

Do they have to be “boys” or “girls” - can’t they simply be children?

- *A quantitative study about whether or not H&M should remove the division between the genders in the children’s department and replace it with a gender-neutral presentation of children’s clothing.*

The gender debate has become more and more apparent in recent years, not least in the fashion industry for children. Messages, prints, colors and not least *how* clothes are presented in the store has highly been discussed in media. People express their concern and opinions about that the fashion retailers, such as H&M, chose to distinctly separate “boys” and “girls” clothes based on stereotyped gender roles, which reinforce a picture of the genders that does not match the reality. This debate aims to show that this is no longer a thing that can pass unmarked, but actually is important to do something about. The aim of the paper was to examine whether a gender-neutral clothing presentation in the children’s department at H&M should be executed and if it – really – would affect the consumers, as well as the brand, favorably.

A quantitative experiment was conducted with 201 respondents in order to address the research questions. The results revealed that H&M should consider restructuring their gender-divided children’s clothing department. Firstly, the results showed that a gender-neutral presentation of children’s clothes had a significant positive influence on the consumers. As a matter of fact, a presentation that includes gender neutrality leads to emotions of pleasure and positive change in customer attitudes, both in terms of the attitude towards the presentation of the clothes, but also in terms of attitudes towards the brand. Furthermore, a gender-neutral presentation is perceived as creative due to the fact that it is incongruent in comparison to what consumers expect from H&M, which also affect their interest in the brand. For H&M, the investment in merging the two gender-divided children’s departments would lead to increases in purchase intention, recommendations from consumers and last, but not least, positive buzz and thus – hopefully - also an opportunity to set a new standard for the Swedish fashion market.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 BACKGROUND	4
1.2 PROBLEMATIZATION	6
1.3 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	6
1.4 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS	6
1.5 DELIMITATIONS.....	7
1.6 DISPOSITION	8
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	9
2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.1.1 Norms.....	9
2.1.2 Schema theory.....	10
2.1.3 Moderating factors that shape the effects of incongruity	11
2.1.4 Consumer in-store behavior	12
2.1.5 Creativity	15
2.1.6 Brand familiarity	15
2.1.7 Brand interest	15
2.1.8 Visual merchandising	16
2.2 THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS GENERATION	17
2.2.1 Theoretical model.....	17
2.2.2 Hypothesis generation	18
2.3 SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES	25
3. METHODOLOGY	26
3.1 SCIENTIFIC APPROACH	26
3.2 PREPARATORY WORK.....	26
3.2.1 Pre-study 1 - a qualitative discovery of the phenomenon.....	26
3.2.2 Pre-study 2 - the familiar retail brand	28
3.2.3 Pre-study 3 - is it incongruent?	30
3.3 MAIN STUDY	33
3.3.1 Experimental design	33
3.3.2 Questionnaire design.....	34
3.3.3 Manipulation check	35
3.3.4 Dependent variables	35
3.3.5 Pilot test.....	37
3.3.6 Sampling and data collection	37
3.3.7 Data quality control.....	38
3.4 STATISTICAL METHODS	39
3.5 DATA QUALITY.....	40
3.5.1 Reliability and validity.....	40
3.5.2 Ecological validity.....	41
4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	42
4.1 RESULTS OF MAIN STUDY.....	42
4.1.1 Emotional response to the gender-neutral presentation	42
4.1.2 Attitudinal response to the gender-neutral presentation	43
4.1.3 Presentation - Pleasure - Arousal - Intentions	47
4.1.4 Presentation- Presentation Attitude - Intentions	50
4.1.5 Presentation - Brand Attitude - Intentions.....	53
4.1.6 Dogmatism as moderating variable.....	55
4.1.7 Personal relevance as moderating variable.....	58
4.1.8 Is the gender-neutral presentation more creative?	60

4.1.9 Presentation - Creativity - Brand Interest	61
4.2. FURTHER ANALYSIS OF MAIN STUDY	62
4.2.1 Is it still incongruent?	62
4.2.2 Is it the gender neutrality or the incongruity that matters?	62
4.2.3 Is creativity linked to incongruity?	63
4.3 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS	65
5. DISCUSSION	67
5.1 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS	67
5.1.1 S-O-R Model	67
5.1.2 The moderators	69
5.1.3 Creativity	69
5.1.4 Incongruity or gender-neutrality, what matters the most?	70
6. CONCLUSION	72
7. IMPLICATIONS	72
7.1 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS	72
7.2. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS	72
8. CRITIQUE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	74
9. FUTURE RESEARCH.....	76
10. REFERENCES	77
11. APPENDICES.....	88

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

“In the long run, everyone is entitled to do what they want and look the way they want. Whether it's a boy or a girl, a woman or a man. But if you're going to do what you want as an adult, you need a good foundation as a child, where you felt that it is okay”¹.

The debate about gender is becoming increasingly important and salient in the media. People openly express their opinions in this community debate, not least about the way it appears in the fashion industry for children. Retail giants have been largely criticized for their conscious way of strengthening gender stereotypes for children through ads and in-store marketing. From the ongoing fluctuated debate in the media, consumers are furious about the fashion companies' way of categorizing children by gender and exaggerate stereotypes in a traditional, unequal way.

-“The message that H&M is signaling to children through their gender stereotyped clothing and gender-divided department are so clear. Girls should be cute and nice, while boys are loud stars that are shaping the world. Oh, this should be so obvious in 2017, I should not even have to wright this. But apparently it is not so obvious for H&M's product department”².

-“I really like when the tags do not categorize on gender, but instead on color, or size or type of garment. It feels much more natural and beautiful”³.

-“Only when we give the children a childhood that is not affected by the stereotypical image of male and female we can honestly say that they have the opportunity to do what they want with their lives as adults”⁴.

H&M is frequently mentioned in this debate. The circulated media around the retail company went so far that private individuals took the matter in their own hands and made a commercial to H&M to show their dissatisfaction:

- “Dear H&M, we need your help to close the gender gap, so we decided to help you first by making this campaign. Please feel free to use it as your first step towards a more gender equal future”⁵.

¹ Maria Svärdsén, 2011. ”Kläder som ger barnen frihet istället för att begränsa”, *Värmlands Folkblad*, 2011-09.16. Accessed: 2018- 04-22. Available from <https://www.vf.se/uncategorized/klader-som-ger-barnen-frihet-istallet-for-att-begransa/>.

² ”Hej H&M, det är 2017 nu”, *Designbloggarna*, 2017-09-03. Accessed: 2018- 04-22 Available from <http://designbloggarna.se/bloggar/anna-spanar-smatt/hej-hm-det-ar-2017-nu/>.

³ ”Barnkläder & genus – så tänker experten”, *Loopi*, 2017-03-16. Accessed: 2018- 04-22. Available from <https://loppi.se/barnklader-genus-sa-tanker-experten/>.

⁴ Maria Svärdsén, 2011. ”Kläder som ger barnen frihet istället för att begränsa”, *Värmlands Folkblad*, 2011-09.16. Accessed: 2018- 04-22. Available from <https://www.vf.se/uncategorized/klader-som-ger-barnen-frihet-istallet-for-att-begransa/>.

⁵ Ibid.

The message individuals emphasize to convey is the importance to avoid gender stereotypes and norms, especially when it comes to children's clothes, and thus encourage to let the children find themselves and who they are in which clothes they can identify themselves. In accordance with Vänskä (2017) fashion constructs and forms childhood by symbolizing “how it should be” rather than “what it actually is”. Thus, clothes are not "innocent items" (Annamari 2017), but they are connected to stereotypes regarding, i.e. girlhood and boyhood. Issues as these some might dismiss as non-significant or small but seen from a broader perspective they have a major impact on the community as whole, which can lead to greater inequality and discrimination of different kinds in the society.

The fact that clothing plays an important role in this is strengthened by Belk (1988), (Belk 1988) who believes that clothing is a way for people to show how and what they are and that the clothes can be seen as a part of extended self, which in a way enhances one's psychological and social well-being. Viewed from a social perspective, clothing works not only as an extension of one self but also as a non-verbal means of communication because it allows others to interpret and understand the person who wears the clothes (McCracken, Roth 1989).

In fashion companies, it is most common to direct the communications and products towards individuals in different segments and the most ordinary type of segmentation is through gender division, between male and female (Butler, Almqvist 2007) which is based on stereotyped manner (Eisend 2010). However, for children this is questioned since this type of segmentation causes individuals to either identify themselves as female or male but not both or neither, which in turn, reinforces gender-specific differences that are socially constructed (Deaux 1985) and thus not real. According to (Schroeder, Borgerson 2005), market communication should reflect the values that are right in time or exist in society, but to communicate the stereotypical beliefs that exist might be seen as promotion and reinforcing (Eisend, Plagemann & Sollwedel 2014) ethically irresponsible representations of identity which put restrictions on the possibility for self-realization (Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen 2011). However, stereotypes are still used in communication.

It has long since been known that it is essential for companies to take into account and understand their customers to identify their needs and find effective ways to meet them (Hanssens, Pauwels 2016, van den Driest, Sthanunathan & Weed 2016, Kotler 1973). Particularly important is it for physical stores through the increased competition from online retailers. Hence, the in-store marketing is essential for physical stores for its survival in the long-term. Appealing layouts and merchandise presentations do affect the degree to which shoppers enjoy their experiences in the store (Wu et al. 2013), which further differentiates the brand from competitors (Mehta, Chugan 2013, Otieno, Harrow & Lea-Greenwood 2005).

1.2 Problematization

As the introduction reveals, gender neutrality is an important topic in the society, where it is questioned how fashion retail companies in 2018 are managing gender related issues when it comes to children.

Although stereotypical communication previously has been used to simplify the information processing for consumers (Johnson, Grier 2012) and contribute to lower cognitive effort (Diehl, van Herpen & Lamberton 2015), there is a clear demand for change in how the stereotypes are handled in fashion and specifically when it comes to children. However, it may be relevant for companies to understand what this can lead to and how it will affect its business strategy. Is a gender-neutral presentation of children's clothes worth investing in? Like all other marketing and communication initiatives, the aim is to generate positive consumer affects, in order to generate a top line growth. Hence, in accordance with the described background in the field, it is reasonable to assume that the outcome from such investment can create positive consumer affects, why it is highly important for retail companies to understand what such a venture can contribute with.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

Based on the background and problem area, the purpose of this paper is to investigate whether, and how, a gender-neutral presentation in the children's department at H&M will affect consumer reactions as well as the brand. Thus, the research questions are as follows:

RQ1: "Does a gender-neutral clothing presentation in the children's department at H&M affect the consumers positively?"

and:

RQ2: "Does a gender-neutral clothing presentation in the children's department at H&M result in intentions that are positive for H&M?"

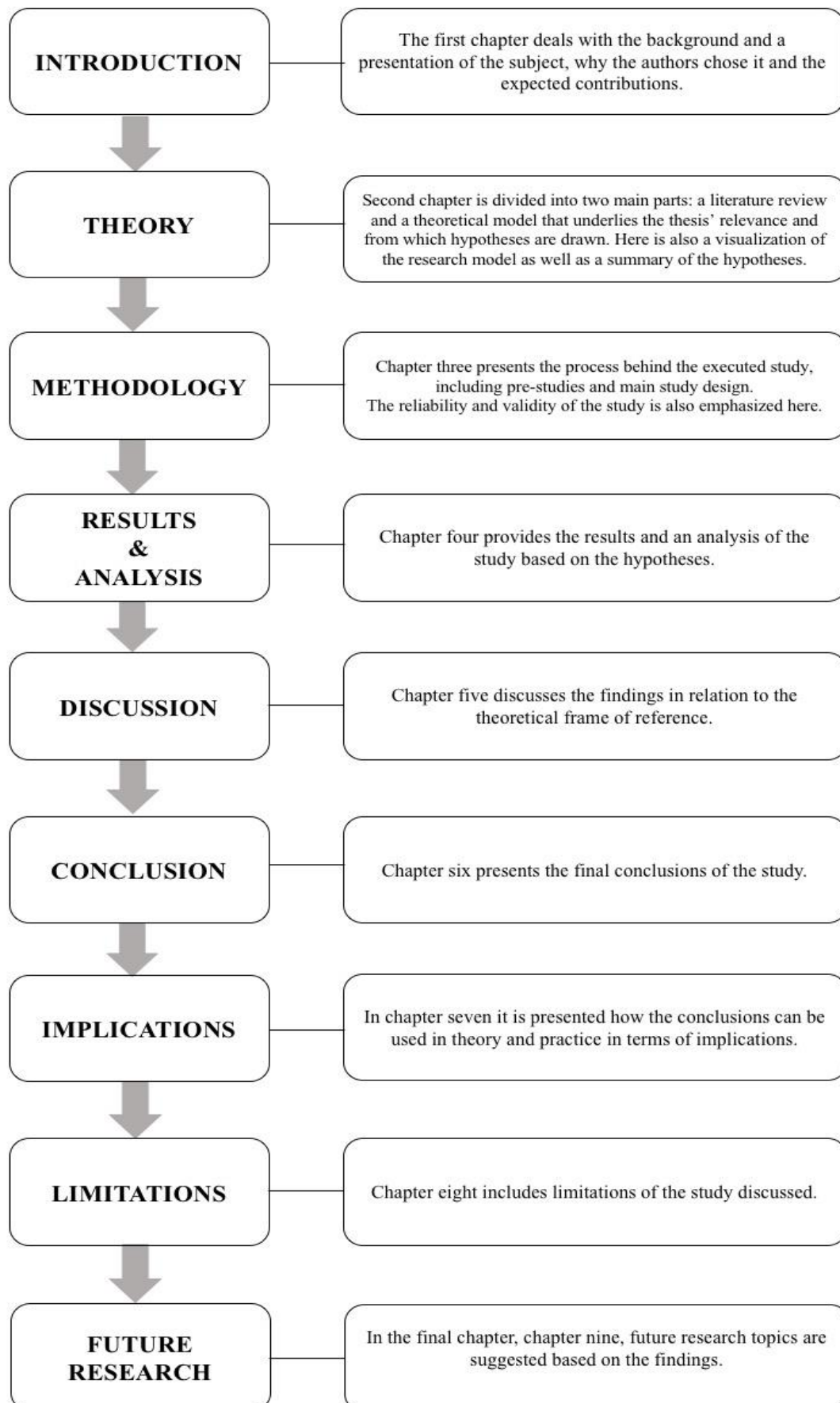
1.4 Expected contributions

By linking three bodies of literature; norm theory, incongruity and visual merchandising, this study aims to contribute to the retail in-store marketing in terms of incongruity through non-stereotypical communication. To the knowledge of the authors, limited academic literature has investigated the influence of norms and stereotypes in the context of in-store marketing and more specifically visual merchandising. Hence, this study aims to contribute with new in-store marketing knowledge, insights and concrete tools that can give advantageous outcomes for a company as well as its brand.

1.5 Delimitations

Due to resources and time restrictions, the paper is subject to delimitations in order to fit with the possible scope and scale. From a larger perspective, the findings of this research aim to contribute to in-store insights that can be generalized to actors within the fashion retail industry in Sweden. However, this study is delimited to investigating the expected outcomes through one store and one brand, in this case the retail giant H&M. Further, this research is also restricted to the physical store and hence not tested in other types of retail distribution channels. Moreover, the study is limited to investigation of to the children's department only. Lastly, the geographical scope was delimited to Sweden and Stockholm due to the necessary interactions with a H&M store in the research, as well as to cultural contexts (Eisend 2010).

1.6 Disposition



2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Following chapter presents the theoretical framework used for the study. The theoretical framework is divided into two parts. The first part, 2.1, presents the literature review. Since the aim of this study is to investigate the consumer's emotions, attitudes and responses to a gender-neutral clothing presentation, the literature review is found in norm theory, incongruity literature as well as visual merchandising literature. The second part, 2.2, presents the theoretical model and hypothesis that are based upon the literature review. Lastly, the chapter ends with a summary of the generated hypotheses in part 2.3.

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Norms

Norms are a sociological term, a construct with widespread usage, for commonly shared belief systems produced by the society about the directions, rules, traditions and expectations of human behavior (Cialdini, Trost 1998) and involves practices of interpretation, communication and meaning giving (Pearse, Connell 2016). Norms include for instance traditions, values and fashions that has become standardized as an effect of the contact of individuals in the society (Sherif 1936). Failing to act in accordance with norms can result in sanctions and disapproval from social networks, why it is important to point out the strong impact of social norms on one's behavior (Cialdini, Trost 1998). Thus, social norms do not only serve as guidelines for behavior, but also a reminder for what is seen as acceptable (Reno, Cialdini & Kallgren 1993).

Norms do not only exist in people, they are also embedded other parts of the society. Since different fields, such as companies and media control and structure resources, they reproduce, support and legitimate the different shared belief systems (Seguino 2007). This is the underlying reason for why norms become salient and deeply fixed in the social and individual consciousness and, consequently, might become difficult to change (Seguino 2007). However, norms are in "subjects of extensive bargaining" which means that some groups can exercise influence over institutions, such as media and companies, to contribute in changing them (Agarwal 1997).

2.1.1.1 Gender norms and gender stereotypes

Gender norms are norms applied to groups established in the gender order, most often to differences between women and men with differential rules of manner also between the sexes (Pearse, Connell 2016). "Gender" is used to refer to the psychological features *associated* with biological sex that are socially created, as opposed to "sex" which refers to only the biological sex (Deaux 1985). Norms, such as gender norms, lead to creation and fixation of stereotypes, which is an image or picture in an individual's mind, created not by the person himself but derived culturally (Lippmann 2017) as a result of a greater social process (Pearse, Connell 2016). Generally, stereotypes can serve as tools to simplify and understand communication and information but may also affect people in terms of creating some kind of preconceived opinions and expectations. This, in turn, can limit the possibilities for self-realization (Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen 2011).

2.1.1.2 Norms, stereotypes and children

Norms get transferred to children through “social agents”, such as parents, school and media (Ghaill 1994). In this way, norms and stereotypes are automatically passed on to future generations. However, children are curious, often in conflict with adults, internalizing and acquiring norms unevenly even though norms and stereotypes are salient (Eickelkamp 2011). This means that although different theories suggest a quick and smooth transfer of norms (Pearse, Connell 2016), it is not as easy as socialization models claim. Moreover, typical forms of stereotypes that distinguish boys and girls lies in appearance, such as which what clothes they wear. Research has shown that fashion and clothing are crucial for the reproduction of existing norms (Rouse 1999). Clothing is viewed and used by young people as an intermediate of self-presentation (Alexandra König 2008). When attitudes and beliefs are practiced they also become strengthened (Kashima 2014). Thus, gender stereotypes are incorporated by the fact that clothing companies and manufacturers, among others, do not look at what they are signaling.

People are today more conscious of the existing disagreement of gender norms in social movements (Das, Singh 2014). Nonetheless, even in Scandinavia where the culture of gender equality is strong, there are still areas where persistence of gender separations exists (Gunnarsson, Andersson & Vänje 2003). I.e., still, women as a group show more support for change towards egalitarian gender principles than men as a group (Pearse, Connell 2016).

2.1.2 Schema theory

Schema theory represent a network of cognitive structures or connections in the mind of an individual (Mandler 1982). Schema can be explained as “*knowledge structures that are the building blocks of cognition*” (Rumelhart 1980). The cognitive structures summarize information and represent the relationship between its components (Anderson 1984).

When an individual is exposed to a particular event (Fiske, Taylor 1991) an existing schema will be activated in the mind of the individual (Mandler 1982). Schemas helps individuals to organize information of prior experiences and knowledge (Fiske, Taylor 1991, Fiske 2014) that are learned and acquired through interactions with the social environment (Halkias 2015).

2.1.2.1 Schema incongruity

Majority of all incoming information that come across an individual’s mind will be well organized into existing knowledge structures and fit with an existing schema, however, some information will not (Törn 2009, Yoon 2013). The information that deviates too much and do not fit with existing schemas is called schema-incongruent information (Törn 2009, Mandler 1982). If an experience is highly congruent with an existing schema, it creates a feeling of familiarity, perceived as comfortable and does not evoke any cognitive effort (Mandler 1982). By contrast, extreme incongruent experience disrupts the existing knowledge structures (Katz 1993), which can result in that the individual cannot solve the incongruity and the experience will be perceived as irritating and frustrating (Meyers-Levy, Tybout 1989, Jurca, Madlberger 2015). Thus, depending on the extent of incongruity, it will have different effects on an

individual's overall feelings towards the experience; if the incongruity is moderate it can stimulate the cognitive efforts (Jurca, Madlberger 2015) and generate pleasurable sensation (Phillips 2000) when the mind has solved the perceived mismatch between the experience and the schema (Jurca, Madlberger 2015, Phillips 2000). The stimulation of the incongruity may result in positive attitudes, purchase intentions (Meyers-Levy, Tybout 1989) as well as increased attention towards the experience (Fiske, Taylor 1991, Goodstein 1993).

2.1.2.2 Communication through incongruity

Due to the benefits of incongruent information, it is frequently used in marketing communications (Yoon 2013). Using incongruity within communication, should lead consumers to engage more in the experience in order to resolve the incongruence (Meyers-Levy, Tybout 1989), which further can generate a more positive attitude and greater liking toward the advertisement and the brand (Yoon 2013, Lee, Mason 1999, Lee 2000) as well as achieve a better recall (Yoon 2013). The positive communication effects that is given from the incongruity information have been proven in numerous studies (Dahlén et al. 2005). However, the risk with incongruent marketing communication, is that the core associations within the brand image can be diluted. If the communication is congruent, it would share the target associations with the brand, however, with incongruent communication, it may interfere with the brand's existing associations (Dahlén et al. 2008).

