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Deconstructing Masculine Stereotypes

The impact of gender-neutral advertising on
masculine buying behavior in the realm of fashion,
considering intrinsic factors

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Dissertation written under the supervision of Prof. Vera Herédia Colaço

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the MSc in
Management with Specialization in Strategic Marketing, at the Universidade
Católica Portuguesa, September, 2024.

Abstract

Title

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The criticism of masculine stereotypes in fashion advertising is increasing as traditional perspectives on masculinity are reinforced. This has adverse effects on men, such as impeding individual expression. Therefore, creating non-stereotypical advertising strategies for masculine consumers is essential.

Consequently, this dissertation examines gender-neutrality as an approach to non-stereotypical advertising and aims to ascertain the influence of the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) on masculine buying behaviors. Additionally, it examines intrinsic factors that are relevant in masculine consumer behavior, such as the moderating role of need for uniqueness and mediating role of self-expression.

The results derived from an experimental study indicate a positive impact of gender-neutral advertisements on masculine buying behaviors compared to stereotypical masculine advertisements. Findings suggest that the high need for uniqueness increases masculine buying behaviors for gender-neutral advertisements when traditional gender role attitudes are controlled. Mediation findings show that self-expression indirectly influences the relation between the type of gender-oriented advertisements and masculine buying behaviors.

This dissertation yields insightful perspectives on masculine consumer behavior in fashion and adds to existing literature about stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral advertising. Furthermore, it provides fashion brand managers with recommendations on successfully implementing gender-neutral approaches in their marketing strategies to achieve positive brand-related effects and position themselves as progressive and diverse.

Key Words

gender-neutral advertising | gender-neutral fashion | masculine consumer behavior | masculine stereotypes | diversity

Resumo

Título

Deconstructing Masculine Stereotypes

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Autor

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O aumento das críticas aos estereótipos masculinos na publicidade de moda é uma preocupação crescente, uma vez que estes podem ter um impacto negativo nos homens, limitando a sua expressão individual.

Consequentemente, esta dissertação examina a neutralidade de género como uma abordagem à publicidade não estereotipada e visa verificar a influência do tipo de publicidade orientada para o género (estereotipado-masculino vs. Género-neutro) nos comportamentos de compra masculinos. Além disso, examina os fatores intrínsecos que são relevantes no comportamento do consumidor masculino, como o papel moderador da necessidade de singularidade e o papel mediador da autoexpressão.

Os resultados de um estudo experimental indicam um impacto positivo da publicidade neutra em termos de género no comportamento de compra masculino, em comparação com os anúncios masculinos estereotipados. Os resultados sugerem que a elevada necessidade de exclusividade aumenta os comportamentos de compra masculinos para anúncios de género neutro quando as atitudes tradicionais dos papéis de género são controladas. Os resultados da mediação mostram que a autoexpressão influencia indiretamente a relação entre o tipo de publicidade orientada para o género e os comportamentos de compra masculinos.

Esta dissertação oferece um conjunto de perspetivas relevantes no âmbito do comportamento do consumidor masculino na moda e acrescenta uma contribuição à literatura existente sobre publicidade estereotipada e não estereotipada. Fornece aos gestores de marcas de moda recomendações sobre como implementar com sucesso abordagens mais neutras em termos de género nas suas estratégias de marketing para alcançar efeitos positivos relacionados com marcas com posicionamento mais atual e com diversidade.

Palavras-chave

neutralidade de género na publicidade | moda neutra em termos de género | comportamento do consumidor masculino | estereótipos masculinos | diversidade

Acknowledgments

This dissertation represents the last milestone of my MSc degree, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who has supported me along the way. Your assistance, wisdom, and perseverance have broadened my perspective and enabled me to successfully navigate this challenge. I would also like to express my gratitude to everyone who reviewed my work critically and to all participants. Your comments and observations have greatly influenced this work.

To my advisor, Professor Vera Herédia Colaço, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude. This dissertation has benefited greatly from her knowledge, commitment, and support. In addition to letting me explore my own interests, Professor Vera Herédia Colaço encouraged me to think critically and consider alternative viewpoints. Her advice has influenced the value of this dissertation and my academic path greatly.

My friends have always been a source of inspiration, support, and encouragement, for which I am truly grateful. Throughout this dissertation, their guidance and presence were especially helpful.

My deepest gratitude goes out to my parents for their unwavering support, love, and faith in my potential. Without their encouragement and opportunities throughout my life, none of my achievements would have been possible.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance

Modern society is characterized by a constant flux of attitudes towards gender and conventional viewpoints are increasingly being rejected (Boehnke, 2011). In this context, fashion and advertising are particularly significant in shaping and reflecting these changes (Eisend, 2016; Entwistle, 2015). The marketing and fashion industries have, therefore, adapted their strategies in response. As a result, gender-neutral clothing brands and non-stereotypical marketing, such as gender-neutral advertising, that subvert gender stereotypes and seek to present diverse and inclusive representations have emerged (Amed et al., 2023; Chu et al., 2016).

The popularity of gender-neutral marketing and fashion approaches is increasing and studies indicate attractive growth opportunities in this market across different generations, genders and origins (Klarna, n.d.; Amed et al., 2023). A study by Statista reveals that, on average, that 36% of American and 25% of European consumers have previously purchased apparel that does not correspond with their gender identity, with numbers predicted to rise (Fleck, 2023). In response, international fashion brands such as Gucci, Prada, H&M, and Zara have developed gender-neutral collections (Petter, 2017; Robinson, 2023).

Feminine influences are seen as the primary cause of the alteration in attitudes towards gender as men are perceived as the privileged gender nevertheless (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). However, stereotypical views often restrict men's unique identities, thus they also benefit from the shifts towards egalitarian perspectives (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Rivera & Scholar, 2020; Sommer, 2000). These modern views deviating from traditional gender roles by fostering individuality and especially allow men to express themselves by exploring diverse fashion styles, a behavior previously not accepted as typical masculine (Barry, 2018; Gardiner, 2002). The greater flexibility in the way of how men dress is evident in a surge in industry interest. The male fashion industry is continuously growing, reaching \$573 billion in 2024 and with a 2.9% annual rate from 2024 to 2028 (Statista, 2023).

However, the societal shift in masculinity and gender roles is not reflected in advertising as a recent study found that traditional perspectives persist in masculine fashion portrayals (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024). Stereotypical advertising, which portrays men as emotionless and dominant, is not only criticized by men but also has negative effects on society as it

reinforces traditional gender roles, thus perpetuating gender inequality (Bem, 1974; Goffman, 1979).

In contrast, non-stereotypical representations have not only positive effects on society, as they can alter traditional gender roles but also support men's expression of individual identities (Chu et al., 2016; Barry & Phillips, 2016). Expanding upon this comprehension, it demonstrates that certain intrinsic factors are crucial for a positive evaluation regarding non-stereotypical advertising. Consequently, the expression of individuality arises as a significant influence on masculine consumer behavior. Self-expression is crucial in masculine purchasing behavior, especially in fashion, as it demonstrates individuality, to distinguish from hegemonic and non-hegemonic men (Barry, 2018; Barry & Phillips, 2016; Sinh & Koh, 2020). Further, in relation to expression through identity, need for uniqueness is suggested to be an important factor for the success of modern and unconventional approaches, such as non-stereotypical advertising (Chu et al., 2016).

Advertisers have a responsibility to achieve positive social effects, however it is equally important to ensure its profitability (Eisend et al., 2023). Therefore, brands employ stereotypical representations as it brings advantages such as the simplification of the purchase decision (Pratto & Bargh, 1991). As a result, brands are hesitant to use non-stereotypical advertising for fear of not getting the desired results (Eisend et al., 2023). However, one way to conceptualize effective non-stereotypical representations is gender-neutral advertising, which goes beyond feminine and masculine distinctions by also targeting non-binary consumers (DFU Publications, 2023). Further, it brings additional benefits as it fits the triple bottom line approach: people, planet, and profit. Thus, it allows improved financial viability while having a positive impact on the planet and society (Glac, 2015).

Gender-neutral approaches do not only promote equality, diversion, and inclusion, but especially gender-neutral fashion has sustainable advantages (Amed, 2023; Bandekar, 2021). Production decreases due to "one-fits-all" designs and increases the possibility of sharing clothes, supporting the principle of conscious consumption (Bandekar, 2021). Profit-wise, the gender-neutral industry has high growth potential, and by targeting beyond gender, it is possible to expand into unexplored markets. Further, advertising costs are reduced by applying the same marketing strategies (Amed et al., 2023; Loureiro, 2022). Brands that exhibit social responsibility stay relevant and are also valued by consumers, which in turn benefits brand loyalty (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

These factors highlight the numerous benefits of gender-neutral fashion and advertising. Thus, evaluating the efficacy of gender-neutral advertising is critical from both a business and social perspective to facilitate future growth and to deconstruct masculine stereotypes.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The growth in the male fashion industry leads men to be an attractive target group to research further. However, literature is also expressing a need as most studies focus on female behaviors about non-stereotypical depictions in advertising (Sommer, 2000). Further, academic literature indicates that women respond favorably to non-stereotypical portrayals due to their perceived higher interest in socially responsible practices and gender equality (Zayer & Coleman, 2015). Although a handful of studies have explored the impact of physical appearance on men regarding stereotypical advertising (Blond, 2008; Elliot & Elliot, 2005; Lorenz et al., 2004), research in larger contexts is urgently needed (Gupta & Gentry, 2015).

Researchers have examined how men's stereotypical behavior is portrayed and altered in fashion, it is, however, important to understand how men respond to fashion advertisements to understand the underlying mechanisms (Barry & Phillips, 2016). Another area of research that needs more attention is gender-neutral advertising since most studies only investigate non-stereotypical advertising such as cross-gender effects, which markets female products as masculine (Jung & Lee, 2006; Ulrich, 2013) or masculine products with female models (Åkestam et al., 2021; Chu et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is insufficient research examining gender-neutral fashion and advertising in combination.

Investigating masculine purchase behavior in the realm of fashion is hence necessary to create the possibility of conceptualizing masculine-focused advertising strategies that do not impose stereotypes. This would contribute to breaking down traditional gender roles in society and fostering a more diverse and inclusive advertising landscape, also for masculine consumers.

The main objective of this research is to explore the influence of non-stereotypical fashion advertising strategies on masculine buying behaviors and decision-making processes, explicitly examining stereotypical-masculine advertising versus gender-neutral advertising. The study seeks to comprehend how masculine buying behaviors are influenced by self-expression. Thus, determining if these behaviors are significantly influenced by their ability to express themselves through gender-neutral fashion advertising. Further, in this investigation, need for uniqueness

as a characteristic feature of men who react positively to a gender-neutral approach will be identified.

The results of this thesis provide more insights into masculine consumer behavior about stereotypical and gender-neutral fashion advertising and have business implications for the fashion industry. Therefore, the following section will present the research questions that guide this thesis.

Research Questions

RQ. 1: How does gender-neutral fashion advertising affect the buying behaviors of men?

RQ. 2: How does need for uniqueness influence the effectiveness of gender-neutral fashion advertising for masculine consumers?

RQ. 3: What is the impact of perceived self-expression, and to what extent does it influence masculine buying behaviors regarding gender-neutral fashion advertising?

1.3 Research Outline

To answer the research questions, the concepts and characteristics of traditional and contemporary masculinity and their relationship with gender roles and gender-neutral fashion are described. Furthermore, the literature review explores the traits and impacts of stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral advertising. It further employs different psychological perspectives to comprehend masculine buying behavior in the realm of fashion. Adhering to the methodology and data analysis section, the results of this research are presented. The dissertation provides theoretical and practical insights for the fashion industry, highlights its limitations, and suggests future research on gender-neutral fashion advertising in masculine buying behavior.

2. Academic Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Masculinity and Gender Roles in Society and Fashion

2.1.1 Masculinity and Gender Roles

Traditionally, men are described by the monolithic standard of “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1995; Everitt-Penhale & Ratele, 2015). Hegemonic masculinity is centered on dominance and control, but other characteristics include assertiveness, physical strength, risk-taking, aggression, courage, competitiveness, heterosexuality, and a lack of feminine traits (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

It is a key concept of understanding gender dynamics between and within genders (Demetriou, 2001; Jewkes et al., 2015; Morrell et al., 2012). Stereotypical gender roles and hegemonic masculinity interact in a complex way as they influence each other negatively. Conventional gender roles perpetuate hegemonic masculinity, dominating and marginalizing other non-binary individuals and perpetuating gender inequality (Heise et al., 2019; Stamarki & Son Hing, 2015; Smith et al., 2015). Conversely, the strengthening of patriarchal systems and traditional roles is a result of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Although men are perceived as the advantaged gender due to these traditional views, there are also harmful consequences for men (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). Men view their stereotyped roles negatively, as they constantly strive to prove their masculinity to conform to their social gender roles (Goffmann, 1979). This limits their behavioral spectrum and triggers a fear of not being the ideal male (Bem, 1974; Gardiner, 2002; Kachel et al., 2016; Hearn & Kimmel, 2006). Men must reject feminine traits and behavior to be seen as masculine (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). This compels them to repress their feelings and results in relationships of poorer quality as well as lower social conscience and is also associated with limited self-expression and personality development (Gardiner, 2002; Rivera & Scholar, 2020). Further, being responsible for a restricted ability to express themselves through clothing fully (Barry, 2018).

In recent years, men have been experiencing a significant transformation regarding stereotypical views of gender and norms (Harrison, 2008). Movements like feminism questioned traditional gender roles and masculinity, encouraging men to consider patriarchy and their own gender privileges. Redefining masculinity became necessary, which not only

succeeded in shattering the stereotypical ideal of gender but also inspired men to critically examine their gender roles (Heinreich, 2014).

In this contemporary transformation, traditional masculinity has changed towards hybrid masculinity, which integrates characteristics from different gender identities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). This modern form allows men to adopt traditionally perceived as feminine behaviors and promotes the expression of emotions (Chesebro & Fuse, 2001). Therefore, this change in masculinity gives men the ability to liberate themselves from the stereotypical constraints. This change in masculinity led also to social changes as it redefined gender roles and contributes to the egalitarian view of gender (Heinrich, 2014).

2.1.2 Masculine- and Gender-Neutral Fashion

Traditionally associated with feminine characteristics, fashion experienced a similar shift regarding masculinity and gender roles. The idea of hegemonic masculinity led to a conflict between masculinity and fashion (Kaiser, 2012) and its primary purpose was to expose gender identity and thus preserve gender rights (Barry, 2018). Masculinity and femininity were clearly defined, reflecting and emphasizing stereotypical gender roles (Arvanitidou & Gasouka, 2013). Traditional views dictated that men had to conform to strict dress codes to fulfill their dominant role (Barry, 2018; Entwistle, 2015). However, hybrid masculinities bring freedom from traditional strict norms and more inclusive identities, which is reflected in an increased interest in fashion and the integration of clothing previously considered feminine (Barry, 2018; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). This allows an individual expression of identity (Barry, 2018).

The blending of gendered fashion elements is reflected in the recent trend, gender-neutral fashion, which denotes not having a clear gender identity and is characterized by the absence of gender presumptions (Robinson, 2019). It means creating styles that move beyond traditional gender roles and clothing norms and promote inclusivity, diversity, and individual expression by mixing feminine and masculine styles and cuts (Kapoor, 2023; Risman & Davis, 2013). Gender-neutral clothing emphasizes comfort and style by deconstructing gender stereotypes and focusing on relaxed silhouettes using neutral colors such as olive, kaki, monochromatic patterns, or beige (Rubin, 2020; Kapoor, 2023; Risman & Davis, 2013).

Gucci and Zara are two prominent fashion brands that have adopted gender-neutral strategies. Gucci, known for its gender-neutral designs, launched an independent, non-binary collection called “MX”, aiming to challenge traditional gender roles and to promote self-expression

(Robinson, 2023; Wheatcroft, 2021). Zara, on the other hand, introduced its "Ungendered" collection, featuring uni-sex basics like jeans, demonstrating how mainstream fashion brands adopt gender-neutrality (Fashion Model Directory, 2016). Please refer to Appendix A for pictorial presentation.

2.2 Strategies and Effects of Stereotypical-Masculine and Gender-Neutral Advertising

Advertising can be defined as "brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people" (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016, p.343). Especially in the context of fashion, advertising has not only brand-related effects, such as affecting consumer perceptions or purchase intentions, but also high social effects as it influences norms and ideals (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016; Eisend, 2016). Social effects shape society and affect how the viewer perceives others and themselves (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016). Thus, advertisements influence self-identity but also form gender expectations and roles (Knoll et al., 2011; Garst & Bodenhausen, 1997; McLuhan, 1964).

There are two approaches, the mold and the mirror approach, to comprehend the effects of advertising and its consequences on society (Pollay, 1986; Pollay & Mittal, 1993). According to the mirror perspective, advertising represents societal values (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). This viewpoint holds that advertising reflects the gender roles already present in society and that changes in gender roles affect advertising (Goffmann, 1979). The mold perspective holds that advertising shapes societal attitudes and values (Pollay, 1986). According to this theory, advertising can reinforce or alter stereotypes and thus gender roles (Ganahl et al., 2003).

Advertisers should not only encourage the creation of brand-related effects but also have a social responsibility (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2016). Considering the mold perspective, advertising can either perpetuate traditional gender roles, allowing men to maintain their stereotypical roles, or support hybrid masculinity, moving beyond conventional norms. The following section explores the characteristics of stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral advertising as well as its effects on masculine consumers.

2.2.1 Stereotypical-Masculine Advertising

Stereotypical-masculine advertising depicts men in traditional gender roles and with attributes related to hegemonic masculinity (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). Although there are slight changes in modern representations in media, content-, and meta-analyses, illustrate that masculine stereotyping is still prominent (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024; Knoll et al., 2011; Marshall et al.,

2014). Stereotypes are anchored ideas that are assigned to certain social groups (Vinacke, 1957). Hence, some attributes, such as physical appearance or trait descriptors, are perceived as typically feminine or masculine (Deaux & Lewis, 1984).

Marketers develop stereotypical-masculine advertising to achieve positive brand-related effects, for example, by gender congruency (Sirgy et al., 2016). Further, it reduces cognitive load and serves as a heuristic, simplifying the processing of the advertisement (Pratto & Bargh, 1991). However, it has to be acknowledged that stereotypes are overly simplistic ideas that can lead to incorrect interpretations and harmful conclusions (Knoll et al., 2011).

To depict men in a stereotypical view, various attributes are combined, such as stereotypical role behavior or facial expressions (Åkestam et al., 2017). These associated characteristics are presented in certain cues that reflect hegemonic masculinity, meaning dominance, aggression, and assertiveness (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Knoll et al., 2011). The hegemonic masculine assumption that men are unemotional is reflected in emotional stoicism as men are shown without smiling, with a stern and self-confident facial expression, as well as in situations of control (O'barr, 2006). Authoritarian positions are an important cue emphasizing traditional gender roles (Knoll et al., 2011). Therefore, an inequality of power between men and women is portrayed in which men are either at the forefront of the advertising or a sexual relationship between both genders is depicted (O'barr, 2006). To portray the ideal man in advertising, the male body is usually shown in perfect physical condition (White & Gillett 1994).

Rectangular shapes are shown by prior literature to be favored by typical men (Lieve et al., 2015), as well as the choice for darker colors such as navy, gray, or black, often associated with hegemony (Courtney, 1986). Regarding communication, the focus is on product performance, the functionality, or the status one will achieve by obeying the product (Bellizzi & Milner, 1991). Further, as men do not want to be singled out, the communication is direct by using gender-laden captions and slogans, such as Harley Davidson's "Big Boys for Big Toys" (Avery, 2012; Knupfer, 1998). Diverse fashion brands employ stereotypical depictions of men throughout history and until today. Please refer to Appendix B for advertisement examples.

Although advertisers apply stereotyping to achieve positive brand-related effects, it may also lead to negative attitudes towards the advertisement and brand, as research indicates (Åkestam et al., 2021; Dwivedy, 2009). Additionally, the conventional portrayal of physical conditions can have a negative impact on men's self-image and self-esteem. This perfected image can lead

to psychological problems such as a negative body image and mental health problems (Blond, 2008; Elliot & Elliot, 2005; Lorenz et al., 2004).

Further, stereotyped advertising carries a multitude of adverse effects for men and society. Stereotypical views on gender can be reinforced, leading to continued gender inequality (Bem, 1974; Goffman, 1976). Studies show that exposure to stereotypical advertisements leads to an increased feeling of dominance and assertiveness (Åkestam et al., 2021), and exposure to traditional gender roles in advertising also results in increased traditional role attitudes among men (Garst & Bodenhausen, 1997). In addition, men adjust their behavior to stereotypes in response to this advertising type (Hundhammer & Mussweiler, 2012), which leads to the negative implications of traditional gender roles, such as a restricted behavioral spectrum and limited self-presentation as well as personality development (Gardiner 2002; Rivera & Scholar, 2020).

Due to the relationship between traditional gender roles and hegemonic masculinity, stereotypes in advertising may, therefore, also operate as a barrier to the further development of hybrid masculinities and thus strengthening hegemonic masculinity (Knoll et al., 2011; Gentry & Harrison, 2010).

2.2.2 Gender-Neutral Advertising

There is increasing criticism against stereotypical-masculine advertising from men who do not feel that stereotypical advertisements reflect their true selves and are beyond the realm of reality (Gentry & Harry, 2016; Marshall et al., 2014). Accordingly, advertisers slowly move their depiction of men away from stereotypical depictions to a modern view that allows feelings, vulnerability, and diverse identities (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Men are starting to be portrayed as having greater emotional investment and attitudes towards gender roles have become more egalitarian (Fowler & Thomas, 2015).

The growth of non-stereotypical advertising began due to the urge to change how males are portrayed in advertisements. This type of advertising does not conform to stereotypes and either avoids traditional roles or may also challenge them (Chu et al., 2016). Gender-neutral advertising can be categorized in this advertising segment as it is a modern approach in marketing that aims to market products inclusively and do not associate with a specific gender (Smith & Bamberg, 2021; Stavrianea et al., 2020).

Gender-neutral advertising is characterized by the absence of stereotypical cues such as role distribution, emotional behavior or communication strategies (Stavrianea et al., 2020). Segmenting based on product benefits rather than gender and using neutral language are key components of gender-neutral advertising. As a result, rather than marketing the product specifically for a certain gender, the advantages that each consumer can receive are highlighted (Monakhove et al., 2023). Additionally, gender-neutral colors are used that are appealing to both genders, such as blueish shades (Bornadell et al., 2018). Activities and roles show men in the same power position as women and in situations that are seen as feminine and masculine (Knoll et al., 2011). Different brands use gender-neutral advertising strategies for their fashion labels, please refer to Appendix C.

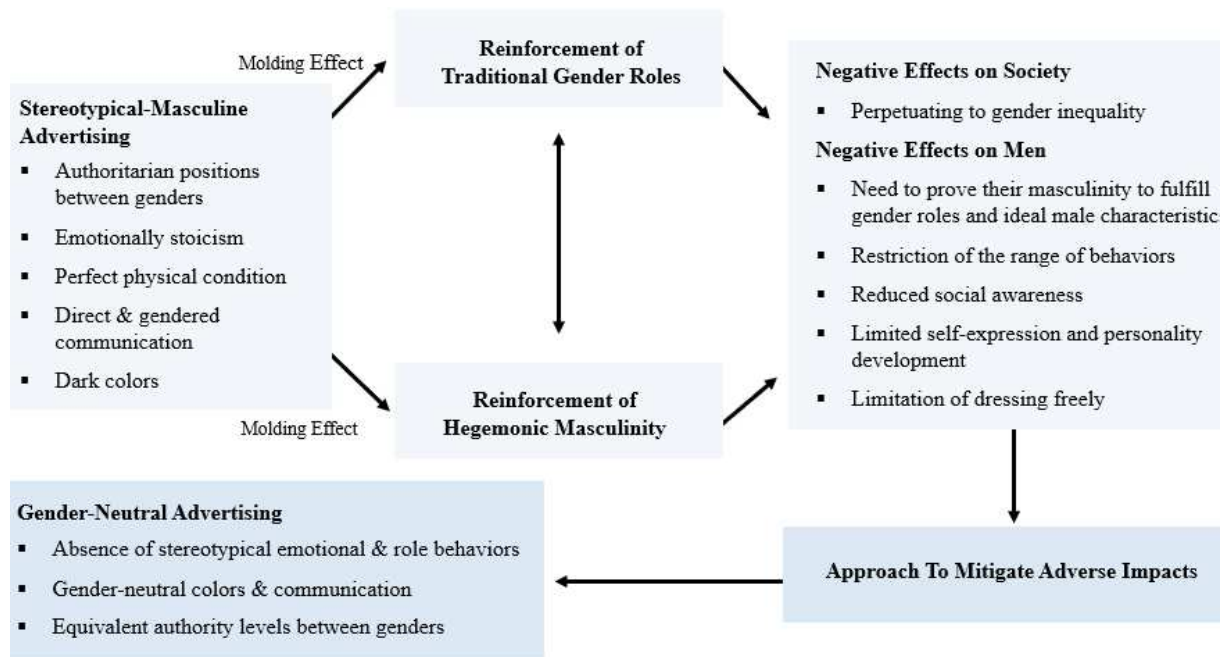
Prior studies document that this modern form of advertising has positive social effects, such as the potential to lessen respondents' stereotyping and thus contribute to the reduction of traditional gender role attitudes. Chu et al. (2016) found a decrease in the tendency to stereotype after exposure to a non-stereotypical advertisement. Further, Hundhammer & Mussweiler (2012) investigated that priming with modern gender roles in advertisements can reduce stereotypical behavior. In addition, there is also evidence for positive brand-related effects as studies show that men have significant positive attitudes toward non-stereotyped portrays in advertising compared to traditional illustrations (Baxter et al., 2016; Liljedal et al., 2020; Simone & Tosca, 2023).

However, it is also to mention that the attitude towards the advertisement depends on consumers' attitudes and perspectives (Eisend, 2019). As previously stated, this contemporary approach to advertising differs from traditional methods, particularly by contemporary conceptions of gender roles and by being a unique type of advertising (Chu et al., 2016). Thereof, a modern approach to gender is required for a positive perception of non-stereotypical advertisement (Chu et al., 2016; Ulrich, 2013), and it can be especially successful for men who value individuality und uniqueness (Chu et al., 2016; Eisend & Tarrahi, 2016).

Thus, gender-neutral advertising, by depicting non-stereotypical portrayals of men in media, has the ability to decrease the negative effects of stereotypical gender roles and hegemonic masculinity. To conclude, figure 1 depicts the complex interactions and impacts of stereotypical-masculine advertisements by illustrating gender-neutral advertising as an approach to mitigate these.

Figure 1

Stereotypical-Masculine and Gender-Neutral Advertising Interactions



Note: Own presentation

2.3. Masculine-Oriented Behavior in Fashion

2.3.1 Fashion Influences and Decisions

Fashion trends are recognized as a reaction to social and political changes, and they are influenced by shifts in gender roles and masculinity (Entwisle, 2015). Given that fashion products are seen as requiring a high level of involvement, the decision-making process, which describes how consumers assess products before making a purchase, is complex (Kotler, 1994). Consequently, significant aspects of this internal and external processing are extended aspects such as psychological factors (Solomon, 1986). Fashion is a comprehensive social phenomenon that can convey cultural values, social hierarchies, and individual identities through clothes, hairstyles, and accessories. This is intended to promote individual distinctions and create conformity (Simmel, 1957).

Fashion therefore has two main functions: to provide security and comfort and to enable personalization and differentiation (Simmel, 1957). The qualitative study of Barry & Phillips (2016) on men and fashion provides additional evidence. Results indicate that masculine

consumers either avoid participating in fashion to uphold and affirm their masculinity or do so to express themselves.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, it is evident that the consumer behavior in the non-stereotypical fashion advertising domain is complex, thus different psychological factors need to be considered. Consequently, the following subchapter will delineate masculine buying behavior and focus on different psychological theories within the context of fashion and advertising.

2.3.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Masculine Consumer Behavior

In contemporary research on masculine consumer behavior, numerous intrinsic factors hold significant importance and can be elucidated by psychological theories. Three theories are crucial when discussing stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral advertising and fashion: the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1978; 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which explains that behavior arises from group affiliation and the Self-Concept Theory (James, 1890; Rosenberg, 1965; Sirgy, 1982) as well as the Extended Self Theory (Belk, 1988), which describe that behavior is caused by factors of the internal self.

