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The Representation of Motherhood in *Femvertising*: A Balance of Authenticity and Aspiration

Prof. Paolo Peverini
SUPERVISOR

Prof. Luigi Monsurrò
CO-SUPERVISOR

Beatrice Nanfitò ID:775071
CANDIDATE

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A tutto ciò che profuma di casa: le carezze di mia mamma,
i baci sulla fronte di mio papà, lo sguardo complice di
mio fratello, la risata inconfondibile di tutti e tre.

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Introduction

In recent decades, the advertising landscape has undergone profound transformations, not only in terms of communication techniques and target audiences, but above all in the representation of social subjects; in particular, the female figure has been at the center of a progressive process of symbolic redefinition, suspended between consolidated stereotypes and more or less successful attempts to reflect the plurality and complexity of gender identity. It is within this context that the phenomenon of *femvertising* emerges: a term coined to describe those advertising strategies aimed at promoting female empowerment through inclusive, authentic, and value-driven narratives.

While *femvertising* has opened new possibilities for constructing an emancipated feminine imaginary, it has also raised important questions about the consistency between corporate rhetoric and practice, the actual ability of campaigns to represent female subjectivities in their diversity, and the thin line between brand activism and the commercial appropriation of social causes. These tensions become even more evident when *femvertising* intersects with a theme as symbolically charged as motherhood, in fact, the figure of the mother occupies an ambivalent position within both collective imagery and advertising discourse: on the one hand, she is idealized, celebrated, and portrayed as a symbol of dedication and unconditional love; on the other, she is still often trapped in stereotypical roles that serve patriarchal cultural models or consumption logics. Where *femvertising* aims to challenge traditional portrayals and propose more authentic models, motherhood represents a further challenge: how can mothers be represented truthfully, without sacrificing aspiration? How can empowerment be reconciled with vulnerability, authenticity with desirability?

This thesis seeks to answer these questions by exploring how the principles of *femvertising* can be effectively applied to maternity-focused advertising campaigns, aiming to find a balance between realistic representation and value-driven messaging. To this end, the work is divided into two main parts: a theoretical section that reconstructs the evolution of brand activism, female representation, and *femvertising*, with a specific focus on motherhood; and an applied section that combines the semiotic analysis of four advertising campaigns with a qualitative investigation based on in-depth interviews with mothers of various ages and life experiences. The objective is twofold: on one hand, to understand the communicative strategies currently in use; on the other, to give voice to maternal subjectivities by analyzing how they relate to the representations of motherhood conveyed by contemporary marketing.

Chapter 1: Brand Activism, Women in Advertising, and *Femvertising*

1.1 Brand Activism

In today's post-truth society, defined by Oxford Dictionary as an era in which "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief", brands are increasingly expected to engage with social and political issues (Peverini, 2024). This shift is driven by several factors, including the democratization of knowledge through the internet, the expansion of social media and fake news, the weakening trust in traditional institutions, including political entities and corporate brands, and a growing sense of pessimism about the future due to a variety of social and environmental concerns confronting humanity (Kotler & Sarkar, 2018). As societal concerns about climate change, social justice, and inclusivity grow, consumers demand that brands take an active stance, leading to the rise of brand activism as a corporate strategy.

Brand activism is defined as *"the business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform with the desire to improve society"* (Kotler & Sarkar, 2018): it emerges as a purpose-driven approach for companies that prioritize the future of society and the planet's well-being.

Unlike Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which traditionally focuses on mostly philanthropic efforts, brand activism is often tied to contentious social and political debates, making it a more proactive and emotionally engaging approach (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Companies that embrace activism as part of their core values aim to create a sense of justice and fairness, aligning their mission with progressive social change.

The evolution of brand activism also reflects broader societal transformations; according to Cammarota et al. (2023), the increasing awareness of corporate influence on social matters has led to a shift in consumer expectations: brands are no longer evaluated solely on their products and services but also on their ethical conduct and stance on pressing societal issues and this development underscores the necessity for businesses to engage in genuine, value-driven activism to maintain credibility and consumer trust. Furthermore, Kotler and Sarkar (2020) argue that brand activism is not just a reactive strategy but a fundamental shift in how corporations align themselves with global challenges, positioning themselves as key players in fostering systemic change.

Figure 1: Brand Activism (Sarkar and Kotler, 2020)

Although CSR has long been a key component of corporate ethics, it is often perceived as a passive approach aimed at minimizing reputational risks rather than actively addressing societal challenges (Ahmad et al., 2022), as it primarily revolves around issues that are widely accepted and non-controversial; on the other hand, brand activism delves into debates surrounding racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, environmental advocacy, and gender equality.

Kotler and Sarkar (2018) distinguish between two types of brand activism: *progressive* activism, which promotes social change and inclusivity, and *regressive* activism, which resists change and upholds traditional structures. While some brands position themselves as progressive leaders, others may take stances that align with conservative values, demonstrating that brand activism is not inherently synonymous with progressive ideologies.

Figure 2: Brand Activism (Sarkar and Kotler, 2020)

Moreover, Kotler and Sarkar (2018) identify two opposing reactions to brand activism: brand-*shaming* and brand-*evangelizing*: these concepts reflect how consumers respond to corporate activism based on its perceived authenticity, alignment with values, and long-term commitment.

Brand shaming occurs when consumers react negatively to a brand's stance on a social or political issue, this often happens when a brand engages in regressive brand activism, where it resists social progress or aligns itself with outdated and harmful values; such brands may promote controversial or ethically questionable products and messages, leading to public backlash. One of the most well-documented examples of regressive brand activism is cigarette advertising in the mid-20th century: Tobacco companies heavily marketed cigarettes as glamorous and even health-enhancing, despite growing scientific evidence of their harmful effects. Over time, as public awareness increased and regulatory pressures mounted, these companies faced severe backlash, brand shaming, and legal restrictions that fundamentally altered the industry's public perception.

Figure 3: Regressive Brand Activism Examples (retrieved from Google Images)

Conversely, *brand evangelizing* occurs when consumers passionately support and promote a brand's activism due to its perceived authenticity; brands that engage in progressive brand activism take strong stances on social or environmental issues, often challenging the status quo and advocating for systemic change. A prime example of progressive brand activism is Patagonia's *"Don't Buy This Jacket"* campaign: in this advertisement, Patagonia encouraged consumers to reconsider unnecessary consumption, promoting sustainability even at the potential cost of its own sales. This bold, counterintuitive stance reinforced the company's long-standing commitment to environmental advocacy, earning it consumer trust and loyalty; Patagonia's activism extends beyond marketing, as the brand actively invests in conservation efforts and supports climate change initiatives, further solidifying its credibility.

Figure 4: Patagonia Adv, 2011 (retrieved from Google Images)

The divide between *brand shaming* and *brand evangelizing* underscores the importance of credibility in brand activism: consumers today scrutinize corporate motives more than ever, rewarding brands that demonstrate long-term commitment while punishing those that appear opportunistic.

It is possible for some brands to be considered progressive for a certain theme, but at the same time regressive for another: these two polarizations are not mutually exclusive. A clear example of this complexity is LEGO, which has demonstrated both progressive and regressive brand activism through different initiatives: on one hand, LEGO took a significant step toward gender inclusivity by announcing its commitment in removing traditional role socialization and gender bias from its toys following findings from a global child survey, and this initiative was widely praised as a progressive move, reinforcing LEGO's dedication to fostering diversity and breaking down gender stereotypes in children's play; however, at the same time, LEGO faced criticism from Greenpeace in the *"LEGO: Everything is NOT Awesome"* campaign (2024), which highlighted the brand's partnership with Shell. Greenpeace accused LEGO of indirectly supporting environmental degradation through its collaboration with the fossil fuel giant; public pressure ultimately led LEGO to sever ties with Shell, showcasing how a brand can be progressive in one domain while being regressive in another. This case illustrates the challenges of maintaining a consistent activist stance across different corporate decisions and the impact of consumer and activist group scrutiny in shaping brand behavior.

A crucial aspect of this transition is the growing influence of stakeholder capitalism, which marks a shift from the traditional focus on maximizing shareholder value to a broader responsibility toward various stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and the environment (Cammarota et al., 2023); this approach redefines the role of businesses, positioning them as active participants in societal debates and decision-making processes, rather than entities solely driven by financial gain. Under stakeholder capitalism, companies are expected to engage in corporate activism that has tangible consequences for the communities they operate in; this means that businesses must go beyond symbolic gestures and integrate social and environmental responsibilities into their core strategies. Kotler and Sarkar (2020) emphasize that this shift requires companies to move away from treating social responsibility as a peripheral concern and instead embed it into their long-term vision and operational framework; this includes adopting sustainable business practices, promoting ethical labor policies, and actively engaging in advocacy for societal issues.

For example, companies like Patagonia and Ben & Jerry's have successfully embraced stakeholder capitalism by aligning their business models with their activist messaging: Patagonia, through its long-standing commitment to environmental sustainability, invests in conservation efforts, promotes responsible consumerism, and even takes legal action against policies harmful to the planet; similarly, Ben & Jerry's integrates social justice initiatives into its brand identity, supporting causes such as racial equality, climate action, and LGBTQ+ rights, making activism an essential part of its business strategy rather than an occasional marketing tool.

Conversely, brands that fail to incorporate activism into their core operations, and instead use it as a superficial promotional tactic, risk being perceived as deceitful; this is particularly evident in cases of *woke-washing*, that is, companies promote social justice causes in their business practice but fail to implement real changes internally. Woke-washing, a term coined by Vredenburg et al. (2020), refers to the practice of brands exploiting social or political issues for commercial purposes without demonstrating a genuine commitment to the cause; it often manifests through symbolic messaging in advertising campaigns that lack substantive action, making brands vulnerable to consumer skepticism and backlash.

One well-known example of woke washing is Pepsi's 2017 advertisement featuring Kendall Jenner, which attempted to align with the Black Lives Matter movement but was widely criticized for trivializing protests against police brutality; instead of addressing systemic racial issues, the ad framed activism as a marketing aesthetic, leading to significant backlash and forcing the company to pull the advertisement. Another instance is Burger King's 2019 mental health awareness campaign, which aimed to challenge the positivity-driven messaging of its competitor McDonald's "Happy Meals" by introducing "Real Meals"; however, the initiative was criticized because the company failed to provide adequate mental health support for its employees, exposing a gap between its advocacy efforts and actual corporate policies.

Thus, stakeholder capitalism presents a new paradigm where companies must balance profitability with broader societal contributions: by embedding activism into their operational DNA, brands not only strengthen their reputation but also cultivate trust and loyalty among ethically conscious consumers; however, as the phenomenon of woke washing demonstrates, consumers today are more critical of corporate activism and can easily detect insincere efforts. This evolution highlights the importance of authenticity in corporate activism, ensuring that businesses contribute to real change rather than simply leveraging social movements for commercial advantage.

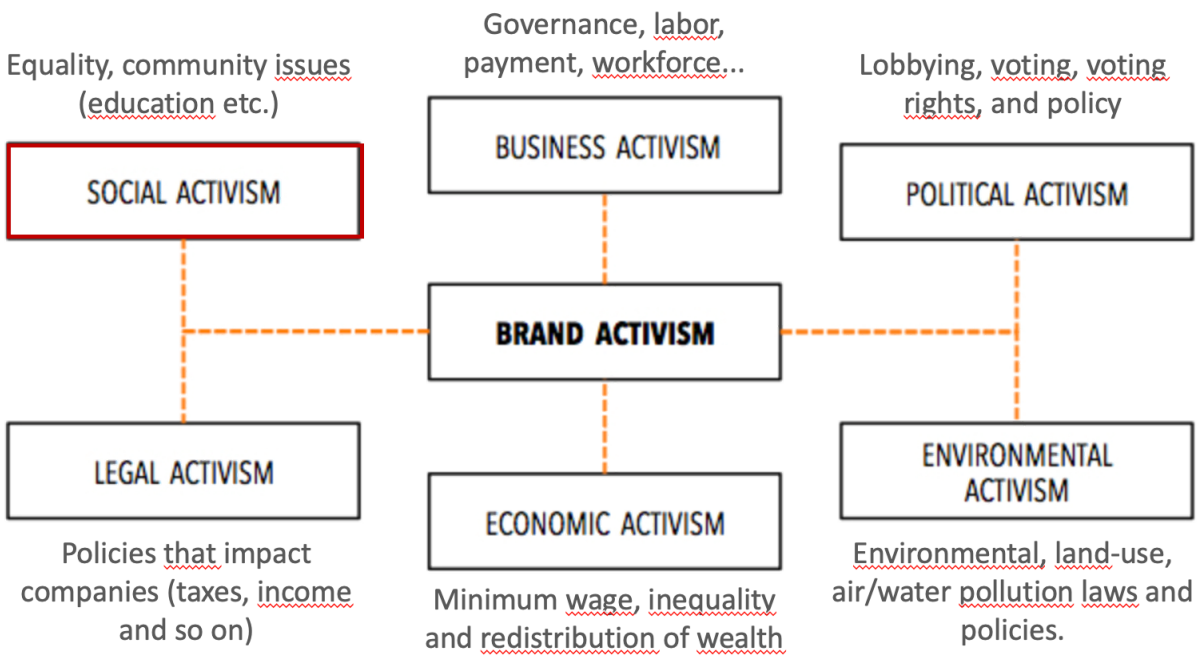


Figure 5: https://italianmarketing.org/il-brand-activism-secondo-philip-kotler-e-christian-sarkar/

Brand activism can also be categorized into six key areas, as identified by Kotler and Sarkar (2020). These areas include: *social activism,* which focuses on human rights, diversity, and inclusion; *workplace activism,* addressing fair wages, labor conditions, and employee rights; *political activism,* where companies take stances on governmental policies and democracy-related issues; *economic activism,* which concerns income inequality, taxation policies, and ethical business practices; *environmental activism,* targeting sustainability and climate change initiatives; and *legal activism,* which involves engagement with regulatory policies and justice system reforms. These six dimensions illustrate the broad scope of brand activism and highlight the varying ways in which businesses can integrate activism into their corporate strategy, depending on their values and market position.

Within this thesis, we will specifically focus on social activism, with an emphasis on feminism and gender representation in advertising; the discussion will investigate how brands engage with feminist issues through marketing, the role of *femvertising* in shaping public perception, and the effectiveness of such campaigns in promoting gender equality. Given the increasing consumer demand for authentic representation and empowerment, the study will analyze both successful and criticized examples of feminist brand activism, highlighting the opportunities and risks for brands taking a stand on gender-related issues.

1.2 The Feminist Movement

Feminism is one of the most significant and transformative social movements in modern history, continuously evolving to address systemic gender inequalities; however, it is not a singular, static ideology, rather, it has taken on different forms, priorities, and strategies across time, shaped by the cultural, political, and economic contexts of each era (Evans, 2015). At its core, feminism seeks to dismantle patriarchal structures that have historically marginalized women and gender minorities, advocating for equal rights, representation, and opportunities. Yet, the ways in which these goals have been pursued have changed significantly over time, leading scholars to categorize feminism into distinct “waves” (Gillis, Howie & Munford, 2007); moreover, the wave metaphor provides a useful framework for understanding the historical trajectory of feminism.

The first wave, emerging in the 19th and early 20th centuries, was primarily focused on securing political and legal rights for women, particularly suffrage. *The second wave*, spanning the 1960s to the 1980s, expanded its scope to include social and economic rights, reproductive autonomy, and the fight against gender oppression in both private and public spheres. *The third wave,* which began in the 1990s, introduced an intersectional approach, recognizing that gender inequality is inseparable from race, class, and sexuality, and emphasizing individual empowerment and cultural representation (Evans, 2015). *The fourth wave*, emerging in the 2010s, has been largely shaped by digital activism, using online platforms to amplify feminist discourse on a global scale and combat contemporary issues such as sexual harassment, workplace discrimination, and media representation (Valenti, 2014).

Each wave has built upon the struggles and achievements of its predecessors while also criticizing and reshaping feminist discourses to meet contemporary challenges: while early feminists fought for fundamental political recognition, later waves have tackled deeper structural inequalities, questioned traditional gender norms, and sought inclusivity in ways that were previously overlooked (Baumgardner & Richards, 2010). However, internal tensions have also emerged, the rise of "commodity feminism," for instance, has led some to question whether feminism is being diluted by consumerist culture rather than serving as a force for real change (Gillis, Howie & Munford, 2007). Despite these debates, feminism remains an ongoing movement that continues to evolve in response to shifting social dynamics; the challenges that remain, including the gender pay gap, reproductive rights restrictions, and gender-based violence, demonstrate that feminism is not just a historical phenomenon but an active, necessary force for change today (Valenti, 2014). Examining the four waves of feminism offers valuable insights into how feminist activism has shaped contemporary society and continues to influence political, cultural, and economic spheres. The following sections will explore each wave in detail, analyzing their key achievements, limitations, and lasting impact.

1.2.1 The First Wave

The first wave of feminism, spanning from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, was primarily concerned with securing legal rights for women, particularly suffrage; this movement laid the groundwork for future feminist activism and significantly contributed to the transformation of gender roles in Western societies. The origins of the first wave of feminism can be traced back to the Enlightenment and early liberal thought, where intellectuals such as Mary Wollstonecraft laid the foundation for feminist philosophy; in fact, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was one of the earliest works advocating for women's education and equality, positioning her as a proto-feminist thinker (Ferguson, 2017; Alexander, 2021), her ideas influenced the growing demands for women's legal and political rights in the 19th century.

The movement gained momentum in the mid-19th century with the emergence of organized suffrage campaigns. In the United States, the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, marked a pivotal moment in feminist history (DuBois, 1987; Mohajan, 2022); The convention's *Declaration of Sentiments* was modeled after the *Declaration of Independence* and articulated grievances related to women's lack of political representation and economic independence. Alexander (2021) highlights how the legal struggles of the first wave were not only focused on voting rights but also on property ownership, marriage laws, and educational access; women's ability to inherit and control property was a crucial issue that early feminists fought for, as economic independence was seen as key to true political and social emancipation. According to Mohajan (2022), legal reforms in this period, while significant, were largely limited to white, middle-class women, leaving working-class and racial minority women with fewer gains.

In Britain, the suffragette movement, spearheaded by Emmeline Pankhurst and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), employed militant tactics to demand the right to vote; the suffragists, in contrast, pursued legal reforms through peaceful advocacy (Griffin, 2012). These efforts culminated in legislative victories, such as the Representation of the People Act (1918) in the UK and the 19th Amendment (1920) in the US, granting voting rights to women.

While the first wave of feminism is often associated with liberal feminism, which focused on achieving equality through legal reforms, there were also radical and socialist feminist strands: the St.-Simonians and Charles Fourier, for instance, advanced early socialist feminist ideas by linking women's oppression to economic structures and advocating for collective ownership and sexual freedom (Goldstein, 1982). These perspectives influenced later feminist critiques that emphasized the need for systemic social change beyond legal equality.

Mohajan (2022) argues that early socialist feminists played an essential role in bridging the gap between class struggles and gender equality. Working-class women were often at the forefront of

labor movements, advocating for improved working conditions and equal pay alongside their fight for suffrage; however, mainstream feminist movements frequently distanced themselves from these labor struggles, reflecting a divide between different feminist approaches.

One of the main critiques of first-wave feminism is its narrow focus on the experiences of white, middle-class women: black feminists and other marginalized groups were largely excluded from mainstream feminist discourse; as Sharin N. Elkholy argues, the movement often failed to address issues of racial and class-based oppression, which were deeply intertwined with gender inequality (Elkholy, 2010). The activism of figures such as Sojourner Truth, who delivered the famous *Ain't I a Woman?* speech, highlights the intersectional struggles that were overlooked by many first-wave feminists, and this highlights a crucial limitation of the first wave: its inability to fully embrace intersectionality.

The rhetorical strategies used by first-wave feminists played a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and mobilizing support, as Tara Janowick analyzes, the discourse of women's rights was constructed through appeals to justice, morality, and democratic principles, but it also reflected the biases and exclusions of its time (Janowick, 2015). The emphasis on respectability and rhetoric often reinforced traditional gender roles even as it sought to expand women's rights. Alexander (2021) notes that feminist rhetoric in this period often focused on the idea of women as moral guardians of society, which paradoxically reinforced the very gender norms feminists sought to dismantle; while this strategy was effective in gaining public sympathy, it also constrained feminist

Limitations, particularly in the exclusion of marginalized voices and its contradictory rhetoric: as point out (Reger, 2018; Mohajan, 2022), contemporary feminism must critically engage with the legacies of earlier waves to build a more inclusive and intersectional movement. By acknowledging both the achievements and shortcomings of first-wave feminism, scholars and activists can better understand the complexities of gender equality and social justice today.

1.2.2 The Second Wave

The second wave of feminism, which emerged in the mid-20th century, expanded upon the legal rights secured by the first wave and sought to challenge systemic gender inequalities in multiple spheres, including the workplace, education, and reproductive rights; this movement introduced feminist consciousness-raising, intersectionality, and cultural critique as key methodologies in advancing gender equality.

The second wave of feminism began in the 1960s and continued into the 1980s, driven by post-war social changes, economic shifts, and the civil rights movement. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine*

Mystique (1963) is often credited with sparking this wave, as it critiqued the "problem that has no name", the widespread dissatisfaction among housewives who were confined to domestic roles (Friedan, 1963; Alexander, 2021; Alexander, 2020a); moreover, Friedan's work ignited a larger discussion about women's autonomy and the limitations imposed by patriarchal structures.

The National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966, played a pivotal role in advocating for legal reforms to ensure gender equality in employment and education (Mohajan, 2022; Grady, 2018). Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Roe v. Wade decision of 1973, which secured abortion rights in the US, were significant legislative victories of the movement; however, Alexander (2021) and Grady (2018) argue that despite these achievements, legal reforms were insufficient in dismantling deeply ingrained societal norms that perpetuated gender discrimination.

While liberal feminists such as Friedan focused on legal and institutional reforms, radical feminists sought to challenge the very foundations of patriarchy; writers like Shulamith Firestone, in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), argued that the oppression of women was rooted in biological reproduction and called for technological advancements to liberate women from the constraints of childbearing (Firestone, 1970; Mohajan, 2022; Alexander, 2020a).

Socialist feminists, such as those in the *Redstockings* collective, connected gender oppression with capitalist exploitation: they argued that women's unpaid labor at home was a fundamental component of capitalist economies (Mohajan, 2022; Grady, 2018). Alexander (2021) notes that socialist feminists played a crucial role in bridging the gap between class struggles and gender equality, advocating for policies such as state-funded childcare and workplace protections for women.

One of the main critiques of the second wave is its initial failure to adequately address the experiences of women of color, working-class women, and LGBTQ+ individuals; as Bell Hooks argued in *Ain't I a Woman?* (1981), mainstream feminist discourse often centered white, middle-class women while marginalizing the voices of Black and working-class women (Hooks, 1981; Mohajan, 2022; Grady, 2018). The Combahee River Collective, founded in 1974, emerged as a response to this exclusion, advocating for an intersectional approach that recognized how race, class, and gender oppression were interconnected (Alexander, 2021; Alexander, 2020a). Mohajan (2022) and Grady (2018) highlight that the feminist movement often struggled with internal divisions, as different factions debated whether to prioritize gender over other forms of oppression; while some feminists sought to work within existing political systems, others, such as lesbian feminists, rejected traditional institutions altogether and promoted separatist strategies (Rich, 1980; Alexander, 2021).

The discourse of second-wave feminism was characterized by a shift from private grievances to public activism; slogans such as *"The Personal is Political"* became central to the movement, emphasizing that personal experiences of oppression were deeply tied to larger systemic structures

(Hanisch, 1969; Mohajan, 2022; Grady, 2018). Consciousness-raising groups, which encouraged women to share their experiences, played a crucial role in mobilizing activism and shaping feminist theory (Alexander, 2021; Alexander, 2020a).

However, Alexander (2021) critiques second-wave rhetoric for sometimes reinforcing binary oppositions between men and women, which limited the movement's ability to address non-binary and fluid gender identities (the rise of third-wave feminism in the 1990s was, in part, a response to these limitations).

This wave was also marked by internal tensions and exclusions that necessitated the emergence of later feminist waves; as Alexander (2021), Alexander (2020a), and Mohajan (2022) argue, a critical engagement with the second wave's legacy is essential for building a more inclusive and intersectional feminist movement today.

1.2.3 The Third Wave

The third wave of feminism, which emerged in the early 1990s, sought to address the perceived shortcomings of the second wave, particularly its lack of inclusivity and intersectionality; it emphasized diversity, individual empowerment, and the deconstruction of gender norms, often drawing from postmodernist and queer theories.

The third wave of feminism is often traced back to the early 1990s, influenced by the work of second-wave feminists but also shaped by new cultural and political landscapes. Rebecca Walker, daughter of Alice Walker, is credited with coining the term "third wave" in her 1992 article *Becoming the Third Wave*, where she called for a more inclusive and intersectional feminist movement (Walker, 1992; Alexander, 2021).

This wave developed alongside broader social changes, including the rise of digital media, globalization, and the growing influence of queer theory, Mohajan (2022) argues that third-wave feminism distinguished itself from its predecessors by rejecting universal narratives of womanhood and embracing a more fluid, individualized approach to gender and identity. Unlike the legal and structural focus of earlier waves, third-wave feminists emphasized cultural change, self-expression, and personal empowerment as central to gender equality efforts.

A defining feature of third-wave feminism was its engagement with postmodernist critiques of essentialism. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) played a foundational role in shaping third wave thought, challenging the binary conception of gender and its performative nature (Butler, 1990; Alexander, 2021); this perspective influenced feminist activism, encouraging a more fluid and inclusive understanding of gender identities.

Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, also became central to third-wave feminism, highlighting how gender oppression intersects with race, class, sexuality, and other social categories (Crenshaw, 1989; Mohajan, 2022). Third-wave feminists sought to correct the exclusions of previous feminist movements by amplifying the voices of women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups.

Third-wave feminism was characterized by a decentralized and diverse set of activists, scholars, and cultural influencers: while figures like Walker and Butler shaped its theoretical foundations, grassroots organizations, pop culture figures, and online communities also played a crucial role (Alexander, 2021).

Riot Grrrl, a feminist punk movement that emerged in the early 1990s, exemplified the DIY ethos of third-wave feminism, using music and activism to challenge gender norms and advocate for social justice (Mohajan, 2022); additionally, online feminism gained traction during this period, with digital spaces becoming vital platforms for feminist discourse and activism.

Despite its emphasis on inclusivity, third-wave feminism has been critiqued for its perceived lack of clear political goals and organizational structure: some scholars argue that its focus on individual empowerment and cultural expression diluted the movement's ability to drive systemic change (Alexander, 2021); others have noted that its embrace of consumer culture and "choice feminism" sometimes reinforced neoliberal ideals, prioritizing personal agency over collective action (Mohajan, 2022). Additionally, while third-wave feminism sought to be more intersectional, some critics argue that it did not go far enough in addressing global feminist concerns. Issues such as labor rights, migration, and economic justice were often overshadowed by a focus on identity politics and representation (Crenshaw, 1989; Mohajan, 2022).

