

***Motivations and attitudes towards the consumption of male grooming products: The influence of gender role portrayals in modern advertising.***

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**Abstract:**

Advertising is, arguably, one of the most influential tools in spreading stereotypical ideas and in affect has created certain perceptions in real life. Although gender roles are considered antiquated by most, advertising still falls under criticism as it is presenting a non-realistic view of modern society. As society is changing, it is a generally assumed that advertising is gradually changing to reflect this process. This paper will examine how advertising has altered to mirror the changes in society and how consumers react to gender roles in advertising. It particularly examined gendered products and whether or not consumers are making purchase decisions depending on how they identify their own sexuality. This paper argued that products that carry a gender identity require careful advertising and marketing when targeting specific markets as consumers use products to represent of themselves. Finally, although gender representations are still prevalent in advertising, they are altering to match the gender roles merging in society.

**Key Words:** Advertising, Gender role portrayals, Gender perception, Hofstede's masculinity dimensions, Consumer psychographics.

## **Introduction**

In post-modern advertising, men were often portrayed as masculine, powerful and the bread winners of the families. However, in today's society, more men are defining themselves as 'metrosexual', a term used to describe an urban male who takes more care in their appearance and cultivates an upscale lifestyle. This is becoming more apparent as we are now seeing a lot more adverts targeting men with grooming products in this postmodern society where traditional notions of femininity and masculinity appear to be antiquated. Consumption associated with the altering of self-image and beautification has always been linked with the female consumer. However, male grooming products are being consumed not only for their tangible benefits but also for the meanings they conveyed. There is evidence to support the view that men have become more concerned with enhancing their attractiveness and reducing the ageing process.

“Men...are now just as much a part of modern consumerism as women. Their construction of a sense of who they are, of their identity as men, is now achieved through style of dress and body care, image, the right “look”, as women's.” (Bocock, 1993, p.102).

According to Mintel (2011), the male grooming product market grew by an estimated 12% between 2006 and 2011. Due to heavy promotional activities and an increasing number of men taking an interest in their appearance, the market has been predicted to continue growing. Mintel have forecasted that between 2011 and 2016 the male grooming product market will grow a further 8%. Some of the biggest consumers of these grooming products are young males aged between 15 and 34. The population of over 15 year old is set to rise by 4% (26.2 million people) between 2011 and 2016 which will offer opportunities for manufactures to boost their sales.

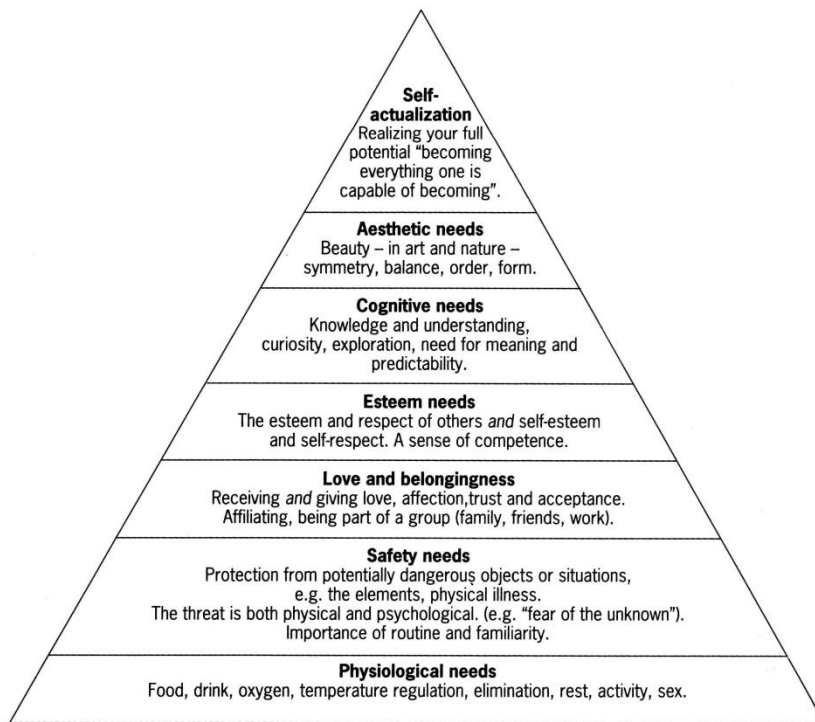
A greater interest has been paid into the ways in which males consume advertising “partly due to the adoption of a postmodern perspective to consumption studies, which consider women and men as equally involved in the practices of consumption.” (Sturrock and Pioch, 1998, p.337). With changes in society where gender roles are now more antiquated and gender roles are beginning to merge, marketers need to understand how these changes in society are affecting the way consumers are perceiving advertising. This paper will discuss how consumers form the motivation to consume a product; how attitudes towards a product are formed and how modern advertising has changed these motivations and attitudes.