Behavior and Social Group Affiliation

The Social Identity Theory - SIT (Tajfel, 1978; 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) describes how belonging to significant social groups influences individuals' attitudes as well as behaviors and consists of three components: social categorization, social identification and social comparison. According to this theory, people categorize themselves and others into groups to develop affiliation, to then identify with their own group which creates emotional attachment, and thus influences behavior. Therefore, the SIT suggests that the ingroup should be positive and distinct from the outgroup, with the aim of increasing self-esteem (Brown, 2019).

The effectiveness of advertising therefore depends on the ingroup masculine consumers feel they belong to and whether these advertisements and products support the ingroup's behavior. An important factor that influences the evaluation of stereotypical and non-stereotypical advertising is *attitudes towards traditional gender roles* (Chu et al., 2016; Ulrich, 2013). Men who internalize traditional gender role attitudes are more likely to belong to ingroups that embody traditional masculinity, influencing their behavior and are more drawn to traditional advertising and fashion as a way to demonstrate their ingroup affiliation. Research suggests that

men who hold traditional gender role attitudes evaluate stereotypical advertising more positive (Meulenaer et al., 2018; Morrison & Schaffner, 2003). Conversely, men with less traditional attitudes are more favorable towards non-stereotypical advertising (Chu et al., 2016; Ulrich, 2013).

Behavior and the Self

Masculine consumer behavior is, however, not only dependent on social groups but also on different factors influencing the self that can be described in this context based on the Self-Concept Theory (Sirgy, 1982), and the Extended Self Theory (Belk, 1988).

The Self-Concept Theory (James, 1890; Rosenberg, 1965), has been developed by many researchers based on various aspects and describes the self-image as well as self-perception. In the area of consumer behavior, Sirgy (1982) provides important work to understand how the self-concept of individuals influences their purchasing behavior. The self-concept is made up of several components that together determine consumer behavior and includes self-image, self-esteem, ideal self, and social-self, which all relate to how individuals perceive themselves, including physical appearance, personality traits, and how others perceive them, influencing their public image. Consequently, it also describes the accentuation and perceptions of the entire social environment (Mead, 1934; Schau & Gilly, 2003), going beyond the emphasis of the ingroup as described in the SIT (Tajfel, 1978; 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The Extended Self Theory (Belk, 1988) further explains that possessions become integral parts of consumers that reinforce their individual identities and can be viewed as an extension of the self, increasing the importance of individual expression. Thus, the Self-Concept Theory (Sirgy, 1982) and the Extended-Self Theory (Belk, 1988) describe that the effectiveness of non-stereotypical advertising is not only dependent on the belonging to social groups but includes deeper psychological factors that motivate masculine purchase behavior. Additionally, these theories explain the reason for increasing criticism of stereotypical advertising by men as this advertisement type limits self-expression and thus the possibility of individual identities (Gentry & Harry, 2016; Marshall et al., 2014). Consequently, two factors emerge as critical for gender-neutral advertising: the potential for *self-expression* and masculine consumer's *need for uniqueness*.

Self-expression is a distinctive characteristic that allows one to express uniqueness and individuality to both them and other people (Solomon, 1983; Da Silveira et al., 2015). This

factor is mainly driven by achieving personal fulfillment, authenticity and identity (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and especially modern fashion is seen as an “unconscious” field of self-expression for expressing a real self, an ideal self, or a social-self (Entwistle, 2015; Sinh & Koh, 2020). Studies support that men use fashion as a means of self-expression to express their creativity and identity (Kostrzewski & Wojciech, 2018; Kang et al, 2011; Morrison & Johnson, 2012; Parker et al., 2014). This understanding highlights the importance of self-expression in achieving brand-related outcomes, including the intention to purchase (Chernev et al., 2011), positive emotional attachments to the brand, and positive word-of-mouth (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Another aspect of the expression of identity through consumption is need for uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977), which describes the need for individuality and uniqueness. As a result, consumers prefer to avoid overly popular products such as fashion, instead looking for unique and scarce items (Tian et al., 2001). Need for uniqueness is mainly influenced by the individual need to differentiate (Lynn & Harris, 1997; Snyder & Fromkin, 1989). However, factors such as social norms and contexts can influence the need to be unique (Berger & Heath, 2007; Tian et al., 2001).

Need for uniqueness is an important factor influencing purchase intentions, especially for masculine consumers (Seo & Lang, 2019). Furthermore, this factor is related to gender-neutral advertising because this type of advertising is nonconventional and primarily distinguished by being distinctive and special, it is thus especially effective with individuals who desire to express their individuality and uniqueness (Chu et al., 2016).

To summarize, the SIT provides important insights into how traditional gender role attitudes influence the effectiveness of stereotypical and non-stereotypical advertising through group affiliation. However, masculine consumer behavior is complex, and possessions are seen as an extension of the self-concept which encompasses broader aspects than just the attitude towards gender roles. Consequently, it has been demonstrated that self-expression and need for uniqueness play significant roles in masculine consumer behavior. Table 1 visualizes the elaborated theories and factors in the context of stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral advertising.

Table 1

Theories and Factors in Stereotypical-Masculine and Gender-Neutral Advertising

Theory	Source of Motivation	Factor
Social Identity Theory	Social Groups	Traditional Gender Role Attitudes
Self-Concept Theory Extended-Self Theory	Individual Self	Self-Expression & Need for Uniqueness

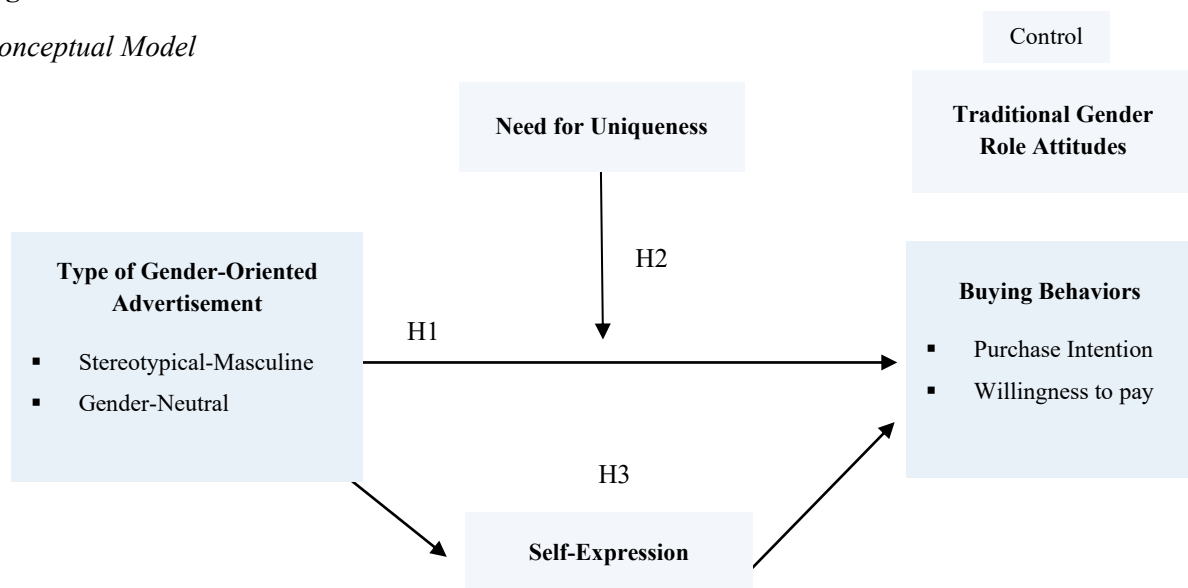
Note: Own presentation

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The theoretical background concerning stereotypical depictions of men in advertising and their effects as well as masculine consumer behavior in fashion serves as a basis for the empirical research and determines the relationships and variables to be tested. This research aims to analyze the effects of the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) on buying behaviors (purchase intention and willingness to pay (WTP)). Further, this study will investigate the moderating role of need for uniqueness and the mediating effect of self-expression. Due to its significance, the covariate traditional gender role attitudes, on the moderation analysis is investigated (figure 2).

Figure 2

Conceptual Model



Note: Own presentation

Hypotheses

Men are adopting a range of non-hegemonic traits, which is indicative of the shift in masculinity towards egalitarian viewpoints (Barry, 2018). As a result, men perceive stereotypical advertisements as negative as it strengthens traditional gender roles and hegemonic masculinity, thus limiting their individual identity and hindering self-development and differentiation (Gentry & Harry, 2016; Marshall et al., 2014). These viewpoints are supported by research that indicates that men prefer nontraditional forms of advertising (Baxter et al., 2016; Liljedal et al., 2020; Simone & Tosca, 2023).

Contemporary viewpoints have given rise to greater dressing freedom, which has raised the interest of masculine consumers in fashion (Barry, 2018). As a result, gender-neutral advertising, which challenges conventional gender roles by featuring non-stereotypical male representation, combined with gender-neutral fashion blending elements of different gender identities, is likely to lead to more favorable purchasing behaviors in the realm of fashion compared to stereotypical-masculine advertising. Based on these primary findings, it can be hypothesized:

H1: There will be a positive impact of the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) on buying behaviors so that: gender-neutral advertisement will be associated with higher (a) purchase intention and (b) higher WTP than stereotypical-masculine advertisement.

Masculine consumer behavior is complex and includes diverse psychological aspects. Based on the foundational understanding of the importance of identity expression, need for uniqueness is a way in which identity is expressed through consumption (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Some individuals have a strong desire to differentiate from others through opting for distinctive products (Workman & Kidd, 2000). In modern times, men strive to set themselves apart through their fashion choices, making uniqueness a significant factor in the fashion industry (Chu et al., 2016; Barry, 2018). Gender-neutral advertising also has the distinctive characteristic of being unique and is a form of advertising that is not yet mainstream, which satisfies the poetic need for uniqueness among consumers (Chu et al., 2016). Further, research illustrates that consumers with a high need for uniqueness tend to positively evaluate non-stereotypical advertisements, as they perceive them as unique and engaging. On the other hand, consumers with a lower need

for uniqueness tend to prefer traditional advertisements (Chu et al., 2016). Therefore, the second hypothesis can be stated:

H2: Need for uniqueness will moderate the relationship between the type of gender-oriented advertisement and buying behaviors, so that: the higher the need for uniqueness the higher the impact of gender-neutral (vs. stereotypical-masculine) advertisement on (a) purchase intention and (b) WTP.

Since gender-neutral advertising is defined by its depiction of progressing gender values, traditional gender role attitudes play a significant role in evaluating advertisements for men and, consequently, influencing purchasing decisions. According to research, men with traditional gender role attitudes are more likely to be in favor of advertisements that support traditional gender roles and vice versa (Chu et al., 2016; Meulenaer et al., 2018; Morrison & Schaffner, 2003; Ulrich, 2013).

Gender-related attitudes and traits also have an impact on consumers individual beliefs and behaviors (Fischer & Arnold, 1994; Spence, 1993) and social norms and contexts can influence the need to be unique (Berger & Heath, 2007; Tian et al., 2001). Therefore, it is significant to use traditional gender role attitudes as a covariate for the moderating effect of need for uniqueness as this effect tests the strength of the relationship between type of gender-oriented advertising on buying behaviors without testing the direct causal mechanism of the study (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Thus, traditional gender role attitudes are eliminated as a confounding factor by isolating masculine's need for uniqueness which increases the internal validity of the effect (Maxwell et al., 2017).

According to literature, the self-concept is an important determinator of purchasing decisions and thus advertising effectiveness through identity expression (Sirgy, 1982). Products can also become essential components of an individual (Belk, 1988) and fashion in particular is used by men to express a real self, an ideal self, or a self that is viewed as a reference group (Barry, 2018; Entwistle, 2015; Sinh & Koh, 2020).

The limited individual representation of men in stereotypical advertisements is one of the reasons why men have been criticizing this type of advertising (Barry & Phillips, 2016; Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Gentry & Harry, 2016; Marshall et al., 2014). Further, research indicates that men express their creativity and individuality through fashion (Kostrzewski & Wojciech, 2018;

Kang et al, 2011; Morrison & Johnson, 2012; Parker et al., 2014) and that gender-neutral clothing is particularly useful for expressing identity (Sinh & Koh, 2020). Furthermore, self-expression has the ability to achieve positive brand effects (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Chernev et al., 2011). Thus, self-expression is expected to be a significant mediator in influencing masculine buying behaviors. Considering these prior key research findings, the following hypothesis is suggested as follows:

H3: Self-expression will mediate the relationship between the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral advertisement) and buying behaviors ((a) purchase intention and (b) WTP).

4. Methodology and Data Collection

4.1 Research Method

For the purpose of this research, primary data is collected and analyzed to answer the research questions in this thesis. The experimental design is chosen in this case because it is most effective in determining the causal relationship between the variables being tested while ensuring a high degree of internal validity (Stanley & Campbell, 1963).

A parallel group model was chosen for the research process because it is imperative that the factors be under control. In this approach, participants are divided into two groups in which they are exposed to two different advertisements and are analyzed in parallel. The paired group is exposed to the stereotypical-masculine advertisement and the experimental group to the gender-neutral advertisement (Levy & Hastie, 2009).

4.2 Sampling

Sampling is the selection of individuals to be surveyed, representing a subset of the target population based on certain characteristics (Bryman, 2016). In this study, non-probability sampling, more precisely, purposive sampling, was employed.

This sampling method selects participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question, allowing researchers to focus on specific traits within a population for deeper insights (Tongco, 2007). For this study, the criteria were gender, specifically masculine participants. As a subset of purposive sampling, homogeneous sampling focused on a uniform

group of participants. By selecting only masculine participants, it was possible to gain insights about the behaviors and attitudes of men regarding the research topic. To do so a screening question was included at the beginning of the survey, excluding all participants that do not identify as masculine. There were no other restrictions besides gender. The survey was shared on social media, and invitations to participate were sent to the researcher's personal network.