2.1.2.3 Incongruence within norms and stereotypes

There are practically endless varieties and different types of incongruity (Latta 1999) why incongruity can be applied in several different contexts. The cognitive structures that contains expectations can be related to the concept of standards (Higgins 1990, Higgins, Strauman & Klein 1986) whereas standards can be expressed as "*functional standards*", which comprises beliefs about attitudes about others (Biernat, Billings 2001). Individual use standards in order to easier understand incoming information, which is also is known as stereotyping (Brewer 1996). When encountering a person or an object, the cognitive processes automatically tries to fit the experience with existing stereotypes. Due to the fact that the individual devotes at least some level of relevance to the encounter, the cognitive processing will typically result in a categorization (Fiske, Taylor 1991).

2.1.3 Moderating factors that shape the effects of incongruity

2.1.3.1 Dogmatism

In the body of Trait theory, it is investigated whether some personality traits lead to a certain consumer behavior, and one found is the characteristic dogmatism (Hoyer, MacInnis & Pieters 2013).

The concept of dogmatism is connected to how willing an individual is to receive new information. In general, people that are open to new information are less dogmatic than those who are more close-minded and thus more dogmatic (Brown 2012). This difference between open-minded and close-minded individual is due to different cognitive abilities, which is how *well* a person *can* think (Davies 2005) and cognitive style, which is how a person normally

does think (Davies 2005, Stanovich, West 1997). Evidence show that people who are dogmatic are contaminated by prior beliefs (Stanovich, West 1997) due to poorer working memory capacity, which leads to difficulties in temporary storing new information (Brown 2007) (Baddeley 1992). This often results in denial of happenings challenging or threatening one's beliefs (Rokeach 1954) and thus, evaluations and reactions such as ignoring and minimizing the information that is conceived as inconsistent (Kleck, Wheaton 1967).

2.1.3.2 Personal relevance

Personal relevance is the fundamental characteristic of involvement (Petty, Cacioppo 1981, Zaichkowsky 1985) and is explained as *"the extent that consumers perceive the object to be self-related or in some way instrumental in achieving their personal goals and values"* (Celsi, Olson 1988). Personal relevance has been proven to be highly influential upon attitudes (Petty, Cacioppo 1979).

Individuals presented towards a personally relevant object are more likely to engage in detailed processing and devote cognitive efforts towards it (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann 1983a). Accordantly, incongruent information that is perceived as personal relevant, will have a better chance of being resolved (Törn 2009), which moreover can lead to a pleasurable sensation (Phillips 2000), arousal and generally positive responses (Meyers-Levy, Tybout 1989, Goodstein 1993, Hastie, Kumar 1979, Houston, Childers & Heckler 1987, Srull, Lichtenstein & Rothbart 1985, O'sullivan, Durso 1984). Furthermore, it has been proven that personal relevance, directly and indirectly, effects the attitude (Campbell, Wright 2008). Numerous researchers have argued that relevance probably is the most important factor for determine motivation to process message information (Ajzen, Brown & Rosenthal 1996, Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann 1983) and contribute to advertising effectiveness (Lutz 1985).

2.1.4 Consumer in-store behavior

2.1.4.1 The S-O-R model

A dominating model within store atmosphere research is Donovan and Rossiter's (1982) developed model of Mehrabian and Russel's (1974) classic S-R model (Bitner 1992, Yalch, Spangenberg 2000, Krishna 2012). The original model is based upon environmental psychology where individuals are being exposed to external stimuli (S) in psychical atmospheres, which may result in responses (R) in terms of consumer behaviors (Mehrabian, Russell 1974). However, by only focusing on stimuli and response, it becomes difficult to determine what mediates the response, after which the organism (O) of emotional impact, was added to the model (Donovan et al. 1994). The modified Mehrabian-Russel model was developed to understand the environmental psychology and measure the store atmosphere effects on consumer emotions and responses (Donovan et al. 1994).

2.1.4.1.1 Individuals perceptions of the environment

In order to describe the human perceptions of the psychical environment, Mehrabian and Russel (1974) examine three emotional dimensions, Pleasure, Arousal and Dominance (PAD), that are conceived as the basic states of emotional responses that indicate individual's state of feelings

(Mehrabian, Russell 1974, Russel, Pratt 1980, Zajonc 1980, Russell, Ward & Pratt 1981, Russell 1980). Pleasure is an emotional response that refers to the extent in which the individual feels good, satisfied, joyful or hopeful in the situation. Arousal refers to the degree to which the environment induces feelings as excitement, stimulation or activation through the “load” of the environment which relates to how unexpected, surprising, new and unfamiliar the environment is. In a low-load environment people feel stimulated, and when consumer is in a “low-load” environment, they will feel calm and relaxed (Mehrabian, Russell 1974, Robert, John 1982). Lastly, dominance is about the control the individual perceive itself possess in relation to the environment (Mehrabian, Russell 1974). However, dominance has in later studies been criticize (Russell, Ward & Pratt 1981, Russell 1980) and deleted from the model for its lack of evidence as part of the affective state due the dimension requires a cognitive interpretation and therefore not purely applicable in situations that required affective response (Russell 1980).

2.1.4.1.2 Emotional responses

Russel and Pratt (1980) developed a two-dimensional model based upon pleasure and arousal. Depending on the specific in-store stimuli, different types of emotional responses can evoke from the conditional interaction between pleasure and arousal, in determining approach-avoidance behaviors (Bitner 1992, Mehrabian, Russell 1974, Donovan et al. 1994, Robert, John 1982). The approach behavior relates to a willingness to psychically stay in, explore the environment, communicate with others or interact supportively, whereas avoidance relate to the opposite; get out from the environment, desire to leave the environment, avoid interaction with others and dissatisfaction (Mehrabian, Russell 1974, Robert, John 1982). Hence, consumers will approach pleasant environment and avoid unpleasant ones (Andersson et al. 2012).

2.1.4.1.3 Behavior in a retail setting

It is founded that store-induced pleasure evokes approach-behavior, while arousal effects are however less consistent among studies. According to Sherman, Mathur and Smith (1997) arousal leads to spending more money and increased purchase intentions, while Milliman (1982) finds the opposite effects. Further, Smith and Curnow (1966) do not find any effects at all. Also, Sherman, Mathur and Smith (1997) find that arousal emotions increase store visit duration, while the opposite is found by Smith and Curnow (1966). Donovan and Rossiter (1982) support Sherman, Mathur and Smith (1997) results, but only in pleasant environments. This is supported by Demoulin (2011), that show that two-dimension correlate, the level of arousal will be affected by the perceived pleasantness in environment. However, arousal is difficult for the consumer to explain and henceforth capture in studies (Nordfält, Offesson 2007) which can be an indication of the contradictory results.

2.1.4.2 Customer attitude

Attitude is an evaluation of a stimuli, object or situation (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch 1986, Hoyer, MacInnis 2008) that refers to the degree of how favorably or unfavorably an individual perceive e.g. the object or stimuli (Petty, Brinol 2010). A favorable attitude towards a brand is

vital for long-term success (Modig, Dahlén & Colliander 2014), while a favorable attitude towards the stimuli is important since it affect future perceptions and patronage of the products as well as the brand (Hefer 2012). Further, attitudes influence intentions which is an indicator of behavior (Ajzen, Fishbein 1977, Ajzen, Fishbein 1980). Research show positive correlation between attitudes and purchase intentions (Micael, Fredrik 2003, Sutherland, Galloway 1981) but also attitudes and WOM (Tho, Trang & Olsen 2016).

2.1.4.3 Response- Intentions

2.1.4.3.1 Customer WOM and buzz intentions

Word of Mouth (WOM) and buzz are described as the informal communication between non-commercial parties regarding product, services or brands (Buttle 1998, Arndt 1967, Kirby, Marsden 2006). The differences between the two forms of communications are that WOM is communicated as recommendations while buzz is spread without recommendations (Törn 2009).

It is found that a positive WOM significantly shapes a consumer's attitude toward the recommended product (Martin, Lueg 2013) and applies a strong impact on consumer decision-making process (Katz, Lazarsfeld 1955, Mohr, Chiagouris 2005) as well as the decision itself (Arndt 1967, Richins, Root-Shaffer 1988) due to the fact that consumers tend to rely on friends more than marketers (Buttle 1998, Morrissey 2007, Reichheld 2003). Furthermore, WOM plays a highly important role for the company's brand image (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels 2009, Chen, Xie 2008, Grace, O'cass 2005, Schivinski, Dabrowski 2016) and can be perceived as an indication of true customer loyalty (Reichheld 2003). The consumers' willingness to recommend the store is vital part for its marketing and the most important measure since existing customers' promotion will attract new customers which affect the company's sales growth (Reichheld 2003).

The phenomena of buzz or "consumer generated media" (Niederhoffer et al. 2007) on the other hand, is based upon excitement around a product, idea or a person that is being spread (Falk et al. 2013). Marketers are interested in gain positive buzz since its potential to affect the commercial views of their products (Niederhoffer et al. 2007), it is generally accessed more frequently and assumed as objectively (Price, Feick 1984, Thorelli 1971). Moreover, it has been shown theoretically that buzz influences the degree of effectiveness of awareness, brand image as well as purchase decision (Leila, Abderrazak 2013). Thus, the creation of buzz requires consumers to be actively engaged, motivated and feel a desire of involvement (Morrissey 2007) in order for them to spread their opinions effectively (Falk et al. 2013).

2.1.4.3.2 Customer purchase intentions

Purchase intention can be defined as consumers' intention to purchase or utilize an offering, such as a product or a service (Shao, Baker & Wagner 2004). The purchase intention is a complex process that is direct connected to purchase behavior (Ajzen 1991, Axelrod 1968) perceptions and attitudes of consumers (Mirabi, Akbariyeh & Tahmasebifard 2015). Psychology research shows that attitude has the highest correlation with purchase intention

(Hosseinpour et al. 2016). Thus, if there is a choice of many available alternatives, such as in merchandise presentation, it exists fewer behavioral constraints, which means that intentions more often are met. Accordantly, does intentions have a higher predictability than attitudes (Ajzen, Fishbein 1980b). Purchase intention can be seen as a part of the decision-making process, which identifies the reason why consumers buy a certain product from an advertisement or a presentation (Shah et al. 2012). Further, if the presentation is considered as creative, it will have a direct effect upon purchase intention (Smith, Chen & Yang 2008, Smith et al. 2007, Kover, Goldberg & James 1995).

2.1.5 Creativity

Creativity is close linked to aspects of newness, originality and unexpectedness (White, Smith 2001). Creativity in retailing can be practiced in a small scale such as in displays (Davies, Ward 2005), yet small degrees of “differentials” in a store environment can be apparent for the consumers (Kent 2007). Creativity also refers to the divergence from the norm, such as stimuli that are not expected (Haberland, Dacin 1992). Hence, this kind of novelty is comparable to the construct of expectancy, which related to how well information fits with existing knowledge (Heckler, Childers 1992). However, for the novelty and unexpectedness in the stimuli to be perceived as creative, the element must also be meaningful for the consumer (Lethagen, Modig 2008).

2.1.6 Brand familiarity

The knowledge of the brand, in terms of brand familiarity, is a significant factor that can guide how people process information in marketing (Kent, Allen 1994). Research indicates that consumers process information is poorer when it comes familiar brands that they already have knowledge of and thus also a stable opinion about (Campbell, Keller 2003). As a matter of fact, consumers seek variety and if a brand is perceived as tedious, they tend to switch between familiar brand (Kahn 1995). Nevertheless, others argue that brand communication should not deviate from its’ commonness but instead stay consistent (Aaker 2012, Fill 2011) with the purpose to facilitate customer understanding and learning about the brand and thus become easier to remember.

2.1.7 Brand interest

Brand interest is referred to the level of positive emotions (Izard 2013) approachability, openness or curiosity an individual has about a brand (Machleit, Allen & Madden 1993); it is conceived as having behavioral intentions such as “exploring” (Plutchik 1980), which can evoke better brand attitude and purchase intentions. However, a problem for a well-known brand is that the familiarity can result in decreased interest (Berlyne 1974) even though consumer’s attitude towards the brand is positive (Faison 1977). It is therefore important for well-known brands, through their interactions with consumers to (re)-create an interest, so that attitude and intentions can be maintained (Machleit, Madden & Allen 1990). Accordantly, researchers discuss the importance of brands constantly reinvent themselves, surprising

consumers (Dahlén 2003), do something new and challenge cognitive schemas (White, Smith 2001, Ang, Low 2000).

2.1.8 Visual merchandising

Visual merchandising serves as a tool that visually communicate to the customer (Ebster 2011), inform and it act as a “salient salesperson” through for example suggestive selling created by displays and presentations (Kunwar 2010, Krishnakumar 2014). In accordance with (Krishnakumar 2014) visual merchandising is about creating visual effects by presenting and showing products (Mehta, Chugan 2013) in a way that appeals to customer in terms of interest, attract and attention. The purpose is to influence consumers in an emotional, perceptive and behavioral way (Dhruv et al. 2014) to evoke desire and to motivate the customer to purchase the product (Ebster 2011, Kerfoot, Davies & Ward 2003, Hefer 2012, Ballantine, Parsons & Comeskey 2015).

Since visual merchandising is affecting the customers and the in-store experience it can also enhance differentiation of the retail brand (Mehta, Chugan 2013, Matthews et al. 2013), which has become very initial in retailing (Verhoef et al. 2009, Grewal, Levy & Kumar 2009) and especially in the fashion market, which due to the emergence of online shopping that have started to change rapidly in comparison to other markets (Choo, Yoon 2015). Furthermore, the fact that 83% of the in-store cues and stimuli are processed through sight (Nordfält, Offesson 2007), indicates that the visual aspects of the store is highly important to manage in the right way.

2.1.8.1 Visual merchandising displays

Visual merchandising displays are feature areas in the store where the retailers add fixtures, materials and other props to the display with the aim to enhance the appeal of the merchandise. Displays are commonly used to present new merchandise in a decorative way to enhance the attractiveness of both the merchandise but also the store environment (Hefer, Cant 2013). It is showed that display of merchandise as stimuli affect consumers’ perceptions which evoke responses (Du Plessis, Rousseau 2003).

Consumption constellation (Englis, Solomon 1996) of clothes based on their colors, print and patterns that make an attractive whole is a way of presenting merchandise (Pegler 2006) through visualizing outfits. This type of merchandise presentations is also popular and appreciated among customers since the presentation facilitates the mix and matching of clothes (Wu et al. 2013). By adopting this, according to customers attractive way of presenting clothes, retailers can thus increase customer satisfaction (Wu et al. 2013).

Over time, customers’ expectations change, and shopping habits evolve (Choo, Yoon 2015) why it is vital for retailers to recognize their expectations and needs in order to be certain that their stores are up-to-date (Baker, Levy & Grewal 1992) and offer an environment that attract and retain the customers (Krishnakumar 2014). However, it is also possible for retailers to vary cues in the store through for instance visual merchandising, and thus alter customers thoughts,

feeling and behaviors (Dhruv et al. 2014) without the consumers conscious awareness (Nordfält, Offesson 2007, Bargh et al. 2001, Spence et al. 2014).

2.2 Theoretical model and hypothesis generation

2.2.1 Theoretical model

In order to study the effects of a gender-neutral presentation of children's clothing in terms of effects on consumers' emotions and attitudes as well as possible intentions, a theoretical model was conducted. The model was created on the basis of literature, particularly upon the S-O-R model developed by Donovan and Rossiter (1982). The hypotheses are generated in accordance with the process of how an in-store stimuli can evoke consumers emotions and attitudes and how they in turn mediate the responses in terms of intentions and consumer behaviors. Moreover, the theoretical model includes the potential moderating variables dogmatism and personal relevance in view of its proven importance and influence on the consumers which can guide, and directly or indirectly moderate, their behavior. Further, the theoretical model includes creativity but also brand interest. This is based on the fact that even though the presentation stimuli are gender-neutral, it is also a case of incongruity. Since it is found in the literature that positive incongruity depends on creativity, in form of perceptions of novelty and unexpectedness, these are prerequisite for increase brand interest, these dimensions were highly important to take into consideration. The theoretical model is illustrated in figure 1.

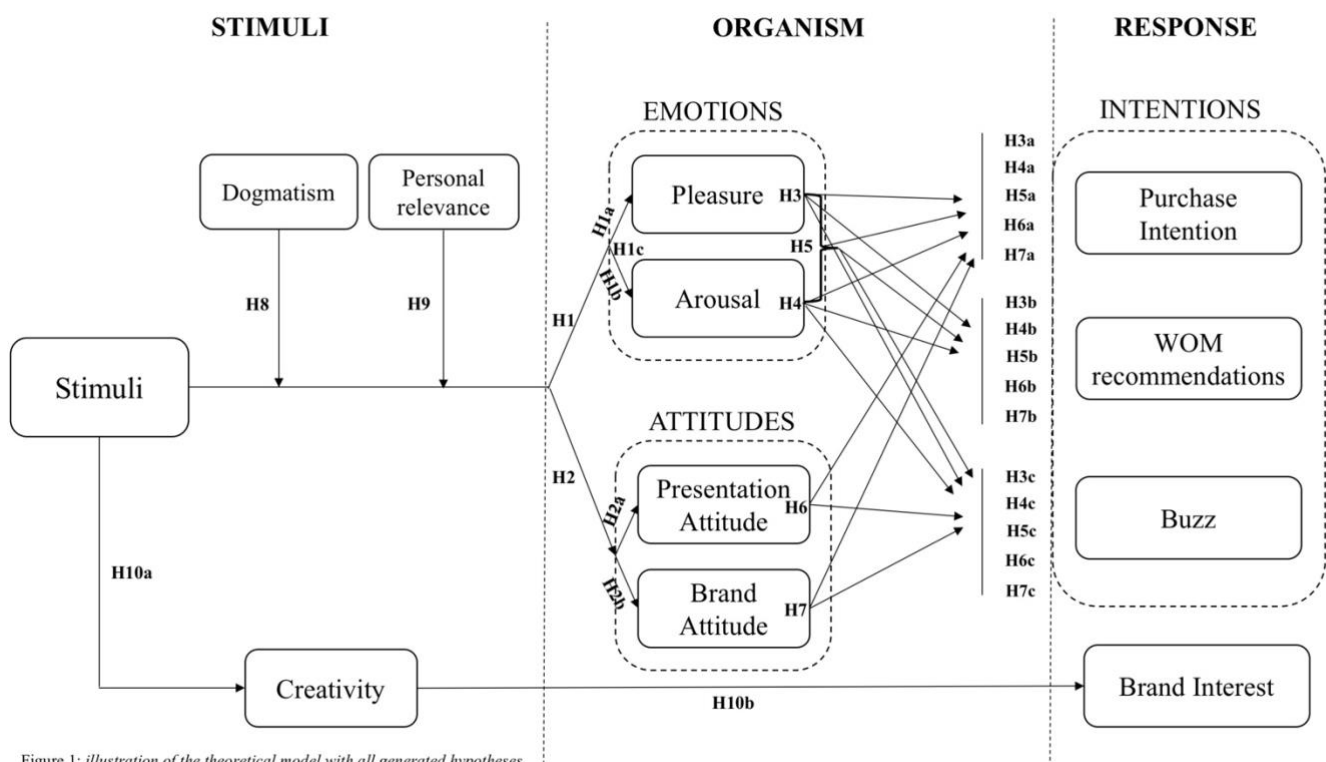


Figure 1: illustration of the theoretical model with all generated hypotheses

2.2.2 Hypothesis generation

2.2.2.1 Stimuli to organism

2.2.2.1.1 Emotions

Research has proven that the physical environment will affect emotional responses that indicate a state of feelings. The state of feelings that occur from an in-store retail stimuli, can be categorized into two dimensions; pleasure and arousal (Mehrabian, Russell 1974). Accordingly, it is interesting to investigate if the stimuli can evoke such feelings, thus leading to the three hypotheses (H1a-c):

H1a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H1b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H1c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

2.2.2.1.2 Attitude

In the same way stimuli can affect consumers emotions, stimuli can affect consumer attitude. Consumer attitudes can be affected by external information and associations, such as a clothing presentation (Law, Wong & Yip 2012). Therefore, leading to the two hypotheses (H2a-b):

H2a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H2b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

2.2.2.2 Stimuli to Organism to Response

2.2.2.2.1 Stimuli-Emotions-Intentions

If the stimuli will evoke positive consumer emotions and attitudes and hence H1-H3 will be supported, it is further interesting to investigate what intentions can be invoked in consumers. Firstly, it is highly relevant for companies to explore if the stimuli can lead to purchase intentions, since those intentions can be connected to behaviors. Further, if consumers feel pleasurable emotions from the incongruent and gender-norms transcendence clothing presentation, it can evoke approach-behaviors in terms of a willingness to recommend the store to friends and family. Based on this are following two hypotheses generated (H3a-b):

H3a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H3b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Due to the highly circulated gender debate of the stereotyped children's clothes stimuli incongruent with the “functional standards” can evoke pleasurable emotions and engaging consumers (Meyers-Levy, Tybout 1989), when resolved. Since the stimuli is incongruent with present norms, rules and beliefs in the society, it may make consumers feel excited around the presentation and feel a desire of involvement (Morrissey 2007), which can create buzz. Therefore, it can be argued that (H3c):

H3c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

According to theory presented in the literature review, the impact of how arousal emotions effect shopping behavior in a retail environment, are various across studies. Therefore, this study aims to investigate if feelings of arousal will evoke an approach behavior in increased purchase intentions and WOM recommendations. Henceforth are following two hypotheses formulated (H4a-b):

H4a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H4b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Further, if the consumers will perceive the environment of the stimuli as “high-loaded” in the arousal dimension, simultaneous as they feel engagement, it can enhance the creation of buzz due to buzz is based on excitement, hence thus leading up to the hypothesis (H4c):

H4c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will generate *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Due to the fact that pleasure and arousal are interacting with each other and evoke behaviors, this study aims to investigate if the two dimensions together, will determining approach-behaviors. Therefore, following three hypotheses are formulated (H5a-c):

H5a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H5b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H5c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

2.2.2.2.2 Stimuli - Attitudes - Intentions

Since it is stated that a positive brand attitude is important for the company's success (Modig, Dahln & Colliander 2014) it is interesting to investigate whether the stimuli will lead to better brand attitude and hence favorable intentions. Furthermore, since attitude towards the presentation affect patronage of products but also the brand (Hefer 2012) is also this point of view interesting to look at. It is stated that brand attitude can be affected by present information (Hoyer, MacInnis 2008) and that incongruent information is proved to lead to changes in attitude (Meyers-Levy, Tybout 1989), why it is reasonable to assume that the incongruent merchandise presentation will lead to higher purchase intention since is directly connected to attitude (Mirabi, Akbariyeh & Tahmasebifard 2015) through both higher attitude towards the presentation as well as the brand. Based on this are following two hypotheses generated (H6a, H7a):

H6a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H7a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Attitude is also connected to informal communication about opinions, information and comments in terms of WOM (Tho, Trang & Olsen 2016). WOM conversations often refers to the brand, why it becomes even more important to generate an experience that incites the consumers and thus a positive WOM (Keller, Berry 2006). To look at whether the incongruent merchandise presentation will lead to more positive WOM recommendations is interesting since consumers' WOM are highly important promoters that attract new customers (Reichheld 2003) that, in turn, spread it further to attract new one. Accordingly, the following two hypotheses are generated (H6b, H7b):

H6b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H7b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

A common response to customers presented for incongruent communication is that they talk about what they have experienced (Törn 2009) and since incongruent information is lead to better evaluations, the way people talk about the experience will be colored by the positive direction of the evaluation. with family and friends in different ways. Therefore, the two following hypotheses are formulated (H6c-H7c):

H6c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H7c: Consumers exposed to a gender- neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

2.2.2.3 Moderators that influence the S-O-R process

If the hypotheses above are accepted, it is highly interesting to investigate if the effects are affected by the moderating variables dogmatism and personal relevance.

