



# Customers' choice of a salesperson during the initial sales encounter



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## ABSTRACT

In retailing, the initial encounter of a customer with a salesperson (SP) is crucial. Easily accessible cues, such as physical, task, or social attractiveness, may help in the choice process of an SP. Another cue is SP gender. Enhancing the current literature about brand gender, this research analyzes a possible match between brand and SP gender including aspects of physical, task, and social attractiveness characteristics, as well as the customers' requirements of rather core or relational aspects for the specific brand. Androgynous brands that attracted attention in recent publications are included in the analyses as well.

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## 1. Introduction

Many sales processes include a sales encounter. Both the sales encounter and the relationships resulting from it have been analyzed in numerous studies (Babin et al., 1999; Bäckström and Johansson, 2006; Bitner, 1990; Darian et al., 2005; Jamal and Adelowore, 2008; Piercy et al., 2001). The literature considers the relationship between a salesperson (SP) and a customer to be one of reciprocal communication, a so-called dyad (Evans, 1963; Williams and Spiro, 1985). Researchers have discussed the moderating role of customer gender (Darley et al., 2008), and, among other aspects, the role of SP gender (Gable and Reed, 1987; Mohr and Henson, 1996; Swan et al., 1984). These studies have yielded ambiguous results. Although it is clear that an employee's gender matters to customers, the effects of gender preference appear to be masked by complex interactions (Mohr and Henson, 1996).

This study attempts to shed more light on these masked interactions during the very first encounter between a customer and an SP along several dimensions, such as attractiveness characteristics, as well as differing requirements of core or rather relational aspects, of the SP and customer gender, and of brand and product gender. Since the publication of Grohmann's (2009) "Gender dimensions of brand personality", a handful of articles have been published analyzing the effect of brand and product gender on brand equity (Lieven et al., 2014), brand preference (Lieven et al., 2015), brand-alliance fit and purchase intentions (van Tilburg et al., 2015a), and product aesthetics and evaluation (van Tilburg et al., 2015b). To implement brand gender in a gendered process of

the SP choice is a logical extension in the framework of behavioral branding, where employees fit the brands through on-brand behavior (de Chernatony and Cottam, 2009).

This research analyzes the crucial moment when the customer encounters the SP for the first time. This impression persists throughout subsequent encounters, and "... the first impression is a pervasive one" (Solomon et al., 1985). Consequently, the first encounter claims substantial attention in the retail process. The present research has incorporated brand and product-related properties, such as brand gender, as part of brand personality (Grohmann, 2009), as well as interpersonal aspects such as physical, task, and social attractiveness. Additionally, customers' expectations regarding SPs with core or mainly relational capabilities are included.

After reviewing the theoretical backgrounds and formulating hypotheses, two empirical studies will be presented. Several of the interactions that mask the effects of gender preference (Mohr and Henson, 1996) can be revealed. The research method and the results contribute to the literature of brand gender and adequate brand sales encounters.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

Regarding the creation of customer experiences (Verhoef et al., 2009), brands themselves have acquired a more prominent role in the sales process. Employee behavior is now oriented not only toward the outcome of the sales encounter, but also toward the brand itself via the brand's personality. The personalities of the people representing the brands, which is known as "humanics" (Berry and Lampo, 2004), has increasingly moved to the forefront of marketing considerations (King and Grace, 2005). In the framework of behavioral branding, the personality of the sales staff is

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related to the personality of the brand. Employees' consistent on-brand behavior (de Chernatony and Cottam, 2009) positively influences brand loyalty and a willingness to recommend the product to others, which benefits the brand beyond the actual sales encounter. This article employs an approach in which gender is the most salient and accessible personality trait (Dion et al., 1972), and examines the potential effect of a fit between brand and SP gender. Brands have been shown to possess gender (Grohmann, 2009). Similar to the impact of self-image congruence on brand preferences and loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006), consumers can be expected to strive for a congruence between SP and the brand, particularly regarding gender.

**H1.** Consumers asking advice for feminine/masculine brands tend to choose a female/male SP.

Gender was initially defined as either feminine or masculine. In recent decades, however, a more differentiated view described gender in four categories based on quadrants in a feminine/masculine coordinate diagram. Brands high on both masculinity and femininity are referred to as androgynous; those high/low on femininity but low/high on masculinity as feminine/masculine; and those low on both as undifferentiated (Bem, 1974, 1977; Spence et al., 1975). According to Bem, androgynous personalities react more flexibly to requirements, have a wider range of possible behaviors, and adapt better to situations. Androgynous people "define a more human standard of psychological health" (Bem, 1974, p. 162). Jackson (1983) demonstrated that androgynous persons were more likeable compared to masculine and feminine persons. Thus, it can be expected that in the matching process between brands and SPs, the choice regarding androgynous brands will tend toward SPs with high physical attractiveness.

