

# Femvertising and postfeminism

An investigation of postfeminist female consumers'  
engagement with femvertising-led campaigns

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**Femvertising and postfeminism - An investigation of postfeminist female consumers' engagement  
with femvertising-led campaigns  
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**Abstract**

**Purpose** - This study aimed to contribute to the current research on femvertising and to help shed light on the matter of how postfeminist female consumers engage with femvertising campaigns - and the potential for brands to invest in such advertising strategy.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** - Constructed under an interpretivist philosophy, this research uses an inductive approach to reasoning and is exploratory in nature. It uses Grounded Theory strategy and a qualitative mono-method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews with six postfeminist females were undertaken to gain detailed insights into their feelings and thoughts about femvertising. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic coding analysis.

**Findings** - Findings indicate that postfeminist women do not discuss femvertising in depth but they do appreciate that companies are promoting empowering messages. They are, however, sceptical of corporate intentions and do not consider these campaigns feminist straight away. Additionally, it was observed that companies guilty of promoting Commodity Feminism were strongly disapproved.

**Limitations** - The researcher assessed the thoughts of a small number of women, which inflicts low levels of representativeness and generalisability of the results of the study. To overcome the possibility of biased analysis, all interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Also, the interviews were conducted only with women based in Ireland and future studies may find different results if conducted considering participants in different countries due to cultural differences.

**Originality/Value** – This research is unique and relevant because it investigated femvertising from a postfeminist perspective, hoping to add new insights to the discussion of the value and contribution of femvertising for companies and society. By bringing in the thoughts of postfeminist consumers, the researcher aims to offer material for companies to make educated decisions in terms of feminism and femvertising.

**Keywords** - femvertising; empowering advertising; advertising; feminism; postfeminism; feminist consumers.

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## **Dedication**

Without hesitation I dedicate this dissertation - as well as everything I will ever achieve in life - to my parents. For their never ending love and support, I am forever grateful. *Eu amo vocês mais que tudo e morro de saudade todo dia! Continuemos nadando. .*

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	11
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	13
2.1. Introduction	13
2.2. Overview of Advertising	13
2.3. Female Portrayals in Advertising	15
2.4. Femvertising	19
2.5. Postfeminism	21
2.6. Commodity Feminism	23
2.7. Female's agency and capacity for resistance	24
2.8. Summary	25
<b>3. Research Methodology</b>	27
3.1. Introduction	27
3.2. Research Aims and Objectives	27
3.3. Research Philosophy and Design	28
3.3.1. Research Philosophy	28
3.3.2. Research Approaches	29
3.3.3. Research Strategy, Choice, and Time Horizon	30
3.4. Data Collection Method	32
3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews	33
3.5. Sample and Participant Selection	34
3.6. Ethical Considerations	35
3.7. Data Analysis Method	35
3.7.1 Thematic Coding	35
3.8. Limitations	36
3.9. Summary	37
<b>4. Findings and Analysis</b>	38

4.1. Research objective 1: Correlation between femvertising and feminism	38
4.1.1. Changes in advertisements	38
4.1.2. Trust in femvertising	39
4.2. Research objective 2: Contribution to the feminist movement	41
4.2.1. Tool for societal impact	41
4.2.2. Effects on men and school girls	42
4.3. Research objective 3: Extent of engagement with femvertising	43
4.3.1 Femvertising awareness	44
4.3.2. Feelings towards advertisement and advertisers	44
4.4. Summary of key findings	46
<b>5. Discussion</b>	48
5.1. Introduction	48
5.2. Research objective 1: Correlation between femvertising and feminism	48
5.3. Research objective 2: Contribution to the feminist movement	49
5.4. Research objective 3: Extent of engagement with femvertising	50
5.5. Summary	51
<b>6. Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	53
<b>7. References</b>	55
<b>Appendix</b>	63

## **1. Introduction**

The portrayal of women in advertising has been a topic of discussion for years. Several authors have stated that women are usually presented in ways that do not represent their realities - usually confining them to traditional and domestic roles through hypersexualised or stereotypical representations (McCleary, 2014; Lazar, 2009; Gill, 2007a; Gulas and McKeage, 2000; Goldman, Heath and Smith, 1991; Goffman, 1987).

This is a matter of concern due to the highly persuasive and pervasive characteristics of advertising. Advertising has been said to use hidden manipulation strategies to play with the audience's emotions (Pollay, 1986; Galbraith, 1974; Packard, 1957). Although the audience plays an active role in decoding and interpreting the messages sent through advertising (Dyer, 1988; Fiske, 1987; Hall, 1980), it has been proven that regular encounters with the highly sexualised, idealised, and objectified portrayal leads to personal and political implications for women's lives and society as a whole (Pounders, 2018; McCleary, 2014; Eisend, 2010; Gill, 2007a; Pollay and Gallagher, 1990).

The pattern in the portrayal of women in advertising started to change when second-wave feminists started to voice their anger about women being treated like objects. By the end of the 1980s, seeing women's increasing financial independence, advertisers began to rethink their advertising strategies. That was when what is now called femvertising started to gain momentum. Advertisements selling products from sanitary towels to cigarettes began portraying women in more empowering roles and sharing pro-female messages.

Femvertising is the main focus of this study. It is not a new strategy in mass communication, and yet, there has not been much research done to investigate its effects on the audience. Its relationship with the feminist movement is not clear either - it carries the word female (or feminist) in its name, but it is sometimes criticised for being a commodified version of the feminist movement (McCleary, 2014; Goldman et al., 1991). Femvertising is also sometimes seen as a tool to invite more people into the feminist movement (Jalakas, 2016).

Thus, this dissertation aims to understand how postfeminist female consumers engage with femvertising led campaigns. The topic emerged after studying the topics of

advertising, feminism, postfeminism, commodity feminism, and femvertising itself. The existing discussion around the topic of femvertising is scarce and even fewer academic articles have been published investigating how consumers perceive these campaigns from a feminist standpoint. Postfeminist female consumers were chosen as the subjects of this study for two reasons: first, because part of the changes that happened in the portrayal of women was pushed by feminism (Gill, 2008), and second, because postfeminism is a growing section of feminism that directly relates to several aspects of femvertising and commodity feminism.

Different from some of the femvertising articles found by this researcher (Akestam, Dahlen and Rosengren, 2017; Drake, 2017; SheKnows Media, 2016), this study adopted a qualitative design. The study is exploratory by nature and adopts an inductive approach. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were used to collect data and elements of Grounded Theory were drawn upon for the selection of participants and analysis of the findings.

The findings pointed to a critical audience that is sceptical about the feminist intentions of corporations behind these femvertising campaigns. There was an overall positive feeling towards pro-female and female-empowering campaigns with participants looking to see the bigger picture and know more about the advertiser in terms of their feminist attitude. The detailed discussion linking the data collected and the content of the literature review is presented in chapter 5.

Finally, the following chapter will take the reader through an overview of the topics that facilitate the understanding of femvertising. It is a comprehensive chapter that covers advertising, female portrayal, femvertising, postfeminism and commodity feminism. Chapter 3 presents the details of the methodology used to carry out this research. Chapter 4 contains the analysis and findings of the data collected from the six conducted interviews. Chapter 5 and 6 are reserved for the discussion of the findings of the research and the author's reflections on it, as well as recommendations and suggestions for future studies.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the relevant literature that helps to shape the research questions detailed in Chapter 3. It also gives the reader an understanding of the topic being studied. The content of this literature review was organised in the format of a funnel: the author starts detailing a broader topic and works towards narrowing it down to more specific subjects.

Thus, the first chapter here presented will offer an overview of advertising, with its definition and a discussion of its characteristics. Chapter 2.3 discusses the portrayal of women in advertising throughout history, the ongoing changes and the consequences of unrealistic portrayals. Chapter 2.4 details the idea of femvertising, a not so new strategy branded with a fairly new name that describes female-empowering advertising. Chapter 2.5 presents postfeminism, which can be seen under different definitions, from a new era of feminism to a backlash to the movement. Commodity feminism is presented in chapter 2.6 - this is about the idea of feminism being used as a product, a direct criticism of femvertising. Finally, the summary rounds up the literature review chapter and links the concepts that create the basis for chapter 3.

### **2.2. Overview of Advertising**

Advertising is an inescapable feature of western societies and it has grown to become one of the most powerful forms of communication around the world (Gill, 2007a). It is also one of many communication tools used by organisations to promote products and services to their customers. The word “advertising” itself means “drawing attention to something” or notifying, informing somebody of something, however it has seen different definitions throughout time. Advertising has been defined with a focus on sales (Starch, 1923), the goal of persuading the consumers (Richards and Curran, 2002), and recently as a “brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people” (Dahlen and Rosengren, 2016, p. 334).

Advertising was originally used to stimulate consumption among the public using persuasive and pervasive communication strategies (Dyer, 1988), and it has since been

playing an important role in the economic success of businesses and national economies (Pollay and Gallagher, 1990). The topic of advertising has also been widely studied in terms of its social and manipulative effects (Pollay, 1986; Galbraith, 1974; Packard, 1957). Critics state that advertising employs strategies of hidden manipulation that plays on the audience's emotions and unconscious desires to try and influence them.

This is because the language, imagery and signs used in advertising are professionally crafted to reinforce certain behaviours and values, as well as to influence awareness, perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and preferences among its intended audience (Gulas and McKeage, 2000; Pollay and Gallagher, 1990). Pollay and Gallagher (1990, p. 361) point out that, while some consumers see themselves as “fully autonomous”, they may not always have agency (the capacity to make their own independent choices) and still be subconsciously affected by the subtle and indirect messages spread through advertising.

Advertisements have become such a big part of people's lives in modern western societies that for some people, the exposure to advertising begins at birth and will follow them throughout their lives, being seen everywhere they look at (Gulas and McKeage, 2000; Kilbourne, 1999). Kilbourne (*Still Killing Us Softly*, 1987) points out that in the 80s, the average American saw around 1500 advertisements per day and spent 1,5 years of their lives watching television commercials. More recent research has found that the average daily number can go from 362 when looking at advertisement-only exposure (Media Dynamics, 2014), up to 5000 if advertising and brand exposures are considered (Story, 2007).