One of the most significant contributions of third-wave feminism was its integration with popular culture and digital activism; unlike previous waves, which largely relied on traditional activism and academic discourse, third-wave feminists leveraged music, fashion, film, and the internet to spread their messages (Mohajan, 2022); for instance, figures like Beyoncé, who identified as a feminist while embracing femininity and sexuality, symbolized the movement's embrace of diverse expressions of womanhood (Alexander, 2021).

Digital feminism flourished in this period, with early feminist blogs, forums, and social media playing a key role in mobilization; online activism allowed for greater accessibility and participation, but it also led to debates about the effectiveness of "hashtag feminism" and the risks of online discourse becoming performative rather than action-driven (Alexander, 2021; Mohajan, 2022).

The third wave of feminism was instrumental in diversifying feminist discourse, challenging rigid gender norms, and leveraging digital media for activism; however, it also faced critiques regarding

its coherence, political efficacy, and engagement with global feminist struggles. As Alexander (2021) and Mohajan (2022) argue, the lessons of third-wave feminism continue to shape contemporary feminist movements, particularly in the ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive and intersectional approach to gender justice.

1.2.4 The Forth Wave

The fourth wave of feminism, emerging in the late 2000s and early 2010s, builds upon the activism of previous waves while incorporating digital tools, intersectionality, and global perspectives; this wave is characterized by the use of social media for mobilization, a strong emphasis on inclusivity, and a renewed focus on combating gender-based violence.

The fourth wave of feminism arose in response to the limitations of the third wave, particularly its perceived lack of collective action and global engagement (Alexander, 2021; Burke, 2023). While third-wave feminism emphasized individual agency and cultural critique, the fourth wave reintroduced mass activism, propelled by digital communication. Mohajan (2022) argues that the rise of social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have fundamentally reshaped feminist activism, allowing for rapid mobilization and global solidarity.

Movements such as #MeToo, which was popularized in 2017 after allegations against Harvey Weinstein surfaced, became a defining feature of the fourth wave (Mohajan, 2022; Grady, 2018). Originally founded by Tarana Burke in 2006, the movement gained mainstream traction through social media, highlighting the pervasive nature of sexual harassment and assault (Alexander, 2021; Burke, 2023). Other global campaigns, such as #TimesUp, #NiUnaMenos, and #SayHerName, further demonstrated how online activism could translate into tangible policy changes and cultural shifts.

Unlike previous waves, which relied on print media, protests, and grassroots organizing, fourth-wave feminism is deeply embedded in digital culture; social media allows for decentralized activism, enabling individuals to share their stories, call out injustices, and hold powerful institutions accountable in real time (Mohajan, 2022; Burke, 2023). Hashtag activism, as seen with #MeToo and #YesAllWomen, has played a critical role in shaping public discourse and policy changes. However, Alexander (2021) and Grady (2018) critique the reliance on digital activism, arguing that while online campaigns raise awareness, they sometimes lack the structural mechanisms necessary for sustained political change. Additionally, Mohajan (2022) highlights concerns over "cancel culture," where public shaming on social media can sometimes overshadow meaningful dialogue and rehabilitation.

Intersectionality remains a central tenet of fourth-wave feminism, building upon Kimberlé Crenshaw’s foundational work (Crenshaw, 1989); this wave actively seeks to amplify the voices of

marginalized groups, including women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, disabled women, and non-binary people (Alexander, 2021; Burke, 2023).

The fourth wave has also expanded feminism's focus beyond gender equality to include issues such as racial justice, economic inequality, environmental activism, and reproductive rights (Mohajan, 2022; Grady, 2018): this broader perspective reflects the increasing recognition that oppression is multi-faceted and interconnected.

Unlike earlier feminist movements, which had prominent leaders such as Gloria Steinem or Betty Friedan, the fourth wave is characterized by a decentralized leadership structure; activists, scholars, and influencers alike contribute to the movement through online platforms, mainstream media, and grassroots organizations (Alexander, 2021; Burke, 2023). Figures such as Tarana Burke (#MeToo), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*We Should All Be Feminists*), and Roxane Gay (*Bad Feminist*) have played key roles in shaping feminist discourse (Mohajan, 2022; Grady, 2018).

Global movements have also played a significant role in shaping the fourth wave: in Latin America, #NiUnaMenos has mobilized millions against femicide and gender-based violence, in India, protests against rape culture following the 2012 Delhi gang rape have led to legislative reforms (Mohajan, 2022; Burke, 2023). These examples demonstrate the international reach and impact of fourth-wave activism.

Despite its successes, fourth-wave feminism has faced several critiques; one major concern is the digital divide: while social media has made activism more accessible, it also excludes those without reliable internet access or digital literacy (Alexander, 2021; Grady, 2018). Additionally, the movement has been critiqued for its occasional over-reliance on social media "call-out culture," which can sometimes foster division rather than constructive dialogue (Mohajan, 2022; Burke, 2023); some critics argue that the rapid spread of information online can lead to misinformation, performative activism, and a lack of nuance in feminist debates. Furthermore, while the fourth wave has embraced intersectionality, Mohajan (2022) and Grady (2018) argue that class and economic issues remain underrepresented in mainstream feminist discourse; the focus on online activism can sometimes overshadow the economic struggles of working-class women, who may not have the same access to digital platforms.

The fourth wave of feminism has leveraged digital tools to amplify feminist activism, foster global solidarity, and advocate for intersectional justice; however, it has also faced challenges related to online discourse, inclusivity, and long-term political impact. As Alexander (2021), Mohajan (2022), and Burke (2023) argue, the lessons of the fourth wave continue to shape contemporary feminist movements, particularly in the ongoing struggle to create a more just and equitable society.

1.3 Genealogy of Woman in Advertising

Advertising, broadly defined as a strategic and paid form of marketing communication, aims to promote products, services, or ideas by shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors through persuasive messaging (Belch & Belch, 2021). Beyond its commercial function, advertising has long functioned as a reflection of societal norms, and the portrayal of women in advertisements has undergone profound transformations over the decades: from the idealized housewife of the 1950s to the intersectional feminist representations of today, advertising has both shaped and been shaped by cultural, political, and economic shifts. Scholars such as Goffman (1979) and Gill (2007) have analyzed the semiotic and discursive construction of femininity in advertising, highlighting the tensions between empowerment and objectification.

Here the objective is to show the genealogy of women in advertising from 1950 to the present, analyzing key trends, significant campaigns, and their broader implications on gender perceptions and consumer behavior.

1.3.1 The 1950s: The Ideal Housewife

During the 1950s, women were primarily depicted as homemakers whose primary role was to care for their families and maintain the household. Advertisements reinforced the belief that a woman's fulfillment was derived from serving her husband and children, while the emergence of television allowed for visual storytelling that entrenched traditional gender roles (Friedan, 1963).

The 1950s marked what is often referred to as the "Mad Men" era of advertising, characterized by highly gendered portrayals that positioned women as figures primarily concerned with pleasing their husbands. This period saw the consolidation of traditional domestic roles for women, heavily reinforced by advertising campaigns that depicted them as caretakers, homemakers, and diligent consumers devoted to their families. Advertisements in this era largely ignored women's autonomy and ambitions outside the household, reinforcing the belief that their ultimate fulfillment derived from serving their husbands and children (Friedan, 1963).

Research by Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) found that women in advertisements during this period were overwhelmingly portrayed in domestic settings, with limited representation in professional or autonomous roles and these portrayals further cemented the cultural expectation that a woman's primary duty was to maintain a perfect household. Moreover, the rise of television provided a new medium for advertisers to visually reinforce these roles, with commercials often depicting women gleefully engaging in housework, reinforcing the notion that their happiness was intrinsically linked to domestic labor.

The advertising industry, largely dominated by male executives, capitalized on and perpetuated these stereotypes, often implying that a woman's primary concern should be to satisfy her husband. Advertisements for household appliances, cleaning products, and food framed women as the gatekeepers of domestic bliss. Many campaigns infantilized women, portraying them as dependent on male authority, while beauty advertisements stressed that maintaining physical attractiveness was essential to keeping husbands happy. A well-known example of this messaging can be seen in Hoover's 1950s Christmas campaign, which depicted a woman receiving a vacuum cleaner as a gift from her husband, reinforcing the notion that household chores were an inherently feminine responsibility. Kellogg's also exemplified this reinforcement of women's economic dependency on men with its slogan, "The best husband a woman can have is a man who brings home Kellogg's."

Figure 6: Hoover ads from the '50s (retrieved from Google Images)

This pervasive narrative, crafted by Madison Avenue's male-dominated advertising agencies, shaped not only consumer culture but also broader societal attitudes toward women's roles; the underlying message of this advertising era was clear: a woman's worth was measured by her ability to create a harmonious home life, cater to her husband's needs, and maintain a pleasing physical appearance. These entrenched ideals would later face significant challenges as the feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960s, demanding a redefinition of women's roles both within and beyond the domestic sphere.

Figure 7: Van Heusen Ties and Schlitz ads from the ‘50s (retrieved from Google Images)

1.3.2 The 1960s and 1970s: The Emergence of Feminism

The 1960s and 1970s marked a transformative era in the portrayal of women in advertising, shaped by the rise of second-wave feminism, evolving societal expectations, and the increasing commodification of feminist ideals; however, advertising often lagged behind these societal changes, reinforcing outdated stereotypes: women were still predominantly depicted in subordinate roles such as secretaries or assistants, reinforcing male authority in professional settings (Barthel, 1988). Simultaneously, the sexual revolution, driven by greater access to contraception and shifting attitudes towards female autonomy, played a crucial role in advertising's depiction of women; this led to a paradoxical representation of women: on one hand, empowered and independent, yet on the other, increasingly objectified. Advertisements frequently leveraged sexuality to appeal to male consumers, reinforcing the notion that a woman’s value was still largely tied to her physical attractiveness and ability to attract men. The rise of fashion and beauty advertising further complicated this dynamic, as brands capitalized on women’s newfound self-expression while still upholding traditional beauty standards (Goffman, 1979).

Figure 8: Collection of ads from the '60s (retrieved from Google Images)

A trend of that years was the rise of feminist rhetoric in marketing, often termed *"commodity feminism",* became increasingly prominent as advertisers incorporated feminist slogans and imagery into their campaigns, primarily as a means to sell products rather than to advance genuine gender equality (Lazar, 2006). A notable example is Virginia Slims' *"You've Come a Long Way, Baby"* campaign, launched in 1968 and popularized in the 1970s: by associating cigarette smoking with female empowerment, the brand commodified liberation, framing consumption as an act of independence while downplaying the health risks; similarly, Shake 'n Bake advertisements subtly acknowledged evolving gender roles by presenting their product as a time-saving solution for the modern working woman. However, rather than challenging traditional expectations, such campaigns reinforced the notion that women were still responsible for household duties alongside their careers. Many brands sought to align themselves with progressive feminist messaging, though often in ways that were commercially driven rather than politically sincere.

Virginia Slims' campaign remains a key example of how advertising appropriated feminist ideals, positioning smoking as a symbol of autonomy and choice; yet, as Goldman (1992) argues, these campaigns illustrate how empowerment can be leveraged as a marketing tool, serving corporate interests rather than advocating for meaningful social change.

Figure 9: Virginia Slims Ads from 1970 (retrieved from Google Images)

Pepsi's 1963 *"Come Alive! You're in the Pepsi Generation"* campaign similarly reflected a shift toward more youthful and modern depictions of women: the advertisement positioned women as active, fun-loving consumers who sought personal enjoyment rather than solely existing in service of their families; this marked a departure from the 1950s ideal of the self-sacrificing housewife and hinted at the broader societal changes that were beginning to take place. However, while such campaigns acknowledged women's evolving roles, they still largely framed their liberation within consumerist terms, suggesting that empowerment could be achieved through purchasing power rather than political or social reform.

Figure 11: Pepsi Ads from 1963 (retrieved from Google Images)

The 1970s saw an intensification of these trends, as advertisers sought to integrate feminist themes while ensuring that empowerment remained inextricably tied to consumerism. The decade witnessed the emergence of the *"superwoman"* archetype, a figure expected to seamlessly balance career success, domestic responsibilities, and personal attractiveness; this ideal, heavily reinforced through advertising, encouraged women to consume products that would facilitate their ability to manage multiple roles without challenging deeper structural inequalities (Faludi, 1991). Despite an increased representation of women in professional settings, their roles were largely confined to specific career paths, particularly those associated with nurturing or service-oriented work. The beauty and fashion industries capitalized on this shift, positioning femininity as a form of power while simultaneously reinforcing conventional beauty standards; Revlon's 1973 *"Charlie"* campaign exemplified this duality, portraying a confident, independent woman in pants, a symbol of liberation, while maintaining traditional ideals of attractiveness.

Figure 11: Revlon Adv from 1973 (retrieved from Google Images)

Additionally, the incorporation of feminist slogans into advertising (Lazar, 2006) allowed feminist rhetoric to enter mainstream media while simultaneously diluting its political significance. Campaigns such as Shake 'n Bake's positioned their product as a time-saving solution for working women, subtly reinforcing the expectation that they would continue to bear the primary responsibility for household duties alongside their careers.

Figure 12: Shake 'n Bake Adv from the '70s (retrieved from Google Images)

Despite evolving portrayals, advertising remained largely shaped by patriarchal structures, and many supposedly progressive representations of women were designed to serve corporate rather than feminist interests. While women were increasingly depicted as independent consumers and professionals, the industry continued to dictate the terms of their empowerment, ensuring that it remained closely tied to consumption rather than genuine social change. The commercialization of feminist ideals in the 1970s laid the foundation for the ongoing tensions between empowerment and commodification that would define advertising's approach to women in the decades that followed.

1.3.3 The 1980s: The Superwoman and Corporate Feminism

As the feminist movement gained traction and more women entered the workforce, advertising in the 1980s adapted to these shifting dynamics, crafting a new ideal of female success: women were no longer confined to domestic roles; instead, they were portrayed as ambitious professionals who could seamlessly balance career, family, and personal appearance. The concept of the *"superwoman"* emerged in the 1970s, in the 1980s was fully established and commercialized; advertising reinforced the expectation that women could "have it all" without structural support for work-life balance, making the superwoman archetype aspirational but ultimately unrealistic (Faludi, 1991). One of the most striking symbols of this shift was the trend of power dressing: the structured silhouettes, padded shoulders, and tailored suits of the era became visual markers of women's presence in corporate spaces. Advertisers capitalized on this aesthetic, positioning fashion and beauty products as tools of empowerment and a strong example of this is L'Oréal's *"Because You're Worth It"* campaign, which,

even if it had been introduced in 1973, gained greater prominence in the 1980s, reframing self-care and beauty as acts of financial and personal independence. While this messaging resonated with the increasing number of women in professional fields, it also reinforced consumerism as a means to empowerment, subtly linking confidence and success to the purchase of specific products.

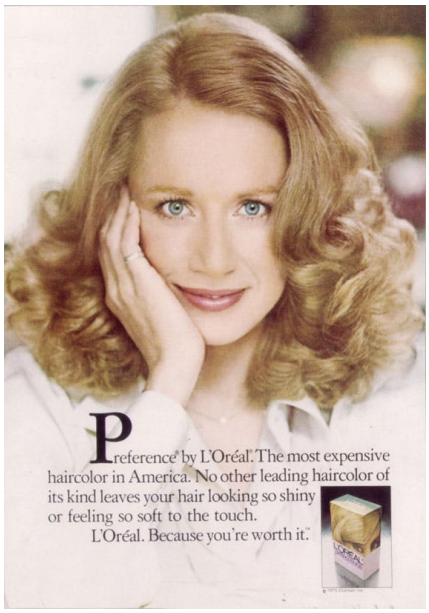


Figure 13 + Figure 14: L'Oréal Adv from 1973 (retrieved from Google Images) + https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_GvlikmZzc

The 1980s saw the rise of fitness culture as a dominant theme in advertising, with aerobics, diet programs, and the pursuit of the "ideal" female body taking center stage. Marketed as a path to empowerment, women's fitness became synonymous with self-discipline and personal achievement; however, this movement also reinforced unattainable beauty standards, placing new pressures on women. Media figures like Jane Fonda played a key role in popularizing aerobics, while brands eagerly capitalized on the trend by promoting weight loss products, athletic wear, and workout videos as essential elements of the modern woman's lifestyle. Although exercise was framed as a means of strength and independence, the expanding fitness and wellness industry ultimately reinforced rigid ideals of femininity, intertwining physical health with the demand for a specific body type (Gill, 2007).

Another significant development in 1980s advertising was the recognition of women as financial decision-makers; the luxury and finance sectors, previously dominated by male-oriented messaging, began to market directly to women, highlighting their growing purchasing power. Credit card companies, investment firms, and automobile brands crafted campaigns that depicted financial independence as a key element of modern womanhood; however, this form of empowerment was

often narrowly defined, equating success with material wealth rather than broader economic or social change.

Nike's 1988 *"Just Do It"* campaign further challenged traditional representations of femininity by positioning women as competitive athletes: encouraging female participation in sports, the campaign reframed athleticism as a form of empowerment and self-actualization, and by portraying women as strong, capable, and physically resilient, Nike's advertisements contributed to a cultural shift that encouraged women to claim space in historically male-dominated arenas. This was a departure from traditional advertising norms, which had typically portrayed women in passive or ornamental roles.

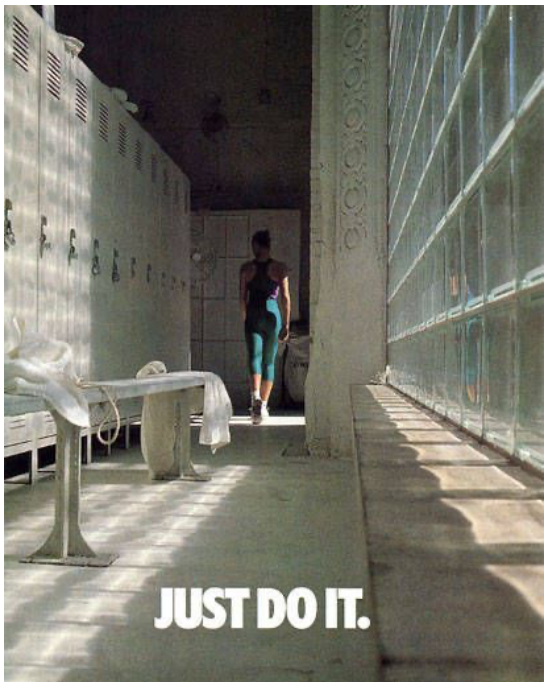


Figure 15: Nike Adv from 1988 (retrieved from Google Images)

Despite these progressive shifts, the 1980s also reinforced deeply ingrained gender stereotypes: the *"superwoman"* image, while aspirational, placed immense pressure on women to excel in every domain, without acknowledging the structural challenges that made such balance nearly impossible. Advertisers presented these ideals as attainable, yet the reality was far more complex. The advertising industry's engagement with feminism during this decade remained largely superficial, leveraging empowerment narratives to sell products rather than addressing the fundamental inequalities women faced. This trend of commercialized feminism would persist into the 1990s, as brands continued to use feminist rhetoric to drive consumer engagement while often failing to support the broader movement for gender equity.

1.3.4 The 1990s: Post-feminism and the rise of "Girl Power"

The 1990s saw a shift in the portrayal of women in advertising, influenced by the rise of post-feminism, which suggested that gender equality had largely been achieved and that feminism was no longer necessary. This ideological shift reframed empowerment as an individual pursuit rather than a collective movement, encouraging women to express independence through personal choices and consumer behavior rather than activism (Gill, 2007). Advertisers capitalized on this cultural transformation, crafting narratives that depicted women as strong and self-sufficient while continuing to reinforce conventional beauty ideals and, in many cases, sexualized imagery.

A defining element of 1990s advertising was the rise of "*girl power*", a phrase popularized by the Spice Girls, which celebrated female confidence and autonomy, and brands quickly adopted this rhetoric, using it to market products ranging from cosmetics to sports apparel. Mattel, for example, rebranded Barbie as an independent and career-driven figure, introducing dolls like "Doctor Barbie" and "Astronaut Barbie" to align with the decade's themes of female empowerment. However, this version of empowerment was often surface-level, promoting consumerism rather than addressing deeper societal inequalities; women were encouraged to embrace their independence, but this was largely tied to purchasing power and personal appearance rather than systemic change (Banet-Weiser, 2018). While "girl power" appeared to support female empowerment, it largely operated within the confines of neoliberal ideology, suggesting that success was based on individual effort rather than collective progress or policy reform.

Hyper sexualization also intensified during this decade, particularly in fashion and beauty advertising: one of the most controversial campaigns of the 1990s was the Wonderbra's 1994 *"Hello Boys"* ad, which, while promoting female confidence, also catered to the male gaze, illustrating the blurred line between empowerment and objectification.

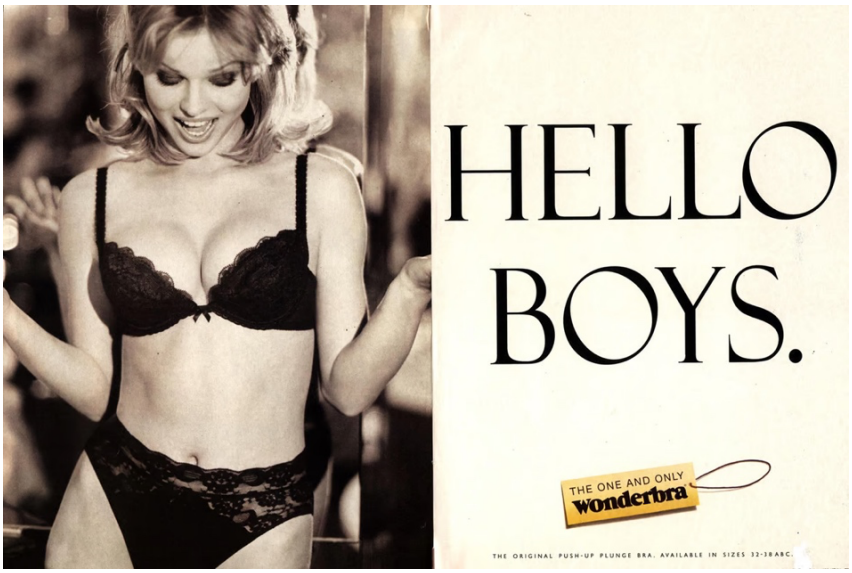


Figure 16: Wonderbra Adv from 1994 (retrieved from Google Images)

Similarly, brands like Victoria's Secret built their success on marketing lingerie as a symbol of female confidence, while still upholding narrow and often unattainable beauty standards. The rise of *"heroin chic"* in fashion advertising, popularized by brands such as Calvin Klein, further reinforced extreme beauty ideals, glorifying thinness and an androgynous aesthetic that often erased diverse body types from mainstream representation. In this context, Kate Moss, the face of this trend, became emblematic of the industry's preference for an almost unattainable standard of beauty.

Despite these tensions, some brands genuinely embraced narratives of empowerment: Nike's 1995 *"If You Let Me Play"* campaign, for example, was a powerful statement advocating for young girls' participation in sports, reinforcing the brand's commitment to fostering female empowerment beyond aesthetic appeal. The campaign highlighted the social and psychological benefits of sports for women, contributing to the broader cultural shift toward recognizing female athleticism as a legitimate and empowering pursuit. This campaign, alongside the rise of female athletes like Serena Williams and Mia Hamm as role models, marked a departure from traditional femininity, positioning women as strong, ambitious, and physically resilient.

Figure 17: Nike Adv from 1995 (retrieved from Google Images)

Another important shift during the 1990s was the increasing recognition of women as diverse consumers with different aspirations and lifestyles; advertisers began segmenting their audiences more strategically, acknowledging that not all women fit into a single mold of femininity. Women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* reflected this new segmentation, promoting messages of success and independence while simultaneously reinforcing consumer-driven ideals of femininity. Advertisers also began to explore themes of friendship and solidarity among women, shifting away from purely romantic or domestic narratives as popularized by conventional TV programs: a notable case was the 1997 launch of *Sex and the City*, which, though a television series, influenced advertising by portraying women as financially independent and sexually liberated, further popularizing postfeminist ideals. A well-known example of this is the 1996 *Diet Coke* ad featuring a group of women watching a shirtless construction worker during their break: the ad flipped the male gaze dynamic, portraying women as confident and in control of their own desires, reinforcing the idea of female camaraderie and empowerment in a lighthearted yet impactful way. Another example of this can be seen in the 1998 *Boddingtons Beer* campaign, which humorously subverted gender norms by featuring a glamorous woman choosing a pint of beer over more traditional feminine symbols like champagne, reinforcing the idea that modern women were independent and self-assured. This decade laid the groundwork for more inclusive advertising approaches in the 2000s, even as the commercialization of feminism continued to shape brand narratives.

Figure 17: Diet Coke Adv from 1996 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsHBD1Z625g

While the 1990s represented an evolution in how women were portrayed in advertising, the underlying dynamics of consumer-driven empowerment and commodified feminism remained prevalent. The decade reinforced the idea that liberation could be achieved through consumption, setting the stage for the continued marketing of feminist ideals in the 21st century; advertisers successfully repackaged feminism into a palatable, market-friendly concept, ensuring its profitability while often neglecting its broader political and social goals.

1.3.5 The 2000s: The Rise of *Femvertising* and the Commercialization of Feminism

The 2000s marked a significant shift in the representation of women in advertising, as brands increasingly incorporated feminist messaging into their campaigns. This period saw the emergence of the so called *"femvertising",* a marketing approach that leveraged themes of female empowerment to attract consumers; however, much like the commodification of feminism in previous decades, this strategy often prioritized sales over genuine progress toward gender equality (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The contradiction of this era lay in the fact that, while advertising promoted messages of empowerment and self-acceptance, many of the same brands continued to uphold rigid beauty standards, profit from insecurities, and fail to enact meaningful change beyond their marketing efforts. While some companies made authentic efforts to challenge gender norms, others were criticized for *"woke-washing",* that means using feminist rhetoric as a branding tool without enacting meaningful change (Gill, 2007).

One of the most defining advertising moments of the decade was Dove's 2004 *"Real Beauty"* campaign, which aimed to challenge traditional beauty standards by featuring real women of various

shapes, sizes, and ethnicities: the campaign resonated with many consumers and sparked conversations about body positivity and self-esteem (Johnston & Taylor, 2008). However, critics highlighted the contradiction in a beauty brand profiting from an anti-beauty-standard message, reflecting the ongoing tension between empowerment and commercial interests (Elliott & Elliott, 2005).

