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Influence of the residual code of masculinity on brand-related effects

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Summary. The goal of the paper is to present results of an experiment explaining the influence of a residual code of masculinity on brand-related effects. Gender and gender roles are elements used in brand communication. However, models of femininity and masculinity are subject to changes and so, for brands to remain up-to-date in the eyes of consumers, their communication should keep up with the changes and replace old models with new ones. This paper is based on literature studies concerning research on models of masculinity and their application in marketing and on an experiment.

Introduction

This article is a part of series of articles, which aim to investigate the possible relationships between various cultural ideas used in branding and communication and the results of such strategies. This particular paper is a continuation of the research on the application of models of masculinity in brand communication and the effects of such actions¹. Gender and gender roles have been an area

¹ The results of the earlier research were presented by the author in the paper titled *Wzorce męskości w komunikacji marki [Models of masculinity in brand communication]*, published in 2015, *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego*, 866, *Problemy Zarządzania, Finansów*

of interest to scholars representing diverse disciplines for years. However, models of masculinity and femininity are subject to changes and the change dynamics has been particularly high for a dozen or so years. Gender roles are one of the criteria of segmentation in marketing, they are also a frequently used element of marketing communication. The variability of the roles and models of masculinity and femininity as well as their significance for marketing are areas which require research.

The aim of the conducted research was to explain whether the application of the residual code of masculinity in brand communication influences the assessment of and behaviour towards the brand. The paper was written based on an experiment.

Literature overview

Kimmel notices that masculinity is not only a biological or a socio-cultural issue but also a market one (Kimmel, 2012). Such a perception of masculinity permits enterprises to market products and brands positioned as „masculine” ones regardless of the model of masculinity in question. Therefore, enterprises try to sell masculinity in the form of products, thus enabling the consumer – a man – to stress his gender identity. The relations between masculinity and brand were studied in various dimensions. The product categories which permit men to manifest their masculinity best were subject to examination (these are categories such as weapon, tools, vehicles, alcohol, tobacco products, clothes, and cosmetics) (Hirschman, 2014, pp. 324–329). The research regarded also the brand name (whether the presence of various types of consonants in the name influenced the perception of the name as more masculine or feminine – the influence was confirmed) (Guèvremont, Grohmann, 2015, pp. 101–122) and brand graphics – it was examined if the brand design (logo shape, brand name, font, and colour) influenced the perceived brand masculinity and femininity, consumer preferences, and brand equity. The research confirmed such a relation (Lieven, Grohmann, Herrmann, Landwehr, van Tilburg, 2015). It was also examined whether there was a relation between gender identity and consumer response to brands. The research proved a strong relation between masculinity and consumer loyalty towards brands with a masculine personality. Women are more prone to accept brands with a masculine personality than men are in the

i Marketingu, 39. The invoked paper presents the results of the descriptive research aimed to identify the models of masculinity present in popular culture and marketing communication as well as identification of the variability of the models. The research method was the RDE (variability of cultural codes) analysis, which belongs to the group of semiotic methods. Selected results of the research will be referred to in a further part of this paper since, in connection with the results of research by other authors, they are a substantiation of the research problem adopted in this study.

case of brands with a feminine personality (Robbie, Neale 2012). Definitely fewer studies were dedicated to the issue of the defining masculinity as a category used in marketing and variability of the definition. One of the studies regarded the exploration of the nature and structure of the masculine brand dimension, development of the methodology of measuring brand masculinity, and exploration of various models of brand masculinity (Azar, 2013, pp. 502–512). Another research concerned in turn the determination if to the presented models of masculinity undergo a change in brand communication. The research showed that a majority of brands had presented men as traditionalists guided by reason until the early 1980s. A change is noticeable in the 1990s, when 25% of the analysed brands began to present more diversified models of masculinity, which allowed for emotions (Ourahmoune, Nyeck, 2008, pp. 181–188).

