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Cross-gender extension potential of luxury brands

A semiotic analysis

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Elyette Roux died in May 2017 following a long illness. She was a Professor of Marketing at IAE Business School in Aix-en-Provence, at Aix Marseille University. Elyette Roux was the director of the research centre (CERGAM) and the doctoral program. A pioneer in Luxury Brand Management, since the early 1990s, she has been appointed the first Louis Vuitton-Moët Hennessy Professor of Brand Management at Essec Business School (1991-2004). Her research focused on the analysis and the management of brand identity. She has written reference books and numerous articles for French and foreign academic journals.

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Abstract:

Faced with the need to constantly find new growth drivers, luxury brands increasingly use cross-gender extensions (extension from the female to the male market and vice versa). Because of the lack of research on this topic, the aim of this article is to analyse the potential for cross-gender extension. We adopt a long-term perspective by analysing the discourse being directly produced by brands. We use a structural semiotic approach to define brand narratives and contracts and their level of openness. Seven luxury brands have been studied: Audemars Piguet, Cartier, Chanel, Dior, Hugo Boss, Montblanc and Rolex. The results show that they do not all have the same legitimacy for extension from the male to female market and vice versa. Specifically, in the context of cross-gender extensions, rather than brand extension potential (to new product categories), the narratives related to contracts of determination (linked to characters, gender and state) can determine the success or the failure of cross-gender extensions. We find that brands anchored in open determination contracts, i.e. those whose values are desired by both sexes (men and women), will be extended more easily from one market to another.

Key words:

Cross-gender extensions, luxury, semiotics, brand narratives and contracts, openness

Introduction

Luxury brands, faced with the need to generate new profits, try to find new growth drivers. One of the strategies frequently used is brand extension (extensions into new products categories) (Aaker and Keller, 1990). For example, Louis Vuitton, specialised in leather goods, has been extended to clothes, underwear, sunglasses, jewels and, more recently, perfumes. In addition to these strategies, cross-gender extensions are also increasingly frequent. They correspond to brands for women or men that extend their collections to target the opposite gender (Ulrich, 2013). Even though extending the same brand name to launch products on the opposite gender market is not a new phenomenon, in the last 15 years, more and more brands have practiced cross-gender extensions (Ulrich, 2013). For example, in 2003, Aubade launched its first collection of lingerie for men. Two years later, because of poor results, its managers decided to stop the men's collection and to refocus on the female market, before attempting gender extension again in 2013. Sandro, a French ready-to-wear brand for women, launched its first collection for men in 2013. Audemars Piguet, a high-end brand of watches, has been trying to penetrate the female market for over a decade, but sales of women's watches are still very marginal. All product categories and sectors are concerned by cross-gender extensions: jewellery and watches (Boucheron, Cartier, Rolex, Van Cleef & Arpels), ready-to-wear (Dior, Hugo Boss, Yves Saint-Laurent), cosmetics (Guerlain, Lancôme), wines and spirits (Veuve Clicquot), etc. This illustrates a new trend in brand development strategies but also shows that these extensions are not always successful. A better understanding of the reasons behind their success or failure is needed.

While the number of cross-gender extensions is on the increase, very little research has focused on the analysis of cross-gender extensions (Jung and Lee, 2006; Ulrich, 2013) and

there is no research on this specific strategy in the luxury sector. The results of studies by Jung and Lee (2006) and Ulrich (2013) essentially show that, beyond the impact of consumer gender, the evaluation of these extensions depends on the brand's degree of femininity or masculinity. The more a brand is perceived as feminine (masculine), the less its extension to men (women) is well perceived by consumers. However, if we only consider these findings, how is it that two brands both perceived as feminine, such as Chanel and Dior¹, which are in the same sector, offer the same level of quality and have the same targets, do not have the same cross-gender extension potential? Why is Dior's men's collection well established in the ready-to-wear market, while Chanel continues to focus on the female market (although it has made a few attempts, like the ephemeral launch of products for the men accompanying the female models during fashion shows)? Can an answer be found in the definition of brand gender, which is undoubtedly more complex than a designation in terms of degree of femininity? Does the diversity of feminine gender associations, differentiating between the identities of Chanel and Dior, influence the potential extension of these two brands into the men's market? There are in fact different types of femininity and masculinity (Azar, 2009, 2013): "multiple femininities and masculinities" (Vigarello, 2004, p. 233) where each gender borrows attributes from the other. Thus there are different profiles on which brands can be based and which may impact the success of their cross-gender extensions.

