Title: Brand stereotypes: the relevance of having a female vs male
personality brand

Abstract: Building a meaningful and differentiable brand identity appealing for customer keeps on being a challenge for companies nowadays. Facing this challenge, companies use gender to position their brands. This research contributes to brand gender and brand stereotypes literature with new insights about the relationship between them. A study with 490 participants analyses the effect of brand masculinity and brand femininity personalities on brand stereotypes (competence and warmth). Additionally, this research relates brand stereotypes with customer-brand identification.

Introduction.

Research on branding and social psychology establishes the presence of gender bias on consumers' products assessments (Hess and Melnyk, 2016; Spielmann et al., 2021). These assessments not only depend on the gender of the consumer but also on the gender of the brand since consumers can perceive a brand as a human-like entity. It is a common practice to position brands as feminine or masculine with the use of cues such as logo's colours or shapes (Craham, 2021, Hess and Melnyk, 2016), advertising, promotion or even distribution (Aley and Thomas, 2021, Neale et al., 2016). The successful use of brand gender strategies is well documented in the branding literature (e.g., Aley and Thomas, 2021; Machado et al., 2019). Brand gender impacts cross-gender extensions and segmentation strategies (Avery, 2012, Azar et al., 2018; Veg-Sala, 2017), consumer-based brand equity (Machado et al., 2019), consumers' brand perceptions and purchasing behaviour (Hess and Melnyk, 2016, Spielmann et al., 2021). However, backfires are also documented (Avery, 2012; Azar, 2013), what suggest that despite been a common practise, it is unclear how to better use brand gender. Because consumers need to belong and tend to stablish a strong identification with brands, understanding the role of the gender of a brand (masculine vs feminine) can actually be of practical use to companies.

Previous research suggests that gender cues, such as the ones included in product packaging or advertising, can activate content relating to warmth and competence (Hess and Melnyk, 2016). However, there is sparse evidence supporting this relationship. In this sense, social role theory explains the different roles men and women are thought to occupy in society (Eagly, 2013). Men are expected to be agentic, while women are expected to be communal. In a context where brands tend to perpetuate men and women stereotypes, it is not clear how nowadays people process this information. In an attempt to understand the link between brand gender personality (masculinity and femininity) and brand stereotypes (warmth and competence), our study pursues to answer the following key questions: (1) do brands with a masculine personality activates brand competence perceptions, (2) do brands with a feminine personality activates brand warmth perceptions and (3) do brands stereotypes (warmth and competence) positively affect consumer's identification with the brand.

Therefore, the objectives of the present study are to (1) examine the impact of masculine and feminine brand personalities on brand warmth and competence perceptions, and (2) assess the impact of brand warmth and competence on consumer's brand identification.

Theoretical Framework and hypotheses

Stereotype content model (SCM) and Brands as Intentions Agents Framework (BIAF)

Social psychologists have showed evidence of the universality of both warmth and competence as basic stereotyping dimensions (Fiske et al., 2002, 2007, Cuddy et al., 2008). These two universal dimensions are used

both at the individual level and at the group level of human social cognition (Fiske et al., 2007). According to the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), when people have to interact with others (individuals or groups), they use these dimensions to guide their decisions. While warmth answers the question of "what intentions has the other/s towards me?", competence answers the question of "is/are the other/s capable of implementing these intentions?". Therefore, warmth includes trustworthiness, sincerity, helpfulness, kindness, friendliness (Aaker et al., 2010; Ivens et al., 2015; Kolbl et al., 2020); whereas competence captures efficiency, effectiveness, intelligence, skilfulness, competitiveness, ability, and initiative (Aaker et al., 2010; Ivens et al., 2015; Kervin et al., 2021).