The cultural idea of masculinity is important to marketing and brands but it is a dynamic category. It is necessary to observe the changes in the models of masculinity over time and take the changes into consideration in marketing communication. The variability of the models of masculinity in popular culture and marketing communication can be examined by means of the semiotic approach based on the analysis of the production and distribution of signs in culture. The analysis of cultural codes (RDE analysis), which is one of semiotic methods (content analysis of products of popular culture), allows the identification of the ideas and values which lose their significance in popular culture, the ones which are significant today and the ones which will be significant in the future.

In the RDE analysis, the object of the research is a cultural code, defined in semiotics as a system of signs such as language, gestures, colours, rituals, social behaviours, or method of organising time and space. Three types of codes can be distinguished (Oswald, 2012):

- residual codes – codes of the past, vanishing, being a residue of earlier times, manners of thinking, ideas,
- dominant codes – codes of the present, representing ideas that are commonly accepted and applied in a given culture,
- emergent codes – codes of the future, emerging, being outlined in the cultural horizon.

Brands can use the cultural codes they have identified in marketing communication by reaching for ideas representing residual, dominant or emergent codes. The diversity of the cultural codes which are at the disposal of brands provides the possibility to position the brands in accordance with the intention of the enterprises being their owners: as culturally conservative brands, brands located in the cultural mainstream, or avant-garde, culturally progressive brands. In semiotics, the concept of brand positioning is described as brand narrative (Rossatolos, 2013).

Research gap

The marketing literature explored issues such as:

- masculinity as a market category,
- product categories in the context of masculinity (weapon, tools, vehicles, alcohol, tobacco products, clothes, and cosmetics),
- brand name structure in the context of masculinity,
- brand design in the context of masculinity,
- gender in the context of consumer response to brands.

Studies of the variability of models of masculinity were rare and comprised only the statement that a change in the model of masculinity presented in advertisements occurred in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Despite the development of a stream related to the cultural context in the brand strategy in the relevant literature, there is no research indicating the effects of such actions. It remains unknown if associating a brand with individual cultural codes brings effects. Such studies have not been conducted for the cultural codes related to models of masculinity.

Conceptual framework

The economic, social, demographic, and technological transformations of the past few dozen years have brought also many cultural changes. The shift from industry- to service-based economies meant a change in the employee structure. In 1945, the share of men in workforce constituted 70%, today the percentage is below 50% (Romano, Dokoupil, 2010, p. 28). This means that increasingly more men need to find their place in occupations related to services, which have been associated with women thus far, i.e. teachers, nurses or carers. Hence, the cultural categories such as femininity or masculinity are being redefined. Semioticians suggest that a clear change from the masculine (rational, classified, functional) to the feminine (emotional, liquid, sentimental) perspective is visible in culture (Żurawicka-Koczan, Polak, 2006).

Table 1 presents an attempt at identification of residual, dominant and emergent codes related to masculinity by the key traits and values (the mental and emotional sphere), relationships with a woman and roles in the family (the social sphere), as well as the physical appearance and attitude to it (the physical sphere).

It needs to be emphasised that it is often pointed to the possibility that many diverse models of masculinity instead of one could occur in the future (Azar, 2013). Therefore, the model of masculinity described in the table in the emergent code should be treated as one of many probable models, a hypothetical one.

Table 1

Change in codes of masculinity

	Residual codes	Dominant codes	Emergent codes
Key traits /values	strong, competitive, success-oriented, physically fit and active; guided by reason („men logic”, concealing emotions („men don’t cry”))	resourcefulness, mental power equally or more important than muscle power; rational but also emotional if need to be	depth and mysteriousness, authenticity and engagement, activity, creativity, charisma; reason and emotions
Relationships with a woman	control and dominance	partnership	partnership autonomy
Role in the family	patriarchal model; tenderness towards a child assigned to the role of mother; the father’s role is to ensure safety; the father enforcing respect and distance or „emotionally unavailable”	family partnership model; the father showing tenderness and concern to his children; an active carer for his children and an active household member	family partnership model, fathers aware, active, engaged and creative; redefine the role of father on their own
Physical appearance and attitude to one’s own body	not much importance attached to appearance, perceiving his own body only from the angle of activity and functionality. Harsh facial features. „Macho” type	increasing significance of physical appearance; a man taking care of himself; gentle facial features, a boyish slender silhouette. „Metrosexual” type	austere yet refined appearance; a beard but well-groomed by the barber; workwear suggesting physical work or outdoor activity yet high quality materials and fashionable design. The so-called „lumberjack”

Source: Hajdas, 2015, pp. 23–32.

