

## **EVALUATING A DEMAND FOR GENDER-NEUTRAL PRODUCTS IN BELARUS**

*This study aims to investigate the demand for gender-neutral products in Belarus and to identify factors that may influence this demand. The study will be based on the analysis of data on consumer purchases and preferences, as well as on surveys conducted primarily among students.*

**Keywords:** *gender-neutral goods, gender neutrality, Belarus, gender stereotypes, equality*

Gender is fluid in a way like never before, and the marketing world is scrambling to understand how best to respond to this market change. Is a completely gender-neutral strategy the answer or should brands try a new approach to gender marketing? In recent years, there has been a growing trend towards the creation and sale of gender-neutral products around the world.

Gender-neutral goods are goods that are not related to a certain gender or include signs and elements referring to belonging to a certain gender group. Such products can be presented in various fields – from clothes and shoes to toys and household goods. Gender neutrality implies the rejection of linking products to a specific gender, which allows creating more inclusive and equal conditions for all consumers [1].

The purpose of this study is to assess the demand for gender-neutral goods in Belarus and to identify the factors influencing this demand.

The goal of this study is to prove or disprove the hypothesis: “the demand for gender-neutral goods in Belarus is influenced by factors such as age, gender and encouraging gender stereotypes”. The study will be based on analyzing data on consumer purchases and preferences, as well as conducting surveys among the population.

The study of assessing the demand for gender-neutral goods in Belarus is relevant, since in recent years there has been an increase in interest in this topic in various countries. Pinogorsky D.A. (“Gender in modern marketing”) [2], Jirapong Jiravorapat (“Study of market opportunity for gender-neutral design parenting products in thailand”) [3], Isabel Nelson (“Is the Future of Personal Care Product Packaging Gender Neutral?”) [4], Alina Steindl (“No more pink barbies?: Investigating customer acceptance towards gender neutral marketing initiatives”) [5] and other scientists have already conducted research on this topic in the USA, Europe and Russia. Therefore, conducting a study in Belarus will provide new information about the consumer behavior and preferences of the Belarusian audience regarding gender-neutral goods.

In modern society, more and more people strive for equality and reject gender stereotypes. Gender-neutral goods are becoming increasingly popular, and studying the demand for them in Belarus will help understand which factors may influence this demand and which marketing strategies may be effective in this area.

Most brands have a gender-specific audience which leads them to choose traditionally gendered colors for their ads and stereotypically aimed vocabulary for their messaging. This generalized approach can actually prove to be disadvantageous and hinder the presentation of products and services to an additional audience segment that may have an interest.

But Gender roles have changed. Men and women cook, clean, and tend to other household responsibilities. Women and men hold strategic, decision-making business positions. Instead of gender-specific marketing, brands need to better understand how they authentically fit into the professional and personal lives of consumers. This change will be a major key to brand longevity and success as we move forward.

As a result, brands are rolling out beauty products that aren’t targeted at one specific gender. Skincare brands from Aesop to Ursa Major to Non-Gender Specific have ditched gendered marketing, opting to package and sell unisex products that focus on specific skin concerns or conditions instead. In makeup, examples include Fenty and Milk Makeup, as well as indie startups like Fluide and Jecca Blac [1; 6].

There is an interesting study called “From the cradle to change: the cost of living of a female consumer” [7], which compares the prices of similar goods sold to men and women. It is published by the Department of Consumer Affairs of the City of New York, but it can be assumed that the same trend exists in other places. The researchers compared nearly 800 products (toys and accessories, children’s

clothing, adult clothing, personal care products and household goods for the elderly) with clear male and female versions from more than 90 brands sold in two dozen retail stores in New York to assess the price difference faced by buyers male and female when buying goods of the same type.

In all but five of the 35 product categories analyzed, prices for women's goods were higher than for men's goods. Across the sample in this study, it was found that goods for women cost more in 42 percent of cases, while goods for men cost more in 18 percent of cases.

