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Is the Future of Personal Care Product Packaging Gender Neutral?

A Comparative Study on the Consumer Perceptions of Gendered Packaging by Generation Z and Generation X

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Abstract:
Traditional gender roles and stereotypes are changing yet certain industries rely on these stereotypes in their marketing, such as the personal care product industry and its common usage of gender-specific packaging. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how consumers perceive the gendered packaging of personal care products to evaluate the effectiveness of this marketing strategy. Through the qualitative research method of focus groups, the consumer perceptions of generation Z and generation X consumers in Helsinki were investigated and compared. The researcher asked general questions about gendered packaging and showed examples of personal care product packaging to gauge their perceptions. The main theories used in this study to develop the method and analyze the results were theories related to packaging as a marketing tool, gendered marketing, the stages of consumer perception, and generation Z and generation X as consumers. The focus group data was then analyzed using thematic analysis.

The results indicate that there are both similarities and differences between the perceptions of gendered packaging amongst generation Z and generation X. Both generations believe that most personal care products are gendered. Generation Z showed more of a preference for gendered products over generation X, yet both groups were in favor of a more gender-neutral approach. Both generations showed a preference for being able to decipher the scent, and purpose of the product on the packaging. Therefore, the results lead to the conclusion that marketers should consider focusing more on highlighting the product's features rather than its gender. Both generations also believed there is a demographic of non-binary consumers being left out by gendered packaging, which marketers should also consider. The scope of this study does not involve other product categories or consumers of other demographics and geographical locations. The study results are also limited by a small sample size, meaning more research would be needed to increase the generalizability of the results.

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FOREWORD

Firstly, I would like to thank all my friends and family who have supported me throughout this process. Whether it was through motivating speeches, accompanying me on study dates, or making sure I took breaks when I needed them.

I would especially like to thank my mother Kirsi Nelson, who supported me every step of the way both practically and emotionally. I would also like to especially thank my younger brother William Nelson for his utmost help and support.

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Helsinki, May 2022

Isabel Nelson

1 INTRODUCTION

From clothing to razors, marketers constantly anticipate their consumer's gender. It is ingrained into marketing communications such as packaging design, and this gendered marketing strategy stems from the assumption that consumers prefer products that are targeted to a specific gender. Gender-specific design acts as a social script that affects consumer decisions and exemplifies gender norms and structures. Marketers and designers will depend on gender ideologies that put women on one side and men on the other when it comes to market segmentation. Scholars who work in the fields of gender and design have demonstrated an interest in how social gender norms are not only reflected in but created by objects. It is believed that consumer goods are not merely the result of social beliefs on gender, but also create ideas of what is feminine, masculine, and gender-neutral (McIntyre, 2019 p.338). Gender has been used as a design element in product development for ages and in certain branches like clothing and perfumes, there has been a long tradition to differentiate between female and male products (Schroeder, 2010).

One industry that is notorious for using gender-specific packaging design is the personal care industry. Necessities such as deodorant, shampoos, and razors that in theory serve the same function for both men and women, are very often targeted to a specific gender. A study done on the gender-based stereotyping of razors on three prominent e-commerce retailers revealed that ninety-three percent of razor listings used the terms "women" or "men" and did not consider non-binary consumers. They also found that the razors used colors that follow gender stereotypes with women's razors often using lighter colors whilst men's razors often used darker and bold colors (Chang & Lipner, 2021). It is apparent that packaging design is used as a marketing tool that allows brands to communicate their product benefits to the consumer and that this marketing tool is often coupled with a gendered marketing strategy. Packaging is usually the first point of contact the consumer has with a brand which makes it a vital component of a product as it draws the consumer's attention whilst quickly conveying messages that support the brand (Klimchuck & Krasovec, 2013 p. 39).

However, traditional notions of gender are fading increasingly with many modern consumers believing that gender is a non-binary construct. Eighty-one percent of Gen Z members hold a strong belief that gender does not define someone as much as it has in the past. They also believe in the notion of gender nonconformity with nearly sixty

percent stating that they think official forms should have selection options other than "female" or "male". This leads to speculation about how effective gendered marketing is as modern consumers are seeking out brands that consider and target people of all gender identities and do not assume their preferences based on gender stereotypes (Powers, 2019).

1.1 Problem Statement

Personal care products such as razors, deodorants, and shampoos are traditionally marketed as gender binary which is conveyed through their packaging design. However, traditional gender roles, gender stereotypes, and the notion of binary gender are changing, making gender neutrality a tool for empowerment. The rise of gender ambiguity is reshaping societies and customs in numerous aspects such as dress codes, parenting methods, language use, and consumer trends. As many aspects of society adjust to these changes, the marketing sphere needs to do the same and react accordingly to the attitudes of their consumers. Many modern consumers view gender as either fluid or non-binary meaning that gender identity no longer falls into the two exclusive categories of man or woman. Even though the social roles of gender have changed drastically, the personal care industry still reflects gender stereotypes through its packaging (Knoll et al., 2011; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004).

The topic of gender-neutral marketing is relatively new yet increasingly valuable as the conversation on gender continues and the next significant consumer group matures. The existence of gendered products and marketing communication that utilizes gender stereotypes is still widely accepted in the marketing world. It should be scrutinized as it may project harmful or discriminatory ideals. There is substantial research on gendered advertising, but there is not as much research done on gendered packaging specifically and the current relevance of it which is a research gap this thesis aims to help fill. It also aims to fill the gap in research that demonstrates these consumer groups' attitudes towards a gender-neutral approach. By providing a better understanding of gendered packaging and consumers attitudes towards a more gender-neutral approach, marketers and brands can start to consider this relatively new approach to marketing. As personal care products are a product segment that consistently uses the gendered packaging strategy, it acts as an effective product group to research due to the clear-cut gender differences in packaging

The research problem leads to the following research questions:

1. What are common stereotypes and gender roles used in packaging design?
2. What is the difference in preference for gendered products between generation Z and generation X consumers?
3. How is gendered packaging perceived by generation Z and generation X consumers?

These research questions help investigate the relevance of gender-specific packaging in the current marketing world and social climate.

1.2 Aim of Study

As the social attitudes and preferences of consumers change, brands should follow by adjusting their marketing efforts accordingly. One of the most effective ways to evaluate whether a marketing strategy is successful or not is through the study of consumer perception. Therefore, this thesis aims to investigate how consumers perceive the gendered packaging of personal care products to evaluate the effectiveness of this marketing strategy. This aids in deducing whether a more gender-neutral approach should be considered in the industry. More specifically, the researcher aims to compare the consumer perceptions of consumers in Helsinki belonging to generation Z and generation X to compare how the younger and older generations respond to gendered packaging.

1.3 Demarcation

The scope of this study is limited by multiple variables such as geographical location and time constraints. Due to the researcher's geographical location, this study solely focuses on generation Z and generation X consumers in Helsinki. This means the results are not generalizable to all generation Z and generation X consumers. However, Finland is considered a western nation, making the results somewhat applicable to other western nations' generation Z and generation X consumers. More specifically, Nordic consumers as Finland is a part of the Nordics.

Information and literature on generation Z and generation X consumers in Finland specifically is limited. Hence, research on Western generation Z and generation X consumers is used for part of the secondary research and is applied to Finns. Since Finland

is a western country, it is expected that the information on western consumers is culturally similar enough to be applied to Finnish consumers. This research does not include non-western notions of gender as the study focuses on Finnish consumers. Gender roles and gender norms vary between cultures meaning universal conclusions cannot be drawn. This means that the results cannot be applied to the marketing efforts of nations that are not located in the west.

The research also solely focuses on packaging design elements related to gender even though several other packaging factors also affect consumer perception. This ensures that the focus remains on how gendered packaging specifically influences consumer perception. Since packaging design is a vast field and because of the limited timeframe for this research, the thesis focuses on examining the packaging design of personal care products. In addition to the packaging design field, gendered marketing is also vast which is why gendered packaging design is the only aspect of gendered marketing studied. Personal care products were selected due to their obvious use of gendered packaging. The product category of personal care products is broad which is why the researcher focuses on the two products of deodorants, and shampoos. These are used in the primary research and the consumer perception of these two products and their packaging will be studied. However, since multiple products from the product category are being studied, the results can be generalized to a certain extent to the product category in general. The study does not include products from any other product category meaning the findings should mainly be applied to the personal care industry.

1.4 Definitions

Personal Care Products- Personal care products are applied to the body to beautify, clean, change one's appearance, or promote attractiveness. There are seven categories of personal care products which include oral care, sun care, skincare, decorative cosmetics, perfumes, and body care (Cosmetics Europe, 2019).

Gender- Gender can be defined as the socially constructed traits of females and males. This includes behaviors, norms, and roles corresponding with being a male or female. It is a social construct that is different depending on the society and is ever-changing (World Health Organization, 2019).

Gender binary- Gender binary is a classification system containing two genders, male and female. It also refers to the concept or belief that only two genders exist and that one's gender aligns with traditional social constructs of masculinity and femininity (Gender Binary, n.d.).

Gender fluidity- Gender fluidity refers to changes in a person's gender identity and/or gender expression (Katz-Wise, 2020).

Gender Neutral- The term 'gender-neutral' refers to something that is not associated with either of the binary genders of man or woman. What is often perceived as gender-neutral is the reflection of gender blindness or not recognizing gender specificities (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2015).

Consumer Perception- Consumer perception is a marketing concept concerning the process by which consumers select, organize, and interpret stimuli to create meaning of a company or its offerings (Schiffman & Wisenblit).

Generation Z- Generation Z refers to members of the generation of people born between the mid-1990s and mid-2010s who are distinguished as confident uses of new technology (Collins English Dictionary, 2019a).

Generation X- Generation Z refers to members of the generation of people born between the mid-1960s and the late-1970s who are perceived as being highly educated but underemployed (Collins English Dictionary, 2019b).

2 THEORY

This chapter outlines and explains key concepts, theories, and models that are regarded as relevant to the empirical part of the study. The overlaps and relationships between the key concepts of packaging design as a marketing tool, gender, and consumer perception are delved into.

2.1 Packaging as a Marketing Tool

Packaging includes the design and production of a wrapper or container that holds a product. Traditionally, packaging served the sole function of holding and protecting the product. However, packaging now also serves as an important marketing tool as there is increased competition and an abundance of products on store shelves. Packaging therefore must perform multiple marketing tasks such as attracting the buyer, communicating the brand positioning, and closing the sale. A brand's advertising or other marketing efforts may never be seen by the consumer but all consumers who buy and use a product will interact with the packaging. This makes packaging a prime marketing space. Effective packaging has the power to create immediate brand recognition amongst consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017 p. 252). Research suggests that seventy percent of purchase decisions are made at the moment of purchase in the store, even when the consumers intend to purchase specific products (Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014 p. 663). On average a shopper will pass by almost 300 items per minute making retail stores a highly competitive environment for consumer products. This possibly means that the packaging is the seller's best chance to influence consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017 p. 252).

Packaging design consists of all the external and visual elements of packaging, including design elements and regulatory information used to promote the product. The primary objective of packaging design is to enable the packaging to act as a vessel that contains, protects, and distinguishes a product. Packaging design aims to meet marketing objectives by presenting the product's benefits and functions to generate a sale. In a consumer society, products and their packaging design are not perceived as separate objects and rely on one another for purchase success. Successful packaging design creates a desire for the product and affects all the marketing mix activities. Such as the pricing, placement, and merchandising of a product. There may or may not be a difference between ingredients or performance amongst competing products, but in regards to packaging design, this makes little to no difference. This is due to how marketing is often about facilitating the perception of difference, even if there is none (Klimchuck & Krasovec, 2013 p. 40).

2.1.1 The Role of Packaging Design

Packaging design in terms of marketing serves an important role in communicating to the consumer. Packaging design utilizes color, characters, typography, structure, and other design elements that become category cues for potential buyers. In addition to this, packaging design often communicates specific information about the product to the consumer to incite a purchase. The external appearance of a product is often the main reason for a product's sale as over two-thirds of consumers decide to buy a product at the point-of-sale which is when the shopper sees the product on display. In terms of sales, packaging design is most successful when the marketer has identified either a niche or target market. Even though companies want to sell their products to many consumers, defining a consumer group can provide a clear focus for the marketing communications of a product and its packaging. A defined consumer group considers the consumer's values, lifestyles, preferences, and habits, which provides a framework for determining marketing and design strategies. Marketers also consider which consumer groups would benefit most from their products and who would perceive them the best. By doing so, marketers can curate packaging design and overall marketing communications to appeal to a certain consumer group (Klimchuck & Krasovec, 2013 p. 42).

Underwood and Klein (2002) and Underwood (2003) conducted studies on the importance of packaging as a communicative vehicle. They investigated the importance of communicative packaging when it comes to creating and portraying a brand identity. Their research highlights how crucial packaging is and showed how products that are not bought in their prepared state, rely heavily on packaging as a means of understanding how the product works once it is in that state (Rundh, 2013 p. 1551).

2.1.2 VIEW Model

To evaluate the effectiveness of a packaging's design, certain general features need to be evaluated. These are outlined in the VIEW model which stands for visibility, information, emotional appeals, and workability. These four dimensions of packaging are known to influence purchase decisions and consumer perceptions of a product (Andrews & Shimp, 2018 p. 505).

Visibility

The first dimension is visibility which represents a package's ability to catch and retain the consumer's attention at the point of purchase. The package should stand out on the shelf in a way that does not take away from the brand's overall image. Certain visual elements such as bright colors and interesting shapes can enhance a product's visibility and therefore grab the shoppers' attention. However, it is important to consider the packaging of the competing products when designing a package as it should be distinctive among them. Another way brands improve their visibility is by changing the packaging depending on the season or a special holiday. This gives consumers an additional reason to choose the specially packaged product over all the alternatives that never change their design (Andrews & Shimp, 2018 p. 505).