Advertising is now so pervasive and such an intrinsic part of people's lives that it does not only work as a selling strategy, but it also said to affect the audience at a more subconscious level. Advertisements provide the audience with frameworks for what is acceptable and work similarly to how myths did in primitive society; providing people with simple stories in which values and ideals are conveyed and through which the audience can make sense of the world they live in (Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008; Hirschman and Thompson, 1997; Dyer, 1988). Such pervasiveness reinforces advertising's persuasiveness.

Therefore, even though advertising was first developed to introduce a range of goods to the public, over the years its influential power started to be used in the manipulation of social values and attitudes (Dyer, 1988; Packard, 1957). This

manipulation strategy uses discourse to make an audience believe or do things in a certain way that is favourable for the manipulator (Van Dijk, 2006). In the context of advertising, in which people do not give enough conscious attention to the message being sent (Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008), manipulative discourse acts as an illegitimate influence on consumers - which is likely to remain unquestioned. This modern use of advertising makes authors such as Pollay (1986) and Pollay and Gallagher (1990) advise marketers and academics to be vigilant of the unintended social consequences of advertising.

However, as individuals gain easy access to multiple sources of information, consumers tend to be less easily led by the messages sent by advertisers. Advertising has become just a part of a flow and not the exclusive source of information about products and services (Roche, Pickett, and Gertz, 2016; Dyer, 1988). Research also suggests that the audience is much less passive than it might be thought and that individuals play an active role in decoding the messages sent through advertising (Dyer, 1988; Fiske, 1987; Hall, 1980). According to the Encoding/Decoding model proposed by Hall (1980), a message always contains more than one potential “reading” which depends on the receiver’s personal cultural background, economic standing, and experiences. Advertising literacy - the level to which a consumer understands what advertising is trying to do and the techniques used for this (Malmelin, 2010; O’Donahoe and Tynan, 1998) - also mediates the effects of advertising on individuals. It is argued that consumers with a higher level of advertising literacy tend to be more critical towards advertising and more likely to react negatively to manipulative messages (Livingstone and Helsper, 2006; O’Donahoe and Tynan, 1998). Therefore, despite the influential power of advertising created by the way it is crafted and its pervasiveness, not everyone is likely to absorb the messages in the same way. Individual and personal factors such as income, level of education, and personal experience act as filtering mechanisms around an individual and any potential influence of the media is somewhat limited. In this context, Dyer (1988) states that advertising is more likely to reinforce than change a person’s values.

### **2.3. Female Portrayals in Advertising**

When portrayed in advertising, women are notably presented in ways that usually do not represent their realities - their representation is often hypersexualised or stereotypical, confining women to traditional and domestic roles (McCleary, 2014; Lazar, 2009; Gill, 2007a; Gulas and McKeage, 2000; Goldman, Heath and Smith, 1991;

Goffman, 1987). Women and girls are also targets of sexual objectification more often than men (Szymanski, Moffitt, and Carr, 2011; Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). This means that women are usually diminished to the status of trivial instruments, having their bodies and sexual functions separated from their personal identities and mental lives (Bartky, cited in Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). Men are also often victims of the pressure imposed by advertising, nevertheless, historically they have been portrayed in active and occupational roles and depicted in more positive ways. They are frequently presented as independent, strong, autonomous, and dominant individuals (Szymanski et al., 2011; Gill, 2007a; Gulas and McKeage, 2000).

In the 1970s and 1980s, sexism and stereotypes in advertising started to be much more pronounced and found in a pattern that repeated itself across several countries. Women were usually shown in the home, in dependent or subservient roles, and depicted as housewives and mothers (Gill, 2007a; Brown, El-Ansary, and Darsey, 1976; McArthur and Resko, 1975), whereas men were usually portrayed owning their own identity and as authorities or experts of the product being advertised (McArthur and Resko, 1975). Both in their credentials and their behaviour, men were more likely to be portrayed as more knowledgeable than women. During the same period, the sexually exploitative use of women in advertising also increased - back then, one out of two advertisements showing women, depicted them as sex objects (McCleary, 2014). In print media, whenever women appeared at all, the focus would be on their bodies or body parts, while men tended to be shown with greater facial detail (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). Eitherway, fully dressed or half-naked, women's presence in advertisements rarely added anything to the advertised product - they were usually just passive decorative elements (Furnham and Lay, 2019; McCleary, 2014; Gill, 2007a).

A major shift happened in the 1990s when women went from being portrayed as passive sex subjects to being portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects (Gunter, cited in Eisend, 2010; Evans, Riley, and Shankar, 2010; Gill, 2008; Gill, 2007a). Such shift was probably pushed by the changing role of women in society at the time, their constant dissatisfaction with female portrayals in advertising and their increasing financial independence (Gill, 2008). The traditional and domestic portrayal started to be replaced by images of sexually assertive, confident and ambitious women. The overall portrayal also saw some changes - for example, women were then more likely to be portrayed in the workplace and as independent individuals. Overall, the portrayal of women shifted from a focus on their subordinate behaviour to a focus on their quest for pleasing



appearance. Although it might seem like a positive change when compared with the type of advertising done earlier in the 1970s and 1980s, this shift has been heavily criticised in feminist literature (Halliwell, Malson and Tischner, 2011; Gill, 2007a; Levy, 2005).

By offering women the promise of power by becoming objects of desire, this new shift in advertising makes the sexual objectification of women look like empowerment. In this context, women are in charge of their bodies and they can choose to use it in whichever way that suits their “liberated” interests. Gill (2007a, p. 90) argues that “in this way, sexual objectification can be presented not as something done to women by some men, but as the freely chosen wish of active (confident, assertive) female subjects”. Not only does this new contemporary depiction of women offer them a false promise of empowerment, making women responsible for their own objectification (Gill, 2007a) but it is also potentially more damaging than the previous representations.

These regular encounters with the highly sexualised, idealised, and objectified portrayal of women has been said to lead to personal and political implications for women’s lives and society as a whole (Pounders, 2018; McCleary, 2014; Eisend, 2010; Gill, 2007a; Pollay and Gallagher, 1990). It leads to serious effects on women’s well-being and cognitive performance and has been associated with increased fear and perceived risk of rape, greater hostility towards other women, greater likelihood of self-harm, higher rates of mental health issues such as depression and eating disorders, among others (McCleary, 2014; Calogero and Jost, 2011; Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008; Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). These sexually objectifying portrayals also lead to self-objectification as women tend to internalise an outsiders’ (usually masculine) perspective of their own bodies, which is known as the Male Gaze (Halliwell et al., 2011; Calogero and Jost, 2011; Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). This Male Gaze, the act of portraying women from a masculine and heterosexual standpoint that objectifies women’s bodies to please male viewers, leads to more body shame, social anxiety and higher intent to diet among women (Calogero, 2004).

To this discussion on the portrayal of women as agentic sexual subjects in advertising, Hakim (2010) brings a less critical perspective which suggests that women’s personal resources, like sexual attractiveness and beauty, have the potential to leverage them above others and should indeed be used in their favour. Hakim (2010) proposes the existence of Erotic Capital that is available for everyone but is more common among women and resembles other types of capital in terms of power, for example economic or

political. With the rise of postfeminism, the use of sexuality as a resource by women has become a commonplace (Green, 2012). According to Hakim (2010), by leveraging their erotic capital, women should be able to close the gender gap they have been fighting for for years. Particularly in the media the change to a sexual subject portrayal represents a disruption of old patterns and could be seen, especially by postfeminists, as a positive change that allows women power and agency and mostly celebrate rather than condemn women's sexuality (Gill, 2008).

Nevertheless, the concept of Erotic Capital as a tool for women empowerment does not seem to find much support among feminists of other chapters and has been said to be a bad remedy for solving gender inequality (Green, 2012). As a matter of fact, it is seen as offensive (Katsoulis, 2011) and supportive of a rather outdated view (Boesveld, 2011). For Hakim (2010, p.511), however, the reasons why some feminist scholars are critical of the use of women's Erotic Capital and the portrayal of women as active sexual objects, as discussed earlier, are because they see a false dichotomy where "either a woman is valued for her human capital (her brains, educations, work experience, and dedication to her career) or she is valued for her erotic capital (her beauty, elegant figure, dress style, sexuality, grace, and charm)". The fact is that although Hakim's Erotic Capital is available for both sexes, it is women who are subjected to this hyper-sexualised gaze and have their bodies on display to be judged and looked at - reinforcing objectification in an even more damaging way than the previous representations (Halliwell et al., 2011; Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008).

While brief, the above discussion allows an overview of the complex and contradictory nature of the analysis of the portrayal of women in contemporary advertising. As highly sexualised portrayals of women in advertising become more common in the media, some authors point that women and young feminists also tend to become more tolerant to sex in advertising, and as a consequence, the discussion around depictions that are pleasurable and liberating and yet appear objectifying become endless (Evans et al., 2010; Hyllegard, Ogle and Yan, 2009). Such complicit behaviour in which women increasingly accept the highly sexualised portrayal might be the result of acceptance or perceived futility of resistance led by the notion that these portrayals have grown too omnipresent to be tackled. This idea, however, is not discussed in depth by the authors. Their claim is that the promise of empowerment seems to make women less likely to negatively react to highly sexualised advertisements and such twine makes it difficult to study the impacts and perceptions of such portrayals and also to challenge

them (Choi, Yoo, Reichert and LaTour, 2016; Halliwell et al., 2011; Gill, 2008; Gill, 2007a).

## **2.4. Femvertising**

Dissatisfied with the sexist portrayals that led not only to several psychological and sociological consequences but also to reinforced sexism and gender inequality (Grau and Zotos, 2016), second-wave feminists started to voice their resentment at being treated like objects. It was only by the end of the 1980s that, instigated by women's increasing financial independence, advertisers began to rethink their advertising strategies - if they were to sell products to working women, this segment's desire for more authentic representation would have to be considered (Gill, 2007a).

