

MARKETING

Master Gender Identity in Consumer Behavior: Boost Your Marketing Connection

by Jorge Pena Marin, Micayla Downey, Ayalla Ruvio, and G. Tomas M. Hult



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Strategic Approaches to Connecting with Male and Female Consumers

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Gender identity can influence how consumers respond to marketing initiatives in multiple ways. Procter & Gamble's (P&G) campaign for the brand always "Like a Girl" empowered young women by using gender identity to challenge stereotypes. This campaign multiplied by three the percentage of girls that have a positive association with the phrase "like a girl",

from 19% to 76%, and 94% of viewers agreed that the campaign helped girls to feel more confident. Another successful campaign was Old Spice's "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like". It focused on traditional masculine ideals such as confidence, charisma, and humor. Both campaigns resonated with their respective target markets, increasing brand engagement and sales. Thus, managers need to understand how and why gender might affect consumers' reactions to their marketing efforts.

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Ming Hsu, "[Neuromarketing: Inside the Mind of the Consumer](#)," California Management Review, Volume 59, Issue 4, 2017.

Based on a recent [review](#) summarizing consumer behavior research in gender identity over the last 10 years, we focus on four key areas that highlight how managers and marketers can benefit from understanding gender differences in consumption settings:

- Gender Influences in Marketing Communications and Advertising: Women prefer harmony whereas men are persuaded by simplicity. Sympathy appeals are more effective for women, while pride appeals resonate more with men. Humorous ads are particularly effective for women when employing nontraditional stereotypes.
- Gender Differences in Luxury Consumption: Women use luxury products to screen out undesirable pursuers, as well as to guard their existing romantic partner from female competitors, and they value refinement and heritage. Men, on the other hand, use luxury consumption to attract romantic partners, and as a signal of status, value, and exclusivity. Men also increase spending on status-signaling products when attended by physically dominant employees.

- **Gender Differences in Experiential Consumption:** Women derive happiness from meaningful experiences whereas men prefer pleasurable ones. Women compared to men are more likely to opt for surprise offerings, whereas men prefer having a higher degree of control over the purchase experience.
- **Gender Roles in Sustainable Consumption and Prosocial Behavior:** Sustainable consumption is associated with femininity which deters men if made salient, women typically pay more than men for products using a pay-what-you-want scheme due to their higher communal orientation whereas men increase their payment if provides individual benefits, women also donate more than men if reminded of their ideal identity and they also prefer products made by female producers.

Managers who consider these gender identity-consumer behavior areas can develop strategies that better resonate with both male and female consumers, fostering stronger customer relationships and business success.

Gender Influences in Marketing Communications and Advertising

Regarding marketing materials, men tend to prefer simplicity and clean designs, generally responding better to designs that may require less cognitive effort, whereas women tend to appreciate **harmonious** and aesthetically pleasing visuals that align with their gender identity and personal style. Two reasons might be responsible for these differences. First, biological sex influences early-stage perception due to differences in processing abilities. Secondly, gender identity affects later-stage evaluations due to self-congruity perceptions.

Across genders, prosocial behavior can be impacted by the use of different **emotions** in persuasive appeals; sympathy appeals are more effective for women, while pride appeals resonate more with men. For instance, women will be more likely to donate to a charitable organization that uses sympathy-based messages highlighting the terrible situation of those in need. However, men may be inspired to donate by an appeal that emphasizes the satisfaction of supporting a project that has achieved success.

Humor can also have a differential impact based on how gender-role stereotypes are used in advertising. **Humor** enhances the effectiveness of advertising, particularly when it employs *non*traditional stereotypes instead of traditional ones. Further, humor in stereotyped advertisements tends to have a greater impact on women than on men. Women tend to evaluate gender portrayals more favorably and perceive them as more credible in humorous ads than in non-humorous ones, especially when nontraditional stereotypes are used rather than traditional stereotypes. An effective campaign might then humorously depict a man struggling with domestic tasks, which challenges traditional stereotypes and can be engaging and memorable.

