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Gender Congruency Flexibility in Consumer Behavior

A Quantitative Study of Finnish Millennials

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ABSTRACT

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It is generally assumed that equality between men and women has initiated a blurring of gender roles in our modern society. It was thus deemed interesting to explore whether this blurring affected the younger generation's consumption behavior in Finland. More specifically, do Finnish millennials prefer purchasing objects that are gender-congruent? And under which circumstances could they be flexible about the gender of their purchase?

The first question suggests that objects have a gender just like humans, and that it is easily identifiable, which was confirmed in the theory review. Past researches also confirmed that previous generations do prefer gender-congruent products. However, it seemed that women might be more gender-flexible than men in their consumption.

Before verifying those assumptions, additional data about millennials' economic situation and buying decision process was needed in order to assess which factors might notably affect their purchases other than gender. The most important ones appeared to be price, due to millennials' limited revenues, and social setting, as they appear to consume to assess their personal status and to fulfill a need to belong in certain social groups.

Thus, these two factors were integrated in the questionnaire that aimed at measuring the preferences of millennials. In this survey, respondents had to pick their favorite among different gendered objects. The process was repeated with the introduction of price, and then a social setting. The higher than expected number of Finns over 30 years old responding to this questionnaire allowed us to compare the results between the two generations.

It was found that there was little change between the generations. Millennials still preferred gendered congruent products, especially men. Women, while preferring gender-congruent objects, showed more variety in their consumption, and were more flexible when faced with prices and a social setting. In this regard men were inflexible.

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1 Introduction

It seems that several companies in the last few years did not receive the following memo: times have changed in the gendered marketing world. To market towards women, the “pink it and shrink it strategy” is no longer enough (Contrera, 2016). Bic, among other companies, realized this when its line “Bic for her”, pens specifically designed in pink and purple with a “soft contoured grip” to fit the “delicate” hands of women encountered immense backlash online (Felix, 2012). Not only were the pens “for her” more expensive than the brand’s regular lines of pens, they were also unnecessarily gendered. Women sarcastically commented on the Amazon webpage of the product that they had no idea they had been using men’s pen for so long before “Bic for her” arrived.

Bic’s public debacle raised questions concerning gendered products. At a time and age where gender roles are blurring (Fugate, Philips, 2010, 253) have the consumers’ attitude towards gendered products changed?

1.1 Aim of the study

This thesis will aim at researching the consumption habits of Finnish millennials in relation to their gender and the gender of the products they purchase.

The current blurring of gender roles (Fugate, Philips, 2010, 253) is expected to be particularly strong in Finland considering the country’s advanced views and practices of gender equality. Historically, due to the severe climate which required everyone to work, not only men, the division of gender roles in Finland was not as marked as in other countries (Khoreva, 2012, 5). Finland was the first country to fully instore women’s suffrage in 1906 (Khoreva, 2012, 5) and is today ranked second in the Global Gender Gap Index.

To assess whether this blurring of gender roles affects the consumption practices of Finnish millennials, this thesis will aim at answering the following questions through a quantitative study:

- Do Finnish millennials solely purchase gender congruent products?

- Do prices affect the gender congruency of their purchases?
- Are women more flexible than men concerning the gender congruency of their purchases?
- Do social circumstances affect the gender congruency of their purchases?

1.2 Limitations

This study will solely focus on Finnish millennials. Due to geographical constraints the majority of millennials approached for this thesis will be students from Vaasa. This might skew the results of the study as millennials are not solely comprised of students.

Several factors affect a purchase. However for this study, only price, aesthetics, social settings and gender will be considered. The most notable exclusion will be “brands”. In the quantitative study only pictures of products without noticeable brand details such as a logos will be displayed.

Information about Finnish millennials’ consumer habits are sparse in English. Hence, some information in the theoretical study are extrapolations of studies about Western millennials applied to Finns. Since Finland is a Western nation, it is expected that the information will not be altered by cultural differences.

1.3 Structure and implementation

This thesis will debut by a theory overview. The key terms of this study will be defined and followed by an analysis of gendered products, on how they came to be and how to identify them. Then previous findings on gender congruence in consumer behavior will be detailed, and specifically how they differ between the sexes. To end the theory section, the sample at the heart of this thesis: Finnish millennials will be analysed through its current economic situation and purchasing decision process.

To answer the thesis questions, a quantitative study will be conducted through an electronic questionnaire. The methodology surrounding said questionnaire will be detailed: its design, its sample size and its data collection method.

When all the answers to the questionnaire are collected, the data gathered will be analysed and interpreted in order to validate or disprove the research's questions. The validity and reliability of said data will be under scrutiny.

Finally, as a conclusion, the main results of this thesis will be underlined and further research topics will be suggested.

2 Theory

2.1 Definition of key terms

Before attempting to answer the problematics of this thesis, clear definitions of the terms “gender”, “gender congruency” and “elasticity” are required.

Gender might be a controversial topic as its definitions vary across the political spectrum (liberalism VS conservatism). This thesis will adopt a “liberal” approach and consider gender in opposition to biological sex.

Biological sex: A combination of primary and secondary sexual characteristics used to categorize people, animals and plants as male, female or intersex. Primary sexual characteristics are sexual traits present at birth, such as chromosomes and genitalia whereas secondary sexual characteristics emerge later at puberty. E.g. facial hair for human males and breasts for their female counterparts (Reid 2017).

Gender: “A personal conception over oneself”(Gosh 2015) as a man, a woman, both, or neither at a certain time period or indefinitely. This notion is deeply intertwined with the concept of identity. Contrary to biological sex, a person may choose freely to identify oneself, or not, on the gender spectrum. Indeed, gender is not binary (Henig 2017). Picture a vertical line, on one end is written “feminine”, on the other end “masculine”, in the middle “both, in between” and on the side “none or fluid”. This line (figure 1) represents a greater number of possible identities than the traditional male and female options determined by biological sex alone.



Figure 1. Representation of the gender spectrum

Because of this greater number of possibilities than the historical male/female dichotomy, its constant misuse as a synonym to “biological sex” and the

termination of the gender-sex congruence obligation (e.g. a person with male genitalia does not have to identify as a man anymore), gender may be a controversial topic. This is especially the case when gender identity is wrongly affiliated to “alternative” sexualities (i.e. Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer and Asexual people). It is then worth reminding that gender identity is a social construct that is unrelated to one’s sexual orientation (Henig 2017).

Congruence: “An agreement, harmony or compatibility” (Oxford Dictionary). Thus *gender congruency* may be, for instance, the gender harmony between two people interacting (i.e. two women or two men) or, what interests us in this thesis: the gender harmony between a person and an object.

This last example, which will be at the center of this thesis, suggests that objects, and thus products that we consume have a gender (Fugate, Philips 2010, 252).

Elasticity / Flexibility: The measure of “the relation of a relative change of one variable to the relative change of another variable” (Friedel 2014, 9). In other words, if we take the most common variables: price and demand, elasticity measures the impact of a change in price to the demand.

This thesis will measure the gender-flexibility of Finnish millennials regarding their purchase intent in relation to price and social context. In other words, if consumers are able to choose non-gender congruent objects and in which circumstances this flexibility might increase or decrease.

2.2 Gendered products, services and their evolution

2.1.1 The human psyche at the origin of gendered products

To understand the existence of gender in objects, it is worth defining a human psychological phenomenon “anthropomorphism”.

Anthropomorphism is attributing human characteristics to objects (Oxford Dictionary). It explains, for instance, why we see faces in the clouds. This phenomenon is believed to be the reason behind the fact that “consumers tend to attribute human like characteristics to products and to evaluate them in the same

way that they evaluate other people” (van Tilburg, Lieven, Herrmann and Townsend 2015, 422). And one of the first attributes humans notice in other humans when meeting them for the first time is their assumed gender (van Tilburg et al. 2015, 423).

This assumption was certified by Fugate and Philips, who analysed numerous researches conducted throughout the 80’s and the 90’s about objects and gender. They discovered that “most products have sex-typed identities as masculine or feminine - with relatively little ambiguity”. In other words, products (and services) have a gender (Fugate, Philips 2010, 252) and it is easily identifiable by consumers.

Moreover, consumers seem to attribute a sole gender to products, either masculine or feminine. They never seem to label products as both masculine and feminine at the same time (Ye, Robertson 2012, 83).

And this tendency of attributing genders to products and services appears to grow as the researchers discovered that “the shift seems to be in the direction of more strongly identifying products as gendered rather than undifferentiated (or asexual)” (Fugate, Philips 2010, 258).

A possible explanation for this increasingly gendered tendency would be that we are now living in a post-unisex era. The second unisex/androgyny era of the 90’s is behind us. And perhaps, just like immediately after the first unisex era of the 1960’s - 1970’s, the market’s post reaction is a rejection of said unisex codes (Paoletti 2012, 94-95), resulting in a desire to have clear gender demarcation in products and services.

But how is that gender demarcation defined? How are genders assigned to products and services?

2.1.2 How to identify a product’s gender?

The gender identity of a product is, on one hand, established by its aesthetics characteristics, such as color, form and material. The first examples that may

come to mind concerning aesthetics and a product's gender is the prevalence of the color pink and curved lines in feminine products and of the colour black and straight, angular lines in masculine products (van Tilburg et al. 2015, 424).

On the other hand, it is established through the consumers' perceptions of the products, which is itself partly influenced by mass media (Fugate, Philips 2010, 252). However, the influence of mass media over products' gender seems limited as marketers appear to be incapable of re-gendering or de-gendering a product on their own (Fugate, Philips 2010, 258).

Nevertheless, the reassignment of gender for a product or a service is possible. Fugate and Philips observed the examples of the toothpaste and wine industry who successfully repositioned themselves as feminine products. They noted that re-gendering or de-gendering is possible when a whole industry, not just a single player, is involved in the repositioning of a product or service.

Re-gendering may also occur as cultural and aesthetics aspects evolve on their own. For instance, the colour pink, which is today almost exclusively associated with feminine products used to be shifting regularly to be a boys' or girls' colour. Hence it became quite a gender neutral colour for instance for young children's wear until the mid-twentieth century. Ironically, pink only became an exclusively women's colour at the end of the first unisex fashion era in the 1970's (Paoletti 2012, 110).

