

The empowerment and
evolution of women
through advertising:
The rise of Femvertising

Prof. Paolo Peverini

SUPERVISOR

Prof.ssa Stella Romagnoli

CO – SUPERVISOR

Lucrezia Giovannoli 730141

CANDIDATE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER I: PRESENTATION OF THE PHENOMENON, LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONTEXT. WOMEN IN ADVERTISING.	
1.1 Gender, Advertising and Society	6
1.1.1 Gender Stereotypes in Advertising	7
1.1.2 The “mirror” vs. the “mold” argument: the role and social nature of advertising	8
1.1.3 Advertising and Women’s development	9
1.2 The representation of Women in Advertising: a diachronic perspective	10
1.2.1 The Pre-Feminist period: the “happy housewife” and the “good mother” stereotypes as predominant myths	11
1.2.2 The Feminist period: Women’s rights movement as a cultural disruption. Emancipation and Sexualisation through the advertising lens	15
1.2.3 The Post-Feminist period: Commodity Feminism, Sexual Subjectification and the myth of the Modern Woman.....	21
CHAPTER II: FEMALE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ADVERTISING: THE RISE OF FEMVERTISING.	
2.1 Femvertising: an overview of the phenomenon	24
2.2 Femvertising and Brand Activism	27
2.3 Characteristics and Themes of Femvertising	28
2.4 Relevance, Managerial implications, Criticism and Recommendations	38
2.5 Research Gap and Research Questions	41
CHAPTER III: THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.	
3.1 Research Method.....	43
3.2 Semiotic Analysis	44
3.2.1 The Semiotic approach: theories and tools	45
3.2.2 FemVERTISEMENTS from a semiotic point of view: data set definition	47
- Pantene: “Sorry, Not Sorry”	48
- Barbie: “Imagine the Possibilities”	51
- Gillette Venus: “#UseyourAnd”	54
- Dove: “My Beauty My Say”	56
- Nike: “Dream Crazier”	61
- Bumble: “The Ball is in Her Court”	
3.3 Content Analysis: Coding through NVivo.....	64
3.3.1 Analysis Overview	66
3.3.2 Coding results.....	69

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION - RESEARCH DISCUSSION, RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS.

4.1 Conclusive debate: results discussion	80
4.2 Theoretical Contributions	82
4.3 Managerial Implications and Recommendations	82
4.4 Limitations and directions for future research	83
REFERENCES	85

INTRODUCTION.

“Advertising is our environment. We swim in it as fish swim in the water. We cannot escape it... advertising messages are inside our intimate relationships, our home, our hearts, our heads.” (Kilbourne, 1999).

Starting from this concept, this thesis explores the impact brand discourses have in shaping, influencing and reflecting society, especially with regard to gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender relationships. In this regard, advertising contributes to the development and adaptation of gender identities through a system of visual representation (Zotos and Tsihla 2014), by providing precise iconographies of masculinity and femininity that create meaning within the cultural framework (Schroeder and Zwick 2004).

In particular, this work examines the evolution and the empowerment of women through advertising, highlighting how female portrayals in media have changed in response to social and cultural tensions. In this sense, advertising discourses have progressively been re – adapted mirroring as well as molding the cultural context of the time.

In detail, Chapter 1 begins with the presentation and explanation of the long – term existing relationship involving gender issues, advertising and society. From this broad perspective, the discussion then continues focusing on the changing representation of women in media, following a diachronic approach. More specifically, the investigation covers a time span of approximately 70 years (from the 1950s up to the present day) presenting the myths and brand narratives that have characterised the pre – feminist era (defined by the “happy housewife” and the “good mother” stereotypes), the feminist period (marked by the coexistence of emancipation and sexualisation) and the post- feminist period (distinguished by the emergence of Commodity Feminism, Sexual Subjectification and the myth of the modern/super woman).

Later, Chapter 2 goes on introducing the current female representation in commercials through the phenomenon of Femvertising. In particular, Femvertising is examined by going through its characteristics, its relation to and conversation with the third and fourth waves of Feminism as well as its extension of a brand’s dedication to corporate social responsibility and brand activism. Then, the last part of the chapter presents the research questions, which deal with the identification of the advertising myth narrated by Femvertising campaigns and female consumers’ reactions to this new narrative and their level of identification with it.

Indeed, Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to answer to the research questions. Precisely, the research involves two studies, both pertaining to qualitative and explorative methods. The first study developed has a semiotic nature. It is the analysis of six Femvertisements and focuses on their narration, rhetorical tools and advertising strategy. Together, the analysis provides a clear picture of the feminine myth conveyed by Femvertising, thus answering to the first research question. The second study takes a different approach. In fact, it is the coding of female users’ Facebook comments posted with regard to each commercial included in

the semiotic analysis. By using NVivo coding platform, it is first possible to categorise and codify words and sentences present in the comments and then identify the most recurrent themes in the discussion as well as women's opinions and reactions to the ads. This activity provides an answer to the second research question.

Concluding, Chapter 4 reports the results emerging from this research and shows the theoretical and managerial implications of the work. What's more, both limits of the research and suggestions for future works are presented.

Last, despite this research found evidence confirming previous literature and is able to give interesting insights to the business world, it is important to remember that empowering female portrayals in advertising are increasing at an impressive rate, following the new social and cultural tensions. For this reason, it might be expected that the phenomenon studied by this work would become more relevant and widespread in future years.

CHAPTER I: PRESENTATION OF THE PHENOMENON, LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONTEXT. WOMEN IN ADVERTISING.

1.1 Gender, Advertising and Society (Conceptual Background).

The investigation of gender representation in advertising has received considerable academic attention. More precisely, the analysis of gender stereotypes in advertising is counting five decades of research, resulting in a significant body of knowledge. This stream of literature was stimulated and fuelled by a series of social, cultural and historical events such as the advent of the women's rights movement in the 1960s and the gradual changes in the occupational and domestic structures (Zotos and Lysonski, 1994; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009; Zotos and Tsihla, 2014).

In fact, the progressive tendency of more and more women to acquire higher education, their growing participation in the work force and their aspirations for top executive positions traditionally held by men ushered in significant changes. Not only did women acquire a financial independence that allowed for an increased disposable income, but more importantly, their social and educational status has significantly evolved (Zotos and Tsihla, 2014).

These changes in society regarding traditional gender roles and stereotypes were accompanied by changes in gender portrayals in cultural vehicles such as advertising (Zotos and Tsihla, 2014).

In concrete, the rise of Feminism and the evolution process initiated by it had a great impact on the advertising system. Feminist theorists criticized the way women used to be portrayed in advertisements. According to them, women's portrayals were unrealistic, unfavourable and limited: pictures of women as happy housewives and sexual objects, themes of females as incompetent, depictions of women dependent upon men and the underrepresentation of working women (Wasson 1973; Courtney and Whipple 1983). This criticism had a significant effect on advertising, since starting from that moment on, we witness to gradual and progressive changes in the representation of women in the media.

Following the timeline and the cultural changes through the advertising lens, it is possible to notice that the 1970s have been the era dominated by emancipation and sexualization (as a response to the sexual freedom solicited by the feminist movement) in advertisements. From the mid-80s to the 90s, the prevailing themes recurring in advertisements presenting female portrayals have been sexual subjectification (women finally become active sexual subjects and are no longer passive sexual objects) and the myth of the modern woman in the perspective of commodity feminism. Eventually, we come to the present day where female empowerment has given rise to a new form of advertising: Femvertising.

The evolution of women's representation in media over time will be further analysed with supporting literature and cases in the second paragraph of this chapter.

1.1.1 Gender Stereotypes in Advertising.

Stereotypes are a set of concepts pertaining to a social category (Vinacke, 1957). In particular, gender stereotypes are defined as beliefs that certain attributes differentiate women and men (Ashmore and Del Boca, 1981).

As stated by Deaux and Lewis (1984), gender stereotypes are characterized by four different and independent components: trait descriptors (e.g., self – assertion, concern for others), physical characteristics (e.g., hair length, body height), role behaviours (e.g., leader, taking care of children), and occupational status (e.g., truck driver, housewife). Each component has a masculine and a feminine version with masculine and feminine traits significantly more strongly associated with males and females, respectively.

Numerous content analyses have provided a catalogue of variables related to gender roles. These variables can be categorized along the components mentioned above, except for the first one (trait descriptors), since the first component is not directly observable by means of a content analysis. For instance, age of central figures in advertising relates to physical characteristics, profession of central figures refers to occupational status and a central figure's expertise or the way she/he talks about products is associated to role behaviours (Eisend, 2010).

Stereotyping should not be necessarily considered as a negative practice since stereotypes lead to expectations that can provide a useful orientation in everyday life. However, stereotypes can lead to oversimplified conceptions and thus to wrong evaluations of subjects of a social category (Eisend, 2010).

Each gender stereotyping component can lead to negative consequences that restrict life opportunities, especially for women. Stereotyping of physical characteristics (e.g., beauty ideals for women) may lead to reduced self – dignity and body dissatisfaction; stereotyping of role behaviours (e.g., women taking care of children may lead to restricted opportunities of self – development); lastly, stereotyping of occupational roles may lead to disadvantages in women's careers (Eisend, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that the European Parliament (2008) gave careful consideration on the avoidance of gender stereotypes, raising public policy concerns toward marketing activities that promote them.

Gender stereotypes have always been present in advertising. Companies and marketers have frequently used gender roles to promote products, and researchers have therefore shown interest in the portrayal of men and women since the 1960s. Scholars have been particularly interested in stereotypes in advertising concerning women. Over the years, they have focused not only on the different kinds of stereotypes used to portray women and men, but also on the cultural implications and social consequences of stereotypes and advertising.

Focusing on gender portrayals in the media, research has shown that women have traditionally been presented in more decorative roles (e.g., for their beauty or body), in more family-oriented roles, in fewer professional

roles and in more demure roles (Uray and Burnaz, 2003) while men have been typically shown as more independent, authoritarian and professional with little regard to age and physical appearances (Reichert and Carpenter, 2004).

However, it must be noticed that gender stereotypes have evolved over the years according to societal and cultural changes. Women have progressively gained substantial ground on their male counterparts and have gradually broken out of negative stereotyping. In support of this, several studies have shown that role portrayals in commercials are more representative of contemporary women and are gradually becoming equal to men (Furnham and Mak, 1999).

New developments in social theory, argued that gender stereotypes, which derive from the division of labour (Eagly, 1987), have evolved according to women's increased participation in society and in the paid labour force. In particular, because women are no longer confined to the domestic sphere, but have finally gained a position in the working environment, feminine traits have shifted to reflect this new situation. In fact, research has shown that women's attributes are now more agentic (e.g., competitive, individualistic) and less communal (e.g., kind, nurturing) than those typically identified with the domestic role (Eagly and Steffen, 1986). Thus, there has been a progressive shift from communal traits related to characteristics such as concern for others, interpersonal sensitivity and maintenance of relationships towards agentic traits which are referred to qualities relevant for goal – attainment, self – assertion and independence

In addition, Diekman and Eagly (2000) demonstrated that stereotypes are dynamic constructs that change over time as society becomes increasingly progressive. Their findings suggest that advertising stereotypes evolve along with changes in society. In the concrete, gender stereotypes are strongly influenced by time and culture. More specifically, as women continue to hold more traditionally “masculine” roles, the authors predict that female stereotypes – in advertising and also in other contexts – will become increasingly non-traditional. This prediction is consistent with the notion that stereotypes are fluid and flexible constructs that adapt to changes in society, thus setting the theoretical foundation for the introduction of Femvertising.

1.1.2 The “mirror” vs. “mold” argument: the role and social nature of advertising.

The nature of the relationship between gender – related values in society and gender stereotyping in advertising constitutes the centre of a long debate between sociologists and advertisers. So far, two opposing positions have been developed: on the one hand there is the “mirror” argument (Holbrook, 1987), on the other hand there is the “mold” argument (Pollay, 1986, 1987).

The “mirror” argument states that advertising reflects cultural values, beliefs and norms that already exist and prevail in society (Holbrook, 1987). As a consequence, gender roles in advertising reflect cultural expectations

towards gender. Following this perspective, women and men featured in advertisements have been typecast to adhere to the dominant concepts held regarding gender roles. According to the author, changes in advertising content are more likely to correspond to changes in society than vice versa. As changes constantly occur in the cultural context (e.g., a society's view of gender roles alters), advertisers work on their communication strategies and adapt the images they portray in advertisements to those changes. Thus, this argument considers advertising as a mirror of society.

The “mold” argument, on the other hand, presents a different perspective. More specifically, according to this position, advertising has the power to mold and shape the values of its target audience (Pollay 1986, 1987). Hence, gender roles in advertising create, shape and reinforce gender stereotypical beliefs and values in a society (Ganahl et al. 2003b). This view is based on the idea that exposure to media and advertising can lead to changes in attitudes and behaviour as well as the fact that people learn from media. Therefore, the argument is consistent with the findings and explanations offered by cultivation studies. Cultivation theory was first developed by professor George Gerbner in the 1960s and examines the lasting effects of media, primarily focusing on television. This theory suggests that people who are regularly exposed to media for extended periods of time are more inclined to perceive the world's social realities as they are depicted in the media they consume, which in turn affects their attitudes and behaviours. Television, in fact, has long-term effects on viewers that are small, gradual, indirect and while at the same time cumulative and significant. Repeated TV watching can influence viewers' perceptions and beliefs to be more consistent with the world depicted in television rather than the real world itself (Gerbner et. al, 2002).

Considering what has been said, it must be noticed that there is not a theory that is more appropriate than the other and vice versa. In fact, it could be suggested that the truth resides somewhere within the continuum between the “mirror” and the “mold” arguments (Zotos and Tsihla, 2014). Thus, the conclusion is that advertising both reflects and contributes to culture and society.

1.1.3 Advertising and women's development.

As just said in the previous paragraph, advertising both reflects and shapes society. Its impact and influence in the cultural context are even more pronounced when it comes to gender – related discourses.

In particular, research has shown that advertising can contribute to women's development. This function is performed by advertising through two different routes: the direct route and the indirect route (Vadakkappatt et al., 2022).

The direct route supports the idea that advertising can enhance women's development by raising awareness and promoting the adoption of products that directly advance women's education, health and living standards

(Goldman, 1991). This role of advertising has also a great impact on the market since it can shift demand to products that have greater values and benefits for women.

The indirect route, on the other hand, states that advertising can leverage women's development by serving as a catalyst to change social norms around what society expects of women, which in turn can influence the same outcomes namely health, education and standard of living (Vadakkepatt et al., 2022). There exist two ways in which advertising can help in shifting social norms.

First, commercials can encourage women's empowerment by creating an enacted reality of a liberating female experience (Pumphery 1987; Rabinovitch-Fox, 2016). In this regard, Femvertising constitutes a perfect example of how advertising is useful to shift social norms. In fact, Femvertising, that can be defined as advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages and imagery to empower women and girls (SheKnows Media, 2014), has contributed to a shift from stereotypical advertisements to commercials that purposely motivate and inspire women by providing representations of female experiences and achievements.

Second, when advertising displays negative stereotypes of women, such problematic representations lead to psychological reactance (Vadakkepatt et al., 2022). Reactance generally transforms into resistance, that is "the process and act of challenging one's subordinated position in a given social system" (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). Resistance should be intended as a way to protest against negative and oppressive stereotypes within the culture. In particular, resistance can result in oppressed groups utilizing coping strategies (such as online protests in modern societies) to challenge female stereotypes, thus promoting women's development (Vadakkepatt et al., 2022).

1.2 The representation of women in advertising: a diachronic perspective.

Over time, the role and the depictions of women in advertising have changed. Starting from the 1950s until the present day, it is possible to notice an evolution and relevant changes concerning female portrayals produced by the brands through all forms of advertisements and communicated through the media.

These changes in the representation of women in ads were actually produced by cultural and social shifts, thus confirming the idea that advertising and media interact to both influence and reflect the culture.

By following the timeline reconstruction, the analysis will cover a period of approximately 70 years through a diachronic perspective. Within this time frame, the changing role and portrayal of women will be centred on three key subperiods: the pre – feminist period, the feminist period and the post – feminist period. Then, the review will continue in the second chapter with a focus on the current empowered female representation in commercials through the phenomenon of Femvertising.

1.2.1 The pre – feminist period: the “happy housewife” and the “good mother” stereotypes as predominant myths.

During what is known as the pre - feminist era (immediately after the end of World War II), which covers a range period between 1950 and the early 1960s, women were mainly depicted in the private sphere, often at home. On the contrary, men were usually positioned in the public sphere, often in places of work and in portrayals that conveyed authority.

In positioning men and women differently in relation to the public and private spheres, masculinity was granted powers that were not granted to femininity (Mager and Hegelson, 2010). This period, in fact, was characterised by the ideal of “hegemonic masculinity”, that promoted male dominance in society and consequently women’s subordination. The ideals of manhood espoused by dominant masculinity were physical strength, stoicism (emotional restraint), toughness, courage, competitiveness, achievement, success, violence and aggression.

Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) demonstrated that in the pre – feminist period women were primarily portrayed in decorative and traditional roles. In particular, in the study the authors analysed print advertisements dating back to 1958 and resumed the prevailing viewpoint towards females in the 1950s and 1960s. More specifically, they found out that magazine advertisements mirrored the following stereotypes of the era:

- "Women as unemployed." This finding is the most representative of the clichés about a "woman's place" in society. Most women were shown in non - working roles and often at home, doing not heavy household chores such as cooking or cleaning.
- "Non-working women in decorative roles and idle situations." Often, the presence of women was not substantially related to the product advertised.
- "Women have limited purchasing power." This reflects the observation that females were depicted as decision makers only for small - ticket items for the home (such as linens and health care supplies).

They also pointed out that in extremely rare cases women were shown in working environments. However, when it happened, the jobs carried out by female subjects were mainly low-income occupations, such as secretarial, clerical or blue-collar positions. This means that they were shown as workers and followers, not as bosses or leaders.

Based on the masculine society of the time and the related gender roles and stereotypes, advertisements used to represent situations showing that women were dependent upon men and in need of men’s protection. On the contrary, men were depicted as only being interested in women as sexual objects (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971).

Furthermore, in the ads men were always shown as active, while women were shown as passive (Berger, 1972).

Considering what has been said, it is possible to state that advertising was extremely sexist in the 1950s. Both in the real world and in advertisements, the woman was tied to her private realm and was submissive to the endless will of the man. In addition to submission, advertisements also pointed out her naivety, stupidity, obedience and ignorance (Dimitrieska and Efremova, 2020).

This period in advertising is called the “Mad Men” era, where the ads implied that women were figures who mostly cared about pleasing their man.

There is a plenitude of advertisements showing the prevailing ideal prototype of woman and the related stereotypes of the time.

One of the most egregious examples of the era is provided by Van Heusen Ties and the advertisement published in Collier’s Magazine in 1951. The advertisement is multi – modal, with both visual and lexical elements. It portrays a domestic scene of a couple in a bedroom. The man is sitting on the bed and looks comfortable, handsome and well – dressed. He is wearing a tie, which symbolizes power and authority. His arms are stretched behind his head to symbolize how relaxed and carefree he is. The woman is literally standing on her knees (a position which symbolizes inferiority and servitude) serving breakfast to the man. She is wearing a dressing gown, probably to feel comfortable while tidying the house. She looks like a loyal and devout wife. Also, the two subjects are positioned on two different levels: the man is placed visually higher while lying in bed (looking dominant and strong), while the woman is kneeling on the floor and thus placed on a lower stage.

The scene is reinforced by the slogan “Show her it’s a man’s world”. The ad, in fact, truly shows it’s a man’s world where men have the power as they are the ones who work and earn money. In this world, women are just there to take care of their husbands.

The picture is actually an accurate representation of the stereotypes previously mentioned:

- Men dominating women;
- Man is to be in employment;
- The female gender role is portrayed as housewife while the male gender role is portrayed as breadwinner;
- Women are not intelligent (this stereotype is represented through the image of the “dumb blonde”).



Fig. n.1 Van Heusen Ties, 1951 (retrieved from Google Images)

Another interesting advertisement confirming these stereotypes is represented by the campaign released by Schlitz in 1952 to promote its beer. The ad depicts a couple in a domestic scene in the kitchen. The man is dressed elegantly with a brand-new black suit and tie, suggesting he has just got back from a very important job. The woman, on the other hand, is wearing a shabby housewife dress with a hole in the t – shirt.

In examining the picture, the tagline “Don’t worry darling, you didn’t burn the beer” is what immediately stands out. This sentence is pronounced by the man, implying that women are so incapable and useless to fail the only occupation they are given, which is doing the housework and cooking for their husbands.

The woman is humiliated and made fun of with the nonchalant, laughing face of the husband, confronting his crying wife who looks miserable and helpless. It is ironic how her total failure is resolved by the simple existence of the beer, the quintessential symbol of masculinity that cannot be tainted by women.

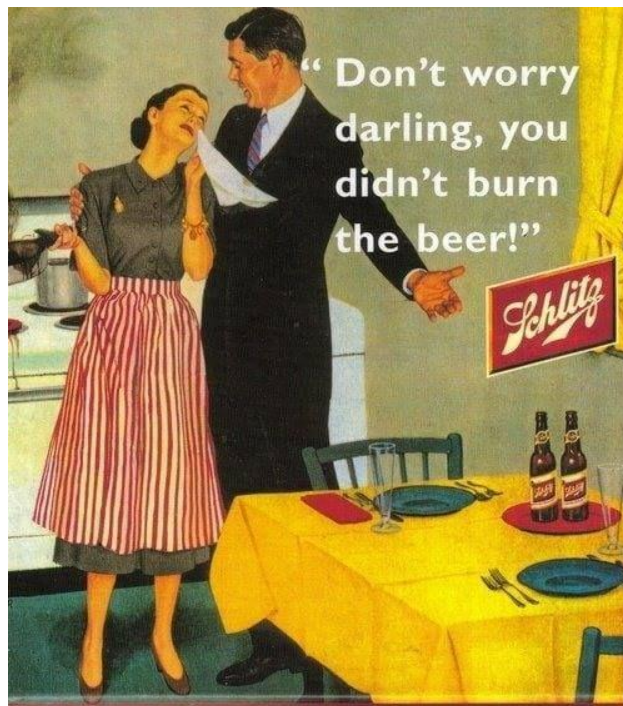


Fig. n. 2 Schlitz, 1952 (retrieved from Google Images)

This ideal of woman continued to be present throughout the 1950s until the early 1960s. Besides Van Heusen Ties and Schlitz, a multitude of brands used this stereotypical female portrayal in their communication strategies. The following ones are some of the most notable examples:

- Alcoa Aluminium, 1953: “You mean a woman can open it?”;
- Budweiser, 1956: “Budweiser has delighted more husbands than any other brew ever known. She married two men!”;
- Frigidaire, 1960: “Whether you wash the sheerest sheer curtains or baby diapers... you’ll feel like a queen!”;
- Kenwood, 1961: “The Chef does everything, but cook - that's what wives are for!”;
- Acme Coffee, 1963: “The most important quality in coffee is how much it will please your man.”;
- Mr. Mustard, 1964: “Are you woman enough to buy a man's mustard?”.