Information

The second element is the product information presented on the packaging such as product ingredients, claimed benefits, and usage instructions. The objective is to present the appropriate type and amount of information without overcrowding the package with too much information that consequently interferes with the main message or cheapens the look of the package. The labels on packaging directly affect consumer purchase behavior and perception. An example of this is how product information heavily influences purchase behavior within the food industry. Front of package nutrition research has shown that certain systems of representing nutrition in a visually appealing way, encourage consumers to evaluate the nutrition levels which in turn affects their decision to buy the product. Slogans on the packaging are also an effective information communication tactic. A slogan on a package can remind the consumer of a brand's advertising which activates the consumer's retrieval of advertising content and therefore increases the likelihood they will recognize the brand and buy the product (Andrews & Shimp, 2018 p. 505).

Emotional Appeal

The third element is emotional appeal which has to do with a package's ability to elicit a favorable emotion or mood. Package designs usually will try to invoke different feelings such as cheerfulness and prestige through various elements such as color, packaging

materials, and shape. However not all packaging utilizes emotional elements as they may choose to focus on informational content. Whereas other brands choose to emphasize emotional elements and in turn will not present as much information. Heinz Ketchup is a good example of a brand that once did not focus on emotional appeal through its packaging but then improved it and its sales, by doing so. At first, the ketchup was packaged in relatively bland glass and plastic containers. However, they then decided to appeal to children who make up most ketchup consumers in the United States. They did so by creating a fun-oriented packaging with bright colors and a striped design. The determinant of whether a brand should emphasize information or emotion to a greater extent is the nature of the product category and the consumer behavior involved. For products where consumers make decisions based on what's the best value for their money, the packaging should focus on providing concrete information. However, if the product involves selection based on the pursuit of fantasies, amusement, or sensory stimulation, then the packaging should focus more on emotional content to elicit purchase behavior (Andrews & Shimp, 2018 p. 506).

Workability

The last element is workability which is how a product functions instead of how it communicates. Multiple workability issues must be considered such as the degree to which the package protects the contents, how easily it can be stored, how effectively it enables usability of the product, how it protects the retailers against damage, and if the package is environmentally friendly. To improve workability, packaging innovations are constantly occurring. For example, pourable-spout containers were created as an innovative form of packaging which are now used for sugar, motor oil, and oatmeal. Another example of workability being improved which in turn increased sales is the introduction of General Mills Go-Gurt yogurt in a tube which allowed it to be consumed on the go without a spoon. In its first year, Go-gurt improved its sales by 100 million dollars and nearly doubled the number of yogurt consumers under the age of 19 (Andrews & Shimp, 2018 p. 506).

An emerging trend within this element is the environmental aspect of packaging which is something consumers are becoming increasingly aware of. Many changes involving this aspect have been the transformation from plastic to paper packaging. However, it is well-known that many packages are highly environmentally wasteful

through the exercise use of plastic, cardboard, and other materials which all end up in landfills. To improve the environmental workability aspect, companies need to try and reduce the number of packaging materials used (Andrews & Shimp, 2018 p. 506). The VIEW model can be used by package designers, marketers, and brands, as a tool to determine whether the packaging of their product will be successful in meeting its marketing, and functional purposes.

2.2 Packaging Design Elements

The features of packaging design and its characteristics are meant to call attention to the benefits of a product and distinguish it from competitors. Silayoi and Speece (2007) conducted a literature review in which they consequently identified four main packaging elements that impact consumer perception and purchase behavior. These elements are divided into two categories: visual and informational elements. The visual elements consist of the size and shape of the packaging and its graphics. Whilst the informational elements are concerned with information about the product and technological information.
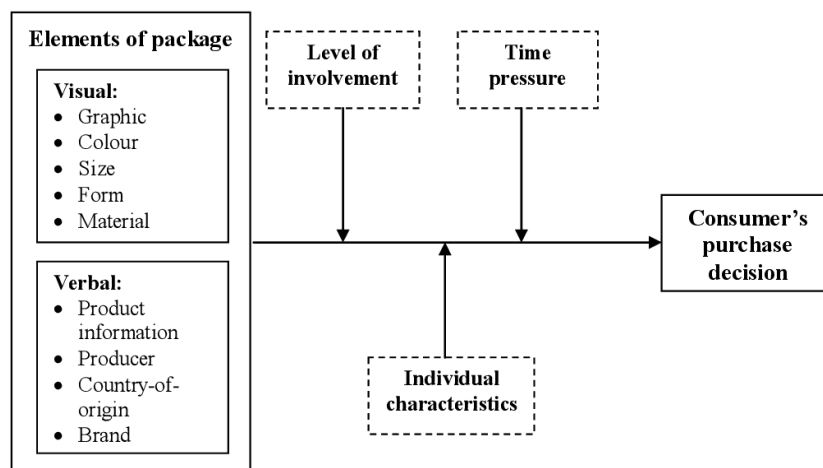
Figure 1. Elements of Packaging and Consumer's Purchase Behaviour (Agariya et al., 2012)

2.2.1 Visual Elements

Visual elements such as graphics and color can significantly affect how a consumer evaluates packaging. The significance of these elements is closely related to the level of interconnection between a consumer and the package, as conveyed through the level of involvement. The level of involvement refers to where a product category lies on the

spectrum of being a high involvement or low involvement product. A high involvement product has a large effect on a consumer's life such as a home, whereas a low involvement product is less significant and reflects routine purchases such as toothpaste. When it comes to the graphics and colors of a product's packaging, a low involvement product is much more likely to be influenced by them. (Silayoi & Speece, 2007 p. 611).

Graphics refers to the image layout, typography, colors, and images on a product that works together to communicate an overall image of the product. The graphics convey important information and contribute to the branding and identity of the product. One study found that when consumers are looking for products in stores, the positioning of the graphics and differential perception can be the deciding factor in whether a product is identified or missed. Eye-catching graphics also help the product stand out and lure potential buyers (Silayoi & Speece, 2007 p. 611). Color is a powerful element within graphics as it is estimated that up to ninety percent of a person's assessment of packaging has to do with its colors (Singh, 2006 p.783). Bix, Seo, and Sundar (2013) researched the effect of color contrast on consumer behavior and found that the contrast of colors greatly affects consumers' perception of product quality and its visual appeal and influences their purchase intentions.

In addition to the graphics on packaging, the packaging's size and shape are also significant when it comes to packaging design. A consumer will evaluate these factors to make judgments and decisions. Consumers will use these elements to make volume judgments. As an example, an elongated package may give the illusion that it has more product. Different sizes of products are also intertwined with different levels of involvement. For example, a low price for lower involvement purchases is enabled through reduced packaging. Generic low involvement products such as dish soap are usually in larger packaging to communicate more value for their money to consumers. Consumers seeking a bargain will find cheap generic items in large packaging as a good deal. This shows the importance of packaging size regarding consumer perception as when the product quality is difficult to decipher, the packaging size has a large effect (Silayoi & Speece, 2007 p. 612).

2.2.2 Informational Elements

One core function of packaging is the communication of information as it helps consumers make purchasing decisions. It is especially important with some higher involvement products as consumers need more information beyond its visual appeal and appearance. Written information on the packaging is the most efficient way of communicating the product's usage, benefits, and other useful information which will enable the consumer to make an informed purchasing decision. However, packaging information can also lead to confusion by presenting an abundance of information or incorrect information. Some designers will use fonts that are too small or dense to get as much information onto the label as possible which leads to poor readability. Many consumers appreciate product labeling yet are not satisfied with the current formats used. A survey done in the UK on food labeling found that nearly two-thirds of people read food labels but one-third of them want the labels to be more clear. All in all, consumers will use the information portrayed on the packaging to examine its quality and benefits which directly impact their purchase decision and product perception (Silayoi & Speece, 2007 p. 613).

The second informational element of packaging is the technology developed for packaging which is derived from current trends in products and consumer behavior. Big retailers will expect swift responsiveness and flexibility from their packaging manufacturers so that they can consistently satisfy consumer demand and wants. Consumers will often perceive a product as of higher value and pay more for it if the packaging is of high quality. However, companies are often limited in creating products that fully meet their consumer's expectations due to processing and cost restraints. Companies are expected to innovate and develop new products that are more efficiently produced, and packaged and that are more sustainable in response to changing consumer expectations. The communicative role of packaging technology is to make sure that creative design is implemented functionally and ensure that design and execution are working together (Silayoi & Speece, 2007 p. 613).

2.3 Gender, Gender Roles, and Gender Stereotypes

Gender has traditionally been perceived as existing in the two opposite forms of male and female, based on biological sex. Throughout history, the social expectations of how each gender should behave and look, have influenced the way people act. Therefore, gender roles represent the beliefs society shares on what occupations and behaviors a specific gender should engage in (Fischer & Anderson, 2012 p. 17). Sex and gender are often used interchangeably but gender is not biologically determined and instead is developed socially and varies from culture to culture (Avery, 2012 p. 322). This means that traits seen as either masculine or feminine are dependent on people reinforcing them with their actions and behavior. West and Zimmermann (1987) suggest that "gender is not something that we are, but something that we do.". Hence, femininity and masculinity are personality traits enacted through social interaction.

In addition to gender and gender roles, gender stereotypes are also a social construct. A gender stereotype is a preconception about characteristics or social roles that are perceived as often possessed and performed by a specific gender. They are often harmful as they limit men's and women's ability to develop their personalities, pursue certain careers, and make life decisions. Stereotypes also often perpetuate inequalities such as the traditional view that women are "caregivers" which then puts all childcare responsibilities on women (United Nations, 2021). Even though gender identity is a product of socially shared meaning, the notion of gender is continuously linked to biological sex. It is expected that males act masculine and females feminine. Essentially, "gender is viewed as the socially constructed meanings of one's physical sex" (Krijnen et al., 2015, p. 3).

2.3.1 Redefining Gender

Notions of gender and gender roles have changed tremendously over the years, and one of the biggest changes has been the rise in gender neutrality. Gender neutrality can be defined as "not referring to either sex but only to people in general" (Merriam-Webster, 2022). However, the majority of traits tend to fall into the categories of feminine or masculine, which makes complete neutrality difficult to achieve, especially in marketing. Considering this, gender neutrality can be portrayed by either making no reference to

gender whatsoever or by referring to both at the same time without highlighting a particular one. Due to gender being socially constructed, it is viable that people identify with cross-gendered traits (Neale et al., 2015 p. 350). This means some people might identify as neither binary gender, as both binary genders, as different genders at different times, or with no gender at all. Gender identities that do not fall under the male and female binary are starting to be recognized in medical, legal, and psychological systems and societal norms regarding gender are shifting (Richards et al., 2016 p.95). Gender as a concept has evolved and is now seen as a spectrum instead of dichotomous.

2.4 Gendered Marketing

Both men and women use and buy the same products from toothpaste to cars. Gendered marketing, however, assumes that men and women do not want the same products, with men often being targeted with one variant of a product and women with another. The notion of gender has been of interest in the field of marketing for a long time, including advertising. Gender-based marketing strategies can be seen readily, such as in toy shops where it is apparent which section of the store targets girls and which boys. Gender is often used as a segmentation strategy and is based on the biological binary of men and women which are traditionally perceived as easily identifiable. Consumer segments based on gender are also viewed as reachable, responsive, and profitable due to their large size. The gender binary has dominated marketing research and practices which can be seen through gender role stereotyping in advertisements, and gendered product positioning. However, meta-analytical research has recently shown that demographics such as gender, tend to have lower prognostic value in comparison to psychographics in marketing (Zawisza, 2019 p. 8).

One of the largest fields of marketing has to do with advertising and it has largely been studied regarding the portrayal of men and women. Early research into the topic dates back to the 1970s with the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (2006) in which he analyzed 500 print advertisements that led to the development of various pictorial representations and messages that were conveyed based on gender. He found that pictorial representations of women could be seen through their poses and positioning around men which conveyed messages of submissiveness, fragility, and dreaminess. Whereas men were portrayed as confident and sometimes intimidating. More recent content research

into gendered marketing has shown that this type of gendered portrayal still exists. Grau and Zotos (2016) have shown through their research that marketing communications do not accurately reflect changing gender roles, however, some changes can be seen such as men being used in more egalitarian roles in advertisements.

2.4.1 Gender Segmentation

Market segmentation is an important marketing concept and strategy which involves dividing the market into distinct groups of consumers who have different characteristics, behaviors, or needs and who might benefit from separate marketing strategies. One common way in which this is done is through gender segmentation which falls under the larger umbrella of demographic segmentation. This results in creating two separate consumer groups based on whether they are female or male. Gender segmentation has long been used in marketing in industries such as toiletries, toys, and clothing. For example, P&G was one of the first to use gender segmentation with their deodorant brand Secret which was formulated specifically for women and packaged and advertised to reinforce a female image. A notable industry that uses gender segmentation is the personal care industry, more specifically the men's personal care industry. It has recently exploded with brands that previously targeted mainly women, such as L'Oreal and Dove, who now market lines exclusively for men (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017 p. 214).

Gender segmentation is built on the assumption that men and women differ in their utility considerations which helps form brand preferences. Marketers and brands believe that men are focused more on instrumental utilities and that women are more experientially oriented. Instrumental utilities refer to the functional attributes of a product in addition to socially conspicuous utilities that enhance self-image and social well-being (Friedmann & Lowengart, 2018 p. 3). Research has demonstrated that these two focuses are more important for men.

