

**UNIVERSITY  
OF TWENTE.**

**Master Thesis**

**The gender-binary paradox: a study on young  
adults' experiences, perceptions, and behaviour  
towards gender marketing**

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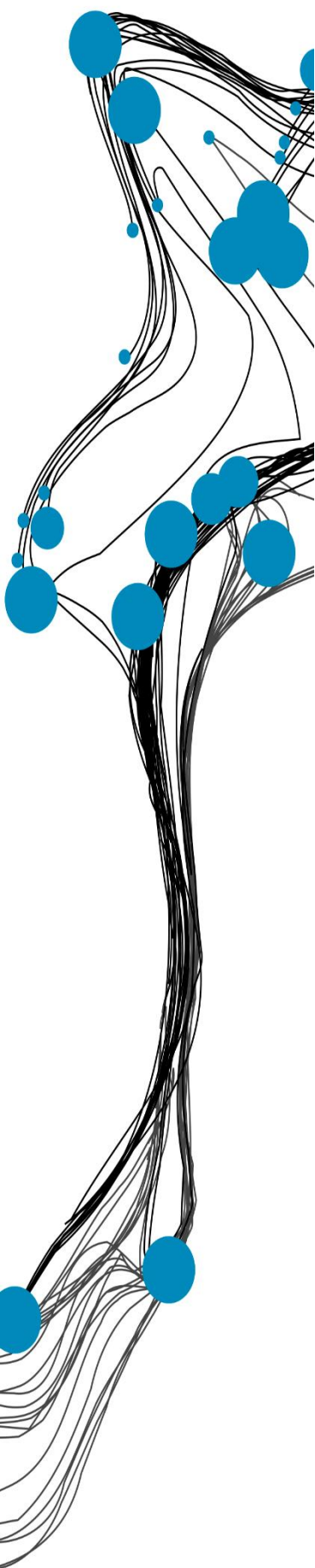
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**Abstract**

*Objectives:* This study addresses the current gap in the literature about the imbalance between the perception and behaviour of young adults towards gender marketing, resulting in a gender-binary paradox, and the experiences of young adults towards the gender-binary dynamics in marketing, by exploring, investigating, and explaining these concepts.

*Methodology:* The exploratory study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, with a total of four pre-tests and 15 interviews. To analyse and interpret the data of the interviews, the methods of open, axial, and selective coding were used, resulting in a codebook. The codes of the codebook were analysed and interpreted based on their frequencies and the relevance of their individual meanings for the context of the study.

*Findings:* The study's findings give evidence for the presence of the gender-binary paradox among young adults within the marketplace, even though some unexpected findings show that not all participants acted in favour of the paradox. The study provides new insights into possible reasons for the support of gender marketing, such as participants' habits, upbringing, or the limited availability of gender-neutral products. Furthermore, the study presents ideas about changing the marketplace towards more inclusivity for genders outside the binarity by shifting the gender-based focus of marketing to a unisex focus by targeting and developing products based on their unique characteristics and usage, not on gender.

*Implications:* This study confirms and simultaneously extends existing research of gender marketing by giving new theoretical insights into the issue of gender marketing, introducing the gender-binary paradox and giving explanations for the behaviour and experiences of the participants. Furthermore, with the findings of this study, especially marketers are able to better understand the issue of gender marketing and acquire recommendations on how to handle these issues, such as focusing on the shift from gender-focused marketing to develop products that are in line with the values and beliefs of their target group, to make the marketplace and society more gender-inclusive.

*Keywords:* gender-binary paradox, gender marketing, advertising, young adults, gender inclusion, gender diversity

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## 1. Introduction

It is a common assumption that the society we live in today, which is considered to be rather innovative, progressive and continuously improving, is becoming more inclusive and open to diversity (Morgenroth et al., 2020). In other words, having arrived in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one would hope that people would, by now, have become more respectful towards their fellow human beings, regardless of their differences like race and gender. Unfortunately, however, some people are still excluded in various areas of society because they diverge from ‘social norms’, which can also be detected in the existing literature on contemporary marketing strategies. In particular, the use of gender within marketing - also known as gender marketing - can still be characterised by using the binary genders, male and female, exclusively (Murto, 2020). People who do not fit into one of the two categories, known as non-binary genders, appear to be underrepresented and excluded within marketing (Stevens, 2018). This study, therefore, explores and investigates the perceptions and experiences of young adults towards gender marketing.

The practice of exclusively using the two biological genders, male and female, also known as gender binary, is still common in modern society. For instance: dividing products associated with different genders in stores, the labelling of public restrooms, or a gendered focus on children’s toys (Murto, 2020). In all these examples, primarily male and female genders tend to be represented, indicating a dominant stance on those binary genders. Generally, within societal norms, it is still assumed that gender is biologically determined at birth and holds for a lifetime. As a result, there is a general belief that a person’s biological sex and gender should be the same concept to be interchangeable (Hyde et al., 2019).

However, the concepts of sex and gender cannot be equated since both terms mean something fundamentally different. The sex of a person refers to biological attributes, which include the chromosomes, genitalia, and general anatomy (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Tannenbaum et al., 2019). In fact, four sexes can be discerned: male, female, intersex, and hermaphrodite (Carpenter, 2018). When it comes to the gender of a person, other attributes are important. Tannenbaum et al. (2019) refer to gender as: “psychological, social and cultural factors that shape attitudes, behaviours, stereotypes, technologies and knowledge” (p.138). It means that the gender of a person refers to attributes that change and influence the thinking and living of the person. Thus, it defines parts of a person’s identity, who they are and how they want to be seen by others (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

Nowadays, various gender identities exist, such as transgender, agender, genderqueer, non-binary gender, and many more (Carpenter, 2018), collectively referred to as people with

gender nonconformity. Gender nonconformity is “the degree to which an individual’s appearance, behavior, interests, and subjective self-concept deviate from conventional norms for masculinity/femininity” (Diamond, 2013, p. 290). Therefore, the sole focus on male and female genders fails to reflect the realities of contemporary society – especially since people increasingly can be seen to express their ‘real selves’ openly within society (McKeage et al., 2018).

Recently, a ‘slow’ shift in society’s thinking and behaving towards gender inclusion can be detected (Morgenroth et al., 2020). As a result, different gender identities are increasingly recognised and somewhat accepted by a part of society (Schroeder, 2020), for example, through progressively implementing gender-inclusive language or more visibility of a variety of gender identities, such as in the online environment (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

Especially young adults (age range from 18-30 years), including Generation Y (approximately from 1978 to 1995) and Generation Z (from 1995 to 2010) (Swanzen, 2018), have been found to be more willing to support social movements and fight for their rights (Bates et al., 2019) Bates et al. (2019) indicate that young adults are said to have a strong desire and ambition towards equality and justice, e.g. in the context of diversity, as well as environmental issues. In other words, they can be seen as the driving force of change related to inclusion, diversity, and many more social issues (Coffin et al., 2019).

However, parts of society still seem to show resistance towards gender equality and acceptance (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Within various contexts such as marketing, online algorithms and so forth, it is still common to exclusively focus on the binary genders. Marketing, in particular, tends to primarily address their products and advertising to the male and female genders – which is known as ‘gender marketing’ (Schroeder, 2020). Gender marketing is often associated with reinforcing (outdated) stereotypes and other discriminations based on gender (Grau & Zotos, 2016), which tends to result in gender inequality (Prothero & McDonagh, 2021). Even between the male and female genders, there is a very strong distinction in marketing, for example, by separating those genders based on specific gender roles or by developing products exclusively for one of the genders. This inequality is also reflected, for example, in the term ‘pink tax’, which refers to the fact that products specifically addressed to women are generally more expensive than products addressed to men (Guittar et al., 2021; Stevens & Shanahan, 2017).

Against this backdrop, it can be said that the ‘gender binary’ is still commonplace in society and, more specifically, in the marketplace (Schroeder, 2020). Young adults tend to still buy products that are, for example, ‘gendered’; being specifically aimed at one of the binary

genders. By buying such products, the binary tendencies in marketing are supported and reinforced (Murto, 2020). Therefore, even though young adults generally express their aversion towards marketing strategies based on gender (Grau & Zotos, 2016), a paradox can be detected in their purchasing behaviour. It suggests the existence of an imbalance between their perception and their behaviour towards gender marketing and its binarity. The so-called 'gender-binary paradox'.

Therefore, this study sets out to explore and investigate the perceptions, experiences, and behaviour among young adults towards gender marketing to examine the gender-binary paradox. In exploring this paradox, the study aims to offer a better understanding of the issues at hand and provide a systematic explanation.

In doing so, the following research questions will be examined:

*RQ1. How can the gender-binary paradox be explained?*

*RQ2. How do young adults experience gender-binary dynamics in marketing?*

To investigate and understand young adults' perceptions, experiences, and behaviour towards gender-binary in marketing and to yield insights into the gender-binary paradox, an exploratory study has been developed by means of a qualitative research design by conducting interviews. The interviews focus on young adults' general perception and behaviour towards gender marketing, its binarity, and the gender-binary paradox by investigating their associations and experiences. The study focuses on young adults since literature indicates that those generations drive social movements and societal changes, especially regarding diversity, inclusion, and other social issues (Coffin et al., 2019).

The structure of the remainder of this thesis is as follows: Firstly, a theoretical framework will be presented, discussing existing literature and important concepts. Within this section, a conceptual model was created with the intention to offer a better understanding of the connections between the concepts and the gender-binary paradox. In the following section, the method of the study will be explained. Meaning: the elaboration of the choices made in the data collection, the development process of important instruments, the sample, procedure of the interviews and the general structure of the analyses conducted. Additionally, the coding process is included, based on which the codebook was established. After that, the findings of the study are presented by evaluating the codes from the codebook based on their frequencies and connections, with an additional focus on the opinions of participants relevant to the context of the study. Lastly, the discussion part of this study will evaluate and reflect on the main findings, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

It is important to explore existing literature to understand gender marketing, its binarism, and the associated gender-binary paradox. Therefore, the first attention is given to explaining and visualising the gender-binary paradox to frame the issue at hand. Furthermore, existing literature about the current state of gender inclusion, important parties and gender marketing will be addressed to understand the context of this study and the theoretical foundation on which it builds. Additionally, since the study focuses on young adults and their general perceptions and behaviours towards gender marketing, literature about likely associations and experiences will be collected.

Since the topic is sparsely researched and the study is exploratory, the framework serves mainly as an understanding and initial starting point for exploring the topic. It is assumed that other concepts will emerge during the data analyses that could be important and impactful for the research and the general topic.

### **2.1 The gender-binary paradox**

In the context of the current state of gender inclusion and diversity, literature shows an inconsistency in the general perception and behaviour among young adults towards gender marketing. On the one hand, more and more people perceive themselves as being inclusive and supportive towards gender non-binary, which means that they also support the diverse gender categorisations besides male and female genders. Especially young adults have a generally negative perception of gender marketing, which could be related to the fact that it only focuses on and addresses the binary genders (Stevens, 2018). Stevens (2018) states that gender marketing has many downsides, such as reinforcing stereotypes and inequality, sexualisation and exclusion of gender outside the binarity. However, on the other hand, customers still tolerate and reinforce gender marketing and other areas that tend to support a focus on biological genders. This happens by, for example, buying gendered products or generally supporting brands that only focus on the male and female genders and neglect to address and include genders outside of those two categories (Murto, 2020).

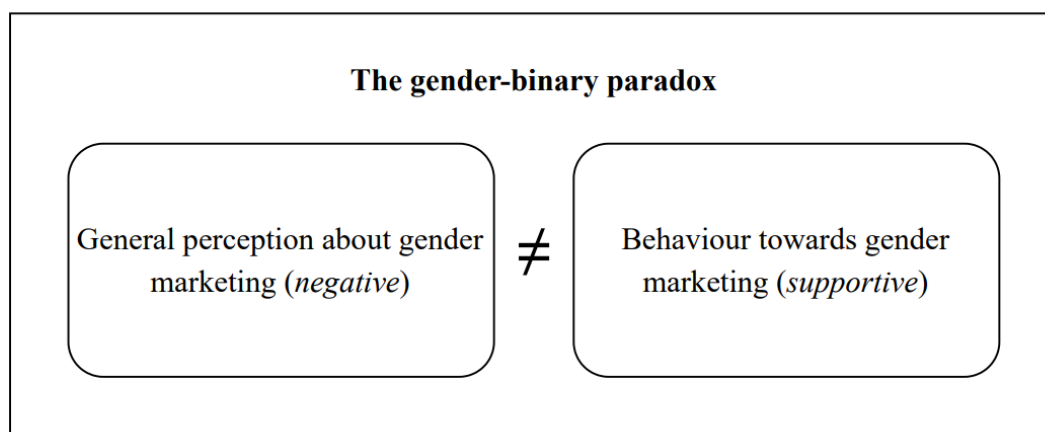
Accordingly, it is presumed that a so-called gender-binary paradox exists within society. This paradox assumes an inconsistency between a person's general perception and behaviour towards gender marketing and its binary tendencies. It indicates that people generally perceive gender marketing and its binarity negatively. However, they still buy products or support brands that reinforce gender marketing. Therefore, the differences and inconsistencies between a person's general perception and behaviour towards gender marketing result in the gender-



binary paradox (Figure 1). Thereby, the person's perception about gender marketing is negative, while the behaviour towards the issue is supportive.

**Figure 1**

*Visualisation of the gender-binary paradox in marketing (among young adults)*



## 2.2 Gender inclusion among young adults

To explore the gender-binary paradox and the general topic of gender marketing, it is essential to understand the wider context of these topics in terms of the current state of literature about gender inclusion and parties that are of importance for the issue.

Literature shows that some actions have already been taken to enhance gender inclusion. One example is the increased implementation of gender-inclusive language (Morgenroth et al., 2020). The inclusive language supports the diversity of people, especially in the context of gender, but also for race, culture and many more. It signals respect towards all people by listing the differences between the gender identities without displaying one specific gender as superior, highlighting the equality of all gender identities (Zimman, 2017).

The visibility of different gender identities on media platforms constantly increases (Morgenroth et al., 2020), and more and more people avoid brands and products that restrict their identity, especially in the context of gender. Therefore, reduced desirability of gendered products or products mainly based on gender roles of the binary genders can be observed. People increasingly wish to correlate their identity, values and beliefs with the products they buy and, therefore, develop a preference for brands and products that match these beliefs. Some customers tend to choose their products not based on their gender but other aspects such as sustainability or the ingredients within the products (Drake & Radford, 2018).

These changes are mainly owed to the many social movements and activists (Hyde et al., 2019), such as the LGBTQIA+ movement (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\*, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other non-heterosexual people, who feel part of the queer community) (Betts, n.d.).

These movements advocate equal rights of all kinds (Bates et al., 2019). In addition, literature states that younger generations are more open-minded and respectful toward the wider range of gender identities and are more willing to act upon these beliefs (Coffin et al., 2019). Thus, the fast growth of social movements, especially in the last decade, and society's general shift towards a more inclusive environment, can be attributed to young adults, including Generation Y and Z (Bates et al., 2019).

### **2.3 Gender marketing and gender binary**

Besides the topic of gender inclusion and its important parties, current literature on gender marketing is also necessary to understand the commonness of the strategy within the marketplace and its binary tendencies, to further understand the context of the study.

As mentioned above, the first steps of a slow shift towards a more inclusive and non-binary society have been taken recently, mainly through the actions of young adults. However, gender binary can still be found in most everyday tasks and environments, especially in marketing and retail. For example, men and women sections are separated into different floors within clothing stores, drugstores, or other stores. Children's toys are often divided into girls' and boys' toys, which shows that almost all products are gendered based on predefined gender stereotypes (Murto, 2020). McKeage et al. (2018) refer to the current marketplace as "a strongly binary, gendered marketplace" (p. 74) where "nonconformity frequently equals invisibility" (p. 74). It indicates that genders outside the binarity are invisible and underrepresented in today's marketplace; thus, they simply do not exist in it.

The general topic of gender marketing reaches far back in history, more than 50 years, and, to date, tends to represent the dominant marketing strategy (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Gender marketing can be defined as a specific marketing strategy where the behaviour, character traits and actions of a certain gender are analysed to understand how this specific gender can be best targeted and addressed (McKeage et al., 2018). So far, strategies and research about gender marketing only focus on the biological genders, male and female, and assume that these two genders differ in "their needs, wants, and behaviour" (Murto, 2020, p. 1).

In general, scholars assume that segmentation and gender categorisation are essential to effectively target a product to customers as they are believed to provide insight into their needs (Murto, 2020). However, products of gender marketing, therefore male and female products, often share the same characteristics (Drake & Radford, 2018). The only difference between them is the general design, packaging, and advertising. These aspects are often designed based on traditional and cultural "sex roles rooted in sex-trait stereotypes" (Drake & Radford, 2018,

p. 125). According to Drake and Radford (2018), the general strategy of gender marketing is sex-based and draws correlations between the gender of a person and the associated product preference.

## **2.4 The use of stereotypes and gender roles within gender marketing**

Since the study focuses on the gender-binary paradox and, therefore, on the perceptions of young adults towards gender marketing, existing literature about associations on gender marketing is collected, giving first insights into the perceptions and associations of the target group.

Existing literature shows that people in society have rather negative associations with gender marketing. They often associate it with negative aspects such as outdated stereotypes and reinforcing traditional and unrealistic gender roles for the binary gender, male and female (Stevens, 2018). Using such stereotypes and ‘differences’ of gender is common in gender marketing as used in traditional media and the online environment (Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Existing literature discusses so-called ‘outdated stereotyping’ and traditional gender roles in advertising mainly related to the female gender. Women are often stereotyped and depicted in traditional roles as mothers and homemakers, or for decorative purposes, by objectifying their bodies and beauty or sexualising them in general (Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020). Consequently, women are limited in what they are or could be, which means they are often limited to their bodies. Women are dehumanised through such limitations, and a sense of availability, exploitation, and mistreatment is shown, reinforcing sexism (Gurrieri, 2020). Nonetheless, men are also impacted by outdated stereotypes and gender roles within marketing. In the mindset of society and marketers, the perfect man is a strong and masculine person, without fear and feelings (Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020).