Years later an advertising trend called femvertising started to gain momentum. As a result, there has been a surge of advertising portraying women in more empowering roles as well as sharing pro-female messages to promote products targeting female audiences. Femvertising, sometimes called ad-her-tising, has been described in different ways but mostly centres around the same idea. It refers to female-targeted advertising that actively seeks to celebrate and empower women and girls (Hunt, 2017; Perez and Gutierrez, 2017; Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016) and it is considered novel in the sense that it "challenges" traditional female advertising stereotypes (Akestam, Dahlen and Rosengren, 2017; Hunt, 2017).

Even though female liberation has been seen co-opted in marketing campaigns since the 1960s, when Virginia Slims used the topic of women's independence to sell cigarettes through the slogan "you've come a long way, baby", it was only in 2014 that the term "femvertising" first appeared. Its creation is usually attributed to the lifestyle website SheKnows, which used "femvertising" as the label for advertising campaigns questioning traditional female gender stereotypes and employing pro-female messages and imagery to empower women and girls (Akestam et al., 2017; Hunt, 2017).

Femvertising has since made it to major media outlets such as CNN, The Guardian, Huffington Post, and Irish Independent, and in 2015 it was even given an exclusive category in the Cannes Lions awards. Brands have been increasingly adopting a "feminist" approach as a selling strategy in advertising. Important players such as Procter & Gamble (owner of Pantene and Always), Unilever (owner of Dove), and more

recently Nike, are examples of companies that have leveraged femvertising as a successful marketing strategy. This steady growth of femvertising suggests that many brands have perceived it as a “successful strategy for targeting female audiences” (Akestam et al., 2017, p. 795).

Feminism has had a major impact on the shift seen in advertising but it does not mean that the latter can be characterized as straightforwardly feminist. Although femvertising has been actively pushing organisations to change the way women are portrayed in the media (Gill, 2007b; Hunt, 2017), these are still advertisements - mediated messages explicitly encouraging people to consume or at least trying to promote favourable images of specific brands (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016). This combination of feminism and consumption is contradictory to feminist scholars’ belief that feminism is a political and social movement rather than a matter of purchasing decisions (Ramazanoglu, 1989).

Another relevant aspect to keep in mind is that advertisers are moved by their eagerness to sell and advertising always aims to only reinforce the lifestyles and philosophies that serve sellers’ interests (Pollay and Gallagher, 1990; Dyer, 1988). This means that brands would not promote women’s liberation or feminist messages if they were not to gain with that - increased sales, greater brand preference, etc. Thus, the concept of femvertising itself is loaded with an intrinsic conflict between its economic, its political and its social function (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016).

Some authors argue that this said contradiction is not at all negative, but rather a small price that has to be paid to have more representative and diversified portrayals of women in advertising (Hunt, 2017; Johnston and Taylor, 2008). Johnston and Taylor (2008) found in their research that women perceived Dove’s Real Beauty campaign as not truly feminist but they did not seem to be bothered - they understood it as being a necessary contradiction. According to Jalakas (2016), women tend to perceive pro-female advertisement as resources, tools to nourish fellow feminists and also to educate and invite more people into the movement.

Despite criticism from feminist scholars (McRobbie, 2009; Gill, 2007a), organisations that embrace pro-female advertising have much to gain as they present their brands as politically and culturally conscious and committed to gender equality (Hunt, 2017). Research has found that promoting empowerment in advertising leads to positive attitudes towards the advertisement and higher purchase intentions (Drake, 2017;

SheKnows Media, 2016). When done with enough company-cause alignment, women are likely to buy into the feminist rhetoric of femvertising (Hunt, 2017) but they are not naive and are prone to react negatively to the overt appropriation of feminist rhetoric by brands (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016).

Dove, for example, has been widely complimented on its “feminist” efforts with its Real Beauty campaign, and while the brand has enjoyed great sales success, most other Unilever brands failed to follow their sister’s path (Pounders, 2018; Drake, 2017; Jalakas, 2016). Also, they are among many other female-targeted brands that claim to have a progressive view and women-positive ideals while trying to get women to buy beauty products - as if being pretty was their ultimate goal (Gill and Elias, 2014; McCleary, 2014). What companies like Dove demonstrate is a postfeminist position (Gill and Elias, 2014; Gill, 2007b) which instead of promoting women’s rights and equality, tends to “reinforce decades-old ideologies about women’s appearance and status in society” (McCleary, 2014, p. 3).

## **2.5. Postfeminism**

Despite the existence of several feminist currents that vary widely in terms of political strategies and goals, the popularisation of feminist ideals aimed at changing the relations between the sexes has certainly made feminism more accessible - one does not need to have read many books or be an academic to call themselves feminist (McCleary, 2014; Riordan, 2001). In fact, most of what counts as feminist debate in western societies nowadays take place in the media - social media, radio, television and print media discussing rape and the pressure on young girls to meet beauty standards - rather than outside it. However, it would be wrong to affirm that the media and marketing industries have appropriated feminist ideologies (Gill, 2007b). Feminism is a political and often rather polemic position that questions and challenges relations between sexes and much of what is taken for granted as natural or normal in society (Ramazanoglu, 1989), therefore, for feminism to be popular means getting involved in some delicate paradoxes (Jalakas, 2016), like partnering with mass communication and advertising.

In order to make feminism suitable for mainstream culture, the original feminist ideas had to be watered down and turned into a depoliticised feminist discourse (Hunt, 2017; McCleary, 2014; Riordan, 2001; Goldman et al., 1991). This results in companies

and the media incorporating, revising and depoliticising feminist ideas in a trend that can be seen through the emergency of postfeminism (McCleary, 2014; Gill, 2007b).

Postfeminism, just like feminism, is not a unitary discourse (Taylor, 2011; Brooks, 1997) and the topic has been the subject of considerable debate for over two decades. There is still no agreement about what it is and how the term should be used, (Taylor, 2011; Aronson, 2003; Hall and Rodriguez, 2003) but it is usually seen in three different ways: (1) as an epistemological break with feminism - marking a shift from focusing on equality to focusing on debates about differences and a more 'pluralistic conception of the application of feminism'; (2) as a historical shift, a move into a new period, with different problems and concerns, a discourse that usually sees feminism as socially-achieved common sense, neuters and empties the movements of its radical potential; or (3) as a backlash against second-wave feminist social, economic and political gains, with "post" suggesting a reaction against feminism itself (Taylor, 2011; Gill, 2007b).

Here, however, postfeminism is understood as a historical shift in which feminism, being embraced by companies purely for commercial purposes, starts to be emptied of its political significance (Goldman, 1992). In this context, postfeminism has a clear emphasis on women as individuals rather than a collective, and on being confident and proud of who you are while suggesting that the struggles that motivated the women's movement have ended and equality has basically been achieved (Gill and Orgad, 2017; Tsaousi, 2015; Lazar, 2009; McRobbie, 2009; Gill, 2008; Aronson, 2003). It is a neoliberal version of feminism in which women might still be fighting for equality in certain aspects but now on their own: they are fully responsible for their well-being and self-care.

The term is usually used to describe women who have benefited from the feminist movement (e.g. had access to education, employment, suffrage, etc.) and understand they have achieved equality so will "not push for further political change" (Aronson, 2003, p. 904). Thus, this postfeminist position, lacking political intention, is compatible with corporate interests and it positions women's freedom in the marketplace - as empowered consumers who will reach independence and happiness through consumption - and that is why it has been so widely embraced by advertising (Dowsett, 2014; McCleary, 2014).

Although the use of straightforward negative stereotypes in advertising has been proven to have negative impacts on society, the surface activism promoted by feminist

advertising is not always seen as positive either. Through an almost total removal of notions of politics or cultural influence, postfeminism bases every aspect of life on a neoliberal idea of personal choice and self-determination. The famous Dove (Real Beauty, Sketches, etc) and Always (Run Like a Girl) campaigns are great examples of postfeminist messages that barely scratch the surface of second-wave feminist topics (Hunt, 2017): both campaigns place the power to change their lives on the individual (here women and girls), to believe and make themselves look pretty, and go ahead and pursue their dream, instead of asking for or promoting collective changes at a political and societal level. On the bright side, women are no longer judged or depicted as dependent on men as they used to be. Instead, postfeminist advertising is all about feeling good and attractive for yourself - in this case scenario that becomes the ultimate goal of postfeminists. These present women “as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever” (Gill, 2007b, p. 153), and, therefore, eliminates the need for feminism as postfeminism sees most or all traditional feminist goals as having already been achieved (McRobbie, 2009).

According to Gill (2007b), postfeminism is rather contradictory and poses what McRobbie (2009) describes as a double entanglement in which young women are offered recycled versions of historical feminist goals, like empowerment and freedom, as an alternative for real feminist politics and change. On the other hand, Banet-Weiser (2004) and Brooks (1997) argue that it is unfair to call postfeminism an antifeminist movement - the authors are less critical and see it as a development of feminist ideology, even if it is highly adapted to fit the frames of commercial media.

Finally, in postfeminist advertising, what is offered back to consumers after companies have resignified the feminist ideals as feminism becomes a commodified form, or something that is called commodity feminism (Goldman et al., 1991).

## **2.6. Commodity Feminism**

Commodity feminism is a corporate strategy that uses feminist topics, such as empowerment, to promote goods and services to women (McCleary, 2014). The ideals usually associated with the feminist movement are used to sell everything, from sanitary pads to cars. The following strategy was developed in an attempt to incorporate the cultural power and strength of feminism while simultaneously ‘taming’ its critique of

advertising and the media to increase sales (Gill, 2007a). Ideas such as those of liberation, freedom, and independence are appropriated by advertisers by being detached from any political meaning and turned into sources of profit (McCleary, 2014), in the form of an aesthetically depoliticized and watered-down feminism (Riordan, 2001; Goldman et al., 1991).