**H2.** For androgynous brands, customers prefer SPs with high physical attractiveness.

Some authors have claimed that women's strong work ethic, service orientation, and sustainable, humanistic, and ethical-moral attitudes predestine them for sales careers (Skolnik, 1985). Male sales force members were most responsive to a transactional style (Comer et al., 1995). Based on their better listening ability, female SPs are significantly more often found in service-based businesses (Lane and Crane, 2002). Thus, we expect:

**H3.** For service brands, female SPs are more often chosen than for product brands.

A large portion of the previous literature is based on general discussions of gender roles. Various studies have analyzed different gender-typed information processing (Dube and Morgan, 1996). Differing capabilities might play an important role in the expectations of a sales encounter regarding the core vs. the relational outcomes of a transaction.<sup>2</sup> There are two characteristics that act as the main drivers of these outcomes: competence, which tends to be associated with men (Deaux, 1984), and warm-expressiveness and sensitivity to the concerns of others (Meyers-Levy, 1988), which are associated with women. SPs' core and relational abilities reveal themselves through task or social attractiveness (McCroskey et al., 2006). Regarding specific brands or products, when core competence is required, male SPs should be chosen due to their task- and goal-oriented attitude. When customers require mainly relational aspects, female SPs with their

higher social attractiveness are preferred.

**H4a.** Chosen SPs with high task and low social attractiveness are usually male; chosen SPs with low task and high social attractiveness are usually females.

**H4b.** Customers' core vs. relational requirement moderates the claims of H4a in a way that requirements for core aspects increase the probability of choosing a male SP, and requirements for relational aspects increase the probability of choosing a female SP.

Attractiveness has been found a positive moderator in the retail context leading to higher customer service ratings (Kulesza et al., 2014). A gender mismatch between customer and SP resulted in higher customer satisfaction for a facial attractive SP (McColl and Truong, 2013). Here, the important question of how physical, task, and social attractiveness compete against each other and whether this differs between male and female customers can be investigated with an interaction where the gender moderates the SP choice process. Men are said to tend to come into contact with physically attractive women because of men's orientation toward short-term mating (Schmitt et al., 2001). We hypothesize that male, but not female, customers who choose a physically attractive female SP are willing to accept a lower task and social competence.

**H5a.** Female customers' choice of SPs are balanced across physical, task, and social attractiveness.

**H5b.** Male customers prefer female SPs with high physical attractiveness, even if task or social attractiveness is low. If physical attractiveness is low, male customers prefer male SPs, and this is even more so when task or social attractiveness is high.

Hypothesis 1 will be tested in Study 1 and H2–H5 in Study 2.

### 3. Empirical studies

#### 3.1. Study 1: Preferred choice of female or male SP regarding 140 brands

##### 3.1.1. Procedure, stimuli, and participants

The 140 brands used in Lieven et al. (2014) were selected. There, the respective brand genders had been assessed by the Grohmann (2009) model with brand masculinity (MBP: adventurous, aggressive, brave, daring, dominant, sturdy;  $\alpha=0.80$ ) and brand femininity (FBP: expresses tender feelings, fragile, graceful, sensitive, sweet, and tender;  $\alpha=0.94$ ). It might be argued that it is not the brand but the product category that determines the gender. However, Grohmann (2009) and Lieven et al. (2014) found brand genders within specific product categories significantly different. To analyze a possible confounding of brand and product category, product genders were included in the analysis (Masculine Product Personality, MPP; Feminine Product Personality, FPP). The respective genders had been assessed in Lieven et al. (2015) with masculine product gender (MPG;  $\alpha=.88$ ) and feminine product gender (FPG;  $\alpha=.92$ ). Brands were presented to survey participants in random groups of 16 logos. Using a continuous semantic differential from 1=female SP to 20=male SP, the relative preference for one or the other was specified.

The survey was conducted online in Germany by a well-established global provider of data solutions for survey research with 30 offices in 21 countries. The provider collected completed questionnaires from participants according to the countries' demographics to provide a representation as close as possible to the population. In total, 1043 respondents participated (43.2% females,  $M_{\text{Age}}=42.6$  years,  $SD_{\text{Age}}=12.4$  years) yielding a total of 15,801 SP choices.

<sup>2</sup> Several terms for the core aspects exist: expertise, (technical) competence, task-oriented, agentic (Meyers-Levy, 1988), or task- and goal-oriented (Iacobucci and Ostrom, 1993). Other terms for the relational aspects are: process, communal (Meyers-Levy, 1988), interpersonal, or socially-oriented. In this article, the terms within each group are used interchangeably.