According to Aramendia-Muneta et al. (2020), these stereotypes are anchored within society’s mindset, which means that society has specific, often unrealistic expectations towards certain genders. Therefore, all genders suffer from stereotyping, especially when behaving inconsistently with these stereotypes. When someone does not behave within the gender roles, society often pressures them and excludes them since they do not conform to the norm (Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020).

To sum up, it can be said that there are negative impacts for all genders, limiting them to these expectations. Once a stereotype has spread in society, it is not easy to eliminate it (Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020). Thus, even if the area of advertising has slightly changed by slowly abandoning outdated stereotypes, for example, by depicting women more often in men-

dominated occupations, these traditional stereotypes are still used and anchored in the minds of society and result in the separation of gender (Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020; Stevens, 2018). Therefore, this study assumes that those associations influence the perception and behaviour of young adults.

## **2.5 Negative experiences with gender marketing**

Besides the gender-binary paradox, the study further investigates the experiences of young adults on gender-binary dynamics in marketing to understand the possible existence of the gender-binary paradox.

Besides the negative associations towards gender marketing and its binary tendencies, people also experience negative outcomes of gender marketing. Through the binarity of gender in gender marketing, an underrepresentation of other genders occurs (Gray et al., 2021; Gurrieri, 2020). McKeage et al. (2018) highlight the invisibility of gender in the marketplace outside of the binarity. Their study deals with customers' vulnerability in the marketplace, highlighting that some customers experience advantages and disadvantages that others do not. According to McKeage et al. (2018), customers outside the gender binary are more vulnerable than those that fit into the binary system. This means that non-binary genders are limited in self-expression since they do not fit into the binary dominated marketplace (Drake & Radford, 2018). McKeage et al. (2018) further highlight this underrepresentation and exclusion since the deeply rooted societal gender roles and expectations within the binary marketplace "can be marginalising for many people who have gender identities outside the biologically-based binaries" (p.77). They further state that it creates an "exclusionary environment for this group of consumers" (p.77), which concerns people with gender nonconformity.

According to McKeage et al. (2018), this exclusion from the marketplace can happen in different types. For example, it can be physical, so that there are only male and female sections, changing rooms and toilets, resulting in a lack of control for the people affected since they have no place to go. Additionally, it can be through interactions with the service or other customers. This can happen by being misgendered, which means being addressed with a different gender than the one you identify with. Moreover, it can also happen that the person is generally violated since people with gender nonconformity are perceived as entering a section or area they do not belong. All this, because they do not fit societies deeply rooted and outdated norms and beliefs of gender identities. The last type of exclusion is about the product. Besides physical and social exclusion, the product itself can be excluding. Most products are tailored for the ideal male or female person, which means that people outside of the binary may experience those products

do not fit their needs, such as being too small because of differences in biological body proportions (McKeage et al., 2018). For example, a transgender person may not have the body proportions assumed in marketing and cannot buy the desired clothing.

The underrepresentation of certain gender in marketing makes it seem like genders outside the binary are not good enough to exist and be displayed within advertising (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Consequently, these genders are discriminated against by not being included, which generally creates negative experiences with gender marketing. Thus, it is expected that young adults experience the marketplace as dominated by gender-binary, which excludes genders besides male and female and leads them to have negative perceptions about the marketing strategy.

## **2.6 The conceptual model of the gender-binary paradox**

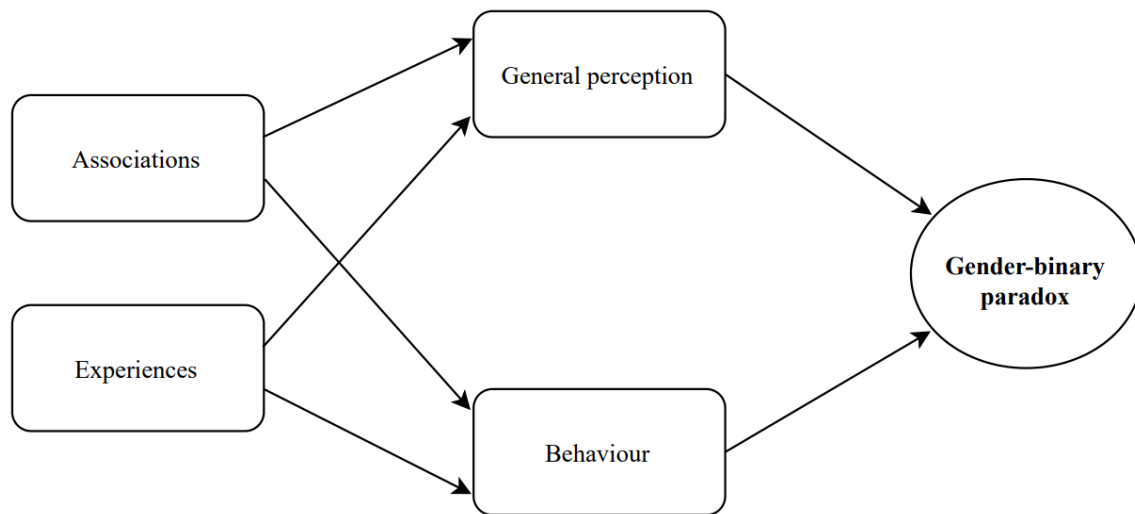
To sum it up, the findings of existing literature show a general trend within society towards more inclusion and diversity, especially among young adults. People are increasingly aware of other gender identities, besides the binary gender, male and female (Zimman, 2017). However, as already stated, gender marketing is still a popular and successful strategy in the contemporary marketplace (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Surprisingly, evidence within the literature shows that people within society generally have negative associations with gender marketing, such as using outdated stereotypes and reinforcing sexualisation of gender, especially women, and therefore, sexism. Furthermore, besides the negative associations, some members of society also have negative experiences with gender marketing, such as the underrepresentation of, especially genders besides the binary (Stevens, 2018).

Figure 2 shows that it is assumed that the associations and experiences influence young adults' general perception of gender marketing. Through the negative associations about gender marketing, such as stereotyping and sexualising gender, and the negative experiences that discriminate against specific genders by excluding them, gender marketing is perceived as negative. Furthermore, these two concepts are also assumed to influence the behaviour of young adults towards gender marketing.

Figure 2 further shows the previously mentioned gender-binary paradox that is assumed to occur due to the contrast between the general perception and the behaviour of young adults towards gender marketing. Therefore, the gender-binary paradox can be observed when the general perception of gender marketing of a person is negative, and the behaviour towards gender marketing of that same person is positive, thus, supportive towards this marketing strategy.

**Figure 2**

*The conceptual model of the gender-binary paradox*



Besides the displayed concepts within Figure 2, it is further assumed that during the study process, other concepts emerge that could influence the general perception or the behaviour, and therefore could reinforce the gender-binary paradox.

### 3. Method

For this study an exploratory research design was developed to tackle issues about gender marketing and the related gender-binary paradox to answer the following research questions:

*RQ1. How can the gender-binary paradox be explained?*

*RQ2. How do young adults experience gender-binary dynamics in marketing?*

Thus, the purpose of the study was to investigate and explore the topic of gender marketing, its binary tendencies and to explain and fathom the gender-binary paradox. This was done by focusing on collecting and analysing the perception and behaviour, hence, the associations and experiences of young adults towards these topics.

#### 3.1 Research design

For this study, the method of semi-structured interviews was used to collect the required data. The research method was selected since the nature of the study aims to acquire information about the participants' associations and experiences with gender marketing and their resulting general perception and behaviour. The method was favourable for the research since it can give insights into the participants' perceptions, behaviour, feelings, and beliefs (Newcomer et al., 2015). Through the study's exploratory nature, other possible factors that could influence the phenomenon can be detected through the individual answers of the interview participants.

A semi-structured interview is "a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions" (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 493). Thereby, it is common that only one respondent at a time is interviewed. As the name suggests, during a semi-structured interview, the questions do not necessarily have to be used verbatim but can be adapted to fit the interview flow. Hence, it is important to stay on topic, focussing on the aim of the interview and the information that are essential for the study. It is helpful to keep up with a general interview guideline while simultaneously working with the input of the individual participant (Newcomer et al., 2015).

Semi-structured interviews allow the collection of individual thoughts and beliefs about a specific topic from a carefully elaborated sample (Newcomer et al., 2015). In the case of this research, it is about the general perception and behaviour towards gender marketing and its binarity. The method is beneficial to examine "uncharted territory with unknown, but potential momentous issues" (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 494) since the participants have the opportunity to answer the open-ended questions freely. They can share their honest opinions on the topic

and are not bound to pre-defined answers. Due to the flexible nature of the semi-structured interviews, it was possible to adapt the interview questions tailored to the general atmosphere and situation of the individual interviews (Newcomer et al., 2015). It means that for all interviews the same interview guideline was used, and therefore, all interviews dealt with the same main topics. However, questions were adapted and improved during the process based on previous interviews and the interviewee's answers to ensure a favourable interview flow and support new arising topics.

Since the purpose of the interviews was to investigate and understand the participants' behaviour, it was important to keep possible biases in mind. For example, relying on self-reported behaviour can have some negative consequences on the accuracy of the collected data. Participants might avoid the disclosure of sensitive information about themselves or desire to be viewed favourably (Lavrakas, 2008). The intention was to reduce the effects of biases such as the social desirability bias through being transparent by informing the participants about the data collection and processing. The participants were assured that their data would be treated confidentially by remaining anonymous or storing the data on a secure external hard drive. Due to participants' anonymity, it was assumed that the participants were more willing to report their behaviour accurately (Lavrakas, 2008), especially because the behaviour was investigated by asking participants about daily situations and experiences, such as their shopping in drugstores or clothing stores, without framing gender marketing. These information allowed the researcher to infer the behaviour of the participants.

### **3.2 General measures**

The interviews took place in an online setting due to the circumstances dictated by the ever-changing COVID-19 regulations and to protect the participants and the researcher. The online interview sessions were conducted through the online communication programme Microsoft Teams. The interview sessions were online, 'face-to-face' interviews (webcam-based), and all interviews were screen recorded with the prior permission of the participants. The collected data were stored on an external hard drive, only accessible by the researcher. In general, the data were treated confidentially, for example by anonymizing all participants. The data collected were only used for this study and were not forwarded to third parties. All recordings of the interview sessions will be deleted after the completion of the study and only the anonymised transcripts will be retained.



### 3.3 Instruments

Due to the topic's academic novelty, the instruments included in the interview guideline, such as possible questions for the interview sessions, were independently established by the researcher and are not based on scales from the literature. Instead, the questions were established based on the findings of the theoretical framework and the established conceptual model. These information guided the development of the topics of the interview guideline. They were broadly structured into a sequence favourable for the flow of the interview sessions. Table A.1 in Appendix A shows how the findings and concepts of existing literature were used to develop the study's material, such as the interview guideline and questions.

Additionally, an informed consent form included in the participants' recruiting email was established. It is important to mention that all materials were prepared in German, as the interviews were conducted in German. The documents were then translated into English for this paper. The e-mail and the included informed consent form (German and English version) can be found in Appendix B.

The first set of instruments was dedicated to the general interview session. The interview guideline and list of questions consists of nine main topics and related questions with follow-up questions (Appendix C). The nine main topics were: '*General purchase intention/behaviour*', '*Areas of gender marketing*', '*Perceptions about gender marketing*', '*Gender representation in advertising/marketing*', '*Awareness about gender marketing*', '*Gender binary in marketing*', '*Perceptions of gender binary in marketing*', '*Gender-binary paradox*' and '*General opinion and ideas for change*'. These topics were established with possible questions that could be asked within the session and extended with follow-up questions such as "*Why/Why not?*". The follow-up questions should help to understand further why the participant perceived or experienced certain situations.

The second set of instruments used within the study were general questions about the demographics of the individual participant (see Appendix C). These questions were asked at the end of each interview session and included gender, age, highest educational level, occupational status, and household situation. These data were obtained with the objective to create an overview of and get insights into the sample, thereby ensuring that participants meet the pre-defined criteria set by the researcher (see section 3.5).

### 3.4 Pre-test

To test the quality of the interview instruments, pre-tests with four participants were conducted. These pre-tests were conducted to improve the interview guideline and questions and elaborate

and improve the general interviews to obtain the most insights into the topic and fit the study's purpose favourably. A detailed description of the participants of the pre-test can be found in the next section of this thesis in Table 1. Furthermore, a detailed overview of the individual duration, dates, and period of the pre-tests (and main interviews) can be found in Appendix D

The pre-test was divided into two rounds of testing. In the first round, two interview sessions with participants were conducted with the initial interview guideline. During these interviews, the researcher wrote down possible improvements that came up. Participants were further asked to provide general feedback related to the interview sessions. Next to this, the interview transcripts were skimmed to see whether the participant's information were sufficient to answer the study's research questions and investigate and understand the purpose of the study. The interview guideline was improved, and another interview session was conducted to test the improved interview guideline. After this session, the same procedure of detecting possible improvements was performed until the interview guideline was favourable to get the information necessary for the study and answer its research questions, which succeeded after the fourth pre-test.

The results of the first round of pre-tests revealed that the interview guideline questions were somewhat negatively framed by the researcher. For example, one question about negative and positive aspects (Topic 3) about using gender and gender characteristics to market a product was changed to start with the positive aspects. Furthermore, in the first round of pre-tests, it was detected that there was a need to reformulate the first question (Topic 1) about describing a purchase experience in the drugstore. For example, one participant's last drugstore visit was only to buy toilet paper, which did not contribute to the study. Based on that, the first question was changed in describing the last drugstore visit where one bought at least one hygiene product.

After the second round of pre-testing, another limitation was found in the interview guideline. In Topic 4, it was asked if there are products that are specifically marketed to only one gender. The intention of the question was not to find products that can only be used by one gender, such as tampons, but rather to name products that are mainly marketed to one gender. Hence, the question was changed to be more specific about the products the answer referred to. More generally, after the second round, it became clear that the researcher sometimes formulated the questions too long and occasionally combined two questions, resulting in participants experiencing difficulties remembering the question and answering it properly without asking to repeat it. Accordingly, the questions were generally cut shorter, and the researcher tried to be more precise in asking the questions.

The last round of pre-testing, the fourth and last pre-test, was sufficient, and the researcher decided not to change anything else in the guideline. It is important to mention that the pre-tests of the study mainly aimed to improve the guideline of the interviews and were not included in the study results.

### **3.5 Sampling procedure and participants**

For this study, the participant recruiting relied on non-probability sampling techniques since a specific target group with specified requirements was essential for the study's purpose, which will be explained in detail later in this section.

Non-probability sampling is a technique where the sample is selected based on the subjective judgement of the researcher instead of random selection. Due to the nature of the study, the non-probability sampling techniques of purposive/judgmental sampling and snowball sampling were chosen as favourable (Babbie, 2015).

The purposive/judgmental sampling technique is defined as: "A type of nonprobability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones will be most useful and representative" (Babbie, 2015, p.187). The researcher identified that it is essential for the study to include people who identify with the binary genders and people who identify with the non-binary genders. Therefore, the judgemental sampling technique was favourable to select important participants who were assumed to have a wide range of opinions on the topic.

The second sampling technique that was chosen was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is defined as: "A nonprobability sampling method, often employed by field research, whereby each person interviewed may be asked to suggest additional people for interviewing" (Babbie, 2015, p. 188). This technique was specially chosen to recruit participants that identify with non-binary genders. It is important to note that there were several individual runs of the snowball sampling. The researcher initially selected several participants based on the requirements explained in the next section. The snowball sampling method was then conducted with each participant individually, meaning that these participants could propose new potential participants.

As mentioned above, the participants had to fulfil some requirements to participate in the study. The first requirement was that the participants had to be from either Generation Y or Generation Z and within the age range from 18 to 30 years. Thus, it was focused on young adults. This requirement was chosen since literature suggests that people from these generations and age range better understand the relevance of gender inclusion and diversity, are more open-

mindful, and actively support it. They can be seen as the driving force of changes and improvements in many social issues, especially gender diversity (Coffin et al., 2019). Another important requirement was that the participants needed to have their own household or be responsible for their purchases, since the participants were asked to give their opinions on gender marketing and related products they were buying, so if someone else would buy those products for them, the answers would not have value for this study. Due to this research's limited scope and resources, it was only focused on consumers' perspective of gender marketing living in Germany.

To start with recruiting of participants for the study, friends, family, and fellow students were asked to suggest participants that could fit the requirements of the study. In order to do so, a pre-established e-mail with the purpose and topic of the study and the data collection procedure and privacy issues were sent to these potential participants (see Appendix B). Those interested in taking part in the study were asked to answer the email. The researcher then contacted all potential participants with further details and a date for the individual interview session. All participants were asked to forward the email to other potential participants who met the requirements.

The final sample for the interview sessions consists of 15 participants. Table 1 shows an overview of the distribution of demographics of these participants and of the four participants of the pre-test sessions.

