# Stereotypical Versus Feminist Advertising: A Review Article

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## Abstract

The representation of gender is one of the significant manifestations of social justice, and so can act as a mirror that reflects the dynamic relation between media, society and culture in the contemporary world. Gender representation in media remains a debatable issue till today and has a significant reflection on multiple academic disciplines. This review article traces the changes in female gender representation, specifically through the genre of advertisements, as a reflection of the impact of modern Feminism on both the society and media. Through the review of research, the paper demonstrates that the advertising discourse has witnessed a long history of stereotyped portrayals where the female identity is misrepresented and confined to a limited set of gender roles. However, due to the different waves of Feminism, female roles have gradually changed together with their portrayals in the media, especially in the genre of advertising. As a result, a new trend of feminist advertising has largely grown worldwide, depicting a new female identity as empowered rather than subservient or objectified. This technique reflects the gender-inclusion policies adopted in various cultures. By reviewing and synthesizing the relevant literature, this article provides sufficient background knowledge about stereotypical versus positive female representation in advertising. The contrast between both trends includes not only the features of each but also their discrepant impacts on the society and on the brand itself. Hence, the contribution of the article can serve both fields of sociology and marketing by raising viewers' and advertisers' awareness on the impact of gender representation on both the cultural values and the brand sales respectively.

**Key words** Gender Identity, Gender Roles, Stereotypes, Feminism, Feminist Advertising.

## 1. Introduction

Media is considered a powerful site for the production and circulation of ideas. As Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (1960) posits, values and portrayals in mass media are capable of influencing and shaping viewers' perceptions and attitudes. In this respect, Fairclough (1995) highlights the role of media as a powerful ideological apparatus through the different ways of representing realities. While describing the constitutive role of discourse in general, Fairclough (1995) stresses on the ideological work of media discourse in constructing knowledge, values and social identities. Van Dijk (1995) similarly explains the symbolic power of media to do ideological, social and cultural changes, through mind control, by controlling the viewers' opinions and mental representations. That is why Thornborrow (2006, p. 56) describes the power of media discourse as "one of the most pervasive phenomena in our culture". However, media discourse can be discriminatory through the prejudiced representation of certain social groups. In this concern, Wodak and Busch (2004) agree that media discourse can contribute to perpetuating

social imbalance. For example, it can help produce and reinforce unequal power relations between social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural groups through the ways the media represent things and position people. Hence, by reproducing negative stereotypes, the media can encourage some exclusionary practices that can lead to different forms of discrimination. One of these forms is the creation and reinforcement of dichotomous gender boundaries through the reproduction of stereotyped gender roles, which ultimately leads to excluding the female gender from certain social roles.

Among the different genres of media discourse, advertisements represent a particularly important domain of study since they are considered complex cultural artifacts which can convey certain socio-cultural values and behavioral patterns. As Dyer (2009), points out, advertisements are a source of popular culture, reflecting as well as shaping people's life, as they include a lot of signs which convey different meanings and ideologies. They are considered part and parcel of our everyday life as we are bombarded with numerous advertisements communicating various messages. Not only are advertisements a means of selling products, but they are also a means of selling ideas which can significantly shape the public beliefs of controversial issues. In this respect, Pollay and Gallagher (1990, p.360) posit that advertising can be a "distorted mirror" by communicating false ideas and values only to promote for the brand they are selling. That is why there are sometimes contradictions between the realities of the society and the portrayal of these realities via advertisements. One of these contradictions relate to patriarchy-feminism stereotypes by stressing the traditional masculine-feminine splits. As Chan and Cheng (2012) argue, female characters are usually associated with domestic products and home-oriented roles while men are associated with non-domestic products and out-of-home settings.