This redesign of feminism enables individuals to call themselves feminists, claiming to be part of a movement associated with self-respect, independence, personal strength, and collective identity, without doing any work to generate social change (Dowsett, 2014; Johnston and Taylor, 2008). The main goal of commodity feminism is to lead women to buy more: individual consumption is the way to liberation and full control of one's body. Overall, feminism becomes just another style decision (Hains, 2014; Gill, 2007a). It is also an important communication strategy for corporations, as the social message adds value to their brand while also shaping "consciousness through the circulation of ideological meaning" (Riordan, 2001, p. 285).

## **2.7. Female's agency and capacity for resistance**

The topic of effects of advertising has been a concern among social science scholars for a long time. The long-lasting debate involves theories of communication, sociology, psychology, anthropology and more. Advertising is defined as pervasive, repetitive and professionally developed to get attention and shape consumer behaviour and these characteristics make it highly likely to penetrate an individual's consciousness and affect their behaviour (Pollay, 1986). Its action has been compared to a hypodermic needle that injects messages into the audience's minds, being able to cause changes in attitudes, learning and imitation behaviour (Dyer, 1988). The repetition and pervasiveness aspects have been said to tend to cultivate - or stimulate - specific messages in individuals' minds (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1986). These arguments were, for many years, very important in explaining the effects of advertising.

Building on the overview of advertising presented in 2.2., the power advertising has to affect someone's ideas or views of the world is also said to be mediated by the capacity of resistance of the audience. Dyer (1988) himself critique the experimental research conducted on the role that media plays in society - according to the author, there are many factors involved in the extent of the effects that advertising may have on people.



As discussed earlier in this literature review, aspects such as the individual's personal background and their advertising literacy are likely to act as a filtering mechanism for advertising. This is also Hall's argument used with his Encoding/Decoding model.

Following up on this discussion, the audience (in this case women), should have agency and, therefore, be able to place a filter between themselves and the advertising messages, which will help them to analyse and judge its content before absorbing it. The same should work for stereotypical and unrealistic portrayals of women in advertising, discussed earlier: with access to information, education and some life experience, women should be able to reject portrayals they do not identify with.

## **2.8. Summary**

Key topics have been addressed in the above literature review that take the reader through essential aspects for a full comprehension of the research topic of femvertising. The dissatisfaction with the portrayal of women in advertising and how it, along with other factors, lead to the emergence of femvertising is also covered in the chapter and gives the reader a background to what has been evident in the media throughout the years. The concepts of postfeminism and commodity feminism are presented later on in the chapter but are also essential to understand the existence - and the critical views - of femvertising.

The change in the portrayal of women and the growth of the trend of femvertising is undeniable. As seen in this chapter, there is a substantial amount of research already conducted around the topics of feminism, advertising, the portrayal of women and other topics that facilitate the understanding of femvertising. However, not a lot of studies have been carried out about femvertising itself, its effects on women and their own thoughts on the new pattern of portrayal. Few academic articles discussing femvertising specifically have been published - and are mentioned in this literature review - and a few other newspaper articles were found online, raising relevant discussion but mostly based on the writer's opinion.

It was in this context that the researcher identified a gap worth exploring. Aware of the gap in the research about femvertising and having found that the topic itself is sometimes seen as an ambiguity by feminist scholars, this author will look to investigate the perceptions that postfeminist millennial females based in Dublin, Ireland, hold towards

femvertising. Previous research has found that the strategy is commercially effective and beneficial for brands, but outside of the commercial sphere, the perceptions of feminist women - those that pushed the change in the portrayal of women - have not been investigated in depth so far. Therefore, this dissertation intends to study this aspect conducting an exploratory qualitative approach helping with in-depth data. The details of the methodology used in the study are explained in the following chapter.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter covers all aspects of the research process carried out for this study. The first subchapter presents the research aims and objectives that guide it. Later, having Saunders et al.'s (2016) Research Onion as a central framework, the author presents the research design and the rationale behind the strategies that will help further explore the topic. The data collection method, the rationale for sample and participant selection and the method for data analysis are also discussed. Towards the end of the chapter, the reader will also find the research limitations and ethical considerations regarding the study.

#### 3.2. Research Aims and Objectives

According to Adams, Kahn and Raeside (2014, p. 19), research is an investigation looking to discover new facts and findings related to any subject, and involves “collection of information, interpretation of facts, and revision of existing theories or laws in the light of new facts or evidence”. With this in mind, this study aims to contribute to the current research on femvertising and to help shed light on the matter of the perception of femvertising by feminist female consumers - as well as analysing the potential for brands to invest in such an advertising strategy.

Thus, the leading research question to be answered is: “**how postfeminist female consumers engage with femvertising led campaigns?**”. Guided by this question, the following sub-objectives will be attained upon the conclusion of this research:

- (a) To understand the correlation between femvertising and feminism from the postfeminist female consumer standpoint
- (b) To explore the thoughts of postfeminist female consumers about pro-female advertising in terms of its contribution to the feminist movement
- (c) To investigate to which extent they engage with femvertising

Fulfilling the above-mentioned sub-objectives will provide a clearer view of femvertising and present data that can be relevant for companies that are looking for feedback on the use of pro-female messages in advertising.

### 3.3. Research Philosophy and Design

Using Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2016) Research Onion model (Figure 1) as a guiding framework, this subchapter goes through the layers and outlines the research philosophy and design of the project. The following sub-chapters further detail the research methodology, including data collection, sample selection, and data analysis. The following topics will be presented and explained considering the research choices.

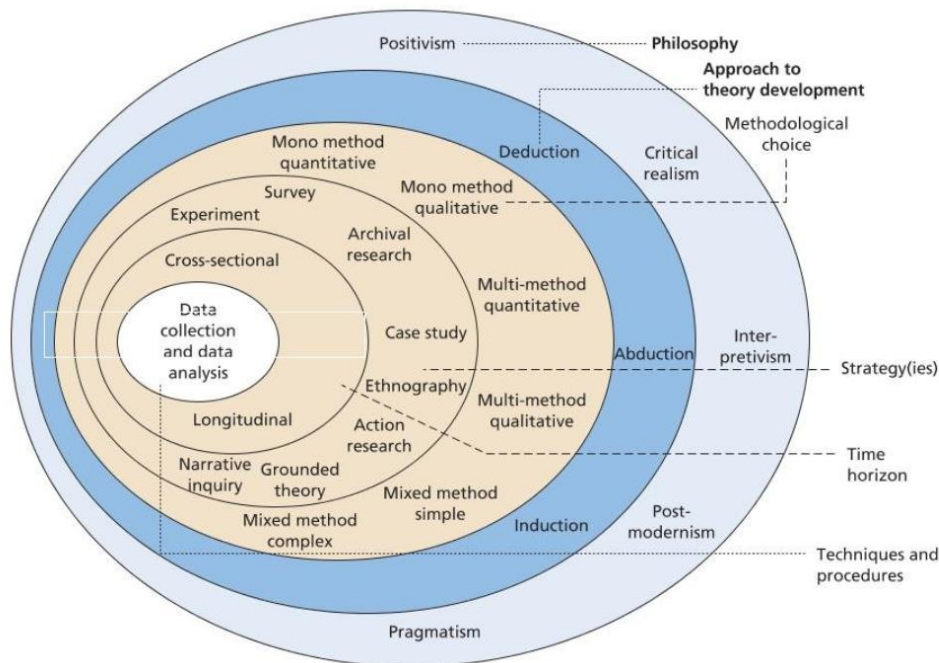



Figure 1 - Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2016)

#### 3.3.1. Research Philosophy

As an introduction to the model, Saunders et al. (2016) starts by describing three assumptions that distinguish research philosophies: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Creswell (2003) summarises these very well by stating that ontology relates to the claims researchers make about what is knowledge, epistemology relates to how they know it, and axiology is about the values that go into it. However, as suggested by

Saunders et al. (2016), the researcher will focus only on ontology and epistemology exclusively .

Ontology, which determines how the researcher see the world and, therefore, influences their choice of what will be researched, is frequently presented in two different positions: objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism accepts the existence of one single reality, while the constructionism understands that reality is socially constructed and therefore accepts the existence of multiple realities (Saunders et al., 2016; Bryman, 2012). Epistemology concerns the researcher's view of what comprises adequate knowledge - from numerical to textual data, from facts to interpretations, etc; and is usually divided into two positions: positivism and interpretivism. As an epistemological position, positivism only accepts knowledge that is measurable and can be confirmed by the senses. Interpretivism, in contrast, believes that the difference between people and the objects of natural science needs to be respected and focuses on subjective meanings and social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2016; Bryman, 2012).

This study is based on the principle that there are multiple realities, in which social actors are influenced by different factors and thus make sense of the world in different ways. The researcher attempts to gain insights into the thoughts and attitudes of a group of individuals by examining subjective perceptions. Therefore, an interpretivist position was adopted for this piece. 

### **3.3.2. Research Approaches**

Following the Research Onion, there are also the research approaches. The three contrasting approaches to reasoning mentioned by Saunders et al. (2016) are deduction, abduction, and induction - which are described in similar ways by several authors (Saunders et al., 2016; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Brewer, 2003a; Brewer, 2003b). A deductive approach starts with a theory and the researcher designs a research strategy to test this theory. A piece using an abductive approach collects data to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and explains patterns to later build or modify an existing theory (Saunders et al. 2016). Finally, an inductive approach starts by collecting data to generate a theory. This approach does not rely on a priori assumptions to interpret the data; only the social meaning from the data should be used to come to theoretical statements (Brewer, 2003b). Here, data are collected to explore a phenomenon and create

a conceptual framework. Considering the subjective human nature and exploratory purpose of this study, an inductive approach is believed to be the most appropriate. Inductive approaches are also usually associated with qualitative research and often use Grounded Theory (Gibson, 2003; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as a research strategy, which is used in this research and is further explained later in this chapter.

