

**THE AUTHORITY OF FASHION:
THE IMPACT OF BRAND CREDIBILITY AND GENDER BLURRING ON
ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDERED FASHION ADVERTISEMENTS**

BY

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A thesis
submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Commerce

Victoria University of Wellington

2017

ABSTRACT

Gender identity is increasingly accepted as a continuum. Consumers feel that they are no longer constrained by the norms of gendered consumptions, so they are expressing themselves and their identities through new purchase behaviours. *Gender blurring* refers to the crossing of gender boundaries, when masculine and feminine traits are swapped. This has been seen in the fashion industry, where brands are featuring male models in womenswear and vice versa.

Despite the increasing usage of gender blurring in fashion campaigns, there is little empirical evidence as to how consumers respond to it. This study attempted to fill this gap in knowledge, investigating how brands that can utilise gender blurring in their advertising without eliciting negative consequences. Brand credibility influences the persuasiveness of advertising, and it is evident within luxury fashion brands and their ability to set fashion trends. In this study, a 3x2x2 between-subjects experimental design was used. Subjects were exposed to a fashion advertisement, featuring either a high- or low-credibility brand (Louis Vuitton or the Warehouse), with a male model wearing stereotyped, androgynous, or gender blurred clothing. The clothing was framed in either a work or casual context. As the purpose of the study was to assess responses irrespective of gender or social class, the sample was made up of adult consumers from New Zealand randomly assigned to experimental conditions.

The findings indicate that overall consumers respond more negatively to gender blurring in fashion advertising, and more positively to advertising from a high-credibility brand. Interestingly, no main effect of context was found. The analysis suggests that brand credibility moderates the effect of gender blurring, as consumers exposed to gender blurring by the Louis Vuitton advertisements reported more positive attitudes than those in the Warehouse conditions. This normalising effect contributes to our understanding of cultural authority and the movement of meaning. High credibility brands have an authority over consumer culture, and thus can facilitate the movement of fringe issues, like gender blurring, into the mainstream, fostering wider acceptance. Managerially, marketers should be aware of the potential negative impacts of utilising gender blurring, and understand that brand credibility is an important factor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisors, Janine Williams and Djavlonbek Kadirov, thank you for your dedication and input throughout this entire process. This thesis would not have been possible without your tireless support and guidance. You've taught me more over the past 18 months than I thought possible, and shaped me into the researcher that I am today.

Thank you to the lecturers, administration, and other staff within the School of Marketing & International Business for the support in learning about research, the chats over the constant (but required) pots of coffee, and for allowing productive procrastination in the form of tutoring. You've helped to develop my worldview, and kept me constantly curious.

To the Masters girls: Anya, Maddie, Monica, and Tessa, thank you for keeping me sane. From complaining about word counts, to gossiping over a flat white, your never-ending encouragement has both inspired and grounded me. Tessa, we've become so close that we subconsciously wear the same clothes, and the staff will forever be confused to see us separately.

To the Honours class of 2016: Ainsley, Carla, Charleen, Connie, Kirsten, and Madz, I may not miss the heated debates, but I will miss the camaraderie! Thank you for making the year more enjoyable.

To my co-workers outside of the University, thank you for the welcome distractions and support throughout my academic career, including being so understanding of my stress levels leading up to submission.

Thank you to my friends for the reality checks, proofreading, and words of support; you've made life so much better, and you putting up with my rambles on branding has been invaluable.

Finally, to my family, thank you. You've constantly pushed me to be my best, but also supported me through my ups and downs. Your continuous interest in my study has not only made me more passionate, but aided with my clarity around the topic. At last, it's finally over!

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the fashion industry, there has been a blurring of gender lines (La Ferla, 2015), and increasingly brands are utilising this trend in their marketing communications. As a more diverse group of brands adopt these practices, study of consumer response to gender blurring by brands and how the brands themselves influence consumer attitudes is becoming increasingly salient. *Gender blurring* refers to the rejection of traditional gender stereotyping (Kasriel-Alexander, 2016), with men exploring feminine clothing and vice versa. The trend is currently causing controversy within society, launching conversations around bathroom door signs, social media gender options, the non-gendering of colours, and depictions of gender in the media (Kasriel-Alexander, 2016). In recent fashion shows, runways have been awash with gender blurred models walking down the catwalk. In previous years, this used to be the domain of the niche houses such as Nicopanda, an exclusively gender neutral brand (Garbarino, 2015). However, recently gender blurring has been seen in the shows of more mainstream and prominent labels, such as Lanvin, Gucci, and Proenza Schouler (Garbarino, 2015). Fast fashion brands such as Zara and Diesel have additionally launched gender neutral lines (Binkley, 2016).

In fashion advertising campaigns, Acne made headlines by featuring the founder's son in their womenswear editorial (Marzec, 2015). More recently, New Zealand womenswear brand Karen Walker posted a picture on the brand Instagram profile of one of their male employees wearing some of the newest collection pieces (karen_walker, 2017, July 23). Icons such as David Bowie have been considered a key influence (La Ferla, 2015). The movement has gained traction because of a more general acceptance of gender as a spectrum, and the recognition that gender is something separate and distinct from the more traditional binary biological sex (Cohen, 2015). The usage of gender blurring has been met with mixed reviews and responses from consumers. Some, such as the Acne campaign, have been met with critical acclaim, while others, such as the recent introduction of choker necklaces to fashion retailer ASOS's menswear site, have been met with speculation and criticism (Stuff, 2017).

The above anecdotal evidence suggests that brands are engaging in the non-normative practice of blurring gender in fashion, however there is limited understanding as to the

effectiveness of this strategy nor whether the brand involved in the practice influences consumer response.

1.1 Background to the Research

Gender identity, or one's sense of their own maleness or femaleness (Spence, 1984), is distinct from biological sex, and is regarded as an important concept in marketing. It is important in terms of the consumer's gender congruence with products (Fugate & Phillips, 2010) and brands (Sandhu, 2017), the success of brand extensions across genders (Jung, 2006; Ulrich, 2013) and responses to role portrayal in advertising (Chu, Lee, & Kim, 2016). Despite its relevance and changing conceptualisations in parent disciplines such as gender studies (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and psychology (Burr, 1998), the majority of current marketing scholarship and wider society still views gendered consumption in terms of the binary (Avery, 2012).

Gender meanings derive from cultural symbols and become associated with products and consumption via marketing and fashion systems (McCracken, 1986), as a result this gender is typically reflective of the gender or sex of the end-user (Golden, Allison, & Clee, 1979). This influences cultural perceptions of appropriate consumption behaviours for the different genders, creating gender stereotypes (Peñaloza, 1994; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Fashion is an industry of particular relevance to the realm of gender, with society placing gendered meanings on articles of clothing and consumers using these articles as identifiers of gender (Davis, 1992). Advertising typically reflects these gender stereotypes, as gender congruence between the consumer and aspects of communications, such as the brand, the spokesperson, the role portrayal, and the product have been found to influence attitudes towards the advertisement and advertising effectiveness (Stafford, 1998).

In terms of practitioners, the primary objective of advertising is to facilitate business and drive sales, yet managers are engaging in the practice of gender blurring without a full understanding of the consequences of doing so. Relevant advertising effectiveness literature is typically concerned as to whether the relationships and constructs studied within the advertisements actually entice consumers to engage with the brand (Akbari, 2015; Gelb & Pickett, 1983; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000; Shimp, 1981). The persuasive effects of advertising on consumers has been well documented within literature (see Clark, Wegener, Habashi, & Evans, 2012; Curlo & Chamblee, 1998; Maddux &

Rogers, 1980; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010; Wood, 2000), with the consensus being that effective advertising results in consumers more readily processing messages and claims, ending in an attitudinal or behavioural change. (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986). Advertising has been found to be more persuasive when the source has a higher credibility, which acts as a signal conveying the product quality and reducing processing times (Baek, Kim, & Yu, 2010).

Evans (1989) discussed how branding and brand image is of the utmost importance within the fashion industry. The brand is one of the main cues used by consumers in their decision-making process when purchasing fashion products, given the range of functional and symbolic attributes under consideration (Choi, Ko, Kim, & Mattila, 2015). As such, the brand is an important concept to consider, as it influences a consumer's consideration set (Erdem & Swait, 1998). Brand credibility has been conceptualised as being made up of trustworthiness and expertise (Baek et al., 2010; Erdem & Swait, 2004) and it has been shown that brands with a higher credibility are more often considered by consumers, as well as positively influencing attitudes towards advertisements (Goldsmith et al., 2000), which could influence the adoption of new and potentially non-normative trends.

Historically, the meaning of clothing has been shown to be able to change, with Crane (2000, p. 172) positing that the "transition to postindustrial society has affected the meaning of items of masculine clothing in different contexts – business and leisure settings." Fashion is predominantly concerned with what is new, and as such an understanding surrounding the use of new and non-normative trends such as gender blurring is of extreme import for branding (Evans, 1989). In the fashion world, the brand is at the forefront of fashion trends, and the increased credibility associated with luxury brands results in the trends that they place in their collection diffusing throughout the wider fashion markets (Okonkwo, 2007). This influence on fashion choice and meaning also depends on the fashion business model – be it luxury fashion, industrial (mass-market), or street fashion. With the fast-moving pace of the industry, and what is considered fashionable, innovation and differentiation are largely considered the *raison d'être* of luxury fashion houses, with the branding aspects fulfilling the role of driving continuous desire in spite of constant change (Okonkwo, 2007). This further evidences the authoritative nature of luxury fashion in setting the fashions of the time.

Fashion, being typically a hedonic, high-involvement product category, involves consumers engaging in intense, emotional relationships with brands (Ismail & Spinelli, 2012). The Brand as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) proposes that brand relationships are akin to interpersonal relationships (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012), in addition to predicting how the perceived intentions and ability of a brand, similar to the key dimensions of credibility (trustworthiness and expertise), influence consumer evaluations. Thus, understanding the perceived credibility of a brand could aid in explaining the impact of the related variables in this study.

1.2 Research Gaps

Despite previous work exploring the adoption of fashion trends, there is still a gap in understanding as to the role that the brand plays in the acceptance of trends when the claim is non-normative and controversial, such as with gender blurring. Academia typically accepts that gender identity is an important concept to understand within consumers, however stereotypical views of gender are still most commonly employed within advertising portrayals (Bettany, Dobscha, O'Malley, & Prothero, 2010). This is widely justified by the positive effect of gender congruence (between the consumer and the brand/portrayal) on attitudes (Jung, 2006; Pike & Jennings, 2005). Summers, Belleau, and Xu (2006) found that the perceived appropriateness of controversial fashion products had a significant positive influence on a consumer's willingness to purchase, but did not examine branding aspects in depth, nor the influence of marketing communications on attitudes.

Brand credibility literature has explored the influence of a brand on purchase intention and consumer evaluations (Baek et al., 2010; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Erdem, Swait, & Louviere, 2002), but not specifically the acceptance of a non-normative fashion advertising claim. As evident through the Transfer of Meaning Model (McCracken, 1986), cultural meaning is moved through advertising systems, however it is not known how significant an effect the brand has in enabling this transference of meaning, particularly when controversial issues are involved. Controversial advertising typically elicits less favourable responses (Fam, Waller, & Erdogan, 2004), since behaviours are seen as less appropriate (Summers et al., 2006), but can more credible brands influence the acceptance of such claims? Given the current lack of empirical evidence surrounding the topic, yet the increasing proliferation of

its use in fashion advertising, it is important for marketing academics and practitioners alike to understand the role of the brand in potential consequences of using gender blurring.

1.3 Research Problem & Questions

This research aims to seek a better understanding as to the role of the brand in the acceptance of non-normative advertising claims. Specifically, the study means to investigate the influences of brand credibility and gender blurring on consumer attitudes, in addition to considering this influence in different fashion contexts.

Credible brands hold a heuristic influence over consumers, acting as a symbol of expertise and trustworthiness (Erdem & Swait, 1998), and hence it is proposed that the higher the credibility a brand has, the more accepting consumers will be towards the use of gender blurring in fashion advertising. Luxury fashion brands are typically considered to be symbolic of the upper echelons of society, and as such, with their high profile creative directors, they are typified as having prestige and expertise that other brands do not, giving them the ability to set the trends for a season (Okonkwo, 2007).

This examination of the phenomenon and current literature provides some key research questions:

1. What influence does the utilisation of gender blurring have on a consumer's attitudes towards gendered fashion advertisements?
2. How does the brand influence consumer's attitudes towards gendered content in fashion advertisements?
3. Does fashion context influence consumer's responses to gender blurring in fashion advertisements?

1.4 Methodology

As the main objective of this research is to understand responses from consumers, a deductive, quantitative approach was taken. The research draws on the BIAF to relate the credibility of a brand to the persuasive ability that strong relationships can hold over people, and thus measure their acceptance of gender blurring within fashion advertising. A wide range of consumers within New Zealand made up the sample. Using an experimental method, subjects were exposed to an advertisement for a new collection of clothing from one of two familiar brands within New Zealand. To test the hypotheses, data was subjected

to statistical analyses, including the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and regression testing. The findings interpreted from these contribute to branding literature and guide marketing communications practice.

1.5 Significance & Importance of the Research

This research has several significant implications for marketing theory and practice, as it aims to contribute to areas of import. Theoretically, the study provides insight as to the effects of brand credibility on the acceptance of controversial claims within marketing communications. The significance of the research centres around the examination of the authority that brands may have in relation to the general acceptance of non-normative issues. It examines the influence of the brand on the transference of meaning within consumer culture. Greater understanding is required as to the responses of consumers to gender controversies within advertising. The research aims to contribute to brand credibility literature, investigating how the role that the brand plays in the facilitation of moving the phenomenon into mainstream culture.

Managerially, marketing practitioners can benefit from further understanding as to the potential effects or consequences of using gender blurring within their marketing communications. Currently brands are capitalising on the phenomenon, however some are being praised for it, and some are being subject to consumer backlash. What is it about the brands elicits these varying responses? Further examination in this area allows for practitioners to understand the extent to which they can gender blur without severe consequence, as well as providing insight into branding aspects that should be emphasised and curated in order to increase the effectiveness and persuasiveness of their advertising and communications. The research additionally has potential implications for public policy decisions, providing insight as to the representation of various gender identities within the media and policy, to foster more acceptance of non-binary individuals within society, and the creation of more inclusive communities.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Following this introduction to the thesis, Chapter Two frames the research, providing insight into what is currently known within extant academic literature, and identifies gaps in understanding. The review draws on key studies from the various disciplines pertinent to the topic, including gender studies, psychology, and marketing. It begins with a

conceptualisation of gender theory and the gendering of products. Following this is a discussion of the persuasive influence of advertising, with a focus on the brand as a source and related credibility. Chapter Three provides the conceptual framework of the study, detailing the key hypotheses generated which examine the key relationships between the constructs employed. Next, Chapter Four highlights the primary methodological considerations, including the research approach, research design, the measurement model used, and the statistical approach employed in the analysis of the data. Chapter Five details the results, testing the hypotheses. Chapter Six includes an interpretation of the results, discussing them using both micro- and macro-theory. Finally, Chapter Seven discusses contributions of the study, along with directions for potential future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Given the relatively recent incorporation of gender blurring in marketing practice, this chapter outlines and discusses the major streams of research from the domains of gender studies, psychology, and marketing that are relevant to the study at hand. Next, the current knowledge relating to gender within consumer research is discussed, followed by an overview of the advertising persuasion literature, and specifically source credibility in advertising messages. The chapter reviews the predominant marketing concepts explored within the study of advertising effectiveness, and the persuasive influence of both advertising and brands. Finally, major theoretical perspectives relating to brands and persuasion within marketing are reviewed.

2.1 Gender and Gender Blurring

2.1.1 Gender

Gender is a concept that has been studied and discussed within a range of disciplines, most notably gender studies, psychology, and marketing. The extant literature shows that, over time, the concept of gender has evolved. Historically, gender was thought to be the same as an individual's biological sex, i.e. either male or female (Palan, 2001). However, it was recognised that a distinction existed between the two; biological sex being male or female, and gender being considered as culturally defined (Firat, 1993; Palan, 2001). This change came as the relationship between the biological and cultural processes relating to gender were found to be more complex and reflexive than previously thought (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Case (1995) proposed a legal grounding for the demarcation of gender and sex as mutually exclusive terms, arguing the previously mentioned biological versus cultural inputs. She says "it is a sex distinction that men can grow beards and women typically cannot; it is a gender distinction that women wear dresses in this society and that men typically do not" (Case, 1995, pp. 10-11). Butler (1990) also argued for a distinction between gender and masculinity/femininity, saying that one can consider themselves to be a woman, but also be masculine, and vice versa. As such, extant literature is of the view that our conception of gender is comprised of both biological aspects (e.g. sex/sex category), and psychological aspects (in relation to gender identification).

Biologically, sex is a determination made at birth based on set criteria (most notably genitalia), whereas sex category refers to the placement sustained by socially-required

identifiers, that elucidate one's sex (Delphy, 1993; Fischer & Arnold, 1994; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Psychologically, gender is much more complex, and has been conceptualised in a multi-faceted manner. Gender has come to be considered a sociocultural construct; a set of behaviours that signify and are associated with the different sexes (Burr, 1998; Kacen, 2000). Gender identity has been referred to as the 'psychological sex', and was posited to refer to one's "basic psychological sense of belongingness to their own sex" (Spence, 1993, p. 625), or the extent to which they identify themselves with masculine or feminine traits (Spence, 1984). Alexander (2003, p. 8) refers to it as "the hypothesised core of gender schema or mental representations that include socially defined gender appropriate behaviours." Additionally, these masculine and feminine traits are not to be considered as bipolar, or opposites, but rather that individuals can relate to all traits to varying degrees (Fischer & Arnold, 1994). As gender is socially constructed, and not inherent in biology, males can identify with feminine traits, and females with masculine ones (Neale, Robbie, & Martin, 2016). Androgyny is a gender identity term that comes from Greek, using the words for both male and female. Sometimes referred to as gender-ambiguous in common vernacular, it considers individuals or clothing styles comprised of both masculine and feminine aspects. Reflecting this, in academia it refers to a high rating on both masculine and feminine traits (Case, 1995; Ravinder, 1987). Sex-role transcendence, as discussed by Ravinder (1987), typifies what people commonly refer to as androgyny – the lessening of differences between genders, or being independent of such stereotypically held views of masculinity and femininity.

Individuals also differ in the importance that they place on the relevance of their gender identity. Gould and Stern (1989) discussed gender consciousness, in relation to private-gender (the degree to which an individual is conscious of their own gender) and public-gender (the degree to which the consumer is conscious of their gender as public interest), in an attempt to refine the definition of gender within consumer behaviour. They maintain that viewing gender as a dichotomy creates too superficial a construct to predict outcome variables such as attitudes and purchase intentions, and as such academics need to consider within-sex differences (Gould & Stern, 1989).

The apparent internalisation of socialised gender norms has been thought to occur with the formation of one's gender identity, and this socialisation of gender is considered to be consistent with stereotypical gender roles (Alexander, 2003). Park (2012) investigated how gender role identity plays a part in symbolic consumption and appearance management – i.e. how a consumer curates the clothing they wear or the way in which they style themselves to display their gender role, in addition to having an interest in managing one's appearance. She noted that people choose clothing that reflects their role in society, but that these gender roles are being blurred – there are an increasing number of both dominant female roles, and submissive male roles (Park, 2012).

Gender schema refer to what can be considered as the 'rules' for what each gender is allowed to do in society; they dictate how gender is performed through things such as consumption (Avery, 2012). These rules are commonly termed as gender roles, and Alreck (1994) describes them as the prescription of ideals illustrating what a man and woman should look like in terms of their clothing, hairstyle, and presentation, as well as what they should do in current society. Gender role attitudes, therefore, are the result of gender schema and refer to how a consumer perceives the roles of males and females in society, with regard to their home, public, and work lives. Traditional gender role attitudes are defined as those where the individual holds strong gender stereotypes and norms, and prefer products congruent with their own gender (Ulrich, 2013). An example of such is the notion that men should not display tender emotion, or affection towards other men, or that women should not be as aggressive as a man, or leave the house without makeup on (Alreck, 1994). Gender roles and the accompanying attitudes are instilled into individuals from birth, with research showing that gendered labels, language and advertisements influence the toy choices of preschool children (Alexander, 2003; Owen & Padron, 2016; Pike & Jennings, 2005).