However, in the light of the current wave of Feminism, female roles have changed worldwide together with the portrayal of female identities in the media as well, depending on the specificities of each country (Debbagh, 2012). In this respect, the current article is significant by reviewing the change in contemporary female representation in contrast to the stereotypical one. First, it explains the Theory of Gender in relation to both gender identity and gender roles. Second, it explores the features of the stereotyped gender representation in advertisements, followed by its impact on both the society and the brand. Third, it goes through the different waves of Feminism that lead to the emergence of the Feminist Theory. Then, it explores the new features of feminist advertising, followed by its impact on both the society and the brand. In this respect, the paper concludes with a message for the marketers to further enhance the strategies of feminist advertising. Finally, by presenting the various linguistic studies previously conducted on gender representation, the paper highlights the main gap in the previous literature and provides suggestions for future research in relation to the analysis of the aspects of positive female portrayal in the media.

## 2. Gender Theory

Gender studies are an interdisciplinary field which is mainly concerned with the representation of gender, masculinity and femininity, in a variety of disciplines, such as literature, media, politics, linguistics, sociology and history. According to Butler (2002), there are two approaches that deal with the concept of Gender. The first is known as Essentialism, which views gender and sex as the same. The other is known as Constructivism, which views gender as constructed in social interactions. In the light of Constructivism, the main concern of the Gender Theory is the construction of individual behavior as nurtured through certain cultural patterns that develop over time. In this regard, Butler's point of view about the Gender Theory resonates that of Foucault. According to Foucault (1978), the main concern of the Gender Theory is to explore new ways to be human by challenging

sexist stereotypes about gender roles. In this sense, the Gender Theory targets problems such as unequal distribution of power in the world because of gender issues in regards to gender identity and gender roles.

## 2.1 Gender Identity

Travis (2001, p.43) defines Identity as "the sense one has of who one is" and Identity Formation as the process of "committing oneself to a specific identity". In this process, gender has a significant role due to the social organization that imposes specific roles for each gender. This happens through the norms and traditions which shape individuals' self-perceptions, goals, and values. As a result, men and women acquire different self-concepts and different criteria for success. In this regard, Butler (2002) refers to the concept of Acted Identity, noting that people act the identity that reflects the normative acts imposed by the society. Butler's opinion about Identity Formation agrees with that of Erikson (1968, p. 22) who regards it as a psychological process "located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture". Erikson (1968) further explains that the process of Identity Formation constitutes two basic dimensions. The first is exploration where the individual explores different values and attitudes. The second is commitment where one becomes dedicated to certain behaviors. Beauvoir's (1949/2011, p.330) famous quote "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" indicates that one's gender identity is rather shaped by the society as they grow up.

Similarly, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) point out that the conceptualizations
of masculinity and femininity in the Gender Theory are modes of performing identity rather than natural manifestations of biology per se. For gender theorists, one is not masculine or feminine but rather gradually becomes masculine or feminine by performing a combination of many characteristics and behaving in gendered ways for a variety of reasons depending on the context. In this sense, Gender implies a

history, of expected roles, that exists beyond the individual. These role expectations are deeply ingrained and tend to exaggerate and stereotype gender differences, bringing into focus particular attributes while ignoring others. However, there is also a great diversity in how individuals express their gender which may not conform to existing stereotypes. Therefore, there are often two complementary goals of the Gender Theory. One is to challenge the hierarchical placement of feminine-gendered attributes as inferior to masculine-gendered attributes. The other goal is to remove coercion and accept plurality and multiplicity, so that any woman or man can freely be the individual they wish to be.

In the light of these goals, Judith Butler's Theory of Gender first clarifies the mechanism of gender structure and then provides counterpart mechanisms that challenge gender construction. In her Undoing gender, Butler (2004) explains how gender construction makes the norm for a human being limited to the gender of man leaving behind the woman-gender as relative. In other words, gender has been a tool of segregation whereby men and women are scaled into classes of humans, less than humans, or even non-human. This relativeness of woman leaves her with the options of either to comply with the norms of that social construction of gender and accept a second-class human status or to be an honorary man by breaking off the feminine sphere. "If I am a certain gender, will I still be regarded as part of the human?" (Butler, 2004, p.2). Here, Butler echoes Beauvoir (1949/2011) when commenting on the patriarchal representation of the world, as the work of men, like the world itself, described from their own point of view, and confused with absolute truth. Beauvoir (1949/2011) describes the status of being a woman as a tragedy not only because of having limited life choices but for being considered as a second-rate human being.

