



## Beyond Gender Labels: The Impact of Peer Influence on Consumer Perception towards Unisex Products

\*<sup>1</sup>Latha N and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Shubha A

<sup>\*1</sup>Assistant Professor and Research Scholar, School of Commerce, REVA University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

<sup>2</sup>Dean, REVA Business School, REVA University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

### Abstract

The growing acceptance of unisex products has transformed consumer markets by challenging traditional gender-based marketing and promoting inclusive consumption practices. In the FMCG personal care sector, consumers are increasingly evaluating products based on quality, functionality, and brand values rather than gender-specific positioning. Among the various factors influencing consumer behaviour, peer influence plays a significant role in shaping consumer perception through interactions with friends, family, reference groups, and social media. This study aims to examine the impact of peer influence on consumer perception towards unisex products and its influence on consumer acceptance. The study adopts a qualitative research approach using a descriptive and exploratory research design. Secondary data were collected from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, industry reports, and credible online sources. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret recurring themes related to peer influence, consumer perception, and acceptance of unisex products. The findings indicate that peer influence significantly affects consumer perception, while inclusive branding, social media engagement, and changing societal values positively contribute to the acceptance of unisex products. The study concludes that marketers should adopt gender-neutral branding and inclusive marketing strategies to meet evolving consumer expectations and enhance brand acceptance in the FMCG personal care sector.

**Keywords:** Peer Influence, Consumer Perception, Unisex Products, Gender-Neutral Branding, FMCG Personal Care, Consumer Behaviour, Inclusive Marketing.

### 1. Introduction

The global consumer market has undergone a remarkable transformation as evolving social values, increased awareness of gender equality, and changing lifestyle preferences have reshaped traditional consumption patterns. Products that were once marketed exclusively to men or women are increasingly being introduced as unisex or gender-neutral offerings, particularly in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and personal care sectors. This shift reflects consumers' growing preference for inclusivity, individuality, and functionality over conventional gender stereotypes. Organizations are responding by adopting gender-neutral branding strategies, redesigning product packaging, and developing marketing campaigns that appeal to a broader audience regardless of gender identity. Consequently, consumer perception towards unisex products has become an important area of research, as understanding the factors influencing product acceptance can help businesses design effective marketing strategies and foster inclusive consumption practices (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Solomon, 2023; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

Among the various factors influencing consumer perception,

peer influence plays a significant role in shaping attitudes, preferences, and purchasing behaviour. Friends, family members, colleagues, and social networks often serve as important sources of information, recommendations, and social validation, particularly for products that challenge traditional gender norms. The widespread use of social media has further amplified peer influence by facilitating electronic word-of-mouth, influencer marketing, and online discussions that shape consumer opinions and purchasing decisions. As gender-neutral products continue to gain popularity, it is essential to understand how peer interactions affect consumers' willingness to adopt these products. Therefore, the present study, "Beyond Gender Labels: The Impact of Peer Influence on Consumer Perception towards Unisex Products," aims to examine the influence of peer groups on consumer perceptions of unisex products, with particular reference to the FMCG and personal care sectors. The study is expected to provide valuable insights into consumer behaviour and contribute to the development of inclusive marketing strategies that align with evolving societal expectations (Bandura, 1977; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Cialdini, 2009; Bhanja & Mehta, 2022).

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. Peer Influence (Independent Variable)

Peer influence is one of the most significant social factors affecting consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. According to Albert Bandura (1977), individuals learn attitudes and behaviours by observing and interacting with others, suggesting that peers play a crucial role in shaping consumption patterns. Similarly, Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) explained that individuals adopt behaviours that are consistent with the norms of their social groups to maintain a positive social identity. Robert Cialdini (2009) further emphasized that social proof and interpersonal influence significantly affect consumer choices, particularly when consumers are uncertain about their purchase decisions. In the digital era, Eytan Bakshy *et al.* (2012) demonstrated that peer recommendations and social interactions on online platforms substantially increase purchase intentions and brand engagement. More recently, Bhukya and Paul (2023) concluded that peer groups, social media interactions, and reference groups positively influence consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and brand loyalty across various product categories.

### 2.2. Consumer Perception (Mediating Variable)

Consumer perception refers to the way individuals interpret and evaluate products based on psychological, social, cultural, and personal influences. According to Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller (2022), consumer perception is shaped by several internal and external factors that determine how consumers evaluate products and brands. Leon G. Schiffman and Joseph Wisenblit (2019) argued that consumers interpret product attributes through prior experiences, beliefs, and social interactions rather than objective product characteristics alone. Likewise, Michael R. Solomon (2023) highlighted that modern consumers increasingly purchase products that reflect their identity, values, and lifestyle rather than traditional demographic classifications. As gender norms continue to evolve, consumer perception toward unisex products is increasingly influenced by inclusivity, authenticity, product functionality, and brand values rather than gender-specific positioning.