**Table 1**

*Participants' demographics distribution (pre-test, main interviews and total)*

	Pre-test (N = 4)	Interviews (N = 15)	Total (N = 19)
<b>Age</b>			
Range	21-26	21-27	21-27
Average	23.5	23.4	23.42
<b>Gender</b>			
Diverse/Non-binary	N = 0	N = 3	N = 3
Female	N = 3	N = 6	N = 9
Male	N = 1	N = 5	N = 6
No gender	N = 0	N = 1	N = 1

**Table 1** (continued)

Highest educational level			
O-level	N = 0	N = 1	N = 1
Highschool diploma	N = 3	N = 9	N = 12
Bachelor's degree	N = 1	N = 4	N = 5
Master's degree	N = 0	N = 1	N = 1
Occupational status			
Student	N = 4	N = 10	N = 14
Full-time	N = 0	N = 5	N = 5
Household situation			
Living alone	N = 1	N = 5	N = 6
Shared house	N = 2	N = 3	N = 5
With parents	N = 1	N = 2	N = 3
With partner	N = 0	N = 4	N = 4
With partner and child(ren)	N = 0	N = 1	N = 1

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For the main interview sessions, all interviews were conducted between the 26th of July and 4th of August 2021. The total duration of all 15 interviews was six hours, 51 minutes and 11 seconds. On average, the interviews lasted 27 minutes and 25 seconds. Thereby, the shortest interview lasted 18 minutes, and the longest lasted 44 minutes and 14 seconds. As mentioned in the pre-test section of this paper, a detailed overview of the individual duration, dates and period can be found in Appendix D.

The data collection of this study was discontinued after 15 interviews were conducted. This was due to the scope of this research, as well as an absence of new insights, and increased repetition of answers provided by participants. At this point, the researcher concluded that the research was saturated and terminated the data collection process.

### 3.6 Procedure

Before the individual interview sessions could be started, the researcher sent an information/recruiting email to possible participants (as explained in the previous section). This email included the informed consent form and general information about the study and its purpose. Then, when the participants agreed to participate in the study, the researcher invited them to an interview session through the communication medium Microsoft Teams.

At the beginning of the session, the researcher welcomed the participant to the interview session and introduced herself. After that, the participants were asked to introduce themselves shortly. The researcher then briefly explained the purpose of the study, that the data will be treated confidentially and anonymously, that the participant can withdraw from the study at any time without a specific reason, that honest and accurate answers are appreciated and without any judgement and that the session will be screen recorded. After the presentation of the informed consent form information and a brief explanation about the purpose of the study, possible questions from the participants were answered. Lastly, the researcher briefly explained the general procedure of the interview. Then, with the consent of the participant, the researcher started the recording.

With the start of the recording, the interview session began. Before starting with the topics of the interview guideline, the researcher again asked for the consent of the participants regarding taking part in the study, being recorded and how the data will be collected and treated. The individual participants were asked questions related to the interview guideline (see Appendix C). According to the unique answers of the participants, the questions were adopted and tailored to the individual interview sessions. After the nine main questions with related follow-up questions, the researcher asked the demographically related questions. After these questions, the interview session was finished. The researcher answered further questions from the participant, if any have arisen, and closed the session by thanking the participant. All participants were provided with the mail address of the researcher if any questions arose after the interview session.

After all interview sessions were conducted, the researcher started to transcribe the recorded sessions. Thereby, it was important to exclude personal information that could reveal the identity of the participants; therefore, all participants were randomly assigned to a number.

### **3.7 Analyses**

Since the study is based on exploratory research, no pre-defined codebook was established to analyse the data collected. Nonetheless, the concepts and general structure of the interview guideline, which was established based on existing literature (see Appendix A), were used as starting points of the coding procedure. For this procedure, the analysis methods of open coding, axial coding and selective coding were used to edit and create a codebook. To perform the coding, the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti was used.

Atlas.ti is a software that helps analyse a large amount of qualitative data effectively and efficiently, such as text, audio, or video data. Furthermore, it assists the researcher to

arrange and organising identified codes within qualitative data analysis, simplifying the structure and interpretation of qualitative data (ATLAS.ti, 2021). In the following sections, all choices regarding the analysis of the data will be discussed and justified.

### ***3.7.1 Reliability and validity***

In social science, the reliability and validity of research are often equated with trustworthiness and legitimacy, or rather they are elements of the trustworthiness of a study (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Rose and Johnson (2020) indicate that the “[t]rustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the systematic rigour of the research design, the credibility of the researcher, the believability of the findings, and applicability of the research methods” (p.3). So, the overall quality of qualitative research.

Originally, reliability and validity were coined in quantitative research and transferred to qualitative research (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020). Nonetheless, literature about the topic is contradictory. Many scholars believe that reliability and validity are indeed important in qualitative research; however, it does not need to be calculated, for example, through intercoder reliability (ICR). So, even if some scholars see this method as essential (Rose & Johnson, 2020), opinions differ. Thus, O’Connor and Joffe (2020) argue that several scholars believe there is no universal way to conduct and analyse qualitative research. Based on the research topic, qualitative research can be adapted, and methods that fit best, from the researcher’s point of view, can be used to analyse the data. Hence, there is no universal step by step guideline, and qualitative research gives the researcher certain freedom on how to conduct and interpret it (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020).

For this specific study, the researcher abstained from using the popular method of ICR. First of all, the most frequent argument against the method is that it “essentially contradicts the interpretative agenda of qualitative research” (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020, p. 4). It means that ICR somehow implies that there is only one single meaning in the qualitative data. Accordingly, the method does not fit the study’s general nature since this study aims to investigate a wide range of perspectives and opinions of young adults, thereby placing great emphasis on the gathering of individual opinions and beliefs. Secondly, the used coding schema of this study is open, axial and selective coding, which fits the study’s exploratory nature. For the study, no pre-defined codebook was used to code the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews. Conversely, it was impossible to calculate the ICR since it would not be possible to be coherent in the coding process without a codebook.

Hence, in this study, the researcher focussed on subjectivity and reflexivity within the process. These concepts can generally be seen as a strength of qualitative research and differentiate it from quantitative research. The subjectivity and reflexivity of conducting and interpreting qualitative research allow different perspectives to view a social phenomenon, such as the gender-binary paradox (Rose & Johnson, 2020), by including various opinions from different people. In addition to that, the reliability and validity of the study are given by focussing on the concept of trustworthiness, as mentioned above. The reliability is assured through consistency in the use of methods, providing clear definitions of concepts and codes and transparently documenting all steps of the research process and justified decision processes to ensure imitability. Furthermore, the validity of the research will be ensured through the accuracy of the research findings (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Therefore, the results section of this paper will include an appropriate amount of data fragments and citations to ensure this accuracy (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020; Rose & Johnson, 2020), which in turn provides trustworthiness (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

### ***3.7.2 Coding***

For the analyses, different coding methods were used to categorise and structure the data to have an overview of all findings and information from the interviews (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The codes that arise during the process can be seen as “building blocks” (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020, p.2), which structure the data’s analysis and interpretation. Due to the study’s exploratory nature and limited available literature, the researcher abstained from establishing a pre-defined codebook and coded the interviews openly. However, to have a starting point for the coding process, the concepts from the theoretical model and the structure of the interview guide were used to guide the coding process.

To start with the coding procedure, the coding technique of open coding was used. Open coding can be defined as an “initial classification and labelling of concepts in qualitative data analysis” (Babbie, 2015, p. 388). Thereby, the researcher examines and questions the data at hand and starts with openly coding the data based on first impressions (Babbie, 2015). After the open coding, the coding technique of axial coding was used. Babbie (2015) defines axial coding as a “reanalysis of the results of open coding” (p. 389), where the previous codes are combined into more general codes or concepts. After creating these general codes, the coding technique of selective coding was used on the data. This coding technique builds on the previous coding techniques. In this step, more central concepts are identified that help organise the



general concepts and make the data clearer and easier to understand, compare, and interpret (Babbie, 2015).

An overview with examples of the process of this coding procedure can be found in Table E.1 in Appendix E. Finally, from these codes and concepts, a codebook was established (see Appendix F).

### 3.8 Codebook

The final codebook consists of 79 codes. Those codes are divided into two main categories: descriptive codes and main codes. Within the 15 transcripts, a total of 988 sections were coded. On average, there were 65.9 codes per transcript ranging from 42 to 87 codes per transcript. In the following, the codes of the study are listed and explained.

#### 3.8.1 Descriptive codes

The descriptive codes of the study include demographic codes and codes that help categorise the data objectively. The descriptive codes comprise a total of 18 and are all categorical codes, meaning they have related subcodes. Table 2 shows an overview of all descriptive codes, their subcodes and related descriptions/definitions.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive codes*

Main codes	Subcodes	Description/Definition
Affectedness	affected	The code <i>Affectedness</i> refers to whether the participant is affected by gender marketing or not. Thus, a person affected by gender marketing, for example, identifies with a gender not included in marketing. In contrast, a person not affected by gender marketing, for example, identifies with one of the binary genders and can identify with related products.
	not affected	
Awareness	high awareness	The code <i>Awareness</i> refers to the participant's awareness of gender marketing, ranging from high to low awareness.
	medium awareness	

**Table 2** (continued)

	low awareness	A participant with high awareness is familiar with the topic and has already dealt with it in detail. Whereas a participant with medium awareness recognises products of gender marketing but has not otherwise dealt with the subject. Someone with low awareness is not aware of the topic at all.
Division of store	binary	The code <i>Division of store</i> refers to the participant's perception of how individual stores divide their inventory. For example, the subcode binary refers to stores that only represent the female and male gender. The subcode non-binary refers to stores that include all genders, for example, by focussing on unisex products.
	non-binary	
Supportive behaviour	supportive	The code <i>Supportive behaviour</i> refers to how the participants behave towards gender marketing, thus, if they are supportive, sometimes supportive, or not supportive, towards this strategy. Therefore, for example, participants that are supportive buy products that are specially established for the gender they identify. Furthermore, participants that are sometimes supportive also buy gendered products; however, they also buy products for another gender besides their own. Lastly, participants who are not supportive pay attention to not buying any products established for a specific gender.
	sometimes supportive	
	supportive	
	not supportive	
Target group	female target group	The code <i>Target group</i> refers to the sections within the interviews where the participant mentioned the target groups of different products. In the context of this study, the target groups are based on gender.
	male target group	
	gender-neutral target group	
	target group	

### 3.8.2 Main codes

The main codes of the study help structure the individual perceptions and experiences of the participants. Therefore, nine super categories within the interviews were identified, with 52 corresponding subcodes. In the following, these main codes are introduced and described. The detailed and full codebook with further descriptions of the subcodes and examples from the interviews can be found in Appendix F.

**Advantages of gender marketing.** The code Advantages of gender marketing refers to the participant's opinion about the advantages and positive aspects that gender marketing strategy can bring. For this code, four subcodes were identified: (1) *guidance*, (2) *fit*, (3) *formation of identification*, and (4) *profit*.

**Advertising.** The code Advertising refers to different aspects and characteristics that participants recognised in advertising related to gender marketing, based on the gender displayed in the advertising. For this code, five subcodes were identified: (1) *physical characteristics*, (2) *personal characteristics*, (3) *product category*, (4) *product characteristics*, and (5) *design/setup*.

**Areas of gender marketing.** The code Areas of gender marketing refers to areas in the participant's lives where gender marketing has been recognised. This code includes six subcodes: (1) *beverages*, (2) *children's items*, (3) *clothing*, (4) *cosmetics/hygiene articles*, and (5) *everywhere*.

**Disadvantage of gender marketing.** The code Disadvantages of gender marketing refers to the participant's opinion about the disadvantages and negative aspects that gender marketing strategy can bring. For this code, 12 subcodes were detected within the interviews: (1) *confusion*, (2) *discomfort*, (3) *discrimination*, (4) *exclusion*, (5) *gender roles*, (6) *inequality*, (7) *personal restriction*, (8) *pink tax*, (9) *separation of gender*, (10) *sexism*, (11) *stereotyping*, and (12) *nonessential*.

**Experiences.** The code Experiences refers to the participant's experiences within different kinds of stores. For this code, four subcodes were identified: (1) *clothing store*, (2) *drugstore*, (3) *online environment*, and (4) *unisex store*.

**General perception.** The code General perception refers to the participant's general perception of the topic of gender marketing. For this code, two subcodes were identified within the interviews: (1) *indifferent* and (2) *negative*.

**Ideas for change.** The code Ideas for change refers to the participant's opinion on improving marketing to be more inclusive towards all genders. Within the interviews, four subcodes for Ideas of change were detected: (1) *education*, (2) *marketing*, (3) *parenting*, and (4) *unisex*.

**Possible reasons for the support of gender marketing.** The code, Possible reasons for the support of gender marketing, refers to the reasons the participants came up with why customers accept and support gender marketing. For this code, nine subcodes were identified: (1) *effortlessness*, (2) *fear*, (3) *habit*, (4) *larger target group/profit*, (5) *only option*, (6) *preference*, (7) *social environment*, (8) *lack of awareness*, and (9) *upbringing*.

**Product choice.** The code Product choice refers to the participant's purchase choices, so why they bought certain products. For this code, seven subcodes were detected: (1) *based on gender*, (2) *fits needs*, (3) *ingredients*, (4) *price*, (5) *routine*, (6) *scent*, and (7) *sustainability*.

## 4. Results

The result section of this thesis displays the main findings of the study. In the following section, important findings regarding participants' perception, attitudes, and behaviour towards gender marketing will be presented and related to the gender-binary paradox, including possible explanations. The section continues with the general experiences of participants regarding gender marketing. Lastly, additional findings that occurred during the interviews, important to further explore the topic of gender marketing and explain the gender-binary paradox, such as participants affectedness, awareness, and their expression for the need for change in marketing, are presented.

### 4.1 The gender-binary paradox

The findings of the interviews show evidence for the presence of the gender-binary paradox within the marketplace. The participants of the study expressed a generally negative perception and attitude towards gender marketing. However, they simultaneously admitted that they still support the marketing strategy by buying products specifically targeted for their biological gender.

#### 4.1.1 Participants' perceptions and behaviour towards gender marketing

In general, the attitude and perception of the participants of this study were mainly negative but sometimes also indifferent towards gender marketing, as measured through the code *General perception*. Most participants stated that they perceive gender marketing as nonessential and overall negative. For example, participant 7 mentioned that “*gender marketing is bullshit*”, and participant 9 clearly stated: “*I think it is bullshit. I do not see anything positive in it*”.

Besides these negative perceptions and attitudes, two participants also indicated that their perception of gender marketing is indifferent. According to them, their purchasing behaviour is mainly led by product preference, referred to as a focus on features and properties of the product, and an attitude of indifference towards marketing strategies based on gender. Thus, they also buy products not specifically marketed towards their biological gender. Participant 13, for example, stated:

*I have to say I did not care at all. [...] when the men's shaving foam [...] is empty, for example, then I also buy it in the women's department. I do not have a problem with that now. I know that most of the ingredients are the same. That it is actually the same*

*product, and just because it has different packaging, I do not go home without shaving cream.*

To sum it up, the code *General perception* shows that the participants had two main perceptions. On the one hand, most participants indicated that gender marketing is overall negative and nonessential. On the other hand, a few participants also did not care if their products were for their specific gender and, therefore, had an indifferent perception of gender marketing. For these participants, their product choice is based on their individual needs, regardless of gender-based marketing. Remarkably, none of the participants had a positive perception and attitude towards gender marketing.

**Advantages and disadvantages of gender marketing.** Besides their general attitude and perception, participants also mentioned associations in terms of advantages and disadvantages of gender marketing. It was prominent that the participants came up with more disadvantages (N = 12) than advantages (N = 4). The most frequently mentioned disadvantages of gender marketing were *discomfort, exclusion, gender roles, inequality, and personal restriction*. Less often mentioned and, therefore, less prominent disadvantages for the participants were *confusion, discrimination, the pink tax, separation of gender, sexism, stereotyping, and nonessential*. Advantages mentioned by the participants were *formation of identification, guidance, profit, and fit*.

The most frequently mentioned disadvantage of gender marketing was *discomfort*, which 13 participants mentioned in their interviews. This disadvantage was mainly used when referring to people who do not identify with one of the binary genders wanting to buy products for themselves. For example, participant 8 indicated that those people “*probably feel bad or weird about being in the department they do not outwardly belong to*”. It indicates that they feel uncomfortable when going in the department of the opposite gender of their biological gender, as participant 16 described: “*I do not do that either, because I think that is the men’s department. And I am not a man, then everyone thinks, what is she doing there*”. In addition, the participants generally indicated that other people’s opinions make shopping in the opposite department uncomfortable for them. For example, participant 7 described a situation like this by saying: “*how stupidly you are just looked at*”. This statement is supported by participant 17, who indicated that it could happen, that “*they get stupid looks or a derogatory remark afterwards*”, which indicates a lack of tolerance towards gender diversity and inclusion.

Furthermore, most participants (N = 12) mentioned *exclusion* as a disadvantage of gender marketing, which they mentioned within two different contexts. On the one hand, participants generally stated that marketing completely excludes genders besides the binary genders, female and male. Participant 10 describes this exclusion as trying “*to find acceptance and then still be so ignored by the whole industry*”. In addition, participant 6 mentioned that those people are “*simply discriminated against by products, are not integrated into them, in advertising or their presentation*”. On the other hand, marketing excludes them since special products important for some genders besides the binary genders are also not integrated within advertising. Participants 6, for example, mentioned: “*there is no advertising for products that only these gender minorities need. So, I have never seen an advertisement for any kind of binder or anything*”. Thus, participants’ experiences and associations with gender marketing generally show that genders besides the two biological genders are excluded from marketing and advertising. It can consequently result in those people experiencing feelings of inadequacy about themselves, such as participant 16 describes:

*You do not even know who you are, and you are told that you are false. You do not exist. There are only two binary roles, but suppose you are somewhere in between these roles; you are wrong because there is no place for you there.*

This was affirmed by participant 5, who stated: “*I think people are just afraid of losing their social status or not fitting in so that they are excluded or something*”. This statement indicates that besides the actual exclusion of gender outside the binary gender in marketing, people also fear the general exclusion from society when acting or looking different to what is presented in marketing.