2.3 Previous findings on gender congruence in consumer behavior

Before mentioning gender congruence, it is worth noting that products and services that possess strong gendered aesthetics, whether they are feminine, masculine or more rarely, both, seem to lead to higher purchase intents (as they are perceived as highly aesthetic) than undifferentiated products (van Tilburg et al. 2015, 435).

However, aesthetics is only one of many factors encouraging purchase intent. Another important factor is self expression. Products and services are used by consumers to convey several aspects of themselves such as status, class, ethnicity,

culture, belongingness to certain groups or communities, etc. (Emile, Hyde, Lee 2012, 371) and of course gender. This idea is part of the self congruency theory.

Self congruency theory advocates that customers purchase and use products that reflects their own identity. Products become a vessel of self expression, and this latter attribute outshines functional characteristics (Fugate, Philips 2010, 252). Brands are then encouraged to offer products and services which allow consumers to express their self image as it “leads to a stronger consumer-brand relationship” (Ye, Robertson 2012, 83).

Thus according to self congruency, men and women seek products and services that are gender congruent with themselves. This assumption has been tested and “past research indicates that both men and women are psychologically uncomfortable using products and services which do not seem to be made for them” (Fugate, Philips 2010, 252).

It is then a deal breaker for consumers when products do “not communicate desired gender related aspects of the self”. For instance, this was the case in a study from the 1970’s where men demonstrated reluctance to purchase hairspray because of its feminine appeal (Emile et al. 2012, 371).

This uncomfortable feeling may be exacerbated by advertisers as they work actively to create gender images for their products and brands. For instance, their target’s gender would be featured in their communication campaigns as a “typical user of the product” (Fugate, Philips 2010, 252). This is a classic method to assign a gender to a product through communication.

This method has proven to be effective, at least in the past, as a research from the 1960’s found that men “were likely to smoke cigarettes with masculine images” and women “were likely to smoke cigarettes with feminine images” (Emile et al. 2012, 371).

The relevance of the researches on hairspray and cigarettes may be questioned as they concern older generations than the one at the center of this thesis: millennials

(born between 1980 and 2000). However, they do inform us about the type of environment millennials grew up in: a strongly gendered one.

Moreover, these findings might not be entirely obsolete yet as self-expression is still a core factor influencing consumption in millennials. Gender congruence remains sought after as millennials are “actively involved in negotiating their gender identity and pursuing their desired sexuality via their favorite products or brands” (Ye, Robertson 2012, 84).

2.4 Are women more flexible than men in terms of gender congruence?

The idea behind gender congruence as this thesis’s subject came from this quote by Rob Calder, head of marketing at Kopparberg (a cider brand):

“In my experience, it’s always been the case that you are better to err on the side of male appeal rather than female. You can appeal to female drinkers with brands that are more masculine but you tend to wipe out any appeal to blokes if you become too girly. It works one way but not the other unfortunately” (Darroch 2014, 6).

He suggests that women are more flexible in terms of gender congruency when it comes to consumption than men. This assumption was confirmed by Fugate’s and Philips’s research: “men are more likely to seek gender congruence with products than females”.

The researchers suggest, just like Rob Calder, that masculine attributes in products and services should be the dominant ones as they would attract men consumers without alienating women (Fugate, Philips 2010, 258).

Hence masculine cues appear to be necessary to attract men’s attention in products. This idea was verified in the attempts of several brands to sell to men traditional feminine products. Instead of repositioning their products as gender neutral, they created separate lines targeted specifically at men. This is the strategy applied by Sarah Goldthwait, Director of Marketing and Communications for Powerful Yogurt:

“As a man, when you walk into the kitchen in the morning and you are faced with a Danish, a cereal box, or a very feminine-looking yogurt in the fridge, the yogurt is always going to lose out. Whereas if you see a larger serving size in a black package labeled as high-protein, then you are really going to start piquing men’s interest and communicating to them that this is for them too, not just for women” (Krishna 2017).

Powerful Yogurt’s strategy worked: it did attract men to eat yogurt, but not only. Sarah Goldthwait reported in 2016 that the company's sales were evenly split between men and women (Audrey 2016). The highly masculine features of the yogurt did not alienate women.

Repeatedly throughout history women have demonstrated that they do not fear to appropriate themselves masculine cues. During the first Unisex era in the 1960’s - 1970’s, women adopted masculine wear (such as trousers) and kept it to this day, whereas the “attempts to feminize men’s appearance turned out to be particularly short-lived” (Chrisman-Campbell 2015).

Tomboyism (the expression of traditionally masculine cues by women) is regarded as a positive trait in women. It is not perceived as threatening and it may even be considered sexually appealing to a masculine audience. However, in the English language there is no positive word for men appropriating themselves parts of women’s cues. And the negative terms employed instead are in majority homophobic (Paoletti 2012, 107-108, 130).

Another example of women’s gender flexibility in consumption would be perfumes. It was estimated that 20% of men’s fragrance sales in department stores were by women for their own use. This figure inspired Calvin Klein to launch CK1, a successful unisex fragrance and a staple of the 1990’s (Markham, Cangelosi 1999, 393).

A possible reason for women’s higher gender flexibility in their consumer behavior is their higher use of products as a mean to express themselves. Women

seem to be more conscious than men about the messages they communicate through their consumption (Emile et al. 2012, 376).

However, a more plausible reason would be a mixture of latent sexism and homophobia. Even if this is not an academic source, Madonna's song "What it feels like for a girl" expresses this idea efficiently in a simple fashion:

"Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short
Wear shirts and boots 'cause it's okay to be a boy
But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading
'Cause you think that being a girl is degrading"

2.5 Characteristics of the Finnish generation Y/ millennials

Finnish millennials will constitute the sample of this thesis' quantitative research. As this thesis problematic is affiliated with consumption, it is important to familiarize ourselves with this population's economic power and consumer behavior. The latter will be analyzed through the five steps buying decision process.

Generation Y or Millennial Generation (those terms are interchangeable) is a group of people born approximately between 1980 and 2000. As its members are close in age, they are supposed to have lived and been impacted by similar events (such as the 2008's financial crisis) and lifestyles which forged their distinctive group consciousness (Lukina, 2016, 11). Thus millennials are eligible to population studies as they are supposedly sharing similar characteristics.

The estimated size of this generation in 2012 was of 1.7 billion people worldwide. Its influence is expected to increase tremendously as they enter the workforce and inherit their relatives' wealth (which should be higher than previous generations as millennials have less siblings). Moreover millennials' interconnectivity and influence on other generations' consumer habits (they are powerful influencers) make them hard to ignore. "Businesses focusing on them become a necessity rather than an optional decision" (Lukina, 2016, 18-19). This is why this thesis is focusing on them.

2.5.1 Millennials' economic situation

Generation Y's global economic influence is expected to grow in the future. However at present time their situation is not desirable. In developed countries, people in their mid-twenties "have way less money to spend than the previous generations" at the same age (Lukina, 2016, 59).

The financial crisis of 1987 and 2008 had an impact, firstly on millennials' attitude towards spending as it has been demonstrated that people who had been exposed to recession during their childhood tend to be conservatists financially. They invest modestly and are highly critical towards products and brands, which makes them hard to sell to (Lukina, 2016, 25, 36). Secondly, it impacted their level of disposable income. In Finland, students part of the Generation Y have the lowest level of disposable income of all populations as shown in Figure 2 (Statistics Finland).

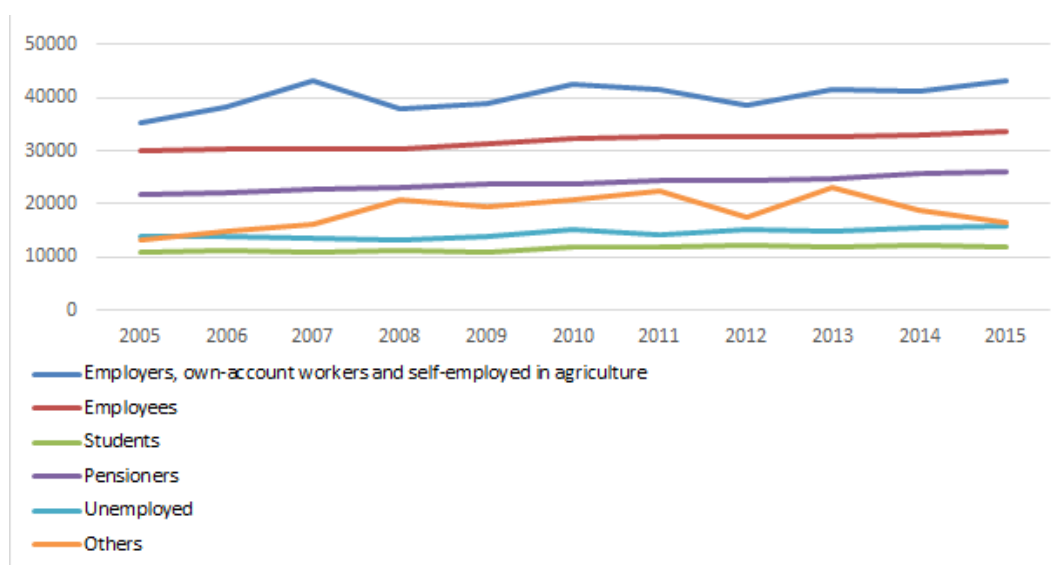


Figure 2. Evolution of consumption units' disposable income by socio-economic group in Finland

Generation Y is also the population witnessing the least evolution in their income as demonstrated by the almost flat green line in the figure above. It is then no wonder that millennials poverty is on the rise in Finland considering the diminishing effects of inflation and high youth unemployment rates (Figure 3) on

their income. One in four 18-24 years old Finn is poor or possess little income (Yle, 2017).