2.2.2.3.1 Dogmatism

Trait theory suggests that dogmatism affects how a person behaves (Hoyer, MacInnis & Pieters 2013). As a person with this characteristic has a closed cognitive organization of beliefs that affects what this person considers to be right and wrong as well as true and false (Rokeach 1954, Rokeach 1960), it may be that those who are less dogmatic and therefore more open-minded, are more positive to communication contrary to its' beliefs because the concept of dogmatism is linked to how capable and willing people are to bring in new information (Brown 2012). Since norms and stereotypes present a standard (Brewer 1996) organization of beliefs about how society as a whole means that things *should* be, less dogmatic people should be more open to communication that goes against their past beliefs about what is right and wrong. As

the deteriorated ability of the dogmatic individuals to process new information leads to negative evaluations and reactions to what is perceived as inconsistent (Kleck, Wheaton 1967), less dogmatic persons should interpret new information better, which should in turn lead to better evaluations and responses. Accordingly following hypothesis is generated (H8):

H8: Dogmatism will moderate *the founded positive effects* on emotions and attitudes derived from the gender-neutral presentation

2.2.2.3.2 *Personal relevance*

Personal relevance also affects how people process information and thus how their attitudes are formed (Petty, Cacioppo 1979). Information that is personally relevant to an individual will be resolved more easily in spite of incongruency (Törn 2009), which in turn leads to more positive response, as opposed to a person that consider the communication to be less relevant e.g. (Goodstein 1993). Although norms present the rules and beliefs of the society, there are still people who disagree with the embedded norms and stereotypes and thus do not share the same beliefs, which many times results in openly talking about their disagreement (Pearse, Connell 2016). This is also visible in communities with clear and apparent ideals (Kane 2000). Since the gender debate has become very noticeable and reinforced over the last years, it is reasonable to assume that there are people who oppose the socially constructed and generally accepted truths. Thus, individuals who believe the gender debate is relevant in terms of the gender-divided children's divisions on H & M should also respond more positively to a gender-neutral clothing presentation. Thus, the hypothesis leads as follows (H9):

H9: Personal relevance will moderate *the founded positive effects* on emotions and attitudes derived from the gender-neutral presentation

2.2.2.4 *Incongruity as stimuli*

2.2.2.4.1 *Creativity as a result of incongruity*

Since creativity refers to the divergence from the norm and this kind of novelty is comparable to the how well information fits with existing knowledge, it is reasonable to assume that an incongruent gender-neutral presentation will be perceived as creative. This is further strengthened by the fact that gender related issues may appear meaningful for the consumer, therefore it is it can be assumed that (H10a):

H10a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will perceive the presentation *more creative*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

2.2.2.5 Creativity and brand interest

If the results show support for H10a and thus show that the gender-neutral presentation is perceived as creative stimuli, it can open up for wider opportunities for H&M. As supported in the literature, creativity is especially important for familiar brands due to that consumers establish standards and cognitive associations that can only be disrupted if the brand does something creative and different. This in turn can create interest in the brand since it does not fit with what the consumers expect, and hence can lead to favorable outcomes for the brand. Accordingly, H10b is formulated as follows (H10b):

H10b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will perceive the presentation *more creative*, which in turn will lead to *higher brand interest*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

2.3 Summary of hypotheses

H1a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H1b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H1c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H2a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H2b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H3a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H3b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H3c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H4a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H4b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H4c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will generate *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H5a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H5b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H5c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H6a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H6b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H6c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H7a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H7b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H7c: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H8: Dogmatism will moderate *the founded positive effects* on emotions and attitudes derived from the gender-neutral presentation

H9: Personal relevance will moderate *the founded positive effects* on emotions and attitudes derived from the gender-neutral presentation

H10a: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will perceive the presentation *more creative*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

H10b: Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will perceive the presentation *more creative*, which in turn will lead to *higher brand interest*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

3. METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 focus on explaining the methodology and choices made in order to answer the research questions. Firstly, the chapter begins with a description of the scientific approach in section 3.1. Secondly, section 3.2 presents the preparatory work consisting of three pre-studies that builds the foundation for the main study design. This is followed by section 3.3 that presents the methodology of the thesis main study. Further, in section 3.4 are statistical models used presented. Lastly, the chapter ends with presenting the data quality in section 3.5.

3.1 Scientific approach

Even if the aim of the study was derived from inspiration from the gender debate, a deductive approach was used. Prior research has investigated the chosen bodies of literature in one way or another, why a combination of the bodies allows for an appreciation and elaborate on the possible outcome, with foundation in existing literature. Hence, knowledge was drawn from different bodies of literature and were combined in the theoretical framework which laid the foundation for the hypotheses that were later supported or dismissed (Bryman, Bell 2015). Nevertheless, the approach used was also appropriate in order to develop existing research in the chosen fields. A deductive approach was also more suitable with regards to limitations in time and scope (Dudovskiy 2016). Important to note is also that the authors are fully aware of the fact that there is an increased risk of missing important information when assuming concrete expectations (Jacobsen, Sandin & Hellström 2002) as the approach requires. Also, a deductive approach was also made on intentions of drawing causal relationships about if, and why, people are positively affected by a gender-neutral clothing presentation in the children's department at H&M and this results in favorable outcomes for H&M.

Additionally, the research was also made through quantitative and individualistic approach. Quantitative experiments were used to examine and statistical analyze human responses (Söderlund 2010), with the purpose to demonstrate consumers feelings, attitudes and intentions. This was made through data collection by using self-completion surveys. Since Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that the use of self-completion surveys is somewhat limited when it comes honesty of the respondents, the authors devoted time and effort to design the surveys as reliable and valid as possible.

3.2 Preparatory work

3.2.1 Pre-study 1 - a qualitative discovery of the phenomenon

3.2.1.1 Purpose of the pre-study

Due to the background of the research, little academic research has been conducted in the fields of norms, incongruity and visual merchandising. Therefore, the study uses a pre-study in order to investigate consumer relevance and perceptions of gender-neutral presentations at the kid's department. The purpose of the pre-study 1 was to further explore the authors observations. According to Edmondson & McManus (2007) (Edmondson, McManus 2007) a qualitative

method is preferred when studying a new phenomenon. Further, qualitative study gathers rich data and takes on the participants perspective (Flick 2014) and hence was a qualitative methodology used.

3.2.1.2 Sample and data processing

The data was collected from primary data through 6 in-depth interviews. To find interviewees, participants were targeted directly by asking in the authors' network. The sample consisted of 3 men and 3 females within an average age of 35 years. Among the interviewees, three had own children and three had no children. The interviewees were selected to represent different consumer perspectives of children's clothes. The sample's age group was limited to 18 years old or above. This decision was based on concerns about ethical as well as appropriate reasons. Having a diverse sample increased validity of the analysis (Bryman, Bell 2015).

The interviews were conducted in Swedish through telephone between January 15 and January 17, 2018, with duration of 9-17 minutes, with an average of 13 minutes. All interviews were recorded. Before the interview the authors made a short introduction of themselves but did not mentioned the research topic until after the interview, in order to minimize priming-effects. All interviews were transcribed within 12 hours after being conducted, and then compared to identifying lines of convergence and organizing the information accordance with these patterns (Hood 2007). The results were further compared to the literature review in order to build a base for pre-study 3 and main study.

3.2.1.3 Interview design

The interview design adopted in the data collection was based upon semi-structured interviews hence it is an exploratory study and allows the authors to get an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon (Edmondson, McManus 2007, Saunders 2011, Miles, Huberman 1994). Responsive interviewing was used in the interview design, which allowed open-ended questions (Rubin, Rubin 2011), to generate deep insights into the interviewees' perceptions to make the findings reliable. The responsive interviewing guided the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee, which primarily intended to connect and build trust and hence, get an integrated conversation. Through funneling and an interview guide, the interview started with general questions to develop a discussion and get a full image of the interviewees' perspectives and experiences (Grbich 2012). These were followed by more specific questions that proved better in-depth understanding by forcing the participant into a state of reflection (Saunders 2011). The interview guide is presented in Appendix 1.

Even though the interview design contained responsive interviewing, the authors were fully aware of the risk that it can be difficult for an interviewee in an interview situation to reflect the full experience of the reality and that it could exist incitement to not tell the whole truth (Jacobsen, Sandin & Hellström 2002).

3.2.1.4 Pre-study 1 results

3.2.1.4.1 Gender stereotypes

A clear pattern was detected regarding gender stereotypes in the kid's department. Majority of interviewees mentioned that the clothing stores reinforce the gender roles extremely, which clearly shows by the patterns, design and colors of the clothes. The girl's clothes are bright, pink and "cute", while boy's clothes are dark, dull and "cool". Further, it was mentioned that the boy's department generally have more comfortable, soft basic items.

3.2.1.4.2 Gender-neutral departments

The majority of interviewees had a positive attitude towards a gender-neutral children's department. It was concluded that small children do not have opinions about which department the clothes come from and it is the adult's norms that should be questioned with regards to the fact that children grow up with gender-divided standards. It was stated that girls do not necessarily have to like pink, nor do boys have to like the green color. Children should be free to wear whatever they want, without restrictions created by norms. Children just want to wear comfortable clothes in some specific colors that they like, thus they don't think about which department the clothes are bought from. It was mentioned that for children, the department should not be divided by gender with the argument that "they are too young to be separated between". However, some interviewees doubted a gender-neutral department and stated that it was nothing they had missed. However, a clear pattern occurred among those interviewees. Their indifferent and slightly negatively approach to a gender-neutral kid's department was defended by excuses such as "I am old school", "I am conservative" and "I am old-fashioned".

3.2.2 Pre-study 2 - the familiar retail brand

3.2.2.1 Purpose of the pre-study

The aim for the second pre-study was to identify a company with high brand familiarity in Sweden. Since the study aim to investigate incongruent clothing presentation, familiar brands are best suited (Dahlén et al. 2008) due to consumers existing associations stored in an individual's brand- schema are strong (Petty, Cacioppo 1984), will increase the possibilities that the experiments regarding incongruity will affect individuals existing brand knowledge and hence make the test more robust.

3.2.2.2 Pre-study design

The authors used statistics from Statista (Statista, 2018)² which showed a ranking by turnover, over companies in the clothing and fashion retail industry in Sweden 2015. This was in order to get a guidance with regards company selection of the research. The five highest ranked

² Largest companies. n.d. "Ranking of selected companies in the clothing and fashion retail trade industry in Sweden in 2015, by turnover (in million SEK)", *Statista*. Accessed: 2018-02-28. Available from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/607764/ranking-of-clothing-and-fashion-retail-companies-in-sweden-by-turnover/>.

companies were selected with the requirement of vending children's clothes, due to the aim of the research.

3.2.2.3 Questionnaire design

A survey was conducted using the survey tool Qualtrics (Qualtrics 2018). The survey contained the five selected retail company logos, where each of the logos were followed by one question regarding brand familiarity. One logo was shown per page in order to avoid respondents being affected of the other company logos. The logos were placed in randomized order in order to increase internal validity. Moreover, in order to measure immediate response of the respondents and avoid unanswered questions, the surveys contained forced answers, in order to go to the next one. The respondents could not go back and change the answers. The surveys were designed to be as short as possible to minimize bias and prospect of respondents becoming tired (Söderlund 2010). The surveys took approximately 1 minute to complete.

Brand familiarity was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale with three items, given the question "Regarding (brand), are you?", and the endpoints: "unfamiliar/ familiar", "inexperienced/ experienced" and "not knowledgeable / knowledgeable" (Kent, Allen 1994). The responses to the three items were averaged to form an index, Cronbach's alpha .850, which was accepted. Demographic questions such as gender and age were asked in the very end.

3.2.2.4 Sample

The online survey was sent out to a completed by 35 respondents via Facebook between March 1st- 2nd, hence a convenience sample was practiced (Söderlund 2010, Jacobsen, Sandin & Hellström 2002). Among the respondents, 20 (57,1%) were identified as women and 15 (42.9 %) as men.

3.2.2.5 Pre-study 2 results

Through Independent sample t-tests conducted in SPSS, data showed mean values for five selected companies, as displayed in table 1. Results support H&M as being the most familiar brand ($M_{H\&M} = 6.28$), in comparison to the studied brands.

Table 1: mean values for familiar brands

	M_{Lindex}	M_{Cubus}	$M_{H\&M}$	$M_{Kappahl}$	$M_{Stadium}$
Brand familiarity Index	4.67	4.21	6.28	4.25	5.68
N	35	35	35	35	35
Std. Deviation	1.48	1.60	.73	1.10	.92

3.2.2.6 Operationalization

Pre-study 2 supported H&M as being the company with highest brand familiarity. The study of research will hence be executed at H&M.

3.2.3 Pre-study 3 - is it incongruent?

3.2.3.1 Purpose of the pre-study

A third pre-study was conducted in order to test if gender-neutral clothing presentations in H&M children's department were considered incongruent, compared to gender-divided clothing presentations. Due to the fact that the children's department consists of the sub-departments Baby (size: 68-104, age: 4 months to 3-4 years) and Kids (size: 92-140, age: 1.5-2 years to 9-10 years), the aim of pre-study 3 was to also to investigate whether there were differences in incongruity between the two sub-departments. The choice to examine children's clothing presentations was drawn from the qualitative study in pre-study 1. H&M was chosen as the specific company to perform the experiment, as drawn from pre-study 2.

3.2.3.2 Pre-study design

Four quantitative studies were conducted using the survey tool Qualtrics (Qualtrics 2018). Each study contained one control group and one treatment group, see figure 2 below. In order to make the experiment as authentic as possible, baby and children's clothes from H&M Sweden online shop were carefully selected and manipulated to eight different stimuli used in the pre-study. Study 1 and study 2 each contained one stimuli of one gender-divided presentation (control group) and one manipulated stimuli of a gender-neutral presentation (treatment group) *for the sub-department baby*. Study 3 and 4 contained stimuli of gender-divided presentations (control group) and manipulated stimuli of gender-neutral presentations (treatment group) *for children*.

As described in the literature review, clothing presentations can be presented in several different ways, hence the tests were divided up on two different layout structures in order to avoid potential unintended effects that could occur from the layout. In a non-structured layout were the clothes organized randomly, while in a structured layout were the clothes organized through complement-based organization. The pre-study design is illustrated in figure 2.

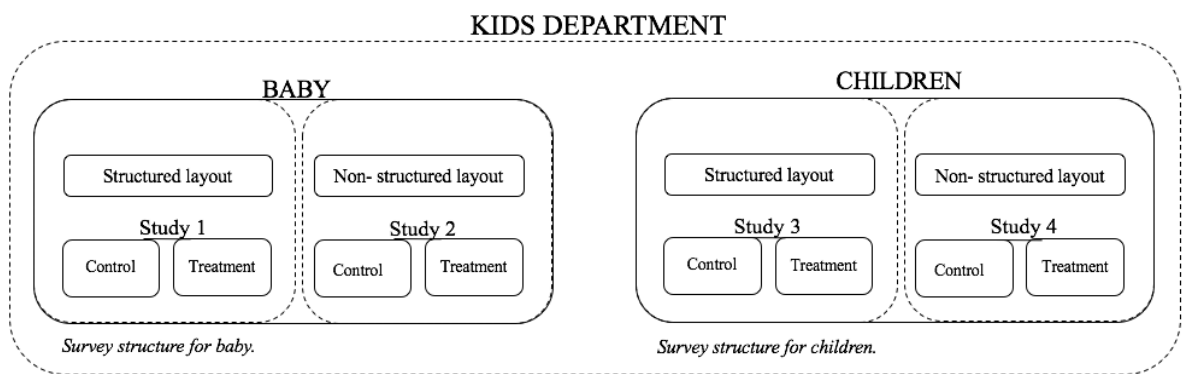


Figure 2: illustration of the pre-study design for pre-study 3

3.2.3.4 Questionnaire design

The respondents were exposed to the given stimuli, in the very beginning of the questionnaire, followed by one questions regarding incongruity of the stimuli. All respondents, in both control group and treatment group were given the same questionnaire. Incongruity was measured on a seven-point four items, semantic differential scale with the question “How do you perceive the merchandise presentation?”, with the endpoints “expected/ unexpected”, “routine / fresh”, “ordinary/ unique” (Ang, Low 2000), “predicted/ surprising” (Alden, Mukherjee & Hoyer 2000). The responses to the four items were averaged to form an index, Cronbach’s alpha = .832.

The surveys were made in Swedish and technical language was removed to a larger extent, in order for respondents to understand and be more relaxed in the survey situation, which can provide better quality in the answers (Söderlund 2005, Ittner, Larcker 2003).

The stimuli were only shown once in the very beginning of the questionnaire and not on every page, due to measure immediate intuition of the respondents. Moreover, the survey contained forced answers, which means that the respondents were forced to answer the questions, in order to go complete the survey. The respondents could not go back and change the responses. The survey took approximately 1 minute to complete.

3.2.3.5 Manipulation control

Before investigating the results from the pre-study 3, a manipulation check was conducted in order to ensure that the respondents perceived the stimuli as intendent. In order to ensure correct perception, a question regarding observed clothing presentation was included in the very end of the survey. The question to determine if the stimuli was correctly observed it was asked; “The picture (s) (I saw earlier) was/were...” with the optional answers: “girls’ clothes”, “boys’ clothes” “girls’ and boys’ clothes” and “don’t know”. All respondents had been exposed for both girls’ and boys’ clothes.

3.2.3.6. Data quality control

For all the four studies combined, 275 surveys were filled out. However, in order to ensure high quality results, data cleaning was conducted (Malhotra 1999). Surveys that were uncompleted or where respondents had failed perceived the stimuli as intendent were removed from the sample (Bryman and Bell 2015). Moreover, the eight groups did not contain the exact same number of respondents, which, however, is stated as valid in accordance with Söderlund (2010).

After manipulation control and data cleaning, the final sample used in the main study were 245 respondents, which reach a response rate of 89%, as displayed in table 2.

Table 2: results from the data quality control in pre-study 3

	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3		Study 4		Total
	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment	
Initial sample	33	33	36	31	33	38	30	41	275
Numbers removed due failing perceived the stimuli as intendent	3	2	4	0	2	8	0	11	
Final sample	30	31	32	31	31	30	30	30	245
Response rate									89%

3.2.3.7 Sample

The surveys were collected through Ipad at the Central Station in Stockholm between 7th- 8th and 12th- 14th of February 2018. Among the respondents, 93 (38%) were men and 152 women (62%), within the age range of 18-74 with an average age of 36 years. In order to increase the internal validity, respondents were randomly assigned to either the control groups, or treatment groups (Söderlund 2010) and randomly selected with the selection type of volunteers (Dipboye, Flanagan 1979, Schultz 1969). The sample was limited to 18 years old, or above due to ethical as well as appropriate reasons.