### 2.3. Consumer Acceptance Towards Unisex Products

Consumer acceptance of unisex products has gained increasing attention as brands adopt inclusive marketing strategies. Bhanja and Mehta (2022) found that consumers generally respond positively to gender-neutral products when they are supported by strong brand equity and inclusive positioning, with women exhibiting relatively more favourable attitudes than men. Similarly, Ludwig, Hattula, and Kraus (2016) reported that consumers with flexible gender identities are more receptive to unisex-labelled products because they emphasize functionality over traditional gender cues. Vieira (2019) also observed that gender-neutral branding positively influences purchase intention in the cosmetics industry, especially among consumers familiar with the product category. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of inclusive advertising, gender-neutral packaging, and socially responsible branding has strengthened consumer acceptance, particularly among younger consumers who value diversity, inclusivity, and authenticity in FMCG and personal care products.

### Research Gap

- Limited research on the mediating role of consumer

perception between peer influence and acceptance of unisex products.

- Lack of studies focusing on FMCG personal care unisex products, as most research has concentrated on fashion and cosmetics.
- Insufficient empirical research examining the combined effect of peer influence and consumer perception on consumer acceptance of unisex products within a single framework.

### Statement of the Problem

The growing acceptance of unisex products has transformed consumer markets by challenging traditional gender-based marketing strategies. However, consumer perception towards these products is influenced by various social factors, particularly peer influence through friends, family, reference groups, and social media. While previous studies have examined consumer behaviour and gender-neutral branding, limited research has explored the impact of peer influence on consumer perception towards unisex products, especially in the FMCG personal care sector. Therefore, this study aims to examine how peer influence shapes consumer perception and influences the acceptance of unisex products.

### Objectives of the Study

- To examine the influence of peer influence on consumer perception towards unisex products.
- To analyze the effect of consumer perception on the acceptance of unisex products.
- To assess the relationship between peer influence and consumer acceptance towards unisex products in the FMCG personal care sector.

### Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the impact of peer influence on consumer perception towards unisex products in the FMCG personal care sector. A descriptive and exploratory research design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of consumers' experiences, opinions, and attitudes regarding gender-neutral products.

The study is based on secondary data, collected from published journal articles, books, conference proceedings, industry reports, company publications, and credible online databases. Relevant literature was reviewed to identify themes related to peer influence, consumer perception, and consumer acceptance of unisex products.

The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis, wherein recurring patterns and themes are identified, categorized, and interpreted to understand the relationship between peer influence and consumer perception. The findings are presented descriptively to explain how social interactions, reference groups, and inclusive marketing practices influence consumer attitudes and acceptance of unisex products.

The study is limited to the FMCG personal care sector and relies exclusively on secondary sources. The findings provide conceptual insights into the role of peer influence in shaping consumer perception and offer implications for marketers adopting gender-neutral branding strategies.

### Findings

- Peer influence significantly shapes consumer perception towards unisex products through friends, family, reference groups, and social media interactions.
- Consumers increasingly evaluate unisex products based

on product quality, functionality, inclusivity, and brand values rather than traditional gender stereotypes.

- iii). Consumer perception acts as a key factor influencing the acceptance and purchase intention of unisex products.
- iv). Younger consumers, particularly Generation Z, show greater acceptance of unisex products due to their preference for diversity, authenticity, and inclusive branding.
- v). Gender-neutral branding, inclusive advertising, and socially responsible marketing positively influence consumer attitudes and strengthen brand acceptance in the FMCG personal care sector.
- vi). The study indicates that integrating peer influence with inclusive marketing strategies can enhance consumer perception and encourage the adoption of unisex products.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that peer influence plays a significant role in shaping consumer perception towards unisex products in the FMCG personal care sector. Friends, family, reference groups, and social media influence consumers' attitudes, which in turn affect their acceptance and purchase intentions. The findings indicate that modern consumers, particularly younger generations, increasingly value inclusivity, product quality, and brand authenticity over traditional gender-based product classifications. As gender-neutral branding continues to gain acceptance, marketers should adopt inclusive marketing strategies that resonate with evolving consumer preferences. Overall, the study highlights the importance of peer influence and consumer perception in promoting the acceptance and growth of unisex products.

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