



An exploration of the perceived role of femvertising in retail fashion customer
brand preference

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I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Honours in BA Strategic Brand Communication degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

ABSTRACT

Femvertising can be defined as advertising that is aimed at empowering females. In the past decade alone, there has been a significant number of brands who have utilised femvertising in order to reach and create relationships with their female audiences. Femvertising seeks to address and rectify the traditional stereotypical images of women in media.

Women have become the world's most powerful customers driving approximately 70-80% of customer purchases, and their influence is increasingly growing every year. This growth has resulted in brands taking female customer more seriously as well as forcing these brands to acknowledge the gender-based struggles women have been fighting for years.

Brands are increasingly starting to use pro-female storylines in their advertisements as a new way of reaching their female customers. Due to the contemporary nature of femvertising, a problem exists in that there is a lack of research around the perceived role between femvertising and brand preference across industries. Furthermore, a gap exists in research around femvertising being used in a developing country such as South Africa.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceived role of femvertising in retail fashion customer brand preference amongst South African female customers.

Research was conducted across three South African fashion retailers, with twenty-one participants in total. It was found that femvertising does play a role in retail fashion customer brand preference. The study revealed that diversity, inclusivity, female empowerment, body positivity and racial inclusion are all important criteria for a successfully received femvert within the South African market.

The findings contribute to academia and offer insight into femvertising for marketing practitioners, agencies, and retailers. The study also sets out recommendations for further research in the field.

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Chapter 1: Research Proposal

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextualisation

Femvertising can be defined as a form of pro-female advertising that is created by businesses in an effort to empower women (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017). The word femvertising arises from the combination of the word's female, empowerment and advertising (Hunt, 2017). The dawn of the concept of femvertising dates back several years (Herby, 2016). However, in recent years there has been a rise in the amount of pro-female advertising, and this has created an increase in conversations around femvertising and its effects on its target markets (Abitbol, 2016).

Historically, advertising has depicted females in what is regarded as a sexist manner (Gill, 2008). The traditional portrayal of women in advertising often spoke to orthodox portrayals of gender roles and imagery that disempowered females (Herby, 2016). These gender roles and orthodox imagery saw advertisements created that portrayed women as sexual objects, with advertisers using the traditional rationale of "sex sells" (Zawisza, 2018). This has occurred across several industries for years with the most famous example being from luxury brand Dolce and Gabbana who have continuously been scrutinised for depicting females in advertising with imagery of them being dominated by men (Blanco, 2018). An example of this type of advertising by Dolce and Gabbana would be their controversial shoot from 2007 in which they showcased their products on a woman with a man on top of her whilst three other men watched (Gordon, 2017).

In 1975, researchers McArthur and Resko conducted a study in which they explored the portrayal of both men and women in advertising (McArthur & Beth, 1975). They concluded the study by describing the portrayal of women as highly concerning (McArthur & Beth, 1975). The next significant milestone in the emergence of femvertising arose in 1994 when Dove released their campaign for real beauty (Herby, 2016). This campaign was seen as one of the pioneering campaigns in femvertising and many brands have employed similar femvertising strategies ever since (Herby, 2016). The change from traditional images of women in advertising to the contemporary images of women shown through femvertising evolved from the rise in the need for change in how women are depicted in media (Grau, 2016). Women are the world's most powerful customers driving approximately 70-80% of customer purchases and their influence is increasingly growing every year (Bloomberg, 2018). The rise of third wave feminism and resistance against woman's rights by some politicians around the world has resulted in a cultural shift amongst females becoming more and more independent and questioning the way they are depicted in the public domain (Aune & Holyoak, 2017). This study will set out to explore the perceived role of femvertising in retail fashion customer brand preference.

1.2. Rationale

Gender based violence (GBV) is a prominent issue within South Africa (Dlamini, 2021). Gender based violence can be defined as violence that is targeted at a specific group of people due to their gender and within South Africa this violence is targeted towards women and children (Colombini, et al., 2021). This has resulted in a rise in feminism within South Africa as women have begun to stand together against the rise in GBV cases (Dlamini, 2021).

The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States of America was seen as the beginning of many major shifts in society (Strom & Martin, 2017). The shifts included a rise in feminism amongst the American public and celebrities around the world (Strom & Martin, 2017). These individuals began to stand together in solidarity against the new laws and regulations proposed by President Donald Trump, which would decrease woman's rights in America (Setzler & Yanus, 2018). The involvement of American celebrities in feminist activism resulted in the launch of feminism becoming a part of mainstream pop culture, thus increasing femvertising amongst major brands aiming to get involved (Acharya & Ristimäki, 2019).

The rise of feminism and femvertising internationally has influenced the South African market extensively (Zawisza, 2018). Being a fairly new concept means that there is a minimal amount of research conducted around the concept of femvertising and its perceived relationship to brand preference (Varghese & Kumar, 2020).

This study aimed to contribute to academia whilst simultaneously being available to practitioners in the branding and communication industry when making reference to femvertising. The study aimed to gain greater insights into the concept of femvertising and its potential influence on retail fashion customer brand preference in a developing country such as South Africa.

1.3. Problem Statement

Femvertising is a concept that is used to describe advertising that empowers women, and it is on the rise (Herby, 2016). Due to the international and now local social trend of feminism, there has been a rise in brands participating in empowering women through Femvertising.

Brands are increasingly starting to use pro-female story lines in their advertisements as a new way of reaching their female customers (Herby, 2016). Due to the contemporary nature of femvertising a problem existed in that there was a lack of research around the perceived relationship between femvertising and retail fashion brand preference across industries (Erasmus, 2018). Furthermore, there was a lack of research around femvertising being used in a developing country such as South Africa (Baer, 2015).

1.4. Purpose Statement

Femvertising is a fairly new concept, and therefore, businesses are at a disadvantage as there is little research around the topic (Baer, 2015).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceived role of femvertising in retail fashion customer brand preference amongst South African, female customers.

This study wished to add to the current limited amount of research done on femvertising, particularly in a developing country such as South Africa. The research also aimed at informing businesses within the South African market by providing them with research on the topic.

1.5. Research Questions

The researcher set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What perceived effect does femvertising have on retail fashion customer brand preference?
2. Why do retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising?
3. How does brand loyalty towards the retailer affect the perceived relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?
4. How does the customers age influence the perceived relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?
5. What level of retail fashion customer brand preference is created through femvertising?

1.6. Research Objectives

The research had the following objectives:

1. To explore whether femvertising has a perceived effect on retail fashion customer brand preference.
2. To explore whether retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising.
3. To explore if the brand loyalty towards the fashion retailer has perceived effects on the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.
4. To explore the perceived level of retail fashion customer brand preference that is created through femvertising.

2. Literature Review

This literature review will consist of four main topics: feminism, femvertising, brand loyalty and customer brand preference. These topics have been explored further to identify any existing literature on these topics as well as any gaps in knowledge that may have existed.

2.1. Conceptualisation

The following key terms, concepts and variables have been defined below as these concepts were further explored in the next section of this proposal.

Femvertising- Femvertising can be defined as a form of pro-female advertising that is created by businesses in an effort to empower women (Sky, 2015).

Feminists- Oxford dictionary defines the word “Feminist” as someone who is an advocate for the beliefs that women should have equal rights and opportunities as men (Abdallah, et al., 2018).

Brand Loyalty- Brand loyalty is said to be a social construct that showcases a customer’s bias towards one particular product or brand over another (Ishak, 2014).

Customer brand preference- Brand preference can be defined as when a customer consistently picks one brand over other brands unless that brand is unavailable (Cant & van Heerden, 2017).