3.2.3.8 Pre-study 3 results

The incongruity index was tested in IBM SPSS Statistics version 25, using Independent Sample T-test and One-way ANOVA, in order to examine the differences in mean values. As displayed in table 3, there were no significant differences in mean value between the control groups and treatment groups with baby clothes, independent of the clothing presentation. On the other hand, as displayed in table 4, data confirmed that the treatment group considered the children's clothes significantly more incongruent, compared to the control group. This was however only supported with a structured clothing layout ($M_{\text{control}} = 6.03$ and $M_{\text{treatment}} = 4.55$).

Accordantly, data confirms that the clothing layout, in terms of structured and non-structured layout, do have an effect on perceived incongruity between gender-divided (control) and gender-neutral (treatment) presentations.

Table 3: mean values of perceived incongruity between gender-divided (control) and gender-neutral (treatment) presentations in baby clothing

BABY		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p
Structured clothing presentations	Gender-divided	30	5.69	1.18	.145
	Gender-neutral	31	4.68	1.32	.145
Non-Structured clothing presentations	Gender-divided	32	5.67	1.07	.921
	Gender-neutral	31	5.18	1.33	.921

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$ *** Significant at $p < .001$

Table 4: mean values of perceived incongruity between gender-divided (control) and gender-neutral (treatment) presentations in children's clothing

CHILDREN		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p
Structured clothing presentations	Gender-divided	31	6.03	0.91	.001***
	Gender-neutral	30	4.55	1.38	.001***
Non-Structured clothing presentations	Gender-divided	30	5.98	0.86	.593
	Gender-neutral	30	5.31	1.35	.593

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

3.2.3.9 Operationalization

The pre-study supported study 3, which is displayed in figure 3. with a structured layout of children's clothes, is a gender-neutral clothing presentation considered as incongruent, compared to gender-divided clothing presentation. Accordantly, the supported incongruent presentation of children's clothes will be used in the main study.

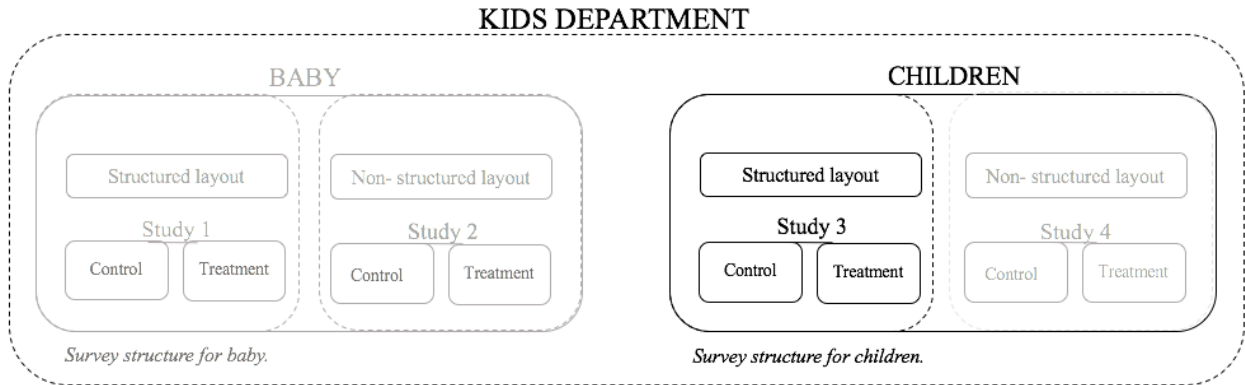


Figure 3: illustration of the final result from pre-study 3

3.3 Main study

3.3.1 Experimental design

The experiment of the main study was based upon a role-play experiment, where respondents got a description of the given scenario of imagine being in the children's department at H&M and act like it was reality (Söderlund 2010). The experiment setting was based on photos taken by the authors from an H&M store at Drottninggatan, Stockholm. The photos used in the study were based upon H&M children's department that today is divided by gender. The photo of the gender-divided department required the authors to manipulate a part of the children's department at H&M, which resulted in an extensive dialogue with H&M but ended up with an agreement.

Before the authors manipulated a part of the children's department to gender-neutral, photos of the normal state were taken. Hence, in order to take a photo of the normal state, it was important to find identical wall systems (a wall system is how the clothes are exposed on the wall) for the boys' and girls' departments in order to isolate that the effects come indeed from the clothing, and no other unintended effects. Yet, due to the findings in pre-study 3, it was required that the wall systems clothing was structured (complement-based organization) in order to find incongruent effects. Two identical wall systems with complement-based organizations were placed in "A-surfaces" which includes "hot-spots" where new merchandise is placed. This meant that clothing used in the study could be considered as highly up to date, and most representative of the departments. The boys wall system had a blue sign over it written "Boy size 92-140" while the girls wall system had a pink sign written "Girl size 92-140". Photos of the two selected wall systems, divided by gender, were taken. Hence, the photos of the gender-divided departments was taken. The photos can be found in Appendix 2.

Afterwards, with help from a Visual Merchandiser at H&M, clothes from the boys' wall system were mixed in the girls' wall system in order to create a gender-neutral presentation with identical conditions as the gender-divided ones. Moreover, a yellow sign was placed over the gender-neutral wall system saying, "Children size 92-140". A photo was taken of the manipulated, gender-neutral, wall system. Hence, the photo of the gender-neutral department was taken. The photo can be found in Appendix 2.

This experiment design enabled measurements and evaluations of real differences between the two groups (Söderlund 2010). Moreover, since the study was based upon role-play experiment where the setting was manipulated through photos and conducted through a survey, made it possible to control the experiment. The design of the experiment made it further possible to control that everything in between the two groups were kept consistent and it was only the independent variable (gender-neutral) that was different.

3.3.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaires were conducted using the survey tool Qualtrics (Qualtrics 2018). Both respondents in the control group and treatment group were given the same self-reporting questionnaires (Söderlund 2010). The congruent or incongruent stimuli were shown only once in beginning of the questionnaire and not on every page in order to capture the initial reaction and emotional intuition. To avoid respondents, get affected by the stimuli, question regarding dogmatism were placed first, before stimuli picture. After stimuli were shown, questions regarding emotions, attitude, brand interest, innovation and incongruity was asked. These were followed by questions concerning intentions and personal relevance. The manipulation control check was asked in the end of the questionnaire in order to avoid a revelation of the study (Söderlund 2010). Demographic questions such as gender and age were put in the end of the questionnaire due these questions otherwise can affect the answers (Bradburn, Sudman & Wansink 2004). Majority of all questions contained of multi-item scales due to the benefits in predictive validity (Diamantopoulos et al. 2012), the single-item measures were carefully selected and so could be as valid as multi-item measures (Bergkvist, Rossiter 2009).

In order to measure immediate response of the respondents and avoid unanswered questions, the surveys contained forced answers, which means that the respondents were forced to answer all questions in one page, in order to go to the next one. Further, the respondents could not go back and change the answers.

The surveys were designed with a vernacular, Swedish language and defined the term “clothing presentation”, to make it easier for the respondents to understand and hence make the answers meaningful (Söderlund 2005). It further entailed the respondent to be more relaxed in the survey situation, which can provide better quality in the answers (Ittner, Larcker 2003). The surveys were designed to be as short as possible to minimize bias and prospect of respondents becoming tired (Söderlund 2010). The surveys took approximately five minutes to complete. The main study questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.

3.3.3 Manipulation check

It was vital to the study that respondents perceived the independent variables correctly. In order to ensure correct perception, a question regarding department observation was included in the end of the survey. The question to determine if the stimuli was correctly observed it was asked; “The picture (s) (I saw earlier) was/were...” with the optional answers: “girl's clothes”, “boy's clothes” “girl's and boy's clothes” and “don't know”. Since the studies aims to observe how the independent variables were perceived, respondents who observed the stimuli incorrectly were excluded from the sample. All respondents had been exposed for both girl's and boy's clothes.

3.3.4 Dependent variables

Pleasure

Pleasure was measured with four items on a seven-point semantic differential scale with the question “Please describe your overall feelings of the clothing presentation after seeing the picture”. The four items were: “unhappy/happy”, “annoyed/pleased”, “melancholic/contented” and “despairing/hopeful” (Donovan et al. 1994). The index was accepted with a Cronbach's Alpha of .939.

Arousal

Arousal was measure using two items on a seven-point semantic differential scale with the question “Please describe your overall feelings of the clothing presentation after seeing the picture”, with following items: “relaxed/stimulated” and “calm/excited” (Donovan et al. 1994), with an accepted Cronbach's Alpha of .717.

Presentation Attitude

To understand how respondents perceived the clothing presentation, attitude towards the clothing presentation was measured using three items, seven-point semantic differential scale, with the question “Please describe your overall attitude of the clothing presentation after seeing the picture?”. The four items were: “bad/good”, “negative/positive” and “dislike/like” (Bruner 2009, Spears, Singh 2004). The index was accepted with a Cronbach's Alpha of .966.

Brand Attitude

Brand attitude was measured with a three item, seven-point semantic differential scale. The question was formulated “Please describe your overall attitude of H&M after seeing the picture?”, with following items: “bad/good”, “negative/positive” and “dislike/like” (Bruner 2009, Spears, Singh 2004), with an accepted Cronbach’s Alpha of .985.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention was measured through one item, seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “not likely at all” (1) to “very likely” (7). The question used was “Imagine that you are going to purchase a children’s garment. How likely are you to purchase the product from H&M?” adopted by Törn (2009).

WOM

To measure WOM intention, one item, seven-point semantic differential scale was developed using the question “How likely are you to recommend H&M to a friend?” with the item “not likely at all/ very likely” (Wright, Jayawardhena & Dennis 2008).

Buzz

The measure of buzz was developed from Törn (2009), with one item, seven-point semantic differential scale using the question “How likely are you to tell a friend about H&M’s clothing presentation?”. The item was formulated as “not likely at all/ very likely”.

Dogmatism

To measure dogmatism three item, seven-point semantic differential scale was used with the question “Assess to what degree you agree to following statements”. The three items were: “There are so many things we have not discovered yet, nobody should be absolutely certain his beliefs are right (R) “, “Twenty years from now, some of my opinions about the important things in life will probably have changed (R) “and “Someday I will probably realize my present ideas about the BIG issues are wrong (R) “(Altemeyer 2002).The index had a Cronbach’s Alpha of .649, which is <.7. An exception was made and thus the index was accepted, even though it can be questioned.

Personal Relevance

Personal relevance was measured through a three item seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “totally disagree” (1) to “totally agree” (7). The question was formulated as “Gender related issues are...”, with following items “important to me”, “meaningful to me” and “worth remembering” (Wells, Leavitt & McConville 1971). The index was accepted with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .961.

Incongruity

Incongruity was measured on a seven-point four items, semantic differential scale with the question “How do you perceive the merchandise presentation?”, with items: “expected/ unexpected”, “ordinary/ unique” (Ang, Low 2000) and “predicted/ surprising” (Alden, Mukherjee & Hoyer 2000). The index was accepted with a Cronbach’s alpha of .921.

Creativity

Creativity was measured by a four item, seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “totally disagree” (1) to “totally agree” (7). The question was formulated: “Please assess to what degree you experience the clothing presentation as...” with following items: “creative”, “innovative”, “imaginative” (Heath, DelVecchio & McCarthy 2011) and “new thinking”. The fourth item was added by the authors due to its fit for the study. The index reached a Cronbach’s Alpha of .964 which was accepted.

Brand Interest

Brand interest was measured on three items, seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “totally disagree” (1) to “totally agree” (7), with the question “Please assess to what degree you agree with following statements”. The items were: “I would like to know more about H&M”, “The clothing presentation made H&M interesting to me” and “The clothing presentation made me want to learn more about H&M” (Machleit, Allen & Madden 1993). The average index of brand interest had a Cronbach’s Alpha of .877 which was accepted.

3.3.5 Pilot test

After the main study survey design was completed, a pilot-test was conducted in order to identify potential errors that may have negative impact on the study. The pilot test objective was to ensure high quality of the survey and increase the internal reliability and validity of the main study (Bryman, Bell 2015). Moreover, ensured the pilot test the feasibility, clarity of scales (Saunders, Lewis 2009) as well as if questions would operate as intended in the given context (Bryman, Bell 2015).

Through the online survey tool Qualtrics (Qualtrics 2018), the pilot test was conducted and carried out to business students that were asked to conduct the test and give feedback afterwards. A convenience sample was hence used (Söderlund 2010). The pilot test sample consisted of 16 respondents in total, which was within the span of the sample size a pilot test should have (Hill 1998). Feedback was verbally collected from the respondents, which resulted in adding an explanation of the “clothing presentation” meaning as well as correcting language. All indexes from the multiple-item questions (except from dogmatism) had a Cronbach’s Alpha $\geq .7$, which was an acceptable level (Kline 2013), see Appendix 4. For clarity was only the final survey presented in section 3.2.2.3 Questionnaire design.

3.3.6 Sampling and data collection

In a large extent, the sampling process and data collection consists of establishing the setting of research conducted and choice of respondents (Bryman, Bell 2015).

The surveys were collected through an iPad at Stockholm Central Station and Vasaparken in Stockholm between 17th and 22th of April 2018. The places were carefully selected due to its high turnover of diverse people. In order to increase the internal validity, respondents were randomly assigned to either the control group, or treatment group (Söderlund 2010) and randomly selected with the selection type of volunteers (Dipboye, Flanagan 1979, Schultz 1969). Through random assignment, group- dependent effects could be minimized to ensured

that the observed effects occur from the treatment. Moreover, could selection bias be removed through random assignment (Cook, Campbell & Shadish 2002). The sample was limited to 18 years old, or above due to ethical as well as appropriate reasons.

3.3.7 Data quality control

The data of the main study contained in total of 245 surveys that were filled out. However, in order to ensure high quality results, data cleaning was executed (Malhotra 1999). Surveys' respondents failed the manipulation control check, were deleted from the sample (Bryman, Bell 2015). As displayed in table 5, 44 (18%) respondents were removed from the sample due to failing perceived stimuli as intendent. One reasonable assumption for this to happen could be that respondents had rushed too fast throughout the survey and hence not carefully looked at the stimuli. Another assumption that respondents failing perceived stimuli as intendent could be that the respondents could only study the stimuli once in the survey. However, it was conscious from the authors in order to capture the initial reaction and emotional intuition of the respondents.

Even if respondents were removed from the sample, the statistical test from the surveys could still be motivated due to the high number of respondents in each survey (Söderlund 2010). Moreover, the two groups did not contain the exact same number of respondents; however, it is considered as valid according to Söderlund (2010).

Table 5: data quality control for the main study

Initial sample	245
Numbers removed due failing perceived the stimuli as intendent	44
Final sample	201
Response rate	82%

After manipulation control and data cleaning, the final sample used in the main study were 201 respondents, which reach a response rate of 82%, as displayed in table 5 above.

3.3.8 Sample demography

The respondent's demographic data, after the data quality control, for each group of the main study is presented in table 6 and 7 below. It can be concluded that the gender distribution between the groups are rather even. Additionally, the average age and age range between gender of the total sample are close to similar. Overall, the demographic distribution between the groups are relatively similar.

Table 6: number of respondents and gender distribution between the control group and treatment group

	Control <small>Gender- divided</small>	Treatment <small>Gender-neutral</small>
Female	59 (58,4%)	55 (55%)
Male	41 (40,6)	45 (45%)
Other	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Total number of respondents	101	100

Table 7: average age and age range of the total sample, divided on gender

	Female	Male	Total sample
Average age	32.7	34.6	33.8
Age range	18-68	22-74	18-74

3.4 Statistical methods

In order to conduct the analysis of the data from the main study, IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 was used. Hypothesis were accepted at a 95% level of significance (Fisher 1992). In the presentation of the results, the significant levels will be presented as

* Significant at $p < .05$, **Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$.

The following statistical tools were used through SPSS:

- Cronbach's Alpha
- One Sample T-test
- Independent Samples T-test
- Bivariate Linear Regression Analysis
- Hayes' Process Tool

3.5 Data quality

3.5.1 Reliability and validity

A critical part when conducting research is to examine in which degree insights provides an accurate description of the reality and measure what was intended (Bryman, Bell 2015). Two essential criteria's that helps to evaluate quantitative research data quality are reliability and validity that hence are assessed and evaluated.

3.5.1.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the measurements and whether the results in a study are repeatable or not in future similar studies (Bryman, Bell 2015). There are several ways to measure reliability; through internal validity, stability over time or inter-observer consistency (Bryman, Bell 2015). This study was only conducted one's due to time constraints, which lowers the stability of the study. However, to ensure reliability, several pre-studies were used. (Bryman, Bell 2015). The pilot test moreover ensured a clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire, while the manipulation checks ensured that the stimuli was perceived as intended, which minimize risks of bias in the findings. Majority of all respondents were random people at public places, which can be considered as a non-probability/convenience sample. Therefore, the sample could be considered as reliable for a wider population. Moreover, by not giving respondents information prior conduction of the survey, the reliability could be controlled hence it minimized priming-effects. Lastly, the reliability of the data was also controlled by created indexes from the multiple-item variables showed a Cronbach's Alpha above .7, which shows high internal consistency and hence increased the reliability of the research study (Bryman, Bell 2015, Bearden, Netemeyer 1999). Thus, the reliability of this study can be considered as satisfactory.

3.5.1.2 Validity

In addition to reliability, which is dependent on the correct data collection and data registration, the results are also dependent on the validity and the relevance of data i.e. that data actually measure what was intended to be measured (Söderlund 2005, Andersen 1998).

3.5.1.2.1 Measurement validity

Measurement validity is relevant to consider due to this study contain quantitative studies. Measurement validity concerns whether used measurements reflect the reality (Bryman, Bell 2015). As mentioned above did the questionnaire contain multiple-item variables and were taken from previous established studies within the area in order to reduce risks for possible misinterpretations in the results and enhance future comparability studies. However, was "new thinking" added as a fourth item to measure creativity due to its fit to the studied research context. Also, the item increased the Cronbach's Alpha from .951 to .963.

3.5.1.2.2 Internal validity

Internal validity concerns the experiments' accuracy and to what degree it can be ensured that it is the treatment that indeed explains the participants reactions (Söderlund 2010). Internal

validity regards for example whether there are control groups and the design of the experiments. Several internal validity threats were removed through randomly assigned respondents to either the control group or treatment group (Söderlund 2010). Moreover, to reduce threats of internal validity, the survey design was made carefully where all questions in the conducted surveys were referred to previous studies and presented order was considered to avoid answers being affected by previous questions (Söderlund 2005). Also, a manipulation check was added.

3.5.1.2.3 External validity

External validity refers to the degree the results can be generalizable, both from a sample to a population and from a specific case to a more general theory (Svenning 2003). The issue for external validity in quantitative research is argued being a robust reflection of the reality (Alvesson, Sköldberg 1994). It is further claimed that respondents interpret or misunderstand questions in a quantitative research (Bryman, Bell 2015). However, the sample used in this study can be argued being heterogeneous due to the randomized collection of volunteers at public places such as Stockholm Central Station with high turnover of diverse people, and Vasaparken in Stockholm, which can make it easier to generalize the results to a wider population of consumers and hence strengthen the external validity. At the same time, the generalizability can be limited geographically to Sweden, due to Swedish respondents were targeted. Moreover, since the survey was pre-tested, it ensured the external validity (Eliasson 2010). Overall the external validity of this study is considered as satisfactory.

3.5.2 Ecological validity

Ecological validity concerns whether the findings are applicable and generalizable to settings in which the studied phenomenon naturally occur (Bryman, Bell 2015). The stimuli in the main study experiment were constructed in a physical H&M store where a section of the children's department was re-hanged and transformed into a gender-neutral department, while the gender-divided department was kept unmanipulated. Due to the fact that the gender-neutral department was manipulated, it was not taken from real life and hence artificial, which has limited the ecological validity of the study. Moreover, the approach of the experiment was to ask respondents to think that they went to the children department of H&M and afterwards rate a picture showing how clothes are presented. The fact that the experiment was not treated in the real environment (in this case a physical H&M store) where participants naturally are located in, and that participants were not unconscious of being part of the experiment, has limited the ecological validity. Nevertheless, due to various limitations and restrictions from H&M, a real in-store experiment was not possible, even if the authors tried hardly.

However, the overall credibility of stimuli in terms of real environment atmosphere as well as clothing could be argued to strengthen the stimuli authenticity and hence the ecological validity. Based upon the evaluation, the degree of the ecological validity of this study is considered as satisfactory.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following chapter presents the results as well as analysis of the statistical testing of the hypotheses. Firstly, in section 4.1, findings will be presented by supporting or non-supporting the hypotheses. Secondly, section 4.2 presents a further analysis of the main study. The chapter ends with a summary of the results, which is presented in section 4.3.