### 3.1.2. Results

The distribution of scores on the semantic differential had a strong mode in the middle, indicating that approximately 30% of all choices were indifferent regarding SP gender. Two other modes could be seen on 1 (6.8%) and 20 (6.9%), indicating that these respondents clearly preferred either a female or a male SP. To visualize SP gender depending on brand gender, the FBP value was subtracted from the MBP (MBP–FBP) as a measure for gender (Uzzell and Horne, 2006). A respective graph is shown in Fig. 1.

As a test statistic for H1, a linear mixed model (LMM) was chosen. The dependent variable was the semantic differential of SP gender. As fixed effects, MBP, FBP, MPP, and FPP were included (brand and product gender). The product category with 12 levels served as a random factor. Brand gender was highly significant with an expected positive estimate for MBP (1.51,  $p < .001$ ) and an expected negative estimate for FBP (–1.81,  $p < .001$ ). Product gender estimates had the same signs, but were not significant ( $ps > .500$ ), rejecting an assumption of a confounding effect of product category on brand gender. As a result, SP gender follows brand gender and H1 was supported.

### 3.2. Study 2: Gender, attractiveness, and requirements for core or relational aspects

In addition to brand gender and to control for attractiveness effects, interpersonal attraction constructs were included in the analyses (McCroskey et al., 2006). As well, customer requirements for core or mainly relational aspects with regard to a specific brand were included.

#### 3.2.1. Procedure, stimuli, and participants

While the dependent SP variable in Study 1 was continuous, in Study 2, four alternative SPs were offered as SP choice. Four portraits of two females and two males were carried over from previous research (Lieven et al., 2014). Fig. 2 illustrates these images.

The survey was again conducted in Germany. Sixty-four well-known brands were selected. In Study 2, several airline, travel, and hotel brands from the service sector were included. At the beginning of the main survey, one of the brands was chosen randomly. First, participants rated the 12 gender items for this brand (Grohmann, 2009). Then, the four SP photographs were shown simultaneously in random order and the respondents were asked to choose an SP for further advice regarding this brand. To assess the attraction scales, the four SP pictures were presented in a random order again and participants answered the following questions (McCroskey et al., 2006) on a scale from 1 (I do not agree at all) to 7 (I fully agree): Physical Attraction: I think this person is handsome/pretty; this person is sexy; this person has an attractive face; Task Attraction: I could probably depend on this person; I have confidence in the expertise and ability of this person; this person takes her/his work seriously; Social Attraction: this person could be a friend of mine; I could have a friendly talk with this person; this person is easy to get along with. As well, the participant's requirement for core or mainly relational aspects regarding this specific brand was assessed on a five point scale (1=exclusively core aspects to 5=exclusively relational aspects).

#### 3.2.2. Results

In total, 1804 respondents participated (50.4% female,  $M_{Age}=41.7$  years,  $SD_{Age}=13.2$  years). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values were .87 for the six MBP items and .93 for the six FBP items. Thus, the scales were sufficiently reliable (Nunnally, 1978). Means and reliabilities of the three attractiveness constructs (McCroskey et al., 2006) are depicted in Table 1. They were all above .7 and sufficiently high (Nunnally, 1978).

The brands were categorized using their MBP and FBP medians

into androgynous brands (high on both masculinity and femininity), feminine/masculine brands (high/low on femininity and low/high on masculinity), and undifferentiated brands (low on both masculinity and femininity) (Bem, 1977; Spence et al., 1975).

