



Shaping your Product for Success in Emerging African Economies: A Gendered Study in the SME Industry in Mauritius

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Abstract

This paper explores how product shapes influence consumers' attitudes towards products interest and purchase from a gendered perspective in the SME industry in Mauritius. It also investigates upon the dual-effect relationship that may exist between prior brand gender perceptions and product shapes. The paper follows an exploratory research approach and uses both primary and secondary data. Responses are collected from 70 consumers using quota sampling whereby equal amounts of men and women were involved and multiple empirical tests (eta test, independent sample t-test and Pearson Correlation test) are carried out to investigate on the impact of product shapes on consumer attitudes in Mauritius. The findings indicate that product shapes help in product identification, repeat purchase, product recall and in attracting consumers' attention. The study also revealed that people pair round shaped products with femininity, angular shaped products with masculinity and spherical shaped products with no gender. Furthermore, it was noted that a prior brand gender perception has no impact on product shape. These findings serve as the building blocks for SMEs in Mauritius to provide the right product shape to the specific target market. It also serves as a guideline on how SMEs can be more competitive after the Covid-19 pandemic in order to re-launch their business and gain profits. This paper is, as far as it's known, the first to investigate on product shapes' impact on consumers' attitudes in the SME industry in Mauritius. The study aims to find out how SMEs can be more competitive in the post Covid-19 Mauritian market by focusing on the product shape to add to their competitive advantage.

Keywords: Product Shapes, Gender Marketing, Small and Medium Businesses, Marketing Strategy.



Introduction

Product Shape

Product personality refers to “the external qualities and the overall impression that a product makes upon the consumer” and is influenced by the product’s appearance. Marketers usually associate 3 human personalities with products – agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion (Grovers, 2004). In most cases, the product shape and packaging are what helps consumers to identify personality traits and is known to provide protection, uniqueness and competitive advantage to products. Patha (2014) advises that product shape and package should be distinct (to allow for product differentiation), have emotional appeal, be aesthetically pleasing (showing beauty to grab attention) and logical (in terms of creating convenience for consumers). Orth and Malkewitz (2006) suggest that a good product shape and packaging helps in constructing brand identity and perceived brand gender as consumers tend to prefer products that matches their self-image (Govers & Schoormans, 2005; Qadri & Yasri, 2019). Walsh et al. (2011) further indicate that introducing new inconsistent information about a product, especially when it comes to product shapes and forms, can be viewed negatively by consumers. Hence, the importance of having a clearly defined product shape or form that is consistent with brand gender perceptions from consumers.

SME Industry in Mauritius

The small and medium enterprises in Mauritius contribute to approximately 40% in the GDP and 56% in employment. The aim of the Mauritian government is to increase the GDP by 16% by 2026 with a 10-year Master Plan that began in 2016 (Roopchund, 2020). This is even more crucial as this study takes into account the global Covid-19 pandemic whereby half of the Mauritian population saw their salary decreased by 50%, 25% of the population has lost their jobs and 36% of households saw their income level decline (Ranzani & Suet, 2020). Hence, SMEs in Mauritius need to find innovative ways to be more competitive on the market and knowing consumers’ expectations and preferences of product shape and designs is one of the building pillars for SMEs to succeed (Niu et al., 2019). Product shapes or forms are known to produce cognitive (product beliefs and categorization) and affective responses (positive or negative) that translate to behavioral responses (approach or avoidance) which lead to product interest and purchase. Product shape or form represents a number of elements blended together into a whole by the design team to achieve a particular desired effect (Bloch, 1995). Product aesthetics and design have proven to increase competitive advantage, help in product recall, influence consumer choices, attract customers, informs functionality of product, increase product/brand identity, acts as a differentiating element amongst other products, increase sales and profits as well as customer loyalty (Veryzer, 1993; Horváth, 2001; Grovers, 2004).

Product form may create beliefs pertaining to characteristics such as durability, value, technological sophistication, ease of use, sex role appropriateness, prestige and the product category. Product forms may vary according to its position in the product life cycle (PLC) such as products with a novel shape would perform better at the introductory phase while the product effectiveness and performance should be focused upon when it comes to the growth and maturity phase respectively (Bloch, 1995).