Owing to the researcher's potential outreach, young men attending universities make up most of the prospective sample. It has to be acknowledged that while men of all ages can be regarded as inclusive consumers, young men are the most inclusive. The social aspects of brands have a significant impact on their purchasing decisions. Of particular importance to them are aspects like gender representation in advertising (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

4.3 Research Instruments

The research was performed based on two experimental designs: a pre-study to test the feasibility of the study and a main study on which the results are based (Rios et al., 2010). The data was collected using an online survey via the CXM platform Qualtrics (2024) to collect the most comparable and objective data possible. Further, a standardized survey was conducted as this type is best suited to capture feelings, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (Babbie, 2010). Considering ethical concerns, participants were informed of the study's objective and assured that their responses would remain confidential, anonymous, and solely used for research purposes. This tactic helps reduce social desirability bias by ensuring participants are not pressured to provide socially acceptable responses (Fisher, 1993).

4.3.1 Pre-Study

The purpose of the pre-study was to assess the validity of the questions and if the manipulation check questions performed sufficiently. In total, 34 masculine participants completed the survey. Since parallel group testing was used, participants were randomly exposed to one of the two experimental conditions. One-half of the participants were presented with a stereotypical-masculine advertisement, and the other half with a gender-neutral advertisement. After viewing the advertisement, the participants were given two manipulation check items to complete, aimed to identify whether the advertisement was evaluated as “gender-inclusive” and avoided “stereotypical-masculine attributes” on a 7-point Likert scale (1—strongly disagree, 7—strongly agree).

Demographics revealed that the majority of the respondents were between 18 and 34 (87.9%), from Germany (57.6%), attending a university full-time (51.5%), already holding a Bachelor's degree (57.6%) and having an annual income of less than €10,000 (60.6%).

To guarantee the most accurate results, scale reliability is tested. The bivariate correlation analysis is used to analyze the correlation for the manipulation check, which consists of a two-item scale. The Pearson correlation r indicates the strength of the relationship between the two tested items. A correlation of 0 denotes no relationship, while a correlation of (-)1 denotes a perfect correlation (Schober et al., 2018). Pearson correlation is statistically significant at $p < .001$ and r above .50 (Cohen, 1988). Thus, results indicate a high correlation (see table 2).

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Pre-Study

Variable	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig (2-tailed)
Manipulation Check	.83	< .001

Further, an independent t -test was conducted to test the manipulation check questions. The results (see table 3) show that the advertisements differ significantly in the evaluation of the consumers ($M_{\text{stereotypical-masculine}} = 2.32$, $SD = .71$ vs. $M_{\text{gender-neutral}} = 6.06$, $SD = .60$; $t(31) = -16.32$, $p < .001$). Since the manipulations worked as expected, the author moved to the main study with confidence.

Table 3

Manipulation Check Pre-Study

Variable	Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement				t -test
	Stereotypical-Masculine		Gender-Neutral		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Manipulation Check	2.32	.71	6.06	.60	-16.32***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, + $p \leq .1$

Note: Equal variances assumed

4.3.2 Main Study

The main study provides the framework for the data collection, analysis and hypotheses' testing. The online experiment was available for completion from the 2nd of May until the 27th of June 2024. A total of 117 respondents could have been collected out of 173 initial participants who either did not finish the survey, identified with another gender than male, or preferred not to indicate their gender. Masculine participants were randomly presented with one of the two experimental conditions, 62 of which were stereotypical-masculine and 55 of which were gender-neutral. The group size is presumed to be large enough to align with the required number of observations for a randomized experimental study (Maxwell et al., 2017).

4.4 Design and Procedure

The study's primary objective is to analyze the effect of stereotypical-masculine vs- gender-neutral advertisements on masculine buying behavior. Further, the moderating role of need for uniqueness with the covariate traditional gender role attitudes and the mediating influence of self-expression are analyzed. The study design followed a 2 (type of gender-oriented advertisement: stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral) between-within-subjects design, with need for uniqueness and self-expression as measured (continuous) moderator and mediator variables, respectively.

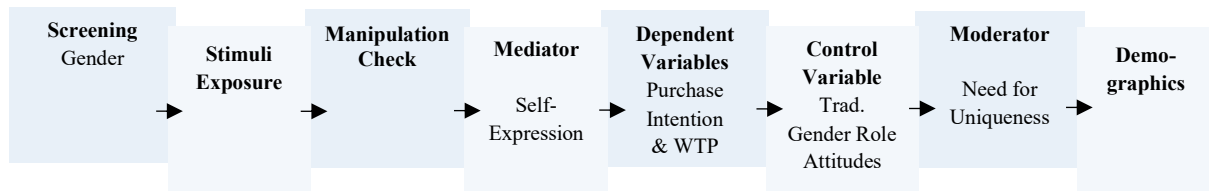
The participant was first presented with a brief introduction describing the survey's parameters but not stating its precise goal. The experimental group was exposed to a gender-neutral advertisement, which represents gender-neutral advertising strategies and a masculine and a feminine model. In contrast, the stereotypical-masculine advertisement (control group) was presented with a similar stimulus. However, only one masculine model was depicted and this advertisement employed stereotypical-masculine advertising strategies. After the exposure to the type of gender-oriented advertisement, participants had to determine whether the previously shown stimuli were perceived as gender-inclusive or stereotypical-masculine, as manipulation checks.

To avoid biasing the participant's responses, the survey included questions on self-expression and buying behaviors separately directly after the exposure. This approach aimed to minimize memory distortion and gather accurate emotional and cognitive responses (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Petty et al., 1983). Questions about traditional gender role attitudes and need for

uniqueness were asked later in the survey, followed by demographic questions (see figure 3). Finally, a section acknowledging participants' contribution was included. Please refer to Appendix D.

Figure 3

Survey Order



Source: own presentation

4.5 Stimuli Development

To facilitate the exploration of various scenarios, two distinct advertisements from a fictional fashion brand were created. These advertisements were altered using digital manipulation, and advertising strategies were applied to differentiate them between stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral. The foundation of the different advertisements is an e-commerce product image of a pair of black jeans from the brand ASOS (ASOS, n.d.).

This product was purposefully chosen because jeans are a classic fashion item with its purchase a wide range of consumers can identify with, and the viewer is more likely to notice that the product is gender-neutral because a pair of jeans is more visually striking than, for example, a shirt. Another reason for choosing this specific product image is the potential for digital manipulation, as the picture allowed to create a masculine-stereotypical version by removing the female model. Further, the product image provided significant cues regarding gender-neutral advertising. Both genders were thus depicted in the same position of power, while at the same time, the colors were kept muted to signify gender-neutrality. A fictional brand named "Evers Attire" was employed to enhance the advertisement's realism while also ensuring distinction from pre-existing brand preferences.

To draw statistically significant conclusions, advertisements must be similar in their product and advertising attributes, even when they are compared side by side in a parallel group model (Schweidel et al., 2006). As mentioned, both advertisements depicted a pair of black jeans

branded by the fictional brand "Evers Attire", whose logo was placed in the same size and font at the top right. Further, both advertisements were strategically placed on a blue background. The structure of the two advertisements was identical, and the main slogan, "define your denim," was used in the same font and size. Each advertisement showed three different images: on the left was the product's main image with the model(s), on the right were close-ups of the product. The latter differed between the advertisements.

The differences in the advertisements are found in the way gender-neutral and stereotypical-masculine cues were portrayed. For instance, the gender-neutral advertisement depicted both men and women as well as a product close-up, and the use of a sub-slogan in neutral language illustrated gender-neutrality. In contrast, the advertisement, which is stereotypical-masculine, only featured the male model in each image. Further, in this type of gender-oriented advertisement, an image of a shirtless man in perfect physical condition was applied, inspired by various stereotypical jeans advertisements of brands such as Levis and Diesel (Elizabeth, 2009; Mauclère, n.d.). This picture featured dark colors associated with hegemonic masculinity. To use direct communication, a gender-laden sub-slogan was inspired by a Hugo Boss campaign (Pinterest, n.d.) This different approach made it possible to analyze and compare the effectiveness of gender-neutral and stereotypical-masculine advertisements. Please refer to Appendix E.

4.6 Variable Description

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation Checks aimed to identify whether the advertisement was evaluated as “gender-inclusive” and avoided “stereotypical-masculine attributes” on a 7-point Likert scale (1—strongly disagree, 7—strongly agree).

Independent Variables

Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement was experimentally manipulated using two conditions, stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral.

Dependent Variables

Buying Behavior

Purchase Intention was assessed with three items regarding participants' likelihood and possibility of purchase and their willingness to buy on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – extremely unlikely, 7 – extremely likely) adapted from Lynn & Harris (1997).

Willingness to Pay (WTP) was evaluated with the slider function ranging from a price of 0€ to 200€ for a pair of jeans from the advertised brand.

Moderator

Need for Uniqueness adapted from Ruvio et al. (2008), comprised three different components: creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity. This measure asked participants to rate their desire to purchase unique products and their motivation to distinguish from others. The variable consisted of 12 items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – extremely unlikely, 7 – extremely likely).

Mediator

Self-Expression was adapted from Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) and consisted of 7 items which evaluated to what extent participants can express themselves through the fashion advertisement, measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – extremely unlikely, 7 – extremely likely).

Control Variable

Traditional Gender Role Attitudes was adapted from the gender role attitude scale (GRAS) (Zeynepoğlu & Terzioğlu, 2011) and was composed of 8 items by asking participants to rate statements in regard to traditional gender role opinions and situations on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – extremely unlikely, 7 – extremely likely).

Please refer to the main survey in Appendix D for insights about the items and scales that were applied to evaluate the variables.

5. Analysis and Results

This chapter analyzes the data using descriptive statistics and the effect of stimuli manipulation. The measurement items are analyzed for reliability and correlation. Different statistical analyses are applied to test the hypotheses.

5.1 Sample Characterization

The demographic questions are the basis to analyze descriptive statistics. Of the 117 masculine respondents were the majority between 25 and 34 years old (53.8%), followed by the range of 18 to 24 (39.3%). The participants were from twelve different countries, however, Germany makes up the largest part of the sample (50.4%) followed by Austrian (13.7%) and Portuguese respondents (12.8%). In total, most of the sample is from other European countries, only a small portion originated from South America (0.85%).

In terms of education, the sample represents a highly educated cohort. Most of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree (74.4%) followed by a master's degree (20.5%). High school degrees (4.3%) and one doctorate (0.9%) is also represented in the sample. The majority of the sample is made up of university students (59.8%) followed by full-time working adults (21.4%) and part-time employees (12.8%) as well as unemployed participants looking for work (5.1%) and one retired participant (0.9%). Employment status is also reflected in the annual income as most participants earn below 10,000€ (59%), followed by 10,000€ – 19,999€ (17.1%), 20,000€ - 49,999€ (7.7%), 50,000€ – 74,999€ (6%) and 75,000€ - 150,000€ (3.5%). Further, the sample is also characterized by an annual income of over 150,000€ (1.7%). Please refer to Appendix F for detailed information.

5.2 Scale Reliability

All scales are derived from reliable literature sources, however scale reliability is tested to ensure the most accurate results. For the two-item scale manipulation check, the bivariate correlation analysis is used. The Pearson correlation r indicates the degree of relationship between the two tested items. A correlation of (-)1 indicates a perfect correlation, which can be either positive or negative, whereas a correlation of 0 indicates no relationship (Schober et al., 2018). Results indicate that Pearson correlation is statistically significant at $p < .001$ and r above 0.5 (Cohen, 1988), thus the variable manipulation check has a high level of reliability, and items have been re-coded in the new variable (see table 4).

Table 4*Pearson Correlation*

Variable	Pearson Correlation (<i>r</i>)	Sig (2-tailed)
Manipulation Check	.81	< .001

To assess the reliability of multi-item scales, a factor analysis with a principal component analysis and varimax rotation was conducted. The variables in question are purchase intention, self-expression, need for uniqueness, and traditional gender role attitudes, which only had one extractable component for each variable. Moreover, the reliability of Likert-type questions was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha statistical test (see table 5). Higher Cronbach's alpha values (which range from 0.1 to 1) correspond to higher levels of internal consistency and reliability (Peterson, 1994). Thus, results show that for all variables Cronbach's alpha was sufficiently high with values above 0.9 and were therefore re-coded into new variables including all initial items.

Table 5*Cronbach's Alpha*

Variable	Initial number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha if items deleted	Items deleted	Final number of items
Purchase Intention	3	.98	-	-	3
Self-Expression	7	.98	-	-	7
Need for Uniqueness	12	.97	-	-	12
Traditional Gender Role Attitudes	8	.90	-	-	8

5.3 Manipulation Check

To analyze if the manipulations were interpreted as intended, an independent sample *t-test* for equality of means with a 95% confidence interval was performed.

The findings show that there are notable variations in how the different types of advertisements affect the manipulation check item (see table 6). In comparison to the stereotypical-masculine advertisement, participants rated gender-neutral advertisement much higher in terms of

avoidance of stereotypical-masculine attributes and gender-inclusivity ($M_{\text{stereotypical-masculine}} = 2.84, SD = 1.56$, vs. $M_{\text{gender-neutral}} = 5.56, SD = 1.15$; $t(115) = -10.6, p < .001$).

Table 6

Manipulation Check Main Study

Variable	Stereotypical-Masculine		Gender-Neutral		<i>t-test</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Manipulation Check	2.32	1.56	5.56	1.15	-10.60***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, + $p \leq .1$

Note: Equal variances assumed

5.4 Main Results

Hypothesis 1 – The Effect of Gender-Neutral Advertisement

H1: There will be a positive impact of the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) on buying behaviors so that: gender-neutral advertisements will be associated with higher (a) purchase intention and (b) higher WTP than stereotypical-masculine advertisements.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to test hypothesis 1 and, therefore, to determine the primary impact of the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypically masculine vs. gender-neutral) on the dependent variable (purchase intention and WTP). This type of statistical test considers several dependent variables at once and aids in comprehending differences between groups (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2013).

Table 7*MANOVA Results*

Dependent Variable	Stereotypical-Masculine		Gender-Neutral		<i>F-test</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Purchase Intention	3.35	1.28	4.92	1.58	34.80***
WTP	51.92	24.29	78.87	31.77	19.52***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, + $p \leq .1$

Note: Equal variances assumed

Results of the MANOVA (see table 7) indicate that the type of gender-oriented (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) advertisement had a statistically significant main effect on both dependent variables: purchase intention ($M_{\text{stereotypical-masculine}} = 3.36$ vs. $M_{\text{gender-neutral}} = 4.92$, $F(1,115) = 34.80$, $p < .001$) and WTP ($M_{\text{stereotypical-masculine}} = 51.92$ vs. $M_{\text{gender-neutral}} = 74.87$, $F(1,115) = 19.52$, $p < .001$).