The next frequently mentioned disadvantage of gender marketing was *inequality*. For this disadvantage, it was prominent that it mainly referred to the inequality between the male and female genders within stores. Most participants mentioned that nearly all stores offer more female-oriented than male-oriented products. Participant 9 stated: “*The selection in the women’s section is much bigger than in the men’s section*”. In addition, the participants also indicated that the genders are separated, so that “*men have a separate area, which is also quite manageable. And the majority is simply for women*”.

Moreover, participants further mentioned that *gender roles* are another disadvantage of gender marketing. Participants generally mentioned gender roles in a negative context by using words such as “*toxic*” (participant 7). The participants also negatively described the effect of

gender roles on people, for example, by saying: *“these gender roles, this need of belonging is actually difficult, that you are always pushed into a role, even as a child”* (participant 16). It indicates that the participants associate gender roles as something obsessive that partly pushes people into a role they do not feel comfortable in just to be accepted in society.

A substantial part of participants also mentioned the disadvantage of *personal restriction* (N = 10) during their interviews. This disadvantage is not only in the context of pushing people into different roles accepted by society but rather about people not being able to express their true identities and selves because of gender marketing. In this context, participant 6 mentioned that *“it definitely restricts a lot right from the start. So many people do not use products because they are not for their gender”*. Furthermore, since gender marketing only includes the binary genders, therefore only develops products for female and male customers, participant 9 stated that gender marketing also puts people *“into pigeonholes, norms that they are somehow supposed to represent, even though they cannot actually think about them consciously or they are not given the freedom to think about who they actually want to be, what they actually like”*. Therefore, participants believe that a person who cannot identify with one of the binary genders is restricted in expressing their true selves due to the limited availability of products without a binary focus.

The participants were also asked to think about positive and advantageous aspects of gender marketing for customers during the interviews. It was prominent that some of the participants needed extra time or took a break to be able to answer the questions about positive aspects of gender marketing. Many of the participants had trouble coming up with positive and advantageous aspects of gender marketing. For example, participant 7 stated: *“I do not believe I can think of anything positive about it”* when asked about those aspects.

Nonetheless, the participants came up with four advantages of gender marketing. The most frequently mentioned advantage was *formation of identification*. Nearly all participants (N = 10) mentioned statements such as *“you could perceive it positively that it contributes to the identification”* (participant 7), or *“the only positive thing is that they know it and can perhaps identify themselves and thus build up their identity”* (participant 9). Some participants justified these statements because they perceived identifying with one of the binary genders as easier. For example, participant 15 stated: *“Through this, I believe that simply the majority of people feel they belong in the gender they are born in. It is very easy to differentiate there. Like, okay, I identify as a man”*. These statements indicate that some participants believe that gender marketing can help form an identity because it can somehow guide them by providing a simplified product choice.



The findings of the subcode *guidance*, which was used by ten participants during their interviews, can support this statement. They mentioned that a positive aspect of gender marketing could be its guidance because gender marketing can help customers find products that fit their needs. For example, participant 8 indicates: “*you have a guide if you do not know what to buy*”. Similar to this, participant 11 stated: “*At least you know where to look*”. Therefore, the participants perceive gender marketing as advantageous since it can guide them to find products they probably like and fit their needs.

During the interviews, some participants also mentioned *profit* and *fit* as advantages of gender marketing. For example, participant 14 stated: “*in the end, a business wants to make money somehow*”, and participant 6 mentioned: “*I think it is very profitable*”. These statements show that the participants know that gender marketing is a profitable strategy within contemporary marketing. In the case of the code *fit*, participants mentioned “*often both men and women have a different body type, and accordingly all the things have to be tailored differently*” (participant 13). Moreover, the participants indicated that the differences in body types are integrated within gender marketing. Therefore, someone with the biological female gender is more likely to find clothes in the women’s section than in the men’s section, such as participant 15 indicated: “*But yes, it should be relatively easy for a woman to find trousers in the women’s department*”.

In general, the fact that the participants came up with more negative aspects than positive ones shows that the participants’ general perception and opinion towards gender marketing tend to be overall more negative. It was also more difficult for the participants to find positive and advantageous aspects of gender marketing. Many of them needed more time to develop positive aspects or did not know any at all. Lastly, it was prominent that the positive aspects mentioned by participants often related to the situation of others and not themselves.

#### ***4.1.2 Participants’ product choices and behaviour towards gender marketing***

The study explored whether the participants behaved supportive, sometimes supportive, or not supportive towards gender marketing and possible reasons for that. Additionally, it investigated what aspects the participants based their product choices on to better understand their purchase intentions and behaviour.

**Behavioural support.** Table 3 shows the distribution of the level of behavioural support among the participants. It indicates that more than half of the participants support or sometimes support gender marketing by, for example, buying products exclusively addressed to their biological gender.

Nevertheless, Table 3 further shows that a large part (N = 6) of participants does not support gender marketing. Instead, those participants indicated that they generally buy gender-neutral products, such as participant 7 mentioned: “*the shampoo is very neutral, also from the packaging*”, and only on some very rare occasions, for example, if there is no gender-neutral product available, buy ‘gendered’ products.

**Table 3**

*Supportive behaviour among the participants*

Main code	Subcodes	Frequency
(N=15)	supportive	N = 4
	sometimes supportive	N = 5
	not supportive	N = 6

**Product choice.** The participants mentioned seven product characteristics that influence their purchase decisions in different stores. The most frequently used factors were *sustainability, routine, ingredients* and *based on gender*. The remaining factors, *fit needs, price, and scent* were less often mentioned and, therefore, not so prominent for the participants.

Ten different participants mentioned *sustainability* as a reason for their product choice. Those participants indicated that they care for the environment and want to ensure that the products they buy are sustainable and environmentally friendly. For example, participant 10 mentioned: “*I try to make it as ethical and vegan as possible, that is, against animal suffering. I try to pay attention to that*”. Similarly, participant 13 stated: “*In general, sustainability is the most important thing for me*”.

Half of the participants (N = 7) also indicated that they pay attention to the *ingredients* within the products. For example, participant 15 mentioned: “*I pay [...] attention to the ingredients*”. For some participants, the product’s ingredients must be natural and not harmful to their bodies. Participant 7, for example, stated: “*it is important to me that they do not have*

*any fragrances. [...] just not so blatantly irritating ingredients, so something like alcohol [...] I pay much attention to the ingredients”.*

Apart from that, habitual behaviour, so their routine, plays a crucial role in their product choices for eight participants. For example, the participants indicated that they regularly buy the same products, such as participant 11: *“I always use the same shampoo for my hair because it is the best”*. The participants further mentioned that if they had good experiences with a product and were satisfied, they would be willing to buy it again. This was also the case for participant 18, who said: *“I always buy from experience, so I buy the same shampoo and the same deodorant, so to speak”*.

Furthermore, it was prominent that some participants connected the factor *routine* with the factor *based on gender*. In general, using the factor *based on gender* indicates that participants buy products designed specifically for their biological gender. The connection with the factor *routine* implies that the participants who mentioned gender as a factor for their product choice also indicate that they are probably used to buying products for their gender. For example, participant 12 stated: *“When I am looking for a shampoo, I go straight to the women’s section and do not even look in the men’s section. So, I never really thought about it consciously before. I just went straight there”*. In addition, it indicates that some participants never had a look at the products for the opposite gender, such as participant 16 stated: *“Well, I personally would look in the women’s section, but I personally have never bought anything in the men’s section either, to be honest”*.

The statements about the product choices of the participants show that some participants still buy their products based on their gender, which they often justify with their routine and habit. However, it was prominent that most participants indicated that aspects such as sustainability or ingredients are more important when deciding which products to buy.

**Possible reasons to support gender marketing.** To better understand the product choices of the participants, especially concerning product choices based on gender identities, the participants were asked to think and reflect on possible reasons to support gender marketing. During the interviews, the participants mentioned nine possible reasons for accepting and supporting gender marketing among young adults. The most frequently mentioned reasons were *habit, upbringing, social environment, only option* and *preference*. Less often mentioned reasons were *larger target group/profit, effortless, fear, and lack of awareness*.

Except for one participant, all participants stated that they often exclusively purchase their products in the departments of their biological gender because of their *habit*. Participant

7, for example, stated: *“I think it is also the power of habit somewhere”*, and participant 11 further said: *“Well, I think it is just a matter of habit for me because it has always been like that”*. Participants indicated that they are used to using products and departments exclusively addressed to their specific gender.

Closely related to habit, a large part of the participants also mentioned *upbringing* as another possible reason (N = 11). Participants indicated that parental influence in their childhood affected their product choices. Most of the participants of this study believe that upbringing has a big impact on how you behave towards gender marketing and your product choices. For example, participant 6 mentioned: *“Well, I think a big point is [...] family, that the older generation still transmits it from an early age. So, the things that your parents buy for you, [...] perhaps also support, what you then buy”*.

Related to the previous reason, the reason of *social environment* was frequently mentioned by the participants (N = 8). The participants believe that a person’s *social environment* has a big influence on how they behave. They also believe that people still support and buy specifically gendered products since it is accepted and anchored within society and their social environment. Participant 16, for example, mentioned: *“it is also difficult because people still think that way because that is still anchored in many people’s minds. You have to be this toxic [...] masculine, and you are not allowed to buy this women’s product”*. Similar to that statement, also participant 19 explained: *“gender-specific expectations and prejudices and also the identification with gender is somehow maintained. Thus, in that sense, the identification with the gender that is attributed to one with these characteristics and the gender binary is just so solidified”*.

Moreover, many participants mentioned as a reason for the support of gender marketing that products based on gender are simply the *only option* in marketing and advertising (N = 10). For example, participant 8 explained this by saying:

*There are not many products that are not gendered, [...] in the drugstore at least, [...] I can either buy a shower gel that was in the men’s section or that was in the women’s section [...] a third shelf does not exist. So, I have to buy one of them.*

Participant 13 supported this statement and indicated that people that do not identify with one of the binary genders do not have an alternative besides the products for women or men by stating: *“Yes, I don’t know if they have many choices, because of course they buy the products*

*that are offered so aggressively through this gender marketing. But you don't have much of an alternative".*

More than half of the participants mentioned *preference* as another possible reason for supporting gender marketing. This reason indicates that people prefer to buy products developed for their specific gender. For example, participant 18 supports this statement by saying:

*Yes, because I simply believe [...] this is a product that is for me as a man. [...] It is [...] somehow tailored to me [...] the fragrance of the shampoo or something like that makes it more of a product that suits me or what I like.*

During the interviews, the participants came up with various possible reasons for supporting gender marketing. Apart from their personal preference for certain products, participants explain their support of gender marketing as the outcome of their upbringing, the influence of the social environment, as well as the formation of habits. However, the limited range of products that are not addressed to a certain gender is another factor that influences their choice since they have no other options.

## **4.2 Participants' experiences with gender-binary dynamics in marketing**

The interviews show that the participants experience gender marketing and the marketplace as dominated by the binary genders. During the interviews, the participants mentioned various areas of gender marketing, their experiences with binarity in advertising and among stores and products of the marketplace. The reactions of the participants indicate that there are large differences regarding marketing strategies between products targeted for a male audience and those for a female audience. The findings further show that the participants experience negative outcomes of gender marketing, such as the exclusion of genders outside the gender binary and the separation of gender based on differences created by underlying social norms.

### **4.2.1 Areas of gender marketing**

The participants of the study were asked to reflect on areas within marketing and the retail sector where they experienced gender marketing. During the interviews, the participants identified five areas where they experienced gender marketing: *clothing, cosmetic/hygiene articles, beverages, children's items* and *everywhere*.

The two most frequently mentioned areas where participants experienced gender marketing were *clothing* and *cosmetics/hygiene articles*. Participants indicated that especially those areas in marketing are separated by the binary genders so that the products are exclusively categorised for the male and female genders. For example, participant 18 stated: “*of course clothing is very conspicuous with gender marketing*”. Additionally, the participants further mentioned that products such as “*deodorant and shavers*” (participant 5), “*decorative cosmetics, such as make-up*” (participant 15) and other products within the drugstore are mainly targeted for one specific gender.

Besides these two areas, the area of *beverages* was also mentioned when thinking about areas of gender marketing. For example, participants mentioned that they experienced gender marketing while “*grocery shopping or [...] when you go out to eat*” (participant 12). Some participants further highlighted that this is especially the case when the food is “*specially designed for children*” (participants 16), such as sweets and confectionary targeted specifically for boys or girls. Apart from beverages, *children’s items*, in general, were mentioned as a big area of gender marketing. For example, participant 7 mentioned that “*in general toys*” are always separated by gender. Therefore, there is always a version for girls and one for boys.

It was prominent that three participants mentioned that they do not know an area where gender marketing is not represented. Participant 8 stated: “*Yes, everywhere. In fact, in every shop you go, there is gender marketing*”. These participants believe that mainly every product is established for one specific gender or has two versions, one for women and one for men.

The findings show that the participants came up with various areas in which gender marketing is present. However, especially big areas such as clothing, cosmetics and beverages are dominated by gender marketing. Stores and products are separated by the binary genders, which means that the products are either exclusively addressed to one of the binary genders, or there are two versions of the same product.

#### **4.2.2 Experiences in stores**

The reactions of the participants indicated that their experiences are based almost exclusively on stores, both physical and online, that use a binary-oriented retail layout. For example, participant 12 mentioned: “*I would say that everything is always relatively similar. That the men have a separate area, which is also quite manageable. And the majority is simply for women*”.

In the case of the online environment, participants had slightly different experiences. The participants mentioned that in the online environment, the separation of gender is even

more present. For example, since the female and male departments in a physical clothing store are next to each other, it is more accessible to compare these departments. However, in an online environment, participants experienced that it is even more separated because, in most cases, the customers have to indicate their gender when logging into their account. This feature can lead to favourable custom advertising, but also the consequence that they are only presented with the items that are designed for their biological gender. Participant 6 explained this in very detail by saying:

*I find it even more extreme online because you do not have these aisles [...] you just go through, but you really have to choose whether it is presented to you or not, and it is often not even possible to see both sections at the same time.*

It was further prominent that mainly all participants had many experiences within the clothing store, drugstore, and online environment.

When asked about experiences with unisex shops, i.e. shops without a focus on binary genders, many participants could not name an example without this focus on binary genders. For example, participant 6 mentioned: *“Well, I do not know any, I cannot think of any right now that does not do it”*, or participant 11, by stating: *“But I do not really know about that kind of shop right now”*. However, six participants mentioned their experiences within unisex stores that were not separated by the binary genders. For example, participant 6 mentioned: *“Smaller shops or alternative shops that don’t have a big label or don’t produce any clothes themselves. There it’s often mixed”*. Similar to this, participant 13 stated: *“second-hand shops [...] I think they almost only go by size”*. Furthermore, some participants also indicated that they buy gender-neutral products, such as participant 7, by indicating: *“the shampoo, it is [...] very neutral, also from the packaging”*.

Thus, when participants were asked about their general experiences, it became clear that most of them only had experiences within stores separated by the binary genders, so their overall experiences with gender marketing were dominated by gender binarity. However, a small group of the participants had some experiences with gender-neutral products and unisex stores, not separated by the binary genders.

#### ***4.2.3 Experiences in advertising***

When asked to reflect on products mainly addressed to a specific gender and the associated advertising, all 15 participants only thought about products for either the male or female gender.

This is because the participants believed that those are the only genders with specific products and related advertising; related findings were subdivided into male and female to better reflect this situation.

During the interview sessions, participants indicated *physical characteristics* of the genders displayed in advertising. For the female gender and target group, participants mainly pictured women in advertising as “*very standard beautiful, so they are such thin white women with long hair of course and probably in dresses*” (participant 7). It was prominent that generally, all participants pictured women in advertising as “*the beautiful gender*” (participant 14) that is “*conforming to a certain ideal of beauty*” (participant 12). However, the participants’ opinions and experiences on physical characteristics related to the male gender were inconsistent. On the one hand, participants pictured men in advertising as looking “*good and trained, of course, because he is the strong man*” (participant 16), “*probably also corresponds to the European beauty standard*” (participant 19), similar to the answers for women in advertising. However, on the other hand, some participants also mentioned the exact opposite. Participant 14, for example, stated that a man in advertising “*could also be a normal person, for example, a nerd*” and that in the case of displaying men in advertising: “*They do not aim quite so hard for a certain ideal of beauty*” (participant 14).

The next subcode, *personal characteristics*, was used rather rarely. Many participants could not come up with personal characteristics that they associate with women or men. However, the participants who came up with personal characteristics characterised women in advertising as friendly, happy and soft. For example, participants 9 described women as: “*good-humoured, friendly, nice*”, or participant 15: “*Very gentle. Somehow happy all the time*”. There were no personal characteristics mentioned for the male gender.

The subcode *product category* indicates the sections in the interviews where participants identified products, especially addressed to one specific gender. For the female gender, most of the participants came up with examples such as “*Make-up*” (participant 10), “*a lot of hygiene articles. And also cooking things, baking things*” (participants 6) or “*shaving commercials*” (participant 9). Participants examples for male products were similar to each other. Therefore, participants stated examples such as “*Beer and cars*” (participant 6), “*this 3000 in one shampoo, wash gel, beard oil*” (participant 7), “*Shaving products for the face. Or just beard care in general*” (participant 10), “*something like drills? So, handicraft stuff*” (participant 16) or “*Sports and sportswear*” (participant 18).