With such an interest on product shape and how it impacts consumer behaviour, the main objectives of this paper are:

- To find out whether product shapes influence gender perception of products.
- To investigate whether product shapes affect product interest and purchase by gender.
- To analyze whether product shapes are influenced by perceived brand gender perceptions.

This research aims to contribute to the literature by (1) examining consumer's attitudes (product interest and purchase) towards product shapes; (2) adding to the research of product shapes and product gender perceptions in Mauritius; (3) analyzing whether product shapes are influenced by pre-conceived brand gender perceptions; (4) and by providing managerial implications for SMEs based on the findings from this paper.

Theoretical Background

Product Shape and Gender

Product shapes and forms have been used as a tool to inform consumers of the product gender or desired product gender perceptions, thus creating market for gendered goods (McIntyre, 2018). Product shapes have changed over the years to adapt to the target market that businesses want to prosper in and aspects such as ergonomic demands, government and consumer gender influence product shape, weight, and texture, thus encouraging product designers to come up with more effective product shapes and forms that attract the attention of the desired consumer and which leads to product purchase. Products with angular shapes are seen as tough, healthy, aggressive and conflicting while products with a round shape are seen as gentle, happy and harmonious. Nowadays, many products are adopting shapes and forms that challenge the 'normal' gendered attributes in order to be different from competitors and stand out (Bloch, 1995; Grovers, 2004; Ruumpol, 2014; McIntyre, 2018). Product shapes are usually made to match an individual's own gender in view of increasing product purchase and loyalty (Moss, 2003; Ehrnberger et al, 2012). Previous studies concluded that women prefer rounded, slim, smooth, flexible, decorative, luxurious and curvy product shapes while men most generally buy squared, solid, relevant, ergonomic and geometrical product shapes (Xue et al., 2007; Lieven et al., 2015). This is in line with the findings from Tilburg and Lieven (2013) who discovered that products which are narrower and adopt a slim, curvy and round shape were seen as more feminine while products that were more bulky, wider and angular were seen as masculine.

The study carried by Ding et al. (2018) further states that the product shape is influenced by the gender of the end user and not necessarily the buyer and consumers prefer products that were rounded more than angular in shape, which is also in line with the findings from Chitturi et al. (2019). However, this is contrary to what Jiang et al. (2019) mentions in that affluent people prefer products that are angular in shape over rounded ones. Some businesses even associate specific colours along with product shape to reinforce the product gender they want to portray. Hence, products geared



towards a female audience will mostly adopt a cone/sphere shape along with warm colors and curve typefaces while products meant for a male audience will go for a cubic/vertical shape coupled with darker colors and products that want to remain ungendered on the market would go for a pyramid shape (Ritnamkam & Sahachaisaeree, 2012; Fenko & Drost, 2014). However, Xue et al. (2007) suggests that no one can be completely stereotyped as men do look for classy and smooth products as well and both genders appreciate convenience and wouldn't hesitate to switch from their expected product shape association. And although some products are associated with one gender, breaking the product gender discrimination with genderless design is the new norm that many businesses are adopting. Genderless product designs eliminate all signs of masculinity and femininity, find a balance between masculinity and femininity and are thought to diminish constructed gender discriminations in the society (Cakiroglu, 2017; Tak et al., 2019).

Based from the preceding evidence, the following hypothesis was developed whereby the independent variable is product shape and the dependent variable is product gender perceptions:

H₁: Product shapes have an impact on overall gendered product perceptions, such that products with round shapes increase femininity perceptions and products with angular shapes enhance masculinity perceptions.

Product Shape & Purchase Intentions

Previous studies suggest that products adopting subtle gender cues (product shapes or forms) influence product interest and purchase. Women would mostly buy products that are curvy, slim and are seen as feminine while men would purchase products with an angular design and that are seen as tough (Raghubir & Greenleaf, 2006; Xue et al., 2007; Hess & Melnyk, 2016; Lo et al., 2017). This is further reinforced by Grovers (2004) who concluded that people prefer products with personality alike to theirs and would most probably exude positive purchase intentions towards these products. It can also be noted that products exhibiting high masculine traits are viewed negatively by consumers (Hess & Melnyk, 2016). However, this is contrary to the findings of Eckman and Wagner (1994) who found that people were more attracted to rectangular-shaped products and that consumer judgments of attractiveness differ by age and not gender of the person.