4.1 Results of main study

4.1.1 Emotional response to the gender-neutral presentation

In order to see whether consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate in higher *pleasure* than a gender-divided presentation, an Independent Samples T-Test was carried out. The test was used to measure the mean differences between the two conditions *gender-neutral presentation* and *gender-divided presentation*. The test was made on the created pleasure index. The results showed a statistically significant mean difference index for the pleasure index ($M_{\text{treatment}} = 4.70 > M_{\text{control}} = 4.03$ $p = 0.001$), see table 8. Thus, **H1a has empirical support.**

Table 8: mean difference between control group and treatment group in Pleasure

	M_{Control}	Std. Deviation	$M_{\text{Treatment}}$	Std. Deviation	p
Pleasure Index	4.03	1.49	4.70	1.29	.001***

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

✓ **H1a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Furthermore, similar to the examination of H1a, an Independent Samples T-test was used to measure mean differences in respondents' *arousal* response between the two conditions *gender-neutral presentation* and *gender-divided presentation*. The test was made on the created pleasure index. The results showed a statistically significant mean difference index for the pleasure index ($M_{\text{treatment}} = 3.76 > M_{\text{control}} = 3.54$ $p = 0.214$). Thus, **H1b lacks empirical support.**

Table 9: mean difference between control group and treatment group in Arousal

	M_{Control}	Std. Deviation	M_{Treatment}	Std. Deviation	p
Arousal Index	3.54	1.29	3.76	1.16	.214

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

× **H1b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Since the above hypothesis, H1b, had to be rejected due to lack of significance, hypothesis H1c is also rejected. This is based on the fact that this hypothesis also contains arousal which was demonstrated to have no significant effect. Therefore, **H1c cannot be supported.**

× **H1c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

4.1.2 Attitudinal response to the gender-neutral presentation

When measuring *presentation attitude*, again an Independent Samples T-test was performed to analyze if there are differences between *gender-neutral presentation* and *gender-divided presentation*. The results demonstrated the mean value for the gender-neutral presentation ($M_{\text{treatment}} = 4.69$) was significantly ($p = 0.000$) higher than the mean value for the gender-divided presentation ($M_{\text{control}} = 3.50$). Thus, **H2a is supported.**

Table 10: mean difference between control group and treatment group in presentation attitude

	M_{Control}	Std. Deviation	M_{Treatment}	Std. Deviation	p
Presentation Attitude Index	3.50	1.64	4.69	1.47	.001***

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

✓ **H2a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

When testing H2b, the execution followed the same process, an Independent Samples T-test was used to examine mean differences in *brand attitude* between the two conditions *gender-neutral presentation* and *gender-divided presentation*, see table 11. The results show a statistically significant higher mean value for respondents presented with a gender-neutral presentation ($M_{\text{treatment}} = 4.49$, $M_{\text{control}} = 4.03$, $p = 0.030$). Hence, **hypothesis 2b can be supported.**

Table 11: mean difference between control group and treatment group in brand attitude

	M_{Control}	Std. Deviation	$M_{\text{Treatment}}$	Std. Deviation	P
Brand Attitude Index	4.03	1.60	4.49	1.38	.030*

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$ *** Significant at $p < .001$

✓ **H2b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

4.1.3 Presentation - Pleasure - Intentions

In order to examine whether *Pleasure* serve a mediating variable between the independent variable *Condition* and the dependent variables *Purchase intention*, *WOM recommendation* and *Buzz*, mediation analyses were conducted through the use of Hayes' Process Tool (Hayes, 2016) for SPSS by utilization of Model 4. In accordance with Preacher and Hayes (2008) "bootstap" tests were done instead of Sobel z-test (Baron and Kenny, 1986) with the purpose to gain better representation of the data since bootstrapping of is found to almost always be more powerful. The number of bootstraps were set to 5000. Further, the level of confidence for all intervals was set to 95%. In order to understand, interpret and present the results, the decision tree developed by Zhao, Lynch & Chen (2010) was used. A visualization of the decision tree can be found in Appendix 5.

The first tested hypotheses show that the mediator *Pleasure* has significant and positive *indirect effect* in on *Purchase intention* ($a \times b = .34$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.144 to .597). However, there was no significant *direct effect* of c, the independent variable *Condition* on the dependent variable *Purchase intention* ($-.30$; $p = .184$). Hence, there is an indirect-only mediation. This confirms the S-O-R-model and indicates that in order to obtain effect on purchase intention (R) there must be a mediating variable (O) as highlighted in the theory. Thus, to get effect in purchase intention the condition needs to be mediated, in this case, by pleasure. **H3a is supported.**

Table 12: Mediation of Pleasure on Purchase Intention, WOM recommendations and Buzz

Path	β	p	95% Conf. Interval	
			LLCI	ULCI
Purchase Intention				
a	.67	.001***	.279	1.052
b	.51	.001***	.348	.665
c	<i>Direct effect</i>	.184	-.775	.146
a*b	<i>Indirect Effect</i>	.34	.144	.597
WOM recommendations				
a	.67	.001***	.279	1.052
b	.62	.001***	.446	.789
c	<i>Direct effect</i>	.063	-.851	.025
a*b	<i>Indirect Effect</i>	.41	.187	.693
Buzz				
a	.67	.001***	.279	1.052
b	.31	.002**	.121	.507
c	<i>Direct effect</i>	.355	-.808	.291
a*b	<i>Indirect Effect</i>	.21	.062	.433

n=201

X (independent): Condition

M (mediating): Pleasure

Bootstrap 5000

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

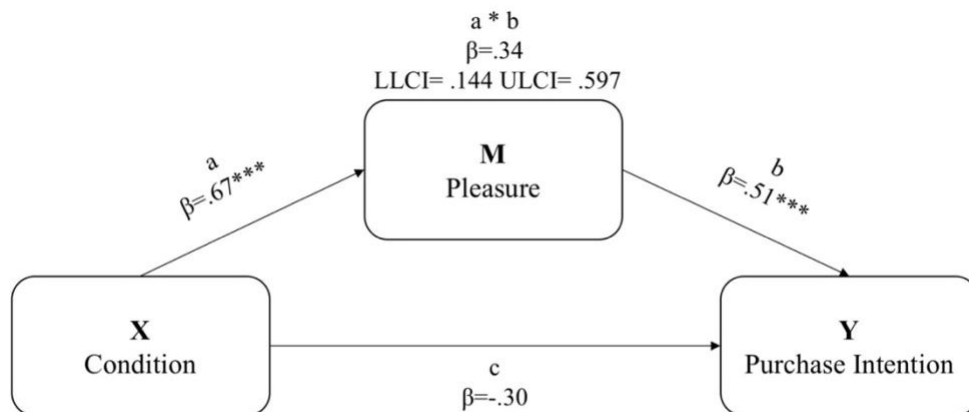


Figure 4: illustration of the mediation of Pleasure on Purchase intention from table 12

✓ **H3a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Just as in the first test, this also show that the mediator *Pleasure* has a significant and positive *indirect effect* in the relationship between the independent variable *Condition* and the dependent *WOM Recommendation* ($a \times b = .41$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.187 to .693). Here, again, there was no significant direct effect of dependent variable *Condition* on independent variable *WOM Recommendation* ($c = -.46, p = .063$). Thus, there is an indirect-only mediation. Therefore, **H3b is supported.**

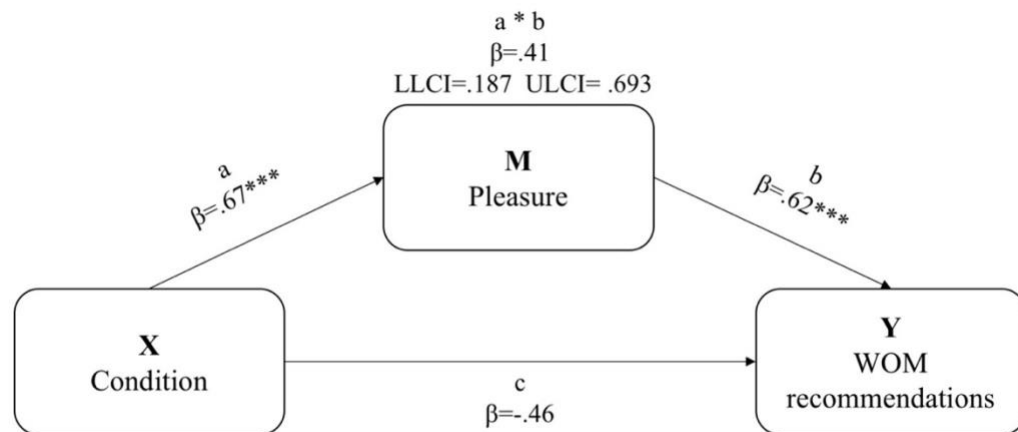


Figure 5: illustration of the mediation of *Pleasure* on *WOM recommendations* from table 12

✓ **H3b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Lastly, it was showed that the mediator *Pleasure* has a significant and positive indirect effect on the dependent variable *Buzz* ($a \times b = .21$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.062; to .433). There was no significant direct effect of the independent variable *Condition* on the dependent variable *Buzz* ($c = -.26; p = .355$) and therefore an indirect-only mediation. Hence, **H3c can be supported.**

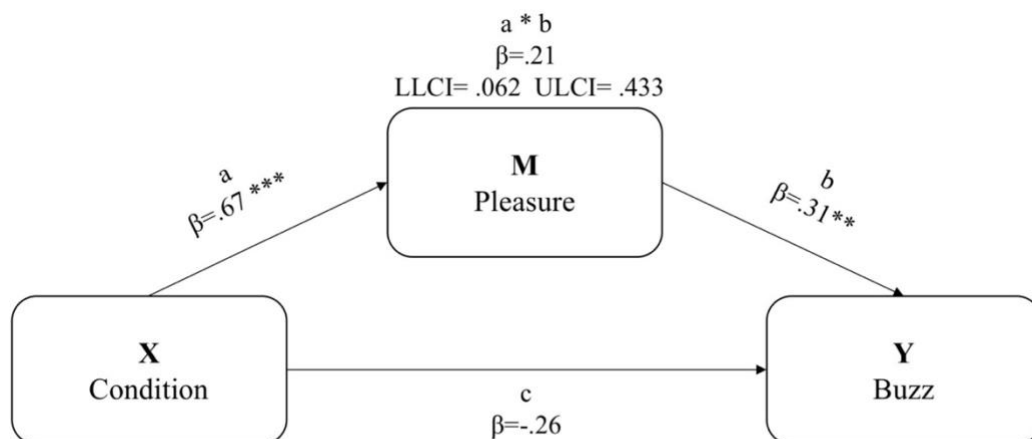


Figure 6: illustration of the mediation of *Pleasure* on *Buzz* from table 12

✓ **H3c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

4.1.3 Presentation - Pleasure - Arousal - Intentions

Since prior results indicated that arousal was not affected by the stimuli, there were **no empirical support for H4a, H4b, and H4c**.

However, it is founded in the literature that pleasure and arousal can interact, why it is interesting to investigate whether the two variables together mediate the outcome of the dependent variables *Purchase intention*, *WOM recommendation* and *Buzz*. The independent variable is still *Condition*. To make this analysis possible, three mediation analyses were conducted through the use of Hayes' Process Tool (Hayes, 2016) for SPSS by utilization of Model 6. Apart from the change of model number from 4 to 6 in Hayes' Process Tool, all other settings were equal to the ones in H3.

To begin with, it was tested if the independent variable *Condition* had any indirect effects through the two mediators $M_1 = \text{Pleasure}$ and $M_2 = \text{Arousal}$ on the dependent variable *Purchase intention*. That is, if pleasure and arousal served as mediators.

Table 13: Mediation of Pleasure and Arousal on Purchase Intention

Path		β	p	95% Conf. Interval	
Purchase Intention				LLCI	ULCI
a1		.66	.001***	.279	1.05
a2		.02	.898	-.310	.353
b1		.49	.001***	.324	.660
b2		.05	.600	-.140	.242
c	<i>Direct effect</i>	-.31	.183	-.757	.146
d		.29	.001***	.174	.408
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Indirect effect 1</i>	.33		.128	.569
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Indirect effect 2</i>	.01		-.024	.062
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Direct effect 3</i>	.00		-.029	.055

n=201

X: Condition

M_1 : Pleasure

M_2 : Arousal

Y: Purchase intention

Bootstrap 5000

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

The result above revealed that there was no indirect effect on the dependent variable *Purchase intention* through *Pleasure* and *Arousal* together, which is seen in *indirect effect 2* in table 13. The only indirect effect was *indirect effect 1* (.327) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.129 to .569) which demonstrates an indirect effect on *Purchase intention* through only $M_1 = \text{Pleasure}$. Thus, **H5a is not supported**.

× **H5a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Secondly, it was analyzed whether the independent variable *Condition* had any indirect effects through the two mediators $M_1 = \text{Pleasure}$ and $M_2 = \text{Arousal}$ on the dependent variable *WOM recommendation*. That is, if pleasure and arousal served as mediators.

Table 14: Mediation of Pleasure and Arousal on WOM recommendations

Path		β	<i>p</i>	95% Conf. Interval	
WOM recommendations				LLCI	ULCI
a1		.67	.001***	.279	1.052
a2		.022	.898	-.310	.353
b1		.575	.001***	.394	.757
b2		.145	.165	-.060	.351
c	<i>Direct effect</i>	-.466	.061	-.953	.021
d		.291	.001***	.175	.408
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Indirect effect 1</i>	.383		.171	.667
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Indirect effect 2</i>	.028		-.003	.093
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Direct effect 3</i>	.003		-.048	.079

n=201

X: Condition

M_1 : Pleasure

M_2 : Arousal

Y: WOM

Bootstrap 5000

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

Again, that there was no indirect effect on the dependent variable *WOM recommendation* through both *Pleasure* and *Arousal*, which is demonstrated in *indirect effect 2* in table 14. The only indirect effect was *indirect effect 1* (.383) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.171 to .667) which demonstrates an indirect effect on *Purchase intention* through only $M_1 = \text{Pleasure}$. Thus, **H5b is rejected**.

× **H5b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

The last dependent variable *Buzz* was also investigated. The independent variable *Condition* had any indirect effects through the two mediators $M_1 = \text{Pleasure}$ and $M_2 = \text{Arousal}$ on the dependent variable *Buzz*.

Table 15: Mediation of Pleasure and Arousal on Buzz

Path		β	p	95% Conf. Interval	
Buzz				LLCI	ULCI
a1		.67	.001***	.279	1.052
a2		.02	.898	-.310	.353
b1		.21	.037*	.013	.414
b2		.35	.003**	-.118	.574
c	<i>Direct effect</i>	-.27	.332	-.804	.273
d		.29	.001***	.175	.408
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Indirect effect 1</i>	.14		.009	.351
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Indirect effect 2</i>	.07		-.020	.166
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$	<i>Direct effect 3</i>	.01		-.117	.147

n=201

X: Condition

M_1 : Pleasure

M_2 : Arousal

Y: Buzz

Bootstrap 5000

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

One again, that there was no indirect effect on the dependent variable *Buzz* through both *Pleasure* and *Arousal*, which is presented in *indirect effect 2* in table 15. The only indirect effect was *indirect effect 1* (.142) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.009 to .351)

which demonstrates an indirect effect on *Purchase intention* through only $M_1 = \text{Pleasure}$. Thus, **H5c is not supported**.

× **H5c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

4.1.4 Presentation- Presentation Attitude - Intentions

In the same way as *Pleasure* was evaluated as a mediator, *Presentation attitude* stands in line to be investigated for the purpose to see it affects the response variables *Purchase intention*, *WOM recommendation* and *Buzz*. In order to look into this Hayes' Process Tool was used. This time model 4 was necessary to carry out the analysis. The number of bootstraps were set to 5000 and the level of the confidence interval was 95%. The decision tree (Zhao, Lynch & Chen, 2010) was used.

To clarify, the independent variable was *Condition*, the mediating variable was *Presentation attitude* and the dependent variables were *Purchase intention*, *WOM recommendation* and *Buzz*.

Table 16: Mediation of Presentation Attitude on Purchase Intention, WOM recommendations and Buzz

Path		β	p	95% Conf. Interval	
Purchase Intention				LLCI	ULCI
a		1.19	.001***	.755	1.622
b		.47	.001***	.333	.613
c	Direct effect	-.53	.026*	-.994	-.065
a*b	Indirect Effect	.56		.334	.853
WOM recommendations					
a		1.19	.001***	.755	1.622
b		.57	.001***	.415	.719
c	Direct effect	-.73	.005**	-1.23	-.221
a*b	Indirect Effect	.67		.417	1.000
Buzz					
a		1.19	.001***	.755	1.622
b		.35	.001***	.177	.517
c	Direct effect	-.46	.109	-.026	.103
a*b	Indirect Effect	.41		.187	.709

n=201

X (independent): Condition

M (mediating): Presentation Attitude

Bootstrap 5000

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

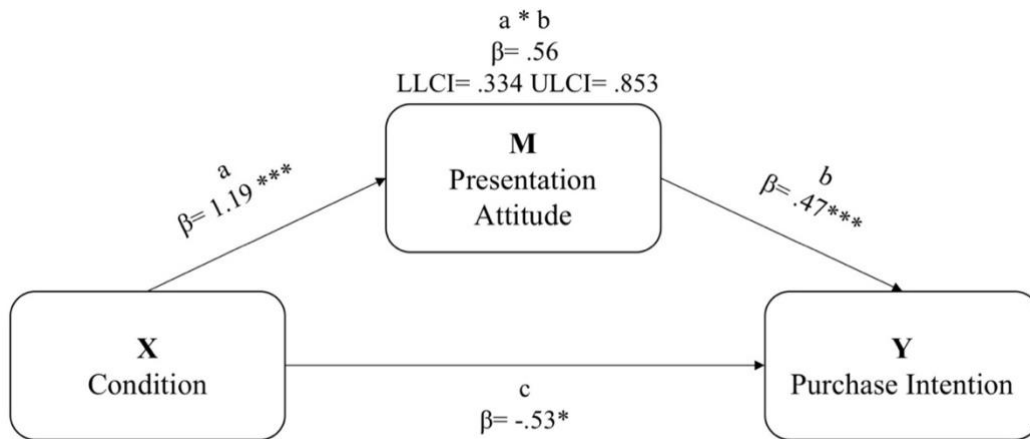


Figure 7: illustration of the mediation of Presentation Attitude on Purchase Intention from table 16

The result reveal the mediator *Presentation attitude* has a significant and positive *indirect effect* on *Purchase intention* ($a \times b = .56$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.334 to .853). Further, an interesting finding is that a statistically significant ($p = .023$) negative *direct effect* ($c = -.53$, -.994 to -.065) occurred. Since the hypothesis intend to measure the *indirect effect* which is the mediation, no further explanation for this has been made. However, in accordance with the decision tree presented by Zhao, Lynch & Chen (2010) this is an indication of a competitive mediation. This means that It is likely that this is a result of some second omitted mediator in path c, the direct path, which can be pursued in future research. Thus, **H6a is supported**.

✓ **H6a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

Moreover, the result from figure 8 shows that *Presentation attitude* has a significant and positive *indirect effect* on *WOM recommendation* ($a \times b = .67$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.417 to 1.00). Once more, there is a significant ($p = .005$) negative *direct effect* ($c = -.73$, -1.23 to -.221) occurred, thus a competitive mediation. However, no further investigation has been made since the *indirect effect* is positive and thus, **H6b is supported**.

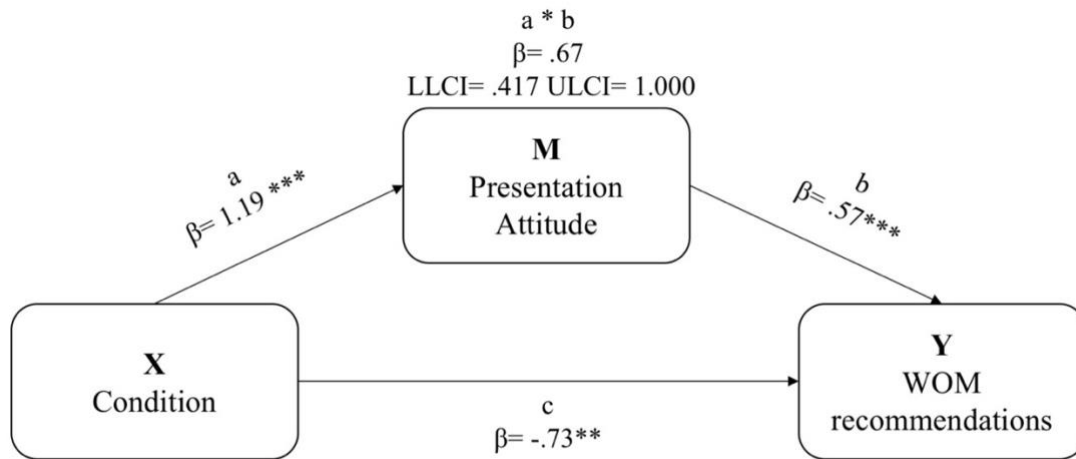


Figure 8: illustration of the mediation of Presentation Attitude on WOM recommendations from table 16

✓ **H6b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

The result from figure 9 shows that *Presentation attitude* has a significant and positive *indirect effect* on *Buzz* ($a \times b = .41$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.187 to .709. Further, there was no significant ($p = .109$) *direct effect* ($c = -.46$, -1.03 to .103) in this case. This means that there is an indirect-only mediation. Therefore, **H6c is supported**.