The aim of this article is to analyse whether the diversity of brand gender can be used to better understand the success or failure of cross-gender extensions in the luxury sector. We adopt a

¹ A study of a convenience sample of 30 people was conducted specially for this research to define the perceived gender of Chanel and Dior. The sample is composed of luxury consumers, 16 men and 14 women, aged from 29 to 55. Gender was measured using two 7-point Likert scales (a scale of femininity and a scale of masculinity). Chanel and Dior were both rated as very feminine (for Chanel M = 6.07 and for Dior M = 5.87) and not masculine (for Chanel M = 1.93 and for Dior M = 2.47). The mean comparison tests show that there is no significant difference between the perceived femininity ($t = -0.587$, $p = 0.567$) and masculinity of both brands ($t = 1.468$, $p = 0.164$).

structural semiotic approach (Floch, 2001; Mick *et al.*, 2004). This methodology focuses on the definition of brand narratives and their legitimacy in terms of expanding the brand into new territories. This approach is particularly used to analyse luxury brands and complements the existing academic research that has analysed the key success factors of extensions and mainly the role of perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension when evaluating the launch of a new product under the brand's name (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Park *et al.*, 1991; Loken and Roedder John, 1993; Roux and Boush, 1996; Martinez and de Chernatony, 2004; Keller, 2009; Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Jung and Tey, 2010; Roper *et al.*, 2013; Evangeline and Ragel, 2016). While such studies are essential to analyse the likelihood of the success of a new product, these studies focus only on the message received by consumers and on their evaluations. However, it can be useful to have an additional approach to analyse such brand extension strategies based on messages directly communicated by the brands, i.e., their narratives and contracts (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2004; Viot, 2011). The study of brand extension potential according to brand narratives and contracts is essential to better manage brand extension strategies in the long term. Moreover, very few studies have focused on the concept of brand contract, e.g. the discourse directly produced by the brand, and the relevant methodology to analyse brand extendibility. The use of semiotics is particularly appealing, as suggested in recent research (Ugglá, 2016). Semiotics, or the theory and study of signs and symbols, is of great use for understanding representation processes (Grayson and Shulman, 2000; Mick *et al.*, 2004; Mick and Oswald, 2006). This is a methodology increasingly used by management researchers in general and in marketing in particular (Ogilvie and Mizerski, 2011; Magnoni and Roux, 2012; Coneja and Wooliscroft, 2014; Freire, 2014; Ourahmoune, Binninger and Robert, 2014; Veg-Sala, 2014).

This article is structured as follows. First, a literature review presents marketing research that has analysed brand gender and cross-gender extension, as well as brand extension potential and extension legitimacy, with a focus on luxury brands. The research methodology is then developed, followed by a presentation and discussion of the findings.

Theoretical background

Brand gender and cross-gender extension

Beyond the sexual image of products (Morris and Cundiff, 1971; Stuteville, 1971; Mervis and Rosh, 1981; Fugate and Phillips, 2010), there is a trend for consumers to categorise brands as feminine or masculine. The study of this "gendered" consumption began around 1960 and continues today to be particularly present in our society (Avery, 2012; Azar, 2015). It relies on human gender defined as a set of characteristics and behaviours that a given society associates with and expects of men and women (Bourdieu, 2001).

Because of the use of these conventions in brand positioning and differentiation (McCracken, 1986; Alreck, 1994) and because of their effect on brand equity (Lieven *et al.*, 2014), brand gender has led to numerous studies in marketing (Bem, 1974; Alreck, Settle and Belch, 1982; Till and Priluck, 2001; Grohmann, 2009; Ulrich, Tissier-Desbordes and Dubois, 2010). Brand gender is linked to the brand personality traits of the brand-as-a-person metaphor (Azar, 2015). Grohmann (2009, p. 106) defines brand gender as "the set of human personality traits associated with masculinity and femininity applicable and relevant to brands". Therefore, brand gender differs from brand sex (defined as a demographic characteristic and referring to the biological difference between men and women) and brand sexual orientation (defined as a

behavioural characteristic and referring to the human sexual orientation associated with a brand) (Azar, 2015).

Whereas brand sex (for men and/or women) and sexual orientation (for heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual) were easy to code, coding brand gender was much more complicated and led to various conceptualisations.

Marketing studies define brand gender as a one- or two-dimensional construct. When it is defined as a one-dimensional construct, brand gender is generally evaluated by considering one item as having a masculine/feminine trait (Vitz and Johnson, 1965; Fry, 1971). It is also possible to consider a set of bipolar scales: masculine/feminine, big/small, common/luxurious, hard/soft, rough/smooth (Alreck, Settle and Belch, 1982; Jung and Lee, 2006) or masculine/feminine, hard/soft, strong/weak (Till and Priluck, 2001). Researchers who treat gender as a two-dimensional concept consider that brands can be studied simultaneously according to their feminine and masculine traits (Bem, 1974; Debevec and Iyer, 1986; Grohmann, 2009; Ulrich, Tissier-Desbordes and Dubois, 2010), using one scale to assess the degree of femininity and another the degree of masculinity of each brand. More recently, some researchers have responded to the criticism of the double conceptualisation of brand gender through degrees of femininity and masculinity (Helgeson 1994) and focused on the fact that there is not just one type of masculinity or femininity, but several (Vigarello, 2004; Azar, 2009, 2013). In this regard, four feminine brand profiles (altruistic, fluffy, emphasised and tempting) and four masculine brand profiles (hegemonic, subaltern, emerging and chivalrous) have been identified (Azar, 2009, 2013) (Table 1). These findings allow us to overcome the brand definition based on levels of femininity and masculinity and clarify the gendered identity of brands and their positioning.

