

Rethinking Brand Feminine Dimension: Brand Femininity or Brand femininities?

Abstract :

The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of brand personality by focusing on feminine dimension of brands. Previous research in marketing considered the femininity of brands as a unidimensional construct often opposed to masculinity. Through several studies, we explore the structure and the nature of brand femininity construct. Results indicate that brand femininity is a bi-dimensional construct. A scale reliable and generalizable across product categories' gender is developed leading to the development of four brand femininity types. To finish, theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Key-words: Brand Gender, Brand Personality, Scale Development, typology.

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Introduction

Even though brand personality has been studied extensively in marketing literature (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 1985; Ferrandi and Valette-Florence, 2002; d’Astous and Lévesque, 2003; Koebel and Ladwein, 1999; Caprara et al., 2001), little research has delved into a deep exploration of the different sexual aspects attributed to brands (Alreck, 1994; Azar and Darpy, 2008). Some issues about brand sexual attributions have been addressed in the branding literature such as their impact on brand categorization process (Azar and Darpy, 2008), brand evaluation (Sirgy, 1982; Vitz and Johnson, 1965; Fry 1971; Alreck et al., 1982; Whipple and Courtney, 1985) and brand extension strategies (Jung and Lee, 2006). For instance, Vitz and Johnson (1965) showed that feminine women consumed cigarettes with feminine brand image. Yet, till date, brand feminine image remains an unexplored construct. All this lead us to raise some questions concerning the nature and the structure of this construct: can brand femininity be considered as a uni-dimensional or a multidimensional construct? Is there different types of femininities that can be attributed to brands? Especially that recent studies highlights the existence of different feminine aspects attributed to persons in general and to women in particular (Aléx et al., 2006)? In other words, should we talk about brand femininity or brand femininities?

In order to answer those questions, one of the main purposes of this research is to examine the structure and the nature of brand femininity as perceived by consumers. The first part of this paper focuses on a brief review of the literature about gender and femininity in general before developing brand as a person metaphor and the theoretical gap that this paper attends to fill. We then develop a series of studies allowing us to explore the nature and the structure of brand femininity dimension. Study 1 investigates the content validity and the feminine brand items’ generation. Study 2 explores the major feminine brand dimensions and study 3 allows for the development of a reliable and a valid feminine brand gender scale generalizable across product categories’ gender. In the last part of this paper, we propose a new typology of brand femininity based on the main feminine dimensions explored in previous studies. To conclude, theoretical and managerial implications are developed and future research directions are suggested.

1. Background:

Gender and Femininity: Most of authors who worked on gender have noted confusion between sex and gender in the literature (e.g. Deaux 1985; Pryzgoda and Christler 2000; Borna and White 2003; Carr, 2005). To avoid later confusion, it is important to distinguish those two aspects. While sex refers to the biological sex (i.e. human beings as males or females), gender reflects the social or psychological sex of the person (Bem 1985, Oakley 1972; Spense and Helmreich 1978; Pryzgoda and Christler 2000). After the call of Constantinople (1973) to move beyond a binary opposition of masculinity and femininity, Sandra Bem was the first to consider masculinity and femininity as two orthogonal and independent dimensions. She defines gender as “*the degree of masculinity and femininity of an individual*”. The sociological literature regard femininity from a subordinate perspective (Weltzer-Lang, 2000) stressing the men’s domination over women (Delphy, 1998; Mathieu, 1991), and most recent studies showed the existence of different kinds of femininities (Aléx, 2006). To summarize, the psychological literature teach us the independence of masculinity

and femininity, as for the sociological literature, it highlights the multiplicity of the feminine construct.

Brand Personality and Brand Gender: Although femininity figures as a component of brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997), it is considered as a uni-dimensional construct in most studies on brand research (Ferrandi et al., 1999) and most of the time it was measured using a single item (Aaker, 1997) or as an opposition to masculinity (Koeble and Ladwein, 1999; Wolin, 2003). Even though, the work of Bem (1974) gave a new vision of gender by considering masculinity and femininity independently, the uni-dimensionality of those constructs has been criticized by academics (Helgeson, 1994; Spence, 1984). On the other side, recent studies on brand sexual associations revealed the existence of three sexual constructs that can be attributed to brands: brand sex, brand gender and brand sexual orientation (Azar, 2007). Therefore, there are risks of confusion in the mind of consumers while scoring brand femininity on a single item. Do consumers refer to the feminine sex of the brand? To the feminine gender of the brand? Or even to the feminine sexual orientation of the brand? In order to overcome those problems, the development of a scale to capture the feminine gendered aspect of the brand personality must be conducted.