2.2. Review of Literature

2.2.1 Feminism

As feminism is an important variable in this study, it is important that an assessment of the current literature around this topic is conducted. A feminist can be defined as someone who advocates and stands up for the rights of women (Abdallah, et al., 2018). Upon conducting research on the topic of feminism, there is a range of research done across many different fields. Molony and Nelson (2017), Schuster (2015), Aune and Holyoak (2017) and Thorpe and Toffoletti (2017) are seminal authors who have all researched feminism in their respective fields.

A commonality observed amongst the literature by these authors is that millennials have brought about a generational change (Thorpe & Toffoletti, 2017) (Aune & Holyoak, 2017) (Molony & Nelson, 2017). This generational change is known as third-wave feminism (Molony & Nelson, 2017). The wave theory surrounding feminism has been frequently studied and scrutinised by scholars conducting research in the feminist field (Evans, 2014). The feminist wave theory looks at dividing feminism into three main waves, mainly first-wave, second-wave and third-wave feminism (Evans, 2014).

These waves symbolise a change in thought around what it means to be a feminist and can be directly linked to the zeitgeist and generational views of feminists during a particular period of time (Schuster, 2015). The current generation of feminists led by millennials is third-wave feminism (Schuster, 2015). Third-wave feminism shows a shift in the thought of feminists and is characterized around breaking down the barriers of existing ideals around gender and sexuality as well as redefining what it means to be a female (Thorpe & Toffoletti, 2017). Redefining what it means to be female is shown by third-wave feminists who embrace the complexity of being female and proudly showcase what was once known as their imperfections, such as stretch marks and cellulite (Keller, 2012).

In a South African context, studies regarding feminism are not researched on as large a scale as global feminism. Researchers such as Macleod, Bohmke, Mavuso, Barker & Malvern (2018), Benya (2017), Orton (2016) and Thurman (2008) are South African researchers who have conducted studies around feminism in South Africa. Their studies are centred around the current struggles of South African women, which include inequality, female gender-based violence and abuse (Macleod, et al., 2018). These studies show that

although South African feminists are a part of the third-wave generation they are still very much fighting more archaic battles for females to have basic human rights such as safety and equality (Benya, 2017).

2.2.2 Femvertising

Femvertising can be defined as advertising that is aimed at empowering females (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017). Upon conducting research around the topic of femvertising, there is a multitude of recent studies conducted. Researchers such as Couture (2017), Akestam and Rosengren (2017), Abitbol (2019), Hsu (2017), Mamuric (2018), Kapoor and Munjal (2019) and Feng and Chen (2019) have all conducted research around femvertising. It is seen that most of these researchers were interested in investigating femvertising, the factors that contributed to its rise, as well as the effects of femvertising on female customers.

In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of brands using femvertising (Feng & Chen, 2019). Femvertising has been used as a way for marketers to market their products whilst still aiming to be socially responsible by using feminism as a way of communicating with customers (Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). The most common aim of femvertising by brands has been said to create pro-female imagery of women in advertising to redress the gender stereotypes of advertising in the past (Mamuric, 2018). Brands have also set out to inspire women with these adverts and encourage the ideas of third-wave feminists to embrace their imperfections and differences (Mamuric, 2018).

Amongst the current literature available on femvertising, a commonality stood out in that the rise in femvertising has been a result of many different contributors (Abitbol, 2016). One contributor who has been said to be the most influential factor in persuading marketers to advertise in this manner has been the rise in female buying power around the world (Hsu, 2017). This rise in female buying power has been a direct result of an increase in educated females and females entering the labour force giving them the resources to make their own purchasing decisions (Feng & Chen, 2019). The increase in females entering the labour force also means that there has been an increase in females working in the marketing environment (Hsu, 2017). This has, in turn, resulted in gender equality in the workplace and has allowed females in the marketing sector to voice their opinions on the portrayal of women in advertising and the need for change (Abitbol, 2016). Another driving force for femvertising has been the increased use of social media by customers (Couture, 2017). Researchers found that the use of social media by females allowed them to pressure businesses into making a change by emphasising their disapproval of the portrayal of women in advertising through social media (Hsu, 2017).

In studies conducted to understand the effect of femvertising on customers, there is a variation of results received. In Feng and Chen's (2019) study they found that the participants of their study reacted both positively and negatively to femvertising (Feng & Chen, 2019). The participants that reacted positively found that the advertisements were empowering and encouraged pro-female imagery in advertising whereas the participants that reacted negatively felt that femvertising was just another way that brands were trying to manipulate customers into buying their products (Feng & Chen, 2019). On the other hand, in a study conducted by Akestam and Rosengren (2017), they were able to test the effects

of femvertising on female participants across different media and they found the results to be consistent across all platforms (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017). The effects observed were that their participants found that femvertising was less stereotypical than traditional advertising (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017). The participants also showed a lower advertisement reaction and a higher advertisement attitude towards the femvertising (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017).

Although there is evidence of literature and research around femvertising, a gap in literature was identified. This gap indicates that there is a lack of research conducted around femvertising and its perceived influence on customer buying preference. Another gap exists in that there is a further lack of research conducted on femvertising in a developing country such as South Africa (Erasmus, 2018).

2.2.3 Brand Preference

Brand preference can be defined as when a customer consistently picks one brand over other brands unless that brand is unavailable (Cant & van Heerden, 2017). Researchers such as Ebrahim (2013), Banerjee (2016), Lieven and Grohmann (2015), Hwang and Cho (2019), Roy and Malhotra (2018) and Miao and Pingping (2018) have all conducted research on brand preference in their respective fields.

Brand Preference is said to be a level of brand loyalty that is constantly evolving (Cant & van Heerden, 2017). The recent evolution in the study of brand preference is due to a shift in customer thinking (Ebrahim, 2013). Researchers have found that there is a visible shift in brand preferences as it is no longer about tangible brand attributes for the customer but rather about experiences that different brands can offer their customers in order to create a preference (Hwang & Cho, 2019). In a study by Hwang and Cho (2019), it was found that customers who have positive experiences with brands are more likely to choose that brand over another, thus creating a brand preference (Hwang & Cho, 2019).

Literature shows that there are four main types of customer brand preference: actual preference, meta-preference, true preference and unrestrained preference (Ebrahim, 2013). Actual preference is when a customer appreciates and creates a need for a product or service of the brand (Ebrahim, 2013). Meta-preference is a customer preference due to a customer preferring a brand over another due to consistent behavioural actions that see the customer doing something over and over, which builds a preference (Tomer, 1996). True preference is what will be the most correct brand for the customer based on the attributes of the product or service and the customers' needs and wants (Ebrahim, 2013). Lastly, unrestrained preference is the brands that will satisfy the lowest needs of the customer (Ebrahim, 2013).

As stated above, customer brand preferences are when customers pick a brand over another (Cant & van Heerden, 2017). Picking a brand over another is as a result of a biased position towards that brand and these positions can either be from a holistic response or cognitive response (Hwang & Cho, 2019). A holistic response is due to the level at which a customer likes a brand and cognitive response refers to a deeper emotional connection with a brand due to perceived added value from that brand (Ebrahim, 2013).

In reviewing literature on customer brand preference, it is evident that there is a sufficient number of studies conducted on the theory regarding brand preference. The literature regarding the types of brand preference and biased positions that lead to brand preference are important factors to take into consideration when investigating this concept. These theories will, therefore, be used in this study to investigate the relationship between customer brand preferences and femvertising. Whilst conducting this literature review, it was, however, identified that a gap in literature exists between the perceived relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference making this study of value to the marketing industry in South Africa and around the world (Erasmus, 2018).