[Insert Table 1]

Following this trend to consider brand gender, some academic articles have studied the key success factors of cross-gender extensions (from the female to the male market and vice versa) (Jung and Lee, 2006; Ulrich, 2013). Beyond the impact of consumer sex, i.e. biological sex, and consumer gender, i.e. psychological sex (Jung and Lee, 2006; Ulrich, 2013), Jung and Lee (2006) show that brand gender has a significant impact on these extensions. Consumers evaluate cross-gender extensions more positively (greater perceived consistency and more favourable attitudes) when the brand is defined as masculine than when it is defined as feminine. Moreover, Jung et Lee (2006) show that, for an extension from the female to male market, the more the brand is perceived with a high degree of masculinity and a low degree of femininity, the more the evaluation of cross-gender extension is positive. Inversely, cross-gender extensions from the male to female market are evaluated more favourably when the brand is perceived to have a high degree of femininity and a low degree of masculinity.

These initial findings are important but need to be further developed. In fact, according to recent research on brand gender (Azar, 2009, 2013), brands seem to be more complex than degrees of femininity and masculinity. Moreover, these articles use only consumer perceptions to analyse the success or failure of cross-gender extensions (Jung and Lee, 2006; Ulrich, 2013). But it has been shown that another approach can be used, based on the discourses directly produced by brands (Veg-Sala and Roux, 2014). This approach allows us to define brand extension potential (BEP) and has been especially developed for luxury brands.

Brand extension potential (BEP) of luxury brands

Generally, most research on the key success factors of brand extensions shows the importance of perceived brand consistency in the success of extensions at time “t” (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Park *et al.*, 1991; Loken and Roedder John, 1993; Roux and Boush, 1996; Martinez and de Chernatony, 2004; Keller, 2009; Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Jung and Tey, 2010; Roper *et al.*, 2013; Evangeline and Ragel, 2016). Recent research also suggests considering brand extension authenticity, referring to the consumer’s sense that “a brand extension is legitimate and culturally consistent” with the parent brand (Spiggle *et al.*, 2012). Beyond this approach focused on consumer evaluations, the definition of brand extension potential (BEP) reflects a long-term approach to brand management. Brand extension potential defines how far a brand can be extended consistently and legitimately according to what it is (Veg-Sala and Roux, 2014). The BEP concept does not focus on consumer perceptions but on a more managerial approach based on the study of brand identity (Kapferer, 2004). Brand extension potential can be studied according to the definition of brand narratives and contracts and their openness and has been especially used in the luxury sector.

The narratives and contracts of brands have been analysed by anthropologists (McCracken 1993; Stern, 1995) and used by semioticians (Floch, 2000; Oswald, 2012). They can help marketing researchers and managers to consider and analyse brands. According to anthropologists and semioticians, a brand can be rooted in six brand narrative dimensions: (1) time (date of creation, temporal roots), (2) place (city, country or mythical space), (3) state or life stage (life situation or feelings, feminine or masculine gender, transition i.e. ugly to beautiful or old to young), (4) character (archetype, celebrity), (5) know-how (traditional manufacturing or technological processes) and (6) material (natural or technological). These six dimensions can be grouped in pairs, forming three brand contracts (Table 2): (1) a contract of delimitation, formed by narratives related to time and place; (2) a contract of

determination, formed by narratives related to a state or stage of life and a character; and (3) a contract of mastery, formed by narratives related to know-how and a material (Remaury, 2004).

[Insert Table 2]

The concept of openness, derived from psychology, analyses the ability to integrate innovations based on personal traits (Rokeach, 1960). Transposing this openness to marketing and brand contracts makes it possible to study a brand's ability to include new brand extensions by examining the openness of each brand contract (delimitation, determination and mastery). Semiotics and the semiotic square are used to define the openness of each brand contract. The appeal of the semiotic square lies in "its ability to organise a universe coherently" and anticipate how meaning may follow (Floch, 1988, p. 239). The "open–closed" opposition is particularly relevant when analysing the openness of each brand contract and defining brand extension potential. Added to the "continuous–discontinuous" opposition, the semiotic square considers not only the spatial but also the temporal dimension of brand management (Floch, 2000, 2001) (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1]

The concept of brand extension potential (BEP) has been used to analyse luxury brand extensions into new product categories (Veg-Sala and Roux, 2014). The results show that BEP depends on brand identity and especially the openness of the mastery contract. If the mastery contract is defined as open (e.g. general know-how such as fashion), the brand can be extended into other product categories (accessories, glasses, jewellery) in a consistent way. In

contrast, if the mastery contract is defined as closed, i.e., associated with specific expertise (such as jewellery and watches), the brand cannot easily be extended into new territories.

But what about cross-gender extension of luxury brands? Beyond the analyses of evaluations of degrees of brand femininity and masculinity, that have shown some limits in understanding the strategies of cross-gender extensions, how can the analysis of brand contracts and their openness help us to better understand the legitimacy of luxury brands in terms of extending from the female to the male market and vice versa?