In light of the research gap identified earlier, the research problem can be worded as follows: does the presence of the residual code of masculinity in brand communication influence the effects of such communication? The justification of the selection of the research problem is the following: the concept of cultural context in brand strategy and the use of cultural codes in marketing communication is developed in the relevant literature, which, however, lacks research on the influence of individual cultural codes in brand communication on the effects of such communication.

Wishing to determine the influence of the residual model of masculinity on the brand-related effects, the author formulated the following research hypotheses:

H1: The residual code of masculinity (RCM) related to brand has a positive influence on brand quality perception

H2: The RCM has a positive influence on price perception

H3: The RCM has a positive influence on the brand purchase intention

H4: The RCM reduced the perceived brand switch risk

H5: The RCM induces the purchaser to pay a higher price

H6: The RCM induces the purchaser to recommend the brand to others

The research model is presented in figure 1.

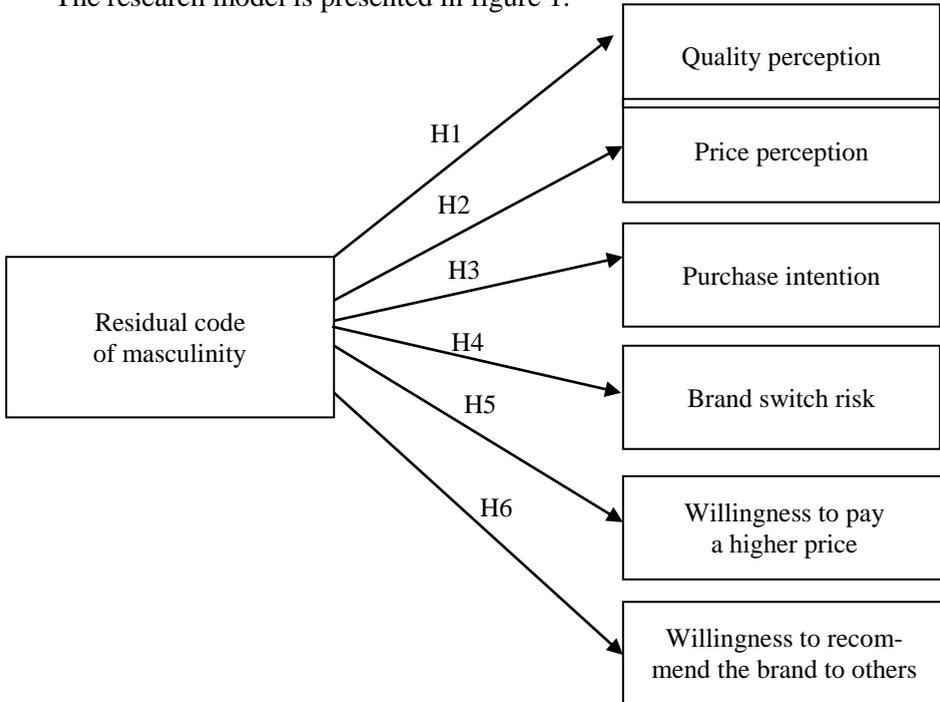


Figure 1. Research model – the influence of the residual code of masculinity on the brand-related effects

Source: own elaboration.

Experiment

The research method was an experiment due to the possibilities to provide evidence for a cause and effect relationship. Dependent (explained) variables were: quality perception (QuaPer), price perception (PriPer), purchase intention (PurInt), perceived brand switch risk (SwR), willingness to pay a higher price (WillHiPr), and willingness to recommend the brand to others (WillRec). The independent (explanatory) variable was the contents regarding the residual code of masculinity in the description of the concept behind a brand of men's casual trousers (the most popular category of men's clothes in Poland). The experiment was conducted in December 2014 and January 2015.

Design & participants

Research participants: two groups were subject to the research: control (n = 101) and experimental (n = 100) ones. The studied population was men aged 25–49, participants of the IMAS International research agency's panel. The research participants were randomly assigned to the control and experimental groups.

