

Chapter 7

Gender Fluidity in the Age of Technologically Mediated Environments: Implications for Fashion Industry

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ABSTRACT

Gender is a concept that has evolved with time, varying its meaning and relevance regularly. Today, it manifests across many facets of life. Whilst theories of gender began as a device to categorise individuals and groups, these have evolved into a broad, complex system of identification to describe the uniqueness of the individual. Central to the discussion of gender is the question of how we can understand human conduct and experience in technologically laden marketing environments. Drawing on extant theories, the current chapter examines how the technologically mediated marketing environment (TMME) is increasingly challenging fashion and luxury marketers to reconsider their marketing communications strategies, particularly with the impact of evolving Internet technologies such as social media platforms. The concluding section offers further agenda for future research.

INTRODUCTION

As an individual grows and evolves, so too does the concept of personal identity. There can often be varying images of mental identity, including ethical, religious and national identity (Steensma et al., 2013). However, gendered identity is often viewed as an undimensional and bipolar paradigm (Vantiegham et al., 2014). An individual's sense of gender is often based on interactions of relevance and congruency

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with others of the same gender (Steensma et al., 2013). Many authors acknowledge gender identity as a complex issue, albeit one that has perhaps lost traction (Mishna et al., 2012; Rasmussen, 2009; Steensma et al., 2013). Vast amounts of literature focus on examining gender identity based on the idea of man versus woman (Budgeon, 2013; Moghaddam, 2009; Pryzgoda and Chrisler, 2000; Schippers, 2007; Vantieghem et al., 2014). There is, however, limited published research on gender-fluid identity, especially in terms of how this identity is expressed through fashion and clothing.

This chapter examines how gendered clothing for children can possibly predetermine clothing choices in adulthood. Tajfel (1982) states that when faced with new situations, children draw on previous experiences as a reference point for how they should conduct themselves. Tajfel's social identity theory (1982) emphasises that children from varying cultures behave differently. Tajfel (1982) also states that if a person has knowledge of a child's social background, the child's behaviour can be predicted. Therefore, it is possible that if children have been exposed to strict gender colour-coding in the past, their predetermined behaviour may be to choose pink or blue items when allowed to select their own clothing. However, as Trepte (2006) observes, Tajfel's social identity theory (1982) uses assumptions from an entire social group and does not take individuality into consideration. This may indicate that predetermined behaviour may not always be applicable to individual children when observing gender-coded actions. Conversely, existing literature on social identity theory does not discuss how a child can utilise unisex fashion to move away from a gender-coding upbringing (Hutchinson, 2011; Maye, 2014; Paoletti, 2012, 2015; Sweet, 2015).

Ismail (2012) states that a significant obstacle facing modern marketers and brands is how to successfully market innovation. Previously innovations could be marketed using brand extension strategies. However, He and Li (2010) state that in today's modern fashion world, brand extension no longer has to be product-based, as technology creates such brand extension. As technology can provide extensions to a brand, technology can also extend the idea of gender. Kwahk and Ge (2012) state that the Internet strengthens social circles, rather than narrowing them. Xiang and Tang (2010) state that innovation is the inventor of fashion, whilst Simmel (2001) argues that fashion is the pursuit of change and peculiarity. In harnessing the power of technology and innovation, the concept of a sole, dichotomous variable within gender is long gone. Due to the success of the Internet and social media, brands are now constantly seeking out further trend developments (Ozuem, Howell and Lancaster, 2008; Lusch, 2007; Webster, 1992) in order to expand their customer base. However, there is a paucity in the literature with regard to how brands harness the power of gender within today's fashion industry in order to create experimental fashion and increase customer interest (Huber, 2008; Lamrad and Hanlon, 2014; Spade, 2008, 2013; Vanska, 2014; Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014).

This chapter contributes to existing research based on gender and fashion in a number of ways. Whilst current literature discusses gender as a rigid concept, there is an obvious paucity of literature discussing gender as a fluid theory, both in everyday life and in the modern fashion industry. By evaluating the concept of modern gender, the findings of this chapter enhance existing literature on the effects of gender on the modern fashion industry.

BACKGROUND

In ancient Greece men and women wore tunics and cloaks that featured bright colours and patterns, and the only real variation between genders was the length of the fabric used. Men would wear their

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