The focus on the luxury brands and cross-gender extension is particularly important because, while the use of extensions has become fundamental to the business model of most luxury brands, little research has been conducted on these strategies in the case of luxury brands (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Reddy *et al.*, 2009; Monga and John, 2010; Magnoni and Roux, 2012). Yet researchers point out that the management of luxury brands is significantly different from other sectors. This is especially the case for brand extension strategies (Park, Milberg and Lawson, 1991; Reddy *et al.*, 2009; Albrech *et al.*, 2013; Kapferer, 2015). Moreover, even if luxury brands very often use extension strategies, there are many examples of brand extension disasters, which emphasises the need to focus on this sector. Finally, in a more intense competitive environment, luxury brands are constantly looking for new growth drivers (Kapferer, 2015). It is for this reason why they were the first to engage in cross-gender extensions, as in the examples of Yves Saint Laurent (in 1969 for the ready-to-wear), Dior (in 1970 for the men ready-to-wear) and Gucci (during the mid 60s and early 70s s for all the product categories of the brand).

Methodology

The objective of the research methodology is to study cross-gender extension potential, i.e. extensibility from the female to the male market and vice versa. Through the theoretical analysis above and based on previous research, a three-step analysis is used.

Analysis process

The first step is to define brand narratives and contracts. These are identified by analysing similarities and differences across a corpus of communication including old and recent advertisements, product visuals developed since the creation of the brand, interior store design visuals or any other available material from, for instance, brand events, exhibitions, and museums. All recurring signs (e.g. plastics, figurative and linguistic signifiers) are recorded in a summary table and analysed according to their meanings and symbols, i.e., their signification (Greimas and Courtès, 1982; Floch, 2000, 2001). The meanings are then structured according to the three types of brand contracts (delimitation, determination and mastery).

The second step consists in analysing the openness (i.e., the ability to integrate innovation) of each contract in which the brand is rooted. To define the openness of each brand contract, the semiotic square based on the semantic oppositions open/closed and continuous/discontinuous is used (see Figure 1). Each brand contract is positioned on a different semiotic square of openness. For example, if a brand is linked to a delimitation contract and a mastery contract, two semiotic squares are developed.

The last step in the analysis of cross-gender extension potential using the semiotic approach is to consider simultaneously the openness of the different contracts in which the brand is rooted. For this step, the openness semiotic squares of the different brand contracts are

crossed in pairs. A diagnosis can then be made about the ability of the brand to integrate cross-gender extensions in a coherent and legitimate way.

To increase the internal validity of this research, an expert in semiotics at the University of Limoges (France) was asked to evaluate the relevance of the analysis based on a sub-sample of two brands. He confirmed that the methodology corresponds to the academic standards applied to the discipline of semiotics.

Brand sample

Because of the difficulty of defining luxury brands, due to their relativity, subjectivity and evolution (De Barnier, Falcy and Valette-Florence, 2012; Kapferer and Laurent, 2016) and because of the purpose of this research, the choice of brands is based on several criteria.

First, the selected brands have to represent a variety of core businesses. Indeed, previous research has shown that the values associated with luxury brands can vary according to product categories (Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013). It is therefore important for the sample to include a variety of sectors in order to increase internal validity.

Second, the average price of the core business products of each brand should exceed \$500. This criterion introduces an objective limit to choose luxury brands which are subjective by definition.

Third, the sample has to take into account the direction of cross-gender extensions. These strategies can concern brands for women that decide to sell products for men and vice versa. To ensure representative brand strategies, the sample should include brands representing these two scenarios.

Based on these criteria, seven luxury brands are studied: Audemars Piguet, Cartier, Chanel, Dior, Hugo Boss, Montblanc and Rolex. Three of them initially targeted the female market

only (Cartier, Chanel and Dior) and the other four the male market (Audemars Piguet, Hugo Boss, Montblanc and Rolex). They represent different core businesses: jewellery and watches (Audemars Piguet, Cartier and Rolex) and fashion and accessories (Chanel, Dior, Hugo Boss and Montblanc). Finally, these brands also represent a diverse range of countries of origin: France, Switzerland and Germany.

Results: Classification of brands based on semiotic analysis of their cross-gender extension potential

Based on the semiotic analysis, a cross-gender extension classification of the brands is presented. It refers to the study of the openness of the brand contracts (delimitation, determination and mastery), both separately and simultaneously. The results are presented in two stages.

- First, to better illustrate the analysis process, the examples of Audemars Piguet and Rolex (two watchmaker brands) are developed and compared. The choice of these brands is based on two criteria: (1) the analysis of both brands in the same sector and (2) two brands whose results on cross-gender extensions are for one a success (Rolex) and for the other a failure (Audemars Piguet).
- Then, after this illustration, the seven brands are analysed based on the brand contracts and their openness. The intersection of these contracts leads us to define a classification of brands according to their cross-gender extension potential.

Illustration of the semiotic analysis process: Audemars Piguet and Rolex

The case of Audemars Piguet

Audemars Piguet is related to a determination contract (the masculinity linked to the values of strength, virility and also expertise) and a mastery contract (watchmaking know-how).