## Motivation

Motivation is defined as “an aroused motive before it is influenced by expectations and values that shape preferences for particular acts” (McClelland, 1987, p.474). The study of motivation is the exploration of the driving forces that affect human behaviours (Deci *et al.* 1985) and direct people to act in a certain way. Motivation theories explore why people do what they do instead of picking an alternative option. Motivation can fall under 2 categories, mechanistic or organismic. According to mechanistic theories, decisions are driven by psychological drives and stimuli in the environments in which we live. McDougall (1908) stated that we have an innate psychological disposition in which we perceive or pay attention to particular objects and then act in response to them in a particular manner based on our motivations. These responses are inherent and are based on instinct. Mechanistic theories suggest that we are influenced by the environment and the situation we are in and we will act accordingly to the situation.

Organismic theories propose that humans have intrinsic needs and particular psychological drives that cause people to react in a certain manner to fulfil these needs. Jex and Britt (2008) postulated that the individual performs tasks that they receive inherent enjoyment out of completing the task, rather for extrinsic reasons such as pleasing others. This could suggest that from a marketer’s point of view, consumer behaviour is largely driven by the satisfaction of needs. A key theorist in motivation is Maslow (1954) who explored the importance of intrinsic needs being met to motivate human’s behaviour.

Maslow (1954) proposed that human motivations have a hierarchical structure which he called the Hierarchy of Needs. These needs are arranged based on their relevant potency. Maslow’s hierarchy presents needs that motivate humans to behave in a certain manner to fulfil intrinsic needs. “When people fulfil most of the elemental needs, they strive to meet those on the next level, and so forth, until the highest order of needs is reached.” (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2009, p.448). The most basic needs at the bottom of the hierarchy are those that we need to survive. These psychological needs are basic needs such as food, water, air and sex. To ensure survival in the long run, they must move up the hierarchy to safety needs. This is security, stability, freedom from anxiety and threats and protection. Once these basic needs have been met, psychological needs through social interaction are developed. These cover psychological needs such as love and belongingness that we receive from family, friends and sexual intimacy. We then seek for esteem needs such as self-esteem, confidence, achievement and respect from others.



**Figure 1: Adapted from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1974)**

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1974) has further been developed that have presented two extra needs that must be met before self-actualisation can be met. The first of those steps is the need for knowledge. "Our focus will shift to satisfying our intellectual needs, including understanding and knowledge." (Jarvis, 2005, p.120). We seek to learn more about the world in which we live in. The last step before self-actualisation are aesthetic needs. These represent the need humans have for beauty, order and balance in their lives. Once all of these needs have been met, self-actualisation is reached and top of the hierarchy is reached. Maslow (1970) described self-actualised people as those whose intrinsic needs had been met so were now completely fulfilled and doing all that they were capable of.

The hierarchy postulates that all human motivation is driven by the innate desire to consciously satisfy needs in a similar order. Although Maslow's hierarchy is generally accepted by most, there are a few critics. Buck (1988) suggested that people will judge certain needs as more important than others so the hierarchy is not applicable to everyone. For example, some individuals may rank self-esteem as more important than love, family and social relationships. Buck (1988) criticised the model for making the assumption that all

human behaviour is predictable and universal when it comes to consumer decision making when actually there could be numerous factors affecting the decision.

Although the order of the hierarchy may change between each individual, the model presents motivations that are universally relatable. Human motivation is driven by the desire to consciously satisfy hedonistic needs. Hedonistic consumption is defined as “those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage experience.” (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982, p.92). In hedonistic consumption, products are contributors to the overall experience, but the need for happiness and gratification has a strong impact on the motivations for a person to consume the product (Martin, 2004).

The existing literature on motivation has explored different motivations to consume products and how consumers aren't just looking to fulfil their utilitarian needs but also their hedonistic needs. This has underpinned the research into men's motivations to consume male grooming products and how important these motivations are in making purchase decisions. This has raised the question into how advertising has changed the motivations to consume these products.

