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Brand gender and cross-gender extensions

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BRAND GENDER AND CROSS-GENDER EXTENSIONS

Summary: In order to develop brands and increase growth, most *luxury brands* rely on extensions on different product categories. On top of that, the current trend is the *cross-gender extensions* (eg. Masculine watchmakers targeting female audience). The objective of this paper is to discuss the concept of brand gender and its potential influence in crossover extensions. More specifically, we intend to describe how female brands extend on the men market and vice versa. Using semiotic analysis, a qualitative research is performed on a sample of *eight brands*. The semiotic techniques allow to understand the deep meanings of their products, communication, web sites and narratives. The exploratory findings highlight the importance of brand consistency in terms of values while addressing both male and female segments. These findings, specific to luxury brands, provide support to the brand extension literature.

Key words: Brand gender, cross-gender extensions, masculinity, femininity, consistency, luxury

Résumé: Afin de se développer et de générer des profits, la plupart des marques de luxe utilisent les stratégies d'extension de marque, c'est-à-dire qu'elles essaient de s'introduire dans de nouvelles catégories de produits. En complément, une nouvelle tendance émerge : il s'agit des extensions de segments de marché (par exemple un horlogers masculin visant les femmes). L'objectif de cet article est de discuter du concept du genre de la marque et de son influence potentielle sur les extensions de segments de marché (homme – femme). Plus spécifiquement, nous souhaitons décrire comment les marques féminines s'étendent sur le marché d'hommes et vice-versa. Une recherche qualitative, de type sémiotique structurale, est effectuée sur un échantillon de huit marques de luxe. Les techniques sémiotiques permettent de comprendre les significations profondes du discours des marques au travers de leur communication. Les résultats exploratoires soulignent l'importance de la cohérence entre le genre de la marque et le genre utilisé pour parler au segment de marché opposé. Ce constat fort qui ressort des analyses est en conformité avec la littérature sur les extensions de marque et l'importance de la congruence.

Mots clés: Genre de la marque, extensions de segments de marché, masculinité, féminité, cohérence, luxe

BRAND GENDER AND CROSS-GENDER EXTENSIONS

1. Introduction

The concept of brand extension has been widely studied, the main objective being to explain key success factors of brand extension. The congruence between brand and extension (Boush and al, 1987; Romeo, 1991), the conceptual fit (Park and al, 1991; Aaker and Keller, 1990; Roux and Boush, 1997) and the typicality (Boush and Loken, 1991; Ladwein, 1994) are some of the factors explaining a successful extension, the brand name and awareness reducing the costs of new products launch and the risk of failure.

But a new trend in brand development is the cross-gender extensions and few, if none research has been published on the topic. The trend appears to be of interest for managers who need to sustain their double digit growth, mainly in the luxury sector (Nyeck and Veg, 2006). Eg. Chanel is offering watches for men, Aubade is a lingerie brand and has developed recently male products; Montblanc is a masculine brand and has extended into female market, with jewel collections. This gender extension is complex, especially when the brand gender (masculine or feminine) is well established.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to understand how the brand gender affects the cross-gender extensions. Particularly, how masculine brands enter on woman market and conversely for feminine brands? Which processes they use? How do they transfer their codes in order to maintain the brand desirability?

The exploratory research is conducted on a corpus of eight brands whose have made cross-gender extensions. A semiotic analysis allows to compare the values and narratives used by brand to tap women and men targets. The patterns of cross gender extensions are discussed in the light of brand extension literature.

2. Conceptual Background

2.1. Brand identity and gender

Every reflection on brand strategy begins with the following question: what is brand ? A brand is a sum of associations, but the distinction between brand image an brand identity should be made clear (Kapferer, 1991, 2004). The brand identity focuses on the stable values that the company wants to convey to consumers, while image is the brand as perceived by consumers. The brand identity in the long run is what conveys the brand essence and guarantees a continuous relationship with consumers and employees.