2.2.4 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty can be defined as a customer's commitment to making repeat purchases from a brand (Lee, Moon & Kim, 2015). Brand loyalty is said to be a social construct that showcases a customer's bias towards one particular product or brand over another (Ishak, 2014). There are many studies conducted around the topic of Brand Loyalty which include studies by researchers such as Pedeliento, Andreini & Bergamaschi (2015), Lee, Moon & Kim (2015), Ishak (2014), Ordun (2015) and Krystallis & Chrysochou (2014). These researchers have all conducted studies around brand loyalty in their respective fields of research. Their studies are based on exploring and gaining a greater understanding of brand loyalty, what creates it as well as what impact it has on businesses.

A commonality identified amongst these studies is that brand loyalty is said to have two main types, these being attitudinal and behavioural loyalty (Kuo & Feng, 2013). Behavioural loyalty refers to a loyalty that stems out of a customer's habitual repeat purchasing of a product over a period of time (Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014). Alternatively, attitudinal loyalty is said to be a deeper loyalty that is rooted in an emotional connection created with the brand that influences the customer to buy their products over another (Chahal & Bala, 2010). This influence is also known as customer brand preference (Ordun, 2015). Thus, this study will be based on an understanding that customer brand preference forms a part of attitudinal type of brand loyalty (Chahal & Bala, 2010).

3. Methodology

Methodology can be defined as specific procedures taken during a study in order to obtain further information around the topic and answer the research questions (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This section of the report sets out the research design, research plan, population and sampling, data collection method and data analysis method of this research.

3.1. Research Design

This research took on an exploratory approach. Exploratory research is conducted when there is a lack of research around a topic or a lack of understanding around certain facets of a topic (Hunter & McCallum, 2018). This approach was most suitable as this research set

out to explore femvertising and its perceived relationship with customer brand preferences in a South African market where there was little research conducted on this topic.

Paradigms can be defined as a certain view of the world or way of thinking (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). They are about patterns of behaviour and regulations set out around these patterns (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research was based on the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm is based on the belief that the reactions of participants changes based on the times and certain circumstances that surround them (Taylor & Medina, 2013). This paradigm was best suited for this research as it enabled the researcher to explore whether the perceived effects of femvertising differ in a South African context.

In research, there is three main conceptual approaches, mainly quantitative, qualitative and mixed method (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data in order to create generalisations that can be used to answer the research questions (Babbie, 2010). Alternatively, qualitative research is less numerical and rather focuses on exploring the motives, beliefs, and opinions around a topic (Denzin & Yvonna, 2005). Mixed method is a conceptual approach where researchers combine the quantitative and qualitative approaches in their research to gain both numerical data and a deeper understanding of motives, beliefs, and opinions around their topic (Trefry, 2019). This research took on the qualitative approach as it seeks to explore the opinions and perceptions around femvertising in the South African marketplace.

Both primary and secondary research was conducted during this study. Primary research was conducted on participants by the researcher as it allowed the researcher to collect specific information that was beneficial to the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Secondary research was conducted in order to gain a greater contextualisation around the topic of femvertising during the initial stages of this research (Maree, 2016).

Research has two main approaches for reasoning, these include inductive and deductive research (Soiferman, 2010). Inductive reasoning occurs in research where there is an observation and generalisations are drawn from these observations (Hyde, 2000). Deductive reasoning shows researchers starting with generalisations and then exploring whether these generalisations occur in certain instances (Hyde, 2000). As this research was qualitative in design and wished to explore the perceived relationship between femvertising and customer brand preference, the researcher worked inductively. This aided the researcher in assessing commonalities amongst reactions towards femvertising, thus gathering generalisations around the topic and ultimately addressing the research objectives of this study.

This research was conducted through in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were conducted around three South African fashion retailers who sell multiple brands across their retail channels. The research focused on the main retailer's brand and not the brand sold within the retailers. The interviews were aimed at twenty-one customers that were exposed to examples of the chosen retailers' femvertising efforts. Across the three retailers, seven interviews took place per retailer, making it a total of twenty-one interviews conducted during this study. Seven interviews per retailer meant that the researcher reached saturation level. Interviews were conducted on the target market of the femvertising adverts in order to gain a greater understanding into whether femvertising has a perceived effect on retail fashion customer brand preference; whether retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising; whether the brand loyalty towards the fashion retailer affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference;

whether the customers age affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference; and lastly whether the customers race affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.

3.2. Research Methodology

3.2.1 Unit of Analysis

A unit of analysis defines what the researcher will be studying (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The unit of analysis that was most suitable for this study was the perceptions of female customers, as this research aims to explore the perceived relationship between femvertising and customer brand preference which is a social construct aimed at customers. This study used the perceptions of female customers as a unit of analysis as females are the target audience for femvertising and also make up a greater percentage of the target market of the South African fashion retail environment.

3.2.2 Population and Sampling

3.2.2.1 Population

A population can be defined as a group of desirable individuals that need to be studied in order to address the research objectives of the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research had one desired population as this study aimed to focus on the customer perspective.

The population of the customers was South African females who regularly interacted with South African retail fashion brands and who had been exposed to femvertising by these brands in the last five years. For the purpose of this study, there were no limitations on the age of the participants nor the race. This allowed the researcher to observe the varying opinions around femvertising amongst different age groups and races.

Conducting a study with one main population allowed for this to be a more focused study that enabled the researcher to understand the perceived relationship between femvertising and customer brand preference from the perspective of females who have viewed femvertising.

3.2.2.2 Sampling

Sampling can be defined as a selected group of individuals that will represent a larger population in a study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Sampling has two main categories, probability and non-probability sampling (Maree, 2016). This research used non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is a method used in qualitative research and can be

defined as non-random sampling that sees the researcher subjectively selecting certain individuals to be a part of the study, making it the most suitable for this research (Maree, 2016).

Within non-probability sampling, there are six types of sampling methods. These include quota, snowball, purposive, accidental, volunteer and convenience sampling (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research utilised the purposive sampling method. The purposive sampling method refers to a population being chosen due to the judgement and selection of the researcher (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The researcher utilised this method as they had wide access to the studies population and were able to approach individuals that they knew.

The sample size was twenty-one in-depth interviews. These twenty-one interviews consisted of seven interviews per retailer, as discussed in the methodology section.

3.2.3 Data Collection Method

Qualitative data collection can be conducted through focus groups, in-depth interviews, non-reactive and non-obtrusive data collection methods (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research used in-depth interviews as a data collection method.

In-depth interviews were conducted as they allowed the researcher to pose questions to the sample in order to gain a deeper understanding of the opinions and beliefs of these individuals (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The in-depth interview allowed the researcher to have an informal conversation with the participants in which she was able to ask them open-ended questions and probe further questions in order to gain as much information from the participants as possible (Maree, 2016). This was the most effective data collection method for this research as it allowed the researcher to ask specific questions that helped obtain the objectives of the research and helped the researcher gain a greater understanding of the perceived relationship between femvertising and customer brand preferences.

The in-depth interviews took place in a quiet, agreed upon setting that both the researcher and participant was comfortable with and was between 45 and 60 minutes in duration. The participant was asked to sign a consent form agreeing to be a part of the study and being voice recorded. The interviews were recorded using a recording device in order to ensure the validity of the data collected. The researcher also had a notebook for note-taking during the interviews and read the interview questions from a printed document. Both the voice recording, and note-taking helped aid the researcher in the coding and analysis phase of this research.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, trustworthiness and confirmability were important factors to consider. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher remained transparent in all facets of the study. Confirmability was ensured by making sure that the researcher remained objective at all times during the study and that the research findings were based on the beliefs and opinions of the participants and were not tainted by the beliefs and options of the researcher.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis can be defined as the method used to analyse the data collected by the researcher in order to gather findings and address the research objectives of the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The data analysis method that was used during this study was the thematic analysis method. The thematic analysis method can be defined as a qualitative data analysis method that is used to identify common patterns and themes amongst the data collected from participants of the study (Maree, 2016).