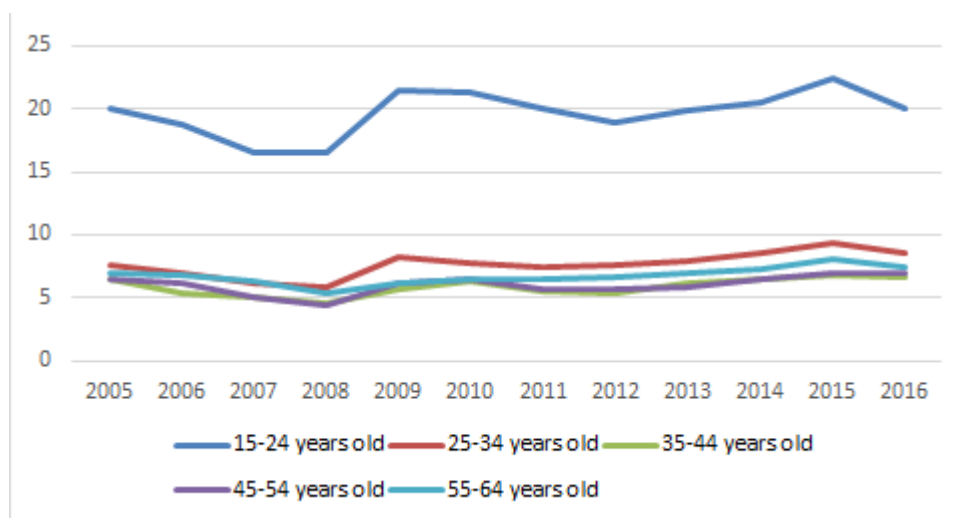


Figure 3. Evolution of the unemployment rate per age cohort in Finland

Considering their precarious financial situation, millennials have to prioritize their spending. It is then not surprising that their main expenses are rent (Yle, 2017) and food (Leipämaa-Leskinen, Jyrinki and Laaksonen, 2012, 192).

However, despite their limited economic power in the present, this generation holds high hopes for the future. They are more optimistic and idealistic than generation X (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. 2012, 189-190).

2.5.2 Millennials' buying decision process

The buying process of Finnish millennials will be the focus of the quantitative study of this thesis (especially the evaluation and purchase decision processes), hence it needs to be explored.

The buying decision process as its name suggests offers “a basic outline of how people make consumption decisions” (Blyth, 2013, 274). There exists numerous models to fit different types of consumption as not all of them require extensive efforts or information searches (Schiffman, Kanuk, 2004, 549).

For this thesis, a five stage model was chosen for its practicality and simplicity (Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen, 2006, 338).

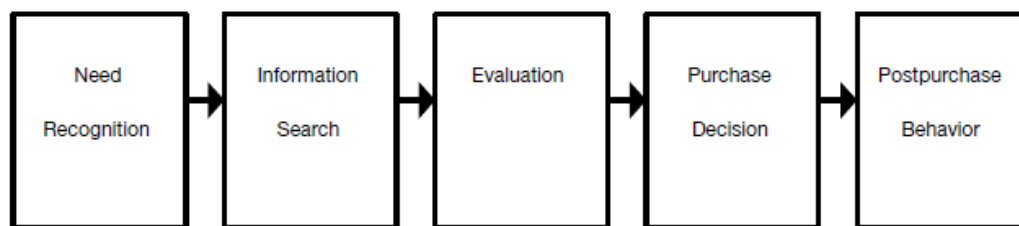


Figure 4. Representation of the five stages buying decision process

Need (or problem) recognition (Figure 4) occurs when an individual realizes he misses something or is faced with a problem (Blyth, 2013, 273 and Schiffman, Kanuk, 2004, 555).

The information search (Figure 4) then attempts to find solutions to this need or problem through consumption (Schiffman, Kanuk, 556). The search may be internal, e.g. remembering past experiences or external, e.g. an internet search.

When possible solutions have been found, the individual evaluates which one would best suit his need fulfillment. Purchase decision then occurs: the final selection is made and purchased (Figure 4).

Finally the product is used and its performance is evaluated in the postpurchase behavior (Figure 4). A positive outcome results in a satisfaction feeling that may, for instance lead to repurchases or positive word of mouth. Whereas a negative outcome resulting in dissatisfaction may lead to product replacement, disposal and/or negative word of mouth (Blyth, 2013, 273, 327).

2.5.2.1 Need recognition

One would think that Finns, especially millennials given their financial situation, would only consume reasonably. After all, in the Finnish culture, consumers are expected “to have control over their desires and needs”. This is the result of the country’s protestant tradition “of being economical and careful consumers”. And the ideal consumer in generation Y’s eyes is still to this day, one who saves money and consumes sparingly (Autio, 2005, 333-334).

However, Finnish youth today seems more relaxed in its consumer behavior (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. 2012, 190). Unnecessary spending is allowed for

personal enjoyment (Autio, 2005, 336) and may be perceived as a gratification or reward for an effort (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. 2012, 190) or as a step towards growth as a consumer (Autio, 2005, 338). Moreover, this generation is more likely to perceive shopping as a leisure activity than other generations (Lång, 2011, 24).

Despite this relaxed attitude, the spectre of the ideal frugal Finnish consumers is still hovering over the youth. They categorize more questionable needs as essential such as social activities (Syrjälä, Leipämaa-Leskinen, Laaksonen, 2015, 306), in perhaps an unconscious attempt for moral justification for their purchases to see them as necessary (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. 2012, 194). Thus, “the boundaries between necessary consumption and luxury consumption are not rigid” for Finnish millennials (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. 2012, 194). In fact, as young Finns reported 60% of their purchases as necessary, it was found most of the practices reported “were far from the so called bare necessities” (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. 2012, 194).

2.5.2.2 Information search

Studies in English about Finnish millennials’ information searches are sparse in detail. It is only stated they seem “to be more rational when it comes to search, decision and choice processes when shopping” (Lång, 2011, 28). To go further, results of a study about the buying behaviour of the Western generation Y will be extrapolated to the Finnish millennials, as Finland is a Western nation itself.

The fact that millennials appear to be more rational when purchasing comes from their tendency to conduct in-depth researches pre-purchases due to a greater selection of goods and ease of information access. On average, four resources are consulted by a generation Y customer before buying (Lukina, 2016, 26, 62).

A lack of available information may result in negative effects towards millennials, as they are believed to be the most impatient customers. They require immediate access towards information. Additionally, they require said information to be trustworthy. Millennials seem to demonstrate a certain suspicion towards commercial information, they prefer user-generated ones such as customer

reviews. In 2013, “25% of information searched on a brand through any of the search engines is user generated” (Lukina, 2016, 17, 26, 62).

2.5.2.3 Evaluation

When several alternatives have been found during the information search process, consumers then evaluate them through different criterias to choose which one would satisfy their needs the best.

The social aspect is one of those criteria. Finnish millennials use consumption as a tool to integrate themselves in the social groups they are interested in (Syrjälä et al. 2015, 309). Following the norms in place such as the ones of fairness and equality in the Finnish culture has an influence on their shopping behavior (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. 2012, 191). However, at the same time, members of the generation Y seek uniqueness in the products they purchase (Syrjälä et al. 2015, 310), most likely to show status.

Another criteria influencing their choice of purchase is the environmental factor. The Finnish Youth Barometer of 1998 found that 86% of young Finns desired to be environmental friendly consumers and to help save the environment. However at the same time they desire a high standard of living. It seems then that Finnish millennials, “as well as other age groups in society, are at once both materialistic and environmentally aware”. Ultimately, price appears to be the decisive factor. Some Millennials are willing to pay extra for environmentally friendly products while other are not (Autio, Heinonen, 2004, 140, 142, 145).

On a broader scale, Western millennials demonstrate interest in all ethics, not only green ones, behind products and brands. They are not willing to accept discriminations of any kind. Thus transparency concerning a brand’s ethics is a meaningful way of encouraging loyalty in generation Y (Lukina, 2016, 17-18, 34, 56).

2.5.2.3 Purchase decision

The purchase decision of a Finnish millennial is influenced by many criteria as seen in the evaluation process. However, for most consumers, especially as tight on money as millennials are, the decisive criteria will be the price-value ratio. Young Finns regard their purchases as future investments (Lång, 2011, 28-29).

Researches on Western millennials provide further details: they are trying to maximize the goodness out of their purchases. Surprisingly, they do not automatically choose cheap goods. They are willing to buy fewer products and spend more to acquire high quality, performing and durable goods (Lukina, 2016, 60).

2.5.2.4 Post-purchase behavior

As not all of their purchases are necessary, Finnish millennials may be prone to guilt or regret after spending (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. 2012, 190). However, these unfortunate purchases are perceived as learning experiences in their growth as consumers (Autio, 2005, 338).

More positive post-purchase behaviors are reported in studies concerning Western millennials. Young Westerners are perceived as demanding towards customer service, but in return they are willing to help the brands online. 86% of them “reported to willingly share the brand of their preference online” and 62% “are open to sharing personal information with companies” (Lukina, 2016, 17, 42).

Generally, generation Y seems more inclined to communicate about their purchases, whether to demonstrate interest in brands they like or to help other customers in their information process. Millennials account for about 60% of the user-generated data creation online i.e. user reviews or tests (Lukina, 2016, 26).

3 Research methodology

To answer this thesis' questions, it was decided to conduct a quantitative study through a web questionnaire. The reasons for choosing a quantitative approach over a qualitative one will be explained in the following section. Then the questionnaire design and data collection method will be detailed. Finally, additional information about the sample and the way the data collected is analyzed will be provided.

3.1 Qualitative or quantitative study?

This thesis aims at answering the following questions:

- Do Finnish millennials solely purchase gender congruent products?
- Do prices affect the gender congruency of their purchases?
- Are women more flexible than men concerning the gender congruency of their purchases?
- Do social circumstances affect the gender congruency of their purchases?

It is then a consumer research as it strives to identify price, social setting and most importantly: consumers' and objects' genders as factors affecting the purchase decision (Sontakki, 2009, 11).

As for any consumer research, a choice between performing a quantitative or a qualitative study had to be made. A quantitative study aims at measuring data accurately such as a market size or a purchase frequency. The information collected is then, most of the time an extrapolation from a sample to the population. A qualitative study is harder to define as it is not a matter of measurement but a matter of "understanding" an issue, for instance through an interview of a small sample. The information collected is usually not extrapolated to the general population (Nair, 2008, 53-55).

For this thesis, a quantitative approach has been chosen since the aim of the research is to investigate possible relationships between variables, in this case gender, price and social context. Hence it fits into a "correlational" type of study,

which is typically quantitative (Khaldi, 2017, 21). Moreover, studies concerning gender may cause controversy, hence an empirical methodology, relying on measurements is preferable as they cause less ambiguity when extrapolated to the general population.