### **3.3.3. Research Strategy, Choice, and Time Horizon**

Following an interpretivist research philosophy, a qualitative research method is best suited for this project. Usually associated with interpretivist studies (Saunders et al., 2016), qualitative methods emphasise words in the collection and analysis of data and see social reality as a constantly changing aspect of individual's creation (Quinlan, Carr, Babin, Griffin, and Zikmund, 2015; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Quantitative methods, on the other hand, emphasise quantification and understand social reality as an objective reality (Quinlan et al., 2015; Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Recent studies discussing femvertising have been mainly qualitative, using data collection methods such as focus groups (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016), interviews (Jalakas, 2016), and discourse analysis (Hunt, 2017; Perez and Gutierrez, 2017). These studies have achieved great depth and detailed insights by using qualitative methods, a characteristic that is in line with the goals of this study. Quantitative methods are also an option when studying femvertising (Drake, 2017; Akestam et al., 2017), and is the best suitable option for studies looking to understand the effectiveness of femvertising and as a consequence, justify the investment in such strategy. The drawback is that qualitative methods might lead to simplifications, translating results into numbers and positive/negative answers rather than explaining more far reaching effects or reactions to femvertising. For example, Akestam et al. (2017) used an experimental strategy and their findings showed that femvertising leads to lower levels of ad reactance when compared to traditional advertising and to higher advert and brand attitudes. Drake (2017) opted for qualitative surveys which showed that femvertising elicits a greater emotional response to the brands amid millennial women. Although relevant, these results do not give the researcher details about the audience's thoughts and perception about femvertising. Jalakas (2016), on the other hand, manages to investigate these aspects in depth by carrying out interviews instead. Even though both methods are equally concerned with answering research questions and understand the importance of

transparency (Bryman and Bell, 2011), for the purpose of this study a qualitative design is the best suited to help the researcher to answer the research question.

Looking to understand the thoughts and attitudes of a group of people in society, the researcher will collect data using a mono-method qualitative research methodology. This means that the researcher will use one qualitative data collection technique and corresponding analytical procedure (Saunders et al., 2016). Ideally, multi-method research would have been carried out, mixing two qualitative methods of data collection, to allow triangulation of data, which enhances credibility and adds depth and richness to the research (Saunders et al., 2016; Bryman, 2012). However, due to time constraints, which will be discussed later on, the researcher decided to carry out only semi-structured interviews. Authors such as Hunt (2017), Perez and Gutierrez (2017) and Abitbol and Sternadori (2016), who also studied femvertising in their papers, have also adopted a mono-method choice with no negative effect on their findings. Jalakas (2016) also conducted a study about femvertising with a strategy very similar to the one applied to this research, using exclusively semi-structured interviews.

For this research design, elements of Grounded Theory were drawn upon. Grounded theory is an inductive process to “analyse, interpret and explain the meanings that social actors construct to make sense of their everyday experiences in specific situations” (Saunders et al., 2016, p.193) that is often used with qualitative research (Charmaz, 1996) due to the similar nature of both. In Grounded Theory, the aim is to generate theory grounded exclusively in the data produced by the interviewees. It is a common approach for exploratory studies as it offers the most flexibility and allows for new topics and questions to be added into the interview as the researcher learns from previous meetings (Ryan and Bernard, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Other research strategies explained by Saunders et al. (2016) were also considered but, among them only grounded theory, ethnography and netnography were strategies associated with qualitative inductive studies. Ethnography and netnography are methods that are used to “study the culture or social world of a group” (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 187) and could offer great contribution to the study, however, sampling and ethical implications would represent obstructions to the research. Therefore, in regards to the time limitations of this study, its particular objectives, and taking into consideration the characteristics of each strategy, Grounded Theory was understood as a better fit for the study.

As part of the Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2016), it is also important to note that this research will be conducted in a cross-sectional time horizon. That means that the data here collected will refer only to a particular phenomenon at a particular time, as a ‘snapshot’ of time. This is more due to time constraints than to a choice of the researcher as longitudinal studies collected data throughout time and manage to compare results at different stages of the research.

### **3.4. Data Collection Method**

Qualitative studies usually bring in methods such as ethnography, interviews, and focus groups for the collection of data that represent the perspective of those being studied (Saunders et al., 2016; Bryman, 2012; Bryman and Bell, 2011). This is usually non-numerical data focused on individual human experiences, understandings and interpretations (Quinlan et al., 2015).

Considering the aspects of Grounded Theory upon which this study was drawn, the researcher has opted for semi-structured interviews as a method for data collection. These are essentially purposeful conversations in which the researcher has a guide with questions or topics to be discussed (Saunders et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews differ from quantitative interviews for their flexibility and depth of data, so even though most of the interviews within a study are likely to be similar, the researcher might include or remove questions in light of new information (Bryman, 2012). The main rationale behind choosing this over other qualitative methods is exactly the flexibility and adaptability of the method, which are a great advantage when exploring new grounds (Duffy, Ferguson and Watson, 2004). Semi-structured interviews are the ideal method as the interviewer can have a discussion with the interviewee and does not need to follow a strict list of questions. The researcher therefore is able to probe into any relevant topics that might emerge from each interview.

In Grounded Theory, as data collection and analysis happen simultaneously, interviews are one of the preferred means of data collection (Bluff, 2005; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) because they allow the researcher to adapt the interview guide as they go, probing particular issues that might have emerged from previous interviews (Duffy et al., 2004; Charmaz, 1996). Other data collection methods that are consistent with Grounded Theory methodology - such as focus groups and group interviews - were also considered.



However, as mentioned by Bluff (2005), any method that is not individual would have made it more difficult for the researcher to carry out theoretical sampling and also to benefit from the depth that the individual interviews provide.

### **3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews**

For this study, six semi-structured individual interviews were carried out with postfeminist women based in Dublin. After the sixth interview the researcher achieved theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), meaning that the data collected stopped revealing new relevant findings. The number of interviews match the recommendations of authors for studies conducted using semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2016; Bryman, 2012)


One of the interviews had to be conducted over Skype to due to scheduling difficulties but the other five were face-to-face. The meetings followed a suggested schedule with several questions (Appendix A) that aimed to investigate the participant's thoughts about feminism, advertising, femvertising and companies promoting femvertising campaigns.

Prior to these interviews a pilot test was carried out to flag any flaws in the suggested questions. The interviewer applied the original protocol to the Pilot Interview: probing, taking notes and recording. During the test, the researcher realised that it would be interesting to have some femvertising campaign examples at hand to play for the participants and also to add the definition of femvertising to the interview schedule. This was important to make sure the interviewees had a clear idea of the topic and the type of advertisements being discussed. It also helped them to get involved in the discussion. The Pilot Interview was used only for testing purposes and its content was not included in the findings of this study.

All the six interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Otter.ie platform. Coding was conducted using MAXQDA 2018. The transcripts are not attached to this dissertation but are available upon request. However, to facilitate the elucidation of the findings of the study, anonymised extracts of the interviews may be found in chapter 4.

### **3.5. Sample and Participant Selection**

Samples use a portion of a given population, selected either randomly or with purpose, to represent a larger group. Sampling is carried out for pragmatic reasons: it is usually impractical or impossible (due to budget and time constraints) to consult an entire population (Quinlan et al., 2015). Since this study does not aim to generalise the findings but instead to uncover and add insights to the scarce existing literature, a non-probability sampling technique was chosen.

General purposeful sampling will be used in the beginning, initially consulting participants who will be able to provide relevant data to the study. The researcher will start by collecting data from postfeminist women, aged between 20 and 35 years old, who have been exposed to femvertising and been to university. As suggested by Bluff (2005) and Glaser and Strauss (1967), as theory begins to emerge, theoretical sampling will be carried out. Theoretical sampling is a traditional sampling strategy used in Grounded Theory that suggests that participant selection should be led by previous interviews and interviewees, based on emerging codes and categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this sampling strategy, the main goal is to probe specific issues as they emerge rather than achieve population representativeness. This sampling strategy meets best practice because it follows the suggestions of Glaser and Strauss (1967) for Grounded Theory research and also because it will help the researcher to find the answer to the research questions. As it is usually the case in theoretical sampling (Bluff, 2005; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), sample sizes are small and continue until the researcher has achieved theoretical saturation - when data stop revealing new properties relevant to the study. In this study, saturation happened after six interviews. 

The study will be carried out with feminist women because the researcher is interested in knowing the thoughts of those individuals who relate to and support the changes feminism has caused in several aspects of society, including the portrayal of women in the media. In order to narrow down the scope of this study, postfeminism was selected as the specific section for this sample. Besides being a growing section of feminism surrounded by heated discussions, many aspects of its definition are aligned with the concept of commodity feminism, advertising and female empowerment. All these topics were discussed in depth in the literature review chapter. The author is interested to understand to which extent women who identify as postfeminist are engaging with femvertising.

### **3.6. Ethical Considerations**

The researcher described the goals of this research project to the participants and guaranteed they were happy to participate in the study and have their responses quoted in the findings and discussion chapter. Their consent was formalised through consent forms. Confidentiality was assured and participants were advised that their identities would be kept anonymous - unless requested by the supervisor and/or examiner of the study. Participants were also informed they could leave the interview, refuse to answer specific questions, and even withdraw their consent at any moment during the interviews.

With regards to data protection, GDPR guidelines were followed. The audio recordings of interviews are safely stored in a personal laptop kept in the researcher's home and online drive.

### **3.7. Data Analysis Method**

Data analysis is the process through which the collected data acquires meaning in relation to the research questions and objectives (Saunders et al., 2016). In Grounded Theory, as mentioned earlier, data collection and data analysis happen simultaneously. This also means that the emerging analysis shapes the researcher's data collection - by conducting an early analytic work, the researcher can adapt the later interviews to collect more data around specific issues (Charmaz, 1996).