Fig. n. 3 Collection of ads, 1950s/1960s (retrieved from Google Images)

Considering together the studies conducted by scholars and the advertisements used by the companies to present their products, it is possible to notice that the myths of the “happy housewife”, “the good mother” (implicitly associated to the former) and “the woman as man’s sexual object” dominated the years that followed the end of WW II.

1.2.2 The feminist period: Women’s rights movement as a cultural disruption. Emancipation and Sexualisation through the advertising lens.

Cultural tensions started to emerge in the mid-1960s and continued throughout the 1970s. That was the period of the Feminist Revolution. More specifically, those were the years of the second wave of the Feminist movement, which touched on every part of every area of women’s experience—including politics, work, the family, and sexuality. The first wave, instead, had taken place between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, mainly focusing on women’s legal rights such as the right to vote (suffrage and suffragettes).

One of the main contributions of the time was “The Feminine Mystique”, a book published in 1963 by Betty

Friedan within which she revealed the hidden frustration of women who had felt unfulfilled and trapped in the domestic sphere (Paglia, 2008).

Feminist theorists challenged the unequal power granted to women and men. They also questioned the independence and career positions associated with masculinity and the lack of power, independence, and sexual freedom associated with femininity.

Women taking part to the second wave movement emphasized gender equality and also fought to separate themselves from the restrictive stereotype of the submissive American housewife that became even more engrained in western culture throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, one of the main problems for the Feminist movement was the “timeless and naturalized association of women with the home” (Whelehan, 1995).

Leaders of the second wave encouraged women to reflect upon their lives and recognize the influence of the patriarchal gender biased society. This idea that the “personal is political,” a phrase coined by Carol Hanish, inspired women to seek equal treatment not just politically, but also socially and culturally (Paglia, 2008).

All those protests and criticisms impacted the advertising system. In a certain sense, in fact, the feminist movement triggered relevant changes in the representation of women in advertising compared to the previous era.

Schneider and Schneider (1979) analysed television commercials of the time and found some convergences in the role portrayals for women and men (even if differences still existed).

Lyonski (1983) provided an update on women representation in television advertisements and concluded that women started to appear as more independent. He also noted that men were shown less often as dominant over women.

The changing nature of women in advertising due to the social and cultural tensions of the time was also studied by Sullivan and O’ Connor (1988). In particular, in their research, the authors performed a content analysis of advertisements portraying women in 1983 to assess the changes that had occurred in the female representation in media. Then, they compared the gained data with the data from similar studies conducted by Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) and by Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) undertaken for the years 1958 and 1970 (Sullivan & O’Connor, 1988).

The authors found out that women had been portrayed more often in the employment status and less in a family setting in the 1983 advertisements in respect to the advertisements dating back to 1958 and 1970. Furthermore, they emphasized that women were shown more often as decision makers.

One of the most notable examples of the advertisements of the era is represented by Virginia Slims, a brand

of cigarettes owned by Philip Morris. In 1968, the company launched a campaign with the famous slogan “You’ve come a long way, Baby!” that lasted the entire decade of the 1970s.

The campaign consisted in a series of television commercials and print ads showing how the company framed the product as "tailored for the feminine hand," and, more to the point, as a symbol of women's empowerment.

The television commercials of the campaign usually featured anecdotes of early 20th century showing women who were punished for smoking, usually by their husbands or other men, as compared to the situation in their period when women had gained equal rights such as the right to vote. In a certain sense, they equated women smoking with events such as women’s suffrage to capitalize on equal rights for women.

The print ads featured the same themes as tv commercials, emphasising the contrasts between the 1970s circumstances and the patriarchal culture of the past and mirroring the myth of the free – spirited and independent woman created and propagated by the feminist movement.



Fig. n. 4 Virginia Slims, 1970 (retrieved from Google Images)

Virginia Slims targeted a female market to sell not only cigarettes but also the emotional and psychological needs of women with society's ideals of women's outward appearance and female equality.

Another campaign which constitutes a turning point in the representation of women in advertising is the one released by Revlon in 1973 to promote Charlie perfume. The campaign featured the model and actress Shelley Hack striding confidently alone across pages of magazines and television screens.

The television commercial of the campaign is emblematic. It showed a blond statuesque woman getting out of a Rolls Royce in a gold silk pantsuit. As she walks into the bar it is clear she is known by all of the men she encounters. The catchy jingle was sung by lounge singer extraordinaire Bobby Short. She exactly represented the ideal of the liberated woman to emulate. Wearing pantsuits, driving a car and going to a bar were no longer symbols and activities reserved and associated to men only.

The print ads of the campaign represented this new ideal of independent and free – spirited woman.

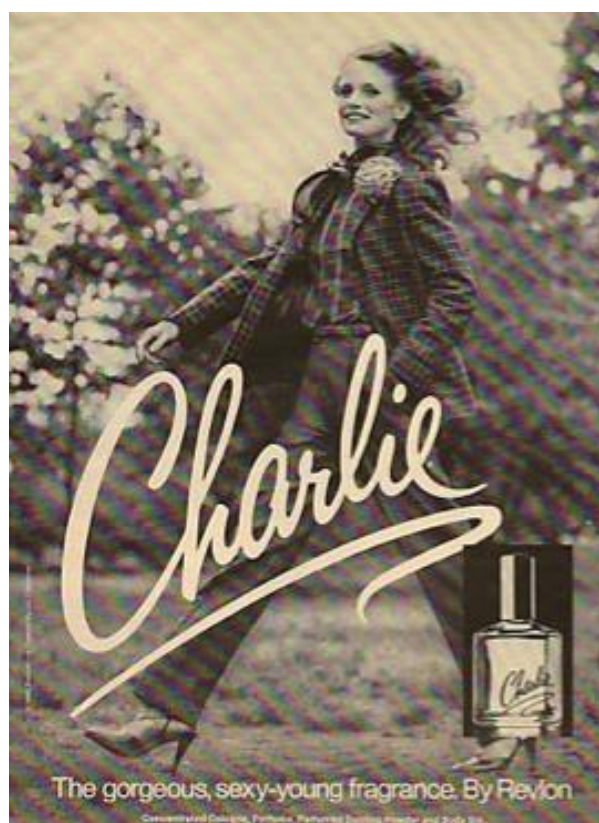


Fig. n. 5 Revlon, 1973 (retrieved from Google Images)

However, it must be noticed that if on the one hand the feminist revolution led to the use of the theme of women's emancipation in advertising, on the other hand it also led to a greater use of sexuality. Sexual freedom, in fact, was one of the main ingredients of the women's liberation movement and was actually employed by advertisers through the exploitation of female bodies in ads.

Scholars confirm that during that period the sexually exploitative use of women in advertising increased (McCleary, 2014). Female bodies were shown entirely or in fragments focusing only on a specific body part (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). Either way, fully dressed or half-naked, women's presence in advertisements rarely added anything to the advertised product - they were usually just passive decorative elements in the form of sexual objects (Furnham and Lay, 2019; McCleary, 2014; Gill, 2007a).

Therefore, in addition to emancipation, sexual objectification deriving from sexual liberation was the other major theme characterizing the 1970s and the early 1980s.

A clear example of sexual objectification comes from the automotive industry and is represented by Esso with its print campaign in 1970. The campaign featured a blonde model wearing a pink bikini surrounded by motor supplies. She is not related to the product advertised and her presence needs to entice the male gaze. The tagline "Esso supplies all these motoring needs. Except one" actually emphasizes sexual objectification by comparing the woman to a motor piece.

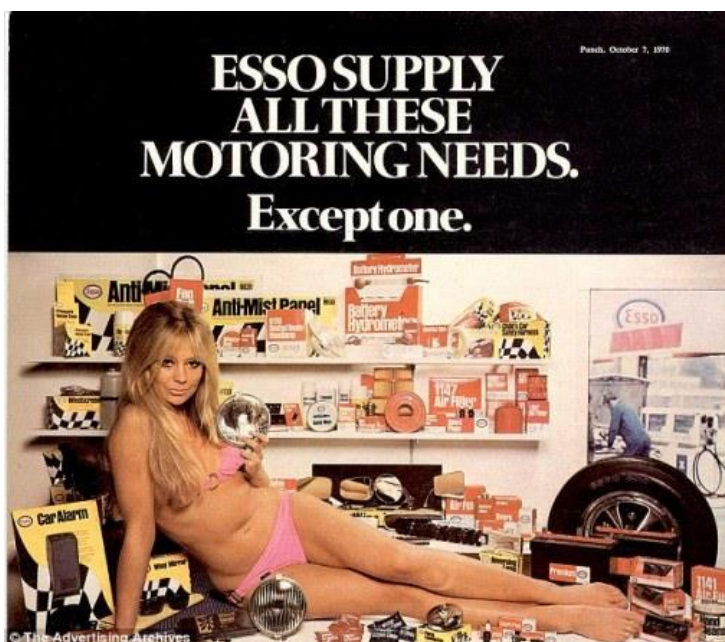


Fig. n. 6 Esso, 1970 (retrieved from Google Images)

During the same years, Peroni perfectly exemplified the concept of sexual objectification in Italy with the television and print campaign "*Chiamami Peroni e sarò la tua birra*" (Call me Peroni and I'll be your beer) first released in 1971. The woman here is sexually objectified as something to have, own and consume.

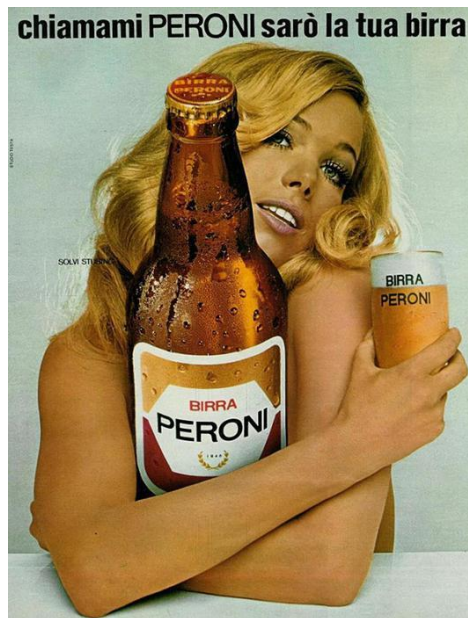


Fig. n. 7 Peroni, 1971 (retrieved from Google Images)

Sony's campaign "Now the Difference is Perfectly Clear" is another great illustration of how sexual objectification and female bodies were used at the time to promote items (1985). In the ad, in fact, the brand showed the public the new format of audio cassettes by inserting one in the pocket of a pair of transparent pants, worn by a girl with perfect shapes.



Fig. n. 8 Sony, 1985 (retrieved from Google Images)

Given what has been discussed so far, it is possible to draw the conclusion that female representation in the media during the 1970s–early 1980s had a two – fold nature.

In actuality, on the one hand, the feminist movement led to the depiction of female emancipation in ads and to beginning of the decline of the “happy housewife” stereotype.

On the other hand, the sexual object stereotype was perpetuated as a result of advertisers' re-interpretation of sexual liberation as a means of exploiting female bodies.

1.2.3 The post- feminist period: Commodity Feminism, Sexual Subjectification and the myth of the modern woman.

Moving to what can be defined as the “post – feminist” period (approximately 1985 and beyond), we find that the impact of the Feminist movement seemed to have stabilized.

Macdonald (2004) discussed three ways feminist ideas were co-opted in the post – feminist era. These included the presentation of quasi-feminist concepts, a change in the traditional feminist quality of caring associated with motherhood to make it compatible with self-fulfilment, and the beginning of incorporating female fantasies in ads. Advertisers thus appeared to be supporting feminist concepts while at the same time using these concepts to their best advantage in presenting the product to the audience. This practice was also known as “commodity feminism” (Goldman et al.,1991).

Commodity Feminism, in fact, can be described as the re – defining of feminism through consumerism and purchase behaviour. Feminist ideals such as independence, freedom and sexual agency have been “rehabilitated” for the world of advertising, being depoliticized and emptied of their social dimension (Goldman et al.,1991). In this way, feminism is reduced to the status of a mere signifier or signified.

The 1988 advertisement for Nivea Visage Facial Nourishing Cream serves as an illustration of how commodity feminism was used in advertising. The woman in the ad, in fact, exemplifies what has been said above: her attire as a set of visual signifiers functions as a sign for feminism (Goldman et al.,1991). By analysing the image, it is possible to recognise a series of important meaning relations. The child whose hands she holds is probably her daughter. Her other hand holds a brief – case which is a symbol of her professional rank and status. Keeping the attention on her hands, it is not clear whether she is wearing a ring or not. The centrality of a man in her life is left open and one might infer she is a single mother. Her outfit, composed of a blazer and a matching skirt, actually suggests she is a fashion – smart woman who has succeeded in a previously male – dominated work world while also committing herself to her family. The tagline “Is your face paying the price for success?” emphasises the situation in the post – feminist world where women have to balance

themselves between family and work.

Following the perspective of commodity feminism, in this case the feminist concept of independence (both personal and financial) was actually used in the advertisement to sell the solution of the facial cream able to fight “the look of stress” deriving from being a mother and a professional at the same time.



Fig. n. 9 Nivea, 1988 (retrieved from Google Images)

The woman featured in the Nivea advertisement effectively represents the new image of womanhood that characterized the post – feminist era.

Advertising depictions of the post – feminist woman emphasized her independence, strength and pleasure. Framing this construction progressively, Kates and Shaw – Garlock (1999) contended “As women have crossed the boundary from the domestic sphere to the professional arena, expectations and representations have changed as well”.

The old myth of the woman confined to her traditional roles that had long dominated both popular culture and

advertising was finally giving way to the myth of the “modern woman”. According to it, women were sexually assertive, independent, confident and ambitious.

Besides this, another important stereotype that had characterized the previous decades started to be questioned in the 1990s. In fact, women stopped to be represented as passive “sexual objects” and started to be portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects (Gunter, cited in Eisend, 2010; Evans, Riley, and Shankar, 2010; Gill, 2008; Gill, 2007a). In this context, women were in charge of their bodies and they could choose to use it in whichever way that suited their “liberated” interests. Gill (2007) argued that “in this way, sexual objectification can be presented not as something done to women by some men, but as the freely chosen wish of active (confident, assertive) female subjects”.

Cindy Crawford in the Pepsi television commercial released in 1992 and Ali Landry in the Doritos television commercial launched in 1999 perfectly embodied the concept of sexual subjectification. In the ads, in fact, both women look confident with their bodies and aware of their sexual power over men.

All those shifts were probably pushed by the changing role of women in society at the time, their constant dissatisfaction with female portrayals in advertising and their increasing financial independence (Gill, 2008).

By the turn of the 21st century, many key positions in advertising started to be occupied by women, enabling them to exert a major influence on ad campaigns.

In fact, the recent position acquired by women in the society and the rise of the third wave of the Feminist movement (started at the end of the 1990s), had laid the foundation for a new media discourse of empowered women, in which they were positioned “in relation to the emerging configurations of subjectification” (Gonick, 2006).

Female empowerment became a prevalent theme in communication and a new trend in advertising started to emerge: the so – called “Femvertising”.

CHAPTER II: FEMALE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ADVERTISING: THE RISE OF FEMVERTISING.

2.1 Femvertising: an overview of the phenomenon.

Taking into consideration what has been said in the previous chapter about female representation in media, it could be argued that Femvertising is the natural consequence of women's evolution in society and in advertising discourses.

Femvertising, also referred to as “ad – her – tising”, has been described in a variety of ways, but mostly centres around the same idea. It refers to female-targeted advertising that actively seeks to celebrate and empower women and girls (Hunt, 2017; Pérez and Gutierrez, 2017; Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016).

Although female liberation has been seen co-opted in marketing campaigns since the 1960s (Ford et al., 1991), when Virginia Slims used the topic of women's independence to sell cigarettes through the slogan “you've come a long way, baby”, it was only in 2014 that the term “Femvertising” first appeared. Its creation is typically attributed to the lifestyle website “SheKnows”, which hosted an Advertising Week panel on the topic in October 2014 (Ciambrello, 2014). In that occasion, Femvertising was defined as “advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls” (SheKnows Media, 2014). The panel deeply explored the trend of Femvertising and how it has impacted the way the advertising industry interacts and connects with female consumers, particularly Millennials (Bahadur, 2014).

By using marketing tools while genuinely supporting the feminist cause, Femvertising challenges traditional gender stereotypes (Åkestam et al., 2017; Hunt, 2017) and ensures that women are the protagonists in the advertising narrative (Becker – Herby, 2016).

Femvertising messages promote gender equality both visually and rhetorically, and thus make feminist language more accessible to the masses. In this way, advertising really becomes an instrument of female empowerment (Crouse – Dick, 2002).

According to Varghese and Kumar (2020), Femvertising is a phenomenon resulting from the combined effect of five factors: 1) growing activism around the better representation of women in advertising; 2) brand activism and conscious capitalism; 3) the criticism of corporate and commodity feminism (which characterised advertising during the 1990s); 4) increasing awareness of gender stereotyping; 5) and increasing scrutiny by regulatory bodies on gender role representations in advertising.

In a certain way, Femvertising can be seen as the concrete manifestation of the consciousness and self – awareness of the generations embracing the fundamentals of the third wave of feminism and the beginning of the fourth one. In other words, women started to demand more to the brands they bought: to behave as activists

and support their new identity desires.

Although the term “Femvertising” was officially introduced in the marketing environment only in 2014, the trend of empowered female portrayals in the media had already been circulating in the branding landscape for about ten years.

In this sense, Dove can be considered a pioneer of Femvertising (Hsu, 2018). In 2004, in fact, the personal care brand owned by Unilever launched the “Real Beauty” campaign which aimed at providing a new representation of women in the media. In particular, the campaign focused on challenging stereotypical portrayals of women in terms of their physical characteristics, such as body size (Åkestam et al., 2017). The advertisements, in fact, featured non – models wearing only their underwear publicizing Dove products. The idea behind the campaign was to show that women of all shapes and sizes should feel comfortable in their own skin (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016), thus promoting realistic beauty over unrealistic standards of perfection.



Fig. n. 10 Dove, 2004 (retrieved from Google Images)

Besides challenging stereotypes associated with physical characteristics, Femvertising also promotes female empowerment by questioning stereotypes related to personality traits, roles and occupation (Åkestam et al., 2017). For example, Always’ “Like a girl” campaign (2014) encouraged young women to be confident by transforming the sentence “like a girl” from a stereotypical insult to an affirmation of strength and determination. Following the same principles, campaigns such as “Imagine the possibilities” (2015) and “More role models” (2018) by Barbie or “Labels against Women” (2013) by Pantene promoted female empowerment in the working environment. More specifically, Barbie inspired girls to follow their career dreams even in traditionally male – dominated contexts, while Pantene tackled the issue of gender biases in the workplace.

By addressing the contemporary social tensions of the feminine realm, Femvertising has progressively become a marketing and cultural phenomenon that has gained an incredible success and popularity over the years.

In April 2017, the word “Femvertising” generated about 46.000 hits on Google, including important media outlets such as CNN, The Guardian and Huffington Post (Åkestam et al., 2017). In 2015, it even received its own category in the Cannes Lions awards (The Glass Lion). In the same year, SheKnows Media, the US communication agency that officially defined Femvertising for the first time, launched the Femvertising awards. With this initiative, the aim is to reward and honour brands that are challenging gender norms by building stereotype-busting, pro-female messages and images into ads that target women. In other words, the goal is to give recognition to companies that actively promote and support female empowerment through advertising.

The growth of Femvertising actually indicates that contemporary brands have understood that in order to be iconic in the modern economic and cultural climate, it is necessary to stimulate and support consumers’ social causes and not only providing them with the best products and services as was the case in the past.

Besides Dove, Always, Barbie and Pantene (which did an outstanding work also with the campaign “Sorry not Sorry” in 2014), the list of companies that have succeeded in promoting female empowerment includes Verizon (“Inspire her mind”, 2014), CoverGirl (“Girls can”, 2014), Under Armour (“I will what I want”, 2014), Gillette Venus (“Use your and”, 2015), Microsoft (“#Makewhatsnext”, 2016), Lane Bryant (“ImNoAngel”, 2017), Bumble (“The ball in is her court”, 2019), Nike (“Dream Crazier”, 2019) and many others.

Many of these campaigns have gone viral. For example, in April 2017, the “Like a Girl” video had over 60 million views on YouTube. The success of femvertisements online, especially on social media platforms, has been great. In fact, as Kapoor & Munjal (2019) pointed out “the advertisements themed on women empowerment have been doing the rounds in the online space”.

One of the reasons behind the spread of Femvertising campaigns online is related to the rise of the fourth wave of feminism which began around 2012. Varghese and Kumar (2020) explained that the fourth wave of feminism is characterised by the use of two channels of activism diffusion: social media and the Internet. Through these communication channels, feminism is reaching more and new activists, such as raising awareness among younger generations. In this way, feminism is inserted in the digital era of the 21st century.

Social media offers feminism a new way to speak out and have an impact on society. In this purpose, it must be noticed that a new trend combining the power of social media in the form of influencer marketing and the typical themes of Femvertising has recently emerged: it is the so – called “Femluencing” (Sharma and Bumb, 2022).

Considering what has been said so far, it is possible to conclude that Femvertising represents one of the latest phenomena in social marketing and stands under the umbrella of brand activism (further analysed in the following paragraph). A thoughtful and ethical use of this advertising tool could actually result in a cultural breakthrough at a global level. The diffusion of advertisements that encourage women to focus on their essence rather than on their appearance and to cultivate their talents without regard to social constraints could really represent an important progress in achieving gender equality.

2.2 Femvertising and Brand Activism.

By capturing the feminist issues of the time and promoting women's emancipation and affirmation through advertising practices, Femvertising falls within the sphere of brand activism. Marketing guru Philip Kotler (2017) called brand activism a kind of business intention to engage in solving societal problems, as the next stage in marketing. In this sense, brands become activists advancing improvements and progress in society.

Brand activism is the result of the fact that in the modern context positioning is no longer enough. While in the past businesses could achieve excellent selling outcomes by simply using strategies based on the performance characteristics of their goods and services (Ries and Trout, 1986), nowadays consumers have higher expectations towards the brands and value companies that care more about the community than only about profits (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). As a consequence, brands have started to utilise their advertisements to take a stance in societal issues and establish emotional connections with both their potential and existing customers (Dahlén & Rosengren, 2016).

Femvertising has developed as a part of brand activism and is closely tied to marketing strategies such as conscious capitalism, corporate social responsibility (CSR), cause – related marketing, or cultural marketing, all of which are policies related to giving back to society (Varghese and Kumar, 2020).

According to Kotler (2017), in the future companies will be run by enlightened managers who pursue both profitability and sustainability (intended in the economic sense of the term) through brand activism and conscious capitalism.