2. Construct definition

Brand femininity is defined here as “the set of feminine human personality characteristics that can be attributed to a brand”. In this regard, we consider brand femininity as dimension of brand personality.

3. Scale Development

To develop a scale measuring brand feminine gendered dimension, we followed the steps recommended by Churchill (1979).

Study 1: Content Validity and Item generation.

To generate the pool of feminine brand items, we followed the three theoretical recommendations of Osgood et al. (1957).

Item Factorial composition: We included in our pool of items, items from different psychological scales capturing the feminine gendered dimension of human being such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attribute Questionnaire (Spence et al. 1975). Moreover, we added items from different brand personality scales (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 1985; Ferrandi and Valette-Florence, 2002; d’Astous and Lévesque, 2003; Koebel and Ladwein, 1999; Caprara et al., 2001)

Usage frequency of Items: Both a paper-pen exercise and an interview approach were used to generate frequently used feminine items. 18 semi-structured interviews using projective techniques combined with a paper pen exercise asking respondents to quote all the traits they use to describe separately a brand for men and a brand for women. This last task first used by Bem in 1974 to generate the pool of items for her BSRI scale development was filled by 50 undergraduate students. After eliminating redundant items and those used to describe both types of brands (i.e. for men and for women), we filtered brand’s products or product categories’ associations (such as cotton, silk, square) from brands’ associations. Only associations used to describe brands as a person were added to the final pool of items.

Item Relevance: Overall, 273 masculine and feminine items were evaluated by 4 experts in consumer behavior's scales development according to their levels of reflecting the masculine/feminine brand constructs and also according to their applicability to brands. By the end of this evaluation, only 58 items were considered. Since gender is culturally defined, we tested statistically the relevance of those 58 items from a consumer's perspective. To do so, 157 French undergraduate students evaluated those items as to their level of representing separately a brand for man and a brand for woman, consistently with the approach of Bem. A paired sample t-test was conducted on the overall sample. Since we wanted to develop a scale generalizable across human sex, we also studied separately men and women. Only items with significant t test (sample and across the sexes) were kept and used to conduct a median split. The median split (Median Masculinity = 3.17; Median Femininity = 3.59) allowed us to distinguish masculine brand items (i.e. items scoring higher than the median on the masculine dimension and lower than the median on the feminine dimension) and the feminine brand items (i.e. scoring higher than the median on the feminine dimension and lower than the median on the masculine dimension). At this level, 14 feminine items listed below were left – see table 1.

< ----- Insert Table 1 here ----- >

Study 2: Exploring Dimensions of Brand Feminine Gender.

140 French undergraduate students evaluated 16 well known brands using the 14 feminine traits mentioned above using a seven point likert scale. On an average, each respondent evaluated 4 brand names. To control for product categories' effect on the perception of feminine brand personality scale, we had both symbolic and utilitarian brands represented in our sample of brand names: clothing brands (Zara, Levi's); Baskets (Reebok, Nike); lingerie (Dim, Aubade); Cars (BMW, Ferrari); Perfume (Calvin Klein, Lancôme, Armani); Soft Drinks and water (Coca Cola, Contrex); Fast Food (Mac Donald); Supermarkets (Monoprix) and banks (Société Générale). 494 usable responses were analyzed. An exploratory factor analysis conducted with SPSS 16.0.2 revealed two major feminine dimensions. After exclusion of cross loading items and those with communalities less than 0.5, 11 feminine items were left. We used Amos 5.0.1 for confirmatory factor analysis: NFI = .941, TLI = .937, CFI = .951, GFI = .908, AGFI=.859. SRMR = .040, RMSEA = .098.