The recorded interviews were transcribed. These transcribed interviews were then coded, and the researcher then started to develop codes based on pattern recognition within the interviews. Through the patterns recognised, the researcher then used their discrepancy to prioritise the patterns identified in order to extract the most essential information from the interviews to help aid the answering of the research questions for this study. The pattern recognition and analysis were done by means of the research system, Atlas. This system assisted the researcher in creating an organised way of conducting a thematic analysis.

This data analysis method was the most effective as it allowed the researcher to compare and find commonalities amongst the opinions and beliefs of the participants around the perceived preference femvertising has created between these retailers and their customers.

4. Limitations

The following limitations were identified as possible constraints that could have affected the viability of this study:

- Access to a large enough sample group as the data collection method was through in-depth interviews, which were lengthy therefore making individuals more reluctant to participate.
- A lack of previous research conducted around femvertising in the South African market as this could have added to the theoretical framework from which this study was based upon.
- This research was confined to the retail fashion sector and therefore cannot be automatically generalised across other retail segments in terms of the findings.
- This research was conducted during the Covid 19 pandemic, which limited the researchers access to the sample group. The nationwide lockdowns also meant that the researcher had a legal obligation to conduct the research remotely, where possible.

5. Chapter Outline

The following formed as the chapter outline for this study.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter served as a comprehensive introduction to this study. The introduction consisted of contextualisation, a rationale, problem statement, and research objectives and research questions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This section formed a part of the secondary research conducted during this study. Literature was reviewed regarding the topics of feminism, femvertising, customer brand performance and brand loyalty as these topics form the theoretical framework on which this study was based.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This section set out the methodology that was used in this study as well as details regarding the population, sample, data collection method and data analysis.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

In this section, the data collected was analysed by means of thematic analysis. This section also included an interpretation of this analysis and findings.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Finally, this section summarised the entire study, the findings from the study as well as recommendations for further research and implications for practitioners.

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important part of research as it ensures the integrity of the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The following were ethical considerations of this study.

The researcher did not view this study as harmful to herself, the three chosen fashion retailers or the participants. Participation of all participants was on a voluntary basis, and consent of participation in the study as well as to be voice recorded was required. The participants were made aware of the objectives of the research and were allowed to request a copy of the research once it had been completed. The participant remained anonymous, and their information was kept confidential throughout the study. The participants had the right to withdraw at any time if they wished and without consequences.

The researcher obtained ethical approval from the IIE postgraduate committee, following the successful defence of the research proposal.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review will consist of four main topics: feminism, femvertising, brand loyalty and customer brand preference. These topics have been explored further to identify existing literature on these topics as well as any gaps in knowledge that may have existed.

The literature review helped guide the study and understanding around critical concepts within the study.

1. Feminism

A feminist can be described as someone who is an advocate for the belief that women should have equal rights and opportunities as men (Abdallah, et al., 2018). Whilst conducting research, it is, however, evident that this definition is very basic as feminism involves more complexity and cannot simply be summed up in one sentence (Peng & Yu, 2015). Feminism is a complex and multi-faceted social construct (Hall, 2020). Within feminism, there have been different stages (or waves) that have been influenced by the zeitgeist of a certain era which can be classified as the wave theory (Evans, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the literature review will focus on the feminist wave theory, millennial's role in feminism as well as feminism in a South African context.

1.1 Feminist Wave theory

Historically feminism has always been present, and there has always been the questioning of discrimination and inequality that women around the world experience based on their gender (Bonifacio, 2018). In assessing the feminist movements, there have been different distinct stages that have been characterised by the zeitgeist of different generations of feminists (Gillis & Howie, 2017). These distinct stages are also referred to as different feminist 'waves' (Evans, 2014).

Literature sees the first wave of feminism as one of the first major feminist movements that have been documented in history (Munro, 2013). Before this feminism had existed, however, it was not until first wave feminism in the mid-nineteenth century that these feminists began forming a more organised movement (Kinser, 2004). The first wave of feminism was attributed to the need to fight for women's rights to legally vote in political elections as well as the right to ownership of property, right to guardianship of their children and, right to wages (Munro, 2013). This resulted in the Seneca Falls Conventions, which was the first women's rights convention ever held and was organised to address the lack of civil rights for women (Kinser, 2004). This convention was a pinnacle point in feminism and paved the way for many more feminist gatherings and the fight for further social, civil and moral rights for women (Kinser, 2004).

The term 'Second wave' Feminism was coined to illustrate that the first wave had ended in the 1920s (Munro, 2013). This gave second-wave feminists room to reinvent and evolve their beliefs and values whilst still carrying forward certain beliefs and values that were developed by the first waves (Kinser, 2004). The need for the second movement stemmed from the sudden dormancy of feminism (Munro, 2013). It was a way for women in the 60's to reinitiate the fight for these rights by working on the basis and foundation of the first wave movement. Second-wave feminists often used the phrase "the personal is political" (Munro,

2013). This was their way of expressing the constant sexism and inequality they had still been experiencing in their everyday lives (Munro, 2013). Literature notes that their main priority was their focus on equality and discrimination. The second wave feminists wished to gain further rights beyond the enfranchisement of women that was gained during the first wave (Bonifacio, 2018). The movement was aimed at addressing issues that women were facing in their private lives, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment and gender-based violence (Kinser, 2004).

Third-wave feminism occurred around the mid-80s (Kinser, 2004). According to literature, the movement was formed against the second wave feminist rather than as a continuation of this movement (Mann & Huffman, 2005). The third wave feminists wanted to address the wrongdoings of the second wave in order to make the movement more diverse and inclusive (Mann & Huffman, 2005). This diversity and inclusivity spanned to include different women of colour and ethnicities and their rights which were noted as not prioritised in the previous waves (Baker, 2013). Literature states that third-wave feminists were characterized around breaking down the barriers of existing ideals around gender and sexuality as well as redefining what it means to be a female (Thorpe & Toffoletti, 2017). Third-wave feminists are noted for embracing the complexity of women and having a non-judgemental stance towards other women and their sexuality, race, or gender preferences (Thorpe & Toffoletti, 2017). Literature around third-wave feminism also identifies this wave as the first-time feminism was identified as being a part of pop culture (Aune & Holyoak, 2017). It is for this reason that a rift between the second wave and third wave feminists began to form a second-wave feminist began to feel like the severity of the issues were being commercialised by pop culture (Aune & Holyoak, 2017).

Studies show that feminism is currently moving towards a fourth wave as feminists adapt to the zeitgeist of the times (Chamberlain, 2017). One of the major characteristics of the fourth wave is the digitalisation and online presence of feminist activism (Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2018). This fourth wave has been said to be led by millennials who, through social media, are able to connect and spread awareness amongst friends and even strangers 24/7 through their access to social media (Chen, 2018). Research shows that millennials are a generation most open to social change and the difference of people amongst the human race (Chen, 2018). This openness to change and inherently the need for this change has brought about this generation of feminists who, in fact, prefer not to define themselves as feminists as they see the notion of feminism and how it was historically represented as “anti-male” (Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). Technology helped women build a strong online presence for feminism, and this presence allowed women greater access to the feminist movements as well as to the information that would better inform them around the current female battles across the world (Zimmerman, 2017). The fourth wave is said to be very much a revival of earlier battles fought by the previous feminist movements (Rampton, 2019). Issues such as rape, gender-based violence and pressures to conform to an “ideal” body image have become a part of mainstream media and the commercial environment as a part of this movement (Rampton, 2019). Literature notes that the fourth wave of feminism is still ongoing and thus far has been noted for its intersectionality and inclusivity of different races, genders and sexual orientations, which were overlooked or ignored by previous movements (Maloney, 2017).

