

GENDER BENDER BRAND HIJACKS AND CONSUMER REVOLT

The Porsche Cayenne Story

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Larson tells you that he bought his new Ford Mustang because of its performance characteristics, touting its 4.6 liter V8 engine that generates 315 horsepower and torque power like he's never felt before. He and his dad spent years in their garage rebuilding old Mustangs from the 1960s when he was growing up.

The crowd is thick at the bar and John has to shout so that the bartender can hear. As John yells, "A cosmopolitan with Stolichnaya Razberi," the crowd surrounding him goes quiet and then erupts into laughter. John quickly adds, "...for my girlfriend. And a Jose Cuervo tequila shot for me."

Carlo laughs when you ask him whether he smokes Marlboro cigarettes in order to be a cowboy. He tells you that Marlboros generate the densest smoke, thick and syrupy, just like he likes it. He's always smoked Marlboro because that's what the older boys in his neighbor smoked when he was a teenager.

Walking out of the theater, Dalton just shakes his head when you ask him whether he liked the movie he has just seen, Confessions of a Shopaholic, starring Isla Fisher as a Manhattan writer with a shopping addiction. Smiling, he points to his girlfriend who gushes about the movie. While she is speaking, he rolls his eyes and pretends to slit his own throat.

Brands are Gender Identity Markers

In today's world, the things we buy serve as identity markers, communicating who we are or who we would like to be to others around us. People who know us use our consumption as clues to understand who we are, and they judge us based on what we buy, use, and do. Our consumption communicates a lot of different things about who we are. Think about how the clothes someone wears helps tells us whether they are rich versus poor, conservative versus liberal, old versus young, yuppie versus bohemian, urban versus rural, showy versus modest, hip versus mainstream.

One central part of who we are is our gender identity—our sense of ourselves as women or men. Larson, John, Carlo, and Dalton are typical guys and they choose products, brands and consumption experiences that reflect who they are. What these consumers have realized is that the products and brands they use and the consumption experiences they choose contribute to their identity as men. Their masculinity is judged by the cars they drive, the drinks they order, the cigarettes they smoke, and the movies they like. Buy the wrong thing and one's masculinity is questioned; buy the right thing and one's masculinity is secured. Across many different product

categories, things are gendered. Think about how easy it is for you to match the following products with either men or women:

- Harley-Davidson motorcycle vs. Vespa scooter
- Mountain Dew vs. Diet Coke
- Chevy Corvette vs. Volkswagen Cabriolet
- Jack Daniels whiskey vs. Turning Leaf chardonnay
- Entourage vs. Sex in the City

Marlboro vs. Virginia Slims

Throughout history, marketers have created gendered brands, creating their brands and the stories they crafted about them in their advertising to appeal either to men or to women. One classic example comes from The Altria Group, formerly known as Philip Morris. The Marlboro cigarette brand, known today for its rugged American West imagery, actually began life as a cigarette targeted towards women. Early advertising for Marlboro from the 1920s featured the tagline "Mild as May." It was only in the 1960s that Marlboro created the Marlboro cowboy and the mythical place he inhabits, "Marlboro Country," which has fueled the masculine image the brand enjoys in the marketplace today. Today, the Marlboro brand team hosts smokers at the Marlboro Crazy Mountain Ranch in Montana to let them live out their cowboy fantasies. At the same time that the company was giving the Marlboro brand a masculine make-over, it introduced Virginia Slims, a cigarette targeted to women, that featured taglines like "It's a woman thing" and a more elegant, narrow shape, tapered to mimic a woman's fingers.

Diet Coke vs. Coke Zero

A more contemporary example comes from The Coca-Cola Company. For years, Diet Coke has reigned as the top selling diet soda in the marketplace. However, Diet Coke's sales have been fueled almost entirely by women. Why? Consumer research told marketers at Coca-Cola that men, increasingly conscious about their weight, would like less calories in their soda, but that they were turned off by Diet Coke and other diet sodas because of their ubiquitous appeal among women. It was only when Coca-Cola in 2005 introduced Coke Zero that men flocked to the category. Coke Zero was launched in a black can, which starkly contrasted with Diet Coke's white and silver can, reflecting, as Coca-Cola's marketers claimed, the fuller flavored, bolder drink inside. Coke Zero's irreverent launch advertising was also designed to pull in men, as was its sponsorship of the 2008 "Coke Zero 400" NASCAR