While the shape of a product is seen as a determining factor for product interest and purchase, other factors that affect purchase of a product are time, economic situation, influence of adverts, post purchase benefits and long term consideration (Silayoi & Speece, 2005; Vijaya et al., 2017). Moreover, product shapes and forms should conform to norms such as truthfulness, sincerity, comprehensibility and legitimacy so as to increase product and package equity (Underwood & Ozanne, 1998). Product shape and forms are known indicators of product choice and purchase but also of post purchase behaviours and expectations (Spence, 2016). Another interesting discovery from Lo et al. (2017) indicates that companies use curves and horizontal lines to illustrate products that are used by middle-class people. Marketers also tend to use product shapes that have worked well or proved successful in the past to adapt to new products in hopes of reproducing the same success and completely shaped products are known to generate greater purchase intentions than incomplete shaped ones (Sevilla & Kahn, 2014; Spence, 2016).



Based on the preceding evidence, the following hypothesis is developed whereby the independent variable is product shape and the dependent variable is consumer gender:

H₂: Product shapes affect product interest and purchase by gender such that women are more interested in and buy products that are curvy and rounded in shapes while men are more interested in and buy products that are more angular and rectangular in shapes.

Product Shape & Perceived Brand Gender

Extensive researches have been carried out that shows a direct relationship between product design/personality and consumer-brand relationships. Products arouse emotions which contribute to consumers' feelings about a specific brand and one of the design elements used to evoke feelings from consumers is product shape and forms (Karjalainen, 2003; Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2007; Kumar et al., 2014; Stomppf, 2010). Brand gender forms part of brand personality which consists of brand masculinity and brand femininity. While product shapes have been seen to contribute to gender perceptions of products (i.e. angular-shaped products are seen as masculine and rounded-shaped products are seen as feminine), marketing theorists conclude the fact that both product gender perceptions and brand gender perceptions are inter-related (Grohmann, 2009). Angular shapes promote the feelings of 'conflicted', 'harsh', 'strength' and 'energetic' towards brand perceptions while round shapes contribute to brand perceptions in terms of association with 'soft' and 'harmonious' (Arnheim, 1974; Henderson & Cote, 1998; Zhang et al., 2006). Moreover, angular shaped products create the perception of hardness and durability for a brand while rounded shaped products contribute to perceptions of comfortableness and sophistication to brands (Zhang et al., 2006; Jiang et al., 2015). This relationship can be depicted with the following framework:

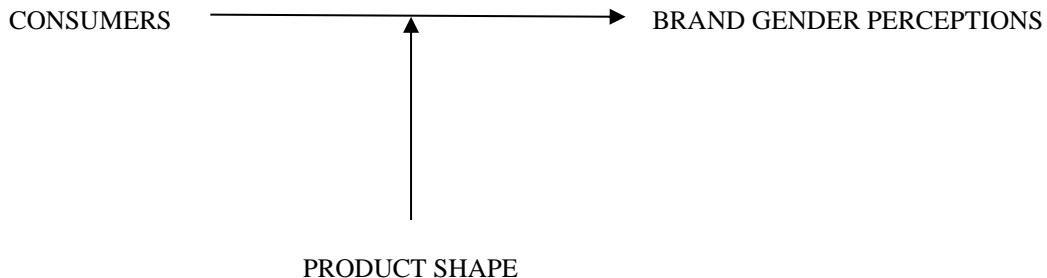


Figure 1: Product Gender Influencing Brand Gender Perceptions

Figure 1 demonstrates that product shape (acting as an element of product design) influences consumers' perception of brand gender such that an angular product shape contributes to masculine brand gender perceptions and round product shape contributes to feminine gender perceptions. McIntyre (2018) further suggest 8 ways to represent gender with product designs, keeping in mind the brand gender perceptions. They are (1) stereotyping, (2) gender-segmented, (3) feminine challenging norms, (4) masculine is neutral, (5) feminine is norm, (6) creating uncertainty, (7) gender as choice, and (8) gender neutral. Other things to consider when thinking of gender dimensions of product design that are incurred from a strong brand gender perceptions are the value, benefits,



interaction, aesthetic and communication of the product shape (Schroeder, 2010). While there has been a number of researches where brand gender perceptions are the dependent variable and product shapes are the independent one, both of these elements are known to be inter-related and impact each other when it comes to overall gender perceptions. Hence, it can be said that product gender is greatly influenced by pre-conceived brand gender perceptions such that consumers expect brands that are perceived as feminine to have products that are more rounded in shapes and brands that are perceived as masculine to have products that are more angular in shape. This dual-effect of brand gender perceptions and product gender (whereby product shape is the ultimate result of this effect) can be depicted in the following framework:

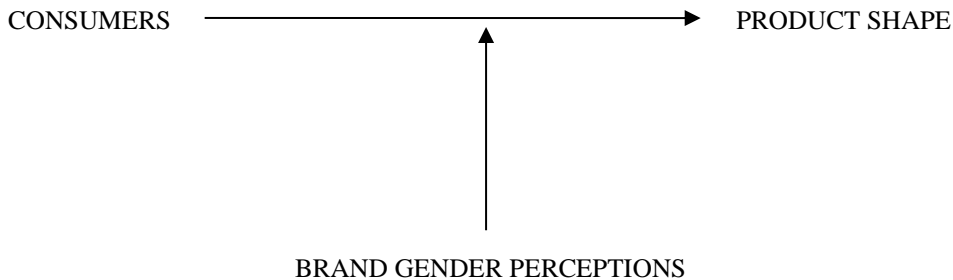


Figure 2: Brand Gender Perceptions Influencing Product Shape

Figure 2 suggests that product shape (angular or round) is ultimately the result of an already established brand gender perceptions and that consumers look for products that match their pre-conceived brand gender perceptions to reinforce the gender association with product shapes and designs. Hence, the following hypothesis is developed:

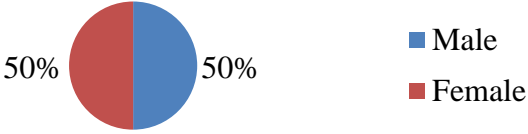
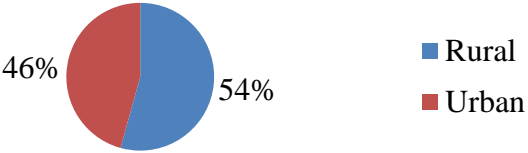
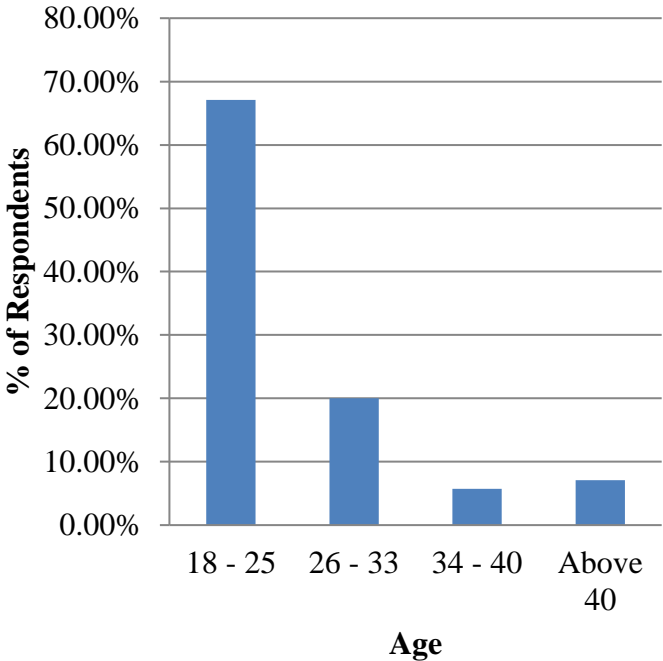
H₃: Product shape is influenced by brand gender perceptions such that masculine brand gender perceptions will have angular shaped products while feminine brand gender perceptions will have round shaped products.