2.4.2 Gendered Packaging

Packaging performs gender by communicating whether the product is "for him", "for her", or for everyone. Packages claim to explain the contents by dictating which gender the product is for, but this is not the case. For example, saying "for her" on a perfume

bottle makes the contents feminine and perpetuates a consumer group of women who like certain scents. However, this does not mean that the perfume itself is inherently for women or can only be used by women. In a similar sense, female-targeted packaging tends to use the color pink but this is not because it is in a woman's nature to like pink, but instead, because the color is associated with femininity. A product's physical appearance such as its packaging is a major factor in determining its personality and gender. Prior research on product personality has provided insight into how the product of gender is perceived and how it is related to how people perceive other people. Person perception theories have found that one of the first aspects noticed when meeting someone is gender which is judged based on the person's physical appearance. This indicates that appearance is an important indicator of gender and this can be applied to products and packaging (McIntyre, 2019 p.338).

The visual elements of packaging trigger consumer responses such as preference and aesthetic liking. Lieven et al. (2015) found regarding product proportion, that angular, bold, and solid traits of brand logos perpetuate masculinity. On the contrary, they found that the round, smooth, and delicate properties of brand logos perpetuate femininity. This is in line with research that has shown that concerning shapes, angular forms represent masculinity and round forms represent femininity. The packaging's shape and size are also perceived to represent gender. Research suggests that slim and round body shapes of the packaging indicate femininity whilst bulky and angular shapes of the packaging indicate masculinity (Lieven et al., 2015).

A study done by Lieven et al. (2015) investigating how product visuals perpetuate the gender of a product, identified multiple design guidelines for creating gendered products. Their research found that color was a significant factor in differentiating between female and male products. In their interviews with packaging designers, the participants explained that the consumer market heavily relies on color stereotypes. They described women's products as using light colors and traditionally feminine colors such as pink and purple. Whilst men's products utilize darker, stronger colors such as blue and black. Two out of the three designers interviewed also provided insight into what kind of packaging is used in the European markets to perpetuate gender. They said that female products tend to use shiny materials whereas male products used dim materials (Lieven et al., 2015).

2.4.3 Gender Performance through Consumption

Once a gender identity has been constructed, its expression can be seen through multiple outlets. Sandhu (2017) states that "a common way [to express gender] is to appropriate consumption practices and props that reflect our gender identity. It is central to how we perform and accomplish our understanding of our gender" (Sandhu, 2017, p. 152). Consumption behavior and props are essential elements that reflect gender identity. Consumer products allow individuals to express the gender they identify with. Marketers consider this by marketing products to specific genders to encourage materialistic reinforcement of performing gender. In support of this, Avery (2012) states, "Gendered brands contain either masculine or feminine identity meanings that are socially shared among members of a culture. We adorn our gender displays with these brands as tangible markers; gendered brands help materialize gender, enlivening who we are as men or women." (Avery, 2012 p. 323).

Targeting male or female consumption fosters a certain gender culture for products and as a result, divides females and males into distinct purchasing segments. Sandhu (2017) states that gendered marketing segregates consumers and that it "constrains what consumers buy". This gendered consumption culture created by products leads to male consumers being more inclined to purchase male-marketed products and vice versa with females (McGinley, 2019 p.11). Research has also demonstrated that individuals buy products that either create or maintain a valued dimension and one of these is gender. This is increasingly relevant for products where body, identity, and consumerism overlap such as personal care products. Choosing a product sometimes has more to do with how it reflects the consumer's identity rather than the meaningful differences between products (Sandhu, 2017, p. 152).

Duesterhaus et al. (2011) conducted a study on the gender-based differences in the costs of personal care goods and found that the most mundane of products such as razors and moisturizers express personal identity. They found that while the functional value of the product is the main purchase reason (e.g. moisturizer being bought for moisturizing), the product is also chosen due to the perceived symbolic meaning and what it represents (e.g. extra moisturizers being perceived to feminize and beautify the body). By purchasing a "woman's moisturizer", women feel they can express their femininity in a largely masculine world. They also found that women tend to pay more than men for certain

personal care items and services. They suggest that this practice perpetuates gender inequality by increasing the economic burden on women and by reinforcing the notion that men and women are different (Duesterhaus et al., 2011 p.16).

2.5 Consumer Perception

Perception refers to the process of choosing, organizing, and interpreting stimuli such as color, light, texture, sound, and odor. The study of perception is focused on what people add to raw sensations taken in by the sensory receptors such as the eyes, to give them meaning. Each person interprets stimuli and their meaning based on their own biases, experiences, and needs. Perception allows individuals to create a meaningful and coherent image of the world around them. Regarding consumer perception, consumers will act based on their perceptions rather than objective reality. Each individual views their reality based on their values, needs, experiences, and wants. Meaning that to marketers, consumers' perceptions hold more value than their own knowledge of reality (Madichie, 2012 p.153).

What affects a consumer's intent to purchase is not what the offering is but is rather what the consumer thinks it is. Since consumers make decisions based on their perceptions of the offering, marketers must understand the concept of perception and concepts related to it to dictate what influences consumers to purchase (Schiffman & Wisenbelt, 2019 p.107-108). Individuals are bombarded with tremendous amounts of stimuli every day, and none of this information is passively processed. Only a small number of stimuli presented will ever be noticed, and even a smaller number will be attended to (Solomon et al., 2019).

2.5.1 Stages of Consumer Perception

The consumer perception process happens in the four stages of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and adapting information inputs to create meaning that will assist consumption decision-making. The perceptual process starts when the sensory receptors (eyes, tongue, nose, ears, and skin) encounter sensations (sights, tastes, sounds, odors, and textiles). Through the sensory system, a person is presented with a never-ending amount of stimuli, and the stimuli that do receive one's attention are then evaluated and

given meaning based on various forms of cognitive and behavioral processing. At the end of the perceptual process, some of the stimuli will become adapted and their significance diminishes (Drake et al., 2018).
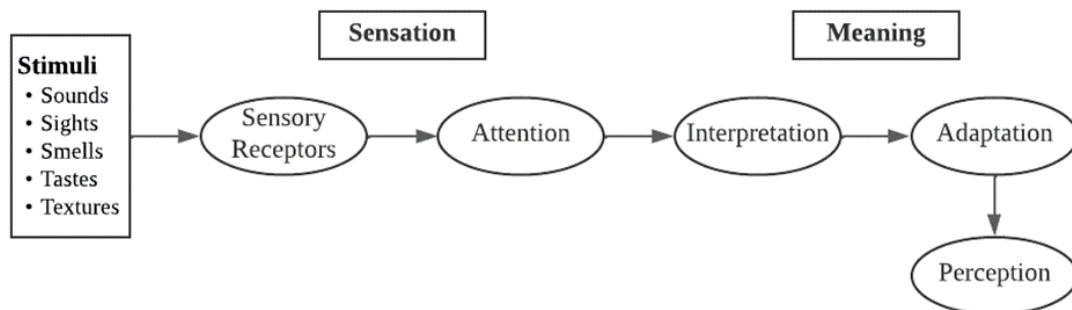

Figure 2. The Perceptual Process (Adapted from Draskovic, 2009)

Exposure

The first stage of the consumer perceptual process is exposure which is when stimuli encounter one's sensory receptors. Regarding marketing efforts, consumers are subject to a plethora of commercial information through radio, television, the internet, magazines, and advertisements. Digital marketing specialists estimate that the average person is exposed to around one thousand to four thousand ads a day. Today, it is not unusual for people to be online, on their phone, and watching television simultaneously and not all information will make it into their minds. The selection of which information is seen or heard is referred to as selective exposure (Drake et al., 2018).

To cope with this abundance of advertising messages, consumers dedicate degrees of mental processing to solely the messages that are relevant to their attitudes, wants, needs, and preferences. Marketers rely on the premise that repetitive exposure will lead to their message sticking in the minds of consumers at some point and that their attention will be grabbed at the right moment (Drake et al., 2018). The lowest intensities of a stimulus that can be registered can be defined by sensory thresholds. These consist of the absolute and differential thresholds. The absolute threshold is the minimum amount of stimulation that a sensory receptor can detect. An example of this is how the sound from a dog whistle is too high to be heard by human ears, which makes that stimulus beyond a human's auditory absolute threshold. Marketers need to ensure that the marketing stimulus is above the absolute threshold, otherwise, it cannot be perceived (Madichie, 2012 p. 159).

The differential threshold, on the other hand, is the ability of a sensory receptor to notice changes or differences between two stimuli (Madichie, 2012 p.159). The minimum difference that can be identified between two stimuli is referred to as JND which stands for just noticeable difference. This stems from the work of German physiologist Ernst Weber who discovered that being able to notice differences is not reliant on the differences in size but rather the differences in size relative to the size of the stimulus in its entirety. This is known as Webers Law which "maintains that the JND of a stimulus is a constant proportion of the original intensity of the stimulus.". (Drake et al., 2018) The differential threshold is also important for marketers to consider as sometimes they may want the consumers to notice a change and sometimes they may not. For example, a marketer might want the consumer to notice when a retailer offers a discount. Whereas in situations where a price has been raised, they may want to downplay this (Madichie, 2012 p.160).

Attention

The second stage of the perceptual process is attention which is the extent to which processing power is dedicated to a certain stimulus. This varies depending on both the characteristics of the stimulus and the recipient. Often consumers are dealing with sensory overload meaning they are being exposed to more information than they can process. In terms of marketing, this includes a multitude of marketing stimuli which means there is competition for the consumer's attention (Madichie, 2012 p. 154). At this stage, the consumer is only paying attention to the messages that meet their interests or needs. This is known as selective attention, and it helps people get things done.

The principle of salience can be seen at this stage which refers to a situation where one pays attention to information that catches their attention in a certain scenario. In this case, what catches one's attention is information that is relevant, prominent, important, and timely. Sometimes consumers may forget relevant information, and that is referred to as selective retention. In this case, the consumer may forget information that goes against their beliefs, despite its relevance. For example, a regular smoker may forget a lot of the information communicated in an anti-smoking advertisement. Marketers try and get their advertising messages noticed and remembered by using repetition. They do this in hopes that consumers will retain some of the information which will be retrieved once a want or need for their brand emerges (Drake et al., 2018).

Interpretation

The third stage is an interpretation which is when meaning is assigned to the sensory stimuli. The same way in which people perceive stimuli differently also applies to this stage in which the meaning assigned to stimuli can vary greatly (Madichie, 2012 p.154). Selecting and organizing stimuli happens rapidly and sometimes does not involve much conscious thought. However, interpretation is a more conscious and deliberate stage in the perceptual process (Drake et al., 2018).

The meaning assigned to stimuli is dependent on the schemas assigned to them (Madichie, 2012 p.154). A schema is a "cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among those attributes" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 98). Every individual has a complex network of schemata that have developed as small pieces of information merge to create meaningful groups of information. It is important to recognize schemata as they guide one's interactions by providing scripts for behavior. Everyone possesses schemas about groups, individuals, things, and places that filter perceptions at all stages of interaction (Drake et al., 2018). Marketers must identify and evoke the relevant schema as this determines the criteria that the consumer will utilize to evaluate a package, product, or message (Madichie, 2012 p.154).

Adaptation

The final process of perception is sensory adaptation and that refers to the decreased sensitivity one experiences to a stimulus that they have been exposed to constantly or for a prolonged period. Sensitivity towards said stimulus starts to diminish as a result which means it will no longer be perceived. This ability to adapt to the things that consistently remain the same is crucial as it allows the sensory receptors to be free so that they can detect important and relative changes in the environment. As mentioned in the other stages, consumers are exposed to many marketing messages daily, and whilst some of them successfully capture the consumer's attention, some start to become tuned out as the consumer grows tired of the advertisement (Drake et al., 2018). Adaptation is a process marketers wish to avoid as they want their marketing messages to be noticed.

There is a multitude of factors that lead to the habituation of a stimulus. The first one is the duration of the stimulus, and the longer one is exposed to a certain stimulus, the more likely habituation is to occur. The next factor is relevance as irrelevant stimuli do not attract the consumer's attention. The third factor is intensity in which less-intense stimuli habituates due to lessened sensory impact. Exposure also contributes to habituation as one encounters certain stimuli more frequently. Lastly, discrimination plays a role in habituation as simple stimuli might not require attention to detail. This involves the actual characteristics of the stimulus which determines what gets noticed. Marketers must understand these factors when creating packages and marketing messages as they try and higher their chances of standing out to the consumer. There is a multitude of ways in which marketers can achieve this. One way is through harboring novelty which is when the stimuli appear in unexpected places or ways, to catch attention. Another way is through the positioning in which marketers try and position their messages in places people are more likely to look. This is the reason there is major competition between the products on the shelves at eye-level at stores. Next, the size of the stimulus should be considered as this can help it stand out amongst competitors and command attention. Lastly, color is an important element as it is an effective way to give stimuli a distinct identity and can garner attention (Madichie, 2012 p.162).

2.5.2 Semiotics and Gender Cues

It is widely accepted in the marketing field that many marketing images do not have a literal connection to the product. As a result, marketers use the field of study called semiotics to better understand how consumers interpret the meaning behind symbols. Semiotics is the study of the relationship between symbols and signs and how they assist consumers in assigning meaning. Semiotics is important when understanding how consumers perceive products and packaging as they use products to exemplify their social identities. From a semiotic viewpoint, all marketing messages contain three basic elements. These three are an object, a sign, and an interpretant. The object is the focus of the message whilst the sign is the sensory image that represents the meaning behind the object. Whilst the interpretant is the meaning that comes out of the object and sign. For example, in the case of Marlboro cigarettes, the cigarettes are the object whilst the sign is the Marlboro cowboy which leads to the interpretant meanings of American,

individualistic, and rugged. The sign can be related to the object in three different ways. It can either resemble the object which would be referred to as an icon. It can also be connected to a product due to shared properties and this is an index. It can also be conventionally attached to the product which is referred to as a symbol (Madichie, 2012 p.163).