In particular, conscious capitalism refers to a socially responsible economic and political philosophy that helps a company to increase customer loyalty, to benefit from more productive and engaged employees and to satisfy stakeholders and suppliers, not only shareholders (Sisodia et. al, 2014). The foundations of conscious capitalism reside in cultural marketing, a refined strategy practiced by many iconic brands (Sarkar, 2015). In this scenario, Femvertising has emerged as a result of brand activism in the era of conscious capitalism and as a form of cultural marketing (Varghese and Kumar, 2020).

Expanding on the concept of cultural marketing (also often referred to as cultural branding), it can be said that Holt (2004) defined it as an empathetic approach to consumers' cultural identity used by iconic brands. In his model, the author emphasised that brands turn into cultural symbols by responding to disruptions in society, exploiting cultural contradictions and becoming cultural activists. Managers who are aware of the cultural context will act as genealogists and will be able to create a brand – myth that helps in cultural activism. In this way, brands become icons since they actively encourage people to act and think differently through their stories. They do not simply evoke benefits, personalities and emotions, but they advance causes.

Focusing on Femvertising, many brands (such as Dove, Always, Pantene, Barbie or the ones presented in the following paragraph) were able to spot the emergent cultural opportunity associated with female empowerment ideals and the related social shifts that created new identity desires. Those brands might be considered as cultural platforms, since they responded (and continue to respond) to these desires and tensions with new and effective myths aligned with the cultural context (Holt, 2004).

More specifically, Femvertising campaigns addressed and still address the paradigm shift towards “empowering women” that characterises the contemporary age (Varghese and Kumar, 2020). This shift was actually initiated and fuelled by the tensions raised by the several waves of the feminist movements (especially the most recent ones, the third wave and the fourth wave), the progressive evolution of women's role in society and the emergence of gender – centred discourses. As a consequence, stereotyped, sexualised and limited female portrayals have started to give way to more diverse and inclusive ones. The myths of the happy housewife, the woman as sexual object and the superwoman balancing between work and family, which have followed one another throughout history, have progressively been abandoned to embrace the new story of female empowerment.

Challenging gender stereotypes and promoting a renewed and positive representation of women in advertising, brands become activists and position themselves as leaders of the conversation about the crucial issue of gender equality.

2.3 Characteristics and Themes of Femvertising.

After having introduced the phenomenon of Femvertising and having acknowledged its correlation to brand activism, it is necessary to narrow down to the distinctive features that characterise it and the specific themes it addresses in order to have a clearer understanding of it.

Starting from the characteristics of this new advertising trend, Becker – Herby (2016) identified five pillars of Femvertising according to marketing professionals' perspectives. In fact, after reviewing dozens of Femvertising campaigns (and interviewing experts), the author has found out that nearly all of them embrace

the following principles:

- The utilisation of diverse female talent;
- The presence of pro – female messages;
- The effort of pushing gender – norm boundaries and stereotypes;
- The action of downplaying sexuality;
- The use of authentic portrayals.

The first pillar, the utilisation of diverse female talent, is strictly linked to the reality that Femvertising is intersectional. Girls and women are more likely to see themselves reflected by models of their same race, shape, body size and age. For this reason, Femvertising commercials usually opt for a variety of female representation, rather than choosing to feature “cookie – cutter” ideal supermodels.

The second pillar, pro – female messaging, emphasises that key messages conveyed in Femvertising campaigns are empowering, inspirational and inclusive. Messaging seeks to provide the female consumer with feelings of affirmation, motivation and self – confidence, instead of implying that she is not good enough and that the product promoted is the solution to fix her imperfections. In other words, the messages are always positive and aim at celebrating women in all their aspects.

The third pillar, the effort of pushing gender – norm boundaries, refers to the fact that Femvertising campaigns portray girls and women in situations that are outside of the traditional stereotypes that are associated with the female gender. Commercials rarely feature women doing the housework or while performing other duties associated with marriage or motherhood. On the contrary, femVERTISEMENTS usually depict women in athletic or competitive environments while doing sports, enjoying leisure activities, working or in neutral scenarios.

The fourth pillar, downplaying sexuality, stresses that Femvertising is not always stripped of all sexual appeals and references, but uses them in more nuanced ways than the traditional advertising featuring women. Exposed skin and bodies are shown in a manner that is perceived relevant and authentic (for example, athletes in sport bras or women wearing only lingerie to express their body confidence). What is important to underline is that when it comes to femVERTISEMENTS sexuality does not cater to the male gaze.

The last pillar, the use of authentic portrayals, emphasises the importance of authenticity in all aspects of advertising from the talent, the product, scenario and styling. In the case of Femvertising, authenticity is a part of all the pillars just described. Said differently, the campaign has to feel real in all its components.

However, it should be noticed that even if these five pillars provide a good and precise picture of the phenomenon, they do not translate into consumers' understandings of what constitutes Femvertising, as they emerged from an analysis of what is currently produced by brands and interviews with marketing professionals. These five pillars are relevant for describing how professionals perceive and produce

Femvertising, but were identified without considering consumers' perspectives.

In this purpose, an accurate understanding of Femvertising from consumers' point of view was proposed by Hainneville, Guèvremont and Robinot (2022). In their research, the authors provided a holistic definition of Femvertising based on consumers' standpoint that comprises six dimensions: transparency, consistency, identification, diversity, respect and challenging stereotypes.

Transparency refers to the fact that brands must be transparent with their customers. For all participants who took part in the study, transparency included the notions of truth (i.e., naturalness, sincerity, integrity) and simplicity (i.e., spontaneity, humility). This finding is absolutely consistent with Becker – Herby's authenticity pillar. Furthermore, for the people interviewed, transparency also implied the absence of modifications in terms of body shapes and skin texture as well as the representation of ordinary situations of everyday life (realism).

Consistency relates to the internal coherence of a brand in terms of its identity (i.e., history, fundamental values, parent firm), communications (i.e., content/form, congruence between campaigns), and offer (i.e., fit). For instance, participants did not find a brand's approach to be sufficiently credible when it previously acted or communicated in a sexist way. In contrast, a company that has positively contributed to women's representation since its foundation is more easily perceived as genuine. Similarly, a brand that did not initially promote these values but pioneered the movement, such as Dove, is more likely to be seen as authentic.

Identification implies the existence of a relationship between the advertisement and the self, such as through projection (of oneself or those we know) or proximity (i.e., geographic, social). Participants stated that Femvertising is effective when they are able to identify themselves with it.

Diversity refers to the inclusion of all the different kinds of women in the ads. More specifically, according to the people interviewed, diversity can be broken down into three areas: physical (i.e., ethnicity, morphology, personal style), identity (age, gender), and health related.

Respect comprises two major components: respect from brands towards women (i.e., reducing sexualisation without making it taboo) and from women towards themselves (i.e., inducing acceptance and self-esteem). For instance, reducing sexualised messages is an important part of Femvertising, and participants agree that advertisers should stop using nudity as a selling point. At the same time, the interviewees associated Femvertising with encouraging self – acceptance, self – confidence and self – esteem.

Lastly, challenging stereotypes is a dimension that can be divided into three aspects: fighting role stereotypes (i.e., career, household), physical stereotypes (i.e., beauty standards), and stereotypes related to women's interests and abilities (i.e., taste, personality, physical abilities, intellectual abilities)

It is important to notice that these six dimensions are complementary. This means that consumers interpret femvertisements through an overall perception of these six aspects to determine whether a campaign is authentic (Femvertising) or not (Femwashing or False Feminism). Thus, consumers define authentic Femvertising as advertising that authentically aims to empower women and girls through the use of diverse, transparent, consistent, relatable, and respectful messages and imagery that challenges gender stereotypes (Hainneville et al., 2022).

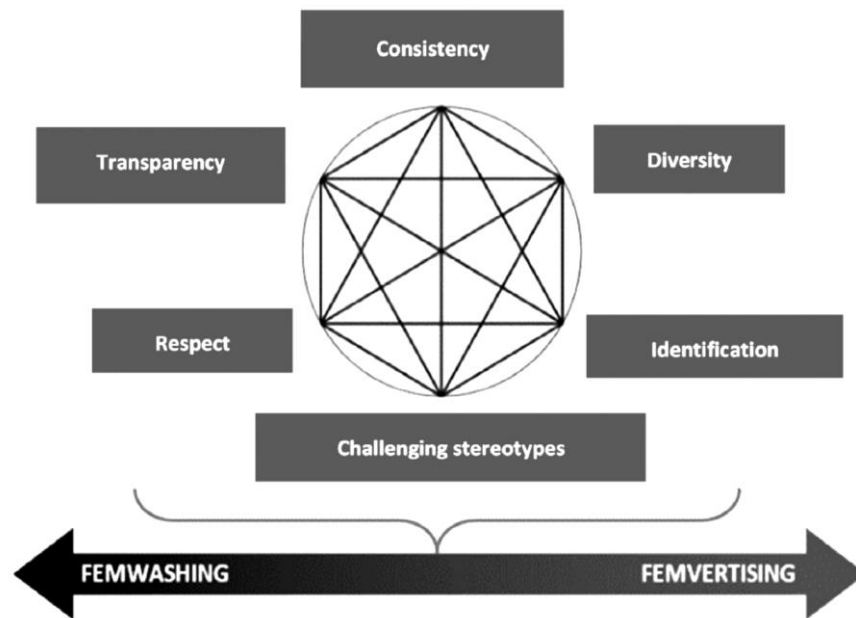


Fig. n. 11 The six dimensions of authentic Femvertising (Hainneville et al., 2022).

Moving on to the themes used by this new advertising trend, Hsu (2018) identified ten topics (explained and supported with coherent examples) that brands have employed and still employ to convey pro – female messages and confront negative or unrealistic portrayals of women and girls.

The first theme listed by the author is the is the promotion of body confidence. As already mentioned in the chapter, in fact, Femvertising embraces a wide range of body shapes and sizes with the aim of fighting stereotypical, narrow – minded and unrealistic beauty standards that emphasise thinness, youth or even the sexualisation of women. In this purpose, Dove with its “Real Beauty” campaign (2004) or American’s Eagle Aerie lingerie with its campaign “#AerieReal” (2014) represent perfect cases of brands featuring real women and real body figures in ads in order to provide a new female representation in media while promoting confidence and self – esteem.



Fig. n. 12 Aerie lingerie, 2014 (retrieved from Google Images)

The second theme identified is championing females' confidence beyond a beauty focus. In this case, the idea is to enhance women's self-worth beyond the single dimension of beauty. This approach breaks away from stereotyping women as weak, submissive and obsessed with physical appearance and moves towards representing women's strength, confidence and achievements — characteristics that have traditionally been associated with men. The digital campaign "You're more than a pretty face" Under Armour started on Instagram and Twitter in 2017 is an example of a brand celebrating women in all their aspects, without considering only outer beauty.

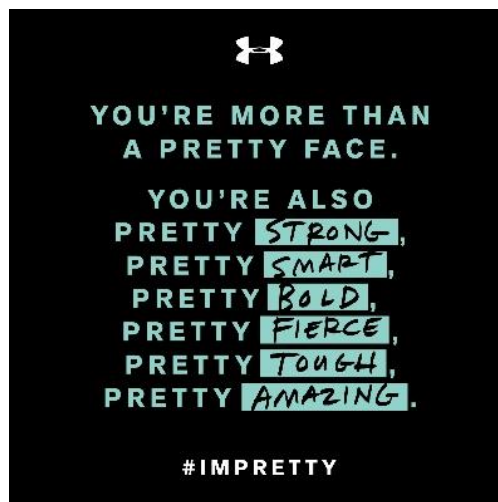


Fig. n. 13 Under Armour, 2017 (retrieved from Google Images)

The third theme Hsu highlighted in her work relates to the promotion of women's participation in sports. More specifically, this advertising topic breaks free from gender stereotypes of girls being inactive versus boys being active and athletic. For instance, in 2015 Sport England launched the campaign "This girl can" to liberate females between the ages of 14 and 40 from the fear that they aren't "good enough" to engage in physical activity. The ads featured real women and girls of different sizes, shapes and levels of ability exercising and playing sports.

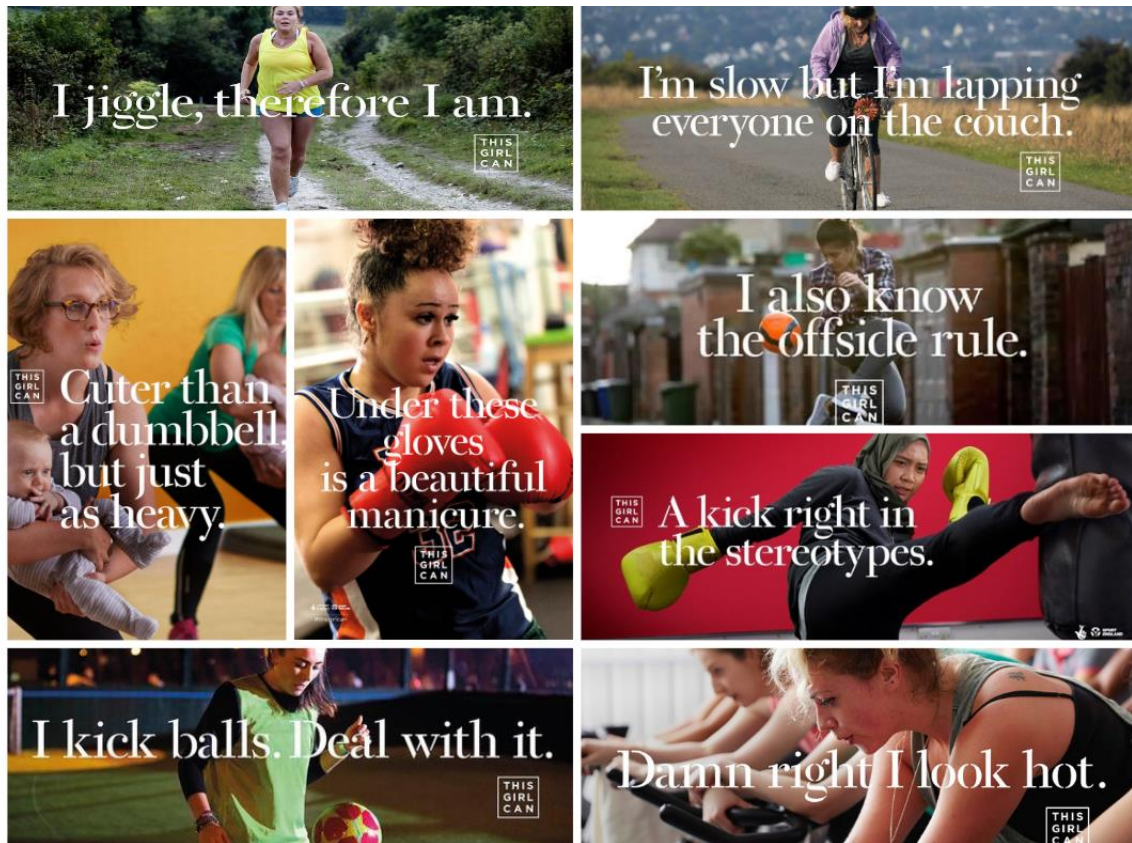


Fig. n. 14 Sport England, 2015 (retrieved from Google Images)

The fourth theme is somehow related to the previous one and consists in acknowledging women's athletic prowess and inner strengths. This advertising approach features a woman's strong, muscular body and sport activeness to signify power, traditionally monopolised by men. For example, in 2014 Under Armour launched the campaign "I will what I want" transforming their masculine sportswear brand into a symbol of aspiration for female athletes. The campaign featured top ballerina Misty Copeland, supermodel Gisele Bundchen and Olympic skier Lindsey Vonn, highlighting how these women's willpower enabled them to defy expectations and prejudices, pursue their dreams and achieve their goals in sport.

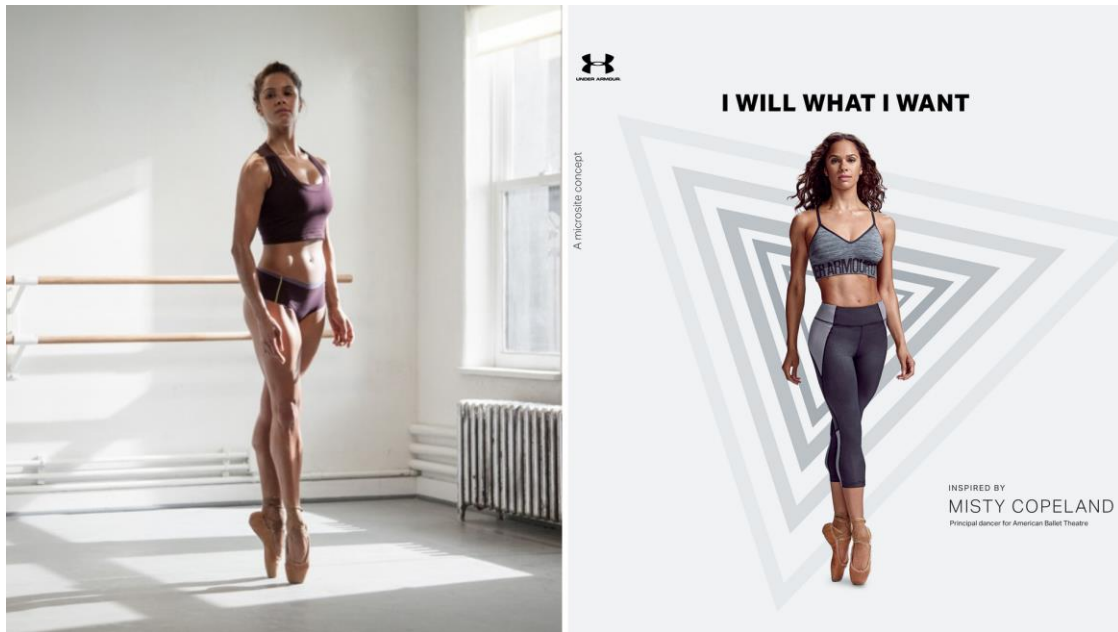


Fig. n. 15 Under Armour, 2014 (retrieved from Google Images)

The fifth theme presented by Hsu is the depiction of females in a multiplicity of roles beyond stereotypes. In fact, as the author noted, women have traditionally been associated with stereotypical roles in advertising such as housewives, mothers, sex objects, later evolving to include career women and supermoms. The campaign “The courage is already inside” launched by Ram trucks (a brand of trucks that usually targets male audiences) in 2015 is an example of a brand addressing this Femvertising topic. The ad featured outdoorsman Eva Shockey, who became the first woman in 30 years to appear on the cover of *Field and Stream* magazine, horse racing jockey Rosie Napravnik, who won the Kentucky Oaks twice, country music singer Miranda Lambert, who is the Academy of Country Music Awards’ most awarded female vocalist, and professional motocross racer Tiana Falls. The commercial demonstrates that women own the courage to defy gender stereotypes and to succeed in the roles they are committed to, including those that are traditionally male – dominated or thought impossible for women to accomplish.



Fig. n. 16 Ram trucks, 2015 (retrieved from Google Images)

The sixth theme is the celebration of mothers beyond their nurturing role. Hsu, in fact, noted that traditionally moms have been portrayed as nurturing caregivers of their children. A campaign that overcomes the classical motherly depiction is the one launched by General Electrics in 2015, titled “Childlike Imagination: What My Mom Does at GE”. Although the mum remains visible in the ad, a voice of a young girl proudly describes all the incredible things (such as underwater fans, talking airplanes, miniature hospitals and so on) her mom makes as an employee at GE. In addition, the brand intentionally shows her mother and not her father doing great work in technology that inspires the little girl.



Fig. n. 17 General Electrics, 2015 (retrieved from Google Images)

The seventh theme listed in the paper focuses on encouraging young females to pursue science, technology, engineering and maths (the so – called “STEM”). This type of pro – female advertising aims at rejecting gender stereotypes that divide boys and girls into distinct interests and traits. Furthermore, it inspires young women to pursue traditionally male – dominated areas. In this purpose, Verizon launched the campaign “Inspire her mind” in 2014 showing how parents usually prioritise girls’ neatness, quietness and safety over risk-taking and confidence. In this way, they unintentionally inhibit their daughters’ budding interest in STEM and withdraw them from areas and activities believed to be for boys. Another brand that has been doing an incredible job in incentivising girls’ interest for scientific subjects since its foundation is GoldieBlox. The company, in fact, creates, sells and promotes STEM – themed toys to inspire a future generation of female engineers. Its communication on social media is aimed at reaching young girls (and their parents) and encouraging them to imagine and create things.



Fig. n. 18 GoldieBlox on Twitter (retrieved from Google Images)

The eighth theme proposed by Hsu is the advocacy of equal opportunity and equal pay for women. Gender equality in the workplace, in fact, is still an important social issue. “Secret” deodorant touched this important point in 2016 with the spot “Raise #StressTest”. The ad depicts a young woman nervously practising asking her male boss for a raise in front of a bathroom mirror while getting encouraged by an older female co-worker to go for it. Then a text appears on the screen: ‘Stress Test #4528: At 3 o’clock Lucy does her part to close the wage gap’. Through this commercial, the brand intended to support all women who face stress in challenging cultural norms and striving for equal treatment at work.



Fig. n. 19 Secret Deodorant, 2016 (retrieved from Google Images)

The ninth theme is similar to the one just presented and relates to men advocating for positive female roles and equality. In other words, it addresses the issue of gender equality with a male voice in support of his female counterpart. A great example is represented by the commercial “Daughter” Audi created for the Super Bowl in 2017. The advertisement shows a father reflecting on all the challenges his daughter will have to face at the workplace because of her gender as he observes his daughter fearlessly competing with a group of boys in a downhill soap box car derby and winning at the end of the race. He is worried because he does not know how to explain his little girl that despite her education and all her abilities she will automatically be valued as less than every man she will meet in her life. At the end, Audi states that the company is committed to equal pay for equal work.