Based on this study, it can be concluded that gender-neutral products contribute to the creation of a more equal society. By offering an alternative to traditional gender roles and expectations, they help break down patterns of behavior and provide an opportunity for everyone to be themselves without fear of condemnation or discrimination. If the prices of goods for women are on average higher than for goods for men, then choosing gender-neutral products can allow consumers to save money without losing quality or functionality.

Assessing the demand for gender-neutral goods in Belarus is an important task for understanding the needs and preferences of consumers. The survey will help to obtain valuable information that can be used to develop marketing strategies and improve the supply of gender-neutral goods on the Belarusian market.

We have made research that includes empirical collection of data using Google Forms, as well as statistical analysis and interpretation of the results. The survey participants are mostly students.

In the course of the conducted research, the results were obtained, which allow to draw certain conclusions and form an idea about the opinion of the interviewed people on various issues related to gender division of goods and also to estimate the demand.

The first question concerned the attitude of the respondents to the division of goods with the same properties into male and female. Almost half of the respondents (47.7 %) answered that they have a neutral attitude towards it, which may indicate that it is not a matter of principle for them. However, 40.6 % of the respondents expressed their negative attitude to this division, which indicates some dissatisfaction with the existing practice. Only 11.7 % of respondents answered positively, agreeing with the division of goods into gender categories (Fig. 1).

The next question asked about the perceived "value" of dividing goods into male and female. The majority of respondents (56.3 %) stated that they see no real "value" in such a division, which indicates that there is no practical need for it. However, a notable share of respondents (28.9 %) responded positively, indicating that gender division of goods is of some importance to them. 14.8 % of respondents found it difficult to answer this question, which may indicate their lack of awareness of this topic (Fig. 2).

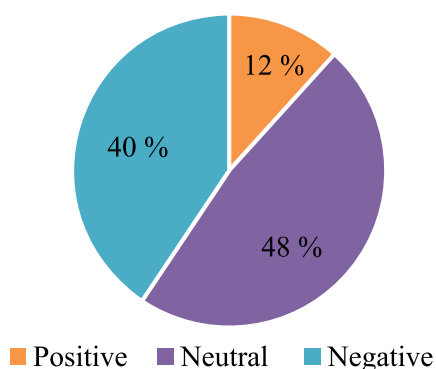


Fig. 1. Answers to the question «How do you feel about the fact that products with the same properties (composition, functions, etc.) are divided into male and female?»

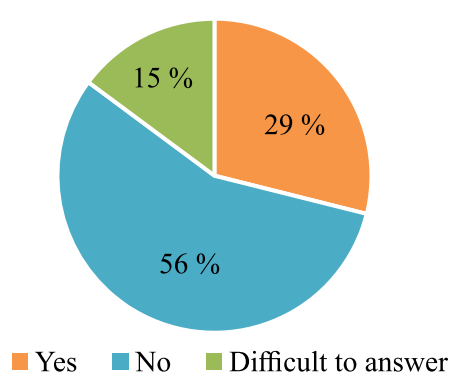


Fig. 2. Answers to the question «Do you see a real "value" (benefit, functionality, etc.) in the division of goods into men's and women's?»

The following results relate to the willingness of respondents to purchase products that are "opposite gender" products. The majority of respondents (59,4 %) answered that they would buy such goods that suit them, regardless of gender identity. 24.2 % of respondents said that they would buy such a product only if they could not find a similar one among products for their own gender. 16.4 % of respondents said that they would not buy such a product. It is interesting to note that among women the percentage of those who are ready to purchase goods for the "opposite gender" (73.6 %) is higher than among men (29.3 %) (Fig. 3).