Like Beauvoir, Butler (2004) points out how the concept of Gender is used as a tool of discrimination between men and women in regards to the human elements.

Here, she refers to the three elements of body, mind and soul as the main elements that compose the human being. Along the same line, Ali (2015, p.5) posits that while men in the patriarchal world have the three elements integrated, women are conceived as "a fragmented human; a sexual/reproductive body, a crippled mind/psyche, or a needing soul". According to Rocha (2013), this status of the fragmented woman gender has become the reality of the woman's situation. Most noticeably, women are identified through their female bodies: a female sexual body and a female reproductive body. In both cases of identification through the body, she is passively controlled and manipulated by man. Thus, the woman's body is considered a central value of her individuality where the male gaze works on objectifying woman to be utilized by man. Even more, this female body is further fragmented, divided into parts, detailed and scrutinized. Therefore, like Butler, Rocha (2013) notices that the social construction of gender ascribes all negative and less-than-human qualities to the woman gender. In this scenario, Ali (2015, p. 2) agrees that "women have to be re-born into humanity" by going through a new transformation and challenging the regulatory norms of gender roles in order for a woman to claim a human status, with human characteristics, equal to that of man.

## 2.2 Gender Roles

In their Social Role Theory, Eagly and Wood (2012) relate to gender roles as an important part of the culture and social structure of every society. According to Wood and Eagly (2010), people's perceptions of men's and women's social roles reflect the gender role beliefs of the society in which they live. These gender role beliefs arise because men and women are thought to possess different attributes that equip them for sex-typical roles. That is why gender roles appear natural and inevitable. In this regard, Wood and Eagly (2010) refer to a trio of biosocial mechanisms that influence gender behavior. These mechanisms include biological processes, sociocultural factors of gender identity and others' stereotypic expectations. For instance, women occupy

roles that need communal, domestic or subordinate behaviors, as stereotypic female gender roles. Meanwhile, men occupy roles that require agentic behaviors, or dominant behaviors as stereotypic male gender roles.

According to Wood and Eagly (2010), people internalize these gender roles as part of their personal identities and regulate their own behavior accordingly. Wood and Eagly (2010) further argue that these gender roles are so commonly shared to the extent that people believe that the correct thing to do is to act consistently with these roles, avoid deviating from them and react approvingly to behavior consistent with them. Both genders are typically rewarded for conforming to gender roles and penalized for deviating while inconsistent behavior is often sanctioned as disruptive of social interaction. These gender roles begin to be acquired and elaborated throughout childhood and adolescence. Abdelmogeth and Mossad (2018) agree that children regularly learn to adopt gender roles which are not always fair to both sexes. If a man or a woman acts differently from how their gender is assumed to behave, they are misjudged.

These consensually-shared beliefs lead to gender stereotypes. Abdelmogeth and Mossad (2018) define gender stereotypes as overgeneralization of the characteristics attributed to a certain group based on their gender. They are widely accepted judgments or biases about certain traits that apply to each gender. Wood and Eagly (2010) postulate that people's self-concepts tend to be gender-stereotypic. In other words, gender roles influence people's self-concepts and hence become gender identities: their sense of themselves as female or male. People who have self-concepts that differ from those that are typical of their sex are less likely to show gender-stereotypic behavior. In this respect, Eagly and Wood (2012) point out that these beliefs are not inevitable. As women and men assume nontraditional roles, people may develop new beliefs about both genders' attributes and role performance where sex differences have

become relatively invariant. That is how the Social Role Theory can offer a way to understand both stability and change in gender identity and gender roles. In the light of the gender theory, the issue of stereotyping gender is dealt with in the next section with special reference to the genre of advertising.