#### **3.7.1 Thematic Coding**

The first step for data analysis in Grounded Theory is the coding of the data being collected (Charmaz, 1996). In qualitative research, codes are not preconceived and will emerge as the researcher studies the collected data. This phase of the analysis is called open coding (Strauss and Corbin, cited in Bluff, 2005). Open coding allows the researcher to dive into unforeseen areas and develop new research questions for matters that need further investigation. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), coding should start as data collection starts - this allows for constant comparison between the emerging data, helping the researcher to identify similarities and differences in the data set (Bluff, 2005). From

there, the constant comparison process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) continues until data saturation is reached - and that the process has stopped generating new codes and concepts.

As the data is being coded, themes should start to emerge, enabling the researcher to link together codes with similar meanings or ideas, in a process that is called axial coding (Bluff, 2005). As the third step in the analysis process, the researcher used selective coding to integrate the similarities between the codes and produce major themes that helped build theory around the research question and sub-objectives. This analytic process is in line with the recommendations of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and other authors that discuss the process of data analysis in Grounded Theory research (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2005; Duffy et al., 2004).

### **3.8. Limitations**

A number of relevant limitations with regard to this study were identified and are important to note. These limitations are outlined below.

It was not the intention of this study to make general statements that reflected the perception of an entire population. However, due to time constraints, the researcher only managed to consult a small sample - which might have prevented the research from reaching complete saturation and reduced its potential findings. It could also be pointed out that the scope of this study is limited, since the data was collected only in Dublin - this is also a result of time and budget limitations. Also, given the use of semi-structured interviews for data collection, the possible occurrence of bias in the analytic process is something that the researcher acknowledges. In order to try and reduce the likelihood of bias, only open-ended questions were used during the interviews and the interview schedule was pilot-tested with someone external to the research. Also, to provide a more accurate analysis of the data collected, the interviews were recorded and the actual transcripts along with handwritten notes were used during the coding process. This meets best practice to reduce errors or misinformation of the data.

Finally, the research was conducted only with postfeminist women aged between 20 and 35 years old and based in Ireland, but it did not consider their nationalities. Although they were all women from similar backgrounds, future research could benefit from studying the impact local cultures have on different perceptions. The sampling,

however, did follow the recommendations from previous research such as those from Choi et al. (2016) and Ford et al. (1991) in which they recommended specifying the participants academic background. In terms of sampling, finding people that met the requirements was also an obstacle: with the popularisation of feminism, not everyone seems to know within which section of the movement they fit and therefore, finding participants who identified themselves as postfeminist was time-consuming.

### **3.9. Summary**

This chapter outlined the research aims and objectives and the rationale behind each of the chosen aspects of Saunders et al.'s (2016) Research Onion. As suggested in the Literature Review chapter, themes that led to the emergence of femvertising (advertising, the portrayal of women in advertising and the concepts of postfeminism and commodity feminism) have been widely researched over the years. However, femvertising itself has not been the centre of many academic studies so far. Considering the gap of literature focused on women's perception of a strategy that was created to empower them and meet their demands for a more representative portrayal in the media, this study strove to understand feminist females' perceptions towards femvertising.

Considering the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative design was best suited. It follows an interpretivist philosophy and uses an inductive approach to reasoning. Drawing on elements of Grounded Theory, the research used semi-structured interviews (mono-method) to collect data. Participants were selected using purposeful and theoretical sampling, adapting the sample according to the issues emerging from previous interviews, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Finally, the data collected from the interviews was analysed using a coding strategy, as well as constant comparison to find differences and similarities amongst the interviews.

The limitations of the study were also discussed: time was a relevant obstacle throughout the research including challenges in the sample selection stage, along with overcoming the chances of biased results. These were all the main concerns and limitations mentioned in the chapter. The ethical aspects are also presented, ensuring that all interviewees understood their rights and agreed to the use of their opinions and perceptions in this study.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

This chapter will present and analyse the data from the six semi-structured interviews conducted as explained in the previous chapter. These findings are the result of a thematic coding strategy. By comparing and contrasting the data, codes that had a similar idea were grouped under themes and this allowed common themes to emerge. Looking to address the objectives of this study, this chapter will introduce each of the identified themes under each sub-objective along with direct quotes from the participants.

### 4.1. Research objective 1: Correlation between femvertising and feminism

The first sub-objective of the research was “to understand the correlation between femvertising and feminism from the postfeminist female consumer standpoint”. The researcher looked to understand how and if the participants could build a connection between both and the characteristics of this link. By coding the transcribed interviews, the codes led to two emerging themes: the changes in advertisements and the aspect of trust in the feminist intentions of femvertising.

#### 4.1.1. Changes in advertisements

All interviewees spoke about the changes they have been noticing in advertisements over the years. Questions around this topic were present in all interviews and were asked at an early stage of the meeting as an attempt to have the participants create their own connections between feminism and advertising before the interviewer introduced the topic of femvertising. Their comments showed that from their point of view, the changes in the portrayal of women in the media were not thorough, the interviewees noted that it is slightly changing yet some stereotypical messages are still circulating.

**Interviewee 1:** *“I believe yeah, it is changing. Like step by step, you know, like slowly. Small changes, but it is changing”*

**Interviewee 3:** *“I think the portrayal is not as stereotypical anymore. So you don't always just have let's say, women as just like objectified things, or sex objects”*

**Interviewee 4:** *“No, actually, like, there is that billboard that I’m passing every day when I’m going to work, and it’s sort of like a car washing product but there’s a sexy lady in there. I mean, why? Why is there a sexy lady like... she’s just like advertising carwashing”*

Some interviews pointed to a perceived increase in representativeness in advertisements pushed by feminism, which is not only a feeling among the participants but a fact discussed in depth in chapter 2.3. Yet, the interviewees did not fail to notice that very often these said positive changes in the portrayal of women are seen in the advertisements targeted to them.

**Interviewee 2:** *“I think it depends on the ad and on what they are trying to advertise because I think like if it is a product for a housewife they will try to be more feminist but for young people I feel it is quite the same. But I feel like there is more diversity at least.”*

**Interviewee 3:** *“But of course, I mean, especially like for female targeted products, those ads, how to say it, have become a bit more feminist in the last years, just to make sure that you actually still contact the audience that you want to reach.”*

**Interviewee 6:** *“I think it is super cool that now we see all types of people and women in ads and that there are shown in so many different ways but, like, I don’t think it’s just a coincidence that these are always ads targeting us, I mean... you know? Pads, beauty products, etc.”*

The changes noticed by the participants are part of the shift in the portrayal of women in mass media pushed by the emergence of feminism and women's increasing financial independence, which Gill (2008) also reported. Here, it became evident that even though the participants were mostly happy with the changes in advertisements they are not so quick to associate them with feminism.

#### **4.1.2.Trust in femvertising**

Even though none of the participants named the concept of Commodity Feminism (McCleary, 2014), most of them unconsciously described it as something they disliked. When interviewees connect the changes in advertising that relate to feminist ideals to marketing goals, their trust in femvertising seem to be affected and the relation between feminism and femvertising pushed further apart.

Several times the interviewees brought up marketing aspects of female-empowering campaigns and questioned the companies' real intentions behind the feminist messages of their advertising campaigns. Although all the six participants reported positive feelings towards femvertising campaigns, they also demonstrated certain concerns about the feminist intentions of advertisers.

**Interviewee 1:** *"I believe they are there for money. That's the truth."*

**Interviewee 4:** *"So it's sort of nice that, you know, companies take time to change but on the other hand, the point is that, like when we go back to the definition of femvertising, right, if they are actually doing something about it. But okay, so that's nice, the Always ad in there, but what else are they doing? Are they supporting like a, you know, charities? Or are they doing lectures at university? Or are they just making money out of it? Because the idea is great. I love the idea. But are they actually doing something else?"*

**Interviewee 3:** *"I like to believe that they're not just doing it for sales, but that they're like going in that direction, because there is a deeper meaning behind it for them. But of course they've seen how popular feminism has become so they're like, jumping on the train as well. Because it is a trend right now. It has never been so easy to get like products or just like t shirts with any feminist slogan on, what you had to search for 10 years ago, like really search or make it yourself. Now you can literally just buy it and Penneys, they are, like, everywhere, Right? So there's a huge increase in popularity"*

From the six interviews carried out, it became evident that the participants appreciate the efforts companies are putting on promoting female-empowering messages. They feel proud and are happy to see such messages in the media. However, they are not so easily convinced of the brand's feminist intention or attitude just by the advertisement. According to the participants of this study, female-empowering advertising only does not necessarily make a campaign or a company feminist. There were requests for deeper meaning in real-life conversations and actions outside the media, such as charity contribution and collective education.

**Interviewee 4:** *"If they are actually supporting because if they are supporting they are feminist, but I don't know, because I'm not into these companies and all they're like, oh, corporate responsibility. So they are actually doing it? It's on their agenda, officially reported or something or not, because I don't know that. But if they are, yeah they're feminist. But if not, they're just bastards."*



**Interviewee 6:** *“I really like seeing these ads but I, like, I appreciate even more when you see those brands doing more, you know? If they are actually doing what they are trying to sell to us, like. I heard of one of these brands that was supporting groups of young girls in Africa. Things like these are nice, right? And, I mean, we need it, like... education for those girls who can't access it, projects to help mothers, things like these are even more empowering than these ads”*

## **4.2. Research objective 2: Contribution to the feminist movement**

The second sub-objective of the research was “to explore the thoughts of postfeminist female consumers about pro-female advertising in terms of its contribution to the feminist movement”. This looked into how the participants, as spokeswomen of feminism, understood the role of femvertising in the feminist movement.

### **4.2.1. Tool for societal impact**

Despite not seeing femvertising as feminist, when questioned about the role it plays in the feminist movement all participants agreed it is a tool that can cause certain societal impact. The main themes emerging from this discussion were accessibility and education. According to interviewees, femvertising makes it easier for people to get in touch with feminist messages and educate them to certain level. Some of their thoughts are seen below.