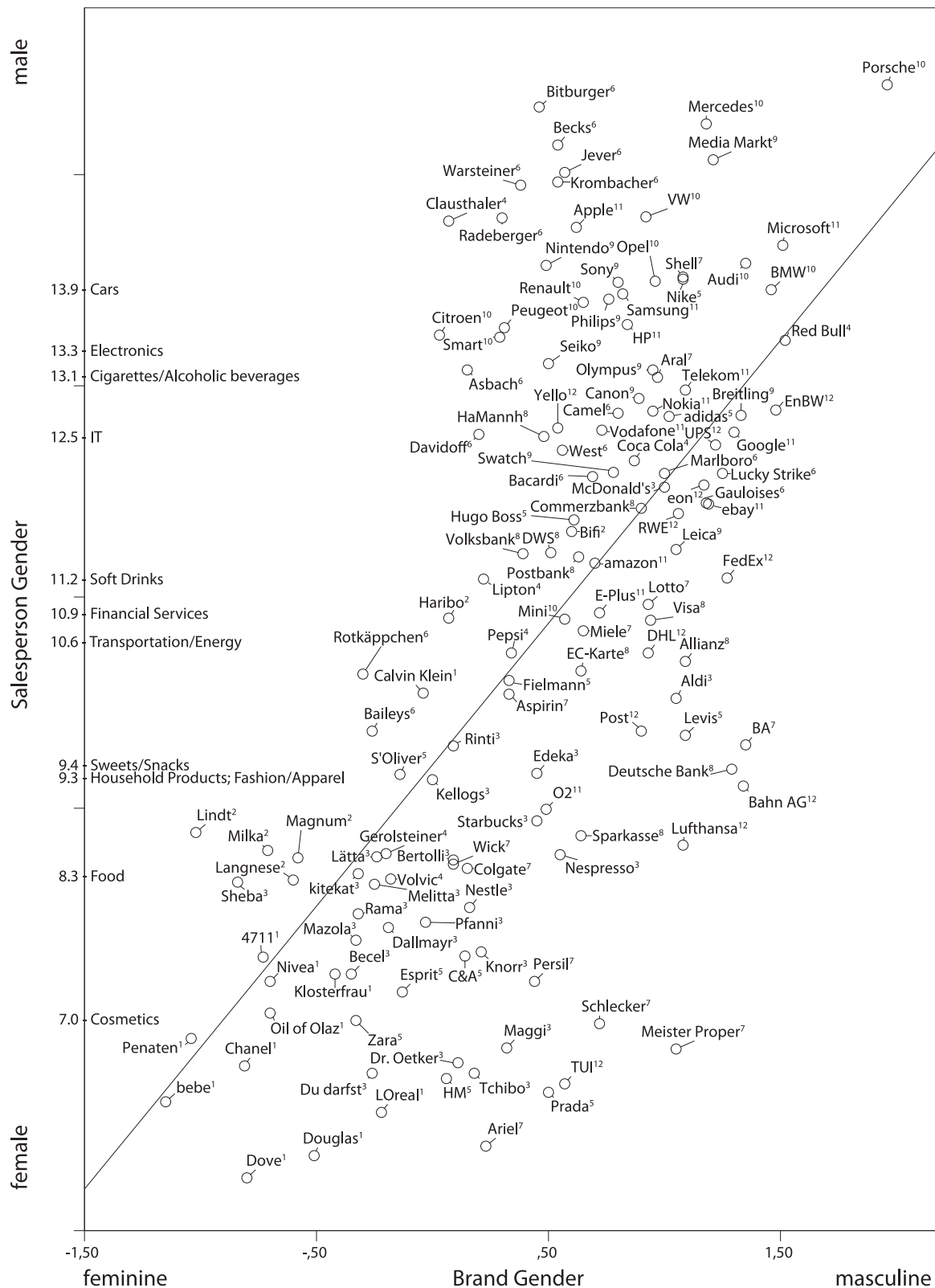
A multinomial regression of the categorical SP choice on the four brand genders, the three attractiveness scores, the requirement for core or relational aspects, and participant gender showed significant  $\chi^2$ -tests for all variables ( $ps < .001$ , except for core/relational requirements with  $p < .05$ ). The effects of the different variables can best be explained by their odds ratios (Table 2), which equals the chance for the specific SP to be chosen divided by the chance not to be chosen. In the case of an equal chance, the odds ratio is 1 which is represented by Male 2 as the reference category. In the case of an assumed total sample of 100 participants, the ratio would be 50:50 for Male 2. For physical attractiveness, the odds ratio increases to 7.64 for Female 1, meaning that of 100 persons 88 choose her and 12 do not ( $\frac{88/100}{12/100} = 88/12 = 7.33 \approx 7.64$ ) due to the highest physical attractiveness of Female 1. However, Female 1 is the least task and socially attractive, which reduces the respective odds ratios to .46 and .51. For androgynous brands, a ratio of 75:25 ( $=3.00 \approx 2.93$ , Table 2) chooses Female 1 with the strongest physical attractiveness. Feminine brands were equally distributed across both Female 1 and Female 2 with a similar ratio of about 75:25, again supporting H1 claiming that female SPs are preferably chosen for feminine brands. It is noteworthy that males in contrast to females choose Female 1 with a ratio of 70:30= $2.33$  which is the reciprocal of the odds ratio of .44 for female participants.