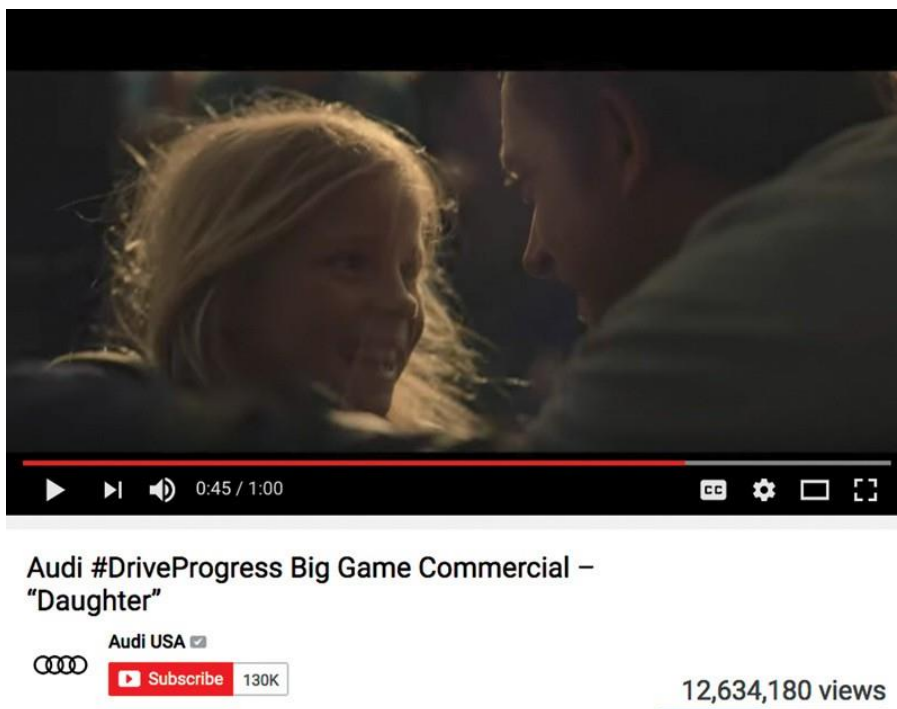


Fig. n. 20 Audi, 2017 (retrieved from YouTube)

Finally, the last theme identified by Hsu is the effort to normalize and celebrate menstruation. In this regard, Kotex did an excellent work by embracing the mission to break the cycle of shame, embarrassment and outdated beliefs concerning menstruation and make a cultural shift to start open and real conversations about feminine health. Its spot, titled “Break the cycle” (2010), involves a mother and daughter walking along a beach in the late afternoon sun. The daughter asks her mother if she can talk about her period. The mother replies: “Of course! But since this is a TV commercial, I’ll have to use confusing metaphors”. The entire commercial adopts a tone of humour and honesty, mocking Kotex’s own reliance in the past on confusing and vague language as well as unrealistic depictions of women during their menstrual cycle.



Fig. n. 21 Kotex, 2010 (retrieved from YouTube)

In conclusion, the themes illustrated demonstrate that Femvertising is not something reserved only to women’s products such as Dove, Always or Pantene. Rather, an array of products and brands, including Audi, Verizon, Under Armour, and Ram Trucks (but also Microsoft and Nike), have effectively delivered women’s and girls’ empowerment messages. Femvertising is viable for all brands that genuinely aim to connect with female consumers and address the social tensions characterising women’s world (Hsu, 2018). Also, it should be noticed that themes presented are the ones that have been mostly used so far, but marketers and advertisers can be creative and develop new topics to implement in their campaigns by observing women’s diversity in terms of their backgrounds, lifestyles, needs, aspirations, fears and so on and connect authentically to their identity.

2.4 Relevance, Managerial Implications, Criticism and Recommendations.

As previously said, Femvertising officially started to gain traction in 2014 (even if the first female empowerment themed campaign dates back to 2004) and has rapidly developed and spread around the world. It has emerged in a context where female consumers have started to ask brands to support them in their liberation from stereotypes as well as in their affirmation. This is in line with a survey conducted by SheKnows Media where 71 per cent of the women who participated affirmed that brands should be held responsible for using their ads to promote positive messages to women and girls (SheKnows Media, 2014).

From a managerial perspective, organisations that embrace pro – female advertising have much to gain as they present their brands as politically and culturally conscious and committed to gender equality (Hunt, 2017). In this purpose, scholars confirm that Femvertising brings positive effects to the companies that put it into practice by developing and proposing campaigns that promote women’s empowerment in all its aspects.

First of all, it has been demonstrated that less stereotypical female portrayals used in advertising lead to less ad reactance and enhance attitudes towards the ad and the featured brand (Åkestam et al. 2017). In fact, among women exposed both to messaging with Femvertising themes and traditional non – empowerment themes, the former was found to positively affect attitudes towards brands. This is consistent with the data reported by Susan Wojcicki (2016), YouTube’s chief executive officer, who highlighted that the top ten empowering ads on YouTube were “2.5 times less likely to be skipped than their peers” (reduced ad reactance). Moreover, 18 – to 34 – year old women were “twice as likely to think highly of a brand that made an empowering ad and nearly 80 per cent were more likely to like, share, comment and subscribe after watching one” (higher brand attitudes and engagement).

Using Femvertising themes in brand communication has also the beneficial effect of strengthening emotional connections with customers (especially Millennials). In fact, research has shown that consumers exposed to femvertisements described the brand like a companion, thus confirming that female empowerment elicits a stronger emotional connection to brands than traditional, non – empowering advertisements (Drake, 2017). Femvertisements resonate with women because advertisements with female empowerment messages can actually counter historical and exiting gender stereotypes and create positive self – views for women (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2019; Varghese and Kumar, 2020).

In addition, it has been found that if done correctly, Femvertising enhances brand image (i.e., consumers’ perception of the brand) and appeal (Abdallah et al., 2019). On the contrary, if Femvertising is communicated wrongly, it can lead to a deterioration of attitudes and opinions towards the brand.

Lastly, Femvertising has been proven to be effective in driving sales. According to Drake (2017), women who were exposed to female empowerment advertisements indicated significantly higher purchase intentions. This is in line with a SheKnows Media survey, where 52 per cent of the women stated that they had purchased a product just because they liked how the brand portrayed women (SheKnows Media, 2014). When done with enough company – cause alignment, women are likely to buy into the feminist rhetoric of Femvertising (Hunt, 2017) but they are not naive and are prone to react negatively to the overt appropriation of feminist rhetoric by brands (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016).

Keeping the focus on the economic perspective, a real proof that Femvertising benefits firms also in terms of selling outcomes comes from Dove, which has reported multi-billion-dollar profits since launching Femvertising branding initiatives such as the “Real Beauty” campaign (Wallace, 2015). More specifically, the

company saw an increase in sales from US\$2.5bn to US\$4bn in the campaign's inaugural year (Hsu, 2018).

Considering all these positive effects, Femvertising represents a perfect strategy to target female audiences (Åkestam et al., 2017), who are becoming keen on leveraging purchase power to choose brands that are aligned with their values.

However, it must be noticed that despite all these positive consequences, Femvertising has been subject to a lot of criticism. In fact, whereas Femvertising has received support and praise from women and men alike for abandoning the decades-old stereotypes and adopting empowering depictions of females, it has also attracted scepticism about marketers' motivation for employing this advertising approach.

Criticism centres around the idea that brands often simply attempt to tap into the viral potential of pro – women messages to sell products and make money, reducing female empowerment to a mere commodity (Hsu, 2018). Generally, advertisers are moved by their eagerness to sell and advertising always aims to only reinforce the lifestyles and philosophies that serve sellers' interests (Pollay and Gallagher, 1990). This means that brands would not promote women's liberation or feminist messages if they were not to gain with that - increased sales, greater brand preference, higher brand attitudes etc. Thus, the concept of Femvertising itself is loaded with an intrinsic conflict between its economic, its political and its social function (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016).

Some authors argue that this said contradiction is not at all negative, but rather a small price that has to be paid to have more representative and diversified portrayals of women in advertising (Hunt, 2017; Johnston and Taylor, 2008). In other words, in the current context capitalism is inseparable from the fight for gender equality. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that as Samantha Skey (SheKnows Media's CEO) noted Femvertising is not a philanthropic movement, but rather a form of advertising that is meant to address the cultural tensions of female empowerment while at the same time achieving the bottom-line business objectives.

In conclusion, whether Femvertising is practiced only as an exploitation of women's collective equality struggle or works as a catalyst for a social and ideological shift depends on its foundation. Due to its linkage to women's activism and digital movements of this century, Femvertising emerging from conscious capitalism and brand activism (explained and analysed in the second paragraph of this chapter), deep-rooted in corporate values and culture has the potential to marshal social change (Varghese and Kumar, 2020).

Going beyond criticism, Hsu (2018) offered four recommendations for all brands that want to adopt the implementation of Femvertising:

- Be purposeful, gain insights through research, and address females' real needs;
- Embrace real, not idealised, images and lifestyles of women;
- Transcend gender divisions in addressing females' roles, aspirations and abilities;

- Align the brand's 'do' messages with 'say' messages concerning female empowerment (in other words, brands must practice what they preach).

2.5 Research Gap and Research Questions.

By analysing the evolution of women in advertising and focusing on the recent trend of Femvertising, it is possible to notice that there are still some gaps related to the topic (probably due to the fact that it is a recent phenomenon). More specifically, the objective of my study is to cover the gap that characterises the research area of Femvertising, focusing on the marketing semiotics' methodology as an instrument to dive deeper into the topic. In fact, while there is plenty of literature explaining the importance of this new advertising trend and a multitude of papers analysing the marketing and managerial implications, a semiotic analysis of the phenomenon is the missing link.

Semiotics, that is the study of signification and meaning making, is relevant in the marketing context to explain consumer culture. Consumer culture includes not only the discourses created by advertisers and designers but also the lived environments, social rituals, and ideological tensions structuring daily life.

A semiotic perspective on Femvertising is needed because it is a form of advertising that is closely linked to the concepts of brand activism, cultural branding and brand language, all of which fall under the semiotic umbrella.

Cultural branding theories affirmed that brands are cultural identities that are active and that evolve along with culture, both modifying it and being changed reflecting social issues. For this reason, they are able not only to mirror consumers' ideals, but also to influence their behaviour (Oswald, 2015; Holt, 2004). Additionally, brands employ narrations to deliver to consumers powerful messages that are created through the use of semiotic tools and techniques which find their best expression in audio – visual commercials (Mangano & Marrone, 2015; Peverini, 2012; Bianchi, 2011).

In particular, exploiting the means of narratives, brands make use of semiotic and rhetorical associations, such as metaphors and metonymies, to transmit values to customers. The use of semiotic instruments allows them to market products spreading effective messages which are in line with cultural and social codes of target customers (Oswald, 2015). In this way, advertising is not necessarily a "consolatory art" as Eco defined it, but becomes a "producer and reproducer of society from which it draws energy" (Semprini, 2003).

Considering what has been said, in this case the semiotic approach is necessary since Femvertising originates from the social tensions brought about the various waves of the feminist movement, thus reflecting women's evolution in society while at the same time shaping and influencing it towards the achievement of gender equality. In this sense, brands that implement Femvertising campaigns use narratives and myths to address to

consumers' new identity desires.

Keeping the semiotic standpoint, I propose the two following research questions:

1. What myths and new stereotypes are being produced about contemporary women by the empowering campaigns of Femvertising?
2. How do women react to these new myths of femininity proposed by Femvertising commercials and to what extent do they identify with them?

The first question originates from the fact that the analysis of the evolution of female representation in advertising presented in the first chapter has highlighted the existence of several feminine myths (and stereotypes) that have characterised brands' communication throughout history. More specifically, as already explained, the myths of the "happy housewife" and the "good mother" dominated the entire decade of the 50s. In the mid – 60s, the emergence of cultural tensions provoked by the feminist movement led to a paradoxical dual shift towards the myths of the "free- spirited woman" (as a reflection of emancipation) and the "woman as sexual object" (as a result of advertisers' reinterpretation of sexual liberation) that characterised advertising from the early 70s until the mid – 80s. Then, the myth of the "superwoman" struggling between family and work characterised the 90s. The new century opened with the ideal of a new representation of women in advertising, until the rise of empowering campaigns under the name of Femvertising. However, there is no research explaining the actual myth or myths that Femvertising campaigns are producing about contemporary women, their ideological meaning and the cultural codes encoded in those commercials. Similarly, there is no research analysing the new stereotypes (if any) femvertisements are creating.

The second question, instead, is intended to analyse women's reactions to the new myths proposed by Femvertising commercials and the extent to which female consumers actually identify with these narratives.

The following chapter will focus on the empirical research conducted in order to answer the two research questions and will be introduced by a digression explaining in a detailed manner the semiotic approach.

CHAPTER III: THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.

3.1 Research Method.

In order to answer to the research questions, a qualitative and exploratory research was needed. The research was based on two studies.

Study 1 comprehended a semiotic analysis of a series of Femvertising commercials, chosen from the above-mentioned cases and from more recent campaigns. The investigation focused on multiple brands rather than just one in order to produce a synchronic analysis.

The semiotic analysis aimed at “identifying the normative dimensions of advertising meaning, beginning with aesthetic codes structuring the organization of texts and stretching codes structuring meaning in the competitive set and cultural context” (Oswald, 2015).

The commercials have been analysed sequence by sequence, following the theoretical frameworks proposed by Semprini (1992), Bianchi (2011) and Peverini (2012).

The first phase of the semiotic analysis concerned the discursive level and was based on the analysis of each commercial in sequences in order to highlight the different components such as visual text, sound text, frames and all the other elements that enable to produce the desired meaning.

After that, the semio – narrative level was considered. In this second phase, the Actantial Model (Greimas, 1996) was used as a tool for the analysis.

Last, in the third phase, the values building each spot and the promotional strategy were reviewed.

Study 2 completed Study 1. It focused on consumers’ (only women were taken into consideration) reactions to the commercials. It consisted in a content analysis conducted through the use of NVivo coding platform.

The analysis focused on female users’ comments posted Facebook referring to the commercials included in the data set, which of course were object of the semiotic analysis. Thus, a coding activity was performed by identifying the most relevant codes for the research.

In this way, it was possible to understand if and how the changes occurring in the narration of the commercial, in terms of values communicated and narrativity, are perceived. Last, this analysis showed how the brand and its activism are perceived by female consumers.

In conclusion, Study 1 provided an answer for the first research question, while Study 2 produced all the elements that were necessary to respond to the second question.

3.2 Semiotic Analysis.

Semiotics is one of the oldest paradigms for perceiving meaning (Mick and Oswald, 2006). The word “semiotics” derives from the Greek term “*semios*” which means “sign”. According to Saussure (1974), a sign is composed by two main parts: the signifier, a sound- image and the signified, which is the concept generated by the signifier.

Going more in depth, semiotics investigates the function of systems and the processes of signification, putting the concept of text at the centre of its reflection. The text, in fact, is the minimal unit of semiotic analysis (Oswald, 2012). A text is a narrative assemblage of elements (such as words, images, sounds and/or gestures) constructed (and interpreted) with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication. In the semiotic perspective, the notion of text does not include only texts in the strict sense, but any portion of the signifying reality that can be studied by the semiotic methodology, acquiring those formal traits of closure, coherence, cohesion, narrative articulation, multiplicity of levels, etc., which are most easily found in the texts (Fabbri and Marrone, 2000).

As Campbell (2014) noted, semiotics proposes that advertisements are bundles of signs that generate finely constructed conventions. In semiotics, the image is a text, and, like any language, possesses its own specificity. For example, the meaning expressed by an image is based on its composition, lighting, framing, focus, gestures, spacing of forms, and so on. More specifically, there are three different levels of sign analysis: the micro-, mid- and meta-level (Mick et al, 2004). The micro – level conceives advertising signs as tiny units, such as the vectors, colours and forms present on the visual layer (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). The mid – level analysis decomposes signs into human-level characteristics including gender, hairstyle, posture, facial expression, buildings, as well as rhetorical devices such as metaphors and tropes (McQuarrie and Phillips 2005; McQuarrie and Mick 1996). Finally, the meta – level focuses on the narrative structure of the advertisements, which has often a mythic nature (Holt, 2004).

Considering what has been said so far, applying semiotics to advertising allow as to decode the main ideas, symbols and metaphors that could be “at play” in cultural texts (these may include print ads, tv commercials, packaging, websites) related to a certain area or a specific category of interest. For example, we might wish to understand what kind of cultural values and symbols commercials of a particular product or brand are trying to convey. Analysing commercials from a semiotic perspective, in fact, allows us to interpret their political and ideological impact on the audience.

In conclusion, the use of semiotics in the field of advertising language makes it possible to comprehend how the advertising industry reflects, influences and shapes society.

3.2.1 The semiotic approach: theories and tools.

As already mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter, Study 1 concerned a semiotic analysis of a series of Femvertising commercials. When it comes to decomposing a television commercial, it is important to keep into consideration the fact that we are analysing a video and not a static content: for this reason, the goal is to study every visible aspect and every symbolic message.

More specifically, in the first phase, each commercial was analysed sequence by sequence following the theoretical frameworks proposed by Semprini (1992), Bianchi (2011) and Peverini (2012). By doing this, the narrativity of a television commercial consists of an orderly progression of situations and actions. As a result, analysing sequences means analysing self – contained stories related to specific and different topics.

Each sequence was examined considering both the visual and sound elements. The visual elements refer to the description of the scene, the width of the frame, the angle of view, the lights and the colours. The sound elements, instead, include things such as dialogues, music and background noises.

The complete and detailed analysis of all these factors provides the tools necessary to understand the meaning conveyed by the advertisement. Recreating the meaning of a text, in fact, means trying to interpret the complexity of its articulation.

Once the analysis of the discursive level was completed, each commercial was reviewed on the semio – narrative level taking into consideration the Actantial Model (Greimas, 1966).

The Actantial Model (shown in the next page) is a tool utilised to analyse the action that takes place in a story. It was first developed in 1966 by semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas. According to it, every narrative revolves around a set of unchanging, universal syntactic positions, the so – called “actants” (that should not be confused with manifest discursive actors): the sender, the object, the receiver, the subject, the helper and the opponent (Collantes and Oliva, 2015).

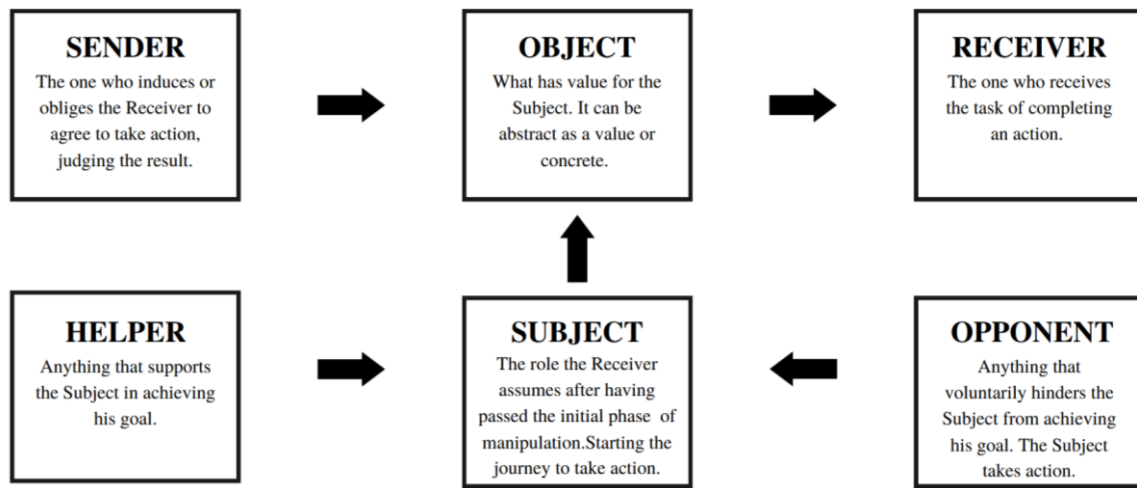


Fig. n.22: Actantial Model by Greimas (Ruiz, Collantes & Oliva, 2015).

Finally, each commercial was analysed taking into consideration the values building each television spot and the strategies used by the brand.

In other words, the whole semiotic analysis followed Semprini's Brand Identity System (1992), thus covering the superficial (or discursive), the narrative and the axiological levels of each spot.

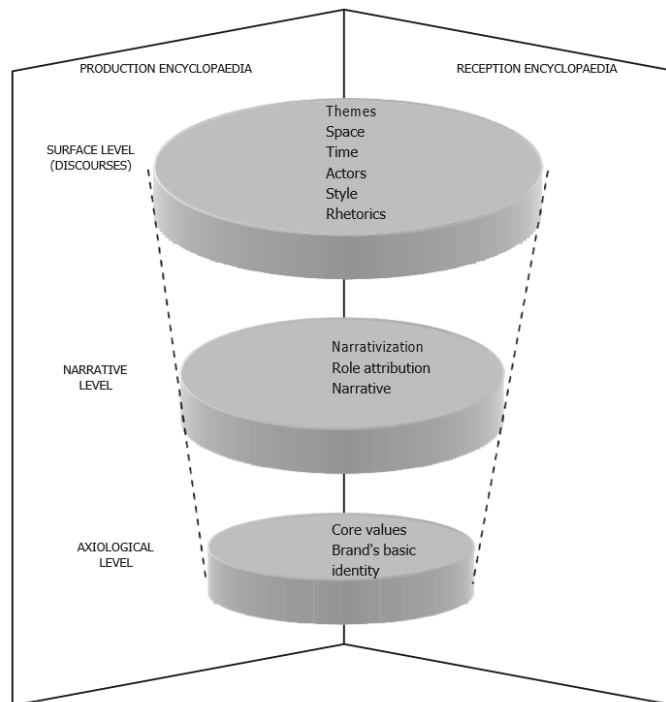


Fig. n.23: Brand identity system adapted from Semprini 1992 (Collantes & Oliva, 2015).

3.2.2 Femvertisements from a semiotic point of view: data set definition.

After having reviewed a series of Femvertising commercials, the following ones have been selected for the analysis:

- “Sorry, Not Sorry” by Pantene;
- “Imagine the Possibilities” by Barbie;
- “#UseYourAnd” by Gillette Venus
- “My Beauty My Say” by Dove;
- “Dream Crazy” by Nike;
- “The Ball is in Her Court” by Bumble.

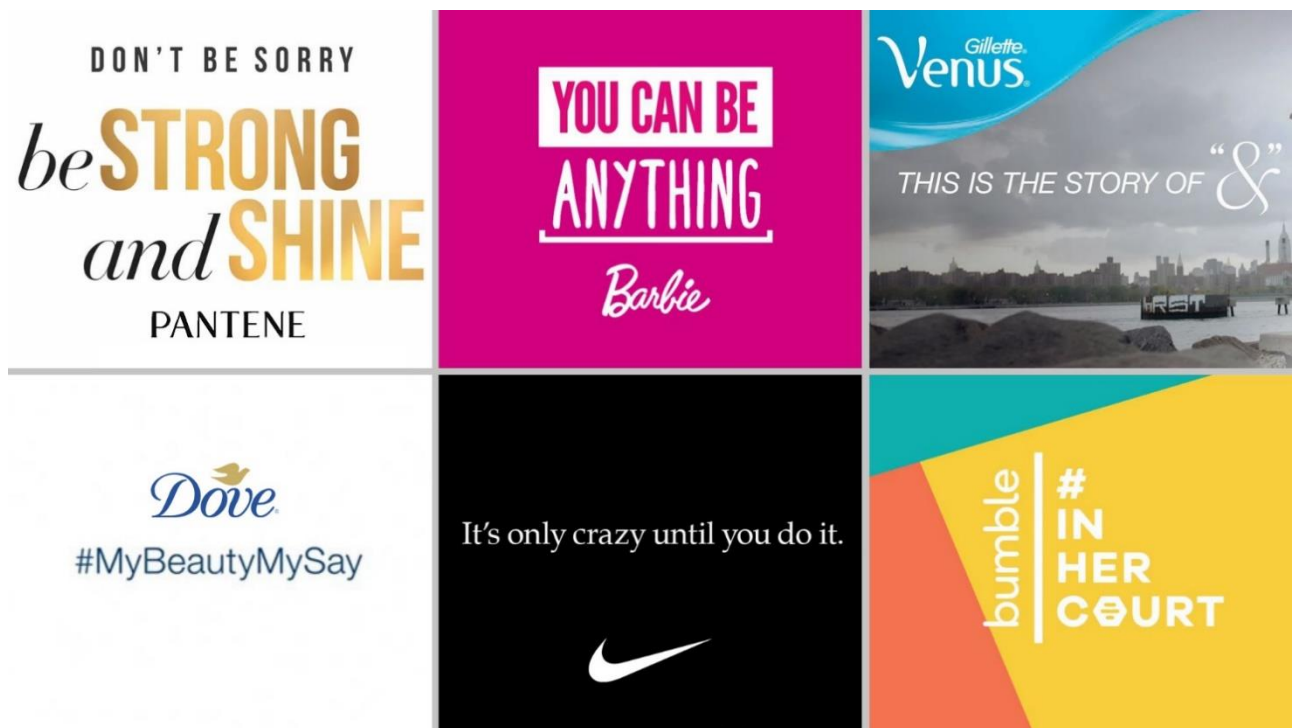


Fig. n.24: Final data set for the semiotic analysis.

