified as “global” in their international marketing strategies, are other examples of luxury sector firms with top women in management.

In early 2014, the online magazine e-marketing.fr published a list of the 8 most influential women in marketing in France. At Engie, Valérie Bernis, Executive Vice-President in charge of Communications, Marketing and Environmental and Societal Responsibility stated that the objective for 2015 was first and foremost control of digital media, and that women must become familiar with them quickly. As long ago as 2010, Paul Agon, Chairman and CEO of L'Oreal, announced his intention to hire 170 professionals "so that every product line can have its own digital media specialist".

Multilevel marketing

Another example of the major role played by women is direct sales, often also called multilevel marketing. This very popular approach was first seen in the USA, then in Asia, especially certain ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, and has also expanded in Russia and Europe, particularly central Europe with Oriflame, and now mainland China, where the sector's annual sales already exceed several billion dollars. All direct sales businesses operate through a network in which more than 85% of freelancers are women, responsible for defining their own strategies.

Among the world leaders in direct sales, the two firms Avon and Amway alone have networks of several million female freelancers, and register total annual sales of some \$20 billion between them. In other words, these millions of businesswomen who have set up and own their own business are developing genuine management qualities and real strategies, helped and advised by the owners of the brands they sell, and their work to promote the product leads to sales growth.

Apart from Amway and Avon, which reached its hundredth anniversary long ago, women have taken a dominant position in sales of a very diverse range of products made by companies such as Oriflame, Herbalife, Natura (Brazil) and more recently Tiens (China). The predominance and obvious success of women in most direct sales disciplines, where success requires compliance with professional rules of long-proven efficiency, appears particularly relevant today, notably due to all the connection possibilities offered by technology, and the unavoidable need to replace all the jobs destined to disappear in the near future.

Women's predominance and obvious success in direct sales is part of the same general phenomenon observed in the largest companies. A recent study (2014) by American Express covering the period 1997 to 2014 shows that businesses started by women increased by 68%,

and businesses started by black women increased by 216%. By 2018, small women-owned businesses will account for half of the job market.

In e-marketing.fr in March 2015, Thomas Pike - who had given the list of France's 8 most influential women in marketing - reported that one of them, Frédérique Agnès, who set up Media Prisme in 1995, had become one of public broadcaster France Télévision's panel of experts on matters concerning women.

In Russia, "in 10 years' time, there will be more businesswomen and women managers than men". In January 2014, the Voice of Russia published the following text (here translated from the French):

"The financial elite in the United Kingdom is already 47% female. Several prestigious companies such as Data Monitor, Deloitte and Barclays Wealth Management have published the following information: Women are rapidly overtaking men in education, career development and new business creation. If things carry on like this, there will soon be fewer men than women in management positions."

Women: more active and more energetic than men

Psychologist Irakli Pozharisky noted: "The feminist movement has necessarily played an important role in the promotion of women. In business, learning capacities, personal skills, energy and intuition are vital. Taking an objective view of modern society, young men seem to be more infantile. Men are less inclined to take on responsibility. And in recent times, women are more active. Comparing Europe and Russia, we see the same phenomena in Russia. The highest-paid jobs are still occupied by men. But women are actively fighting for a place in the spotlight. Above all they want to succeed by themselves."

In the family, there have been great changes in women's nature and role: they have not necessarily become simpler, but they are no doubt clearer. When companies like Google and Apple openly release their proposal (or recommendation) to certain female executives not to think about starting a family before the age of 35, because they are and will be too important in their work life before that point... and offer them \$25,000 to freeze their eggs for the future, that is clearly one way to clarify their human resource policy.

Many other companies have had no qualms over clearly setting out, one way or another, the criteria for a successful employee. Some of the most common examples are:

- 1- Be sure to become familiar with and use the best new technologies
- 2- Constant improvement of customer service is an objective that has no limits
- 3- Learning and constant training concern both customers and employees

4- Knowledge of and adjustment to local cultures are always vitally important

5- Sourcing is by definition vitally important

Do these five criteria concern men more than women in their work? The question is not easy to answer, given the wide variety of challenges facing all companies of every kind. In fact the current and future boom in communication and marketing tools and methods makes it impossible to answer. Their use might encourage us to put the same question differently: is it possible or desirable for the role and repetitive actions of men and women in the tasks and organisations of the contemporary world to be necessarily and principally different?

In CAC 40 index companies in France in 2014, only five women were identified as members of a top management team (at Renault, Danone, Engie, Orange, and Unibail-Rodanco). Another five women were also at the head of the largest French digital companies. The Los Angeles Times has reported that in 2015, 17% of female employees at Google are in engineering positions, compared to 15% at Facebook and 20% at Apple. If these percentages rise substantially in the next few months or years, what real influence will that have on new strategies?