Its determination contract is linked to the archetypal man with exacerbated virility. Straight forms, generally dark colours and linear writing are attached to those values. The masculinity of Audemars Piguet is twofold: physically strong masculinity (with muscles) (the brand is a partner of Maserati and the America's Cup) and the masculinity of expertise (represented by its knowledge and know-how). The values of this determination contract cannot integrate women or female products without changing these characteristics. In Western society, women cannot share the qualities associated with the archetype of the strong and virile man. These values are not desirable for women. According to the definitions of the four positions on the semiotic square (see Figure 1), this contract can therefore be defined as closed for cross-gender extensions.

Audemars Piguet's mastery contract is linked to its watchmaking expertise. Its narrative highlights the technical complexity of watches. It describes itself as a "master watchmaker since 1875." Its advertisements focus on "the beauty of mechanisms." Watches and their complexity are widely highlighted in the brand's communication, with close-up images often at the centre. This mastery contract related to watchmaking expertise can be enriched by the integration of products into new markets, while remaining the same. Whether for men or for women, all watches can develop this specific know-how. This contract is therefore enriched by developing watches for women, while the brand remains the same. Referring to the semiotic square, it can therefore be defined as open for cross-gender extensions.

The case of Rolex

Rolex is related to a determination contract (linked to power and performance) and to a mastery contract (linked to watchmaking know-how).

Its determination contract is linked to the values of performance and power. The brand is associated with many male plastic codes, like dark colours, linear shapes and rectangular representations or font. Brand advertising focuses successively on technicality ("Flying a Concorde"), performance (various extreme sports), perfection and power ("The men who preside over the destinies of the world wear a Rolex"; the brand logo is a crown) and mental strength ("femininity without fragility"). This determination contract referring to power and performance is enhanced when it integrates products for the female market. More and more women in Western society are claiming access to power and high levels of responsibility (especially in the context of work and politics) (Vigarello, 2004; Vigarello and Giust-Desprairies, 2014). Therefore, the values of this contract legitimate the integration of products for women who themselves attribute importance to these values. The brand demonstrates this commitment in one of its advertisements with the slogan: "The man's watch the women prefer". Referring to the semiotic square, this contract can therefore be defined as open for cross-gender extensions.

Rolex's mastery contract is linked to its watchmaking expertise. Rolex produces only watches. In its advertising, the brand regularly uses the terms "perfection" and "precision". Since its creation, the brand has received numerous awards in recognition of its talent, as in 1937 with the "wristwatch world record". This mastery contract based on watchmaking expertise is enriched by the development of products for the opposite market. Whether for men or women, all watches enhance the specific know-how of the brand. By creating watches for women, the brand consolidates its values in this specific and precise craftsmanship. According to the semiotic square, Rolex's mastery contract can therefore be defined as open for cross-gender extensions.

[Insert Table 3]

[Insert Figure 2]

Comparing the two brands and data triangulation

Although Rolex and Audemars Piguet are originally two luxury watchmaker brands for men, the semiotic analysis shows that they do not have the same cross-gender extension potential (on the women's market). Based on these two open contracts, Rolex can more legitimately develop cross-gender extensions than Audemars Piguet, which has one open contract and another that is closed.

The results of the semiotic analysis of cross-gender extension potential are compared with two different types of data: (1) market observations, with the place accorded to women for each brand, and (2) consumer perceptions of the launch of women's watches for each brand.

First, to calculate the proportion dedicated to women, the number of references for women and men sold by Audemars Piguet and Rolex were counted. While the number of Rolex references is the same for men and women (96 models for men and 96 for women), there was a significant difference in the case of Audemars Piguet (310 models for men, representing 63% of the brand collection, and 115 for women, representing 37%). Women's watches are therefore more developed in the case of Rolex.

Second, a study was conducted to evaluate consumer attitudes toward the launch of women's watches by Audemars Piguet and Rolex. It involved a convenience sample of 128 people, about 60% women and 40% men, aged 19 to 68 (average age = 33). The survey was administered online. It successively presented Audemars Piguet and Rolex (with a descriptive text and advertising visuals). Participants were then asked questions about their attitudes and

behavioural intentions with regard to the launch of women's watches by these brands. Variance analyses (ANOVA on SPSS software) were performed. Overall attitude toward Rolex is significantly more favourable than for Audemars Piguet as measured by the following dimensions: the desirability and the appeal. Compared with Audemars Piguet, respondents think Rolex watches for women are significantly more desirable ($\text{Mean}_{\text{AP}} = 2.91$ and $\text{Mean}_{\text{Rolex}} = 3.83$, $p < 0.000$) and more appealing ($\text{Mean}_{\text{AP}} = 3.19$ and $\text{Mean}_{\text{Rolex}} = 3.83$, $p < 0.000$). The results also show that intentions to buy Rolex watches for women are higher than for Audemars Piguet ($\text{Mean}_{\text{AP}} = 3.09$ and $\text{Mean}_{\text{Rolex}} = 3.73$, $p < 0.000$). This is the same for the willingness to wear women's watches ($\text{Mean}_{\text{AP}} = 3.04$ and $\text{Mean}_{\text{Rolex}} = 3.98$, $p < 0.000$).