## 3. Stereotyping Gender Roles in Advertisements

Cardwell (1996) defines the term stereotyping as "a fixed, often simplistic generalization about a particular group or class of people" (as cited in El-Mohandes, 2019, p.6). Similarly, Fahmy (2004, p.94) agrees that "a stereotype is an oversimplified opinion that can be identified by examining the way a particular group appears mostly within one category (e.g., teenagers as troublemakers)". In this regard, Akestam (2017) suggests that a stereotype is a cognitive structure that forms beliefs and attitudes towards a group of people. These beliefs can be either positive or negative. However, Stereotypes are often correlated with negative associations rather than positive ones. Furthermore ,stereotyping is dynamic and can change over time. Akestam (2017) further suggests that some stereotypes that appear in advertisements tend to reinforce the stigma that exists in society in general. Hence, a non-stereotyped advertising portrayal presents a certain social group in a way that does not adhere to the stereotype for the social category to which they belong.

One of the most common stereotypes in advertising is the portrayal of gender in general. Fitts (2009, p.1) defines gender stereotypes as "common beliefs formed in culture about how men and women behave". According to Baran, Davis and Striby (2014), the media continue to present both women and men in stereotyped ways that limit peoples' perceptions of human possibilities. Therefore, media reinforce long-standing cultural ideals of masculinity where men are presented as tough, independent, unafraid, and totally in control of all emotions. Meanwhile, media's images of women reflect cultural stereotypes that

depart markedly from reality where girls and women are dramatically underrepresented as being housewives, inferior to men, and fond of beauty products. According to Desmond (2005) and Suggett (2009), one of the negative effects of advertisements in any society is the embodiment of stereotyped images of men and women where ads' producers portray gender stereotypes in their advertisements according to the culture they are presenting their ad within. In this regard, Baran et al (2014) argue that the constrained representation of females in the media show that they are subpar compared to men.

Chin (1995) posits that advertising supports four cultural stereotypes: First, a woman's place is in the home. Second, women do not make important decisions or do important things. Third, women are dependent and need men's protection. Finally, men regard women primarily as sexual objects. That is why women are portrayed as unemployed, as low-income earners, in decorative roles and idle situations, and as having limited purchasing power. Chan and Cheng (2012) confirm that these gender stereotypes have not changed as even recent gender representation in media is still characterized by the following patterns. Males are frequently shown as the authoritative central figures whereas females are confined to dependent roles. Females are more often portrayed at home while males are more often portrayed in outdoor settings. Finally, males are shown selling automobiles and sports products while females are always related with home and personal care products. Similarly, Pandey, Garg, Kataria, and Dhasmana (2016) note that the comparison between past advertisements with more recent ones suggests that some of the prevalent stereotypes about gender roles have remained the same. Therefore, these ideas are still deep-rooted and hinder people's behavior changes.

### 3.1 Social Impact

Dahlen and Rosengren (2016) define advertising social effects as the unintentionally extended impact of

advertisements on the consumer. This impact can include the individual's feelings and emotions, self-esteem, social relations, cognitive potentials as well as undercurrent behaviors. Hence, these effects mainly relate to the consumer's view of oneself and the others. From this perspective, Mastro (2009) posits that stereotyped gender portrayals in advertising can have a dangerous social impact because of the ideals that are being frequently presented and which the consumers interpret as more real and more important than others. According to Mastro (2009), the consumers' recurrent exposure to stereotyped ideals about certain social categories makes them vulnerable to believe that such stereotyped versions are true. In other words, these stereotypes become their perception of reality. According to a report from the British Advertising Standards Authority (2017, para. 6), "gender stereotypes in ads can contribute to harm for adults and children by limiting how people see themselves, how others see them, and potentially restricting the life decisions they take".

Several studies assure that gender stereotyping in advertisements can cause social as well as psychological problems. For instance, As Wang (2018) states, the audiences' constant exposure to women's portrayal in inferior roles makes them think of women as truly subservient and inferior to men. Furthermore, Eisend (2010) argues that stereotyped gender advertising negatively affects the behavior of the female viewers themselves. First, stereotyping physical features, like the standards of beauty, can negatively affect women's body satisfaction. Second, stereotyping certain gender-related behavioral patterns, like depicting women as dependent, can reduce women's aspirations for self-development. Third, stereotyping gender social roles can negatively affect women's career ambitions. Likewise, Davies, Spencer, Quinn, and Gerhardstein (2002) state that using gender stereotypes as a marketing strategy can cause several psychological implications like reducing self-esteem, increasing self-ideal discrepancy and increasing body-focused anxiety.

