Pink Filter: Gender Effects in Meaningful and Meaningless Product Differentiation
Camila Vincent de Urquiza, Dr. Alan Cooke, Department of Marketing, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

Introduction

Although gender differentiation is common, some believe that women’s products are often higher priced than comparable undifferentiated products without offering gender-specific benefits. Carpenter et. al. (1994) found that consumers utilize trivial attributes when they have no other means for product comparison. Given the recent increased attention surrounding the Pink Tax, we hypothesize that women may be primed to feel negatively towards products targeting them and exhibit a “pink filter,” especially when the value provided is dubious. We sought to determine the prevalence of these beliefs and the efficacy of various gender targeting marketing practices through a survey and multiple behavioral experiments. We seek to test whether men and women hold similar beliefs regarding gender-based targeting and whether they respond similarly to the practice. Further, we want to explore the relative effectiveness of different differentiation methods including those that differentiate based on functional, credence, and non-functional attributes.

Methodology

Participants. 505 participants, 293 females & 212 males. Participants were recruited through Facebook and the mTurk platform to provide a broad sample.

Procedure. Subjects were asked to rate their agreement with fourteen statements that assess responses to differentiation strategies.

Experiments 1 & 2

Participants. For experiment 1, 379 undergraduate students completed the survey in the marketing lab. 2 participants were dropped. Accepted participants consisted of 132 (35.2%) males and 243 (64.8%) females. For experiment 2, 276 Amazon mTurk workers completed the study on the mLab mobile research platform (Cooke & Zubcek 2011). One participant was dropped from analysis, and the remaining 275 participants were 122 (44.4%) males and 153 (55.6%) females.

Stimuli. 7 conditions were created with a 3 x 2 design (differentiation type vs. gender) with an additional untargeted condition. Participants saw 3 replicates: energy bars, razors, and sunscreens. Form differentiation occurred by including a neutral or targeted background with a model for experiment 1, or just through packaging changes (in experiment 2). Function differentiation occurred through implying gender-specific ingredients or through tagline changes in both experiments.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the seven conditions and asked to rate their attitude, quality expectations, purchase likelihood, and relative expected price for each product.

Results

Survey

- On average, both men and women significantly agree that women’s products are priced higher than other products.
- Women did not report being more likely to buy female-targeted products.

Experiment 1

- Average attitude across all female-targeting conditions was marginally less than the baseline.
- On average, women rated their purchase likelihood lower for female-targeted than untargeted products.
- Compared to untargeted products, women rate purchase likelihood for female-targeted products significantly lower when targeted by packaging only.

Experiment 2

- Results aligned with experiment 1. Ratings of expected quality differed across conditions for female participants.

Conclusions & Future Work

- A pink filter may exist as, on average, women were not significantly more positively responsive towards female-targeted products.
- Men’s attitudes/likelihood to purchase products were not significantly affected by targeted products.

Future Work:

- Study gender differentiation through scents which are often stereotyped to fit gender stereotypes.
- Utilize different products since participants may not have purchased used presented replicates.
- Explore different possible subsets of women who respond differently to gender-targeted marketing.
- Explore if a corresponding male “blue filter” equivalent may also exist.

References


Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Alan Cooke for his assistance, mentorship, time, and constructive feedback throughout the planning, organization, and carrying out of this project. I would also like to thank Evan Hauser for his assistance in data analysis. I am grateful for Dr. Anne Donnelly and the Center for Undergraduate Research for developing the University Scholars Program and enabling this research.