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PINK MARKETING

HOW DOES IT WORK? WHY IS IT (STILL) WORKING?

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Pink is used in marketing to particularise a product “for girls/women”, managing to construct a “feminine mode of consumption”. Akin to the “extended self” by Belk, the consumption of these “feminine products” then allows female consumers to prove their belonging to the category of “women”, while reinforcing their feeling of “being a woman”.

PINK = FEMINITY IN GENDER MARKETING

While it is common to find a product available in several shades, pink is specifically used in gender marketing to make products available in a version for women, allowing double profits for marketers [fig. 1]. Although it is not possible to control all the parameters that influence consumer persuasion, Kacha argues that colour can influence, or even change, consumer attitudes towards a product by acting on both the cognitive – congruence with the symbolism of a colour – and emotional – (dis)liking a colour – dimensions [1]. Regarding pink, however, we are emotionally confronted with its rejection by many women [2], and the growing criticism from feminist academics and associations about its use for gender marketing purposes, which they consider as reinforcing sexist gender stereotypes [3][4].

THE 4 GATES OF PERSUASION

Derbaix and Gregory identify four “gates of persuasion”, conceptual levers usable by advertisers permitting to change consumers’ attitudes and behaviour through persuasive communication: “gate of logic”, corresponding to cognitive learning; “gate of imitation”, referring to interpersonal relationships; “gate of feelings and emotions”; and “gate of

automatism”, linked to the conditioning of consumers [5]. Pink in marketing operate all these levers at once: it is a nearly worldwide recognised symbol of femininity; it spreads as such through tradition and fashion; girls are conditioned from childhood – via toys, media,... – to associate pink with femininity; and it is very difficult to associate it with anything other than females and femininity [6]. Female consumers are thus conditioned from birth to own pink objects [7], making pink marketing a real tool of persuasion, playing on both the cognitive and emotional registers, and having repercussions on gender relations.



Fig. 1: Various pink products from gender marketing, 2021 (brand names have been masked)

TO CONSUME PINK TO BE FEMININE

Baudrillard [8] and McCracken [9] show that possessions have meaning beyond their desired functionalities: the cultural significance of consumption is projected from the world of cultural values and symbols to consumer goods. The object of consumption is thus also a social marker, which participates in social and cultural identities [10]. So, it is possible to consider pink objects produced by gender marketing as a way for some women to signify their femininity through the consumption of these

objects, or more accurately, a way to signify their conformity to a model of femininity. Consuming “in pink” can then be seen as a way of expressing femininity and constructing a gendered identity [11]. Thus, it does not matter whether women like pink or want to have pink objects, the important thing is that they buy these products, because to consume pink is to consume femininity. We can relate this to the concept of “extended self” developed by Belk: human being invest objects symbolically as an extension of oneself [12]. Possession would define not only what is “mine”, but also what is “Me”, implying a definition of identities through objects and their consumption. Pink objects are thus visible and measurable markers of femininity: to possess something pink is to be pink oneself, and to be what it symbolises – the feminine. Pink in gender marketing is therefore a paradox: it means femininity in order to respond to women’s “natural” needs and, at the same time, it refers femininity to an artificial aesthetic process that is consumed.

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