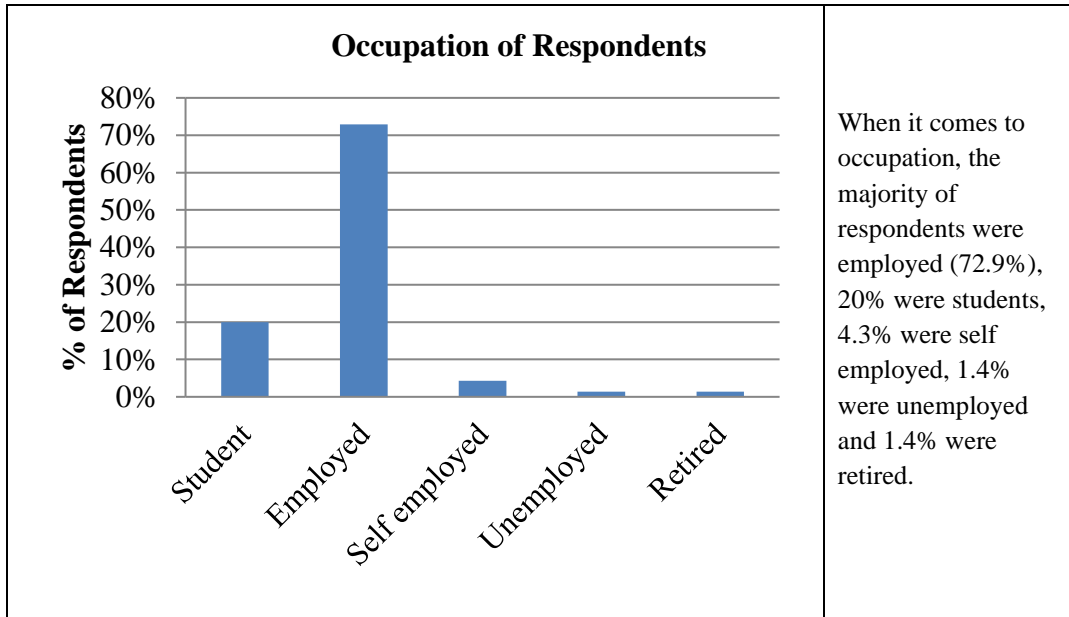
Methods

Three studies were carried with 70 participants whereby quota sampling was used to avoid any biased results. The same respondents took part in all of the studies for convenience and consistency of the final results. Table 1 is a summary of the demographics of the respondents whereby details such as age, occupation, gender and residing region of the respondents are illustrated.



Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

<p style="text-align: center;">Gender of Respondents</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">50% 50%</p> <p style="text-align: right;">■ Male ■ Female</p>	<p>The respondents consisted of equal amounts of males and females to avoid any biases in the final results.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Residing Regions of Respondents</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">46% 54%</p> <p style="text-align: right;">■ Rural ■ Urban</p>	<p>Most of the respondents reside in rural areas of Mauritius (54%) while the rest (46%) live in urban parts of the country.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Age of Respondents</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Age</p>	<p>Most of the respondents were aged between 18 years old and 25 years old (67.1%), between 26 years old and 33 years old (20%), between 34 years old and 40 years old (5.7%), and above 40 years old (7.1%).</p>



Internal Consistency of Questionnaire

The Cronbach alpha for the questionnaire found was 0.663, showing that the questionnaire is a good indicator for analyzing consumers' perception and attitudes towards different product shapes and forms in Mauritius. As stated by Gliem & Gliem (2003), the nearer the Cronbach's alpha value is to 1.0, the greater is the internal consistency of the items in the scale.

Survey Findings

Table 2 gives an overview of the results obtained from the survey. It can be noted that 52.9% of respondents agree that the shape of a product helps them to identify a particular product, 35.7% of respondents agree that the product of a shape encourages them to buy the same product again, 41.4% of respondents disagree that they are loyal to a product due to its shape, 45.7% of respondents agree that the shape of a product helps them to recall a product easier and 48.9% of respondents agree that the shape of a product attracts their attention. It was also noted from Figure 3 that product shape is important during product purchase for 70% of respondents but that only 28.4% said that it is very important with 37.1% saying it is important only. Moreover, it was noted that 72.9% of the respondents do not have a favourite product shape.



Table 2: Overview of Survey findings

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The shape of a product helps to identify a product.	2.9%	4.3%	25.7%	52.9%	14.3%
The shape of a product encourages you to buy the same product again.	2.9%	21.4%	31.4%	35.7%	8.6%
You are loyal to a product because of its shape.	10%	41.4%	34.3%	11.4%	2.9%
The shape of a product helps you to recall a product.	1.4%	2.9%	17.1%	45.7%	32.9%
The shape of a product helps to attract your attention.	1.4%	2.9%	14.3%	48.9%	32.9%