Gender schema and their associated roles influence the way that people perceive the gender of themselves and others. Gender Schema Theory (GST) proposes that individuals personify traits and behaviours that are congruent with their gender identity (Bem, 1981). Bem (1981) also used the theory to suggest that sex typing (the way in which society intuitively associates masculine to mean male, and feminine, female) is the result of gender-based schematic processing. Palan (2001) noted that GST was the first theory to regard masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions to be measured, which allowed for the inclusion and

assessment of androgynous individuals (who rank high or low on both). With this inclusion, Bem (1981) used the ability to measure androgyny to propose the androgyny score, which, in this context, can be regarded as an individual's gender identity, and that this can be used to predict a wide range of attitudes and behaviours where society associates them with masculinity or femininity.

Therefore, GST requires the rating of both how masculine and how feminine an individual perceives themselves to be in order to assess their gender identity. Furthermore, the two concepts should be treated as independent of one another, and not seen as on a continuum (Bem, 1981; Palan, 2001; Ulrich, 2013). Multifactorial Gender Identity Theory (MGIT) (Spence, 1993) was later developed and challenges the claim made by GST that gender identity is purely based on masculinity and femininity. The main assumption from MGIT is that gender identity is a combination of factors, such as gender attitudes, role expectations, and preferences (Palan, 2001). Ulrich and Tissier-Desbordes (2013) propose that within MGIT, gender is comprised of three key components (cognitive, affective, and behavioural), in addition to four contextual influences (biological, social, cultural, and situational). The theory proposes that an individual's gender identity is fluid, with them emphasising their masculine or feminine traits based on the context they find themselves in. Additionally, the cognitive, affective, and behavioural facets of MGIT provide insight as to when certain aspects of gender should be measured within consumer behaviour literature (for example, supplementing a cognitive aspect such as gender identity with the need for gender congruence with their products) (Ulrich & Tissier-Desbordes, 2013). This provides further evidence that viewing gender in terms of the binary, particularly in regard to consumption behaviour, is not necessarily the most appropriate.

There are several researchers who have looked at the gendered meaning of products, and how this meaning is constructed (see Alreck, 1994; Bellizzi & Milner, 1991; Jain, Bharadwaj, Bansal, & Natarajan, 2016; Milner & Fodness, 1996; Sandhu, 2016; Stonewall & Dorneich, 2016; Weisgram, Fulcher, & Dinella, 2014). Once products have been associated with a gender, they are termed 'gender dominant' (Bellizzi & Milner, 1991; Golden et al., 1979), and this gender dominance can be attributed based on the consumer's gender image, or the sex of the typical user (Golden et al., 1979; Iyer & Debevec, 1986; Stafford, 1998). The gendering of a product is done by imbuing it with masculine or feminine identities, taken from the dominant stereotypical view of men and women within

a culture (Alreck, 1994). This is done to further appeal to the intended market, particularly historically when gender was considered binary (Alreck, 1994). The gendering of products and brands creates what is known as gender cultures (Peñaloza, 1994; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), containing within them all that is considered to be appropriate gender consumption. These cultures are the enactment of gender by consumers, and as such they inhabit a gendered social space (Peñaloza, 1994), separate from other gender cultures.

In current society, however, “diversity has replaced homogeneity” (Alreck, 1994, p. 7) with a wider range of gender identities being expressed by consumers, and this is expected to additionally happen for modern gender categories, with diffusion due to the blurring of gender boundaries (Firat, 1993).

2.1.2 Gender Blurring & Gender Congruity

Gender blurring generally refers to the crossing of gender boundaries; “the substitution of an appropriate masculine (feminine) trait or behaviour for its feminine (masculine) counterpart” (Peñaloza, 1994, pp. 361-362), in regard to the product or person. There is disagreement on the term to use when referring to gender blurring, as a number of additional terms have been used to refer to the phenomenon. Kacen (2000) discussed how marketers can promote gender *blurring* through campaigns that subvert or ignore traditional gender notions and norms. She posited that over time this blurring strips products of their gendered meanings. Other academics have utilised the term gender *bending* (see Avery, 2012; Sandhu, 2016; Sandhu, 2017), to refer to marketers deconstructing the gendered division of brands. Sandhu (2017) discussed how the divide between masculine and feminine is becoming *unisex*. However, conceptually distinct from gender blurring, *unisex* in this instance refers to products having no specific or exclusive gendered identity. For instance, Stonewall and Dorneich (2016, p. 750) were of the view that “the exclusionary nature of gendered design is the driving force behind developing gender neutral designs”, indicating that gender neutrality is conceptually distinct from gender blurring, where gender boundaries are crossed and meanings are exchanged, as opposed to removed. Articles and reviews from practitioners and fashion industry insiders have denoted the phenomenon as gender blurring (see Garbarino, 2015; Kasriel-Alexander, 2016; La Ferla, 2015), and for the sake of consistency this term will be used in the remainder of this research.

Despite the apparent relaxation of normative rules around gender, stereotypical conceptions still reflect the majority of consumers and are used to determine purchase decisions in many product categories (Fugate & Phillips, 2010). Attitudes towards a brand have been shown to be positively affected by the perceived fit of the brand's gender with the consumer's gender (Alexander, 2003; Grohmann, 2009; Jung, 2006; Neale et al., 2016). Due to this, academics are commonly of the view that when it comes to gender, congruence leads to more favourable outcomes, due to the match-up hypothesis and congruity theory (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; Stafford, 1998). Brands are readily considered to have a gendered aspect of their personality (Grohmann, 2009), and in addition to this, many brands have been introducing cross-gendered brand extensions (Jung, 2006; Ulrich, 2013). Such extensions are considered to blur gender at the brand level, for example Gillette (a masculine brand) releasing Venus (a feminine brand extension). Attitudes towards cross-gendered brand extensions are impacted by the congruence between the consumer's gender and the brand gender. Ulrich (2013) found that traditional gender role attitudes had a negative relationship with attitudes towards the brand extension, whilst gender identity has little impact. However, the research focused on behaviour and congruity around the gender identity of the individual, and how that impacts whether they will purchase products that are associated with a specific gender. Jung (2006) also studied the evaluation of such cross-gendered extensions based on the impact of the gender of both the consumer and the brand. They found that the acceptance of such an extension was higher when the extension came from a masculine parent brand and targeted females, than when it came from a feminine parent brand targeted at males. This is in addition to women being typically more accepting of cross-gendered extensions (Jung, 2006).

Few studies have looked at gender congruence at the product-level. Fugate and Phillips (2010) formulated their research surrounding whether consumers categorise products in terms of gender. They also utilised self-congruity theory to examine the extent to which consumers' desire product-gender congruity. These effects are stronger in males, who felt a higher need to purchase gender-congruent products. It was additionally found that being brought up to have less traditional gender role attitudes lessened this effect (Fugate & Phillips, 2010). These findings within both cross-gendered extensions and product-gender congruence are consistent with the prevailing understandings of hegemonic masculinity, where the realm of womanhood is seen as a signal not only of femininity, but as a lack of masculinity and thus inferior (Avery, 2012; Kramer, 2005).

On the basis of this reasoning applied at a brand level, Neale et al. (2016) suggested that if a brand wishes to gender blur, they should err on the side of masculinity. Work has proposed that hegemonic masculinity is incredibly pervasive within consumer culture, and that men view women being included within masculine brands (or the gender blurring of brands) negatively, and as a threat to their masculinity (Avery, 2012; Sandhu, 2017). As such, they are likely to abandon the brand in favour of others (Tuncay & Otnes, 2008), and view gender blurring attempts more negatively (Sandhu, 2017). Peñaloza (1994, p. 366) highlighted that as “those with money and power are men, the crossing of women into the male domain by wearing clothing associated with the masculine is viewed as rational and is naturalised, whereas for men, the crossing into the feminine domain by wearing clothes associated with the feminine is to willingly pursue its stigma and downward mobility, which is viewed as irrational as it goes against individual male privilege and the male dominated culture”, a notion supported by Kramer (2005). Case (1995, pp. 22-23) similarly noted that “every aspect of androgyny as is fashionable today is constructed by women taking a giant, culturally endorsed step towards the masculine, while men move, if at all, only a baby step toward the feminine”, with Kimmel (1996) indicating that to be considered masculine is dependent on the avoidance of feminine brands. Sandhu (2016) discussed how the perceived gender of a product is typically not open for redefinition, however Avery (2012) noted that phenomena such as metrosexual discourse changed the borders of masculine consumption. Men used gender blurring to experiment with various identities, but also to resist feminine contamination (the movement of femininity into masculine brands), by redefining consumption seen as exclusively feminine to also incorporate masculinity, thus creating various gendered spaces within the brand (Avery, 2012). These findings, in combination with observed trends, suggest that there may be greater acceptance of gender blurring from females into masculinity, as opposed to males moving into femininity.

2.1.2.1 Gender & Fashion Contexts

Davis (1992) proposed that consumers use clothing to convey information about themselves that could otherwise be ambiguous within their social self, such as their age, masculinity vs femininity, rebelliousness, or occupation, highlighting the apparent need for gender congruence between consumers and their products, at least in terms of gender identity. Therefore, fashion conveys gender and social status within society (Crane, 2000).

Clothing styles historically reflected and perpetuated gender stereotypes, for example it was expected that women wear restrictive clothing (such as corsets) in order to accentuate their femininity and body shape and highlight their role as the 'lady of the house' (i.e. someone who did not have a career and was expected to keep the house) (Crane, 2000). Thus, femininity in fashion was typically demarcated by its focus on the womanly form, in an effort to fully distinguish between males and females (Case, 1995). Men, conversely, were expected to own a suit for a range of affairs (Crane, 2000). However, in more modern times fashion has become increasingly fragmented; the advent of machine-made clothing lessened the economic importance of clothing, allowing for the continual redefinition of the meaning of clothing items.

Over time, fashion for business and leisure activities have become vastly differentiated and exclusive. Society has specific ideas as to what type of clothing is considered formal, and what is considered informal. Adding to the impact of culture and society on the meaning of these clothing items, Schofield, Birtwistle, and Schmidt (2005) argued that clothing conveys meaning to allow individuals to fit into different situational contexts, and thus allows the enactment of various different identities. In the construction of the self, two categories of such identities can be considered in terms of fashion – one for business, and one for leisure. In a business setting, people are considered to maintain a sense of decorum; to act in the best interests of the company, and not as an individual. The business suit is intended to promote conformity as a way to convey the identity of the company, resulting in stricter workplace dress norms (Joseph, 1986).

Bell (1976) also argued that in the leisure sphere of contemporary society, identities are much more fluid than in the workplace. Furthermore, he proposed that the construction of one's identity outside of work is increasingly more important, as the more fluid nature allows for further expression and differentiation. This overall has led to two different clothing cultures, with different clothing behaviours observed in each of them. Corporate or workplace clothing has been noted to create a strong hierarchy, distinctly identifying where and what people do, in way of a uniform. Leisure clothing, however, has been deemed to blur the differences in social strata, with everyone living within the same world of fashion, exposed to the same popular culture and media (Crane, 2000). Forsythe, Butler, and Kim (1991) studied the adoption of fashion by women in regard to work clothing. They found that younger consumers were more likely to adopt and influence fashion choices, but

in the context of work clothing, the perceived appropriateness of the item was a significant predictor of adoption.

Crane (2000) further discussed how these two cultures of clothing differ in terms of norms and values. The activities that an individual performs when wearing leisure clothing, for example, elude to different values than that of the workplace. They highlight the social self, and the identity people wish to convey is often irrespective of social class; there are even overlaps between classes. Consumers use clothing as a form of symbolic consumption, not only to reflect their gender identity but also to convey it to others, as a form of managing first impressions. The clothing an individual wears acts as a signal, conveying likeness to social in-groups, which increases their acceptance (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004).

Whisner (1982) discussed how companies enforce dress codes based on gender, and that this is a form of distinguishing between the sexes. Dellinger (2002) conducted qualitative research exploring how dress norms are dictated and influenced by the organisational culture of the given workplace. Accountants and editors at two different magazines – one feminist and the other heterosexual porn – were interviewed around how they felt regarding their dress in the office and if it allowed them to express themselves. Across the two magazines, and the two business units, there was the general consensus that the place of work did dictate to an extent the clothing that employees chose to wear (Dellinger, 2002). The accountants typically felt that, even if the business did not have a formal dress code, they were expected to wear appropriate office clothing – “a suit and tie for men, and some kind of business attire for women” (Dellinger, 2002, p. 8). The impression that clothing gave to a client was considered important, and thus what was worn needed to meet a certain standard. Even with more relaxed and informal working environments, some attention was still paid to wearing clothes that were congruent with the organisational culture (Dellinger, 2002). In particular, newer employees to the companies were more concerned with clothing that was considered appropriate (Dellinger, 2002), indicating a stronger rigidity in clothing and gender norms. On the basis of the stricter norms and differing symbolic aspects of business clothing, gender blurring as a non-normative practice may be less acceptable.

2.2 Advertising

2.2.1 Source Credibility

Within marketing communications, the message model typically concerns a source, such as a brand, where marketers encode a message, which is sent to consumers, who decode the message (Stern, 1994). The source is typically considered as the communicator of the message. One of the earliest studies on source credibility, Hovland and Weiss (1951), did not define the construct outright, but discussed how sources deemed untrustworthy were discounted. They held the view that more prestigious sources are typically perceived as being more credible, and that source credibility is like an individual's attitude toward the communicator. Such perceived attributes of the communicator have been found to influence the persuasiveness of marketing communications (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 1998).

Credibility literature as a whole describes credibility as being comprised of two key dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise (e.g. Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Erdem et al., 2002; Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2004; Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978), with some adding that attractiveness as an additional dimension (Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Till & Busier, 2000). Other research has conceptualised the construct as being comprised of trustworthiness in addition to dynamism and competence (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969), objectivity (Whitehead, 1968), or authoritativeness and character (McCroskey, 1966). However, more recent literature typically contends that trustworthiness and expertise are the two most critical components, and that these earlier studies selected the additional dimensions arbitrarily, and are thus deemed problematic (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

Credibility has been found across literature to have a positive effect on a range of marketing variables. Sources with higher credibility have been found to have a significant positive effect on attitudes towards both the product and the company selling it (Buda & Zhang, 2000; Fireworker & Friedman, 1977; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Pornpitakpan, 2004). The perceived expertise of a celebrity endorser has also been found to have such an effect on a consumers intention to purchase a product (Ohanian, 1991). Some authors argue that the credibility of the source stems from the appropriateness or fit of the endorser and the message, termed the 'match-up hypothesis', and therefore endorsers with a stronger fit are considered to be more effective (Erdogan, 1999; Till & Busier, 2000).

Extant literature often breaks down source credibility into various constituent constructs, based on the source of the message, including celebrity (e.g. Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990, 1991; Silvera & Austad, 2004), corporate (e.g. Lafferty, 2007; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2004; Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002), and brand (e.g. Jin, Lee, & Jun, 2014; Ok, Choi, & Hyun, 2011; Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011; Sweeney & Swait, 2008). The literature base largely finds that a source deemed to be more credible has a more persuasive impact on the receiver of the message (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Sternthal et al., 1978).

2.2.2 The Brand as a Source

A brand is considered as one of the sources of credibility of a marketing message, and from this brand credibility has been introduced as a construct that specifically focusses on the brand engaged in communications with the consumer. Erdem and Swait (2004) defined brand credibility broadly as the believability of a brand's intentions. They conceptualised it as being comprised of the same two dimensions as source credibility, however in this context, trustworthiness refers to the perception of how willing a firm is to deliver what they promise, and expertise refers to how capable they are of delivering that (Sweeney & Swait, 2008). Erdem and Swait (1998, 2004) drew on signalling theory to examine consumer-based brand equity, and ultimately found that credibility underlies consumers' confidence in the claims made by a brand. Past marketing mix strategies become associated with the brand that introduced it, and thus a brand signal is the embodiment of these strategies within the market (Erdem & Swait, 1998). These signals are characterised by their clarity (how unambiguous the information conveyed is) and credibility, with credibility being considered the most important aspect (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004; Erdem et al., 2002).

The research has focused largely on the effects that brand credibility has on consumer-based equity and celebrity endorsement (Spry et al., 2011), perceived risk, quality and brand consideration (Baek et al., 2010; Erdem & Swait, 2004), and customer loyalty and satisfaction (Sweeney & Swait, 2008). Brand credibility in these cases was found to have a significant positive impact on the dependent variables. Additionally, some studies have looked at the impacts of brand credibility on common attitudinal and behavioural constructs, such as attitudes toward the advertisement and purchase intention (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Spry et al., 2011; Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). They

have found significant positive effects of brand credibility on attitudes towards advertisements, attitudes towards the brand, and purchase intentions (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty et al., 2002). In these studies, the advertisements were in the contexts of fictitious shoe brands and oil companies.

The effects of brand credibility can also be seen within the context of luxury branding. The construct was found to have the same effect on variables such as brand preference and purchase intentions in the context of luxury restaurants (Jin et al., 2014). Jackson (2004) proposed that luxury products are exclusive, and have a premium image, price, and status. Together, these characteristics create a product desirable not solely for function, but for the symbolic aspects of the brand, and as such consumers are influenced by factors such as prestige (Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010). Fionda and Moore (2009) proposed the following as key dimensions of a luxury fashion brand: a clear brand identity, company culture (for both internal and external relationships), a luxury environment and service, heritage, exclusivity, premium price, a design signature, product integrity, and appropriate marketing communications. Additional proposed key aspects of luxury branding include the perceived conspicuousness, uniqueness, quality, hedonism, and effect on the extended self (Daswani & Jain, 2011). Okonkwo (2007) asserted that luxury brands set the stage for each season's trends, and draw this power from the strength of their brand signals. Brand credibility is drawn from the signals of a brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998), resulting in luxury brands (with more prestige, generated from the above dimensions) typically having a higher credibility than mass-market brands (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Additionally, the way that a consumer sees themselves as being congruent with the image of the brand has a significant positive effect on brand attitudes and loyalty (Liu, Abimbola, Li, Mizerski, & Soh, 2012). This influence exerted on branding information by credibility gives fashion houses persuasive power over what is in style, as detailed below.

2.2.3 Persuasive Influence of Advertising

The academic literature has widely accepted that the formation of attitudes towards an advertisement is an important concept to understand in regard to persuasion, as these attitudes affect and influence a consumer's evaluation of a brand and purchase intention (Cox & Locander, 1987; Miniard, Bhatla, & Rose, 1990; Mitchell, 1986). Shimp (1981) found evidence that attitudes towards the advertisement positively impact brand attitudes, which then influenced brand choice. This was also evidenced in research by Gardner

(1985), who found a significant positive effect of attitudes towards the advertisement on brand attitudes, both when consumers had processing sets directed towards evaluating the brand, or the advertisement on its own.

Advertising literature has extensively studied variables that could potentially impact attitudes towards advertisements. Some research found a significant effect of emotional feelings experienced on attitudes towards the advertisement, suggesting affect-transfer effects (Machleit & Wilson, 1988). Emotional and rational appeals both have significant impacts on attitudes towards advertisements, with Akbari (2015) finding rational appeals have a more dramatic effect on attitudes for advertisements portraying high involvement products. Additionally, when an advertisement is more blatantly promotional (a banner/print advertisement as opposed to sponsorship, for example), consumers can more readily recognise a persuasion attempt, which in turn means that their persuasion knowledge is higher (Tutaj & van Reijmersdal, 2012). If the consumer has a higher knowledge or understanding of the advertiser's or brand's intent, they are more critical in evaluating the brand, meaning that the credibility of the brand influences the persuasion of the advertisement (Tutaj & van Reijmersdal, 2012). Moore and Rodgers (2005) also found that print advertising was perceived as being more credible than online advertising, with Flanagin and Metzger (2000) finding that evaluating the source and credibility of online advertising is more difficult for consumers.

DeBono and Harnish (1988) performed a study investigating the impact of expertise on the persuasiveness of a message. They found that when the source was perceived to be an expert in the area, high self-monitoring individuals had an attitudinal change, towards the claim presented by the source. Additionally, this change was found to happen via heuristics and peripheral cues (DeBono & Harnish, 1988), such as the imagery common in fashion advertising. Homer and Kahle (1990) conducted research on how message evaluation and source credibility attributes influenced changes in beliefs. They found that a source with higher expertise significantly influenced a change in beliefs towards the message claim, both directly and indirectly through message evaluation (Homer & Kahle, 1990). This was similarly found by Maddux and Rogers (1980), whose research found that there exists a positive relationship between source expertise and the persuasiveness of an advertising claim, indicating that a highly credible source is more likely to be able to convince consumers of potentially novel claims.

Additionally, it has been found that attitudes towards advertisements are informed by how a consumer perceives and decodes the messages being sent, and whether or not they judge the message to be credible and authentic (based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model) (Miniard et al., 1990). Brand credibility may play an important role in the formation of attitudes, and whether a consumer is favourable towards the advertising or not influences how likely they are to be persuaded by the messages being conveyed (Mehta, 2000).

Potentially controversial products (such as sex-related products like condoms, or feminine hygiene products, or alcohol, have additionally been found to impact attitudes towards advertisement. When advertising potentially offensive products, offense is especially taken when advertising is deemed racist, sexist, or indecent (Waller, 1999). While personal characteristics are influential, for example consumers who are more highly religious have been found to deem such advertising more offensive (Fam et al., 2004), limited literature examines the impact of the brand on responses to controversial advertising. Summers et al. (2006) found that in the case of luxury apparel, purchase intention towards controversial products (in this case alligator leather) was strongly impacted by a consumer's attitude towards the behaviour (of owning alligator products). They suggest the luxury brands should consider emphasising product or brand attributes within advertising campaigns in order to persuade consumers to purchase, as consumers purchased to reflect their desired social status (Summers et al., 2006). There is still, however, a gap in understanding in regard to how the brand selling the product influences the persuasion.

Evident in the realm of fashion, Phillips and McQuarrie (2010) discussed how narrative techniques in high-fashion editorials lead to different modes of persuasion. For example, when grotesque imagery (such a woman standing by a pool with a corpse floating in it, or a woman holding a knife to someone's throat) was used in high-fashion campaigns, subjects conceptualised the images as akin to a form of art, becoming immersed in the realm of fashion and focusing on the innovation conveyed by the brand (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). Crane (2000) found, through interviews, that consumers perceived fashion brands as an authority. One quote reads, "she might be inclined to wear a particular combination of clothing, without remembering the source of the idea, because an advertisement in a fashion magazine showed it" (Crane, 2000, pp. 214-215).

A key aspect influencing the persuasive impact of an advertisement is likely to be the brand involved. As highlighted by the brand credibility literature, brands seen to have a higher expertise have been shown to reduce processing times for consumers (Baek et al., 2010; Erdem & Swait, 2004). It has been argued that the credibility of brands typically acts as a signal conveying product quality and positioning, which in turn reduces risks involved with purchase, allowing consumers a shorter processing time when developing a brand consideration set (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Erdem et al., 2002; Srinivasan & Ratchford, 1991). Information costs can be conceptualised in terms of the lowering of information gathering and processing times, which includes monetary, time, and emotional costs (Baek et al., 2010). Curlo and Chamblee (1998) found that there is a significant positive relationship between brand identification and attitude towards the advertisement, indicating that when consumers know which brand is being promoted, they can more readily understand the claim. Identification allows for previous information known about the brand to be accessed and utilised in evaluating the advertisement. They additionally proposed that ease of brand identification also results in an advertisement being perceived as more credible, and thus more persuasive (Curlo & Chamblee, 1998). Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999) discussed how the persuasion of an advertisement depends on the mental processes that it invokes within the consumer, for example how images form heuristic cues that prompt inferences to determine a consumer's judgement. This is particularly important when the brand becomes a signal of the worth and quality of the product being advertised, which becomes stronger when the brand has a higher credibility (Erdem & Swait, 1998). While it seems likely, it remains to be shown whether the credibility of a brand influences responses to non-normative or controversial imagery within brand level advertising.

2.2.4 Advertising and Gender

2.2.4.1 The Effect of Advertising on Gender Attitudes

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and the Transfer of Meaning Model provide insight as to the persuasiveness of advertising's influence within culture. Meaning is created within the culturally constituted world as a result of cultural production, which is the process by which cultural products are created and diffused within consumer culture (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). This process is dependent on cultural actors, such as brands and consumers, negotiating culture itself (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). This meaning is then transferred throughout society via fashion and advertising systems, as highlighted by McCracken (1986). "Advertising discourse both reflects and creates social norms" (Schroeder &

Zwick, 2004, p. 24), and as such, representations of people in advertising influence perceptions of identity, at both an individual and a cultural level. Such representations are evident within gender stereotyping, and therefore advertising both mirrors and progresses societal views surrounding the roles of men and women. However, changes to gender portrayals are still typically considered contentious and non-normative by consumers, and despite the deconstruction of sex and gender, gender is still a pervasive and central concept within many marketing narratives (Avery, 2012). As such, there have been many studies investigating the impacts of gender roles and portrayals on advertising effectiveness.

Advertising can have an influence on the acceptability and creation of gender norms, as additional studies have found that advertising has a significant persuasive impact on the perpetuation of gender roles – influencing consumers from childhood into adulthood (Browne, 1998; Fowler & Thomas, 2013). Schroeder and Zwick (2004) demonstrated that repeated versions of gender within advertising redefine what is considered normal and appropriate, naturalising stereotypes and beliefs. This was similarly found by Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel (2014), where non-traditional stereotyping in advertising increased acceptance and credibility of the portrayal.

Conversely, Till and Priluck (2001) examined whether the perceived gender of products and brands can be conditioned through advertising. They found that conditioning gendered beliefs explains part of McCracken's (1989) model, in that consumers can be conditioned to understand gender cues from a brand. In the study, the researchers placed subjects within a classical conditioning procedure, whereby a conditioned stimulus (in this case a branded cologne), was paired with an unconditioned stimulus (a 2x2 design: positive/neutral valence x masculine/feminine). The study found that when paired with a gendered unconditioned stimulus, subjects were more likely to view the product as being appropriate for that corresponding gender, indicating the influential nature of gender cues (Till & Priluck, 2001).

Elliot, Eccles, and Hodgson (1993) investigated the portrayal of gender in advertising, with a focus on women as homemakers. In light of the Transfer of Meaning Model (McCracken, 1989), they discussed how cleaning products have become gender dominant, and studied the effects of advertising portrayals attempting to change this stereotyped view, a process they referred to as gender re-coding (Elliot et al., 1993; Wernick, 1991). They argued that

advertising does not mirror the gendered views of society, but rather processes them, reflecting some aspect of reality and perpetuating it (Elliot et al., 1993). Wernick (1991) additionally elucidated how masculinity has, over time, become reconstructed with the weakening of patriarchal ideologies, and that with this, marketing has begun to extend the range of products marketed towards them. Thus, the brand plays a role in the perpetuating influence of advertising on normative values.

2.2.4.2 The Effect of Gender of Advertising Attitudes

In addition to advertising influencing gender norms, gender identity and gender roles also have an impact on advertising effectiveness. As noted earlier, academics tend to agree that when it comes to gender, congruence between the consumer and the marketing aspects (the product, brand, spokesperson etc.) leads to more favourable outcomes (Jung, 2006; Pike & Jennings, 2005; Stafford, 1998; Worth, Smith, & Mackie, 1992; Ye & Robertson, 2012). For example, LaTour and Henthorne (1993) found that advertisement effectiveness was partially determined by the congruence between the model and the product being advertised (in this case a feminine perfume).

Other researchers have found that progressive, or non-traditional, gender role portrayals can also elicit positive responses. In the context of sex role portrayals in magazines, role incongruity was found to have a weak, but significant, effect in attitudes towards the advertisement (Orth & Holancova, 2003). When the role incongruity was detailed or approved of, attitudes towards the advertisement increased, and inversely decreased when disapproved of. Chu et al. (2016) conducted work exploring consumer reactions to non-stereotypical gender role advertising, and focused on gender-oriented products, where it was not always categorically known what gender the product was aimed at (for example kitchen appliances). They found that non-stereotypical gender role portrayals positively affected attitudes towards the advertisements. Morrison and Shaffer (2003) found that encouraging a form of self-reference within subjects gave them some way to relate themselves to the portrayal and thus created an associative link. In the manipulation of models within non-traditional gender portrayals (for example showing women an advertisement of other women promoting hard liquor, something traditionally viewed as masculine), self-reference garnered significantly more positive responses towards the portrayal. Progressive sex role portrayals (such as working women) were also found to be equally, if not more, preferred to traditional portrayals (traditional housewives) by Whipple

and Courtney (1980), which was similarly found by Iyer and Debevec (1986), where incongruence (in this case non-traditional role portrayals) elicited more positive outcomes and more effective advertising. Moreover, content analysis has found that portrayals of men in American advertising have changed significantly over time, with them increasingly being portrayed in paternal roles, and are less likely to sexualise women (Fowler & Thomas, 2013). However, the authors noted that such non-traditional portrayals should be considered in light of the extent of consumer persuasion knowledge, as this could influence advertising effectiveness, as adults may be slower to adapt to changing gender roles.

In summary, research on gendered aspects of advertisements have largely considered reactions to non-traditional versus traditional role portrayals, but has not considered the effect of the brand in relation to consumer responses to such depictions.

2.2.5 Purchase Intentions

A significant amount of marketing literature has considered the impact of attitudes on behavioural responses, such as purchase intentions. Some academics have proposed that the relationship between the two variables is mediated by brand attitudes (see Machleit & Wilson, 1988; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981).

However, a significant number of studies have also provided evidence towards a direct relationship between the two variables. Gelb and Pickett (1983), in their research on the effectiveness of advertising humour appeals, found that subjects who had more positive attitudes towards advertising appeals reported a significantly higher purchase intention. Biehal, Stephens, and Curlo (1992) additionally proposed the same relationship, with their study finding a significant positive effect of attitudes towards the advertisement on dependent variables such as brand choice and behavioural intentions. This was again supported by Lafferty et al. (2002), who found in their research the same positive effect of attitudes on purchase intentions. This relationship was further evidenced in a study by Akbari (2015), who found that across emotional and rational appeals for both high- and low-involvement products, attitudes towards the advertisements were significantly positively related towards purchase intentions for the product or brand being advertised. When looking at consumer involvement with products and corporations, Kim, Haley, and Koo (2009) found that attitudes towards the advertisements were a mediating factor between consumer involvement and purchase intention, with a significant positive effect

of their attitudes on purchase intention. This was similarly found by Lee, Byon, Ammon, and Park (2016) who examined how South Korean consumers' attitudes' towards golfing advertisements impacting their intent to purchase – again a significant and positive effect.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

The two theoretical frameworks most likely to be of relevance to this research are the Persuasion-Knowledge Model (PKM), and the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF). Therefore, they need to be considered in order to explore the relationships between the brand characteristics employed within this study, and gender blurring in fashion. The frameworks indicate potential insights into the ways in which consumers may perceive the utilisation of gender blurred imagery in advertising, and ways in which the brand has power to influence these perceptions.

2.3.1 The Persuasion Knowledge Model

The PKM was originally presented by Friestad and Wright (1994) as a way to explain how an individual's knowledge of persuasion influences their responses to persuasion attempts. The model proposes that this persuasion knowledge, comprised of both knowledge about persuasion, knowledge about the marketer, and knowledge about the topic at hand, play a significant role in the effectiveness of the advertisement being presented (Yagci, Biswas, & Dutta, 2009). The knowledge is culturally contextual, and constantly evolves throughout the individual's lifetime (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Formative experiences, such as social interactions with friends and family, conversations about behaviour, and even exposure to commentaries on advertising and the media can add to this knowledge base (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The model focuses on three primary knowledge structures: persuasion knowledge, agent knowledge, and topic knowledge. Agent knowledge refers to the consumer's knowledge about the advertiser (or brand, in this case), and topic knowledge refers to the what the consumer's beliefs are about the topic of the message - gender blurring and fashion, in this context (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The model presumes that consumer's knowledge impacts on the effectiveness and appropriateness of a claim made within an advertisement, any judgements made influence the believability of such claims, and consequently any behavioural responses (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Yagci et al., 2009). A key element of the persuasiveness of an advertising attempt, and something influenced by persuasion knowledge, is the credibility of the advertisement (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Moore & Rodgers, 2005). As such, there is perceived to be a direct link between agent

knowledge and the credibility of the message, and from this, how likely consumers are to be persuaded by that message (Moore & Rodgers, 2005). When consumers have a high persuasion knowledge the credibility of the brand influences the credibility of the advertisement, which in turn influences their response to the advertisement (Tutaj & van Reijmersdal, 2012), suggesting that more credible brands are more effective at persuading critical consumers.

2.3.2 Brands as Intentional Agents

The BIAF extends the Stereotype Content Model, linking interpersonal relationships to brand-person relationships, proposing that consumers perceive their relationships with brands as similar to those with other people (Kervyn et al., 2012). Kervyn et al. (2012) highlighted the significant validation provided for the model, citing research providing both neurological and intercultural evidence as support. Fournier (1998), with her seminal work on consumer relationship theory, provided the foundation for the translation of relationship theory to extend beyond interpersonal to brand relationships, thus providing a basis for the BIAF (Kervyn et al., 2012).

The Stereotype Content Model indicates perceptions of social groups based off two aspects: warmth and competence, and proposes that individuals rationalise the social world around them relative to these two dimensions. The BIAF modifies these dimensions to instead be intentions and ability (Kervyn et al., 2012). The model proposes that brands act as intentional agents, and suggests that behavioural actions and perceptions of the brand are considerably affected by the perceived intent and ability of the brand with their claims (Kervyn et al., 2012). Keller (2012) additionally proposed that brand relationships, as highlighted by the BIAF, could similarly be affected by other marketing and branding constructs, such as brand knowledge and brand credibility. In this context, brand knowledge can be considered as similar to persuasion knowledge, as aspects of the PKM (such as agent knowledge) are based on what the consumer knows of the marketer (brand) and their tactics. MacInnis (2012) discussed that trustworthiness (one of the dimensions of brand credibility) can be inferred as an outcome of brands or sources deemed to be warm and competent, in addition to being conceptualised as a predictor of warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Bennett and Hill (2012) found support for the framework, with their empirical research finding a significant positive effect of the warmth and competence dimensions on purchase intention. This also supports Holt's (2002) discussion on the

consumer as a part of the process regarding the cultural authority of brands in their relationships with consumers.

Fiske, Malone, and Kervyn (2012) further elaborated on the theory behind the BIAF, highlighting how the theory requires seeing the brands involved in the relationship as actual 'people' whereas other consumer relationship theories conceptualise the interaction as that between people and a non-human entity (the term relationship is inherently used as a metaphor). The BIAF involves viewing brands as "an extension of the individual people and groups that produce them" (Fiske et al., 2012, p. 207). This implies that understanding of perceptions of these people is important in terms of predicting consumer behaviour. This is particularly pertinent within the realm of luxury fashion, where as much of the brand is drawn from the creative director or designers of the clothing as the traditional branding cues (Okonkwo, 2007). This indeed could underlie part of the prestige and aura of power around luxury brands – designers and creative minds considered to be at the top of their field are at the helm.

2.4 Research Gap

The prior literature discussed details what is currently known within gender, psychology, and marketing literature surrounding gender blurring and brand credibility, along with evidence of a brands potential impact on attitudes towards advertisements, and the persuasive influence of advertising.

Gender research has come to agree that one's biological sex and gender identity are two completely distinct concepts (Burr, 1998; Butler, 1990; Kacen, 2000; Palan, 2001). This literature has noted the importance of gender identity to consumers beyond biological sex, and that identity is accepted as more fluid. However, stereotypical identification remains reflected in advertising (Bettany et al., 2010) as gender congruence overall has been found to positively affect attitudes. Work conducted within the contexts of brand extensions (Jung, 2006; Ulrich, 2013), gendered product cues (Fugate & Phillips, 2010), or gender portrayals in advertising (Orth & Holancova, 2003; Stafford, 1998) typically find that congruence leads to more favourable attitudes. However, some have suggested that in regard to advertising portrayals, moderate incongruity can elicit positive responses (Chu et al., 2016; Jhang, Grant, & Campbell, 2012; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Conversely,

literature exploring the gender blurring of brands finds that movement from masculinity into femininity elicits more negative attitudes (Avery, 2012; Sandhu, 2017). However, it is still not known how consumers will respond to the use of gender blurring within marketing communications.

Credibility literature has highlighted that more credible sources are capable of influencing attitudes (towards both advertisement and brands) in positive ways (Baek et al., 2010; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Erdem et al., 2002; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2004; Lafferty et al., 2002; Ok et al., 2011; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Spry et al., 2011). There is, however, little evidence validating this relationship in the context of gendered fashion imagery. Additionally, while brand credibility can increase the persuasiveness of an advertising claim (Miniard et al., 1990), it is not known what influence the brand has on the acceptance of non-normative claims, as literature has found that consumers respond more negatively to controversial advertising, as the portrayal is not deemed appropriate (Fam et al., 2004; Summers et al., 2006). Kacen (2000) stated that marketing has the capability of altering gendered norms, however, there is no empirical testing of marketing and branding constructs that have this capability. Consumers often recognise advertising as claims, and this influences how they respond to the persuasion attempt of the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994). If a brand is perceived as more credible, and thus their claims are likely to be more believable (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004; Erdem et al., 2002), are consumers more likely to respond favourably to persuasion attempts conveying that non-normative or controversial claims (such as gender blurring) are acceptable?

The BIAF predicts that consumers perceive brand relationships similarly to interpersonal ones, and thus that brands can influence perceptions and normative values much like people can, dependent on the perceived ability and intent of the brand (Kervyn et al., 2012). This could have implications for fashion advertising, with the model providing a potential basis of understanding towards the perceived expertise of luxury fashion houses. What is not known is whether brands can co-opt these cultural changes in meaning.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Development

This section develops the hypotheses in order to address the research gap. The variables of gender blurring, brand credibility, and fashion context are related to attitudes towards the advertisement, and from this, purchase intention. Potential relationships are proposed in light of previous literature.

Based on the research questions, the objectives for this research are to:

1. Determine how gender-stereotyped or gender blurred content influences consumer attitudes to fashion advertisements
2. Analyse the impact that brand credibility has on consumer attitudes towards gender blurring in fashion advertisements
3. Determine whether fashion context influences attitudes towards gendered fashion advertisements

3.1 Hypothesis Development

3.1.1 Gender Blurring & Attitudes

For the purpose of this study gender blurring has been defined as the swapping of masculine traits for feminine ones (within products or people), and vice versa (Peñaloza, 1994). This is based on the cultural and societal norms of the research context, such as when a biological male wears more feminine clothing than traditionally considered the norm.

Sandhu (2017) discussed how men generally respond negatively towards brands using gender blurring, as they perceive the gender contamination to result in a loss of masculinity. This is on the basis of masculinity typically being viewed as superior to femininity (Avery, 2012; Kramer, 2005). This is additionally indicated by Peñaloza (1994), who discussed how men using feminine products is seen as irrational and against male privilege. From her review, Sandhu (2017) posited that women typically are more tolerant of gender blurring within their brands than men are, but overall the typical responses gravitate around a reduced appeal of brands, brand abandonment. Men were also found to, at times, renegotiate the masculinity of the brand.