To gain deeper insights and to compare the means for both conditions (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) an independent samples *t-test* was performed on both dependent variables (purchase intention and WTP). This enables the identification of specific differences between groups for each dependent variable without affecting the MANOVA results (Barton et al., 2016).

Findings (see table 8) show that the means of the two dependent variables differed significantly between both conditions: for the gender-neutral advertisement induced a higher purchase intention ($M_{\text{stereotypical-masculine}} = 3.35$, $SD = 1.28$ vs. $M_{\text{gender-neutral}} = 4.92$, $SD = 1.58$; $t(115) = -5.89$; $p < .001$) and a higher WTP ($M_{\text{stereotypical-masculine}} = 51.92$, $SD = 24.29$ vs. $M_{\text{gender-neutral}} = 74.87$, $SD = 31.77$; $t(115) = -4.42$; $p < .001$) than for the stereotypical-masculine advertisement.

Table 8*Independent t-Test Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on Buying Behaviors*

Dependent Variable	Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement				<i>t-test</i>
	Stereotypical-Masculine		Gender-Neutral		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Purchase Intention	3.35	1.28	4.92	1.58	-5.89***
WTP	51.92	24.29	78.87	31.77	- 4.42***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, + $p \leq .1$

Note: Equal variances assumed

Both, purchase intention and WTP were significantly impacted by the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral). In comparison to stereotypical-masculine advertising, gender-neutral advertising showed considerably higher **(a)** purchase intention and **(b)** WTP, fully supporting hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 – Moderating Effect of Need for Uniqueness

H2: Need for uniqueness will moderate the relationship between the type of gender-oriented advertisement and buying behaviors, so that: the higher the need for uniqueness the higher the impact of gender-neutral (vs. stereotypical-masculine) advertisement on (a) purchase intention and (b) WTP.

To test hypothesis 2, the moderating effect of need for uniqueness on the relationship of type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) on buying behaviors (purchase intention and WTP) was examined. A regression analysis was conducted to examine a possible moderation effect with the help of Hayes' (2013, 2017) Process macro for SPSS, using model 1. Regarding variables, the need for uniqueness moderator was used as a continuous (mean-centered) variable, and the type of gender-oriented advertisement was dummy-coded (0 = stereotypical-masculine; 1 = gender-neutral). This regression model demands for a significant moderating effect that the confidence interval does not include zero (i.e. the upper and lower limit is positive and negative, respectively) (Hayes, 2015).

Purchase Intention. Results show that the gender-oriented advertisement type (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) had a statistically significant main effect on purchase intention

($b = 1.39$, $SE = .23$, $t(113) = 6.05$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [.94, 1.85]$), despite a statistically non-significant main effect of need for uniqueness ($b = -.09$, $SE = .12$, $t(113) = -.84$, $p < .40$, $95\% CI = [-.33, .13]$). More importantly, moderation results show a significant and positive gender-oriented advertisement type x need for uniqueness interaction effect on purchase intention ($b = .97$, $SE = .18$, $t(113) = 5.42$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [.62, 1.33]$) (see table 9).

Table 9

Need for Uniqueness as Moderator on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on Purchase Intention

Dependent Variable	Overall Model		Moderation				
	R ²	F-test	Estimate (b)	SE	t-test	LLCI	ULCI
Purchase Intention	.44	29.69***	.97	.18	5.42***	.62	1.33

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

A slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991; Fitzsimons, 2008) was further conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the conditional impacts of gender-oriented advertising (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) at ± 1 SD of the need for uniqueness mean. Results show differences between low, mean and high need for uniqueness on purchase intention and WTP, no significant effect occurs at -1 SD.

Findings show that the relationship between the type of gender-oriented and purchase intention was not significant at low (-1SD) need for uniqueness levels ($b = .13$, $SE = .33$, $t(113) = .39$, $p = .69$, $95\% CI = [-.53, .79]$). Yet, significant results were found at average (mean) ($b = 1.39$, $SE = .23$, $t(113) = 6.04$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [.94, 1.85]$) and high levels (+1 SD) of need for uniqueness ($b = 2.66$, $SE = .32$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [2.01, 3.30]$). Specifically, as need for uniqueness increased, the impact of the gender-neutral advertisement became more stringent and positively significant, whereas the impact of the stereotypical-masculine advertisement became more negatively rated (see table 10; figure 4).

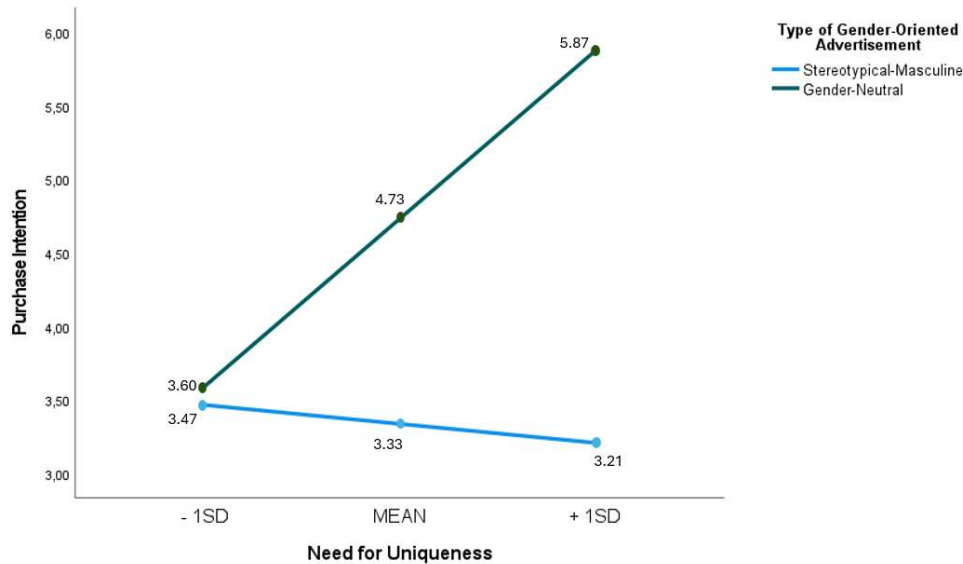
Table 10*Conditional Effects of Need for Uniqueness on Purchase Intention*

	Conditional Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Purchase Intention				
Low Need for Uniqueness (-1 SD)	.13	.33	-.53	.79
Mean Need for Uniqueness	1.39***	.23	.94	1.85
High Need for Uniqueness (+1 SD)	2.66***	.32	.94	3.30

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Figure 4

Moderator Need for Uniqueness on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on Purchase Intention



WTP. Results indicate again a significant main effect on *WTP* ($b = 20.05$, $SE = 4.67$, $t(113) = 4.27$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [10.74, 39.36]$) despite a statistically non-significant main effect of need for uniqueness ($b = -1.74$, $SE = .2.39$, $t(113) = -7.3$, $p = .47$, $95\% CI = [-6.48, 3.01]$). Moderation results showed a significant and positive gender-oriented advertisement type x need for uniqueness interaction effect on *WTP* ($b = 17.04$, $SE = 3.66$, $t(113) = 4.66$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [9.79, 24.29]$) (see table 11).

Table 11*Need for Uniqueness as Moderator on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on WTP*

Dependent Variable	Overall Model		Moderation				
	R ²	F-test	Estimate (b)	SE	t-test	LLCI	ULCI
WTP	.33	18.51***	17.04	3.66	4.66***	9.79	24.29

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Results of the slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991; Fitzsimons, 2008) show that the relationship between the type of gender-oriented and WTP was not significant at low (-1 SD) need for uniqueness levels ($b = -2.1$, $SE = 6.79$, $t(113) = -.31$, $p = .76$, 95% CI = $[-15.56, 11.36]$.) but significant at average (mean) ($b = 20.05$, $SE = 4.67$, $t(113) = 4.26$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = $[10.74, 29.36]$) and high levels ($+1$ SD) ($b = 42.21$, $SE = 6.58$, $t(113) = 6.41$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = $[29.17, 55.25]$) of need for uniqueness. Higher need for uniqueness led to a positively significant evaluation of the gender-neutral advertisement, while the impact of the stereotypical-masculine advertisement was more negatively rated (see table 12; figure 5).

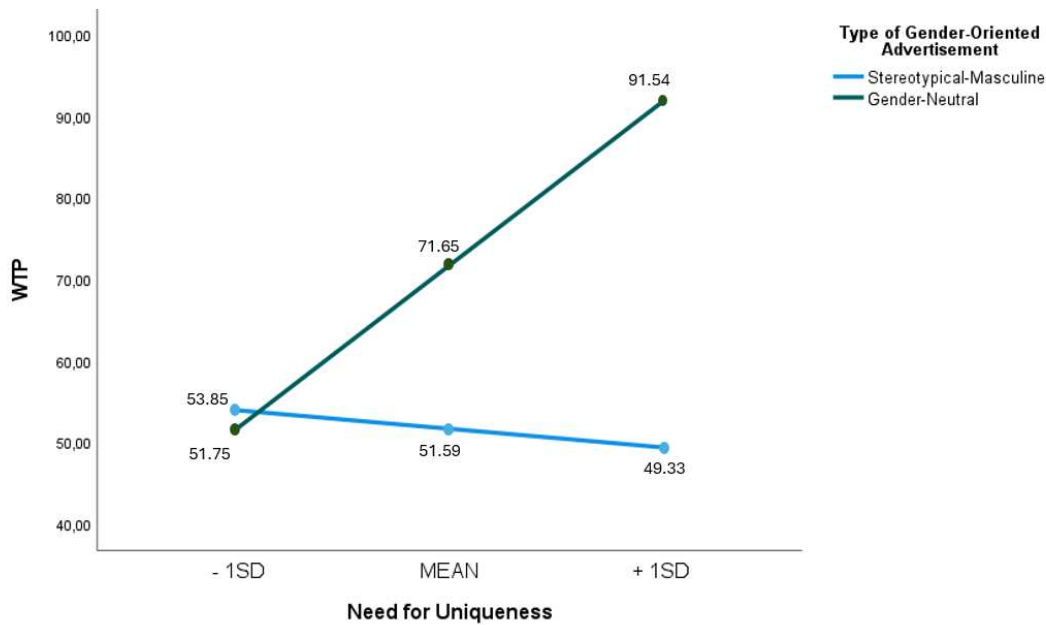
Table 12*Conditional Effects of Need for Uniqueness of WTP*

	Conditional Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
WTP				
Low Need for Uniqueness (-1 SD)	-2.13	6.79	-15.56	11.36
Mean Need for Uniqueness	20.05***	4.76	10.74	29.36
High Need for Uniqueness (+1 SD)	42.21***	6.58	29.17	55.25

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Figure 5

Moderator Need for Uniqueness on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on WTP



Controlling for Traditional Gender Role Attitudes

To further investigate the findings obtained in hypothesis 2, traditional gender role attitudes were added as a control variable to the analysis as it was initially anticipated that the degree of these attitudes would have an indirect impact on the valuations of the type of gender-oriented advertisement. For this purpose, a further regression analysis was performed using Hayes' (2013, 2017) Process macro for SPSS model 1 with the respective covariate.

Purchase intention. Results showed a statistically significant main effect of type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) ($b = 1.47$, $SE = .24$, $t(112) = 6.14$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [.99, 1.94]$) on purchase intention and no significant effect of traditional gender role attitudes on purchase intention ($b = 0.15$, $SE = .13$, $t(112) = 1.15$, $p = .25$, $95\% CI = [-.11, .39]$). More importantly, the two-way type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) x need for uniqueness interaction effect on purchase intention influenced by covariate traditional gender role attitudes remained statistically significant ($b = .98$, $SE = .18$, $t(112) = 5.46$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [.62, 1.33]$) (see table 13).

Table 13

Moderator Need for Uniqueness on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on Purchase Intention with Traditional Gender Role Attitudes as Covariate

Dependent Variable	Overall Model		Moderation				
	R ²	F-test	Estimate (b)	SE	t-test	LLCI	ULCI
Purchase Intention	.45	22.66***	.98	.18	5.46***	.62	1.33

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

As the regression analysis results demonstrate that there was no discernible change after adding the covariate, the slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991; Fitzsimons, 2008) also revealed no significant shift of the conditional impacts of type of gender-oriented advertising (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) at ± 1 SD of the need for uniqueness mean on purchase intention after adding traditional gender role attitudes as a covariate in the model. That is, findings show non-statistically significant results at low levels (-1 SD) of need for uniqueness ($b = .19$, $SE = .34$, $t(112) = .58$, $p = .56$, 95% CI = [-.47, .87]), but significant at average (Mean) ($b = 1.47$, $SE = .24$, $t(112) = 6.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.99, 1.94]) and high (+1 SD) ($b = 2.74$, $SE = .33$, $t(112) = 8.3$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [2.09, 3.39]) need for uniqueness levels (see table 14 and figure 6).