3.2 Questionnaire design and structure

It was decided to use a web structured questionnaire for this thesis. In other words a survey with questions arranged in a precise order, with specific wording and predefined answers to choose from (Hague, 1993, 21). Structured questionnaires are generally quick to fill, hence it was chosen to counteract the fact that respondents “may be less inclined to spend a long time completing a web survey due to the temptation to go and explore other pages on the web” (Hewson, Yule, Laurent and Vogel, 2003, 83).

The survey was designed on Google Forms. It contains 23 closed questions, thus encouraging quick and spontaneous answers and simplifying data processing (Hague, 1993, 38).

The survey is divided into four sections. The three main sections contain behavioral questions aiming at defining the respondents’ actions and the fourth section focuses on defining the nature of the sample (e.g. their age, gender, occupation...), i.e. classification questions (Hague, 1993, 34).

Only one question appears per web page, ensuring clarity and hindering (but not preventing) the respondents’ ability to return and check previous answers, thus encouraging spontaneous answers.

Spontaneity is especially important in this case as the 3 main sections of the survey use the same type of questions: a need is established, and respondents must choose their preferred object among 3 to 5 options to answer said need, thus determining “the demand”. The options are displayed through pictures under creative commons licenses and vary in gender.

The objects' gender are as equally distributed as possible. For instance, in the question below (Figure 5), five objects are displayed: option 1 and 2 are masculine, option 4 and 5 are feminine, and option 3 is neutral.

You want to workout at home and you need a pair of dumbbells.
Which one of those pairs would you buy? (please keep in mind that their grip, weight and cost are the same) *

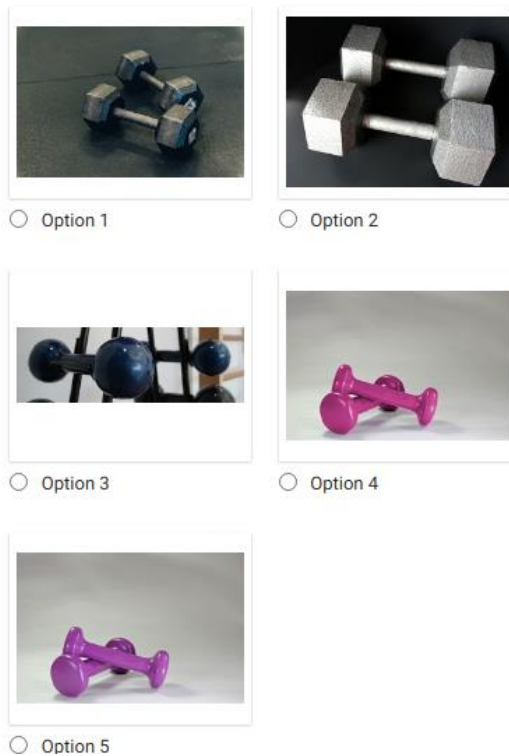


Figure 5. Example of a typical question in the thesis questionnaire

However, in some questions, the equal distribution of gendered objects could not be reached. Finding non-ambiguous objects gender-wise proved to be more challenging than expected. The assumption that most products have easily identifiable genders (Fugate, Philips 2010, 252) does not seem to apply entirely to the Finnish youth, and thus hindered the primary objective of displaying five objects in each question.

3.2.1 Pre-test phase

The fact that an object's gender is not always easily identifiable by Finnish millennials was witnessed during a pre-test phase when building the structure of the questionnaire.

To ensure the validity of the data collected, a pre-questionnaire was designed with the sole purpose of verifying if the objects displayed in the quantitative study would be easily identifiable as masculine, feminine or neutral.



Do these dumbbells look more...

- Masculine
- Feminine
- Neutral

Figure 6. Example of a typical question in the thesis' pre-questionnaire

A small number of Finnish millennials were asked to define the gender of the objects presented to them, as seen above. If an object was defined by this small sample as either masculine, feminine or neutral at 63%, the object would be considered non-ambiguous gender wise and thus qualified to be part of the quantitative study.

Finding non-ambiguous objects gender wise proved to be more difficult than expected, especially for masculine objects. There seem to be a blur between the masculine and neutral aesthetics characteristics for Finnish millennials. Feminine objects tended to be less ambiguous than their masculine counterparts, especially when the color pink was involved.


In retrospect, the blur between masculine and neutral cues should have been expected. We have seen that marketers tend to shift towards masculine cues for objects destined to both genders as they do not alienate female consumers, whereas feminine cues would deter male consumers (Darroch 2014, 6). The

repetitive usage of masculine cues for neutral objects might make the distinction between them harder for consumers.


3.2.2 First section (Aesthetics)

The first section of the questionnaire aims at defining whether there is a need for gender congruent objects in Finnish millennials, free of constraints. As seen previously, the respondents are presented with a need to fulfill and a selection of gendered objects to attend to that need.


You want to listen to music, you need headphones. Which one of those would you buy? (please keep in mind that their characteristics such as price, sound quality, durability...are the same).*




Option 1




Option 2



Option 3



Option 4



Option 5

Figure 7. Example of a typical question in section 1

As visible Figure 7, respondents are reminded that all the options presented to them possess the same characteristics and, thus, would answer their need equally.

This is to ensure that they base their choice solely on aesthetics. This is the demand “free of constraints”.

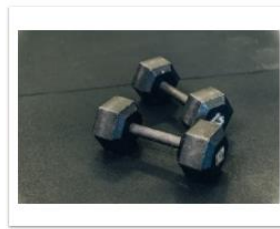
To further ensure this, all the objects presented in this questionnaire are displayed on a neutral background, without a “typical user” present, and are brandless. If a brand was visible on the chosen pictures, it was blurred through an image editing software.

This measured demand, “free of constraints” will be compared to the gender of respondents (collected in section 4) to give us their need, or lack thereof, for gender-congruent products.

3.2.3 Second section (Price)

The second section of the quantitative study recycles the objects and questions of the first section but introduces one “constraint”: price. This is to assess whether the demand measured in the first section is affected by the notion of price and whether Finnish millennials favor money saving against gender congruence, which is a possibility considering their limited revenues (Statistics Finland). Thus, this section introduces the concept of “gender-congruent elasticity” in purchasing behavior.

You want to workout at home and you need a pair of dumbbells.
Which one of those pairs would you buy? (please keep in mind that their grip and weight are the same) *



A. 30€



B. 30€



C. 40€



D. 40€



E. 40€

Figure 8. Example of a typical question in section 2

As visible in Figure 8, respondents are reminded that the objects displayed would answer their need equally. The only things differentiating them are their aesthetics and price.

The prices of the objects were chosen based on equivalent prices of products on Amazon. Additionally, the prices scenarios were equally distributed between feminine and masculine objects. In other words, there is an equal number of questions where the feminine products are the most expensive compared to the masculine ones and where the masculine products are the most expensive compared to the feminine ones.

The equal distribution of price scenarios was almost reached for the neutral products as well. However, due to the lack of a neutral object for one question, the price scenarios for neutral objects are slightly imbalanced. This slight imbalance

will cause some percentages in the results' analysis not to amount exactly to a hundred percent.

3.2.4 Third section (Social context)

The third section of the quantitative study recycles yet again the objects and questions of the first section but withdraws the price “constraint” and introduces another one: the social setting. This is to assess whether the demand measured in the first and second sections of the questionnaire is affected by the social environment of the respondents, which is a possibility considering millennials consume partly to belong to certain groups or to achieve a social status (Syrjälä et al. 2015, 309-310).

You are asked by your workplace/university to give your opinion on which type of mouse they should buy for all their computers. Which one of those would you suggest? (please keep in mind that they cost the same and are equal in quality) *






	
<input type="radio"/> Option 1	<input type="radio"/> Option 2
	
<input type="radio"/> Option 3	<input type="radio"/> Option 4
	
<input type="radio"/> Option 5	

Figure 9. Example of a typical question in section 3

As visible in Figure 9, respondents are faced with a situation that requires them to choose an object, but not only for themselves. This was to ensure that respondents would feel a form of “social pressure” while answering.

3.2.5 Fourth section

The study aims, in the fourth section, at verifying whether the questionnaire was successfully directed towards the desired sample: Finnish millennials. Hence, respondents were asked about their age, occupation, country of residence and most importantly gender.

You identify yourself as... *

- Masculine
- Feminine
- Neither masculine nor feminine
- Fluid (it varies over time)
- Autre...

Figure 10. Question concerning the gender of respondents

Since this thesis is taking a liberal approach towards gender, respondents were not asked about whether they are men and women but about how they identify themselves, as visible above. This thesis aims at being inclusive of people’s various identities. Moreover, it seems pertinent to focus on respondents’ identity as consuming is a way to express said identity (Emile, Hyde, Lee 2012, 371).

3.3 Data collection method

This thesis questionnaire was designed on Google forms. It is then a web survey. It was distributed via e-mail with an embedded URL directing respondents towards the form. The e-mail listing used comprised all students from VAMK,

Vaasa. Additionally, the URL was shared on Facebook, however, the majority of respondents were from the VAMK e-mail distribution.

The questionnaire was unexpectedly distributed twice (due to a mistake in the first distribution which compromised the data in section 2) within a three month period. The data which will be analyzed in this thesis come from the second distribution.

As the questionnaire is web-based, it qualifies as a self-administered or self-completion survey, which means the respondents had no supervision when filling the form (Burns, Bush, 2003, 243).

The self-administered method was chosen as it is inexpensive and allows for a quick gathering of data (typically a questionnaire may be closed after a week if no additional distribution is required). Moreover, it gives respondents more control over their time of response, allowing them to answer in a relaxed environment and without feeling any judgement from a supervisor. Their answers are then believed to be more truthful than under other gathering methods requiring supervision (Burns, Bush, 2003, 243, 293). However, the main drawback of this method is the lack of supervision itself. If some respondents needed clarifications over questions, none could be provided (Brace, 2013, 23).

3.4 The sample

The desired sample of this thesis questionnaire is Finnish millennials aged between 15 and 30 years old.