It is important to note that although literature makes reference to the ‘wave’ theories as a way of sectionalising the different periods of feminism in history, there are some authors who scrutinise using these theories (Dean & Aune, 2015). The reason for the scrutiny against the waves is largely due to authors believing that the waves create a generational divide between feminists and allude to them as being mutually exclusive (Evans &

Chamberlain, 2014). Another reason researchers have scrutinised the wave theories is because these theories also speak of periods of time in which the feminist movement was dormant, which some argue is incorrect as there was still action being taken during this time (Evans, 2014). Taking this into consideration, this study will use the feminist wave theories as a theoretical background for the study, however, it will not influence the way in which the study is conducted.

1.2 Feminism in South Africa

Feminism in South Africa has been an ongoing struggle that has required activism for a multitude of years (Kemp, Madlala, Moodley & Salo, 1995). In a South African context, studies regarding feminism are not researched on as large a scale as global feminism. Researchers such as Kemp (1995), Wittman (2012), Parashar (2014), Thurman (2008) and Gouw (2012) are South African researchers who have conducted studies around feminism in South Africa. Their feminist studies largely look at the history of feminism in South Africa, as well as the current struggles of South African women, which include inequality, female gender-based violence and abuse (Macleod, Bohmke, Mavuso, Barker & Malvern, 2018).

When reviewing the history of feminism in South Africa, it is important to contextualise the history in terms of Apartheid which is a large part of South African history (Wittmann, 2012). Apartheid was a period of time in South Africa where legislation was promulgated that promoted the segregation and inequality of non-white individuals within the country (Parashar, 2014). It is, however, importantly noted amongst researchers that gender inequality was a large part of Apartheid as women still lacked basic rights during these times (Parashar, 2014). During apartheid, women had become a part of the fight against the apartheid government both on the ground as well as politically and militarily (Steyn, 1998). It was during this time that South African women had begun to prove themselves as vital parts of society (Steyn, 1998). Researchers note that once talks began to start regarding a revision of the legislation these women, who had been fighting for freedom, made a point of including revised women's rights and gender demands as part of the new constitution of South Africa (Wittmann, 2012). These rights were written into the constitution and post-apartheid women had been given greater political and human rights within the country (Wittmann, 2012).

Researchers note that, despite there being twenty-six years since apartheid ended, there are still major feminist issues within South Africa (Britton, 2006). One of these issues includes gender-based violence, which has put South Africa high up on the ranks of international rape and sexual violence incidences (Britton, 2006). Although having been present for multiple years, the topic of gender-based violence became a common topic of discussion in South Africa in 2019 (Kempen, 2019). This increase in conversation was due to the rape of nineteen-year-old, Uyinene Mrwetyana who was raped and murdered at a post office in South Africa (Kempen, 2019). This tragic event brought about an increase in conversations around gender-based violence in South Africa (Kempen, 2019). These conversations led to many protests around the country, where women stood together to create awareness around gender-based violence and how this has affected the quality of living for women in the country (van Heijden, Abraham & Harried, 2019).

These protests in 2019 were, however, not the first sign of a new wave of South African feminism in recent years (Seidman, 2018). In 2017, many South African gathered at

universities to protest against the price of university fees in South Africa with the #FeesMustFall and #FreeEducation campaigns (Gouws, 2017). It was at these protests that young, female protest leaders were beginning to identify themselves as intersectional feminists (Gouws, 2017). Intersectional feminism can be defined as feminism that wishes to separate itself from white feminism and rather identify that women face different realities due to their race, class and circumstance (Gökarıksel & Smith, 2017). This has been identified by researchers as the first introduction to a new wave of feminism in South Africa which has been present within society ever since (Gouws, 2017). Since then, young South African students have set up many protests demonstrating against the rape culture in South Africa and particularly in South African universities, which are often overlooked by university management (Shefer, 2019).

Through identifying pivotal moments in South African feminist history and current feminist movements in South Africa, there is evidence that South African feminism is an important societal need currently within the country (Seidman, 2018). This study will use the above information of the different feminist waves, South African feminist history and the current happenings in feminism in South Africa to provide a background on the topic for the research to be conducted.

2. Femvertising

Femvertising can be defined as advertising that is aimed at empowering females (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017). Femvertising has become a way for brands to connect with their female customer, and this type of advertising is being used around the world (Sternadori & Abitbol, 2018). Femvertising has been categorised as a type of social movement marketing aimed at redressing the way women were previously portrayed in media (Abitbol, 2016). Brands have also set out to inspire women with these adverts and encourage the ideas of third-wave feminists to embrace their imperfections and differences (Mamuric, 2018). For the purpose of this study, the literature review will focus on defining femvertising; the historical portrayal of women in media; contributors to the rise in femvertising; and understanding the effects of femvertising on customers, and lastly, criticism that femvertising has received.

2.1 The Historical Portrayal of Women in Media

The portrayal of women in media has been studied for many years. Authors such as Plakoyiannaki (2008), Theodoridis (2013), Zawisza (2018), and O'Driscoll (2018) have all conducted research into the stereotyping portrayed against women in advertising. Their research spans over a number of topics involving the portrayal of women in media which includes gender stereotyping in advertising; the perceptions of men and women on the stereotyping in advertising; as well as the need for change in the way women are portrayed in media.

Advertising has a great influence on the way people think and the shaping of their thoughts on certain topics (O'Driscoll, 2018). This is why there is great importance and responsibility for marketers and brands to portray their adverts in as sensitive a way as possible (Theodoridis, 2013). Historically, women have often been portrayed in the media as inferior to men (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2008). For years women have been portrayed as either sexual objects or housewives (Zawisza, Luyt & Zawadska, 2019). Women are often over-

sexualised in advertising showing women in short skirts and cleavage-bearing shirts falling over men in order to sell products (O'Driscoll, 2018). These advertisements are either aimed at women who believe that that is the way they should dress and behave to get a man or aimed at men who would like women falling over them in this manner (O'Driscoll, 2018). Researchers also note that adverts have often portrayed women as weak and vulnerable without the guidance of men, and this left little room for idolising women in advertisements (Gordon, 2017). In the case of being portrayed as housewives, for years, women have been the target market for food and household items (Gordon, 2017). These advertisements further reiterated the sexist and archaic idea that women should do the cooking and cleaning in their homes, and that is their primary role in families (Gordon, 2017).

Well known examples of major fashion brands that have been criticised for their sexist advertisements are Dolce and Gabbana, Saint Lauren and American Apparel (Christoforou, 2015). Dolce and Gabbana are famously known for their 2007 advertisement, which was said to portray a 'gang rape' (Christoforou, 2015). This advertisement showed a woman in a bathing suit being pinned down by a half-naked man whilst other topless men surround her (Roy & Gangopadhyay, 2012). People of the public were said to be outraged by the insinuations of the advertisement's (Roy & Gangopadhyay, 2012). In a study conducted by Roy and Gangopadhyay (2012), it is stated that advertisements like this have a negative effect on young women's self-image as well as how they view their role in society.