In other words, will women's influence in the future of marketing strategies be seriously affected? Should we set limits and continue to encourage the emergence – and the beauty? – of women in marketing for reasons that are primarily economic and financial, or should we incorporate the aim for a more agreeable life at work? This is underlined by Académie Française member François Cheng who reminds us that “beauty is ethics itself, since it always implies an unexpected, unhoped-for encounter”. This encounter is with the client, beyond what exactly is expected or hoped for.

Examples of successful women

Many women choose to study luxury marketing: female graduates of such programmes work in all segments of the luxury goods industry, including the boutiques and stores of course. As already noted, their enthusiasm for studying luxury marketing doubtless results from their taste and instinctive sense of interpersonal relations. For Shayda de Bary, a boutique manager with Sonia Rykiel⁷ “knowing more about a brand is like learning a new language. As soon as you start to learn the vocabulary you really want to talk about it”.

⁷ Michaela Merk, Manager les vendeurs du luxe, Dunod, 2015

The case of the English firm Burberry, which dates back to 1856, is significant as regards the role played by women in its development. At the end of the 20th century, Burberry had literally lost its identity. In less than twenty years, two successive female CEOs, Rose Marie Bravo and Angela Ahrenda, very successfully restored a corporate culture and a new strategy. Another example is Chanel, which had a single millinery store in Paris in 1910. Chanel's annual sales for 2014 are estimated at €5 billion.

In the ranking of the most sought-after brands⁸, Chanel comes behind Audi and BMW, but ahead of Vuitton, Prada, Dior, Burberry, Armani and Versace. At Hermès, where sales amounted to €600 million in 1926, the figure is now well above the €4 billion mark.

Regarding employee qualifications, the leading luxury companies have long sought to develop partnerships or striven to forge active links with the best universities or equivalent institutions concerned by their own sectors. Above all, they want to identify the best and most talented students. Almost 80% of the students enrolled on specialist luxury management or marketing courses created by business schools such as ESSEC, HEC and ESCP in Paris are women, and every year they naturally attract the attention of luxury companies prepared to fast-track them to responsible positions in strategy and management.

The 8 Ps of luxury marketing

Every marketing manager, like every company manager, is a professional of other people's desires. The "other person" is the client. André Comte Sponville⁹ singles out the thought of Plato (desire as a lack) and Spinoza (desire as power). The question arises of whether the choices made by men are very different from the choices made by women.

Ashok Som and Christian Blanckaert, in their recent book¹⁰, propose an updated version of Philip Kotler's famous 4 Ps for the luxury industry. They double the number to 8 Ps, and put the spotlight on an interesting character: the nomad. Their description of the nomad and the nomad's life, in under three pages, corresponds to the various success criteria of luxury industry patricians, but should certainly not prevent other professional sectors from putting them into practice. The 8 Ps of luxury are also available for anyone wishing to make use of them, or who thinks they are helpful. The two authors sum up their brief description of the

⁸ World Luxury Index, China 2013, Digital Luxury Group

⁹ André Comte Sponville, *Repenser l'entreprise*, Le cherche midi, 2008

¹⁰ Ashok Som and Christian Blanckaert, *The road to luxury*, Wiley 2015

nomad world as follows: “Emotion, desire, beauty, care and culture are the natural companions of nomads – and of luxury.”

PART III

Women and the purchase and consumption decision

Research into changes in the relative influence of men and women on purchase and consumption decisions is rare, and already old. There are many analyses of the influence of gender, although the concept of gender remains ill-defined and difficult to operationalise.

The existing research shows that over the period 1955-1973, spouses were more specialised for autonomous decisions (food, life insurance) while both partners participated more in syncretic decisions (car, house, holidays). In the authors’ view¹¹, this could be explained by the rapidly-changing role of women, who were becoming more active and more individualistic.

More recently, a study by the CREDOC¹² has looked into the differences in motivation between men and women as regards consumption.

Women are more involved than men in the consumer world. “They occupy this space more broadly as a place of political and social commitment.” In 2013, women’s purchase motivations were driven more than men’s by a feeling of responsibility concerning the criteria of local production (made in France, or in the region), quality labels and support for humanitarian causes.

Clothes-shopping appears to be a primarily female leisure activity. This type of shopping is often done by women together, with their mother, sister, daughter or with friends. A shopping trip is an outing, with no particular need to buy clothes. It is enjoyable and not subject to time constraints. Men, on the other hand, tend to see this kind of shopping as a utilitarian – and solo – activity. Some, particularly in the older generations, are willing to delegate it to their wife or girlfriend. They see it above all as meeting a need, and spend as little time as possible in the shops.