Related to the subcode *product category* is the subcode *product characteristics* mentioned by the participants. It became clear that there is a substantial difference between the



products for women and men regarding their product characteristics, for example, design choices. Mainly all participants described female products as *“colourful with glitter”* (participant 11) or that there are *“almost all colours. Rather lighter shades”* (participant 5). For the male products, the participants agreed that male products are dominated by *“either dark blue or black, maybe orange, but no other colours”* (participant 5).

The last subcode of *Advertising is design/setup*. For the female target group, participants described the design and setup of the advertisements as colourful and cheerful. Participant 6 indicated that advertising addressed to women shows: *“gentle or feminine things, somehow with plants and bright, bright colours and somehow a sweet pop song behind it”*. Furthermore, participant 9 supported this statement by describing the female advertisement as: *“women happily jumping around somewhere and everything is great [...], and her legs are shown, and of course, she wears a dress or something. It is always like that, and these specific feminine things are represented”*. For the male target group, the design and setup are differently. Participant 8 described a typical advertisement addressed to a male target group as: *“always something blue, it is always something blue or black or something in the advertisement, and it is always so hard, I say, a hard advertisement”*. Furthermore, participant 10 adds, that the male part in advertising has no actual task, by indicating: *“Well, I do not really have a concrete idea of what the man is doing in this advertisement. I think it is just important that he is there”*. Those findings show that the design and setup of advertising addressed to a female target group is completely different from advertising for a male target group.

Besides the fact that participants experienced that no other gender apart from the binary genders are shown and addressed in advertising, the results also show a huge difference in the presentation of the binary genders, female and male, and the products that are addressed to them.

### **4.3 Affectedness, awareness, and the need for change**

Besides these main findings of the thesis, the study further revealed some other important findings during the interviews. These findings deal with the topics affectedness and awareness of the participants related to gender marketing and the participants’ expressions of the need for change within marketing.

### 4.3.1 *Affectedness and awareness*

**Table 4**

*Frequencies of the level of affectedness and awareness among the participants*

Main codes	Subcodes	Frequency
Affectedness (N = 15)	affected	N = 5
	not affected	N = 10
Awareness (N = 15)	high awareness	N = 5
	medium awareness	N = 6
	low awareness	N = 4

Table 4 shows the frequencies of the level of affectedness and awareness of the participants. It shows that one-third of the participants indicated that they are not affected by gender marketing. However, the remaining third is affected by gender marketing, and therefore, excluded or discriminated by this contemporary marketing strategy.

The participants' level of awareness shows that the participants' awareness is somewhat equally distributed among the participants. It means that about one-third of the participants identify with each level, high, medium, and low.

### 4.3.2 *The openness and need for change*

At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked to summarise and reflect on their general opinion on gender marketing. During this reflection, nearly all participants indicated a need to change gender marketing because its negative aspects overrule the positive aspect. The participants came up with ideas to improve or change the marketplace, especially gender marketing. The participants mentioned four possibilities for positive changes for the issues of gender marketing and the marketplace: *unisex*, *marketing*, *education*, and *parenting*.

The most frequently mentioned idea for change was *unisex*. The participants believe that making marketing more or completely unisex would change and improve the issues of the binary of gender marketing. They indicated that the marketplace should change so that the focus shifts from gender-specific products to products that simply fulfil their purpose without focussing on a specific gender. Participant 8, for example, stated:

*It would be better if you could go to the shop and just buy something that does not say 'for men' or whatever, it does not say anything at all. It just says what it is that you are buying.*

Similar to that, participant 10 indicated: *“people should buy products based on the products and not according to whether the product is marketed for a woman or for a man because it actually says nothing about the product”*.

This aspect is also related to the second idea of changing *marketing*. As already mentioned, the participants stated that they want products that fulfil their needs and no gender-specific focus in marketing. In their opinion, marketing and advertising are the first areas where the binarity of gender should be abolished due to their strong influence on customers and all people within society. Participant 17, for example, stated: *“So I would change the marketing to no longer market these stereo-male, stereotypical-female products so that they go a bit more into unisex [...]. I think that would be a good first step in any case”*.

Related to the previous ideas of change, participants also mentioned that it would help to educate people about the topic. They indicated that not everyone is aware of the topic of gender marketing and the fact that in this marketing strategy, only the binary genders, female, and male, are represented. The participants believe that more awareness about gender marketing and its binarity, or in general about all gender identities, is important and necessary for positive change and inclusion. Correspondently, participant 9 stated: *“I think a very conscious and honest approach to other genders [...] is important so that you do not develop this feeling of otherness”*.

A few participants also mentioned that the change should start by *parenting* (N = 4). Those participants believe that when parents openly discuss and include all gender identities in a child's upbringing, children would grow up with more awareness and tolerance towards the issue. In this context, participant 5 stated: *“That is why I think it is very important in upbringing and education that this is conveyed so openly: you can be whomever you want. That is not bound to your gender, what we ascribe to you”*.

For most participants, it was important and necessary that something changes in the marketplace, society, and everything that belongs to or influences it. Related to that, for example, participant 19 stated:

*The negative aspects of it can only be solved if the big whole dissolves more and more, so to speak, the big whole being this gender binarity, and I believe that this is necessary*

*and important in order to somehow also achieve larger goals such as equality, feminism, combating sexism is important and can also, in part, somehow combat racism.*

Even the participants that had an indifferent opinion on gender marketing were not against improvement and change within the marketplace and marketing either. All participants generally believed that a general change towards inclusion, especially in marketing, is important and necessary and could start by changing gender marketing and abolishing the separation of gender.

## 5. Discussion

To answer the research questions of this thesis, the following two objectives were pursued: The first objective of this study was to explore, investigate, and explain the gender-binary paradox that is potentially present among young adults in the marketplace. For the second objective, the experiences of young adults on gender-binary dynamics in marketing were investigated and elaborated. In this part of the thesis, the study's main findings will be discussed and further compared to findings of existing literature, particularly the unexpected and new findings of the study. In addition, important theoretical and practical implications drawn from the study's findings are presented. Finally, the study's limitations and further recommendations for future research are specified and concluded.

### 5.1 Main findings

#### 5.1.1 *The gender-binary paradox*

The first assumption of the study indicates that there is a gender-binary paradox among young adults in the marketplace. This assumption was based on existing literature in the field and visualised in the conceptual model of this study. Literature states that young adults generally have negative perceptions, attitudes, and associations towards gender marketing (Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Stevens, 2018). However, the study by Murto (2020) gives evidence that young adults behave supportively towards the strategy of gender marketing by, for example, buying 'gendered' products. An inconsistency can be observed between the perceptions and behaviour among young adults towards gender marketing, resulting in the gender-binary paradox.

The study's findings are mainly in line with this assumption; thus, the existence of the gender-binary paradox among young adults can be first and foremost be perceived as being true since most of the participants acted in line with the paradox. This outcome can be concluded since most of the participants had a negative perception towards gender marketing, which was shown, for example, by the fact that the participants came up with more disadvantages than advantages of the strategy. Besides these findings, the product choices and behaviour of the participants further gave evidence for the paradox since most of the participants admitted their product choice was influenced by their gender as well as the corresponding marketing strategy. Additionally, most of the participants were also found to support gender marketing, for example, by buying gendered products.

However, even though most of the participants acted in favour of the paradox, there were some unexpected findings. Firstly, the results of this study show that not all participants

had a negative perception and attitude towards gender marketing. A few participants had an indifferent opinion, so they do not have negative or positive perceptions about it since it does not bother them when buying products. Those participants indicated that they place more emphasis on the values and other aspects of the products, such as sustainability, or ingredients. This generally contradicts the assumption of the study at hand that young adults have a negative perception of gender marketing. A reason for this finding could be explained by Drake and Radford (2018). The authors mentioned that customers increasingly wish to be consistent in their identity and beliefs and project these values onto the products they want to buy. Thus, customers increasingly base their product choice on personal values and beliefs and not on the gender the product is developed for (Drake & Radford, 2018). This would explain that some participants had an indifferent perception of gender marketing, basing their product choice on other aspects than gender.

Those findings were similar to the findings of behavioural support among the participants. As expected from existing literature and the assumptions of this study, most of the participants were found to support or at least sometimes support gender marketing by buying products exclusively addressed to their biological genders (Murto, 2020). However, surprisingly, more than one-third of the participants indicated that they do not support gender marketing. Instead, they buy gender-neutral products and avoid supporting brands that use this strategy, which contradicts the study's assumptions. On the one hand, these findings could be explained since most of the participants indicated that they perceive gender marketing as negative. So similar to their perception, it could be the case that those participants aligned their beliefs with their product choice. As mentioned before, Drake and Radford (2018) indicated that most people want to be consistent in their identity and beliefs. Therefore, it could be the case that the participants implement this consistency of identity and beliefs in their consumption. On the other hand, another possible reason could be that young adults are generally more open-minded and empathic towards social issues (Coffin et al., 2019). The study by Coffin et al. (2019) shows that young adults are more willing to actively participate in improving social issues, for example, by taking part in demonstrations or boycotting certain products and brands due to the contradiction of the brands' values with their beliefs. Therefore, it could be the case that the participants that do not support gender marketing are more active in changing social issues, such as the exclusion of genders outside the binary. It means that they actively contribute to it, for example, by boycotting brands and products that still practice and reinforce this separation and exclusion of genders by using gender marketing.

Besides these expected and unexpected findings, the study further extended the academic field of gender marketing by investigating the *possible reasons to support gender marketing*. When participants were asked about possible reasons why gender marketing is supported and accepted within the marketplace, the most frequently mentioned reasons were habit, upbringing, and a lack of options. These reasons are rather new to the academic field and, therefore, extend existing literature. Nonetheless, they can be explained by existing literature. As Khalil and Dhanesh (2020) mentioned, the binarity system and the associations that people have with different genders are solidified in the mindset of society. Therefore, it is reasonable that participants came up with reasons such as habit and upbringing. The practice of buying products that conform with one's own gender has been taught and reinforced over the previous decades by society and by their own parents. Therefore, it is understandable that people fall back into these behavioural patterns or generally do not break out because it is right for them to do so. Additionally, as mentioned by participants, the reality of the marketplace provides no alternative to the traditional gender binarity regarding product choices. Limited availability of gender-neutral or unisex products requires a proactive attitude on the consumer side, thereby creating more obstacles for the consumer. Thus, since most of society still identifies with one of the binary genders, it is easier for them to buy the products they know and have been using for years, which results in the support and reinforcement of gender marketing.

To conclude, even though some of the findings are unexpected and contradict the study's assumption regarding the existence of the gender-binary paradox, most of the study's findings favour it. Thus, it is concluded that the gender-binary paradox exists, as shown by the fact that some of the participants showed behaviour as described by the paradox. Besides this, the study further extends existing literature and the founded gender-binary paradox by giving explanatory approaches for the support among young adults towards gender marketing and, concurrent, for the paradox.

### ***5.1.2 Participants' experiences with gender-binary dynamics in marketing***

Another assumption of the study indicated that the participants strongly experience gender-binary dynamics in marketing. Thus, it was assumed that the participants actively experience the exclusive separation of stores and products into the binary genders, male and female. This results in participants experiencing negative outcomes of gender marketing, for example, the exclusion of genders outside the gender binary and the separation of gender based on differences, such as their physical attributes. This assumption was based on existing literature; for example, Schroeder (2020) mentioned that marketing primarily focuses on the binary

genders, male and female, and McKeage et al. (2018) even refer to the marketplace as “a strongly binary, gendered marketplace” (p. 74). Prothero and McDonagh (2021) further highlighted in their study that the focus on gender and this binarity in marketing not only means that genders beside the binary genders are not represented, but also that there is an inequality between these binary genders, since also those genders are separated based on their differences.

Again, most of the findings of the study are in line with the assumptions and the findings of existing literature. In general, the participants mostly mentioned experiences with marketing in the context of gender binary. Thus, participants mentioned various areas where they experienced gender marketing and, therefore, the exclusive focus on the binary genders. Besides this, the participants also mentioned that they experience advertising as exclusively binary since, in their opinion, only the binary genders are displayed and addressed. This inequality between the genders was actively experienced by the participants, since the departments within the stores are of different sizes and the advertisings of products were also experienced as completely different between the male and female genders.

Even though most of the participants exclusively experienced marketing as being dominated by only focusing on the binary genders, the results showed some unexpected findings. Besides those experiences that are dominated by the binarity, some participants indicated that they also have experiences within stores that are not separated by gender, such as small second-hand stores. They also indicated that they have experiences with gender-neutral products. This means that some areas of marketing, for example, specific brands and stores, do not have an exclusive focus on gender or support the binarity of gender. These findings could be explained by the slow shift of society and the marketplace. Morgenroth et al. (2020) mentioned in their study that increasingly more gender identities are visible within, for example, the online environment or other areas in society. Therefore, the findings give evidence that the shift as expected by literature might slowly develop in society and particularly in the marketplace, bringing the focus from gender-based marketing to a more inclusive focus on the unique attributes of the products.

To sum up, most of the results correspond with the findings of existing literature. Only a few findings point out the existence of brands that do not focus on separating their products based on the gender binary but instead focus on other aspects such as sustainability. Therefore, it can be concluded that the marketplace is still dominated by the gender-binary, so a focus on addressing products and separating stores based on the binary genders, since it was consequently experienced by most of the participants. Nevertheless, the study gives evidence for the slow shift of society towards more inclusion.



### ***5.1.3 The openness and need for change***

Besides the findings related to answering the study's research questions, the participants gave some new insights about gender marketing, particularly about ideas to improve or change this marketing strategy. Thereby, it is important to keep in mind that when talking about the need for change in the context of gender marketing, most of society still identifies with one of the binary genders. However, within the study's results, it was prominent that all participants were open to improving and changing the strategy of gender marketing. They all had some ideas about how this should take place. Surprisingly, even the participants who indicated that they have an indifferent opinion on gender marketing mentioned that they would not care if something would change/improve in the marketplace and would support such change if it would make marketing more inclusive.

Thus, participants mentioned different ideas to positively change the marketplace to be more inclusive towards genders outside the binarity. The participants frequently mentioned especially the idea of changing the marketplace into a unisex marketplace, meaning that products and stores are not separated based on the binary genders, but rather on product categories, sizes or brands. In other words, they believe that the labelling and separating of stores and products based on the binary genders, or genders in general, should no longer be used in marketing.

## **5.2 Theoretical implications**

Literature about gender marketing shows that this specific marketing strategy has been a subject of scientific literature for several decades (Grau & Zotos, 2016); however, research on gender marketing outside the traditional gender binarity is still scarce. Supported by existing literature, the study explored the topic of gender marketing and highlighted the societal relevance through presenting an analysis of current marketing practises, arriving at implications for binary-oriented marketing and contributing to new insights in this field of research.

The first theoretical contribution of this study is related to the overall topic of the study. In general, existing literature in the field has either focused on people's perceptions and opinions towards gender marketing (Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Stevens, 2018) or their behaviour towards the strategy (Murto, 2020). This study, in contrast, focussed on the relation between the perceptions and behaviour of young adults and showed that there is an imbalance between these aspects. This focus on the relation between the perception and behaviour among young adults and the resulting, newly developed theoretical

concept contributes to a better understanding of gender marketing. The study introduces the gender-binary paradox, which was found to be present among most participants of the study. By introducing this paradox, the study adds a new perspective of gender marketing to academic literature about contemporary marketing strategies. To ensure the existence of the paradox, the study not only relied on existing findings, but also supported these findings with the results of the interviews and by further extending them.

Thus, the study continues existing research by giving reasons and insights for the perceptions and behaviour of young adults. This was done, for example, by providing a variety of advantages and disadvantages of gender marketing as mentioned by participants of the study, such as the advantages of comfort and formation of identification or the disadvantages of exclusion and personal restriction. Additionally, the participants' reflections on reasons to support gender marketing showed that the habit and upbringing of participants impact the support of gender marketing and the fact that gendered products are often the only option within the marketplace. Besides that, the study gives further insights into the participants' product choices, revealing that participants base their product choices mostly on their gender.

A novel aspect of the study is the inclusion of people who do not identify with one of the binary genders, which means that the focus of the study lies in the inclusion of their opinions about the topic. This was important since especially genders outside the binary are negatively affected by the marketing strategy, for example through exclusion, and therefore, their opinions and perspective are important when discussing the topic. Since the opinions of people who identify with a non-binary gender are not common in academic research, the study contributes to a new perspective on gender marketing.

Furthermore, the study not only highlights the disadvantages of gender marketing and how young adults perceive it and how they behave but also gives new insights into how the strategy can be improved or changed, based on the opinions of the participants of the study. Therefore, the study contributes to underpin the need for change and give first evidence for the participants' willingness to change marketing positively, meaning in this context, dissolving gender marketing and the dominated focus on the binary genders within the marketplace. The study even provides the first ideas for implementing the change since the participants mentioned that they would prefer the marketplace to change into a unisex/gender-neutral marketplace, separating products through sizes, product categories, or brands.

All these contributions give new evidence and insights into the topic of gender marketing and its binary tendencies, such as reasons for the perceptions and behaviour of the participants, the existence of the gender-binary paradox and first insights into ideas of a positive

change of the marketplace to be more gender-inclusive. Furthermore, those new findings and insights contribute to developing and conducting future research in the field.

### **5.3 Practical implications**

The participants of the study indicated that especially marketing could be the pioneering area of improving or even the ending of the gender binary and guide society to be more gender inclusive. Since the participants highlighted the influence of marketing on gender inclusion and diversity, the study offers several practical implications for marketers.