To further test H2 which claims the affinity of androgynous brands to highly physically attractive SPs, the distribution of the four SPs depending on the four categorical brand genders was examined. It showed a significant effect ( $\chi^2(9)=59.819$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Since such cross-tabulations are quite difficult to interpret, a visualization with a correspondence analysis (CA) plot is more suitable (Hoffman and Franke, 1986). The result is depicted in Fig. 3. CA plots are interpreted from the midpoint, the so-called centroid, by angles around it (Hoffman and Franke, 1986). Four sectors can be seen in Fig. 3 with feminine brands between Female 1 and Female 2, Masculine brands between Male 1 and Male 2 (both supporting H1), undifferentiated brands between Female 2 and Male 2, and androgynous brands between Female 1 and Male 1 who are the most physically attractive. Thus, for sales encounters regarding androgynous brands, preferably physically attractive SPs are chosen which supports H2.

Hotels, airlines, and the travel business are typical service categories. For these, 70.2% chose female SPs (either Female 1 or 2). For products, only 59.7% chose female SPs. This distribution was significant ( $\chi^2(1)=12.004$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, females are relatively more often chosen as SPs for services and H3 is supported.

A four-way interaction model was evaluated with the probability of choosing a female (Female 1 or Female 2) or male SP (Male 1 or Male 2) as the outcome, participant gender as the independent variable, and task attractiveness, social attractiveness, and the requirement for core vs. relational aspects as moderators.<sup>3</sup> The model itself was significant ( $\chi^2(6)=57.642$ ,  $p < .001$ ) with the following significant main effects:  $b_{\text{participant gender}}=-.113$ ,  $p < .05$  (i.e., males tend to prefer female SPs);  $b_{\text{task attractiveness}}=.291$ ,  $p < .001$  (task attractive SPs are usually male);  $b_{\text{social attractiveness}}=-.289$ ,  $p < .001$  (i.e., socially attractive SPs are usually female);  $b_{\text{requirement for core vs. relational aspects}}=-.114$ ,  $p < .05$  (i.e., participants with mainly core requirements tend to choose male SPs, and those

<sup>3</sup> Variable Coding: SP Gender: 1=female, 2=male; Attractiveness: low vs. high; Core vs. relational requirements: low=only core, high=only relational; Participant gender: 1=female, 2=male.



Note: Superscripts denote Product Categories: <sup>1</sup> Fragrance/Cosmetics, <sup>2</sup> Sweets/Snacks, <sup>3</sup> Food, <sup>4</sup> Soft Drinks, <sup>5</sup> Fashion/apparel, <sup>6</sup> Cigarettes/Alcohol, <sup>7</sup> Household Products, <sup>8</sup> Financial Services, <sup>9</sup> Electronics, <sup>10</sup> Cars, <sup>11</sup> IT, <sup>12</sup> Transportation/Energy. Salesperson gender scale from 1 = completely feminine to 20 = completely masculine.