In the last decade, the SCM has been applied to the brand consumption realm. Aaker et al., (2010) used the model to apply it to organisations (non-profits). Meanwhile, Kervyn et al. (2012) extended the aforementioned model to propose a Brands as Intention Agents Framework (BIAF). This framework not only uses warmth and competence to explain how consumers think about brands, but also it identifies four emotions (admiration, contempt, pity and envy) that mediate the impact of consumers' cognitive perceptions (warmth and competence) on their behaviour and differentiate four competence-warmth combinations. Kervyn et al.'s (2012) seminal work has laid new foundations on how brands can be evaluated within the warmth and competence dimensions. Since then, research has proved that brand stereotyping results in positive brand evaluations, increase purchase intentions, brand ownership, perceptions of value (Aaker et al., 2012; Ivens et al., 2015, Kolbl et al., 2020), brand endorsement on social media (Bernritter et al., 2016), and it also has an impact on advertising effectiveness (Zawisza and Pittar, 2015) among other aspects. In their model, Stokburger-Sauer et al., (2012) include brand warmth as antecedent of Customer Brand Identification (CBI) together with another five determinants. Other studies have identified antecedents for one or both brand stereotypes (Aaker et al., 2010, Davvetas and Halkias, 2019, Diamantopoulos et al., 2021, Gidaković et al., 2021, Ivens et al., 2015; Kolbl et al., 2020,). For example, a recent study links country competence stereotypes with brand competence stereotypes and country warmth stereotypes with brand warmth stereotypes, finding out that the effects of brand competence are stronger on brand attitude than the effects of brand warmth (Diamantopoulos et al., 2021).

Brand Gender Personality

Brand gender is defined in his seminal work by Grohmann (2009, p. 106) as "the set of human personality traits associated with masculinity and femininity applicable and relevant to brands". Previous research on gendered brands resulted on conclusions such as: women will buy female-typed and male-typed products, but men will not buy female-typed products (Avery, 2012; Neale et al., 2016; Spielmann et al., 2021); strongly gendered brands not only increase word of mouth (Grohmann, 2009) but also influence consumer-based brand equity (Lieven et al., 2014). In this sense, there is evidence that consumers rely on gendered brands as "props to perform their gender identities" (Avery, 2012, p. 322). Brand gender is still a key construct in branding since it contributes to the brand equity more than

other personality dimensions (Lieven et al., 2014). Gendered brands are a mean for consumers to materialise gender, they enliven "who we are as men or women" (Avery, 2012, p. 323). This can explain why gendering products is a common advertising practice to attract a target audience (Aley and Thomas, 2021). Moreover, gendered products have basic functional characteristics acceptable for any gender, but use visible cues (logos, names, colour, texture, shape, packaging), advertising, promotion or even distribution so the brand can be identified primarily with one sex (Neale et al., 2016).

Brand gender includes two dimensions, masculine brand personality traits and feminine brand personality traits (Grohmann, 2009). These genders are subject to stereotypes. The role of stereotypes is important since they serve as lens through which individuals view the world. Stereotypes affect how people process information about gender and influence their judgments about other members or non-members of their group (Hess and Melnyk, 2016x). For example, women are considered to be warm, kind, friendly, communal, and caring, while men typically are competent, forceful, agentic, rational, confident, and assertive (Hess and Melnyk, 2016; Veg-Sala, 2017).

Gender and sex are often used interchangeably. However, we need to stress that these are two different constructs. Sex is a demographic trait since it refers to the biological sex (i.e., male vs female). Meanwhile, gender is a psychological or social construct which reflect a person's social or psychological sex (Azar, 2013).

Despite the relevance of the use of the gender to develop brand positioning strategies and the fact that brands are perceived as intention agents, to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that analyse how the use of a female/male personality brands affects perceptions of brand warmth and competence. Furthermore, the link between brand stereotypes (warmth and competence) perceptions and brand customer identification have only partially been tested (Kolb et al., 2019).

Hypotheses

Based on gender schemas (Greenwald, 1980), when brands explicitly position themselves as feminine or masculine, brand gender identity is salient. This results in the activation of the associated brand stereotype. In this sense, a brand with a masculine gender identity will have personality traits associated with masculinity such as self-centredness, physical power, hardness, adventure, assertiveness, and high-risk behaviours (Azar, 2013, Grohmann, 2009). Meanwhile, a brand with a feminine gender identity will have personality traits associated with femininity such as sensitive, tender, affective, fragile, or graceful among others (Grohmann, 2009). Those personality traits will influence the judgments of the two dimensions (competence and warmth) of brand stereotypes. In this line, empirical evidence shows how salient gender identity activates positive gender stereotypes, more specifically, "woman equals warm" (White and Gardner, 2009, p. 247). Therefore, we expect that a masculine brand personality will influence brand competence perceptions, and that a feminine brand personality will influence brand warmth perceptions. Then,

H1: Brand masculinity has a positive effect on brand competence.

H2: Brand femininity has a positive effect on brand warmth.