In this respect, Gerbner's (1960) Cultivation Theory helps understand the impact of living in a cultural environment that depends heavily on mediated mass communication. In the light of Gerbner's theory, Chan and Cheng (2012) argue that individuals tend to incorporate stereotypes presented in the media into their own concepts of reality. People perceive these portrayals as reality, and so they may modify their personal behavior based on these stereotypes which they have been repeatedly exposed to. Here, Akinola (2019) refers to the social impact of stereotyped advertising on the audience's attitudes and beliefs, especially towards women; that is to say, the repetition of the negative representation of women cultivates these stereotypes as the norm for women. Hence, if women are continuously represented in a negative way on television, this representation becomes the norm, and many people, especially children and young youth, will believe that this how women should be. Similarly, Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen (2011) argue that gender stereotyping in advertisements may influence the beliefs of viewers and the way they view gender roles in their lives, to the extent that they may even change their own behaviors to mirror what they see in the media. In other words, there is a direct link between both genders' portrayals in advertising and the behavior of society members.

### 3.2 Brand-related Impact

Eisend (2016) suggests that the main objective behind advertising is originally to promote brand selling. In this respect, Eisend (2016) defines the brand-related effect as the reaction of the consumer in relation to the actual purpose of the advertisement. Eisend, here, mainly refers to the consumer's purchase intentions. In this regard, Chan and Cheng (2012) argue that one of the strategies employed by advertisers is utilizing women as a means of attracting the target audience. However, academic evidence has proven that using gender stereotypes as an advertising strategy can backfire and negatively affect the popularity of the advertising campaign. Several studies have found that using

stereotyped female portrayals generates negative results by lowering the level of both the ad and the brand. As a result, the target consumers' attitudes towards the product and their purchase intentions are negatively affected.

In this concern, Henderson-King, Henderson-King and Hoffmann (2001) explain how the stereotypical female portrayals in advertising can hinder the success of the campaign and so negatively affect the popularity of the brand. They posit that these stereotypes limit the targeted female audiences' range of alternatives regarding, for example, the criteria of beauty and success. As a result, the limited options presented by this kind of advertisements put the target female consumers under the pressure that they have to act in consistence with these stereotypes, and so they react negatively towards the ad by refraining from purchasing that brand. Akestam (2017, p.132) explains this process in the light of the theory of psychological reactance. This theory posits that when the viewers feel that their personal freedom is threatened, they experience a state of reactance to recover the lost or threatened behavior. As a result, they oppose or turn against the ad as "the source of the threat". Meanwhile, women's reverse reactions against gender stereotypes in ads are also out of concern for others, believing that other women may negatively be affected as well. "This belief in turn would influence ad and brand attitudes as consumers 'punish' the brand for hurting others" (Akestam, 2017, p. 104).

## 4. Feminist Advertising

Artz and Venkatesh (1991) posit that one of the main goals of the modern women's movement is to analyze the language related to gender in different types of discourse including the language of marketing and advertising. In response to rising concerns about the misrepresentation of gender in advertising, a movement has arisen in advertising that empowers women and adequately represents them. This movement is born from the drive of the consumers as well as the ethical and moral behavior of the advertisers. Similarly, Gill (2008) refers to the impact of modern

Feminism on advertising as creating a discrepancy between the depictions of women in advertising and the way in which many women view themselves . From this cultural tension a new form of female-centric advertising has emerged, termed as Femvertising.