Marketing semiotics can then be divided into two categories: surface and underlying. The surface level includes visible elements like color, text, and shape, and the underlying level deals with the notion of identity and how individuals perceive signs. Due to the nature of semiotics and the way it explains how cues convey meaning, means it can also be used to better understand gender cues in marketing. Gender cues are the signs that point someone to a specific gender. In the world of marketing, the dualism of gender as portrayed through males and females is coded. Marketing efforts represent gender through shapes, looks, colors, and action. According to Rossi (2003), products will utilize packaging to convey certain cues to the consumer. For example, the consumer will be able to tell whether a moisturizer is meant for dry or oily skin and whether it is meant for men or women. Gender cues on a product attempt to make the consumer believe it is for a specific gender. Masculine cues tend to be associated with competence and are used to target the male consumer group. Whereas feminine cues tend to represent compassion and soft values to sell to women (Hess & Melnyk, 2016 p.1550).

The names of products and the coloring on the packaging also contain gendered cues (Wu et al., 2013 p.319). Products meant for men tend to use words correlated with strength and competence and the colors used tend to be vibrant and dark. For women, the product names have more to do with beauty and delicacy with lighter more pastel colors (Lieven et al., 2015 p.425). It is debatable whether strong gender cues benefit the brand. Researchers have found that high levels of masculine gender cues tend to benefit brands (Lieven et al., 2015p. 425) but others have found that highly feminine gendered cues do the opposite (Adkins, 2011). Research has also shown that men are less likely to purchase products with feminine cues, as they want to buy products that contribute to their masculine image. Whereas women are more open to buying products geared toward men (Lieven et al., 2015 p.425). This is why brands should consider a gender-neutral approach to appeal to a broader consumer group (Jung, 2006 p.67). According to Jung (2006) brands that only focus on the traditional market segments of men and women, may lose the chance to expand and grow their clientele.

2.6 Generation Z and Generation X as Consumers

Age is a factor commonly investigated in the field of consumer behavior. Marketing research suggests that the use of generational cohorts can be an effective way to identify certain character traits and habits of consumer groups. This is because cohort-based analysis provides valuable insight into consumer motivations as they may stem from common beliefs and attitudes shared by members of the same generation. This has resulted in multiple studies on how the specific experiences, attitudes, and preferences of individual generations impact purchasing behavior. The two generations, generation Z and generation X are of strong interest to marketers due to their substantial purchasing power. On one hand, generation X makes up a large proportion of the working force, whilst generation Z comprises the emerging generation, with many of the members adults already (Burgiel & Sowa, 2017 p. 61).

2.6.1 Generation Z

Generation Z consists of people born between the mid-1990s and mid-2010s, meaning it currently is largely made up of young adults and teenagers. They are known to be highly educated, good with technology, creative, and innovative. It is the first generation to be born into a digitalized society where a multitude of activities takes place online including communications with brands. In terms of marketing, Generation Z poses a challenge as research has shown they act differently in comparison to preceding generations, affecting the way they consume and perceive products (Priporas et al., 2017 p. 376).

In their brief lifetimes they have witnessed many changes politically, economically, socially, and technologically. Generation Z consumers tend to be less loyal to retailers and put the responsibility on the retailer to get the product to them which puts pressure on the retailer to find innovative ways to capture and maintain their attention. Their expectations are high, and they value the experience over brand loyalty (Priporas et al., 2017 p. 376). Generation Z is hypercognitive and likes to cross-reference many sources offline and online before making a purchase decision. A study was done by McKinsey & Company on generation Z and their ramifications for companies which led to the development of four core generation Z behaviors which all stemmed from one element which is this generation's pursuit of truth. People of this generation value

individual expression and do not believe in labels. They feel passionate about many causes and mobilize themselves to fight for them. Their behaviors and traits consequently influence the consumer behavior and consumption behavior of their generation. To be successful in targeting this generation, brands should be aware of three implications for this generation which are "consumption as access rather than possession, consumption as an expression of individual identity, and consumption as a matter of ethical concern." Generation Z is comfortable in not only being themselves in one, and their search for genuineness leads to freedom of expression and an open mind to understanding all types of people (Francis & Hoefel, 2018 p. 2).

One of the four core generation Z behaviors identified by McKinsey & Company is referred to as the undefined ID. In the pursuit of expressing individual truth, people belonging to this generation do not want to define themselves based on one stereotype and want to shape their identities over time. One of the most telling signs of this behavior is the rise in gender fluidity. People of this generation are constantly connected and are always evaluating information from a multitude of sources. For them, it is important to experiment, change, and try things out when it comes to the development and expression of "the self". In the surveys conducted by McKinsey and Company, seven out of ten generation Z respondents said they believe it is important to fight for causes related to identity. They are more interested in rights relating to LGBT issues, race issues, and feminism compared to the older generations (Francis & Hoefel, 2018 p. 3-4).

Another one of the core Generation Z behaviors is singularity which views consumption as a way to express individual identity. Those belonging to this generation are keen on possessing an individual identity and use consumption to express this identity. This is different from earlier generations who were more likely to buy products to fit in with the norms. One of the findings that stood out in the survey was that 48% of the Generation Z respondents prefer brands that do not categorize their products as either male or female. Whilst only 38% of consumers in other generations held the same view. For most brands, this is new territory and raises the question of whether gendered items will continue to make sense when trying to market to this generation (Francis & Hoefel, 2018 p. 8).

2.6.2 Generation X

Generation X consists of consumers born between the mid-1960s and the late-1970s who are perceived as being highly educated but underemployed (Collins English Dictionary, 2019b). This generation has witnessed many social, environmental, and economic changes which have created expectations of change. Socially, they experienced a shift in occupational gender roles and negative criticisms against the clergy and church. Their communication style is unique and they expect immediate and constant feedback whilst being equally comfortable in giving feedback. They understand the value of media and are technologically savvy, however they treat media with irreverence (Barber et al., 2010 p.64).

When it comes to marketing, generation X consumers expect an honest and straightforward approach and they demand that companies deliver on their marketing promises (Nicholas, 2009 p. 49). They view marketing as manipulative yet are not hostile towards advertising efforts. They know the purpose of advertising is to sell products which leads to their attitude being that marketing efforts should tell them about the offering, give them information, and inform them the reasons they should buy it. Marketing efforts are most successful with this generation when they include themes of security, safety, and self-sufficiency. They need to be convinced that the product is reliable and will ease their life rather than complicate it (Benckendorff, 2010). This generation tends to be unsure of themselves and as a result, want reassurance from the product that they're making the right decision. This consumer group is also quite price conscious and possesses low price sensitivity. They also expect that products are designed for their lifestyles and tasks (Nicholas, 2009 p. 48).

3 METHOD

The following chapter discusses the qualitative research conducted for this study including the reasoning behind the chosen method and how the study was conducted. The objective of the study was to determine how generation Z and generation X consumers in Helsinki perceive the gendered packaging of personal care products. A qualitative research approach was chosen as it was deemed the most beneficial for gathering data on

the perceptions of the chosen sample population. More specifically, the research method of focus group interviews was chosen, with one focus group for each sample population.

Qualitative methodology consists of research that provides descriptive data, through people's own words and their observable behavior. The aim is to understand people through their own experiences, frames of reference, and reality. Qualitative research is inductive, meaning the researcher develops concepts, insights, and understandings based on the data patterns rather than collecting data to test against a pre-determined theory, hypothesis, or model (Taylor et al., 2015 p. 17-18). The choice of the correct research method is vital to the success of a study and this choice is guided by the research questions, existing knowledge, and available resources and time. The method and data collection techniques used must be capable of meeting the study objectives by providing the information required (Bryman, 2012 p.45).

3.1 Choice of method

The qualitative research method of a focus group with the use of semi-structured interview questions was chosen and this involves a group interview of around six to eight participants from similar demographic characteristics, similar backgrounds, or both. A Focus group gives the researcher a more detailed understanding of participants' perspectives on certain products, ideas, or policies. A qualitative research method was chosen as it is the most effective in gathering behavioral, attitudinal, and emotional data (Lavrakas, 2008). This type of data comprises the overall perceptions participants hold, and for this study, which is what this research aimed to gain data on. This method also gave respondents a chance to explain their answers and elaborate, which in turn provided rich insight into their thoughts and opinions.

The use of focus groups enabled the researcher to develop an understanding of why people feel the way they do. On the contrary to a one-on-one interview approach, the focus group approach allowed for the participants to probe each other's reasons for holding certain viewpoints. This can provide interesting insight as participants may modify their view or voice agreement to something they would not have thought of on their own due to what the other participants have said (Bryman, 2012 p.503). The interview method chosen for the focus groups was semi-structured which refers to an interview that utilizes both closed- and open-ended questions often accompanied by follow-up questions

inquiring why or how. This means the topics discussed vary and are largely influenced by the participant's responses. This interview method was chosen as it is effective in collecting behavioral and emotional data as it allows for in-depth and follow-up questions to be asked (Bryman, 2012 p.471). This primary research method will aid in answering the research questions related to the preferences and opinions of the participants. With this method, the researcher was able to conduct one focus group per sample population which provided data that could be compared.

3.2 Respondents

The respondents comprised the two target populations that were studied which were generation Z and generation X consumers in Helsinki. One focus group consisted of a sample of Generation Z consumers whilst the other one consisted of a sample of Generation X consumers, all living in the city of Helsinki. Each focus group contained 8 participants, with 4 who identify as women and 4 who identify as men so that the results amongst these genders could be compared. Generation Z and generation X consumers were chosen as the researcher wanted to compare how gendered packaging affects a more mature consumer segment as well as the emerging consumer segment. Consumers in Helsinki were chosen due to its manageable scope and convenience for gathering participants for the study. The participants will act as a representative sample for the Finnish population, and due to Finland being a Nordic country, the results could also be seen as useful when researching the consumer perception of Nordic consumers.

The respondents were recruited through snowball sampling which is when "study participants recommend others who have similar characteristics which are of interest to the researcher." (Seetharaman, 2016). This method was chosen as the researcher needed participants that met a certain criterion. Which is that they live in Helsinki, speak fluent English, and are either between the ages of 16-25 or 42-57. With this sampling method, the initial participants were selected via convenience sampling as with this, the researcher was able to select the initial participants who they know to belong to the target population (Naderifar et al, 2017). For the generation Z sample, the researcher recruited four people who belong to this population and requested that they further recruit one person each. For the generation X population, the researcher contacted four international school teachers belonging to generation X and requested that they further recruit one participant each.

International school teachers were chosen due to their accessibility to generation X consumers who live in Helsinki and speak fluent English.

3.3 Interview guide

The objective of the focus group interviews was to gain an understanding of how generation Z and generation X consumers perceive the gendered packaging of personal care products. To do so, the researcher created a semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix 1) to be used for both focus groups. The questions were derived from the various models, theories, and studies presented in the theory chapter. This has allowed the researcher and reader to gain insight into whether the theoretical framework used for the thesis, has implications in practice. The interview guide was created with five topics related to the research aim, in which multiple questions exist for each one. These topics start more general and progressively get more specific as the interview goes along. It is suggested by Bryman (2012) that there should be a certain degree of order when it comes to the topics covered for the questions to flow well, but that this order can be altered during the actual interview.

The interview guide started with topics and questions that gave the researcher a general idea of the participant's thoughts on personal care product packaging in general, and on a gendered level. The next part of the interview guide then consisted of the researcher showing the participants a female-targeted and male-targeted package of deodorants and shampoos. (See Appendix 3) The interview guide then consisted of questions relating to these products. The questions present in the interview guide are variable as Kvale (1996) suggests that there are nine different types of questions and that most interviews will contain all of them. The researcher employed all nine types of questions when creating the interview guide. For example, introducing questions were used in the beginning, and probing questions were utilized throughout the guide (Bryman, 2012 p.476-477).

The first topic is 'Personal care products consumption' (See Appendix 1) which consists of questions that gave the researcher a general idea of the participants purchasing behavior regarding personal care products. This topic also gave insight into what factors of personal care products influence them to buy the product. The next topic is 'Personal care products packaging' (See Appendix 1) which involves questions that revealed what

the participants think of personal care product packaging in general, what elements of packaging stand out to them, and how this packaging affects their perception of the product or desire to purchase it. This allowed the researcher to find out what consumers notice about personal care product packaging and if gender or gender-related elements were prominent for them.

The third topic is 'Personal care products gendered packaging' (See Appendix 1) which contains questions specifically related to gender-targeted packaging of personal care products. The questions were about if and how participants have noticed the gendered packaging of such products, and what indicated to them that those products were gender-specific. This topic also probed into whether the participants buy personal care products geared towards their gender, and why or why not. This gave the researcher information on how the participants generally view the gendered packaging of personal care products. The fourth section is 'Perception of gendered packaging' (See Appendix 1) and under this topic, the researcher showed the participants a female and male-targeted version of a shampoo and deodorant package. (See Appendix 3) This section aimed to find out how the participants perceive the gendered packaging of those specific products, to determine their thoughts on them, their preferences, and if they do perceive the shown packages as gender-specific.