Figure 18: Dove Adv from 2004 (retrieved from Google Images)

Another major shift during this period was the growing recognition of intersectionality in advertising: brands began acknowledging that women were not a homogenous group and that factors such as race, body size, and socioeconomic status influenced their experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Companies like Nike and Adidas expanded their campaigns to include women from different ethnic backgrounds, athletic abilities, and body types, offering a more inclusive representation of femininity. Despite these advancements, many of these efforts were still confined to corporate narratives designed to enhance profitability rather than drive substantial social change (Gill, 2016). An example of this is Nike's use of female athletes in campaigns, such as Serena Williams, which promoted messages of empowerment but did not always address broader systemic barriers for women in sports, such as pay disparities or investment in female leagues.

At the same time, hyper sexualization remained prevalent in many advertising sectors, particularly in fashion and beauty: Victoria's Secret dominated the lingerie market with its annual fashion shows and advertisements featuring ultra-thin, hyper-feminized models. However, by the end of the 2010s, consumers and activists increasingly challenged these unattainable beauty standards, advocating for more diverse and realistic portrayals of women's bodies (Gill & Orgad, 2018).

Reality television and celebrity culture also contributed to the paradox of female representation, with figures like Paris Hilton and Britney Spears embodying both sexualized and empowered personas in

advertisements for perfumes, clothing, and even fast food. This contradiction was particularly evident in how these celebrities were simultaneously portrayed as symbols of female independence and success while being objectified and hypersexualized to maintain public appeal (McRobbie, 2009). On one hand, their presence in advertising was framed as empowering: showcasing confident, successful women who had built their own brands; on the other hand, their image was often shaped by male-gaze-driven aesthetics, reinforcing traditional beauty standards and expectations of female desirability (Mulvey, 1975). A prime example is the 2005 Carl's Jr. commercial featuring Paris Hilton washing a car in a bikini while eating a burger: an ad that epitomized the paradox of empowerment and objectification.

Chapter 2: Motherhood and *Femvertising*

2.1 *Femvertising*

Femvertising, also referred to as *"ad–her–tising",* has been described in a variety of ways but mostly centers around the same idea: it refers to female-targeted advertising that actively seeks to celebrate and empower women and girls (Hunt, 2017; Pérez & Gutiérrez, 2017; Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016). Rooted in the broader cultural shifts toward gender equality and the postfeminist sensibility that characterizes much of contemporary media (Gill, 2007), *femvertising* emerged in the early 2000s as a reaction to the decades-long reliance on objectified, stereotyped portrayals of women. While early feminist critiques of advertising, such as those from Goffman (1979) and Kilbourne (1999), highlighted the pervasive sexualization and passivity of women in media, *femvertising* sought to replace these depictions with narratives of empowerment, confidence, and agency.

Initially embraced by marketers eager to appeal to a growing demographic of media-savvy, self-aware female consumers, *femvertising* was lauded for expanding the visual and symbolic lexicon of femininity in advertising. Campaigns such as Always' "*Like a Girl*" (2014), which reframed a common sexist insult into a badge of strength, demonstrated the emotional resonance and viral potential of such messaging; similarly, Sport England's "*This Girl Can*" (2015) campaign showcased women of all ages and body types engaging in physical activity, unapologetically sweating, jiggling, and persevering, contradicting long-standing beauty norms in athletic advertising. These campaigns were received positively for challenging narrow ideals and encouraging self-acceptance, while also generating significant consumer engagement and brand visibility (Cortese, 2016; Kanai, 2019).

Figure 19: Always Adv from 2014
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxd_DKsITXo

Figure 20: Sport England Adv from 2015
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsP0W7-tEOc

Other campaigns such as REI's *"Force of Nature"* (2017) aimed to position women as central figures in outdoor sports, a field historically dominated by male imagery and marketing narratives; similarly, Tecate's 2017 anti-gender-violence ad in Mexico attempted to merge a traditionally masculine beer brand with a socially progressive message, showing how even male-oriented advertising began incorporating feminist tones. These developments indicate the diffusion of feminist rhetoric across diverse market segments, not just beauty and fashion, but sports, tech, and even automotive advertising, for instance; Audi's 2017 Super Bowl ad *"Daughter"* highlighted gender pay equity, demonstrating how *femvertising* increasingly intersected with broader social justice concerns.

Figure 21: Audi Adv from 2017 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iksaFG6wqM

In more recent years, additional brands have tried to take a feminist turn through marketing strategies targeting women's empowerment: for example, Net-a-Porter's *"Incredible Women"* campaign placed a spotlight on female leaders across various industries (from the arts to entrepreneurship) framing them as cultural influencers and role models; similarly, Bumble's *"Find Them on Bumble"* campaign combined messages of romantic independence with professional empowerment, encouraging women to take the lead in both love and career networking. These examples indicate how *femvertising* has evolved into more than visual representation, it now includes lifestyle narratives that shape the way women are encouraged to navigate contemporary society.

However, the history of *femvertising* is not without contradictions: scholars have observed that despite their seemingly progressive surface, many campaigns continue to uphold a neoliberal, individualistic form of empowerment that deflects attention from systemic inequality (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Banet-Weiser, 2018); in these narratives, empowerment becomes an internal, marketable feeling rather than a call for collective change. For example, Pantene's *"Labels Against Women"* campaign (2013) critiqued double standards faced by women in the workplace, but offered no discussion of structural

solutions or the brand's own labor practices; similarly, H&M's 2016 campaign featuring a diverse cast of women (including a hijab-wearing model and plus-size body types) was praised for its inclusivity, but criticized for clashing with the company's history of unethical labor conditions affecting female garment workers (Murphy, 2017).

Furthermore, the aesthetics of *femvertising* often remain tightly controlled by dominant commercial standards: even when bodies outside the mainstream beauty ideal are featured, they are typically curated to remain within the realm of visual appeal, avoiding overt disruptions of heteronormativity or class privilege (Elias, Gill & Scharff, 2017). This tension reveals *femvertising*'s limitations: it often rebrands traditional femininity rather than radically reimagining it. For example, Barbie's *"Imagine the Possibilities"* (2015) campaign repositioned the iconic doll as a tool for inspiring female ambition, but without acknowledging the decades of body image issues associated with the brand.

In the 2020s, the landscape of gender representation in advertising continues to evolve, but not without new challenges: while inclusivity and diversity have become central themes, brands still struggle to navigate the line between authentic advocacy and commodified empowerment. The rise of social media and digital feminism has empowered consumers to more critically scrutinize advertising strategies, amplifying backlash against superficial or opportunistic uses of feminist discourse (Dobson, 2015). This dynamic is intensified by the algorithm-driven aesthetics of platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which often promote hyper-polished images that simultaneously uphold and obscure the very beauty standards that *femvertising* claims to reject (Duffy & Hund, 2019).

Recent examples illustrate the complexities of this environment: Gillette's 2019 *"The Best Men Can Be*" campaign, though targeting toxic masculinity, faced polarized reactions, praised for its message by some and condemned as virtue signaling by others; similarly, the decline of Victoria's Secret and the rise of Savage X Fenty under Rihanna highlight a consumer shift: from a narrow vision of femininity to one rooted in intersectional representation. While Victoria's Secret maintained an idealized beauty standard for years, Rihanna's brand built its success on inclusivity, showcasing models of different body types, races, and gender identities.

Figure 22: Savage X Fenty Adv from 2021 (retrieved from Google Images)

At the same time, successful brands are those that integrate feminist values not only in their advertisements but also in their corporate practices, companies that genuinely engage with gender issues implement equal pay policies, ethical labor conditions, and executive-level diversity rather than relying solely on empowering slogans (Gill & Kanai, 2018).

Campaigns in recent years have increasingly focused on multidimensional portrayals of women, highlighting their achievements, ambitions, and challenges rather than reducing them to mere symbols of empowerment. This shift is evident in major brands such as Nike, which celebrates female athletes' resilience, and luxury fashion houses that feature women in leadership and entrepreneurship narratives (McRobbie, 2020). For example, Dior's *"We Should All Be Feminists"* campaign, inspired by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's book, positioned itself as a supporter of feminist ideology but was met with skepticism due to the brand's high prices and lack of substantive activism. These cases underscore the ongoing tension within *femvertising*: between symbolic inclusivity and material accountability; as Banet-Weiser (2018) notes, the commodification of feminist discourse risks depoliticizing it, transforming a movement for collective liberation into a style, a slogan, or a product. Moving forward, the sustainability of *femvertising* will depend not only on the aesthetics of representation but on the structural commitments that brands are willing to make in support of gender equality.

At a theoretical level, the contradictions of *femvertising* can be understood through the lens of post-feminism, which celebrates individual empowerment while masking broader social inequalities (Gill, 2007). Post-feminism embraces a "choice" discourse, in which women are portrayed as freely choosing careers, lifestyles, and consumer goods, even though these choices are often shaped by existing power structures (Gill, 2007). *Femvertising* often mirrors this framework: it centers on aspirational narratives while offering little critique of the institutions that limit real-world

empowerment; therefore, while *femvertising* may gesture toward feminist ideals, it often fails to engage in feminism as a political movement concerned with dismantling economic inequality and structural oppression. Another emerging concern is the rise of algorithmic branding, where data-driven advertising platforms use user behavior to tailor empowerment messages that often lack consistency or ideological coherence. A brand may present different gender values to different audiences, depending on what sells better, promoting traditional femininity in one context and feminist empowerment in another. This segmentation strategy, enabled by digital advertising tools, complicates the evaluation of *femvertising* campaigns' sincerity and impact. Consumers are increasingly aware of these contradictions, leading to greater demands for accountability and authenticity, especially from younger demographics who prioritize brand ethics and social responsibility in their purchasing decisions.

In conclusion, *femvertising* has transformed the advertising landscape by offering new representational possibilities for women; however, its impact remains contested. The evolution of *femvertising* from aesthetic diversity to corporate feminism underscores both the progress made and the work still to be done.

2.2 Maternity and Advertising:

The Genealogy of Maternal Representation in Advertising

As scholars such as K.D. Lynch (2005) and Mary Thompson (2017) have shown, representations of motherhood in advertising are deeply tied to ideological and cultural constructions that serve both economic and political purposes. Lynch emphasizes that the maternal image is not merely symbolic but functions as a key site of ideological production, shaping notions of femininity, morality, and consumption in capitalist societies; similarly, Thompson highlights how third-wave feminism has complicated the narrative of maternal identity, with contemporary advertising negotiating tensions between empowerment, choice, and traditional expectations. These insights provide a theoretical framework for examining how maternal figures have been used in advertising to both reflect and regulate evolving social norms.

The image of motherhood has long been a focal point in advertising, serving as both a reflection of prevailing social norms and a strategic tool to drive consumption; from the early days of modern advertising in the early 20th century, maternal figures were used to convey trust, nurture, and moral stability. These portrayals evolved in response to shifting historical and cultural contexts, setting the stage for the more complex and dynamic representations that would emerge from the 1950s onward. This paragraph will explore how the maternal figure in advertising has adapted over the decades, from the post-war domestic ideal to the ethically engaged mothers of the present day.

2.2.1 The Early 1900s-1940s:

In the early decades of the 20th century, advertising solidified the maternal figure as a moral cornerstone of the household. Known as the *"domestic angel",* this representation emphasized self-sacrifice, cleanliness, and nurturing. In an era dominated by print media, brands such as Ivory Soap and Campbell's Soup created campaigns that portrayed mothers as custodians of purity and health and these advertisements, often rich in sentimental imagery, positioned the mother as the ultimate caregiver whose value was intrinsically tied to her family's well-being.

Figure 23 + Figure 24: Ivory Soap Ads from the '30s (retrieved from Google Images)

The iconography of the time included aprons, modest clothing, and children nestled around the maternal figure, and the underlying message was clear: good mothers are those who maintain domestic order and devote themselves entirely to their families. These images reinforced the gender norms of the time, aligning womanhood with home-making and moral instruction. As pointed out by Susan J. Douglas and Meredith Michaels in *The Mommy Myth* (2004), early advertising cemented the maternal ideal within a moral framework that left little room for deviation, offering a singular, prescriptive version of motherhood (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

During the Great Depression and World War II, the ideal of motherhood evolved to encompass themes of resilience and patriotism, the *"resilient homemaker"* emerged as a figure who could endure economic hardship and sustain family life in the absence of male breadwinners (Honey, 1984; Milkman, 1987; Cowan, 1983). Advertising during this period portrayed mothers as strong, frugal, and emotionally steadfast government propaganda and commercial advertising alike utilized this imagery: brands such as Quaker Oats and Jell-O depicted mothers engaged in rationing, gardening, and creative home economics. The message conveyed was one of national duty: mothers were not

only serving their families but contributing to the war effort. Visually, advertisements employed patriotic colors and motifs, aligning maternal labor with civic responsibility. According to Roland Marchand in *Advertising the American Dream* (1985), this period relied heavily on maternal imagery to foster national unity and resilience, with the mother presented as a stabilizing force amidst crisis (Marchand, 1985).

2.2.2 The 1950s:

With the return of soldiers and the economic boom of the post-war period, the 1950s marked a re-domestication of women; advertising played a central role in reinforcing the image of the *"idealized housewife":* a cheerful, stylish woman whose greatest joy was found in serving her family. This representation not only reflected the values of postwar domestic ideology but also served to stabilize and naturalize the gendered division of labor. The home became a central site of identity for women, and advertising helped shape their perceived social role through narratives of contentment, femininity, and maternal devotion (Friedan, 1963; Goffman, 1979; Marchand, 1985; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Winship, 1987).

Television became a dominant medium, enabling the proliferation of visual narratives that celebrated domestic bliss: Brands such as Tide, General Electric, and Betty Crocker produced commercials filled with smiling mothers, immaculate kitchens, and happy children; these images conveyed a lifestyle of prosperity and control, where the perfect housewife managed her household effortlessly with the help of consumer goods. The advertising narrative suggested that a woman's success and fulfillment were best realized within the private sphere of the home, where consumption was framed as both a duty and a source of pride.

One of the most iconic advertising campaigns of this decade was the series of print and television ads for Tide laundry detergent: these ads typically featured mothers in pristine kitchens or laundry rooms, proudly holding spotless garments with taglines such as *"Tide's in, dirt's out."* The messaging emphasized maternal responsibility for cleanliness and hygiene, aligning perfectly with the domestic expectations of the time.

Similarly, General Electric ran ads promoting its kitchen appliances as essential tools for the modern housewife: in these ads, mothers were portrayed as rational decision-makers who used technology to streamline their domestic duties, yet always within the context of family care. A 1955 GE commercial showed a smiling woman introducing a new refrigerator to her child, reinforcing the idea that good motherhood meant equipping the home with the latest conveniences.

Figure 25: Tide Adv from the '50s (retrieved from Google Images) Figure 26: GE Adv from the '50s (retrieved from Google Images)

Another example is the Betty Crocker brand, which personified the ideal maternal figure; although Betty Crocker was a fictional character, her omnipresence in cookbooks and advertisements made her a cultural symbol of the perfect homemaker: ads emphasized ease, love, and family satisfaction, with taglines like *"Homemade means Betty Crocker made."*

Figure 27: Betty Crocker Adv from the '50s (retrieved from Google Images)

All these examples not only marketed products but also actively constructed and disseminated a model of motherhood tied to service, warmth, and consumer expertise. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) provides a critical backdrop to this period, arguing that advertising was complicit in selling a version of happiness that confined women to domestic roles under the guise of personal fulfillment (Friedan, 1963).

At the same time, the 1950s mother was increasingly expected to demonstrate competence in selecting the right products, ensuring the health, cleanliness, and moral development of her children, in fact this period saw the emergence of what Davis, Hogg, and Marshall (2003) define as the *"knowing mother":* a figure who is expected to be informed and responsible for making the right consumer choices within the domestic sphere. While she is presented as knowledgeable, this knowledge is narrowly constructed around consumption, hygiene, nutrition, and childcare, reinforcing her role as a feminine consuming subject and reaffirming traditional gender roles (Davis, Hogg, & Marshall, 2003). The knowing mother becomes an ideal marketing subject, simultaneously competent and dependent on expert advice dispensed through advertising.

Moreover, as Lynch (2005) observes, this era laid the ideological groundwork for the feminization of consumption, in which a woman's value was equated with her effectiveness as a shopper and caretaker. Through meticulously curated advertising campaigns, women were encouraged to channel their maternal instincts into purchasing decisions, thus intertwining affective labor with economic productivity. These representations not only constructed ideals of good motherhood but also helped establish patterns of consumer behavior that would endure well into the 21st century.

2.2.3 The 1960s-1970s:

The cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s introduced new complexities to maternal representation: while traditional domestic ideals persisted, advertising began to acknowledge women's increasing participation in public life and decision-making. The *"modernized traditional mother"* was still primarily a homemaker, but one who exercised greater autonomy and intelligence in managing her household; this figure reflected a transitional model of femininity that combined the stability of the post-war housewife with elements of self-determination advocated by second-wave feminism (Friedan, 1963; Goffman, 1979; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; McRobbie, 2009).

Color television, women's magazines, and the rise of consumer advocacy shaped this evolving image and brands like Folgers Coffee depicted mothers who were both caretakers and communicators: women who comforted their families with a warm cup of coffee, but also negotiated the emotional dynamics of domestic life. The famous Folgers slogan, *"The best part of waking up is Folgers in your cup",* was embedded in ads that showed women bringing order and care to the household through small acts of consumption. Kodak, on the other hand, leaned into the emotional labor of mothers, portraying them as memory-makers, the keepers of family continuity, through campaigns that celebrated maternal presence at birthdays, holidays, and school plays.

Figure 28: Folgers Coffee Adv from the ‘60s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm2b6lKtx8Q

A number of advertising campaigns from the 1960s and 1970s provide insight into the shifting representation of mothers during this era; one prominent example is the “Maxwell House Coffee” television commercials, which often featured mothers preparing coffee as a way to maintain family harmony. These ads placed the mother at the emotional center of the household, using coffee as a symbolic gesture of care and control. Similarly, print ads for Jell-O during the late 1960s emphasized ease and creativity in food preparation, showing mothers as inventive yet still firmly rooted in domestic routines.

Another illustrative case is the “Clorox” campaign, which framed mothers as vigilant protectors of their children’s health. Advertisements emphasized the sanitizing power of bleach and relied on imagery of mothers eliminating invisible germs, reinforcing the idea that maternal love was expressed through cleanliness and precaution.

Figure 29: Jell-O Adv from the '60s
(retrieved from Google Images)

Figure 30: Clorox Adv from the '60s
(retrieved from Google Images)

During this same period, Campbell's Soup ran a series of television spots emphasizing convenience and warmth, where mothers were shown serving soup to smiling children returning home from school; the tagline *"Soup is good food"* subtly positioned the mother as a provider of both nutrition and emotional nourishment. Though the tone of these ads was more relaxed than in the 1950s, they continued to idealize maternal care as essential to the moral and physical development of children.

These campaigns walked a fine line: they respected emerging feminist consciousness while ultimately reaffirming motherhood as a woman's primary role. As McRobbie argues in *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009), advertising during this period often incorporated feminist rhetoric only to repackage it within conservative frameworks that maintained traditional gender roles (McRobbie, 2009); advertisements began to show mothers who "chose" domestic life, subtly presenting it as an empowered, voluntary commitment rather than a cultural obligation.

Additionally, the knowing mother was further developed in this period as a competent but still domestically confined consumer, her expertise was positioned as intuitive rather than professional and thus remained comfortably within the boundaries of the home (Davis, Hogg, & Marshall, 2003). Advertising campaigns used this logic to appeal to women supposed innate maternal instincts, subtly reinforcing gendered divisions of labor: the mother was expected to be discerning (choosing the right brand of baby food, diapers, or cleaning products) and to express love and care through her consumer choices. As Lynch (2005) emphasizes, the power of advertising in this era lay in its ability to mask structural inequality beneath the language of choice, comfort, and care.

Overall, the 1960s and 1970s portrayals of mothers in advertising served as a cultural negotiation between stability and change: the maternal figure retained her centrality in the home but gained a more articulate and reflective voice, a voice that, while more visible, remained closely aligned with her role as the moral and emotional center of the family.

2.2.4 The 1980s:

By the 1980s, the growing number of working mothers gave rise to the *"supermom"* archetype: this figure was characterized by her ability to excel professionally while maintaining a loving and well-organized home, and, as a consequence, this archetype reflected and reinforced the increasing pressures placed on women to fulfill both traditional maternal duties and modern professional aspirations. In this context, advertising responded by depicting mothers as hyper-competent, multitasking individuals who could balance careers, childcare, and household duties with apparent ease (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Hays, 1996; McRobbie, 2009; Kilbourne, 2010; Winship, 1987).
Brands such as Johnson & Johnson and McDonald's embraced this image, crafting campaigns that celebrated maternal strength and dedication. Johnson & Johnson, for instance, ran ads portraying mothers gently bathing their babies, emphasizing emotional intimacy and reliability, while also suggesting that even the busiest working mothers would find time for this nurturing ritual. McDonald's commercials often featured mothers rewarding their children with Happy Meals after a long day, framing fast food as a practical yet loving maternal gesture in an over-scheduled lifestyle.

Figure 31: McDonald's Adv from the '80s (retrieved from Google Images)

These ads reinforced the idea that successful mothers ensured the emotional and physical wellbeing of their families without compromising professional or personal commitments, the mother became the family CEO: calm, capable, and constantly in motion.

Yet, as Hays notes in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996), the supermom ideal imposed unrealistic burdens, demanding perfection in all spheres and reinforcing the *"intensive mothering"* model (Hays, 1996). These representations idealized not only maternal multitasking but also consumer efficiency: the supermom was expected to make wise product choices that optimized time, health, and happiness.

Notably, the knowing mother evolved into a figure who could apply her maternal expertise both in the workplace and at home, her consumer knowledge extended to time-saving devices, healthy meal options, and educational tools, reinforcing her role as the family's logistical and emotional center (Davis, Hogg, & Marshall, 2003). Advertising thus promoted an image of maternal omnipotence, where the mother's competence was tied to her ability to consume effectively across multiple spheres of her life, a role both empowering and exhausting.

Further examples from the 1980s illustrate the dominance of the supermom narrative: Kodak's *"Capture the Moments"* campaign continued into the decade, portraying mothers as the emotional archivists of family life, in both print and television ads, mothers were shown documenting birthdays, school performances, and holidays, reinforcing their role as the custodians of memory and tradition: the act of photographing family moments was marketed as both a maternal responsibility and a means of emotional expression.

Oreo also capitalized on this maternal narrative by promoting cookies and milk as a bonding ritual between mothers and children: ads from the 1980s depicted mothers in modest work attire returning home and sharing Oreos with their children at the kitchen table. These domestic interludes helped to frame even brief, practical gestures as meaningful emotional labor performed by multitasking mothers.

Campbell's Soup, known for its longstanding association with family comfort, adapted its messaging in the 1980s to appeal to the modern working mother: commercials often featured women returning from work and preparing soup for their children, reinforcing the idea that maternal love could be expressed through efficient, thoughtful consumption. One television spot showed a child saying, "Mom, you're the best," after being served soup, a succinct summation of the emotional validation offered to mothers who fulfilled their roles with warmth and resourcefulness.

Figure 32: Campbell's Soup Adv from the ‘80s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mif4BqgrWsc

2.2.5 The 1990s:

In the 1990s, the shift toward more realistic depictions of mothers became increasingly visible in popular advertising, this was a decade marked by a growing discomfort with the unattainable standards set by previous decades, especially with the image of the supermom. Advertisers began to embrace a more grounded portrayal, acknowledging that mothers were fallible, overworked, and juggling complex emotional and practical responsibilities.

Hence, a backlash against the perfectionist ideals of the 1980s emerged in the 1990s: advertising began to explore more relatable and imperfect representations of motherhood. The *"real mom"* was someone who made mistakes, experienced frustration, and coped with the messiness of everyday life. These shifts mirrored wider cultural changes, including the emergence of mom-focused media such as parenting magazines, early web forums like BabyCenter, and the growing presence of television shows that portrayed mothers as multidimensional characters. In this context, advertising adapted to these new discourses, moving away from rigid idealization and toward more inclusive and emotionally honest portrayals of maternal life.

Brands like Dove, Cheerios, and Hallmark produced emotionally resonant campaigns that acknowledged the emotional labor and vulnerability of motherhood; this echoed the discourse on *“new momism”,* a term that describes how the media constructed a more down-to-earth maternal ideal that still demanded immense dedication, albeit in a more emotionally visible way (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

A notable example is the Cheerios campaign, which featured real-life mothers and children engaging in simple, unscripted moments of bonding over breakfast with a tender tone, moving away from the

spectacle of perfection. These ads resonated because they celebrated the ordinary, suggesting that good mothering was not about constant achievement but about being present and attentive.

Hallmark also contributed to this trend with emotional commercials centered on handwritten notes, cards, and small acts of love; their Mother's Day campaigns particularly emphasized the emotional labor performed by mothers, their ability to notice, remember, and care. These ads acknowledged that maternal love is expressed in subtle, often invisible ways, challenging the idea that motherhood must always be loud or performative.

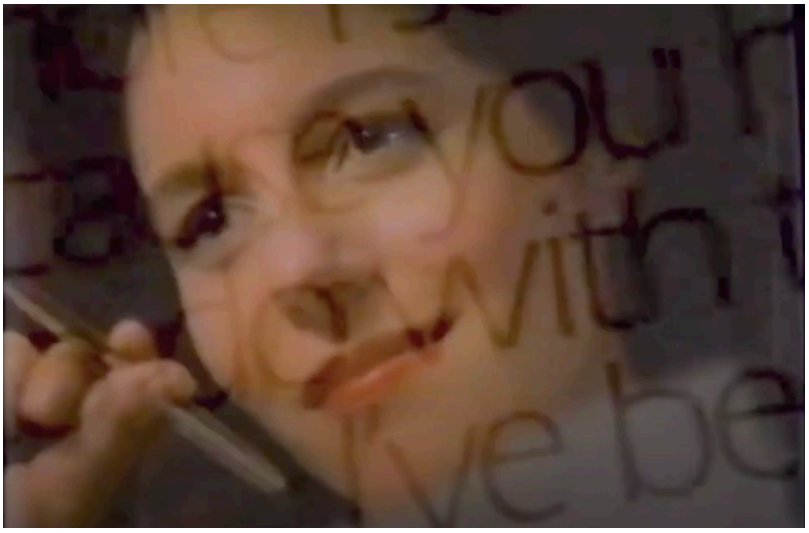


Figure 33: Hallmark Adv from 1995 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5dzXOC9ejY

Dove, which would later become famous for its "*Real Beauty*" campaign in the 2000s, laid early foundations in the 1990s by portraying women, including mothers, as emotionally complex and physically diverse; although not solely focused on mothers, these representations helped pave the way for a broader cultural acceptance of maternal imperfection and vulnerability.