According to Becker-Herby (2016), the term Femvertising has officially been coined by Samantha Skey (the CEO of SheKnows Media), in 2014, when she has created the Femvertising Awards to celebrate brands whose advertising defies gender stereotypes and empower women and girls. Skey defines Femvertising as "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls" (SheKnows, 2014, para.1). Becker-Herby (2016, p.18) notes that "the terms ad-her-tising and Femvertising have been coined to define advertising concerned with feminist practices and that exhibits qualities of empowering women and equality". Hence, Femvertising is a short term for "female empowerment advertising" which challenges the stereotyped female advertising. This trend has received significant attention throughout the advertising community. As Becker-Herby (2016) points out, the introduction of Femvertising challenges many of the gender stereotypes that consumers have grown accustomed to while introducing a new way for brands to reach female consumers. It is a new advertising trend that seeks to reach women through messages of power, strength and authenticity.

Becker-Herby (2016) relates the new trend of Femvertising to the Feminist Theory of Commodity Feminism as one of the features of the post-feminist culture. The theory of Commodity Feminism has first been introduced by Goldman, Heath and Smith (1991). Goldman et al. (1991) confirm that Commodity Feminism is the redefining of Feminism through consumerism and purchase behavior. They argue that advertisers have been trying to link the emancipation of women to the sale of corporate goods and services. In this sense, feminist ideals such as

independence, freedom and sexual agency have been transformed to serve advertising, as some brands have exploited these ideals. As explained by Crouse-Dick (2002), Commodity Feminism insinuates that if a woman wants to be powerful (a core feminist ideal) she must first make a purchase, and so she controls her worth by making the correct consumer choices. Here, Goldman et al. (1991) show how advertisers are signaling femininity in a way that connotes independence, participation in the workforce, self-control, freedom and sexuality.

In this respect, Goldman et al. (1991) refer to the paradoxical nature of Commodity Feminism. They argue that although women display a sense of freedom and strength, they do it in a way that is attractive and sexually pleasing to men. As Crouse-Dick (2002, p. 22) explains, "This portrayal of independent freedom of choice - a feminist ideal - has been fused with images of sexuality, thus teaching women to see themselves as sexual objects because it accommodates their liberal interests" . Gill (2008) also agrees that in the Commodity Feminism era, women are no longer passive figures of the male gaze; however, their sexuality is almost portrayed in a way that is meant to be pleasing to men. Hence, as Love and Helmbrecht (2007) argue, Femvertising is considered a direct backlash to Commodity Feminism which has dominated female-centered advertising till early 2000s. "Femvertising can be considered novel in that it focuses on questioning female stereotypes acknowledged to be (at least partly) created by advertising" (Akestam, Rosengren & Dahlen, 2017, p.796).

According to Davidson (2015), Femvertising seeks to celebrate women and showcase them in authentic scenarios. Becker-Herby (2016) explains that Femvertising campaigns embrace five major pillars. First, they opt for a variety of female representation rather than a group of "ideal" supermodels. Hence, women are much more likely to see themselves reflected in the advertisements by models of their same race, shape, body size and age. Second, the messaging reinforces and celebrates something positive. Therefore, key messages are empowering, inspirational and inclusive and filling the female consumer with feelings of affirmation, self-confidence and motivation, rather than inferring that the product is the key to "fixing" her imperfections. Third, Femvertising campaigns portray women or girls in scenarios that are outside of the traditional stereotypes. For example, they feature women in an athletic or competitive environment, performing a leisure activity, or in a profession. Fourth, sexuality is used in ways much more nuanced than traditional advertising. Hence, sexuality does not cater to the male gaze. Fifth, women are portrayed in an authentic manner so that the campaign message has to feel real.

## 4.1 Social Impact

Crouse-Dick (2002) predicts the shift from postfeminist advertising to Femvertising by calling for women to realize that products do not determine who woman should be or look like. Likewise, Femvertising is a confirmation of the Social Role Hypothesis by Diekman and Eagly (2002), showing that gender stereotypes and depictions of women change with society as it evolves. Accordingly, the trend of Femvertising has changed the way the industry speaks to female consumers. As a result, experts have noted the shift in the portrayal of women and the use of positive messages and imagery that show women as multidimensional. Most notably, Femvertising casts aside the use of traditional gender stereotypes and ensures that women are the protagonists in the new advertising and marketing strategies (Bahadur, 2014). In this regard, Akestam (2017, p.18) comments "As stereotyped portrayals have been suggested to generate social effects that limit consumers' well-being, non-stereotyped portrayals could, at least under some circumstances, be expected to enhance well-being".