### **Attitude Formation and Changing Attitudes using Mass Media**

An attitude as suggested by Allport (1954) is a ‘learned predisposition to think, feel and behave towards a person or an object in a particular way’. This definition identifies three important variables in the formations of attitudes which are, “they are learned, the predispose action and they imply evaluation.” (Pratkanis, 1989, p.408). This can either be positive or negative and can be made up of several different components. An attitude can be formed based on affective, cognitive or behavioural components (Nairne, 2009). The affective component is made up of the feelings that the product produces. The cognitive component represents what people already know about the product or what they believe their attitude to be. The behavioural components are the predisposition to act towards a product in a particular way. Attitudes form directly as a result of experiencing something. These attitudes can form as either a personnel experience or may result from a direct observation made.

Societal pressures can also have a strong influence on the formation of attitudes. Katz (1960) developed the Function Theory of Attitudes postulating that attitudes can facilitate social behaviour and are determined by a person's motives to consume. These were based on four attitude functions which are utilitarian, value expressive, ego-defensive and knowledge

function. The utilitarian function suggests that a person's attitude may change when they receive a reward or meet their needs (Baker, 1992). If a consumer perceives the consumption of a product or a service as pleasurable, they are likely to form a positive attitude towards it. The value-expressive function forms a product attitude based on its ability to express their identity. The ego-defensive function protects consumers from internal or external insecurities. For example, the consumption of deodorants is an ego-defensive function. The last function is knowledge and this refers to when "a problem cannot be solved without the information associated with the attitude." (Wrightsmann, 1999, p.38).

Katz's Functional Theory of Attitudes (1960) simply suggests that attitudes help us make decisions in our day to day lives and that different functions affect our attitudes dependant on a person's motives. Although attitudes have a powerful impact on a person, they are not set in stone. The functions that lead to an attitude being formed can also change the attitude the person holds. "People select salient beliefs and build attitudes towards products based around those beliefs." (Blyth, 2008, p.157). Using the Elaboration Likelihood model as developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), marketers can gain understanding in how attitudes can be changed through persuasion. The model postulates two ways in which attitudes can be changed through the use of mass media. It can either be done through the central route of persuasion or the peripheral route. "The distinction between the central and peripheral routes mirrors the distinction between informational conformity and social conformity." (Shaughnessy and Shaughnessy, 2004, p.126.). Certain factors affect the route that is taken to illicit an attitude change in the consumer.

The central route of persuasion is relevant to attitude change when the consumer has high involvement with the product so it motivated to assess the attitude object. An attitude change can occur when the consumer carries out an information search that is relevant to the attitude object. An attitude change can occur through the central route of persuasion when the consumer is motivated to gain knowledge or evaluate the information that is available about the attitude object. "Attitude tends to be relatively enduring when it occurs in the central route." (Babin and Harris, 2010, p.134). However, when a customer's involvement with the product is relatively low, the attitude change can occur through the peripheral route. The consumer does not focus on the information that is relevant to the attitude object. "Attitudinal change doesn't always require effortful evaluation of the information presented by the mass media or other sources" (Petty *et al*, 2009, p.135). The peripheral route to attitude change however is short term as emotions change and people's feelings about sources change. For the attitude change to become more permanent, the message must be repeated.

This research has explored how attitudes can be formed and changed through advertising and how different functions motivate certain attitudes. On the basis of existing evidence, this paper argued that advertising has changed attitudes towards the consumption of male grooming products and these attitudes have motivated men to become heavier users of these products.

## **Gender role portrayals in advertising**

Odekerken-Schroder *et al* (2001) postulated that advertising is more powerful tool in spreading stereotypical concepts than any other forms of literature due to its high volume. Is the way in which sexes are portrayed in advertising affecting the gender roles in real life? In certain cases, images can be used to reinforce and reshape society's beliefs. As Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2008) suggests advertising is still fashioning these stereotypes in today's society. It has been perceived that men are still not commonly being associated with domesticated products. As stated by Hofstede (2006), the UK is a 'masculine' society but has witnessed a high level of interest in gender role portrayal.