Another emblematic campaign of this period was the Huggies diaper commercials, which began to embrace humor and realism: these ads featured mothers navigating messy diaper changes and unpredictable toddlers, often with a knowing smile or a relatable sigh; the tone was light and self-aware, portraying mothers as fallible yet loving figures doing their best in less-than-glamorous situations. Huggies' slogan *"There's a baby in there"* emphasized the humanity and chaos of motherhood, offering a stark contrast to the perfectionism of previous decades.

Meanwhile, Toyota's minivan commercials targeted *"soccer moms",* a cultural archetype that gained traction in the 1990s: these ads portrayed mothers as active, practical, and protective decision-makers, focused on both safety and convenience. They reinforced the image of the mother as a logistical expert, coordinating activities, transporting children, and choosing vehicles that met her family's evolving needs.

Figure 33: Toyota's minivan Adv from 1990 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8eXO72wSBk

These examples collectively reflect a growing recognition in 1990s advertising that maternal identity was multifaceted and rooted in real-life experience, and the emphasis was no longer solely on idealization but on relatability, complexity, and emotional truth.

Despite the shift toward imperfection and authenticity, the mother continued to be framed as the central decision-maker in the home. The knowing mother persisted, now portrayed as navigating the chaos with humor and resilience, often consulting new digital sources of information like parenting forums and brand websites (Davis, Hogg, & Marshall, 2003).

2.2.6 The 2000s:

In the early 2000s, maternal representation shifted again to highlight the mother's role as a discerning and empowered consumer. This period saw the rise of parenting forums, product reviews, and social media platforms, which transformed mothers into influential market actors, and advertising began to target mothers not only as caretakers but as informed, ethical decision-makers.

The 2000s ushered in a wave of maternal representations that highlighted individuality, research-driven decision-making, and concern for health and sustainability; one of the key examples from this era is the rise of Earth's Best Organic baby food campaigns, which emphasized that mothers could express love and responsibility through organic, chemical-free nutrition. The image of the mother here was one of discernment: she read labels, compared ingredients, and made careful choices rooted in health knowledge and long-term care.

Simultaneously, Johnson's Baby updated its messaging to acknowledge modern maternal anxieties: ads stressed product safety, hypoallergenic formulas, and endorsements by pediatricians, aligning

with the mother's role as an informed protector. These campaigns spoke directly to the knowing mother's desire for verified expertise, reinforcing that good mothers are not only caring, but also evidence driven.

Figure 34: Johnson's Baby Adv from the 2000s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0Y1pt1wfj4

Another example is the rise of the *"mommy blogger"* and her influence on consumer choices: companies began sending products to influential mothers with online followings, creating a new form of peer-led advertising. Mothers like Heather Armstrong (Dooce) and Ree Drummond (The Pioneer Woman) emerged as powerful voices, turning personal anecdotes into powerful endorsements and their relatability and trustworthiness gave brands access to communities built on emotional connection and shared experience.

Automotive companies also responded to these cultural shifts, indeed Subaru and Honda campaigns targeted millennial mothers with messages focused on safety, reliability, and environmental responsibility, often using storytelling to emphasize maternal strength and care. In one Subaru commercial, a mother teaches her daughter to drive and then gives her the keys to the family car, suggesting a maternal role that blends nurture with empowerment.

Another campaign that exemplifies the shift we are talking about is Pampers' *"Every Baby is a Little Miracle"* initiative, which presented mothers not just as caregivers but as thoughtful, informed individuals making emotional and health-conscious choices. These ads included diverse families and emphasized research-based product development, connecting maternal instincts to scientific knowledge.

Figure 35: Pampers Adv from the 2000s (retrieved from Google Images)

Similarly, BabyCenter.com emerged in this period as both a parenting resource and a platform for targeted advertising; mothers used these online forums to seek advice and product recommendations, and brands responded by tailoring digital campaigns to meet their informational needs. These interactions blurred the line between peer support and brand influence, reinforcing the centrality of the 'digitally empowered' mother.

Retailers like Target and Whole Foods also ran print and television campaigns that highlighted mothers shopping for eco-friendly and health-conscious products; these narratives often featured mothers pushing carts filled with organic food, green cleaning products, and educational toys: a visual vocabulary designed to affirm maternal care through ethically informed consumerism.

Brands focused on health, safety, and sustainability, often portraying mothers as proactive guardians of their children's well-being, the *"empowered consumer mother*" was depicted researching products, choosing organic foods, and making environmentally responsible choices. According to Lisa Wade and Myra Marx Ferree in *Gender* (2018), this version of motherhood aligns with neoliberal ideologies that prioritize individual responsibility, positioning mothers as rational actors within a market-driven framework (Wade & Ferree, 2018). Davis, Hogg, and Marshall (2003) argue that this empowered consumer identity is still tethered to traditional expectations: the mother's empowerment is sanctioned primarily in service of her family, and her knowledge, while broader, remains gendered

and domestic. The knowing mother is now "digitally fluent", but her sphere of influence is often restricted to the domestic and the consumable.

2.2.7 The 2010s:

The 2010s marked a significant diversification in maternal representation, influenced by social media and shifting cultural values around identity and inclusivity. The *"multidimensional digital mother"* encompassed a wide range of experiences, including single mothers, LGBTQ+ mothers, working mothers, and stay-at-home mothers.

Specifically, during the 2010s, maternal representation expanded significantly, both in who was portrayed and how. A defining example was the 2017 Dove Baby campaign *"#Realmums"*, which celebrated diverse forms of motherhood, from same-sex parents to single mothers and career-focused women: the campaign's slogan, "*Trust your way*", directly challenged the rigid standards of the past, validating a variety of maternal choices and parenting styles.

Figure 36: Dove Baby Adv from 2017 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtbzjBW3sD8

The brand Frida Mom also broke boundaries with its raw and honest depiction of postpartum recovery, airing ads that showed the physical and emotional aftermath of childbirth. These commercials sparked discussions about censorship and maternal invisibility, with many viewers praising their willingness to show what had long been hidden in sanitized portrayals of motherhood.

Brands like IKEA also entered the conversation with relatable storytelling: one 2015 ad followed a busy, overwhelmed mother rushing to get her kids ready in the morning, only to find peace and routine with IKEA's organizational solutions; the subtle messaging emphasized that chaos was part of modern motherhood, and that emotional comfort could come from structure, not perfection.

Another notable campaign from this period was Procter & Gamble's *"Thank You, Mom"* initiative, launched in the lead-up to the 2012 Olympic Games. These emotionally resonant commercials

focused on the behind-the-scenes role mothers play in raising future athletes, and by highlighting mothers' unseen labor, from waking early to prepare meals to comforting their children after failure, the campaign positioned motherhood as a foundational force of resilience, success, and character-building. The tagline, *"The hardest job in the world is the best job in the world",* became iconic.

Figure 37: P&G Adv from 2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnBvlz8EaZ0

Amazon's 2017 "*#MomGoals"* campaign, which circulated on social media platforms, portrayed modern mothers juggling parenting, careers, and social lives, often with humor and a strong sense of individuality. These representations moved away from the unrealistic perfectionism of the past and instead celebrated daily wins, like getting kids to school on time or improvising dinner.

These campaigns, alongside influencer partnerships and user-generated content, expanded the notion of what motherhood could look like in advertising, no longer limited to one image or lifestyle, but rich with contradictions, imperfections, and personality. As Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad (2015) note in their work on mediated intimacy, these portrayals allowed for greater complexity but also introduced new pressures to perform authenticity in the digital public sphere (Gill & Orgad, 2015).

Moreover, platforms like Instagram and YouTube enabled real mothers to become content creators, sharing personal narratives and influencing brand discourse and the rise of "*momfluencers*" also contributed to a new advertising paradigm: mothers partner with lifestyle brands to share everyday moments of parenting, blending personal narrative with sponsored content. Their curated authenticity resonates deeply with viewers, creating a sense of shared maternal experience that blurred the line between influencer and consumer; campaigns increasingly emphasized authenticity, diversity, and relatability. However, this visibility is not without contradictions, while *momfluencers* often promote an image of maternal imperfection and emotional honesty, these narratives are frequently shaped by the logic of platform capitalism and brand partnerships; the presentation of "real motherhood" is

selectively curated, aligning vulnerability and intimacy with commercial imperatives. As such, even portrayals of messiness and exhaustion become commodified, reinforcing normative ideals of motherhood through seemingly authentic content, and this creates a paradoxical expectation for mothers to be both relatable and aspirational, emotionally transparent yet brand-consistent. The knowing mother here becomes a curator of her own brand, managing her identity across platforms and engaging with products and practices that reinforce her maternal credibility. Though more visible and diverse, her labor continues to be commodified and directed toward family wellness and consumption (Davis, Hogg, & Marshall, 2003).

2.2.8 The 2020s, today:

In recent years, advertising has further evolved to depict mothers as ethically and socially engaged individuals: the *"conscious mother"* is one who navigates motherhood with awareness of broader societal issues, including sustainability, racial justice, mental health, and gender inclusivity.

Campaigns by brands such as Nike, Patagonia, and Billie have positioned mothers as activists, educators, and role models; this representation reflects the convergence of consumer culture and political awareness, portraying mothers as agents of change within both the family and society. This shift aligns with what Sarah Banet-Weiser describes in *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (2012), where brands adopt social justice language to resonate with consumers' ethical sensibilities, blurring the line between activism and marketing (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

Even in this progressive image, the knowing mother persists: she is expected to be ethically aware, socially engaged, and capable of making morally correct consumption choices for her family and community; her identity remains closely tied to the products she chooses and the values they symbolize (Davis, Hogg, & Marshall, 2003).

Advertising in the 2020s increasingly features mothers speaking directly to the camera, narrating their challenges, joys, and values in unscripted or lightly scripted formats. The aesthetic of these campaigns (often with minimal filters, documentary-style lighting, and real environments) amplifies their message of authenticity, and in doing so, brands aim not just to sell products, but to align with broader cultural conversations around gender justice, mental health, and caregiving labor.

An illustrative example of this shift is the 2020 Billie Razor campaign, which featured mothers of different body types and backgrounds in candid, unretouched moments of self-care; by including visible stretch marks, body hair, and postpartum skin, the campaign offered an unapologetic view of maternal bodies and helped normalize postpartum recovery in commercial spaces.

Another striking campaign that reflects this era is Apple's 2021 "*The Whole Working-From-Home Thing*" advertisement, which featured a working mother managing professional deadlines while

parenting her children in a cramped household: the ad portrayed the chaos, multitasking, and emotional toll of pandemic-era parenting, emphasizing empathy and resilience rather than control or perfection. It resonated with audiences by showcasing the real, unfiltered labor mothers perform professionally, emotionally, and logistically.

Likewise, the 2022 "*Real Postpartum*" campaign by Frida Mom broke further ground by showing scenes of postpartum care and physical recovery, including the use of mesh underwear and ice packs; these images were powerful because they rejected sanitized or aestheticized motherhood, instead emphasizing honesty, vulnerability, and community. The brand received widespread praise for addressing a reality many mothers experiences but few advertisements have dared to represent.

In the beauty industry, brands like CeraVe and The Ordinary collaborate with mom-influencers to destigmatize "*tired mom skin*" and offer accessible, honest skincare routines: these campaigns shifted focus away from glamour and anti-aging toward self-care and recovery, reimagining beauty for mothers without erasing the evidence of caregiving and fatigue.

Through these examples, 2020s advertising continues to champion authenticity, emotional transparency, and ethical awareness, recognizing motherhood not as a fixed identity but as a lived, evolving experience embedded in social and political realities.

2.3 The Representation of Motherhood in *Femvertising*

In contemporary advertising, motherhood has become a powerful symbol, increasingly framed through the lens of empowerment and diversity. This shift is especially visible within the phenomenon of *femvertising*, a marketing strategy that leverages feminist discourse to promote products while aligning with socially progressive values. This paragraph focuses specifically on how maternal figures are represented within this advertising trend and how these portrayals negotiate the complex terrain of tradition and transformation. The maternal subject in *femvertising* is constructed through a series of tensions: between empowerment and sacrifice, individuality and responsibility, resistance and conformity, that reflect broader ideological currents in contemporary society.

One of the most significant contributions of *femvertising* to maternal representation is its diversification of motherhood: advertising campaigns no longer exclusively depict white, middle-class, nuclear families; instead, they often include representations of single mothers, working mothers, mothers of color, and mothers with disabilities. These portrayals disrupt the cultural hegemony of the "*perfect mom*" stereotype and respond to long-standing feminist critiques of exclusion and normativity in media representations (Gill & Orgad, 2015). For example, the 2019 Mothercare "*Body Proud Mums*" campaign featured unretouched photographs of postpartum bodies,

challenging the sanitized depictions that have dominated advertising for decades; this was more than a visual shift, it was a political statement about bodily autonomy, authenticity, and the normalization of maternal experiences that are usually hidden from public view.

Figure 38: Mothercare Adv from 2019 (retrieved from Google Images)

Similarly, WaterWipes' 2020 campaign, *"When a Baby is Born, a Parent is Born",* shifted the narrative focus away from the infant and onto the mother's psychological transformation, it portrayed the early stages of motherhood as a raw, complex, and often overwhelming process; by doing so, the campaign emphasized the humanity of mothers, highlighting not just their nurturing instincts but also their emotional needs. This approach aligns with a broader trend in *femvertising* that seeks to humanize, rather than idealize, the maternal subject.

European and American campaigns have both contributed meaningfully to this change: the Swedish furniture giant IKEA's "*Where Life Happens*" campaign featured a single mother navigating her daily routine with grace and quiet strength, without romanticizing or dramatizing her struggle; in the United States, FridaMom's campaigns have been particularly bold: their postpartum recovery ads, which depict mesh underwear, ice packs, and emotional exhaustion, broke taboos around childbirth and maternal recovery. Despite being rejected from broadcast during the 2020 Oscars for being "too graphic," the ad went viral online and sparked widespread conversations about maternal health and representation. All these cases reveal the cultural boundaries that *femvertising* continues to test (and sometimes transgress) in its portrayal of motherhood.

In these campaigns, visual and narrative techniques play a key role: unlike traditional glossy, idealized imagery, *femvertising* often opts for handheld camera styles, natural lighting, and documentary

aesthetics to create an impression of realism and intimacy, while the tone is confessional rather than prescriptive, emphasizing emotion over perfection; this strategic authenticity has become one of *femvertising*'s most recognizable signatures. As Banet-Weiser (2012) argues, the language of empowerment in branding is often ambivalent: it invites consumers to feel seen and understood while still operating within the commercial logic of market exchange.

In the realm of maternal representation, this ambivalence becomes particularly evident. While many campaigns celebrate maternal imperfection and diversity, they simultaneously construct new norms; for instance, the "*real mom*" in *femvertising* is often expected to be emotionally articulate, socially conscious, and aesthetically minimalist, she may not need to bake cookies or wear heels, but she must still embody a curated version of authenticity that is marketable and aspirational. This points to a subtle but powerful shift: the ideal of maternal perfection has not disappeared, it has been rebranded. The Honest Company, co-founded by Jessica Alba, exemplifies this phenomenon: its branding revolves around maternal ethics (organic products, transparency, and responsibility) and its visual language features fresh-faced mothers in natural settings, surrounded by wooden toys and eco-friendly packaging. On one hand, this disrupts the hyper-polished imagery of 20th-century domesticity; on the other, it creates a new, equally demanding maternal archetype: the ethical consumer-mother. As Davis, Hogg, and Marshall (2003) observe, advertising has long framed mothers as "knowing subjects", responsible for making informed choices that ensure the wellbeing of their families, and we can definitely say that *femvertising* continues this tradition, but under the guise of feminist progress.

Figure 39 + Figure 40: The Honest Company Ads from 2023 (retrieved from Google Images)

The Elvie Pump campaign (2018) is another illustrative case: it featured working mothers using silent, wearable breast pumps in everyday environments, including office meetings and commutes. By integrating motherhood into public and professional spaces, the campaign challenged the cultural divide between maternal and productive labor; it redefined the mother not as someone temporarily

removed from society, but as an active participant navigating its demands. Yet, the aspirational tone (the sleek design, the well-dressed users) reinforced the idea that maternal empowerment is still shaped by access to resources and aesthetic codes of middle-class professionalism.

While *femvertising* has opened space for diverse maternal figures, these representations are often uneven: queer mothers, black mothers, immigrant mothers, and mothers with disabilities are still underrepresented or appear in symbolic ways, their experiences are rarely integrated into the central narrative of a campaign. As Crenshaw (1991) and McRobbie (2009) argue, any feminist politics that ignores structural inequality risks reproducing the very exclusions it seeks to overcome; thus, the celebration of maternal difference in *femvertising* must be read critically, with attention to who is visible and whose experiences remain marginal.

Femvertising thrives on emotional resonance, it seeks to generate empathy, solidarity, and recognition, the maternal body becomes a site of emotional authenticity: stretch marks, tired eyes, joyful laughter, and quiet exhaustion are visual cues meant to signify "realness." This emotional capital is what gives *femvertising* its persuasive power. Yet, as Illouz (2007) notes, the commercialization of emotion is one of the defining features of late capitalism: when maternal vulnerability becomes a marketing asset, the line between recognition and exploitation becomes blurred. As we can notice, examples of true *femvertising* exist, but there are still very few that do not risk contradiction for now.

Nevertheless, despite these contradictions, *femvertising* has succeeded in expanding the symbolic repertoire of motherhood, it has challenged taboos, celebrated complexity, and legitimized maternal experiences that were once silenced; it has also invited public discourse on issues like postpartum depression, work-life balance, and reproductive rights. These achievements are not insignificant, however, they must be situated within a critical framework that interrogates their limits and implications; as scholars like Gill (2007) emphasize, feminism in media must be evaluated not only by its representational gains but by its political and economic conditions of production.

In conclusion, the representation of motherhood in *femvertising* is a site of both possibility and constraint: it reflects evolving cultural values and responds to feminist critiques, but it also reinscribes new norms and market dependencies. The maternal subject in *femvertising* is empowered, but within boundaries defined by commercial viability and aesthetic appeal; she is visible, but her visibility is conditioned by brand strategy, and understanding this ambivalence is crucial for analyzing how contemporary advertising shapes, and is shaped by, broader discourses of gender, care, and identity.

2.4 "Real Mum" VS "Ideal Mum": The Ambivalent Role of *Femvertising* in Shaping Maternal Stereotypes

The dualism between the "*real mom*" and the "*ideal mom*" lies at the heart of *femvertising*'s ambivalent role in shaping maternal identity: these two archetypes serve not only as symbolic figures but also as cultural frameworks that define what kinds of motherhood are visible, celebrated, and normalized in advertising. Laura Oswald (2009) insightfully explores this dichotomy through the lens of semiotics and branding, arguing that the "real mom" and "ideal mom" are not simply characters but semiotic entities and archetypes within a cultural narrative. These two maternal archetypes emerge from a cultural tension between aspiration and authenticity that has come to define contemporary advertising: on one side lies the desire to uphold traditional ideals of maternal excellence, graceful, composed, and self-sacrificing; on the other, the growing demand for realness, emotional transparency, and imperfection. This tension reflects broader societal shifts in the perception of motherhood, shaped by feminism, labor market changes, and social media culture. According to Oswald, advertising constructs meaning by positioning these archetypes in opposition to one another: the ideal mom representing control, beauty, and tradition, while the real mom symbolizes relatability, vulnerability, and modernity. One illustrative example Oswald discusses is a Zyrtec commercial (Oswald, 2009 and 2012) in which two mothers interact at a playground: the ideal mom is perfectly styled, composed, and represents a traditional standard of maternal grace, while the real mom is slightly messy, casually dressed, and presented as more down-to-earth and approachable. Although the ad frames the real mom as the more authentic and relatable figure, Oswald emphasizes that this character, too, is carefully curated, her authenticity becomes a brand asset, a commercially viable identity constructed to engage a modern audience.

Oswald emphasizes that both figures ultimately serve brand strategy by offering consumers recognizable roles they can identify with or aspire to: in this framework, the "real mom" becomes a symbolic update rather than a rupture with past norms; instead of dismantling the ideal, she functions as a soft alternative that still aligns with dominant cultural values, particularly those associated with middle-class femininity and competent consumption. This shift reflects a broader strategy in *femvertising*, where authenticity becomes a commodity; the "real mom" figure is used to challenge outdated representations but also to sustain a commercial narrative that values relatability over radical change. She is not free from expectations, rather, she embodies a different set of norms: she must be self-aware, emotionally expressive, environmentally conscious, and aesthetically effortless. The "ideal mom," once criticized for being unrealistically flawless, is replaced by a "real mom" whose flaws are curated and marketable. Both figures remain tethered to ideals, they simply reflect different cultural desires and anxieties.

A comparable example can be found in the 2017 Johnson's Baby UK campaign, which contrasted a traditionally serene and flawless mother figure with a more relatable, casually dressed mother multitasking through a chaotic routine. The ad explicitly aimed to humanize maternal labor, showing spilled cereal, emotional outbursts, and last-minute diaper changes. Like the Zyrtec ad, it offered the "real mom" as the more desirable figure, praised not for flawlessness but for her resilience and relatability; however, the campaign still featured a tidy kitchen, a well-lit home, and a healthy child, signaling that even 'realness' must meet certain aesthetic expectations.

An interesting case can be found in a recent Pampers campaign in the United States, which depicted a tender, emotionally rich moment of a mother waking up in the middle of the night to care for her newborn: the ad highlighted the fatigue and sacrifice involved in early motherhood, offering a seemingly authentic portrayal of maternal dedication. Yet, even within this depiction of exhaustion and vulnerability, the visual setting remained idealized: a soft-lit nursery, a calm baby, and a mother whose tiredness never undermines her gentleness. The campaign was powerful in its emotional appeal, yet it reaffirmed a maternal ideal in which selflessness is expected, and hardship is beautifully contained within aesthetic boundaries.

Another notable example is H&M Mama's maternity wear campaign, which featured pregnant models (including women of different ethnicities and body types) posing confidently in urban settings. While it embraced body positivity and inclusivity, the campaign also reflected a new standard: the stylish, composed, and empowered pregnant woman who navigates motherhood with elegance and modern flair. The use of aspirational fashion imagery suggested that even real motherhood should be publicly presentable and trend-conscious, subtly reinforcing ideals of composure, consumption, and beauty.

These examples reinforce Oswald's insight: the "real mom" does not liberate viewers from expectations, but updates them; her challenges are more visible, but she is still rewarded for meeting them with grace and consumer-savvy solutions. The emotional labor of motherhood, now central in femvertising narratives, remains unequally distributed, quietly normalized, and subtly monetized.

Psychologically, this ambivalence mirrors the deep and continuous negotiation mothers experience as they construct their identities under competing social and cultural pressures. On one side, contemporary advertising tells mothers they are allowed to be "real": tired, messy, emotionally open; on the other, it provides a very clear visual guide for what that realness should look like: not too raw, never disruptive, always balanced. Scholars such as Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004), in *The Mommy Myth*, argue that even progressive media representations tend to impose subtle, invisible pressures on mothers to perform according to culturally desirable versions of authenticity. This leads to what they call "*new momism*", a phenomenon where mothers are celebrated for their apparent imperfection, but still expected to maintain emotional composure, self-discipline.

Susan Bordo's theory (1993) of female embodiment helps to explain how this contradiction becomes inscribed on women's bodies: for Bordo, the body is the site where social norms are negotiated and internalized, especially for women; the maternal body, in particular, becomes a visual surface on which cultural ideals are projected, it must show evidence of labor, but not too much; stretch marks are welcome, but in soft light; fatigue is permitted, but only if accompanied by quiet strength and control. In *femvertising*, the mother's body becomes a curated canvas of culturally acceptable vulnerability, a zone where authenticity is managed and commodified; this makes the maternal figure highly visible, but also subject to relentless scrutiny, even under the guise of empowerment.

From the audience's perspective, these distinctions are deeply felt: some mothers express relief and recognition when seeing "real" representations of motherhood, with campaigns that show exhaustion, mess, and emotional complexity, yet others experience a new kind of pressure, feeling that even imperfection must now be performed correctly. As research by Johnston and Taylor (2008) shows, women often approach empowerment-themed ads with ambivalence: they may appreciate the visibility and relatability but are also wary of the underlying commercial motives. Similarly, focus groups analyzed by Negra and Tasker (2014) reveal that many mothers feel caught between old and new ideals, navigating a landscape where both the "perfect" and the "authentically imperfect" mother are equally prescriptive.

In addition, the rise of social media influencers has introduced a new dynamic in the circulation of maternal representations: "*momfluencers*" often partner with brands to share highly curated versions of their parenting journey. While these narratives include messiness and honesty, they also perpetuate new standards of performative authenticity. As Abidin (2016) points out, the affective labor of influencers is deeply tied to their marketability: the mother becomes a brand in herself, whose worth is measured in followers, engagement, and sponsored content, and this economy rewards certain maternal performances over others, subtly reinforcing norms under the guise of personal storytelling.

Despite these limitations, *femvertising* does offer meaningful openings for the redefinition of motherhood, it has given visibility to marginalized experiences and expanded the cultural vocabulary of maternal identity. Campaigns such as Dove's "*Real Moms*", Cora's menstruation and motherhood storytelling, or Nike's celebration of athlete mothers like Serena Williams contribute to a broader dismantling of the narrow ideals that once constrained maternal representation; they acknowledge maternal strength, complexity, and autonomy, even if within the limits of branding.

Therefore, the role of *femvertising* in challenging or reinforcing maternal stereotypes must be understood as inherently ambivalent; it operates through a constant negotiation between progress and preservation, critique and conformity: on one level, it contests the myth of the perfect mother; on another, it reimagines perfection in new, marketable forms. It offers diversity but often within

aesthetic and economic boundaries, it speaks the language of feminism but through the grammar of advertising.

To evaluate its cultural and ideological impact, we must resist the temptation to categorize *femvertising* as either liberatory or regressive; instead, we must analyze how it functions, how it produces meaning, distributes visibility, and organizes affect. In doing so, we can appreciate its contributions to maternal representation while remaining critical of the systems it sustains. As a media form, *femvertising* has proven its power to shape narratives of care, identity, and womanhood; as a cultural force, it reflects the contradictions of our time, where feminism and capitalism, resistance and reinforcement, often coexist within the same frame.

2.5 Research Gap and Research Question

In the last two decades, *femvertising* has been widely recognized as a powerful shift in the advertising industry: one that moves away from the traditional sexualization and objectification of women toward a more empowering and emotionally resonant form of representation (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Cortese, 2016). Rooted in the broader landscape of brand activism and postfeminist media culture, *femvertising* encourages brands to align with feminist ideals by portraying women as strong, self-reliant, and multidimensional subjects (Gill, 2007; Kanai, 2019; Banet-Weiser, 2018). Scholars have explored how these campaigns reconfigure the symbolic economy of femininity, introducing alternative role models and embracing diversity in terms of body size, ethnicity, ability, and profession; yet, despite these advances, the representation of motherhood within *femvertising* has received limited scholarly attention and remains a largely unresolved terrain.