Cultural anthropology underlines the fact that *identity* is used to point out the principle of permanence which allows the individual to remain « the same », to persist in his being during his whole life, (...) despite the alterations of his living modes or the roles he plays (Greimas and Courtés 1986; Courtés 1991). The brand identity is a consistent, recognizable and unique brand imaginary transmitted by creation, style, products, packaging, communication, distribution, merchandising. The permanence underneath disruptions, changes and innovation leads to brand invariance. *Invariants* define the brand, and their meanings are shared with consumers in a given culture. Besides, through time, the invariants allow the brand to stay true to his essence, whilst adapting to trends. The two dimensions of brand identity are the *aesthetic* invariants which portray recognizable *signifier* of the brand (product, design,

physical attributes) on one hand, and the *ethic* invariants on the other hand. The later deals with intangibles *signified*, the brand's vision of the world (its personality, its philosophy) (Floch, 1995; Roux and Floch, 1996).

Gender is one of the aesthetic and ethic invariants organizing and defining the brand identity, and leading to strong associations with the brand (Remaury, 2004; Park and al, 1991 ; Aaker, 1996 ; Kapferer, 2004). Femininity and masculinity are therefore relevant in studying cross-gender extensions. In the next section, we will briefly discuss the factors that define a brand as a feminine or a masculine one, through its aesthetic and ethic invariants.

The brand gender

The « feminine vs. masculine » opposition is a semantic axis describing culture (Floch, 1990). This axis relevant to analyse brands as they are cultural products, carrying meanings shared in any given society. Then, a brand will have a gender if its aesthetic and ethic invariants contain feminine or masculine values (Alreck, 1994). Many authors have defined gender ethic and aesthetic values (Badinter, 1992 ; Maffesoli, 1990, 1993 ; Alreck, 1994 ; Bourdieu, 1998 ; Palan et al, 1999 ; Tissier-Desbordes et Kimmel, 2002 ; Vigarello, 2004), which are described in the following table 1.

Table 1 : Cultural Stereotypes of femininity and masculinity
Badinter (1992), Maffesoli (1990; 1993), Bourdieu (1998), Vigarello (2004)

	Feminine values		Masculine values	
Ethic	Mother / Wife	Emotion	Power	Intellect
	Beauty	Sensuality	Efficiency, Performance	Expertise, Control
	Aesthetic	Appearance	Accomplishment	Long term - Planification
	Cosmetics	Focus on present	Work	Freedom
	Family	Dependence	Virility	Independence
	Woman-object	Seduction	Man – subject	Competition
	Tenderness		Strength	Tradition
Aesthetic	Pastel colours	Sweet material	Dark colours	Hard material
	Pink	Small products	Blue	large products
	Thin	Curved shape	Large	Straight shape
	Italic writing		Straight writing	

To build a strong gender association, brands use symbols, signs and codes referring to these feminine and masculine values in their narratives, advertisings, products and retailing. Also, using gender as invariants leads the brand to define the relationship between men and women (Remaury, 2004). Each of them can be “subject” if he/she is *active* in the relation or “object” if he/she is more *submissive*. Different patterns can be defined according to the man-woman relationship (appendix 2).

Assuming the gender is part of brand aesthetic and ethic invariants, one key issue in cross-gender extensions (extensions from female market to male market or from male market to female market) is to translate this brand identity to the other segment (male or female) while staying true to his essence. Previous research on brand extension underlines the factors leading to a successful extension.

2.3. Success factors of brand extension

The congruence between brand and extension seems to be a key variable for successful extension evaluation. The physical similarity (Boush and al, 1987; Romeo, 1991; Lee, 1994),

the conceptual fit (Park and al, 1991; Aaker and Keller, 1990; Roux and Boush, 1997) and the typicality (Boush and Loken, 1991; Ladwein, 1994) are some of the measures of proximity between brand and extension (Sujan and Tybout, 1988).

The physical similarity compares only the material features of products; but the brand is not only a product. The conceptual fit included others associations and analyses the logical perceived link between the different products of brands. In the same way, the typicality compares the number of same features (concrete or abstract) and the number of the different features (concrete or abstract).

As the brand is also linked to more abstract associations, it is important to evaluate the proximity between brand and extension in terms of concept and value consistency. These values (concrete and abstract) have to be consistent to have a successful extension. Finally, the more typical the extension (including physical attributes and symbolic values), the more favourable are consumers evaluations. Successful extensions need to show congruence with the brand values.