The potential effects of gender blurring can be determined in light of schema incongruity. Fugate and Phillips (2010) and Ulrich (2013) examined consumer responses to cross-gendered brand extensions and found evidence to suggest that such brand extensions, with

lower congruence between the consumer's gender and the perceived product gender, are significantly negatively related to attitudes or acceptance at a base level. Based on research conducted by Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989), the level of schema incongruity is a significant influencer of consumer product evaluations. Moderate schema incongruity can elicit more positive consumer evaluations, whilst extreme schema incongruity is negatively related to such outcomes (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Overall, new products are often released with claims of attributes that are incongruent with their general product category, and it is how extreme the level of schema incongruity is that influences consumer evaluation. Further to this proposition, moderate incongruity (defined as when only some of the attribute schema are incongruent), require fewer associative linkages to resolve than extreme incongruity (when all attribute schema are incongruent) (Jhang et al., 2012). Overall, studies have agreed that moderate schema incongruity, when compared to extreme schema incongruity, can lead to more favourable evaluations by consumers due to them being more readily able to resolve the incongruity (Chu et al., 2016; Jhang et al., 2012; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989).

Schema incongruity in terms of products is also applicable to gender schema incongruity within advertising, and typically perceived gender-oriented products (such as vacuum cleaners typically being female-oriented) can be considered moderately incongruent with the opposite gender, whereas gender-exclusive products (such as lipstick and brassieres) can be considered extremely incongruent to the opposite gender (Chu et al., 2016). Within the product category, clothing is typically coded as being of the same gender as the intended end consumer, due to gender dominance (Bellizzi & Milner, 1991). Hence, this study proposes that gender-stereotyped clothing (when all attributes are schema congruent with the model/intended end consumer) can be considered completely congruent, androgynous clothing (when some attributes are considered incongruent, i.e. some aspects appear both feminine and/or masculine) can be considered moderately incongruent, and gender blurred clothing (when all attributes are considered incongruent, i.e. all attributes are considered feminine when on a male) can be considered extremely incongruent. It is important to note for the operationalisation of this concept that the perceived incongruity is between the product (clothing) and the person wearing that product (in this case the model). This is because the study is intending to look at people's attitudes toward the phenomenon, as regardless of whether they would actually wear the product or not, they may be favourable towards others having the free will to do so.

While schema incongruity literature suggests that moderate incongruity can elicit more positive responses to the stimuli than congruent imagery, the current literature on the gender blurring of brands typically finds that, in the context of men, any deviation from masculinity results in negative responses (Avery, 2012; Neale et al., 2016; Sandhu, 2017). Thus, while androgynous (or moderately incongruent) clothing may elicit more positive responses than gender blurred (extremely incongruent) clothing, the effect could still be negative overall. Therefore, this study hypothesises that:

H1: Gender blurring will have a negative effect on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement.

3.1.2 Brand Credibility & Attitudes

Based on the acceptance of the work conducted by Erdem and Swait (1998), this study defines brand credibility as the extent to which a brand's claims and conjectures can be believed by consumers (trustworthiness), coupled with the perceived expertise the brand possesses to meet these claims. Studies have found that these two dimensions (trustworthiness and expertise) are important to the operationalisation of the construct, and that brand credibility has a significant relationship with and influence on consumer evaluations of both advertisements and the brands as entire entities (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty et al., 2002).

The extant literature has suggested that brand credibility overall has a significant effect on attitudes towards advertisements (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty et al., 2002). Lafferty and Goldsmith (2004) found that a higher credibility led to more positive attitudes (towards both brand and advertisement) but was not as influential on purchase intentions, further validating the same findings found in their previous experiments (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lafferty, 2007; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty et al., 2002). There has, however, been some minor contention as to whether or not brand credibility has a direct or indirect effect on advertising variables such as attitudes towards the brand and purchase intention, as while Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) found a direct effect on purchase intention and attitudes towards the brand by brand credibility, Goldsmith et al. (2000) additionally found that attitudes towards the advertisement was a mediator between credibility and purchase intention. In subsequent research, Lafferty et al. (2002) found

further support for this mediation, as well as a direct relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention.

Erdem and Swait (2004) proposed that brands with a higher credibility are more likely to be a part of a consumer's consideration set, and through this, the credibility has a positive effect on the consumer's brand choice and evaluations. This is a relationship reported throughout source credibility literature, with the common theme among credibility (be it termed general source, endorser, brand, corporate or otherwise) is that a source with a higher credibility is more likely to elicit more favourable attitudes and evaluations from the consumer (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Yoon et al., 1998). Based on these findings, the next hypothesis is derived as follows:

H2: Brand credibility will have a positive effect on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement.

3.1.3 Interaction Effects

3.1.3.1 Gender Blurring x Brand Credibility

Based on advertising and branding literature, the predominant barrier to the acceptance of, or positive attitudes towards, a phenomenon that is considered controversial or non-stereotypical, such as gender blurring in fashion, is the processing required to resolve the incongruity with the schema, as discussed earlier (Jhang et al., 2012; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Therefore, if the incongruity can be resolved earlier, then the negative effect of the phenomenon on consumer attitudes will be lessened. Extant brand credibility literature has explored the effect of the construct on information processing (Baek et al., 2010; Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004; Spry et al., 2011). Studies found that the more credible a brand is perceived to be, the lower the associated information costs and perceived risks there are, thus increasing the consumer's expected utility of the brand (discussed as brand purchase intention) (Erdem & Swait, 1998). This information processing requirement is intrinsic within the discussion of the complexity of the associative linkages required to resolve incongruity by Chu et al. (2016). If information costs are saved, then the incongruence can be resolved more readily.

Additionally, a more credible brand is considered to have a higher expert social power (which is drawn from the perceived ability of a brand, and thus its credibility) (Crosno,

Freling, & Skinner, 2009). It is believed that this higher social power will give the brand an authority to make more controversial claims, such as the normalisation of gender blurring within fashion. This increased authority due to the credibility and social power is proposed to aid in the resolution of the moderate and extreme incongruities, by creating associative linkages in the consumer's mind and highlighting that gender blurring is something that is acceptable considering current cultural changes regarding the perception of gender. This effect is made more acceptable by the fact that a trusted brand is engaging in the practice.

This interaction can additionally be considered in regard to how the dimensions of brand credibility influence the persuasiveness of the claim made in the advertisements (the utilisation of gender blurring). The majority of source credibility and expertise literature agrees that sources with a higher perceived expertise are more persuasive than those with a lower expertise (see Homer & Kahle, 1990; Sternthal et al., 1978). When a source is perceived to be an expert, attitudes have been found to change in favour of the claim, via peripheral cues (DeBono & Harnish, 1988; Homer & Kahle, 1990), such as the images in fashion advertising. Additionally, a highly credible source is more likely to be able to convince consumers of potentially novel claims (Maddux & Rogers, 1980). Clark et al. (2012) argued that when an advertising claim advocates counterattitudinal views, a more credible source motivates consumers to process the information more carefully, as the information is perceived as being more likely to be valid. A significant positive relationship has also been found between a consumer agreeing with the claim in an advertisement, and their agreement with the overall conclusion underlying the advertisement (Maddux & Rogers, 1980). In light of the PKM, the credibility of a brand influences the persuasiveness of an advertising claim, as a consumer's topic knowledge is impacted by the believability of the claim (Moore & Rodgers, 2005). This is similarly evident within the BIAF, where brand relationships are considered as similar to interpersonal relationships, and thus the credibility of the brand can influence attitudes in a similar way to peers (Bennett & Hill, 2012; Fiske et al., 2012).

Thus, this study hypothesises as follows:

H3: Brand credibility moderates the effect of gender blurring on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement.

3.1.3.2 Gender Blurring x Fashion Context

The evidence of the effect of the context of a fashion collection in regards to gender blurring largely comes from the rigidity of gender norms. Whisner (1982) discussed how companies enforce dress codes based on gender, and that issues of clothing and corporate appearance bear regulation. A dominant theme arising from her commentary was that of clothing regulations being a form of distinguishing between the sexes – setting in place defining characteristics that led ultimately to the objectification of women. Examples of such ‘rules’ were men being unable to grow long hair, wear dresses, or other “distinctly ‘feminine’ items” (Whisner, 1982, p. 119). Crane (2000) also highlighted that business and leisure lives and activities have become separated, changing what is considered to be appropriate in each domain. Work attire was considered to be more strictly defined, with leisure attire allowing for the expression of identity in a more liberal way (Crane, 2000). Case (1995) suggested that this is due to employers having specific requirements for how their employees should dress, noting that grooming standards in the workplace are very often sex-based. Additionally, workplaces dictate gendered dress norms based on the organisational culture, with even relaxed working environments being considered as more formal than leisure contexts (Dellinger, 2002). This indicates that gendered norms are typically more rigid in formal contexts. Based on this, the following hypothesis is generated:

H4: When the fashion is in a work (casual) context, the negative effect of gender blurring on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement will be stronger (weaker).

3.1.4 Purchase Intention

There is a significant amount of academic marketing literature that has explored the relationship between attitudes towards the advertisement and purchase intention. Many propose that there is no direct effect of attitudes towards the advertisement on purchase intentions, but rather that it is an indirect effect, mediated by attitudes towards the brand (Machleit & Wilson, 1988; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Shimp, 1981).

There is significant evidence, however, that there is a direct relationship between attitudes towards advertisements and purchase intentions. Across a range of contexts, such as

product involvement (Kim et al., 2009), advertising value (Lee et al., 2016), humour appeals (Gelb & Pickett, 1983), emotional appeals (Akbari, 2015), and credibility (Lafferty et al., 2002), attitudes towards the advertisement has been found to have a significant positive effect on purchase intentions.

Thus, based on the extant literature, the final hypothesis for the study can be derived as follows:

H5: Attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement will have a positive effect on purchase intentions.

Chapter Four: Methodology

The following chapter outlines the methods employed to conduct the study. The research paradigm is discussed, followed by a justification for the research approach, methodology, and specific methods chosen for the study.

4.1 Research Approach

The overall research paradigm for any piece of academic study denotes the researcher's holistic worldview and beliefs of inquiry. Each paradigm contains a set of assumptions that provide this philosophical framework for investigation (Deshpande, 1983). These assumptions refer to the researcher's position on what knowledge is, and are referred to as epistemology and ontology (Creswell, 2014). The paradigm influences how the research is conducted (Creswell, 2014).

The predominant research paradigms within the marketing discipline span from positivism through to constructivism, with the former viewing the world as one true reality that can be objectively measured, and the later viewing knowledge as being locally and specifically constructed within multiple realities (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Quantitative research typically lies within the positivist end of the paradigm spectrum, with qualitative methods preferred for the constructivist viewpoint. Thus, the different worldviews are typically aligned with the different research approaches. Positivism is geared towards theory verification, and constructivism towards theory generation (Creswell, 2014).

The nature of the current research sits between the two extremes of positivism and constructivism, in what is referred to as postpositivism (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). The postpositivist paradigm addresses many of the issues commonly associated with positivism. These include the view that only one reality exists, and that methods such as triangulation will always emerge with one interpretation (Hunt, 1991). Additionally, positivism is considered to have limiting criteria on what constitutes knowledge (Patton, 2002). The postpositivist paradigm aims to explain relationships, with an emphasis on prediction and control, much like positivism, however there is the ontological assumption that the reality can only be "imperfectly and probabilistically" understood (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 98). Postpositivism acknowledges the inherent bias of the research, but also that being objective is the basis of any good inquiry. Thus, methods and evidence must be checked for bias in order to have valid and reliable results (Creswell, 2014). Postpositivism

takes a “modified dualist/objectivist” approach (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 100), assuming that the true reality can only be approximated and thus the research community needs to have both inductive and deductive studies in order to both generate and verify theory (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln et al., 2011; Patton, 2002).

The postpositivist approach is appropriate for the current research, as it draws on previously generated theory and applies it to newer contexts, whilst attempting to explain relationships between existing constructs. The area of gender blurring, whilst including more subjective elements akin to individual interpretations, can be objectively measured regarding the influence it has on advertising effectiveness. Postpositivism is more appropriate than positivism for this study as our understanding of gender blurring is relatively new, and as such any interpretations of findings can only be considered as having a probabilistic truth, and thus require further studies to validate the results.

4.2 Methodology

This study, measuring the effect of gender blurring and brand credibility on consumer attitudes towards advertising, was conducted using a quantitative approach. This type of research, geared towards theory verification, is suitable when testing relationships between constructs highlighted in previous literature (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research sits well within the postpositivist paradigm, where causal links can be tested and found to have a probabilistic truth. Furthermore, to have a strong research design, the appropriate methodology should be apparent through the research question.

Experimental research was the selected quantitative methodology. This style of research was chosen as it allows for the researcher to control the situation in its entirety, manipulating variables whilst having others held constant in order to observe any effects on the dependent variable(s) (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). Experimental research also sits within the postpositivist paradigm, given that the level of control will allow for any effects that occur to be considered as probabilistically due to the relationships analysed, as well as acknowledging that there could be other factors that influence any changes (Creswell, 2014; Zikmund et al., 2013).

4.3 Research Design

The main study was designed as an online experiment. This was in order to attempt to understand the effect that the presence of gender blurring, or the credibility of the brands has on attitudes towards the advertisement. Able to be manipulated under experimental conditions, all other factors that could result in a change in attitudes need to be controlled and accounted for, hence potential confounds were reduced. The study was a true experiment, as opposed to a quasi-experiment, with all subjects randomly and independently allocated to one of the 12 experimental conditions (Creswell, 2014).

The research was conducted as an online experiment for many reasons. Firstly, online questionnaires are the primary source of data for many quantitative studies, as they allow for the anonymity of subjects. Studies conducted in relevant consumer behaviour areas, exploring constructs such as brand credibility and attitudes, have used online questionnaires and obtained significant results (e.g. Baek et al., 2010). Additionally, research investigating the impact of gender-related constructs has also obtained significant results using online experiments (Ulrich, 2013). Advertising literature has also found that online experiments can provide valid data for analysis (Vargas, Duff, & Faber, 2017), and the use of an online experiment has been suggested to be time-efficient, allowing researchers to reach a wider range of people in a much smaller timeframe (Wright, 2005).

There are, however, some key drawbacks or limitations to the utilisation of an online experiment as the method of data collection. For example, there can be no guarantee that the data collected is completely accurate, due to self-reporting error, as consumers may speed through the survey, not reading questions correctly (Wright, 2005). However, efforts were taken to minimise these effects, such as the inclusion of quality control checks to minimise bias (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017). These limitations to an online experiment, however, are overcome by the advantages of the research method, chiefly the random allocation of subjects controlling for systematic bias, meaning that any observed differences in the dependent variables can be explained by the manipulations Creswell (2014).

Qualtrics was an appropriate tool to use to collect the data to conduct this research, as it has built-in cross-platform functionality, meaning that any survey generated through it can be accessed on devices with Internet capabilities, such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones.

A 2015 study found that 72% of adult New Zealanders now have access to their own personal computer or smart device (Research New Zealand, 2015), showing that this functionality is important, and that consumers are constantly on the move. The use of *Qualtrics* (and by default, the online experiment method) is also justified as the survey flow capability of the platform allows for each of the manipulated conditions to be equally and randomly allocated to subjects, which is important for an experiment and assuring the validity of the findings.

4.4 Experimental Design

4.4.1 Pre-test

A pre-test was conducted to select the clothing and brands used to generate the advertisements for the main study. Subjects were randomly allocated to be exposed to three images of male models, and three images of female models. They were asked to rate each image in terms of whether they felt the clothing worn by the model was more appropriate for males or females, on a 7-point Likert scale (*definitely for males - definitely for females*). They were asked to rate this for in a work context, in a casual context, and overall. They were then asked to rate how easy making that decision was for them, and to rate how masculine/feminine they considered the model and image to be on a 7-point bipolar scale. Following the evaluation of the images, subjects were asked to rank-order ten brands on the two dimensions of brand credibility - trustworthiness and expertise.

Twelve images of models on catwalks were selected by the researchers to be included in the questionnaire, with six males and six females, wearing clothing ranging from stereotyped to gender blurred. The images of males ranged from a black suit, to coloured suits, to lace blouses, with females wearing gowns, suits, and pants. In addition to this, 10 brands ranged from high-end luxury fashion brands like Louis Vuitton and Gucci, to mass-market, budget brands like the Warehouse and Kmart. All were considered to be known by the New Zealand population. For a full list of the images used in the pre-test, refer to Appendix A, and for a list of brands and the pre-test questionnaire, refer to Appendix B.

4.4.2 Main Study

The main experiment for this research was a 3 (gender blurring: stereotyped, androgynous, gender blurred) x2 (brand credibility: high, low) x2 (fashion context: work, casual) between-subjects factorial design. The conditions within the experiment are highlighted in

Table 4.1. The experiment was created as an online questionnaire using the software *Qualtrics*. This was the appropriate method for the experimental methodology because it allowed for the visual advertising stimuli to be presented to the subjects, in addition to allowing the researcher to control the scenarios in order to analyse the identified independent variables. For the between-subjects design, subjects were randomly allocated to one of the manipulated conditions, making it a true experimental design.

Table 4.1 Experimental Relationships

<i>Relationships</i>	Context (Work)		Context (Casual)	
	Brand credibility (high)	Brand credibility (low)	Brand credibility (high)	Brand credibility (low)
Gender blurring (stereotyped)	1	2	3	4
Gender blurring (androgynous)	5	6	7	8
Gender blurring (gender blurred)	9	10	11	12

The conditions within the design took the form of a typical fashion advertisement. Brand credibility was manipulated by having the brand with the highest (Louis Vuitton) and the lowest (The Warehouse) ranked credibility from the pre-test. Gender blurring was manipulated by having the images of model from the pre-test found to be the most stereotyped, androgynous, and gender blurred. The decision was made to only include male images in the study as male gender norm violations are typically found to be perceived more negatively than female norm gender violations (Blakemore, 2003). Therefore, to see an effect, the most extreme manipulations were selected. This was echoed by the pre-test results, which found that stereotypically masculine clothing, such as a suit, was still seen as appropriate when worn by a female. Conversely, males wearing feminine clothing was seen as less appropriate overall.

Efforts were taken to ensure that the advertisements for the main study were as similar as possible, to control for all factors other than the manipulated variables, including background colour, placement, and size (refer to Figure 4.1 for an example of the advertisements, and Appendix C for all final advertisements).



Figure 4.1 Example Advertisement

Subjects were exposed to the advertisement, and asked to rate their attitude towards it, as well as their purchase intention. Following this they were asked to respond to items regarding the control variables for the experiment. This was in addition to answering a quality control check (*'If you are taking an online survey, please click disagree'*) in order to ensure that responses were valid and that subjects were reading and paying attention to the items (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017). Next, due to the elapsed time since the initial exposure to the advertisement, subjects were shown the stimulus once again, in order to ensure that there was reduced error (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017) and responded to the manipulation check items, followed by demographic questions, as well as a check to ensure that subjects had not guessed the purpose of the study. The specific measures are discussed in the following section. Refer to Appendix D for the final experiment. Finally, subjects had the option to go into a prize draw for a \$50 voucher, and/or request a summary of the findings. Responses for this were collected via a separate survey in order to maintain the anonymity of the data. Following the completion of the research, summaries were sent to all those who requested them.

4.4.2.1 Sampling

The target population for the research was broadly defined as all adult consumers within New Zealand. This was due to the purpose of the study having potential implications for managers and researchers in a wide context. It aimed to understand behaviour and attitudes towards a phenomenon present in society, and not just one specific demographic. Fashion is an industry relevant to a wide range of consumers, with gender stereotypes and preconceptions being ingrained within society. Enabling a wide range of consumers to participate in the study allows for a greater range of responses that will only enrich the findings to create an understanding more generalizable to the general public.

New Zealand is a developed economy, meaning that citizens are likely to be higher on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, having met the lower needs, such as physiological and safety, when compared to citizens of developing or emerging economies. Being more likely to be at the self-actualisation stage of the hierarchy, members of developed economies are more able to process messages relating to industries such as fashion, and are exposed to such advertising. Developed economies also have higher rates of literacy and education (Euromonitor, 2016), making citizens more suitable subjects for online experiments.

The sampling for this study was through both Facebook, Neighbourly, various workplace intranet networks accessible to the researchers, and university course sites. Facebook is cost-effective, and one of the world's most widely used social networking sites, amassing over 1 billion users (Statista, 2016). Users were encouraged to disseminate the questionnaire link throughout their own networks, resulting in snowball sampling. This type of dissemination ideally generates responses beyond the confines of similar social groups, allowing for findings to be more indicative of a wider sample frame. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique, also referred to as a chain-referral technique (Bhutta, 2012). This type of sampling has been considered appropriate for use via platforms such as Facebook, as it allows access to a greater range of the population. It is important to note, however, that chain-referral techniques such as snowball sampling can result in similar networks being oversampled, or result in some people not distributing due to social risk (Bhutta, 2012). However, this is offset by the efficiency in collection and cost-reduction.