Similarly, Saint Lauren was condemned for their Spring 2017 advertisement campaign, which had female models displayed in a highly sexual manner (Naisbayeva, Massalimova & Kuanyshbekovna, 2018). The Saint Lauren advertisement was said to portray the models in submissive sexual positions that displayed sexist stereotypes about the role women play in relationships (Dray, 2019). Much like Saint Lauren, American Apparel has similarly used seductive poses and hyper-sexualised images of women in their advertisements for years (Bryla & Gruczynska, 2018). Upon observing a timeline of American Apparel advertisements, many researchers noticed that their advertisements became increasingly revealing over time and have always had sexist undertones using the female body to sexualise their campaign (Bryla & Gruczynska, 2018). Their advertising campaigns often contain nudity followed by suggestive commentary (Filopoulos, 2016). In a study conducted on Millennials in Poland by Bryla and Gruczynska (2018), the participants of the study stated that they found the American Apparel advertisements of a distasteful and provocative nature. In conclusion, the study deemed a need for change in advertising and the sexism present within it (Bryla & Gruczynska, 2018).

Researchers state that it is important to note that these historical portrayals of women in advertisements are still utilised by brands and businesses today (O'Driscoll, 2018). One example of a major brand that has recently portrayed women in a sexist manner was Volkswagen in their 2019 e-Golf commercial (Hilder, 2019). The advertisement shows both extraordinary and ordinary tasks being achieved (Smith, 2019). The extraordinary tasks include camping on the side of a mountain, floating around in space and a disabled person doing the high jump in prosthetic legs (Smith, 2019). It is important to note that all these extraordinary tasks are completed by men within this advertisement (Hilder, 2019). In contrast, the advertisements also show mediocre everyday tasks being performed which include making a sandwich, doing the laundry, and lastly, sitting on a bench with a pram (Smith, 2019). These ordinary tasks are all conducted by women, clearly highlighting the suggested gender roles portrayed in the advertisement (Johnson, 2019). This advertisement by such a major international brand clearly shows that sexism within advertising still exists (Johnson, 2019). It is for this reason that the Advertising Standards Authority removed the

advertisement on the grounds that they believed the advertisement was sexist and portrayed stereotypical gender roles (Hilder, 2019).

2.2. Contributors to the rise in Femvertising

While researching femvertising, the researcher found that multiple studies regarding femvertising had a focus on the contributing factors that have led to the rise in femvertising in recent years. Researchers such as Drake (2017), Perez & Gutierrez (2017), Herby (2016), Jalakas (2016), Rodrigues (2016) and Abitbol (2016) have all studied the contributors to the rise in femvertising in their respective fields. As femvertising is still a fairly new concept and way of thinking for marketers and brands, it was important that researchers analysed the contributing factors to the rise in this type of advertising (Jalakas, 2016).

A commonality amongst all the above researchers' studies is that one of the main contributing factors for the rise in femvertising is the increased spending power of female customers (Abitbol, 2016). In the past, women had little to no spending power within their households (Drake, 2017). As the number of educated females and females in the workplace has increased, women now have a much greater buying power than before (Pérez & Gutiérrez, 2017). Women now have greater economic power than the generations before them and marketers have acknowledged this by trying to appeal to this market (Drake, 2017). The rise in the number of women entering the workforce also means that there are now more women working within the marketing industry (Hsu, 2017). The marketing industry within America is made up of 63% females (Duggan, 2018). This in turn has also resulted in the change against the way women were commonly portrayed within advertisements as more females within the marketing industry are voicing their opinions and speaking out against sexism within advertising (Hsu, 2017).

Another main contributor to the rise in femvertising is said to be the access females have to social media platforms, which have been pivotal within fourth wave feminism (Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2018). Women all around the world have used social media as a platform to voice their opinions and share information around feminism and female empowerment (Herby, 2016). It was through creating these feminist communities online that brands were publicly beginning to be called out on the sexist ideas within their advertisement (Herby, 2016). Social media also became a place where individuals could openly discuss the negative impact that these advertisements were having on many women's self-image as well as men's image and expectations of women around the world due to the common sexist advertisements, they viewed (Rodrigues, 2016). Businesses began to take notice of the criticism they were receiving from the public regarding the type of advertisement's they put out, and thus, they began to make a change in their portrayal of women in advertising (Abitbol, 2016).

Lastly, many businesses have stated their reason for using femvertising as their social responsibility to their female customers. This contributor to the rise in femvertising can be identified by looking at the social issues addressed within current femvertising put out by brands (Herby, 2016). In a study conducted around the rise of femvertising, Herby (2016) discussed five key social issues that femvertisers are trying to address. The researcher was able to identify these five social issues by finding commonalities amongst the narratives within these advertisements (Herby, 2016). These examples include female diversity within advertising; messaging that is pro-female; address stereotypes and gender norms/roles; downplaying sexuality and; portraying women in an authentic manner (Herby, 2016).

2.3 Effects of Femvertising on customers

Once researchers understood the need and the contributing factors that led to the rise in femvertising, an increased curiosity on the effects femvertising had on its audience came into interest. This interest was also largely driven by brands (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017). These were brands that had or wanted to invest in femvertising and wanted to understand the effects they could have on their customers (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017).

Research around the effects of femvertising on customers has been conducted by a number of researchers. Acharya & Ristimäki (2019), Abdallah, Jacobson, Liasse & Lundt (2018), Sternadori & Abitbol (2020), van Deest & van der Stelt (2019), Feng (2019) and Sternadori (2018) have all conducted research around the effects of femvertising on customers within their respective fields.

These studies all conclude that femvertising has many different effects and reactions from customers, but commonalities do exist (Sternadori, 2018). A majority of the above-mentioned studies looked into the change of customers perceptions of a brand based on traditional advertisements versus femvertising. van Deest and van der Stelt (2019) conducted their research by exposing their participants to a sexist advertisement and gathering their opinions of the brand and thereafter a femvertised advertisement and analysed the difference in reactions. Upon conducting the research, they found that the effects of femvertising on customers were positive, and women felt more favourable towards brands who had portrayed pro-female imagery (van Deest & van der Stelt, 2019). This in turn, resulted in the participants having greater purchase intention towards brands who used femvertising (van Deest & van der Stelt, 2019). In another study, a similar conclusion was found, however, the study also noted that individuals that identified themselves as feminists also embraced the advertisements (Sternadori, 2018). It is important to note that although the feminist involved in this study embraced the femvertising, they cautioned against brands creating a generic narrative as this will eventually come off as an appropriation of feminism by brands (Sternadori & Abitbol, 2018).

In a study conducted by Acharya and Ristimäki (2019), the effects of femvertising within fashion advertisements were analysed. Within this study, the initial response towards femvertising was positive, and those who had a negative response to the femvertising stated their reasoning as confusion due to knowing how the brand previously conducted themselves (Acharya & Ristimäki, 2019). The participants stated that the femvertising examples used as stimuli within the study did not depict reality (Acharya & Ristimäki, 2019). It did, however, give the participants hope for a future where diversity and authenticity are praised within reality and not just advertisements (Acharya & Ristimäki, 2019).

The male participants who participated in this study noted that they did feel that the femvertising examples used were quite critical of men, and this affected their responses towards femvertising negatively (Acharya & Ristimäki, 2019). Similarly, in a study conducted by Abdallah, Jacobson & Liasse (2018), which aimed to understand the effects of femvertising on male customers, the participants noted that the execution of femvertising is detrimental to how men will react to this type of advertising. This study also showed that the male participants reacted positively towards femvertising and felt that more businesses and brands needed to move towards this type of equality within advertisement's (Abdallah, et al., 2018). They believed that femvertising could help rectify the social issues of gender inequality as these brands have large platforms from which they can reach greater audiences with these messages (Abdallah, et al., 2018).

Although there is a recent increase in the number of studies conducted around the effect of femvertising on its customers, there is still a lack of qualitative studies within this regard. These studies are also generic and do not focus on the effect of femvertising in specific industries besides the study conducted around the effects on the fashion industry (Acharya & Ristimäki, 2019). This lack of research provides further rationale for the need for this study to be conducted around the perceived relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preferences.