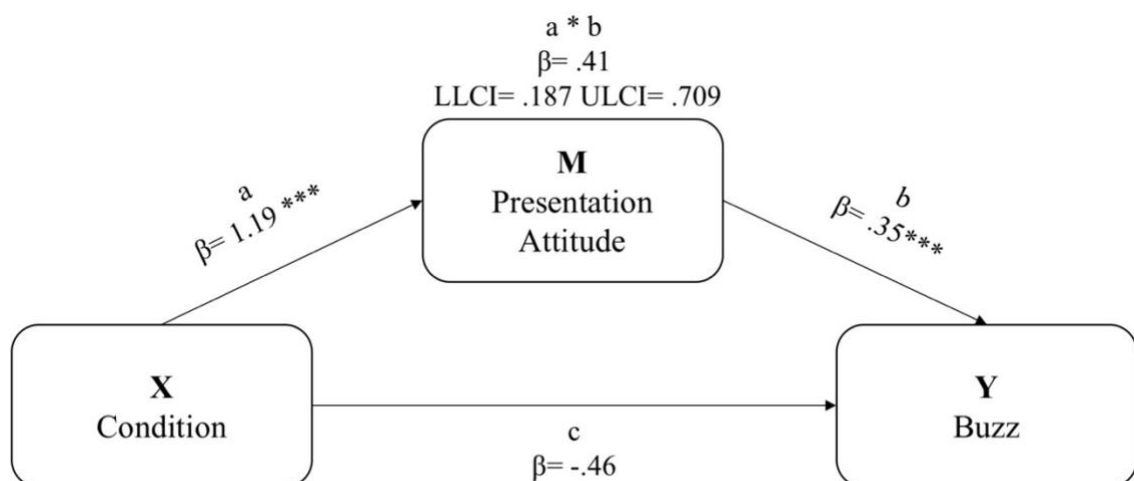


Figure 9: illustration of the mediation of Presentation Attitude on BUZZ from table 16

✓ **H6c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

4.1.5 Presentation - Brand Attitude - Intentions

This part concerns the hypotheses related to analyze *Brand attitude* as a mediating variable affecting *Purchase intention*, *WOM recommendation* and *Buzz*. Hayes' Process Tool was used with model 4 selected, bootstraps set to 5000 and lastly a confidence interval level of 95%. Thus, the independent variable was *Condition*, the mediating variable was *Brand attitude* and the dependent variables were *Purchase intention*, *WOM recommendation* and *Buzz*.

Table 17: mediation of Brand Attitude on Purchase Intention, WOM recommendations and Buzz

Path		β	<i>p</i>	95% Conf. Interval	
Purchase Intention				LLCI	ULCI
a		.46	.030*	.045	.876
b		.59	.001***	.452	.729
c	Direct effect	-.24	.26	-.656	.178
a*b	Indirect Effect	.27		.027	.546
WOM recommendations					
a		.46	.030*	.045	.876
b		.83	.001***	.697	.968
c	Direct effect	-.44	.037*	-1.230	-.221
a*b	Indirect Effect	.38		.44	0.731
Buzz					
a		.46	.030*	.045	.876
b		.43	.001***	.254	.602
c	Direct effect	-.25	.355	-.771	.278
a*b	Indirect Effect	.20		.040	.450

n=201

X (independent): Condition

M (mediating): Brand Attitude

Bootstrap 5000

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

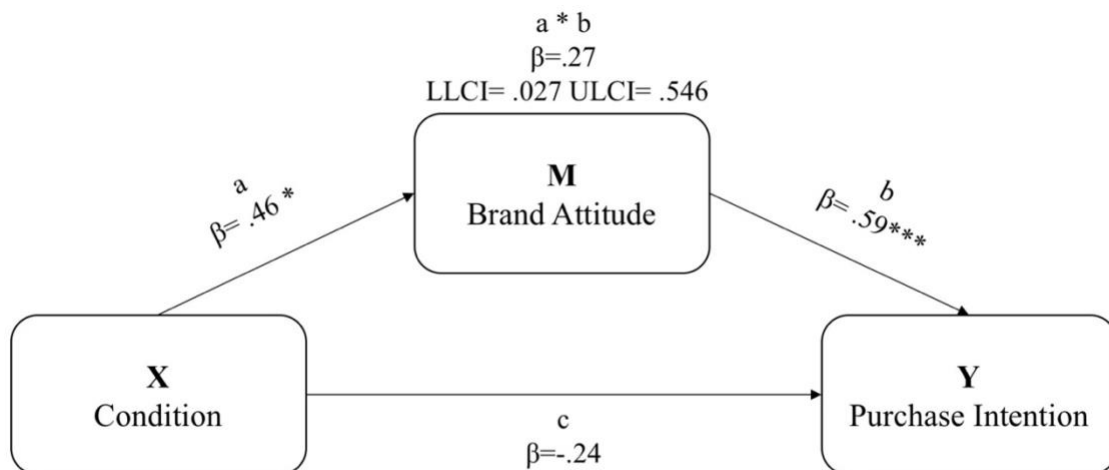


Figure 10: illustration of the mediation of Brand Attitude on Purchase Intention from table 17

The tested hypothesis show that *Brand attitude* has a significant positive *indirect effect* on *Purchase intention* ($a \times b = .27$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.027 to .546), showed in figure 10. No significant ($p = .260$) *direct effect* ($c = -.24$, $-.656$ to $.178$) were found. Hence there is an indirect-only mediation. The positive indirect effect constitutes that **H7a is supported**.

✓ **H7a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

When the effect of *Brand attitude* on the dependent variable *WOM recommendation* was investigated the results showed that there was a significant positive *indirect effect* on *WOM recommendation* ($a \times b = .38$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.044 to .731), showed in figure 11. However, a statistically significant ($p = .036$) negative *direct effect* was also found ($c = -.44$, -1.23 to $-.221$) This means that there is a competitive mediation which is not further investigated since the hypothesis is supported by the indirect effect. Thus, **H7b can be supported**.

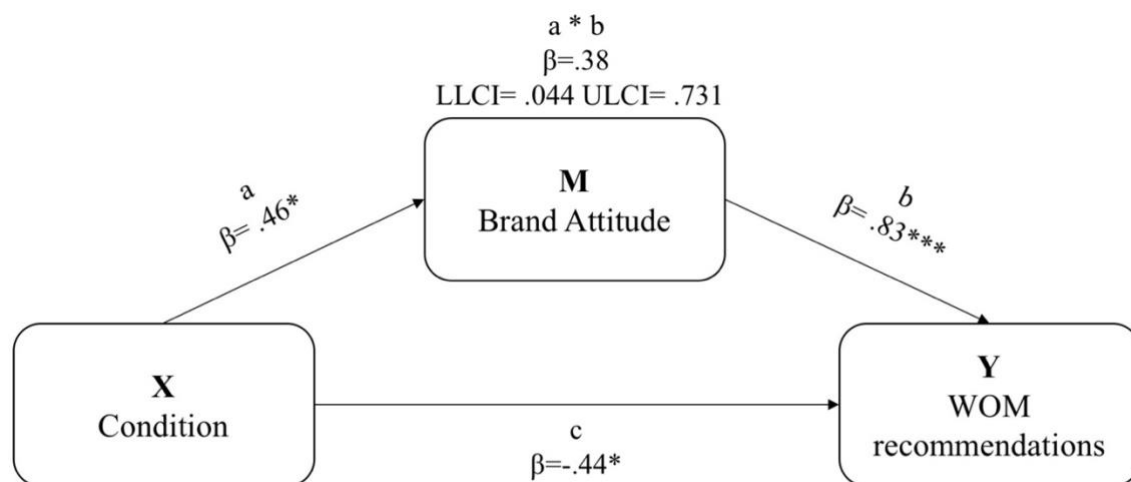


Figure 11: illustration of the mediation of Brand Attitude on WOM recommendations from table 17

✓ **H7b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

The tested hypothesis show that *Brand attitude* has a significant positive *indirect effect* on *Buzz* ($a \times b = .20$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.040 to .450), showed in figure 12. No significant ($p = .355$) *direct effect* ($c = -.25$, $-.771$ to $.278$) was detected. Hence there is an indirect-only mediation. **H7c is therefore supported.**

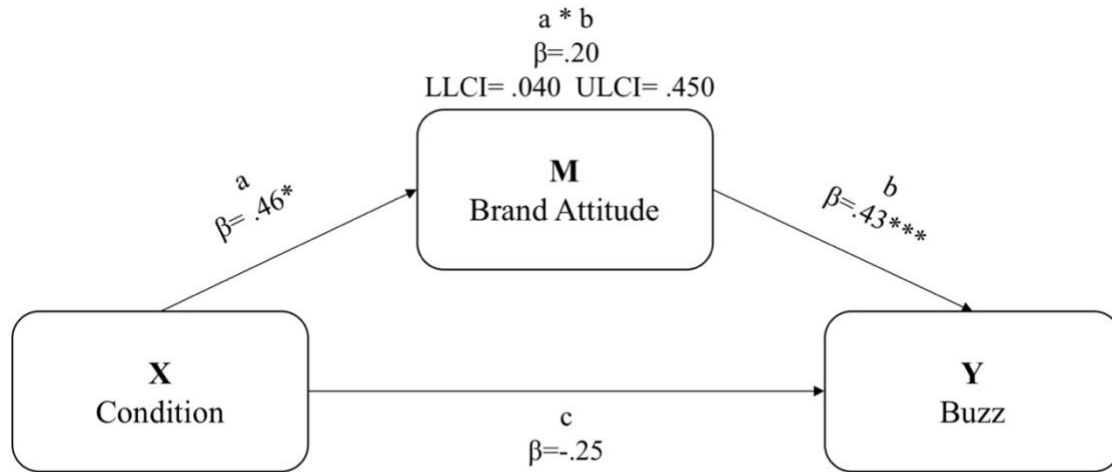


Figure 12: illustration of the mediation of Brand Attitude on BUZZ from table 17

✓ **H7c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender- divided presentation

4.1.6 Dogmatism as moderating variable

In order to evaluate whether *Dogmatism* can moderate the prior founded effects on *Pleasure* in hypothesis H1a, *Presentation attitude* in hypothesis H2a and *Brand attitude* in hypothesis H2b, three moderation analyses was conducted using Hayes' Process Tool (Hayes, 2016). Model number 1 was used. The number of bootstraps was set to 5000. Further, the level of confidence for all intervals was set to 95%.

The first analysis was made with *Condition* as independent variable, *Pleasure* as dependent variable and *Dogmatism* as moderator.

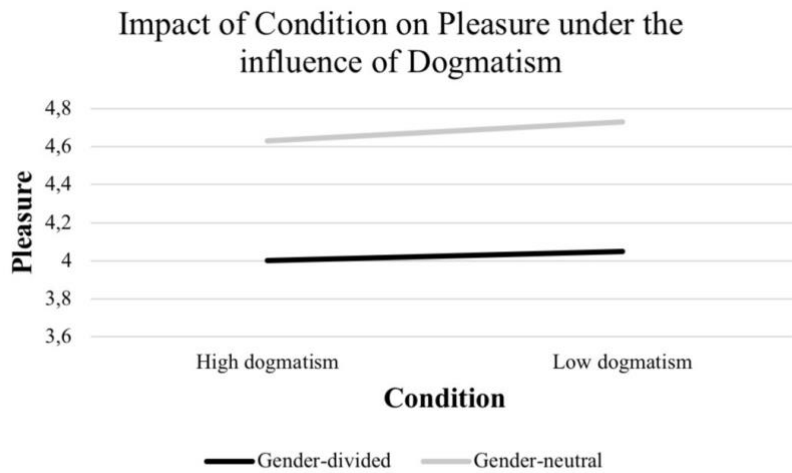


Figure 13: graph illustrating the impact of Condition on Pleasure under the influence of Dogmatism for the gender-divided group (control group) and gender-neutral group (treatment group)

The result revealed that there was no statistically significant ($p = .922$) interaction effect found (R square change = .000). Therefore, no moderating effect could be detected. However, an interesting observation is that *if* the interaction would have been significant, the effect would have been found in those who are low in dogmatism. This means that *if* it was significant it would have been found that people low in dogmatism feel higher pleasure ($p = .006$) than those high in dogmatism ($p = .068$). As the graph illustrates (see figure 13), the gender-neutral presentation had higher value, as visualized on the y-axis, than the gender-divided presentation on the dependent variable pleasure. This would have indicated that a gender-neutral presentation the hypothesis is **not supported**.

The second test was made with *Condition* as independent variable, *Presentation attitude* as dependent variable and *Dogmatism* as moderator.

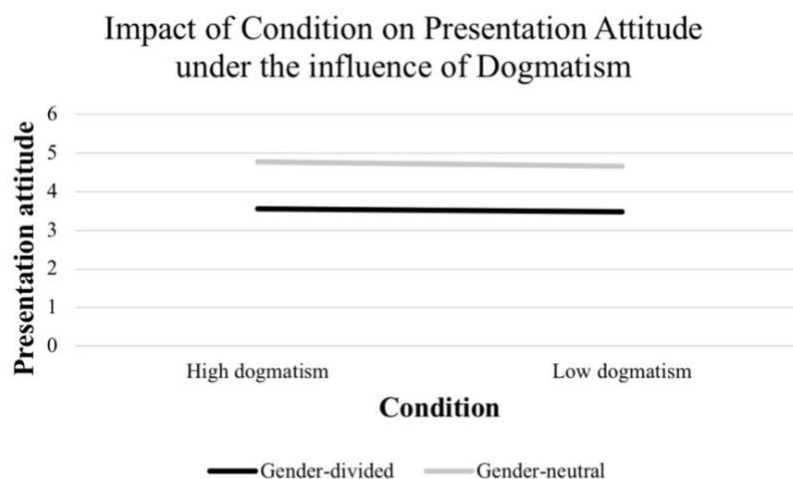


Figure 14: graph illustrating the impact of Condition on Presentation Attitude under the influence of Dogmatism for the gender-divided group (control group) and gender-neutral group (treatment group)

The result revealed that there was no statistically significant ($p = .981$) interaction effect found ($R^2 \text{ change} = .000$). Thus, *Dogmatism* is not moderating in this case. See graph 2. Though, if it would have been significant, it would have been find that both that people low in dogmatism feel higher pleasure ($p = .000$) and those high in dogmatism ($p = .002$). Still, the hypothesis **not supported**.

Lastly, an analysis was made with *Condition* as independent variable, *Presentation attitude* as dependent variable and *Dogmatism* as moderator.

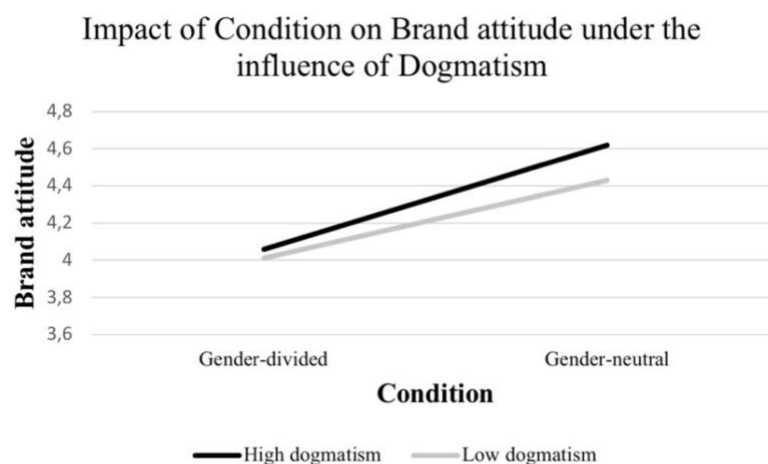


Figure 15: graph illustrating the impact of Condition on Brand Attitude under the influence of Dogmatism for the gender-divided group (control group) and gender-neutral group (treatment group)

The result revealed that there was no statistically significant ($p = .767$) interaction effect found ($R^2 \text{ change} = .000$). Thus, *Dogmatism* is not moderating in this case. See graph 3. Here, there was no statistical significance nor for low in dogmatism ($p = .103$) or high in dogmatism ($p = .134$). The hypothesis is **not supported** since dogmatism does not moderate neither the effects on *Purchase intention*, nor *WOM recommendation* or *Buzz*.

× **H8:** Dogmatism will moderate the founded positive effects on emotions and attitudes derived from the gender-neutral presentation

4.1.7 Personal relevance as moderating variable

In order to evaluate whether *Personal relevance* can moderate the prior founded effects on *Pleasure* in hypothesis H1a, *Presentation attitude* in hypothesis H2a and *Brand attitude* in hypothesis H2b, three moderation analyses was conducted using Hayes' Process Tool (Hayes, 2016). Model number 1 was used. The number of bootstraps was set to 5000. Further, the level of confidence for all intervals was set to 95%.

The first analysis was made with *Condition* as independent variable, *Pleasure* as dependent variable and *Personal relevance* as moderator.

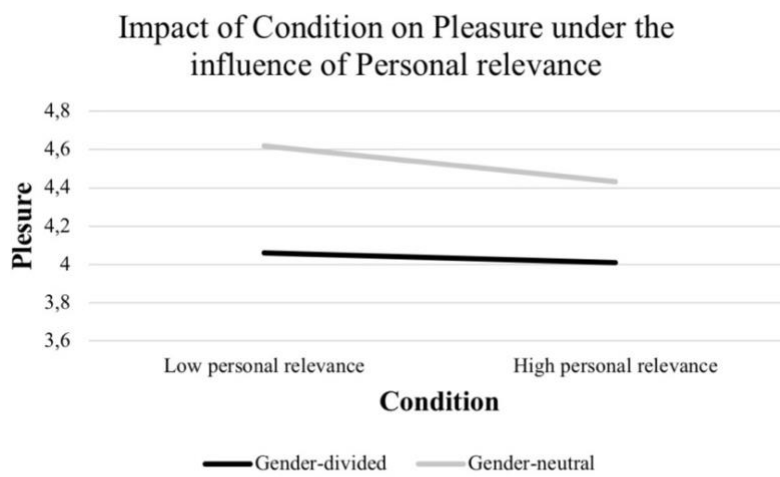


Figure 16: graph illustrating the impact of Condition on Pleasure under the influence of Personal relevance for the gender-divided group (control group) and gender-neutral group (treatment group)

The result revealed that there was no statistically significant ($p = .345$) interaction effect found ($R^2 \text{ change} = .004$). Thus, *Personal relevance* is not moderating in this case. See graph 4. Though, if it would have been significant, it would have been find that both that people with high personal relevance feel higher pleasure ($p = .007$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.169 to 1.02) but also those with low personal relevance ($p = .023$, .153 to 2.03). However, the hypothesis is **not supported**.

The second test was made with *Condition* as independent variable, *Presentation attitude* as dependent variable and *Personal relevance* as moderator.

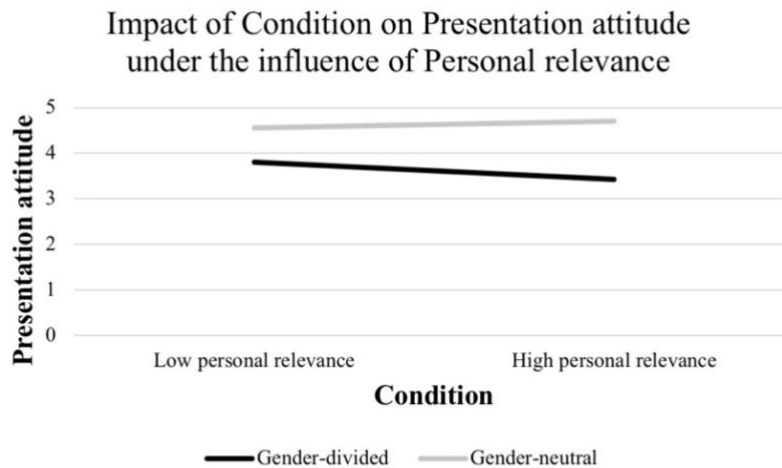


Figure 17: graph illustrating the impact of Condition on Presentation Attitude under the influence of Personal relevance for the gender-divided group (control group) and gender-neutral group (treatment group)

The result revealed that there was no statistically significant ($p = .349$) interaction effect found ($R^2 \text{ square change} = .004$). Thus, *Dogmatism* is not moderating in this case. See graph 5. Though, if the interaction would have been significant, the effect would have been found for those who are high in *Personal relevance* ($p = .000$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.816 to 1.78) but not for those low in *Personal relevance* ($p = .539$, -.696 to .133). Though, the hypothesis is **not supported**.

Lastly, an analysis was made with *Condition* as independent variable, *Brand attitude* as dependent variable and *Personal relevance* as moderator.

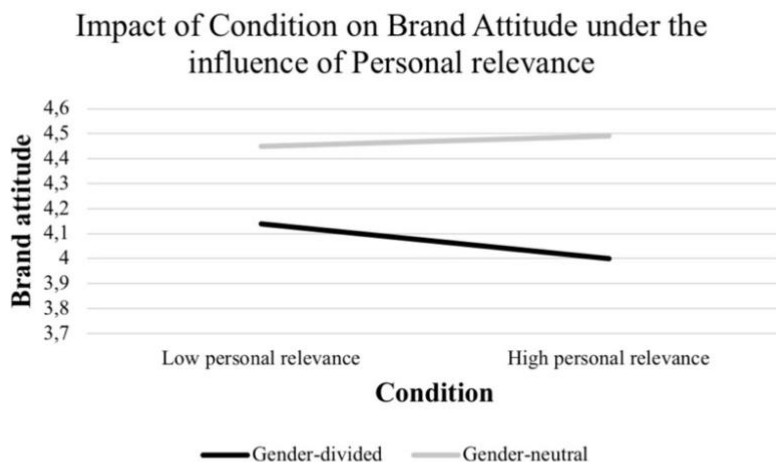


Figure 18: graph illustrating the impact of Condition on Brand Attitude under the influence of Personal relevance for the gender-divided group (control group) and gender-neutral group (treatment group)

The result revealed that there was no statistically significant ($p = .749$) interaction effect found ($R^2 \text{ change} = .001$). Thus, *Personal relevance* does not serve as a moderator (see graph 6). However, if the interaction would have been significant, the effect would have been found for those who are high in *Personal relevance* ($p = .035$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.035 to .958) but not for those low in *Personal relevance* ($p = .539$, -.696 to .133). Though, the hypothesis **not supported**.