Extent to which product shape is important during product purchase

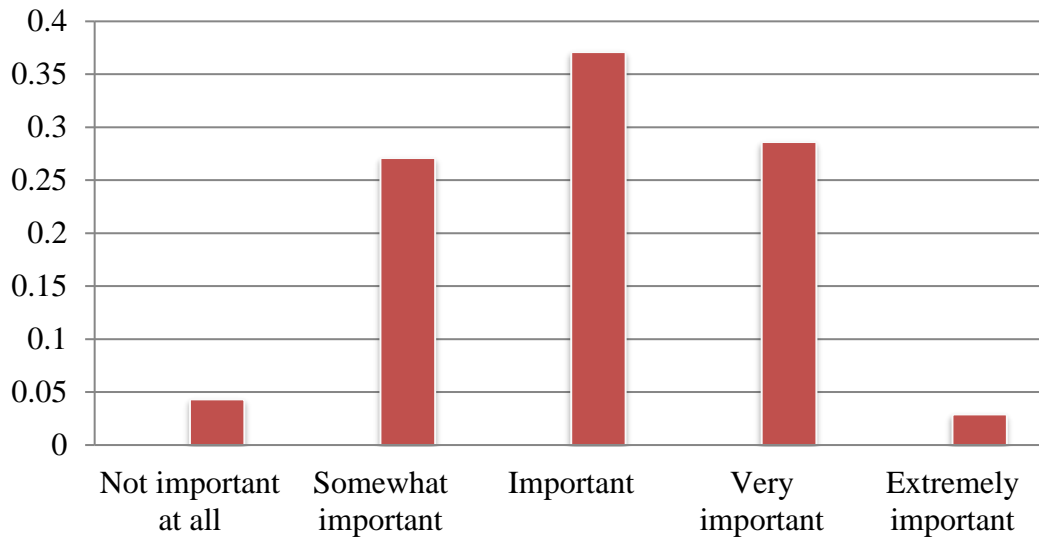


Figure 3: Extent to which Product Shape is important during Product Purchase

Study 1

The first study examines whether product shapes influence product gender perception (i.e., product masculinity perceptions and product femininity perceptions - H_1). A questionnaire was distributed which included 3 pictures (in black and white so that respondents are not influenced by colours) of perfume bottles, each shaped as per a gender perception and one which was used as control in the study (whereby one was rounded in shape, one was angular in shape, and one was spherical in shape). A total of 70 respondents evaluated the product shapes on five-point scales whereby 1 represented highly masculine and 5 represented highly feminine. An independent sample T-test was performed whereby gendered product shapes served as the independent variables. The results are depicted in Table 3 whereby it was found that products that are round in shape are seen as feminine ($M = 4.27$, $F = 0.174$, $p = 0.678$), products that are angular in shape are seen as masculine ($M = 1.84$, $F = 0.059$, $p = 0.808$) and products that are spherical in shape are gender-neutral ($M = 3.11$, $F = 11.433$, $p = 0.001$).

Table 3: Gender Perception of Products based on Product Shape			
Product Shape	M	F-Value	p-Value
Rounded Product Shape	4.27	0.174	0.678
Spherical Product Shape	3.11	11.433	0.001
Angular Product Shape	1.84	0.059	0.808



Hence, the first hypothesis (H_1) is accepted whereby product shapes have an impact on overall gendered product perceptions, such that products with round shapes increase femininity perceptions and products with angular shapes enhance masculinity perceptions.

Study 2a

The second study makes use of the same 3 perfumes from the first study and the same respondents ($n = 70$) were included in the study for convenience and consistency of results. The second study extended the investigation of product shapes and product gender perception to include product interest and purchase. Respondents were first asked to select a perfume that they would buy for themselves. An Eta test was considered to test the strength between the categorical variable (gender) and scale items (product gender perceptions). The results are depicted in Table 4 where an Eta value of 0.764 was obtained with a partial Eta² value of 0.583. This means that 58.3% of the independent variable (product gender perceptions) has an effect on gender. This denotes a rather medium bond between gender of respondents and product shape chosen in this study.