In sum, while for male audiences marketing managers may find it beneficial to use bold, clear, and simple designs, for female consumers, harmonious and intricate visuals would resonate with their sense of identity and aesthetic appreciation. Regarding humor, it can be used to challenge traditional gender roles, which should enhance advertising appeal and effectiveness. For example, nontraditional stereotypes in humorous contexts can make advertisements more relatable to a broader audience. Finally, when designing persuasive messages, marketers should match the type of emotional appeal used to their target. Whereas for women sympathy-driven content might be advantageous, for men, pride-focused narratives will be more persuasive.

Gender Differences in Luxury Consumption

Gender also influences how luxury products are used as a signaling tool. Whereas women generally utilize luxury products to show their **high standards** and discourage unwanted partners, men often use luxury goods to convey resources, and thus, to attract potential partners. For example, a lady might buy an expensive designer handbag not just for its aesthetic appeal but also to convey that she has an elevated taste and high expectations, which might discourage men who might not meet her standards. However, men might purchase an expensive watch not only for its enjoyment but also to signal high status and attract desirable potential partners.

Women also use luxury products as a protective mechanism. That is, this type of conspicuous consumption **signals** a healthy relationship, therefore deterring potential female rivals. In this sense, wearing a piece of jewelry can signal to other women the strength and commitment of their relationship, reducing the likelihood of rival interference.

Men and women also associate different **values** with luxury brand consumption. Women prioritize refinement and heritage, while men emphasize exclusivity and elitism. As an example, a woman may focus on product associations with craftsmanship and history, and she might appreciate the details and legacy behind the product. However, a man might focus on owning a limited-edition item that sets him apart from others, highlighting his unique status.

In addition, men tend to spend more on status-signaling products in the presence (versus absence) of physically dominant male staff, an effect labeled as **“The Abercrombie & Fitch Effect”**. Intriguingly, this effect seems more noticeable within men who do not possess physical dominance themselves. For instance, a man might be more likely to buy a pricey suit if helped by a tall, well-built salesperson, as the encounter can increase his desire to demonstrate status with his purchase.

As key strategic takeaways, when it comes to luxury brands, those targeting women may find it beneficial to position their products as symbols of personal values and high standards, also highlighting that owning luxury items may reflect women’s expectations in social and romantic contexts. Additionally, luxury products might be marketed as symbols of relationship commitment and exclusivity. Further, managers in luxury markets need to leverage the right product associations based on their target. Whereas for female consumers, brand associations with heritage, quality, and refined elegance would be more beneficial, for male consumers, companies should focus on exclusivity, rarity, and the status-enhancing aspects of the products. Finally, if a company sells products associated with status and prestige to male customers, having dominant male staff may encourage consumers to make higher-end purchases.

Gender Differences in Experiential Consumption

Women obtain more life satisfaction and **happiness** from meaningful experiences, whereas men seem to obtain more from entertaining ones. This difference in preferences for men and women may occur because women tend to have a higher Need for Cognition (NFC), which leads them to reflect more deeply on their experiences. As an example, a woman attending a cultural immersion workshop may find more fulfillment from the depth and significance of the experience, whereas men might prefer attending a thrilling event that is more focused on enjoyment and excitement.

Retailers have recently introduced products that intentionally conceal some information from the consumer at the time of decision-making, such as restaurants offering a "chef's choice" or retailers selling collectible vinyl figures in blind boxes. Men are less likely than women to opt for these **surprise offerings** due to a stronger desire for control over purchase outcomes, whereas women's higher tolerance for uncertainty makes them more receptive to surprise products.

To summarize the key strategic takeaways, while for female audiences, experiences that provide depth, purpose, and opportunities for reflection should be emphasized, for male audiences, activities that offer excitement, fun, and instant gratification are advised. If a retailer offers surprise products to men, it should consider providing more control over the purchase by offering hints or partial information about the possible contents, or by allowing customization options that allow some level of control. For female customers, managers should emphasize the thrill and novelty that come with surprise offerings.

Gender Roles in Sustainable Consumption and Prosocial Behavior

Gender also affects sustainable consumer behavior. **Eco-friendly** products seem to be stereotypically associated with femininity, and thus, their purchase fits with women but men may avoid using them to protect their masculine image. As a consequence, a man might hesitate to carry a reusable shopping bag or purchase eco-friendly household items

because these actions might be perceived as less masculine. We suggest that marketing managers should rebrand sustainable products with more masculine cues to appeal to male consumers.