These commercials were chosen in order to provide a complete data set that could take into consideration not only one single aspect of Femvertising, but all its relevant attributes such as:

- Beauty confidence and body positivity;
- Women's celebration behind the beauty focus (stressing their achievements);
- Women's athletic prowess and inner strengths;
- Gender equality in every situation (at work, at home and in all daily – life circumstances);
- The depiction of women in a multiplicity of roles;
- Female power and spirit of initiative.

Besides this, other criteria were used in the selection of the commercials composing the data set:

- Relevance of the social and cultural context where the spots were launched. All the commercials, in fact, were released in the United States, which have always been highly affected by and deeply interested in the feminist cause, acting as a model for all the Western countries (from a socio – cultural as well as advertising points of view);
- Level of intensity of brands' activism in the commercials;
- Degree of representation of gender stereotypes attached to women;
- Degree of representation of new feminine attributes.

In this way, it was possible to have a comprehensive and exhaustive vision of the phenomenon, necessary to answer the first question about the feminine myth(s) conveyed by Femvertisements.

Pantene: “Sorry, Not Sorry”.

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qt5kOTzdyL8>

General Information.

- Spot Duration: 61 seconds;
- Release Date: June 25th, 2014;
- Creative Agency: Grey Global Group Inc. No famous actors are present.

The commercial shows women apologising in the office, at home and even in bed, with one woman apologising to her partner while pulling up the covers. After the apologies, the ad shifts gears to show women who are strong and taking control, with some of the women saying, “*Sorry, not sorry.*” In this way, Pantene encourages women to be strong and shine. No famous actors are present.

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by sequence segmentation.

Sequence 1: 0 – 2 seconds. The spot starts in an effective way with a direct question written in black capital letters on a completely white screen, in order to create a strong contrast and grab viewers' attention. The question is: “*Why are women always apologising?*”. A tense music plays in the background.

Sequence 2: 3 – 6 seconds. The sequence opens up in a working environment (probably a meeting room) where a woman apologises to her male boss for asking a “stupid question” (“*Sorry, could I ask a stupid question?*”). The camera strictly focuses on these two characters, even if it possible to notice the presence of secondary people. The woman is sitting while the boss is standing, so to emphasise his superiority.

Sequence 3: 7 – 9 seconds. The camera turns to another working situation where a woman opens a door entering an office and apologising for needing the help of a colleague because she internally believes she is wasting his time (“*Sorry, do you have a minute?*”). The woman is the only character focused in the frame.

Sequence 4: 9 – 13 seconds. The scene takes place in the waiting room of a hospital. A woman is already sitting when a man comes and bumps into her to sit down. Even though it is not her fault, she apologises (“*Sorry*”). Furthermore, she moves a little to make room for him, thus affirming male superiority and dominance. The frame only focuses on them.

Sequence 5: 14 – 17 seconds. The camera turns to a domestic situation that specifically takes place in the kitchen. In the frame, there are a woman, a man and a baby. Here, the woman apologises (“*Sorry*”) when she hands off her toddler to her husband because she has to prepare dinner. It almost seems as though she feels guilty for not being able to manage her responsibilities as a wife (giving attention to her husband) and mother (taking care of the child) at the same time. Furthermore, her attire (a shirt combined with a skirt) suggests she is a career woman, tired at the end of a busy day.

Sequence 6: 18 – 22 seconds. The sequence unfolds in a meeting room where it is possible to hear a chorus of apologies (“*Sorry*”) from women as they scoot their chairs over to accommodate a male co-worker who has just showed up to the meeting. Their behaviour practically imply that they believe subconsciously that he is superior and thus deserving this kind of attention.

Sequence 7: 23 – 26 seconds. The scene takes place in a bedroom. Here, there are a woman and a man sleeping on the bed. The woman apologises (“*Sorry*”) to her partner while pulling up the covers. In a certain sense, her apologies emphasise the fact she feels guilty for having disturbed him while sleeping.

Sequence 8: 27 – 30 seconds. The camera turns to an every – day life situation where the focus is a couple in the car. They are in the middle of a conversation when the woman apologises (“*Sorry, you go first*”) for having interrupted him trying to saying something while he was still talking.

Sequence 9: 31 – 37 seconds. The screen suddenly becomes white and an imperative black text in capital letters appears: “Don’t be sorry”. Immediately, another text in black and gold follows: “Be strong and Shine”. This sequence is the beginning of a plot twist: in fact, from this point on many of the previous scenes are re – proposed but in a completely different way.

Sequence 10: 38 – 41 seconds. The camera goes back to sequence 2, but this time the woman expresses her opinion with a lot of confidence (“*I have a question, why don’t we go back to the original thing we did?*”) rather than apologising to her male supervisor for asking a “stupid question”.

Sequence 11: 42 – 44 seconds. The spot goes back to sequence 3, but in this case the woman confidently enters her colleague's office asking to join her without saying "sorry" ("*Morning, you got a minute?*" rather than "*Sorry, do you have a minute?*").

Sequence 12: 45 – 46 seconds. The commercial returns to sequence 4, but this time it is the man who apologises the woman for having bumped into her while sitting and not the other way around.

Sequence 13: 47 – 48 seconds. The camera goes back to sequence 5, but this time the woman says "*Sorry not sorry*" (rather than apologising) when she hands off her toddler to her husband.

Sequence 14: 49 – 54 seconds. The spot returns to sequence 7, but in this case the woman does not apologise to her partner for pulling up the covers. She proudly and confidently says "*Sorry, not sorry*". At the end, the man hugs her.

Sequence 15: 55 – 61 seconds. The commercial ends with the Pantene logo and the text "Shine strong".

B – NARRATIVE LEVEL – The Actantial Model.

Sender: the empirical sender is the feminist movement (more specifically the third and the fourth waves) and the social and cultural tensions provoked by it.

Receiver: women.

Subject: women who firmly accept to fight to emerge from their role of subordination and affirm their power and strength.

Object: female empowerment and women's full achievement of their independence and self – affirmation.

Helper: Pantene plays this role. It does not appear as a brand, but as an endorser.

Opponent: it is embodied by the patriarchal system, the stereotypical social conventions and traditions.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL – Square of values and promotion strategy.

In this commercial, Pantene uses the "Sorry, Not Sorry" slogan to discourage women from over-apologising in their everyday life. By showing situations where women apologise to men without reason and solely out of habit and feelings of inferiority, Pantene attempts to dispel traditional gender roles. The result is a brand that encourages women to be confident, authoritative and unapologetic.

The most interesting aspect of this campaign is that Pantene does not show its hair care products at any time. Pantene chooses not to feature its products on purpose. Although there is no mention of hair care products, it is impossible to miss the fact that all women in the video have strong and beautiful hair, just as one would expect in a shampoo commercial.

With this ad, Pantene acts beyond the product benefits and mainly focuses on branding creating an important conversation with its target consumers. The message the brand is trying to deliver is that with their products women will “Shine Strong”. The expression "Shine Strong" is used in the advertisement to leverage on brand cues because it can allude to both the product features (Pantene will make your hair shiny and powerful) and the company’s core values (women should shine and be strong in their everyday life).

In conclusion, Pantene addresses the theme of female empowerment to support women’s cause while at the same time bolstering its multi-faceted *strong is beautiful* brand personality.

Barbie: “Imagine the Possibilities”.

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7XTJSDFJbs>

General Information.

- Spot Duration: 105 seconds;
- Release Date: November, 26th 2015;
- Creative Agency: Ogilvy & Mather.

In the hidden camera-style video, young girls realise that no dream is too big to achieve. The commercial features relatively precocious little girls filling the shoes of a professor, a vet, a museum tour guide, a men's soccer coach and a high-flying businesswoman. The video frequently cuts to shots of unknowing adults who are charmed, surprised and impressed that these little women are schooling them.

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by sequence segmentation.

Sequence 1: 0 – 4 seconds. The commercial begins with a question written in white capital letters: “*What happens when girls are free to imagine they can be anything?*”. A pink-filtered university classroom is seen in the background as it starts to fill with students.

Sequence 2: 5 – 20 seconds. The students are captured by the camera while as they get their seats. Suddenly, a young girl enters the classroom from a door on the left. Everyone appears in astonishment. The girl reaches the centre of the room and says: “*Hello my name is Gwenet and I’ll be your professor today...and I will be talking about the brain*”. She looks very confident and professional. An entertaining music plays softly in the background (it will be present throughout the duration of the advertisement).

Sequence 3: 21 – 30 seconds. The camera moves to a veterinary clinic. A man enters the room and finds a young girl wearing a lab coat who says: “*Hello, I’m your veterinarian today*”. He looks surprised and says “*Are you kidding?*”. The girl (who is actually the vet) confidently replies: “*Nope, I’m Doctor Brooklyn...do*

you see it? (Indicating the badge on her coat)”. The man is still astonished and responds “Okay, Doctor” while giving the girl his dog to visit. The scene focuses only on these two characters and on their dialogue.

Sequence 4: 31 – 36 seconds. The sequence opens up in a soccer field where a girl wearing a sport uniform and holding a whistle meets a male team and present herself by saying: *“Good morning everyone, I’m your new coach! My name is Maddie...Nice to meet you!”*. The frame is first wide on the whole field and then becomes progressively more focused on the girl and the team.

Sequence 5: 37 – 45 seconds. The scene takes place at the airport where a little girl dressed up like a business woman is waiting to get on the airplane. She is talking at the phone and says *“I had the most fantastic day in the office, you’ll never believe what happened...we got that new business I wanted”*. The people around her smile, laugh and look at her with incredulity. The camera follows her actions while also capturing other people’s reactions.

Sequence 6: 46 – 51 seconds. The camera goes back to the veterinary clinic. Now, the girl is visiting a middle - aged woman’s cat. The little doctor asks the woman: *“Have you ever seen him fly?”*. The woman shocked partially repeats the question to be sure to have understood well: *“Have you ever seen him...what?”*. The girl firmly says: *“Fly! My cat can fly”*. The woman smiles and says *“Okay!”*. The scene focuses on these two characters and on the cat.

Sequence 7: 52 – 58 seconds. The spot returns to the setting of the second sequence, that is a university classroom. Here, the little Professor is continuing to hold her science lesson saying: *“The dog’s brain can’t think as much as a human’s brain...because there’s no high school for the dog!”*. Everybody laughs at this assertion. The camera strictly focuses on the girl’s figure while also capturing the students’ positive reactions to her speech.

Sequence 8: 59 – 71 seconds. In a museum of natural sciences, the action is taking place. Here, a little girl is a tour guide. She is wearing a shirt, a pair of shorts and a badge with the words *“Ture Gide”* (a misspelling for *“Tour Guide”*). She is explaining the dinosaur age to a group of visitors while showing them some skeletons. In her speech, she says: *“This is Peter, a triceratops. Peter is one year old; the t – rex Sally is 12 million 252 years old”*. All the visitors look at her in astonishment and laugh when she talks about the dinosaurs as if they were people. The camera frequently switches the frames between the girl and the audience.

Sequence 9: 72 – 78 seconds. The commercial goes back to the setting of the fourth sequence, that is a soccer field. Now, the little girl is intensively training the male team making all the players run. To motivate them she uses her whistle and says: *“Knees up like the unicorns...higher, higher!”*. The frame is first wide on the whole field and then focuses on the girl’s face and the players’ movements.

Sequence 10: 79 – 83 seconds. The spot returns to the setting of the fifth sequence, that is an airport. The little business woman is still talking on the phone and says: *“I’ve been to New York, Transylvania, Pennsylvania...”*. People continue to look at her with wonder. The girl and the other travellers are alternately shown in the shots.

Sequence 11: 84 – 89 seconds. The ad goes back again to the university classroom. The little Professor is going on with her lecture on the brain: *“We can think and do lots of stuff with our brain”*. The camera focuses on both the girl and the audience’s faces.

Sequence 12: 90 – 100 seconds. Now, the girl who was the Professor in sequences 2, 7 and 11 is at home playing with the iconic dolls themselves. She has created a cardboard lecture hall where the "student" Barbies sit, while she speaks from the perspective of a "Professor" Barbie. She asks *“Now, does anybody know how big the brain is? Anybody? Sophia!”*. She raises the hand of one of the dolls and makes her reply to the question: *“It is medium!”*. The Professor replies *“Very good!”*. At the end, the girl’s room is filled with a pink filter and a text appears on it: *“When a girl plays with barbie, she imagines everything she can become”*.

Sequence 13: 101 – 105 seconds. The screen becomes completely Barbie pink. The words: *“You can be anything”* and Barbie’s logo appear on it.

B – NARRATIVE LEVEL – The Actantial Model.

Sender: The feminist social and cultural tensions represent the sender.

Receiver: young women.

Subject: little girls who play with Barbie dolls to imagine they can be anything in the future. In this way, they overcome stereotypical prejudices and barriers regarding female ambitions in the working sphere.

Object: female empowerment and women’s full accomplishment of their career dreams.

Helper: Barbie plays this role. It inspires girls to imagine all of the possibilities for their future careers.

Opponent: it is embodied by old beliefs and stereotypes regarding women and their job aspirations.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL – Square of values and promotion strategy.

In a society where girls are frequently told that they can't, or that their appearance is worth more than their intelligence, it might be difficult to teach them that they can grow up to be anything they want to be. But with this commercial, Barbie is here to tell them that their potential is limitless. The message is crystal clear: it assures little women that they can do anything they want if they only "Imagine the Possibilities."

Over the years, critics have often claimed that Barbie dolls negatively impact on girls’ career goals and aspirations. Through this campaign, Mattel changes the public perception that the doll “dumbs down” its audience. The commercial, in fact, emphasises the idea that Barbie can act as an extension of a girl’s natural curiosity and imagination. Barbie is not just a pretty face: it is a university Professor, a veterinarian, an expert tour guide, a flying – business woman and a soccer coach who trains a male team.

In conclusion, in this case the brand does not focus on hair, makeup and fashion, but makes its product a vehicle that encourages girls to use their creativity, express themselves and follow their career dreams.

Gillette Venus: “#UseYourAnd”.

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CzkJDqg0ls>

General Information.

- Spot Duration: 75 seconds;
- Release Date: January 8th, 2015;
- Creative Agency: Paydirt Production.

The commercial features a diverse selection of women participating in different sports, reading books, making music, designing clothes, and working with electronics amongst other things, whilst a spoken word narrator encourages us not to allow ourselves to be limited by the labels we are assigned by people and society.

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by sequence segmentation.

Sequence 1: 0 – 13 seconds. The commercial begins showing a little girl wearing an astronaut cap with a pink ballerina dress running and playing soccer. As the scene goes on, the viewer is addressed by a middle – aged woman (in a white coloured room) who will be the speaker throughout the whole video. In this sequence, she is framed close up from frontal angle and comments the scene by saying “They told you, you could be anything. A beautiful astronaut. A soccer-player ballerina. A superstar...”. In the background, the brand’s general song “She’s got it” is playing.

Sequence 2: 14 – 21 seconds. The sequence starts showing a young Asian woman, with a particular style of clothes, going through book shelves in a library. Then, the camera moves to another woman wearing a skirt: only her legs and the microphone boom pole are visible, suggesting that she is singing. Following this scene, the viewer is shown a medium shot of another young woman framed from behind. Then, the camera focuses on a full shot of the woman speaker. Finally, a skater woman is shown. During all these shots, the woman speaker voiceover continues the speech started in the first sequence and says: “...Then said here is what you really are, with a label that size you up and box you in if you let it”.

Sequence 3: 22 – 36 seconds. In this sequence, the viewer sees scenes depicting several women while playing the drums, dancing, singing, riding motorbikes and wearing completely black leather clothes, playing the saxophone, playing volleyball, doing a handstand, and also sees a couple holding hands and a young woman

repairing an electronic instrument. The woman speaker comes back and forth in the scene and comments the shots by saying: “When someone labels you this or that, use your ‘and’ to take a stand with your legs and your voice and your head and your heart”. Her voice is perfectly in tune with the high tempo music playing in the background. The shots are rapid and dynamic.

Sequence 4: 37 – 56 seconds. The viewer is shown several shots depicting women being more than just one thing (or label). First, the camera goes back to the woman repairing an electronic instrument and the voiceover says “If someone says you’re smart, say ‘yes and’...”. Then, the scene returns to the beautiful girl dancing on her own and the woman speaker comments: “If someone says you are pretty, say ‘yes and’...”. These two shots together include discourses regarding stereotypical femininity and empowerment, finally unifying the words “smart” and “pretty” in order to convey the myth of a woman who can be both intelligent and attractive. Following these two shots, the camera goes back to the Asian girl in the library shown at the very beginning. She is reading a book (a symbol of her intelligence), but the focus is on her perfect manicured nails (a symbol of personal beauty care). Here, the voiceover says: “Make them understand you are polished nails and polished mind...”. Thus, the feminine myth produced visually and verbally in this shot is that of a young intellectual woman who can maintain her nail-polish desire as well as celebrating her sophisticated side. The commercial goes on showing multiple situations producing similar meaning. First, the viewer is shown a woman with a sewing machine while making a pink tulle dress. The camera focuses on the sewing machine (symbolising the traditional woman) and on her heels and red nails (symbolising the modern woman). Then, the commercial goes back to the woman playing the drums. There is a focus on her foot on the pedal, which establishes a connection with the previous shot of the woman sewing (in fact, the movement to press the pedal to play the drums and to activate the sewing machine is the same). Following this scene, the spot depicts a woman taking care of her mother and ends by showing again the skater girl. All these shots are commented by the woman speaker who comes back in forth in the scene continuing the speech previously started: “...Raw and refined, shy and bold, not just what you’re told, you are warmth and wisdom, grace and guts”.

Sequence 5: 57 – 75 seconds. This sequence starts with a close – up on the woman speaker’s face who says “No ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’, just ‘ands’”, thus making clearer the idea that women should insist on being more than one thing. Then, the woman leaves the scene and the “&” sign appears on the screen with the following text: “One – dimensional labels limit your potential. Venus invites all women everywhere to #UseYourAnd to take a stand against labels”.

B – NARRATIVE LEVEL – The Actantial Model.

Sender: The feminist movement and the related socio – cultural tensions.

Receiver: women.

Subject: women who actively decide to fight labels given by other people and society and express their

limitless potential.

Object: female empowerment and women's full expression of their multi – sided personality and potential.

Helper: Gillette Venus plays this role. It inspires women to step out one – dimensional labels and fully express themselves embracing all of their attributes.

Opponent: it is embodied by the labels given by society and other people as well as the stereotypical feminine representation.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL – Square of values and promotion strategy.

According to a 2015 Global survey conducted by Gillette Venus, 70% of women worldwide have experienced being labelled by others. Those labels can be assigned as young as 10 years old and nearly half of those surveyed said those labels have had a negative effect on their lives (43%). Despite the advances of women in the work place and home, the survey showed that girls still feel being labelled affects their self-perception and life choices (P&G USA website).

In response to this, the world leader in female shaving launched the “#UseYourAnd” campaign to inspire women and girls to stand-up against one-dimensional labels, encouraging them to unleash their innate potential. More specifically, the commercial establishes a conversation on female empowerment with the brand's consumers and inspires women to use their *ANDs* to embrace all of the qualities, attributes and characteristics that make them who they are.

In opposition to the majority of beauty brands, which usually tend to focus only on singular dimensions of women - either *Super Model* or *Super Mom* – Gillette Venus presents women as a mix of everything: the idea is that someone can be an astronaut and a ballerina, smart and pretty, strong and sensitive. There are not “*ORs*” only “*ANDs*”.

Dove: “My Beauty My Say”.

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOa7zVqxA4>

General Information.

- Spot Duration: 90 seconds;
- Release Date: June 28th, 2016;
- Creative Agency: Forsman & Bodenfors.

The campaign features a series of short videos that share the stories of nine women who challenged and overcame other people's negative comments of their looks. All of them rejected to let judgements on their appearance limit their achievements.

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by sequence segmentation.

Sequence 1: 1 – 5 seconds. The commercial begins showing a woman boxing. She is wearing a grey tank top, black shorts and boxing gloves. She is training at the gym. In the background, the viewer can hear the woman's voiceover telling the comments people have always done on her: *"They said I was too pretty to fight. Aw, she can't fight. You're going to mess up that beautiful face"*. A rhythmic and fast drum music is playing. In the scene, the frame first focuses on a low angle close up of the woman boxing and then on an eye – level mid-shot of her training and walking.

Sequence 2: 6 – 8 seconds. The scene presents a Latin overweight woman walking outside with her dog. She is wearing a white t- shirt, a long red skirt and a black leather bag. Her voiceover says: *"They said I was too fat. Only skinny girls can dress well"*. The camera first frames her body from behind and then focuses on her face, shown in profile.

Sequence 3: 9 – 11 seconds. This sequence shows an eye-level mid shot of a woman walking to the window and laying her bag down. She is talking in French reporting some comments people have frequently made on her, judging her look in relation to her profession: *"Ils me regardent de la tête aux pieds... comment peut-elle être avocate?"* (in English, *"They look at me head to toe...How can she be a lawyer?"*).

Sequence 4: 12 – 13 seconds. The scene depicts an elderly woman looking out a window. She is wearing a nice silver dress matched to a bracelet, a necklace and a pair of earrings. She has fashionable glasses on. Her voiceover says: *"They said I didn't dress for my age"*. The camera frames her figure with an – eye level mid shot.

Sequence 5: 14 – 15 seconds. In the scene, there is a Caucasian woman. The focus is on her face and her hands. However, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the upper part of the golden dress she is wearing. Her voiceover reports the comments others have done on a part of her visage during her life: *"They said my nose was too prominent"*.

Sequence 6: 16 – 17 seconds. The sequence presents an eye-level mid shot of an androgynous woman walking down a street. She is wearing a pink blazer and a pair of dark blue jeans. The camera frames her figure from the back. Her voiceover says: *"They said I was too masculine"*.