Item reduction: The initial model's χ^2 is significant and $\chi^2/ ddf = 5.766 > 3$ (Bollen 1989), moreover the RMSEA is slightly greater than the accepted norm (.08). In order to have better fit indices, we eliminated items iteratively (following item to total correlations) until χ^2/ ddf became less than 3. Five items were eliminated: passionate, sentimental, romantic, delicate and Pretty. $\chi^2/ ddf = 2.985$; NFI = .988, TLI = .985, CFI = 1.000, GFI = .983, AGFI=.956. SRMR = .0242, RMSEA = .063.

Naming the two factors, reliability and internal validity: The first factor included items "tender", "affectionate" and "cuddle" and was called "Philanthropy". This factor accounted for 64.93% of total variance explained with Cronbach's alpha = .881 and $\rho_{J\ddot{o}reskog} = .881$. The second factor included two items "charming", "passionate" and "seductive" and was called "attractive". This factor accounted for 17.19% of total variance explained with Cronbach's alpha of .894 and $\rho_{J\ddot{o}reskog} = .895$. The correlation between the two factors is positive, high and significant ($r = .678$; $p = .000$). This correlation strongly suggests that both dimensions "Philanthropist" and "Attractive" measure the same construct "femininity". A second order exploratory factor analysis confirmed this interpretation, since both dimensions "Philanthropist" and "Attractive" load on a single factor accounting for 79.33% of total variance explained with Cronbach's alpha = .737 and $\rho_{J\ddot{o}reskog} = .813$.

Convergent validity: AVE is greater than .5 for both Philanthropist (.712) and Heroic (.741) dimensions (Fornell et Larcker, 1981), leading us to assume the unidimensionality of both dimensions. Moreover, all the links between latent variables and indicators are significant (Bagozzi et Yi, 1981).

Discriminant Validity: Multivariate ANOVA analysis was conducted on the means of scores on both masculine dimensions for each of the 16 brands. This analysis revealed to be significant showing the discriminated power of the scale across the brand names tested. Moreover, for each philanthropy and attractive dimensions, AVE is greater than the square of the correlation between the constructs (.47) (Fornell et Larcker, 1981).

Study 3: Generalization of these dimensions across product categories' gender.

The literature review highlights the existence of product categories' gender (Allison et al., 1980). Study 3 examines the generalizability of feminine dimensions across the different product categories' gender.

Selection of gendered product categories and brand names: 140 French undergraduate students evaluated different product categories according to their levels of masculinity and femininity, separately measured on a seven point likert scale (e.g. Perfumes are masculine: evaluated from 1 (strongly disagree) till 7 (strongly agree); Perfumes are feminine: evaluated from 1 (strongly disagree) till 7 (strongly agree)). After conducting t-test and a classification using the median split approach, we could identify 4 product categories' gender heterogeneous in their levels of masculinity and femininity (i.e. masculine, feminine, androgynous and undifferentiated). We had 33 well known brand names representing the different product categories tested before. Those 33 brand names were divided into 4 groups of 9 brands each. Overall 1155 inputs were included in this study; table 2 represents the input data considered for each case.

< ----- Insert Table 2 here ----- >

Psychometric properties across product categories' gender are very good for undifferentiated, feminine and androgynous product categories and fairly good for the masculine product categories as shown in table 2. For the latter, RMSEA and the χ^2/ ddf are slightly greater than the commonly used values. Again, convergent and discriminant validity were supported across product categories as shown in table 3. Thus, the structure of feminine brand gender dimension is generalizable across product categories.

< ----- Insert Table 3 here ----- >

4. Exploring types of brand femininities

Based on the feminine dimensions explored before, the classification using dynamic clouds allowed us distinguishing four different types of brand femininities:

- **Fluffy Femininity:** concerns brands who scored low on both philanthropy (final class center=2.43) and attrayance (final class center=2.55) dimensions. Brands belonging to this class are: Levis', Peugeot, Reebok, Coca Cola, Mac Donald, Lacoste, Hoover, BNP Paribas, Nike, Société Générale, Castorama.
- **Altruist Femininity:** concerns brands who scored low on attrayance (final class center=3.46) but high on philanthropy dimension (final class center=3.81). Brands belonging to this class are: Benetton, L'Oréal, Orangina, Nokia, Monoprix, Evian, Moulinex, Contrex, Converse, Philipps.