The study provides new insights into young adults' perception and purchase behaviour towards gender marketing, which could be advantageous for marketers. The findings of the study show that a large majority of participants displayed a negative perception about gender marketing; in particular, the study revealed that a relatively large proportion of the participants rejected gender marketing and actively "boycotted" it, which further highlights the importance of the topic and its implications for marketers. Brands and their marketers should take this shift in marketing seriously and increase their brand research about their target group's actual values, needs, and beliefs without referring to gender. They should find ways to target their customers, besides their genders, such as sustainability, ingredients, or focusing on the product's usability. Thus, marketers could use this study as a first approach to understand the importance of changing and use the findings and insights as starting points and first suggestions.

Highly related to this implication, marketers should not introduce another gender category, such as a third category. Participants of the study mentioned that introducing a third category only reinforces the gender categorisation and highlights the 'differences' of those genders, which would not solve the problem. The binarity would still be present in marketing, with the difference that those who do not identify with one of the binary genders are pushed into a new category.

To sum it up, the study at hand highlights the importance of a focus shift within the marketplace, away from binary gender-based thinking. When implemented into the real world, this process is expected to take a long time because of the intensity with which current ways of thinking are rooted in society. Nevertheless, the findings of this study show that a gender-based focus in marketing is no longer desired by the majority of consumers, as there are already people who completely boycott this type of marketing and its related products. Therefore, it is recommended to start dissolving the focus on separating stores, products, advertising, and general marketing based on gender, stereotypes, and gender roles since they are increasingly perceived as outdated, and an increasing proportion of consumers cannot identify with them.

This means that marketers are recommended to shift away from a marketing strategy based on gender towards a focus on product features, such as size, colour, style, features, and brand image, to work towards more inclusion and diversity in the marketplace.

#### **5.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research**

The study presented in this thesis faced some limitations that restricted its results to a certain extent, which need to be considered and improved in future research in the field. Firstly, the generalizability of the results was limited by the sample of the study. The initial goal was to create a heterogeneous sample, including participants with various different gender identities, as well as educational and occupational levels. However, due to multiple reasons this goal could not be achieved as intended. On the one hand, there was limited availability of participants that do not identify with one of the binary genders, male or female. Thus, the sample is dominated by participants that identify with one of those two genders. This was further amplified since gender and sexuality are sensitive topics, and many people are uncomfortable talking about them. On the other hand, a large part of the sample had a similar educational and occupational status, so most participants were students and had a high school diploma or bachelor's degree. These limitations could be a consequence of the sampling procedure of this study, in particular the use of snowball sampling. It is assumed that snowball sampling limits the scope of participants since it is common that the recruited participants suggest potential participants with similar characteristics, values, and backgrounds, referred to as selection bias (Parker et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this limitation does not influence or impair the findings of this study. However, it impacts the generalizability of the results since they do not represent the entire population, or in this case, all young adults. Therefore, it is recommended to emphasise these limitations in future research by focussing on a more heterogeneous sample, which could be achieved by using different sampling strategies that are more aimed at recruiting participants from different social circles and environments, to assure more generalisable results.

Related to that, this study claimed in its method section that the method chosen would assure subjectivity and reflexivity in interpreting the study's results since it allows to present a social phenomenon, in this case, the gender-binary paradox, from different perspectives. In general, the study and its chosen method presented different participants' perspectives regarding gender marketing. The study allowed the participants to talk about their opinions on the topic freely. Due to the fact that a part of participants identified with a gender outside the binary, the study was able to present different perspectives and opinions on the topic. Nevertheless, the study was still limited in presenting different perspectives of the paradox since it only focuses

on the consumers' perspectives of gender marketing. Therefore, it is recommended that future research include marketers' perspectives of gender marketing to give more insights and increase the variety of perspectives of the paradox to understand the issue fully. Furthermore, marketers' perspectives could be favourable to detect possible advantages of gender marketing and understand why the strategy is still commonly used and profitable for brands and companies.

The same holds true for the interviews. In general, the study mainly focused on clothing and drugstores due to the limited scope and time of the study. However, to make the findings more generalisable for the marketplace, it is recommended to include other areas of marketing within future research, for example supermarkets or other retail stores. Including and investigating more areas of marketing assure a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

In addition, there were also limitations due to the overall research design of the study. Generally, the study succeeded to assure a certain accuracy of the findings, for example, by investigating the supportive behaviour towards gender marketing, by asking the participants about their experiences and purchase behaviour in different stores, without previous framing the existence of the paradox. However, the results of this study are based on the outcomes of semi-structured interviews in which the participants talked about perceptions, experiences, and behaviour. As mentioned before, this could lead to possible limitations such as the social desirability bias, which indicates that participants may have the desire to describe their behaviour favourably for them. Additionally, participants' perceptions about their behaviour may differ largely from their actual behaviour, further limiting the generalizability and reliability of the results. Such limitations could be avoided by conducting a study about the topic based on an experimental design, where the researcher could observe the participants' actual behaviour and experiences. An experimental design would assure evidence for causality and would further support and improve the results of this research.

Within future studies on the topic, it is recommended to include aspects that could not be addressed by this study, due to the nature of its design. Research could be further extended by focussing on the effects of the level of awareness about gender marketing among the participants, meaning investigating whether this influences the perceptions or the behaviour among young adults on gender marketing. The same goes for the gender and affectedness of participants. Furthermore, aspects such as culture, country of residence, and the income of the participants could be of interest to be investigated in future research. These aspects could be influential and important to further understand the causes of the gender-binary paradox and give new insights into gender marketing.

Lastly, it is important to mention the limitations regarding the conceptual model of this research. After conducting the study, it is still assumed that the conceptual model favourably visualizes the general connections between the concepts found in the literature. The findings of the study, for example, support the assumption that the association of gender marketing, such as stereotypes, influences the perception of young adults. However, the model is limited in the explanations about the connections. The study did find other aspects that could have an influence on the paradox, such as habit or upbringing, that can give evidence for more insightful connections and relations between the concepts in the conceptual model of this study. However, due to the scope of the study, it is not possible to assure the significance of these new findings. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct experimental research about the concepts newly found in this research to see whether and how they could be included in the conceptual model and how they further influence or change the connections and the model.

## **6. Conclusion**

This research aimed to investigate and explain the possible existence of the gender-binary paradox and the experiences and perceptions of young adults towards gender marketing and its binary tendencies.

The study's findings show that there is a gender-binary paradox among the participants, which means that there is an inconsistency between the perception and the behaviour towards gender marketing. Participants generally experienced gender marketing and the related binary dynamics of corresponding strategies as negative since its exclusive focus on the binary genders and the resulting exclusion and discrimination of gender identities outside this dual gender system. However, the findings further show that some of the participants do not act in favour of the paradox, which gives input for future research.

As assumed, the study gives new insights into the topic of gender marketing by investigating participants reasons to support this marketing strategy and the gender-binary paradox. Thus, new concepts and factors that influence the paradox were detected, such as the strong influence of habit and upbringing on the product choice of the participants.

Besides the new insights, the study provides recommendations based on the findings of the interviews, such as the participants desire of a positive change towards a gender-neutral marketplace. The study can be used as starting points for future research in the field, which should extend the research by verifying these findings through an experimental research design.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

*The connection between theoretical concepts of literature and the interview guideline and questions of this study*

**Table A.1**

*Theoretical concepts from existing literature linked to interview guideline (with example questions)*

Concept	Related literature	Related topics in interview guideline	Example questions
Binarity in stores/in the marketplace	(Drake & Radford, 2018)	Topic 1: General purchase intention/behaviour	<i>At the beginning of the interview, I would like you to imagine the last time you went shopping in a drugstore and bought a hygiene product (e.g., a shampoo). Can you remember the situation and perhaps describe the shopping experience in detail? Are there any departments? How is the shop divided? Are there any categories?</i>
	(McKeage et al., 2018)	Topic 4: Gender representation in advertising/marketing	
	(Murto, 2020)	Topic 6: Gender binary in marketing Topic 8: Gender-binary paradox	
Areas of gender marketing	(Murto, 2020) (Schroeder, 2020).	Topic 2: Areas of gender marketing	<i>I would like to discuss with you the topic of marketing aimed at specific genders. Do you know of any areas in marketing or the retail sector where products are targeted at specific genders?</i>

Advantages and disadvantages of gender marketing	(Aramendia-Muneta et al., 2020)	Topic 3: Perceptions about gender marketing	<i>When you think about the general topic of using gender (characteristics) to target a specific group of people, what do you think is positive (negative) and maybe (not) beneficial about it?</i>
	(Drake & Radford, 2018)	Topic 7: Perceptions of gender binarity in marketing	<i>So, there is evidence that only the male and female gender is considered in such shops. With this in mind, I would like you to think again about your opinion on this issue. What do you think is positive (negative) and perhaps (not) beneficial about the use of (only) these genders?</i>
	(Gurrieri, 2020) (Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020) (Stevens, 2018).		
Gender representation in advertising	(Gray et al., 2021)	Topic 4: Gender representation in advertising/marketing	<i>Can you think of a product that is specifically targeted to one gender (this does not have to be a product that only one gender can use, but one that is marketed mainly to one specific gender)?</i>
	(Gurrieri, 2020). (McKeage et al., 2018) (Morgenroth et al., 2020)		
Support of gender marketing	(Grau & Zotos, 2016).	Topic 8: Gender-binary paradox	<i>What is the reason you bought the shampoo that is (not) aimed at a particular gender?</i>

Gender-binary paradox	(Grau & Zotos, 2016)	Topic 1: General purchase intention/behaviour	<i>What is the reason you are (not) in a particular department?</i>
	(Zimman, 2017)	Topic 3: Perceptions about gender marketing	<i>What else did you buy there? Did you buy a specific shampoo? Was the shampoo in a particular section of the drugstore?</i>
		Topic 5: Awareness about gender marketing	<i>So, when you think about the general topic of using gender (characteristics) to target a specific group of people, what do you think is positive (negative) and maybe (not) beneficial about it?</i>
		Topic 6: Gender binary in marketing	
		Topic 7: Perceptions of gender binarity in marketing	
		Topic 8: Gender-binary paradox	

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## Appendix B

### *Recruiting e-mail and informed consent form (German version)*

Liebe:r Teilnehmer:innen,

vielen Dank, dass du dir die Zeit nimmst, an meiner Studie teilzunehmen.

Mein Name ist Rabea Hecker, und ich bin Masterstudentin der Kommunikationswissenschaft mit dem Schwerpunkt Digitales Marketing und Design an der Universität Twente. Diese Studie wird daher im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit durchgeführt. Die Forschung wurde von der BMS-Ethikkommission der Universität Twente genehmigt.

Ziel der Studie ist es, die unterschiedlichen Meinungen und Erfahrungen junger Erwachsener zum Thema Gender Marketing zu erforschen und zu untersuchen.

Die Teilnahme an der Studie wird in Form eines Interviews durchgeführt. Das Interview wird etwa 30 bis 45 Minuten dauern. Während des Interviews wirst du gebeten, verschiedene Fragen zum Thema Marketing in Bezug auf die Verwendung von verschiedenen Geschlechtern (und ihren Merkmalen) nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen zu beantworten. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten; deine ehrliche Meinung ist gefragt.

Deine Teilnahme an dieser Studie ist freiwillig, und du kannst jederzeit ohne Angabe von spezifischen Gründen von der Studie zurücktreten. Die Interview-Sitzung findet online statt und wird aufgezeichnet. Dabei wirst du gebeten, deine Webcam einzuschalten damit es etwas persönlicher ist, aber natürlich nur wenn du das möchtest. Die Daten dieser Studie werden vertraulich behandelt und nur für den Zweck dieser Studie verwendet. Die Daten werden auf einer externen Festplatte gespeichert, auf die nur die Forscherin Zugriff hat. Außerdem werden die aufgezeichneten Daten nach der vollständigen Auswertung der Studie durch die Forscherin gelöscht. Lediglich die Transkripte der Aufzeichnungen werden aufbewahrt; alle Teilnehmer:innen werden natürlich anonymisiert.

Wenn du Fragen hast oder du dir weitere Informationen wünschst, kannst du gerne Kontakt mit mir aufnehmen.

**Kontaktdaten Forscherin:**

Rabea Hecker; r.m.hecker@student.utwente.nl

**Kontaktdaten BMS-Ethikkommission:**

Sekretär:in der Ethikkommission der Fakultät für Verhaltens-, Management- und Sozialwissenschaften an der Universität Twente; ethicscommittee-bms@utwente.nl

*Recruiting e-mail and informed consent form (English version)*

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study.

My name is Rabea Hecker, and I am a master student in Communication Science with a major in Digital Marketing and Design at the University of Twente. This study is therefore conducted concerning my master's thesis. The research has been approved by the BMS Ethics Committee of the University of Twente.

The purpose of the study is to explore and investigate different opinions and experiences about gender marketing among young adults.

Your participation within the study will be conducted through an interview session. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. During the interview, you are asked to answer various questions about gender marketing and gender-binary in marketing, to the best of your knowledge. There are no right or wrong answers; your honest opinions and answers are needed.

Your participation in this study is voluntarily, and you can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason. The interview session will be screen recorded, and you are asked to turn on your webcam if you like to. The data of this study will be treated confidentially and will only be used for the purpose of this study. The data will be stored on an external hard drive, only accessible by the researcher. Furthermore, after the study is completely evaluated by the researcher, the recorded data will be deleted. Only the transcripts of the recordings will be retained; however, all participants will be made anonymous.

If you have any questions or want to receive further information, please contact me.

**Contact details researcher:**

Rabea Hecker; r.m.hecker@student.utwente.nl

**Contact details BMS Ethics Committee:**

Secretary of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente; ethicscommittee-bms@utwente.nl

## Appendix C

### *Interview guideline (German version)*

#### **Interview-Leitfaden**

##### ***Zu behandelnde Themen:***

- Gender-Marketing und Geschlechter-Binärität im Marketing
  - Wahrnehmungen/Assoziationen
  - Erfahrungen
  - Meinungen
- Gender-binary paradox

##### ***Forschungsfragen:***

RQ1: Is there a gender-binary paradox in the marketplace and how can it be explained?

RQ2: How do young adults experience gender-binary dynamics in marketing?

RQ3: How do young adults perceive balancing the scales between diversity preferences and the potential exclusion risks associated with the gender-binary?

##### ***Der Ablauf der Interviewrunde:***

1. *Begrüßung der TeilnehmerInnen zur Interviewrunde.*
2. *Vorstellung der Forscherin. Vorstellung der TeilnehmerInnen.*
3. *Die Vorstellung des Zwecks der Studie.*

***Zweck:*** *Der Zweck der Studie ist es, unterschiedliche Meinungen und Erfahrungen über Gender Marketing unter jungen Erwachsenen zu erforschen und zu untersuchen.*

4. *Schicken der Einverständniserklärung (Vorgang der Datensammlung). Zustimmung einholen.*
5. *Erklären des Ablaufs des Interviews:*  
*Was ist während des Interviews zu erwarten, und was wird vom Teilnehmer erwartet?*
6. *Einholen der Erlaubnis, die Sitzung aufzuzeichnen.*

##### ***7. Beginn des Interviews:***

##### ***Thema 1: (Kauf-)Verhalten***

*Zu Beginn des Interviews möchte ich dich bitten, dir das letzte Mal vorzustellen, indem du in einem Drogeriemarkt einkaufen warst und dir einen Hygieneartikel (z.B. ein Shampoo) gekauft hast. Kannst du dich an die Situation erinnern und mir vielleicht das Einkaufserlebnis im Detail schildern? Was hast du sonst noch dort gekauft? Hast du ein bestimmtes Shampoo gekauft? War das Shampoo in einer bestimmten Abteilung des Drogeriemarktes? Warum hast du das Shampoo gekauft, gibt es bestimmte Gründe? Würdest du sagen, dass sich das Shampoo an eine bestimmte Zielgruppe richtet, wenn ja, welche Eigenschaften hat diese Zielgruppe?*



**Thema 2: Gender-Marketing**

*Dies führt uns zum Hauptthema der heutigen Interviewrunde. Ich möchte mit dir das Thema Marketing besprechen, das sich an bestimmte Geschlechter richtet. Kennst du Bereiche im Marketing oder auch Einzelhandel, in denen die Produkte auf bestimmte Geschlechter ausgerichtet sind?*

**Thema 3: Wahrnehmungen**

*Wenn du also über das allgemeine Thema nachdenkst, Geschlechter Merkmale zu nutzen, um eine bestimmte Gruppe von Menschen anzusprechen, was ist deiner Meinung nach positiv (negativ) und vielleicht (nicht) förderlich daran?*

**Thema 4: Theoretische Konstrukte**

*Kannst du dir ein Produkt vorstellen, das sich speziell an ein Geschlecht richtet (das muss nicht nur ein Produkt sein was nur ein Geschlecht verwenden kann, sondern eins was hauptsächlich an ein Geschlecht vermarktet wird)?*

*Wie würden die Werbekampagnen aussehen?*

*Welche Geschlechter würden einbezogen werden?*

*Wie werden Männer in Werbung dargestellt? Wie werden Frauen in Werbungen dargestellt?*

**Thema 5: Bewusstseinsbildung**

*Hast du dich vor diesem Interview schon einmal aktiv mit dem Thema der Nutzung von Geschlecht und Geschlechterunterschieden im Marketing beschäftigt? Warum denkst du, dass dies der Fall ist?*

**Thema 6: Gender-binär**

*Okay, als Nächstes möchte ich, dass du dir wieder eine Situation vorstellen. Du gehst in ein Bekleidungsgeschäft deiner Wahl. Welches Geschäft wäre das? Wenn du das Geschäft betrittst, was siehst du dann? Versuche so detailliert wie möglich zu sein.*