Sequence 7: 18 – 19 seconds. An eye – level close up of an Afro – American woman's torso and camera is the focus of the scene. She is walking down a street, wearing a black tank top and black trousers. From the fact she has a camera, it is evident she is a photographer. Her voiceover says *"They thought that catcalling was a compliment"*.

Sequence 8: 20 – 21 seconds. This sequence shows a close up shot of a Latin woman blowing at a dandelion. The scene is a bit blurred. Her voiceover reports a comment a man has done once on her smile: *“He said you can fix those teeth quite easily”*.

Sequence 9: 22 – 24 seconds. The androgynous woman comes back in the scene. First, there is a close up shot of her face and then a low angle close up shot of her looking up. She talks to the camera and reports other things people used to say on her appearance: *“Boyish and ugly? (She laughs) ... When they were talking about females, they were not talking about me”*.

Sequence 10: 25 – 26 seconds. The scene presents an eye-level mid shot of an Afro – American woman standing outside. The camera first frames her figure entirely, and then focuses on her afro curls. Her voiceover says: *“This was not pretty”* (referring to what people thought about her particular hairstyle and hair characteristics).

Sequence 11: 27 – 36 seconds. In this sequence, there are short shots of all of the characters previously introduced. They report, again, a comment or an insult people have made on their look and appearance. The first to appear is the photographer (presented in the seventh sequence). Her voiceover says: *“They would holler from across the street”*, referring to the terrible catcalling episodes she experienced. Then, the camera turns to the Afro – American woman presented in the tenth sequence. Her voiceover says: *“Look sophisticated”*, reporting an ironic comment someone made on her afro curls. Following, the focus shifts to the Caucasian woman introduced in the fifth sequence. Her voiceover says: *“Embarrassing nose”*, citing one of the insults she has received in her life because of this “beauty imperfection”. Then, the camera turns back to the Latin overweight woman presented in the second scene. Here, her voiceover says: *“Too chubby”*, reporting one of the things people usually say when commenting her body size. After this, the spot shows the elderly woman first shown in the fourth sequence. Her voiceover says: *“Just too skinny”*, referring to one of the usual comments people make when commenting her physical appearance. Following this shot, the viewers see the androgynous woman already shown in the sixth and ninth sequences. Her voiceover says: *“Manly”*, alluding to the fact that she has always been criticised for not being “too feminine”. Then, the commercial displays again a shot of the Afro – American woman with the afro curls. Her voiceover says: *“Crazy hair”*, reporting another negative comment on her hairstyle. Next, the Latin overweight woman comes back to the scene. Her voiceover says: *“Never look good”*, citing another thing people think of her because her body size. After that, the Afro – American woman with the afro hairstyle appears again. Her voiceover says: *“Too wild”*, emphasising another time people’s judgements about her curls. Following this shot, the Caucasian woman comes back to the scene. Her voiceover says: *“Too beautiful”*, reporting a comment alluding to the fact that her beauty is in contrast with her profession as a lawyer. Then, the Latin overweight woman is captured again by the camera. Her voiceover says: *“Too fat”*, emphasising another time the criticism she receives for her weight. Finally, the camera rapidly shows short shots of the Latin woman with the diastema shown at the eight

sequence and the Latin overweight woman. In the background, it is possible to hear a unified chorus of all the women saying “*He said, they said, she said...*”.

Sequence 12: 37 – 38 seconds. Music stops at the beginning of the shot. The Caucasian woman (the lawyer) appears in the scene. She talks to the camera and completes the last sentence of the previous scene by saying: “...*I said: No way!*”. She looks very confident. From this moment on, a music with a slower but stronger beat starts to play.

Sequence 13: 39 – 41 seconds. The androgynous woman talks to the camera. She says: “*You are not me, I am me*”, to respond to the criticism and the negative comments she’s always been suffering from. The frame is strictly focused on her face.

Sequence 14: 42 – 44 seconds. The sequence presents a medium shot of the Caucasian woman. She is performing on a stage with a nice costume and a hairband full of glittered stars. It is now possible to understand her profession: she is a burlesque woman. Her voiceover says: “*“I’m not gonna be defined by anyone’s expectations”*”.

Sequence 15: 45 – 47 seconds. There is close up shot of the elderly woman talking to the camera. The focus is on her face. She says: “*I don’t dress my age, I dress myself the way I am*”, thus replying to all the negative comments for her style.

Sequence 16: 48 – 53 seconds. The scene begins with a mid-shot of the boxing woman talking to the camera. She says: “*‘Cause my face has nothing to do with my boxing*”, thus replying to all those who thought that she would have ruined her beauty with this sport. Then, she is seen playing with a boxing toy while her voiceover says: “*I’m ranked number one in the country and number two in the world*”.

Sequence 17: 54 – 56 seconds. The sequence presents an eye-level medium shot of the Latin, overweight woman with her dog, looking at the camera. She is sitting on a sofa cuddling her pet. Her voiceover says: “*As a fashion blogger, my style is one hundred per cent unapologetic*”.

Sequence 18: 57 – 58 seconds. A medium shot of the Latin woman with diastema is the focus of the scene. She is confidently talking to the camera saying: “*I don’t wanna change my teeth*”. She is wearing a green tank top.

Sequence 19: 59 – 61 seconds. This scene presents an eye – level close up of the Caucasian woman. She is looking into the camera and saying: “*My looks have nothing to do with my capabilities*”, referring to the fact that her beauty has nothing to do with her professional skills as a lawyer.

Sequence 20: 62 – 64 seconds. This sequence focuses on a mid-shot of the Afro – American woman with the afro hairstyle. She is talking to the camera and saying: “*This is me. This is my hair*”, simply replying to all the negative comments on her thick curls.

Sequence 21: 65 – 67 seconds. In this scene, there are multiple shots following one another. The first one is the Caucasian burlesque woman, followed by the boxing woman, then the photographer and finally the androgynous woman. The first three ones say “*My Beauty*” in a row and the last one completes the slogan affirming “*My Say*”.

Sequence 22: 68 – 82 seconds. In this sequence, all the characters are finally officially presented by name, making a match between their appearance and their job. The first one is Hannah, the photographer. Then, there is Elain, the woman with the diastema, who is an administrator. Following, there is Grace, the burlesque dancer. After her, there is Jessica, the Latin overweight fashion blogger. Then, there is Elizabeth, the Afro – American woman with the afro hairstyle, who is a poet. Following, there is Marcia, the beautiful woman who is a lawyer. After her, there is Judith, the elderly woman with the unique fashion style who is a clinic psychologist. Then, there is Rain, the androgynous woman who is a model. Finally, there is Heather, the boxing woman. The shots are very short.

Sequence 23: 83 – 86 seconds. The screen becomes white and the slogan “#MyBeautyMySay” appears on it.

Sequence 24: 87 – 90 seconds. Dove logo appears on the screen. The music stops as the logo fades out.

B – NARRATIVE LEVEL – The Actantial Model.

Sender: The feminist movement and the social and cultural tensions provoked by it.

Receiver: women.

Subject: women who decide to fight against beauty stereotypes and other people’s judgements on their appearance.

Object: female empowerment and women’s full achievement of beauty confidence despite all kinds of criticism.

Helper: Dove fills this role. It inspires women to transcend their looks and define themselves not by what they look like, but what they do. Furthermore, it encourages women to accept themselves, by defining their own beauty standards.

Opponent: it is embodied by the beauty standards imposed by society and other people’s negative comments on one’s personal look and physical appearance.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL – Square of values and promotion strategy.

Dove's #MyBeautyMySay commercial tells the stories of nine female characters of different ages, ethnic backgrounds and professions. It focuses on a struggle many women can relate to: being judged for how they look, rather than who they are. This fact was also confirmed by a global research conducted by Dove (2016), where seven out of ten women reported that they get more comments about how their appearance rather than their achievements (Dove US website). Taking into consideration this problem, the campaign was created to inspire all women to elevate their self- image beyond physical appearance.

The advertisement serves as an evolution of the previous campaign Real Beauty Effort. The Unilever brand, in fact, had demonstrated its commitment to female empowerment (and body positivity) in many different occasions, being a pioneer of Femvertising.

With this particular advertisement, Dove showed its support to women breaking barriers and challenging stereotypes, thus demonstrating its awareness of the social and cultural challenges characterising the feminine world. In this way, it created a deep conversation with its target customers, sharing their fights and fears, while encouraging them with the company's core values (beauty as a source of confidence and power, not anxiety and limitation).

Nike: “Dream Crazy”.

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWfX5jeF6k4&t=1s>

General Information.

- Spot Duration: 90 seconds;
- Release Date: February 24th, 2019 at the Oscars;
- Creative Agency: Wieden + Kennedy Agency.

The commercial is narrated by American professional tennis player Serena Williams. Besides her, the spot stars Olympic gymnast Simone Biles, fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad, snowboarder Chloe Kim, members of the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team (Alex Morgan, Julie Ertz, Alyssa Naehar and Megan Rapinoe), basketball professional Sue Bird, tennis player Li Na, boxers Chantel Navarro and Marlen Esparza, basketball player Lisa Leslie, NBA coach Becky Hammon, professional swimmer Simone Manuel, Paralympian Tatyana McFadden, soccer player Sam Kerr, basketball professional Diana Taurasi, basketball head coach Cheryl Reeve, tennis player Simona Halep 10-year-old skateboarder Sky Brown, soccer player Olivia Moultrie and other female athletes.

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by sequence segmentation.

Sequence 1: 0 – 8 seconds. The commercial begins with a female cyclist crying both at the end of a competition and during an interview. The shot is closely focused on her face (and on her tears). Serena Williams' voice can be heard in the background saying: *“If we show emotion, we are called dramatic”*.

Sequence 2: 9 – 13 seconds. The camera turns to an American football field, where a woman is playing against a male team. Serena Williams' narration continues and says: *“If we want to play against men, we're nuts”*. The frame mainly focuses on the woman's attack and defence actions.

Sequence 3: 14 – 18 seconds. The scene opens with the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team while singing the National Anthem. The camera progressively frames the athletes (Alex Morgan, Julie Ertz, Alyssa Naeher) with a medium close up, until ending with the capture of the captain's face (Megan Rapinoe). Serena Williams goes on with her speech saying *“And if we dream of equal opportunity, delusional”*.

Sequence 4: 19 – 26 seconds. The sequence depicts tennis Li Na and basketball professional Sue Bird yelling at the officials for unfair decisions made. Here, Serena Williams says *“When we stand for something, we're unhinged”*. The camera strictly focuses on the athletes' protesting reactions.

Sequence 5: 27 – 29 seconds. The camera turns to an athletic track where South African middle-distance runner Caster Semenya has just won a competition. The sequence is complemented by Serena Williams' voice saying *“When we're too good, there's something wrong with us”*. From a technical point of view, the camera goes from a wide – angle shot to one that focuses on the athlete's arrival and triumph.

Sequence 6: 30 – 36 seconds. The scene represents three sportswomen (basketball professional Diana Taurasi, basketball head coach Cheryl Reeve and tennis player Simona Halep) who get angry after experiencing failure or injustice. In the background, Serena Williams' narration continues and says *“And if we get angry, we're hysterical or irrational or just being crazy”*. The shots change very quickly: three women in three different (but similar) situations in only one sequence.

Sequence 7: 37 – 44 seconds. The sequence features the 1975 Morat – Fribourg Marathon, which was closed to women since it was believed that a 42 km course would cause irreversible damage to their reproductive system (almost to indicate that their function was relegated to giving birth). In that context, even though the authorities are trying to stop her, a woman (Katherine Switzer) takes the lead and starts running the marathon. The words *“Et les femmes?”* (*“And women?”*) are written on the front half of her t – shirt; the words *“Pourquoi pas les femmes?”* (*“Why not women?”*) are written on the back. Serena Williams' voice emphasises the scene by saying *“But a woman running a marathon was crazy”*. The shot first focuses on all of the men running and then passes tightly on the woman and her actions.

Sequence 8: 45 – 61 seconds. In this sequence, the commercial displays a series of women achieving important results in sports. The first shot captures boxers Chantel Navarro and Marlen Esparza fighting during a final bout. The camera rapidly moves to a basketball court where WNBA legend Lisa Leslie makes a perfect dunk. Here, the focus is on her muscular and athletic body and on her movements. Then, the frame switches to the famous coach Becky Hammon while motivating a basketball male NBA team. In keeping with the same theme, the camera catches Muslim fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad, who has just won a fencing match. Here, the most relevant detail is the fact she has competed wearing a hijab. Moving on, the frame captures swimmer Simone Manuel and snowboarder Chloe Kim performing exceptional actions during a competition. All these short shots that follow one another are narrated by Serena Williams' voice which highlights the greatness and the "craziness" of female athletes' results: "*A woman boxing was crazy. A woman dunking, crazy. Coaching an NBA team, crazy. A woman competing in a hijab; changing her sport; landing a double-cork 1080...*". The shots are very short and change rapidly.

Sequence 9: 62 – 66 seconds. Serena Williams finally appears. The camera focuses on her actions during a tennis match. She looks confident, happy and satisfied. In the background, her voice resumes the speech from where it was interrupted in the previous sequence and describes her accomplishments: "*...Or winning 23 grand slams, having a baby, and then coming back for more... crazy*".

Sequence 10: 67 – 75 seconds. The commercial continues displaying women achieving extraordinary results in sports, specifically: soccer player Sam Kerr doing a dual flip after scoring, a girl dribbling balls in two hands, Paralympian Tatyana McFadden winning a cycling competition, a girl doing 90 pounds lifting, 10-year-old skateboarder Sky Brown, Olympic gymnast Simone Biles while performing a perfect exercise at the vault and Olivia Moultrie (the first girl in the history of the U.S. Soccer Development Academy to compete full-time against boys). Serena Williams' voice keeps emphasising the relevance of female achievements in sports by saying "*Crazy, crazy and crazy*".

Sequence 11: 76 – 81 seconds. This sequence focuses on a provocative sentence (alluding that women can do the same as men in sports or even better) affirmed by Serena Williams which emphasises female athletic greatness and "craziness": "*So if they want to call you crazy, fine. Show them what crazy can do*"

Sequence 12: 82 – 90 seconds. The screen becomes black and a white text appears: "*It's only crazy until you do it*". The commercial ends with Nike slogan "Just do it" and their famous logo.

B – NARRATIVE LEVEL – The Actantial Model.

Sender: The feminist movement and the resulting social and cultural challenges serve as a metaphor for the sender.

Receiver: women.

Subject: women who actively choose to fight gender stereotypes in sports and follow their dreams demonstrating their athletic power and strength.

Object: female empowerment and women's full achievement of gender equality in sports and athletic environments.

Helper: Nike fills this role. It encourages women to give their best and overcome obstacles by citing successful examples (through Serena Williams' narration).

Opponent: it is embodied by gender stereotypes in the world of sports.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL – Square of values and promotion strategy.

Nike made a strategic move by releasing this commercial at the 2019 Oscars by reaching out to the TV cable audience. The 90 seconds ad portrays remarkable women athletes, highlighting the challenges they face and how they have broken all barriers achieving incredible results. The emphasis is put on the label “crazy”, which is often applied to women athletes in a negative way when taking on challenges and aiming for big achievements within sports. To demonstrate that this is not crazy or impossible to do, events from the history are brought up, such as showing that years ago a woman running a marathon or a woman boxing was crazy, but today that is perfectly normal. As a consequence, the message is that women should continue to do things that are perceived to be “crazy” since, once done, they are not crazy anymore. The final sentences “*So if they want to call you crazy, fine. Show them what crazy can do*” and “*It's only crazy until you do it. Just do it*” reinforce the main idea that women should demonstrate their skills, follow their dreams and break down all the limits in the world of sports. Therefore, thanks to this ad, the term “crazy” has no longer a negative connotation, but takes on a positive meaning becoming synonymous with female greatness, power, determination and strength.

With this campaign, Nike deviates from the functional approach focused on highlighting products' characteristics and adopts a more socially driven approach centred on showcasing an important conversation on the relevant and contemporary theme of female empowerment.

Nike understands this social approach is essential in the contemporary world, since consumers are nowadays more likely to buy from brands that support them in their social causes. In this specific case, Nike demonstrates to encourage women to fight against gender stereotypes. It must be highlighted that through its advertising campaigns, the company has always been at the forefront of promoting gender equality to its target audience. Prior to that, the brand took a stand on Serena Williams and capitalised on the controversy over the French Open banning the catsuit she wore to an event in 2018.

Bumble: “The Ball is in Her Court”.

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmO6NWSq7lw>

General Information.

- Spot Duration: 30 seconds;
- Release Date: February 03rd, 2019. First aired during the Superbowl, this commercial won the 2019 Femvertising awards in the “Inspiration Category”.
- Creative Agency: VMLY&R.

In this commercial, Serena Williams collaborates with Bumble and an all-female production crew to encourage other women to make the first move in work, in love and in life with the app's Bumble Bizz, Bumble Date and Bumble BFF features. In the wake of every competition, business venture and relationship she has faced, Williams continues to assert that women don't need to be given power because "We already have it."

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by sequence segmentation.

Sequence 1: 0 – 2 seconds. The commercial begins with Serena Williams in a tennis court. She is wearing a white tennis uniform made up of a t – shirt and a skirt. While the camera captures her with a medium close – up, her voiceover says “*The world tells you to wait...*”. In the background, the song “Soul Survivor” by Rita Ora is playing (it will be present throughout the duration of the advertisement).

Sequence 2: 3 – 5 seconds. The setting is still a tennis court, but in this case the protagonist is a young Serena Williams. She is first seated on a bench but then stands up to start playing. The voiceover continues the previous sentence by saying “*...that waiting is polite*”. The camera follows the girl’s movements.

Sequence 3: 6 - 7 seconds. The spot goes back to sequence 1, where the camera continues to zoom on Serena Williams. Now, her voiceover says: “*But if I had waited to be invited in...*”.

Sequence 4: 8 – 10 seconds. The scene shows several triumphant moments of Serena William’s career. The shots are very short and change rapidly. The voiceover concludes the sentence of the previous scene by saying “*...I never would have stood out*”.

Sequence 5: 11 – 16 seconds. The setting is now Serena William’s apartment. She is in her bedroom looking at herself in the mirror. She is wearing a blue skirt and a black top. Then, she moves to the table and starts reading some documents. Finally, she receives a message on the phone from a friend of hers. The camera focuses on some details such as a picture portraying Serena and her husband on their wedding day and the message on the phone. The voiceover says “*So, make the first move in work, in love and in life...*”.

Sequence 6: 17 – 24 seconds. This sequence is characterised by the continuous alternance of shots representing Serena Williams at the very beginnings of her career (when she was a young woman) and now. The scene ends with her (who has finally become a tennis legend) making a perfect serve. In the background, the voiceover

concludes the speech affirming: "...And don't wait to be given power because here's what they won't tell you...we already have it!".

Sequence 7: 25 – 30 seconds. The screen turns yellow and a white text appears: "Women, the ball is in your court". The music becomes progressively louder. Bumble logo is finally shown (Download Bumble, make the first move).

B – NARRATIVE LEVEL – The Actantial Model.

Sender: The feminist revolution, its ideals and its achievements play this role.

Receiver: women.

Subject: women who actively decide to exert their power making the first move in life, love and work.

Object: the full affirmation of female power, strength and spirit of initiative.

Helper: Bumble fills this role through Serena Williams's experience. It encourages women to get what they want and deserve in all aspects of their lives.

Opponent: it is represented by the outdated patriarchal system, old social conventions and gender stereotypes.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL – Square of values and promotion strategy.

Bumble's "The Ball Is In Her Court," featuring the brand's global advisor Serena Williams, made its debut during Super Bowl LIII, topping ad polls and inspiring women globally in business, friendship, and love. With a predominantly female-driven creative and production team, the ad's message of female empowerment was echoed across the advertising industry.

In the commercial, Serena Williams acts as the perfect representation of a woman who has the ball in her court in all aspects of life. The sentence "*The ball is in her court*" is a metaphor brought from the world of tennis itself. When a ball is on someone's court, it means that is on them to take action. In a more figurative sense, it is used as a synonym for making the first move. In this specific case, women are encouraged to take initiative in work, life and relationships (thus reflecting Bumble's dating app spirit where acting first can really change your life).

3.3 Content Analysis: Coding through NVivo.

After the semiotic analysis of the six commercials, the second study, which was necessary to complete the whole research, focused on the reactions generated among the female audience through the means of a content analysis performed making use of NVivo coding platform.

NVivo (a play on the latin *in vivo* - meaning "within a living organism") is Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software designed to help users conduct qualitative and mixed methods research.

More specifically, in order to answer to the second research question, which was related to the understanding of women's reactions to the new myth(s) of femininity conveyed by Femvertisements, a content and sentiment analysis was conducted through the use of NVivo.

According to Thelwall (2016) "Sentiment analysis is the use of computer programs to estimate some aspect of the sentiment conveyed by a text...Understanding the role of sentiment in communication is an important topic in itself, and being able to identify changes in sentiment over time and differences in sentiment between contexts and objects of discussion is particularly useful for social web investigations".

In other words, sentiment analysis is generally described as a process of coding, where a computer interprets textual data and assigns it various sentiment markers (such as positive, negative or neutral, even if there are some programs that allow to understand specific emotional reactions like happiness, sadness and anger).

Sentiment analysis is thus an approach to natural language processing (NLP) that identifies the emotional tone behind a body of text.

Besides sentiment analysis, NVivo was also used to study and understand the most important and recurrent topics in the comments. To get this insight, word frequency query was used.

The next paragraph explains the whole analytic process more in detail.

3.3.1 Analysis Overview.

Taking into consideration what has been said so far, the coding activity aimed at exploring and analysing female users' comments posted of Facebook referring to the commercials included in the data set ("Sorry Not Sorry" by Pantene, "Imagine the Possibilities" by Barbie, "#UseYourAnd" by Gillette Venus, "My Beauty My Say" by Dove, "Dream Crazy" by Nike and "The Ball is in Her Court" by Bumble), which were of course part of the semiotic analysis.

The reason I chose Facebook to analyse the comments related to the commercials is that through this social media it is easier to distinguish between female and male users (looking at their names and surnames) rather than other platforms such as Instagram and YouTube where people frequently use nicknames (making it difficult to differentiate between genders).

The first step of Study 2 consisted in downloading the comments through a software called ExportComments which is able to export social media comments to an Excel file ready for analysis.

This procedure was done for all of the six commercials of the dataset, thus having six different Excel spreadsheets containing Facebook comments to analyse. Each Excel file was made up of columns providing

the following data: users' names and surnames, their profile IDs, date reporting when the comments were written, number of likes and the comments themselves.

The second step involved the import of each Excel file (one at a time) into the NVivo software. The coding analysis started as soon as the import was finished. The process was the same for all of the six commercials.