Most *femvertising* campaigns focus on young, independent women whose empowerment is framed through themes such as career success, self-love, fitness, or sexual freedom. Motherhood, when it appears at all, is either idealized or treated in ways that reproduce older stereotypes, what Douglas and Michaels (2004) have called the *"new momism":* a romanticized version of motherhood that demands total devotion, emotional perfection, and self-erasure. In contrast to the growing complexity of female identities represented in *femvertising*, the maternal figure remains constrained by binary oppositions: aspirational vs. realistic, motional caregiver vs. rational expert, instinctive vs. assertive. These oppositions reflect broader cultural tensions, but they also suggest a missed opportunity for *femvertising* to evolve into a truly inclusive and intersectional narrative practice.

In parallel, research on maternal imagery in advertising, while historically rich, has rarely intersected with the feminist turn in branding: classical studies (Goffman, 1979; Kilbourne, 1999) have shown how mothers have long been used as instruments of ideological reproduction, embodying values such as purity, domesticity, and selflessness; while, more recent analyses (Lynch, 2005; Thompson, 2017;

Hays, 1996) have problematized the postfeminist construction of the "supermom" or the "competent consumer-mother", revealing how advertising continues to conflate care with consumption, and femininity with maternal responsibility. However, few of these studies engage with the rhetorical, visual, and affective strategies that could be borrowed from *femvertising* to offer more emancipatory portrayals of mothers in contemporary campaigns.

This research gap is significant because mothers constitute one of the most powerful consumer segments, especially in industries related to food, healthcare, fashion, education, wellness, and child-rearing products; brands targeting this audience often resort to emotionally manipulative messages or nostalgic representations of care, without considering how modern mothers perceive themselves and how they wish to be seen. The question, therefore, is not only about how mothers are represented, but also about how they receive, decode, and evaluate these representations.

Which representation of motherhood makes women feel more empowered?
An ideal, multitasking mother, capable of doing it all and perfectly balancing work and family? Or a real mother, with everyday struggles, who can't always manage everything, who is tired, stressed, and sometimes feels down? When a woman, whether she is a mother or not, turns on the television and sees a commercial featuring an ideal, perfect mother, a *"supermom"* of sorts, does she feel inadequate or inspired by this portrayal? On the other hand, if the ad showed a real, imperfect mother, would she relate to her but still feel flawed, or would she instead feel understood and empowered?
So, what is the right balance, the best way to address the audience and the most effective language to convey a feminist message through the figure of the mother and the role she plays in our society?

Against this backdrop, this thesis proposes to investigate how the principles of *femvertising* (authenticity, inclusivity, empowerment, emotional resonance) can be meaningfully applied to maternity-focused campaigns. Rather than assuming that *femvertising* is inherently incompatible with maternal narratives, this research begins with the hypothesis that a productive intersection is not only possible but necessary. The challenge lies in creating a form of representation that avoids both the trap of idealization (which alienates mothers by projecting unattainable perfection) and that of hyper-realism (which risks reinforcing deficit-based narratives of exhaustion and sacrifice). In other words, the goal is to explore how aspiration and authenticity can be balanced, in ways that support the emotional, social, and symbolic needs of contemporary mothers.

The focus of the research will be consumer perception: how do mothers interpret maternity-focused *femvertising*? What kind of language, visuals, and storytelling make them feel seen, valued, and supported? What cultural myths continue to circulate, even within seemingly progressive narratives? And what kinds of rhetorical and semiotic cues contribute to feelings of emancipation, solidarity, or

alienation? These questions will be investigated through qualitative methods, combined with a semiotic analysis of selected advertising campaigns that explicitly target mothers.

To sum up, the research question guiding this investigation is:

How can the principles of femvertising be effectively applied to maternity-focused campaigns to balance authenticity and aspiration?

This formulation highlights a dual concern: on one hand, the application of feminist advertising strategies to maternal representation; on the other, the need to maintain credibility and relevance by avoiding performative gestures or unrealistic portrayals. The emphasis on "balance" underscores the complexity of maternal identity as both a lived experience and a cultural construct, shaped by expectations of care, labor, sacrifice, and fulfillment.

By addressing this question, the study contributes to multiple fields of inquiry: advertising and media studies, feminist theory, maternal studies, and consumer behavior; it also responds to a growing demand for representations that are not only more diverse, but also more ethically and emotionally attuned to the realities of women's lives. As consumers become increasingly aware of marketing strategies and their ideological implications, brands that fail to engage in genuine dialogue with their audiences' risk losing trust and relevance; on the contrary, campaigns that succeed in portraying motherhood as a plural, evolving, and empowering experience have the potential to build stronger connections and foster real social change.

In conclusion, this thesis aims to fill a critical gap by exploring the intersection between *femvertising* and motherhood not just as a thematic innovation, but as a strategic and ethical rethinking of how brands speak to and about women. Through an analysis of visual rhetoric, narrative devices, and consumer reception, the research will offer both a theoretical contribution and practical insights into how maternity-focused campaigns can evolve in a more inclusive, empowering, and culturally sensitive direction.

Chapter 3: The Research

3.1 Research Methodology

In order to address my research question, this study adopted a multi-method research design, combining two complementary approaches. The first stage of the research consisted of a semiotic analysis of four advertising campaigns featuring mothers as central figures and addressing motherhood through diverse aesthetic and narrative strategies. This analytical phase was essential for identifying the symbolic structures, cultural codes, and value systems embedded in these representations, as well as for mapping how different advertising discourses construct, frame, or challenge the maternal role.

Semiotic analysis was chosen because of its unique ability to unpack the latent meanings and ideological underpinnings of visual and textual messages. As Peverini (2012) argues, advertising is not merely a vehicle for promoting products, but a "*symbolic dispositive*" that reflects and shapes collective imaginaries, social norms, and identity formations. Similarly, Oswald (2015) emphasizes that semiotics allows researchers to investigate the interplay between marketing signs and cultural structures, revealing how brands negotiate meaning within specific sociocultural contexts. In this sense, the semiotic lens provides an indispensable interpretive tool for understanding how motherhood is encoded and communicated in *femvertising* campaigns, not only at the surface level of representation, but also in terms of deeper ideological investments and affective appeals.

By selecting advertisements that approached maternity through contrasting tones, ranging from highly emotional to ironic or subversive, the analysis aimed to capture a spectrum of representational strategies and to explore how different brands navigate the tension between realism and idealization in portraying mothers. The findings from this semiotic study laid the conceptual groundwork for the second phase of the research, which consisted of in-depth interviews with real mothers, in order to test and expand the interpretive hypotheses generated in the analytical phase.

The analysis of the selected commercials was conducted following the frameworks proposed by Semprini (1992), Bianchi (2011), and Peverini (2012), which combine discursive segmentation, narrative structure, and value-oriented interpretation to decode the socio-cultural dimensions of advertising. Specifically, the semiotic analysis was carried out in three distinct but interrelated phases: a *surface level segmentation*, in which each advertisement was broken down sequence by sequence to identify narrative progression and visual cues; a *semio-narrative level,* focused on uncovering the underlying narrative structures and actantial roles shaping the portrayal of motherhood; and an *axiological level,* aimed at interpreting the system of values and oppositions embedded in each

campaign, in order to understand the ideological positioning of the brand and the cultural vision of motherhood it promotes.

The second study conducted as part of this research project was a qualitative investigation based on *in-depth interviews* with a group of mothers: this phase was designed to integrate the findings of the semiotic analysis by shifting the focus from the structure of representation to the perspective of those who experience and interpret these representations in their everyday lives. While the first study unpacked the symbolic and discursive mechanisms employed by advertising to construct maternal imagery, the interviews aimed to explore how these portrayals are received, evaluated, and emotionally processed by real women who inhabit the role of the mother.

The choice to employ in-depth interviews stemmed from the method's capacity to generate detailed, reflective accounts of individual meaning-making; this method, grounded in a qualitative paradigm, enabled the collection of first-person narratives that reveal how mothers negotiate the messages conveyed by *femvertising*: what they identify with, what they reject, and how they make sense of the values embedded in these campaigns. Rather than seeking to quantify opinions, the aim was to gain access to participants' subjective interpretations, personal histories, and emotional responses, in order to understand how advertising intersects with their lived experiences of motherhood.

By engaging a diverse sample of women, the study provided valuable insight into the multiplicity of ways in which maternal identity is felt, expressed, and represented; this second empirical phase was therefore crucial to addressing the research question from an audience-centered perspective, highlighting the ways in which advertising can either resonate with or alienate the individuals it seeks to represent. Through these narratives, the study aimed to uncover what elements make a campaign feel meaningful, authentic, and empowering, or, conversely, unrealistic and disconnected from the realities of motherhood.

In conclusion, together, these two methodological approaches (the semiotic analysis of advertising spots and the qualitative exploration of maternal perspectives) enabled a multidimensional understanding of how motherhood is constructed, communicated, and perceived within *femvertising*. Their integration was essential to fully address the research question, as it combined the interpretive depth of textual and visual analysis with the experiential richness of mothers' lived responses.

3.2 Semiotic Analysis

3.2.1 Theoretical foundations of the Semiotic Approach

Semiotics, broadly defined as the study of signs and symbols, what they mean, and how they are used (Cambridge Dictionary) offers a rich and nuanced framework for the analysis of advertising. Far from

being simple tools of persuasion, advertisements function as complex cultural texts that engage in meaning production through images, language, sound, and narrative. A semiotic perspective allows scholars to move beyond surface-level content and instead explore how ads construct, circulate, and naturalize ideologies, values, and identities (Peverini, 2012).

According to Oswald (2012), advertising should be approached as a form of "*commercial storytelling,*" one that does not merely inform or describe, but actively constructs symbolic universes through the manipulation of signs. These signs operate within broader cultural codes that audiences are expected to recognize and decode; therefore, meaning in advertising is not inherent but emerges through the interplay between signifiers and the sociocultural contexts in which they are embedded. Each sign gains significance not in isolation, but through its relationship with other signs and with the interpretive frameworks shared by a given audience.

In her semiotic model, Oswald outlines three registers of meaning within advertising: the denotative, the connotative, and the mythic. The denotative level captures what is literally represented; the connotative level refers to the emotional, symbolic, or cultural associations tied to that representation; and the mythic level reveals the underlying ideological narratives, the "stories" society tells itself about power, identity, gender, and value.

Peverini (2012) draws attention to the semiotic competence required by both producers and consumers of advertising texts. Advertisers must anticipate their audience's cultural literacy, while viewers bring their own interpretive resources to the text. Central to Peverini's view is the notion of the *textual contract***:** an implicit agreement between the advertisement and its audience that governs the mode of address, tone, and interpretive cues. This contract ensures that meaning making is not a passive reception, but an active process of engagement and recognition. Building on this, Solík (2014) emphasizes the critical dimension of semiotic analysis: the author proposes that advertising functions as a semiotic battlefield, where dominant ideologies are either reinforced or contested. From this perspective, semiotic analysis is not merely descriptive, but interpretative and political. It interrogates how ads participate in broader cultural discourses, making visible the ways in which power, identity, and ideology are encoded within commercial communication.

Taken together, these perspectives position semiotics as an essential methodological approach to understanding how advertising functions as a system of signs. By examining both the form and content of advertisements (what is shown, how it is shown, and why), it becomes possible to uncover the cultural assumptions, symbolic logics, and ideological undercurrents that structure the world of consumer communication.

To operationalize the semiotic approach in a systematic way, this study adopts a three-phase model drawing from Semprini (1992), Bianchi (2011), and Peverini (2012). These phases (Surface Level,

Semio-Narrative Level, and Axiological Level) progressively deepen the analysis from the observable to the abstract, from textual construction to cultural meaning, and each phase is essential to understanding how an advertisement encodes and transmits its message.

The Surface Level represents the starting point into semiotic analysis: it involves the detailed breakdown of the audiovisual text into narrative sequences, each of which conveys a distinct episode or function within the advertisement. Rather than merely slicing the video shot by shot, the goal is to isolate coherent segments that correspond to specific narrative or thematic moments. Following the guidelines from Peverini (2012), each sequence should be described according to several key visual and auditory features: *sequence length and structure* (sequences can vary in length and rhythm, from quick cuts typical of dynamic, slice-of-life ads to longer, contemplative scenes. The segmentation depends on narrative coherence, not simply editing pace); *content description* (each sequence should be briefly summarized in terms of what happens, who appears, and what action unfolds. This helps map the advertisement's discursive structure); *framing and camera work* (the width of the frame indicates whether the focus is on people, actions, or objects. Framing choices suggest symbolic priorities: faces may convey emotion; objects may highlight branding); *camera angle* (vertical vs. horizontal framing can signal not only perspective but also the intended platform. Angles create power dynamics and emotional responses); *lighting* (the temperature and direction of light help construct emotional atmosphere. Warm lighting typically connotes intimacy, while cold lighting conveys distance or professionalism); *color palette* (color tones shape the emotional and symbolic mood. Orange-red hues suggest energy or joy; blue-green can indicate calm or detachment); *soundtrack and soundscape* (diegetic and extradiegetic sounds must be identified. This includes music, voiceovers, dialogue, sound effects, and background noise. The relation between sound and image contributes to the ad's rhythm and affective pull); *viewpoint and listening point* (who sees and who hears? Are we aligned with the character's perspective or observing from the outside? Chion's typology helps classify how sound contributes to the narrative and the enunciative strategy); *rhythm and tempo* (the pace of cuts, motion, and transitions defines the ad's internal logic and orientation. Rhythmic variations can signal emotional intensity or highlight product features).

Overall, this surface-level analysis sets the stage for understanding how form and aesthetics prime interpretation: by dissecting the compositional and sensory elements of each sequence, the analyst gains access to the discursive strategies through which meaning is organized. However, it is essential to move beyond this level into the semio-narrative and axiological dimensions to fully comprehend how narratives and values are encoded.

The second phase of semiotic analysis, the *Semio-Narrative Level*, focuses on the deep narrative structures underlining the advertisement. At this level, the analysis is guided by the structuralist

tradition developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas (late 1960s–1970s), particularly through two fundamental models: the Actantial Model and the Canonical Narrative Schema. These tools reveal the internal grammar of the text, how meaning is generated through relations among roles, actions, and transformations, regardless of the medium's brevity or apparent simplicity.

The *Actantial Model* identifies six core narrative roles, called *actants,* which are present in virtually all narrative structures. These roles are not tied to specific characters but rather to functions that can be fulfilled by people, objects, ideas, or institutions. The six actants are: the *Subject* **(**is the protagonist, the one who desires to obtain the object. In advertising, the subject is often the consumer or a surrogate of them); the *Object* (is the value or goal being pursued. In advertising the object might be self-confidence, time, beauty, social approval, or inner peace); the *Sender* (is the instance that prompts or justifies the quest and it could be society, family, the brand itself, or a normative ideal); the *Receiver* (is the actant who receives a mandate from the sender and initiates a narrative program aimed at acquiring the valued object. The receiver commonly becomes the subject of the quest); the *Helper* **(**helpers are agents that assist the subject in achieving their goal, commonly the product or service being advertised); the *Opponent* (opponents are obstacles, adversaries, or social forces that hinder the process, for instance, time pressure, stereotypes, fatigue, social norms). This model is crucial in advertising analysis because it shows how brands construct relationships of desire, conflict, and resolution; for example, in *femvertising* campaigns, the brand often positions itself as the helper, empowering the subject (typically a mother or woman) to overcome opponents such as unrealistic expectations, social fatigue, or cultural constraints. Moreover, identifying the actants clarifies the ideological underpinnings of the message: what role does the consumer play? Who defines what is desirable? And which struggles are validated or ignored? This structural reading reveals the often-invisible ways in which values are encoded and identities are shaped within advertising narratives.

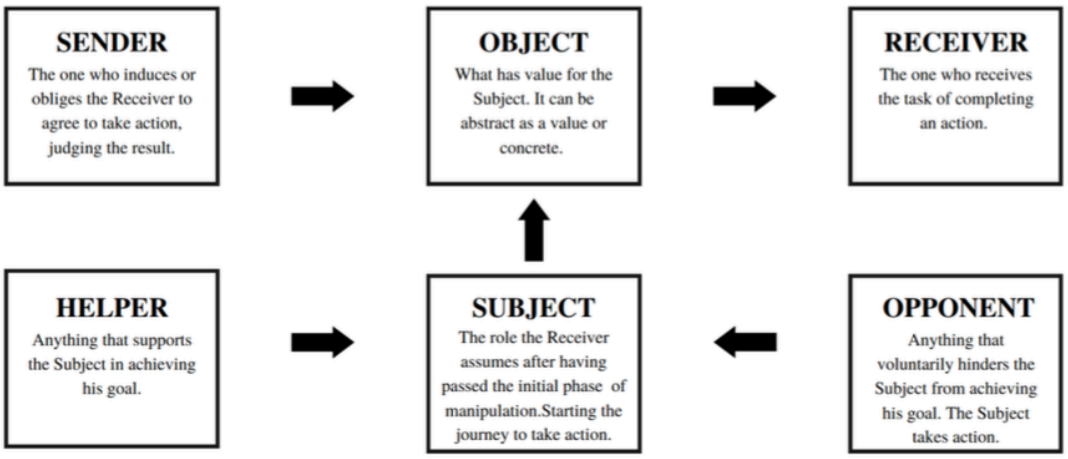


Figure 41: Garimas's Actantial Model (Ruiz, Collantes & Oliva, 2015)

The *Canonical Narrative Schema* (*hereafter, CNS*) further articulates the dynamic structure of transformation into narrative. It divides the story into four key phases, each representing a step in the subject's journey *Manipulation* (this initial phase explains why the Subject enters the quest. A lack is identified, or a desire is instilled, often through a sender figure or a cultural code: normally, the Sender persuades the Subject to take action. In advertising, this frequently corresponds to the articulation of a problem, frustration, or social pressure that the viewer is meant to relate to); *Competence* (here, the Subject acquires the ability to perform an action, he gains the means or tools necessary to succeed in the quest. In ads, this is often where the product is introduced, not just as an object, but as a solution, a way to enable agency or transformation. The competence phase answers the question: how can the Subject act?); *Performance* (this is the execution of the action; the Subject takes action. The Subject engages with the challenge and attempts to achieve the object of value. It is the narrative climax, where transformation begins to occur, often dramatized in physical, emotional, or symbolic terms); *Sanction* (in the final phase, the outcome is evaluated by the Sender: the Subject is either rewarded or validated for their action implicitly or explicitly. This typically involves emotional closure or recognition and, in advertising, frequently manifests in a resolution scene that associates the brand with success, peace, happiness, or empowerment).

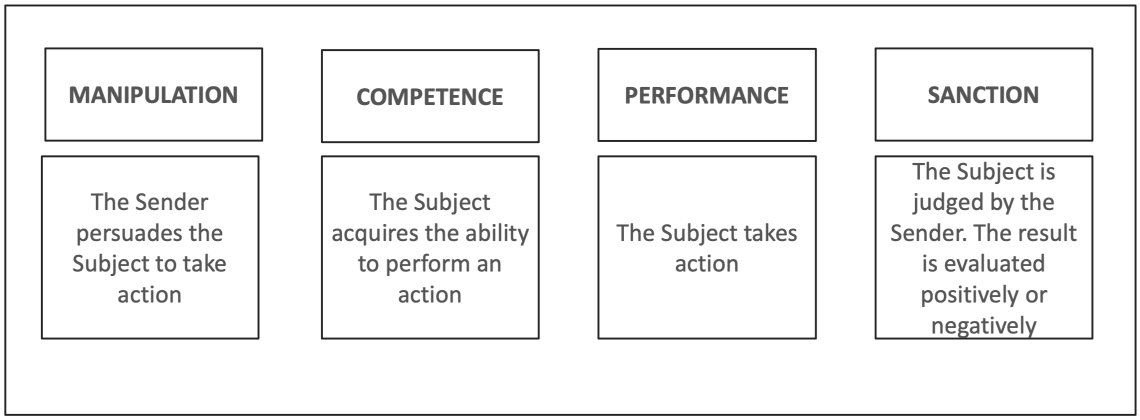


Figure 42: Greimas's Canonical Narrative Schema

While the Actantial Model focuses on roles and relational dynamics, the Canonical Narrative Schema highlights the temporal and logical flow of the narrative. Used together, they enable a deep and systematic reading of the advertisement: the actants define who is involved, in what capacity, and how the story unfolds over time and why. By integrating these models, the semio-narrative level uncovers not only the structure of the story, but the deeper mechanics of meaning, identification, and ideological encoding.

The third and final phase addresses the *Axiological or Value-Driven Level* of the advertisement: here, the focus shifts from narrative structure to the *ideological implications* of the message. Every story is built on a system of oppositions (order/disorder, independence/dependence, nature/technology, tradition/modernity) and these oppositions are rarely neutral; they reflect cultural hierarchies and normative frameworks. Using tools such as the *semiotic square,* the analyst identifies and organizes these oppositions and explores how the ad positions certain values over others; for example, a campaign that champions "real motherhood" may implicitly oppose it to artificial or career-driven femininity, thereby reaffirming specific roles and moral expectations.

In the context of *femvertising*, the axiological level is particularly revealing: it allows the researcher to determine whether the advertisement genuinely promotes empowerment or simply repackages traditional maternal roles within a more polished or commodified framework. Does the ad invite identification with diverse forms of motherhood, or does it normalize a singular, aspirational ideal?

This level also uncovers symbolic exclusions: whose stories are told, and whose are silenced? What norms are reinforced? What utopias or fears are invoked? In this way, the axiological analysis situates the ad within broader cultural discourses and exposes its role in shaping collective imaginaries.

In the end, I can definitely write that the semiotic analysis was conducted in accordance with Semprini's Brand Identity System (1992), thereby encompassing the discursive (surface), narrative, and axiological dimensions of each advertising spot.

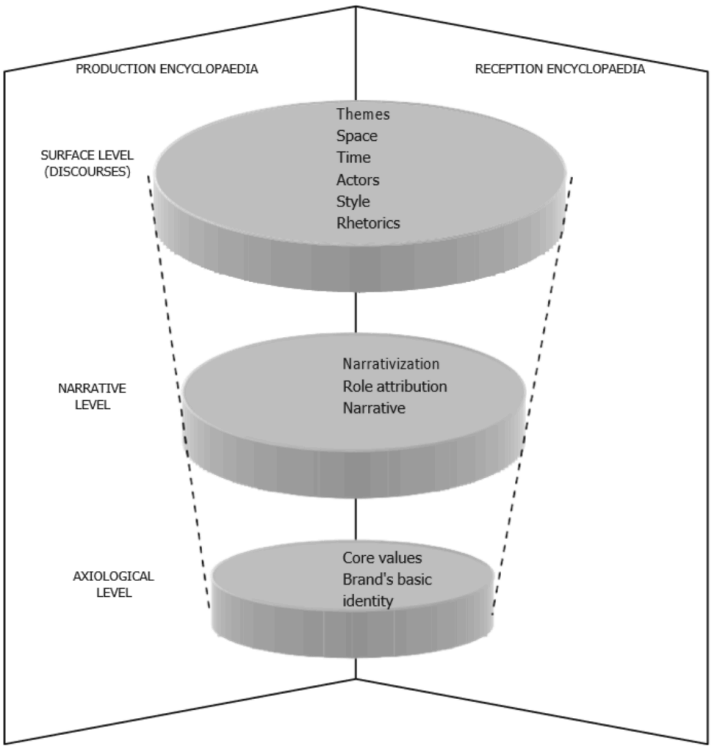


Figure 43: Brand Identity System adapted from Semprini in 1992 (Collantes & Oliva, 2015)

3.2.2 Semiotic Analysis of a Corpus: Ads with Mothers as Protagonists

P&G – "THANK YOU, MOM" (2012 OLYMPIC CAMPAIGN)

YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnBvlz8EaZ0

Spot Duration: Approximately 120 seconds

Release Date: April 17th, 2012

Creative Agency: Wieden+Kennedy

Famous Actors: None, the ad features non-celebrity actors portraying mothers and children across different cultural contexts.

The commercial celebrates the often invisible but essential role of mothers in the success of Olympic athletes. By portraying various moments of everyday struggle, sacrifice, and support, P&G pays tribute to the "hardest job in the world", being a mom.

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by sequence segmentation

Sequence 1: 0 – 25 seconds

The ad opens at dawn. The houses are still in darkness, the streets silent, and yet the mothers are already awake. In multiple homes across the globe, they start the day with the same ritual: walking

gently toward their children's beds, caressing their foreheads, whispering soft words to wake them. The scene is repeated in different cultural and geographic contexts, creating a universal pattern of maternal presence. The framing, pacing, and gestures are nearly identical, suggesting a shared grammar of care that transcends borders.

- *Visual*: A series of mirrored shots across various interiors: bedrooms bathed in soft pre-dawn light, mothers leaning over their children with tenderness. The repetition of similar compositions (close-ups of sleepy faces, slow movements, soft hands) visually reinforces the theme of global motherhood.
- *Sound*: Ambient stillness dominates, with the faint rustle of blankets and the low register of whispered voices. The first delicate notes of Ludovico Einaudi's *Divenire* emerge, laying the emotional foundation of the spot.

Meaning: This opening sequence constructs motherhood as a timeless, borderless practice, grounded in quiet devotion and care. It positions the maternal figure as the invisible catalyst of the day through consistent, intimate presence.

Sequence 2: 26 – 35 seconds

The morning unfolds through a choreography of ordinary but essential gestures: mothers prepare breakfast, buttering toast, pouring cereals, handing out fruit. They help their children get dressed, tie their shoelaces, adjust backpacks. Once ready, they accompany their children to early morning training sessions, often in silence, bundled in coats, moving through dim, foggy streets. Though the actions differ slightly from home to home, the rhythm is the same.

- *Visual*: Medium and American shots alternate seamlessly to depict the fluid coordination between mothers and children. Scenes of warm, lived-in kitchens, doors opening onto the early morning chill, and cars quietly starting in the driveway construct a visual narrative where maternal presence is embedded in the functional architecture of daily life.
- *Sound*: The piano track becomes slightly more rhythmic and structured, mirroring the increasing energy of the household. There is no dialogue, only the sonic trace of morning routine: dishes clinking, shoes hitting the floor, car doors closing.

Meaning: This sequence frames the mother as guardian of rhythm and responsibility. Her labor is essential: she is the one who ensures that things begin on time, that bodies are nourished, dressed, delivered.

Sequence 3: 36 – 59 seconds

Children are shown arriving at training facilities: pools, gyms, tracks. Mothers accompany them, often wrapped in coats, holding bags, waiting in the cold or sitting quietly on benches. The children begin their workouts (running, swimming and so on) while the mothers remain in the background, partially out of frame, present but unacknowledged. The entire morning routine then begins again: waking up, preparing, training. The repetition is accelerated, condensing multiple days into a continuous, looping cycle

- *Visual*: A mix of long shots and dynamic low-angle frames shows the children in motion, framed as athletes in the making. The mothers are often shot from behind or the side, reinforcing their supportive, peripheral function. The cyclical montage (waking, preparing, training) intensifies as it repeats, underscoring the routine's relentlessness
- *Sound*: The music gains in volume and tempo, synchronizing with the rhythm of the children's movements. The sound design emphasizes consistency: footsteps, water splashes, whistles.

