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**SELLING EMPOWERMENT:
THE RISE OF FEMVERTISING**

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Anno Accademico

2022/2023

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Introduction

The main purpose of this thesis is to undertake a comprehensive, business-oriented analysis of the depiction of female characters in advertisements. This endeavor encompasses multiple chapters that contribute to a better understanding of the subject matter.

In the first chapter, I will provide a panoramic view of "advertising" from an entrepreneurial perspective, tracing its historical roots and evolution. Moreover, this opening chapter will introduce the central theme of "Femvertising" and elucidate its intricate ties to the feminist movement, setting the stage for the following chapters.

Chapter two will delve deeply into the multifaceted portrayal of women in advertisements, shedding light on the most common stereotypes and their implications. This critical examination will lay the foundation for a nuanced exploration of gender representation in the world of marketing.

In the third chapter, we will conduct a comparative analysis of two prominent lingerie brands, Victoria's Secret and Savage x Fenty. This comparative study will encompass an exhaustive SWOT analysis, offering valuable insights into the divergent approaches employed by these companies and their respective profitability trajectories over time.

The final chapter represents the culmination of this thesis, as it critically scrutinizes the potentially negative facets of Femvertising, with a particular focus on Empowertising and Performative Activism. This critical examination will enable us to discern the strategic choices made by the previously mentioned case study brands that are most likely to yield effective results in the realm of advertising. Furthermore, this chapter will articulate on the ethical discourse surrounding these choices, offering a well-rounded conclusion to the dissertation.

By embarking on this comprehensive journey through the world of advertising and its portrayal of female characters, this thesis aims to provide an insight which fosters a more informed and responsible approach to gender representation in the realm of marketing.

1. The History and The Genesis

1.1 Overview of Advertising and its History

Advertising represents one of the most effective tools at a company's disposal to maximize its profits. Its influence might be the only reason that a fledgling start up into the coveted position of an industry leader in a matter of months, weeks, or even days. The term "advertising" refers to the techniques and strategies employed to make the public aware of certain items, causes, or businesses. Commercials wield the remarkable ability to shape our images, mold our ideals and moreover, they make an impact on what we define as "normal": "ads sell more than products, they sell normalcy" as the author and activist Jean Kilbourne affirmed.¹ Through precisely targeted ads, marketers subtly and sometimes not so subtly, influence consumers and establish certain standards, convincing buyers to try and reach them by buying particular products.

Whenever a purchaser successfully acquires in obtaining a specific product, automatically it makes him feel part of a certain group. Throughout the years, means of communication have evolved, which is not only intertwined to technological advances, but also to new psychological sociocultural theories. These two aspects together create the necessary basis to draw the attention of buyers to certain benefits of the advertised product. In fact, advertising is used to persuade the public to give predetermined answers to specific questions.

This persuasive nature is at the epicenter of a relevant ethical discourse perpetuated since the naissance of advertising. This ongoing dilemma questions the morality implicated in the persuasive nature of these techniques; whether advertising should detain the power to override a thinking person's ability to choose instead utilizing an autonomous decision-making process.

As advertising continues to evolve, ads resulted in being more specific and catered to a person's uniqueness and idiosyncrasies. While watching commercials with cinematic shots and engaging or dramatic skits, we often find ourselves compelled to purchase the advertised products to identify with the same feelings and experiences being depicted. In such instances, it clearly showcases an "effective endorsement". Author Rory Sutherland² states that advertising wield a compelling influence on the items because of its ability to exhibit to buyers the positive sides that may be overlooked.

¹ *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*, Sut Jhally (2010, United States, Media Education Foundation), DVD.

² Manish Nepal, *Rory Sutherland: Marketing based on behavioral economics*, 2021, Yaagneshwaran: <https://www.yaagneshwaran.com/blog/rory-sutherland-behavioral-economics/>

Advertisements serve as a powerful tool for advocating both for and against specific policies, thesis, or events.

When engaging in promotions as marketers, the most common model employed is AIDA Model³, albeit with necessary alterations, which stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, coined by E. St. Elmo Lewis. Through the advertising activities, following the previously mentioned model, the consumer would be guided through the stages. Making the customer aware of the product represents the initial step, their attention must be grabbed in order to raise their interest. With that aim in mind, the following most practical method would be to communicate the benefits. Once a client's interest has peaked, the subsequent step is parading the advantages of the product, even by making a comparison with others, creating enough of a desire that they feel as if they desperately need the product. After fostering some desire in them, taking action by closing the deal would be the final step.

Since these methods appear to be modern and technological, it may come as a surprise that the roots of the advertising industry go deeper than we might think. Word-to-mouth advertising was always present in society, it probably originated as soon as human beings commenced to trade and sell goods or services, showing off how one product was better than the other one. However, the first written ad dates back to 3000 BC and it is actually from the ruins of Thebes, an ancient Egyptian city. That advertisement might be compared to a modern flyer since it was a papyrus⁴. The aim of that ancient flyer was to promote a political and religious campaign.

Even in literature, the loci of advertisements are narrated. There is the typical representation of markets, which are always described as full of vendors advertising their products and making the ambiance colorful and lively.

As the level of literacy grew higher, it allowed vendors to advertise their stores in a more appealing way. The oldest known example of an outdoor advertising medium⁵ is a printed poster from the Northern Song period, in China, which in this particular case is also a clear trademark. The sellers were advertising their needle business and asking buyers to remember their "white rabbit" which was their "trademark". Across many civilizations, advertising grew wider, radiating to a wider spectrum, and methods used to publicize different products changed many times. For instance, in ancient Rome, they would paint or even carve entire buildings to display ads. The invention of the printer meant another decisive step toward modern advertising.

³ Juliane Behm, *The AIDA Model- Wrong Spelling in Advertisements as an Attention-seeking Device*, GRIN Verlag, Munich, 1^o Edition 2006, 24

⁴ James Playsted, *The Story of Advertisement*, The Ronald Press, New York, 1^o Edition 1958, 512

⁵ Hong Liu, *Chinese Business: Landscapes and Strategies*, Routledge, 2^o Edition 2017, 346

Johannes Guttenberg is considered the inventor of the movable printer in 1440 AD, which started the printing revolution. With the advent of the press, the public was able to read books, essays and even gazettes or journals. The first ads, however, would only consist of short sentences describing the product advertised and a powerful slogan when owners provided one. The technological enhancement, during the 19th century, determined the inclusion of illustrations to make ads more appealing and accentuate their persuasiveness. Agencies for advertisement became more and more popular, although the first advertising agency was created in 1786 by William Taylor in London.

Radio advertisements became popular in the 20th century, additionally to news radio stations, entire channels were created specifically operated by manufacturers and retailers. This would lead to advertisement spaces, which would be sold to shops and activities, leading to the modern model of radiophonic ad placement.

Presumably, one of the most recognizable means used to advertise is television. From the exact moment, the first model of tv was invented in the 1920s, not only the society as a whole was subverted but also the approach to advertising seemed to have reached its full form. Ads were more refined, step by step they became one of the most profitable assets to the television: a 20 second ad, a spot, shown on tv would arrive to cost even thousands of dollars.

The development of the World Wide Web symbolized another pivotal moment in the history of advertisement, the opportunities became endless, and ads were beginning to assume a rather specific and targeted aspect.

Over the centuries, the means used to attract the public became more sophisticated and effective. However, the oldest methods were never forgotten, but were simply supplemented by new ones: for example, leaflets are still used today, however some changes were approved, for instance converting normal paper into environmentally friendly materials. In today's world, advertising is able to separate a successful brand from a mediocre one.

1.2 Definition of Femvertising

Advertising has the purpose of acquiring the most optimal way of communicating with our surroundings, it needs to appeal to the widest cut of a determined targeted audience. For this particular reason, ads tend to follow the same pace of sociocultural progress. Since advertising is limited in time and place, it is influenced by gender, racial and sexual stereotypes, due to this fact, ads need to be quick and of easy comprehension. The background of the advertisement has been always enhanced and promulgated by a masculine point of view, as the history of the world itself. The term "femvertising", as conceived by feminists, combines the words "female" and "advertising" and with

the objective of highlighting women's empowerment in the antithesis of the traditional social norms. SheKnows Media⁶ defines "femvertising" as "advertising that uses female talent, messaging, and imagery to empower women and girls".

This genre of advertising follows the ideologies and social causes of today. In fact, over the decades, women have been portrayed in many different forms, characteristics, and stereotypes. Today's "femvertised" products are characterized by empowering messages and commercials that portray women as active, adventurous, capable, independent, and on the other hand, fragile or lazy. The pioneer of this advertising medium was Dove with its Real Beauty Campaign in 2004, which used female empowerment, equality, and feminism to sell its products, which seemed groundbreaking at the time⁷. Several brands, thoughtfully reviewing the success of that campaign, jumped on the bandwagon, however still with prudence, until it became almost a standard method to promote the products.

In 2015, She Media once again created the Femvertising Awards to honor the brands that challenge gender norms⁸. One of the goals of today's society seems to be recognizing women as simple yet complex human beings, who are able to decide whoever they want to be without having expectations imposed on them because of their gender. Nonetheless, there is a feeling of responsibility concentrated on the brands to add value to the client's life, going beyond all the benefits and advantages that their product assured. According to a study, which She Media conducted in 2016⁹, the ones who tend to put this sort of pressure on the brands are women: 97% of the interviewed women and 90% of men believe that ads have an impact on how society perceives women; however just 65% of the interviewed men think that the sexual portrayal of women in ads is harmful against, an overwhelming 90% of women. Corporations are definitely aware of the importance of having the consumer identify him/herself in their brand, which in the present days is one of the pillars of successful revenues. It is indeed up to them to choose which route to undertake.

⁶ Flagship site of SheMedia, 2004

⁷ Angela Celebre and Ashley Waggonen Denton: *The good, the bad, and the ugly of the Dove Campaign Real Beauty*, 2014, The Inquisitive Mind: <https://www.in-mind.org/article/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-of-the-dove-campaign-for-real-beauty>

⁸ Femvertising Awards: www.femvertisingawards.com

⁹ Jenni Ottum: SheKnows Media to Reveal New Research on #Femvertising and Announce Winners of the 2016 #Femvertising Awards at Advertising Week 2016, Business Wire, 2016: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20160921005572/en/SheKnows-Media-to-Reveal-New-Research-on-Femvertising-and-Announce-Winners-of-the-2016-Femvertising-Awards-at-Advertising-Week-2016>

1.3 Postfeminist culture and commodity feminism

1.3.1 Postfeminist Culture

Separating feminism from femvertising is inherently impossible, hence it is a necessity that some clarifications need to be made. Feminist and media commentator Rosalind Gill locates the progressive change of the representation of women in the media in postfeminist discourse. Postfeminism has been seen over the last twenty years as a variation of second-wave feminism¹⁰ and sensibilities that focus on empowerment and consumerism. Postfeminism is a multifaceted concept that has evolved over the past two decades. It is often viewed as a variation of second-wave feminism, emphasizing themes like empowerment and consumerism. Postfeminism is most commonly associated with the publishing and media industries, although it's important to note that the term has been used both positively and negatively, depending on one's perspective. Postfeminism is commonly referred to as a publishing or media phenomenon, however the term has been adopted to give a negative connotation.

Author Shelly Budgeon distinguishes between the different views of postfeminism:

a. Anti-feminism:

It may represent an actual backlash against the second wave of feminism. According to her beliefs, gender equality has already been achieved. Thus, the obstacles women face in their lives depend on themselves, invalidating the cultural prejudices recognized by the feminist movement.

b. Another stage of feminism:

It is presented as part of the feminist "body". This is the most productive view for Budgeon, identifying the "post" as a metamorphosis rather than something separate. Postfeminism would be a political deviation within its theoretical framework¹¹.

Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez in their article "The Myth of Postfeminism"¹² affirm that there are four columns of postfeminism's ethos. The first step dates the 1980s and 1990s and it is characterized by the decreasing support for the feminist movement among women. The second and logical step is represented by a sentiment of anti-feminist tendencies growing steadily especially in

¹⁰ Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg: *Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation*, Feminist Theory, 2019

¹¹ Shelly Budgeon, *Emergent Feminism Identities: Young Women and the Practice of Micropolitics*, European Journal of Women's Studies, 2001

¹² Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez, *The Myth of Postfeminism*, Sage Publication, Vol. 17, No. 6, 2003, pp. 878-902

younger women's minds. The second to last one is the acceptance of the reaching of feminism's goals, women thought that by having attained its primary ends such as the right to vote or the growing representation of female figures in white-collar positions, feminism was achieved. The last step is what Rodriguez and Hall call the "no, but..." culture; women seem to be apprehensive about declaring themselves as feminists, but on the other hand they support feminist objectives. It appears clearly that for Hall and Rodriguez, it is not a matter of women not wanting to be feminists, rather they no longer want to be associated with the connotation that feminism inherited.

1.3.2 Commodity feminism

In this climate, women are asked to advocate for their empowerment by investing in certain products, which are strictly targeted. This form of employment of the feminist discourse exploited for commercial purposes is called "Commodity Feminism". In the semantic fields, the term is associated with Marx's "commodity fetishism". Marx's "commodity fetishism" follows the idea of an extreme form of alienation, which is induced by the structures of commodity-exchange in a capitalist society.¹³ For the philosopher, a fetish represents an item that is so worshiped that it becomes invested with metaphysical powers. Commodities, in this case, are detached from their material value and become not only valuable for their use but also for the possibility of exchanging them with other commodities. The term "commodity fetishism", as Marx explains it, characterizes the perception of social relations under the sway of commodity transactions; this also helps to discern the type of relationship that it forms, which is one between things, commodities, instead of between people.

"Commodity feminism" shares some underlying principles with the concept of "commodity fetishism," primarily centered around the complete commodification and commercialization of feminist values, often used solely for the purpose of brand success. With the rise of feminism in the last century, the advertising industry, in order to maintain its appeal to female consumers, found it necessary to incorporate feminist ideologies into their messaging. However, in doing so, the inherently political and transformative nature of feminism was often diluted and reduced to just another commodity in the market.

Opinions on this phenomenon within the advertising industry are diverse. On one end of the spectrum, there are skeptics who question the authenticity and depth of this "mainstreaming" of feminism, arguing that it can be insincere and driven primarily by profit motives. On the other end, some believe

¹³ Karl Marx, *Il Capitale*, UTET, 2017, 3011

that such publicity could spark important conversations that lead to positive social change, especially given the wide and diverse online communities where these discussions take place.

In the following chapters, we will delve deeper into the analysis of these types of advertisements, providing examples to support the thesis and explore the various dimensions and impacts of "commodity feminism" within the advertising landscape.

2. Representation of women in ads

Through this chapter, I am going to analyze and regroup the several depictions of women in advertising. Certainly, analyzing and categorizing the various depictions of women in advertising based on their historical appearance is a valuable approach to understanding the evolution of these representations. By presenting these characters chronologically and providing recent examples, you can illustrate the enduring presence and influence of these depictions in the 21st century. This approach will provide valuable insights into how advertising has both changed and remained consistent in its portrayals of women over time.

2.1 Traditional Mom: the domestic obsessive and selfless nurturer

The portrayal of female figures in media was practically non-existent before the XIX century. News of suffragettes or feminist acts of the time was obscured. However, two precursors of feminism flourished during the Enlightenment: Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges. Yet, most male-run magazines and newspapers chose not to publish anything about this women's rights agenda. Instead of seeing these women as smart and progressive, they were portrayed as boorish and aggressive.

The only proper image of a woman was the one of a quiet and caring housewife. Even before the TV spots, newspapers of the 1920s were mostly gathered to the husbands. A flyer from 1924 pictured a couple kissing and, on the side, there was a vacuum cleaner, the slogan was "Don't disappoint her again this Christmas, give her a hoover¹⁴". The matter, of course it was not the gift itself, even in this day and age we would appreciate it as a present, however it was only one of the few reasonable gifts at that time. The wife was depicted as a nurturer and a house servant. The male-oriented gaze of the time focused on appearance, tameness, and domestic chores. In advertisements, women were told not to talk too much, otherwise the man would not be pleased and they would no longer be desirable. For instance, in one of many commercials from the 1940s was reported that: "The women of this family, they owe to the men of the family to look relaxed, rested and attractive at dinner time"¹⁵. Advertising in the 40s and 50s defined the role of women, further confirming the stereotype that already existed. The man was the sole decision-maker in the household, the woman's opinion was never taken into

¹⁴ Witness2fashion: What I don't want for Christmas Part 2: A Vacuum Cleaner, 2014:

<https://witness2fashion.wordpress.com/tag/give-her-a-hoover-ad/>

¹⁵ NowThis News, Sexist PSAs From The 40s and 50s Show How Far Women Have Come, YouTube, 2020. 3:22:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_OAIaBiHc

account. Even when the men portrayed would scold their wives in an aggressive manner, they were praised for their "moral fiber".

This stereotypical housewife only cared about her family, her physical presence, and the housework; the only job encouraged in ads was taking care of the house and the children, while looking pretty. Any other types of hobbies would seem inappropriate and would not give the right representation of the ideal woman of the time. Reading or writing, or any other form of entertainment that could make a woman think, was not portrayed as a leisure activity that a good woman could enjoy. Women should rather enjoy sewing so that their husbands would have freshly sewed trousers or cooking, to provide food for all the family. For this separation, there were never any advertisements for books or essays aimed at women, the first ones to appear were about cooking.

Post-war advertising was completely centered on the depiction of a caring mother. Popular advertisements consisted in straightforward and short videos, where doctors or other medical references explained how women should use their "right" to give birth and take care of children.

One of the standards which has been only even more solidified over the years was the requirement of a slender figure.

Believing to have overcome this stereotype in the 21st appears to be idyllic. Clorox, which is an American manufacturer of consumer and professional products, in 2007¹⁶ launched an advertisement for its products. The ad begins with the slogan "the laundry is not new. Your mother, your grandmother, her mother, they all did the laundry. Maybe even a man or two" keeps on going. With the few first lines of its advertisement, Clorox reaffirms the archaic idea that the family member who needs to take up housework are the females. It would not be fair to say that the ads say that women only have to clean the house or be housewives, however it is safe to attest that they should still be the one to do it, reinforcing the preexisting stereotype.

2.2 "Sexual and Unattainable Object"

Advertisements from the 70s, 80s and 90s appeared to be different from the ones of the previous years. As stated in the first chapter, commercials evolve hand in hand with social development. The 80s represented a spacious fracture between the 50s or 60s, materialism and consumerism were at their prime¹⁷. There was a breakthrough in media sources, radios, cinemas, even new networks such

¹⁶ Briana Delaney, Clorox Commercial... Laundry Timeline, You Tube, 2007, 0:34: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZeQUxSjHwU>

¹⁷ Hisory.com, *The 1980s, A&E Television Networks, 2018*: <https://www.history.com/topics/1980s/1980s>

as MTV were emerging. Young people were trying to escape conservative restrictions, clothes became shorter and more revealing; the “sexual liberation” of the 70s continued in the 80s.

Being one of the oldest myths of advertising, “sex sells”¹⁸ was just the proper motto for these years. Ads of that period pictured the woman as an unattainable and sexual object.

The authors Fredrickson and Roberts¹⁹ define sexual objectification as occurring “whenever a woman’s body, body parts, or sexual function are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her”. Following this definition, several are the ways in which women are sexually objectified every day, however I am going to focus on how advertisements endure and promote such objectification.

Chronologically speaking, the first appearance of a less prude image of the woman happened in the 70s, a type of objectification was made in the 60s too. Pictures from the 60s portraying even famous actresses such as Marilyn Monroe were eroticized. The ideal housewife was still vivid, it was flanked by the figure of the temptress. Women were illustrated with short clothes which left them almost naked, in order to appeal even more to the male gaze. These models in ads were just used as an object, which should have brought grandeur and gorgeousness to the product advertised.

The main reason why these provocative images are used in advertisements is that they attract the consumers’ attention, even though the ad has nothing or merely nothing related to the product itself. Author Kevin Ann Kelsmark²⁰ presents another leitmotif why these types of advertisements are popular, in his work affirms that marketers aim to shock the client; the more irreverent and outrageous ads are, the more time the consumer would stop and look, and the percentage of the persuasion would just rise. Moreover, people have the tendency of seeing sexual images even when they are not meant to be there, so the advertiser’s job is even less complicated.

We have many ads to choose from, and in some of them, sexualization is rather unbearable, some others just suggest it, such as an ad from Nestea of the 80s²¹. In this ad, the only man portrayed is working while watching young ladies; these women, nonetheless, are in small bathing suits getting splashed. The female body here is used to draw attention and to promote the ad, since shots of women in revealing clothes getting splashed with water are alternated with shots of the bottle of Nestea.

¹⁸ Wang Yiqiao, *Sexual Objectification of Women in Advertising*, Bod Third Party Titles, 2016, 33

¹⁹ Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, *Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women’s Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*, 1997

²⁰ Kevin Ann Kelsmark, *Sexual Imagery Attitudes in Advertising*, AV Akademikerverlag, 2012, 124

²¹ Christian Larson, *80s Summer Commercials*, You Tube, 2020, 8:29: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKmwd-XpVLQ>

Publicists who use these sexual images are attributing subconsciously a certain role to women, solidifying them as no more than an object to be tamed and possessed. Female bodies are dismembered and utilized solely for men's gratification.

On the other hand, there is the argument that men too are sexualized, which certainly is accurate, however the way in which they are portrayed is far more different. Men, when sexualized, are depicted as strong leaders that dominate the woman; they are shown taking control of women. Picturing a stark man prevaricating a woman is inappropriate and furthermore dangerous, since ads have always been linked to popular culture. These images may imply, or show clearly, violence against their body. Many ads go as far as dismembering the female body, this means substituting parts of the female body with the product or the body representing the silhouette of the product, such as a female torso used to show the shape of a bottle of beer.²²

In recent decades, one of the most prevalent times to encounter such advertisements is during major sporting events. For instance, we can take into consideration the 2010 ad for Carl's Jr, a fast-food chain, featuring the well-known celebrity, Kim Kardashian. In this ad, Kim Kardashian is depicted eating a salad in a provocative manner, laden with suggestive sexual imagery. The advertisement includes close-up shots focused directly on the woman's chest, emphasizing sexual appeal.

Such advertisements, often referred to as "sexually suggestive" or "sexually explicit" ads, have been frequently employed by various brands, especially during high-profile events, to capture viewers' attention and generate buzz. These ads are designed to be provocative and provocative, often using sexuality as a central theme to sell products or attract an audience.

However, these types of ads have also faced criticism for objectifying and commodifying women, as they can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to the sexualization of women's bodies in the media. Consequently, the use of sexually suggestive advertising remains a subject of debate within the advertising industry and broader society.

2.3 "Real Beauty" (Dove)

"Dove" was created in 1957 and it is one of the most long-running beauty corporations. Since their early days, Dove promoted and advertised their cream in a new "normal" way. Dove showed a more naturalistic image of the woman, quite different from the stilted version of the 60s or 70s. This type of promotion struck a chord with customers and made it very a successful brand. In the new century, Unilever, which was the owner of the brand, had the desire to expand into other categories. With the enlargement of the label, the naturalistic view of the woman remained relevant and was actually

²² <http://www.ltcconline.net/lukas/gender/objectify/womanobject/pics/womanobject16.jpg>

positioned at the center of their campaigns. Dove promoted a survey²³ and the results, of the data collected from nearly 3000 women all over the world, were gut-wrenching. The outcome was clear, women's self-esteem was on a low: only 2% of women felt beautiful. In addition, it would get even lower right after reading a magazine. It was subsequently to these unsettling results that Dove launched the "Real Beauty Campaign"²⁴.

"Real Beauty" Campaign was and remains one of the most successful brand-purpose campaigns of all time. With this campaign, Dove aimed to "broaden the narrow definition of beauty". "Real Beauty" was launched in 2004, making her today resilience even more impressive. Dove tried to inspire women to feel beautiful and confident, by challenging the industry's stereotypes. The first step of the campaign was a poster: it pictured 8 women, all having different ages and ethnicities, and moreover with realistic bodies. Those women's body types or skin represent what the industry calls undesirable, nonetheless those are the real bodies of women. Dove through this campaign was able to make people feel at ease with themselves by showing a realistic body type. The campaign then moved from outdoor advertising to the screen, with the "firming" ads. In the "firming" ad, real women were shown in real situations testing the products, which made a lot of noise. Perhaps one of the most famous campaigns was the "Evolution" campaign launched in 2006. The "Evolution" campaign helped unpack the harming nature of the beauty industry, it consisted in a video that filmed the process of a photoshoot, everything from hair and makeup to photoshop. This advertisement showed how women are not able to follow the strict rules of this industry, they would need a computer to reach those unattainable standards.

The "Real Beauty" campaign was able to carry out a powerful message in disparate ways. In 2013 Dove launched "Dove Real Beauty Sketches"²⁵ which captured a social experiment. In the video women were asked to narrate how they looked like to a forensic sketch artist, who could not see them. The experiment consisted then in making the same group of women describing themselves and moreover, they were asked to describe the other women present in the study. The results of this experiment revealed an intriguing contrast: the self-descriptions provided by the women tended to be much more unflattering than the descriptions they offered of their peers.

One of the most commendable achievements of the overall Dove "Real Beauty" campaign is its ability to spark a global conversation about the authentic definition and boundaries of beauty. This

²³ Dove, Our Research, 2004: <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/about-dove/our-research.html>

²⁴ AdAge, No.1 Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, You Tube, 2015:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpM499XhMJQ>

²⁵ Dove Real Beauty Campaign Sketches, 2013: <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/campaigns/real-beauty-sketches.html>

conversation, initiated by Dove's campaign, continues to be an ongoing and relevant topic of discussion today.

Through their communication efforts, Dove has effectively promoted a positive and empowering image of the female body. Importantly, this approach does not involve criticizing or demeaning other body types. Instead, Dove has championed diversity and inclusivity by celebrating women of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds.

Dove's campaign has played a pivotal role in challenging traditional beauty standards, fostering self-acceptance, and encouraging women to embrace their natural selves. It has become a significant force in advocating for a more inclusive and accepting definition of beauty, demonstrating the power of communication in reshaping societal perceptions and advancing positive social change.

2.4 Girl Boss

The “Girl Boss”²⁶ was popularized by the founder of clothing brand NastyGal Sophia Amoruso, in 2014 with her book “#Girlboss”, and “Lean in” by Cheryl Sandberg, ceo of Facebook. The term “Girl Boss” is usually directly related to empowerment, and in the last two decades it was so widespread that it became a common expression. The term "Girl Boss" refers to women who are self-assured, confident, and assertive in pursuing their ambitions and goals without being hindered by societal constraints. It conveys the idea of women taking charge of their lives and careers, breaking free from limitations, and achieving success on their terms.

In recent years, there has been a significant focus on representation, particularly in media and advertising, with the aim of portraying women in powerful and influential roles. While this representation is important, it is essential to recognize that a decade ago, female representation in positions of power was a significant challenge. The advent of social media has played a pivotal role in the digitalization of "Girl Boss" advertisements, making them more accessible and widespread. When you search for the term "Girl Boss" on internet platforms, you are often redirected to content featuring bright pink and motivational quotes that encourage women to work hard and pursue their dreams. These messages emphasize determination and resilience in the face of obstacles, inspiring women to assert their independence and strive for success.

One notable example of a "Girl Boss" advertisement is the "#GirlCan" women empowerment campaign by Covergirl, launched in 2014. In this one-minute ad, Ellen DeGeneres and several celebrities share instances when they were told they couldn't achieve something, only to defy those expectations. While these advertisements encourage viewers to work hard and succeed, they have

²⁶ <https://girlboss.com/>

also faced criticism from some who argue that they may inadvertently promote a model of success that aligns with existing power structures.

In essence, "Girl Boss" advertisements reflect a shift towards celebrating female empowerment and ambition. However, they are not without controversy, as they can sometimes be seen as reinforcing certain ideals or encouraging women to conform to existing systems rather than challenging them.

Absolutely, "Girl Power" advertisements aim to tap into the deeper essence of women's empowerment and self-acceptance. They go beyond surface-level representations and stereotypes, acknowledging that women are human beings capable of achieving anything they set their minds to. These ads celebrate women for who they truly are, recognizing their individuality, strengths, and aspirations.

In stark contrast to the advertisements of the 20th century, which often portrayed women in limited and stereotypical roles, "Girl Power" ads break away from these constraints. They emphasize the importance of self-confidence, self-expression, and self-acceptance. These ads send a clear message that women should be celebrated for their uniqueness and their ability to pursue their dreams and ambitions without limitations imposed by gender norms.

Ultimately, "Girl Power" advertisements serve as a powerful reminder of the progress made in challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for gender equality. They inspire women and girls to embrace their true selves, pursue their passions, and stand up for their rights, promoting a message of empowerment and acceptance that resonates deeply with their audiences.

The traditional roles of the lady-like persona that a woman was required to follow are shattered, a woman or a girl can do anything they desire to, there is no such thing as a man's work or sport. Women in ads are portrayed while combatting and modifying social norms²⁷.

"Always" represents perhaps the most crowd-pleasing ad in the mainstream, the three-minute-long video has well over 70 million views on YouTube. The "Always" brand, which encompasses a range of personal hygiene products from menstrual pads to body wash, has created a powerful and thought-provoking video that challenges gender stereotypes and empowers girls. In the video, teenagers and children, both male and female, are asked to mimic certain actions with the instruction to do them "like a girl." Initially, the interviews appear to mock these actions, as "like a girl" is often associated with weakness or ineffectiveness.

However, the video takes a poignant turn when young girls are brought into the spotlight. They perform the same actions with confidence and skill, without any notion that doing something "like a

²⁷ Melika Kordrostami and Russel N. Laczniak, *Female Power Portrayals in Advertisement*, 2021

girl" should be seen as a negative or inferior way of doing it. For example, when asked what it means to "run like a girl," one young girl responds confidently, "Run as fast as you can." Throughout the video, a conversation unfolds among the teenagers and children, leading to the realization that "like a girl" is often used as an insult when it should simply be a reflection of reality. The conclusion reached is that being a girl is not something to be ashamed of; rather, it should be celebrated and embraced.

The concept of "Girl Power" is central to this video, as it aims to resonate deeply with its audience on an emotional and impactful level. These advertisements are designed to empower women, challenging the gender stereotypes that have historically been perpetuated by ads targeting men. They send a powerful message that being a girl or a woman should not be associated with weakness or limitations, but rather with strength, confidence, and pride.

2.5 Generation Z Femvertising

Generation Z, comprised of individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a highly targeted audience of young people aged 10 to 25. This generation is often characterized as being "woke," signifying their heightened awareness of the social and cultural movements of the current decade, and their insistence on the respectful representation of these movements. To effectively capture their attention in advertising, femininity must be portrayed in a multifaceted and inclusive manner.

Marketers aiming their advertisements at Generation Z need to recognize and represent every facet of femininity. This includes portraying women of all races, sexual orientations, and genders, including non-binary individuals. In essence, the goal is to reflect the diversity and complexity of the modern female experience.

A perfect example of an ad gathered to Ganz with female representation in all of its aspects is "Instagram: We Make Today"²⁸. This advertisement features a montage of teenagers and young adults, showcasing a wide range of female representation. There are girls of different body types, skin colors, hair lengths, and abilities. Some are in wheelchairs, some are dancing, and others are actively raising awareness about the climate change crisis. They are all portrayed as expressing their creativity and asserting their unique selves. This ad embraces diversity, and the girls depicted in it exemplify the central idea of representing a wide spectrum of female experiences, which resonates with Generation Z.

²⁸ 6 *Examples of Brands that Got Gen Z Marketing Right*, Refuel Agency, 2021: <https://www.refuelagency.com/blog/teen/gen-z-marketing-examples/>

In summary, to effectively target Generation Z, female characters in advertisements should be portrayed as unique and diverse individuals within a creative context. This approach allows them to authentically express their true selves and appeals to the values and expectations of this socially conscious and inclusive generation.

3. Effective engagement

In this chapter, we will delve into two case studies of lingerie brands that have played significant roles in the last few decades: "Victoria's Secret" and "Savage x Fenty." To provide a comprehensive analysis of their marketing strategies, we will review their SWOT analyses. The term "SWOT Analysis" represents a valuable technique for assessing the risk, competition, and potential of a business by identifying its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This analysis will offer insights into the contrasting approaches of these two brands in the realm of femvertising.

3.1 Victoria's Secret

3.1.1 The History of the Brand

"Victoria's Secret" was founded in June of 1977 by entrepreneur Raymond Roy. Being a man, Roy was not really familiar with women's lingerie. It was just when he had to go buy something for his wife Gabe, in a local lingerie shop, that he was inspired to create one of his own. Roy's experience was definitely not one for the books, he felt so uncomfortable in the shop that he decided to create a lingerie shop. The main purpose of this new brand was that even men could feel at ease shopping in it. The Victorian age inspired Victoria's Secret's name: Roy was aiming to evoke the refinement of Queen Victoria's Epoque. Journalist Naomi Barr summed up Roy's vision: "he chose the name "Victoria" to evoke the propriety and respectability associated with the Victorian era; outwardly refined, Victoria's "secrets" were hidden beneath"²⁹.

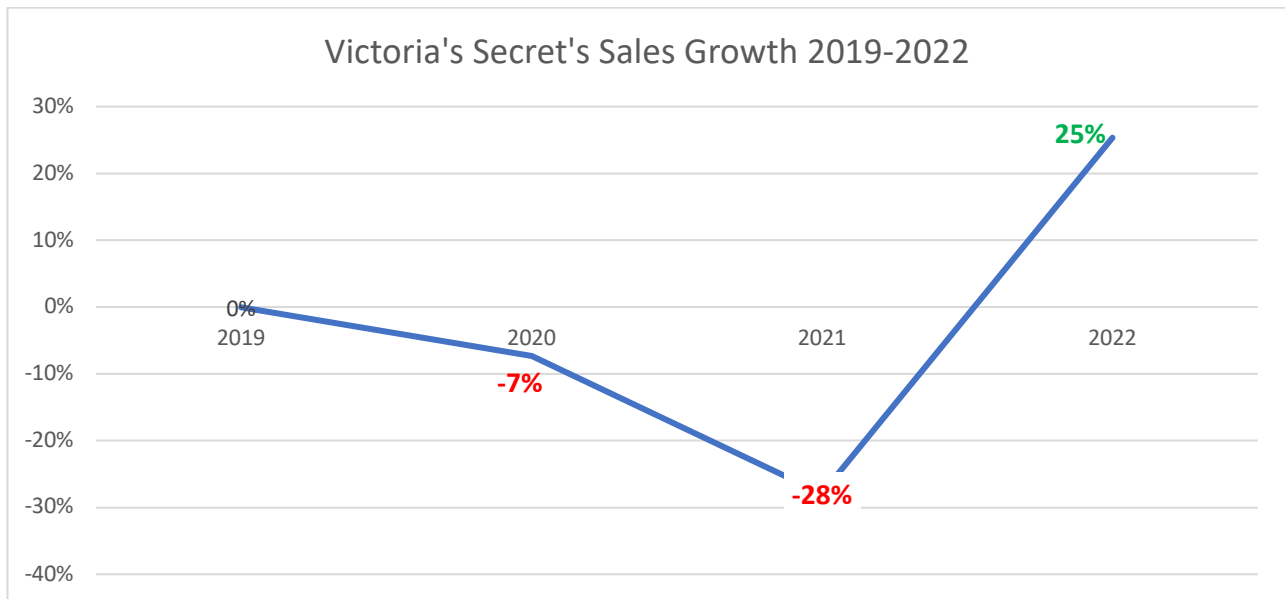
Roy opened his first shop in Stanford Shopping Center, California. The success was not waited for long; prior to Victoria's Secret, lingerie was considered niche and occasional and the designs of the colossal underwear market, "Fruit of the Loom" and "Jockey", were simple and modest.

The first year of Victoria's Secret revealed a much more than favorable outcome with a gross income of \$500,000.³⁰ The profit made helped to open up new stores, ensuring constant growth of the brand. Victoria's Secret was sold in 1982 for one million dollars to Lex Wexener, the founder of "L Brands". From this acquisition, the brand identity changed: Roy's focus on men was shifted by Wexener on women. Wexener chose to bring the aesthetic of European lingerie in those years to the American soil. Victoria's Secret blew up, in the early 90s more than 300 stores were opened nationally, and

²⁹ Naomi Barr, *Happy Ending, right?* Slate, 2013: <https://slate.com/business/2013/10/victorias-secret-founding-roy-raymond-had-a-great-idea-but-les-wexner-was-the-one-to-see-it-through.html>

³⁰ 440 Industries, *Victoria's Secret History Case Study- The Rise*, 440 Industries, 2022: <https://440industries.com/victorias-secret-history-case-study-the-rise/>

sales arrived to top \$1 billion.³¹ Victoria's Secret's catalogs and fashion shows were becoming staples in mainstream culture. The brand dominated during the 2017 the entire "commercial lingerie" scene.



Here there is a graph representing the growth experienced by Victoria's Secret's sales in the years between 2019-2022. It was in 2017-2018, that Victoria's Secret's revenues began to plummet, the assorted details show how the degrowth process has only sped up, touching its lowest point in 2021 with a -28% compared to the data of 2019. Victoria's Secret was not able to keep up with the social and cultural awakening of Gen Z. It was only after the announcement of the new directorial board that the sales grew more confidently, however if the expectations of the inclusivity of a wide range of diversity in campaigns and designs will not be matched, it is predicted for the sales to decrease at a higher speed.³²

³¹ Aine Cain and Mary Hanbury, *The Rise, Fall and Comeback of Victoria's Secret, America's Biggest Lingerie Retailer*, Insider 2022: <https://www.businessinsider.com/victorias-secret-rise-and-fall-history-2019-5?r=US&IR=T#and-it-worked-by-the-early-1990s-victorias-secret-had-become-the-largest-lingerie-retailer-in-the-us-with-350-stores-nationally-and-sales-topping-1-billion-5>

³² WSJ Market: <https://www.wsj.com/market-data/quotes/VSCO/financials/annual/income-statement>

3.1.2 SWOT Analysis of Victoria's Secret in 2021

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
• Brand Presence	• Poor Penetration	• Emerging Markets	• New Competition
• In-store Experience	• Less focus on their "it" products	• Online Presence	• Request of Inclusivity
• Angels	• Inclusivity		
• Fashion Show	• Fashion Show		

Victoria's Secret represents a solid brand of underwear since 1977. Despite its ups and downs, it still is one of the most respectable and relevant companies in its department. Its brand presence is undeniable, its worldwide visibility is almost unmatched with over 1000 shops all over the globe. The Victoria's Secret in-store experience is maybe their most efficient asset. The customer service offered is exceptionally great and welcoming. The employees are well-trained and friendly, and everything is bright up with a pink décor.

Another strength under its belt is surely the celebrity following. Influencers, nowadays, represent one of the most profitable and effortless methods of advertising for every company, no matter how big or small. Victoria's Secret, however, was able to create its own celebrities. Every model, who would run Victoria's Secret's fashion show, would receive a slice of fame. The models became the first form of trust between the brand and the consumer. Victoria's Secret was able also to brand them, every model who walks their runway was called an "Angel". The Angels had many advantages but also, they needed to put in first place Victoria's Secret. Romee Strijd in her first interview as an angel in 2015 affirmed that "becoming a VS angel means a lot for me, because I know that the brand stands for confident women and the angels would inspire me".³³ Angels represented the standard of beauty for young girls for more than a decade. Victoria's Secret's fashion shows became an event to look forward to every year. The models would be dressed up in bedazzled lingerie with pompous angel wings, and in addition, they were accompanied by the most popular musical artists of that time, to name a few: Rihanna, Selena Gomez, The Weeknd and Taylor Swift. It became one of the most-watched fashion shows in the world, gathering more than 3 million watchers every year. The popularity of the show, nonetheless, declined in the past 4 to 5 years, people began to share a more positive outlook on all types of bodies and started to search it on these fashion shows, trying to feel

³³ Victoria's Secret, *Romee Strijd on Becoming a Victoria's Secret Angel*, You Tube, 2015, 1:59: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkcctlyWEs>

represented. This image was never found in Victoria's Secret show, and consequently, ratings plummet.

To solve its weakness of being a non-inclusive brand, Victoria's Secret in June 2021 has officially retired its Angels. This will not invalidate what was previously stated, being able to create a famous personality is a remarkable asset, if used in the proper way. When the acceptance of every type of women's body, face or aesthetic was advancing, Victoria's Secret's Angels would still be representing the same identical body without making any sort of integration. The brand did not really grasp the change in the mentality of the past decades, women are no longer interested to buy products to look like the perfect and canonical standard, they now want to feel at ease with their bodies and they desire to see it displayed and praised for its beauty. Since the idea in itself of branding a person was winning, the brand announced that there would be another group replacing VS Angels, The VS Collective.³⁴ The group is formed by all kinds of women: actresses, footballers, models of all sizes and LGBTQ+ representatives.

Tackling, in part, the problem of inclusivity, there is still the obstacle of the brand's poor penetration. Victoria's Secret customers are located in urban areas, although the brand has a multitude of stores, they are located only in cities and the penetration in smaller towns is nearly non-existing, where it is easier to find small brand shops. Being able to compete with the innumerable lower-cost new competitors, the brand started to concentrate on new products, which gained negative feedback once hit the market. There is the risk of clients switching to other companies, since Victoria's Secret being a long-running brand has many long-term customers who have trust in the brand once that trust gets broken it is really hard to build it back up.

The main opportunity for Victoria's Secret is represented by new emerging markets, in which the new vision of sexuality that is settling in these past few years symbolizes a favorable future for lingerie brands. With this new mentality and the recent online possibilities, the brand has favorable circumstances to capitalize on them, with a needed, and better, understanding of clients' demands.

The threats on which we are going to shine a light on are mainly the inclusivity aspect and the fierce competition. Exclusivity, standards, and perfect body ratio have been some of the strongholds of Victoria's Secret's identity, with the advent of the new wave of feminism, in this case in body positivity, the brand kept on using the same image. Victoria's Secret's Angels embodied perfection, confidence, and the model everybody should inspire to be. Inclusivity, in 2021-2022 especially, is an

³⁴ Vanessa Friedman and Sapna Maheshwari, *Victoria's Secret Swaps Angels for "What Women Want"*. *Will They Buy It?* New York Times, 2021: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/16/business/victorias-secret-collective-megan-rapinoe.html>

attorney for the beauty of all bodies and shapes, all genders and all sexualities, it is the expression of humankind without any kind of barrier. In antithesis, for the past decades, everything Victoria's Secret has been constructing and molding were certain social ideals, which inclusivity is trying to shutter. To keep up with the new generation a shift is needed, which Victoria's Secret's CEO Martin Waters affirms that it will dramatically happen with the withdrawal of the infamous Angels. This will not only help the brand with the inclusivity issue but also, they will still be competitive with young and upcoming new brands, such as Savage x Fenty, our next case study.

3.1.3 The New Attempt

Victoria's Secret has re-entered the industry with a bare new face. The identity of the brand commenced to drastically metamorphose in the past few months, until this 6th September, until the brand-new fashion show. The event came back again after 4 years of pause, making it the right debut for a modern Victoria's Secret. Attempting not to be anchored to the Barbie-like stereotype, they themselves created, many initiatives embark a transformation of its marketing strategy, featuring more prominently fuller-figured models in ads and on store mannequins. Moreover, The brand is broadening its product range to include mastectomy bras and comfortable sports bras. Additionally, it is revitalizing its retail physical shops with brighter lighting and blush pink walls.

Instead of its previous supermodel "Angels," the brand has introduced a diverse group of ten women who offer guidance and promote the brand through social media. In spite, remaining on the top-selling list of lingerie brand in the U.S., its market dominance has declined from 31.2% in 2017 to 18.7% last year. This decrease in market share can be easily reconducted to the exploit of smaller competitors like American Eagles' Aerie and several online startups which tend to prioritize inclusivity from their origin and provided enhanced comfort, as reported by market researcher Euromonitor International. The event took place on Wednesday 6th of September 2023, featuring a headline performance by the singer and songwriter Doja Cat, it showcased a glimpse of the Victoria's Secret's runway film. This film showcased runway presentations featured with creations by the designated designers and a couture collection crafted by the company's design team. Victoria's Secret will make 13 designs inspired by these couture pieces available for purchase in late September. There was no runway, it was just a projection of old runways and brand-new garments. In addition to the iconic models from the original show, such as Campbell, Lima, and Gigi Hadid, the film, which was named the "Tour", also included a diverse array of models, including fuller-size models like Paloma Elsesser, with whom the brand has collaborated for several years.

Only versions of the fifth collection highlighted in the "Tour" and manufactured directly by Victoria's Secret will be available in stores. This collection mainly features bustiers and corsetry, with occasional additions like leather bra tops and gold crystal hot pants. Notably, it departs from the previous show's excessive accessorizing, which included items like balloons, elf boots, and dumbbells.

The challenge lies in the attempt to elevate a multitude of diverse voices and cater to a wide range of women, all of whom were present at the unveiling, offering each other support as the segments were revealed on film. As a result, the "Tour" ultimately lacks a distinct identity or singular focus. In conjunction with the preview party, Victoria's Secret launched a new Instagram campaign. This campaign showcases several models from the movie going about their daily lives on the streets of New York City. They can be seen strolling, getting their nails done, and waiting outside the dry cleaner's, all while sporting vintage wings. It is incredibly enjoyable to watch.

However, it seems to be way too soon to see some drastic changes in the selling department, definitely that is a step in the right direction.

3.2 Savage x Fenty

3.2.1 The History of the Brand

“Savage x Fenty” was founded in May 2018, it is a lingerie brand in collaboration with Techstyle Fashion Group. The face of the brand is non-other than the Barbadian singer Rihanna, whose birth name is Robyn Rihanna Fenty. In 2017 Rihanna launched her beauty brand “Fenty Beauty”, which was highly appreciated by not only the singer’s fans but also by the more mainstream beauty community. The aim of the brand was inclusivity at its finest. “Fenty Beauty” offers about 40 shades of foundations with the same amount of shade of concealer. As for “Fenty Beauty”, the founder followed the same guidelines and principles, as reported on [savagexfenty.com](https://www.savagexfenty.com) “the brand celebrates fearlessness, confidence and inclusivity”³⁵. “SavagexFenty” was born as an online shop, however this e-commerce became so relevant that in the late months of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, it opened in-person shops.

³⁵ Official Website of Savage x Fenty: <https://www.savagex.com/featured/aboutus>

With its creation “Savage x Fenty” positioned itself in as an empowering alternative to “Victoria’s Secret”.³⁶ In an interview for Elle Magazine, Rihanna when asked about her purpose with her new brand, stated “I wanted women to feel celebrated”. This message and the celebrity status of the founder assured Savage x Fenty of a great success, going sold out with all 40 pieces of the debut collection. Savage x Fenty is a fairly recent brand, whereas is nowadays, one of the most important lingerie brands in the world.

The listing of Savage x Fenty is expected to happen this year. Following an article from Bloomberg, Fenty is eyeing an IPO, initial public offering, of nearly \$3 Billions of USD. For a 4-years-old fashion brand this represents the one in a million chance.

3.2.2 SWOT Analysis of Savage x Fenty

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
• Brand Name	• In-store shops	• In-store shops	• Fierce Competition
• Celebrity Following	• Brand Similarity		• Substitute Products
• Inclusivity	• VIP Access		
• Fashion Show			
• Online presence			
• Worldwide penetration			

Being a fairly new brand has not stopped Savage x Fenty from rising to the top hastily. One of the most significant factors of this instant jump is the brand name and the celebrity status with which it is associated. Rihanna’s career is one of a kind: she represents one of the most influential artists in the whole world. She has always been admired for her soulful voice, her beauty and most supremely for giving a voice to the small communities and for speaking up about their injustices. The bond, which was created between the fans, called “Navy”, and the artist grows tighter, whenever the fans recognize themselves not only in her/his music, but also in what they stand for. Equally important are

³⁶ Majorie Van Elven, *Savage x Fenty, One Year Later: What’s Rihanna’s Impact on the Lingerie Market?* Fashion United, 2019: <https://fashionunited.uk/news/business/savage-x-fenty-one-year-later-what-s-rihanna-s-impact-on-the-lingerie-market/2019050643017>

the celebrities or influencers who are associated and who promote the brand, they mirror every person in the society, regardless of their gender identity, sexuality, or exterior beauty. Clear proof of the brand's inclusivity is fashion shows and advertising campaigns. Every year, in order to publicize the new collection, Savage x Fenty sets up a fashion show. This show has many musical acts coming from different countries, who are accompanied by dancers and models. The event celebrates the human race in all of its sizes and colors; in September 2021 the shows hosted colorful and sexual performances³⁷ from Normani, Ricky Martin, Troye Sivan and more supported by talented dancers and models, such as Cindy Crawford and Gigi Hadid, moreover there were present also Gottmik and Simone, who are two of the most iconic Drag Queens coming from Ru Paul's Drag Race. To sum up, it was a feast of inclusivity.

In addition, another highlight of the brand is its online presence, Savage x Fenty is an online-born shop. The success of the brand was so worldwide, mainly because it was accessible online from all over the globe. Not having any in-store shop, represented a great benefit at the Naissance of the label, however since its immense success and request, it is only suitable that Savage x Fenty would have to open in-store shops.

One of the main weaknesses of Savage x Fenty was the absence of a physical in-store experience. Rihanna in January 2022 announced on her Instagram, the opening of "five brick-and-mortar stores" across the United States³⁸. Six more stores were announced to be opening this year, Rihanna and her team understood the potential on having an already established and strong online presence, which needed to be turned in an IRL³⁹ experience. The artist and entrepreneur said to R29Unbothered that one of the main reasons to open in-person shops was to have the "Fit Xperience" because, she admitted, "people don't even know their size"⁴⁰ so when shopping online, it becomes a struggle. The aim of this brand is also reflected in the design of its shops; even the mannequins are cast off real people because everyone should "feel seen and sexy" when entering a Savage x Fenty's shop.

Regarding the aspect of "brand similarity", it is something that nearly every brand needs to face. The factor which is the most disruptive in comparison to other lingerie brands is surely the variety in sizes which goes from XXXS to XXXL, however, this cannot be the only one. Savage x Fenty needs to

³⁷ Kish Lal, *10 Unmissable Moments from Rihanna's Bombastic Savage x Fenty Show*, Dazed, 2021: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/54286/1/rihanna-savage-fenty-show-normani-lourdes-leon-gigi-hadid-erykah-badu>

³⁸ Sarah Spellings, *Rihanna Is Opening Five Savage x Fenty Stores*, Vogue, 2022: <https://www.vogue.com/article/rihanna-savage-x-fenty-stores>

³⁹ IRL is an abbreviation of In-Real-Life

⁴⁰ Venesa Coger, *Rihanna Tells Us Why the IRL Savage x Fenty Experience "Will Change the Game"*, Refinery29, 2022: <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2022/02/10873570/rihanna-savage-x-fenty-interview>

find a more redefining identity, which it would make the customer recognize a Savage x Fenty bra from a competitor's one.

Conceivably, the "VIP access" portrays an aspect of the brand, which is not really appreciated by consumers. VIP access costs almost 50,00\$ per month, with that the member has special discounts on every product on the website. However, at the beginning of the company, it was seen as a scam, the website would show you the discount price, even without the membership, so that when the client would pay, the VIP subscription was added. The VIP access is present up to this date, and in the past years it was added the option of a subscription that would let you skip a month, nonetheless that was the only change that was made. This membership was not and still is not well greeted by consumers, it would be beneficial for the face of the brand to remove it or at least lower it.

The main opportunity for Savage x Fenty seems to be clear, and in full action, it is the opening of a new in-store shop, which would solidify the brand and make it even more mainstream.

The two threats that Savage x Fenty needs to face are quite similar to the ones Victoria's Secret has: substitute products and fierce competition. The lingerie market has had a huge blow-up in the last decade, and it is more competitive than ever, with at least five new online shops born a day it is a real challenge to stay relevant in the market. Fast fashion sites are taking over such as Zaful or Shein where the customer can find copies of Savage x Fenty or Victoria's Secret's designs for 25% of the actual price. The materials cannot be compared however, the problem with fast fashion in general, not only in the lingerie department, is that for the same price as a Victoria's Secret bra, a consumer can buy three to four full sets on Shein or Zaful.

4. The negative side of Femvertising

4.1 Female and Male Gaze

The convergence of political ideologies and technological advancements has underscored the growing importance of inclusivity and representation in advertising to maximize its impact. In our previous chapter, we examined two distinct lingerie brands that have adopted divergent marketing strategies, highlighting how they reflect the evolving ideals and preferences of our time.

Victoria's Secret, which was established during an era characterized by the pursuit of a singular and conventional feminine beauty standard, operated under the influence of the "male gaze." In this approach, the marketing and advertising predominantly catered to the male perspective, often objectifying women and reinforcing traditional stereotypes.

In contrast, Savage x Fenty, a more recently established company in the era of post-feminism, consistently opts for "female gaze"-driven campaigns. This means their advertising is oriented towards empowering and resonating with female consumers, focusing on their perspectives and desires. This approach has proven to be notably more profitable in the contemporary landscape, reflecting the shifting values and expectations of consumers.

The juxtaposition of these two lingerie brands serves as a poignant example of how advertising strategies have evolved over time, and how businesses that prioritize inclusivity and representation in their messaging are better positioned to succeed in today's increasingly diverse and socially conscious market.

Nowadays, "Female and Male gaze" are a few of the most common words utilized by Millennials⁴¹, Generation X and Y. Author Morgan Clarke affirms that "like misogyny, the "male gaze" is built around an internalized inferiority complex of westernized, feminine traits concerning to their westernized, masculine counterparts".⁴² The term "gaze" accompanied by its connotation, feminine or masculine, was coined by film critics in the 1970s. It comprehends visual representations, including television programs, films and even advertisements. The gaze, in the advertisement, is a term that describes how viewers engage with visual media.⁴³ The concept of this differentiation is efficiently found in the opposite views on attractiveness. Depending on the subject to whom the advertisement is directed, it is evident that men and women are portrayed contrastingly. This diversification assumed

⁴¹ Michael Dimock, *Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins*, Pew Research Center, 2019: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

⁴² Morgan Clarke, "The male gaze" vs the "female gaze" and how they negatively impact men, OpEd, 2022: <https://horizon.westmont.edu/9118/oped/the-male-gaze-vs-the-female-gaze-and-how-they-negatively-impact-men/>

⁴³ Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Screen, 1975, 6-18

the form of mainstream content when, in September of 2021, a challenge on the social media TikTok was created. This challenge showed what most men believe women find attractive and what instead, women do actually find attractive. This media content portrayed these antipodal perceptions in disparate fields: by exhibiting clashing outfits, movies or even actors or celebrities. It became so common that it expanded also in the literature field conceiving the phrases “written by a woman” and “written by a man”, to further underline the deep-rooted dissimilarities between what women and men find pleasing or seductive.

The results of this media content illustrate efficiently that most men are attracted by submissive and sexually prominent women, and they believe also that women are captive by strong muscular men. Women on social media platforms have debunked these beliefs, for example women tend to enjoy movies or books where women are portrayed as strong and independent, women who may even end up alone while standing their ground.

Victoria’s Secret, as it was explained in the previous chapter, emerged with the peculiar idea of making men feel comfortable whenever they are shopping for their girlfriends’ or wives’ lingerie. It is inevitable that the advertisement department would focus on the male gaze; however, they were able to cater it towards women too, since it became so prominent among men that it seemed as if Victoria’s Secret’s lingerie was required to appear sexy to their significant other.

Savage x Fenty in the wake of a political and socially influenced generation, chose to appeal to the female gaze; the models of every size, race and gender are the direct consequences of this decision. The winning strategy seemed to be always changing through the years, with some saying that it is rather radicalizing itself to conform to the new wave of social and political renewal veering to a more accepting and open-minded society.

4.2 Empowertising

In line with the emergence of a more socially conscious generation, brands have been striving to align themselves with prevailing opinions and beliefs. Advertisers, in particular, have the crucial task of understanding the nuances of social movements and incorporating them into their messaging. Over the past few years, a new term has been coined to describe the intersection of advertising and empowerment: "empowertising."

The term "empowertising" encapsulates the idea of commodity activism in the 21st century. It refers to advertising campaigns that seek to promote empowerment, social progress, or values associated with social movements while simultaneously marketing products or services. These campaigns often

leverage themes of gender equality, diversity, and empowerment to appeal to socially conscious consumers.

However, there is a critical question that arises in evaluating such campaigns: Can we truly trust a company that promotes progress through its product advertisements while, in contrast, maintains a significant gender disparity in its leadership positions? In many cases, a dissonance between a company's external messaging and its internal practices can raise skepticism and erode trust.

Consumers are becoming increasingly discerning, and they expect companies to align their actions with their advertising. To gain and maintain trust, brands must not only talk the talk but also walk the walk. This means fostering diversity and inclusion within their organizations, ensuring equal opportunities for all employees, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to the social values they promote in their advertising. Empowerment can be a powerful tool for brands, but it must be backed by tangible efforts to effect meaningful change and uphold the principles it espouses.

Indeed, differentiating between the genuine intentions of a brand or company and mere marketing tactics can be a challenging task. The visual appeal of pink-themed advertisements, adorned with powerful and empowering words, can be inherently deceptive. Brands often use slogans presented in pleasing and delicate fonts, accompanied by pastel colors, to captivate the attention of young women who may be seeking acceptance and empowerment. This particular style of advertising has come to be known as "pink washing."

Pink-washing involves companies leveraging the color pink, often associated with femininity and breast cancer awareness, to promote their products or services in a way that may appear to support a social cause or feminist ideals. However, in many cases, these efforts are seen as insincere or superficial, intended more to capitalize on the marketability of feminism and female empowerment rather than to drive meaningful change or contributions to related causes.

Consumers, especially young women, are increasingly critical of such marketing tactics and are pushing for transparency and authenticity from brands. They seek to discern whether a company's commitment to social or feminist ideals is genuine or merely a façade. As a result, the concept of pink-washing serves as a reminder for consumers to scrutinize advertising campaigns and corporate practices more closely, encouraging companies to demonstrate their commitment to social causes through meaningful actions rather than just aesthetically pleasing slogans and imagery.

The term "Pink-Washing" was conceived by "Breast Cancer Action" in 2002 with the campaign "Think Before You Pink".⁴⁴ The denomination was created following the concerning growth of the

⁴⁴ Breast Cancer Action: <https://www.bcaction.org/about-think-before-you-pink/>

presence in several ads of pink ribbons, which represent the fight against breast cancer. The hypocrisy stood by the fact that many of the brands which would advertise the pink ribbon for charity, were the ones actively making cancerogenic products.

One of the most notorious cases of "pink washing" involved the fast-food chain KFC. In 2010, KFC made a public announcement about its partnership with Susan G. Komen, a highly influential and charitable organization dedicated to the fight against breast cancer. As part of this collaboration, KFC pledged to donate a portion of the proceeds from the sale of their fried chicken buckets, which were specially colored pink for the occasion, to support breast cancer research and awareness initiatives. However, what raised significant controversy and criticism was the fact that KFC decided to make a donation to the Susan G. Komen foundation before the conclusion of the promotional campaign. This decision was made without taking into account the full extent of the revenue generated by the campaign, which amounted to a staggering 4 million dollars.

This incident drew attention to the concept of "pink washing," wherein companies exploit charitable or social causes, such as breast cancer awareness, for their own marketing and public relations benefits, often without fully delivering on their promises or without complete transparency regarding their contributions. The KFC case served as a stark example of how such partnerships can sometimes raise ethical concerns, leading to a deeper scrutiny of corporate social responsibility practices in the realm of cause marketing. To add to the negatives, it is a well-known fact that consuming excessive fat, which is present in high quantity in fast-food dishes, leads to obesity which will help increase the risk of cancer⁴⁵.

Disney, a colossal company that often finds itself embroiled in controversies, has been making efforts to promote and sustain gender equality in recent years. This commitment goes beyond mere online posts and extends to their portrayal of empowered princesses in their films. It's worth noting that Disney's legendary movies have historically featured stories of young women who, in many cases, appeared to be waiting to be saved by their princes, with the expected ending being marriage to the prince who rescued them.

For instance, characters like Cinderella epitomized this passive waiting for Prince Charming to confirm a perfect fit with the glass slipper and the subsequent promise of living "happily ever after." Even in Disney movies where the female lead appears strong and independent, such as Belle in "Beauty and the Beast," other female characters often remain constrained by stereotypes. In "Beauty

⁴⁵ Katharina Nimpysch and Tobias Pischon, Obesity and Risk of Cancer: an Introductory Overview, National Library of Medicine, 2016: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27909899/>

and the Beast," despite Belle's independence and intelligence, the other women in the village are portrayed as superficial and driven solely by the desire to marry Gaston, who is portrayed as the most handsome man in the village.

However, in Disney's newest animated films, there is a noticeable departure from the traditional model of a Disney princess. These modern princesses or female lead characters are breaking away from the conventional stereotypes. They are more diverse, complex, and often challenge traditional gender roles and expectations. This shift reflects Disney's acknowledgment of changing societal values and its commitment to portraying a broader range of female characters who can serve as positive role models for audiences of all genders. It's a step toward aligning Disney's storytelling with the evolving perspectives on gender equality and representation in the modern world.

To name a few examples:

1. in the frames of her first appearance, Tiana, from *Princess and the Frog*, is shown as a hard-working young lady, who has two jobs in order to be able to buy a building to create her own restaurant and even when she marries into money, she uses her own savings to finally buy it;
2. Moana, from the animated movie *Oceania*, rejects the role assigned to her by her family, while she embarks on a journey to save the island and find herself, without any kind of restrictions.

Even though the company promotes these kinds of movies, it is being sued for discrimination and gender pay gap inequity. As early as 2020 a group of women sued the corporation alleging “rampant gender pay-gap discrimination.⁴⁶ ” It is not an unquestionably clear behavior from a company that showcases strong women.

4.3 Dilemma of “Performative activism”

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, have indeed transformed into the not-so-secret diaries of modern society. People from all walks of life, spanning different age groups and geographical locations, now use these platforms as spaces to express their emotions, whether it would be happiness, frustration, or even sorrow. In the process of sharing their thoughts and feelings, individuals often find themselves taking a stance on various topics and issues.

In recent years, social media has emerged as a powerful platform for voicing grievances and frustrations, particularly in response to cases of injustice. While these expressions of discontent on social media are often genuine and reflective of the users' feelings, there is a growing realization that

⁴⁶ Meg James, *Another Woman Joins Gender Pay Lawsuit Against Disney*, Los Angeles Times, 2020: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2020-03-11/gender-pay-lawsuit-disney>

simply posting online and waiting for the social narrative to change is, at best, an idealistic and, at worst, a naive approach.

Social media can serve as a catalyst for raising awareness and mobilizing public opinion, but it is not a substitute for tangible action. Real change often requires more than just virtual activism; it necessitates concrete efforts, such as community organizing, advocacy, and engagement with relevant institutions. While social media can be a powerful tool for sparking discussions and garnering support, it is only when online discourse is channeled into real-world actions that meaningful progress can be achieved. Therefore, it is important for individuals to recognize the limitations of virtual activism and to complement their online expressions with practical efforts aimed at addressing the issues they are passionate about.

Consciousness-raising has been the reason why many socially driven topics are being discussed online, such as feminist or racist matters. Sharing posts online gives users the possibility of reaching a broader audience, however, following the performance theory concept of Schechner⁴⁷, as the online space becomes a player, it needs to be taken into account that there is a certain word limit that everyone has to follow resulting in shrunken and filtered thoughts. This particular argument further proves that it is imperative to express beliefs by motivated actions.

"Performative activism" has become a topic of concern for many, and it is seen as a phenomenon fueled by both the prevailing "woke" sentiment and the accessibility of new online platforms. When we use the term "performative activist," we are referring to individuals who seem more interested in enhancing their social reputation and capital rather than genuinely dedicating themselves to a cause. The core principle behind this behavior is the preference for showcasing one's progressiveness and virtue signaling, rather than actively working to address the deeply ingrained racist, homophobic, and misogynistic structures within society.

In essence, performative activism involves individuals engaging in symbolic actions, often on social media, that make them appear as though they are deeply committed to a particular cause, without necessarily putting in the substantial effort required to create meaningful change. This can manifest as posting statements or sharing content that aligns with a particular cause or movement, but without any significant follow-through in terms of activism, education, or advocacy.

While it's important to acknowledge that raising awareness and starting conversations can be valuable, performative activism can sometimes undermine genuine efforts to address systemic issues. It can divert attention away from the need for sustained action and lead to a superficial understanding of complex problems. It's crucial for individuals to recognize the difference between performative

⁴⁷ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, Routledge, 2003, 432

activism and meaningful engagement with social and political issues, and to strive for the latter in order to drive real and lasting change.

Social injustices have become a trend, everything has been lived with a sort of a veil of numbness. These influencers seem to be in a competition to a degree, one must post a black box⁴⁸ on #BlackOutTuesday or the public won't believe that you are a good person. This hashtag was used as a cop-out for many people, by only sharing a black box they could still advocate for George Floyd⁴⁹ without giving an insightful or limpid opinion. "If the 29 million people who posted a black screen would have signed the petition for justice for George Floyd, then the petition would have more than 19 million signatures" this is a statement from the online blog VoxAlt⁵⁰, this evidently shows how campaigning for a cause online can easily be antithetic to making the effort to make a change for the community.

The "feminist propaganda" is not unfamiliar with these white-knight-kind-of behaviors. The digital activism that was discharged at the dawn of the #MeToo Movement was unprecedented. The Me-Too Movement⁵¹ was a phrase coined as early as 2006 by activist Tarana Burke, at its early days it was commonly used in black communities, nonetheless it blew up in 2017. 2017 was a year of turbulent expositions, following the sexual-harassment allegations against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, the movement and the hashtag #MeToo spread rapidly on social media. Soon the hashtag reached millions of posts, also with the help of high-profile actresses such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Lawrence and Uma Thurman.

Following the data of DiggMagazine, the theme of the posts and tweets shared for this hashtag was the majority of narration⁵². Moreover, there is a considerable number of tweets that are referred to as "plug". "To plug" in the online-communication realm means to mention something or someone publicly in favor of promoting it. Once again, as previously mentioned for the #BlackOutTuesday,

⁴⁸ #BlackOutTuesday was a hashtag created to support the BLM Movement.

⁴⁹ George Floyd was an African American man who was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis, USA; after his death many were the protests advocating for the Black Lives Matter Movement, both with physical marches and with online campaign such as the #BlackOutTuesday in question.

⁵⁰ Lauren Ashe, *The Dangers of Performative Activism*, Vox Atl, 2020: <https://voxatl.org/the-dangers-of-performative-activism/>

⁵¹ MeToo Movement Official Website: <https://metoomvmt.org/>

⁵² Marissa K. Wood, *Language in Digital Activism: Exploring the Performative Functions of Metoo Tweets*, DiggMagazine, 2022: <https://www.diggmagazine.com/academic-papers/language-digital-activism-exploring-performative-functions-metoo-tweets>

with the intent of extrapolating themselves from the political discourse flanked to sexual misconduct acts, users would just repost or retweet others' posts.

At the end of the day, reposting someone else's post or article does not require much effort or critical thought, and for the general public that is enough to call it activism. Though, what we need to reflect on is whether this kind of activism does more "good than evil" to the issues that tackle. Without performative activists these hashtags would not be as popular and maybe not in the previous cases which were internationally renowned, nonetheless in small-scale cases retweets and reposts can be the reason why they are brought to the public.

Conclusion:

Every nation across the globe grapples with the pervasive issue of gender inequality. However, it is crucial to recognize that the extent of this gender-based disparity serves as a defining factor distinguishing more developed and forward-thinking countries from their underdeveloped counterparts. In delving into the analysis presented in the second chapter, where we traced the historical evolution of Femvertising, which often evolves in tandem with the progress of gender acceptance, we can bear witness to the significant strides society has collectively taken. Nevertheless, it would be overly simplistic to assert that gender disparity in advertisements has been completely eradicated. The advertising industry persists in perpetuating publicity featuring characters steeped in harsh stereotypes, catering to a more conservative audience.

It becomes imperative, therefore, to emphasize whether adopting a more feminist approach to advertising would be more advantageous to a brand than adhering to a more conservative one. As we have meticulously examined in preceding chapters, the pivotal perspective to consider is the socio-cultural one, even if it does not always align with the prevailing political climate. Furthermore, we must also scrutinize the morality of this choice, as we have observed in chapters 1 and 4, pondering whether it is both financially and ethically sound to implement a policy of genuine feminism versus commodity feminism.

Femvertising is a multifaceted concept perceived through two primary lenses: one that acknowledges its role in shifting the portrayal of women, and another that criticizes it for potentially oversimplifying and commercializing the broader feminist movement. This advertising method is replete with contradictions, and, as we have seen, selecting one perspective over the other can significantly impact the financial outcomes.

Throughout history, the objectification of women and the construction of stereotypical gender roles have left an indelible mark on societies worldwide. As previously explored, even within the realm of advertising, women were often reduced to mere sexual objects or portrayed as obedient housewives solely dedicated to their families. However, Dove's Real Beauty Campaign marked a turning point by providing a platform for women's empowerment and more realistic depictions.

When other brands observed the unprecedented success of this campaign, they made the sensible choice to pivot their advertisements toward a more feminist-conscious audience. This sudden shift generated excitement, and the companies that embraced this change soon experienced exponential growth in their earnings. The ripple effect of this transition not only reshaped the advertising landscape but also highlighted the increasing significance of women's voices and perspectives in the marketing world.

Indeed, it marked a significant turning point in advertising when women were finally recognized as more than mere objects. For the first time, they were acknowledged for their intrinsic humanity rather than being reduced to commodities. Brands began to embrace a rhetoric that celebrated "real women," although it's worth noting that while different types of bodies and figures were featured in various advertisements, some categories still felt underrepresented.

Dove's "Real Beauty Campaign" aimed to incorporate all of women's insecurities and perceived flaws, normalizing and elevating them to a standard of beauty. In contrast, some brands, like the one we previously analyzed, Victoria's Secret, chose a divergent path, opting to appeal to the male gaze. Even in the 21st century, they perpetuated the stereotype of women as sexual objects, albeit cloaking this with a veneer of confidence.

On the other hand, brands such as the one exemplified by Savage x Fenty expanded their representation to include women of all sizes, races, and those with physical or psychological challenges. By portraying and celebrating people with diverse disabilities, ethnic backgrounds, and body shapes, they contributed to eroding the stereotypes associated with these groups. This not only made more individuals feel seen and valued but also helped normalize these differences in the eyes of those who may not relate to these issues personally. Since advertisements are ubiquitous in our daily lives, they serve as a powerful tool for promoting this kind of inclusivity and normalcy.

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the strategy embraced by Savage x Fenty appears to be the most effective in challenging traditional stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive and accepting society.

The validation of this thesis becomes increasingly evident when we consider recent developments at Victoria's Secret. In the past year, the company has made several significant changes, even in areas where it had held steadfast, such as their iconic Angels. However, contemporary judgment extends beyond the mere representation of female figures to encompass the tangible changes being implemented within the company. These changes include addressing the gender-related salary gap and increasing the percentage of women in high-ranking positions, among other factors.

In this evolving landscape, questions of morality and genuineness come to the forefront. It's no longer solely about how women are portrayed in advertisements but also about the authenticity and ethics of the changes a company undertakes. The public and consumers are increasingly scrutinizing not just what a brand says but what it does in terms of promoting gender equality and social responsibility. This shift in perspective reflects a broader societal awareness and commitment to holding companies accountable for their actions, thereby driving positive change in the realm of gender representation and equality.

The advent of globalization has brought about a significant rise in the sentiments of empowerment and female strength. Simultaneously, the expectations and boundaries for companies striving to remain progressive and align with the feminist movement have expanded considerably. The majority of Generation Z, comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, emerges as a generation that is more demanding and socially conscious. These young adults exhibit a heightened sense of thoughtfulness and concern for their surroundings. Even when an issue doesn't directly affect them personally, they are quick to take action when they perceive injustice, often rallying for wrongdoers to be held accountable and face consequences for their actions.

As a result, the concepts of Commodity Feminism and Faux Feminism face mounting challenges in finding their place in this shifting landscape. When a company opts for a more feminist approach to advertising, it is now expected to not just pay lip service but to lead by example, embodying the very ideals it promotes. Before the era of social media, holding companies accountable for their actions was a more arduous task. Abuses of power or inconsistencies were not as readily exposed to public scrutiny as they are today. In this modern era, news travels across borders in mere seconds, and within 5 to 10 seconds of reading a brief news snippet, an individual has often already formed an opinion. This era of hyper-awareness places advertising on both social and political battlegrounds. Companies are categorized based on the ideas or movements they align with. While this isn't an entirely new phenomenon, it has seen a notable shift in recent years. This generation tends to make political and social considerations even when making everyday purchases, such as clothing and sanitary items. They actively seek out brands that align with their ethics and exhibit corporate responsibility. The moral compass of brands is continually scrutinized by these young adults, discouraging many corporations from adopting a socially alienated stance. In essence, the ethical choices made by companies are now subject to public appraisal and have a direct impact on their reputation and success in a world where consumers increasingly prioritize values and principles alongside products and services.

In conclusion, Femvertising has solidified its place as a recognized advertising method, with the key differentiator being how each enterprise chooses to implement it. As long as Femvertising continues to hold promise in capturing the attention of the female audience, brands will likely continue to employ it as a strategy. However, the responsibility of critiquing and scrutinizing these so-called "feminist" marketing campaigns seems to rest firmly in the hands of the new generation. They are poised to hold brands accountable for their support of feminist ideals, looking beyond superficial elements like dainty fonts and pink flowers to evaluate the depth and sincerity of a brand's commitment to gender equality and empowerment. In this evolving landscape, authenticity and

genuine advocacy for feminist principles will be the key drivers of a brand's success in appealing to an increasingly socially conscious and discerning consumer base.

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