*Wenn du nun eine Jeanshose kaufen möchtest, in welche Abteilung gehst du dann? Gibt es irgendwelche Abteilungen? Wie ist das Geschäft unterteilt? Gibt es irgendwelche Kategorien?*

*Und wenn du an andere Geschäfte denkst, ist die Aufteilung ähnlich oder anders als in diesem Geschäft? Warum/warum nicht? Was halten Sie von diesen Kategorien/Abteilungen?*

*Wie sieht es mit Online-Kleidungsgeschäften aus?*

*Fällt dir ein Bekleidungsgeschäft ein, bei dem es eine solche Kategorisierung nicht gibt?*

*Vielleicht auch in anderen Bereichen des Marketings, also anderen Geschäften (z.B. Drogerie etc.)?*

**Thema 7: Wahrnehmung der Geschlechterbinarität im Marketing**

*Es gibt also Hinweise darauf, dass in solchen Geschäften nur das männliche und weibliche Geschlecht berücksichtigt wird. Vor diesem Hintergrund möchte ich dich bitten, noch einmal über deine Meinung zu diesem Thema nachzudenken. Was ist deiner Meinung nach positiv (negativ) und vielleicht (nicht) förderlich an der Verwendung (ausschließlich) dieser Geschlechter? Was ist deine generelle Meinung zu der Tatsache, dass das Marketing hauptsächlich auf Männer und Frauen ausgerichtet ist?*

**Thema 8: Gender-binary paradox**

*Okay, lass uns zum Anfang zurückkehren, also zu dem Shampoo, das du gekauft hast, und zu der Abteilung, in die du als erstes gehen würdest in dem Bekleidungsgeschäft. Was ist der Grund dafür, dass du das Shampoo gekauft hast, das sich an ein bestimmtes Geschlecht richtet? Was ist der Grund, dass du dich in einer bestimmten Abteilung aufhältst? Wie fühlst*

*du dich, wenn du diese Produkte kaufst und diese Abteilungen betrittst? Warum glaubst du ist das deine Meinung?*

*Es gibt die Annahme, dass es in der Gesellschaft eine Art Paradoxon gibt. Ich hab dieses Paradoxon das **gender-binary paradox** genannt und dieses Paradox bedeutet im Endeffekt, dass es einen Unterschied zwischen der Wahrnehmung der Gesellschaft und dem eigentlichen Verhalten zum Thema Geschlechts Binärität gibt. Was ist deine Meinung dazu, glaubst du dass es dieses Paradoxon gibt. Wenn ja/nein, wieso? Was könnten Gründe dafür sein?*

### **Thema 9: Veränderung**

*Möchtest du etwas hinzufügen, oder gibt es etwas zum Thema, zu dem du deine Meinung äußern möchtest? Du hast einige positive (negative) Dinge genannt, wie würdest du mit diesen Dingen umgehen, wenn du die freie Wahl hättest? Würdest du es so lassen oder würdest du eventuell etwas ändern wollen?*

### **Thema 10: Demografische Daten**

- Was ist dein Geschlecht?
- Wie alt bist du?
- Wo wohnst du? Land und Größe der Stadt?
- Welches ist der höchste Bildungsabschluss, den du hast?
- Welchen beruflichen Status hast du?
- Wie ist deine momentane Haushaltssituation, mit wem lebst du zusammen?

*10. Beende das Interview (Feedback, Rückmeldung etc.).*

*11. Gib die Informationen der Forscherin an TeilnehmerInnen für weitere Fragen.*

*Interview guideline (English version)*

**Interview guideline:**

***Topics to be covered:***

- Gender marketing and gender binaries in marketing.
  - Perceptions/associations
  - Experiences
  - Opinions
- Gender-binary paradox

***Research questions:***

RQ1: Is there a gender-binary paradox in the marketplace and how can it be explained?

RQ2: How do young adults experience gender-binary dynamics in marketing?

RQ3: How do young adults perceive balancing the scales between diversity preferences and the potential exclusion risks associated with the gender-binary?

***The interview session procedure:***

1. *Welcome participants to the interview session.*
2. *Introduction of the researcher. Introduction of the participants.*
3. *Introduction of the purpose of the study.*

***Purpose:*** *The purpose of the study is to explore and investigate different opinions and experiences about gender marketing among young adults.*

4. *Sending the consent form (process of data collection). Obtain consent.*
5. *Explaining the process of the interview:  
What to expect during the interview and what is expected of the participant.*
6. *Obtaining permission to record the session.*

***7. Start the interview:***

***Topic 1: General purchase intention/behaviour***

At the beginning of the interview, I would like you to imagine the last time you went shopping in a drugstore and bought a hygiene product (e.g. a shampoo). Can you remember the situation and perhaps describe the shopping experience in detail? What else did you buy there? Did you buy a specific shampoo? Was the shampoo in a particular section of the drugstore? Why did you buy the shampoo, are there any particular reasons? Would you say that the shampoo is aimed at a specific target group, if so, what are the characteristics of this target group?

***Topic 2: Areas of gender marketing***

This leads us to the main topic of today's interview session. I would like to discuss with you the topic of marketing aimed at specific genders. Do you know of any areas in marketing of the retail sector where products are targeted at specific genders?

***Topic 3: Perceptions about gender marketing***

So, when you think about the general topic of using gender (characteristics) to target a specific group of people, what do you think is positive (negative) and maybe (not) beneficial about it?

***Topic 4: Gender representation in advertising/marketing***

Can you think of a product that is specifically targeted to one gender (this does not have to be a product that only one gender can use, but one that is marketed mainly to one specific gender)?

What would the advertising campaigns look like?

Which genders would be included?

How are men portrayed in advertisements? How are women portrayed in advertisements?

***Topic 5: Awareness about gender marketing***

Prior to this interview, have you actively engaged with the issue of using gender and gender differences in marketing? Why do you think this is the case?

***Topic 6: Gender binary in marketing***

Okay, next I want you to imagine a situation again. You go to a clothing shop of your choice. Which shop would that be? When you enter the shop, what do you see? Try to be as detailed as possible.

Now, if you want to buy a pair of jeans, which department do you go to? Are there any departments? How is the shop divided? Are there any categories?

And if you think of other shops, is the layout similar or different to this shop? Why/why not?

What do you think of these categories/departments?

What about online clothing shops?

Can you think of a clothing shop that does not have such categorisation? Perhaps in other areas of marketing, i.e. other shops (e.g. drugstore etc.)?

***Topic 7: Perceptions of gender binarity in marketing***

So, there is evidence that only the male and female gender is considered in such shops. With this in mind, I would like you to think again about your opinion on this issue. What do you think is positive (negative) and perhaps (not) beneficial about the use of (only) these genders? What is your general opinion on the fact that marketing is mainly focused on men and women?

***Topic 8: Gender-binary paradox***

Okay, let's go back to the beginning, to the shampoo you bought and the section you would go to first in the clothing shop. What is the reason you bought the shampoo that is (not) aimed at a particular gender? What is the reason you are (not) in a particular department? How do you feel when you buy these products and enter these departments? Why do you think that is?

There is an assumption that there is a kind of paradox in society. I have called this paradox the gender-binary paradox and this paradox basically means that there is a difference between society's perception and actual behaviour on the issue of gender binary in marketing. What is your opinion on this, do you think this paradox exists? If yes/no, why? What could be the reasons for this?

***Topic 9: General opinion and ideas for change***

Is there anything you would like to add, or is there anything about the topic you would like to express your opinion on? You have mentioned some positive (negative) things, how would you deal with these things if you could decide? Would you leave it as it is or would you want to change something? Can you summarize your general opinion on the whole topic?

***Topic 10: Demographics***

- What is your gender?
- How old are you?
- Where do you live? Country and size of town?
- What is the highest level of education you have?
- What is your occupational status?
- What is your current household situation, who do you live with?

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*10. End the interview (feedback etc.)*

*11. Give the researcher's information to participants for further questions.*

## Appendix D

*Overview of duration, date and period of pre-tests and interview sessions***Table D.1***Individual duration, dates and period of the pre-tests and the main interviews*

Type of interview	Date	Time	Participant	Interview duration
Pre-test	03.07.2021	1:30 pm	Participant 1	00:26:46
Pre-test	05.07.2021	2 pm	Participant 2	00:29:34
Pre-test	09.07.2021	11 am	Participant 3	00:19:11
Pre-test	14.07.2021	12 am	Participant 4	00:36:25
Interview	26.07.2021	11 am	Participant 5	00:44:14
Interview	26.07.2021	2:15 pm	Participant 6	00:24:17
Interview	27.07.2021	4 pm	Participant 14	00:26:03
Interview	29.07.2021	11 am	Participant 16	00:32:56
Interview	29.07.2021	6:30 pm	Participant 10	00:25:30
Interview	30.07.2021	12 am	Participant 9	00:27:21
Interview	30.07.2021	2 pm	Participant 11	00:18:00
Interview	30.07.2021	8 pm	Participant 8	00:18:06
Interview	31.07.2021	11 am	Participant 20	00:37:03
Interview	31.07.2021	2 pm	Participant 7	00:32:04
Interview	31.07.2021	3 pm	Participant 12	00:19:02
Interview	01.08.2021	10 am	Participant 13	00:22:39
Interview	01.08.2021	6:30 pm	Participant 15	00:22:49
Interview	02.08.2021	6:30 pm	Participant 18	00:41:36
Interview	04.08.2021	1 pm	Participant 17	00:19:31

## Appendix E

*Overview of coding procedure by means of examples***Table E.1***Coding procedure (by means of examples)*

Coding method	Definition/description	Process	Examples
Open coding	<i>"initial classification and labelling of concepts in qualitative data analysis"</i> (Babbie, 2015, p. 388).	In this step, the researcher orientated the coding on the previously established interview guideline. Therefore, the interview transcripts were coded based on the main topics of that guideline, to get a more organised overview about the topics mentioned within the interview.	Codes such as <i>purchase intention, advertising, areas of gender marketing, disadvantages and advantages of gender marketing</i> were used to organise the data and to categories it.
Axial coding	<i>"reanalysis of the results of open coding"</i> (Babbie, 2015, p. 389),	In this step, the researcher further elaborated the codes by being more detailed about the information. Therefore, more subcodes of the previous established codes were developed.	Codes such as <i>disadvantages and advantages of gender marketing</i> were extended with subcodes such as <i>discomfort, exclusion or profit</i> .

Selective coding *builds on previous coding techniques and identifies more central concepts to simplify the organisation, understanding, comparison and interpretation of the data* (Babbie, 2015).

In the last step, the researcher merged some codes that had the same statement and deleted codes that were underused and not relevant for the study. Additionally, the researcher changed code names to make them more understandable and lastly, coded all transcripts uniformly.

Codes such as *no awareness* and *unconsciousness* (subcodes of possible reasons to support gender marketing) were merged to the code *lack of awareness*, since they had the same meaning. The code *third category* (subcode of ideas for change) was deleted, since only one person indicated this as an improvement for gender marketing. Moreover, it was also not fitting the context and purpose of the study. For the code *drugstore* (subcode of areas of gender marketing) was changed in *cosmetics/hygiene articles*, to make its meaning clearer.

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## Appendix F

*Complete Codebook (main codes)*

Table F.1

*Codebook (with frequencies)*

	Description/Definition	In vivo example (original version: German)	In vivo example (English)	Total frequency	Individual reference*
Advantages of gender marketing	The code <i>Advantages of gender marketing</i> refers to the participant's opinion about the advantages and positive aspects that gender marketing strategy can bring, such as guidance, fit, formation of identification and profit.			52	
guidance	Participants describe gender marketing as advantageous for giving guidance in terms of finding products they probably like.	<i>"dass man einen Leitfaden hat, wenn man nicht weiß, was man kaufen soll oder so." (participant 8)</i>	<i>"that you have a guideline if you don't know what to buy or so." (participant 8)</i>	13	10
fit	Participants describe gender marketing as advantageous since products from gender marketing tend to fit the customers' physical appearance based on their gender.	<i>"Da finde ich es dann doch eher wieder sinnvoll, weil es häufiger sowohl Männer und Frauen halt auch einfach einen anderen</i>	<i>"There, I think it makes more sense, because often both men and women have a different body type and accordingly all the things</i>	13	9

		<i>Körperbau haben und have to be tailored dementsprechend all die differently." (participant 13)</i>		
		<i>Sachen auch anders geschnitten werden müssen." (participant 13)</i>		
formation of identification	Participants describe gender marketing as advantageous since it can help the customers in their identity formation.	<i>"man könnte es positiv aufnehmen, dass es zur Identifikation beiträgt oder so." (participant 7)</i>	<i>"you could perceive it positively, that it contributes to the personal identification or so." (participant 7)</i>	18 10
profit	Participants describe gender marketing as advantageous for making a monetary profit.	<i>"Also ja, aus Sicht der aus Sicht der Geschäfte kann ich, ist das schon positiv das zu machen, einfach weil sie halt eben Geld verdienen wollen." (participant 14)</i>	<i>"So, yes, from the point of view, point of view of businesses, it is positive to do this, simply because they want to earn money." (participant 14)</i>	15 7

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Advertising	The code <i>Advertising</i> refers to different aspects and characteristics that participants recognised in advertising related to gender marketing, based on the gender displayed in the advertising, such as physical	80
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	characteristics, personal characteristics, product category, product characteristics and design/setup.				
physical characteristics	Participants describe the physical characteristics of the people within advertising, such as physical appearance, hair, body type among others.	<i>"Sie ist sehr Norm schön, also es sind so dünne weiße Frauen mit langen Haaren natürlich und irgendwie Kleidern wahrscheinlich. Also ja, so sehr typisch, sehr sehr typisch weiblich."</i> (participant 7)	<i>"She's very standard beautiful, so these skinny white women with long hair of course and with dresses probably. So yeah, very typical, very very typical feminine."</i> (participant 7)	31	11
personal characteristics	Participants describe the personal characteristics of the people within advertising, such as friendliness, helpfulness etc.	<i>"Sie ist freundlich, hilfsbereit, so diese typischen Frauen"</i> (participant 16)	<i>"She is friendly, helpful, those typical women"</i> (participant 16)	7	6
product category	Participants describe the product categories shown within advertising, such as hygiene products, tools, beverage etc.	<i>"Das ist für mich dieses 3000 in eins Shampoo, Waschgel, Bartöl, keine Ahnung, was. Das ist für mich ein Männerprodukt."</i> (participant 7)	<i>"For me, that's this 3000-in-one shampoo, wash gel, beard oil, I don't know what. That's a man's product for me."</i> (participant 7)	57	14

product characteristics	Participants describe the product characteristics within advertising, such as the colour of the product, the appearance etc.	<i>"dunkelblaue Flasche, was glaub ich auch eher auf männlich hinwirkt."</i> (participant 13)	<i>"dark blue bottle, which I think is also more suggestive of masculinity."</i> (participant 13)	14	5
design / setup	Participants describe the design/setup of the advertising, such as colours, music, structure, focus etc.	<i>"also ich find Männer Werbung ist immer kurz und knackig, ne die kommen halt immer schnell auf den Punkt dort. Ja, die sind halt immer sehr ich würde schon fast motivierend sagen ja doch."</i> (participant 17)	<i>"I think men's advertising is always short and snappy, they always get to the point quickly there. Yes, they're always very I would almost say motivating, yes they are."</i> (participant 17)	53	15
Areas of gender marketing	The code <i>Areas of gender marketing</i> refers to areas in the participants' lives where gender marketing has been recognised, such as beverages, children's items, clothing, cosmetics/hygiene articles, and everywhere.			20	
beverages	Participants state that gender marketing is present in the food and beverage sector, such as in the supermarket or gastronomy.	<i>"Im Supermarkt gibt es hab ich schon mal gesehen irgendwie Saft. Also sowas"</i>	<i>"I've seen juice of some kind in the supermarket. So something like Orange"</i>	6	5

		<i>wie O-Saft oder so wo für sie und für ihn draufstand."</i>	<i>juice or something where it said for her and for him."</i>		
		(participant 8)	(participant 8)		
children's items	Participants state that gender marketing is present in the children sector, such as toys and clothing.	<i>"Ja und allgemein so Spielzeug und so weiter ist glaube ich mega heftig und irgendwelche Ferienfreizeiten"</i>	<i>"Yes, and generally toys and so is I think super intense and also holiday camps"</i>	6	5
		(participant 7)	(participant 7).		
clothing	Participants state that gender marketing is present in the clothing sector, such as within stores and clothes in general.	<i>"also natürlich Kleidung ist sehr auffällig mit Gender Marketing"</i>	<i>"so of course clothes are very conspicuous with gender marketing"</i>	10	9
		(participant 18)	(participant 18)		
cosmetics/ hygiene articles	Participants state that gender marketing is present in drugstores and related products, such as hygiene products.	<i>"Innerhalb der Drogerie"</i>	<i>"Within the drugstore"</i>	7	7
		(participant 19)	(participant 19)		
everywhere	Participants state that gender marketing is present in every sector of daily life.	<i>"dass das in fast allen Bereichen des Lebens irgendwie stattfindet"</i>	<i>"that this somehow takes place in almost all areas of life"</i>	3	3
		(participant 12)	(participant 12)		