Table 14

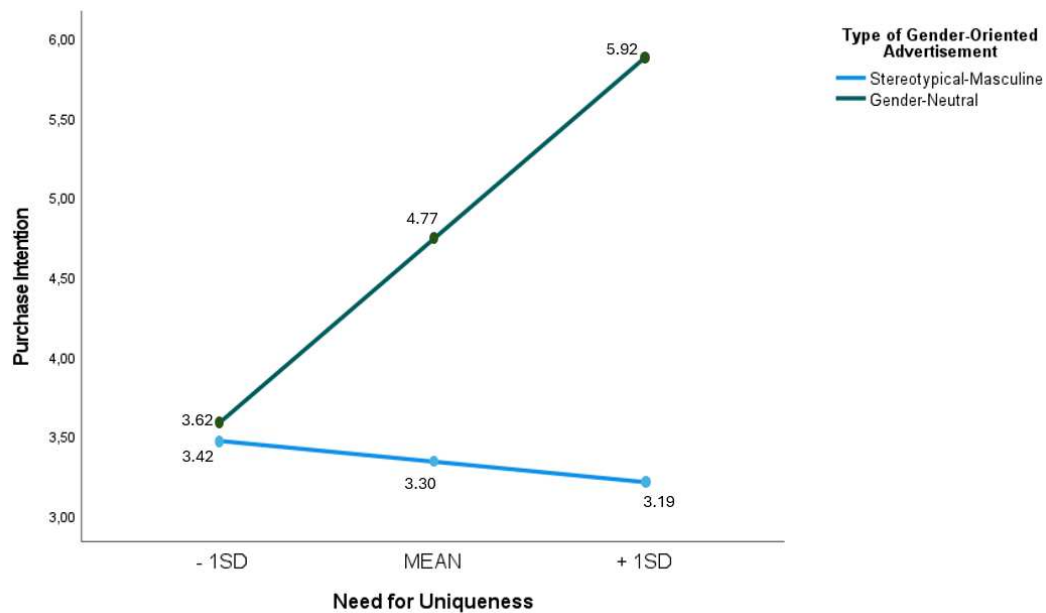
Conditional Effects of Need for Uniqueness on Purchase Intention with Covariate Traditional Gender Role Attitudes

	Conditional Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Purchase Intention				
Low Need for Uniqueness (-1 SD)	.19	.34	-.47	.87
Mean Need for Uniqueness	1.47***	.24	.99	1.94
High Need for Uniqueness (+1 SD)	2.74	.33	2.09	3.39

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Figure 6

Moderator Need for Uniqueness on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on Purchase Intention with Traditional Gender Role Attitudes as Covariate



WTP. Results also show a statistically significant main effect of type of gender oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) ($b = 18.79$, $SE = 4.88$, $t(112) = 3.85$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [-96.65, -25.22]$) on *WTP* but no significant effect of traditional gender role attitudes on *WTP* ($b = -2.49$, $SE = 2.59$, $t(112) = -.96$, $p = .34$, $95\% CI = [-7.62, 2.64]$). The two-way type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) x need for uniqueness interaction effect on purchase intention influenced by the covariate traditional gender role attitudes remained statistically significant ($b = 16.94$, $SE = 3.66$, $t(112) = 4.62$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [9.68, 24.19]$) (see table 15).

Table 15

Moderator Need for Uniqueness on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on WTP with Traditional Gender Role Attitudes as Covariate

Dependent Variable	Overall Model		Moderation				
	R ²	F-test	Estimate (b)	SE	t-test	LLCI	ULCI
WTP	.34	14.11***	16.94	3.66	4.63***	9.68	24.19

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Similarly to the previously obtained results, slopes analysis show differences between low and high need for uniqueness on WTP. Specifically, findings were non-significant at low (-1 SD) need for uniqueness levels ($b = -3.23$, $SE = 6.90$, $t(112) = -0.47$, $p = .64$, $95\% CI = [-16.90, 10.43]$), but significant at average (Mean) ($b = 18.79$, $SE = 4.88$, $t(112) = 3.85$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [9.12, 28.46]$) and high (+1 SD) ($b = 40.81$, $SE = 6.74$, $t(112) = 6.05$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [27.45, 54.17]$) need for uniqueness levels, confirming previously obtained findings (see table 16; figure 7).

Table 16

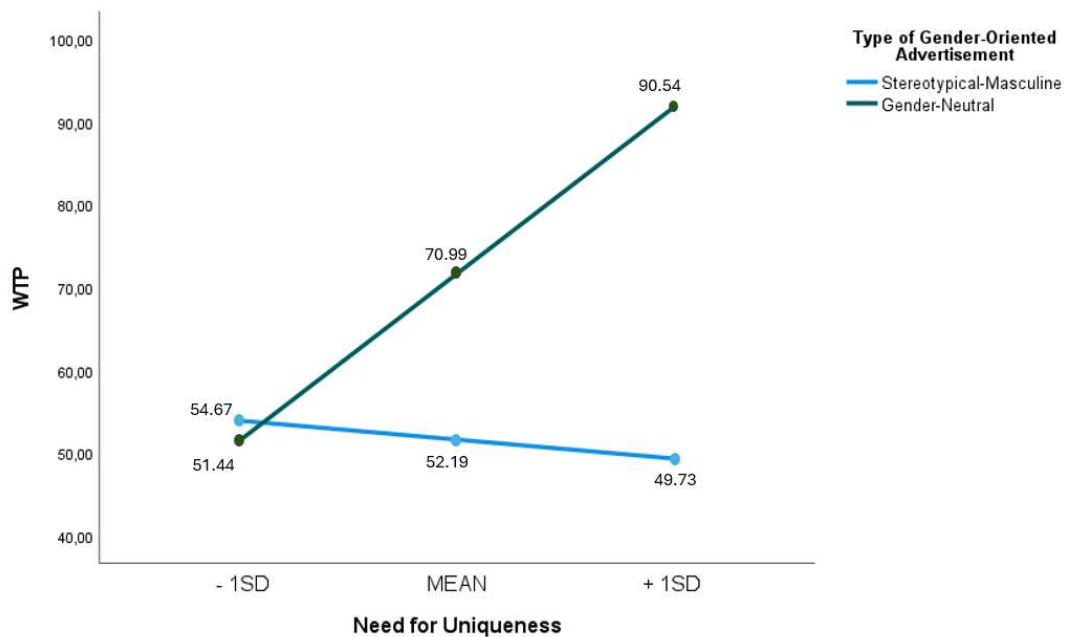
Conditional Effects of Need for Uniqueness on WTP with Covariate Traditional Gender Role Attitudes

	Conditional Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
WTP				
Low Need for Uniqueness (-1 SD)	-3.23	6.90	-16.90	10.43
Mean Need for Uniqueness	18.79***	4.88	9.12	28.46
High Need for Uniqueness (+1 SD)	40.81***	6.74	27.45	54.17

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p \leq .1$

Figure 7

Moderator Need for Uniqueness on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on WTP with Traditional Gender Role Attitudes as Covariate



The covariate traditional gender role attitudes showed not to interfere with the results obtained previously with the moderation analysis without the covariate. As a result, the moderation effect of need for uniqueness on masculine buying behaviors remains significant. Accordingly, the moderation effect is explained solely by the factor need for uniqueness and is not influenced by traditional gender role attitudes. The direction of the slopes varies according to the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical masculine vs. gender-neutral), specifically, the results indicate that masculine consumers with a high need for uniqueness have **(a)** higher purchase intentions and **(b)** higher WTP when exposed to the gender-neutral advertisement, thus fully supporting hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 – Mediation of Self-Expression

H3: Self-expression will mediate the relationship between the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral advertisement) and buying behaviors ((a) purchase intention and (b) WTP).

For testing hypothesis 3, the mediating effect of self-expression on the relationship between type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) and buying behaviors (purchase intention and WTP) was tested. For this purpose, Hayes' (2013) Process macro was used to perform a regression analysis, using model 4. To meet the requirements for mediation, there must be a significant path of a and b. Full mediation is seen when the c' path is no longer significant, otherwise, partial mediation is present (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Purchase Intention. ($R^2 = .87$, $F(2, 114) = 177.38$, $p < .001$). Results of the mediation analysis show that there is a full mediation of self-expression between type of gender-oriented advertising (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) on purchase intention (indirect effect = 1.34, SE = .25, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.87, 1.84]).

The impact of type of gender-oriented advertisement on self-expression (a) is statistically significant ($b = 1.53$, SE = .25, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [1.03, 2.02]). Accordingly, the impact of self-expression (b) on purchase intention is also significant ($b = .88$, SE = .06, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.77, .99]). The direct effect (c) of type of gender-oriented advertisement shows to be insignificant ($b = .22$, SE = .17, $p = .2$, 95% CI = [-.12, .56]) (see figure 8; table 17). The full mediation is supported by the fact that the confidence interval for the indirect effect (a*b) does

not include zero, (i.e. the upper and lower limit is positive and negative, respectively) (Hayes, 2015), and the direct effect non-significant.

Figure 8

Overview Mediation Self-Expression on Purchase Intention

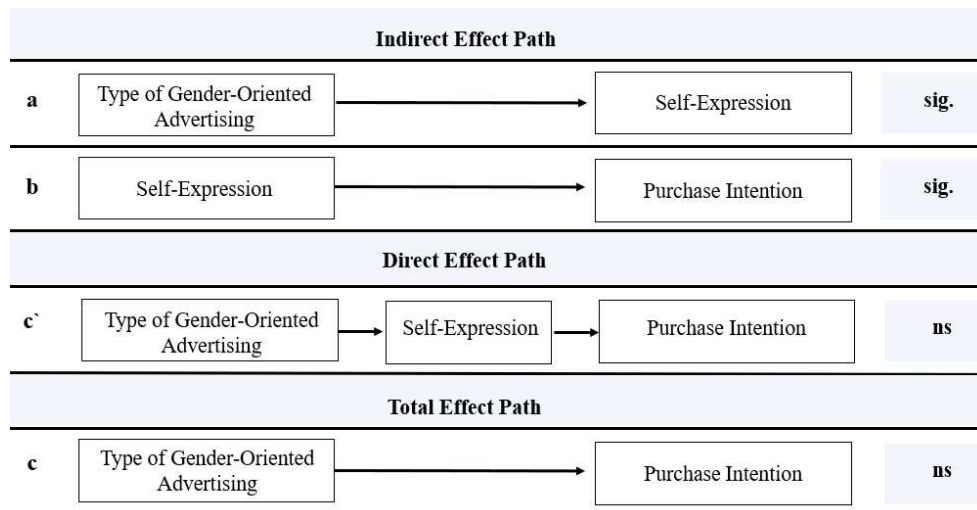


Table 17

Self-expression as Mediator on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on Purchase Intention

	Path	Effect	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect Effect Path				
a	Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement → Self-Expression	1.53***	1.03	2.02
b	Self-Expression → Purchase Intention	0.88***	.77	.99
Indirect Effect				
	a*b	1.34***	.87	1.84
Direct Effect Path				
c'	Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement → Self-Expression → Purchase Intention	.22	-.12	.56

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, + $p \leq .1$

WTP. ($R^2 = .62$, $F(2, 114) = 35.29$, $p < .001$). Regarding the second dependent variable, results also showed full mediation of self-expression between type of gender-oriented advertising (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) and WTP (indirect effect = 16.78, $SE = 4.72$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [8.61, 27.17]) (see figure 9; table 18).

Figure 9

Overview Mediation Self-Expression on WTP

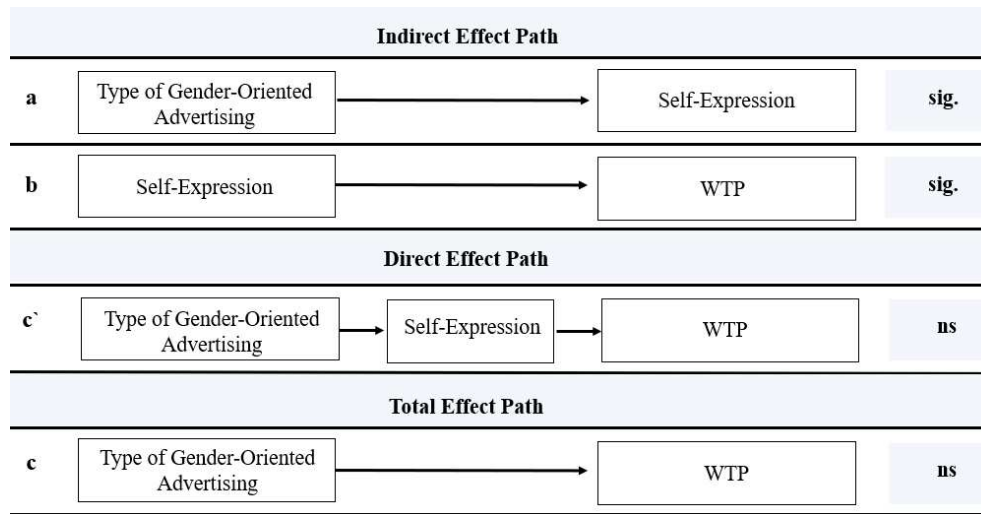


Table 18

Self-expression as Mediator on the Effect of Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement on WTP

	Path	Effect	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect Effect Path				
a	Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement → Self-Expression	1.53***	1.03	2.02
b	Self-Expression → WTP	11.01***	7.71	14.30
Indirect Effect				
	a*b	16.78***	8.61	27.17
Direct Effect Path				
c'	Type of Gender-Oriented Advertisement → Self-Expression → WTP	6.17	-3.95	16.29

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, + $p \leq .1$

The impact of type of gender-oriented advertisement on self-expression (a) as stated before showed to be statistically significant ($b = 1.53$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [1.03, 2.02]$). The effect of self-expression (b) on WTP was significant ($b = 11.01$, $SE = 1.66$, $p < .001$, $95\% CI = [7.71, 14.30]$), and the direct effect (c) of type of gender-oriented advertisement is accordingly non-significant ($b = 6.17$, $SE = 5.11$, $p = .23$, $95\% CI = [-3.95, 16.29]$). Full mediation was

therefore, also confirmed here by the fact that the confidence interval for the indirect effect (a*b) does not include zero and a non-significant direct effect.

Considering significant results, self-expression fully mediates the relationship between the type of gender-oriented advertisements (stereotypical-masculine vs. gender-neutral) and (a) purchase intention and (b) WTP. Further, as both indirect effect paths are significant while the direct effect paths are statistical not significant, the conditions by Baron & Kenny (1986) are fulfilled. Based on these results, hypothesis 3 can be fully supported.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The main objective of this thesis and the associated empirical research was to examine masculine buying behavior in the fashion industry. This was done by focusing on gender-neutral advertising as an approach to non-stereotypical depictions of men in media. In this regard, the intrinsic influences of the related aspects need for uniqueness and self-expression were examined.

To structure the complexity of this topic, three research questions were proposed. One is to answer how gender-neutral fashion advertising influences the buying behaviors of men (RQ1). Overall, the empirical study concludes that gender-neutral fashion advertisement positively influences men's purchasing behavior. Compared to the stereotypical-masculine advertisement, men show a significantly higher purchase intention and a higher WTP for the gender-neutral advertisement. These results suggest that non-stereotypical portrayals of men lead to more favorable buying behaviors and that gender-neutral advertising is one approach to its implementation.

Additionally, the impact of the factor need for uniqueness on the effectiveness of gender-neutral advertisements was examined (RQ2). The effectiveness of gender-neutral advertisements was found to not directly interfere with a high desire for uniqueness. However, results unveil an interesting psychological effect, as specifically masculine consumers who have a high need for uniqueness become more sensitized to gender-neutral advertisements and perceptions of the stereotypical-masculine advertisement is viewed more negatively. Accordingly, this study indicates that buying behaviors of masculine consumers increase when their need for uniqueness is high. Therefore, gender-neutral fashion advertising is perceived as an unconventional and individual approach that allows masculine consumers to differentiate themselves from others.

Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective traditional gender role attitudes emerged as significant in the context of need for uniqueness suggesting that it be incorporated into the study. It was demonstrated, nevertheless, that this factor has no effect on the purchasing behavior of gender-neutral fashion advertising and that need for uniqueness is fully capable of moderating masculine buying behaviors. Accordingly, the findings highlight the significance of need for uniqueness and offer valuable insights into the psychographic traits of the masculine target market for gender-neutral fashion advertising.

The role of self-expression and its influence on masculine buying behaviors should also be investigated (RQ3). This study shows that self-expression is important for men in gender-neutral fashion advertising, as it accounts for the positive indirect effect on masculine purchasing behaviors. The results of this study show by complete mediation that the type of gender-oriented advertisement (stereotypical-masculine vs- gender-neutral) on masculine buying behaviors is explained by self-expression as a mechanism. Accordingly, the findings demonstrate that masculine consumers can express themselves more through gender-neutral advertisements. As gender-neutral advertising avoids stereotypical representations that force men into traditional roles, it reflects contemporary notions of hegemonic masculinity that allow men to express themselves more freely and realistically.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

According to the literature, stereotypical depictions negatively impact society by reinforcing traditional gender roles (Gentry, 2010). Thus, researchers are interested in further investigating how these effects can be reduced, as minimizing stereotypes is crucial for societal progress (Chu et al., 2016). The study confirms that men prefer non-stereotypical advertising for brand effects, aligning with existing literature (Baxter et al., 2016; Liljedal et al., 2020; Simone & Tosca, 2023) and that stereotypical-masculine illustrations lead to negative outcomes (Åkestam et al., 2021; Dwivedy, 2009).

Research suggests that investigating the underlying mechanisms is important in understanding masculine consumer behavior (Barry & Phillips, 2016). Based on psychological theories, the Self-Concept Theory (Sirgy, 1982) and the Extended-Self Theory (Belk, 1988) demonstrate that intrinsic factors of the self are important in consumer behavior. In the context of this study, two factors, self-expression and need for uniqueness were found to be of particular importance.

The results of this investigation confirm the importance of self-expression in the context of fashion and brand-related outcomes of existing literature (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Chernev et

al., 2011; Kostrzewski & Wojciech, 2018; Kang et al, 2011; Morrison & Johnson, 2012; Parker et al., 2014; Sinh & Koh, 2020) as it accounts for the indirect effect explaining positive masculine buying behaviors of gender-neutral advertisements. Furthermore, high need for uniqueness is an important psychographic factor for the effectiveness of gender-neutral advertisements. This aligns with a study on cross-gender advertisements, another non-stereotypical advertisement area (Chu et. al., 2016).

Traditional gender role attitudes, which can be explained within the SIT (Tajfel, 1978; 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and as found of importance regarding non-stereotypical advertising by prior research (Chu et al., 2016; Meulenaer et al., 2018; Morrison & Schaffner, 2003; Ulrich, 2013) could not be supported in the context of this study. Traditional gender role attitudes have no significant main effect on the buying behaviors of men in the context of stereotypical-masculine and gender-neutral advertisements and do not influence the moderating effect of need for uniqueness.

6.2 Managerial Implications

This research provides important managerial and practical implications for marketers and businesses. The results of this thesis explore the important function of gender-neutral advertising and its persuasive influence on masculine purchase behavior. Thus, findings may assuage concerns about the lack of brand-related effects when non-stereotypical advertising is applied, as buying behaviors could be statistically proven to be higher for gender-neutral than for stereotypical-masculine advertisements. Therefore, it is possible to view gender-neutral advertising as an effective, non-stereotypical form of advertising for men regarding brand-related effects.

Important managerial takeaways from this study include the significance of embracing non-traditional gender roles and developing and promoting non-stereotypical representations of men in advertising. By fusing aspects of the feminine and masculine, gender-neutral fashion advertisement reflects hegemonic masculinity and increases buying behaviors.

To mitigate this effect, self-expression is a crucial component influencing positive buying behaviors of men by being a key element that helps to explain the positive effect on buying behaviors on gender-neutral advertisement. Therefore, advertisers should ensure that men can express themselves through their advertisements, which is, as this study shows, achieved by depicting non-stereotypical and gender-inclusive portrayals in the form of gender-neutrality.

The study highlights the importance of masculine consumers' need for uniqueness as those who value individuality as well as differentiation and express this through their purchases have more favorable buying behaviors toward gender-neutral advertisements and perceive stereotypical-masculine advertisements negatively. Therefore, brands that wish to effectively promote gender-neutral fashion should target consumers with high need for uniqueness, according to this study a significant psychographic factor.

Advertisers should ensure that their advertisements exhibit individuality, set themselves apart from the competition, and allow for the freedom of self-expression for the target audience to easily relate to the advertising. If these insights are implemented, it is possible to increase the purchasing behavior of men with gender-neutral fashion advertising, to support hybrid forms of masculinity and to break down traditional gender roles. Accordingly, gender-neutral advertising has the potential to promote the triple bottom line approach, which not only brings economic benefits but also presents a progressive and inclusive corporate image.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This research has revealed new insights and implications regarding masculine purchase behavior about gender-neutral advertisements, but it also has certain limitations that should be considered. Firstly, a drawback of the sample is its low representativeness, as most respondents were young, well-educated German men. This limits the generalizability of statistical findings to a wider population, potentially leading to erroneous interpretations (Hackshaw, 2008), especially considering cultural differences in the perception of gender roles (Zawisza et al., 2018; Furnham & Faragher, 2000; Moon & Chan, 2006; Paek et al., 2011). Another limitation is the different sample size between groups as more participants have been exposed to the stereotypical-masculine advertisement.

Communication problems can arise due to inadequate explanations of the survey questions (Yarmak, 2017). In addition, people interested in the research topic often participate at higher rates, which can lead to biased responses (Andrade, 2020; Klymenko & Kozelska, 2021). Participants may still give socially desirable answers despite efforts to mitigate social desirability through anonymity (Fisher, 1993). Additionally, the study stimulus is based on the author's skills and is not comparable to a professionally produced advertisement, thus results may differ. Furthermore, buying behaviors are only a small part of consumer evaluations, hence these should be tested using a multidimensional approach, such as brand awareness, loyalty, or further consumer perceptions.

These limitations point to opportunities for improvement in future research examining gender-neutral advertising and fashion regarding masculine consumer behavior and stereotyping. Future research should aim for more representative and diverse samples to increase the generalizability of the results. In particular, researchers should analyze the cultural effects of this advertising, for example between Western and Eastern countries and generations, as views on gender roles differ (Amed et al., 2023). In addition, next to brand-related effects, the direct social impact of gender-neutral advertising should be the subject of future research. Studies could investigate whether gender-neutral advertising reduces stereotyping, similar to the study on cross-gender advertising (Chu et al., 2016).

Research into gender-neutral advertising could be expanded to include further diversity and inclusion elements such as self-comparison or acceptance. As self-expression has been identified as an important factor in gender-neutral fashion advertising for masculine consumers, future research could investigate how this perception is further achieved. Finally, although this thesis aimed to understand the behavior of masculine consumers, future research should investigate how gender-neutral fashion advertisements, studied with their analyzed factors, influence the buying behaviors of female and non-binary consumers.

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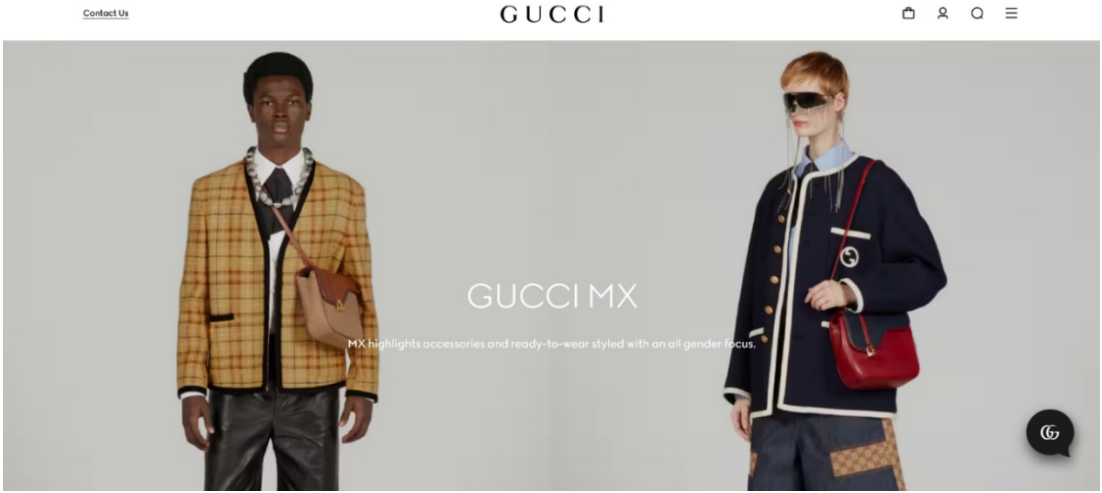
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Appendices

Appendix A Gender-Neutral Fashion

Image A1

Gucci MX Project Collection



Source: O'Grady (2016)

Image A2

Zara Ungendered Collection

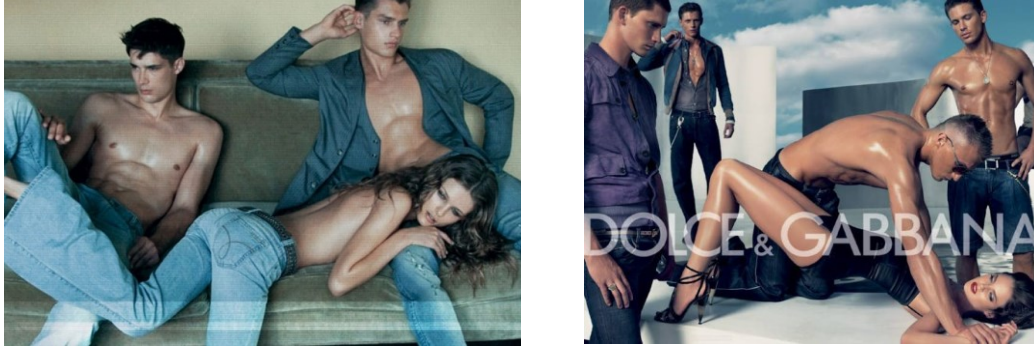


Source: Wren (2023)

Appendix B Stereotypical-Masculine Fashion Advertisements and Analyses

Image B1

Stereotypical-Masculine Dolce & Gabbana and Levis Advertisement



Source: Elizabeth(2009); Leitner (2016)

A striking example of stereotypical masculine advertising in the fashion world are the denim jeans campaigns by Levis and Dolce & Gabbana from the late 2000s (image B1). Hegemonic traits like assertiveness, aggression, and dominance are highlighted in these commercials. The stern and confident facial expressions of the models convey emotional stoicism, while the perfect physical condition of the male bodies is emphasized. The representation of the disparity in power between men and women, which places men in positions of authority and upholds traditional gender norms, is especially noteworthy.

Image B2

Masculine-stereotypical Colcci Advertisement

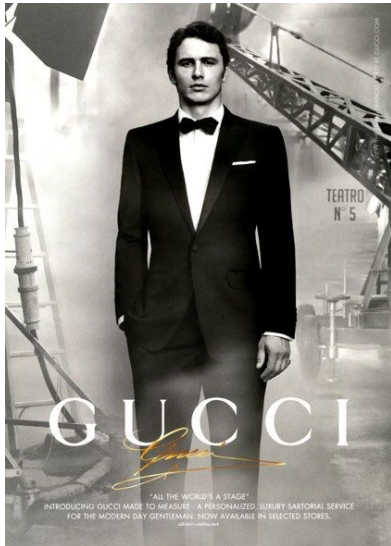


Source: The Fashionisto (2024)

An additional illustration would be the latest Colcci Fall 2024 campaign, also advertising denim clothes. Here, the ideal male body, dark colors, and a self-assured facial expression are employed (image B2).

Image B3

Masculine-Stereotypical Gucci Advertisement



Source: Pinterest (n.d.)

This Gucci advertisement from 2013 includes different cues relating to hegemonic masculinity. The strong impression of spirit and the self-assured and authoritarian attitude corresponds to the image of the stereotypical man. Power and control are also expressed by the use of the slogan “All the man's stage”. This suggests that the wearer of the suit is in the central role in life. The gendered-laden caption “for the modern gentlemen” directly addresses men without embellishment. Furthermore, dark colors are used that are associated with hegemonic masculinity (image B3).

Appendix C Gender-Neutral Fashion Advertisements and Analyses

Image C1

Gender-Neutral Diesel Divertissement



Source: Mauclère (n.d.)

A striking example of a gender-neutral advertisement is the decoded campaign by Diesel from 2015 (image C1). The advertisements demonstrate a gender-neutral and gender-inclusive approach that applies different visual and language specific cues to demonstrate gender-neutrality by excluding any gender-specific cues. The products illustrated in this advertisement, including the sweater and denim outfit, are worn by both genders which also have similar stylings, further emphasizing gender-neutrality and supports the hybrid form of masculinity. Diesel also used brief slogans like "this ad is gender neutral" and "same difference" in this campaign, which were intended to meaningful references to gender-neutrality. Additionally, models are positioned in the same way, which does not create a position of power between genders.

Image C2

Gender-Neutral EGONLAB Advertisement



Source: EGONLAB (2021)

A pair of jeans is also presented as gender-neutral in the social media advertisement of the inclusive brand EGONLAB from 2021. The slogan "Energy and ideas are more important than air right now!" implies that individuality in relation to energy and creativity is more important than conventional views, and gender-specific cues are also avoided for this commercial (image C2).