✗ **H9:** Personal relevance will moderate *the founded positive effects* on emotions and attitudes derived from the gender-neutral presentation

4.1.8 Is the gender-neutral presentation more creative?

In order to answer whether or not the gender-neutral presentation was perceived as more creative than the gender-divided presentation, an Independent Samples T-Test was carried out. The test measured the mean difference between the two independent variables *gender-neutral presentation* (treatment) and *gender-divided presentation* (control) on the dependent variable *Creativity*. The result showed a statistically significant mean difference ($M_{\text{treatment}} = 3.27 > M_{\text{control}} = 2.42$, $p = 0.000$), shown in table 18. Thus, the results **support H10a**.

Table 18: mean difference between control group and treatment group in presentation attitude

	M_{Control}	Std. Deviation	M_{Treatment}	Std. Deviation	p
Creativity Index	2.42	1.59	3.27	1.69	.001***

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

✓ **H10a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will perceive the presentation *more creative*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

4.1.9 Presentation - Creativity - Brand Interest

It was of great interest to also investigate whether *Creativity* as a mediating variable affect *Brand Interest*. Hayes' Process Tool was used with model 4 selected, bootstraps set to 5000 and lastly a confidence interval level of 95%. Thus, the independent variable was *Condition*, the mediating variable was *Creativity* and the dependent variables were *Brand interest*.

The result showed that *Creativity* has a significant and positive *Indirect effect* on *Brand interest* ($a \times b = .43$) on a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (.184 to .744), shown in table 19 and figure 19. However, there was no significant direct effect ($p = .371$) of *Condition* on *Brand interest* ($c = -.17$, -.534 to .422) Nevertheless, **H10b is supported**

Table 19: mediation of Creativity on Brand Interest				
Path	β	p	95% Conf. Interval	
Brand Interest			LLCI	ULCI
a	.85	.001***	.395	1.308
b	.50	.001***	.391	.609
c	Direct effect -.17	.371	-.534	.422
a*b	Indirect Effect .43		.184	.744

n=201

X (independent): Condition

M (mediating): Creativity

Bootstrap 5000

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

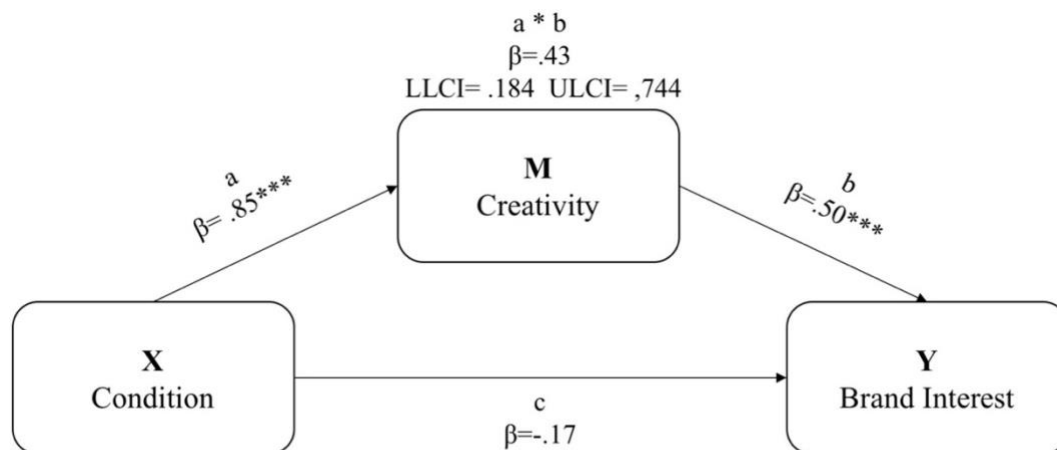


Figure 19: illustration of the mediation of Creativity on Brand Interest from table 19

✓ **H10b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will perceive the presentation *more creative*, which in turn will lead to *higher brand interest*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation

4.2. Further analysis of main study

4.2.1 Is it still incongruent?

Even though the pre-study 3 indicated that the children's boys' and girls' clothes from H&M presented together gave rise to incongruity based on the on the clothes *per se*, which confirmed that the study could continue, this was double-checked in the main study. Based on the questions regarding incongruity an index was created and tested through an Independent Samples T-test in order to test if the gender-neutral presentation was perceived as incongruent in comparison to the gender-divided presentation. The result showed a statistically significant mean difference ($M_{\text{treatment}} = 2.85 > M_{\text{control}} = 2.00$ $p = 0,000$). Thus, the gender-neutral presentation was perceived as incongruent in comparison to the gender-divided presentation.

Table 20: mean values of incongruity between the control group and the treatment group

	M_{Control}	Std. Deviation	$M_{\text{Treatment}}$	Std. Deviation	p
Incongruity Index	2.00	1.31	2.85	1.71	.001***

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

4.2.2 Is it the gender neutrality or the incongruity that matters?

The results from the supported hypotheses show that the gender-neutral presentation leads to positive outcomes in terms of affecting, first and foremost, the *Pleasure* emotion, but also the *Presentation attitude* and *Brand attitude*, which - in turn - further positively affects *Purchase intention*, *Presentation attitude* and *Brand attitude*. Thus, it can be noted that all of the supported findings make it possible for the main research question to be answered.

However, the stimuli is both gender crossing, but it is also perceived as incongruent in comparison to the gender-divided presentation. This is not hypothesized, yet highly important and interesting to consider and analyze, namely - what it is in the presentation that really contributes to the effects, the gender neutrality *per se* or the fact that it is incongruent? Thus, which of the two independent variables is affecting the dependent variable more. This is therefore tested beside the hypotheses in order to discuss the effects deeper.

Four different Bivariate Regression Analyses were carried out, one for each of the main dependent variables *Purchase intention*, *Presentation attitude* and *Brand attitude* but also one for the dependent variable *Brand interest* in order to answer the question. In the regression *Condition* and *Incongruity* served as independent variables.

Table 21: regression analyses of the dependent variables Pleasure, Presentation Attitude, Brand attitude and Brand Interest on the independent variables Condition and Incongruity to see what contributes to prior found effects, the gender neutrality *per se* or the incongruity

	CONDITION			INCONGRUENCY		
	Unstandardized B	Standardized β	Significance <i>p</i>	Unstandardized B	Standardized β	Significance <i>p</i>
Pleasure	.536	.188	.008**	.154	.170	.017*
Presentation Attitude	.950	.286	.001***	.282	.267	.001***
Brand Attitude	.307	.102	.155	.181	.189	.009**
Brand Interest	-.080	-.026	.695	.402	.417	.001***

Independent: Condition, Incongruity

Dependent: Pleasure, Presentation Attitude, Brand Attitude and Brand Interest

95% Conf. Interval

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

The result showed that *Condition* was the main significant ($p = .008$) affecting independent variable on *Pleasure* ($\beta = .118$) and *Presentation attitude* ($\beta = .286$, $p = .000$). Nevertheless, *Incongruity* did also have a significant impact on *Pleasure* ($\beta = .170$, $p = .017$) and *Presentation attitude* ($\beta = .267$, $p = .000$). However, *Incongruity* had a greater significant effect on *Brand attitude* ($\beta = .189$, $p = .009$) and *Brand Interest* ($\beta = .417$, $p = .000$) whilst *Condition* did not have any significant effects on *Brand attitude* ($\beta = .102$, $p = .155$) nor *Brand interest* ($\beta = -.026$, $p = .695$). Thus, *Condition* has the greatest positive impact on *Pleasure* and *Presentation attitude*, while *Incongruity* has the greatest positive impact on *Brand attitude* and *Brand interest*. In short, this shows that both gender neutrality and the fact that the presentation is incongruent play a role for the results.

4.2.3 Is creativity linked to incongruity?

Further is interesting to see whether the creativity is linked to the gender neutrality *per se* or if it is the incongruity that contributes to the effect. This is substantial since creativity is an essential part of incongruity. Since it has earlier in this study been proven that two of the dependent variables, more specifically *Brand attitude* and *Brand interest*, are significantly affected by incongruity it is vital to look at what it is that leads to the perceived creativity. This was neither hypothesized but interesting for the purpose of the discussion.

Again, a Bivariate Regression Analysis was performed, yet this time the dependent variable was *Creativity* and the independent variables were the same, *Condition* and *Incongruity*. This test serves to detect which of the independent variables *Condition* and *Incongruity* that have the most substantial effect on the dependent variable *Creativity*. The analysis revealed that the independent variable *Incongruity* ($\beta = .528$) had a significant ($p = .000$) positive impact on *Creativity* which was greater than the impact of *Condition* ($\beta = .111$) that moreover was not significant ($p = .070$). This shows that the *Creativity* is derived from the *Incongruity* in the stimuli, and hence not from the gender-neutrality *per se*. Thus, the gender-neutral presentation of children's' clothing is not creative in itself, yet it is perceived as creative since it is incongruent.

Table 22: regression analysis of the dependent variable Creativity on the independent variables Condition and Incongruity to see if it is the gender neutrality *per se* or incongruity that contributes to the perception of creativity

	CONDITION			INCONGRUENCY		
	Unstandardized B	Standardized β	Significance <i>p</i>	Unstandardized B	Standardized β	Significance <i>p</i>
Creativity	.374	.111	.070	.567	.528	.001***

Independent: Condition, Incongruity

Dependent: Creativity

95% Conf. Interval

* Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$

4.3 Summary of the results

-
- ✓ **H1a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✗ **H1b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✗ **H1c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
-
- ✓ **H2a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H2b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
-
- ✓ **H3a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H3b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H3c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
-
- ✗ **H4a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✗ **H4b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✗ **H4c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher arousal*, which in turn will generate *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
-
- ✗ **H5a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✗ **H5b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✗ **H5c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher pleasure and arousal*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H6a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H6b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H6c:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher presentation attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
-
- ✓ **H7a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *higher purchase intention*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H7b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive WOM recommendations*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H7c:** Consumers exposed to a gender- neutral presentation will generate *higher brand attitude*, which in turn will lead to *more positive buzz*, than consumers exposed to a gender- divided presentation
-
- ✗ **H8:** Dogmatism will moderate *the founded positive effects* on emotions and attitudes derived from the gender-neutral presentation
-
- ✗ **H9:** Personal relevance will moderate *the founded positive effects* on emotions and attitudes derived from the gender-neutral presentation
-
- ✓ **H10a:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will perceive the presentation *more creative*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
 - ✓ **H10b:** Consumers exposed to a gender-neutral presentation will perceive the presentation *more creative*, which in turn will lead to *higher brand interest*, than consumers exposed to a gender-divided presentation
-

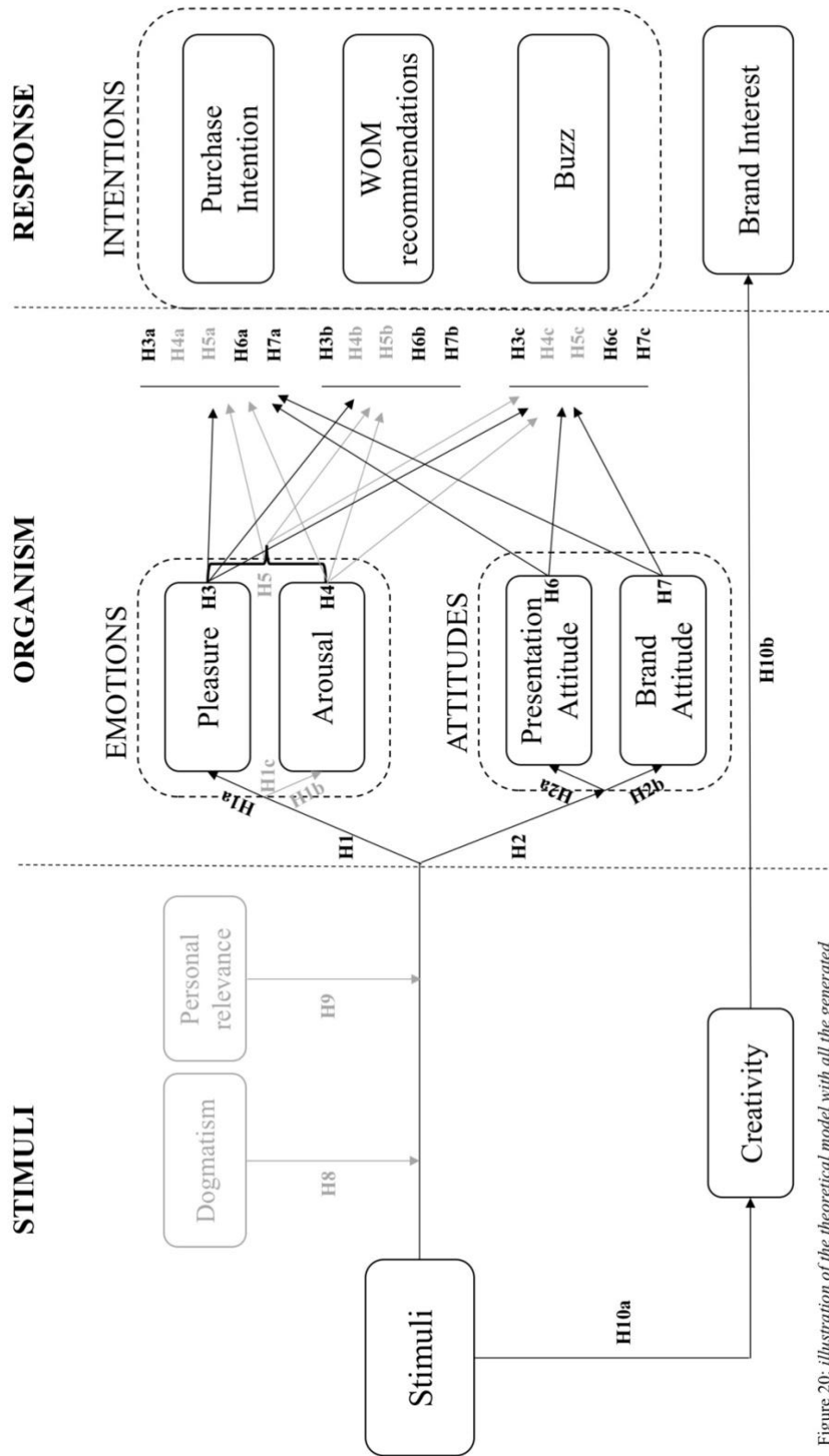


Figure 20: illustration of the theoretical model with all the generated hypotheses and of which the not supported hypotheses are dimmed

5. DISCUSSION

The last chapters of the thesis will present a discussion, conclusion, implications, limitations as well as future research of the thesis. Firstly, chapter 5 presents a discussion of the results presented in previous chapter. This will be followed by chapter 6 that contains a presentation of the conclusion in short, where the research questions are answered. Moreover, a discussion around the theoretical and managerial implications will be presented in chapter 7. Lastly, the thesis will end by critically evaluating the study and suggest future studies within the area, which can be found in chapter 8 and 9.

5.1 Discussion of the results

The purpose of this study was to explore the detected research gap by investigating potential effects from a gender-neutral presentation at the children's department at H&M in Stockholm, Sweden. The answered hypotheses contribute to filling research gap.

With regards to the fact that the topic is derived through inspiration from the ongoing social gender debate in Sweden, different bodies of literature were used in order to be able to understand what a gender crossing presentation of clothing at H&M would lead to and why. Therefore, the results will be discussed from both a holistic view in which the result are connected to the broader picture of the society, but also a narrower view that look at how this affects the brand H&M and the people on individual level.

5.1.1 S-O-R Model

To begin with, the hypotheses H1-H6 that were supported indicated that this kind of stimuli is applicable in the context of the S-O-R-model that commonly used research in which retail in-store environments are studied.

Looking at the effects derived from the stimuli on the organisms, the result showed that a gender-neutral stimuli affect both the consumers emotions but also their attitudes. However, the analysis revealed that only emotions in terms of pleasure were evoked by the gender-neutral presentation. Thus, H2 that concerned the emotion arousal could not be supported. The result can be discussed based on the literature that states that arousal is an emotion stated can be difficult for people to put into words (Nordfält, Offesson 2007). It may be thought that this was the case in this paper. Another potential explanation of the rejection of arousal can be due to the fact that the stimuli was presented to respondents in form of a picture and not a real world in-store environment, which can be argued as important since it is the “high-load” physical environment that usually is underlying the creation of feelings of arousal such as excitement and stimulation. Nevertheless, the respondents did feel higher pleasure which can signal that they actually felt satisfied by H&M choosing to remove the gender-divided departments and merge them into a common children's section. This shows in some way that it actually is important for consumers that the division between children is removed, since they feel more pleased without it.

Just like the positive emotions in terms of pleasure were evoked, positive presentation and brand attitudes were generated from the gender-neutral presentation. This may be due to that the gender-neutral presentations do not reinforce traditional socially constructed stereotypes but opens up for opportunities for better self-identification for children by presenting a fused children's department only. Hence, the fact that this issue concerns children can be an important influencing factor. Thus, the condition limits the constraints that are socially constructed by beliefs about what is - generally - right or wrong when it comes to children. The results may be different if it had been on the clothing department for adult people at H&M.

The positive attitudes could also arise as a result of the visual aspect, in way in which the clothes are presented. Pegler (2012) demonstrated in the literature that a mixture of colors, print and patterns contributes to a visually more attractive presentation which is appreciated by customers and facilitates for them to mix and match different garments to create desirable outfits. Since this kind of gender-neutral presentation includes a merger of what is considered to be boys clothes and girls clothes, it also contributes to an experienced increased variety and ability to choose freely among more clothes with different colors and prints than before. Indeed, it mentioned and highlighted in the debate that it is the division of boys' and girls' clothes that is the problem, not the clothes *per se*. In theory, it is of course, one can from both departments, but in practice but in practice it may be perceived an obstacle as the departments clearly signal which gender they belong to. Thus, a creation of only one department, a children's department, can facilitate the shopping for the consumers since the clothes are then not labeled based on gender stereotypes.

The result further showed that the positive emotions and attitudes created through the gender-neutral presentation also led to positive consumer intentions. Hence, it was confirmed that the S-O-R-model was applicable in this research. However, even though consumers did not feel directly aroused by the stimuli, it was interesting to investigate if pleasure and arousal together led to a positive outcome, since the literature discusses its potential interaction (Robert, John 1982). Nevertheless, the results revealed that pleasure and arousal together did not affect the intentions, however it showed that pleasure did have a significant effect on arousal which confirms the theory about that the emotions are interrelated.

In accordance with the S-O-R-model, the stimuli do affect individuals in one way or another, whether positive or negative, which might result in a response. In this case, it was clear that the gender-neutral presentation actually had a positive impact on the consumer, which also clearly resulted in positive responses in terms of purchase intentions, WOM recommendations and buzz. The increased purchase intention indicated that the in-store stimuli can enhance top line growth and hence be something to be considered in H&M's future strategies. Further, the positive WOM is an important marketing channel since people rely more on fellow human beings than the companies and getting this publicity free is very valuable. Also, buzz effects showed that the presentation actually motivated the consumers to actively share their opinions to others. Those type of positive consumer generated media can be especially important for H&M due to all the negative buzz that currently circulates around the retail giant.

From the discussed section above, the findings from H1-H6 showed that when H&M had a gender-neutral children's department, only positive consumer effects and intentions were created. This indicated that the socially embedded stereotypes might be in a changing process.

5.1.2 The moderators

Additionally, as presented in the results, neither of the personal characteristics personal relevance and dogmatism, moderated factors upon any of the findings. The two personal characteristics were investigated since its relevance when studying a phenomenon that differ from the norm. Hence, the personality characteristics, according to the literature, affect how individuals receive and process information based on what is personally important but also how willing and competent one is to change their beliefs.

The reason why the tests were not shown to be significant can be discussed. One reason is that a dogmatic person may not necessarily be dogmatic in agreement with what is perceived as the norm; a dogmatic person may also be resistant to changing beliefs, whether they are aligned with the norm or not. This means that a person who is highly committed to gender related issues and believe that gender neutrality is the only right, could also be dogmatic. Accordingly, the degree of dogmatism depends on the individual's own subjective beliefs, although it is reasonable to assume that the majority of respondents should have been influenced by the traditional norm. In the same way as dogmatism can be subjective evaluated, personal relevance may also be interpreted in different ways. For example, a respondent who answered that gender related issues are highly personally relevant, may believe that *gender neutrality* is relevant, while another respondent who answered the same, may believe that *gender division* is relevant by allowing "girls to be girls" and "boys to be boys". Thus, gender related issues do not necessarily involve genital neutrality *per se*.

5.1.3 Creativity

Since creativity refers to the unexpectedness and the stimuli in this research is perceived as incongruent and divergence from the norm, it was interesting that the results showed that the stimuli also is perceived as creative. This is of great importance for companies to create since a creative presentation do have a direct effect upon purchase intention (Smith, Chen & Yang 2008, Smith et al. 2007, Kover, Goldberg & James 1995). Additionally, due to the stimuli is perceived as creative, the stimuli do have an indirect effect on brand interest. Without being perceived as creative, the stimuli would not have a direct effect on brand interest. Since it is highly important for familiar brands such as H&M to constantly reinvent themselves to maintain consumer interest and curiosity for the brand, is it essential for H&M to create creativity. Thus, as this research prove, H&M can generate higher brand interest and in turn lead to brand awareness, by re-constructing the children's department into gender-neutral.