**Interviewee 4:** *“I think it's a great tool. I think it's a great tool because like, we all have TVs. And it's great, because you just see, like, randomly on TV, or I don't know, before YouTube videos, so it's kind of like making you think, because you have to watch it anyway. Right. And it can start a really nice conversation.”*

**Interviewee 2:** *“I think it's positive? Because it kind of put more people to talk about it. I think I don't know, 10 years ago, that's something that might have never happened. Fewer people would even think about it. I think it is good. It continues on, it's more and more people..”*

**Interviewee 3:** *“Well, basically just to make it more accessible, or maybe also to throw on people's faces and deal with it, but we have to deal with it. Because Imagine if you*

*have, like, someone that has never personally been interested in that movement, or just in the actual academia behind them, then they see those things where they buy them, maybe, maybe for them that's actually the thing that gets it rolling and they become interested, or they just, like, have an actual conversation with people about it. So I think no matter, like, what the actual intention behind it is, it will still promote the whole feminist movement or just increase the interest."*

This argument brought by the participants finds support on the definition and effects of advertising discussed in chapter 2.2. The interviewees were not probed for their knowledge about advertising itself or the effects it may cause but the point they make is aligned with the discussion around the social and manipulative effects of advertising (Pollay, 1986; Galbraith, 1974; Packard, 1957). If advertising provides people with a framework that helps people to make sense of the world they live in (Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008; Hirschman and Thompson, 1997; Dyer, 1988), it might as well be able to facilitate access to feminism by educating people about it, as suggested by the interviewees.

#### **4.2.2. Effects on men and school girls**

Participants also mentioned that this type of content and message were most likely to affect young girls. They think it is positive for school girls to grow up seeing everything they can do.

**Interviewee 5:** *"I would say, just little girls as well, you know, because I think it's a very nice way for, like, small girls or like teenagers, if, you know, like, wow, that's what I can do as a girl."*

**Interviewee 2:** *"I like that my cousin gets to see this. She's young and hasn't like noticed what else there is.. hm I don't know. So I think it's good for, like, younger people. So I'm happy they have these advertisements. All these young girls can see them. And if they want to play Rugby, they can. I don't want to haha. I think it's good."*

The effects it might cause on men were also mentioned but opinions diverged. Participant 1 mentioned a serious need for involving men in these discussions while participants 4 and 5 believe no advertisement can provide the level of education needed to get men involved with feminism.

**Interviewee 1:** *“Yeah, so I think that is what is missing: more information for the guys. Because most men hey truly believe that we are against them, it's not the point, you know, it's about putting everyone together”*

**Interviewee 4:** *“But I think that men at a certain age, they just can't be changed. I mean, if they are raised by mommy doing everything, I mean, this is still happening to our generation of men. [...] They can't picture women being anything else. I mean, it's so hard. You try to explain your point of view, but it's just like, you know, kind of throwing rocks to the sea, it just disappears.”*

**Interviewee 5:** *“I think men just need education. I'm sorry, it might be too extreme, but I think it's just like come from, like, the parents education that they have when they are small rather than what they see on TV. Because I mean, if something is like, in their brain, they would just take stick to that even though they can see as many women as they want, like on TV. If they were just like, if their parents tell them, like I mentioned, they would still go with the parents thing. So I think it doesn't really have an impact on them at all. They would have to, like research after or to get more benefits from femvertising. Yeah.”*

It might seem contradictory that femvertising is seen as having the potential to educate some people but not others, but this argument is also backed up by theory. As seen in chapter 2.2, advertising is more likely to reinforce than change a person's values (Dyer, 1988). Based on the Encoding/Decoding model proposed by Hall (1980), individual and personal factors such as income, level of education, and personal experience act as filtering mechanisms around an individual and may regulate the effect femvertising has on them. Basically, what the interviewees are saying is, that school girls nowadays are already predisposed to believe they are strong and capable therefore they only need some reinforcement from the media, while grown men who have been conditioned to believe women are inferior are not as likely to be impacted by 3-minute long videos, for example.

#### **4.3. Research objective 3: Extent of engagement with femvertising**

‘ The third sub-objective of the research was “to investigate to which extent they engage with femvertising” and aimed to gather data that would help the researcher to understand how the participants behaved in relation to femvertising. The questions that

led to the themes below were around their attitude as consumers and their knowledge about the femvertising strategy.

#### **4.3.1 Femvertising awareness**

Six postfeminist women aged between 20 and 35 years old were consulted for this project. None of them had ever heard of the concept of femvertising but they had all watched the femvertising campaigns the researcher presented as examples during the interviews (Always - Run like a girl, Dove - Sketches, Nike - Dream Crazier). Most participants could recall other female-empowering advertisements they had seen.

What can be noted from the transcripts and from the notes taken by the interviewer is that the participants very often did not have a solid opinion about female-empowering advertisement. The answers were full of long pauses and filler words such as “like” and “you know”. They also did not bring outside opinions or referred to previous discussions they had with friends, for example. This means that even if they enjoyed the content of the advertising, even if they shared it with their friends on social media, postfeminist women are not discussing pro-female advertising, or femvertising, in depth.

This could be a positive sign for companies embracing the femvertising strategy. Drawing on the discussion presented in the previous two chapters, it is possible to conclude that even though postfeminist women might be sceptical and critical towards femvertising, this scepticism does not emerge unless the audience is provoked and questioned. Yet, it is still a red flag and to ensure customers are happy, companies must make sure their feminist attitude is reflected throughout the entire company.

#### **4.3.2. Feelings towards advertisement and advertisers**

Overall, the participants demonstrated positive feelings towards femvertising and the brands used as examples - those brought by the interviewer and those the participants recalled themselves. They are proud of what they see and sometimes even get emotional with the messages.

**Interviewee 1:** *“Because, you know, women in sport, they are seeing the kind of ... [pause] But it's beautiful. It's beautiful how they put a woman in a position where, like,*

*they can do whatever. Yeah, and it passes this kind of message. You can do it, you know, just do it. And I like to see like, girls doing it.”*

**Interviewee 2:** *“I’m kind of proud I think. [...] It is a step in the right direction, yeah. It is good.”*

**Interviewee 3:** *“I just I appreciate that. So especially the Dove campaign, It showed so many different body types, and it just gave you a better feeling.*

However, these feelings do not seem to impact their purchase intention. There was no heavy criticism towards any specific company but the participants’ feelings towards brands promoting pro-female and female-empowering messages seem to be affected by the lack of trust pushed by the possibility of the company being guilty of doing Commodity Feminism.

**Interviewee 2:** *“So like, I think it’s a nice advertisement. But it wouldn’t, like, convince me to buy that product.”*

**Interviewee 3:** *“So I don’t think I’m too strongly influenced by them to still, like, as if Dove is too expensive, I don’t buy them.”*

**Interviewee 4:** *“Actually no [wouldn’t be more likely to buy these products]. Because, like with the cosmetics, I look at the quality. So I know that is not, like, environment friendly. So that’s another factor that comes in just, like, totally different conversations. [...] But I don’t know for, like, I mean, if they are very expensive. But still, it’s great that they are supporting women and women are all sponsored and all like dressed in Nike because they are doing, you know, something amazing.”*

**Interviewee 6:** *“I watch it, like, and appreciate, it is a really nice attitude and you know, right, I know that at the end of the day they expect us to go and buy the product but I don’t always do it. For me, at least, I consider other factors, like... I mean, being a responsible company is a positive thing but sometimes they just do it for money, right?”*

Overall, from the data collected and from a marketing perspective, femvertising is probably more likely to increase brand awareness and to have the audience interested in your content than to directly increase sales. Customers, just like the participants of this

study, will consider other aspects of the product and service (and sometimes even aspects of corporate responsibility) before going ahead and purchasing a product.

#### **4.4. Summary of key findings**

Covering the three research sub-objectives, the interviews tried to gather data around (1) the correlation between feminism and femvertising, (2) the contribution of femvertising to the feminist movement, and, finally, (3) the extent of the participants' engagement with femvertising. Outside these objectives, it is important to highlight the fact that none of the participants had heard about femvertising or had strong opinions about it before the meeting with the researcher. Although this might have reduced the depth of the findings, it is still a relevant finding on itself as it may reflect how most postfeminist women behave towards femvertising campaigns.

In terms of the correlation between feminism and femvertising, the participants did not seem to spontaneously connect the feminism-led changes in advertising and femvertising itself to the feminist movement. The overall feedback is positive but there seems to be a lack of trust regarding the feminist intentions behind femvertising campaigns. These findings find support in the idea of Commodity Feminism, which is not named by the participants, but related to the thoughts they report: femvertising as a corporate strategy does not necessarily mean a feminist attitude.

When it comes to the contribution of femvertising to the feminist movement, the Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model is essential to understanding the interviewees' ideas. For them, femvertising plays the role of a tool for societal change that, by making feminism accessible and promoting education, is likely to positively impact young girls but will most probably not affect grown men. This is backed up by Dyer's (1988) argument that advertising is more likely to reinforce than change a person's values.

Finally, in terms of the extent of the participants' engagement with femvertising, participants seem to be very happy with femvertising and companies promoting such messages but it seems to have no effect on their relationship with their respective products or services. The lack of trust derived from Commodity Feminism combined with participants' advertising literacy and personal background, seems to play an important role in the extent of their engagement.



## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter will build on the key findings detailed in chapter 4 and focus on discussing them in light of previous research and practical implications. To address the most notable topics, the chapter is structured based on the sub-objectives presented in chapter 3.2.

### **5.2. Research objective 1: Correlation between femvertising and feminism**

The first sub-objective aimed to discuss how the participants understood the correlation between femvertising and feminism. The changes in advertisements over time have been noticed by most of the participants but do not seem to have completely changed the portrayal of women for the better. The positive changes reported are indeed associated with the ideals of the feminist movement, including more equality and representativeness, but the participants seemed sceptical about the feminist attitude of femvertising.