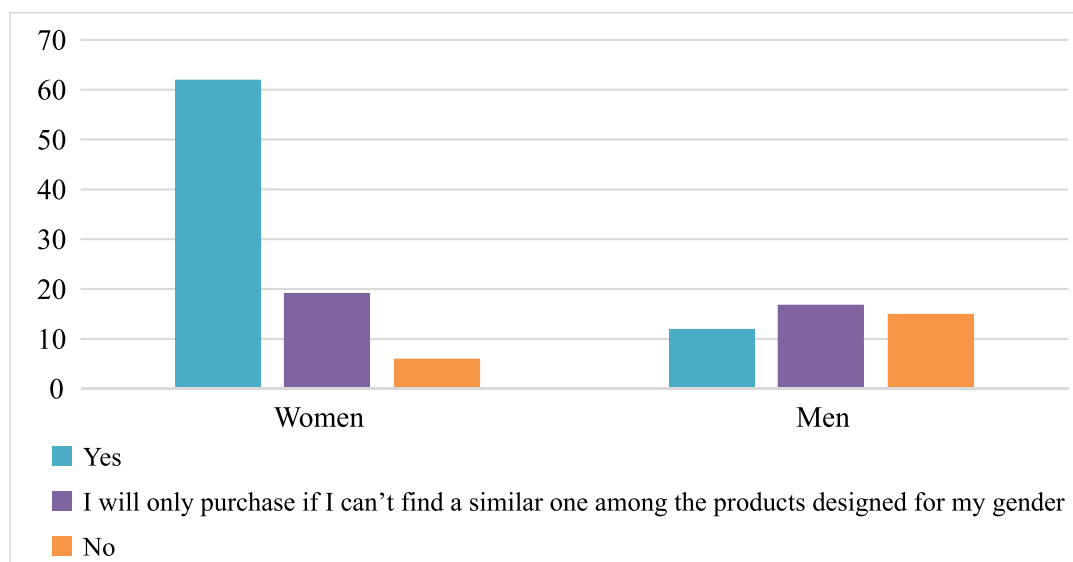


Fig. 3. Answers to the question «Will you purchase a product that suits you but refers to products for the “opposite gender”? » divided by gender

Continuing with the impact of gender labelling on actual purchases, the results were distributed by age as well. The minor respondents were not ready to give up a thing because of its gender identity: 88.9 % would just buy it, 11.1 % would buy it, but after searching for the analogue. Young adults showed the similar results. Majority of people under 25 (65.9 %) were ready to buy a product immediately, 22.0 % needed to check “their” section, 9.1 % would leave without it. Respondents under 35 preferred the following: 42.9 % – instant purchase, 28.6 % – forced purchase, 28.6 % – no purchase. The only age group that stood out were the respondents under 45 (older people weren’t included in the survey). The majority (66.7 %) admitted that they wouldn’t buy a product at all, 22.2 % would buy it only if there’s no similar thing for their gender, and only 11.1 % would buy it on the spot (Fig. 4).