Similar sampling took place through Neighbourly, where the anonymous link was posted to suburbs around the Wellington region (to ensure that subjects would be within the target population). There was considered to be less risk of oversampling from personal connections on this platform, as it works on the basis of being an online community noticeboard. Therefore, non-probability sampling occurred, as the questionnaire was posted based on geographic location. This additionally occurred when the link was posted on various staff intranets, again around the Wellington region. This also allowed for a wider range of subjects in terms of age and income, when coupled with Facebook networks and university sites. This sampling selection enabled a wider range of data, befitting of the intended population of analysis. Disseminating the experiment through the forums like university sites as well as workplace intranets results in subjects from different age backgrounds, education levels, and incomes, making the findings more generalizable. Most importantly, all subjects were randomly allocated to one of the conditions, which enabled the reduction of bias and error in the data, as differences within the population are assumed to be counted for (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

The absolute minimum sample size required for the experiment was 360 responses, due to there being 12 different conditions. Through the utilisation of the survey flow feature on *Qualtrics*, this would allow for 30 responses per condition. It has been recommended by McDaniel (2010) that experimental conditions have 20-50 responses each to be considered valid. Geuens and De Pelsmacker (2017) recommended that there be an absolute minimum of 30 responses per condition. The appropriate sampling size was also estimated using the software *G*Power*. The number of conditions within the experiment (12), and the number of covariates (6) were input into the software, along with a standard expected power of 0.95, *p*-value of 0.05, and effect size of 0.25. This resulted with a suggested sample size of 400, similar to the suggestions from academics above. Therefore, at the very least 30 per condition were required, with an aim for ~34 per condition (to reach 400).

4.4.3 Design and Measures

For a list of all items, please refer to Table 4.2. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree, unless otherwise stated.

Table 4.2 Operationalisation of Scales

Scale / Source	Original Items	Adapted Items (if necessary)
Attitudes towards the advertisement (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Anckaert, 2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I got a positive impression. • I found it really something for me • I found it interesting. • I found it credible. • I found it exaggerated. • I found it attractive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I got a positive impression. • I found it interesting. • I found it credible. • I found it exaggerated. • I found it attractive.
Purchase Intention (Lepkowska-White, Brashear, & Weinberger, 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I were looking for this type of product my likelihood of purchasing the product in the ad would be high. • If I were to buy this type of product, the probability that I would consider buying the product in the ad would be high. • If had to buy this type of product, my willingness to buy the product in the ad would be high. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I were looking for this type of product my likelihood of purchasing from the brand in the ad would be high • If I were to buy this type of product, the probability that I would consider buying from the brand in the ad would be high. • If I had to buy this type of product, my willingness to buy from the brand in the ad would be high.
Gender Blurring (Worth et al., 1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This image is masculine/feminine • (7-point bipolar scale) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The clothing in the advertisement is masculine/feminine • The model in the advertisement is masculine/feminine • This advertisement is masculine/feminine
Brand Credibility (Erdem & Swait, 1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This brand reminds me of someone who is competent and knows what they are doing • This brand has the ability to deliver what it promises • This brand delivers what it promises • This brands product claims are believable • This brand has a name you can trust • This brand doesn't pretend to be something that it isn't. • Over time, my experiences with this brand have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less 	
Brand Attitudes (Sengupta & Johar, 2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that this brand is a very good brand. • I think that this brand is a very useful brand. • My opinion of this brand is very favourable. 	

Brand Familiarity (Delgado-Ballester, Navarro, & Sicilia, 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand X is not familiar to me/it is familiar to me. • I have not heard anything about brand/I have heard something about brand. • I do not know brand/I know the brand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This brand is familiar to me • I have heard about this brand • I do not know this brand
Gender Norms (Fugate & Phillips, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is acceptable for men to use products that are highly feminine • It is acceptable for women to use products that are highly masculine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is acceptable for men to use products that are highly feminine • I feel uncomfortable when I see people wearing clothes specifically made for the opposite sex • It is important for a person to purchase products consistent with their biological sex
Fashion Involvement (O'Cass & Choy, 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fashion clothing means a lot to me • Fashion clothing is significant to me • For me personally fashion clothing is important • I am interested in fashion clothing • I pay a lot of attention to fashion clothing • How involved you are with fashion clothing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fashion clothing means a lot to me • Fashion clothing is significant to me • For me personally fashion clothing is important • I am interested in fashion clothing • I pay a lot of attention to fashion clothing • I have a high involvement with fashion clothing
Self-Congruity (Das, 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The retail store is consistent with how I (would like to) see myself • The retail store reflects who I am • The image of the typical customer of this retail store is congruent (consistent/identical) with how I see myself. • The retail store is the mirror image of me • I am quite similar (I would like to be perceived as similar) to the typical consumer of this retail store 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The brand is consistent with how I (would like to) see myself • The brand reflects who I am • The image of the typical customer of this brand is congruent (consistent/identical) with how I see myself (how I would like to see myself) • The brand is the mirror image of me • I am quite similar (I would like to be perceived as similar) to the typical consumer of this retail store
Need for Product-Gender Congruity (Fugate & Phillips, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like products to have the same gender characteristics as myself • I am uncomfortable buying items that I know are specifically sold to the opposite gender • I do not care about the gender of a product if it satisfies my needs 	
Context		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For this collection, the fashion style is: definitely for males – definitely for females (<i>7-point Likert scale</i>)

4.4.3.2 Dependent Variables

Two dependent variables were investigated in the experiment. As the research intended to study the effects of gender blurring when present in advertising, the influence of the factors on attitudes towards the advertisement were examined, followed by purchase intention.

4.4.3.2.1 Attitudes towards the Advertisement

The scale for measuring attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement comes from De Pelsmacker et al. (2002). The scale was developed to measure a person's reaction to an advertisement that they have been exposed to. This is appropriate for this study, as the intent was to manipulate the levels of credibility and prestige a brand has, control for gender blurring, and then see the effect this had on attitudes towards an advertisement. To fit within the context of the study further, one of the items was adapted (refer to Table 4.2). This was due to the item asking whether the advertisement "has something for me [the respondent]." Since the study looked at attitudes towards gender blurring, including those of gender schematic individuals, this would not be appropriate. The scale was reported to be valid after conducting an exploratory factor analysis, in addition to being reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .9098 (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002).

4.4.3.2.2 Purchase Intention

The scale for measuring purchase intention (for the brand in the advertisement) comes from Lepkowska-White et al. (2003). The scale was initially developed to measure a consumer's intention to purchase a product in an advertisement that they were exposed to. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, and were kept the same for the experiment. Given the focus on responses to advertising in the current research, this scale was deemed appropriate. The three items were adapted slightly, altering the context of the items to ask about the subject's intention to purchase from the brand in the advertisement, as opposed to the product, as conceptually some consumers may not purchase a gender blurred product, but could be happy to purchase from a brand that includes it in their product range, and this is what the current research is interested in. Specific reliability and validity was not reported, however Lepkowska-White et al. (2003) stated that all of their scales had reliability (Cronbach's alpha between .75 and .90), and that all factor loadings were appropriate.

4.4.3.3 Manipulation Checks

4.4.3.3.1 Gender Blurring

The stereotypical image was a male model in a standard black suit, the androgynous image was a male in loose black trousers, with an off-the-shoulder black top, and the gender blurred image was a male in lace shorts, with a lace blouse/shirt. The manipulation check for gender blurring comes from a study conducted by Worth et al. (1992). On a 15-point bipolar scale, subjects were asked to measure how masculine/feminine they found a product to be. To fit within the context of this study, the scale was broken down to capture further elements: the perceived masculinity/femininity of the advertisement, the model, and the clothing presented to them, in addition to being made into a 7-point scale for consistency with other items.

4.4.3.3.2 Brand Credibility

The measurement for brand credibility has come from the research conducted by Erdem and Swait (1998; 2004), and Erdem et al. (2002). Being the researchers who first presented brand credibility into the literature, they have created a scale for measuring the construct that has been used in more recent studies measuring brand credibility (Baek et al., 2010; Erdem et al., 2002; Spry et al., 2011; Sweeney & Swait, 2008). The scale measuring credibility is comprised of two sub-dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise. To create a measure for credibility, the items for these scales were combined. These studies produced significant results, generating acceptable Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from .88 to .96.

The scale looks at brand in the general sense, so fits well within the context of this study, as brand credibility was examined for manipulated brands. Keeping the scale general was appropriate, as the aim is to control for other factors, so the scale items were not adapted, but rather used as they had been in the previous studies.

4.4.3.3.3 Fashion Context

Fashion context was included as a factor in the experiment on the basis of the reviewed literature, and this relevance was confirmed after the pre-test found that subjects saw a difference in what was appropriate for men to wear in a work or a casual context. The manipulation for context was the type of collection that the advertisement was stated to be for - either a work collection or a casual collection.

4.4.3.4 Control Variables

The following constructs have been deemed as conceptually relevant to the study by the researchers, and were expected to have an influence on the effects of the independent variables in the study. Therefore, they have been included as control variables to prevent any confounds in the results.

Brand attitudes were deemed to be important, any pre-existing attitudes that subjects could have towards the two brands (favourable or otherwise) could impact on their evaluation of the advertisement. The construct was measured using the scale by Sengupta and Johar (2002). The items were not adapted for this study. The authors reported a Cronbach's alpha of .93.

The measurement for brand familiarity comes from Delgado-Ballester et al. (2012). As with brand attitudes, the familiarity that a consumer has with a brand will impact their evaluation of any brand activity, and thus the construct has been included as a control. The authors found that brand familiarity has an influence on the impact of brand messages and consumer brand attitudes. Validity and reliability were not reported.

The scale for measuring a consumer's gendered norms has been adapted from the Modern Sex Role Perceptions scale given by Fugate and Phillips (2010). The original scale includes items measuring how the subject feels about men using feminine products, and women using masculine products. Given the context of the study, the item regarding women was omitted, and two items were added relating specifically to the fashion context of the study: *'I feel uncomfortable when I see people wearing clothes made specifically for the opposite sex'* and *'It is important for a person to purchase products consistent with their biological sex.'* The authors reported appropriate factor loadings, and an alpha of .426.

Given the fashion context of the study, the involvement that a consumer has with fashion is conceptually relevant. If a consumer is more involved with fashion, they are likely to have more knowledge of and exposure to concepts such as gender blurring, which could influence their attitudes. The measurement comes from O'Cass and Choy (2008), who report factor loadings all above .80 and an alpha of .94. One item was adapted (*How involved are you with fashion clothing?*) in order to have the entire construct measured in a Likert matrix.

The measure for self-congruity comes from Das (2014), who adapted a scale created by Sirgy et al. (1977). Both studies reported the scale to be reliable, with alphas of .861 and between .82 and .91 (for various iterations of the scale) respectively. Das (2014) also reported the scale to have factor loadings all above the minimum standard. The items were adapted to fit the context. In the study by Das (2014) items were framed around a retail store, so for the experiment they were re-worded to be centred around the brand in the advertisement.

Another scale from Fugate and Phillips (2010), the need a consumer has for gender-congruent products has been deemed to impact their evaluations of gender blurring. Indeed, in the study by Fugate and Phillips (2010), they found the construct to have a significant impact on a consumer's receptivity to product-gender cues, and as such the variable ought to be controlled for. The authors reported an alpha of .67, and satisfactory factor loadings (above 0.5). The items were not adapted.

4.5 Data Analysis Strategy

Once collected, the data was prepared and analysed using the SPSS statistics processing software. Once incomplete responses were removed, the remainder were identified and coded based on each of the three manipulations. To test the main effects and interactions of the manipulated variables on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisements, a factorial ANCOVA was conducted, with post-hoc analyses being conducted to further assess differences within the conditions. Finally, a regression analysis was conducted to test the final hypothesis, the relationship between attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement and purchase intention.

4.6 Ethics Approval

This research was given ethics approval by Victoria University's Pipitea Human Ethics Committee (#23203). Anonymity was maintained through the questionnaire being hosted on *Qualtrics*. Personal information that could identify a respondent was not associated with any the data.

Chapter Five: Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis of the quantitative results of the conducted experiment. The ensure the suitability of the collected data, descriptive statistics, reliability and validity tests, and non-response bias are discussed. The hypotheses were tested using factorial analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) and regression analyses.

Of the 734 subjects who attempted the online questionnaire, 460 provided completed responses. Additionally, 45 responses were removed for invalid responses to the quality control check and gender (such as “apache attack helicopter”), leaving a total of 415 usable responses. The cross tabulation showed that for all 12 conditions (brand x context x gender blurring) there were between 30 and 38 usable responses, fulfilling the sample size requirement discussed by Geuens and De Pelsmacker (2017). Note that the response rate could not be determined, due to the distribution methods employed.

5.1 Pre-Test Results

The pre-test for the experiment was conducted in order to select the appropriate images and brands for the study. The selected images needed to be perceived as different as to whether the clothing was deemed suitable for males or females, in addition to having the models being rated similarly in regard to their masculinity (in order to control). The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 being masculine/clothing definitely for males and 7 being feminine/clothing definitely for females. 103 completed responses were collected in total. A one-sample t-test was conducted on each image to see if there was a significant difference in the perceived gender of the clothing from the neutral value (4), in addition to the perceived masculinity of the model.

The three images, out of the 12 total, for the main study were selected based on this analysis. For the stereotyped condition, the selected image was seen as having both clothing significantly more appropriate for males ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.134$, $t(36) = -11.449$, $p < .001$), and having a significantly masculine model ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.819$, $t(36) = -5.243$, $p < .001$).

For the androgynous condition, the selected image was seen as having a significantly masculine model ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.267$, $t(28) = -4.103$, $p < .001$), but clothing that was

not seen as significantly for either males or females ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.197$, $t(27) = .947$, $p = .352$)

Finally, for the gender blurred condition, the selected image was seen as having a significantly masculine model ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.430$, $t(38) = -2.127$, $p = .040$), in addition to having clothing seen significantly more appropriate for females ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.314$, $t(38) = 4.266$, $p < .001$)

Interestingly, within the selected images for both the androgynous and gender blurred conditions, there was also a significant difference between the perceived gender appropriateness of the clothing style in either a work or casual context. For the androgynous image, the clothing was rated at more appropriate for females in a workplace, but more neutral in a casual context, $t(27) = 2.931$, $p = .007$. The same result was found for the gender blurred image, $t(38) = 2.883$, $p = .006$. There was not a significant difference for the stereotyped image, with the clothing being rated as more appropriate for males in both contexts.

5.2 Measurement Model Validation

The validity and reliability of the operationalised scales and their items was tested through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. This is to ensure that they are correctly measuring the intended constructs.

5.2.1 Validity

Face validity denotes the appropriateness of the scale content in measuring the intended construct. This is helpful in ensuring that items will be understood by the subjects (Hair et al., 2010). The scales used are largely established and utilised widely. Additionally, friends and fellow students were consulted about their understanding of the items, and once agreed that there was a clear understanding, ensuring face validity.

To achieve construct validity a scale must allow accurate reflection of the variable in question. These theoretical latent constructs cannot be directly observed, and thus multiple items are needed to compute a correct aggregate of the concept. Construct validity provides evidence that item measures from the data are representative of the population (Hair et al., 2010). To evaluate construct validity, each scale is assessed for both convergent and discriminant validity.

To establish convergent validity, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were examined. The model was found to have a KMO value of 0.882, and $p < .001$. Thus, the typical requirements were met and the data was considered to be factorable (Malhotra, Hall, Shaw, & Oppenheim, 2006). Additionally, all communalities were above the recommended cut-off of .5 (Hair et al., 2010) (refer to Appendix E).

Secondly, factor loadings were examined in order to check if there was any cross-loading between constructs, and to ensure that the values were above the ideal cut-off point of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). There were some issues where two of the constructs (Subjective Norms and Gender Norms) loaded completely onto the same factor, and some other items additionally loaded onto different factors (refer to Appendix E). Based on this, and the lower reliability score and factor loadings of Subjective Norms, the decision was made to remove this construct from further analysis.

To further assess the validity of the model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. A model was created using AMOS software following a structural equation modelling (SEM) procedure. Confirmatory factor analyses are theoretically driven rather than data driven, and as such conducting a CFA allows the researcher to compare an estimated population covariance with the observed covariance (Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, & Barlow, 2006).

There is no clear consensus as to appropriate measures of fit for a first-order CFA using SEM. Byrne (2010) highlights the problematic nature of the CMIN, or χ^2 , value, due to the sensitivity of the Likelihood Ratio Test. She states that the limitations of χ^2 have been overcome by the development of more appropriate goodness-of-fit indices. Amongst the wide range of fit-indices, researchers seem to more commonly prefer to report, at a minimum, the TLI, CFI, and RMSEA values for one-time analyses (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996; Schermelleh-Engel & Moosbrugger, 2003; Schreiber et al., 2006). Schermelleh-Engel and Moosbrugger (2003) additionally suggest checking the SRMR value. The factor model, as shown in Appendix F, generally met these model fit requirements highlighted by academics, and as such the model has been accepted (refer to Table 5.1).

Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which “a construct is truly distinct from another construct” (Hair et al., 2010, p. 687). It evidences that a construct is capturing a phenomenon that other constructs in the model do not. The SEM measurement model provides evidence of discriminant validity, as latent variables are not highly correlated.

Table 5.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Coefficients

Coefficient	Value	Recommended Value (from Schreiber et al. (2006))
TLI	.961	$\geq .95$, but $0 < \text{TLI} < 1$ is acceptable
CFI	.966	$\geq .95$, but close to is acceptable
RMSEA	.041	$< .06$
SRMR	.0846	Ideally $\leq .08$

5.2.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to whether a scale will elicit consistent responses over time when used again with the same subjects. When assessing reliability, the Cronbach’s Alpha should be above the generally accepted minimum threshold of 0.7 (Peterson, 1994). All constructs had a Cronbach’s alpha measuring above such, thus determining reliability, bar one (Need for Product-Gender Congruity) (refer to Table 5.2). The scale for this, however, was extensively adapted for use within the study (refer to Table 4.2).

Table 5.2 Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha
Attitude towards the Advertisement	.746
Purchase Intention	.912
Brand Attitudes	.791
Brand Familiarity	.907
Self-Congruity	.899
Need for Product-Gender Congruity	.630
Fashion Involvement	.963
Gender Norms	.800
Brand Credibility	.901

5.3 Common Method Variance

Common method variance (CMV) is considered to be the variance attributable to the measurement method rather than the specific constructs that the measures represent (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Such bias can be viewed as a main source of measurement error, which threatens the validity of the conclusions made regarding effects between variables. Commonly used to test for CMV is Harman's single-factor test, whereby all items within the study are placed in an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (Malhotra, Kim, & Patil, 2006; Podsakoff, 1986; Podsakoff et al., 2003). CMV is assumed to exist if a single factor emerges from the un-rotated factor solutions, or if the first factor explains the majority of the variance (Podsakoff, 1986).

Table 5.3 below shows the un-rotated factor solution, with 9 factors with Eigenvalues of a value greater than 1, accounting for a cumulative 72.854% of the total variance. The highest loading factor explained 24.537% of the total variance. Therefore, given the loading of multiple factors, and no single factor accounting for the majority of the variance (>50%), the test suggests that CMV does not have a large influence on the results of the experiment.

Table 5.3 Harman's Single Factor Test

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	9.324	24.537	24.537
2	4.405	11.591	36.127
3	3.308	8.704	44.831
4	2.838	7.469	52.300
5	2.292	6.032	58.332
6	1.845	4.854	63.187
7	1.456	3.832	67.019
8	1.181	3.108	70.126
9	1.037	2.728	72.854

5.4 Non-response Bias

Non-response bias is considered to be present when responses from subjects are significantly different from those within the population who did not respond. Therefore, if the bias present it calls into question whether the sample and its findings are generalizable to the target population (Armstrong & Overton, 1977).