Thus, the different place given to women in the two brand collections and the different attitudes toward the launch of women's watches by Audemars Piguet and Rolex confirm the results of the semiotic analysis. The triangulation is consistent and shows greater cross-gender extension potential for Rolex than for Audemars Piguet.

Brand contract analysis and classification of cross-gender extension potential

Brands and the delimitation contract

None of the seven brands considered is related to a delimitation contract. They do not focus their discourses on a specific place or time. They sometimes refer to the date of their creation but only to highlight their know-how (e.g. mastery contract).

Brands and the determination contract

All of the brands studied are related to a determination contract. However, these have different levels of openness. Some of these brand contracts are open, while others are closed.

The determination contracts defined as open represent brand discourses that highlight the following: (1) two characters (a man and a woman), e.g. Dior's princess and dandy; (2) a gender composed by values desirable by men and women in Western society, e.g. Montblanc's depiction of working life and Rolex's depiction of power and domination; or (3) a more general state (not linked to a character or gender), e.g. Cartier and high social status. These contracts promote extensions and enrich their values by developing new products for the opposite market while remaining the same. For example, power and domination can be valuable not only for men but also for women (Vigarello and Giust-Desprairies, 2014).

The determination contracts defined as closed are brands that develop a specific narrative style of communication linked to a specific archetype of femininity or masculinity, e.g. Audemars Piguet's use of a virile and powerful man, Chanel's archetype of Gabrielle Chanel, and the Hugo Boss archetype of the businessman. These closed contracts highlight the tradition of a specific gender market (men or women). These values are only desirable for one target. According to this semiotic analysis, these contracts could not be enriched by development into the opposite market. Only innovations in the original market (men or women) can reinforce these contracts.

Brands and the mastery contract

All of the brands studied are rooted in a mastery contract. And all these contracts value enrichment and the development of new products for the opposite market; they are all open.

Whether the brands highlight specific know-how in their communication (e.g. Audemars Piguet, Cartier, Montblanc or Rolex) or more general know-how like fashion (e.g. Chanel,

Dior or Hugo Boss), these contracts can legitimately release products for both men and women to develop and strengthen the brand narratives. For example, the watchmaking expertise of Rolex or Audemars Piguet can be represented across both the male and female markets. The values of fashion know-how proposed by Chanel or Dior can be reinforced by the development of products for men.

Simultaneous analysis of brands and their different contracts

After analysing the brands' position in each of the three types of contracts separately, they were then studied simultaneously to identify their cross-gender extension potential. Because no delimitation contract was found for any of the seven brands, the analysis focused on the intersection between the determination and mastery contracts. Two groups of brands can then be differentiated (Figure 3).

The first group includes brands rooted in an open mastery contract (which enriches their brand narratives with the introduction of products for the opposite market) and a closed determination contract (which values tradition), whereby the latter limits the development of cross-gender extensions. We find the following brands in this group: Audemars Piguet, Chanel and Hugo Boss. All these brands are related to a specific character, defined as an archetype of masculinity or femininity. Their values are not desirable by the opposite gender and thus rule out legitimate cross-gender extensions.

The results of the semiotic analysis seem consistent with the market observations. For example, Chanel, except in perfumes, does not have a presence on the male market. No ready-to-wear collection for men has been launched regularly by the brand since its creation. And

even if the three other brands in this group have developed cross-gender extensions, their success has not been significant, as explained in the case of Audemars Piguet.

The second group includes brands with an open determination contract and an open mastery contract (both are enriched by the development of products for the opposite market, while remaining the same). This group includes Cartier, Dior, Montblanc and Rolex. All of these brands are related to gender values desirable by both men and women and can also be expanded by legitimate cross-gender extensions.

The results of the semiotic analysis also seem consistent with the market observations. The four brands analysed have developed successful cross-gender extensions. For example, in contrast to Chanel, Dior has developed specific and successful collections for men.

[Insert Figure 3]

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to analyse cross-gender extension potential of luxury brands by studying brand discourses. Beyond the impact of degrees of femininity and masculinity, this research, using a semiotic methodology, demonstrates that not all brands have the same cross-gender extension potential. Depending on brand narratives and contracts and their level of openness, not all brands can legitimately extend from the male to female market and vice versa. Specifically, in the context of cross-gender extensions, the narratives that brands have to take into account are those related to the determination contract. This research has shown that brands rooted in an open determination contract, i.e. whose values are desired by both sexes, can be extended more easily from one market to the other. This may be linked to brand

associations related to the values of work, family, success or power, like Rolex (with the professional success) or Patek Philippe (with the intergenerational and family sharing). Conversely, brands rooted in a closed determination contract, i.e. whose values are not desirable by both genders, appear unable to legitimately extend from one market segment to the other, like Audemars Piguet (with the exacerbated virility) or Aubade (with the sensual and bodily femininity). These results provide several theoretical and managerial contributions.

Theoretical contributions

Moving beyond the previous research on cross-gender extensions, this article provides a better understanding as to why two brands perceived as feminine (with the same degree of femininity) do not have the same success and the same legitimacy when it comes to extending into the opposite market.