Since the early 1970's, women have debated the portrayal of women in advertising in the UK. The debate focused on whether or not women were being portrayed correctly. Many women felt they were being portrayed to appear inferior to men especially regarding their capabilities. The main concern of most women, however, was the sexist manner in which they were portrayed. Recent studies into the portrayal of women suggest that these stereotypes still exist.

Kacen (2000) agrees with this idea that modern advertisements have created a restricted view of femininity as the images in magazines advertisements implied that the only roles suited for women are domestic roles and that men appeared in advertisements as husbands or businessmen. In 1972, The National organisation of women undertook studies into this area and analysed more than 1,200 television adverts over an 18 month period, more than one third of adverts showed women as "*domestic agents who were dependant on men*" and nearly half were portrayed as "*household functionaries*." (Gill, 2006, p.78).

However, in the 1980's, with the development in information and communication technologies, advertisers had to rethink their strategies in response to the vocal feminist

critiques such as Mulvey. In past years, these feminists branded advertising the key platform for the fabrication of sexist imagery. Advertisers realised that they needed to portray women in a new way especially because women had increasingly become financially independent making them a new target market. These women were the postfeminists, the third wave of feminism. “The third wave is characterised by the reconciliation of feminism and consumption, a reconciliation that links empowerment to sexual expressiveness and purchasing power.” (Maclaren, 2012, pg.466). These women were expressed by their careers and had their own disposable income. They were no longer objectified sexually by adverts and in some cases, roles were reversed. Magazines such as Glamour and Cosmopolitan began to eroticize and objectify naked men.

In recent years, these postfeminist women have appeared a lot more frequently in advertising. Chanel in particular have always used confident, independent women in their campaigns. In their 2011 campaign, we see Keira Knightley playing the assertive and successful protagonist. At the start of the advert, we see her racing through the city on a Ducati motorbike, a very masculine mode of transport. This is reinforced when she pulls up to a set of traffic lights and 4 men in suits pull up beside her on the same bike. In the next scene, we see her on a photo shoot. We see her through the lens of the photographer’s camera and throughout the shoot she is in complete control. She is not being directed by the photographer, she is directing him with her gaze. At the end of the advert, there is a suggestion of a sexual relationship between her and the photographer. However, this relationship is on her terms and she manipulates the man. Once again, she is in control. This advert epitomized everything the postfeminist woman should be.

This was also visible in popular culture in the 1990’s. Girl groups such as the Spice Girls promoted ‘Girl power’ which encourage woman to be independent and assertive whilst still being sexy. American sitcom ‘Sex and the City’ also promoted post feminism by having 4 central female characters that all worked in the city, had their own apartments and had control over their sexual relationships. Another very noticeable change in advertising in the last decade is the use of the male body in advertising. “Where once women’s bodies dominated advertising landscapes now men’s are taking their place alongside women’s on billboards, cinema screens and magazines.” (Gill, 2012, pg.97). These adverts were used to promote all manner of products from underwear to jeans to cars. These men became sexual objects of desire for women. A prime example of this was Diet Coke’s ‘11.30 Appointment’ advert which was released in the 1980’s. We see a group of business women gathering in a board room for an “appointment.” The camera then pans to the window and we see a half-

naked man with a wash board stomach appear ready to clean the windows. The camera then pans to the women who are all gazing with lustful eyes at the man.

Edwards (1997) noted that as a response to these new women, a new market was emerging. Retailers, marketers and magazine publishers had their sights set on a new source of high spending consumers. These affluent males had the desire to become like the men they saw in the adverts that females lusted over. Men began to develop the 'Adonis complex' and wanted to look like the men presented in these adverts. Sales of the men's lifestyle magazines increased as they promised to give men the bodies that women desired.

All of these points raise the question; does this stereotypical portrayal of genders have an impact on the perception and attitude of the consumers on the product being advertised? Are men more likely to buy products if they feel it will satisfy their partners? Are adverts aimed at a specific gender to get an illicit reaction?