The last topic is 'Concluding thoughts on gendered packaging of personal care products' (See Appendix 1) and the questions asked the participants about their overall thoughts on gendered packaging after seeing the examples, and how they would prefer these product packages to be designed in the future. It also consisted of asking the participants if they have any suggestions for personal care product brands that want to be more inclusive of consumers who identify outside of the gender binaries. Through the guiding questions outlined in the interview guide, the researcher was able to gain insight into how generation Z and generation X consumers perceive the gendered packaging of personal care products on a general level, and a more specific level through the examples of packaging shown to the participants.

3.4 Research approach

The primary data was collected through the two focus groups as previously outlined. The Generation Z focus group consisted of eight participants who live in Helsinki aged

between 17 and 25. The generation X focus group also consisted of eight participants who live in Helsinki and were aged between 42-57. In both groups, four respondents identified as female and four identified as male. The researcher then held a focus group interview with each group separately, lasting between an hour and two hours each. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix 1) but also came up with questions on the spot to probe deeper into the participant's answers. The second part of the interview then consisted of the researcher showing a female and male version of shampoo and deodorant. (See Appendix 3) About these, the researcher asked questions regarding their opinions on the packaging as well as which one they would want to purchase and why. This resulted in descriptive qualitative data on the participant's perceptions, insights, attitudes, experiences, and beliefs regarding gendered packaging.

The researcher acted as the facilitator and asked guiding questions, without interjecting with their own opinion. The interviews were recorded with a recording device that was used for transcription later. All participants were asked for their consent to participate through a consent form that they were asked to sign digitally beforehand. (See Appendix 2) Their consent to be recorded was garnered through verbal consent and they were reminded that they will be kept anonymous in the analysis. The researcher screen recorded the interviews and ensured all participants had their cameras on so that this could be analyzed later. The focus group discussions both took place on Zoom so that all participants could attend the interview due to vastly different schedules and due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both focus groups were shown the same products so that the results can be compared between the two. The same questions were also asked to ensure that the results are comparable. The data was then transcribed with the help of the recording, resulting in two documents with the interviews written out verbatim.

3.5 Analysis of the data

The researcher used the qualitative data analysis method of thematic analysis. This approach aims to analyze common themes, ideas, topics, and patterns of meaning that repeatedly come up in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as "an independent method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data". This method of interpretation is carried out through the selection of codes and the construction of themes. It is useful for finding out people's experiences, views, and

opinions which is what the researcher intended to do regarding the gendered packaging of personal care products (Bryman, 2012). To effectively analyze the data, the researcher applied this method by carefully studying the data and recognizing certain themes, concepts, elements, and trends that came up frequently in the focus group interviews. (Saunder et al., 2009 p.135)

Firstly, the raw data from the focus group recordings were transcribed word for word onto a word document. Then the researcher conducted a naïve reading of the transcripts to gain an initial understanding of the text (Simonÿ et al., 2018). After that, the researcher looked through the transcripts again and took initial notes. Then the researcher identified the initial codes by highlighting portions of the texts and grouping them into larger, identifiable categories. To code means to identify key phrases and words and assign them to a category of meaning. Then with the help of these codes, the researcher identified major themes, patterns, and relationships throughout the text. A coding scheme was created in Excel and information was filled in according to the themes found throughout the text. The coding scheme was then used for data interpretation.

An inductive approach was utilized for data interpretation as it helps identify the nature of the relationship between theory and research. The theory as a result is derived from the research (Bryman, 2012 p.24). The patterns and themes identified were interpreted in reference to the research questions and research aim. The data interpretation involved each theme being explained separately with the help of extracts from the transcript.

3.6 Validity and reliability

The notions of validity and reliability have traditionally been noted as important criteria in establishing the quality of quantitative research. However, there has been discussion amongst qualitative researchers concerning their relevance for qualitative research. One common stance is to apply validity and reliability to qualitative research but play down the prominence of measurement issues. According to Mason (1996), "Reliability, validity, and generalizability are different kinds of measures of the quality, rigor and wider potential of research, which are achieved according to certain methodological and disciplinary conventions and principles."

For this study, the definitions of reliability and validity of qualitative research supported by Lecompte and Goetz (1982) and Kirk and Miller (1996), will be used. With this framework, reliability and validity are separated into both external and internal parts. External reliability refers to the degree to which a study can be replicated. LeCompte and Goetz recognize that this is a difficult criterion for qualitative research as it is not possible to "freeze" a social setting and its circumstances. However, they suggest other strategies that can be employed to approach obtaining external reliability. In terms of the research method of focus groups, external reliability can be achieved by conducting another focus group with similar but different participants.

Internal reliability refers to whether there is more than one observer so that the members of the research team agree about what they hear and see. Due to this study being carried out by a sole researcher, this specific criterion cannot be reached. External validity on the other hand refers to the degree to which the findings can be generalized to other social settings and populations. LeCompte and Goetz find that this notion presents a problem for qualitative research as this type of research tends to employ small samples (Bryman, 2012 p.390). In this study's case, the samples came from the two target populations of generation Z and generation X consumers in Helsinki. This means that to a certain extent, the findings from the focus groups can be generalized to the target populations at large. However, the small sample size and the use of snowball sampling which decreases the representativeness of a larger population must be taken into consideration.

Internal validity is whether there is reasonable rapport between the "researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they develop" (Bryman, 2012 p.390). LeCompte and Goetz found that internal validity is the strength of qualitative research as the strong involvement of the researcher and subject can strengthen the internal validity of a study. For this study, the internal validity was strengthened by the moderator giving an adequate amount of guidance without interjecting with their own opinion or silencing anyone and the researcher ensured the focus groups measured what they intended to. In qualitative research, the participants and the researcher are the measurement instruments which means how the focus group is conducted is a prerequisite for internal validity (Bryman, 2012 p.390). The focus group participants also were not given hints about what the research was about until the research was conducted. This enabled the researcher to receive genuine reactions and answers as the respondents did not have the opportunity to evaluate the packages beforehand or conduct research on gendered packaging.

4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from the empirical data acquired from the two focus groups. The focus group results are based on data analysis that involved identifying the themes that arose from the transcripts through the grouping of the categories found within the transcript data. The participants answered the guiding and follow-up questions according to their own experiences and prior knowledge, whilst also interacting with one another through agreeing, disagreeing, questioning, and adding to each other's answers. The results from the focus group are described and framed through the categories and themes that were found during the data analysis process. The themes that emerged from both focus groups are: Packagings Role in Perception, Products Role in Perception, Gender Targeting and Gender Stereotypes Role in Perception, and Business' and Marketings Role in Gendered Packaging. Generation X then separately includes the theme: Age and Familial Status' Role in Preference for Gendered Products. Whilst generation Z separately includes the theme: Gender Identity and Self-Image.

4.1 Packagings Role in Perception

A common theme that arose in both focus groups was the packaging's role in perception. Many different categories such as the colors of a package, text, and labeling on a package, and the overall aesthetic of the package were brought up numerous times by the participants which then comprised the overall theme. Within this theme, the participants discussed what they look for in the packaging of personal care products and what attracts or repels them from a personal care product on the premise of packaging.

4.1.1 Generation Z

For generation Z, the visual aspects of personal care products affect their perception of them and purchase desire. The main elements they brought up were the aesthetic appeal of the package, the colors, the shape, and the labeling/text found on the package. The majority of the participants want the package to be visually appealing and are more likely to purchase it if they find it to be visually appealing.

"How appealing the packaging is plays a part. I do tend to go for generally more visually pleasing, more feminine care products." (Female Participant 4)

This group also found the color to be important but recognized that color is a gender cue for personal care product packaging. Multiple participants stated they are attracted to nice colors, and many were attracted to packaging with colors that are traditionally connected to their gender. They found the darker colors as more masculine in addition to the colors blue, black, and grey. Whereas pink and peach and lighter colors were perceived as more feminine.

"Men are very, like, there's just black and blue and maybe orange, like a very manly kind of feel to them." (Female Participant 1)

This was also the case for the shape of the packaging. No preference for the shape of packaging was mentioned by participants but the shapes of the products shown were spoken regarding the gender of the product. The majority found that the men's packaging was bulkier and square-shaped whilst the women's packaging was more soft and curvy.

The labeling and text found on the packaging was an important element for the majority of participants. Many of the participants based their purchase decision on the different labels and text that could be found on the packaging. One reoccurring topic throughout the focus group was the ingredients, as this is an important factor for six out of the eight participants. Some stated they sought vegan or organic ingredients, whereas others sought ingredients that are scientifically proven to be good. All of the participants also sought the benefits stated on the packaging. Lastly, the different descriptive sayings or slogans were important for some, as some were attracted to descriptive phrases such as "icy cold" or "super fresh."

"Descriptive words are very intense. They usually get to me." (Male Participant 2)

In general, both gendered visual elements and non-gendered visual elements were discussed and affected this group's desire to purchase and their overall perception of the product. Some were attracted to certain gendered elements whereas some found non-gendered elements such as ingredients to be more important.

4.1.2 Generation X

For the generation X group, the aesthetics of the packaging were also important for them. Many participants brought up the importance of the overall aesthetic, the colors, and the labeling of a package. The words simplicity, attractive, benefits, and practical came up multiple times. Many preferred simplistic design, or something that they found to be visually appealing. Some of the participants appreciate how well thought out simplistic packaging seems to be, as well as overall visually appealing packaging.

> *"Sometimes I buy stuff because it looks cute…the packaging is really thought out very, very thoroughly."* (Female Participant 1)

When asked about what the participants look for on packaging, many brought up the different benefits stated on the packaging, and the different labels that can be found such as the recycled label. A topic that came up a lot throughout the whole interview, was the sustainability of the package. Six out of the eight participants brought up that sustainability and the ecological aspect of the packaging was important for them. Many of them turned to the labeling on the packaging to decipher whether it was sustainable.

> *"First thing I look for is innovative, sustainable packaging."* (Female Participant 4)

The actual functionality and physical shape of the package was also brought up, with most participants looking at how practical the product's packaging is. When shown the two different deodorants, some participants brought up how the shape of both of them seems difficult to hold, with one participant even mentioning they would not purchase them because they seem like they would slip out of their hand. When asked to talk about gender targeting in regards to the physical packaging of the product, the participants brought up multiple points of how a lot of the physical elements of packaging are gendered or are perceived to be gendered. They found that male and female packaging tend to use gendered colors such as pink for women, and dark colors for men. They also found that the shapes tend to be gendered with male packaging being bulky and female packaging being more smooth. Lastly, the labeling was also brought up with all participants agreeing that most male-targeted products tend to include the word "man" or the phrase "for men" on them.

"- but most of men's products, it says men, women it doesn't say- it's just like- it's just assumed because of the color and the shape." (Female Participant 2)

All the participants believed that gendered packaging exists and that this is perceived through humans' notions of what colors, shapes, and designs are feminine or masculine. Overall, the physical look of packaging does influence the participant's perception of packaging and their desire to buy it. In addition to this, it also influences their perception of whether it is gender-targeted or not.

4.2 Products' Role in Perception

Another theme that arose was the role that the product itself plays in perception and how this affects the participant's desire to buy a personal care product. This involves the scent of the product, its purpose, its price, and its ingredients.

4.2.1 Generation Z

Most of the generation Z group found the ingredients, scent, and purpose to be the most important elements of the product itself, with price being mentioned but not as a main factor. Many of the participants said they pay attention to whether the ingredients are vegan or organic, and sought good ingredients overall. Some also were attracted to products that had some sort of scientific backing, whether this was through a scientific ingredient or demonstrated formula on the packaging. The scent was also an important factor for many, and many found scent to be one of the basis' for gendered packaging. The majority of the generation Z participants found that men's targeted products have stronger, musky scents whereas female products were described as smelling fruity and sweet. Many of the participants were drawn to the products targeted toward their gender since they preferred either a feminine or masculine scent. Some of the participants were even attracted to the product not meant for their gender as they prefer the scents that tend to come with it.

"I prefer women's products…which has a good scent. Like always lean towards that because I don't like the men's smell, that's like very musky and very strong." (Male Participant 3)

The purpose of the product was also seen as important and many stated they use the stated benefits and purpose of the product as a guide. Some said that they have special needs for their hair or skin and that they buy products based on this, regardless of the product's gender. For example, two of the male participants stated that since they have longer hair, they tend to buy female-targeted shampoo as those are usually targeted at long-haired individuals.

> *"I recently haven't cared that much about packaging. It's just what works best."* (Female Participant 1)

Many were also under the impression that products geared toward their gender will work better for them. The idea that men's deodorant is stronger than women's was brought up and believed by seven out of the eight participants. Due to this, some of the women also said they prefer men's deodorant as they think it will work better.

> *"Woman's [deodorant] are quite often, not as effective as the men. I agree on that. So, I actually go with the men's one. "* (Female Participant 2)

Lastly, the price was brought up a few times in relation to preference for personal care products and in relation to gendered products. Some said that the price was a factor when shopping for personal care products and they looked at how affordable it was. The notion that women's products tend to cost more than men's was also brought up in this group. In addition, it was also stated that men might not be willing to pay as much as women for care products.

> *"Maybe [men] won't pay that price because it's not their priority, but for women, they do make it their priority to be more presentable, more hygiene, focusing on that. "* (Male Participant 3)

Overall, the product itself regardless of packaging was important for nearly all the participants. Many perceived certain product characteristics such as scent, to be gendered, which would draw them to either their genders product or the opposite genders product.