The gender (feminine or masculine) is included in brand values. The literature seems to focus on the importance of consistency between brand and extension. But no research on extension topic has analyzed congruence within the framework of the cross-gender extensions, that is to say for female brand that wants to introduce in male market and conversely.

Thus, we propose that if the extension gender is consistent with the brand gender, then the likelihood for having a successful cross-gender extension will be great.

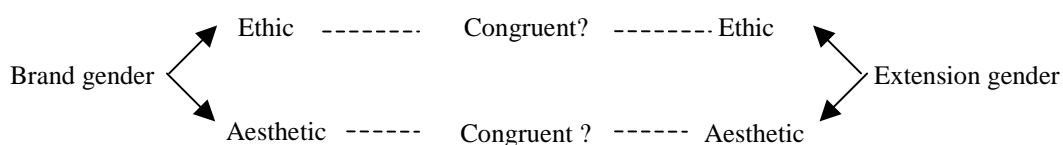
3. Research proposition and Methodology

The research objective is to understand the cross-gender extension process of brands with an established gender identity. More specifically, we want to address the following propositions:

P1- Are the brand gender and extension in a new gender segment consistent/congruent?

P2- How do the brands translate their values in the new segment ? how do they transfer their aesthetic (physical)characteristics of femininity or masculinity and/or their ethic (intangibles) values of these stereotypes? Which relationship can be defined between male and female?

Representative figure



Data and qualitative procedure

Eight (8) brands are used as cases studies: Aubade, Audemars Piguet, Cartier, Chanel, Hugo Boss, Lancôme, Montblanc, and Rolex (Appendix 1). The brands have an established gender and have already moved into cross-gender extensions. Cross-gender extensions are an important trend in the luxury and few research deals with this sector (Roux and Boush, 1997). Finally, the brands illustrate several product categories: fashion and underwear (Chanel, Aubade, and Hugo Boss), jewellery and watch making (Audemars Piguet, Cartier, and Rolex), writing (Montblanc) and cosmetics (Lancôme).

Corpus of the 8 brands communications (new segment and original gender) are created with Ads, products, window stores and web sites. First, we define the brand essence, using gender values stereotypes (see table 1), then, the research analyses the gender extension and compares the female and male narratives to seek for consistency.

To identify the meanings of brand narratives, a structural semiotic analysis is performed (Courtès, 1991, Floch, 1990) with three main purposes: (1) exhibit gender aesthetic and ethic of several brands and their extension, (2) define the relationships between man and woman et (3) analyse the congruence of codes and values.

4. Preliminary Findings

First, the results define the brand gender as feminine or masculine through the narratives. Next, the research describes the different cross-gender strategies used by the 8 brands, ie, how do brands portray their aesthetic and ethic invariants in both male and female segments.

4.1. Feminine brands and masculine brands

Based on the use of aesthetic and ethic invariants in the brand communication and narrative, the semiotic analysis of the corpus leads us to classify four brands as feminine (Aubade, Cartier, Chanel and Lancôme) and four other as masculine (Audemars Piguet, Hugo Boss, Montblanc and Rolex).

Feminine brands and their narrative

The seduction discourse: In this discourse, the Aubade woman offers a fantasy, a pleasure. She uses rules to provoke and stimulate men: *Lesson n°62: wake up his 6th senses; Lesson n°74: Stimulate his creativity*. She offers her body highlighting her sensuality.

The aesthetic and emotion discourse: The discourse of beauty is linked to the impressiveness. Cartier communication focuses on products with little narrative. *Sumptuous sets of jewels, Exceptional pieces, The gems glitter, Precious jewel*.

The beauty discourse: Lancôme claims that the brand has *an uncontested beauty expertise*, and want all the ladies to *Believe in beauty*.

The Queen archetype discourse: The aesthetic invariants of Chanel are very feminine and are conveyed by products: fashion, jewels, and cosmetics. However, its ethic invariants underline freedom for modern women's body. The meaning of masculine working clothes is reversed into and becomes luxury and feminine. The Chanel woman is *audacious, perfectionist, unique, passionate and visionary*. This new meaning refers to a strong Queen in Western society imagery, shared culture and mythology. (Floch 1995, Remaury 2004)

Masculine brands and their narrative

The tradition/heritage and expertise discourse: Montblanc is synonymous of the *Art of writing*. It is the pen expert: *Writing founds its masters*. Audemars Piguet is *The Maître Horloger since 1875*. The technical know-how is transmitted since centuries.