**Fig. 1.** Salesperson Gender depending on Brand Gender.

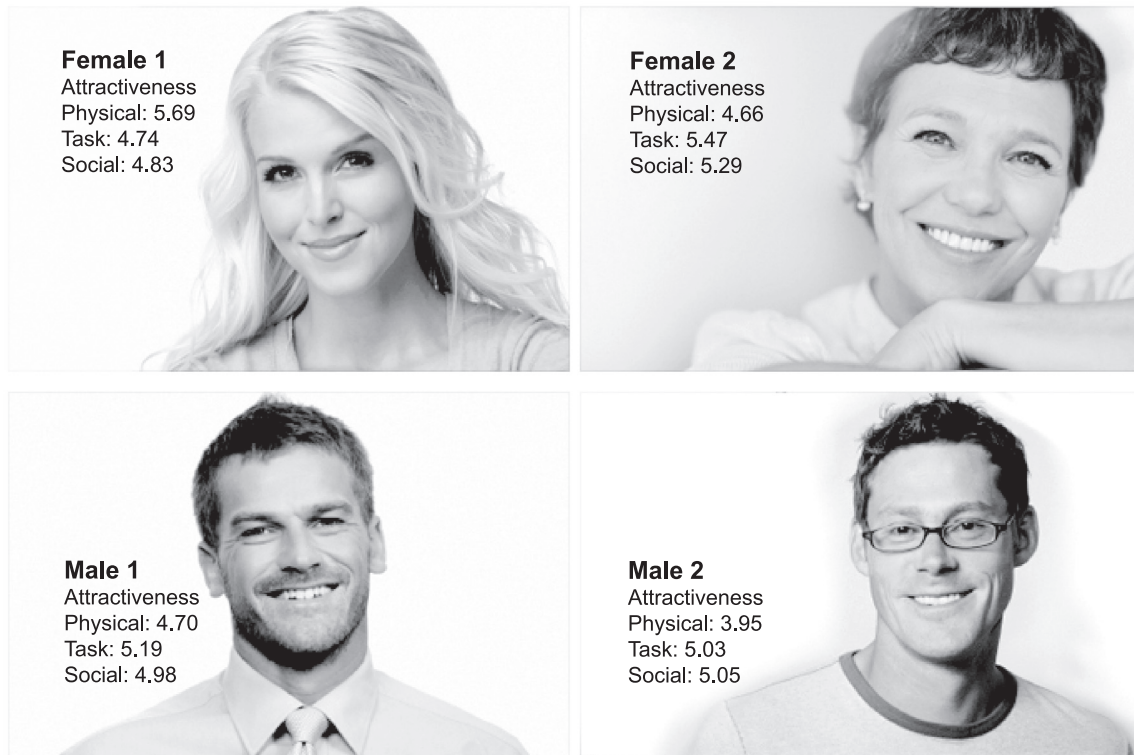


Fig. 2. Four salespersons (cf. Lieven et al., 2014).

**Table 1**  
Attractiveness means and reliabilities.

| SP       | Physical Attractiveness |                     | Task Attractiveness |                     | Social Attractiveness |                     |
|----------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|          | Mean                    | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | Mean                | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | Mean                  | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
| Female 1 | 5.69                    | .779                | 4.74                | .791                | 4.83                  | .808                |
| Female 2 | 4.66                    | .795                | 5.47                | .788                | 5.29                  | .767                |
| Male 1   | 4.70                    | .805                | 5.19                | .786                | 4.98                  | .806                |
| Male 2   | 3.95                    | .798                | 5.03                | .788                | 5.05                  | .781                |

with mainly relational requirements prefer female SPs). Of the interaction terms, two were significant:  $b_{\text{participant gender} \times \text{task attractiveness}} = .297, p < .001$  (i.e., male participants preferring male SPs with high task attractiveness);  $b_{\text{participant gender} \times \text{social attractiveness}} = -.257, p < .001$  (i.e., male participants preferring female SPs with high social attractiveness). While verbal interpretations of four-way interactions can sometimes become opaque, a visualization can bring it to mind better. This can be seen in Fig. 4(a) and (b). Female participants show a balanced choice behavior across task and social attractiveness. Male participants, however, prefer male SPs who are task but not socially attractive, and they prefer female SPs who are socially but not task attractive. This supports H4a, however, only for male customers. For customers with mainly core requirements, the tendency is more toward male SPs, for customers with mainly relational requirements the tendency is more toward female SPs. This supports H4b.

Three-way interactions were evaluated with the probability of choosing a male vs. female SP as the outcome, participant gender as the independent variable, and physical, task, and social attractiveness as moderators. The model with task attractiveness itself was significant ( $\chi^2(5) = 271.032, p < .001$ ). All main effects were significant:  $b_{\text{participant gender}} = -.140, p < .01$ ; again, significant evidence that males usually tend to choose female SPs;  $b_{\text{task attractiveness}} = .296, p < .001$ , (i.e., task attractive SPs are usually

**Table 2**  
Odds ratios of multinomial regression.

| Variable                                     | Chosen Salesperson  |          |          |         |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------|----------|---------|
|                                              | Male 2 <sup>a</sup> | Female 1 | Female 2 | Male 1  |
| Androgynous Brands                           | 1                   | 2.93***  | 1.62*    | 1.27    |
| Feminine Brands                              | 1                   | 3.00***  | 2.87***  | 1.11    |
| Undifferentiated Brands                      | 1                   | 2.12**   | 2.43***  | 1.19    |
| Masculine Brands <sup>b</sup>                |                     |          |          |         |
| Physical Attractiveness                      | 1                   | 7.64***  | 1.43***  | 1.88*** |
| Task Attractiveness                          | 1                   | .46***   | 1.17     | 1.09    |
| Social Attractiveness                        | 1                   | .51***   | .95      | .68***  |
| Need for Core Aspects vs. Relational Aspects | 1                   | 1.18     | 1.01     | .92     |
| Female Participants                          | 1                   | .44***   | 1.48*    | 1.09    |
| Male Participants <sup>b</sup>               |                     |          |          |         |

Note: Dependent variable: Chosen salesperson (one out of four).

<sup>a</sup> The reference category is Male 2.

<sup>b</sup> Parameters are redundant.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

male);  $b_{\text{physical attractiveness}} = -.614, p < .001$  (i.e., physically attractive SPs are usually female). Two interaction terms were significant:  $b_{\text{participant gender} \times \text{task attractiveness}} = .335, p < .001$  (i.e., male

participants preferred male SPs with high task attractiveness);  $b_{\text{participant gender} \times \text{physical attractiveness}} = -.657, p < .001$  (i.e., male participants preferred female SPs with high physical attractiveness). The results for social attractiveness did not differ substantially. The visualization is shown in Fig. 5 for task attractiveness. Female participants showed a balanced ratio of about 60:40 in favor of female SPs, regardless of different physical and task attractiveness. This supports H5a. Male participants were oriented toward female SPs with high physical attractiveness, particularly when task attractiveness was low. When physical attractiveness was low, male participants preferred male SPs, particularly when task attractiveness was high. Thus, H5b was supported as well.