The total number of respondents is 143. This thesis' first goal was to reach approximately 400 respondents with the collaboration of other universities in Vaasa. However, as such collaboration was not ultimately possible, the new goal became to reach 100 respondents. This was achieved.

Out of those 143 respondents 124 provided usable data which will be divided into two categories. The first being Finnish Millennials, the desired sample with 94 respondents, and the second being Finns over 30 years old with 30 respondents.

The fact that Finns from a previous generation also answered this questionnaire will offer the opportunity to compare whether there are differences in gender congruent purchase behavior between the generations.

From now on in this research, Finns over 30 years old may be called “generation X” in order to keep the writing style light, even though the respondents may not all belong to generation X.

Concerning additional differences in the generations in the sample, it should be noted that there are slightly more feminine millennial respondents than masculine whereas there is a majority of masculine respondents in generation X.

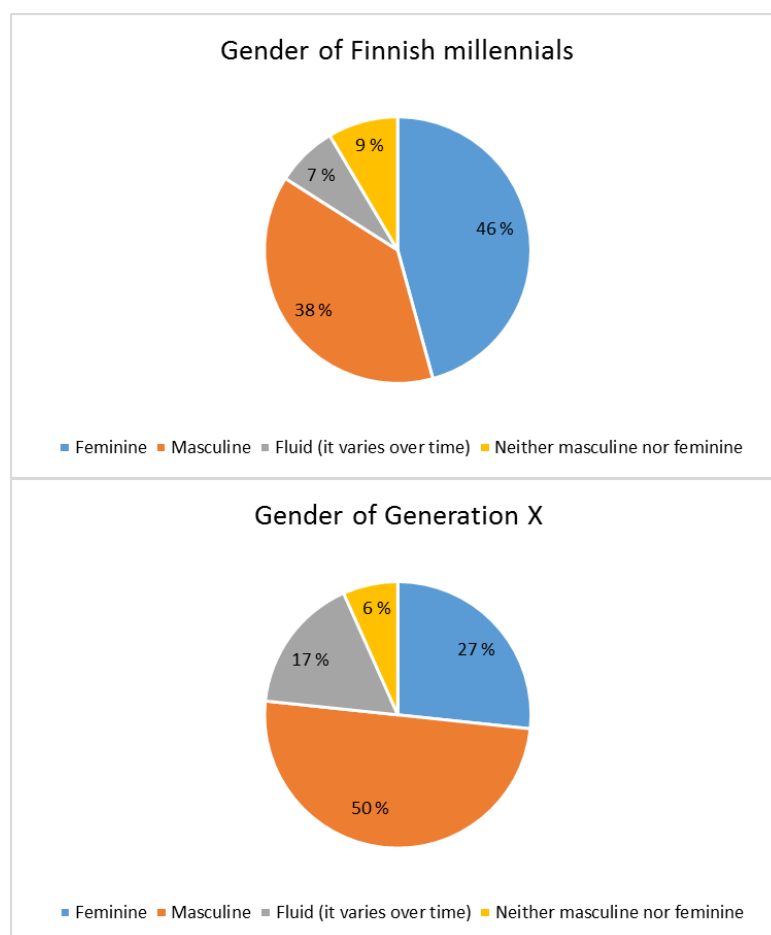


Figure 11. Gender repartition of millennial and generation X respondents

As visible in Figure 11, the majority of respondents identified themselves as masculine or feminine, thus the focus of this research will be on them. The

number of respondents who identified themselves as fluid or neither masculine nor feminine is too limited to provide reliable data.

The masculine and feminine respondents in this report might be called “men” and “women” from now on in order to keep the writing style “light”.

Another difference between the 2 generations in our sample would be their main occupation. Unsurprisingly the vast majority of millennials (92%) are students, as the questionnaire was distributed mainly through VAMK email lists.

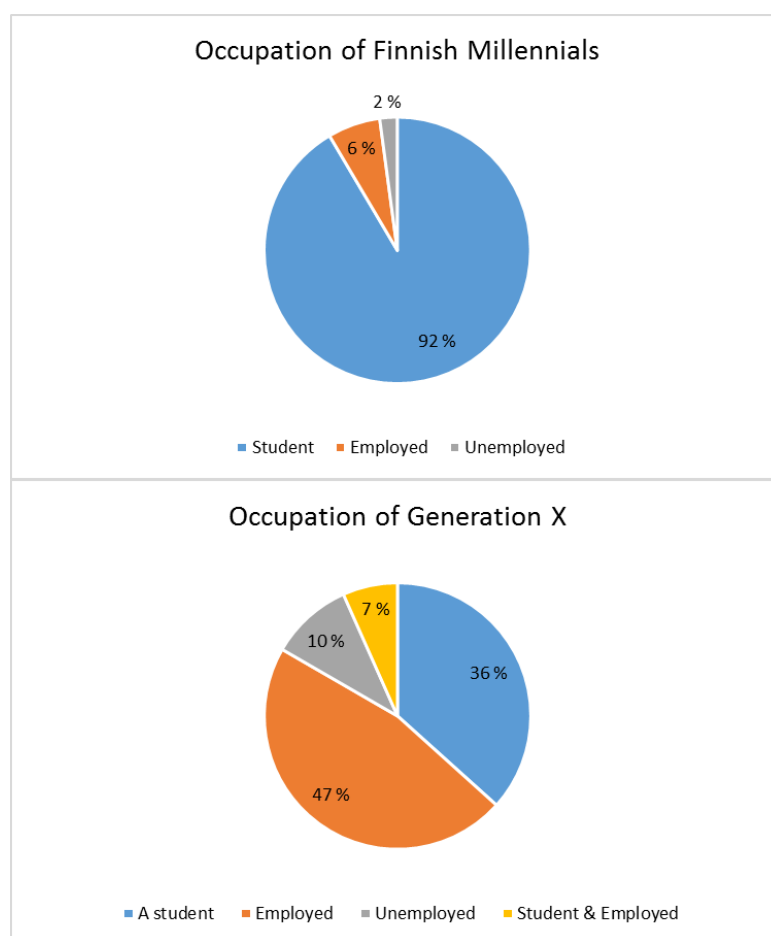


Figure 12. Occupation of millennial and generation X respondents

36% of generation X respondents remain students as well but a greater share is employed (47%) and a small portion (7%) seem to do both (Figure 12).

In terms of age repartition there is no data about generation X as this generation was not the desired sample of this thesis. However, there is additional data about

millennials. In majority, they are between 21 and 25 years old as visible in Figure 13.

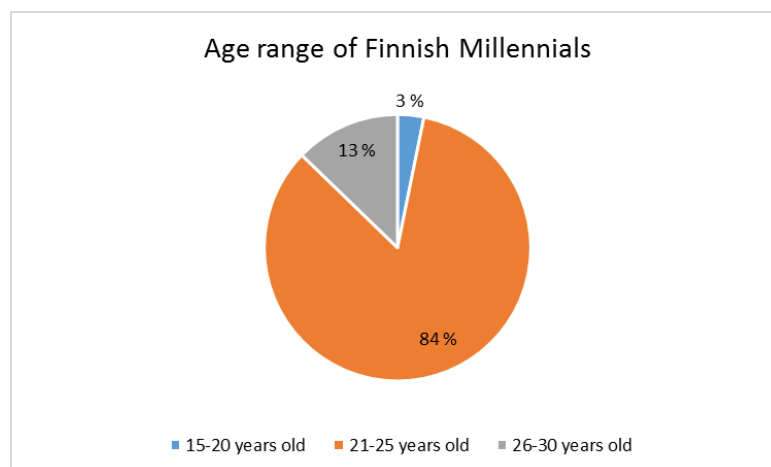


Figure 13. Age repartition of millennial respondents

3.5 Data analysis

The answers to the questionnaire were compiled into an Excel file, which was then exported to SPSS to create two data sets: one compiling the answers from Finnish Millennials and the other from Finns over 30 years old. From those data sets it was possible to dress frequency tables detailing the choices of respondents. For instance, how many respondents chose a masculine set of dumbbells (Table 1).

You want to workout at home and you need a pair of dumbbells. Which one of those pairs would you buy? (please keep in mind that their grip, weight and cost are the same)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fem 1	12	12,8	12,8	12,8
	Fem 2	11	11,7	11,7	24,5
	Masc 1	43	45,7	45,7	70,2
	Masc 2	12	12,8	12,8	83,0
	Neutral	16	17,0	17,0	100,0
	Total	94	100,0	100,0	

Table 1. Example of a frequency table in section 1

From those frequency tables it was possible to calculate averages such as the average popularity of masculine objects among millennials in each section of the questionnaire.

The averages obtained from each section of the questionnaire were then compared through percentages of evolution. The averages calculated from section 1 (aesthetics) served as base for the evolution calculations, as section 1 represents the “true” demand, i.e. without constraints.

This was the general analysis, comparing results between averages from each section of the questionnaire and between millennials and Finns over 30 years old. The second section of the analysis then focused on similar data, but with an additional discriminant: gender. In other words, it was a cross tabulation analysis.

With the addition of gender as discriminant, it was possible not only to know which type of objects were the most popular (as is the general analysis mentioned above) among masculine or feminine respondents, but also to know to which extent respondents seek gender congruent objects. For instance, it was possible to calculate how many masculine respondents chose at least four out of eight masculine products.

This cross-tabulation analysis was only practiced on data collected from Finnish millennials. The number of respondents over 30 years old is too low to conduct such analysis as it would provide inaccurate data.

It is also important to note that some percentages presented in this analysis do not amount to exactly 100%. This is due to the usage of averages as well as the slightly unequal number of neutral objects and cheap objects compared to expensive objects.

4 Results and analysis

The answers to the questionnaire of this thesis will now be analyzed. The sample at the heart of this research: Finnish millennials will be under scrutiny first. It will then be compared to Finns over 30 years old to observe whether there are notable differences between the generations.

The results will provide us with enough data to answer the research's four questions. Finally, the validity and reliability of the data gathered will be assessed.

In this analysis, section 1 will refer to the "Aesthetics" questions from the survey, section 2 to the "price" questions and section 3 to the "Social Context" questions.

4.1 In the Finnish millennials data set

Before analyzing the results from each section of the questionnaire it can be noted that masculine objects were globally the most popular among millennial respondents.