To check that non-response bias did not exist within the data, an independent samples t-test was conducted on the responses for attitudes towards the advertisement, as per the extrapolation method highlighted by Armstrong and Overton (1977). They proposed that those who answer later in the data collection stage respond similarly to nonrespondents, and likely only respond due to increased stimulus. Thus, the data was split into two waves, based on those who responded in the first half of collection, and those in the second. No statistically significant difference was found between the two waves ($M_{first} = 4.5298$, $SD = 1.14473$ vs $M_{second} = 4.3865$, $SD = 1.14069$; $t(413) = 1.278$, $p = .202$). This indicates that there was no non-response bias present.

5.5 Manipulation Checks

After removing the incomplete data, the manipulation checks were conducted. These checks were conducted through independent sample t-tests and ANOVA.

In the high brand credibility conditions, subjects perceived that the brand was more credible than those in the low brand credibility condition ($M_{high} = 4.6784$, $SD = 1.00165$ vs $M_{low} = 3.9242$, $SD = 1.04312$; $t(413) = 7.509$, $p < .001$). Hence, the manipulation was successful.

For the gender blurring conditions, the manipulation was checked in a similar fashion to the pre-test. First, one-sample t-tests were conducted to see if the model in each image was seen as masculine (if the mean was significantly lower than four). This was the case for each condition ($M_{stereotyped} = 2.98$, $SD = 1.390$, $t(135) = -8.573$, $p < .001$; $M_{androgynous} = 3.40$, $SD = 1.370$, $t(137) = -5.158$, $p < .001$; $M_{gender\ blurred} = 3.37$, $SD = 1.411$, $t(140) = -5.311$, $p < .001$).

Secondly, the perceived masculinity/femininity of the clothing in each image was tested against the neutral mean (four). For the stereotyped condition, the clothing was perceived as being masculine ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.180$, $t(135) = -15.194$, $p < .001$). For the androgynous and gender blurred conditions, the clothing was perceived as more feminine ($M_{androgynous} = 4.81$, $SD = 1.282$, $t(137) = 7.438$, $p < .001$; $M_{gender\ blurred} = 5.26$, $SD = 1.136$, $t(140) = 13.117$, $p < .001$). A one-way ANOVA, however, showed a significant difference in the perceived masculinity/femininity of the clothing between the three conditions ($F(2, 414) = 214.718$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc analyses with Tukey's HSD revealed that the stereotyped condition ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.180$) was significantly seen as more

masculine than the androgynous condition ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.282$). The gender blurred condition ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.136$) was also seen as significantly more feminine than both other conditions. Hence, the manipulation was deemed as successful.

5.6. Descriptive Statistics

In terms of age, the sample was predominantly younger: 30.4% were 18-24 and 21.2% were 25-34. However, there were also responses from older age brackets, with 29.5% of subjects being over the age of 45. a predominant average income for the sample was over \$40,000 (59.3%). The sample was also predominantly female, with 71.6% of responses being such (refer to Table 5.4).

5.7 Factorial ANCOVA

A factorial ANCOVA was completed in order to examine the main effect of the independent variables in the experiment, brand credibility, gender blurring, and context, as well as their interaction effects on the dependent variable (attitude towards the advertisement)

5.7.1 Assumptions of Factorial ANCOVA

There are five primary assumptions when conducting a factorial ANCOVA, as outlined by Allen, Bennett, and Heritage (2014). The first, independence, are methodological and as such has already been addressed. This is due to the between-subjects factorial design of the experiment.

The second assumption is that of normality. Data collected should be considered approximately normally distributed, even though an ANCOVA is largely robust over moderate violations of this assumption (Allen et al., 2014).

To test for normality, the kurtosis and skewness for each construct was examined. To assume normality, the values for each should be within ± 1.96 (Allen et al., 2014). All data met this required cut-off (refer to Table 5.5)

Table 5.4 Descriptive Statistics

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Under 18	6	1.4
18-24	126	30.4
25-34	88	21.2
35-44	73	17.6
45-54	65	15.7
55-64	42	10.1
65-74	11	2.7
75-84	4	1.0
Total	415	100
Income		
Zero	25	6.0
\$1-\$5,000	26	6.3
\$5,001-\$10,000	28	6.7
\$10,001-\$15,000	18	4.3
\$15,001-\$20,000	13	3.1
\$20,001-\$25,000	16	3.9
\$25,001-\$30,000	16	3.9
\$30,001-\$35,000	8	1.9
\$35,001-\$40,000	17	4.1
\$40,001-\$50,000	39	9.4
\$50,001-\$60,000	55	13.3
\$60,001-\$70,000	40	9.6
\$70,001-\$100,000	58	14.0
\$100,001-\$150,000	35	8.4
\$150,001 or more	16	3.9
N/A	5	1.2
Total	415	100
Gender		
Male	112	27.0
Female	297	71.6
Other	6	1.4
Total	432	100

Table 5.5 Normality Statistics

Construct	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Brand Attitudes	-.443	.120	.010	.239
Brand Familiarity	-1.323	.120	.583	.239
Self-Congruence	1.216	.120	1.816	.239
Gender Attitudes	.781	.120	.099	.239
Fashion Involvement	-.011	.120	-.869	.239
Need for Product-Gender Congruity	.241	.120	-.398	.239
Liking	.312	.120	-.466	.239
Gender Blurring	.026	.120	-.150	.239
Brand Credibility	-.384	.120	.442	.239
Attitude towards the Advertisement	.130	.120	-.327	.239
Purchase Intention	.196	.120	-.955	.239

The third assumption is that the slopes of the regression lines should be the same for each group formed by the various manipulations and measures on the dependent variables (Allen et al., 2014). There was a significant independent variable-by-control variable interaction between Fashion Context and Brand Familiarity, and Gender Blurring and Gender Norms, indicating that this assumption was violated. However, the significance of results was found to be the same both with and without these two controls present, indicating that any bias caused by them was minimal. As the two control variables have been deemed conceptually relevant, they have been kept in the analysis.

Scatterplots of the control variables against the dependent variable (attitudes towards the advertisement) were examined to check for linearity. The plots appear to show a linear relationship, and thus this assumption is met (refer to Appendix G).

The final assumption of a factorial ANCOVA is homogeneity of variance. The Levene's test for equality of error variances was not significant ($p = .897$), indicating that the assumption was not violated (Allen et al., 2014).

5.7.2 Hypothesis Testing

A factorial analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted in order to examine the impact that the brand, context, and level of gender blurring had on attitudes towards the advertisement. The covariates included in the analysis were brand attitude, brand familiarity, self-congruity, fashion involvement, need for product-gender congruity, liking of the model/clothing, and gender norms. They were all deemed to be conceptually

relevant, and areas of potential confounds. Thus, the ANCOVA enables the exclusion of any bias (Allen et al., 2014).

Regarding the first hypothesis, the effect of gender blurring on the attitude towards the advertisement was found to be significant, $F(2, 397) = 19.117, p < .001$. Subjects within each level of the gender blurring conditions (stereotyped, androgynous, and gender blurred) reported significantly different attitudes towards the advertisement. Those in the stereotyped condition reported the most positive attitudes ($M = 3.910, Std. Error = .080$), followed by those in the androgynous conditions ($M = 3.440, Std. Error = .080$), and finally those in the gender blurred condition had the most negative attitudes ($M = 3.226, Std. Error = .078$). Post-hoc analysis demonstrated that there was a significant negative effect on attitudes towards the advertisement between the stereotyped and androgynous conditions, as well as between the stereotyped and gender blurred conditions, thus providing support for H1. There was, however, no significant difference in attitudes between the androgynous and gender blurred conditions ($p = .056$).

Secondly, the effect of the brand on the attitude towards the advertisement was examined. The ANCOVA indicated that brand credibility significantly affects the attitude towards the advertisement, $F(1, 397) = 17.945, p < .001$. Subjects within the Louis Vuitton (high brand credibility) conditions reported significantly more positive attitudes towards the advertisement ($M = 3.729, Std. Error = .064$) than those in the Warehouse (low brand credibility) conditions ($M = 3.321, Std. Error = .068$). Thus, there is support provided for H2. The final main effect tested was that of context. It was found to not have a significant effect on attitudes towards the advertisement, $F(1, 397) = 1.981, p = .160$.

The interaction effects of the independent variables were next examined. There was found to be a significant interaction effect between brand credibility and gender blurring on attitudes towards the advertisement, $F(2, 397) = 4.455, p = .006$, which lends support to H3. This indicated that the effect of gender blurring on the attitude depended on the brand in the condition, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

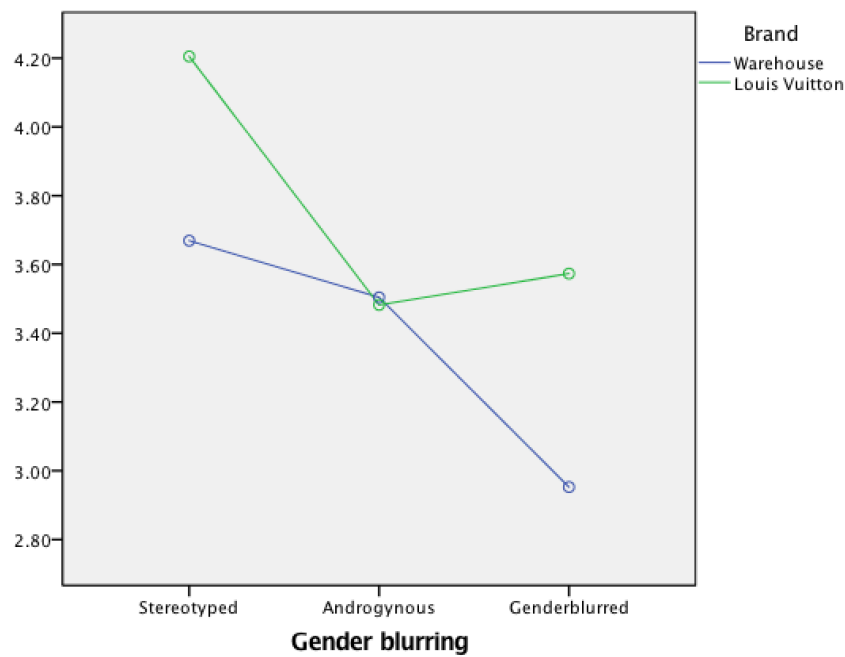


Figure 5.1 *The effects of brand and gender blurring on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement*

Simple effects analyses allow the further examination of this interaction between brand and gender blurring. The analysis indicated that a credible brand has a significant positive effect on the attitude towards the advertisement when stereotypical clothing is present, $F(1, 397) = 10.750, p < .017$, and when gender blurred clothing is present, $F(1, 397) = 14.060, p < .017$. Brand credibility does not, however, have a statistically significant effect on attitudes towards the advertisement when androgynous clothing is present, $F(1, 397) = .003, p = .953$. Simple comparisons evidenced that there was a significant negative effect on attitudes towards the advertisement within the high credibility (Louis Vuitton) group between the stereotyped and androgynous conditions, $t(397) = -4.929, p < .001$, and the stereotyped and gender blurred conditions, $t(397) = -4.195, p < .001$, but not between the androgynous and gender blurred conditions, $t(397) = .756, p = .447$. In the low brand credibility (The Warehouse) group, there was a significant negative effect on attitudes towards the advertisement between the stereotyped and gender blurred conditions, $t(397) = -4.382, p < .001$, and the androgynous and gender blurred conditions, $t(397) = -3.377, p = .001$, but not between the stereotyped and androgynous conditions, $t(397) = -1.073, p = .286$. Those in the high brand credibility group reported significantly more positive attitudes towards the advertisement for both the stereotyped condition than those in the low brand credibility group, $t(397) = 3.552, p < .001$. The same effect was reported for the gender blurred condition, $t(397) = 4.049, p < .001$, however not for the androgynous conditions, $t(397) =$

0.621, $p = .953$. Thus, brand credibility impacted the strength of the effect, providing support for H3.

To assess the next hypothesis, the interaction effect between context and gender blurring was examined. There was found to be no significant interaction effect, $F(2, 397) = .710, p = .492$. Thus, H4 was not supported. The interaction effect between brand and context was also found to not be significant, $F(1, 397) = .420, p = .517$. Finally, there was no significant three-way interaction effect found between gender blurring, brand credibility, and fashion context, $F(2, 397) = 1.453, p = .184$.

5.8 Regression

A regression analysis was conducted to test the relationship between attitudes towards the advertisement, and the final dependent variable, purchase intention. Before hypotheses are tested, assumptions of the analysis are again outlined.

As with the factorial between-groups ANCOVA, the first assumption of a regression analysis is that the data is normally distributed. As previously discussed, this assumption has been met (refer to Table 5.5).

High correlations between the predictor variables can render the model unstable, therefore multicollinearity is detected with the VIF statistics (Allen et al., 2014). The statistics for the majority of variables, including the predictors and controls, indicate that there is no multicollinearity (as the values are below 10) (Allen et al., 2014). There was reported multicollinearity between the male and female variables, however as these are dummy variables created to control for the effects of gender differences, multicollinearity it to be expected, meaning that the assumption is not violated (Hair et al., 2010).

The final assumption presumes that the differences in the observed and predicted values are normally distributed, and that the relationship of the residuals with the predicted values is linear, in addition to the variance being homogenous (Allen et al., 2014). As the residuals closely follow the line, and the scatterplot does not follow a distinct pattern, this assumption is met (refer to Figures 5.2 and 5.3).

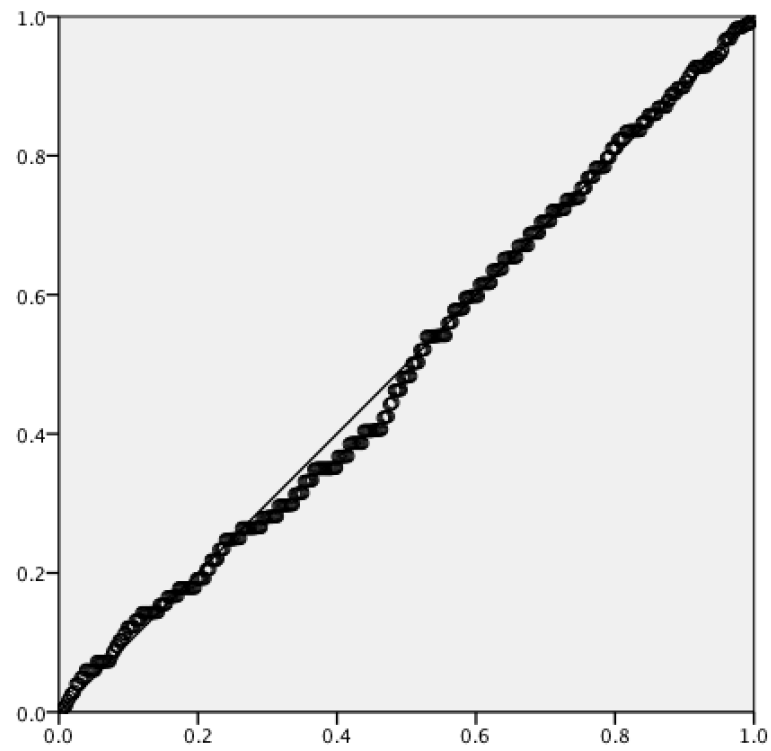


Figure 5.2 Plot of Regression Standardised Residuals

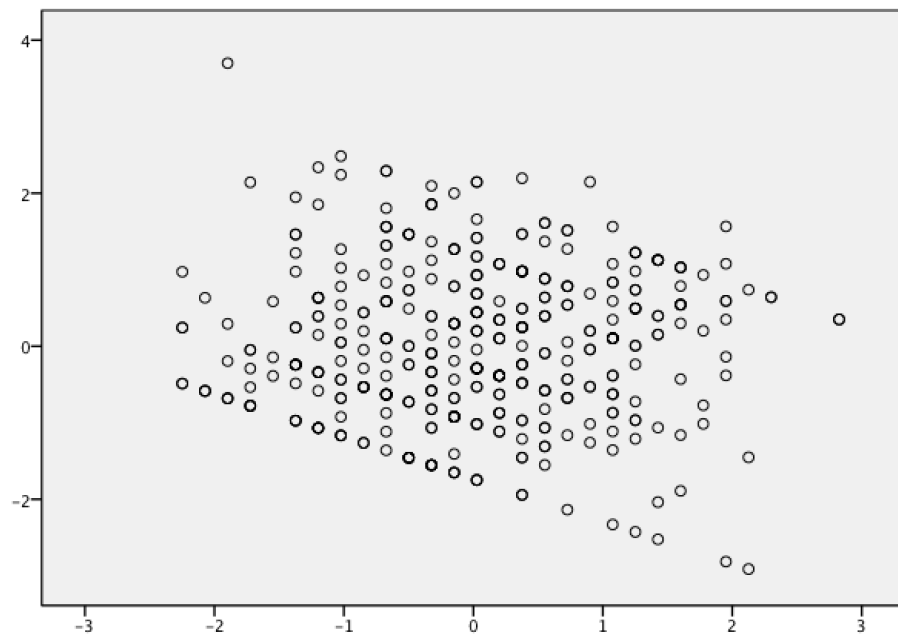


Figure 5.3 Scatterplot of Residuals

To predict the value of purchase intention based on the attitude towards the advertisement, a regression analysis was conducted. A significant regression was found, $F(1, 430) = 132.474$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .236$. There was a positive association between attitudes towards the advertisement and purchase intention, thus providing support for H5. See tables 5.6 and 5.7 for a summary of the regression analysis, and the model summary, respectively.

Table 5.6 Summary of Regression Analysis

Construct	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	-.582	.658		-.884	.377	
Ad Attitudes	.419	.074	.308	5.635	.000	1.743
Brand Attitudes	.202	.065	.160	3.137	.002	1.515
Brand Familiarity	-.068	.036	-.082	-1.897	.059	1.079
Self-Congruence	.245	.075	.163	3.280	.001	1.435
Fashion	-.042	.047	-.042	-.902	.368	1.286
Gender Attitudes	-.035	.061	-.028	-.568	.570	1.375
Liking	.131	.061	.115	2.138	.033	1.692
Need for Product Gender Congruity	.044	.057	.036	.768	.443	1.315
Males	1.119	.559	.319	2.002	.046	14.866
Females	1.078	.549	.313	1.964	.050	14.803

Table 5.7 Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R-Squared	Adjusted R-Squared	Std. Error
Hypothesis 5	.557	.310	.239	1.30974

Below, Table 5.8 provides a summary of the hypothesis testing. Four of the five hypotheses were supported, providing significant evidence as to the influence of brand credibility on the acceptance of controversial advertising claims.

Table 5.8 Summary of Hypotheses Outcomes

Hypothesis	Significance	Outcome
Gender blurring will have a negative effect on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement	$p < .001$	Supported
Brand credibility will have a positive effect on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement	$p < .001$	Supported
When brand credibility is high, the negative effect of gender blurring on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement will be weakened	$p < .001$	Supported
When the fashion is in a work (casual) context, the negative effect of gender blurring on attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement will be stronger (weaker)	$p = .492$	Not supported
Attitudes towards the gendered fashion advertisement will have a positive effect on purchase intention	$p < .001$	Supported

Chapter Six: Discussion

The following chapter discusses the results of the hypothesis testing in light of previous literature and theory in order to broaden the base of knowledge on the subject at hand. The main effects and the interactions are interpreted at a micro-theoretical level, followed by an interpretation at a macro-theoretical level of the authoritative nature of fashion brands.

6.1 Fashion Advertising & Gender Blurring

It was anticipated that overall the presence of gender blurred imagery in fashion advertisements would result in more negative attitudes, and this hypothesis was supported. As the clothing worn by the models deviated further from stereotypical gender norms towards androgyny, and then gender blurred, consumers had less positive responses towards the advertisement.