Brands can "embody, inform, and communicate desirable consumer identities" (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p. 406). They have become a tool for customers to express themselves by contributing to their identity. According to social identity theory, people could feel a sense of belonging to a brand through self-definition. More specifically, consumers can psychologically connect with the brand creating a strong long-term relationship with it (Büyükdağ and Kitapci, 2021). Consumer-brand identification (CBI) can be defined as "a consumer's psychological state consisting of three elements: perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand" (Lam et al., 2013, p. 236). CBI is key due to its capability to explain consumer behaviour (Kolb et al., 2019).

Based on previous research we expect that both warmth and competence can create a sense of liking or admiration that can be translated to consumers' identification with the brand, therefore we propose that:

H3: Brand competence has a positive influence on consumer brand identification.

H4: Brand warmth has a positive influence on consumer brand identification.

Figure 1. Conceptual model
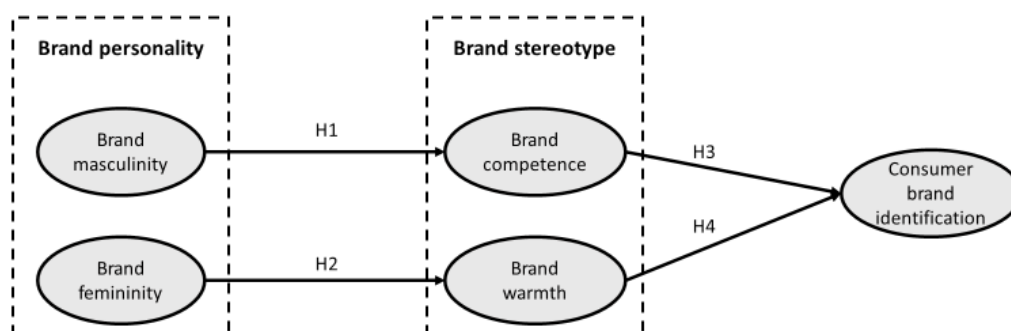
Additional variables such as brand familiarity, product involvement, utilitarian and hedonic nature of the product among others are included in the model to control their potential effect.

Methodology

A pilot test generated a pool of product categories and real brand names to use in the study. A panel of two marketing professors elaborated a list of ten suitable product categories. Based on the previous list, a test was conducted with a convenience sample of 57 people (65% women). They had to evaluate familiarity and brand name's gender neutrality from a list of 30 brands to select familiar brands without any gender-specific resonance (Veg-Sala, 2017). The criteria to retain brands was (1) to be familiar to both women and men (score higher than 3,5 in a 7-point scale), and (2) to be rated higher than 4 on the neutrality item (see Appendix 1).

Grohmann (2009) scales are used to measure Brand femininity (7 items) and Brand masculinity (7 items). Brand competence is measured with 7 items from Fiske et al. (2002) and Halkias and Diamantopolous (2020). Brand warmth is also measured with 7 items from Fiske et al. (2002) and Halkias and Diamantopolous (2020). Consumer brand identification is measured with 4 items from Kolb et al. (2019) and Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012). Brand familiarity is measured with 3 items from Simonin and Ruth (1998). Product involvement is measured with 3 items from Strazzieri (1994) and Veg-Sala (2017). Finally, product utilitarian nature and product hedonic nature are measured with 3 items each one of them from Voss et al. (2003).

Then, we have used lists of distribution in a university to randomly allocate one of the 21 brands (4 categories). After the distribution of 15.136 emails, 490 questionnaires have been collected (3.2% response rate).

Expected results and discussion

The expected results will offer useful managerial implications, as well as provide further insight into the brand stereotypes theory since the study has collected data from a with a wide range of real brands and type of products. In the first place, the results will reveal the impact of gendered brand personality on warmth and competence. In the second place, the model will contribute to understand the relative importance of warmth and competence in predicting a key variable, consumer-brand identification. Finally, practical conclusions from the results could help professionals to take decisions on different context.

APPENDIX 1: Product categories and brands

Technological product	Brands
Social networks & Smartphones	Pinterest, LinkedIn, Samsung, Sony, Snapchat, TikTok, Apple
Personal care product categories	
Deodorants	Dove, Nivea
Food product categories	
Chocolate & Snacks	Nestle, Ferrero Roche, Lay, Pringles, Ruffles, Milka, Suchard
Fashion product categories	
Shoes & Clothes	Zara, Pull & Bear, Nike, Adidas, New Balance

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