Meaning: The mother's presence is not episodic but ritualized, embedded in a repetitive structure that defines the child's development. Her effort is not singular but sustained, day after day. The ad portrays the maternal role as the engine of persistence and progress.

Sequence 4: 60 – 70 seconds

The narrative slows down to show the inevitable setbacks that come with growth and training: children stumble on the track, fall off the beam, or break into tears from frustration or pain. In each of these moments, the mother is already there. Her response is immediate and instinctive, marked not by panic but by presence.

- *Visual*: Close-ups and extreme close-ups emphasize emotional expression and isolate emotional details.
- *Sound*: Einaudi's *Divenire* swells into a crescendo, amplifying the emotional intensity.

Meaning: Maternal love is portrayed as resilience through accompaniment. The mother does not shield the child from difficulty, she teaches them how to face it by never withdrawing. Her presence is a form of emotional anchoring, constant and unconditional, especially in moments of fragility.

Sequence 5: 71 – 109 seconds

Olympic stadiums. The children are now grown athletes, competing at the Olympic Games. Their mothers sit in the stands, watching with quiet pride, their expressions charged with emotion. The camera alternates between the intensity of the competition and the still, tearful faces of the mothers. As soon as the race ends, the athletes look toward the crowd, and their first instinct is to run to their mothers. They embrace with tears in their eyes, in a gesture that condenses years of sacrifice, discipline, and love. No words are needed.

- *Visual*: A powerful contrast is established between the dynamism of competition and the stillness of the mothers. Close-ups capture trembling hands, tear-filled eyes, and smiling faces overcome with emotion. Bodies collapsing into hugs, foreheads pressed together, eyes closed. Time slows down to mark the emotional density of the moment.

- *Sound*: The piano reaches its full emotional peak. The music merges with ambient crowd noise, but the focus remains on the emotional resonance of the reconnection.

Meaning: This sequence resolves the narrative arc: the athletic success is not portrayed as individual triumph, but as a shared accomplishment, the culmination of a journey made possible by maternal devotion. The embrace is not only a gesture of gratitude, but a symbolic recognition.

Sequence 6: 110 – End

A white screen appears with the black text: “The hardest job in the world, is the best job in the world. Thank you, Mum”. Then the P&G logo with the message: “Proud sponsor of Moms.”

- *Visual*: Pure minimalist screen. The shift from image to text signals closure.
- *Sound*: The final piano note lingers and fades into silence.

Meaning: P&G does not just thank mothers; it claims to sponsor them. Motherhood is not only honored emotionally, but reframed as something socially deserving of institutional recognition and branding.

B – SEMIO-NARRATIVE LEVEL

Canonical Narrative Schema:

- **Manipulation:** The story begins in the early morning quiet, where mothers gently wake their children and prepare them for the day. They do not speak much; their care is silent and habitual. The manipulation arises from a cultural and emotional imperative: mothers must support, prepare, and guide their children, not for recognition, but because it is what love demands.
- **Competence:** Through actions like preparing breakfast and driving children to training, mothers demonstrate their relational, organizational, and emotional competence. They are not central in the frame, but their presence is essential, and their skills are invisible but fundamental.
- **Performance:** Children train hard in demanding environments, and mothers are always there waiting, watching, encouraging; when children fall or fail, mothers respond with emotional availability: a hug, a touch, a look. Their performance lies in emotional labor, not athleticism; they are the quiet force that sustains resilience.
- **Sanction:** The emotional climax arrives as the children, now Olympic athletes, finish their races and rush into the stands to hug their mothers; this act functions as a social and affective recognition. The children do not celebrate their own success first, they return to the origin of that success: the mother. The white screen with the phrase "The hardest job in the world, is the best job in the world" transforms maternal labor into social value. P&G publicly recognizes and "brands" the maternal role as sacred and heroic, so the final reward is symbolic and it is gratitude.

Actantial Model:

In this narrative, the athlete-child takes on the role of the **Subject**, driven by the pursuit of Olympic participation and personal fulfillment, which represent the **Object** of their quest. The **Sender**, or the motivating force behind this journey, is shaped by broader societal ideals of success and perseverance, which instill in the child the ambition to excel. The **Receiver**, in this structure, is initially the child themself, who, by receiving this cultural mandate, becomes the Subject and activates the narrative program oriented toward achieving the valued object. The **Helper** in this narrative is primarily the mother, who plays a pivotal role by guiding, supporting, and sustaining the child throughout the challenges of their athletic development. The brand itself also acts as a secondary helper, reinforcing the values and emotional tone of the message. On the other side, **Opponents** emerge in the form of obstacles such as failure, fatigue, emotional breakdowns, and even socio-economic limitations, forces that threaten to derail the subject's path and heighten the dramatic tension of the story.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL

The P&G "Thank You, Mom" commercial articulates a value system centered on care, emotional sacrifice, and invisible labor; motherhood is represented not as a state of being, but as a continuous process of giving, a practice enacted daily in silence, repetition, and love. From the earliest morning routines to the most intimate moments of emotional support, the mother is the stabilizing force behind the child's development and resilience.

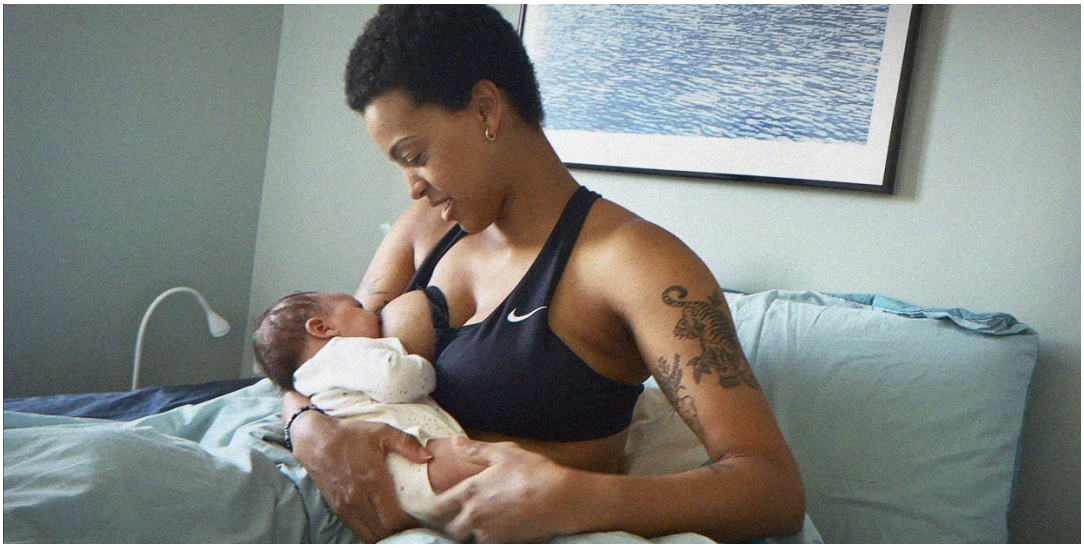
The commercial constructs a strong ethic of dedication and humility: mothers are not celebrated for ambition, public achievement, or individuality, but for their ability to endure, to remain, and to emotionally sustain another. The reward offered is not material or self-focused; it lies entirely in the success and well-being of the child: this reinforces a traditional but emotionally powerful ideal of maternal altruism: the mother is fulfilled when her child thrives.

Another central value is emotional constancy, the mother never falters, never gives up, she is portrayed as emotionally available in the face of discouragement, pain, and failure; her physical proximity becomes a metaphor for her moral constancy. This constancy, however, is not loudly affirmed: it is quiet, domestic, habitual. The spot elevates these overlooked, feminized forms of labor by connecting them to Olympic glory, thus bridging the domestic and the heroic.

At a deeper level, rather than reinforcing traditional gender roles, the ad elevates caregiving into the realm of moral heroism: the mother is not only a helper, but she also becomes the emotional backbone of the narrative, enabling the subject (the athlete/s) to fulfill their quest; the commercial thus positions

gratitude and recognition as moral imperatives. By acknowledging the mother's role, the brand implicitly addresses a broader societal imbalance: the lack of visibility and value historically attributed to domestic and emotional labor. In doing so, P&G aligns itself with a set of deeply human values, such as care, devotion, resilience, and justice, and positions its brand not merely as a purveyor of household products, but as a cultural voice capable of celebrating the foundational role of motherhood in shaping future generations: the brand becomes not just a producer of products, but a sponsor of values.

NIKE – "THE TOUGHEST ATHLETES" (2021)



YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Cp12Qy25Ls
Spot Duration: Approximately 60 seconds
Release Date: March 2021
Creative Agency: Wieden+Kennedy London
Famous Athletes Featured: Serena Williams, Alex Morgan, Perri Edwards, Bianca Williams, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Nia Ali, among others

This commercial is part of Nike's campaign to launch its first dedicated maternity collection, "Nike (M)". It celebrates the strength, resilience, and determination of pregnant athletes and new mothers, redefining the concept of toughness through the lens of motherhood.

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by Sequence Segmentation

Sequence 1: 0 – 15 seconds

The commercial opens with a split-screen of more than 20 mothers across various stages of their pregnancy and postpartum journeys, and is underscored by the lives of Serena Williams, Alex Morgan, Perri Edwards, Bianca Williams, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Nia Ali, along with everyday female athletes.

- *Visual*: Medium shots capturing both body posture and the visible pregnancy bump. High-contrast shots focus on facial expressions and body strength.
- *Sound*: A steady, motivating rhythm begins. A voiceover asks, "*Can you be an athlete?*"

Meaning: The dual identity of mother and athlete is introduced without separation. But then the narrative introduces doubt and begins to challenge it. The ad moves from exclusivity to inclusivity, connecting elite athletes with everyday women.

Sequence 2: 16 – 27 seconds

Scenes of everyday pregnant mothers or mothers with children, stretching, dancing, or practicing movement in daily life. They are all engaging in athletic activities or performing their sport in different ways, for instance a mother lifts her toddler in a playful strength exercise

- *Visual*: Color footage enhances realism and emotional warmth: natural lighting, vibrant colors, and full-body shots create an intimate and authentic atmosphere. The footage mixes static frames with smooth panning to show fluid movement.
- *Sound*: The music deepens, layering soft percussion beneath the voice and the voiceover continues: "*What is an athlete?*"

Meaning: Reaffirms that athleticism is a broad, inclusive category that encompasses both elite sport and the physical realities of motherhood.

Sequence 3: 28 – 54 seconds

Moments of physical exhaustion and change are contrasted with scenes of joy, perseverance and tenderness: holding a child after a race, cheering together. These scenes are shown in quick succession, creating a high-energy montage of women pushing their physical limits.

- *Visual*: Energetic cuts and dynamic framing convey empowerment. Combination of slow-motion and close-ups intensifies emotion. Tight close-ups emphasize both exertion and closeness. The color palette and lighting remain bright and natural throughout, underscoring realism and authenticity.
- *Sound*: Music builds with dramatic pace and swells to its peak intensity.

Meaning: This extended sequence fuses the dual identity of mother-athletes, showing that physical endurance and maternal care are intertwined expressions of strength. No single definition of motherhood or athleticism, both are multifaceted and evolving.

Sequence 5: 56 – 59 seconds

This segment features two final, poignant images. First, we see a mother cradling her baby in her arms, gazing down with a tender and content expression. Immediately after, the scene cuts to a pregnant woman standing in front of a mirror, resting one hand on the glass and the other on her belly, her eyes focused inwardly. Both images are static and contemplative, offering a moment of pause after the high-energy workout sequences.

- *Visual*: Close-ups and medium shots emphasize stillness and reflection. The lighting is soft and natural, casting a warm glow that enhances the intimacy of both scenes.
- *Sound*: The music begins to soften, creating an atmosphere of calm closure.

Meaning: These two images encapsulate the dual nature of motherhood: the relational bond with the child and the personal, introspective journey of the mother herself.

Sequence 5: 60 – End

The commercial closes with a clean black screen showing the Nike logo and the wordmark “Nike (M)” in bold white font.

- *Visual*: Minimalist branding: clean black screen with centered logo and text.
- *Sound*: Music fades out completely, leaving a brief moment of silence at the end.

Meaning: The brand's identity is reinforced with clarity, transforming the narrative into a lasting, impactful statement of values.

B – SEMIO-NARRATIVE LEVEL

Canonical Narrative Schema:

- **Manipulation:** The commercial opens with a challenge to cultural assumptions: "Can you be an athlete?" The manipulation phase introduces doubt, suggesting a tension between the categories of motherhood and athleticism. The viewer is prompted to reconsider a rigid definition of what an athlete looks like, beginning a narrative of inclusion and redefinition.
- **Competence:** The mothers in the ad possess physical, mental, and emotional competencies. They train while pregnant, stretch while holding children, and persevere despite fatigue. Their competence is not just athletic but holistic, spanning physical endurance, emotional availability, and caregiving multitasking.
- **Performance:** This phase is the heart of the montage: women running, lifting, sweating, breastfeeding, and recovering, all within a continuum that merges the roles of athlete and mother. They do not alternate between these identities, they inhabit them simultaneously; the performance is aesthetic, physical, and relational.
- **Sanction:** The sequence slows with two intimate closing shots: a mother cradling her child and a pregnant woman looking inward in the mirror: these are not traditional reward moments, but symbolic acknowledgements of strength and self-awareness. The final "Nike (M)" logo acts as the brand's direct validation, formalizing the recognition. The reward is representational: a redefined, broader notion of athleticism in which motherhood is not an obstacle but a qualifying dimension. The women do not need to prove their worth to others, the ad affirms it by including them in the Nike myth of greatness.

Actantial Model:

In this narrative structure, the **Subjects** are pregnant women and new mothers, portrayed as individuals striving to reconcile their maternal identity with their passion for sport. Their **Object** is the continuation of their athletic life and a sense of empowerment gained through physical activity and self-care. What drives them (the **Sender**) is twofold: an internal motivation rooted in personal ambition and self-worth, and a broader cultural discourse that increasingly associates strength, health, and identity with active motherhood. The **Receiver** of their journey is primarily the women themselves, who seek affirmation and agency through their actions. Yet, it also includes society at large, particularly those who still hold outdated perceptions of motherhood as a condition incompatible with athleticism or high performance. The **Helpers** are their personal determination, supportive social networks, and inclusive brand initiatives such as Nike (M), which aim to equip and encourage them; moreover, also the emotional bond with their children acts as a motivational force that reinforces their resilience. Opposing this journey, however, are a series of **Opponents**: physical fatigue, the transformations of the body, limited time, and above all, the enduring cultural stereotypes that continue to frame motherhood and elite physical performance as mutually exclusive.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL

The Nike commercial constructs a value system that reframes motherhood as one of the highest forms of strength; athleticism is no longer reserved for the youthful, the lean, or the agile people. Instead, it becomes a space for reinvention, endurance, and emotional tenacity. Motherhood is not shown as a retreat from ambition, but as a context that redefines and even amplifies it, especially in challenging environments.

The spot undermines the traditional dichotomy between physical power and maternal vulnerability, instead, it presents a continuum in which care and strength, exhaustion and resistance, softness and power coexist. What is often culturally coded as a limitating condition, that is, pregnancy, is portrayed by the brand as a condition of absolute potential and transformation.

This narrative brings to light the lived, physical experiences of women and affirms their capacity to act and make choices; by placing elite and non-elite mothers side by side, the ad normalizes diverse expressions of toughness and expands the cultural imaginary of who an athlete can be. In doing so, Nike aligns its brand with a set of values rooted in inclusion, authenticity, and the celebration of real bodies in motion, not despite motherhood, but through it.

KRAFT MAC & CHEESE – "SWEAR LIKE A MOTHER" (2017)

YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5NxumE2DVI

Spot Duration: Approximately 90 seconds

Release Date: May 2017

Creative Agency: Crispin Porter + Bogusky Boulder

Featured Character: Melissa Mohr, Ph.D., author and expert on swearing

This humorous commercial was released for Mother's Day and addresses the common yet socially sensitive issue of parents swearing in front of their children. Through the figure of Melissa Mohr, who delivers the message with irony and expertise, the ad proposes light-hearted "swear substitutes" and reassures mothers that imperfection is natural (and forgivable).

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by Sequence Segmentation

Sequence 1: 0 – 23 seconds

Melissa Mohr is sitting in the armchair in the living room and introduces the topic in a light, humorous tone, explaining that many mothers find themselves swearing in front of their children. She discusses how common this situation is and sets the stage for the solution she is about to present.

- *Visual*: Direct-to-camera shot of Melissa sitting in the armchair; natural, homey setting.
- *Audio*: Light, friendly background music; conversational tone.

Meaning: Establishes a safe and familiar environment to approach a delicate topic.

Sequence 2: 24 – 43 seconds

Melissa's children come downstairs and she starts demonstrating "*alterna-swears*," such as "What the frog?" and "Mother trucker," using exaggerated expressions and playful gestures to enhance the humor. She shows a few examples, making the audience laugh while giving practical alternatives.

- *Visual*: Direct-to-camera shot of Melissa speaking delivering the *alterna-swears*. Kids in the background.
- *Audio*: Music remains upbeat; Melissa's tone is animated and fun.

Meaning: Normalizes a shared parental experience while offering a playful solution.

Sequence 3: 44 – 54 seconds

Melissa leaves the living room and walks toward her son's room to provide us with a real-life example, still talking to the camera as she continues explaining how to avoid swearing around children. She emphasizes the importance of staying calm and practicing the *alterna-swears* regularly to make them a habit.

- *Visual*: Tracking shot of Melissa walking through the hallway, transitioning to her son's room.
- *Audio*: Consistent background music; Melissa's friendly, informative narration continues.

Meaning: Grounds the advice in a realistic, multitasking parenting context.

Sequence 4: 55 – 61 seconds

As Melissa continues moving through the house, she accidentally steps on some toys left on the floor. She grimaces in pain and instinctively lets out a curse, but immediately corrects herself by substituting

with *alterna-swears*. Her children hear the noise and come out of their rooms, watching her with curious eyes as she regains her composure with a slightly embarrassed smile.

- *Visual*: Medium shot of her walking and stepping on toys; quick cuts to her facial reaction and to her kids' curious faces.
- *Audio*: Music continues; Melissa's slip-up and correction are clear and audible, with natural household sounds.

Meaning: Illustrates with humor how even prepared parents can slip, reinforcing the ad's relatability.

Sequence 5: 62 – 74 seconds

Melissa is in the kitchen with her children beside her. She reassures parents that no one is perfect and emphasizes that when perfection is out of reach, Kraft Mac & Cheese is there to help. As she gestures toward the pot of macaroni, she accidentally touches it and burns herself slightly, reacting with a quick expression of pain. This humorous slip reinforces the ad's message about imperfection in a playful, relatable way.

- *Visual*: A wide, static shot of the entire kitchen captures the full scene, showing Melissa at the stove and her kids nearby. No close-ups are used; the camera remains still, presenting the moment in a realistic, continuous frame.
- *Audio*: the background music continues lightly; Melissa's narration and her brief exclamation are both clearly audible.

Meaning: Combines humor and authenticity, showing a relatable mishap in an ordinary kitchen setting, reinforcing Kraft's comforting role in real-life parenting moments.

Sequence 6: 75 – 88 seconds

Melissa is back seated comfortably in her living room armchair. She delivers a final, lighthearted message: sometimes moms simply need to swear, and that's okay. With a knowing smile, she raises a mug of tea in a casual toast, embracing the idea of accepting imperfections with humor and grace.

- *Visual*: Direct-to-camera shot of Melissa seated with her tea; warm lighting reinforces comfort and authenticity.
- *Audio*: Soft, steady background music; her voice is relaxed and conversational.

Meaning: Leaves viewers with a sense of acceptance and solidarity, closing on a relatable and humorous note.

Sequence 7: 89 – end

The final sequence features a blue screen with the text "*swearlikeamother.com*" prominently displayed, as a way to establish connectedness with the relevant audience. Below the text, there's a product shot of the Kraft Mac & Cheese box, specially designed for Mother's Day. As the image remains on screen, Melissa's voiceover invites viewers to visit the website to find the perfect Mother's Day gift, tying together the humorous tone with a direct call to action.

- *Visual*: Minimalist background with brand identity at the center: Clean, uncluttered blue screen with white text and product image.
- *Audio*: Background music fades out gently as Melissa's voiceover delivers the final call to action.

Meaning: Converts humor and relatability into a clear marketing push, reinforcing the Mother's Day campaign.

B – SEMIO-NARRATIVE LEVEL

Canonical Narrative Schema:

- **Manipulation:** The commercial opens with Melissa Mohr, in a friendly domestic setting, addressing the common but socially delicate issue of swearing in front of children. The manipulation arises from an emotional tension: parents want to be perfect role models, but reality and life often get in the way. The viewer is invited to reflect on their own imperfections with humor and honesty.

- **Competence:** Melissa provides a playful strategy to handle swearing: the use of "*alterna-swears*" like "Mother trucker" or "What the frog?". She embodies parental competence not through perfection, but through adaptability, creativity, and emotional regulation. The setting (a real home, real interruptions) reinforces this credibility.
- **Performance:** The ad shows Melissa navigating realistic parenting moments: stepping on toys, burning herself, getting interrupted. In each case, she catches herself and substitutes profanity with *alterna-swears*. Her performance is not flawless, and that's the whole point of the commercial: it models how to embrace imperfection and keep going.
- **Sanction:** There's no explicit judgment, only recognition. The children observe her, but there is no scolding, only confusion. The brand itself delivers the sanction: by linking these imperfect moments to Kraft Mac & Cheese, it affirms that being a "good enough" parent, with humor and food, is more than acceptable. The reward is emotional relief and self-acceptance. Melissa raises her tea in a toast, symbolizing solidarity with other parents. The final screen offers a gift idea for Mother's Day, merging humor and empathy with a brand-centered resolution. Kraft positions itself as an ally to real-life parenting, not perfection

Actantial Model:

In this narrative, the **Subjects** are mothers navigating the everyday challenges of parenting, often caught between the desire to do their best and the unpredictable demands of family life. Their **Object** is the ability to maintain composure while remaining authentic and emotionally honest, a balance between self-control and vulnerability that reflects a more realistic portrayal of motherhood. The **Sender**, or the driving force behind this pursuit, is twofold: on one hand, there are the cultural expectations that continue to promote an idealized image of the "perfect parent"; on the other, an equally powerful internal pressure stemming from mothers themselves, who often strive to meet both societal standards and their own. The **Receiver** of this effort is, primarily, the mothers themselves, who are seeking relief, validation, and reassurance in the face of stress and emotional fatigue. The **Helpers** are Melissa Mohr's expert advice, alternative expressions that allow emotional release without guilt (such as creative or humorous ways of swearing), and Kraft Mac & Cheese, which symbolically functions as a gesture of comfort and empathy, reinforcing the idea that imperfection is not only acceptable but human. The **Opponents** in this story are manifold: feelings of guilt, chronic stress, fear of social judgment, and the inherent unpredictability of family life, all of which threaten to undermine the mothers' efforts to feel competent and emotionally grounded.

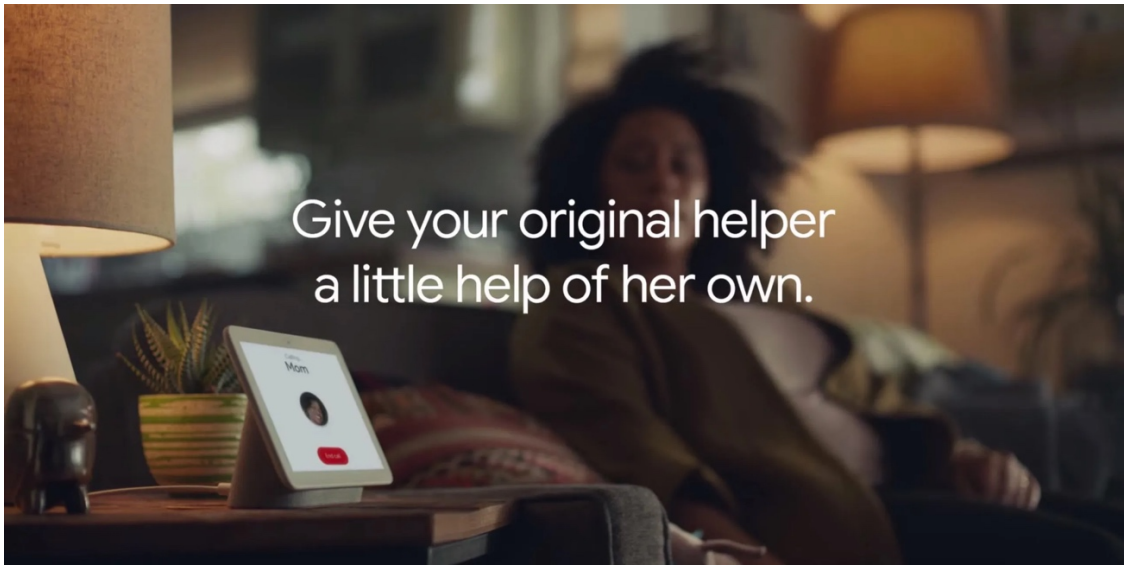
C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL

The Kraft Mac & Cheese commercial constructs a value system grounded in honesty, imperfection, and emotional relatability. Rather than idealizing motherhood as an unreachable model of patience and grace, the ad embraces the everyday flaws and frustrations that come with parenting. It validates the lived experience of many mothers who, under stress or pressure, occasionally resort to inappropriate language. This act, often treated as a taboo in traditional portrayals of family life, is here reframed not as a moral failure, but as a humorous and deeply human reaction to a demanding role.

By offering alternative expressions and inviting mothers to laugh at their own imperfections, the commercial eliminates guilt, replacing it with self-compassion. In fact, the campaign rejects the notion that perfection is a prerequisite for good motherhood, instead, it affirms vulnerability, emotional expressiveness, and authenticity as compatible with maternal care. The tone of the ad (friendly, self-aware, and empathetic) aligns with a broader cultural shift toward more realistic and inclusive representations of motherhood in media.

In positioning Kraft Mac & Cheese as a symbolic "quick fix" for those small, imperfect moments, the brand does not suggest a literal solution, rather offers itself as a companion in the journey of imperfect parenting; the product becomes a metaphor for comfort, forgiveness, and emotional recovery. Through this narrative, the brand aligns itself with values of warmth, emotional truth, and everyday resilience, appealing to a target audience that appreciates relatability over idealization.