Hunt (2017, p.26) clarifies the positive impact of Femvertising messages on the society. These messages "promote gender equality both visually and rhetorically, and thus make third wave feminist language more accessible to the masses". Similarly, Weusten (2008) refers to Femvertising as a reflection for the third wave feminist movement on the media, and so it is a way to send influential messages that can positively shape the cultural values of the society. While inspiring women and girls to take control of their identity and responsibility of their choices, ads with feminist themes are praised for raising awareness in the media about issues facing the female gender (Drake, 2017). According to a survey conducted by SheKnows Media (2014), 71% of women believe in the necessity of promoting positive messages about women through advertising. In this respect, Akestam et al (2017) explain the positive psychological impact of positive female representations on women who feel that less pressure is put on them by increasing the variety of choices about beauty and lifestyles. Here, Akestam (2017) refers to several studies showing that non-stereotyped female portrayals can reduce women's self-conscious anxiety and enhance their self-esteem.

## 4.2 Brand-related Impact

Several studies confirm that Femvertising strategies have positive effects on the ad effectiveness, brand marketing, purchase attitudes and product sales. For instance, Eisend (2016) points out that brands that use non-stereotyped advertising strategies have successfully received much attention from the viewers. Thus, in contrast to traditional advertising, Femvertising strategies increase brand acceptability and, accordingly, purchasing attitudes among the female target audience. Similarly, Belch and Belch (2018) note that the brands that feature gender-positive advertising, promoting equality and empowerment, receive positive reactions from their audiences. Through a survey measuring Femvertising impact on the market, Powell (2014, para.4) finds out that 52% of women are motivated to buy a product "because they liked how the ad for it portrayed

women". Likewise, Monllos (2015, para.5) states that these ads are intended to enhance the products' sales: "We want to make sure that we're delivering on the Femvertising principles of empowerment and also delivering on the bottom--line objectives for each of the clients we work with".

Becker-Herby (2016) presents several examples for different campaigns whose popularity has increased due to Femvertising strategies. For example, some of the most famous campaigns that have gone viral and increased the brands' consumptions and profits include Dove's "For Real Beauty", Always' "Like a Girl", Pantene's "Labels Against Women", Under Armour's "I Will What I Want", Sport England's "This Girl Can", and Nike's "If You Let Me Play Sports". Powell (2014) also confirms that these campaigns have generated more sales; for example, the launch of Dove's Real Beauty campaign has led to a jump in sales by 1.5 billion dollars. According to Akestam et al (2017, p. 795), this has encouraged advertisers and marketers to believe that "gender sells" and that they can "cash in on feminism". This is because such positive female portrayals are seen as more self-relevant and more convergent with the evolving female social roles, which leads to positive responses from the target audience towards the ad and the brand. Akestam et al (2017, p.797) confirm that "By being more open to the target audience creatively decoding and deconstructing meanings, femvertising thus reduces the risk of ad reactance".

Similarly, the study conducted by Drake (2017) confirms that female respondents have shown strong emotional responses towards the female empowerment advertisements which connect the female consumers with their real lives and real selves. Hence, these ads, which show congruence with females' beliefs of self-efficacy, have gained a better reputation, more positive attitudes and, accordingly, higher purchase intentions. The results of this study conforms to previous research which show that most women tend to buy the products whose advertisements use positive female portrayal strategies, most probably due to

the empowering messages that match with this millennial audience. Hunt (2017, p. 27) agrees that the brands that use femvertising strategies are smart for being "able to reach a so-called corporate social responsibility quota while publicly becoming an advocate for women". Hence, while claiming to be defend gender equality, these brands have succeeded in driving sales.