- **Tempting Femininity:** concerns brands who scored low on philanthropy (final class center=3.43) but high on attrayance (final class center=4.82) dimension. Brands belonging to this class are: Chanel, Zara, Dim, Armani, BMW, Apple, Calvin Klein, Ferrari, Hugo Boss and Mercedes.
- **Emphasized femininity:** concerns brands who scored high on both philanthropy (final class center=5.07) and seduction (final class center=5.43) dimensions. Brands belonging to this class are: Lancôme and Aubade.

5. Conclusion

Previously in this paper we explored the two major feminine brand gender dimensions: Philanthropy and Attrayance. A scale measuring brand femininity was advanced; this scale is valid and reliable across product categories' gender. To finish, through dynamic clouds technique, we showed the emergence of four different types of brand femininities that are: fluffy, altruist, tempting and emphasized.

The research described in this paper has several theoretical and managerial implications. The major theoretical implications are advancing knowledge about the structure and the nature of brand femininity. From a managerial perspective, the identification of four different major types of brand femininities would help managers getting a better feminine gender based segmentation strategies. These results also shed lights to the different ways brand femininity is perceived by consumers. In this regard, managers are more aware of the type of femininity they want to infer to their brands in order to appeal to the targeted group or groups of consumers. Advertisers have also more materials when inferring feminine aspects to some brands in the advertisement campaigns they develop.

The scale development would help managers to better understand their brand positioning or repositioning. It also allows conducting quantitative studies while studying this specific gendered aspect of brands. Further research should delve into studying consumers' reaction toward those different aspects in different context. This paper has some limitations that need to be addressed such as the use of French students to develop the scale. Since gender and the perception of femininity in particular are culturally defined, this would lead us to question the generalizability of this scale to other groups of respondents and other cultures.

Appendix

feminine items:						
Tender	Affectionate	Passionate	Sentimental	Feminist	Attractive	Charming
Motherly	Delicate	Sweet	Romantic	Fascinating	Cuddle	Pretty

Table 1 – Feminine items after t-test and median split

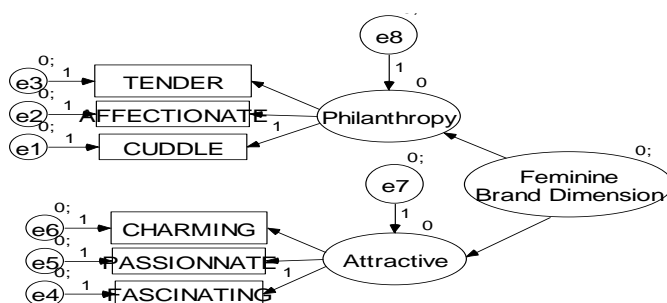


Figure 1: Tested model with AMOS 5

AMOS 5.0.1	study 2	study 3				
		Undifferentiated Product Categories	Masculine Product Categories	Feminine Product Categories	Androgynous Product Categories	All product categories' gender
χ^2/ ddf	2.985	.971	4.092	1.495	2.384	4.252
GFI	.983	.983	.975	.988	.976	.990
AGFI	.956	.956	.935	.969	.937	.974
CFI	.992	1.000	.982	.997	.986	.994
TLI	.985	1.000	.966	.993	.973	.988
NFI	.988	.985	.976	.990	.976	.992
SRMR	.0242	.0112	.0311	.0228	.0472	.0211
RMSEA	.063	.000	.085	.039	.073	.053
CAIC (def< satu)	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK
Usable input	494	143	424	327	260	1155

Table 2 – Psychometric properties Study 2 and Study 3

	study 2	study 3				
		Undifferentiated Product Categories	Masculine Product Categories	Feminine Product Categories	Androgynous Product Categories	All product categories' gender
DIMENSION 1: PHILANTHROPY (3 ITEMS)						
Chronbach's alpha	.881	.850	.836	.865	.842	.864
ρ Jöreskog	.881	.850	.837	.875	.845	.865
AVE	.712	.665	.631	.699	.646	.680
DIMENSION 2: ATTRAYANCE (3 ITEMS)						
Chronbach's alpha	.894	.864	.877	.875	.873	.884
ρ Jöreskog	.895	.875	.877	.878	.875	.885
AVE	.741	.703	.705	.708	.701	.720
$(r_{D1 D2})^2$	0,471	0,577	0,412	0,417	0,151	0,362

Table 3 – Discriminant's and internal reliability's psychometric properties for study 1 and 2

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