

MEASURING ANDROGYNY AND ASSESSING ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

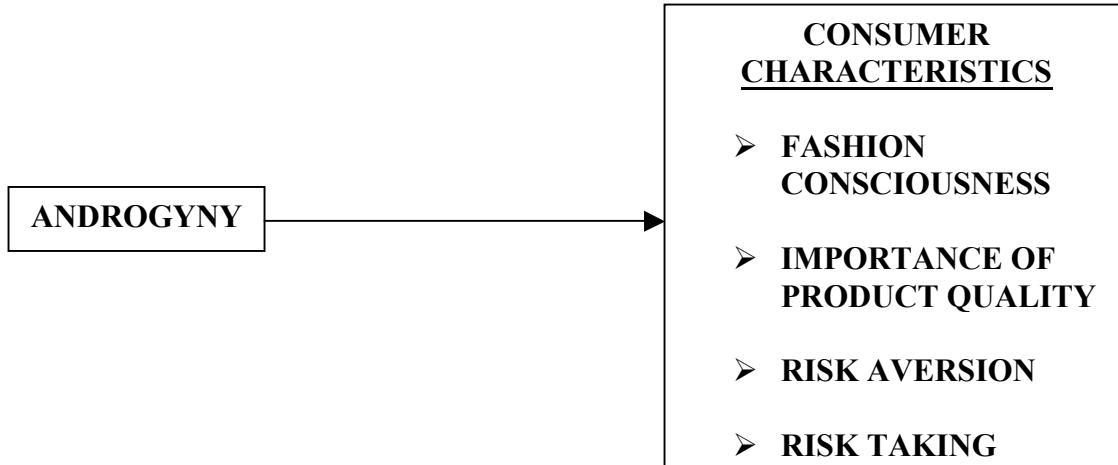
This research uses a sample of young consumers to measure androgyny and to examine how it impacts certain consumer characteristics/behaviors – fashion consciousness, importance of product quality, risk aversion, and risk taking tendency. Findings suggest that more androgynous consumers are less likely to be fashion conscious, more likely to be risk averse, and less willing to be risk takers. In addition, androgynous consumers are less likely to place more importance on product quality than are either feminine or masculine consumers.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, Americans have been concerned with non-sexist language and how we refer to many professional positions has changed as a result (Eubanks 1974). We call them flight attendants, not stewardesses and stewards; there are waiters now and not waitresses and waiters. A major trend with marketing strategies for some consumer products is toward androgyny. In this research, androgyny will be defined as the combination of masculine and feminine characteristics. In other words, major marketing strategies are developed and implemented targeting neither biological males nor females, but rather are more gender neutral and are based more on a consumer personality toward androgyny (Cazenave et al. 2007). These marketing strategies include the development of gender-neutral products that have traditionally been gender-specific, such as clothing and children's toys (Diderich 2015). For example, the San Francisco-based Androgyny Clothing Company is busy developing androgynous clothing lines. High-end British department store, Selfridges has recently launched what it calls “agender” – a shopping space that blurs gender lines (Mendoza 2015). Further, Grinberg (2015) reported that the big box retailer Target will start phasing out gender-specific signage in some departments (e.g., toys) in the near future. This is important given the increase of androgynous individuals in society. One of the “Top 7 Male Models in the U.S.,” as identified by “W” Magazine is biologically female (Bianco 2015).

Regardless of individual views about such marketing approaches, marketers should understand the impact of these strategies on consumer behaviors and attitudes. This study makes a unique examination of the impact of androgyny on four specific consumer behaviors and attitudes – fashion consciousness, importance of product quality, risk aversion in product usage, and risk taking in purchasing new products. The research model tested is found in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1



METHODOLOGY

Sample Selection

Data were obtained from 144 undergraduate student subjects enrolled in upper division business courses at the authors' university. Students were considered to be appropriate for this study for two reasons. First, because of the objectives of the study and the fact that the study is in the exploratory stage of theory development, a student sample was deemed appropriate (Calder, Phillips, and Tybout 1981). Second, university students are enrolled in business courses and are knowledgeable and well-formed about the issues of interest (Asher 1988; Cox 1980).