The achievement and work discourse: This discourse focuses on successful men in business world. The Montblanc products are essential for this accomplishment (pens, cufflinks, and watches). The brand has developed the *Culture Arts Patronage Award*, rewarding the CEO commitment into Arts. Hugo boss also uses elements of men stereotype aesthetics, underlining his masculinity: suits, straight lines, dark colours.

The power/performance discourse: The Rolex invariants are linked to the power. The crown is the logo of the brand, which carries meaning of power. Rolex portrays performance in several activities (sport, business world...): *If you win the F1 price, you would carry a Rolex*. Since 1961, the brand emphasises on this value in their advertisings: *The people who can change the world wear Rolex*.

4.2. Brand gender and cross-gender extensions

In this part, we seek to look at consistency between the brand and the female or male market extension. Is it consistent with the original brand gender, and how do brands define the relationships between males and females ?

Narrative of Feminine brands in the male market extensions

Aubade: The seduction narrative is used for both men and women, with appearance and the body being the focus. The Aubade man is portrayed in a universe of sensuality and emotions. *Lesson n°1: Steal the limelight; Lesson n°2: resist in vain*. Women and men are both objects in their relationship.

Cartier: The beauty narrative is predominant in both segments. Like ladies, the Cartier man is interested by aesthetic and design features.

Chanel: The feminine aesthetic invariant of Chanel products is transferred to man. The men and women watches share the same design. However, the analysis shows that the Chanel man is represented with feminine codes. He is soft and tender. The *Allure* fragrance for men emphasises on sensuality. While the Chanel lady is strong, the Chanel man is far from traditional virility. Besides, both of them don't seem to be connected.

Lancôme: Lancôme man invariants exhibit performance. The brand doesn't use beauty narrative but emphasises on problem solving: *Soin hydratant resource, anti-tiraillement*. The packaging is different with a more masculine blue colour. The rose (brand logo) is avoided. Lancôme man is an expert.

Narrative of Masculine brands in the female market extensions

Rolex: Ethic and aesthetic invariants are the same for male and female, portraying a masculine universe of success and performance: *The man's watch women prefer*. The Rolex woman is an achiever : *The femininity without weakness; That twinkle in her eye, that's her burning desire for perfection*. Both the Rolex man and woman are subject, with powerful will.

Hugo Boss: The same aesthetic and ethic invariants apply to ladies. The Hugo Boss woman is in a masculine universe of work and performance. The working girl is wearing suits like man. Both are subject of the relationship.

Montblanc: Montblanc narrative emphasises expertise, work and accomplishment for both markets.

Audemars Piguet: Both communications for men and women portray different values. The universe of Audemars Piguet for ladies (*Femmes du Monde*) conveys a feminine ethic. Few products share aesthetic invariants (Lady Royal Oak line) of male watches with the same design, while the bulk of ladies collection is linked to feminine values. A detailed analysis of Audemars Piguet extension in ladies market is provided (Appendix 3).

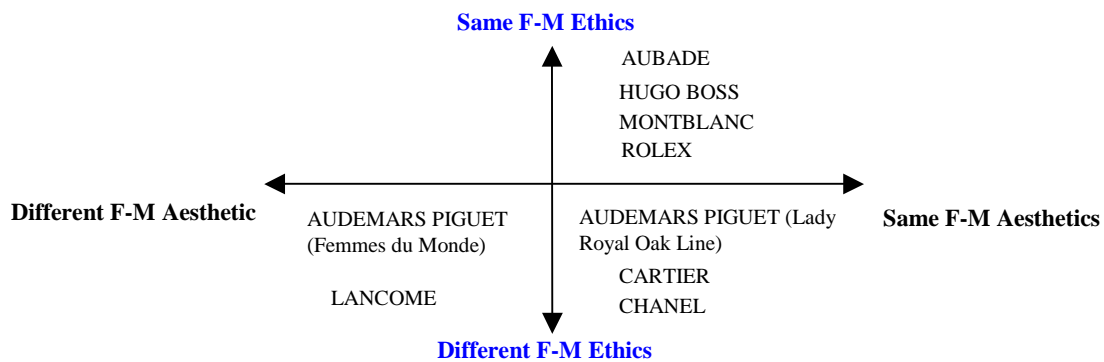
The table 2 below describes a summary of the brand gender and extension in male/female market.