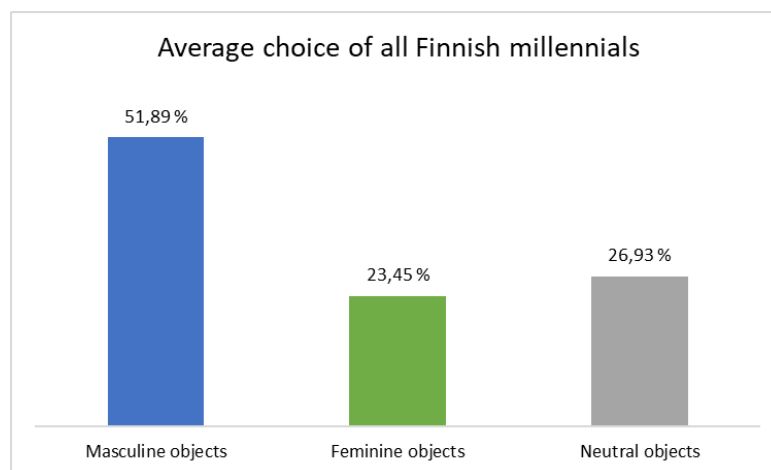


Figure 14. Average choice of all Finnish millennials globally

On average, masculine objects received 52% of the votes over neutral and feminine objects (Figure 14). Neutral objects ranked higher than feminine ones, which might contradict the assumption that undifferentiated objects are less attractive than strongly gendered ones (van Tilburg et al. 2015, 435).

Considering the fact that the sample has slightly more feminine respondents than masculine ones, it seems fair to assume that several feminine respondents preferred non-gender congruent objects. This is accentuated by the fact that feminine objects were the least popular overall.

In fact, out of 19 questions, the most popular choice among respondents was never a feminine object. It was always either a masculine object or a neutral object.

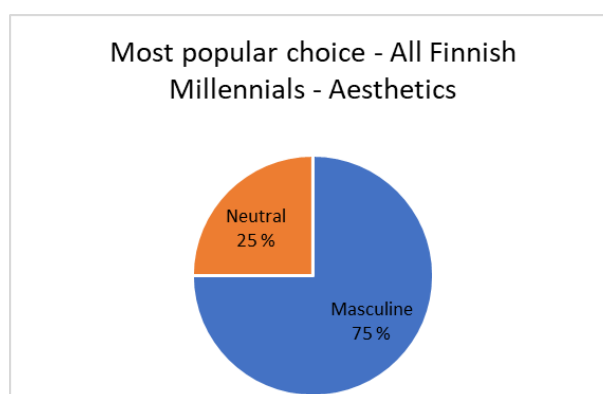


Figure 15. The most popular choice among Finnish millennials in section 1

In the aesthetic section, the object that was the most popular among respondents was 75% of the time a masculine one (Figure 15). In the price section, it was between 75% and 87,5% of the time (this range is due to a tie in 1 question) and in the social context section, it was 67% of the time.

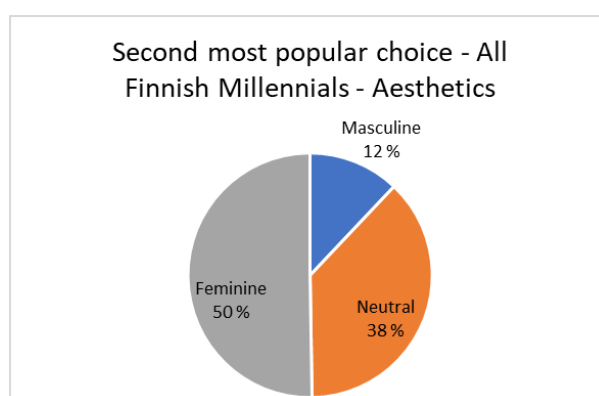


Figure 16. Second most popular choice among millennials in section 1

The “peak” of popularity for feminine objects was when they were chosen as the second most popular objects 50% of the time in section 1 and 2.

The high popularity of masculine objects over feminine objects may be explained by the higher variety of choices from feminine respondents.

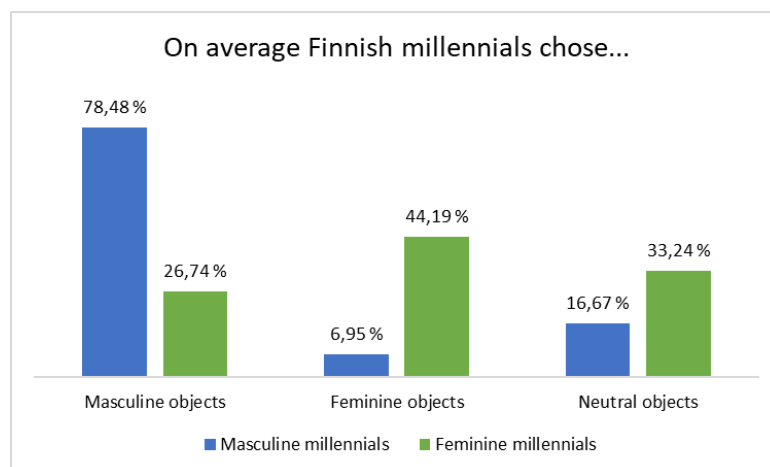


Figure 17. Average choice of Finnish millennials by gender in section 1

Feminine respondents did not demonstrate a clear preference for gender-congruent objects compared to their masculine counterparts. When 78% of men voted for masculine objects in section 1, “only” 44% of women voted for feminine objects (Figure 17). Additionally, women were not afraid to choose masculine objects, as 27% of them did, whereas men were clearly not interested in feminine objects, as only 7% did choose some. This seems to prove the assumption that feminine cues alienate masculine audiences (Darroch 2014, 6).

Hence, masculine respondents demonstrated great interest in gender congruent objects.

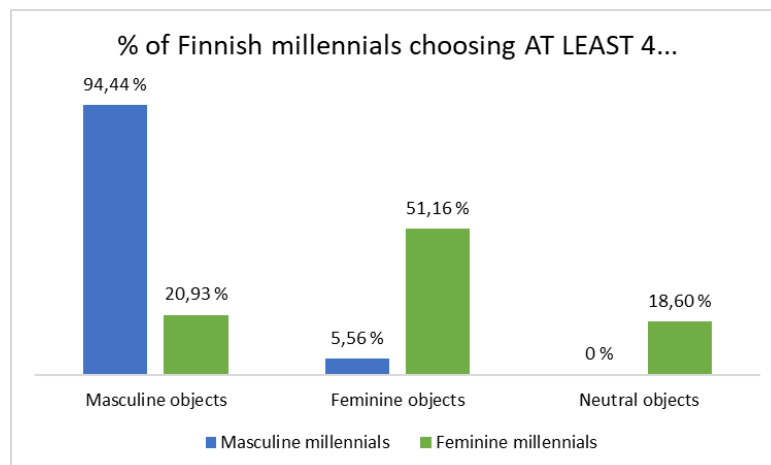


Figure 18. Percentage of Finnish millennials choosing at least four objects according to gender in section 1

In fact, in section 1, 94% of men chose at least four masculine objects out of eight objects. In other words, at least 50% of their choices are gender congruent.

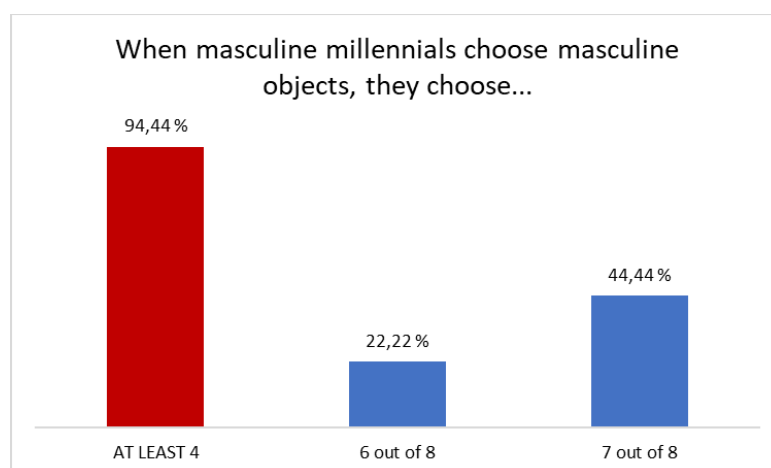


Figure 19. Percentage of masculine millennials choosing x masculine objects in section 1

And 44,44 % of them chose seven masculine objects out of eight in section 1. In other words, almost half of men chose gender congruent objects 88% of the time (Figure 19)! Such figures were not found on the women's side. Only 2% of women chose seven feminine objects out of eight. This demonstrates a clear difference in purchase intent between genders and seems to verify that women are indeed more flexible in terms of gender congruency than men, at least in section 1 where the demand is without constraints (Fugate, Philips 2010, 258).

In section 2, the price factor is introduced, and it may be noticed that on average cheap products are popular among millennials.

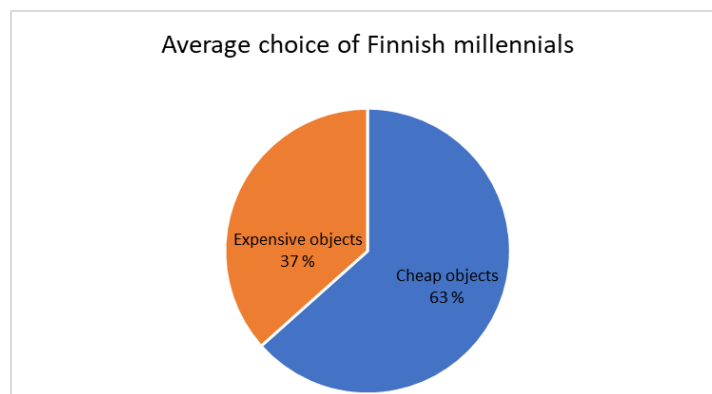


Figure 20. Average choice of Finnish millennials in relation to price in section 2

This is not surprising as millennials in general do not have high disposable income (Statistics Finland). However, it may still be noted that expensive objects are not extremely unpopular either as they were chosen 37% of the time on average (Figure 20). This might demonstrate that they prioritize economical spending but are not afraid to invest in a few expensive items, perhaps as part of a reward system or simply as a leisure activity (Autio, 2005, 336).