For both men who live alone and households with a majority of men, spending on alcohol and cigarettes is significantly higher than in households with a higher female component. The

¹¹ Green, R., T. and I. C. M. Cunningham, *Feminine role perception and family purchase decision*, Journal of Marketing Research, Vol. 12, 1975

¹² Mothe, Thierry and Pascale Hebel, *Comment consomment les hommes et les femmes ?* Document du CREDOC, December 2013

previously male-only habits of drinking and smoking have retained a more masculine status even though the younger generations of women are smoking more and more. Concerning drinking, many women in the younger generations continue to avoid alcohol. The difference faded between 2006 and 2013 but is still highly significant. There is no marked effect of an interest in others, and the difference remains large between single men and single women. This gender behaviour continues to be passed on in the traditional way in our society.

Experimenting with new communication tools remains a masculine trait. Rather than their utility, it is the “fun” aspects of these objects that drives men to acquire them. Younger men are the most attracted to all things new: 52% of 18-34-year-olds are keen to buy products with a technological innovation, compared to 28% of women in the same age bracket. The difference is smaller among the 55-and-over age group, but still substantial: 41% for men, 26% for women.

For women, online shopping is often a choice made necessary by the difficulty of getting around. All the same, they are more sensitive to the atmosphere of shopping spaces, and express greater enthusiasm for going to the shops.

Food eaten in the home accounts for more expenditure in more masculine households, although no difference is observed in the budget coefficient between single men and single women, all other things being equal. This difference can be considered not as a gender-related difference, but a sex-related difference. In the case of single-person households, it is not significant because men who live alone eat out a little more, but in larger households physiological differences (greater energy needs) make themselves felt.

Housing expenditure is higher in more feminine households, but the male/female difference is not significant for single-person households. Once again, this difference can be explained by the physiological effect of a lower tolerance of cold temperatures, rather than a gender-related imitation effect.

In choices regarding communication, the difference is confirmed. While single women do not spend more of their budget than men on communication (services and equipment), more feminine households devote a slightly larger budget share to communication.

Differences remain between men and women or male and female, but they are fading and could soon disappear.

Brands are already targeting women.

Products designed for men are being feminised¹³. In autumn 2012 the Nissan Micra brand

¹³ This section draws on blog.alerti.com.

launched a partnership with *Elle* magazine for a model called Elle. The visuals showed a car with a rounded shape, surrounded by women's beauty products and fashion accessories. French bank Société Générale has bank cards "to make a woman's life better¹⁴", available in seven designs in shades of pink, grey and gold. The feminisation of the product goes beyond the visual aspect, as the range also comes with "handbag theft" insurance. Danone Eaux France launched Taillefine Fiz, "the drink women have been waiting for¹⁵", on an emerging market. The product was very successful, registering 72% growth in 2006 and 10.4% market share in 2008. The brand now has a range of 7 products and paved the way for soft drinks aimed primarily at women. Pastis 51, a famous and typically masculine drink, recently brought out a *pastis rosé* with a cooler, fruitier and most importantly, milder taste than traditional pastis.

What lies ahead for this "pinkwashing", which has already strongly been criticised by its intended targets? Faith Popcorn, the high priestess of female marketing, has written, "Neither female nor male, just human! The battle of the sexes is over".

For an as yet undetermined horizon, peace looks probable. Two processes are taking us there. The heritage of the past, which differentiated the social roles of men and women and brought about genders, is fading away. "Asexual" marketing could be the result. Women's rise to power and the emergence of a dominant matriarchy could turn "female" marketing into just "marketing".

CONCLUSION

A new human society is springing up. Continuing the trends observed today, that society will see women exercising the most enriching functions and dominating men in terms of purchasing power, and power in general.

Women's power in corporate marketing functions is undeniable – first due to their sheer numbers, but increasingly due to the level of responsibility now assigned to them. But men are often more mobile, less caught up in family commitments, and make freer use of the powers given by bankers and investors, at least when they are prepared to take the risks inherent to any new investment. But men on their own can only rarely detect all the subtleties or potentiality of a new development sector, new brands, new technologies and new styles of management and control. Particularly in relation to present or future clients, and the ways they change.

¹⁴ *Pour rendre la vie des femmes plus belle*

¹⁵ *la boisson qui manquait aux femmes*

Many marketing strategy departments have little chance of becoming “unisex” as it seems very clear that their interests are best served by the opposite situation.

In terms of purchases and consumption, women’s behaviour has been observed in the family unit and during the family life-cycle. Dissolution of the family unit challenges these observations, by giving women autonomy in the purchase and consumption decision. They are already the principal buyers in the family unit. Outside that unit, they will buy and consume everything including cigarettes, alcohol, cars, and all the products and services considered as “men’s”. Their purchasing power will make them the primary target of product designers and communication networks; what is more, they will be in charge of those networks, as changes in large companies show.

Will marketing therefore be “gendered” or “sexed”? Nothing could be more certain. The dominant woman will still be a woman by sex. Will she be a woman by gender, even though gender results broadly from historical inheritances that have disappeared today?

Let us dare to make a prophecy: women with power at work, in society and in their personal lives are destined to behave like men.