## 5. Research Gap regarding Female Representation in Advertisements

Despite the global evolution in females' social roles, the new feminist trends in advertising have not been extensively reported in the literature. Previous studies have mainly looked at stereotyped female portrayals where the only aspect of power attributed to the female image is the sexual power as seductive agents. Yet, other dimensions of female power have not been thoroughly investigated. This section traces the most relevant and recent studies conducted on female representation in the genre of advertisements in both Western and Eastern media. For example, using the relevance theory, Gómez (2017) examined the changes in the roles and images of women in the advertising discourse in the Western culture between 20th and 21st-century ads. However, the findings of her study showed that contemporary advertisements represented the same stereotypical images of women that existed in the old ones, depending mainly on sexism, sexual objectification and traditional archetypes. Likewise, Hall and Kappel (2018) conducted a study on the portrayal of men and women in alcohol American TV commercials. The results proved that advertisers provided specific messages about gender roles reinforcing both the masculinity of men as well as the objectification of women.

Similarly, both Arafa (2013) and El-Sherbini, Darwish, Bastawisi and El-Tarabishi (2017) adopted the feminist theory to investigate the reflection of women in Egyptian TV commercials with the aim of examining the representation of femininity. Both studies concluded that the representation of women was stereotypical rather than real and based on traditional beliefs. They added that such negative representation of women as inferior to men did not reflect women's actual status and role in the Egyptian society. Although both studies by Al Jenaibi (2017) and Abdel Aziz (2018) referred to the changing representation of stereotyped gender roles in the Middle Eastern media, they concluded that the Arab female portrayal was a mixture of both modernization and traditional values, and that females were limited to secondary level jobs. Along the same line, Abboud (2020) confirmed that women were still objectified, in Egyptian digital advertising, as sex tools to market certain products and services. Finally, Hal's (2020) contrastive study revealed that Eastern advertisements depicted women traditionally, relating women's success to their efficiency in doing the household chores, whereas American and British commercials associated women's success to their educational and professional achievements.

From these various examples, it is noticed that most of the studies previously conducted on female representation in ads have mostly focused on analyzing the stereotypical portrayal of women, which is not reflective of women's modern and real life presence. Meanwhile, few studies have attempted to trace the new evolving trend of women empowerment, particularly in the Arab culture. In this sense, it is recommended to pay more attention to the change in contemporary gender representation by analyzing the aspects of positive female portrayal that are actually employed in current advertising campaigns. In addition, future studies can integrate different approaches like Critical Discourse Analysis with Visual Semiotics to analyze the different modes of communication used in advertisements, visually and verbally, through which gender messages are delivered. Furthermore, Contrastive studies can also be conducted to examine the most dominant features of women empowerment, as represented in advertisements, across different cultures.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has discussed the relation between media and gender as one of the

most dynamic issues and a rich area for interdisciplinary research. It has particularly revealed the power of the advertising discourse which not only sells products but also ideas and lifestyles. In this concern, the paper has explored the role of advertisements in establishing and maintaining a stereotyped gendered identity through the traditional representation of gender roles. Meanwhile, by tracing the four waves of Feminism and the impact of the Feminist theory on media, the paper has revealed the new trend of feminist advertising, known as "Femvertising", which matches the current evolution of gender roles worldwide. Both traditional and innovative trends of female representation are presented in relation to the influence of each on the behavior of the viewer and the popularity of the brand in the market. Based on the findings provided, it can be concluded that Femvertising not only presents positive socio-cultural values about equality and inclusion but also enhances the brand's popularity and consumption in the market. Therefore, advertising agencies are highly recommended to use positive gender representation as an authentic reflection of gender roles and as a marketing strategy that generates more profits. Since this article is limited to the portrayal of female identity and social roles as represented in the genre of advertisements, some recommendations can be suggested for further research in the future. For instance, other genres of media discourse that reflect the phenomenon of women empowerment can also be investigated. Furthermore, further research can investigate the evolution of the male gender representation by also highlighting the features as well as the impact of such evolution. The discrepancy between the stereotypical versus positive male portrayal, regarding both gender identity and social roles, can be examined in the advertising discourse and other genres of media as well.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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