Brands	Brand gender		Extension gender		Relationship	
	Aesthetic	Ethic	Aesthetic	Ethic	H	F
Aubade	Feminine	Feminine	Feminine	Feminine	Object	Object
Cartier	Feminine	Feminine	Feminine	Masculine	Subject	Object
Chanel	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine	Feminine	No relationship	
Lancôme	Feminine	Feminine	Masculine	Masculine	Subject	Object
Audemars Piguet	Masculine	Masculine	FdM : Feminine LRO : Masculine	FdM : Feminine LRO : Feminine	Subject	Object
Hugo Boss	Masculine	Masculine	Masculine	Masculine	Subject	Subject
Montblanc	Masculine	Masculine	Masculine	Masculine	Subject	Subject
Rolex	Masculine	Masculine	Masculine	Masculine	Subject	Subject

5. Findings discussion and managerial implications

This study shows different brand extension strategies into male/female market with respect to the *gender ethic and aesthetic invariants*. While the literature focuses on extension congruence/fit/consistency with the core brand identity to explain a key success factor, we found that some extensions are consistent with the brand gender (aesthetic and/or ethic) while others don't share the same codes and values. This raises the issue of the extension desirability. Then, several issues have to be addressed in order to maintain and translate the brand identity (with respect to gender) in a new segment.

More precisely, (4) four cross-gender strategies are found in the study. The Figure 1 below organizes the findings through both *aesthetics and ethic invariants dimensions*. Each dimension opposes the brands portraying the same invariants for Female & Male segments to the brands transferring different invariants to Female/Male segment.



The first group defines brands that share gender aesthetic and ethic invariants with their extension (Aubade, Hugo Boss, Montblanc and Rolex). This cluster provides support to research findings on brand extension (Boush and al, 1987; Romeo, 1991; Lee, 1994; Park and al, 1991; Aaker and Keller, 1990; Roux and Boush, 1997). Out of the 4 brands using the *total congruence* strategy with respect to *gender identity*, only Rolex seems to enjoy success as a leader on luxury female watch market.

The second group adopts new aesthetic and ethic gender invariants while entering a new market, as Lancôme or Audemars Piguet (Femmes du Monde Collection). This *refusal of congruence* in terms of gender identity leads to inconsistency between male and female segments. Secondary data show that this strategy is not successful, business wise.

However, a third strategy is found in the sample. The *congruence of aesthetic invariants* between brand gender and the extension is only based on the physical similarity (Boush and al, 1987; Romeo, 1991; Lee, 1994). Audemars Piguet for example only transferred its aesthetic invariants to the extension (with the specific Lady Royal Oak line). It is worth noting that this specific line accounts for 2/3 of female watches turnover.

The fourth strategy, dealing with the transfer of *only gender ethic invariants* in the new segment didn't find support in our study. In this model, the conceptual fit (Park and al, 1991; Aaker and Keller, 1990; Roux and Boush, 1997) is the key element.

In conclusion, it seems that even if brands respect their aesthetic and ethic gender, like the literature recommendation, the brand extensions are not always successful. A brand has to stay consistent with its values, but this necessity doesn't imply that the brand can enter in the other market (male or female). Some product categories are not desirable for the male or female when the brand is associated with a string gender. For example, Aubade is a feminine brand. When it enters in men markets, the brand has used the same feminine values, but the underwear for men, associated to feminine values seems to be not desirable for them, even if the men universe changes. This link between gender, consistency and brand category can explain the relative failure of brands which stay consistent.