Table 4: Product Shape and Respondents' Gender Association					
	df	M	F	Eta Value	Partial Eta Squared
Gender (dependent)	4	2.55	22.75	0.764	0.583

Study 2b

The second part of this study asked respondents to select which perfume they would buy for (a) a male friend, (b) a female friend and (c) a friend who does not identify as male or female. The same perfumes (with their respective gendered product shape) were used. Respondents gave their answers on a 5-point scale whereby 1 indicated 'not likely at all' and 5 indicated 'very likely'. An independent sample T-test was carried to investigate any difference, if there are any, present between the responses of the participants. The results are summarized in Tables 5, 6 and 7 and indicate that respondents are influenced by product shape when purchasing for a specific gender in mind. When purchasing for a male friend, respondents were more apt to choose the angular shaped perfume ($M = 4.06$, $F = 0.178$, $p = 0.675$) compared to the other shaped products. A similar effect was seen when respondents selected a perfume for women and chose the rounded one most of the times ($M = 4.13$, $F = 0.063$, $p = 0.803$). Finally, respondents were more likely to select the spherical perfume when it comes to people who do not identify themselves as male or female ($M = 3.26$, $F = 0.069$, $p = 0.794$).

Table 5: Product Shape Selection for Male end Users			
Product Shape	M	F-Value	p-Value
Rounded Product Shape	1.89	0.906	0.344
Spherical Product Shape	2.94	0.25	0.876
Angular Product Shape	4.06	0.178	0.675

Table 6: Product Shape Selection for Female end Users



Product Shape	M	F-Value	p-Value
Rounded Product Shape	4.13	0.063	0.803
Spherical Product Shape	3.47	1.525	0.221
Angular Product Shape	2.44	2.541	0.116

Table 7: Product Shape Selection for a Gender end Users

Product Shape	M	F-Value	p-Value
Rounded Product Shape	2.94	0.593	0.444
Spherical Product Shape	3.26	0.069	0.794
Angular Product Shape	3.29	2.286	0.135

Both studies (2a and 2b) indicate that people are influence not only by their own gender but the gender for which they are shopping for as well as the product shape when purchasing products. Hence, the second hypothesis (H_2) is accepted such that women are more interested in and buy products that are curvy and rounded in shapes while men are more interested in and buy products that are more angular and rectangular in shapes.

Study 3

The third and final part of this present paper investigate whether an existing strong brand gender perceptions influence the product shape offered by said brand. The same number of respondents ($n = 70$) was used and this time, they were given flash drives as the product. Prior to this study, a preliminary test was done amongst 50 people whereby they rated different brands in Mauritius based on their brand gender perceptions. The final two brands selected for the study were Hugo Boss (which was seen as a highly masculine brand with 80%) and Jennyfer (which was seen as a highly feminine brand with 70%).

Participants were presented with pictures of two flash drives (one round in shape and the other rectangular shaped) and were asked to rate their degree of agreeableness on a 5-point scale (whereby 1 indicated 'not suitable at all' and 5 indicated 'very suitable) which flash drive would be more suitable for the particular brands. A Pearson Correlation test was carried out with product shapes serving as the dependent variable and brand gender perception as the independent variable to test there exist a relationship between those two factors. The results are depicted in Table 8 where it can be noted that respondents thought that both flash drives could be used by any of the brand with p-values above 0.05.

Table 8: Product Shape and Brand Gender Perception

Product Shape	M	r-Value	p-Value
Round Flash Drive for Hugo Boss	3.39	0.164	0.175
Round Flash Drive for Jennyfer	2.69	- 0.093	0.443
Rectangular Flash Drive for Hugo Boss	3.36	- 0.189	0.116



Rectangular Flash Drive for Jennyfer	2.89	0.116	0.338
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Hence, the third hypothesis (H₃) is rejected as there is not enough concrete evidence to say that product shapes are influenced by existing brand gender perceptions.

Managerial Implications

This research contributes to existing knowledge on product shapes and its influence on consumer behaviour in the Mauritian emerging economy. It was noted that product shapes have an impact on (1) product identification, (2) likelihood to purchase again, (3) product recall, (4) consumer attention and (5) product purchase. These findings are in line with those of Veryzer (1993), Horváth (2001), Grovers (2004), Grovers & Schoormans (2005), Orth and Malkewitz (2006), Patha (2014) and Qadri & Yasri (2019). This means that SMEs in Mauritius should put more emphasis on their product shape if they are looking to be more competitive on the market after the Covid-19 pandemic. SMEs managers and product designers should collaborate closely to ensure they come up with a unique product that represents their brand and speaks with their target audience as well. While it was noted that product shape does not help in consumer loyalty, it is still crucial to spend time in developing a competitive product shape that will help in likelihood of purchase again. This is even more important in a post-Covid 19 Mauritian economy where SMEs are trying to find new ways to either launch or re-launch their businesses. Hence, product shape will be a determining factor in their success and help to rejuvenate the Mauritian economy as well.