Disadvantages of gender marketing	The code <i>Disadvantages of gender marketing</i> refers to the participant's opinion about the disadvantages and negative aspects that gender marketing strategy can bring, such as confusion, discomfort, discrimination, exclusion, gender roles, inequality, personal restriction, the pink tax, separation of gender, sexism, stereotyping and nonessential.	92	4	4
confusion	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing the feeling of confusion.	<p><i>"dass man sich irgendwie so ein bisschen fühlt wie zwischen den Stühlen. Also dass man einfach, dass man nicht weiß, was man was man machen soll. Also welche. Welche Hose jetzt einem passen sollte. In welcher Abteilung man gucken sollte." (participant 15)</i></p> <p><i>"that you somehow feel a bit like you're caught between two chairs. So that you just, that you don't know what to do. So which. Which trousers should fit you. Which department you should be looking in." (participant 15)</i></p>	4	4

discomfort	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as discomfoting.	<i>"dann sich wahrscheinlich schlecht fühlen oder komisch fühlen, wenn sie halt in der Abteilung sind, zu der sie äußerlich nicht gehören."</i> (participant 8)	<i>"then they probably feel bad or weird about being in the department they don't belong to according to their appearance."</i> (participant 8)	28	13
discrimination	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as discriminating.	<i>"Oder werden von Produkten einfach diskriminiert, werden nicht in sie integriert, in die Werbung oder in die Präsentation."</i> (participant 6)	<i>"Or are simply discriminated by products, are not integrated into them, in the advertising or the presentation."</i> (participant 6)	4	4
exclusion	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as excluding.	<i>"und es exkludiert halt auch alle Menschen, die nicht Frau oder Mann sind."</i> (participant 6)	<i>"and it also excludes all people who are not women or men."</i> (participant 6)	24	12
gender roles	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing specific gender roles.	<i>"Ja, ganz toxische Rollenbilder."</i> (participant 7)	<i>"Yes, very toxic role models."</i> (participant 7)	15	11

inequality	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing inequality between the gender.	<i>"Die Auswahl bei ner Frauenabteilung ist viel riesiger als in der Männerabteilung."</i> (participant 9)	<i>"The selection in a women's department is much bigger than in a men's department."</i> (participant 9)	21	12
personal restriction	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing the personal restriction of an individual.	<i>"Also es schränkt halt von vornherein auf jeden Fall voll viel ein. Also viele Menschen benutzen halt Produkte nicht, weil sie nicht für ihr Geschlecht sind."</i> (participant 6)	<i>"It definitely restricts a lot right from the start. So many people don't use products because they are not intended for their gender."</i> (participant 6)	19	10
pink tax	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing the pink tax, which means that female products are more expensive than male products.	<i>"Frauen Produkte kosten häufig mehr Geld als als Männer Produkte."</i> (participant 12)	<i>"Women's products often cost more money than men's products."</i> (participant 12)	8	6
separation of gender	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing the separation of gender.	<i>"Und ich glaube auch, dass es mehr dazu, also dass es das fördert, dass Geschlechter gespalten</i>	<i>"And I also think, that it more, so that it's promoting, that genders</i>	11	5



		<i>werden so in männlich, are so split into male, weiblich." (participant 5)</i>	<i>female." (participant 5)</i>		
sexism	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing sexism.	<i>"Ja, das ist natürlich irgendwo schon sexistisch ist, dass du häufig Vorurteile gegenüber dem einen Geschlecht beispielsweise hast." (participant 13)</i>	<i>"Yes, that of course it is somehow sexist that you often have prejudices against one gender, for instance." (participant 13)</i>	1	1
stereotyping	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing gender-based stereotypes.	<i>"Ja, Manifestierung von Stereotypen und ganz, ganz krasse: Ja, Mädchen oder Frauen sind so, Männer sind so." (participant 7)</i>	<i>"Yes, a manifestation of stereotypes and very, very extreme: Yes, girls or women are like that, men are like that." (participant 7)</i>	13	8
nonessential	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as nonessential, without any benefits for the customers.	<i>"Ich finde generell Gender Marketing komplett dämlich. Es macht für mich gar keinen Sinn." (participant 15)</i>	<i>"I think gender marketing, in general, is completely stupid. It makes no sense to me at all." (participant 15)</i>	8	5

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Experiences	The code <i>Experiences</i> refers to the participant's experiences within different kinds of stores, such as clothing store, drugstore, online environment, and unisex store.	88	37	15	
clothing store	Participants describe their experiences within a clothing store.	<p><i>"Ja, gehen wir mal bei, P&amp;C meinetwegen, wo ich hin und wieder mal bin. Ja, der muss ja relativ klar nach Geschlechtern geteilt. Ich glaube, das lässt sich auch auf alle anderen Bekleidungsgeschäfte, ähm, applizieren. Meistens haben die es ja nach Etagen. Je nachdem wie groß der Laden ist, das das die komplette Etage ist, meistens steht ja an der Rolltreppe irgend ein Schild, von wegen erste sind Damen und zweite</i></p>	<p><i>"Yes, let's go to P&amp;C, where I go from time to time. Yes, it has to be relatively clearly divided according to gender. I think that can also be applied to all other clothing shops. They usually have it divided by floor. Depending on how big the shop is, that's the entire floor, usually there's a sign on the escalator saying that the first floor is for women and the second floor is for men or</i></p>	37	15

drugstore	Participants describe their experiences within a drugstore.	<p><i>Herren oder sonst was. Und häufig gibt dann halt noch eine Kinderabteilung dazu.</i>" (participant 13)</p>	<p><i>whatever. And often there is also a children's department."</i> (participant 13)</p>	26	14
		<p><i>"Also wenn ich jetzt mein Shampoo kaufen will, gehe ich immer erst an diesen ganzen Schmink Sachen vorbei mit Wimperntusche und Lippenstift und so und gucke ob es neue Farben gibt für Nagellack oder sonst irgendwie, ja einfach wegen besser haben als brauchen. Und dann gehe ich aber wirklich direkt weiter. Dann zu Bodylotion. Da nehme ich meistens die von Balea und zwar meistens die mit Limited Edition, in besonders bunt und</i></p>	<p><i>"So now when I want to buy my shampoo, I always go past all the make-up stuff first with mascara and lipstick and so on and see if there are new colours for nail varnish or something else, just because it's better to have than to need. And then I really go straight on. Then I go to body lotion. I usually use the Balea lotion, usually the one with the limited edition, especially colourful, and I always use the same shampoo for my hair</i></p>		

*Shampoo nehme ich immer because it's the best."  
dasselbe für meine Haare (participant 11)  
weil es das Beste ist."  
(participant 11)*

online environment Participants describe their experiences within the online environment.

*"Hm, also ich finde es online teilweise sogar noch extremer, weil du halt nicht so diese Gänge und so hast, dass du einfach so durchgehst, sondern du musst wirklich auswählen, ob dir das präsentiert wird oder nicht. Und es ist oft gar nicht möglich, beide Sektionen gleichzeitig zu sehen. Das ist auf jeden Fall bei großen Ketten so. Aber bei da ist es leider auch bei Kleiderkreisel so, also jetzt Vinted auch so, dass du dich entscheiden musst. Was es*

*"Hm, I think it's even more extreme online, because you don't have these aisles and so on that you just go through, but you really have to choose whether it's presented to you or not. And it's often not even possible to see both sections at the same time. That's definitely the case with large chains. But unfortunately it's also the case with Kleiderkreisel, Vinted now, that you have to choose. Which makes it more difficult, because you*

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			<p><i>auch einfach schwieriger</i> have to look through both  <i>macht, weil man dann halt</i> categories and not just  <i>beide Kategorien</i> once." (participant 6)  <i>durchgucken muss und nicht</i>  <i>einfach einmal."</i> (participant  6)</p>		
unisex store	Participants describe their experiences within a unisex store.	<p><i>"Frauen und Männer, wobei</i> "Women and men,  <i>zum Beispiel bei Uniqlo</i> although at Uniqlo, for  <i>finde ich, dass da auch beide</i> example, I find that both  <i>beides anziehen können.</i> can wear both. So there  <i>Also da sind die. Die Mode,</i> they are. The fashion they  <i>die sie haben eher ein</i> have is a bit more gender  <i>bisschen gender neutraler,</i> neutral, a bit more unisex."  <i>also ein bisschen mehr</i> (participant 14)  <i>unisex mäßig."</i> (participant  14)</p>	17	13	
General perception	The code <i>General perception</i> refers to the participant's general perception of the topic of gender marketing.		87		

indifferent	The participant's perception of the topic of gender marketing is indifferent.	<i>"Also für mich persönlich. Mir ist es ja egal." (participant 17)</i>	<i>"So for me personally. I don't really care." (participant 17)</i>	14	5
negative	The participant's perception of the topic of gender marketing is negative.	<i>"Gar nichts. Ich finde daran überhaupt nichts positiv eigentlich." (participant 8)</i>	<i>"Nothing at all. I don't see anything positive about it, actually." (participant 8)</i>	62	14
Ideas for change	The code <i>Ideas for change</i> refers to the participant's opinion on improving marketing to be more inclusive towards all genders, such as through education, marketing, parenting and unisex.			39	
education	Participants state that gender inclusion could be improved/changed through educating people about the issue, by generating awareness.	<i>"Aufklärung finde ich sehr relevant und auch den Leuten mal näherzubringen, was, wie abstrakt eigentlich Gender Normen sind, wie abstrakt eigentlich dieses ganze Konstrukt ist, das von Binarität und wie wir leben und wie Produkte</i>	<i>"I think education is very relevant and also getting people to understand what, how abstract gender norms actually are, how abstract this whole construct actually is, that of binarity and how we live and how products are marketed." (participant 9)</i>	17	10

		<i>vermarktet werden."</i> (participant 9)			
marketing	Participants state that gender inclusion could be improved/changed through marketing, by including other genders beside the binary genders, female and male.	<i>"Ja, genau also das letztendlich Repräsentation halt auch im Marketing umgesetzt wird."</i> (participant 7)	<i>"Yes, exactly, so that in the end representation is also implemented in marketing."</i> (participant 7)	6	4
parenting	Participants state that gender inclusion could be improved/changed through education from their parents, by raising children with a certain awareness towards all genders.	<i>"Von daher finde ich dass das sehr wichtig in der Erziehung und Bildung, dass das halt auch so offen vermittelt wird so: du kannst dein, wer du willst. Das ist nicht gebunden an dein Geschlecht, was wir dir zuschreiben."</i> (participant 5)	<i>"That's why I think it's very important in upbringing and education that this is conveyed so openly: you can be whoever you want. That is not bound to your gender, what we ascribe to you."</i> (participant 5)	7	4
unisex	Participants state that gender inclusion could be improved/changed by desegregating gender (binary) and instead focusing on unisex in shops and other areas.	<i>"Also ich würde wenn dann verändern das auch die Marketing darauf eingeht, nicht mehr dieses stereo-</i>	<i>"So I would change the marketing to no longer market these stereo-male, stereotypical-female</i>	25	13

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*Mann, stereotyp-frau products, so that they go a  
Produkte zu vermarkten, bit more into unisex,  
also dass sie da gleich so ein maybe. I think that would  
bisschen eher auf Unisex be a good first step in any  
eingehen eventuell. Das case". (participant 17)  
würde glaube ich schon den  
ersten, das wäre ein guter  
erster Schritt auf jeden Fall  
schon mal." (participant 17)*

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Possible reasons for the support of gender marketing	The code, <i>Possible reasons for the support of gender marketing</i> , refers to the reasons the participants came up with, that may be responsible for the gender binary of today's society, such as effortless, fear, habit, larger target group/profit, only option, preference, social environment, lack of awareness and upbringing.	86			
effortlessness	Participants state that a possible reason for gender binary is that it is simply more effortless. Thus, people who identify with binary genders can find their products more	<i>"Also eigentlich das gleiche wie in der Drogerie, dass wenn du dich einem dieser Geschlechter</i>	<i>"So actually the same as in the drugstore, that if you feel you belong to one of zugehörig</i>	6	5



	easily and quickly and know exactly where to go.	<i>fühlst, das für dich einfach ist."</i> (participant 15)	<i>those genders, that's easy for you."</i> (participant 15)		
fear	Participants describe gender marketing as disadvantageous since they perceive it as reinforcing the feeling of fear.	<i>"Also ich glaube schon, dass das einfach auch immer noch mit einer Angst verbunden ist oder mit einer Scham."</i> (participant 7)	<i>"Well, I think that it is still connected with fear or shame."</i> (participant 7)	8	7
habit	Participants state that a possible reason for gender binary is habit.	<i>"Ich glaube schon, dass es auch die Macht der Gewohnheit irgendwo ist."</i> (participant 7)	<i>"I think it's also the force of habit somewhere."</i> (participant 7)	36	14
larger target group/profit	Participants state that a possible reason for gender binary is that the binary genders are a larger target group, leading to more profit.	<i>Dadurch glaube ich, dass sich einfach die Mehrheit der Menschen in dem Geschlecht zugehörig fühlen, in dem sie geboren werden. Es ist sehr einfach, da zu differenzieren.</i> (participant 15)	<i>"Thus, I believe that the majority of people simply feel that they belong to the gender in which they are born. It is very easy to differentiate."</i> (participant 15)	10	7

only option	Participants state that a possible reason for gender binary is that the female and male options are the only options that they can purchase.	<p><i>"Und weil man nicht wirklich. Also. Es gibt ja nicht viele Produkte, die halt nicht gegendert sind, also z.B. in der Drogerie zumindest, weil ich kann in der Drogerie entweder nur ein Duschgel kaufen, was bei den Männern stand oder was bei den Frauen stand. Da einen dritten, eine dritte Regal Seite gibt es nicht. Also muss ich eins von beidem kaufen." (participant 8)</i></p>	<p><i>"And because you can't really. Well, there aren't many products that aren't gendered, for example in the drugstore, at least, because in the drugstore I can either only buy a shower gel that was in the men's section or what was in the women's section. Because a third, a third shelf page doesn't exist. So I have to buy one of each." (participant 8)</i></p>	11	10
preference	Participants state that a possible reason for gender binary is their preference.	<p><i>"Das heißt, wenn das jetzt wirklich der Geschmack ist, macht es da schon Sinn aufzuteilen." (participant 16)</i></p>	<p><i>"That is, if that is really the taste, it makes sense to divide it up". (participant 16)</i></p>	9	9

social environment	Participants state that a possible reason for gender binary is their social environment.	<i>"Nicht, dass meine Eltern das mit Absicht gemacht hätten, sondern einfach weil es sozial so konstruiert wurde."</i> (participant 15)	<i>"Not that my parents did it on purpose, but just because it was socially constructed that way."</i> (participant 15)	21	8
lack of awareness	Participants state that a possible reason for gender binary is that gender marketing is unconscious and not recognised by the customers, because of their lack of awareness.	<i>"Es ist eher subtil. Deswegen ist es nicht so in your Face."</i> (participant 5)	<i>"It's more subtle. That's why it's not so in your face."</i> (participant 5)	11	6
upbringing	Participants state that a possible reason for gender binary is the upbringing of the people, so how they were raised by their parents and what they learned in their childhood.	<i>"Also ich glaube ein großer Punkt ist auf jeden Fall Elternhaus oder Familie, das es halt von der älteren Generation noch so übertragen wird schon von klein auf an halt. So die Sachen, die deine Eltern dir kaufen, oder deine Familie und die sie vielleicht auch unterstützen, dass du sie dir</i>	<i>"So I think a big point is definitely parental home or family, that it is still transmitted by the older generation from an early age. So the things that your parents buy for you, or your family and that they maybe also support, that you then buy for yourself with your money or that</i>	23	11

*dann mit deinem Geld kaufst they suggest to you".  
oder die sie dir (participant 6)  
vorschlagen." (participant 6)*

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Product choice	The code, <i>Product choice</i> , refers to the participants' purchase choices, so why they bought certain products, such as: based on gender, fits needs, ingredients, price, routine, scent, and sustainability.		64	
based on gender	Participants describe their product choice and purchase intention was based on their gender.	<i>"Na ja, ich gehe da erst mal hin weil ich mich als Mann identifiziere und das halt natürlich irgendwie reflektiert wird." (participant 14)</i>	22	7
fits needs	Participants state that they chose a product because it met their needs.	<i>"hab ich mir halt das geholt, weil ich dachte, das funktioniert dann für diese Haarmethode, die ich anwende." (participant 16)</i>	11	6

ingredients	Participants state that they chose a product because of its ingredients.	<i>"Ich achte so ein bisschen auf die Inhaltsstoffe." (participant 15)</i>	<i>"I pay a certain amount of attention to the ingredients." (participant 15)</i>	10	7
price	Participants state that they chose a product because of its price.	<i>"Und wie gesagt, mir ist das relativ egal, wie die meine Produkte anbieten. Ich will, dass das Produkt gut ist. Und da leg ich jetzt eher mal den Stellenwert auch drauf, dass das Preis-Leistungsverhältnis passt und nicht, ob da jetzt, ob in der Werbung, Frau oder Mann ist, das ist mir dann persönlich egal ehrlich gesagt." (participant 13)</i>	<i>"And as I said, I don't really care how they promote my products. I want the product to be good. And I tend to put more emphasis on the price-performance ratio and not on whether it's a woman or a man in the advertisement, I honestly don't care about that personally." (participant 13)</i>	3	3
routine	Participants state that they chose a product because of their routine.	<i>"Einfach weil es für mich einfach ist. Weil ich weiß, wo was steht." (participant 11)</i>	<i>"Simply because it's easy for me. Because I know where things are." (participant 11)</i>	12	8

scent	Participants state that they chose a product based on its scent.	<i>"So was am besten riecht."</i> (participant 8)	<i>"What smells best."</i> (participant 8)	8	5
sustainability	Participants state that they chose a product because it is sustainable.	<i>"Da versuche ich schon, dass das irgendwie ethisch und vegan halt möglichst, heißt hier gegen das Tierleid. Darauf versuche ich zu achten."</i> (participant 10)	<i>"I try to make it as ethical and vegan as possible, i.e. against animal suffering. I try to pay attention to that."</i> (participant 10)	16	10

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\*Note. Individual reference refers to the number of individual participants (N = 15) that mentioned the code in their interviews.