First, previous research has shown that successful cross-gender extensions depend on a brand's degree of femininity or masculinity (Jung and Lee, 2006). However, brands and their gender are more complex. Azar (2009, 2013) has highlighted four profiles of brand femininity and four profiles of brand masculinity. The present research reinforces these findings. The semiotic analysis reveals several types of femininity and masculinity, like the archetype of the strong and independent woman (Chanel) closed off from the profile of tempting femininity, the archetype of the princess (Dior) closed off from emphasised femininity, the strong and virile man (Audemars Piguet) closed off from emerging masculinity, and the powerful and dominant man (Rolex) closed off from chivalrous masculinity (see Table 1).

Second, this research has shown that not all luxury brands have the same cross-gender extension potential. This potential depends on the discourses developed in their communication strategy. Specifically, determination contracts and their level of openness,

especially when it comes to brand gender and its various profiles, are the most important to consider. These results run counter to previous research on brand extension potential (analysing brand extensibility into several product categories), on which mastery contracts have the greatest impact.

Finally, the usefulness of semiotics to analyse the potential success of brand strategies and to anticipate these actions is again demonstrated. This supports the traditional vision of brand management that focuses on consumer perceptions, especially used to study extensions (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Park *et al.*, 1991; Keller and Aaker, 1992; Loken and Roedder John, 1993; Roux and Boush, 1996; Martinez and de Chernatony, 2004; Buil *et al.*, 2007; Keller, 2009; Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Jung and Tey, 2010; Roper *et al.*, 2013; Selvanayagam and Ragel, 2015; Evangeline and Ragel, 2016). More and more researchers believe it is important to define the message communicated by brands and not only according to consumer perceptions (Uggla, 2016). The semiotic approach responds to this new requirement and fits with the objective for brands to maintain a consistent discourse over time (Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 2004).

Although many precautions have been taken in order to achieve these theoretical contributions, several limitations point to the need for further research. First, this research has focused on jewellery, watches, fashion and accessories. But in the luxury market, we are seeing increasing development of service brands (luxury hotels and resorts, spas, personal assistants, concierges) and high-technology brands (luxury mobile phones, computers and others accessories). The proposed method could therefore be applied to these types of brands. Second, this analysis has focused on luxury brands only. The analytical procedure was applied to seven luxury brands. However, mass consumer brands are also concerned by cross-gender extensions. Future research could study the extension potential of mass consumer brands by analysing their brand narratives and openness.

Managerial contributions

According to the findings of this research, when a luxury brand has to consider developing into the opposite market, managers need to anticipate their brand strategies and use a managerial approach to analyse the openness of their brand narrative and contract. To do this, they need to study their communication from a longitudinal and semiotic perspective. For cross-gender extensions, managers have to highlight discourses especially linked to determination contracts and define the values associates with them.

Depending on this process and the level of openness of their determination contract, brands must adopt different strategies. When a brand is related to an open determination contract, i.e. related to values that are desirable by both sexes, managers can easily consider cross-gender extensions as part of their brand development. The question is how to launch these new products (communication, collection, price, etc.) while respecting the brand's identity. Conversely, in the case of brands linked to a closed determination contract, i.e. with an emphasis on gender values that are not desirable by both sexes, managers must understand that launching a cross-gender extension is not legitimate and presents certain risks. They need to consider other strategies. For example, they can initiate a strategy to develop a more open determination contract. To do this, brands need to communicate new values. This process is long and costly but can help to increase the brand extensibility. Another strategy could be to use independent branding strategies or a sub-brand. By using a new brand name, more or less closed off from the original brand, the perceived link between the products for men and those for women would be less significant and there would be greater acceptance of cross-gender extensions.

These results and recommendations can also be used for the creation of new brands. The definition of a brand's identity must incorporate the fact that it is important to develop open brand contracts and particularly open determination contracts when considering cross-gender extensions.

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images. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 49 (3): 155-159.

Table 1 Profiles of brand femininity and masculinity (Azar, 2009, 2013)

The 4 profiles of brand femininity (2 dimensions: “philanthropy” and “attractiveness”)	
Altruistic femininity	Low score on attractiveness and high score on philanthropy
Fluffy femininity	Low scores on both philanthropy and attractiveness
Emphasised femininity	High scores on both philanthropy and attractiveness
Tempting femininity	Low score on philanthropy and high score on attractiveness
The 4 profiles of brand masculinity (2 dimensions: “chauvinism” and “heroism”)	
Hegemonic masculinity	Low score on heroism and high score on chauvinism
Subaltern masculinity	Low scores on heroism and chauvinism
Emerging masculinity	High scores on heroism and chauvinism
Chivalrous masculinity	High score on heroism and low score on chauvinism

Table 2 Brand narratives and contracts (Remaury, 2004)

Brand contracts	Brand narratives	Examples
Delimitation contract	Time	Foundation of the brand: date; origin of sector development
	Place	Country, city, street, evocative places, direction
Determination contract	State and life stage	Age groups (adult, childhood), gender (male, female), transition (beautiful to ugly) or other states (travel, feelings)
	Character	Characters (Marlboro cowboy), female or male archetypes, celebrities
Mastery contract	Know-how	Real know-how (quality of products, services or knowledge)
	Material	Natural and technological materials, trade of the brand or sale of a component (natural or technological)