The current findings provide support for gender congruence within the context of the blurring of a product's gender resulting in incongruence with the sex of the end-user. The majority of literature exploring gender congruence, such as in cross-gendered brand extensions (Fugate & Phillips, 2010; Jung, 2006; Ulrich, 2013) or portrayals in advertising (Morrison & Shaffer, 2003; Neale et al., 2016; Park, 2012; Stafford, 1998), supports the notion that when there is incongruence between the gender of the consumer and the brand/product, that responses will be more negative. The current research finding, however, suggests that there is still a negative effect even when the consumer is not necessarily the intended user of the product, and that incongruity between the model within the advertisement and the clothing they are wearing has a similar relationship and impact on consumer attitudes. The finding extends current congruity theory, as it provides evidence that gender congruity is important for consumers within advertising imagery generally, as opposed to just at the brand level. Jhang et al. (2012) discussed how moderate incongruity can lead to positive evaluations, with extreme incongruity leading to negative evaluations. This was also found by Chu et al. (2016). In the current study, however, both levels of gender blurring elicited more negative outcomes than the stereotyped advertisements, suggesting that any amount of gender blurring in the context of menswear could be considered extremely incongruous and will negatively influence attitudes. In the case of fashion, the acceptance of androgyny has been found to occur in product categories

such as accessories and other styling choices, as opposed to the clothing foundation itself (Al-Mutawa, 2016), where the gendering of products is less visible and stereotyped.

Furthermore, other literature has focused on responses to the blurring of gender at the brand level, in terms of targeting the opposite gender i.e. releasing a new product using a brand extension aimed at a new target gender, or blurring the perceived gender of the brand to additionally sell to another sex (such as the case of Harley Davidson (Avery, 2012)). This study, however, examined the effect when the gender was blurred in the advertising but the message still targeted the same consumers – men in this case. Sandhu (2017) provided a review of the gender blurring of brand genders, proposing that men either abandon the brand or renegotiate their masculinity when there is female contamination. She also highlighted cases where men may be accepting of gender blurring, if the gendered identity of the brand is not a key aspect of the overall brand identity. However, the literature reviewed all looks at male responses to the female use of masculine brands, or female responses to male infiltration of feminine brands. The current research looks at consumer responses (both male and female) to males using feminine fashion products, not brands. Therefore, a possible explanation of the findings could be within Peñaloza's (1994) discussion on the place of masculinity and femininity within society, where it is viewed as rational to err on the side of masculinity, as it is seen as superior (hence the typical acceptance of females wearing traditionally men's clothing). Males wearing feminine clothing is not only gender incongruent, but seen as inferior within the prevailing hegemonic societal view (Avery, 2012; Case, 1995; Peñaloza, 1994).

6.2 Fashion Advertising & Brand Credibility

Louis Vuitton was able to elicit more favourable attitudes towards the advertisement than the Warehouse, illustrating how consumers view the credibility of brands as a proxy for the credence of advertising claims. The findings show that consumers respond more favourably towards messages from brands that they perceive to have a higher expertise and trustworthiness - the key dimensions of brand credibility as defined by Erdem and Swait (1998). This relationship is supported by previous credibility literature, with academics agreeing that credibility is positively linked to attitudes (Baek et al., 2010; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Erdem et al., 2002; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2004; Lafferty et al., 2002; Pornpitakpan, 2004;

Spry et al., 2011). This research demonstrates that this relationship, while previously explored in contexts such as high- vs low-involvement products, or in American or Korean cultural contexts (Yoon et al., 1998), is also found within the New Zealand culture and in the context of fashion brands and gender blurred imagery.

The results can be considered in light of signalling theory and the BIAF. Signalling theory comes from information economics, and is “fundamentally concerned with reducing information asymmetry between two parties” (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011, p. 40). Spence (1973) analogised the theory in relation to the job market – positing that employers are unable to know candidate quality, and thus use education as a symbol of such. In regards to brand credibility, Erdem and Swait (1998) highlighted that a credible brand acts as a signal as to the intentions of the company and the business it conducts. Inherently, a more credible brand acts as a signal as to the credibility of an advertising claim, lending the advertisement a higher persuasiveness and rate of acceptance by consumers. This study shows that this interpretation holds within the fashion context, as fashion goods signal status (Coelho & McClure, 1993), so if a credible fashion brand utilises imagery in an advertisement, irrespective of where it lies on the gender blurring spectrum, it is considered more appropriate and acceptable than if a low credibility fashion brand does so, as less expertise and trust is signalled by the brand.

This then ties into the BIAF, as in the context of fashion brands, credibility can be considered a signal created due to the perceived expertise of their creative directors and designers behind the clothing. Luxury houses such as Christian Dior, with their ateliers and the like of Raf Simons and John Galliano as creative director, have a power that comes from the industry expertise of these individuals. The BIAF explains that brands perceived to have well-placed intentions are likely to elicit more favourable attitudes. Brand credibility is considered to conceptualise the capability of a brand to be accurate in any claims they make, as well as their intent and trustworthiness in attempting to do so (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004; Erdem et al., 2002). The prestige and status of a luxury brand serves as a signal, which is associated with credibility, for highly expressive product categories, such as fashion clothing (Baek et al., 2010). This therefore leads to greater acceptance of claims made by credible brands, ending with more favourable attitudes towards their advertising claims no matter how controversial they may be.

6.3 Interaction Effects

6.3.1 The Controversy Normalisation Effect

The observed interaction effect between gender blurring and brand credibility highlighted the persuasive influence that credibility has over consumers' acceptance of potentially contentious claims. The results found that with a more credible brand, the negative effect of gender blurring was weaker (i.e. subjects responded more positively to gender blurring by Louis Vuitton than they did by the Warehouse). There are a number of potential explanations for this observed effect.

Gender blurring, and indeed the concept of gender in current prevailing thought, can be considered as a prevalent social concern within consumers' minds. Because of this, the utilisation of gender blurring within advertising can be thought of as the commodification of a social issue (Tinic, 1997). Advertising has commonly been considered as differentiated from cultural discourse, with it reflecting our capitalistic society and, as a mode of profit generation, it subverts social change and uses it for monetary gain. As such, the commodification of social issues within advertising is often viewed with scepticism by consumers, with the perception that brands may simply engage with such issues for the express purpose of attention and commercial gain (Webb & Mohr, 1998). This may explain the case of the Warehouse, where any level of gender blurring was perceived considerably negatively.

This commodification of gender issues can be interpreted in light of the PKM. The model states that consumers have a certain level of knowledge regarding persuasion attempts, in relation to both the topic of the persuasion claim, and the persuasive agent (Friestad & Wright, 1994). For a less credible brand, it could be that consumer's knowledge of persuasion (such as whether they know they are being persuaded/the intentions of the brand) is more influential due to the potential incongruence between current perceptions of the brand and the claim normalising gender blurring, whereas credible fashion brands are considered to be experts in the field, and as such they create the trends and decide upon the clothing that is considered fashionable (Okonkwo, 2007). Again, drawing from signalling theory, their credibility acts as a signal as to the validity of the claim, capable of filling in any consumer gaps in topic knowledge, and thereby increasing the persuasive effects of the advertisement, thus eliciting more favourable attitudes and acceptance of gender blurring.

6.3.2 Fashion Context x Gender Blurring

Interestingly, the proposed interaction effect between fashion context and gender blurring on attitude towards the advertisement was not supported. Consumers did not have more positive attitudes towards gender blurred clothing as leisurewear than they did for the clothing as work attire, going against theories regarding workplace norms (Dellinger, 2002). The findings could potentially be explained in terms of the cultural context of the population. Within New Zealand, consumers are stereotypically typified as being 'laid back', and this is supported by a low rating on Hofstede's (2001) dimension of Power Distance. This indicates that New Zealand workplace culture is typically more informal in communications and relationships between employees and clients, potentially implying that workplace norms regarding clothing and attire are more relaxed, resulting in the insignificant interaction effect seen in this study. Kiddie (2009) elucidates recent trends within workplace fashion, and how corporations have moved from strict codes, to the introduction of 'casual Fridays', and now to the increasingly relaxed expectations from employers. The findings could indicate that these relaxed norms in relation to formality also extend to the perceived appropriateness based on gender.

6.4 Prediction of Purchase Intention

Finally, the study intended to provide further validation as to the strength of the relationship between attitude towards the advertisement and purchase intention. The impact was as expected, and followed previous literature (Kim et al., 2009; Lafferty et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2016). More positive attitudes towards the advertisement resulted in higher purchase intentions within the subjects. The contribution of the current research indicates that this relationship between the variables is incredibly significant and valid, with the support for the effect still holding even when all control variables were accounted for.

6.5 Macro Theory Interpretation: The Authority of Highly Credible Brands

At a macro-level, the findings can be interpreted in light of Cultural Authority (Holt, 2002) and the Transfer of Meaning (McCracken, 1986). The Cultural Authority Macro Theory initially evolved from a range of disciplines, both within business schools and social sciences examining and exploring how companies market their products and how individuals consume products, and the inter-relations between these two (Holt, 2002). Viewed from a capitalism lens, consumer culture refers to how consumption is structured and informed by the actions and marketing activities collectively operationalised by

industry (Holt, 2002). He discussed the cultural authority narrative relative to theory argued by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), who proposed that marketing activities are formalised procedures, creating an industry of mass-cultural production. The theory posits that popular culture commodities (film, television, fashion etc.) are the optimum ways for the realisation of social identities (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). Ritzer (2008) discussed how brand become icons and symbols of culture. Iconic brands have become almost sacred, with loyal consumers willing to do anything to protect them and keep them thriving. The cultural authority narrative inherently highlights how marketers channel consumer wants and needs through brands, giving the brands power (Holt, 2002; Ritzer, 2008).

Firat and Venkatesh (1995) argued the authority of brands as a process similar to that described by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), in that marketing activities influence consumers as a whole. However, they proposed that the increasing globalisation and fragmentation of markets creates a more heterogeneous consumer base, where segments can create and appropriate their own meanings. Within the fashion industry, this is evident in the increased stratification of the consumer base, with a growing number of identities being expressed through brands and fashion consumption (Crane, 2000). In modern culture, the authority of brands is still evident in consumer society, with consumers still acquiescing to brand marketing activities, however, Holt (2002) argued that moving forward into post-modern and post-postmodern consumer cultures, individuals will increasingly cultivate their self-identities through branding. This is indicative of what was termed the resistant consumer, as discussed by Ozanne and Murray (1995) and Firat and Venkatesh (1995). Holt (2002), however, proposed that the consumer is not, in modern culture at least, a resistor of branding or an entity intent on nonconformity, but rather a participant. He deemed it “a market-sanctioned cultural experimentation through which the market rejuvenates itself” (Holt, 2002, p. 89). This is evident within the findings of this research, luxury fashion brands are seen as icons within fashion consumer culture, and are therefore considered credible. The power of Louis Vuitton, drawn from the brand’s credibility, enables the inclusion of gender blurring within advertising with fewer consequences than less credible brands like the Warehouse. Credible fashion brands have the power to set, or at least influence, trends, and so they also have the ability to shape what is acceptable and appropriate for people to wear. Brands such as this have the capability to leverage cultural and political authority as a result of their perceived expertise and trustworthiness, and therefore are able to create brand narratives that have a cultural impact

(Holt, 2004). Within cultural authority, brand assets are “based on the nation’s collective expectations that the brand can and should author a particular kind of story” (Holt, 2004, p. 125). This indicates that when brands such as Louis Vuitton have the expertise and trustworthiness to influence the acceptance of new norms, such as gender blurring,

The findings can also be interpreted in light of the Transfer of Meaning Model (McCracken, 1986). The theory highlights how meaning is created within the culturally constituted world, with advertising and fashion systems imbuing consumer goods with those meanings, which is then transferred to consumers upon consumption (McCracken, 1986). In the current study, a more credible fashion brand can move meaning by utilising both the advertising and fashion systems. The brand can be considered to act as an agent of change within the advertising system, adding credence to claims and strengthening the persuasive influence of the advertisement through its authority. Within the fashion system, the brand acts as an opinion leader, helping to “shape and refine existing cultural meaning, encouraging the reform of cultural categories and principles” (McCracken, 1986, p. 76).

Within the fashion system, product designers additionally act as agents generating cultural meaning transfers (McCracken, 1986). In light of the BIAF, the perceived intention and credibility of such individuals behind the brand has been shown to influence evaluations and acceptance (Fiske et al., 2012). The brand becomes associated with the expertise of the designer/creative director, and as such the power that the brand holds in terms of its cultural authority may need to be considered regarding how readily it is able to create and transfer meaning to consumer goods.

The Transfer of Meaning Model additionally highlights the importance of innovation and adoption within fashion branding and the acceptance of gender blurring. Social contagion and opinion leadership can influence the adoption of new products (or in this case, attitudes) (Iyengar, Van den Bulte, & Valente, 2011). This opinion leadership could come from the credible brand itself, exerted through social power and the sacralisation of the brand name (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013). Through brand credibility, brands have expert social power, meaning that they can influence attitudes (Baek et al., 2010; Choi et al., 2015; Crosno et al., 2009). Credible fashion brands, being both trustworthy and experts, could be considered as opinion leaders, as they define trends and elements of what is fashionable within society. Fashion brands have the authority to transmit information about clothing

that is then widely diffused. This is evident particularly within the luxury houses, who on principle create goods for the elite classes, and then diffuse fashion trends down through various strata, indicating the power of expertise.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions & Implications

The following chapter concludes the research, synthesising the findings of the study. Contributions and implications, both theoretical and managerial, are discussed, along with the limitations and potential avenues for future research.

7.1 Overall Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how consumers respond to the utilisation of gender blurring within fashion advertising, in addition to the extent to which the concept could be employed by marketers in relation to the trustworthiness and expertise of the brand they are managing. As discussed, the findings have allowed for this understanding by providing evidence of a relationship between the individual variables of brand credibility and gender blurring, but also a significant interaction effect. Ultimately, more credible brands are more readily able to use gender blurring within fashion advertisements. It is the authority that a luxury brand has over fashion as a result of their higher credibility that leads to this effect.

There were three key research objectives addressed by the study. First, gender blurring was found to have a negative relationship with attitudes towards the advertisement. Secondly, brand credibility was found to have a significant main effect and moderating impact on how gender blurring influences a consumer's attitude towards the advertisement. Interestingly, the work or casual context of the fashion collection was not found to have a significant influence on the acceptance of gender blurring. Though not key objectives, the study additionally found that the strength of the relationship between attitude towards the advertisement and purchase intention was found with a range of control variables accounted for, in addition to credible fashion brands can be considered to have a certain level of authority over the acceptance of controversial claims, in light of the findings.

The current research intended to aid in filling a current gap within consumer behaviour and fashion marketing literature. There is limited empirical work that has been conducted exploring gender blurring at the product level, largely due to the infancy of the phenomenon within consumer purchasing behaviour.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study finds a credible brand reduce negative responses to contentious advertising claims, and terms this as the Controversy Normalisation Effect. Investigations into the effects of brand credibility on the persuasive influence of advertising have been limited. Studies from Erdem and Swait (1998, 2004) and Erdem et al. (2002) indicated that having a brand with a higher credibility results in the brand being considered more often by consumers, due to its increased expertise and trustworthiness. The current research finds that brand credibility lends the brand's advertisements a stronger persuasive influence, thus playing an important role in the acceptance of contentious claims, such as the gender blurring of fashion goods. The authority that high credibility exerts over the message enhances the persuasiveness of this claim. The credibility that a brand possesses can be considered as an influencer of the consumer's agent and topic knowledge. A part of agent knowledge is the beliefs about the marketer's tactics, so when a brand has a higher credibility, and thus has a higher trustworthiness, the intentions of the brand are viewed more positively. This increases the persuasiveness of the advertising claim (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Relating to this are the intention and ability dimensions of the BIAF, where brands rating strongly on both are deemed to be 'admired brands' (Kervyn et al., 2012), and this study provides further validation for this framework.

Gender blurring is a minority cultural phenomenon, and in the view of CCT, meaning and identity are transferred to consumers via fashion and advertising systems (McCracken, 1986), but how these are linked required elaboration. The current research finds that in some circumstances brands with high credibility can co-opt cultural phenomena that is cutting-edge and polarising, and as such advertising discourse can influence certain norms dependent on the credibility of the brand. This finding extends our understanding of the movement of meaning, highlighting the role that the brand plays in this transference, and additionally has significant implications for the understanding of Cultural Authority. Brands can be considered as a part of the shaping of consumer culture (Holt, 2002), and more specifically brands with a high credibility more readily imbue symbols with meaning, acting as change agents to transfer this meaning throughout culture. As such, marketing academics ought to consider the Transfer of Meaning in light of how persuasive a brand can be.

Research surrounding gender blurring has failed to look at the blurring of fashion gender, and little has been done in the context of advertising. Previous literature has explored gender incongruence in brand extensions (Fugate & Phillips, 2010; Jung, 2006; Ulrich, 2013), or the blurring of a brand's gender (Avery, 2012; Sandhu, 2017). With the increasing rates of consumers wearing clothing not traditionally congruent with their gender, and increasing awareness around gender fluidity and related issues, the need for such research and understanding is apparent as brands are co-opting gender blurring without an understanding of how the wider market will respond. Fashion is unique category that is highly involved in the construction of identity (Schofield et al., 2005), and thus understanding the role of the brand in the meanings they attach via advertising is important for academics. While work exploring gender blurring at the brand level has indicated that consumers can be accepting of cross-gender contamination by brands, this study indicates that at a base-level, consumers respond negatively to gender incongruence in male fashion advertising.

7.3 Managerial Implications

The key findings provide some particularly interesting implications for managers and marketing practitioners within the fashion industry. While the effects of brand credibility on brand consideration and attitudes towards advertising have been shown previously within literature (see Baek et al., 2010; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Erdem et al., 2002; Lafferty et al., 2002), the effect it has on attitudes towards controversial issues in advertising (such as gender blurring) has not yet been shown. Broadly, the implications for managers are twofold: what happens when brands make controversial claims in advertising and from this, the types of brands that can do so without severe consequences. While the study focused on responses to gender blurring, theoretically the implications could be relevant for any marketing addressing controversial issues. Regardless of a brand's credibility, gender blurring elicits less favourable responses than using gender-stereotyped clothing, and therefore brands should use such claims cautiously. When a brand with higher credibility gender blurs, the more significant decrease found within the study was between the stereotyped image and the androgynous image, with the two non-stereotypical images (androgynous and gender blurred) having similarly rated attitudes. For the low credibility brand, the sharpest decrease occurred between the androgynous and gender blurred conditions. This suggests that for managers of less credible fashion brands, that there is a certain level of gender blurring that they can go to before the responses become too

negative. They can toe the line, but not engage in anything too avant-garde or ‘edgy’ when it comes to gender. For credible brands, however, their expertise allows them to gender blur at any level without the extreme negative effects.

While overall responses to gender blurring were negative, this is not to say that brands should not engage with it. With the credibility that brands hold comes the ability to reduce the controversy associated with gender blurring (and potentially other non-normative phenomena), thus making it be perceived as more appropriate and acceptable within society. Fashion houses should continue to curate their perceived expertise, leveraging on the skills and ability of their creative directors, as well as ensuring that they are perceived as well intentioned, and not just utilising gender blurring as a gimmick, or a way of joining in on the trend. Any foray into using gender blurring in marketing communications or even the practice of gender blurring the fashion goods the brand sells, should be taken seriously, lest the brand get negative responses. While this study focused on the effects within communications, it may also apply through to product selection. As such, brands with a low credibility should be wary of utilising gender blurring, as they may be unable to co-opt the cultural change, creating negative attitudes by using such claims in their advertising.

7.4 Limitations

The first limitation of the study was the large female presence within the sample population. Prior literature has suggested that women typically respond more positively than men towards gender blurring (Sandhu, 2017), however the sample was insufficient to conduct post-hoc analyses assessing such gender differences. This was, however, not the focus of the current work, as the aim was to investigate the effects of gender blurring in a more general context.

Additionally, the sample was comprised of consumers from New Zealand. Therefore, they are typical of the Western world, with higher rates of education, literacy, and access to higher quality fashion goods. New Zealand citizens additionally are typically considered to be more socially and politically liberal than other cultures, with core values of fairness and equality evidenced in area such as women’s voting rights and marriage equality (Levine, 2012). Due to this, the findings are only generalizable within this context. To generalise the findings further, research could be conducted within cultures with different norms.