4.2.2 Generation X

For generation X, the product itself has more of an effect on their overall perception than the packaging does, and they care more about the traits of the product than the packaging. Some elements that came up multiple times in the focus group was the scent of the product, its purpose, and its price. The scent was brought up the most and was a reoccurring category spoken about throughout the whole duration of the focus group. Words such as pleasant, smell, light, strong, neutral, and important came up whilst discussing this topic. The scent of the product was a major determinant of whether the participants wanted to purchase a personal care item.

> *"As [Male Participant 1] said and everybody said like shower gel, it's that as long as it's a pleasant scent, even if it's in a bottle that's blue or pink, it doesn't really matter."* (Female Participant 2)

Participants found it important for the scent to be to their liking and many of them wished that the scent would be highlighted on the packaging. In regards to gender, many participants believed that certain smells are either more feminine, masculine, or neutral, but many believed that that should not determine whether a product is meant for a man or a woman as anyone can like those scents.

> *"More neutral packaging would be fine as long as the scent is mentioned. If its lavender or lemongrass or whatever, it doesn't mean it's aimed to men or women but you can choose your own."* (Female Participant 2)

On the contrary, a couple participants believed that the scents are gendered and make you smell either like a man or a woman. However, the overall consensus amongst the majority of participants was that the scent is what seems to be the difference between male and female-targeted products, and that the product should be marketed based on the scent.

Many participants also brought up how the purpose of the product is what draws them to it. Words such as needs, suits, and purpose came up multiple times. The participants sought items that suited their needs. Multiple participants also believed that the purpose of a product does not need to be gendered and that they would rather just know what the product does and offers and buy it based on that, rather than based on the intended gender. They suggested that the packaging could be less gendered and instead state what needs the product meets so that people can make their decisions based on that.

Lastly, the price was brought up as well as participants found this to be an important aspect. They tended to want to buy the more economical option and have it be affordable. They would sometimes compare the price of two items and buy based on that. For example, one participant would rather buy men's razors because they are cheaper than men's. This notion of the "pink tax" which refers to women's personal care products being priced higher than men's despite being the same thing, was mentioned. This group seemed to be aware of this price disparity and some of the women were turned off by this and would steer clear of female products because they know they will be more expensive. Overall, the product itself and its scent were the two most important factors that influence the desire to purchase and overall perception of this generation.

4.3 Gender Targeting and Gender Stereotypes Role in Perception

Gender targeting and gender stereotypes and how these affect perception was a common theme throughout both the focus groups. The topics of femininity, masculinity and gender neutrality were brought up in relation to care product packaging. In addition to this, many different gender stereotypes were discussed as well as whether the participants tend to go for products meant for their gender or not.

4.3.1 Generation Z

When it came to gendered targeting, gender stereotypes, and gender congruence, there was a multitude of opinions brought up within the generation Z group. This group was aware of the gendered packaging of personal care products, and the majority perceived products to be gendered through various feminine and masculine packaging and product traits in addition to gender stereotypes present on the packaging. They thought that the female-targeted products were feminine through their packaging, using words such as "girly" and "feminine" to describe the packaging. Various female stereotypes also arose in this interview when describing both the products, and women in general. Many of the participants were under the impression that personal care products and hygiene are inherently feminine because women seem to care more about their appearance than men. They believe this is the main reason that male geared products seem more gendered than

female products. When it came to the female products, they mentioned stereotypes such as female products being nurturing and caring with imaging such as flowers and pink colors. Some of the male participants also believed that female products somehow perform differently from their male counterparts and that they will make them appear more like a woman.

"I believe like in my mind, even though I've not done research or anything, if I use like a women's product it's going to make my hair like a woman. " (Male Participant 4)

Whilst for male geared products, they used words such as "manly" and "sport". Generally, they found that men's products are more gender-targeted due to the target market being less educated and interested in personal care, and through its intensely stereotyped packaging. They described male packaging as using "crazy dark colors" and as "heavy-duty". As mentioned in the previous section, many participants both female and male were under the impression that male-targeted deodorant is somehow stronger and works better.

Gender neutrality was also discussed in this group with some saying they would be more inclined to buy a product with more gender-neutral packaging. Some found the "crazy colors", "crazy words" and the word "man" on male products, to be unnecessary. Some participants also believed that if the male products did not include the word man, they would be more neutral.

When it came to gender congruence with products, this group was mixed about whether they would choose the product meant for their gender or meant for the opposite gender. Many of the participants did say that either all the time or most of the time, they buy products that line up with their gender identity. This was usually due to the scent, effectiveness, and packaging. It was also described as a way to strengthen their gender identity and self-image for some, which will be touched upon in the "Gender Identity and Self-Image" theme section.

"I couldn't see myself not buying a man's product, I don't think I have ever bought a care product that was not meant for men, even though it's like, probably can be used on both sexes. That's just my take on it." (Male Participant 4)

"I still am loyal, I would say to like the female products. I don't know, because I just prefer them." (Female Participant 3)

However, some of the participants stated that with certain products, or all, they would purchase the one meant for the other gender. For the female participants, this was usually due to the perceived effectiveness of the men's products, such as stronger deodorant or better working razors. Whereas for men, it would be because the female product was targeted at a trait they have, such as long hair.

Overall when it comes to the necessity of gendered packaging, most found that it was either entirely necessary or somewhat unnecessary, whereas a couple of the participants believed it was still necessary. The ones who thought it was unnecessary believed so since the ingredients are the same and the scent is the only difference, and some thought that the products should be targeted based on the purpose as some males have more feminine perceived traits and vice versa for women.

> *"I think products shouldn't be geared towards any gender because we're all human beings. Men have long hair as well. Men have sensitive skin as well. Women have short hair as well. Women have tough skin as well. So like it really, like, it's not a gender-based, you know, ideology."* (Male Participant 3)

All participants found the usage of the word "for men" or "man" on male packaging to be unnecessary as it is already obvious through other elements that it is male-targeted. None of the participants believed that female or male-targeted packaging has to explicitly have the words "men" or "women" on them, as this may alienate people of the opposite gender, even though they might want to use the product meant for the opposite gender.

Some participants found that some aspects of gendered packaging are necessary as they serve as a guide for people, however, this was mainly seen to be necessary for men and not women. It was said to be convenient as it helps with selection, and that having it be somewhat gendered through colors is fine to keep, as long as it is not explicitly stated which gender the product is for.

4.3.2 Generation X

This group of people was very aware of gendered packaging, and the majority of participants believed it was simply the exact same products but just different scents, which then results in the gender-targeted packaging. All agreed that gender packaging exists, and brought up gender stereotypes and gendered packaging elements. However, in

this group, the majority of the participants stated they would rather buy more gender-neutral products rather than products congruent with, or opposite to their gender.

> *"The packaging [bought] tends to be gender-neutral. Yeah, it's not for men or for women it's basically just to get a body clean kind of thing."* (Female Participant 4)

When shown the gendered shampoo and deodorant, they were able to decipher that they were gender-targeted based on visual cues such as the shape, color, and labeling. Starting off with male-targeted packaging, a lot of the participants found that it was over-the-top when it came to masculinity, and some of the men were turned off by it. They mentioned the different elements that perpetuate male stereotypes. Many found that the use of the labeling "man" or "for men" is unnecessary and could be taken away. Some stereotypes such as speed and efficiency were brought up for men, and most stated that they use masculine colors such as darker colors.

> *"This men stuff is really turning me off because I'm like really?... Turbo maximum carbon?"* (Male Participant 2)

However, some of the men said they would buy the male-targeted packaging as they believe the purpose and the scent will be more suited to them, whereas a female participant also brought up they would buy it for their sons as they would prefer the packaging and scent. Then when it came to the female packaging, most people were more attracted to this, including some of the men. However, they were able to decipher that it was targeted toward women through the color and shape of the packaging and assumed scent. They also brought up gender stereotypes that seemed to be used such as women spending more time shopping, and colors such as pink.

In addition to acknowledging the gender of these products, many participants found themselves choosing the one meant for their gender on the premise of smell more than on the premise that it is for the gender. Whilst some said they would choose to buy the opposite one to their gender because their partner or kids would use it, and for them, it did not matter. However, this aspect will be discussed further in the next theme of age and familial status. Staying in line with their gender identity when purchasing items came up, however many also stated that in the real world, they tend to buy more gender-neutral products.

Overall, there were a few participants who would opt for packaging that is congruent with their gender, but this was mainly because the ones meant for their gender tend to have a scent they prefer. Many also said they personally prefer more neutral scents or would rather have the packaging focus more on scent rather than have it be gendered, as they believe the product in the bottle for both men and women does the exact same thing.

The topic of gender-neutral or non-binary individuals was not discussed much but was brought up by one participant. They mentioned that there are now individuals who are "more gender fluid." This was brought up as an argument for why there should be more gender-neutral options or fewer gender-targeted products. However, this topic was not brought up by anyone else and did not seem to be the main reason for the participant's desire for less gendered packaging.

4.4 Business' and Marketings Role in Gendered Packaging

The last theme that emerged from the focus group data for both generations is the participant's awareness of the business and marketing perspective of gendered packaging. Many believed that gendered packaging is merely a marketing-based business strategy to appeal to more target groups and generate more revenue. This was present in both groups through the mentioning of marketing tactics, profit, and store layout.

4.4.1 Generation Z

This group understood the business perspective of gendered packaging and found that marketing can be misleading when it comes to personal care products. However, this had more to do with the promises of the product rather than its gender. Regarding gendered packaging, this group found that it is done because it's "marketing towards the masses" as they believed most people will buy products associated with their gender. This group also brought up the store layout and acknowledged that store aisles tend to be separated based on gender when it comes to personal care products. Not only did they find that they are separated, but some stated that they tend to go to the aisle meant for their gender. Some participants said that having the stores separated makes for easier selection and that making everything gender neutral might make this confusing. This was then met with

some debate from the group, with most agreeing that not every product has to be gender-neutral when it comes to packaging elements, but that more gender-neutral options could be introduced. They also agreed that unnecessary elements such as the actual gender can be taken away from the package to increase inclusivity. Many participants also acknowledged that companies make more money when they gender their products.

> *"I do feel like they do that because they want women to be spending more, more money, obviously it's capitalism. So, um, why, why do a product with fives with five steps when you can buy each one individually and make five times more money?"* (Male Participant 3)

Most found that there are more separate products for women than men and that brands get women spending more by separating the products instead of having them be multiple products in one like they often are for male-targeted products. Some also believed that if products were not explicitly targeted at men, fewer men would buy personal care products.

4.4.2 Generation X

This group was very aware of the company's perspective when it comes to gendered packaging, and found it to be the main barrier to gender-neutral packaging. They were under the impression that as long as companies are profiting off of gendered packaging, they have no reason to stop using gendered packaging. They see gendered packaging as a way for businesses to increase their profits and appeal to the masses, and this is a main reason they do not believe there is truly a difference between male and female-targeted products, as it was viewed as being a marketing tactic solely by nearly all participants.

> *"People are buying them [and] as long as these companies make money, they'll push them at you and tell all sorts of untruths."* (Male Participant 1)

Some participants also brought up the store layout aspect, and how the personal care item section tends to be segregated by gender. They also believe that this might make it harder for packaging to become more gender-neutral, even if they would want more gender-neutral options on the market.

> *"Our stores-many of them- are segregated by sex…so I think gender-neutral becomes a bit more difficult in terms of shelf space and easily finding it.*" (Male Participant 2)

It is evident that even though many of the participants might prefer gender-neutral packaging, they believe it would be hard to implement in theory due to the business aspect and the ease of finding it due to the segregated store sections. However, they did give some suggestions for businesses and how they can lessen their gender targeting to be more inclusive. They suggested that products can be marketed based on scent and purpose. Many of the participants would rather know what the product does and what it smells like rather than what gender it is meant for.

4.5 Age and Familial Status' Role in Preference

One reoccurring theme that was found in the focus group data of only the generation X group, was their age and familial status. This was a big factor in the participant's preference for gendered or non-gendered products and was brought up by the majority of the participants.

4.5.1 Generation X

This theme came up as the majority of participants in this group share personal care products with their spouses or children. Due to this, many stated they opt for a gender-neutral option, or simply do not mind using a product that is not in line with their gender, as long as their family is okay with it. This was due to the convenience of not having to buy separate products for everyone, as well as to save money. There were a couple of single participants, and these did not share their products with anyone

> *"If it smell's good and it's my wife's, I don't care, I'll use it."* (Male Participant 2)

> *"The shampoos and the conditioners, we, the whole family, use the same."* (Female Participant 1)

Some participants also brought up that they believe that due to their more mature age, they are more aware of the marketing tactics used and aware of how the products are the same despite gendered targeting. Some also brought up how they think as they got

older, they cared less about the gender of the product and the social implications of a personal care product. They do not necessarily feel social pressure to get the product that matches their gender as they are confident with their gender identity.

> *"I'm older now, I know the ingredients are essentially the same. "* (Female Participant 4)

> *"It's probably much more for young people who would get sucked into that kind of thing. I think as you get older, you don't really care."* (Male Participant 1)

Those in this generation feel that due to their more extensive experience in life, they have realized that gendered packaging is based on scent and that it is a marketing tactic.

4.6 Gender Identity and Self-Images Role in Perception

A theme that emerged mainly only from the generation Z focus group, was the notion of gender identity, and self-image when it comes to purchasing gendered personal care products. As this group brought up non-gender conforming people and spoke about the insecurities involved in buying gendered products.

4.6.1 Generation Z

Firstly, the idea of non-gender conforming and transgender people came up, as this was viewed as a demographic that is not targeted with gendered packaging. Some said that the world and demographics are changing with a whole new generation of people and that more gender-neutral packaging would better reach this market. Some participants also spoke about how transgender people might want to keep using the product they used when they were their birth gender but might feel bad using it if it explicitly states it is for their birth gender. This was another argument given for why the title of the gender on packaging should not be used.