#### 4. Conclusions, limitations, further research

The discussion about brand gender as part of brand personality could be enhanced by a new facet in this research. Brand gender not only predicts brand equity (Lieven et al., 2014), but also affects the choice of salesperson in a way that SP gender follows brand

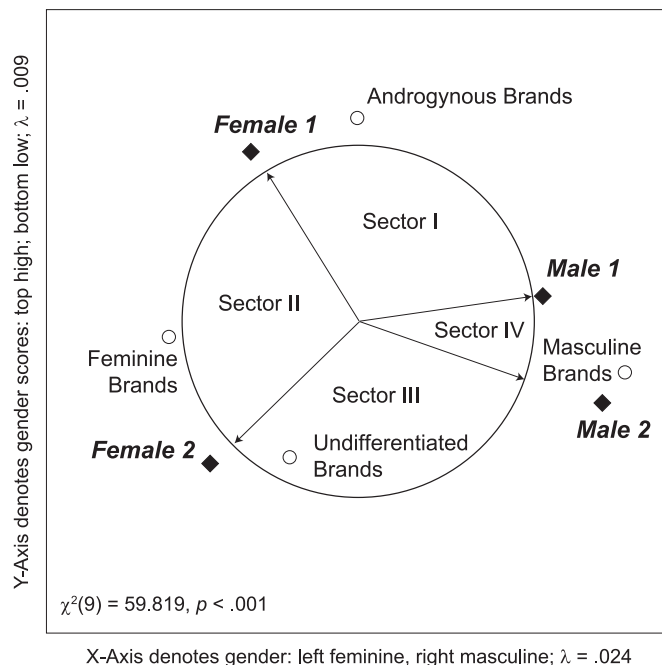


Fig. 3. Correspondence analysis plot of brand gender categories vs. chosen SPs.

gender. Chosen SPs for androgynous brands show a distinct physical attractiveness, which reflects the fact that androgynous persons are perceived as more attractive than others (Jackson, 1983). However, brand gender is not the only predictor of SP choice. Different capabilities between females and males regarding core and relational aspects let customers choose an SP that seems to have the desired characteristics. In general, these are female SPs when relational aspects are required and male SPs when core aspects are required. Female customers show a relatively consistent choice behavior regarding different requirements for core vs. relational aspects and different levels of attractiveness. Men, however, seem to be strongly attracted by female SPs' favorable physical appearance, which motivates them to forego choosing an SP with a higher task or social attractiveness. Women have a nearly equal choice ratio of 60% female vs. 40% male SPs regardless of their task and social competence. This differs for male customers. The SPs they choose with high task and low social attractiveness tend to be male with a ratio of about 2/3 to 1/3. In cases where they choose an SP with high social but low task attractiveness, this ratio changes to 15% male vs. 85% female SPs.

The findings are foremost of a theoretical nature to better understand the matching process in sales encounters. It would be difficult to draw managerial implications from these findings due to the ban on discrimination. However, where it would be possible without discrimination, it could be helpful for the purpose of a successful sales encounter when customers meet a female SP for feminine brands, a male SP for masculine brands, and SPs with high task/social attractiveness where customers expect core/relational capabilities, and most importantly, where customers meet a physically attractive SP for androgynous brands, which is the most particular finding of this research. In any case, for sales and retail managers, it is good to know that female customers are more carefree with respect to the SPs than male customers.

The different kind of metric outcome in Study 1 and the categorical outcome in Study 2 could raise concerns about the appropriateness of the research methods. However, the research goals were different in both studies. In Study 1, a semantic differential was chosen to reveal the degree to which participants tend toward female or male SPs. In cases where they chose a 10 or 11 on the 20-point differential, this was a declaration of indifference and they did not care about SP gender. From Fig. 1, it can be seen that this is mostly the case in the range from Food to IT. In Study 2, the aim was to find out whether more dimensions exist beyond gender, such as several attractiveness characteristics. This could only be done by a categorization of SPs. Since humans realize characteristics from facial cues within approximately 100 ms