GOOGLE – "HEY MOM" (2019)



YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRlY5_jcZlQ
Spot Duration: Approximately 60 seconds
Release Date: May 2019
Creative Agency: Swift
Famous Characters: None

This Mother's Day commercial humorously and tenderly illustrates the countless ways in which children call out to their mothers, asking for help, answers, or simply for attention. These constant calls of "Hey Mom" are mirrored by the now familiar "Hey Google" voice activation, drawing a playful parallel between maternal knowledge and digital assistance. The commercial culminates with a touching moment in which a mother uses Google Home Hub to call her own mom, completing a full circle of care, connection, and emotional support.

A – SURFACE LEVEL: Sequence by Sequence Segmentation

Sequence 1: 0 – 12 seconds

A young boy enters the house covered in mud, suggesting he has been playing outside. He walks slowly through the hallway and approaches a fishbowl, where he notices that his pet goldfish is motionless. Confused and slightly concerned, he leans in and quietly says, "Hey Mum..." as the scene cuts.

- *Visuals*: The camera follows the boy in a continuous tracking shot. The lighting is natural, with a slightly muted tone. The focus is on his muddy clothes, curious expression, and the fishbowl.
- *Sound*: No music yet, just ambient room noise and the boy's hesitant voice as he says, "Hey Mum..."

Meaning: Introduces the emotional tone of the ad as not chaotic, but sincere and tender. The boy turns to his mother not out of demand, but out of need for comfort and understanding. This opening anchor the ad in the emotional instinct behind every "Hey Mum."

Sequence 2: 13 – 42 seconds

A fast-paced montage shows children and teenagers (of different ages and backgrounds) calling out "Hey Mum!" in an endless series of requests, complaints, questions, and emergencies. From answering school questions to resolving conflicts between siblings, every situation is addressed to the mother. The scenes switch quickly, reflecting the non-stop rhythm of domestic life. The mothers, visibly exhausted, are shown constantly moving, intervening, explaining, often unable to sit down on the couch for a moment of rest.

- *Visuals*: A wide range of family settings and household scenarios. Wide and medium shots emphasize the mothers' constant motion and lack of pause. The camera rarely stays still, reinforcing the feeling of chaos.
- *Sound*: Overlapping "Hey Mum!" cries from different voices and tones (curious, annoyed, panicked). Light instrumental music starts to build underneath, playful but ironic.

Meaning: Depicts the mental and emotional overload of caregiving, as mothers are always in demand, their exhaustion made visible. The sequence shifts the tone from the tenderness of Sequence 1 to a more humorous, yet critical commentary on the invisible labor of mothers.

Sequence 3: 43 – 53 seconds

One of the mothers, visibly drained by the continuous demands from her children, whose voices still echo faintly in the background, finally collapses onto the couch. As she leans back, she glances to her side and notices a photo on the Google Home Hub display: an image of herself with her own mother. A subtle emotional shift occurs. Without hesitation, she says, "Hey Google, call Mum", starting a call.

- *Visuals*: Medium shot of the mother slowly sitting down, followed by an over-the-shoulder shot of the Google device displaying the photo. The lighting softens; the movement slows, contrasting with the previous frenetic montage.
- *Sound*: Children's voices calling "Mum" fade slightly but remain present, symbolizing ongoing background pressure. The music transitions into a more emotional tone. The command "Hey Google, call Mum" is clear and calm.

Meaning: Marks the emotional turning point of the ad. The caregiver becomes the one seeking care. The Home Hub is not just a functional tool, it becomes a portal to emotional reconnection and intergenerational support.

Sequence 4: 54 – 57 seconds

The screen shows a close-up of the Google Home Hub resting on a wooden table. The display cycles through personal photos of the mother with her mum, smiling, embracing, sharing joyful moments. Above the screen, the text "Google Home Hub" appears, along with the discounted price "$149 Now $99."

- *Visuals*: Static, focused shot of the device. The room is softly lit, with background objects (lamp, plant, figurines) creating a cozy domestic atmosphere. The slideshow of mother-daughter images flows gently across the device's screen.
- *Sound*: Gentle, sentimental music plays softly in the background, adding emotional weight to the stillness of the scene. No voiceover.

Meaning: Reinforces the theme of maternal connection and positions the Google Home Hub as a vessel of emotional memory and continuity, visually linking technology and familial love.

Sequence 4: 58 – End

The ad ends with a minimalist, clean white screen displaying only the Google logo in the center. There is no tagline or additional text. The simplicity of the design reinforces the emotional clarity and calmness reached by the end of the narrative.

- *Visuals*: White background with the full-color Google logo centered and sharply contrasted. The frame is perfectly still.
- *Sound*: The soft background music fades out completely, leaving a moment of silence to conclude the message.

Meaning: Closes the advertising with visual and emotional simplicity. The absence of words or voiceover gives space for reflection and leaves the viewer with a quiet, lasting impression of the brand as a discreet but constant presence, just like the mothers portrayed throughout the ad.

B – SEMIO-NARRATIVE LEVEL

Canonical Narrative Schema:

- **Manipulation:** The opening moment, and the subsequent cacophony of "Hey Mum!" calls, construct a strong motivational frame: mothers are the default source of help, comfort, answers, and presence. The viewer is invited to reflect on this overwhelming dependence.
- **Competence:** The mothers in the spot demonstrate their competence through constant availability: answering questions, solving problems, soothing, multitasking. But they are also visibly tired, and at the edge of their capacity. Here, Google Home Hub is introduced as an extension of their competence, offering informational and emotional support.
- **Performance:** The emotional pivot occurs when a mother, overwhelmed, sits down and says "*Hey Google, call Mum*." This act signals a shift in the narrative dynamic: the caregiver becomes the one in need of care. It is an act of vulnerability and self-care, using technology not for a child, but for herself.
- **Sanction:** The call connects, and the visual focus on mother-daughter photos on the Google screen delivers a gentle emotional sanction: this was the right action. The tool worked, the emotional need was met, and a deeper maternal connection was re-established. No verbal judgment is needed, the emotional payoff is visual and internal. The ad ends in silence, with the clean Google logo on a white screen. The reward is not material, but emotional balance, reconnection, and recognition of the caregiver as a person who also needs support. The simplicity of the final frame mirrors the peace reached by the protagonist and positions Google as a silent, reliable partner in that journey.

Actantial Model:

In this narrative, the **Subject** is the mother, portrayed as a figure striving to meet the daily demands of her family while preserving her own well-being. Her **Object** is the attainment of a functional balance: managing caregiving responsibilities, maintaining harmony at home, and carving out moments of rest and recovery amidst the constant flow of tasks. The **Sender** of this quest is primarily an internal motivation to nurture and support, a deeply ingrained impulse to care for others, which drives her actions and fuels her perseverance. The **Receiver** of her efforts is twofold: the mother herself, who seeks a sense of relief and control, and her children, who benefit from her continued emotional and logistical support. Supporting her along this journey is the **Helper**, represented by

the Google Home Hub: this intelligent device functions as a responsive, non-intrusive aid, helping her stay organized, informed, and connected, ultimately alleviating some of the cognitive and emotional burden of parenting. Opposing her path are the **Opponents**: the unrelenting needs of her family, the emotional pressures of caregiving, and the invisible labor that defines much of contemporary motherhood; all these forces challenge her ability to maintain balance, making technological support not just useful but symbolically significant in the narrative.

C – AXIOLOGICAL LEVEL

The Google "Hey Mom" commercial constructs a value system centered around care, knowledge, and intergenerational emotional connection; at its core, the ad highlights the cognitive and emotional labor mothers perform on a daily basis. It frames mothers as the central hub of information, attention, and problem-solving within the family sphere, a role that is both essential and exhausting.

Through its humorous yet affectionate portrayal of children calling "Hey Mom" repeatedly, the commercial sheds light on the often-invisible burden of constant availability and emotional responsiveness. This relentless flow of questions and needs is not depicted as a flaw in family dynamics, but as a testament to the mother's central role in the household. Yet, the ad also subtly acknowledges the pressure that comes with being the "go-to" figure for everything, suggesting that even the most resilient caregivers need support.

By introducing the Google Home Hub as a supplementary tool, the commercial suggests that technology can assist, rather than replace, the maternal figure; the smart device is not presented as an alternative to maternal wisdom, but as a way to redistribute cognitive load, helping mothers preserve their energy and focus. The ad aligns the product with a narrative of empowerment through support, rather than replacement.

The final sequence, where the mother initiates a video call to her own mom, adds emotional depth to the narrative; it reverses the caregiving dynamic and illustrates that mothers too, remain daughters, people who continue to seek care, comfort, and connection. This cyclical view of motherhood reinforces values of continuity, empathy, and reciprocal affection.

Ultimately, the commercial positions Google as a brand that understands and supports the emotional realities of modern parenting: it promotes values such as attentiveness, balance, and relational intelligence, offering its technology not as a substitute for human presence, but as an ally in sustaining it.

3.3 Qualitative Research Method: In-Depth Interviews of Target Audience

For the purposes of this research, a complementary qualitative methodology was adopted, as it aligns most effectively with the study's aim to explore the symbolic and cultural meanings surrounding representations of motherhood in advertising. Qualitative research is not defined by statistical generalizability or quantification, but rather by its focus on depth, nuance, and contextual understanding; it prioritizes exploration over measurement, and insight over prediction. As emphasized by McCracken (1988), the qualitative researcher does not merely map the terrain but "*mines it*," adopting an intensive rather than extensive approach to the research field. This perspective enables the capture of latent meanings, social constructions, and the subtleties of lived experiences that are often inaccessible through standardized quantitative instruments.

A central feature of this qualitative design was the use of in-depth interviews, which constitute one of the most effective tools for uncovering the ways in which individuals interpret their experiences, articulate cultural codes, and engage with broader social discourses; in-depth interviews allow for a dialogical exchange in which the interviewer and the respondent co-construct meaning (McCraken, 1988). Unlike structured interviews, where the sequence and wording of questions are fixed, in-depth interviews, especially when semi-structured, enable the interviewer to remain sensitive to the flow of conversation and the emergence of unanticipated themes, and this flexibility is fundamental when exploring a complex and culturally loaded topic such as motherhood.

In designing and conducting the interviews, attention was paid to several key principles of qualitative interviewing. Firstly, the establishment of *critical distance* was crucial, both for the respondent and the investigator: for respondents, this meant encouraging them to reflect on taken-for-granted beliefs and social practices; for the investigator, it required ongoing self-awareness and reflexivity, especially regarding one's own cultural assumptions. Moreover, the interview process was designed to strike a balance between formality and informality, in order to create a setting where participants could feel both respected and at ease. The interviews began with a brief explanation of the research aims, an assurance of confidentiality, and the formal request for consent. Then, "ice-breaker" questions were used to reduce anxiety and facilitate the conversation, allowing it to evolve naturally toward more complex and emotionally resonant themes.

The epistemological orientation underpinning these interviews aligns with a neo-positivist paradigm (Miles & Huberman 1994), which values methodological transparency, procedural rigor, and systematic data collection, even within qualitative frameworks. While the research did not aim to generalize findings statistically, it sought to produce reliable and replicable insights by following a clearly defined interview structure and analytical process. The aim was to identify patterns and consistencies across participants' responses regarding how they perceive, interpret, and emotionally

respond to representations of motherhood in advertising. This approach maintained an analytical distance from the data while acknowledging the relevance of personal experience, thereby allowing the researcher to move from individual accounts toward more generalizable thematic interpretations. Importantly, the selection of participants followed a purposive sampling strategy, aimed at ensuring a variety of profiles and viewpoints; respondents were selected to reflect diversity in age, family structure, professional background, and exposure to advertising, in order to capture a wide spectrum of experiences and interpretations.

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed in full for analytical purposes and in line with best practices in qualitative research, the interview transcripts were subjected to iterative reading and coding. This process involved identifying analytic categories, mapping interrelations, and discerning thematic patterns across the corpus of interviews; drawing upon both existing literature and emergent data, the analysis sought to reconstruct the cultural and ideological frameworks through which motherhood is understood and represented in the context of contemporary advertising.

By employing in-depth interviews as the core methodological tool, this study was able to access not only participants' conscious opinions but also their underlying assumptions, emotional reactions, and socio-cultural positioning. The qualitative approach proved indispensable in uncovering the tensions, contradictions, and negotiations at the heart of maternal representation, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how *femvertising* engages with and potentially transforms gendered expectations of motherhood.

The sample selected for the in-depth interviews were all mothers, as the central objective of the research was to investigate how maternity-focused advertising campaigns can effectively apply the principles of *femvertising* to strike a balance between authenticity and aspiration. Given the specific focus of the research question (*How can the principles of femvertising be effectively applied to maternity-focused campaigns to balance authenticity and aspiration?*) it was essential to engage directly with women who have personal, lived experience of motherhood and no audience is better equipped to assess the emotional truthfulness, representational adequacy, and aspirational appeal of maternal portrayals in advertising than mothers themselves. Their embodied knowledge and experiential insight provide an indispensable lens through which to evaluate whether, and how, such campaigns resonate on both an individual and cultural level.

Involving mothers as key informants was not merely a methodological choice, but a conceptually driven decision that acknowledged their unique insight and direct experience with the subject of maternal representation: as individuals who live and navigate motherhood daily, they are uniquely positioned to assess how advertising reflects or fails to reflect the realities of their lives. Treating them as active contributors in the research process enabled a more grounded and meaningful exploration

of how maternity is portrayed in media. Their perspectives were essential in revealing the tensions, aspirations, and contradictions that shape their reactions to advertising, and in building a more nuanced understanding of how *femvertising* can authentically connect with maternal experiences, without reducing them to simplistic stereotypes or idealized images.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, with the explicit intention of capturing a broad range of maternal experiences and viewpoints; diversity was sought across several key dimensions, including age, socio-economic status, educational background, professional situation, and family structure. This variety was crucial to avoid the homogenization of maternal identity and to ensure that the data would reflect the plurality and complexity of contemporary motherhood; by including mothers with different life trajectories and personal experiences, the study aimed to explore not only shared themes but also tensions and divergences in how maternal representations are perceived and evaluated.

Ultimately, the goal of the sampling design was to assemble a heterogeneous group of informants whose narratives could highlight the nuanced ways in which advertising constructs, reinforces, or challenges dominant ideologies surrounding motherhood; the mothers' testimonies provided a valuable interpretive lens through which to assess the cultural relevance and emotional resonance of *femvertising* campaigns centered on maternal themes.

Participants. The selected target for this qualitative research consists of eight Italian mothers, with an average age of approximately 48 years, recruited through direct contact sampling. The selection aimed to gather a heterogeneous set of maternal experiences, capable of capturing the complexity of contemporary motherhood and perceptions related to advertising representation; and the participants were identified among women willing to share thoughtful and articulate opinions on advertising campaigns related to *femvertising* and motherhood. The sample includes mothers at different stages of their parenting journey: some have been mothers for many years and have older children, while others are new mothers facing the early challenges of caregiving (a mother who adopted her child is also included, offering a valuable and complementary perspective). From a family composition standpoint, the sample comprises women with only one child and others with two or more children, with a balanced distribution in terms of gender: there are mothers of sons, mothers of daughters, and mothers with both sons and daughters. Professional backgrounds are also varied: the sample includes women currently in active careers, women who left the workforce after the birth of their first child, and women who continued working after their first pregnancy but decided to stop working after their second; this variety allowed for a deeper exploration of how motherhood influences career choices and perceptions of personal autonomy.

Despite the small sample size, the diversity of profiles enabled the emergence of several common themes and very few differences, which were mostly linked to subjective preferences or personal tastes regarding communication style. Although the findings are not statistically generalizable, the qualitative richness of the data provides valuable insights into the nuanced realities of modern motherhood in the context of advertising communication.

Respondent Code	Respondent Age	Respondent Job
R1	30	Elementary school teacher
R2	56	Housewife
R3	53	Housewife
R4	57	Elementary school teacher
R5	56	Housewife
R6	59	Lawyer
R7	43	Professor
R8	33	Doctor

Procedure. The interviews conducted for this research were guided by a semi-structured protocol, which included a series of thematic areas derived from the literature review and preliminary theoretical reflections. These thematic areas were explored through *grand tour questions*: open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to share personal stories and reflections in their own terms. To deepen the inquiry and clarify specific elements that did not emerge spontaneously, the interviews also employed *floating prompts* (spontaneous follow-up questions used during the interview to explore relevant issues that emerge naturally from the participant's narrative. They are not pre-scripted but arise in response to the interviewee's statements, allowing the researcher to delve deeper into specific aspects without interrupting the conversational flow) and *planned prompts* (pre-formulated questions designed to introduce or probe specific analytical or cultural categories that have been identified during the literature and cultural review stages, but which do not surface spontaneously during the interview. These prompts ensure that key theoretical themes are addressed across all interviews, providing consistency in data collection); these included contrast prompts, exceptional incident prompts, and category questions, which served to elicit richer descriptions and reflections from participants.

The protocol was organized into three main sections, carefully designed to balance consistency with flexibility and to guide participants through a meaningful and progressive exploration of the research themes. The first section focused on exploring participants' personal experiences and perceptions of

motherhood: this phase invited respondents to reflect on their identities as mothers, the sources of pride and challenge in their maternal roles, and their feelings of visibility within media and advertising. By anchoring the conversation in their lived realities, this section aimed to elicit rich, first-person narratives and set the emotional and cognitive foundation for the rest of the interview.

The second section consisted of an exposure phase, in which participants were shown a curated selection of advertising spots drawn from the corpus analyzed in the semiotic section of the thesis. The selected commercials included P&G's *Thank You, Mom* (2012, Olympics Campaign), Nike's *The Toughest Athletes* (2021), Kraft Mac & Cheese's *Swear Like a Mother* (2017), and Google's *Hey Mum* (2019). The decision to use the same advertisements served a dual purpose: first, it ensured conceptual coherence between the analytical and empirical components of the research; second, these specific spots were selected because they were considered particularly significant, emotionally impactful, and relevant in the way they address maternal representation. Each participant was exposed to a pair of advertisements that differed in emotional register: one highly emotive and pathos-driven, and one more lighthearted and ironic. After each viewing, participants were invited to express their emotional reactions, discuss the extent to which they felt represented, and reflect on the realism and cultural relevance of the content. This emotionally and stylistically varied selection enabled a rich comparative dialogue, prompting participants to critically reflect on the emotional tone, narrative framing, and representational strategies that made them feel either genuinely seen or misrepresented as mothers.

The final section of the interview consisted of a set of more evaluative and reflective questions aimed at synthesizing participants' views on the representation of motherhood in advertising: in this phase, respondents were encouraged to articulate what they believe makes a campaign feel authentic and credible, what elements may provoke pressure or discomfort, and what features they associate with feeling genuinely understood as mothers. This part of the protocol provided critical insight into participants' expectations, ideals, and sensitivities regarding how *femvertising* could more effectively portray the complexities of maternal identity; it also allowed for a deeper understanding of how advertising may influence, reinforce, or challenge personal and cultural beliefs about motherhood. This concluding phase directly addressed the core of the research question, enabling participants to express their views on how *femvertising* can effectively bridge the gap between authenticity and aspiration in maternity-focused campaigns.

Chapter 4: Conclusion: Findings, Discussion, and Implications

4.1 Decoding the Data from Qualitative Interviews

To decode the data emerging from the qualitative interviews, *Thematic Analysis (TA)* was employed, following the structure outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017): this method is a flexible strategy for identifying and analyzing recurring patterns within a textual corpus and is particularly well-suited to exploring how participants construct meanings in relation to representations of motherhood in advertising campaigns. Thematic analysis consists of six main phases, which guide the analytical process from the initial reading of the data to the final writing of the report. The *first phase* involves familiarizing oneself with the data: in this initial stage, interviews are transcribed and read repeatedly and attentively, in order to gain a deep understanding of the narratives; early observations, impressions, and initial analytical notes are recorded to begin identifying relevant content. In the *second phase* initial codes are generated: significant features within the data are systematically identified and assigned concise labels that describe key concepts, recurring expressions, emotional responses, or discursive dynamics; these codes are then grouped according to conceptual similarity. The *third phase* consists of searching for themes: codes are organized into broader interpretive units, forming potential themes that reflect meaningful patterns in the dataset; relationships among codes are analyzed, and a preliminary thematic structure begins to take shape in response to the research question. In the following phase (*forth phase*), themes are reviewed: each theme is assessed for internal coherence and its distinctiveness from other themes; if not, themes are refined, merged, or eliminated; this stage helps consolidate the thematic framework and, if needed, restructure it to enhance analytical clarity and consistency. The *fifth phase* involves defining and naming the themes: each theme is clearly delineated, its scope specified, and its theoretical significance synthesized; theme names are selected to effectively and evocatively convey the core conceptual content of each theme. Finally, the *sixth phase* involves producing the report: representative data extracts are selected for each theme, and a coherent analytical narrative is developed; the findings are critically interpreted and discussed in light of relevant theoretical literature. The report thus makes the interpretive process visible and offers a meaningful understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Overall, the use of thematic analysis allows for a transparent, structured, and theoretically grounded examination of the data, providing an effective methodological tool for investigating the symbolic and cultural complexity of maternal narratives. This approach is consistent with the aim of the study, which seeks to explore how motherhood is perceived and represented in femvertising, while giving value to the participants' voices and the diversity of their perspectives.

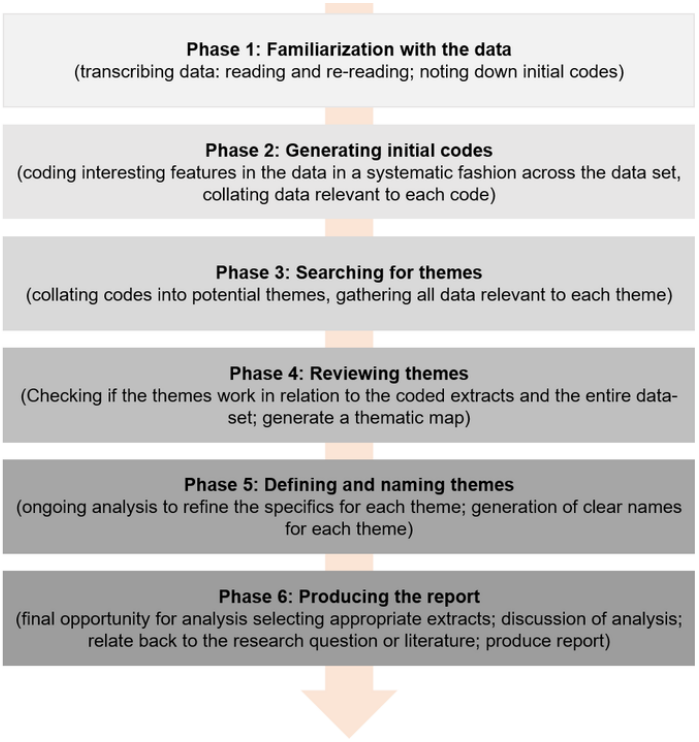


Figure 44: Braun and Clarke's 6 phases of thematic analysis (retrieved from Google Images)

4.2 Findings

The qualitative interviews revealed a complex and multifaceted vision of motherhood, shaped by an interweaving of personal experiences, cultural expectations, and emotional narratives; the participants, who varied in age and social background, described motherhood as an ever-evolving relationship grounded in a deep sense of love, responsibility, and presence. A recurring theme was the importance of the values transmitted through the mother–child bond, which was perceived as one of the most meaningful and fulfilling aspects of being a mother, moreover the interviewees expressed pride in their ability to teach their children empathy, respect, and independence, considering these values part of their personal legacy.

All the women interviewed firmly stated that being a mother does not mean ceasing to be a woman, and this belief was shared across different life choices: both by those who continued their professional careers and by those who left their jobs to dedicate themselves fully to raising their children. For some, work remained a core part of their identity, not only for financial reasons but also as a source of personal fulfillment, while for others, giving up a career was a deliberate and conscious decision, driven by the desire to be actively present in their children's everyday lives during their most formative years. R2 about this said: "*At a certain point, I had to leave my job. It was a sacrifice, that's true, but one I absolutely don't regret, and if I could go back, I would do it again.".* In both cases, the mothers were proud of their choices, and none expressed regret; on the contrary, seeing the results in their children, in terms of independence, affection, and strong values (R3: *"I'm proud to have passed*

on strong values."), was a profound source of satisfaction. These decisions were strongly shaped by a range of structural and individual factors: economic stability, the presence (or absence) of a support network (e.g., grandparents, partners, services), and the age at which the first child was born. Regardless of the path taken, what emerged with clarity was that motherhood does not erase female identity, but becomes deeply intertwined with it, requiring a constant negotiation between devotion, autonomy, and a sense of self.

R8 states: "*The greatest challenge is undoubtedly finding a balance between work and family; being able to devote myself to both is truly a constant struggle."* A key challenge, raised by nearly all interviewees, was the difficulty of balancing the many roles demanded of modern mothers: worker, partner, caregiver, individual; the women spoke of the often-invisible effort required to manage the tension between work and family, between personal independence and emotional availability. A particularly sensitive issue was the challenge of fostering children's independence while remaining a stable point of reference, in fact this dynamic and relational form of care, rarely represented in advertising, was described as one of the most complex and most meaningful aspects of motherhood. About this R5 states: *"It is all about teaching my daughters to be independent and free, while still remaining a constant point of reference for them."*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdQrwBVRzEg

When asked to identify advertising campaigns they felt represented by or emotionally moved by, many cited P&G's "*Thank You, Mom*" campaign for the 2016 Rio Olympics: the spot was appreciated for its ability to highlight the invisible, constant, and emotionally powerful labor of mothers, portraying their presence in their children's lives as quiet but fundamental. R8 said: *"This ad moves*

me deeply because it shows the child's recognition towards the mother, she's the first person he looks for to celebrate his achievement." The ad was perceived as authentic and respectful, not glorifying, nor pitiful, but deeply sincere; its strength lay in the way it elevated the ordinary, transforming daily maternal actions into something emotionally meaningful, without falling into idealization: mothers are represented as landmark and safe haven, and this is what the respondents really liked

In the final part of the interviews, the participants reflected on what makes a portrayal of motherhood in advertising feel credible, engaging, and effective: there was a clear preference for narratives rooted in emotional reality, capable of capturing the full complexity of motherhood (moments of fatigue and joy, uncertainty and achievement, vulnerability and strength). Strikingly, every single participant spontaneously mentioned the "*Mulino Bianco Mom*" as a negative example, an overly perfect, unrealistic, and distant portrayal, in fact this smiling, flawless, nurturing figure was described as a fictitious model, not only unattainable but also harmful, as it promotes an alienating and unrealistic standard of maternal identity.