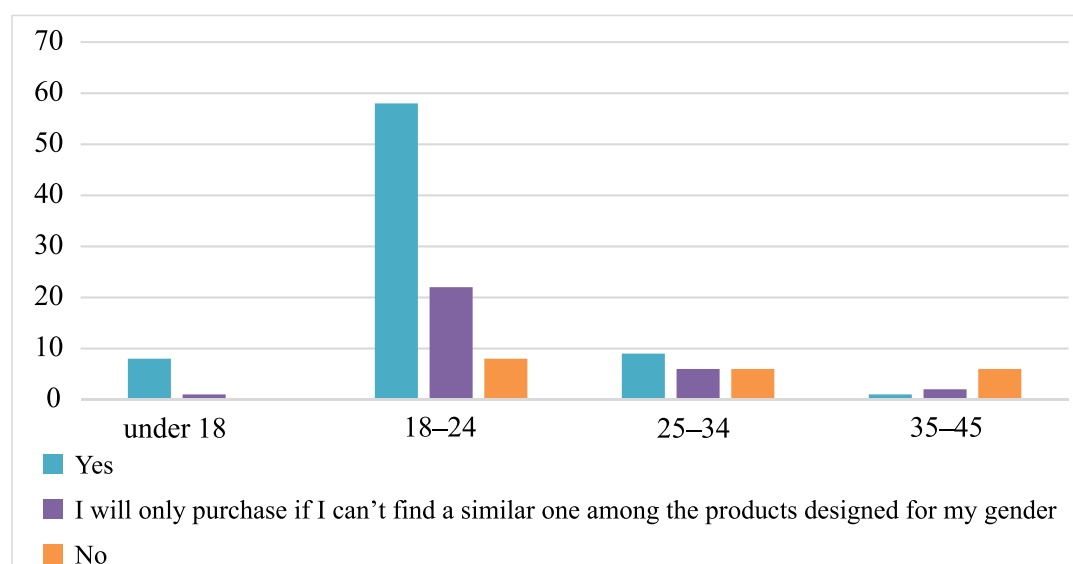


Fig. 4. Answers to the question «Will you purchase a product that suits you but refers to products for the “opposite gender”? » divided by age

The majority of respondents (53.1 %) would like to see more gender-neutral products in stores, which indicates a growing demand for such products and the need for their diversity (Fig. 5).

The majority of respondents (60.2 %) believe that gender-neutral products are not very accessible in Belarus, which may indicate the need to improve their availability to consumers. This may be a signal to manufacturers and retailers to expand the range of gender-neutral products and make them available to all consumers (Fig. 6).

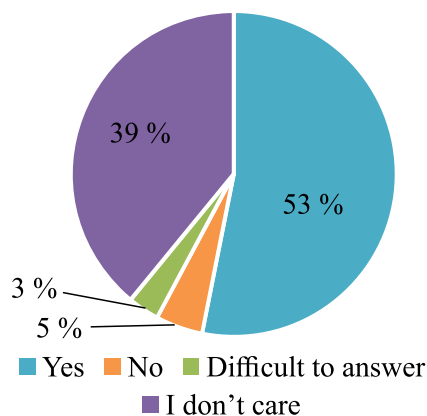


Fig. 5. Answers to the question  
«Would you like to see more  
gender-neutral products in stores?»

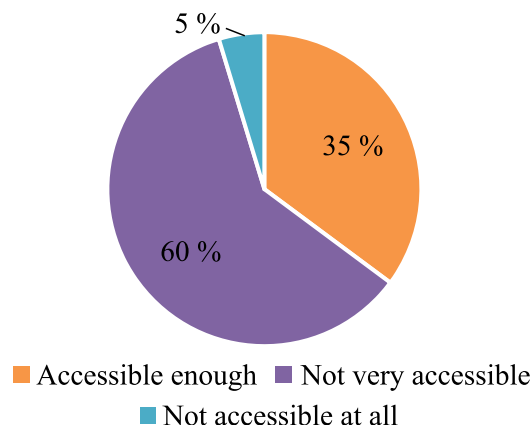


Fig. 6. Answers to the question  
«How would you evaluate an accessibility  
of gender-neutral products in Belarus?»

In general, the results of our study proved the hypothesis about the influence of age, sex and promotion of gender stereotypes on the demand for gender-neutral goods in Belarus. The study showed that among the surveyed consumers in Belarus there is a change of attitude towards gender separation of goods. The majority of respondents are neutral to this issue and do not see any real value in such a division. They evaluate goods by their functionality and usefulness, not by their gender. Also, the majority of respondents do not pay attention to the gender positioning of the brand when buying goods and are willing to buy goods that suit them, even if they are “opposite gender” goods.

Interviewees also expressed a desire to see more gender-neutral products in stores, indicating a growing demand for such products and a need for variety. However, the majority of interviewees believe that gender-neutral products are not very accessible in Belarus, which may require improving their availability to consumers.

Overall, the results of the survey indicate a change in consumer attitudes towards the gender division of goods in Belarus. The majority of respondents are becoming more tolerant and willing to accept goods without reference to gender, evaluating them by their functionality and usefulness. This may be a sign of a change in consumers' preferences and their desire for a more equal approach to the choice of goods.

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