Gender also impacts **Pay-What-You-Want** (PWYW) contexts; women typically pay more than men due to their communal orientation and consideration of social factors, whereas men tend to pay less because they focus more on economic factors and also consider their self-interest. This suggests that companies using PWYW schemes should differ in their strategy based on their main target market. If they primarily target men, managers should emphasize how larger payments may personally benefit them, whereas if they mainly target women they could focus on the societal benefit. For instance, a museum operating on a PWYW admission model allows visitors to choose how much they pay for entry. In this case, women will generally pay more in such contexts because of their communal orientation and concern for supporting the museum and its role in the community. Men, on the other hand, might focus more on their economic personal interest and may pay less. Thus, offering recognition, such as providing them with a special badge or souvenir or listing donors on a website, can appeal to men's desire for status and personal acknowledgment.

There are also differences in **marketplace donations**. Women are more likely to increase donations when primed with moral traits, whereas men do not exhibit the same behavior. This effect appears to happen because women and men prioritize different moral characteristics. This means that when women are reminded of moral characteristics like kindness, generosity, or responsibility, they tend to donate more. This effect occurs because donating helps women reduce the gap between their actual moral identity and their ideal moral identity—essentially, giving allows them to feel that they are living up to their moral standards. For example, a woman who feels that she hasn't donated enough in the past may be more inclined to give generously after receiving a message that highlights moral responsibility and the positive impact of her contribution with messages such as “Your generosity can make a real difference” or “Join us in spreading kindness.”

Gender also moderates the impact of business ownership. Whereas women tend to prefer products made by **female producers** over male producers, this is not the case for men. This difference between women and men seems to be linked to women's belief in

individual action efficacy and their desire to reduce social inequalities.

As key strategic takeaways, if companies target eco-friendly products to men, they may find it advantageous to include masculine cues such as rugged designs, colors associated with masculinity, or attributes like strength and performance. Further, organizations targeting men using Pay-What-You-Want payment formats may emphasize the personal benefits of their contributions and the direct advantages that they will receive.

For nonprofit organizations targeting women, messages emphasizing moral values and personal fulfillment might be advantageous, whereas those targeting men may emphasize the tangible outcomes and personal benefits of the donations, such as social recognition. Finally, highlighting the role of female creators may have a beneficial effect when targeting women. In this regard, storytelling that emphasizes women's contributions can appeal to consumers' social values and encourage them to support brands that promote gender equality.

Conclusion

Understanding the effect of gender on consumer behavior is essential for managers, marketers, and retailers seeking to create effective strategies that resonate with their target audiences. The review of gender differences in marketing communications, luxury and experiential consumption, and prosocial behaviors, can help businesses to enhance consumer engagement, build stronger brand connections, and drive sales. Integrating these insights into marketing strategies not only improves their effectiveness but also contributes to more personalized and inclusive consumer experiences, ultimately leading to greater success in the marketplace.



Jorge Pena Marin [Follow](#)

Jorge Pena Marin, PhD, is a senior marketing consultant, former executive for TBWA, Mercedes-Benz, and Accenture, and current faculty at the Broad College of Business, Michigan State University. Dr. Pena Marin helps multinational corporations make informed decisions based on science-based / data-driven principles.



Micayla Downey [Follow](#)

Micayla Downey is a doctoral candidate at the Broad College of Business, Michigan State University. She previously worked as a consumer insights analyst and brand researcher for PSB Insights and CARFAX, turning data into actionable recommendations for some of the world's largest technology companies.



Ayalla Ruvio [Follow](#)

Ayalla Ruvio, PhD, is associate dean of MBA and Master's Programs, and an applied consumer behavior researcher at the Broad College of Business, Michigan State University. Her research has been featured in CNN, The TODAY Show, Good Morning America, TIME Magazine, New York Times, Forbes, Consumer Reports, and The Atlantic.



G. Tomas M. Hult [Follow](#)

G. Tomas M. Hult, PhD, is an executive with the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI); coauthor of Global Supply Chain Management; and professor at the Broad College of Business, Michigan State University. Dr. Hult is on the Expert Networks of the World Economic Forum and the UN's World Investment Forum.