

Chapter 2

Gender Differences in Boardroom Communications: A Case Study Comparing Male and Female Executives in Kuwait

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ABSTRACT

Consumer behavior in regard to gender is often studied as business-to-consumer (B2C), especially by marketers and sales persons. Furthermore, the social science world is full of research regarding gender differences in over-the-counter purchasing matters. However, there is a dearth of information regarding the matter from a business-to-business (B2B) perspective – let alone the boardroom. It would seem rather logical to examine the matter as important observations could lead to similar benefits to those discovered from B2C research. In this chapter, the authors examine the possibility of similar findings in a boardroom setting. A survey was administered to 156 respondents of both genders in different sectors of Kuwait's workforce. Significant differences were found amongst men and women when it came to the way they perceived information in the boardroom and made final decisions accordingly. Also, there are differences between genders regarding the needs and objectives of a sales pitch meeting.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout time, there have been notable debates about the differences of the purchasing styles amongst genders. It is no surprise that differences in fact exist, and that they ultimately impact the actual purchasing decision. These debates left companies wondering what they can do in order to enhance their product's chances of being favored over another in the context of the sexes. Therefore, many embarked on their own initiatives to try and find answers to the complex equation of gender purchasing styles and decisions. We often find the fruits of these investigations in marketing mediums all around us – some are more male-oriented, which others are more female friendly depending on the product. Nowadays, it seems like common logic to direct a company's marketing efforts to suit the sexes in a business-to-customer (B2C) environment. But is this same logic being applied when it comes to making boardroom decisions?

In 2005, senior managers at Deloitte set out to answer this question. Wondering why they failed a recent sales pitch amongst a female-dominated boardroom, they decided to propose a question amongst their internal staff and found that 70% of senior managers perceived pitching to women was different from pitching to men when it came to sales. (Benko & Palster, 2013) This quickly explained why the male-dominant sales team giving the pitch at the time could not establish rapport with their intended customer as the majority of them were female. To further affirm the fair suspicions, scientific evidence in the form of biological differences can be reviewed. According to a study on brain matter, men's brains have about 6.5 times more gray matter than women whereas women have 10 times more white matter in comparison to men. (University of Irvine, 2005) From a biological perspective, gray matter is a characteristic of the information processing center while the white matter represents the center which controls connections between different centers of the brain. Therefore, scientists concluded that the differences may explain why men are better at sheer processing tasks while women "show relative strength in tasks that call for assimilating and integrating disparate pieces of information." (Benko & Palster, 2013) The differences are assumed to have major implications as to how decisions are made amongst the two groups. For example, with regards to purchasing differences, it has been widely acknowledged that women in general do spend more than men due to reasons such as impulse buying habits, and therefore are better negotiators than men (Pirlympou, n.d; Plabdaeng, 2010; Bahhouthet al., 2012; Tulungen, 2013; Al-Weqaiyan, A., 2005).

With plenty of information and findings in a B2B setting, it is unfortunate that there is no significant research on the decision-making process in a B2C setting such as a boardroom. In this paper, we hope to gain insight on the mentioned topic and

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