For each commercial, the following analysis was conducted. NVivo allows users to perform an auto – coding sentiment analysis, where the software handles all the work. However, with this kind of automated analysis, the tool does not classify content according to sentiment. It does not take each piece of content and rate it on a Likert sentiment scale. It looks at the sentiment of words in isolation, but the context is not taken into consideration. Furthermore, the program does not automatically recognise sarcasm, slang, dialect variations or double negations. Finally, NVivo does not mechanically make a gender distinction related to the users who wrote the comments (which was instead necessary for the purpose of the research, since the focus on women's reactions). For all these reasons and limitations, I decided to perform a sentiment analysis manually.

Each Excel file contained thousands of comments. In every case, I selected 300 comments (the number was chosen as a reference amount in order to have a solid base to conduct a significant and varied analysis) written by female users. Then, the comments were dragged into the four codes I created for the sentiment analysis: “very positive”, “moderately positive”, “moderately negative” and “very negative”. These codes were useful to identify positive and negative attitudes, thus allowing to have the necessary elements to answer to the second research question.



Fig. n.25: NVivo Sentiment Codes

The sentiment analysis produced charts reporting the relevance of each code, stressing the prevailing sentiment among the comments' data set.

Following the sentiment analysis, the study went on to examine word frequency in order to identify the most recurrent words and themes in the content of interest, which in the research was represented by the comments left by female users.

Word frequency was studied through NVivo with the generation of word clouds. A word cloud is a word frequency query used to create clouds containing the commonly used words and phrases (making it possible also to understand the main themes and topics) in the text(s) under examination.

The terms displayed in the word cloud have a specific colour (ranging from orange, to black and finally grey), a placement (at the centre and progressively towards the borders) and a size (big or small) that indicate their relative frequency.

For this research, I analysed word frequency producing word clouds for the positive sentiment sphere of comments, being it the most prominent for all of the six commercials. However, negative comments were not ignored: for each advertisement, I reported the most relevant and the most common ones, in order to have an understanding of the main problems associated with it or with the brand itself.

3.3.2 Coding results.

This section presents the results produced by the coding activity. In particular, each commercial has a dedicated paragraph reporting the outcomes and the charts related to the sentiment analysis and the word frequency query. Additional findings and observations are also highlighted.

“Sorry, Not Sorry” – Pantene.

Pantene “Sorry, Not Sorry” commercial was the first one to be analysed through NVivo. The sentiment analysis produced two charts, giving useful information about the overall feelings and reactions of female users on this advertisement, its message and the related narratives.

The first chart is a hierarchy chart, which generally allows to visualise a hierarchy, helping to see patterns in the coding. In this case, the hierarchy chart gives a general picture of users’ sentiment on the commercial, showing the prevalence of a positive attitude in the references. The largest area, in fact, is covered by “very positive” and “moderately positive” rectangles. Visually, it is possible to deduce that “very negative” and “moderately negative” rectangles together approximately occupy the same space filled by “moderately positive” rectangle.

The hierarchy chart only gives an idea of users’ sentiment. The information is more detailed and complete in the second chart, which reports the specific and numerical segmentation of comments according to the sentiment codes, also emphasising the magnitude of positivity and negativity (how much they are positive or negative, considering the attributes “very” vs “moderately”).

By looking at the second chart, it is possible to see that out of the 300 comments selected (from a basis of 1171) from the Excel file 187 were “very positive”, 63 were “moderately positive”, 38 were “very negative” and 12 were “moderately negative”. So, as already noticed with the hierarchy chart, the positive comments

were more than the negative ones, thus indicating an overall appreciation for the commercial.



Fig. n.26: Pantene's hierarchy chart.

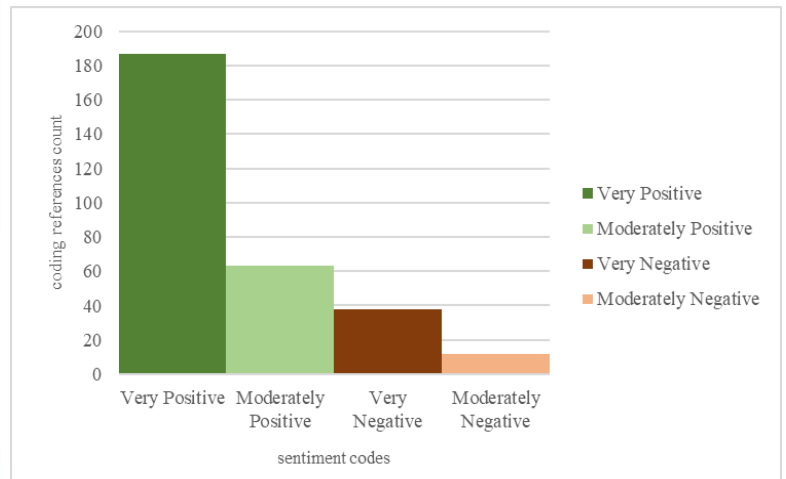


Fig. n.27: Pantene's sentiment distribution.

These data express the fact that women's opinion on Pantene "Sorry, Not Sorry" commercial was generally positive. Only 1/6 of the female users whose comments were included in the dataset reported a negative impression (38 very negative + 12 moderately negative), criticising several aspects of the campaign (that will be further mentioned and discussed).

Moving to the second part of the coding, the word frequency analysis conducted focusing on the positive macro - category, produced an interesting word cloud which is shown in the following page.



Fig. n.28: Pantene's word cloud.

This word cloud was created requiring NVivo to report the 1000 most frequent words/concepts with at least 3 letters that appeared in the comments.

Looking at the word cloud, it is possible to see that the hashtag #sorrynotsorry was one of the most recurrent topics in the comments, since it is big, orange and placed at the centre. This suggests that women appreciated the main message of the campaign and transformed it into a hashtag to make the video going viral and share

the importance of this topic. Two other words directly connected to the commercial are “Shine” and “Strong”. Put together, these two terms form Pantene’s slogan “Shine Strong”. This probably means that women were positively impressed by the haircare brand’s activism for the feminine cause, thus reporting in the comments Pantene’s empowering slogan making it an inspirational principle. Women’s positive reactions are also confirmed by the adjectives “incredible” and “amazing” which were frequently used in the comments as an expression of appreciation and enthusiasm. Finally, terms such as “powerful” and “empowerment” are related to the new myths of femininity generally conveyed by Femvertisements (see the next chapter for a deeper explanation).

As far as it concerns the negative ones, even if though they were few, most of them criticised the commercial because it appeared as a form of “self-victimization” rather than full empowerment.

“Imagine the Possibilities” – Barbie.

Barbie’s Femvertisement was the second one to be analysed through the use of NVivo coding platform. As for Pantene, the sentiment analysis produced two charts that integrate one another.

By looking at the hierarchy chart (the first one), it is possible to get a glimpse of female users’ attitudes towards the commercial. In particular, it emerges that the ad generated a great quantity of positive reactions (distributed between “very positive” and “moderately positive”) which occupy the largest area of the graph. Negative reactions (distinguished between “very negative” and “moderately negative”) only cover a small region, thus confirming the prevalence of positive feelings. If compared with Pantene’s ad in absolute terms, Barbie reported an even higher favourable response (with 5 per cent of more positive answers) from the audience.

Going more in depth, the second chart details the specific distribution of positive and negative comments, indicating the corresponding amount. More specifically, out of the 300 comments (extracted from an original

basis of 795) coded into the four sentiments codes, 159 were “very positive”, 106 were “moderately positive”, 20 were “very negative” and 15 were “moderately negative”.

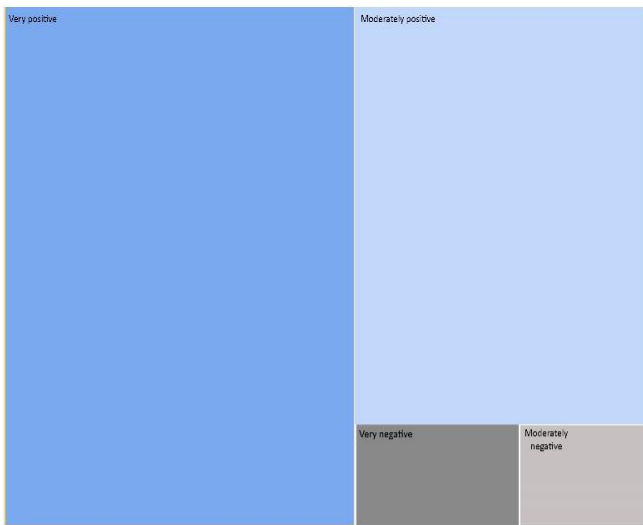


Fig. n.29: Barbie’s hierarchy chart.

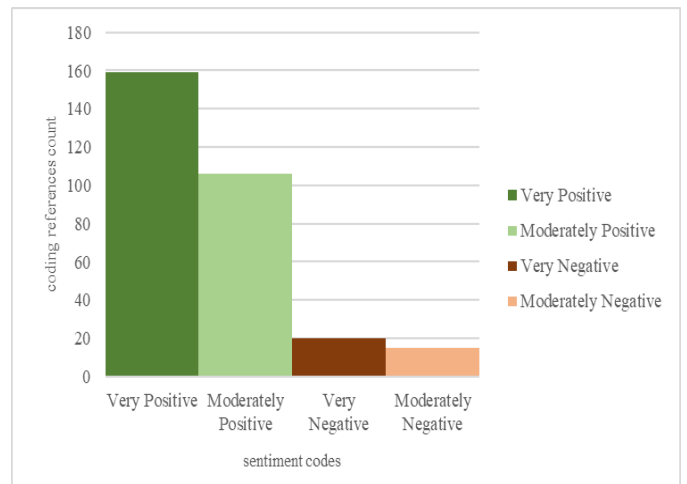


Fig. n.30: Barbie’s sentiment distribution.

Moving on to the word frequency analysis conducted on the positive macro – category, the top 1000 terms with at least three letters in them were identified, producing the word cloud below:



Fig. n.31: Barbie’s word cloud.

The most recurrent words, besides the brand’s name (Barbie) were “cute”, “love”, “nice”, “wow”, indicating positive reactions enjoying and supporting the commercial displaying little girls wearing the shoes of professionals. The terms “awesome”, “pretty”, “adorable”, “true” and “cool” further confirm users’ positive feelings towards the advertisement. Finally, the word “hahaha” is a symbol of the hilarious reaction the video has generated.

The few negative comments that were detected in the data set were mostly from people who disapprove the brand in general. The majority of them defined the video as “cringy” or used the word “cringe” to express their opinion.

“#UseYourAnd” – Gillette Venus.

Gillette Venus’ ad was the third commercial to be coded through NVivo. The sentiment analysis resulted in the two charts shown below.

The hierarchy chart (the first one) generally shows the fact that the positive sentiment has prevailed over the negative one. In fact, the “very positive” and “moderately positive” rectangles occupy the majority of the visual area in the graph.

This finding is confirmed by the second chart which shows as usual the number of comments associated to each sentiment code, making it possible to have a clearer picture of users’ feelings towards the advertisement and its message.

In particular, out of the 300 comments (taken from a first data set of 566) manually coded for Gillette Venus’ commercial, 182 were “very positive”, 78 were “moderately positive”, 29 were “very negative” and 11 were “moderately negative”. In this case, it is interesting to notice the magnitude (visually evident from the chart) of positive reactions: “very positive” references outnumbered “moderately positive” ones by more than two to one, thus suggesting an extremely favourable reaction on the part of female audience.



Fig. n.32: G. Venus’ hierarchy chart.

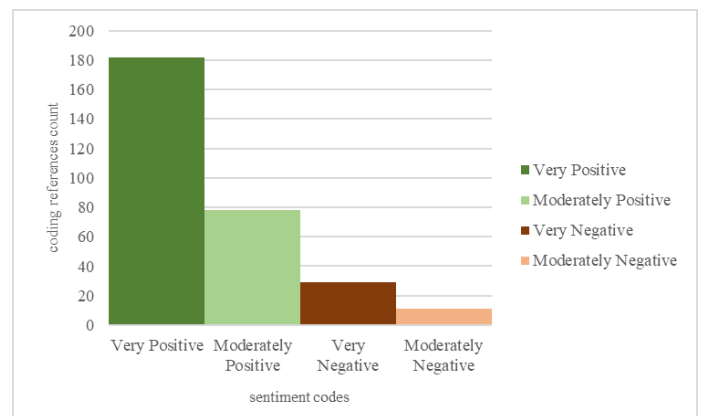


Fig. n.33: G. Venus’ sentiment distribution.

Following, the word frequency analysis (always conducted on the positive macro – sphere) generated the word cloud shown in the picture:



Fig. n.34: G. Venus' word cloud.

Looking at it, it is possible to see that one of the most recurrent words is “labels”, which refers to the main theme of the commercial that is in fact the fight against one – dimensional labels. Also, the campaign hashtag #UseYourAnd was one of the most cited topics in the comments, thus indicating that women appreciated the message and received it by embracing the importance of showing their multi – sided potential. Furthermore, words such as “amazing”, “wow”, “yes”, “true” and “thank” confirm female users’ positive reactions and engagement towards the campaign.

Focusing on the negative sphere, criticism concerned the characters of the advertisement: all young, beautiful, skinny and with perfect shaved legs. This was something considered not to be realistic and inclusive, while Femvertising usually promotes body realism and inclusivity. Others, instead, considered the ad to be “cheesy”, that is cheap and of low quality. Besides these points, negative comments also focused on the product and the fact that women razors are more expensive than men ones.

“My Beauty My Say” – Dove.

Following Gillette Venus’ advertisement, Dove’s commercial was analysed on the NVivo coding platform. For this case study too, the sentiment analysis produced two graphs giving information on female users’ general feeling towards the campaign, its messages and narratives.

The hierarchy chart globally shows a great quantity of positive comments, being the “very positive” and “moderately positive” areas the largest sections of the graph. The negative sentiment, instead, only occupies a small portion of the chart, with the “moderately negative” section representing 1/4 of all of the negative comments.

Providing more detail, the second graph displays the specific number of comments in relation to each sentiment code. Out of the 300 comments (extracted from an original basis of 723) manually coded, 199 were “very positive”, 69 were “moderately positive”, 24 were “very negative” and 8 were “moderately negative”.

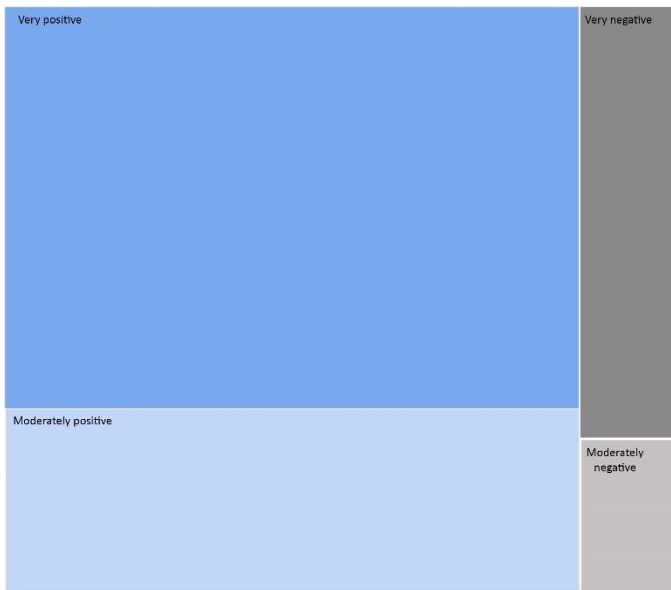


Fig. n.35: Dove’s hierarchy chart.

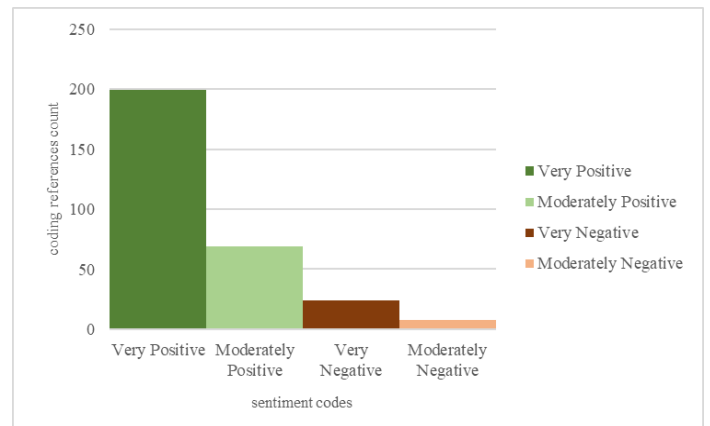


Fig. n.36: Dove’s sentiment distribution.

All these data make it evident that women responded enthusiastically to Dove’s campaign and the message it conveyed.

Shifting to the word frequency analysis on the positive macro - category, NVivo software produced the word cloud reported below:



Fig. n.37: Dove’s word cloud.

Looking at it, it is clear that the campaign hashtag #mybeautymysay was one of the most mentioned topics in the comments. The terms “body” and “positivity” are also in bold orange and placed in the centre, indicating their high frequency in the comments. The word “femvertising” also appears in the upper centre part of the

cloud, suggesting people frequently mentioned it and associated it with Dove when expressing their opinions on the commercial’s Facebook post. Women’s positive reactions towards the message conveyed by the ad are confirmed by the frequent presence of words such as “wow” and “inspiring” in the text of their comments. Finally, terms such as “confident” and “brave” give an idea of some of the attributes of the new myth of femininity narrated by Femvertising.

As far as it concerns the negative comments, in this case they were not really connected to the campaign itself. In fact, they mainly addressed the issue of Dove’s animal testing.

“Dream Crazier” – Nike.

The fifth commercial to be analysed through the coding process was Nike’s “Dream Crazier” ad. The procedure followed the exact same steps taken for the previous videos.

The sentiment analysis was the first thing to be carried out. It resulted in the two charts shown in the figures below.

From a visual point of view, the hierarchy chart shows the prevalence of a positive sentiment, being the graphic area most occupied by the sections representing “very positive” and “moderately positive” reactions. Negative sentiment, on the other hand, only occupies a tiny fraction, confirming the idea that most women appreciated Nike’s commercial and its message.

The second chart completes the information provided by the first one, highlighting the number of comments included in the dataset associated to each coding category. Out of the 300 comments (taken from a first basis of 931) selected for the manual coding, 205 were “very positive”, 79 were “moderately positive”, 12 were “very negative” and 4 were “moderately negative”.



Fig. n.38: Nike’s hierarchy chart.

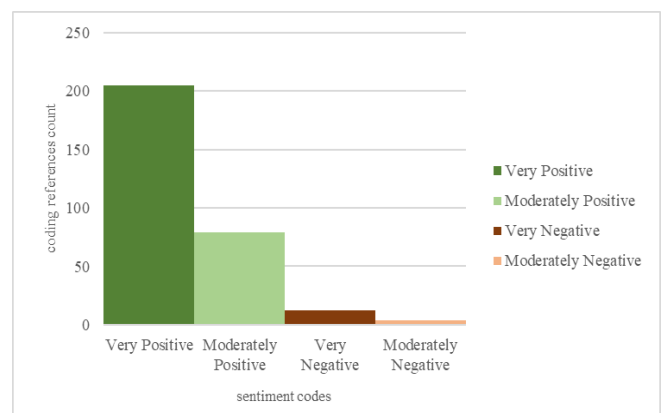


Fig. n.39: Nike’s sentiment distribution.

Moving to the word frequency analysis of the positive macro - category, the following word cloud was

have a look at the second graph, which specifies the number of comments associated with each code. In particular, out of the 300 comments (taken from an original data set of 451) manually coded, 177 were “very positive”, 71 were “moderately positive”, 40 were “very negative” and 12 were “moderately negative”.

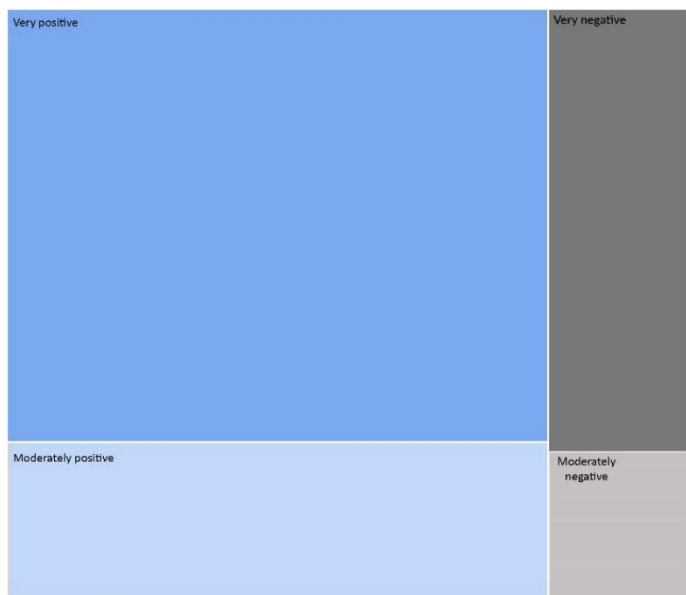


Fig. n.41: Bumble’s hierarchy chart.

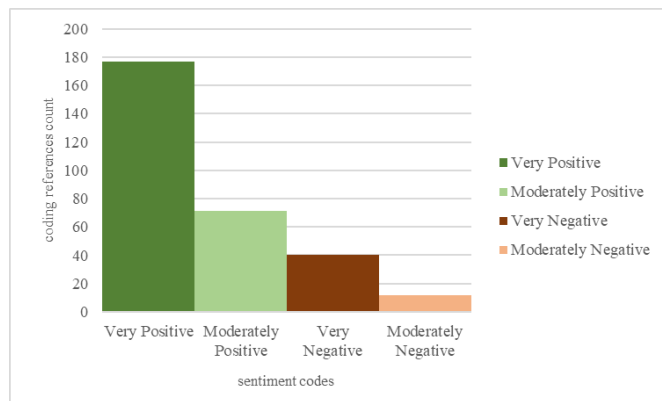


Fig. n.42: Bumble’s sentiment distribution.

Moving to the word frequency analysis of the positive macro - category, the following word cloud was produced:



Fig. n.43: Bumble’s word cloud.

By looking at it, it emerges that the concept of empowerment dominated the comments. Two other words that frequently occurred were “strong” and “women”. Put together, these two terms give an idea of the new myths of femininity narrated by Femvertising. People’s positive reactions towards the commercial are exemplified by the high frequency of adjectives such as “amazing”, “incredible”, “great”, “true” and “nice”. Additionally, it is possible to see the words “make”, “first” and “move” scattered in the centre of cloud: together, they form

Bumble's slogan ("make the first move"). Finally, the name "Serena" was frequently cited in the comments, thus indicating women's approval for the endorser chosen and their admiration for her.

As far as it concerns the negative comments, the majority of them only criticised the app for the bad experiences had. Only a few did not appreciate the commercial, defining it as a pure marketing strategy.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION - RESEARCH DISCUSSION, RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS.

4.1 Conclusive debate: results discussion.

The present research was able to document the evolution and empowerment of women through advertising, thus confirming the relevance brand discourses have in shaping and reflecting the society.

The two studies conducted and reported in the third chapter provided all the data and the elements needed to respond to the two research questions this thesis proposed.