Stimuli and procedure: two descriptions of the positioning concept of a brand of men's trousers were prepared for the purpose of the research. In the control group, a classical description of brand positioning was presented (category, target group, attribute), while for the experimental group the description was supplemented by cultural narrative – the contents concerning the idea of a brand based on the residual code of masculinity.

Description of the brand concept for the control group:

„Men's casual trousers (an everyday informal outfit combining comfort and elegance) are offered under brand X.

The X brand trousers are made of high-quality cotton, which translates into the wearing comfort. Varied styles permit the choice of a model that fits best any man's silhouette. Owing to toned-down colours, they are an appropriate outfit for any occasion.

The brand is addressed to men who appreciate what is classic and universal.”

Description of the brand concept for the experimental group:

„Men's casual trousers (an everyday informal outfit combining comfort and elegance) are offered under brand X.

The X brand trousers are made of high-quality cotton, which translates into the wearing comfort. Varied styles permit the choice of a model that fits best any man's silhouette. Owing to toned-down colours, they are an appropriate outfit for any occasion.

The brand is addressed to men who appreciate what is classic and universal.

The producer of the trousers describes the philosophy behind the brand as follows:

Once upon a time, men wore the pants, and wore them well. Women rarely had to open doors and little old ladies never crossed the street alone. Men took charge because that's what they did. But somewhere along the way, the world decided it no longer needed men. Disco by disco, latte by foamy non-fat latte, men were stripped of their Khakis and left stranded on the road between boyhood and androgyny. But today, there are questions our genderless society has no answers for. The world sits idly by as cities crumble, children misbehave, and those little old ladies remain on one side of the street. For the first time since bad guys, we need heroes. We need grown-ups. We need men to put down the plastic fork, step away from the salad bar, and untie the world from the

tracks of complacency. It's time to get your hands dirty. It's time to answer the call of manhood. It's time to wear the pants!"

The content of the Dockers' manifesto from its 2009 campaign pursued on the American market was used in the brand concept description prepared for the experimental group, in the part concerning the idea of masculinity. The campaign was not conducted on the Polish market and therefore it was assumed that the content would not be familiar to the subjects. Having read the descriptions of the concepts, the subjects in both groups were asked to answer questions regarding brand-related effects. The research tool was a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire contained also one open question (a request for the percentage estimate of a higher price the respondent would be able to pay relative to the average price of men's trousers in Poland determined at the level of PLN 160 based on a telephone survey). The ANOVA method was applied for data analysis, that is a parametric test enabling verification of the hypothesis speaking of an influence of one independent variable on a dependent variable.

Results

Quality perception (QuaPer). The research participants (the experimental group) achieved lower average quality perception indicators than the control group. These were not, however, statistically significant differences (QuaPer: $F_e = 0.14$; $F_c = 3.88$; $F_e < F_c$, $p > 5\%$).

Price perception (PriPer). The research participants (the experimental group) achieved lower average price perception indicators than the control group. These were not, however, statistically significant differences (PriPer: $F_e = 1.27$; $F_c = 3.88$; $F_e < F_c$, $p > 5\%$).

Purchase intention (PurInt). The research participants (the experimental group) achieved lower average purchase intention indicators than the control group. These were not, however, statistically significant differences (PurInt: $F_e = 1.14$; $F_c = 3.88$; $F_e < F_c$, $p > 5\%$).

Brand switch risk (SwR). The research participants (the experimental group) achieved lower average brand switch risk indicators than the control group. These were not, however, statistically significant differences (SwR: $F_e = 1.27$; $F_c = 3.88$; $F_e < F_c$, $p > 5\%$).

Willingness to pay a higher price (WillHiPr). The research participants (the experimental group) achieved lower average indicators of their willingness to pay a higher price than the control group. These were not, however, statistically significant differences (WillHiPr: $F_e = 0.96$; $F_c = 3.88$; $F_e < F_c$, $p > 5\%$).

Willingness to recommend the brand to others (WillRec). The research participants (the experimental group) achieved lower average indicators of their willingness to recommend the brand to others than the control group. These

were not, however, statistically significant differences (WillRec: Fe = 1.84; Fc = 3.88; Fe < Fc, p > 5%).