Table 3 Analysis of Audemars Piguet and Rolex

		Audemars Piguet		Rolex	
		Signifiers	Signifieds	Signifiers	Signifieds
Plastic message	<i>Frame</i>	Focus on watches, shooting in big size in ads	Focus on the business of the brand: watchmaking	Products in foreground (in close-up) and the second level, a related element (man, sport ...)	Focus on the business of the brand : the watch making
	<i>Angle of exposure</i>	Great sharpness	Quality of the watches	Great sharpness	Quality of the watches
	<i>Composition</i>	Link between watches and brand name (reading direction) Link between watches and another object (hourglass, alters)	Focus on the business of the brand: watchmaking And focus on strength, virility, expertise	One image : Watches worn in life situations (work, sport) One text describing the situation and the role of the watch in this specific situation	Focus on the know-how and more precisely on the specific role of the watch in the life of its owners.
	<i>Shapes</i>	Rectilinear shapes	Masculinity	Rectilinear shapes	Masculinity
	<i>Colours</i>	Dark colours: brown, grey, metal, steel	Masculinity	Dark colours Green	Masculinity
Figurative message	<i>Patterns, figures, real objects</i>	Watches (straight lines, visible complications, screws, etc.) Other objects associated: rooster, hourglass, jump rope, car, sailboat	Focus on the know-how of the brand – watchmaking – and also on muscular strength, virility, extreme sports, etc.	Watches (various models but the same for men and women) Crown other objects: Plane (Concorde), tennis, horse, company CEO, competition, etc.	Brand know-how: watchmaking Domination, power Performances, technical nature
	<i>Characters</i>	Some characters pose by putting forward their watches	Focus on watches only for men	Confident men and women	Domination, performance
Linguistic message	<i>Pictures of words (colours, typography, colours, shapes)</i>	Linear writing (logo, name, slogan)	Masculinity	Linear writing (logo, name, slogan)	Masculinity
	<i>Meaning</i>	"Beauty of the mechanism," "mechanisms with complications", "Master watchmaker since 1875", "Audemars Piguet, the watch for your life"	Watchmaking (know-how, tradition, technical know-how and mechanisms, etc.)	"Precision, elegance", "Perfection", "The men who preside over the destinies of the world wear a Rolex," "Measure of Time", "Flying a concorde", "femininity without the fragility", "The real competition"	Watchmaking know-how Power and domination

Figure 1 Semiotic square of brand contract openness (Veg-Sala and Roux, 2014)

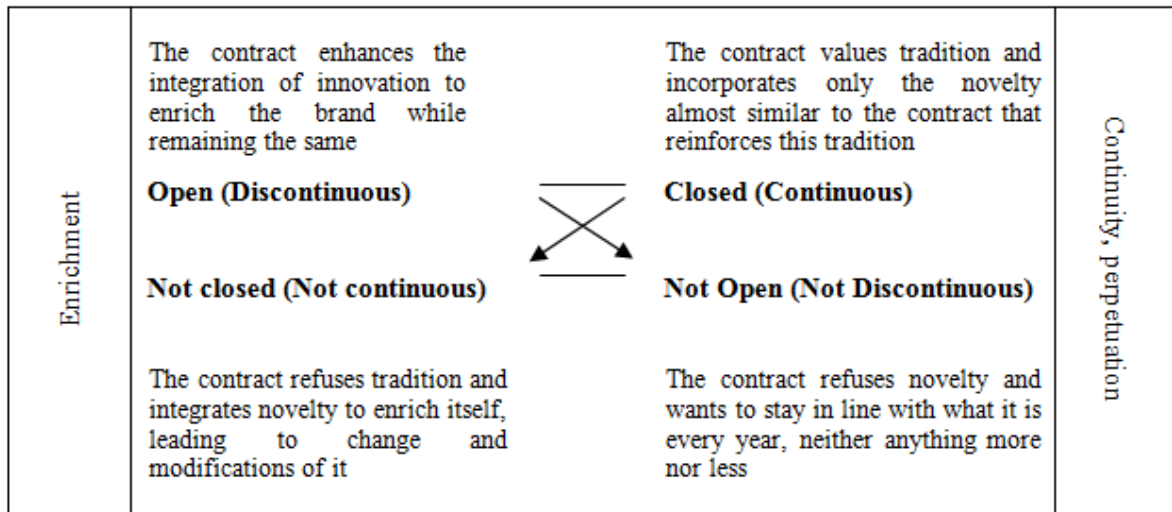


Figure 2 Advertisings of Audemars Piguet² and Rolex³

Audemars Piguet	Rolex
 <p data-bbox="258 846 705 878">Physical strength and exacerbated virility</p>	 <p data-bbox="970 846 1228 878">Power and performance</p>

² <http://en.creasenso.com/print/art-directors/bernard-2/copy-of-audemars-piguet>

³ <http://blog.shanegraphique.com/publicit-rolax/>

Figure 3 Classification of brands based on semiotic analysis

