

# Big or Small? The Effect of Gender-Based Size Segmentation on Product Preference

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## **Abstract**

Although the gender-based size segmentation strategy (small size for women, large size for men) is widely used, its effectiveness remains in question. Across three experimental studies, we examine how this segmentation strategy leads to the divergent product choices of male and female consumers and explore the underlying mechanisms. We theorize that stereotype reactance causes discomfort in female consumers when faced with stereotypical-consistent choices (i.e. small-size products), while masculine identity affirmation drives male consumers' discomfort with stereotypical-inconsistent choices (i.e. small-size products) and makes them conform to stereotypical expectations. Study 1 shows when female consumers learned from the ad that small-size products are (vs. not) for women, they would prefer and choose larger-sized products. Study 2 demonstrates that both male and female consumers prefer larger products when exposed to such gender-segmented advertisements. Study 3 further identifies the key driver for this effect is the heightened discomfort associated with choosing smaller-sized options for both female and male consumers.

*Keywords: gender segmentation, stereotype reactance, gender identity threat*

*Intended track: Consumer Behavior*