Managerial implications

Three steps are necessary for managers to know if their brands can enter in a new market (male or female):

- 1- Analysing the brand gender (its aesthetic and its ethic);
- 2- Having in mind to maintain its values,
- 3- Analysing the category of the potential cross-gender extension:
 - if it is desirable to consumer with the respect of its values, the brand have interest to enter in this market;
 - if it is not desirable to consumer with the respect of its values, it is preferable that the brand doesn't move.

Research limitations

By using a qualitative and semiotic approach, our sample was kept small (8 brands), which is relevant in semiotic studies. Further research is needed to validate our findings. The semiotic analysis of brand narrative has to be triangulated with experts and consumer studies. Interviews of managers and consumer can help providing a better understanding of success/failure of cross-gender extensions and their desirability by consumers. Finally, as social values are changing in the post-modern era, some brands perceived to "androgynous" like Calvin Klein should be taken into account.

These preliminary findings seem to indicate the need for consistency in the case of gender identity while entering a new market, and provide support to previous research indicating the need of congruence for brand extension. This paper has revealed that consistency is also a key factor for successful cross-gender extension.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 : Brand corpus

Brands	Creation date	Activities	Cross-gender extensions
Aubade	1958	Women lingerie	Men lingerie
Audemars Piguet	1875	Men watch-making	Women watch-making and jewel
Cartier	1847	Women watch-making and jewel	Men watch-making and jewel
Chanel	1910	Women fashion, jewel, watch-making, fragrance, cosmetics	Men watch-making and fragrance
Hugo Boss	1923	Men fashion, accessories, shoes, fragrances, watches	Women fashion, accessories, shoes, fragrances, watches
Lancôme	1935	Women cosmetics and fragrances	Men cosmetics and fragrances
Montblanc	1909	Men writing, watch-making, accessories	Women writing, watch-making, jewels
Rolex	1905	Men watch-making	Women watch-making

Appendix 2 : Man and Woman Relationships

Man and woman relationships

	Woman – subject	Woman – object	Woman without man
Man - subject			
Man - object			
Man without woman			

Appendix 3 : Audemars Piguet analysis

Audemars Piguet gender

Aesthetic



Watches

Octagonal form of Royal oak

Screws on watches

Mechanisms complications

Linear writing of logo and brand name



Masculinity

Ethic



watch making how-know

Sponsoring (Alinghi America Cup)

Maserati Racing cars



Masculinity

Audemars Piguet Extension in Ladies market

Aesthetic



Lady Roal Oak :
Octagonal form of Royal oak
Screws on watches



Masculinity



Femmes du monde collection :
Supple form
Beauty
Different colours



Fémininity

Ethic



Women representations
Seduction
Beauty



Fémininity

Appendix 4 : Samples of feminine brand advertisings and extension on male market

AUBADE

Woman



Man

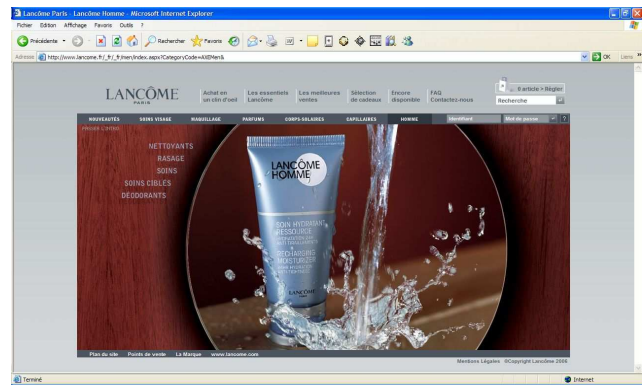


LANCÔME

Woman



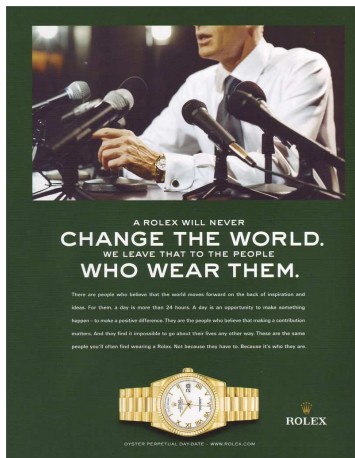
Man



Appendix 5 : Samples of masculine brand advertising and extension in female market

ROLEX

Man



Woman