Instead, the mothers described a more authentic maternal figure: a woman who makes mistakes, who experiences moments of discouragement and moments of profound joy, who navigates emotional contradictions without losing her relational role. Across all responses, one element remained constant: love, in fact, love expressed in a genuine, imperfect, resilient form, was described as the force that holds together the tensions and rewards of motherhood. The women firmly rejected both the idealized image of the perfect, multitasking mother, often a source of anxiety and inadequacy, and the chaotic, disheveled mother, which risks reinforcing a negative and reductive stereotype. What they favored instead was a balanced tone, one that could combine tenderness with irony, realism with hope; they want to be portrayed in a way that is truthful but not discouraging; imperfect, but not diminished; human, but not caricatured. R6 said: *"I really don't like those ads where mothers are perfect, they make me anxious. We moms are perfectly imperfect, and that's the kind of representation I'd like to see."*

What emerged across all interviews was a shared desire for authentic recognition: representations that do not glorify or oversimplify, but that capture the emotional depth, relational meaning, and everyday dignity of being a mother. The most effective advertisements, according to the participants, are those capable not only of mirroring their lived experiences, but also of conveying a sense of understanding, emotional closeness, and possibility.

Some mothers also highlighted a recurring issue: the near-total absence of the paternal figure in advertising representations of parenthood; this symbolic omission reinforces the idea that childcare is an exclusively maternal responsibility, increasing the perceived emotional and practical burden on mothers. Several participants instead emphasized that cooperation with fathers is not only real and

part of daily life, but also a fundamental component of their personal balance. Portraying fathers as present, engaged, and affectionate does not overshadow mothers, instead, it helps to elevate and empower them. *"For me, the father's presence allows the mother to be empowered."* said R7. It is precisely through the shared distribution of parental responsibilities that motherhood can become a less isolating and more sustainable experience, even at the symbolic level, and for this reason, mothers expressed a desire to see campaigns that depict parenting as a shared project, rather than an individual female mission.

Three key themes emerge from the interaction of these insights, which not only summarize the results of the interviews, but also lay the groundwork for broader theoretical and strategic reflection on the way motherhood is represented in *femvertising*.

4.2.1 First Insight: Recognition of Maternal Complexity

A central theme that emerged from the interviews concerns the desire of mothers to be recognized as emotionally rich, complex, and authentic individuals, the participants clearly expressed their wish to move beyond a dichotomous representation that casts them either as flawless superheroes or as passive victims overwhelmed by domestic responsibilities. The mothers interviewed want to be portrayed in their entirety: as active protagonists capable of experiencing a wide range of emotions and acting with awareness and autonomy. In this sense, they demand symbolic centrality within advertising narratives; they want to be shown for who they are: real, imperfect women, full of nuance, who struggle, make mistakes, love, and persevere.

R8 states: *"Being a mother doesn't mean ceasing to be a woman, if anything, it means gaining a new awareness of being a woman, a new facet of womanhood."*

This complexity is not seen as a limitation, but rather as a narrative and expressive resource: portraying mothers in their moments of doubt, in small everyday gestures, in their internal conflicts and acts of tenderness means restoring a full and relatable subjectivity. Mothers do not want to be idealized, but neither do they want to be reduced to functional stereotypes, their demand is for a complete representation, one that acknowledges ambivalence, contrasting emotions, and the ongoing transformations that characterize the maternal experience.

Moreover, the symbolic centrality they call for goes beyond mere visual presence in advertising messages, it concerns the quality and meaning of that presence; the mother should not simply be an "emotional backdrop" for other protagonists, but a meaningful figure, capable of embodying values, desires, contradictions, and worldviews. In this perspective, motherhood becomes a powerful narrative space, one in which new languages of empowerment can be articulated, closer to women's lived realities and more aligned with their need for identity recognition.

R2 states: *"Mothers should be celebrated in the reality of everyday life."*

All the participants in the interviews unanimously and clearly expressed a strong rejection of idealized and perfect representations of motherhood, identifying them as one of the main sources of anxiety and social pressure. This kind of imagery, still widely present in many traditional advertising campaigns, is perceived not only as distant from the daily reality of mothers, but also as harmful, as it promotes an unattainable model of a mother who is always calm, efficient, present, and flawless; such portrayals not only foster a sense of inadequacy but also contribute to a climate of social judgment that prevents women from experiencing the inevitable challenges of motherhood with peace of mind. However, what the interviewed mothers seek is not merely an "opposite" or alternative narrative focused solely on imperfection or hardship, on the contrary, what emerges strongly from their testimonies is the need to see the full spectrum of their experience represented: a motherhood made of joy and exhaustion, pride and vulnerability, moments of fulfillment and moments of uncertainty; their request is not to replace one ideal with another, but to construct a more truthful narrative, one that captures the many shades that define what it means to be a mother.

R3 states: "*I'd like to see something realistic, something that, by being real, shows both its negative and positive sides. I'd like to see a full picture of a mother's life."*

Showing moments of crisis, fatigue, or inadequacy does not mean overshadowing those of happiness, fulfillment, or deep love for one's children, on the contrary, representing both aspects (the light and the dark) makes it possible to offer a more complete, authentic, and relatable vision of motherhood; in this sense, the interviewees emphasized the importance of communication that reflects the complexity of maternal experience without judgment or embellishment, giving dignity to both vulnerability and strength. Only advertising communication that manages to convey a full, well-rounded representation of maternal life can become a space of recognition and be perceived as empathetic, respectful, and above all, true.

R4 states: *"Those who create ads often forget that we mothers are, first and foremost, women."*

In light of all the above, we can confidently affirm that what mothers ask from advertising is not just to be seen, but to be recognized in their entirety: as women and as mothers, as emotionally present and socially active figures; this demand, clearly and consistently expressed in all the interviews, constitutes the first and most significant insight of this study: truly effective *femvertising* cannot overlook the representation of motherhood as a complex, multifaceted experience that deserves narrative centrality.

4.2.2 Second Insight: Authentic, Non-Rhetorical Realism

Another recurring element that emerged from the interviews concerns the delicate balance between realism and rhetoric in the representation of motherhood: the interviewed mothers expressed a strong desire to see their everyday reality reflected, one marked by ambivalent emotions, ongoing challenges, and moments of deep connection with their children; however, this demand for authenticity does not translate into a request for bleak or resigned narratives, what is rejected is both the idealized image and the dramatization of maternal struggle.

R6 sates: *"Seeing the image of a perfect mother with a perfect life is definitely a source of anxiety, just as much as seeing total chaos, with a completely disorganized and panicked mother."*

Many participants emphasized the importance of avoiding, in advertising communication, the glorification of sacrifice or appeals to pity; campaigns should instead aim to portray motherhood in its full humanity, including fatigue and vulnerability, without turning these aspects into dramatic focal points. Within this human experience, for mothers, love should emerge as a constant and powerful force: a love that gives meaning even to the most exhausting days and permeates even the simplest of gestures. In this sense, effective realism is that which restores value to maternal experience through a balanced narrative that captures beauty in everyday life repetition, strength in perseverance, and pride in recognizing oneself in the maternal role, even on the hardest days.

Many mothers expressed the need for advertising not only to reflect reality but also to elevate it, attributing meaning and dignity to motherhood without distorting it; this means representing not only difficulties, but also joy, deep affection, and the small victories that are part of it, in other words, mothers want to recognize themselves in the stories being told, but also to feel inspired by them: they seek messages that reflect the emotional richness of their everyday lives, including that love which sustains them through fatigue and uncertainty. Some participants, for instance, appreciated commercials that depicted scenes of daily life: preparing breakfast, comforting a child after a disappointment, celebrating a small success together, or facing a difficult day with a touch of humor; these representations stood out not only for their realism but for evoking that silent and persistent feeling of love that underlies every maternal gesture. When these scenes are paired with a measured narrative tone and a subtle soundtrack, they create a more intimate and emotionally engaging experience, one that not only tells the story of motherhood, but also celebrates it without distortion.

R1 sates: *"What makes an ad feel authentic is love, because in the end, being a mother is all about love."*

Thus, the tension between authenticity and aspiration, so the tension between the desire for realistic representations that reflect the everyday complexity of motherhood and the simultaneous need for portrayals that offer emotional elevation and dignity, translates into a request for greater emotional

awareness and moderation in advertising narratives: mothers are not asking for raw realism, but for storytelling that makes them feel seen and valued, without exaggeration or rhetorical excess; it is precisely in this intermediate space, where reality is narrated with sensitivity and respect, that a type of communication emerges that can generate identification, empathy, and trust. And at the heart of this "intermediate space," as strongly echoed in the interviews, lies a deep, everyday, and multifaceted feeling: love, love for one's children, for one's identity, and for the life-built day by day through care, presence, and resilience; a love that is revealed in the simplest and most ordinary gestures, a caress, a glance, a shared moment, and that, precisely because of its simplicity, holds extraordinary narrative power.

R8: stated: *"There is nothing more real than a mother's love for her children."*

It is this love, in its most authentic and unembellished form, that represents the key to building credible and emotionally powerful advertising narratives, capable of engaging without falling into sentimentality. It does not need to be shouted or rendered epic: when it is represented with sincerity and delicacy, it surfaces with immediacy and depth, making the communication more empathetic, truthful, and respectful; in this sense, love is not merely a theme to depict, but a true narrative register to inhabit.

4.2.3 Third Insight: Emotional Tone Calibration

One of the most significant insights to emerge from the interviews concerns the emotional tone adopted in advertising when representing motherhood: the interviewed mothers showed a strong sensitivity to how emotions are conveyed, both visually and narratively. Overly celebratory, melodramatic, or sentimentally charged communication tends to create detachment rather than engagement; when emotional expression is perceived as forced or exaggerated, the message feels manipulative, inauthentic, and incapable of generating identification. Likewise, a comedic tone that feels too forced or artificial can also cause discomfort and alienation; humor, when not rooted in shared and relatable experience, risks coming across as inappropriate or disrespectful.

R4 states: *"I like seeing an ad that has sweetness and is moving, but without overdoing the pathos. Sweet, yes, but not overly sentimental."*

What mothers appreciated most was a narrative tone capable of realistically reflecting the range of emotions that fill their daily lives, moments of joy, exhaustion, affection, frustration, anxiety, irony, and pride naturally alternate in the maternal experience: the most effective campaigns were those able to embrace this complexity without simplifying it or reducing it to a single emotional register. Mothers do not live within a single mood, their daily life is made up of highs and lows, of small

gestures filled with meaning, of tender and funny moments that coexist with more challenging ones, and this is what they want to see in advertisings.

Participants highlighted that they felt particularly engaged by advertisements in which motherhood was told with a gentle, sincere tone capable of bringing a smile, these are sweet but never cloying narratives that sensitively depict the tenderness of a caress, the unintentional comedy of a difficult day, the hidden poetry of daily gestures. This kind of communication, light but not superficial, ironic yet respectful, was perceived as authentic: a kind of sweetness that makes mothers feel seen, understood, and recognized without slipping into sentimentalism. The moments described as especially effective were those in which an advertising manages to capture the imperfect beauty of everyday intimacy, without forcing it into an epic or tearful narrative; silent gestures, looks exchanged between mother and child, shared laughter around small daily victories were seen as emotional high points precisely because of their simplicity.

R6 states: *"I like the simplicity of imperfection, the sweetness that lies behind it. And I'd love to see that in a story that not only conveys this sense of tenderness, but also brings a smile to my face."*

This particular tonal balance (sweet without being saccharine, humorous without being cynical) is what enables an advertisement to feel emotionally truthful; it reflects the everyday emotional texture of motherhood, where laughter and fatigue often coexist, and where love is expressed not in grand declarations but in quiet, imperfect moments. Ads that manage to convey this softness with a touch of irony succeed not only in representing motherhood authentically, but also in offering a comforting, affirming emotional resonance.

R5 stated: *"It's true that being a mother means making a lot of sacrifices, but it's also the greatest joy of my life, and what better way to represent this strangely ordinary concept than with a tone of sweetness mixed with a touch of irony?"*

This insight suggests that effective maternal *femvertising* is defined not only by *what* it narrates, but also by *how* it narrates it: the modulation of emotional tone through words, images, music, and narrative rhythm, plays a central role in fostering emotional recognition and engagement. When mothers recognize the rhythm of their own emotional experiences in a campaign, they feel more involved, more heard, and more respected.

4.3 General Discussion

The integration of findings from the semiotic analysis and qualitative interviews reveals a new and significant evolution in how *femvertising* can approach the representation of motherhood. Both approaches, on one hand the semiotic analysis and on the other the qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews, converge on a key point: the need to move beyond traditional logics of idealization or

dramatization, in order to build a more authentic, participatory, and layered communicative space. The campaigns analyzed adopt a variety of tones and strategies: some glorify maternal heroism, others use irony, and still others attempt to depict everyday reality with realism; however, a recurring critical issue is the tendency of many ads to focus on just one aspect of the maternal experience (strength, exhaustion, tenderness, chaos, sacrifice) isolating it from the others and thereby producing partial and polarized representations, and this reduction of the complexity of motherhood leads many women to feel only partially represented. As the interviews revealed, motherhood is experienced as a multifaceted and ambivalent journey, full of light and shadow, strength and vulnerability, love and fatigue: portraying only one side means betraying its reality.

Participants also expressed a strong sensitivity to the emotional tone of campaigns, rejecting both excessive celebratory rhetoric and the dramatization of hardship, humor too was appreciated only when rooted in shared and familiar experiences, in fact forced, stereotypical, or stylized comedy was perceived as distant and disrespectful: it is precisely this emotional and narrative distance that prevents many campaigns from generating identification, empathy, and a sense of belonging.

What emerges, then, is both the possibility and the necessity of a new direction for *femvertising*: one that is inclusive and self-aware, that does not merely speak to mothers, but chooses to speak with them, a *femvertising* that lets go of normative models and unattainable ideals, and instead makes room for authentic, complex, imperfect, and truthful storytelling. Realism, in this context, must not be raw or cynical, but deeply human, capable of restoring dignity to fatigue, beauty to ordinary gestures, and symbolic value to an identity too often taken for granted.

Ultimately, this research shows that *femvertising* can renew its cultural and communicative relevance only if it is willing to abandon simplification and embrace complexity. By overcoming the tendency toward polarization and adopting a more nuanced, respectful gaze that is closer to the real lives of mothers, advertising can become a space for recognition and connection, one that not only represents, but also supports and celebrates maternal experience. It is precisely this call for balance between authenticity and aspiration, between representation and identification, that offers a new framework for maternity-focused *femvertising*.

4.4 Theoretical Contribution

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the current debate on *femvertising* by drawing attention to a largely overlooked aspect in the literature: the representation of mothers in advertising campaigns that aim to promote female empowerment. While *femvertising* has been widely analyzed in recent years as a communication strategy that opposes the historical objectification of women (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Gill, 2007), the maternal figure has remained at the margins of this

discourse (often still associated with traditional, stereotypical, or idealized roles). This research addresses that gap by proposing an alternative vision of motherhood: not as an obstacle to empowerment, but as a space where empowerment can take new and meaningful forms.

The interviews show that mothers do not reject *femvertising* as a concept, instead, they criticize those campaigns that present overly perfect, implausible, or emotionally shallow models of motherhood. What emerges instead is a strong desire to be portrayed authentically, as women who experience both strength and vulnerability, who face everyday challenges, who make mistakes, and grow alongside their children. In this light, motherhood becomes a privileged lens through which to rethink the very concept of empowerment: not merely as individual success, but as a relational, grounded, and lived experience; and from this perspective, *femvertising* itself is redefined: no longer merely as the celebration of strong, independent, high-performing women, but as a communicative practice capable of embracing the complexity of female experience, including motherhood. Within this framework, *femvertising* opens up to a broader narrative, one that does not stop at celebrating individual freedom, but also acknowledges forms of empowerment that emerge through relationships, family ties, and the everyday challenges of caregiving. Including motherhood within this horizon means recognizing that the autonomy, strength, and value of mothers do not arise in opposition to the complexity of caregiving, but develop precisely within it; it is through the daily management of family needs, the balance of roles, and the presence of shared support that many mothers find the conditions to feel free, active, and seen. It is in this space, shaped by emotions, contradictions, and relationships, that *femvertising* can discover new ways of being truly relevant and inclusive.

A key contribution of this study lies in the notion of centrality: mothers want to be the protagonists of advertising narratives, not just background figures or supporting characters. But for this centrality to be credible, it cannot rely on unrealistic models (such as the "supermom" who perfectly juggles every role); rather, the mother must be shown in her everyday truth, marked by complex emotions, work–family tensions, and a profound sense of responsibility and love: this kind of representation does not reduce motherhood to sacrifice, but restores the mother as an active, fully human subject, worthy of visibility and respect.

Ultimately, this study calls for a rethinking of the definition of *femvertising,* expanding it to include representations of motherhood that are more authentic, complex, and complete; the interviewed mothers do not seek to be idealized or trivialized, rather, they want to be portrayed in their entirety, as women who experience motherhood through a wide range of emotions, from joy to exhaustion, satisfaction to frustration, strength to vulnerability. Feeling truly represented means being depicted in the contrasts and nuances that characterize everyday life, made of intense moments, responsibilities, fatigue, and fulfillment. The form of *femvertising* that emerges from this research does not shy away

from complexity, instead it embraces it; it is an approach capable of portraying women not only as autonomous individuals, but also as people embedded in emotional, familial, and relational networks; in this light, motherhood is not an exception to be managed, but a fully legitimate and integral part of female identity. In this context the presence of the father, mentioned by some participants, is seen as a factor that can help make the maternal experience more sustainable, as long as it complements rather than overshadows the mother's narrative. In conclusion, representing motherhood in a complete way, therefore, means showing it in its everyday weave of emotions, relationships, and contradictions, offering a communicative space where mothers can genuinely recognize themselves.

4.5 Managerial Implications

In addition to offering a theoretical contribution to the ongoing discourse on *femvertising*, this research provides practical recommendations for brands, advertising agencies, and communication professionals who aim to design more effective campaigns targeted at mothers. The first key insight to emerge is the need to abandon idealized and unrealistic portrayals: the participants explicitly rejected models such as the "*Mulino Bianco Mom*", which they considered overly perfect, unattainable, and thus not credible; this type of narrative not only creates emotional distance but can also generate feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Mothers want to see themselves represented in their true everyday lives, made up of simple gestures, mixed emotions, effort, but also satisfaction. For this reason, brands should present authentic maternal figures, neither flawless superheroines nor dysfunctional caricatures, but real women capable of being strong and vulnerable, tired and joyful, ironic and tender: these models are closer to lived reality and foster deeper identification. Moreover, communication must maintain a consistent and balanced emotional tone, avoiding both rhetorical excess and forced sentimentality; mothers are not looking for campaigns that make them feel perfect; they are looking for campaigns that make them feel understood.

It is essential for brands to learn how to balance authenticity and aspiration: the mothers interviewed did not ask for gloomy or defeatist campaigns, but rather for truthful representations, ones that also convey a sense of pride, strength, and possibility. Realism should not turn into resignation, and aspiration should not equate to perfection: the most effective campaigns will be those that can portray fatigue without erasing beauty, and show difficulties without turning them into failures, and finding this balance is what enables advertising to generate empathy, resonance, and lasting value.

Brands that seek to build an authentic relationship with this audience must shift from a logic of representation to a logic of listening, and this can be achieved through participatory narrative formats, based on real stories, genuine contributions, or campaigns co-created with the audience itself. Mothers no longer want to be merely "portrayed"; they want a voice in the story, and that's why

actively involving them in the message-building process can significantly increase engagement and brand trust.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that it is indeed possible to apply the principles of *femvertising* to motherhood, as long as it is done with respect, empathy, and authenticity; and brands that succeed in balancing reality with aspiration, inclusion with emotional nuance, will not only communicate more effectively, but will also be better positioned to generate social and cultural value in a domain (motherhood) that has too often been narrated from the outside rather than from within.

4.6 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with any qualitative study, this research presents certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study is based on a limited number of in-depth interviews conducted with mothers from a relatively homogeneous socio-cultural context, while generational variety and differing life trajectories enriched the data, the lack of broader geographic, cultural, and economic diversity constitutes a limitation in terms of generalizability. Perceptions of motherhood, and emotional responses to advertising campaigns, can vary significantly depending on factors such as migratory background, educational level, social class, or the dominant value system in a specific territory.

Secondly, this research adopted an exclusively qualitative approach, focusing on the semiotic analysis of selected advertisements and on individual interviews, and this methodology allowed for a rich exploration of participants' subjective experiences and perceptual nuances but does not permit statistically generalizable conclusions. So, future integration of quantitative methods could offer broader validation of the findings and help explore potential correlations between socio-demographic variables and communication preferences.

An additional limitation concerns the composition of the sample: all the interviewed mothers were either married or in a relationship, which excluded from the analysis the experiences and perspectives of single mothers. This absence may have influenced the range of viewpoints collected, particularly regarding issues such as the balance between family life and personal autonomy, the solo management of parental responsibilities, and the perception of advertising representations that tend to reinforce traditional family models.

Despite these limitations, the study opens several promising avenues for future research. Primarily, it would be valuable to extend the investigation to international contexts, to examine how the principles of *femvertising* are (or are not) applied to motherhood in different cultural and market settings. Such comparative analysis could reveal significant cultural differences in how the maternal figure is

symbolically constructed: in some regions, *femvertising* may already be more integrated into maternal communication, while in others it may still conflict with traditional social norms or rigid family models; exploring these variables cross-culturally could help assess the transferability and adaptability of maternal *femvertising* in a globalized but culturally diverse landscape. Future studies should also consider including the voices of single mothers, whose perspectives were not represented in the present sample: exploring the perspectives of single mothers could also offer critical insights into how *femvertising* can represent non-normative family structures and challenge traditional maternal ideals. Additionally, future studies could examine the evolution of maternal *femvertising* over time, observing how brands respond to shifting cultural sensitivities and societal expectations. Finally, it would be particularly valuable to experiment with new narrative formats, such as short documentaries, podcasts, or branded content co-created with real mothers, and evaluate their effectiveness in terms of engagement and brand trust.

In sum, this research represents a first step in exploring the intersection between motherhood and *femvertising*, it demonstrates that this terrain offers not only original theoretical insights but also concrete strategic opportunities. Future research will be able to expand, deepen, and diversify this field, helping to make advertising communication not only more inclusive and ethical, but also more attuned to the emotional and cultural complexities of modern motherhood, a space too often overlooked in both academic and strategic discourse.

Conclusion

The reflection developed throughout this thesis has shown that the representation of motherhood in contemporary advertising, and particularly in campaigns that adhere to the principles of *femvertising*, constitutes a space of tension between innovation and tradition, between aspiration and authenticity, between symbolic empowerment and market logic. While *femvertising* has marked a significant evolution compared to the stereotyped and oversimplified narratives of the past, the case of motherhood reveals that the path toward a truly inclusive, realistic, and respectful portrayal remains complex and fraught with contradictions.

The semiotic analysis of the four selected campaigns revealed a variety of narrative and visual strategies: some opt for the heroic celebration of motherhood, others adopt an ironic or irreverent tone, while others attempt to convey the fatigue and complexity of maternal experience without sugarcoating it. Nevertheless, even the most successful campaigns show limitations, often linked to the need to maintain a balance between authenticity and desirability, between reality and idealization.; the mother, although emancipated from a purely caregiving and subordinate role, is still frequently portrayed as a performative, responsible, and resilient figure, but rarely as vulnerable, imperfect, or ambivalent, in other words, as human.

The qualitative interviews conducted with different mothers enriched this reflection by offering a bottom-up perspective on how women perceive, identify with, or distance themselves from the advertising images that portray them. What emerges is a strong desire to be recognized in their full complexity, without being reduced to labels or functions: the mothers interviewed express a need for less idealized and more diverse representations, capable of including fatigue, doubt, and social pressure, without giving up the possibility of being inspired or valued in their maternal experience.

In light of these findings, it can be stated that *femvertising* applied to motherhood entails a dual responsibility: on one hand, contributing to the construction of a more equitable and realistic cultural imaginary; on the other, avoiding the trap of commodifying a role that still bears a heavy load of social expectations. Brands that wish to communicate effectively and responsibly must move beyond the aestheticization of empowerment and work toward a consistent alignment between external messages and internal practices, between storytelling and corporate culture. Only in this way will it be possible to overcome the risk of "maternal washing" and build a form of communication that is genuinely transformative.

Appendix

Introduction (Beginning)

- **Brief introduction:** Buongiorno, sono Beatrice, studentessa presso l'università LUISS. Questa intervista si inserisce all'interno di un progetto di ricerca che esplora il tema della rappresentazione della maternità nelle campagne pubblicitarie. Il tuo contributo sarà fondamentale per comprendere meglio l'esperienza delle madri e il modo in cui percepiscono certi messaggi pubblicitari.
- **Explain selection:** Sei stata scelta perché vorrei raccogliere punti di vista differenti sulla maternità e la sua rappresentazione mediatica. Mi interessa molto conoscere il tuo parere e la tua esperienza personale.
- **Guarantee confidentiality:** Ti garantisco che l'intervista sarà confidenziale e anonima. Tutti i dati saranno trattati esclusivamente per fini accademici e nessuna informazione personale sarà condivisa.
- **Consent request:** Ti chiedo il permesso per registrare questa intervista (solo audio). Mi dai il consenso?

Central Phase (In Progress)

Prima parte: Esperienza e percezioni personali sulla maternità

1. Mi racconteresti brevemente la tua esperienza di essere madre?
2. Cosa ti rende orgogliosa del tuo essere madre?
3. C'è qualcosa che trovi particolarmente sfidante nella tua esperienza di maternità?
4. Potresti descrivermi qualche situazione in cui ti sei sentita particolarmente rappresentata da una pubblicità che ha come protagoniste delle figure materne? (qui se dicono che non c'è rappresentazione, chiedere direttamente perché)

Seconda parte: Visione degli Spot (2 spot presi da un corpus di 4)

Mostrerò ora 2 spot pubblicitari. Dopo ogni spot ti farò alcune domande.

Per ogni spot:

- Ti è piaciuto lo spot? Hai provato qualcosa guardandolo?

- Potresti dirmi se e in che modo ti senti rappresentata da questa pubblicità?
- C'è qualcosa che trovi particolarmente realistico?
- Secondo te, come contribuisce questo spot alla rappresentazione delle madri oggi? Potresti spiegare meglio?

Terza parte: Confronto e sintesi finale

1. Secondo te, cosa rende autentica e credibile una pubblicità che rappresenta la maternità?
2. Quando una pubblicità diventa fonte di pressione sociale o ansia secondo te?
3. Idealmente quali caratteristiche dovrebbe avere una pubblicità che ti faccia sentire capita rispetto all'essere madre?
4. Puoi ricordare un momento in cui una pubblicità ti ha fatto riflettere o cambiare opinione su qualcosa relativo alla maternità?

Conclusion (Conclusion)

- Riassumo brevemente i temi più importanti emersi (ad es. autenticità, pressione sociale, realismo, identificazione).
- C'è qualcosa che vorresti aggiungere o approfondire?
- Ti ringrazio molto per il tempo e la disponibilità.
- Saresti interessata a ricevere i risultati della ricerca? In che modo preferiresti riceverli?

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