

Unboxing Gender: How Online Toy Design Shapes Childhood Norms A Study of Aesthetic and Categorical Coding in Austrian Digital Retail

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Cite as:

Holub Sandra, Riedl Kirstie, Brussati Monika (2026), Unboxing Gender: How Online Toy Design Shapes Childhood Norms A Study of Aesthetic and Categorical Coding in Austrian Digital Retail. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (133038)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



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Abstract

This study examines gender-coded design and marketing of toys in Austrian online retail. Drawing on Gender Schema Theory and Priming Theory, it explores how visual and categorical cues communicate gender norms in digital marketplaces. A quantitative content analysis of 405 online toy products was conducted across the categories “for girls,” “for boys,” and “unisex,” coding color, toy type, and imagery. Results show distinct gender-specific patterns: feminine colors and caring themes dominate “girls” toys, while “boys” toys feature masculine hues and technical elements. “Unisex” categories largely mirror the masculine aesthetic. The findings highlight how online retail reproduces gender stereotypes and suggest directions for more inclusive, gender-reflective design.

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics