Legitimising male grooming through packaging discourse: a linguistic analysis

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Legitimising male grooming through packaging discourse: a linguistic analysis

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While packaging is a common marketing subject, this illustration paper provides an alternative perspective through the linguistic examination of packaging as discourse, focusing on male grooming, masculinity and metrosexuality. Male grooming is often perceived as trespassing into feminine space and creating ambiguity in gender borders. This study aims to explore how packaging designers negotiate masculinity, in order to persuade men to accept grooming products through social interactions within the packaging of L’Oréal Men Expert. Employing Scollon’s mediated discourse analysis and incorporating the Barthesian order of signification, the study analyses how different social actions within the packaging discourse are mediated by multimodal features. The findings reveal five negotiating strategies, i.e. constructing a hegemonic masculine image; negotiating (a masculinised) metrosexuality; empowering men; giving men a logical reason to groom; and a different portrayal of skincare products. The key aim of this paper is to illustrate the differences between marketing and linguistics and propose possible collaboration.

Keywords: product packaging discourse; mediated discourse analysis; linguistic semiotics; marketing semiotics; masculinity/metrosexuality

Introduction

Known as “the salesman on the shelf” (Silayoi and Speece 2004) and “the silent salesman” (Kornblau 1961), packaging sometimes “substitutes for traditional advertising” (Hawkes 2010) to communicate information and create brand awareness (Littel and Orth 2012; Orth and Malkewitz 2008). (Cited in Vilnai-Yavetz and Koren 2013, 394). Although the Digital Era diversifies marketing communication from television commercials to social media, ironically, the ever reachable product packaging is still significantly important, particularly in making “point-of-purchase decisions” (Underwood and Ozanne 1998, 208).

Although packaging is a common subject in marketing research, the understanding of it is still somewhat restricted. This discourse analysis aims to focus on packaging as a discourse that serves as a “cultural tool”, which is both socially constituted and constitutive. This paper challenges the traditional focus on packaging as a marketing tool that serves as a “branding tool” (constructing a desired brand image in the consumer’s mind; see Rossolatos 2012, on positioning in marketing) and “communication tool” (giving marketing information).

Choosing male skincare products, the study focuses upon male grooming and how it is legitimised through the multiple lenses of discourse analysis, linguistic semiotics, as

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well as gender and language. The aim is to find out how packaging designers legitimise male grooming via the construction of their packaging discourse.

This case study has chosen to analyse the global manufacturer of beauty products, L’Oréal, which has extended its female brand, L’Oréal Paris (LP) to a male grooming line, L’Oréal Men Expert (LME). Since this paper serves as an illustration of the linguistic analysis of packaging, the process of analysis will be given more emphasis based on the analysis of the packaging of one cleanser each from LP and LME. With regard to our linguistic interest, the purpose of the study is to analyse how masculinity is negotiated to make male grooming more acceptable through the social interactions within the packaging discourse of LME.

Masculinity, metrosexuality and male grooming

Recent studies on the global market have uncovered a rising interest in personal grooming among men, as well as explored the growth of the grooming industry (see Market Research Report 2012–2013). The sales of men’s grooming products are expected to hit US$33.2 billion by 2015 (Global Industry Analysts 2010) with the “significant boom” driven by facial skincare (Euromonitor International 2010), as reported in The Edge Malaysia on 29 June 2012. The perceived invasion of this hitherto female-dominated domain suggests the changing perceptions of masculinity and the emergence of the “New Man”, known as the “metrosexual” coined by Simpson ([1994] 2013).

According to Simpson, a metrosexual is:

a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis – because that’s where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are. He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference. (Simpson [2002] 2013)

Although there are various definitions of metrosexuality, the study employs Simpson’s concept, i.e. men willing to spend money in order to look good, simply because (1) one of the parameters of metrosexuality is male vanity (which incidentally is non-normative in terms of traditional notions of masculinity); and (2) male vanity is the shared similarity among the various definitions of metrosexuality. In other words, practices and products representing male vanity like skincare, cosmetics and fashion are associated with metrosexuality.

Numerous research has revealed uncertain social perceptions among men about male grooming (e.g. Cheng, Ooi, and Ting 2010; McNeill and Douglas 2011). Ourahmoune’s (2009) study and summary of related studies reveal male consumers’ tensions between social conformation to hegemonic masculinity and the (possible) emancipation from gender restriction. Metrosexuality has sometimes been hailed as an important part of the emerging new masculinities. However, the continued pervasiveness of hegemonic forms of masculinity often rejects the notion of metrosexuality and its associated notion of male grooming and vanity. Moreover, while the marketing of beauty products to men does imply a certain sense of vanity, the concept of vanity itself has long been associated with femininity in terms of body pampering, luxury and touch (Barber 2008). Furthermore, vanity is also associated with the idea of being subjected to the gaze of the opposite sex; this then poses the gendered “gaze problem” for metrosexuality and masculinity (Barber 2008; Coupland 2007; Simpson [1994] 2013).
This study aims to examine how LME constructs its packaging discourse to persuade men to accept male grooming and reconcile it with their inner tensions on masculinity, metrosexuality and vanity.

**Differences between linguistics and marketing**

The interdisciplinary semiotics encompasses vast research interests. Nevertheless, the review on previous studies in linguistic and marketing semiotics reveals different interests, concerns and aims between both domains.

According to Chand and Chaudhary (2012), linguists and marketers have different interests, i.e. meaning creation and meaning consumption, respectively. The contrasts between both realms can be observed through the way semiotic resources are treated, e.g. colours and typography. For instance, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002, 355), representing a linguistic perspective, discuss how meaning for colours is created to fulfil three metafunctions, i.e. ideational (representation of the world), interpersonal (expression of social interactions and attitude “towards what is being represented”) and compositional (interaction with surrounding signs to present the whole meaning) (see also Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006; Van Leeuwen 2006; Djonov and Van Leeuwen 2011). On the other hand, marketing concerns generally focus upon how colours affect consumers’ perceptions of brands or products (e.g. Akcay, Dalgin, and Bhatnagar 2012; Labrecque and Milne 2012), consumers’ response towards brands or products (e.g. Sable and Akcay 2010) and consumers’ preferences (e.g. Shin et al. 2012). Hence, as opposed to interpersonal meaning that derives meaning from how authors express themselves through colours, marketing derives meaning mainly from colour psychology that has lists of prescribed colours and tested human responses.

Another difference between linguistic and marketing semiotics is the concern about semiotic resources or modes, which convey messages as language. Discourse analysts analyse various types of modes such as “sound, gesture, visual images, written and spoken language” (Nørgaard 2009, 159). This is mainly due to the linguistic interest that demands paying attention to all details that contribute to meaning creation within a certain text. In terms of language and gender, linguists return to their original subject (written and spoken words) by focusing more on verbal features (Talbot 2010), particularly in social interactions. One of the most prominent examples is Tannen’s (1991) often debated argument about the differing conversational styles between males and females, with males preferring to use a report style in talk, while females tend to establish rapport in their conversational style. Marketing semiotics, on the other hand, is more aesthetic-oriented (non-verbal). According to the “Formula for Gendering Products and Brands” proposed by Alreck (1994, 15–16), aesthetic elements like colours, patterns, textures and shapes are “subtle gender symbols”. For example, light, pastel colours are considered to be feminine, whilst dark, dense colours are masculine. Among the non-verbal features, visuals gain higher emphasis in marketing that “relies on strong visual identity” (Schroeder 2006, 303), i.e. brand image. This includes gender images in advertisements (Schroeder and Borgerson 1998).

Marketing and linguistics also differ in their ultimate goals, i.e. positioning. In linguistics, language is strongly associated with the society and, thus, the focus is on examining how the text is constructed in a particular way to persuade the readers to accept certain ideologies. Chandler (2007, 186–188) argues that linguists (especially critical discourse analysts and multimodal discourse analysts) perceive texts as discursive
practices that are both socially constituted and socially constitutive. The intended “ideal readers” with “a set of roles constructed by dominant cultural and ideological values” are positioned via the construction of particular semiotic codes. This echoes the arguments for “textual positioning” that claim textual comprehension requires readers to take on “an appropriate ideological identity”. Similarly, Sunderland (2004, 21) argues that gendered discourses “position women and men in different ways”. In contrast, brand/marketing positioning refers to the construction of a desired brand image into the consumer’s mind. As George Rossolatos (2012, 27) states, “Positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect”. In other words, it is about how you “position the product in the mind of the prospect” (Ries and Trout 2000, cited in Rossolatos 2012, 27). Again, this reflects marketing’s utmost concern – the customers, i.e. how their customers think about them (brand image). Basically, brand image attributes are represented through “the metaphor of brand personality” (Rossolatos 2012, 27), which is defined by “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker 1997, cited in Pantin-Sohier 2009, 55). In marketing discourse, positioning often “associates brands with masculine or feminine personality traits” (Grohmann 2009, 105).

In summary, the marketing approach is diametrically opposed to linguistics in terms of interests, concerns and aims. Nonetheless, there are some marketing studies that challenge these traditional norms. For example, Schroeder and Borgerson (1998) and Schroeder’s (2006) critical interdisciplinary perspective on visuals consider cultural interpretation. Known as a “critical visual analysis”, Schroeder (2006) addresses the need for “consumer response and post-structural notions of image production and consumption” (304). However, as with many other marketing studies, the lack of analysis on verbal processes is still apparent.

With reference to this particular study, the next concern is to find out how these differences relate to packaging analysis, which in turn reveals the research gap in marketing that can be addressed through a linguistic examination. Since linguistic study on packaging discourse is as yet a relatively unexplored area, current research relies mainly on marketing research. Based on the review of theoretical models for packaging analysis summarised by Vilnai-Yavetz and Koren (2013, 398–400), marketing semiotics on packaging has been more aesthetics-focused and consumer-oriented. Although Underwood and Ozanne (1998) provide insights into the communication within the packaging discourse, packaging is treated as a “communication tool” to provide marketing information rather than a “cultural tool”, which can either represent or influence society.

To examine further the arguments of marketing’s aesthetic and consumer-oriented approach, it is crucial to review some related marketing studies on packaging pertaining to metrosexuality or gender marketing: e.g. (1) Ritnamkam and Sahachaisaeree (2012) reveal a distinctive perceptual response between both sexes to the graphical and formal design in packaging of toiletries and grooming products; (2) McIntyre’s (2011) interview and observations regarding perfume packaging reveal that while luxury appeals to females, utilitarian value appeals to males; and lastly, (3) McNeill and Douglas’ (2011) study uncovers metrosexuals’ consumption behaviour towards grooming products, including packaging. These studies mainly depend on secondary data and focus on aesthetic aspects.

The study: analysing LME packaging the linguistic way
The differences between linguistic and marketing semiotics (as stated previously) lead to distinctive research approaches, as well as potential research gaps in both domains.
Hence, by analysing the common subject in marketing research – packaging, we aim to merge both the linguistics and marketing domains.

With reference to the differences between linguistic and marketing semiotics, this linguistic study emphasises: (1) meaning producer (packaging designers, not consumers or meaning receivers); (2) interpretation of discourse for meaning creation and producer’s intention (i.e. how or why meaning is constructed); and (3) both linguistic and non-linguistic features.

**Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework draws from theories in two main areas, i.e. (1) discourse analysis, specifically Scollon’s (2001) mediated discourse analysis (MDA); and (2) the Barthesian order of signification.

**Scollon’s MDA**

MDA is the analysis of “Discourse in Action” (Norris and Jones 2005), in which the actions within the text become the focus rather than the text itself. Scollon (2001, 6) argues that “Discourse is best conceived as a matter of social actions”, while the discourse (text) merely serves as “a component of social action”. Hence, the unit of analysis is the action undertaken by social actors through mediational means or cultural tools, e.g. language and material objects (advertisement and packaging), appropriated within the social practices.

Although the methodology analyses all possible mediational means, cultural tools, social practices and actors that realise the actions, this study limits the analysis onto packaging, excluding other marketing tools like advertisements and celebrity endorsements. Another feature of MDA is producing “multi-perspectived” data (Jones 2001, cited in Norris and Jones 2005), having the social actors as co-researchers. Again, this is removed from the study with regards to the focus of the paper. In other words, the study only applies the core principle of MDA, which is approaching text through actions.

MDA broadens the scope of discourse analysis by approaching through actions (unit of analysis) that will link to any possible modes (mediational means), which are taken with the particular social action and appropriated within the social practice to achieve the desired social meanings (Norris and Jones 2005). This explains why data in MDA are multimodal (Jones 2001, cited in Norris and Jones 2005) or even more multimodal than other types of discourse analysis.

**Barthesian order of signification**

Barthes’ order of signification uncovers layers of meaning (signifieds) underlying a sign (signifier) from the first order (denotation: literal/primary meaning) to the second (connotation: suggestive of associative/secondary meaning). The higher the order of signification, the deeper the structure of the symbol (social practices) uncovered.

The highest order of signification is mythologies, which reveal social beliefs derived from repetitive social practices over a long period of time in societies. Myth is a socially constructed knowledge that is universally held to be the truth, although in most circumstances it is not. As Barthes explains, “myths are the dominant ideologies of our time” (cited in Chandler 2007, 144). In other words, myths are naturalised connotations that become universally self-evident.
Research methodology
Based on Scollon’s (2001) MDA, the unit of analysis is the social action. The first step was to identify and code the social actions within the packaging discourse of LME. The next step was to analyse the multimodal features contributing to each social action identified earlier. Each multimodal feature was broken down (based on Barthes’ order of signification) into three levels of signification, i.e. denotative, connotative and myth, which are necessary to uncover the related gendered practices, which further reveal the negotiation of masculinity, metrosexuality and vanity to legitimise male grooming within the packaging discourse.

Analytical framework
The analytical framework includes three main aspects: gendered aesthetics, gendered ethical practices and gendered grooming. This framework is an adaptation from the findings and frameworks of previous research. It covers all possible practices and multimodal features of both sexes that are related in the DA. Hence, practices that are taken into account are highly gendered and often oppositional in nature (much like the gender binary).

To construct the framework for gendered aesthetic practices, a few marketing studies were referred to, i.e. Alreck (1994), Grohmann, Giese, and Parkman (2012), Veg (2007) and Moss (2009). Some of the male/female aesthetics are dark (dense)/light (pastel) colours; blue/pink; solid geometric/blended, natural patterns; straight, sharply angular/curve lines and rounded shapes; small, slim/large, broad sizes; heavy, compressed/less heavy, compressed fonts; rough/smooth surfaces; hard/soft, pliable materials; etc.

The framework of gendered ethical1 practices refers to male–female behaviours and characteristics. The studies contributed to the framework are mainly sex/gender research, e.g. David and Brannon’s (1976) “Blueprint for Manhood model” (cited in Kahn 2009) and Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem 1974; Choi and Fuqua 2003; Choi, Fuqua, and Newman 2008, cited in Choi, Fuqua, and Newman 2009). Some male/female ethical practices are independent /dependent; strong, robust, tough, stoic/ weak, vulnerable; dominant/subordinate; aggressive/submissive and adventurous/unadventurous, etc.

As for the gendered grooming framework, grooming-related studies (including metrosexuality) were referred to, e.g. Wolf (2002), Shanmugam (2002), McIntyre (2011), Chand and Chaudhary (2012) and McNeill and Douglas (2011). This includes the ideal body image for both sexes, e.g. dark and handsome/fair and beautiful.

Data description
The study analyses the packaging of cleansers from LP (White Perfect Purifies & Brightens Milky Foam) and LME (White Activ Brightening Foam) found in 2013. Although LME is the focus, LP is used for comparison to show the negotiation of gender in LME that is distinct from its female counterpart. Under the same company, it is assumed that LP and LME have the same brand value, except gender-related elements. Hence, LP serves as a “controlling variable” that filters the “extraneous factors”, i.e. non-gendering factors that may affect the construction of LME packaging discourse.
Findings and discussion

Identification of the unit of analysis: (mediated) social action

Although there are other actions on the back packaging, this section presents only the seven actions found on the front packaging. This is due to the fact that the front packaging is perceived as being more significant, providing the first impression to the potential customers. The actions are illustrated in Figure 1.

Gender construction through multimodal features for each social action

Next, the multimodal features that realised those actions were analysed and discussed.

Presenting brand name/logo (A1)

Figure 2(a) and 2(b) show that the substitution of Paris to Men Expert transforms the image from luxury and sophistication to expertise and, thus, constructs the first masculine trait. Paris, widely known as the capital of fashion, is the home for luxurious cosmetics and fashion. Like many other cosmetic brands from Paris (especially high-end brands), e.g. Clarins and Lancome, the word Paris is placed below the brand, due to the city’s reputation in producing cosmetics as well as its association with sophistication, luxury and aesthetics. Hence, besides signifying L’Oréal’s origins, it also foregrounds the connotation of sophistication, luxury and aesthetics (beauty).

While luxury and sophistication may not signal femininity, aesthetics often does, and the fact that neither aesthetics nor skincare products are a need for survival implies luxury and sophistication. Thus, in the discourse of beauty marketing, luxury and sophistication are highly associated with femininity. This echoes McIntyre’s (2011, 349) argument that “needs and function are masculine, luxury is feminine”.

Figure 1. Illustration of the identification of social actions.
LME clearly shows the construction of a masculine image by replacing feminine luxury and sophistication with masculine expertise, ruggedness and competence using both verbal and visual features. According to Grohmann, Giese, and Parkman (2012), the heavy and compressed type font is associated with ruggedness and competence. As shown in LME, such typography is attributed to the maximally dark (saturated) dense colour – black (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002) – and large fonts, as well as thick fonts and a horizontal orientation (flattened) that give weight (Van Leeuwen 2006). The signification of ruggedness and competence may be made justifiable by the associated meanings of the large and heavy image (fonts) that provide salience (prominence) (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006); the bold fonts that connote “assertive”, “daring”, “substantial” and “solidity” (Van Leeuwen 2006, 148); and the horizontal orientation that signals “solidity” and stability (Van Leeuwen 2006, 149).

In addition, LME replaces the gold fonts in LP that symbolise luxury, sophistication and elegance (Fraser and Banks 2004; Mahnke 1996; Wright 1988) with black, a “control font” (Grohmann, Giese, and Parkman 2012, 398) which suggests a more masculine sense of power and authority (Odbert et al. 1942; Wexner 1954). (Cited in Labrecque and Milne 2012).
Besides constructing a masculine image, the effort of downplaying femininity is achieved through visual composition, i.e. positioning the tiny word “Paris” in the letter “O” of L’Oréal. Along with this effort, Men Expert is designed using heavy and compressed type fonts to have almost the same salience (prominence) as L’Oréal, to enable LME to be read as one entity without Paris.

The rationale is to construct a whole new brand with the concept of being “exclusively for men”. This backgrounds its mother brand, LP that has a strong reputation of selling female beauty products, as well as “denies” the fact that it is a line constructed through market segmentation under LP, in which the female market still dominates. Hence, unlike the marked “metrosexuality” and other male grooming products extended from female beauty brands (with the label “For Men”), LME is presented as a brand in itself and thus legitimises male grooming as being distinct from the feminine notion of grooming.

Presenting brand image (A2)

A2 focuses on the overall aesthetics in a holistic manner, which aligns with the marketing concept of brand positioning that is aesthetically oriented. This includes visual aspects (e.g. colours, patterns, size and shape), as well as the tactile and olfactory aspects. See Figure 3(a) and Figure 3(b).

Figure 3. (a) A2 in LP; (b) A2 in LME.
In terms of colour choice, LME differs from LP which is mainly covered in white. White connotes purity, innocence and cleanliness (Akcay, Dalgin, and Bhatnagar 2011; Fraser and Banks 2004; Mahnke 1996; Wright 1988, cited in Labrecque and Milne 2012, 714), suggesting “spotless” perfection. Like most skin-whitening products, white packaging also signifies fairness. Hence, LME challenges the femininity of white with its opposition (black) and a masculine colour (blue). It also downplays femininity with the use of the intermediate colour of grey.

However, the colour of the cap in LP and LME seems to depict gender reversal, as LP uses the masculine colour blue while LME uses a feminine bright warm colour (orange; Moss 2009). Rather than a gender reversal, we argue that this leverages upon the gender dichotomy in terms of perceived cost and value – “inexpensiveness” (Akcay, Dalgin, and Bhatnagar 2011, 45). Thus, orange in LME challenges the concept of luxury in beauty practice, suggesting a masculine emphasis on more value for money. Moreover, orange is the potential popular colour for packaging (including LME) in 2006, which according to Carroll (n.d.) is due to the “growing demand for individuality from consumers”, i.e. “colours that express personalisation and strength” (cited in Cosmetics design-europe.com on 13 October 2005). It is also associated with energy and adventure (Akcay, Dalgin, and Bhatnagar 2011). Along with its stimulating and attention-grabbing features (Akcay, Dalgin, and Bhatnagar 2011) and connotations of individuality, orange is an attempt at persuading men (who possibly conform to traditional notions of masculinity) to take up a unique personal style, which tends to be associated with metrosexuals.

Since blue is used in both LP and LME, we argue that it is not employed to differentiate in terms of gender. In marketing, blue is “a secure colour” (Schaie 1961; Murray and Deabler 1957; Wexner 1954), being popular to both sexes (Akcay, Dalgin, and Bhatnagar 2011; Sable and Akcay 2010; Funk and Ndubisi 2006; Khouw 2003). (Cited in Akcay and Sun 2013). Besides, due to its association with values like trust, intelligence, efficiency and duty (Fraser and Banks 2004; Mahnke 1996; Wright 1988), it projects positive brand perception. (Cited in Labrecque and Milne 2012). Nevertheless, being a masculine colour (e.g. Paul 2002; Jacobs et al. 1991, cited in Akcay, Dalgin, and Bhatnagar 2011; Valdillez 2012), blue is replaced with another shade – ultramarine in LP, signifying luxury and sophistication (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002).

The second aspect, that of visual patterns, is “masculinised” in LME with many straight lines with solid geometry (Alreck 1994; Moss 2009). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006):

Angularity we associate with the inorganic, crystalline world, or with the world of technology, which is a world we have made ourselves, and therefore a world we can/ at least in principle, understand fully and rationally. (55)

Hence, straight lines and angularity in LME connote rationality and masculine expertise, being “the elements of the mechanical, technological order” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 54). Similarly, Donnies (1973) argues that the square represents “honesty, straightness and workmanlike meaning” while Thompson and Davenport (1982) claim that it “represents the world and denotes order”. (Cited in Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 54) Furthermore, based on the compositional meaning of lines and shapes (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006), the solid, geometrical patterns imply masculinity. Besides constructing framings and salience that disconnect and highlight each piece of information (Kress and
Van Leeuwen (2006), these solid geometrical patterns also suggest a no nonsense practical communication style (see Tannen 1991), as well as exert control and status (Wood 2012).

The tactile differences between LP and LME are insignificant with almost the same smoothness, hardness and weight. This may be a result of L’Oreal’s environmental effort in using “sustainable packaging” that involves reducing “packaging weight and volume” (Sustainable Packaging 2010, 1) Nevertheless, according to Djonov and Van Leeuwen (2011), a visual can provide “an illusion of tangibility … by shifts in focus and colour and by patterns of lines and shapes” (541). As shown in Figure 3(b), the overall visual pattern in LME constructs the visual texture of roughness, toughness (hardness) and density. Having light, bright, dull and dark colours arranged in a disorderly manner, visual roughness in LME is achieved through the abrupt distribution of colours and lines, as well as the relief that is constructed through the presence of jagged lines and variations in colour value from maximally light (white) to maximally dark (black). This overcomes any notions of femininity in LME’s surface which has less tactile relief, i.e. a flat tactile surface that feels “smooth, suggesting youth and unblemished purity” (Djonov and Van Leeuwen 2011, 550). Furthermore, the distribution of lines, solid geometrical shapes, heavy and compressed fonts and dark, dense colours across LME’s surface, project higher density (visually heavier), which according to Djonov and Van Leeuwen (2011, 551), represents a more durable substance and may “suggest solidity, the ability to withstand wear and tear, as well as high quality due to abundance”. Thus, it connotes masculine strength and toughness.

The fourth aspect, packaging shape, is defined as the characteristics of an object that remains unchangeable under the modification of its “size, place, material and time” (Alluisi 1960; Attneave and Arnoult 1956, cited in Pantin-Sohier 2009, 57). While LME is shorter, its size and shape that fit the palm are easy-to-use and as such are associated with the gender difference paradigm which associates masculinity with practicality. Unlike the tall elongated LP that connotes “sophistication” and “expensiveness” (63) but is “less practical” (61), the “short wide” LME is “associated with athletes” (61) and emphasises the “practical” and “sporty” (63) (Pantin-Sohier 2009). This is enhanced by the angularity of LME that does not only project “sturdy, crude, thick and wide shapes” signalling “strength and power” (Van den Berg-Weitzel and Van de Laar 2006), but also suggests “effectiveness and protection” through “angularity and uniform angles” (Dichter 1971, cited in Pantin-Sohier 2009, 57).

Angularity in LME along with a heavy and hard visual texture creates the illusion of “large and heavy”. Although both products have the same volume (100 ml), LME looks larger, heavier and more stable, representing the “sturdy oak” that is “unaffected by the weather and conditions” and remains standing. “Sturdy oak” is one of the themes in David and Brannon’s (1976) “Blueprint for Manhood” model, suggesting masculine independence and self-reliance (cited in Kahn 2009, 56), which associate masculinity with strength and toughness. In contrast to the slim LP, such an allusion in LME implies the ideal male attractive physique, i.e. muscular and buff.

Last but not least, unlike LP which has a sweet scent suggesting perfume (which connotes the luxury associated with femininity), LME has no scent, signalling a masculine anti-femininity that avoids any feminine traits.
Presenting trademark (A3)

A3 refers to the way marketers and packaging designers express the individuality of the brand and differentiate it from other brands.

LP’s “DERMO-EXPERTISE” (Figure 4a) evokes sense of reliance and passivity that are highly associated with femininity. LME, on the other hand, demonstrates independence and an active sense with its trademark “ACTIVE DEFENSE SYSTEM”, which represents “empowered” men, i.e. strong and tough. This is due to the marketers’ creative or, rather, intentional selection of words by using “defence” rather than the common terms, “protection” or “whitening” that are generally more applicable to the functions of whitening products, i.e. protecting skin from sun rays (UV) and lightening skin tone, respectively. The term “ACTIVE DEFENSE SYSTEM” gives an impression of an “immune system” that will make one tougher and stronger, and thus implies independence.

LME’s trademark has been registered and symbolised (unlike LP’s), depicting professionalism. This suggests competitiveness and expertise, not only to its counterpart (LP), but also to its competitors. Such connotations again reveal traces of hegemonic and normative notions of masculinity. While “DERMO-EXPERTISE” is presented very close to and right under L’Oréal to imply a specialised brand in skincare that one can rely on, LME’s trademark is presented at the bottom as practical information, i.e. an expected element from LME, which connotes functionality, a value which is significantly associated with normative masculinity.

The way the trademark is presented in LME empowers men and evokes a strong sense of independence. It also re-emphasises the expert image of the brand with strong

(a)

(b)

Figure 4. (a) A3 in LP; (b) A3 in LME.
competitiveness through visuals. This is further enhanced by the choice of colour, orange, that signifies individuality and affordability. The latter is perceived as strictly anti-feminine in a context that is associated with feminine luxury (reflected in the gold background of A3 in LP).

Classifying product series (A4)

A4 is an important marketing action to give consumers information about the product’s function and target consumers. In this case it is a skin-whitening product for those who desire fair skin (see the illustrations, Figure 5(a) and Figure 5(b) below).

(a)

(b)

Figure 5. (a) A4 in LP; (b) A4 in LME.

LP’s White and Perfect complement each other to suggest an ideal feminine facial complexion, i.e. fair and flawless. While a fair complexion is the ideal for feminine beauty, this feminine ideal is challenged in LME by juxtaposing the word White (which connotes an ideal feminine facial complexion) with Activ, which connotes masculine traits. The term “white” is intended to be taken up by a masculinity that is more metrosexual in its appreciation of an ideal complexion. Significantly, to avoid the accusation of narcissism in metrosexuality (a narcissism that is highly associated with the
“female appraising gaze” (Coupland 2007, 37)), the word *Activ*, representing a sporty and active mode of being, avoids being passive and subjected to another’s gaze (unlike L’Oreal Paris’ *Perfect* that represents the stereotypical function of women’s grooming as an object of contemplation (Chandler 2007, 145)). This ensures that the masculine trait of self-sufficiency is retained, which in turn legitimises the male grooming practice within acceptable parameters of masculinity.

Describing product type (*A5*)

*A5* provides information on the product type, i.e. how it serves as an instrument in skincare (e.g. cleanser, toner and moisturiser). Besides the gendering efforts in typography and visual patterns that have been discussed in other actions, *A5* depicts other significant gendering efforts. Unlike LP’s *Milky Foam* which emphasises a feminine sense of sensuality and tenderness, LME’s *Brightening Foam* stresses instrumentality, once again associating masculinity through functionality (e.g. Tungate 2008).

Highlighting key ingredient (*A6*)

*A6* highlights the key ingredient(s) by presenting the ingredient(s) at the front packaging. The construction of traditional masculinity can be clearly observed through the play of words, which again focuses on functionality.

For LP, the word *gemstone* was deliberately added beside the scientific term *Tourmaline*, which enhances the luxury and sophistication of the brand. On the contrary, LME shows a conscious attempt at representing scientific expertise by “innovating” a scientific term, *Pro Exfoliatine*, which is assumed to originate from the word “exfoliating”. It is not found in the ingredients list and is defined in the back packaging as a “powerful peeling agent”. Not only does this align with Tungate’s (2008) “branding toolkit” for marketing men’s skincare products, which advocates borrowing from “the language of sports and science” in order to “stress functionality” (37), but it also aligns with the claims of science as a “masculine field” (Francis 2010). The addition of *Pro* which is usually associated with the term “professional” further enhances the image of expertise in masculinised grooming.

Highlighting key function(s) (*A7*)

Instrumentality or functionality is an important element in *A7*. While *LP* matches its function (instrumentality) – “whitening” – with the aesthetic impact, “transparent rosy”, (visualised along by its pink symbol with a spark end), LME rejects any association with aesthetic impact. Instead, it constructs masculinity by expressing more instrumentality as both a cleanser (“cleanses and purifies”) and a skin-whitening product (“brightens”), which is further intensified by the word “visibly”, connoting efficiency. Once again, normative masculine parameters are used in order to legitimise male grooming for men. Refer Figure 6(a) and Figure 6(b).
Based on the findings, male grooming in LME is legitimised in LME through five ways as follows.

**Constructing a hegemonic masculine image**

The most obvious effort of LME in constructing masculinity is through its branding. The brand name and its portrayal using visual features create a whole new masculine brand that backgrounds the mother brand, L’Oréal Paris that has a strong feminine image. The package is designed for a strong masculine aesthetic impact, using visuals (i.e. typography, pattern, colour and shape) and tactile impressions to create the illusion of large and heavy, signifying the “sturdy oak” (David and Brannon 1976, cited in Kahn 2009, 56). It also represents the ideal masculine physique, i.e. muscular and buff (Harrison 2008), as opposed to the slim LP. Innovative word constructions such as Pro Exfoliatine and creative borrowing of words, e.g. Recommendation for use and Patented Formula, usually found in manuals and other technological/scientific discourses, also play a significant role in making male grooming more acceptable to men by reinforcing the hegemonic image of overt masculinity.

**Negotiating (a masculinised) metrosexuality**

In order to legitimise the association of vanity with male grooming, LME also negotiates masculinity through metrosexuality. Significantly though, the metrosexual image that is negotiated privileges masculinity rather than any type of gender ambiguity. Word choices such as White Activ and Active Defense System (not protection (from UV) or whitening) play a large part in downplaying the association of vanity in the pursuit of an ideal facial complexion while still privileging normative notions of masculinity through...
metrosexuality (see Carniel 2009; Hall, Gough, and Seymour-Smith 2012). This means that the marketers in the male grooming industry often project a type of metropsexual masculinity that is acceptable to men so they are able to negotiate the tensions between masculinity, vanity and male grooming.

**Empowering men**

Constructing a masculine image is undoubtedly expected by many and proven in most studies on the packaging and advertisements of the male grooming industry. Nevertheless, this study discovers another way of legitimising male grooming in LME’s packaging, i.e. empowering men with the boost of strength and confidence, which in turn reduces the embarrassment and discomfort in using products or brands associated with femininity.

First, its trademark, Active Defense System, provides an impression of an immune system for the skin. Its function states that it will “reinforce the skin’s natural resistance”, implying that the product will enable men to be stronger and tougher, i.e. not vulnerable and not needing protection, since they are equipped with resistance.

Another factor that empowers men is the scientific/technological jargon (e.g. Pro Exfoliatine and patented formula), which provides a sense of expertise and intellectuality within a male domain like technology. Such empowerment continues with “Men Expert” in the brand name implying LME as a brand for men who are experts about men (and their skin). By association then, those who use LME automatically become “men experts”.

**Giving men a logical reason to groom**

Beauty and aesthetics, like beauty products, are not survival needs but luxuries. Developing from this concept, LP’s image revolves around sophistication, aesthetics and sensuality. All these correspond to the feminine desire to have beautiful or even perfect skin, which somehow legitimises their actions in caring for their appearance.

The marketing of male grooming products, on the other hand, needs to provide another reason for men to groom, i.e. one that distances men from the ideals of feminine beauty yet legitimises the care of their appearance as logical and rational. LME does it by portraying the grooming practice as a functional need and emphasising the instrumentality of the product.

Such a striking contrast in grooming reasons between LP and LME is supported by McIntyre (2011, 349), who argues that “needs and function are masculine, luxury is feminine”. The rationale is to “legitimise grooming consumption” (McNeill and Douglas 2011, 452), by perceiving grooming as being utilitarian or practical instead of self-indulgent (Schouten 1991; Cox and Dittman 1995; Gill et al. 2005; Bakewell et al. 2006, cited in McNeill and Douglas 2011).

**Different portrayal of skincare products**

Corresponding to the justification for grooming as a need and fulfilling a utilitarian value, LME is portrayed as a pragmatic, functional tool due to the considerable emphasis on its function and instrumentality or efficiency through various multimodal features. For example, the word choice (e.g. Brightening Foam) and visual positioning (e.g. positioning Pro Exfoliatine under Brightening Foam) enhance functionality and
instrumentality. This supports Harrison’s (2008) study which argues that male mascara is portrayed as a practical tool.