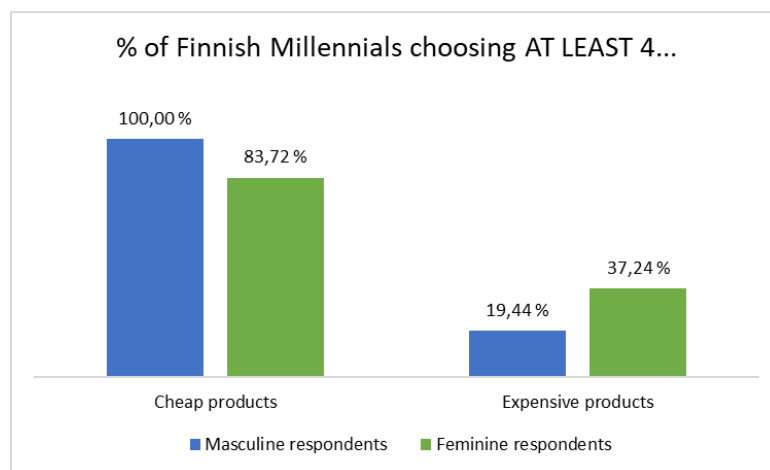


Figure 21. Percentage of Finnish Millennials choosing at least four objects according to price in section 2

This is further ensured by Figure 21 where it is visible that the vast majority of the sample prioritizes economical spending, with at least 50% of their purchase intent directed towards cheap objects. Nevertheless, there seem to be a difference in purchasing behavior between genders again. Women appear to be willing to spend more than men, as 37% of them chose at least four expensive products compared to 19% for men. This might be explained by the fact that women express themselves more through consumption than men, and thus are perhaps willing to spend more in order to convey the messages they want to convey (Emile et al. 2012, 376).

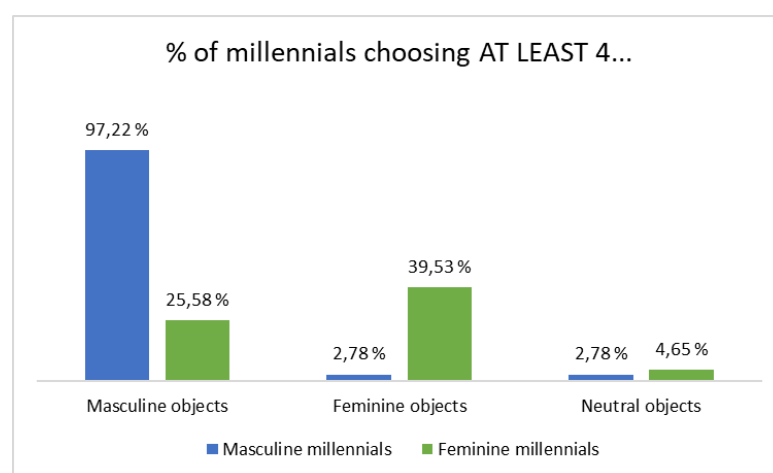


Figure 22. Percentage of millennials choosing at least four objects of one kind in section 2

Overall, men' choices were barely affected by the introduction of price. Men choosing at least four gender-congruent objects increased by 3%, thus reaching 97% instead of 94% in section 1.

Women's spending however was affected by the introduction of price. Interestingly, price made them increasingly seek masculine objects to the detriment of feminine ones. Women choosing at least four gender congruent objects decreased by 23% in section 2, reaching 40% instead of 51% in section 1. They increasingly chose at least four masculine products by 22% to compensate.

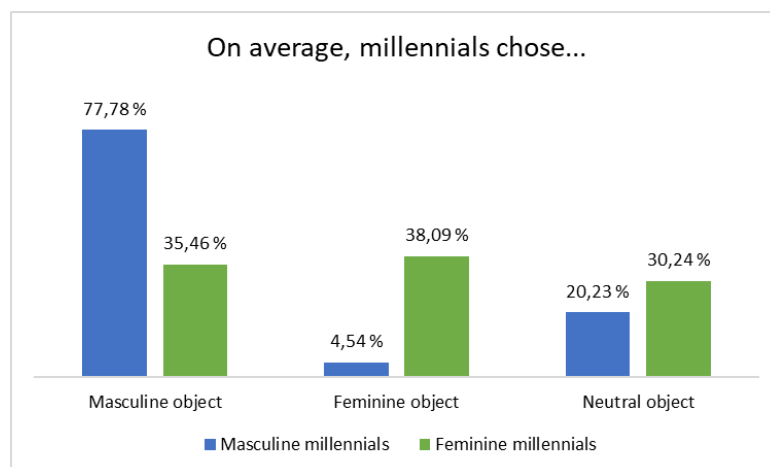


Figure 23. Average choice of Finnish millennials by gender in section 2

Overall, the percentage of women choosing masculine objects increased by 33% since section 1, reaching 35% instead of 27% previously.

As mentioned earlier, price had little effect on men's purchase intent. However, we may note a slight increase (21%) in the percentage of men choosing neutral products in section 2 compared to section 1. The reduced price of some neutral objects might have contributed to that slight shift.

Overall, masculine respondents were little affected by the notion of price and of a social context.

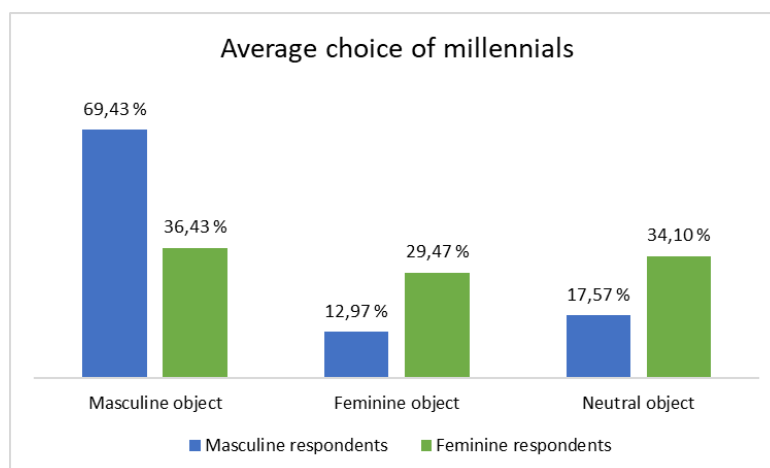


Figure 24. Average choice of millennials in section 3

Indeed, in section 3, their purchase intent varies only slightly from section 1. Interestingly, contrary to section 2 where their choices shifted towards neutral

objects in section 3 they shifted towards feminine objects. The percentage of men choosing feminine objects increased by 87% since section 1, reaching 13% from 7% previously. This might sound like an important increase but only because the initial percentage in section 1 was extremely low. Overall, a vast majority of men still prefer masculine objects and it is hard to pinpoint the reason behind this slight shift for feminine objects. Perhaps the perspective of those products being used not only by men affected their choice.

This last assumption probably affected women's purchase intent greatly. In section 3, feminine respondents demonstrated how varied their purchases may be, as proportions of women choosing neutral (34%), feminine (29%) and masculine (36%) objects was almost equally distributed (an equal distribution would equal 33,33% each).

As varied as their purchases may be, women still demonstrate a preference for gender-congruent objects in section 1 and 2. However, in section 3, gender congruent objects were their least favorite choice. Between section 1 and 2, the proportion of women choosing feminine objects decreased by 33%, reaching 29% from 44% previously.

It seems that when introduced to a social context, women favor masculine and neutral objects. Masculine objects especially were chosen by 36% of women in section 3, which is a 36% increase from section 1.

Women might have unconsciously integrated that feminine cues would not please masculine users, and thus preferred objects that may be enjoyed by all. Overall, feminine respondents seemed to have been more affected by elements such as price and social context than their masculine counterparts.

4.2 In the Finns over 30 years old data set

Before analyzing the results from each section of the questionnaire it can be noted that masculine objects were globally the most popular among Finns over 30 years old.

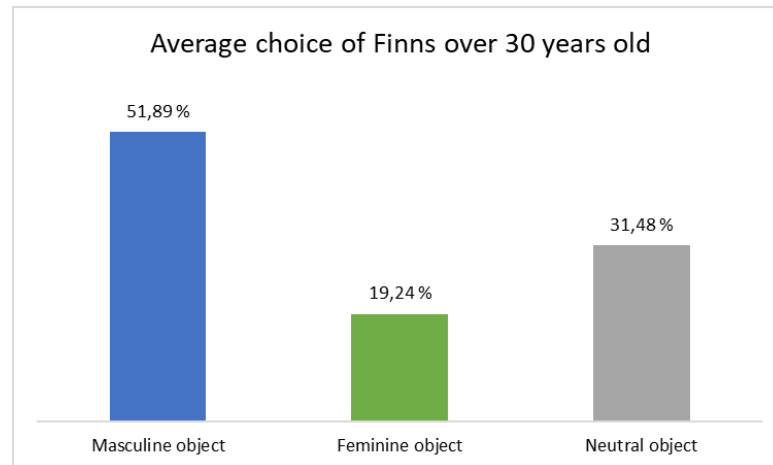


Figure 25. Average choice of Finns over 30 years old globally

Thus, they showed similar results than generation Y. However, this result might be partially explained by an imbalance in the Finns over 30 years old sample: there are more masculine respondents than feminine ones.

Generation X, however, seems to prefer neutral objects marginally better than their younger counterparts, which comforts us to believe that undifferentiated objects may be considered as attractive as gendered ones.

Feminine objects appear even less popular in Finns over 30 years old, with an average of 19% of purchase intent against 23% for millennials (Figure 25). As for millennials, out of the 19 questions, feminine objects were never chosen as most popular. Additionally, their “peak” popularity was even lower than for generation Y (Figure 26).

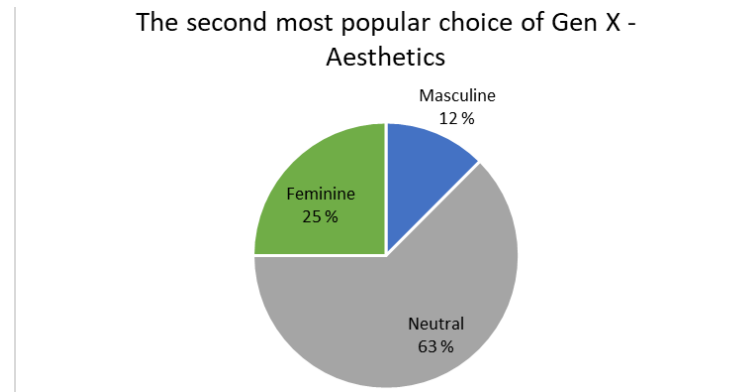


Figure 26. The second most popular choice of Gen X in section 1

They were on average chosen as second most popular object 25% of the time in section 1 and 2 and were not featured at all in section 3.

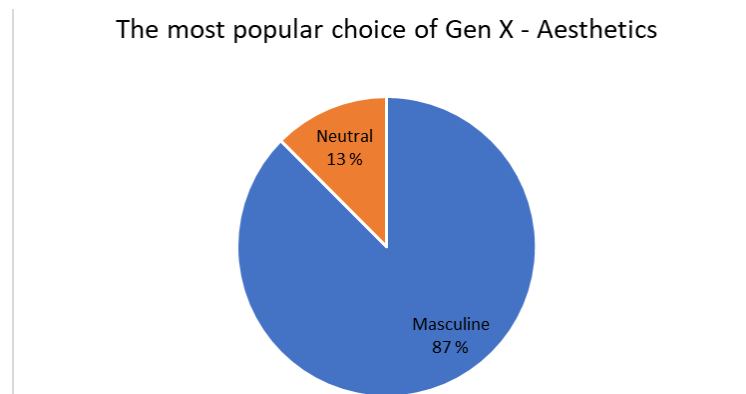


Figure 27. Most popular choice of Gen X in section 1

Masculine objects always casted the majority of votes for most popular object, ranging from 67% of votes in section 3 to 87% in section 1. These results are almost identical as millennials'.

However, contrary to millennials, Generation X seemed overall unfazed by the introduction of price or social context.

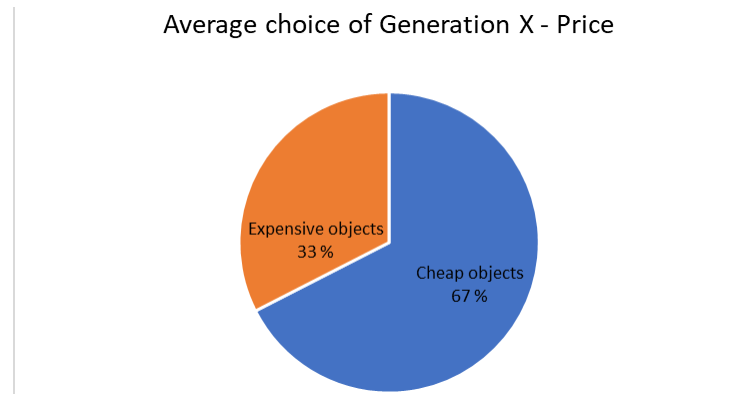


Figure 28. Average choice of Gen X according to price in section 2

Generation X shared a similar preference with millennials for cheaper objects without rejecting expensive objects entirely.

Evolution between section 1 and 2 of the demand for:	
Masculine objects	2,06 %
Feminine objects	-11,71 %
Neutral objects	1,50 %

Table 2. Percentage of evolution of the demand between section 1 and 2

The price introduction barely changed the demand. This might be due to the lesser number of feminine respondents in generation X than in millennials. After all, women from generation Y emerged as the most likely to be affected by the introduction of price.

Evolution between section 1 and 3 of the demand for:	
Masculine objects	1,24 %
Feminine objects	-9,40 %
Neutral objects	0,15 %

Table 3. Percentage of evolution of the demand between section 1 and 3

The introduction of a social context barely changed the demand as well. Although it might be interesting to note that as small as those changes may be, price appeared to have a greater affect than the social setting, contrary to millennials.

4.3 Validation or disapproval of the hypothesis

Having gathered and analyzed the quantitative data from the thesis questionnaire, it is now possible to answer the four questions of the research.

Do Finnish millennials solely purchase gender congruent products?

It appears indeed that the majority of millennials direct their purchase intent towards gender congruent object. Men have the strongest tendency towards gender congruent objects. Almost a 100% of masculine respondents chose gender congruent objects for at least half of their purchases. And in section 1, almost half of them chose gender congruent objects for 88% of their purchases.

Women demonstrated a preference for gender congruent objects as well, although more subdued. Almost half of them chose feminine objects for 50% of their purchases in section 1 and 2. Overall, millennials did not demonstrate different purchase intents than the previous generation, as they gathered similar results.

Do prices affect the gender congruency of their purchases?

The introduction of price had little to no effect on men's purchase intent contrary to women. The notion of price made them shift slightly towards more masculine objects.

Overall both genders appeared to prefer cheaper objects. This might explain why some women chose masculine objects. They might have put price over gender congruency.

Are women more flexible than men concerning the gender congruency of their purchases?

They definitely are. Women have demonstrated throughout the different sections of the questionnaire that they are more varied in their purchase intent. After all, the most popular objects were always either masculine or neutral even though there were more feminine respondents.

Additionally, women were the ones most affected by the introduction of price and social context. Faced with different circumstances, they have proven they can adapt their purchase intent whereas men's barely changed throughout the questionnaire. It seems that feminine cues do discourage men from consuming, whereas masculine cues do not deter women (Darroch 2014, 6).

Do social circumstances affect the gender congruency of their purchases?

Unsurprisingly, as in section 2, the introduction of a social context had little to no effect on men's purchase intent. Women were again the most affected.

Interestingly, a social context appears to have more influence than price over women's purchase intent. This might be explained by the assumption that women are more aware of the messages they display through their consumption than men (Emile et al. 2012, 376).

4.4 Validity and reliability

Having detailed the findings of this research, it is now time to question the validity and reliability of this data.

4.4.1 Factors influencing validity

Validity is, simply expressed, how well a research measures what it is aiming at measuring (Burns, Bush, 2003, 291).

This questionnaire aimed at measuring the preferences of consumers towards objects of different genders, and if their preferences changed when introduced to new factors such as price and social context. To do so, the respondents were faced with 19 questions displaying objects of different genders from which they had to choose a favorite.

The same objects were used in all three sections of the questionnaire, thus it successfully measured if the preferences of the respondents were constant or not facing new factors. If different objects had been used instead, this might have skewed the results.

To ensure the validity of the data gathered, a pre-test phase was organized to verify if the gender of the objects displayed in the questionnaire was easily identifiable. Only objects defined by a small sample of Finnish millennials as either masculine, feminine or neutral at 63% were kept for the questionnaire.

Despite this pre-test phase, however, the respondents' perception of the gender of the objects may never be certain. On one hand, because the sample of the pre-test phase was small, and on the other hand because there seem to be a blur between masculine and neutral cues.

Other factors that may challenge the validity of the study are the gender imbalance of the Finns over 30 years old sample, the smaller number of questions in section 3 compared to section 1 and 2, and the general length of the questions.

It is believed that the questions were clearly formulated, however, they were lengthy. Lengthy questions may cause ambiguity, which should "be avoided at all costs" in a questionnaire (Brace, 2013, 110).

4.4.2 Factors influencing reliability

Reliability measures the repeatability of a research results (Litwin, 1995, 6). In other words, if a research is conducted twice and yields similar results it is considered reliable.

One of many methods to measure reliability that was chosen for this thesis is test-retest reliability. It consists of distributing a questionnaire twice, at two different points in time to the same sample and measuring if the answers are similar through correlation coefficients (Litwin, 1995, 8).

This method was chosen to take advantage of the fact that this questionnaire was distributed twice due to a technical error. Only section 1 and 3 of the questionnaire will hence be submitted to correlation calculations, as data from section 2 in the first distribution is unusable. Moreover, in order not to skew the calculations, it was decided to reduce the number of responses of the first distribution to the number of responses of the second distribution. This was done arbitrarily by keeping the answers in the chronological order that they were submitted in to the researcher.

Since the questionnaire measured nominal responses, the correlation calculations used the frequency of answers as base. The calculations were divided by samples (Finnish millennials VS Finns over 30 years old).

Number of...chosen in question 1	In the first distribution	In the second distribution
Masculine object 1	43	36
Masculine object 2	12	13
Neutral object	16	18
Feminine object 1	12	17
Feminine object 2	11	10
Correlation coefficient	0,9728	

Table 4. Basis for correlation calculation of the first question for Finnish millennials

As visible above, the frequency of answers was listed for each question from the two distributions and served as base for the correlation coefficient that was then calculated using excel.

An average of all correlation coefficient was then computed to state the general reliability of the questionnaire. The average reliability of the Finnish millennials sample is 0,9562 and 0,9161 for Finns over 30 years old.

Correlation coefficients are considered sufficient if they are equal or exceed 0,7 (Litwin, 1995, 8). Thus, it may be concluded that this questionnaire is reliable as it exceeds 0,7.

5 Conclusion

It seems that the consumers' attitudes towards gendered products has not dramatically evolved since previous generations. When given total freedom over their purchases, Finnish millennials prefer products that are gender congruent, especially men. Women, while still voicing a preference for congruency, demonstrated to be more varied in the gender of their purchases than their masculine counterpart.

Additionally, when faced with constraints such as price or a social setting, feminine millennials demonstrated flexibility in the gender of their purchases whereas masculine millennials' preferences remained unchanged in every setting.

It seems that even in a modern gender equal society such as Finland, masculine cues possess a universal appeal that feminine ones simply do not have (not even towards all women). Women might have integrated that idea already, as their purchase intent was more affected by a social setting than the introduction of prices, which was surprising considering millennials' limited revenues.

When presented with the possibility that the object they choose might not solely be used by them, they changed their gender congruent preference towards masculine and neutral objects.

It would be interesting to further analyze the social aspect of gender flexibility consumption in women in future researches, and especially compared to older generations. The limited sample of Finns over 30 years old in this thesis unfortunately prevented the exploration of this theme in detail.

Additionally, to further ensure the validity and reliability of the results of this thesis, it might be interesting to replicate this research on a more substantial and varied millennials and generation X samples. This would also allow us to know more about consumers who are not binary

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