> *"Especially if there is like, let's say a trans or a non-binary person who doesn't identify with the male gender, but they want to use like the deodorant, cause obviously they're familiar with it from the past or maybe they just enjoy the scent or the formula because it works for them. They're going to feel very outcasted and very strange. I would say, would not feel included at all if their own deodorant is calling them a man."* (Male Participant 3)

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Another reoccurring topic was that gendered products seem to aid some of the participants in validating their gender identity, and their self-image. A female participant said they feel proud to be a woman, and therefore want to opt for products meant for their gender. Whereas some of the men stated they would not feel comfortable using products meant for women because of what others might think and due to ego.

> *"I also don't want a deodorant that's like pink, like, I mean, it seems cute, but like, I dunno. Maybe subconsciously, I feel like, you know, what are people going to think?"* (Male Participant 3)

This group tends to use gendered products as a way to strengthen their gender identity, and some are concerned about what others might think if they purchase an item meant for the opposite gender.

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the research findings presented by connecting the empirical results with the literature and theories discussed in the theory chapter. Furthermore, the qualitative method of a focus group that was used for the primary research, is discussed in terms of its implementation.

5.1 Discussion of Results

The discussion of results aims to analyze the study data by connecting the findings to the theoretical research. The results between generation Z and generation X will be discussed in conjunction with one another, and the results will be compared to identify the similarities and differences. The sub-chapters will follow the same thematic structure as the results chapter to ensure each theme is analyzed in accordance with the theoretical reference frame. This discussion of results will then be used to answer the research questions in the conclusion chapter.

5.1.1 Packagings Role In Perception

The first theme that emerged from both focus groups was how the physical packaging affects the perception of personal care products. Between generation Z and generation X,

many differences and similarities were identified. Generally, it was evident that both generations found the physical appearance of personal care product packaging to be important. When shopping for such items, both groups mentioned different elements they look for in packaging such as its labeling, and overall aesthetic.

The VIEW model (Andrews & Shimp, 2018 p.505) discussed in the theory chapter, supports the findings of this study regarding this theme. More specifically, the second element which is informational. The informational element involves all the product information presented on the package such as its ingredients, and benefits, and the VIEW model suggests that this element can be analyzed to determine the effectiveness of a packaging design. Most participants in both groups mentioned that they turn to the labeling to decipher whether the product contains the traits and purpose that they are searching for. The difference between the two groups however lies in what they are searching for on the packages labeling. Generation Z, for example, stated that they search for good ingredients whereas generation X discussed the sustainability and recyclability of the product. This supports the workability element of the VIEW model as it refers to how the product functions rather than communicates. Within this element, the environmental aspect of packaging is seen as important to consumers. However, this element was not brought up by generation Z which contradicts research that suggests generation Z views product consumption as a matter of ethical concern (Francis & Hoefel, 2018 p. 2).

These findings are also supported by Silayoi and Speece's (2007) research on verbal and visual packaging design elements and how they affect consumer perception. Both these elements affect generation Z and generation X's perception of personal care products. The research behind the visual elements of packaging shows that low involvement products, such as personal care products, tend to be affected more by these design elements. The second element of packaging design, informational elements, is also clearly important to both groups, seen through their preference for labeling.

In addition to how a packaging appearance affects consumer perception, this theme was also derived from the discussion of gendered packaging and the visual elements of packaging that both consumer groups deemed to be gendered. Both groups mentioned that they associate certain colors and shapes of personal care product packaging with one of the binary genders. Both groups also discussed that products geared for men tend to include the phrase "for men" or the words "man" or "men", on the packaging whereas

products geared for women do not include the same verbal indicator. This perception is supported by McIntyre's (2019 p.338) research on person perception theories that suggest that one of the first aspects noticed when meeting someone is their gender. McIntyre suggested that this theory can be applied to products as their physical appearance can be viewed as an indicator of gender.

These findings can also be linked to the findings of Lieven et al. (2015) in regards to product elements that perpetuate masculinity and femininity. Their research suggests that angular forms represent masculinity and round forms represent femininity which is what both consumer groups found to be true. Their research also indicated that color was an important element that perpetuates the gender of a product and participants in both the consumer groups described certain colors as being masculine and feminine-.

5.1.2 Products' Role in Perception

The second theme derived from the results has to do with how the personal care product itself affects perception, regardless of packaging. Both consumer groups brought up the importance of the product's scent, its purpose, and the price. Whilst both groups brought up these elements, there were differences between the two consumer groups when it came to the importance of each element. The results also suggest that generation X places more importance on the product itself rather than its packaging, whereas generation Z was impacted by both the packaging and the product to a similar degree. Generation Z placed a lot of importance on the scent and purpose of the product whereas price was mentioned the least. Most generation Z participants were attracted to products that have scents associated with their gender. Generation Z also paid close attention to the purpose of the product and would sometimes buy products meant for the opposite gender as it targets their needs more than the one meant for their own gender. Price was discussed in relation to how female-targeted products tend to be more expensive than male-targeted products. Generation X also believed that female products tend to be priced higher. These findings are in line with those of Duesterhaus et al. (2011) as their study on the gender-based differences in the cost of personal care products found that women tend to pay more for personal care products and that this creates an unfair economic burden on women based on the assumption that their biological needs are different to those of men.

Generation X brought up the scent as a factor influencing perception the most and showed a preference for neutral scents. This group believed that the only difference between gendered products is the scent and that they all serve the same purpose. In opposition to this, many of the participants in the generation Z group were under the impression that products geared toward their gender will work better for them. Most participants even believed that men's deodorant would work better and be more strong, even though the ingredients in men's and women's deodorant are the same. The generation X group was more price-sensitive and mentioned that they look for the more affordable option. This supports research on generation X that suggests they are more price-conscious (Nicholas, 2009 p.48).

The findings that arose for this theme, support the stages of consumer perception and how the stimuli of a product leads to overall perception. Within this theme, the most prominent stimuli is the scent, as was mentioned by both consumer groups. They followed the stages of consumer perception starting from exposure to the scent as stimuli, to the attention stage where the consumer pays attention to the product that matches their interests which in this case is scent preference. Within the third stage, the participants interpret the stimuli and give them meaning based on pre-existing schemas. The findings suggest that the consumers will categorize the scent as feminine, masculine, or neutral based on their schemas related to gender stereotypes. In relation to this, both groups shared the perception that gendered products are largely based on scent. This suggests that in addition to packaging, consumers will determine the gender of a product based on whether they deem the scent to be masculine or feminine.

5.1.3 Gender Targeting and Gender Stereotypes Role in Perception

In reference to personal care products, gender-specific targeting and gender stereotypes present on packaging, and present in the minds of the consumers, were discussed. Firstly, both groups were aware of gendered packaging, and the majority of participants perceived personal care products as gendered based on their traits and gender stereotypes. This supports the previously discussed research on the strong prevalence of gender-binary and gender-stereotypical marketing practices as suggested by Zawisza (2019), Goffman (2006), and Kotler and Armstrong (2017). Research has shown that many industries, including the personal care industry, rely on the gender segmentation marketing strategy

as the separation of consumers based on the two gender-binary groups has traditionally been viewed as easily identifiable (Zawisza, 2019 p.8). Both consumer groups were able to easily recognize the use of gender segmentation in the personal care product industry.

However, the main difference between the two consumer groups is that many of the generation Z participants perceived that there is a difference between male and female-targeted products and that men and women as consumers of personal care products are different. Many of the generation Z participants held the stereotypical view that women care more about personal hygiene than men and that personal hygiene is inherently feminine. Multiple males in this generation also believed that women's geared products might make them appear more like a woman. This supports the findings related to gender cues as Lieven et al. (2015) found that high levels of masculine gender cues tend to be beneficial as men are less likely to purchase items with feminine cues as they want products that contribute to their masculine image. On the contrary, generation X did not hold this belief at all. They believe that the men geared and women geared products work exactly the same. The generation X group also did not hold the stereotypical belief that personal hygiene is more feminine than it is masculine. This supports findings related to generation X as consumers that suggest they are aware of the manipulative aspects of marketing and purely want marketing efforts to be straightforward and inform them the reasons for why they should buy the product (Nicholas, 2009 p. 49).

Gender neutrality was also discussed in both groups. Some of the generation Z participants stated they would be more inclined to buy gender-neutral products whereas almost all of the generation X participants said they prefer gender-neutral products. Male participants in both groups also believed that overall men's products tend to be more clearly geared toward men through the depiction of male stereotypes. Some of the male participants in generation Z were attracted to these strong masculine stereotypes whereas the male participants in the generation X group found the usage of such strong male stereotypes to be redundant.

When it comes to preference for female or male-targeted packaging, most of the participants in the generation Z group said they prefer products meant for their gender. It was evident that most of the participants preferred the smell meant for their gender and believed the product was formulated better for them. The only reason that came up for buying a product not congruent with their gender was the perceived effectiveness of the product meant for the opposite gender. The men in this group would only buy the female-

targeted product if it targeted a trait they have. This supports the findings of Friedmann & Lowengart (2018) that found that men tend to be more focused on the instrumental utilities of a product, which refers to its functional attributes. The findings suggest that generation Z prefers products congruent with their gender more than generation X, as generation X showed a clear preference for gender-neutral products, or then were indifferent about whether the product was meant for their gender or not.

When it came to the necessity of gendered packaging, both groups expressed both sides of the argument as many believed that certain aspects of gendered packaging are not necessary whereas some aspects are. All the participants in both consumer groups believed that the use of the phrase "for men" or word "man" or "men", on male-oriented packaging was unnecessary. However, both groups believed that gendered products act as a guide for some who might need them. This is supported by research that suggests certain consumers may benefit from separate marketing strategies based on gender segmentation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017 p. 214).

5.1.4 Business' and Marketings Role in Gendered Packaging

The last theme that emerged from both groups was the role of business and marketing in gendered packaging. Both groups believed that gendered packaging is a marketing tactic that benefits corporations and that this might be a potential barrier to the transition to more gender-neutral products. Both generations believed that gender segmentation was marketing to the masses, which supports research that suggests men and women have different wants and needs that can be met through gender segmentation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017 p. 214). The results also suggest that the generation Z group was more susceptible to these marketing efforts, regardless of being cognisant of the marketing tactics being used. This group was more inclined to believe that the men's and women's products worked differently, and some of the men felt embarrassed buying women's products. Whereas in the generation X group, they viewed gendered packaging as purely a marketing tactic.

Both groups also brought up how the stores tend to be sectioned based on gender, which was seen as a barrier to both groups to the introduction of more gender-neutral products. The groups were pondering where such products would go, and some liked that the sections were separated. However, both groups discussed how more gender-neutral

packaging could be introduced. Generation Z discussed taking away the actual wording of the gender from the packaging and generation X discussed marketing the products based on scent and purpose rather than gender. Generation X being hyperaware of gendered packaging being a money-making marketing tactic is supported by research that indicates that generation x consumers view marketing as manipulative and that what they want from marketing efforts is an honest and straightforward approach. They want to be told about the offering, given information on it and be convinced on why they should buy it. (Nicholas, 2009 p. 49)

5.1.5 Age and Familial Status' Role in Preference

The theme of age and familial status when it comes to personal care product preference, arose only from the generation X group. The results suggest that the majority of the generation X participants were indifferent about what gender the product was geared to, or preferred a gender-neutral version, due to them sharing the products with their family members. This group wanted to save money and time by getting products that their partners and children can also use. This theme did not come up in the generation Z group as no one in that group mentioned sharing their personal care products with anyone. This suggests why generation Z seems to be more inclined to buy products for their own gender, as they only have to focus on what aligns with their needs, wants, and identity rather than thinking about what someone else might like. Research on generation X consumers suggests that they need to be convinced that the product will ease their life rather than complicate it, and expect products to be designed for their lifestyles and tasks (Nicholas, 2009 p. 48). This is clearly supported by the empirical findings as this consumer group is more focused on buying personal care products out of convenience.

Age is also a factor that came up in the generation X group as many believed that due to their mature age, they are wiser about the reality of personal care products and aware that the ingredients are the same regardless of gender. The data suggests that these participants believed the younger generations are more prone to believe there are differences between gendered packaging, and buy products based on whether it matches up with their gender identity. This was due to social pressure and identity, as they stated they do not care what others think about the products they buy and they seemed to be confident in their identity. There was nothing that indicated that this group felt the need

to buy products that affirm their identity. They believed that younger people may face this social pressure.

5.1.6 Gender Identity and Self-Images Role in Perception

The theme of gender identity and self-image, and the role it plays in perception, was mainly derived from the generation Z group data. The findings show that this generation was more inclined to buy products meant for their gender as a way of strengthening their gender identity and upholding their social self-image. Some of the male participants were insecure over the idea of buying female-targeted products because of what others might think. Some of the participants also felt proud of their gender identity and wanted to encourage this through their product consumption.

These findings are congruent with prior research on gender performance through consumption. Sandhu (2017) has found that a common way people express their gender identity is through their consumption habits and through props that represent their gender. This was viewed to be especially relevant for products where identity and body overlap which can be seen as true for personal care products. Duesterhaus et al. (2011) also found that mundane products like moisturizers and razors can express personal identity and that women might buy women geared products to express their femininity in a mainly masculine world. Through the generation Z focus group results, it is evident that they are more likely to use personal care products as a way to express personal identity in comparison to generation X.