Questionnaire Development

Questionnaire development began with a review of relevant literature. Androgyny was operationalized by calculating the difference between the femininity and masculinity scales developed in past research (Barak and Stern 1985/1986). Both of these scales have 20 items for a total of 40 items. For example, respondents are asked to indicate how well each one of the 40 items describes them, with "1" being "not at all" and "5" being "completely." An example of a femininity scale item is "Compassionate," while an example of a masculinity scale item is "Assertive." All items were retained to leave the scales as compatible as possible for the calculation of the androgyny measure. Reliability analysis indicates that both the femininity scale (Cronbach's alpha = .88) and the masculinity scale (Cronbach's alpha = .95) are reliable.

Fashion consciousness was operationalized using a multiple-item scale based on past research

(Lumpkin and Darden 1982). An example is, "An important part of my life and activities is dressing smartly." The original scale included six items. Through reliability and exploratory factor analysis, the scale was reduced to five items with a Cronbach's alpha of .81.

Importance of product quality was also operationalized using a multiple-item scale based on past research (Gaski and Etzel 1986). An example is, "Too many of the products I buy are defective in some way." The original scale included seven items. Through reliability and exploratory factor analysis, it was determined that all items needed to be retained. The resulting scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .69.

Risk aversion was also operationalized using a multiple-item scale based on past research (Childers 1986). An example is, "I always follow manufacturers' warnings against removing the backplates on products." The original scale included nine items. Through reliability and exploratory factor analysis, the scale was reduced to three items with a Cronbach's alpha of .75.

Finally, risk taking was also operationalized using a multiple-item scale based on past research (Raju 1980). An example is, "I enjoy taking chances in buying unfamiliar brands just to get some variety in my purchases." The original scale included nine items. Using reliability and exploratory factor analysis, the scale was reduced to seven items with a Cronbach's alpha of .58.

Generally, these measures demonstrate adequate reliability, considering the exploratory nature of this research and the relatively small sample size. In all cases, results from factor analysis suggest unidimensionality. Procedures used in questionnaire development ensured content validity. On this basis, we judged these measures adequate for this study and items were averaged to form the composite scales used as input in analysis.

RESULTS

The hypotheses were tested using OLS regression. See Table 1 for these results.

TABLE 1	
Hypotheses	Test Statistic
H1: Fashion Consciousness	1.928**
H2: Importance of Product Quality	2.151**
H3: Risk Aversion	3.164*
H4: Risk Taking	4.172*
n=144	
[*] p ≤ .01	
^{**} p ≤ .05	

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Androgynous marketing strategies are likely in response to the growing trend in the U.S. consumer population toward androgyny. Marketers who are engaged early in these types of strategies will likely have an advantage over those who delay for various reasons. This

willingness to shift strategies, or to develop completely new strategies, is clearly more important for the fashion industry. However, this research suggests that it is important in many other industries.

Consumers are conscious of quality in every industry and our findings concerning that variable are important for industries, such as fashion/clothing, modeling, beauty pageant, bodybuilding, toys, games, cars, etc. In addition, risk-taking and risk-aversion apply to many types of products, including products purchased so consumers can take part in risky activities (e.g., certain sports, such as skiing and snowboarding, etc.); expensive products where consumers are risking more resources than average to purchase the products (e.g., luxury cars, vacations, etc); products related to consumer health and appearance (e.g., shampoo, soap, lotion, and other hair and body care products); and many other types of consumer products.

Therefore, marketers need to be aware of this growing market and make sure they develop strategies to target these consumers. In addition, it may be beneficial for new strategies or product offerings to be communicated in such a way that there is a focus on the style and quality of the products or services, while keeping the focus away from the product or service being risky in any way.

Although this study has opened the door to further studies on androgynous consumer markets, it does have its limitations. Only one culture was examined in this paper and there are indications that cultural differences may interact with a consumer's androgynous tendencies and could result in different findings (Chang 2006). Hofstede's extensive research documents significant cultural factors that interact with masculinity and femininity and likely will affect the impact of androgyny on consumer behavior and attitudes (Hofstede 1984, 1998). Thus, the findings of this research cannot be readily generalized globally. It would be beneficial to compare and contrast several cultures that lie at different ends of the continuum on masculinity and femininity. We also used students rather than a more general sample representative of the actual consumer population. University students are not completely representative of even young consumers, making it difficult to generalize the findings. The measures of the importance of product quality and risk taking are not as reliable as desired, so future studies should work on further developing these measures. Further research should also focus on other constructs and variables that may be impacted by consumer androgyny since it appears to be a trend that is here to stay.

REFERENCES

Available Upon Request