### **Gender role portrayals in advertising and consumption**

Hogg and Garrow (2003) examined the relationship between gender, identity and consumption of advertising with a specific focus on the idea that men and women "consume messages differently (based on their biological make-up and hard wiring of the brain)." (Hogg and Garrow, 2003, p.160). An interesting point raised in the article was that potentially men and women processed information differently based on their gender identities. This research can be reinforced by the study carried out by Fugate and Phillips (2010) into product gender perceptions and antecedents of product gender congruence. They suggest that "a variety of sex-typed products could effectively be marketed on the basis of having a specific gender, although the consumer appeal of such products could also be broadened to both genders" (Fugate and Phillips, 2010, p.251). Hogg and Garrow (2003) suggested that advertisers will often adjust their communications and activities depending on whether they are targeting men or women due to consumers responding to biological differences based on their. This then raises the question whether people still base their purchase decisions on their sexuality? Arguably, sexuality is not just a biological; it is also a psychological state. Fugate and Phillips (2010) proposed that due to changes in society, more purchases are being influenced by product gender deceptions. "For those product categories that are highly public or socially risky, product gender cues may require closer attention from marketers than those products which are not typically used for self-expression." (Fugate and Phillips, 2010,

pg.258). It is vital for marketers to appreciate the significance of the gender identity of their products when selecting target markets as individuals use products as representatives of themselves.

Conversely, Kacen (2000) stated that in our postmodern era, we have become a culture of consumption that has destroyed masculine and feminine differences because everybody is a consumer. She held the belief that this is due to the introduction of the internet. Kacen (2006) proposed that in the future, gender identity will become outdated and consumers will use whatever is at hand to fashion their personality. Besides, people, who did not subscribe to traditional sex roles, were less likely to seek gender resemblance with product purchases. Consumers responded differently depending on whether they categorised themselves as masculine, feminine, androgynous or unidentified. However, some scholars did not agree with this postulation arguing that men and women consume messages in a different way. Severn *et al.* (1990) believed that both men and women reacted favourably to adverts in which both men and woman appear naked. Since the mid 1960's, sex appeal has been used in advertising as a tool to create desire for a product. "A sex appeal ad will tend to not only attract initial attention but also retain this attention for longer periods of time than an ad without such appeal" (Liu *et al.* 2009, pg.502). Sex appeal can also be used to improve recall as well as create an emotional response that will create the feeling of desire for the product. However, sometimes ads with sex appeal can be distracting and take away the main message from the advert. Severn *et al.* (1990) argued that the most explicit sexual messages in ads may interfere with consumers' processing of message arguments and brand information, which in return may reduce message comprehension. When using sex appeal in adverts, marketers need to be very careful how they do it dependant on their target market. If an advert has only one gender it may offend the gender being portrayed in the advert. Ford *et al.* (1990) suggests that female nudity by can make female viewers feel uncomfortable. This is also translatable to males and male nudity in adverts. Elliot *et al.* (1995) investigated into how genders responded to overtly sexual images in advertising. They found that both men and women used a variety of coping strategies in order to deal with the discomfort of being presented with these images. Most of the men in the study showed a strong disliking to the advert of overtly sexual males but it was assumed that this was to protect them from any assumption of homosexuality. This is an indicator that perhaps people were responding in a socially desirable manner that reflected gender stereotyping.

It is clear from the literature that there are some gaps in the research. Very little is still understood about how people react to adverts that are overtly sexual and only represent one gender as many people want to react in a way that is seen as socially acceptable.

Do some people perceive a product negatively because their adverts show only one gender? Does the way male grooming products are advertised have an effect on a man's attitude towards the product? Are women more receptive to male grooming product adverts as they use half naked men to advertise the product? The aim of this paper was to not only explore how modern advertising has altered to mirror society but to also explore how it has helped males form motivations and attitudes towards the consumption of male grooming products. When designing the creative proposition for adverts for male grooming products, certain aspects must be carefully considered.

This paper argued that some men still require strong gender cues in the advertising. For products that could be considered socially risky, men that identify themselves as masculine need reassurance that the product is designed for them. Through appropriate messaging, men have become more comfortable with consuming grooming products that were traditionally classified as feminine. If the claims of masculinity however are unbelievable in the message, consumers are less likely to choose it. Gender neutrality may not be suitable for some markets especially those that are seeking gender congruence in the products they use. However, with men who identify themselves as slightly more androgynous, these masculine themes could alienate them and stop them from using the product.

When designing the creative message, a clear target audience needs to be identified to ensure the themes in the message match the gender classifications that the audience hold. Societal pressures need to be taken into consideration at this point to enable the viewer to relate to the advertising message. This paper also argued that advertisements need to be congruent with the gender stereotypes that are apparent in society. Consumers are using products that are representative of their personalities so marketers need to understand the importance of the target markets individual's personalities and their gender identities.

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