2.4 Criticism of Femvertising

Although there are vast amounts of evidence showing support for femvertising, it is important to note that femvertising has received its fair share of criticism since its emergence (Case, 2019).

In a femvertising study conducted by Jalakas (2016), the researcher noted that although the participants of the study reacted positively towards femvertising, they did feel that some of the imagery was paradoxical and that it was a way for businesses to make more money out of their customers. Many participants within femvertising studies often questioned the intention of businesses going “pro-female” and wondered if it was solely for the purpose of increasing sales (Jalakas, 2016).

Many businesses have received backlash and have been accused of trying to commercialise feminism (Case, 2019). Brands, however, state that femvertising is a way of engaging with female customers and rectifying the wrongs of past advertising (Abitbol, 2016). It is through femvertising that businesses have tried to interact with their female customers through emotional, thought-provoking advertisements (Abitbol, 2016). This has proven to be successful in most cases, however, some studies show that a number of participants of various studies enjoyed the advertisements but questioned the intentions of the brands and whether it was just a money-making scheme (Case, 2019).

Another study suggests that businesses conduct femvertising as a form of corporate social responsibility (Abdallah, et al., 2018). Corporate social responsibility can be defined as a company's efforts to improve the social issues of their community or target market (Hunt & Serazio, 2017). The motives behind corporate social responsibility vary amongst different businesses studied, however, most viewed it as a tactic to increase profits (Hunt & Serazio, 2017).

To conclude, it is evident that there is an increased interest in femvertising in the marketing research sphere. This interest has been shown by both academic researchers as well as businesses who have or who wish to use femvertising amongst their target markets. The research is primarily conducted around the reasoning behind businesses using femvertising, the effects of femvertising on female customers and the overall opinion of femvertising and the chances of it changing brand perceptions. A research gap exists in that few of these studies are fashion industry-specific, and even fewer are based within a South African context. Thus, although this study will join a number of studies conducted around the relationship between customers and femvertising, this study will differentiate itself as it will be about the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.

3. Brand Preference

Another important construct within this study is brand preference. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceived role of femvertising in retail fashion customer brand preference amongst South African female customers. As seen from the purpose of the study mentioned above, it is evident that exploring brand preference is a critical part of this literature review. The review of literature around brand preference will help guide the study. This literature review will explore the definition of brand preference; other studies conducted around this topic and their results; shifts in brand preference that have taken place; the different types of brand preference, and lastly, the different responses of customers towards brands.

A brand is a complex term and encompasses the name, feeling, symbol, design and association connected with a particular product or service that differentiated one product/service from another (Sawant, 2012). Brand preference can be defined as when a customer favours a particular brand over others (Sawant, 2012). Brand preference, however, does have different levels and therefore, although a customer might favour a brand over others, they do have possible preferred substitutes in mind (Liu, 2014). Brand preference can, therefore, be defined as when a customer consistently picks one brand over other brands unless that brand is unavailable (Cant & van Heerden, 2017). When analysing customer preferences, it is evident that these preferences indicate brand awareness of a certain brand by customers as well as brand unawareness where customers are completely unaware of the existence of other brands (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009). It is also evident that customer preference is an indicator of brand acceptance, brand preference, brand loyalty, brand insistence and brand equity (Sawant, 2012). This shows that there are many variables that affect customer preferences towards a brand, and therefore, this makes it a much more complex topic.

3.1 Components that affect Brand Preference

In a study conducted by Grimm (2005), the components that affect brand preference are assessed and noted. These are structured on two basic concepts (Grimm, 2005). The first concept, known as the classic concept, encompasses three main attitude structures these being cognitive, affective, and conative (Grimm, 2005). The second concept is based on a more progressive understanding that attitudes are a unidimensional construct that is either represented by positive or negative effects (Grimm, 2005).

The cognitive element of the classic concept speaks to the practical belief of brand elements, whereas the cognitive concept refers to the product or services attributes (Grimm, 2005). These attributes are said to have a direct link to customer brand preferences (Grimm, 2005). The affective response has more to do with the feeling and emotions that are provoked by certain brands and refers to the degree of liking that a customer takes towards a product and how this affects their brand preferences (Ebrahim, 2013). Lastly, the conative preference is not based on the physical attributes of a product but rather speak to the behavioural choice of customers (Grimm, 2005). For example, customers picking one product over another based on the cost of these products and the amount that the customer is willing to spend (Da Silva & Alwi, 2006).

3.2 Types of Customer Brand Preference

In a study conducted by Tomer (1996), it is said that there are four main types of customer brand preferences. The types include actual preference, meta-preference, true preference and unrestrained preference (Ebrahim, 2013). Actual preference refers to when a customer appreciates and creates a need for a product or service of the brand (Ebrahim, 2013). It refers to a customer's level of appreciation for a brand and their product/services (Prem & Mohan, 2020). Actual preference is said to be the extent to which the customer increases the amount of a certain product that they consume (Butt, Alvi & Javed, 2016). Meta-preference is regarded as the perceptions around the actual preferences that affect the buying decision's (Butt, et al., 2016). It is a customer preference due to a customer preferring a brand over another due to consistent behavioural actions that see the customer doing something over and over, which builds a preference (Tomer, 1996). True preference is what will be the most correct brand for the customer based on the attributes of the product or service and the customers' needs and wants (Ebrahim, 2013). True preference refers to what will actually be truly the right purchasing decision for the customer (Butt, et al., 2016). Lastly, unrestrained preference is the brands that will satisfy the lowest needs of the customer (Ebrahim, 2013). Unrestrained preferences satisfy needs that are of the lowest priority and therefore are not of a high priority or necessity to the customer (Butt, et al., 2016). A majority of studies conducted around brand preference all reference these four types of customer preferences in order to be able to further understand the motives and drivers behind customer preferences.

3.3 Value expressive Perceptions and their effects on Brand Preferences

In a study conducted by Ho, Awan and Khan (2014), it is noted that the customer's personal values also play a major role in what they buy as well as what brands they develop a preference towards (Ho, Awan & Khan, 2014). The study notes that customers that purchase luxury brands have two main purposes, these purposes include internal value expressive perception and external value expressive perception (Ho, et al., 2014).

Inner value expressive perception is when the customer has a preference towards a product and purchases products that evoke feeling and emotion within them and that ultimately fulfil their inner needs (Ho, et al., 2014). These inner needs can include how they want to appear to others as well as the self-esteem need (Ho, et al., 2014). Customers who develop a preference towards certain products based on inner value expression perception wish to relay their values through the brands they pick as well as showcase who they are or whom they wish to be through these preferences (Ho, et al., 2014). External value expressive perceptions, alternatively, speak to customers who develop a preference towards certain products/services based on external factors such as the social environment around them (Ho, et al., 2014). These customers pick products based on what they believe will give themselves an image of high social rank and status amongst their peers (Ho, et al., 2014). External value expressive perceptions are seen when customers purchase a particular product in order to try to differentiate themselves from others through societal recognition (Ho, et al., 2014).

3.4 Brand Preference in the Fashion Retail Sector

The fashion retail industry is ever-growing, and this has made it an industry that requires constant studying. As this study will focus on the retail fashion sector, it is important that brand preference within this sector is explored. Fashion is said to be a way that individuals are able to showcase their self-expressions (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009). As much as fashion is used as a means of self-expression, it is also said to be very much a large part of how people are initially judged and create first impressions, as you can see a lot about a person from what they wear (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009). Fashion also has a major role to play for many in the way that they feel as well as their level of confidence (Achabou, 2020).