The compilation of the obtained results is presented in table 2.

Table 2

Results of the experiment

Dependent variables	Average C	Average E	Fc	Fe	p	Comment
QuaPer	2.25	2.22	3.888612	0.145191	0.70358	Fe < Fc, p > 5%
PriPer	2.53	2.41	3.889096	1.278092	0.259629	Fe < Fc, p > 5%
PurInt	2.49	2.37	3.889096	1.140422	0.28687	Fe < Fc, p > 5%
SwR	2.29	2.19	3.889096	0.962588	0.327739	Fe < Fc, p > 5%
WillHiPr	17.14	20.50	3.889096	0.91904	0.338902	Fe < Fc, p > 5%
WillRec	2.66	2.51	3.889096	1.849692	0.175374	Fe < Fc, p > 5%

Source: own elaboration.

Interpretation of the results

The aim of the experiment was to explain if the application of the residual code of masculinity in brand communication influences communication effects. In light of the conducted research, all hypotheses were rejected: the residual brand-related code of masculinity does not influence quality or price perception, purchase intention, perceived brand change risk, willingness to pay a higher price, or willingness to recommend the brand to others. The rejection of the hypotheses shows that the residual code (based on masculinity patterns) in brand communication does not bring benefits to enterprises. However, other possible interpretations of the obtained result of the research need to be noted. The cultural code was presented verbally in the research, which could affect the result. Most advertisements use both words and images and therefore this method of presenting the concept would be closer to the reality. The concepts presented to the subjects with words and images (vs. only words or only images) result in increased purchase intentions and possibly influence other brand-related effects. The concepts presented to the subjects with the use of images achieve higher indicators than verbal concepts. Moreover, concept descriptions generally achieve lower indicators in research than more realistic simulations, e.g. advertisement designs or product prototypes (Lees, Wright, 2004, pp. 389–400). These issues should be resolved in subsequent research with the use of control variables.

Limitations and future research

The author discerns certain limitations of the conducted experiment. As regards the sample, the sampling frame was not the entire population of men in Poland,

it was participants of IMAS International discussion panel. In general, random sampling is rarely applied in experiments for the purpose of sampling individuals from a larger population (Babbie, 2013). Yet the random sampling logic was maintained when assigning participants to groups. Another limitation related to the sample is the fact that the research covered men aged 25–49, which excluded older respondents. In some theories, the age of purchasers is correlated e.g. with the acceptance level of new ideas or attachment to traditional ideas (e.g. the innovation diffusion process). Older respondents could respond more positively to the presented contents regarding the residual code of masculinity. The limitations of the conducted experiment regard also dependent variables – the research allowed for a limited number of brand-related communication effects.

The areas for further research include:

- a) the influence of residual codes from other cultural areas on brand-related effects;
- b) the influence of residual cultural codes on brand-related effects in the categories where tradition is important (e.g. food, beer);
- c) the influence of dominant and emergent codes of masculinity on brand-related effects.

Conclusion

The conducted research contributes to the existing knowledge in the following manner: it explains whether the use of the residual code in brand communication influences the effects of such communication. The results of the research concerning the residual code of masculinity indicate that the application of the code in brand communication does not bring effects with respect to the examined variables. The research permits the formulation of the following managerial implications: managers should avoid residual codes of masculinity in brand communication because such codes do not influence brand communication effects.

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Wpływ rezydualnego kodu męskości na efekty związane z marką

Słowa kluczowe: marka, efekty komunikacji, kod rezydualny, wzorce męskości, eksperyment

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest prezentacja wyników eksperymentu wyjaśniającego wpływ rezydualnego kodu męskości na efekty związane z marką. Płeć i role wynikające z płci są elementami wykorzystywanymi w komunikacji marki. Jednakże wzorce męskości i kobiecości są dynamiczne i aby marki były postrzegane jako aktualne, w ich komunikacji należy uwzględnić ową dynamikę. Artykuł jest oparty na studiach literaturowych oraz eksperymentach.

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Cytowanie

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