In particular, the semiotic analysis of the six commercials was necessary to provide an answer to the first research question, which focused on the definition of the new myths of femininity conveyed and narrated by Femvertising.

By studying each commercial of the data set considering the surface, narrative and axiological levels, it was possible to collect relevant information about Femvertising narratives. Then, combining all the relevant material together, a clear picture of the current myth of femininity finally emerged.

Getting straight to the point, Femvertising narrates the myth of the empowered woman, portrayed as ambitious, resourceful, self – motivated, fiercely independent, proactive, success- oriented and unstoppable. This narrative is completely different from the passive and dependent female mythology that characterised the 50s, the decade taken as a starting point in this thesis to show women’s progressive evolution and empowerment through the advertising lens.

The empowered woman is confident. Her confidence extends to all facets of her life, starting with her physical appearance (through the definition of her personal beauty standards and the acceptance and enhancement of body “imperfections”) and ending with her professional abilities. This confidence is something rooted in her since her childhood. She knows no limits in the achievement of her dreams. She is courageous, dare and fearless.

Another interesting trait of the contemporary female character is the idea she has a lot of potential and is many – sided. In this sense, the empowered woman is multidimensional. She is aware of being more than the perceived image and emphasises all of her sides and talents. The idea this specific adjective conveys is that in the modern female narrative, the woman has many different roles and attributes that coexist in her.

Last but not least, the empowered woman is strong. Her strength is physical (when her athletic prowess is highlighted, finally overcoming the outdated cliché of athletic force and power being natural male attributes) and psychological (when her perseverance and determination are emphasised).

Taking into consideration what has been said so far, Femvertising has rewritten the rules of femininity by proposing the myth of the newly empowered woman, which symbolises the culmination of an evolution process started between the late 50s and early 60s. As already mentioned in several points of this thesis, the changing representation of women in advertising has been the result of several social and cultural tensions that have produced relevant shifts in gender roles as well as in domestic and occupational structures. In this sense, the empowered woman perfectly fits the contemporary culture which is characterised by female's affirmation and their fight against antiquated stereotypes and clichés. In this context, brands behave as activists supporting and participating to the women's cause putting the new female myth at the centre of their communication while at the same time promoting their products as a sign of feminine power.

Hence, combining the results of Study 1 with the literature review on women's representation in media, it is possible to affirm that companies have progressively adapted the advertising discourses starting from the “happy housewife” and “good mother” mythologies, passing through the “free – spirited woman” narrative and the “woman as sexual object” stereotype, then switching to the “superwoman” ideology and finally reaching the “empowered woman” rhetoric.

As far as it concerns the second research question, which dealt with women's reactions and identification with the new myths of femininity narrated by Femvertising, the coding analysis conducted in Study 2 revealed interesting information.

First of all, it must be noticed that for all of the six commercials of the data set, the sentiment code labelled “very positive” was the one with the highest number of coding references (please see the graphs reported in the previous chapter). This means that women extremely appreciated the advertisements, their messages and the new feminine myth they proposed. Furthermore, for each commercial, the second code with the greatest number of references was the one designated as “moderately positive”, thus confirming the widespread approval and enjoyment of Femvertisements and its narratives among women.

The positive reaction towards the myth of the empowered woman was further highlighted by the word frequency analysis, which generally showed the recurrence of words of appreciation in the comments left under the commercials posted on Facebook. Additionally, in many cases women also emphasised the self – identification with the stories and the characters presented in the ads.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions.

This research contributes to the existing literature providing a semiotic perspective on the evolution of women in advertising, with a specific focus on the recent trend of Femvertising considering the concepts of “myth”, “brand activism” and “cultural branding”.

In particular, this thesis has analysed Femvertising from a communication point of view, taking into consideration both businesses and consumers’ perspectives.

In fact, Study 1 concretely highlighted the myth of the newly empowered woman, as it emerged from the analysis of what has been recently produced by brands and marketing experts. In this sense, companies’ efforts in terms of brand activism for the feminine cause were reviewed and considered to provide a clear vision of the advertising narratives actually used to reach the female audience and promote products.

Study 2 completed the research by providing relevant insights on consumers’ reactions and opinions on the advertising myth conveyed by brands in their female empowerment campaigns.

In conclusion, the two studies together contributed to the stream of literature concerning Femvertising, by filling the semiotic gap that characterised the area of research of this new advertising trend.

4.3 Managerial Implications and Recommendations.

Given the results previously resumed, it is possible to show the contributes this work could give to both marketers and companies as well.

First of all, the myth of the newly empowered woman works particularly well from the perspective of communication, as seen by women's overwhelmingly positive responses to femVERTISEMENTS. Brands should therefore continue to elaborate it, striving to capture all the new emergent tensions, and being prepared to modify and adapt it as necessary. In this way, they will always support and meet their female consumers’ needs and new identity desires, thus establishing a strong emotional bond with them. Of course, this will benefit brands in terms of sales as well.

Going on with the implications, women’s positive and enthusiastic reactions towards the Femvertising narratives and values, highlight the importance brand activism has in the modern society. Consumers expect brands to support their causes. Considering women’s Facebook comments under the commercials analysed, it is evident that female consumers value well brands that show commitment to their issues and challenges, by expressing appreciation, approval, interest and gratitude, sometimes also making the video going viral through

the creation of specific hashtags. As a consequence, brands' commitment to the feminine cause has demonstrated to have the effect of generating positive attitudes on the female audience that rewards the companies' efforts with positive e – WOM (advocacy). In this sense, brands' commitment is essential from a managerial point of view. However, commitment has to be real, concrete and transparent. If it is not perceived as meaningful, negative reactions will spread. Thus, brands taking a stance when releasing femvertisements should be truly committed and clear about the actions they are really conducting to ensure consumers that their speech matches their actions. In this purpose, emblematic is the case of Nike presented and analysed in this thesis. In fact, even though the commercial ("Dream Crazy") aroused many positive reactions and women appreciated its message, the few negative comments highlighted the brand's inconsistency of promoting female empowerment while continuing to exploit women's labour in poor countries. In the long term, this could create problems in terms of credibility and trust.

Another thing brands should take into consideration is that when using the empowered woman narrative, the emotional appeal seems the one to generate the highest level of positive reactions among the female audience. Emotional tactics, in fact, evoke affective states that are influential to consumers and increase the level of interest and engagement (Bulbul & Menon, 2010). In this specific case, "Dream Crazy" was built on the emotional appeal and was the one with the highest number of positive responses. As a consequence, it is possible to deduce that the empowered woman mythology combined with emotional appeals in the commercials generate even more favourable responses compared to other kinds of advertising appeals.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight that the efficacy of the empowered woman myth is strictly linked to the fact that women identify with it. This process of self – identification is even stronger when the advertisement features famous personalities who act as endorsers and motivators and perfectly embody the new feminine narrative. In this thesis, Bumble and Nike's choice of featuring Serena Williams was highly appreciated by the female audience, since her story and her character are an exemplification of the empowered woman and serve as a source of inspiration. Thus, brands should carefully consider the celebrities they choose to feature in their empowering ads, trying to make the best decision choosing a personality that represents the new feminine ideology and that arouses approval and admiration while serving as a stimulus of motivation and encouragement for female consumers.

4.4 Limitations and directions for future research.

While the research objectives have all been fulfilled (since the two studies have provided answers to the questions proposed), the research does present certain limitations.

First of all, this study outlines precise findings that have explorative and qualitative characteristics. For this reason, further research is needed in order to achieve a higher level of precision making these results quantitatively significant. Therefore, additional research would expand and complete these first findings.

Secondly, all of the commercials included in the data set come from the U.S market, a context where the feminist cause has always had a great relevance and magnitude. In a certain sense, the findings might be extended to the Western societies which all share similar cultural values (even if the myth of the empowered woman reaches its peak in the American market), but they are not applicable to the Eastern world, where culture and society are based on completely different principles and gender relations, making brands using different semiotic tools and narratives to reach consumers. Given this limitation, further research could explore narrative choices and customers' reactions in Eastern cultures operating a comparison with Western ones highlighting similarities and differences.

Finally, although this research focuses on current issues related to the representations of women in advertising, it is important to recognise that men are also negatively affected by stereotypes (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). In this sense, to contribute to academic research and offer managerial insights, studies on men's expectations in terms of authentic male representations should be conducted in the future. In particular, it would be interesting to see how men portrayals have evolved through advertising over time, focusing on the shift from hegemonic and toxic masculinity towards a more positive male mythology. In this purpose, the controversial campaign "We believe: the best men can be" (2019) by Gillette could represent an interesting starting point. By doing this, it would be possible also to make a comparison between the different narratives brand use to promote their products and reach the female and male audience respectively.

REFERENCES.

- Abdallah, L. K., Jacobson, C., Liasse, D., & Lund, E. (2019). Femvertising and its effects on brand image. *Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers, 4*. Lund School of Economics and Management Press, Sweden.
- Abitbol, A., & Sternadori, M. (2016). You act like a girl: An examination of consumer perceptions of femvertising. *Quarterly Review of Business Disciplines, 3*(2), 117-138. International Academy of Business Disciplines. University of North Florida.
- Åkestam, N., Rosengren, S., & Dahlen, M. (2017). Advertising “like a girl”: Toward a better understanding of “femvertising” and its effects. *Psychology & Marketing, 34*(8), 795-806. Wiley. Stockholm School of Economics.
- Ashmore, R. D., & Del Boca, F. K. (1981). Conceptual approaches to stereotypes and stereotyping. *Cognitive processes in stereotyping and intergroup behavior, 1*, 35. Taylor & Francis. Livingston College, Rutgers – The State University.
- Bahadur, N. (2014). Femvertising ads are empowering women—and making money for brands. *Huffington Post, 3*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/21/dove-real-beauty-campaign-turns-10_n_4575940.html.
- Becker-Herby, E. (2016). The rise of femvertising: authentically reaching female consumers. University of Minnesota Twin Cities.
- Belkaoui, A., & Belkaoui, J. M. (1976). A comparative analysis of the roles portrayed by women in print advertisements: 1958, 1970, 1972. *Journal of Marketing Research, 13*(2), 168-172. Sage Journals.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Hammondsport, U.K.: Penguin.
- Bianchi, C. (2011). *Semiotic approaches to advertising texts and strategies: Narrative, passion, marketing*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin/New York
- Campbell, N. (2014). The signs and semiotics of advertising. In *The Routledge companion to visual organization* (pp. 150-165). Routledge. Oxfordshire, England, UK.
- Ciambriello, R. (2014). How ads that empower women are boosting sales and bettering the industry. *Adweek*.
- Courtney, A. E., & Lockeretz, S. W. (1971). A woman's place: An analysis of the roles portrayed by women in magazine advertisements. *Journal of marketing research, 8*(1), 92-95. Sage Journals.
- Courtney, A. E., & Whipple, T. W. (1983). *Sex stereotyping in advertising*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books.

- Crouse-Dick, C. E. (2002). She designed: Deciphering messages targeting women in commercials aired during Ally McBeal. *Women and Language*, 25(1), 18. George Mason University Press.
- Dahlen, M., & Rosengren, S. (2016). If advertising won't die, what will it be? Toward a working definition of advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 45(3), 334-345. Routledge.
- Deaux, K., & Lewis, L. L. (1984). Structure of gender stereotypes: Interrelationships among components and gender label. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, 46(5), 991. American Psychological Association.
- Diekmann, A. B., & Eagly, A. H. (2000). Stereotypes as dynamic constructs: Women and men of the past, present, and future. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 26(10), 1171-1188. Sage Publications.
- Dimitrieska, S., & Efremova, T. (2020). Women In Advertising. *Economics and Management*, 17(1), 164-170. SouthWest University "NeofitRilski".
- Drake, V. E. (2017). The impact of female empowerment in advertising (femvertising). *Journal of Research in Marketing*, 7(3), 593-599. Elsevier. New York University.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). Reporting sex differences. *American Psychologist*, 42(7), 756-757. United States.
- Eagly, A. H., & Steffen, V. J. (1986). Gender stereotypes, occupational roles, and beliefs about part-time employees. *Psychology of women quarterly*, 10(3), 252-262. Sage Publications.
- Eisend, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of gender roles in advertising. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(4), 418-440. European University Viadrina, 15230 Frankfurt (Oder), Germany.
- European Parliament. (2008). Report on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men. Retrieved from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A6-2008-0199+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.
- Evans, A., Riley, S., & Shankar, A. (2010). Technologies of sexiness: Theorizing women's engagement in the sexualization of culture. *Feminism & psychology*, 20(1), 114-131. Sage Publications.
- Fabbri, P., & Marrone, G. (2000). Semiotica in nuce. Volume primo. I fondamenti e l'epistemologia strutturale. Booklet Milano.
- Ford, J. B., LaTour, M. S., & Lundstrom, W. J. (1991). Contemporary women's evaluation of female role portrayals in advertising. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*. Emerald Publishing.
- Furnham, A., & Lay, A. (2019). The universality of the portrayal of gender in television advertisements: A review of the studies this century. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 8(2), 109. American Psychological Association. Washington D.C.

- Furnham, A., & Mak, T. (1999). Sex-role stereotyping in television commercials: A review and comparison of fourteen studies done on five continents over 25 years. *Sex roles, 41*(5), 413-437. Springer (Plenum Publishing Corporations). University college of London.
- Ganahl, D. J., Prinsen, T. J., & Netzley, S. B. (2003). A content analysis of prime time commercials: A contextual framework of gender representation. *Sex roles, 49*(9), 545-551. Springer (Plenum Publishing Corporations). New York.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., Signorielli, N., & Shanahan, J. (2002). Growing up with television: Cultivation processes. In *Media effects* (pp. 53-78). Routledge. London, UK.
- Gill, R. (2008). Culture and subjectivity in neoliberal and postfeminist times. *Subjectivity, 25*(1), 432-445. Palgrave Macmillan. Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, UK.
- Gill, R., & Gill, R. M. (2007). *Gender and the Media*. Polity Press. Cambridge.
- Goldman, R., Heath, D., & Smith, S. L. (1991). Commodity feminism. *Critical studies in media communication, 8*(3), 333-351. Taylor & Francis Group. Oxfordshire, United Kingdom.
- Gonick, M. (2006). Between "girl power" and "reviving Ophelia": Constituting the neoliberal girl subject. *NWSA journal, 1*-23. Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimora.
- Greimas, A. J. (1966). Éléments pour une théorie de l'interprétation du récit mythique. *Communications, 8*(1), 28-59. Persée.
- Gunter, B. (1995). *Television and gender representation*. John Libbey and Co. Ltd.
- Hainneville, V., Guèvremont, A., & Robinot, É. (2022). Femvertising or femwashing? Women's perceptions of authenticity. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Holbrook, M. B. (1987). Mirror, mirror, on the wall, what's unfair in the reflections on advertising? *Journal of marketing, 51*(3), 95-103. Sage Publications.
- Holt, D. B. (2004). *How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding*. Harvard business press.
- Hsu, C. K. J. (2018). Femvertising: State of the art. *Journal of Brand Strategy, 7*(1), 28-47. Henry Stewart Publications.
- Hunt, A. R. (2017). *Selling Empowerment: A critical analysis of Femvertising* (Doctoral dissertation, Boston College. College of Arts and Sciences).
- Johnston, J., & Taylor, J. (2008). Feminist consumerism and fat activists: A comparative study of grassroots activism and the Dove real beauty campaign. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society, 33*(4), 941-966. University of Chicago press.

- Kapoor, D., & Munjal, A. (2019). Self-consciousness and emotions driving femvertising: A path analysis of women's attitude towards femvertising, forwarding intention and purchase intention. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 25(2), 137-157. Routledge.
- Kates, S. M., & Shaw-Garlock, G. (1999). The ever entangling web: A study of ideologies and discourses in advertising to women. *Journal of Advertising*, 28(2), 33-49. Routledge Taylor & Francis on behalf of the American Academy of Advertising
- Kilbourne, J. 1999. *Deadly persuasion: Why women and girls must fight the addictive power of advertising*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Kotler, P. (2017). Customer value management. *Journal of creating value*, 3(2), 170-172. Sage Journals.
- Kotler, P., & Sarkar, C. (2017). Finally, brand activism. *The Marketing Journal*, 9, 2017. American Marketing Association.
- Lysonski, S. (1983). Female and Male Portrayals in Magazine Advertisements-A Re-examination. *Akron Business and Economic Review*, 14(2), 45-50. Akron, Ohio.
- Macdonald, M. (2004). From Mrs Happyman to kissing chaps goodbye: Advertising reconstructs femininity. *Critical readings: Media and gender*, 41-67. Open University Press.
- Mager, J., & Helgeson, J. G. (2011). Fifty years of advertising images: Some changing perspectives on role portrayals along with enduring consistencies. *Sex roles*, 64(3), 238-252. Springer (Plenum Publishing Corporations).
- MARRONE, G., & Mangano, D. (2015). Brand language. Methods and models of semiotic analysis. In *Handbook of brand semiotics* (pp. 46-88). Kassel University Press.
- McCleary, C. M. (2014). *A not-so-beautiful campaign: A feminist analysis of the Dove campaign for real beauty*. University of Tennessee Press.
- McQuarrie, E. F., & Mick, D. G. (1996). Figures of rhetoric in advertising language. *Journal of consumer research*, 22(4), 424-438. Oxford University Press.
- McQuarrie, E. F., & Phillips, B. J. (2005). Indirect persuasion in advertising: How consumers process metaphors presented in pictures and words. *Journal of advertising*, 34(2), 7-20. Routledge.
- Mick, D. G., Burroughs, J. E., Hetzel, P., & Brannen, M. Y. (2004). Pursuing the meaning of meaning in the commercial world: An international review of marketing and consumer research founded on semiotics. *Semiotica*, 2004(152-1-4), 1-74. De Gruyter.

- Oswald, L. R., & Oswald, L. (2012). *Marketing semiotics: Signs, strategies, and brand value*. Oxford University Press.
- Oswald, L. R., & Oswald, L. (2015). *Creating Value: the theory and practice of marketing semiotics research*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Paglia, C. (2008). Feminism past and present: Ideology, action, and reform. *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 16(1), 1-18. Boston University Press.
- Pérez, M. P. R., & Gutiérrez, M. (2017). Femvertising: female empowering strategies in recent spanish commercials. *Investigaciones feministas*, 8(2), 337-351. Universidad complutense de Madrid.
- Peverini, P. (2012). *I media: strumenti di analisi semiotica* (No. 445, pp. 1-128). Carocci.
- Plakoyiannaki, E., & Zotos, Y. (2009). Female role stereotypes in print advertising: Identifying associations with magazine and product categories. *European Journal of Marketing*. Emerald Publishing.
- Pollay, R. W. (1986). The distorted mirror: Reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising. *Journal of marketing*, 50(2), 18-36. Sage Journals.
- Pollay, R. W. (1987). On the value of reflections on the values in "The Distorted Mirror". *Journal of Marketing*, 51(3), 104-110. Sage Journals.
- Pollay, R. W., & Gallagher, K. (1990). Advertising and cultural values: Reflections in the distorted mirror. *International Journal of Advertising*, 9(4), 359-372. Routledge.
- Pumphrey, M. (1987). The flapper, the housewife and the making of modernity. *Cultural Studies*, 1(2), 179-194. Routledge.
- Rabinovitch-Fox, E. (2016). Baby, you can drive my car: Advertising women's freedom in 1920s America. *American Journalism*, 33(4), 372-400. Routledge.
- Reichert, T., & Carpenter, C. (2004). An update on sex in magazine advertising: 1983 to 2003. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(4), 823-837. Sage Journals.
- Roberts, T. A., & Fredrickson, B. L. (1997). OBJECTIFICATION THEORY. *Psychology of women quarterly*, 21, 173-206. Sage Publications.
- Ruiz Collantes, X., & Oliva Rota, M. (2015). Narrativity approaches to branding. *Handbook of Brand Semiotics. Kassel: Kassel University Press; 2015, p. 89-150*.
- Sarkar, C. (2015). What Is a Conscious Business? An Interview with Raj Sisodia. *Huffington Post*.

- Saussure, Ferdinand de ([1916] 1974): *Course in General Linguistics* (trans. Wade Baskin). London: *Fontana/Collins*.
- Schneider, K. C., & Schneider, S. B. (1979). Trends in sex roles in television commercials. *Journal of marketing*, 43(3), 79-84. Sage Journals.
- Schroeder, J. E., & Zwick, D. (2004). Mirrors of masculinity: Representation and identity in advertising images. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 7(1), 21-52. Taylor & Francis (Routledge).
- Semprini, A. (2003). Lo sguardo sociosemiotico: Comunicazione, marche, media, pubblicità. Milano: *Franco Angeli, Milano, 20035*, 282.
- Semprini, A., & Franceschetti, M. (1992). *Semiotica, marketing e comunicazione. Dietro i segni le strategie*. Franco Angeli.
- Sharma, S., & Bumb, A. (2022). Femluencing: Integration of Femvertising and Influencer Marketing on Social Media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 22(1), 95-111. Routledge.
- Sisodia, R., Gardner, G., & George, B. (2014). *Conscious capitalism*. Highbridge Audio.
- Sullivan, G. L., & O'Connor, P. J. (1988). Women's role portrayals in magazine advertising: 1958–1983. *Sex roles*, 18(3), 181-188. Springer (Plenum Publishing Corporations).
- Thelwall, M. (2016). Sentiment analysis for small and big data. *The SAGE handbook of online research methods*, 344-355.
- Trout, J., & Ries, A. (1986). *Positioning: The battle for your mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Uray, N., & Burnaz, S. (2003). An analysis of the portrayal of gender roles in Turkish television advertisements. *Sex roles*, 48(1), 77-87. Springer (Plenum Publishing Corporations).
- Vadakkappatt, G., Bryant, A., Hill, R. P., & Nunziato, J. (2022). Can advertising benefit women's development? Preliminary insights from a multi-method investigation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 50(3), 503-520. Springer Science + Business Media.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). Towards a semiotics of typography. *Information design journal*, 14(2), 139-155. John Benjamins Publishing Company
- Varghese, N., & Kumar, N. (2022). Feminism in advertising: irony or revolution? A critical review of femvertising. *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(2), 441-459. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Vinacke, W. E. (1957). Stereotypes as social concepts. *The journal of social Psychology*, 46(2), 229-243. Routledge.

- Wallace, K. (2015). Femvertising: Ads targeting women do plenty for brands. *CNN*. Retrieved June, 9, 2016.
- Wasson, Hilda. "The Ms. in Magazine Advertising,". Proceedings, 1973 Conference of the Southern Marketing Association. Edited by: King, Robert. pp.240–243.
- Whelehan, I. (1995). *Modern feminist thought: From the second wave to post-feminism*. NYu press.
- Zotos, Y. C., & Lysonski, S. (1994). Gender Representations: The Case of Greek Magazine Advertisements. *Journal of Euromarketing*, 3(2), 27-47. Taylor & Francis.
- Zotos, Y. C., & Tsihla, E. (2014). Female stereotypes in print advertising: A retrospective analysis. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences*, 148, 446-454. Elsevier.