Appendix D Survey Questionnaire

Dear participant,

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

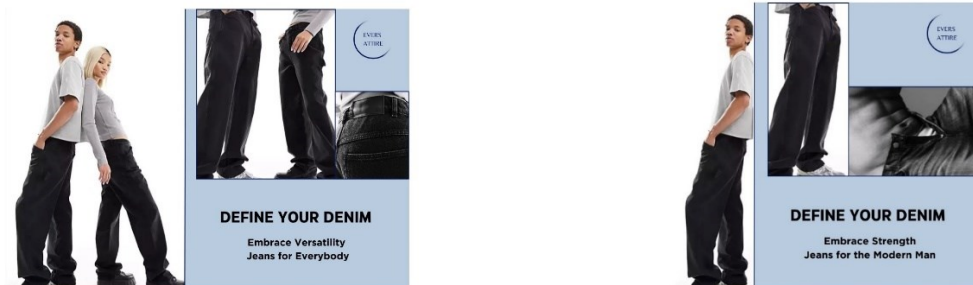
This research study is being conducted as part of my master thesis at Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics. This survey is expected to take 5 minutes to complete, and your participation is voluntary and anonymous.

The data collected will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for the purposes of the study.

If you have any questions or feedback regarding the survey, please contact:

s-ebecker@ucp.pt (Eyleen Becker)

**On the next page you will see an advertisement of the fashion brand "Evers Attire".
Please take a moment to have a careful look. You may also zoom in.**



After seeing the advertisement of the brand "Evers Attire", please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. I perceive the advertisement avoids stereotypical masculine attributes.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree

- 4 — Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 — Somewhat agree
- 6 — Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

2. For me the advertisement promotes gender inclusivity.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
 - 2 — Disagree
 - 3 — Somewhat disagree
 - 4 — Neither agree nor disagree
 - 5 — Somewhat agree
 - 6 — Agree
 - 7 — Strongly agree
-

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. This advertisement symbolizes the kind of person I really am inside.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 — Somewhat agree
- 6 — Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

2. This advertisement reflects my personality.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither agree nor disagree

- 5 — Somewhat agree
- 6 — Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

3. This advertisement is an extension of my inner self.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 — Somewhat agree
- 6 — Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

4. This advertisement mirrors the real me.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 — Somewhat agree
- 6 — Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

5. This advertisement contributes to my image.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 — Somewhat agree
- 6 — Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

6. This advertisement adds to a social 'role' I play.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 — Somewhat agree
- 6 — Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

7. This advertisement has a positive impact on what others think of me.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
 - 2 — Disagree
 - 3 — Somewhat disagree
 - 4 — Neither agree nor disagree
 - 5 — Somewhat agree
 - 6 — Agree
 - 7 — Strongly agree
-

Assume you would like to purchase a new pair of jeans. Please indicate how likely you would purchase the jeans from "Evers Attire" on a scale from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely).

- 1 — Extremely unlikely
- 2 — Moderately unlikely
- 3 — Slightly unlikely
- 4 — Neither likely nor unlikely
- 5 — Slightly likely
- 6 — Moderately likely
- 7 — Extremely likely

Please rate your willingness to buy the advertised jeans on a scale from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely).

- 1 — Extremely unlikely

- 2 — Moderately unlikely
- 3 — Slightly unlikely
- 4 — Neither likely nor unlikely
- 5 — Slightly likely
- 6 — Moderately likely
- 7 — Extremely likely

How likely is the possibility that you will consider purchasing these jeans on a scale from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely)?**

- 1 — Extremely unlikely
- 2 — Moderately unlikely
- 3 — Slightly unlikely
- 4 — Neither likely nor unlikely
- 5 — Slightly likely
- 6 — Moderately likely
- 7 — Extremely likely

How much would you be willing to pay for one pair of jeans of the brand?



Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. The head of the household is the Man.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree

- 5 — Somewhat Agree
- 6 — Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

2. A man's main task in the house is breadwinning.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

3. Woman should not work if the economical situation of the man is adequate.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

4. Profession implemented by woman and man should be different.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

5. Men should be preferred in employment applications because of women's fertility.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

6. A girl should obey his father's wishes until she is married.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

7. Man should deal with tasks away from home such as shopping and paying the bills.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

8. Girls should be dressed in pink while boys should be dressed in blue.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree

- 6 — Somewhat Agree
 - 7 — Strongly agree
-

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

2. I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

3. I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree

- 5 — Agree
 - 6 — Somewhat Agree
 - 7 — Strongly agree
4. Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image.
- 1 — Strongly disagree
 - 2 — Disagree
 - 3 — Somewhat disagree
 - 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
 - 5 — Agree
 - 6 — Somewhat Agree
 - 7 — Strongly agree
5. When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken customs and rules.
- 1 — Strongly disagree
 - 2 — Disagree
 - 3 — Somewhat disagree
 - 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
 - 5 — Agree
 - 6 — Somewhat Agree
 - 7 — Strongly agree
6. I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own.
- 1 — Strongly disagree
 - 2 — Disagree
 - 3 — Somewhat disagree
 - 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
 - 5 — Agree
 - 6 — Somewhat Agree

7 — Strongly agree

7. I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used.

1 — Strongly disagree

2 — Disagree

3 — Somewhat disagree

4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree

5 — Agree

6 — Somewhat Agree

7 — Strongly agree

8. I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they would not seem to accept.

1 — Strongly disagree

2 — Disagree

3 — Somewhat disagree

4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree

5 — Agree

6 — Somewhat Agree

7 — Strongly agree

9. When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less.

1 — Strongly disagree

2 — Disagree

3 — Somewhat disagree

4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree

5 — Agree

6 — Somewhat Agree

7 — Strongly agree

10. I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

11. As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
- 2 — Disagree
- 3 — Somewhat disagree
- 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
- 5 — Agree
- 6 — Somewhat Agree
- 7 — Strongly agree

12. The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it.

- 1 — Strongly disagree
 - 2 — Disagree
 - 3 — Somewhat disagree
 - 4 — Neither likely agree nor disagree
 - 5 — Agree
 - 6 — Somewhat Agree
 - 7 — Strongly agree
-

Demographic Questions

- 1. Lastly, please answer some demographic questions about yourself.**
- 2. Please indicate your age.**

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75-84
- 85 or older

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than High School
- High School
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate
- Professional Degree
- Prefer not to say

4. What is your current employment status?

- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Unemployed looking for work
- Unemployed not looking for work
- Retired
- Student
- Disabled

5. Where do you come from?

(A dropdown list with various countries)

6. What is your monthly income?

- Under €10,000
 - €10,000 - €19,999
 - €20,000 - €29,999
 - €30,000 - €39,999
 - €40,000 - €49,999
 - €50,000 - €74,999
 - €75,000 - €99,999
 - €100,000 - €150,000
 - Over €150,000
 - Don't know
 - Prefer not to say
-

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

Appendix E Advertisement Stimuli

Image E1

Stereotypical-Masculine Advertisement Stimuli



Image E2

Gender-Neutral Advertisement Stimuli



Appendix F Sample Characterization

Figure F1

Sample Characteristic Age

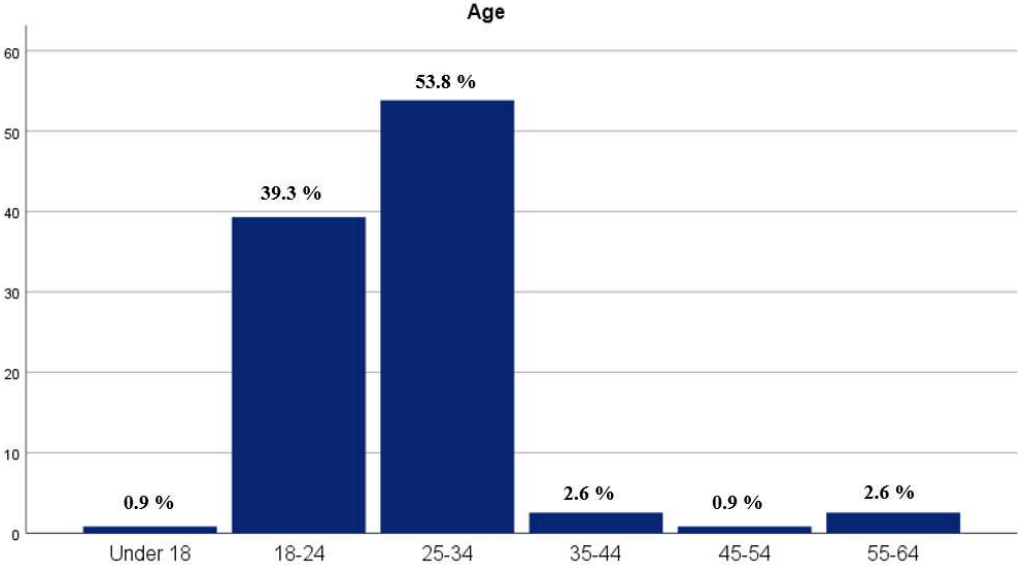


Figure F2

Sample Characteristic Origin

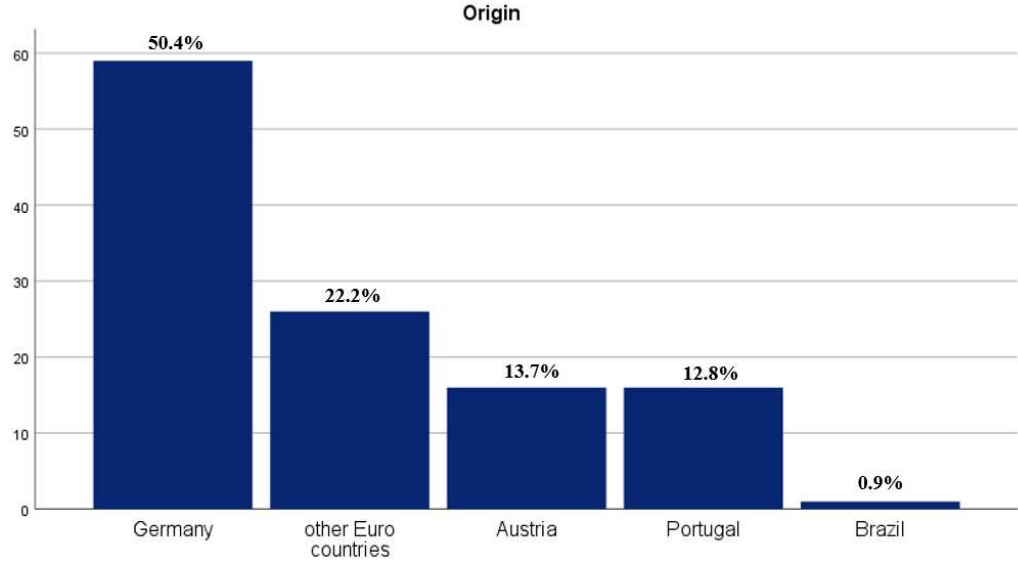


Figure F3

Sample Characteristic Profession

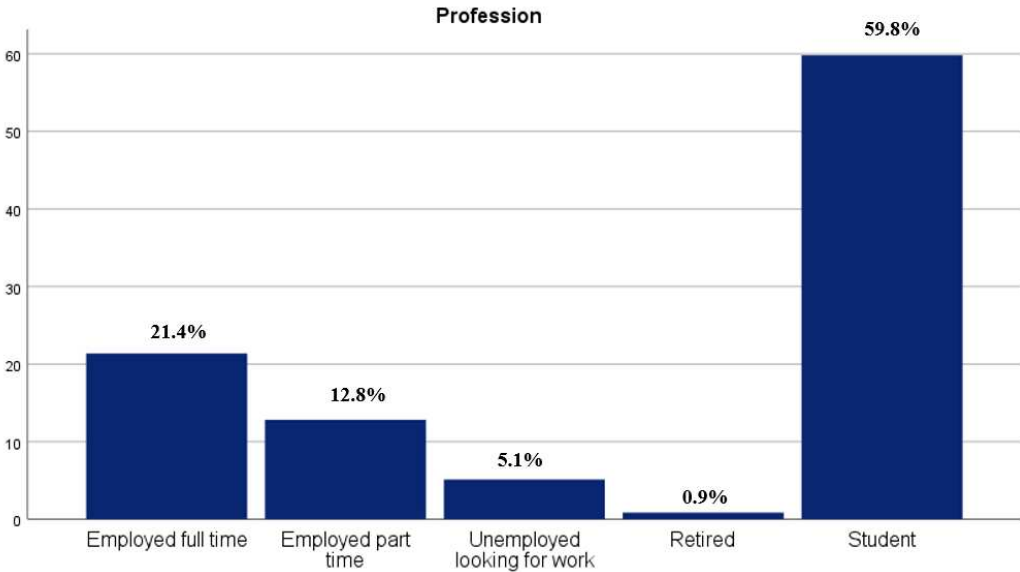


Figure F4

Sample Characteristic Education

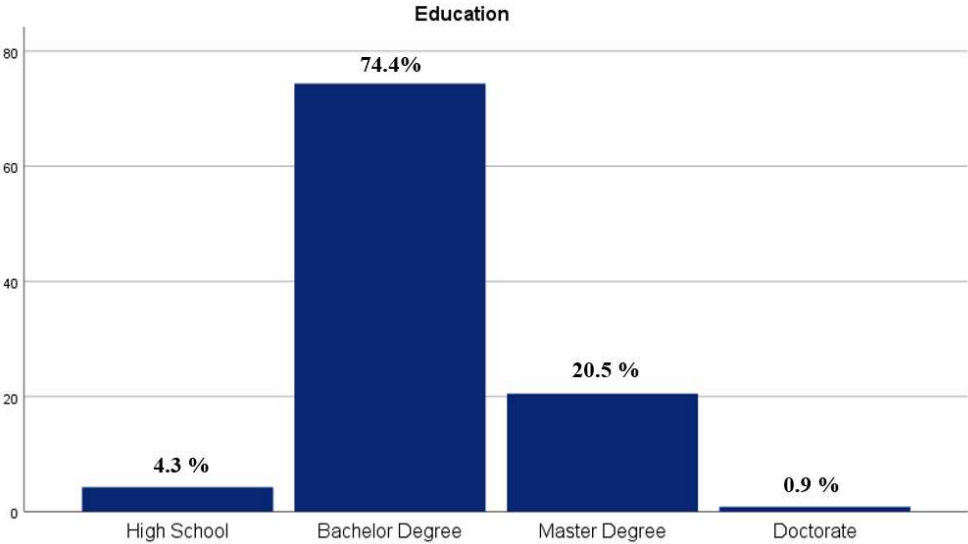


Figure F5

Sample Characteristic Income