Round shaped products were mostly associated with feminine perceptions while angular shaped products were paired with masculine perceptions, which are in line with previous findings from Xue et al. (2007), Tilburg and Lieven (2013), Lieven et al. (2015) and Ding et al. (2018) . This is of great importance to marketers and business owners in the SME industry in Mauritius as this helps to understand the attitudes of their target market better. Small and medium businesses who want to focus on a specific target market where gender is the primarily determinant of the segment can thus use these findings as a tool when coming up with products. Hence, SMEs should provide rounded shaped products when marketing to women while angular shaped products should be used when marketing to men. It is also interesting to note that spherical shaped products were mostly associated with no gender; hence this can be efficiently used by SMEs when they are targeting both men and women. SMEs should also keep in mind that consumers purchase with the end-user in mind, hence women purchasing for men will most likely look for angular shaped products and men purchasing for women will most likely look for rounded shaped products.

Finally, the present study investigated the impact of brand gender perceptions on product shape and it was found that there is no concrete evidence to clearly state if there exist a relationship between the two factors. Hence, a strong brand gender perception does not mean that there is an impact on the product shape. SMEs can use this to their advantage as this means they can have an already clearly defined brand gender but offer products in shapes that do not necessarily adhere to these prior gender constructs. A brand that is seen as feminine can thus offer a product that is angular in shape and brands that are seen as masculine can offer rounded shaped products, although this will be applicable to a certain extent. This is important for SMEs who are looking to launch new products on the



Mauritian market whilst already having a clear brand gender perception. They can easily switch their product shape to adapt it as per their target audience, and not as per their prior brand gender perceptions. This also allows SMEs the freedom to not be stuck with a specific perception from consumers and they can easily enter new markets or target new segments in Mauritius. This is important after the Covid-19 pandemic whereby SMEs are trying to find new ways to give their business a boost and be innovative in their marketing approaches. This research has revealed four major findings, namely: (1) product shapes help in product identification, recall and purchase, (2) product shapes are viewed from a gendered perspective such that angular shaped products are viewed as masculine, rounded shaped products are viewed as feminine and spherical shaped products are seen as genderless, (3) people are influenced by the end user when choosing which product shape to purchase and (4) prior brand gender perceptions does not have an impact on the shapes of products.

Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research Directions

The purpose of this research was to investigate whether product shape had any impact on consumer behaviour from a gendered perspective and applying the findings in the SME industry in Mauritius. It was found that people are influenced by product shapes such that they look for products that are familiar in shape to them, are more likely to purchase products that are shaped as per they desire and classify different product shapes with different genders. Moreover, it was also discovered that prior brand gender perception has no impact on product shapes and this means that SMEs are not restricted by prior consumer gender perceptions when it comes to designing a new product that they want to launch. The findings are even more important as SMEs are trying to rejuvenate their business and adopt innovative marketing strategies after the global Covid-19 pandemic. Product shapes might seem like a subtle change to adopt but one that will prove fruitful for SMEs who do so, as evidenced by the findings in this present study.

The study had some potential limitations, as the focus was solely on product shapes from a gendered perspective. Moreover, the paper has some conceptual limitations with regards to consumers purchasing patterns and their behavioural intentions towards a specific product shape. A bigger sample size would also yield more accurate results.

Future research can investigate whether people's income has any effect on the product shape that they choose. Jiang et al. (2019) mentioned that affluent people are more attracted to angular shaped products; hence this would be an interesting research to investigate in the Mauritian context. Further researches can also be carried out when it comes to genderless design which is becoming a trend amongst Generation Z people. Future research can also pair product shapes along with product colours as it is known that colours also influence consumer behaviour.

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Appendix



Figure 4: Perfumes used in Study 1, 2(a) and 2(b)

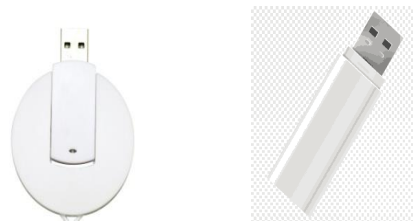


Figure 5: Flash Drives used in Study 3