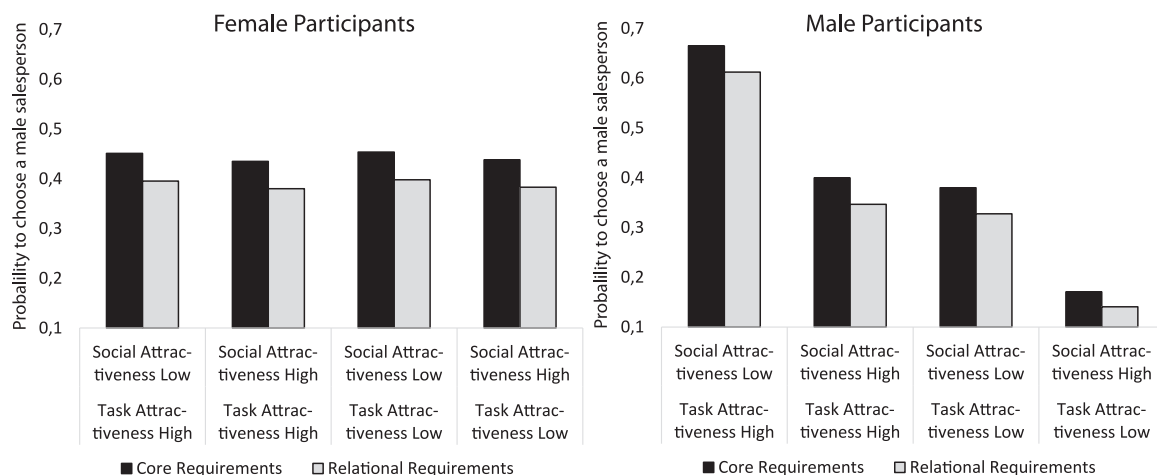


Fig. 4. Interaction of participant gender, task, and social attractiveness, and core vs. relational requirements.

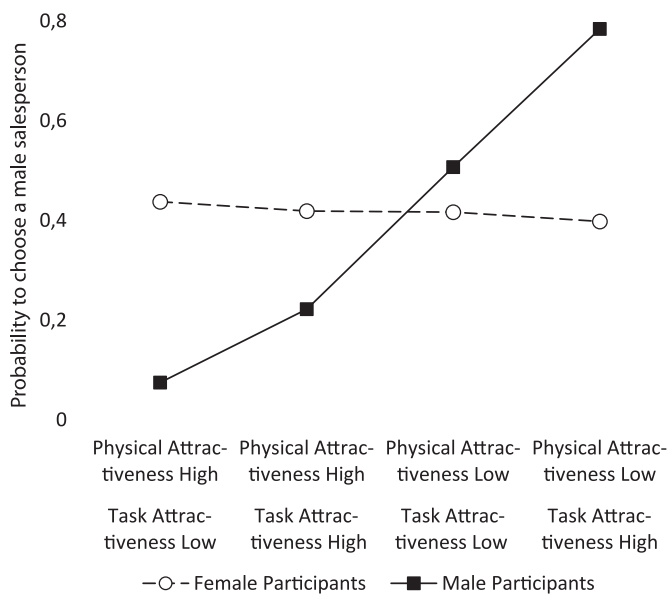


Fig. 5. Interaction of participant gender, task and physical attractiveness.

(Macrae and Martin, 2007), this could easily be done with four portraits. By the implementation of the appropriate statistical tests (LMM in Study 1, logistic and multinomial regressions in Study 2), valid results could be achieved. By this, some of the up to now masked interactions in SP choice (Mohr and Henson, 1996) could be disclosed. The focus on the first encounter could be seen as a disadvantage. Thus, future research should measure customers' satisfaction with the choice of an SP after one or more sales encounters. In addition, several variables remain in the SP choice process that have not been analyzed in this research which, however, could be confounded with brand or product gender, such as the prevailing gender of the customer for specific products (cars are a men's thing, while cosmetics/fragrances are for women), or the gender of the prevailing SPs for these products. Further research should address these dimensions.

As a major limitation, the above results pertain only to the country where the study was conducted (Germany). Potentially, insights could be transferred to the Western hemisphere. According to Hofstede's world-wide research (1980), characteristics of cultural dimensions differ, particularly between Eastern and Western cultures. Western cultures perceive less power distance between society members than Eastern cultures, whereas individuality is more appreciated in Western than in Eastern countries. In Japan, masculinity is an important attribute, in Western cultures the relationship between masculinity and femininity is more balanced. Regarding brand gender as part of brand personality, it could be demonstrated that highly masculine brands generate higher brand equity in more individualistic countries whereas highly feminine brands generate higher brand equity in more collectivistic countries (Lieven and Hildebrand, 2016). Thus, it can be expected that the choice of SPs will be impacted by the cultural context. To analyze SP choice depending on cultural differences in more detail is a promising venue for future research.

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