LME is also associated with the masculine domain through technological or mechanical terms like *Patented formula, Recommendation for use* and *Pro Exfoliante*. In other words, it links the product’s instrumentality to the male domain, which in turn portrays the product as a handy mechanical tool. This is enhanced by the packaging’s visual features – straight lines and angular designs, which according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, cited in Harrison 2008, 63), are “elements of the mechanical, technological order” and represent “a world we can, at least in principle, understand fully and rationally”.

The ultimate aim of such a portrayal is to enable the purchase of LME to be perceived as “not a vanity purchase but a masculine activity based on forethought and rationality” (Harrison 2008, 64).

Conclusion
Ironically, to persuade men to accept male grooming, LME stresses traditional masculinity in LME as well as emphasises the gender dichotomy between LP and LME. The emphasis on masculinity that distances itself from femininity legitimises grooming practices among men by avoiding stigmatisation that makes up the main fear and self-conflict among metrosexuals and men in general (Ourahmoune 2009; Pompper 2010). Hegemonic masculinity is evident in all five negotiation strategies that legitimise male grooming. Even metrosexuality, which has been perceived as being more feminine or deviating from traditional masculinity (Lertwannawit and Gulid 2010), is still marked by hegemonic notions of masculinity in the packaging of LME. It seems that as long as traditional notions of masculinity remain intact, grooming and vanity are perceived to be more acceptable, at least among LME consumers.

Collaboration between marketing and linguistic semiotics
Looking at packaging from the linguistic lens, the study shows how both marketing and linguistics can complement each other for a more multilayered research. Hence, this section proposes the possible collaboration between linguistics and marketing for comprehensiveness in the research framework and findings.

First, the interdisciplinary collaboration between consumer-oriented marketing and producer-oriented linguistics provides a multi-perspectived data, allowing the researcher to examine the same subject from two different perspectives. As Schroeder (2006, 304) argues, “humanities (linguistics) provide theoretical tools to understand image genres, content and narrative, whereas social science (marketing) affords methods for discussing context, effects and strategic implications” (cf. Phillips and McQuarrie 2004; Stern and Schroeder 1994). Furthermore, this collaboration also allows researchers to “illuminate key tensions within the politics of representation (meaning creation), identity (culture) and marketing (meaning consumption)” (Schroeder 2006, 304). The second collaboration between linguistics and marketing is providing justification and validation, respectively. Due to the lack of participants’ validation, linguistics is often criticised for researcher bias (interpreting data according to personal interests). Although marketing mainly involves focus group and surveys that emphasise participants’ (consumers) perceptions, it is
Table 1. Typography analysis via linguistic and marketing collaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode/feature</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Signifier</th>
<th>Denotation</th>
<th>Connotation</th>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Signifier</th>
<th>Denotation</th>
<th>Connotation</th>
<th>Myth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Typography</td>
<td>Light colour</td>
<td>Light and not compressed</td>
<td>Sophistication</td>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>Dark colour</td>
<td>Heavy and compressed</td>
<td>Ruggedness and competence</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Smaller; without bold</td>
<td>Vertical orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bigger; Bold</td>
<td>Horizontal orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
unable to account for how the meanings are derived. Therefore, while the marketing approach could provide the “verification tool” for linguistics, linguistics serves as the “heuristic or explanation tool” for marketing to explore how meaning is created. Although this non-triangulated linguistic study addresses the lack of verification as its limitation, it uncovers the usefulness of marketing knowledge in providing internal validation (internal triangulation) on aesthetic features. Unlike verbal meanings that can be found in dictionaries, aesthetics is mainly based on perception, and thus needs validation. Marketing, being more aesthetic-established and perception-oriented, has conducted numerous studies on how people perceive aesthetic features. While linguistics explains how aesthetic meaning is constructed, previous marketing studies support the researchers’ claims.

One significant example is the heavy and compressed typography in A1. Grohmann, Giese, and Parkman’s (2012) marketing study has revealed that the particular type font contributes to the brand perception of ruggedness and competence (masculinity). However, the construction of the meaning is rather vague. Based on Barthes’ order of signification, the linguistic study questions the creation of meaning, i.e. how the meanings of “heavy and compressed” and “ruggedness and competence” are derived. Apparently, interpretation is needed. Related linguistic studies are referred for a more valid interpretation, e.g. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) and Van Leeuwen (2006) (see Table 1).

In other words, if the linguistic framework is “grammar” (as famously claimed by Kress and Van Leeuwen), the marketing framework is “dictionary”. They both complement each other to ensure a more multilayered and multi-perspectived analysis.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes
1. This refers to the two dimensions of brand identity, i.e. aesthetic and ethic invariance, which the latter are the intangible signifieds that are “the brand’s vision of the world”, i.e. “its personality and philosophy” (Floch 1995; Roux and Floch 1996, cited in Veg 2007). In this case, the personality refers to masculinity or femininity, whilst the philosophy refers to how a male or a female should behave.
2. Although there are numerous colour interpretations, the study chooses the relevant meanings of beauty/grooming discourse, related to fashion, aesthetics, sophistication, gender, marketing, etc.
3. Kindly note that ultramarine is purely determined through personal perception, based on external sources of information provided in books and websites. Hence further validation may be needed.

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