This critical opinion towards advertising campaigns and their feminist intentions is probably associated with the participants' level of advertising literacy (Malmelin, 2010; O'Donahoe and Tynan, 1998). Even though none of the participants were advertising specialists, all of them hold third level degrees and, with a higher level of education, they are more likely to be aware of the ways advertisers try to persuade them. This high level of advertising literacy is also aligned with the Encoding/Decoding model proposed by Hall (1980) and is discussed in detail in chapter 2.2. According to Hall, the receiver's personal background work as a filter that mediates the effect that advertising messages may have on them. Here, the participants level of education and feminist attitude pose as part of their personal background which has likely collaborated to their "filter" and critical opinion.

An issue the participants do not name but indeed describe and criticise is the phenomenon of Commodity Feminism (McCleary, 2014; Goldman et al., 1991). As seen in the extracts quoted in chapter 4.1.2., the interviewees expected the companies promoting femvertising to be taking other actions behind the campaigns in order to consider them feminists. When the message sent through femvertising is not reinforced



with real actions of corporate responsibility, companies and campaigns are not seen as feminist and may frustrate their audience. This behaviour would then fall into the definition of Commodity Feminism in which feminist ideals are detached from its political meaning and used solely to increase sales (McCleary, 2014; Gill, 2007a; Riordan, 2001; Goldman et al., 1991).

In terms of practical implications, drawing on the data collected, a lack of perceived connection between feminism and femvertising could lead to a negative perception of the femvertising campaign and, as a consequence, of the brand involved. This is seen by the extracts in chapter 4.1.2 and by the scepticism perceived by the interviewees. If the consumer admires the advertisements but finds out that the company is not taking any other action besides promoting a female-empowering campaign, the result could be the opposite of what the brand desires. As suggested by Interviewee 4, companies could also get involved with charities, public education and community support to legitimise their support to the feminist cause. The importance of brand-cause alignment and the promotion of real change is also highlighted by Johnston and Taylor (2008).

### **5.3. Research objective 2: Contribution to the feminist movement**

The second sub-objective looked into the contributions of femvertising to the feminist movement. According to the interviewees, femvertising is seen as a tool for feminism. It makes the movement more accessible and educates people about it. This argument considers the influential power of advertising, as discussed in chapter 2.2. In previous studies, several authors have discussed the social and manipulative effects of advertising (Pollay, 1986; Galbraith, 1974; Packard, 1957) and some have claimed it helps the audience to make sense of the world they live in (Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008; Hirschman and Thompson, 1997; Dyer, 1988). This mirrors the results Jalakas (2016) arrived to in her research. Discussing the topic of femvertising with young Swedish women who have an interest in feminism and gender equality, Jalakas found that femvertising was seen “as a political tool used to both strengthen like-minded people but also to recruit and invite more people into feminism” (2016, p. 47).

However, in this study, the researcher also found that the participants thought while femvertising is indeed a tool and it also is likely to positively impact young girls, it

will probably not affect grown men. As briefly mentioned in 4.2.2, although it might seem contradictory that femvertising is seen as having the potential to educate some people but not others, this argument also finds support in the literature. According to Dyer (1988), advertising is more likely to reinforce than change a person's values and therefore the pro-female messages sent through femvertising can only reinforce such ideas with individuals who already see women as equally capable, for example. An adult man who went through his entire life being conditioned to see women as different, will probably need more than a reinforcement to accept feminist ideas in his life. Finally, just as in sub-objective 1, Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model also helps to explain such argument as was outlined by the participants. The viewer's individual and personal background plays an important role in the process of decoding and encoding advertising's messages. A young schoolgirl probably has not been exposed to much prejudice and inequality in her life, while an adult man is likely to have been through several experiences that will reduce the impact of a feminist message.

The practical implications of these are that men are being left out of the equation while women and girls are being pleased by companies that want to sell products and services to them. Companies looking to promote actual change should consider actions focused on men as well - this will cover the concerns the participants reported during this study (detailed in 4.1.2) and at the same time make sure that half of the population is also involved in the fight for equality. Future research around femvertising could benefit from studying the engagement of women in these campaigns: their current perception of what is being done, how they engage and how to get them to engage more with feminism.

#### **5.4. Research objective 3: Extent of engagement with femvertising**

It was observed from the interviews that participants had not put much thought into the topic of femvertising before the discussion with the researcher. Most of them claimed not to pay much attention to advertising but they were all able to recall at least one campaign that they perceived as empowering. This is a positive insight for brands that are considering joining the femvertising trend since this type of message seems to stick and usually promote a positive feedback, an idea also identified in the interviews. However, attention is needed when embracing femvertising as, without further feminist attitudes, female-empowering campaigns can be seen as something negative and,

therefore, frowned upon. This concern reported by the participants related to the criticised practise of Commodity Feminism.

The aspect of agency and capacity for resistance became evident in the themes that fulfilled this sub-objective. Once again, participants' personal experiences seemed to limit the effect femvertising campaigns had on them and even though they demonstrated positive feelings towards the advertisements, these did not affect their relationship with brands. When questioned if they would be more likely to engage or buy from a certain brand that had promoted female-empowering messages, most participants gave a negative response.

It is also important to highlight that, even though there was no heavy criticism towards any specific company, the participants' feelings towards brands promoting femvertising seem to be affected by the lack of trust pushed by the possibility of the company being practicing of doing Commodity Feminism. Their positive notes on the campaigns were often followed by thoughts on other actions the companies are or should be taking.

The researcher understands that the objectives of this study were appropriately fulfilled but acknowledges that the research method chosen did present some limitations that might have affected the results for this sub-objective especially. For example, the semistructured interviews only obtained data regarding what the participants say they do rather than what they do. In terms of practical implications, this shows that femvertising is indeed an interesting strategy for companies that can afford to sustain the image of feminist. Further research is needed but drawing on the participants' experience, femvertising has the potential to increase brand awareness but might not lead to marketing results if other aspects of the product or service are not carefully thought. This creates opportunities for several other niche studies in branding and product design as each audience might value different characteristics - sustainability, vegan products, etc.

## **5.5. Summary**

This chapter linked the findings from chapter 4 with the literature discussed in chapter 2, through exploring the possible connections and differences. In most cases, the

findings found support in the previous theories discussed by academics which are present throughout this project. Also, this discussion showed that the data gathered from all the six interviews successfully fulfilled the research sub-objectives. As a recommendation for future research however, the researcher would like to highlight the unexpected view postfeminist women had on men's education about feminism. Future research could benefit from investigating how to better involve and get men to engage with femvertising in a way that promotes social change.



## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The overall aim of this study was to investigate how postfeminist female consumers engage with femvertising-led campaigns. This aim was achieved by fulfilling the three research sub-objectives that looked into the audience's understanding of the correlation between feminism and femvertising, their thoughts on the role femvertising plays in the feminist movement and, finally, the extent of their engagement with these campaigns. After conducting six interviews, the thematic analysis of findings drew the researcher's attention to the salient aspects of the data.

The data collected from both primary and secondary research allowed the researcher to note that feminism is a political and social cause of which, even in sections said to be less-politicised, its supporters know what they are looking for. Therefore, female-empowering advertising might produce positive feelings but does not seem enough to get their audience on board as consumers. There was a common feeling among the participants that real-life action is needed for companies promoting femvertising to be seen as feminists. The suspicion that these companies might not be doing anything behind the scenes affected the participants' trust in the company's intentions.

Participants also see femvertising as a good tool to help young girls to realise their potential. The interviewees believe femvertising might have the power to make feminism more accessible and to educate the audience. However, its influence seems to be somehow limited to those who already embrace some feminist ideas, and according to them, adult men are likely to be out of reach.

While the research objectives have all been fulfilled, the research did present certain limitations. The chosen method only allowed the collection of data from what participants said, while their actions could not be considered. In terms of their behaviour towards femvertising, for example, the researcher might have missed some relevant data by not being able to analyse the participants' actions. Another limitation involved the selection of participants - it was difficult to find women that fit the profile and, even then, most of them had never heard of femvertising before. Even though all of them had watched female-empowering campaigns and were able to put their opinion together during the interview, the researcher wonders if more insightful data would have come up

had more experienced participants been selected. It is also important to emphasize that this study considered a small sample and, therefore, the findings consist of insights that could be investigated with a larger sample rather than theories or universal truths that can be generalised.

As for future research, this researcher would recommend selecting an alternative methodological approach such as focus groups, which would facilitate the discussion among the participants. Should this had been done in this study, the situation with inexperienced participants would not have an issue. Also, since the topic of men in advertising came up unexpectedly during the interviews and when probed with other participants, the idea repeated itself, the researcher believes that future research could benefit from involving men. Studying the engagement of men with femvertising campaigns - their current perception of what is being done, how they engage and how to get them to engage more with feminism - could help not only the feminist movement but also to put postfeminist women at ease about them.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### Brief introduction about the research

#### **PART 1: Building rapport, getting the interviewee involved in the topic and comfortable with the interview**

- Do you consider yourself a feminist?
- What does feminism mean to you?
- Do you usually pay attention to advertisements?
- What do you think about the portrayal of women in the advertisements you have seen recently?
- Do you think it has been changing over the years? If yes, how?

#### **PART 2: Contextualising the specific topic being studied**

- Have you ever heard of femvertising?
- (if no) the interviewer explains the concept

*It refers to female-targeted advertising that actively seeks to celebrate and empower women and girls (Hunt, 2017; Perez and Gutierrez, 2017; Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016)*

- (if yes) how would you describe femvertising?
- Can you think of any femvertising campaign you saw recently?

#### **PART 3: Investigating their perceptions about femvertising**

(play [\*Always Run Like a Girl\*](#); [\*Dove Beauty Sketches\*](#); [\*Nike Dream Crazier\*](#))

- What do you think about these campaigns? (feelings, emotions related to them, etc)
- Which audience do you think is the most affected by the messages sent through advertising?
- Do such ads make you feel any different about a company?
- Do you think this type of campaigns can be considered feminist?
- In general, what do you think about femvertising?
- As a feminist, what is your opinion about femvertising?
- For you, what is the role of femvertising in the feminist movement?