Finally, the experimental method employed within the study results in the findings being less externally valid, meaning that it cannot be known if the findings would be found in a 'real setting', as the experiment controlled for additional factors. This is offset, however, by the method having the highest internal validity, as potential confounds were addressed (Malhotra, Hall, et al., 2006).

7.5 Directions for Future Research

It would be of value for future marketing research to examine the area of gender blurring in more depth, as there is need for greater understanding as to the effect of the concept within society, both in fashion and product contexts and further afield. Consequently, future research could examine responses to gender blurring in different product categories. There is a significant body of work that has examined how the level of gender incongruence between the consumer and the product/brand/advertising portrayal impacts responses to an advertising claim (Chu et al., 2016; Jhang et al., 2012; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Within the context of gender blurring in fashion, it would be of interest to investigate where the demarcation between moderate and extreme incongruity lies, and therefore a qualitative examination around gender blurring, exploring antecedents to attitudes and additional consequences, would be of value. Case (1995) suggested that even a small movement away from the traditionally masculine is viewed negatively, but there is a gap in empirical research validating this claim. This suggests that there is value in conducting a longitudinal study, to see the changes in what is considered acceptable over time, in addition to seeing the impact that marketing communications from credible brands has on the general acceptance of gender blurring.

Expanding on this, there is further validation required for the Controversy Normalisation Effect of credible brands found in the current work. The current findings provide evidence for the powerful influence of credible brands within the fashion category and gender blurring, but does this effect still occur when gender blurring in other product categories? This would be of particular interest to marketing practitioners and retailers, as gender blurring at the product level has been noted as a trend within consumer culture (Kasriel-Alexander, 2016). Other product categories, such as skincare, cosmetics, footwear, and accessories all have strong gendering at the product-level, and also have utilised the gender blurring trend in their positioning and advertising (for example, cosmetics brand CoverGirl recently hired male YouTuber James Charles as a spokesperson (Shepherd, 2016)). There

is research to be conducted exploring attitudinal responses to gender blurred advertisements and campaigns such as this, in addition to exploring the impact of brand credibility in normalising controversy in contexts apart from gender blurring. If the Controversy Normalisation Effect is more generalizable, then more credible brands may be able to make more contentious claims in areas of controversy within consumer culture, promoting a social change. Such areas could include ethics and sustainability (such as fast fashion) and feminism. Does the credibility of a brand aid in the normalisation of other non-mainstream, or ‘fringe’, issues?

Thirdly, prior research has suggested that there are gender-specific responses to gender blurring at the brand-level, from the perspective of those whose brands are being blurred (e.g. male responses to masculine brands being feminised, and vice versa) (Sandhu, 2017). The current research shows that overall consumers respond negatively to the gender blurring of fashion brand advertising using male clothing, but additional research could explore the gender differences further, examining how different genders respond the gender blurring in various product categories. Although typically men respond more negatively than women, are there any categories where this effect is not as strong? Additionally, all future research branches discussed above could also be examined in regard to gender-specific responses. From this, other demographic segments could be compared through their attitudinal responses – such as sexual orientation and different cultural contexts (for example cross-national studies, examining how one’s nationality influences their attitudes towards gender blurring), or seeing if the effect is stronger in less socially liberal countries.

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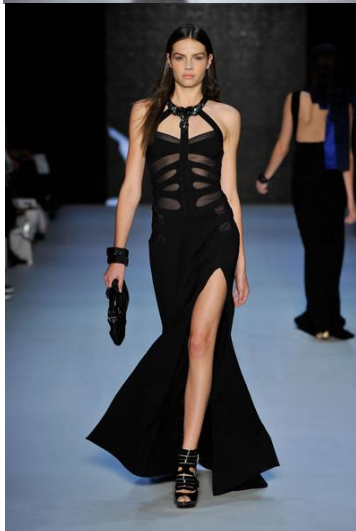
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Appendices

Appendix A: Images used in Pre-test





Appendix B: Pre-Test Questionnaire

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research: Fashion Opinions

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. My name is Daniel Brownie and I am currently at Victoria University of Wellington. I would like to invite you to take part in my research project but you are under no obligation to participate. Before you decide whether you want to take part in this research, you should understand what is involved. This form provides you with information about the project.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

This study is interested in fashion opinions. This activity has been reviewed and approved by Victoria University's Pipitea Human Ethics Committee (#23203).

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION YOU GIVE?

This survey is completely voluntary and it is not possible for any respondent to be identified personally in conjunction with this survey. The survey should take around 10 minutes to complete. Please only complete this survey once. This is a secure website and all responses collected will remain anonymous. All of the material related to survey responses will only be viewed by the researcher and the supervisor. All printed information will be kept in a locked file with access restricted to the researcher. All electronic data will be kept in a password protected file only accessible by the researcher. Data collected in this survey will be destroyed after 5 years.

OUTPUTS OF THE PROJECT

The results may be published in academic journals and/or conference papers and/or reported to retailers in a non-attributable form. The final thesis will also be held at Victoria University of Wellington's library.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS WHOM CAN YOU CONTACT?

Student researcher:

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brownidani@myvu.ac.nz

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Please consider the image for the following questions



Thinking of the image, please answer the following:

	definitely for males	moderately for males	somewhat for males	either for males or females	somewhat for females	moderately for females	definitely for females
This fashion style is:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In a work context, this fashion style is:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In a casual context, this fashion style is:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thinking of the question you just answered, please answer the following:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Making this judgement was easy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thinking of the image, please consider the following:

I consider the model to be masculine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	feminine
I consider the image to be masculine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	feminine

NB: Subjects were randomly exposed to this block of questions six times, with three of the male images, and three of the female images.

Please rank the brands in order from the one you feel is the most trustworthy, to the one you feel is the least trustworthy

- Louis Vuitton
- The Warehouse
- Kmart
- Gucci
- H&M
- Farmers
- Dior
- Burberry
- Zambesi
- Zara

Please rank the following brands in order from the one you feel has the most expertise in fashion, to the one that you feel has the least expertise

- Louis Vuitton
- The Warehouse
- Kmart
- Gucci
- H&M
- Farmers
- Dior
- Burberry
- Zambesi
- Zara

Please rate the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It is acceptable for men to use products that are highly feminine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is acceptable for women to use products that are highly masculine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What gender do you most identify with?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐

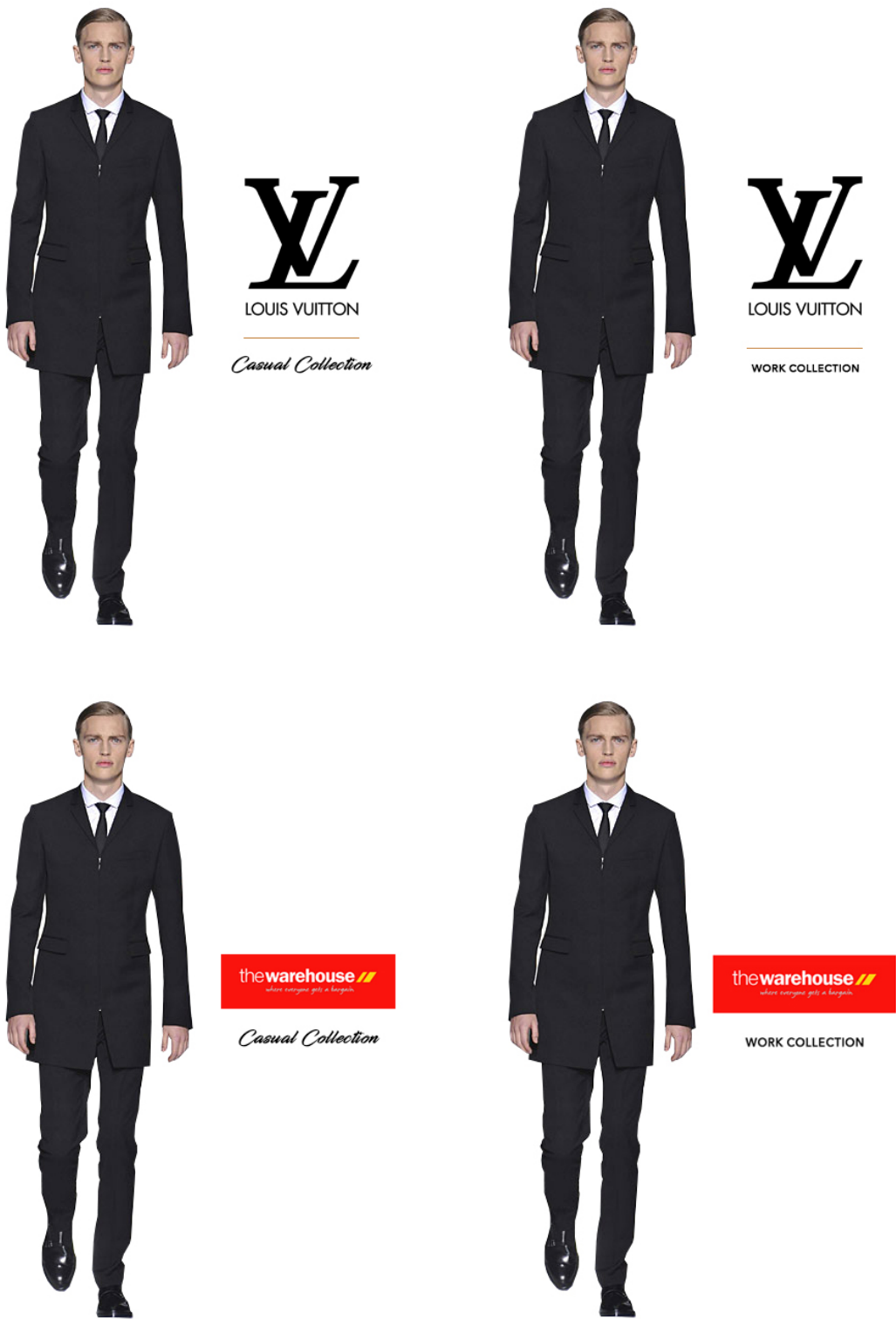
Other (please specify)

What is your age?

- ☐ Under 20
- ☐ 20-24
- ☐ 25-29
- ☐ 30-34
- ☐ 35-39
- ☐ 40-44
- ☐ 45-49
- ☐ 50-54
- ☐ 55-59
- ☐ 60-64
- ☐ 65-96
- ☐ 70 and over

Appendix C: Final Advertisements

Stereotyped Condition



Androgynous Conditions



Louis Vuitton
LOUIS VUITTON
Casual Collection



Louis Vuitton
LOUIS VUITTON
WORK COLLECTION



the warehouse 
where everyone gets a bargain
Casual Collection



the warehouse 
where everyone gets a bargain
WORK COLLECTION

Gender Blurred Conditions



LV
LOUIS VUITTON
Casual Collection



LV
LOUIS VUITTON
WORK COLLECTION



thewarehouse 
where everyone gets a bargain.
Casual Collection



thewarehouse 
where everyone gets a bargain.
WORK COLLECTION

Appendix D: Main Study Questionnaire

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research: Fashion Opinions

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. My name is Daniel Brownie and I am currently at Victoria University of Wellington. I would like to invite you to take part in my research project but you are under no obligation to participate. Before you decide whether you want to take part in this research, you should understand what is involved. This form provides you with information about the project.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

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This survey is completely voluntary and it is not possible for any respondent to be identified personally in conjunction with this survey. The survey should take around 10 minutes to complete. Please only complete this survey once. This is a secure website and all responses collected will remain anonymous. All of the material related to survey responses will only be viewed by the researcher and the supervisor. All printed information will be kept in a locked file with access restricted to the researcher. All electronic data will be kept in a password protected file only accessible by the researcher. Data collected in this survey will be destroyed after 5 years.

OUTPUTS OF THE PROJECT

The results may be published in academic journals and/or conference papers and/or reported to retailers in a non-attributable form. The final thesis will also be held at Victoria University of Wellington's library.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS WHOM CAN YOU CONTACT?

Student researcher:

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djavlonbek.kadirov@vu.ac.nz



Please rate the following, based off of your feelings towards the advertisement

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I got a positive impression.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it interesting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it credible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it exaggerated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it attractive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rank the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
If I were looking for this type of product my likelihood of purchasing from the fashion collection in the ad would be high	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I were to buy this type of product, the probability that I would consider buying from the fashion collection in the ad would be high.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I had to buy this type of product, my willingness to buy from the fashion collection in the ad would be high.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rank the brand on the following:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I think that this brand is a very good brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that this brand is a very useful brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My opinion of this brand is very favourable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following

The brand is familiar to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The brand is not familiar to me
I have heard something about the brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have not heard something about the brand
I do not know the brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I know the brand

Please rate the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is consistent with how I (would like to) see myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand reflects who I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The image of the typical customer of this brand is congruent (consistent/identical) with how I see myself (how I would like to see myself)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is the mirror image of me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am quite similar (I would like to be perceived as similar) to the typical consumer of this retail store	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like products to have the same gender characteristics as myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am uncomfortable buying items that I know are specifically sold to the opposite gender	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not care about the gender of a product if it satisfies my needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
If you are taking an online survey, check 'disagree'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Fashion clothing means a lot to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fashion clothing is significant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For me personally fashion clothing is important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in fashion clothing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I pay a lot of attention to fashion clothing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a high involvement with fashion clothing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It is acceptable for men to use products that are highly feminine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel uncomfortable when I see people wearing clothes specifically made for the opposite sex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important for a person to purchase products consistent with their biological sex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
People close to me think that men should wear clothes made for men	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People who are important to me would approve/be happy with people buying clothing made specifically for the opposite sex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People who are close to me think that I should buy clothing consistent with my biological sex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Here is the advertisement you saw earlier. Please consider it again when answering the following questions



Please rate the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I like the model in the advertisement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like the clothing in the advertisement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rank the advertisement on the following:

This advertisement is masculine	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	feminine
The clothing in this advertisement is masculine	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	feminine
The model in this advertisement is masculine	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	feminine

Please rate the following

	definitely for males	for males	somewhat for males	for either males or females	somewhat for females	for females	definitely for females
For this collection, this fashion style is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rank the brand on the following:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This brand reminds me of someone who is competent and knows what they are doing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand has the ability to deliver what it promises	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand delivers what it promises	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand's product claims are believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand has a name you can trust	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand doesn't pretend to be something that it isn't.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Over time, my experiences with this brand have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographics

What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25 - 34
- ☐ 35 - 44
- ☐ 45 - 54
- ☐ 55 - 64
- ☐ 65 - 74
- ☐ 75 - 84
- ☐ 85 or older

What is your personal income?

- ☐ Zero
- ☐ \$1–\$5,000
- ☐ \$5,001–\$10,000
- ☐ \$10,001–\$15,000
- ☐ \$15,001–\$20,000
- ☐ \$20,001–\$25,000
- ☐ \$25,001–\$30,000
- ☐ \$30,001–\$35,000
- ☐ \$35,001–\$40,000
- ☐ \$40,001–\$50,000
- ☐ \$50,001–\$60,000
- ☐ \$60,001–\$70,000
- ☐ \$70,001–\$100,000
- ☐ \$100,001–\$150,000
- ☐ \$150,001 or More

Which gender do you identify with?

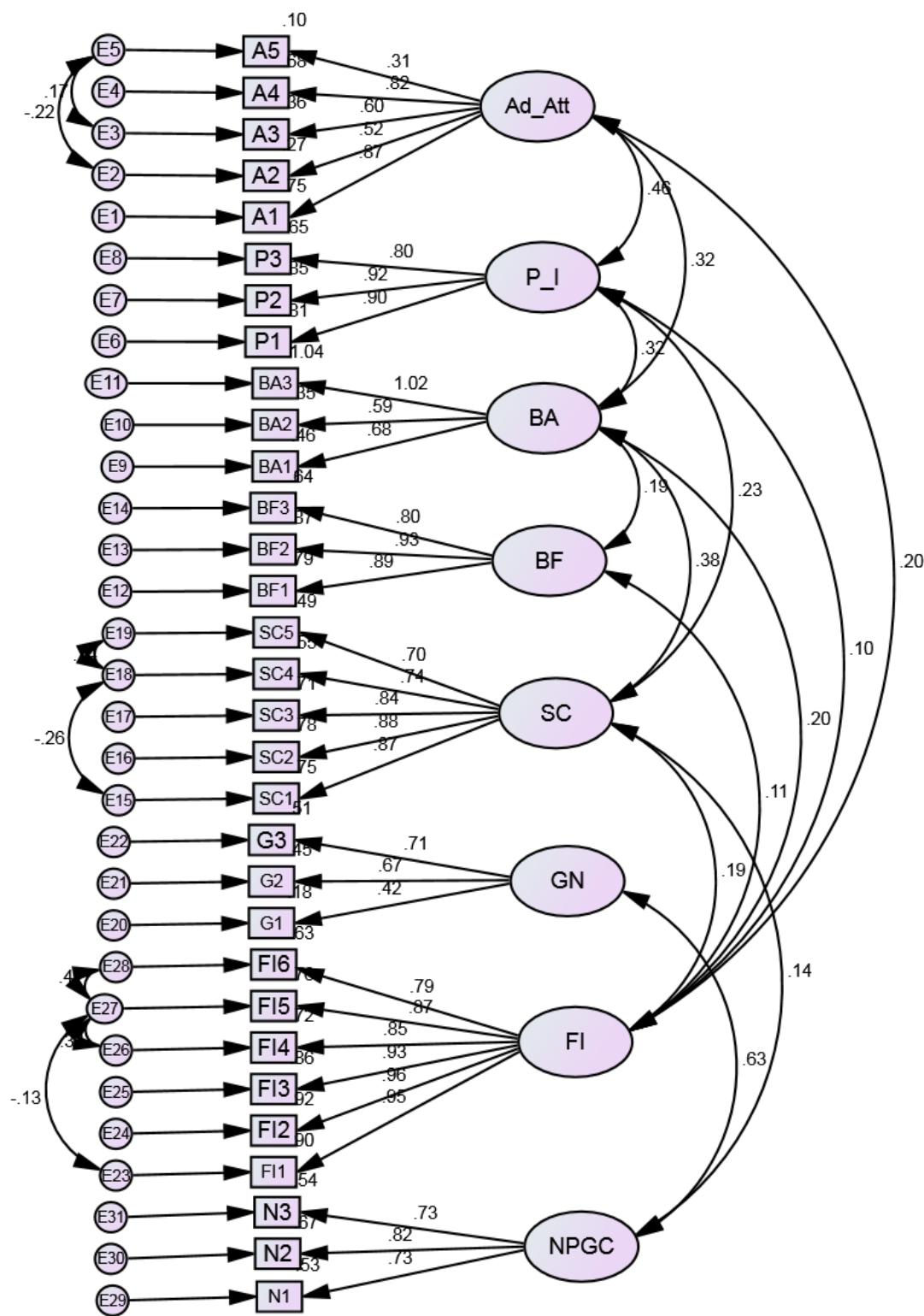
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other (please specify)

What do you think this study is about?

Appendix E: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Variable	Factors										Communalities
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
A1							.789				.779
A2							.539				.573
A3							.607				.597
A4										.668	.584
A5							.773				.743
PI1						.845					.852
PI2						.871					.883
PI3						.823					.790
BA1	.627										.618
BA2									.824		.799
BA3	.494								.590		.796
BF1					.908						.856
BF2					.919						.874
BF3					.878						.801
SC1			.772								.756
SC2			.846								.802
SC3			.833								.775
SC4			.807								.696
SC5			.777								.668
N1								.663			.576
N2								.778			.714
N3								.653			.672
F1		.930									.883
F2		.938									.900
F3		.925									.874
F4		.879									.823
F5		.905									.861
F6		.842									.764
G1				.766							.649
G2				.713							.632
G3				.809							.728
SN1				.666						- .472	.706
SN2				.596							.570
SN3				.673							.672
BC1	.661										.572
BC2	.859										.780
BC3	.878										.797
BC4	.848										.762
BC5	.805										.719
BC6	.683										.513
BC7	.631										.519

Appendix F: Structural Model



Appendix G: Linearity & Homogeneity of Regression Slopes