In addition, since the gender-neutral presentation not only are perceived as creative, but also incongruent, it evokes consumer's cognitive process and engage consumers in the presentation, which can generate positive attitude and greater liking toward the brand. This is important to generate for H&M since it is a familiar brand where consumer's information processes are

poorer since they already have knowledge a stable opinion about the brand. Hence, H&M can through a gender-neutral presentation, interfere with the brand's existing associations and (re)-create the brand interest. Thus, the findings of this research can act as criticism of existing research that implies that communication of familiar brands should not deviate from its' commonness but instead stay consistent.

5.1.4 Incongruity or gender-neutrality, what matters the most?

An interesting observation found in the discussion in the further analysis was that the stimuli is both gender crossing and also perceived as incongruent in comparison to the gender-divided presentation. And it was asked what it is in the presentation that really contributes to the presented effects; was it the gender neutrality *per se* or the fact that it is incongruent?

What was founded was that pleasure was more explained by the gender neutrality which means that people become pleased by the actual fact that the presentation is gender neutral, than by the perceived incongruity. Additionally, the results revealed that also the presentation attitude was more affected by the gender neutrality than the incongruity. Nevertheless, incongruity did also significantly affect both the pleasure and the presentation attitude why it is important to also take incongruity into account.

However, when the results of gender neutrality and incongruity on brand attitude and brand interest were analyzed an interesting thing was discovered. Both brand attitude and brand interest were seen to be dependent on incongruity but, what was found as surprising, was the fact that the gender neutrality did actually not have a statistically significant influence on brand attitude and brand interest.

So, this shows that for all the dependent variables measured in this analysis, incongruity was significantly important, but gender neutrality *per se* only affects the pleasure and presentation attitude. Thus, in this study the gender neutrality does have an important role, but in order to achieve influence on the brand in terms of brand attitude and brand interest, gender neutrality is not enough and thus it must also be perceived as incongruent. Moreover, creativity is perceived as highly, and significantly, dependent on incongruity but not the gender neutrality. Therefore, the findings of the study in terms of the intentions, are based on the fact that a gender-neutral children's presentation at H&M is affected by both the gender neutrality and the incongruity, however in general more by the latter. Lastly, to get positive outcomes on the brand H&M, they need to be incongruent. Yet, when the incongruity becomes a standard, this type of gender-neutral presentation needs to be reinvented in the long run for the effects to sustain.

As final words in this discussion the authors, once again, want to highlight that that H&M does not only constitute 59% of the entire Swedish fashion market, they are also the second they are also the company in Sweden that is ranked second with regards to brand value³. This means that how they choose to act in the debate of whether the children's department should be gender-

³ Brandirectory. n.d. Most valuable Swedish brands in 2017 (in million U.S. dollars). Statista. Accessed 28 February, 2018. Available from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/429515/most-valuable-swedish-brands/>.

neutral or gender-divided can, inter alia, affect other actors in the industry by the fact that H&M can contribute to setting a new standard that will have to be followed by the competitors. Nevertheless, it does also have implications for children and their development of self-realization and identity, with regards to more pleasurable and variable children's department in the stores. "Clothes are more than only an innocent item" as stated by Vänskä (2017) and how companies, such as H&M in this case, choose to communicate today's' current and maybe even changing values can actually have an impact on the upcoming generation and society as whole.

6. CONCLUSION

The main research questions that were to be answered in this research were:

RQ1: “Does a gender-neutral clothing presentation in the children’s department at H&M affect the consumers positively?”

and:

RQ2: “Does a gender-neutral clothing presentation in the children’s department at H&M result in intentions that are positive for H&M?”

In summary, the findings of this research showed that by re-constructing the gender-divided children’s department at H&M to a gender-neutral children’s department, will affect the consumers positive due to generated pleasurable emotions and superior attitude towards the clothing presentation as well as towards the brand. Moreover, the results revealed that the positive consumer outcomes, also, do lead to positive intentions. As a matter of fact, these intentions- purchase intention, WOM recommendations, buzz and not least increased brand interest, are prosperous for H&M. Accordantly, the thesis provide support that a gender-neutral clothing presentation in the children’s department at H&M will affect consumers positively and result in favorable outcomes for H&M. Thus, the answer is therefore “yes”, for both research questions⁴.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Theoretical implications

Studying the consumer reactions and intentions that occurs from a gender-neutral presentation in the children’s department, the theoretical implications relate to different bodies of literature that have not been integrated earlier in the literature. Firstly, a gender-neutral children’s clothing presentation is perceived as incongruent, that hence contributed to the existing incongruity marketing literature due to the fact that incongruity in this paper was put in a different setting and context than studied before. In addition to incongruity, this research highlights the norm literature, in combination with the field of visual merchandising to extract deeper understanding of what it is that contributes to certain reactions and responses when customers are presented to a gender-neutral clothing presentation in the store.

7.2. Managerial implications

Except the positive findings of the study that in themselves are valuable insights to H&M and other actors in the Swedish retail fashion industry, the authors can contribute with several

⁴ Due to the fact that the respondents were exposed to an artificial task, it is reasonable and important to highlight that the chosen approach can contribute to limitations and consequences. The mean values presented in the results, being near the midpoints of the scales, *can* be a result of the respondents having difficulties to correctly appreciate and interpret the experimental task, leading them to respond the questions as if they are indifferent. Note also that the results therefore can be differently interpreted which leads to caveats with regards to the conclusions stated in the paper.

concrete implications that can be highly important to consider for H&M as well as the other actors in the market.

Firstly, this paper shows that increased pleasure, attitudes, brand interest and intentions can be accomplished by small changes in how the retailer, H&M, choose to perform and handle its children's department. Hence, is not necessary to rethink the whole processes and product designs, since it can, indeed, be enough to erase the gender differences that are salient in the stores. Thus, a gender-neutral department does not require as much resources as maybe imagined first.

Secondly, by doing this H&M can be able to turn negative buzz into positive buzz. Since the gender-neutral presentation have a positive effect on buzz, the finding can be discussed in relation to H&M critical situation of repeated negative publicity and buzz. Only during late 2017 and early 2018, H&M has been accused of racism^{5,6}, criticized of gender stereotyped communication through the messages printed on the shirts⁷ and blamed for sexist girls' clothing⁸. Carrying out a gender-neutral presentation may instead lead to positive buzz that may contribute to change of preconceptions about brands stance in gender-related issues.

Thirdly, many retailers believe that they have to reduce the cognitive effort of consumers due to beliefs about that incongruity is not always beneficial. However, the implementation of a gender-neutral children's department can instead lead to an experience for the customers in terms that they now have a twice as big children's department in comparison to when they only shopped in the boys or the girls' department respectively, but also an opportunity for H&M to expose the customers for garments they wouldn't have considered or even seen if the department is divided on the basis of gender stereotypes.

Lastly, even if a gender-neutral presentation of children's clothing can seem as an obvious strategy to some, not many retailers in the Swedish market has implemented this yet. Thus, if H&M were to do this they would stand out, especially with consideration to their size, familiarity and how established they are in the Swedish market. This can also serve as a facilitator from the familiarity point of view, which indicates that familiar brands need to do something different to revitalize the brand and be perceived as interesting for both current customers but also potential future customers.

⁵ "Hon startar upprop efter H&M:s bildmiss", *Dagens media*, 2018-01-11. Accessed: 2018- 04-20. Available from <https://www.dagensmedia.se/marknadsforing/hon-startar-upprop-efter-h-m-s-bildmiss-6892702>.

⁶ "H&M anklagas för rasism efter ny barnkollektion", *Aftonbladet*, 2018-01-08. Accessed: 2018- 04-20. Available from <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/VR1zkJ/hm-anklagas-for-rasism-efter-ny-barnkollektion>.

⁷ "Nya ilskan mot H&M:s barntröjor", *Dina pengar*, 2018-03-02. Accessed: 2018- 04-20. Available from <https://www.expressen.se/dinapengar/nya-ilskan-mot-hochms-barntroror/>.

⁸ "Föräldrar rasar mot H&M för "sexiga" flickshorts- nu svarar de på kritiken", *Femina*, 2017-08-15. Accessed: 2018- 04-20. Available from <https://www.femina.se/hm-korta-shorts-flickor/>.

8. CRITIQUE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though clear implications to the academic and managers, this study can be criticized in through aspects that is being presented below, followed by a discussion of future research.

First and foremost, in consideration to the scope and scale of the study as well as limitations from H&M, the study methodology were conducted through a role-play experimentation with photos of the in-store manipulation, which can be criticized due to its' artefactual setting. The fact that the results that are found in this study are based upon the role-play experiment can somewhat be perceived as debatable. The effectiveness of chosen approach can be argued as dependent on how well the respondents actually interpret and understand the task. This type of experiment is an artificial way to present conditions upon which generated hypotheses are tested. This means that the interpretation of the respondents lays as foundation for the results. What is important to highlight here as a limitation is the fact that personal and subjective aspects might affect how well the experiments works for each and every one of the respondents. This means that it is difficult to ensure that all respondents have the same perception and understanding of the task. Thus, the results should be somewhat be used with consideration. Moreover, this can also be one reason why the results show mean values that are close to the midpoint of the scales.

Further, the authors discussed the fact that the respondents are requested to study the pictures in survey carefully, which in itself can be a limitation. The writers argue that it might give rise to the respondent studying the picture several times due to believes that they are looking for an "hidden answer". This type of concentrated processing done by the respondents allow for a deeper analysis of the picture, which can result in the fact that the respondents understand what the study aims to investigate and why their answers are somewhat biased in comparison to if responses were gathered through i.e. observations in a real-life setting. The fact that a real-life setting wasn't used can not only lead to respondents studying the pictures more carefully, but also less carefully. In both ways the lack of a real physical store and real settings in which respondents are unaware of their participation and respond as well as act intuitive, leads to limitations which is important to mention. Thus, even if it is a simulation of a real event using real an established brand, real clothes in a real H&M store for the pictures through which the authors aim to draw conclusions, the study is somewhat deteriorated.

What must also be mentioned is that here are certain elements in the environment that naturally affect each other, why it can be difficult to be certain that the founded effects in the research only were derived from what was intended. For example, the color of the clothes could affect consumers perceptions and assessment of the stimuli, which were difficult to isolate, even if highly considered.

Also, even though the experiment leaders aimed to stay indifferent throughout the study and not affect the participants with regards to personal norms and values that can bias the respondent in terms of affecting the answers, there is always a risk that the response behavior of the respondents could have been influenced. For example, since the authors were present when the respondents filled out the survey that contained of somewhat sensitive and personal

questions, they might have responded what they thought was appropriate and expected instead of their real opinion. Also, *how* the participants perceived the authors in terms of body language, speech and so on can also be influential factors. Further on the survey itself should be mentioned. Some questions can be argued should have been formulated differently, such as “gender related issues are...”. This question can be seen as a knowledge-based question which requires certain knowledge about the topic and maybe a definition about what the question concerns more specifically. Since the studied topic is personal and sensitive, respondents might assume that the experiment leaders had a strong opinion right from the start and therefore chose the topic, even though that was not the case.

Since this research is testing gender-neutral presentations in the children's department at H&M, it cannot directly be generalized to other categories due to its complexity mixing non-stereotyped marketing, visual merchandising and incongruity. Further the study cannot be expected to be generalized across hedonic categories.

Lastly, when the gender-neutral presentation was analyzed, the results showed a competitive mediation, which revealed that WOM had a positive indirect effect through presentation attitude, but with a negative direct effect. This may be because WOM and attitude are perceived as similar or even equal, to the respondent, why the use of WOM can be criticized. However, the result can also arise from another omitted mediator that has not been tested in this study (Zhao, Lynch Jr & Chen 2010). This is thus left for future research to investigate.

9. FUTURE RESEARCH

First and foremost, statistics showed that H&M's online shop was the second biggest in the Swedish clothing and fashion industry as of 2016, by turnover⁹. This means that they have a large share of the Swedish fashion market both in terms of physical stores but also through their online shop. How this kind of gender-neutral presentation would work in an online shop and what it would contribute with in terms of customer emotions, attitudes and intentions would be relevant to address in a future study.

To make the findings more robust, it would be preferable to make it an in-store experiment where people, in real life, could experience the stimuli. In this paper, the stimuli were limited to a picture containing only a wall system with shelves, whilst the physical store environment comprise other features, such as folded clothes and mannequins but also other spatial and ambient elements, that might influence how the clothing presentation is perceived. This was a good first step into the investigation of whether a gender-neutral presentation of children's clothing on H&M should be implemented, but more research can give rise to other insights that are not covered by this study. Also, to be able to better generalize it could be argued that future studies should address this by tested over more H&M stores in different cities in Sweden. As a suggestion, the experiment design Latin square would be suitable course of action.

Additionally, it is of great necessity for future studies to inquire whether the same patterns can be found if the study was replicated conducting another company or brand in focus. Further, in this paper, many parts of the experiment were completed in Stockholm, however another city or location, could be interesting to look at in order to gain knowledge about whether the same patterns will occur in other parts of the country, or if the result is specific to this research.

Lastly, it would be interesting to find out if this result is related to the fashion category only, or if gender related issues and incongruity together also influence can other product categories.

⁹Brandirectory. n.d. *Most valuable Swedish brands in 2017 (in million U.S. dollars)*. Statista. Accessed: 2018- 02-28. Available from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/429515/most-valuable-swedish-brands/>.

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11. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Briefing

- Presentation of interviewers
- Explanation of interview execution

Intro Questions

1. Age:
2. Age on child/children (If interviewee has children)

Children's clothes and department

3. Do you think there are differences between the girl's/ boy's department?

Explanation of what gender-neutral children's department consists of

4. What is your opinion towards gender-neutral departments?

Conclusion

- Explanation of thesis

APPENDIX 2: STIMULI

The gender-neutral presentation is displayed in Picture 1, while the gender-divided presentations are displayed in Picture 2.



Picture 1: Shows the gender-neutral presentation manipulated at H&M that served as stimuli for the treatment group.



Pictures 2: Shows the gender-divided presentations at H&M that served as stimuli for the control group.

APPENDIX 3: MAIN STUDY SURVEY

Hej!

Vi är två studenter från Handelshögskolan i Stockholm som nu skriver vår masteruppsats. Stort tack för att du tar dig tid att delta i denna undersökning som är helt anonym. Enkäten bör inte ta mer än 5 minuter att genomföra. Det finns inga felaktiga svar, följ din intuition!

Har du några frågor får du gärna kontakta oss,

Emelie Franzén, 50332@student.hhs.se
Anela Hamzic, 50327@student.hhs.se

Bedöm till vilken grad du håller med följande påståenden:

Stämmer inte alls (1)

Stämmer helt och hållet (7)

Det finns så mycket som vi inte upptäckt än, ingen borde vara helt säker på att ens egna åsikter är korrekta.

Tjugo år från nu kommer några av mina åsikter om de viktiga sakerna i livet troligen att ha förändrats.

Någon dag kommer jag förmodligen att inse att mina nuvarande åsikter om de STORA frågorna är felaktiga.

Föreställ dig att du är inne på H&M och går in på barnavdelningen för att titta på utbudet av barnkläder. Du möts av sortimentspresentationen nedan. Vi vill att du studerar sortimentspresentationen **noggrant** och sedan svarar på de frågor som följer.*

** sortimentspresentation = presentation och exponering av produkter.*

BILD VISAS

Hur känner du dig efter att ha sett sortimentspresentationen?

Ledsen	1–7	Glad
Irriterad	1–7	Nöjd
Vemodig	1–7	Belåten
Förtvivlad	1–7	Hoppfull
Avslappnad	1–7	Stimulerad
Lugn	1–7	Exalterad

Hur uppfattar du sortimentspresentationen?

Öväntat	1–7	Förväntat
Annorlunda	1–7	Vanligt
Irrelevant	1–7	Relevant
Överraskade	1–7	Förutsett

Till vilken grad upplever du sortimentspresentationen som...

	<i>Instämmer inte alls (1)</i>	<i>Instämmer helt och hållet (7)</i>
Kreativt		
Innovativt		
Fantasifullt		
Nytänkande		

Vad är din attityd till sortimentspresentationen efter du har sett bilden?

Dålig	1–7	Bra
Negativ	1–7	Positiv
Ogillar	1–7	Gillar

Vad är din attityd till varumärket H&M efter att du har sett bilden?

Dålig	1–7	Bra
Negativ	1–7	Positiv
Ogillar	1–7	Gillar

Bedöm till vilken grad du håller med följande påståenden:

	<i>Instämmer inte alls (1)</i>	<i>Instämmer helt och hållet (7)</i>
Jag vill veta mer om H&M		
Barnavdelningen gör mig mer intresserad av H&M		
Sortimentspresentationen gör att jag vill lära mig mer om H&M		

Föreställ dig att du ska köpa ett valfritt barnplagg. Hur troligt är det att du väljer att köpa plagget från H&M?

Inte alls troligt	1–7	Mycket troligt
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Hur troligt är det att du kommer att rekommendera H&M till en vän?

Inte alls troligt	1–7	Mycket troligt
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Hur troligt är det att du kommer att berätta om H&M:s sortimentspresentation för en vän?

Inte alls troligt	1–7	Mycket troligt
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Genusfrågor är...

Instämmer inte alls (1)

Instämmer helt och hållet (7)

Viktiga för mig

Meningsfulla för mig

Värda att minnas enligt mig

Jag definierar mig som...

Kvinna

Man

Annat

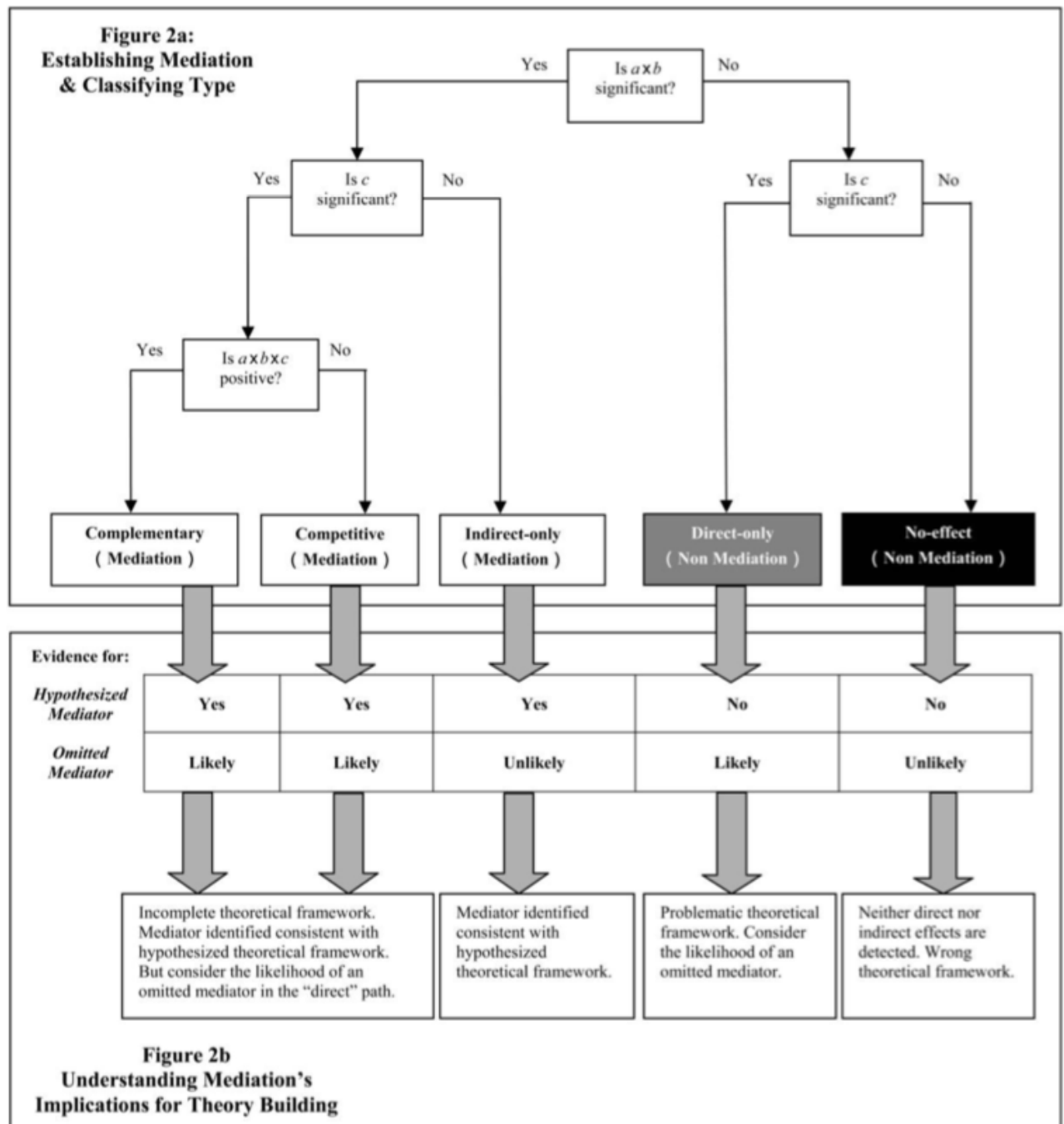
Din ålder (vad god svara med exakt siffra, t.ex. 25)

APPENDIX 4: CRONBACH'S ALPHA

	Cronbach's Alpha
Pleasure Index	.939
Arousal Index	.717
Presentation Attitude index	.966
Brand Attitude Index	.985
Dogmatism Index	.649
Personal Relevance Index	.961
Incongruity	.921
Creativity Index	.964
Brand Interest Index	.877

Cronbach's Alpha values for the main study

APPENDIX 5: DECISION TREE DEVELOPED BY ZHAO, LYNCH & CHEN (2010)



Decision tree for establishing and understanding types of mediation and non-mediation.