These findings also support the research presented earlier on generation Z as consumers. This prior research suggests that generation Z try out products as a means of development and expression of "the self" (Francis & Hoefel, 2018 p. 3-4). Another element that came up within this theme was the discussion of individuals that do not identify with either binary gender. It was clear that this generation group was more aware of this rising demographic as they discussed it in much more detail than the generation X group did. Generation Z viewed gender-neutral packaging as a good way to target the consumers who do not identify as male or female, and even suggested that gendered packaging may make these individuals feel left out. This increased awareness of this demographic of people lines up with research on generation Z that suggests they are

invested in rights relating to LGBT issues and that gender fluidity is on the rise with this generational cohort. (Francis & Hoefel, 2018 p. 3-4)

5.2 Discussion of method

The chosen method of focus groups worked well in practice as it provided in-depth qualitative data on the consumer's perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and overall thoughts on gendered personal care product packaging. However, the implementation of the focus groups was somewhat negatively affected by COVID-19 as it led to the focus groups being held virtually. This presented some challenges such as making natural interaction more difficult as it is harder to decipher when it is appropriate to talk via video call. However, the focus groups still ran smoothly and no major issues occurred. Everyone had their cameras on in both focus groups which facilitated better interaction between the participants, and the facilitator.

The chosen method proved to be a good method for this research due to the type of data it provided. It also proved to be the most practical for the researcher in terms of resources and time, as they were able to collect data from multiple participants at once. However, some limitations can be observed concerning the validity and reliability of the results with this method. It is important to consider that these two focus groups were small groups from each generation living in Helsinki, which means these findings cannot be generalized to these generations as a whole. Also, this study only focused on two generational cohorts, meaning the findings cannot be applied to the other consumer generational groups. This affects its external validity as the small sample size affects the ability for the findings to be applied to larger populations. However, external reliability can be reached with this method as this same focus group can be done with other groups of people.

One other factor that should be considered is that in both of the focus groups, some participants knew each other due to the usage of the snowball sampling method. This can be seen as a strength in terms of helping the participants feel at ease and more comfortable sharing their opinions. However, it could also lead to a certain level of bias due to the assumptions and expectations that pre-existing relationships might involve. Lastly, it must be noted that whilst the focus group method provides detailed qualitative data, it is limited by the group interview factor. Some participants may be easily influenced by other

participants' answers or not feel comfortable sharing their true opinion due to judgment. However, this did not seem to be very prevalent in the two focus groups conducted as there was debate and disagreement, meaning not everyone felt pressured to agree with other participants. Another method that could have been used to provide rich data would have been individual interviews, however, this would have made it much more difficult to obtain results from multiple participants from both generations due to time constraints.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The initial aim of the study was to investigate how generation z and generation x consumers in Helsinki perceive the gendered packaging of personal care products to evaluate the efficacy of this marketing strategy. This resulted in the investigation of the relevance of gender-specific packaging in today's day and age. To further reach this aim, three research questions were presented and used as a framework for both the primary and secondary research. The first research question was:

1. What are common stereotypes and gendered elements used in packaging design?

To answer this question, the results indicated that both generations studied identified various gender stereotypes and gendered elements when it came to personal care product packaging. The purpose of this question was to identify how personal care product packaging is gendered, and what enables consumers to perceive a product as gendered. It was evident that both consumer groups categorized certain colors, shapes, words, and graphics as stereotypically feminine, masculine, or neutral. When shown different versions of gendered packaging, the consumers in both generations were able to immediately distinguish which package was meant for which gender. The findings from the study regarding this question are in line with the research presented in the theory chapter, as both groups brought up elements that marketing research has deemed to be typically gender-stereotyped.

The second research question then aimed to deduce if there is a difference in preference for gendered products between the generational groups. This second research question was:

2. What is the difference in preference for gendered products between generation Z and generation X consumers?

Both similarities and differences in preference for gendered products were found between the generations. Generation Z showed a preference for both gendered products and gender-neutral products, and whilst many of the participants said they buy products meant for their gender, many also said this could vary based on the product and their needs. It was made clear that the women of this generational cohort were more open to male-targeted products than men were to female-targeted products. The preference for gendered products seems to stem from the perception that they perform different functions, whilst many also showed a preference for the product meant for their gender as the aesthetic of the packaging was more in line with their interests. This group also seemed to prefer gender congruent products as they supported their gender identity, and some felt insecure about what others may think if they were to buy packaging that looked like it was meant for the opposite gender.

On the contrary, the generation X group showed a majority preference for gender-neutral products. Some did mention they would buy the product meant for their gender, but this was based purely on scent preference as most of the generation X group believed that there is no difference in function between male and female products. The main reason this group seemed to prefer gender-neutral products, was because the majority of the participants share personal care products with their spouses and/or children. Their main focus was getting a product that everyone can use. This group did not feel self-conscious about buying products meant for the opposite gender, as it was clear that with age, they have become confident in their gender identity and do not seek affirmation from the products they consume.

The third research question aimed to investigate how personal care product gendered packaging is perceived by the two-generational consumer groups, in an attempt to deduce the necessity of gendered packaging. This question was:

3. How is gendered packaging perceived by generation Z and generation X consumers?

Overall, both generations perceived gendered packaging to be necessary in certain cases and unnecessary in others. Both groups found that having gendered products can help with the convenience of selecting a product when it comes to practical elements such as store layout and personal elements such as preference. However, both groups brought up how they would either prefer or be fine with, personal care product packaging focusing on the scent and its benefits rather than gender. Generation X especially thought gendered packaging was quite unnecessary and they prefer more neutral packaging overall. One viewpoint all the participants had from both groups, was that writing what gender the product is for on the packaging is unnecessary. It was also acknowledged by both groups that a whole demographic of non-gender binary people are being left out by gendered packaging. Overall, the perception of gendered packaging by both groups varied, but all in all, most participants were either very supportive or open to, more gender-neutral packaging.

It seems that consumers' perception of gendered packaging has not dramatically changed since previous generations, as there are consumers in the emerging generation of generation Z that prefer to buy gender congruent products. This was especially true for males whilst females proved to be more varied in terms of the gender of their purchases. In line with the theoretical research, it is evident that masculine cues possess a strong appeal that feminine ones do not. However, these masculine cues were more effective on the generation Z men in comparison to the generation X men, which was a surprising factor considering generation Z is viewed as more liberal in terms of gender identity. Even though this preference does still exist amongst some consumers, it is clear that the males in both generations would be open to more gender-neutral options as long as they can tell what the product is meant to do as they were mainly attracted to the functional attributes of the product.

Whilst gendered packaging still plays a role in purchasing decisions for some, there is a desire by both generations for a shift towards more gender-neutral personal care product options. For generation Z, their concerns with personal care products lie more in their ingredients and benefits as this generation is known to do their research when it comes to products. Marketers can benefit from this and try to use packaging as a tool to highlight the benefits and ingredients of the product. Whereas for generation X, their interests lie more in practicality and being able to share personal care products with their

family. These needs can be better met by marketers by highlighting the product's scent and usage, rather than its gender.

However, there is a market for gendered products, as some consumers do utilize this aspect to decipher whether they should buy the product or not. This indicates that realistically, getting rid of gendered packaging completely will not benefit companies or consumers. Yet, taking away certain elements of gendered packaging and including more gender-neutral packages would seemingly benefit both companies and consumers according to this study. By making products a bit less gendered, such as by removing the title of the gender from the product, but keeping certain gender cues such as colors, marketers can target both gender binary and non-binary consumers. The consumers that seek products based on their gender will still be able to decipher the inferred gender of the product through certain elements whilst those who do not seek gendered products, can perceive the product as neutral as it would not explicitly indicate what gender it is targeted towards. Additionally, by adding more gender-neutral options and by focusing more on the benefits and scent of the product, consumers can make their decisions based on what truly matters for them when it comes to personal care products, which is not gender. As the study suggests, no consumer chooses their personal care products solely on their perceived gender.

6.1 Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this research involves its small sample size and specific demographic and geographic scope. As mentioned in previous chapters, this study focused on the consumer perception of generation Z and generation X consumers in Helsinki, which affects the result's generalizability to other consumer groups. Another limitation of this study is the use of the focus group method and its effect on the results. Some participants may have been affected by other people's answers or felt as if they cannot truly share their thoughts.

Another limitation that affects the scope of this study was that only two personal care product categories were shown in the focus group- deodorants and shampoo. This affects the result's generalizability to the personal care product industry as a whole, as perhaps the consumer perception varies depending on the specific product. Furthermore,

since only the product category of personal care products was studied, the results cannot be applied to other typically gendered product categories.

Lastly, this study involves the limitation of the researcher's bias in designing the study. The products shown to the participants were chosen by the researcher based on what they deemed to be a masculine or feminine product. This means that the products chosen were based on the researcher's personal biases on what is feminine and masculine and others may not view the products similarly. However, the products were chosen based on theoretical research that categorized certain elements as typically gendered.

6.2 Suggestions for further studies

Gender-neutral marketing communication is a relatively new phenomenon that has been increasing in popularity rapidly. As this study studied the perception of gendered packaging of personal care products, further research could build off these findings to study the perception of gender-neutral personal care product packaging. This would give marketers a better idea of how consumers feel about gender-neutral personal care product packaging and how they can implement it most effectively.

The notion of gender and gender roles commonly reflected in package marketing is evolving and a deeper understanding of this phenomenon is necessary to further understand the concept of gender-neutral communications. A natural continuation of this research would involve studying the perception of gendered packaging for more product categories and demographics. By studying other product categories, a better understanding of the perception of gendered packaging on a larger scale can be achieved. One product category, or even just a few products from one category, is not adequate enough to make conclusions on the implications of gendered packaging. More research would also be needed to determine the efficacy of this study by studying larger samples. This study could be replicated on other demographics in other geographic locations which could provide interesting insight into the extent to which culture influences consumers' perception of gendered marketing.

Additionally, the perception of neutral product packaging should be studied and compared with the perception of gendered product packaging. Brands, companies, and stakeholders would greatly benefit from the further exploration of these consumer perceptions. It would provide them with the necessary tools that would enable them to

challenge outdated gender stereotypes and become more inclusive of consumers who do not identify with one of the binary genders.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction: Hello my name is Isabel and thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. Today's interview will be a discussion on the gendered packaging of personal care products and how this affects consumer perception of such products. As a participant in this interview, all personal details will be kept anonymous and will not be included in the final report. With your consent, I would like to record this interview so that it can be transcribed for analysis. The interview will take around an hour and be based on the main theme of gendered personal care product packaging.

You are free to stop this interview at any time and if at any point you want your data to not be used in the research, this is also possible through informing me.

Theme: Gendered Packaging of Personal Care Products from a Consumers Perspective

1. Personal Care Products Consumption
    a. What do you notice or look for in personal care products when you see them on the store shelves? For example, deodorant or shampoo

2. Personal Care Products Packaging
    a. What comes to mind when you think about the packaging of personal care products?
    b. What elements of personal care product packaging stand out to you?
    c. How does the packaging of personal care products affect your perception your desire to purchase it?

3. Personal Care Products Gendered Packaging
    a. When looking back on the personal care products you have purchased or seen in the stores, do they appear to be gender-neutral or targeted towards a specific gender?
        i. What elements of a personal care product indicate to you that it is meant for a specific gender?
    b. Do you buy personal care products geared towards your gender identity? Why or why not?

4. Perception of Gendered Packaging (Shows the participants a female and male-targeted deodorant and shampoo package. Asks these questions individually for each product category)
    a. What do you think about the packaging of [product category]?
    b. Is there any packaging you prefer, and why?
    c. If you had to guess which one of these products targets men and which one targets women, which one would you choose and why? Or do you believe they are targeted towards neither?
5. Concluding thoughts on gendered packaging of personal care products
    a. Now that you have seen these examples of gendered packaging, what thoughts on this topic arise?
    b. Do you prefer that personal care products are mainly gender-specific or would you like to see more gender-neutral options on the market? Why or why not?
    c. What would you suggest that personal care product brands do to be more inclusive of those who might not identify with one of the gender binaries of female or male?
    d. Is there anything else you would like to add to the discussion of gendered packaging in the personal care industry?

Conclusion: Thank you for discussing this with me! If you have any questions regarding this interview or my research, please feel free to contact me via e-mail.

APPENDIX 2. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Isabel Nelson

Phone: 0442388078   **E-mail:** nelsonis@arcada.fi

Purpose of Study

This study aims to investigate how consumers perceive the gendered packaging of personal care products to evaluate the effectiveness of this marketing strategy. As a part of this study, you will be asked to take part in a focus group interview and answer open-ended questions regarding this topic. In addition, some packages of deodorants, and shampoos will be shown to you as a part of this focus group interview. This interview will take approximately 60-120 minutes.

Participants Rights

- I have been informed of the nature of the study.
- I have understood that I have the right to withdraw from the experiment at any given time.
- My anonymity will be protected as my name will not be mentioned in any way in the written report.
- My responses will be kept confidential and will only be available to the researcher.
- I will not share other participants' identities or responses with others outside of the focus group to ensure the anonymity of all participants.
- I understand I may skip any questions I do not wish to answer.
- I agree to have my verbal responses recorded and transcribed for future analysis by the researcher.
- After the transcription has been conducted, the recordings will be deleted.
- I understand that upon completion of the study, I will be debriefed on the results of the study.
- I may contact the researcher, Isabel Nelson, at any point for any further inquiries.

Consent to participate

I understand my rights as a research participant as outlined above. I acknowledge that I am participating voluntarily.

Print Name: **Signature:**   **Date:**

APPENDIX 3. PACKAGES SHOWN IN FOCUS GROUPS

Male and Female Targeted Shampoos

Male and Female Targeted Deodorants