Due to the self-expressive nature of fashion, brand preference within the retail fashion industry is said to have a direct correlation to the brand image and brand perceptions associated with certain brands (Bahng, Kincade & Yang, 2013). Customers tend to prefer fashion brands that have a brand image and brand perception that can be linked to who the customer is or how the customer wishes to showcase who they are through their fashion decisions (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2014).

In order to understand customer preferences within the fashion retail context, it is important to understand the two orientations with which customers shop (Bahng, et al., 2013). These include hedonic shopping and utilitarian shopping (Bahng, et al., 2013). Hedonic shopping is when a customer shops for fun or pleasure and are buying more for the experience and there is no real thought put into their purchases (Bahng, et al., 2013). Utilitarian shopping is a more rational form of shopping that involves a process (Bahng, et al., 2013). Utilitarian shoppers are more goal-orientated and see shopping as simply a task that needs to be completed (Bahng, et al., 2013). The orientation of the shopper will have an effect on the level of brand preference that the customer has (Bahng, et al., 2013). For example, utilitarian shoppers are more likely to compare merchants due to convenience and then further compare brands due to price versus quality, making them more susceptible to having true preferences (Overby & Lee, 2006). Hedonic shoppers on the other hand shop for the experience that the shopping can offer and therefore are more likely to have meta-preferences and unrestrained preferences (Overby & Lee, 2006).

3.5 Shifts in brand preference

The recent evolution in the study of brand preference is due to a shift in customer thinking (Ebrahim, 2013). Researchers have found that there is a visible shift in brand preferences as it is no longer only about tangible brand attributes for the customer but rather about experiences that different brands can offer their customers in order to create a preference (Hwang & Cho, 2019). Hwang and Cho (2019), found that customers who have positive experiences with brands are more likely to choose that brand over another thus creating a brand preference. This has resulted in brands no longer being able to just rely on a great product or service, but now rather having to focus on providing the customer with more meaning; that brands are having to put more thought into how they can differentiate themselves from their competitors as well as how they can remain top of mind in such saturated markets (Hwang & Cho, 2019).

In reviewing literature on customer brand preference, it is evident that there is a sufficient number of studies conducted on the theory regarding brand preference. The literature regarding the types of brand preference and biased positions that lead to brand preference are important factors to take into consideration when investigating this concept. These theories will, therefore, be used in this study to investigate the relationship between customer brand preferences and femvertising. Whilst conducting this literature review it was, however, identified that a gap in literature exists between the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference making this study of value to the marketing industry in South Africa and around the world (Erasmus, 2018).

4. Brand Loyalty

Brand Loyalty has been studied for many years as its importance to businesses has been noted (Veloutsou, 2015). This literature review will focus on defining brand loyalty; exploring the different types and contributors of brand loyalty as well as examining previous studies conducted within this field. Brand Loyalty is relevant to the study as the research set out to explore if having brand loyalty towards a fashion retailer affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.

. Brand loyalty is seen as a customer's commitment to constantly and consistently repurchase from a certain brand, product or service (Tellis, 2019). The importance of brand loyalty for business has been well studied over the years (Lu & Xu, 2015). This has made brand loyalty a strategic marketing goal for many brands and is considered a great achievement for brands and businesses (Rowley, 2005). Brand loyalty is a key measurement of the relationships that brands, and businesses build with their customers in the long-term (Lu & Xu, 2015). Businesses that have achieved brand loyalty from their customers have a competitive advantage along with a number of other benefits (Rowley, 2005). Some of these benefits include customers that are less price-sensitive than non-loyal customers; businesses needing to spend less money on attracting new customers and lastly; improved, consistent and predictable business profitability (Rowley, 2005).

Researchers note that customers are also capable of showcasing their brand loyalty in many ways (Rowley, 2005). When studying the customer behaviour of brand loyal customers their loyalty can be studied through the customer choosing to only purchase goods/services from one brand or customers increasing the amount that they purchase from the brand that they are loyal towards (Rowley, 2005). Customers can also be seen as brand loyal when they start publicly supporting or recommending the brand to others around them in order to influence their brand choices and decisions (Tellis, 2019). These word-of-mouth recommendations from loyal customers is how many successful businesses gain great market share (Ahmed, 2014). Customers who are brand loyal are very unlikely to buy a substitute product (Bahng, et al., 2013). If the brand that they are loyal towards is unavailable they are more likely to check multiple places for that brand or rather not purchase the product altogether (Ahmed, 2014).

Businesses aim many of their marketing activities such as advertising, reward/ loyalty programs and brand ambassadors, as well as business activities such as corporate social responsibility and initiatives that the business supports towards gaining customer loyalty (Ahmed, 2014).

4.1 The Two Dimensions of Brand Loyalty

It is argued that there are two dimensions to brand loyalty (Ramaseshan, 2006). These dimensions are behavioural and attitudinal loyalty (Lu & Xu, 2015).

Behavioural loyalty is when a customer continuously purchases from a certain brand (Severi & Choon Ling, 2013). It is, therefore, when a customer continuously purchases out of habit (Rowley, 2005). This poses a problem to many researchers as it is noted that studying and understanding behavioural patterns is difficult as there is a lack of measuring tools for this (Tellis, 2019). Behavioural loyalty is centred around the customers actual purchase behaviour (Sharifi & Esfidani, 2014). Researchers are, therefore, able to measure behavioural loyalty by analysing the customers buying frequency (Sharifi & Esfidani, 2014). In a study conducted by Puligadda, Ross and Grewal (2012), retailers who use their advertising to create relationships with their customers have a positive impact on growing behavioural loyalty amongst their customers. Researchers also note that behavioural loyalty forms part of the more traditional understanding of customer loyalty which is that loyalty is primarily shown through repeat purchasing (Appiah, Ozuem & Howell, 2016).

The less traditional understanding that developed in research, later on, is attitudinal loyalty (Ha, 1998). Attitudinal loyalty looks at loyalty as more than just behavioural buying patterns (Ramaseshan, 2006). Attitudinal loyalty speaks to more of a psychological attachment towards a brand by their customers (Severi & Choon Ling, 2013). It looks at the relationships and emotional connections that customers develop with certain brands and how these connections affect their purchasing decisions (Appiah, Ozuem & Howell, 2013). Attitudinal loyalty deals with the attitude of customers towards a brand and is largely based on a connection with the brand that can be formed due to the values of the brand as well as what value the brand adds to the lives of their customers perceived or not (Sharifi & Esfidani, 2014).

Although behavioural and attitudinal loyalty is seen as two separate dimensions of loyalty, studies note that there is some relation between the two (Severi & Choon Ling, 2013). Behavioural loyalty is suggested to be the first step in creating attitudinal loyalty amongst target markets, as the study found that most customers started out as loyal to a brand and then became more emotionally attached (Severi & Choon Ling, 2013). This is due to constant (behavioural loyalty) positive experiences with a brand leading to the creation of an emotional tie (attitudinal loyalty) between the brand and their customers (Ramaseshan, 2006). Hwang and Han (2014) also noted that attitudinal loyalty has a positive effect on behavioural loyalty as an emotional connection with a brand is more likely to influence the customer to continue purchasing from that brand over others.

4.2 Drivers of Brand Loyalty

As discussed above, there are two main dimensions of brand loyalty, mainly, behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty (Ha, 1998). Literature also shows that there are many drivers that influence these types of brand loyalty (Ramaseshan, 2006). These driving factors include brand trust, brand attachment, brand commitment, perceived quality, perceived value and customer satisfaction (Ahmed, 2014). These drivers will be discussed further below in order to gain a greater understanding of their link to brand loyalty.

4.2.1 Brand trust

Brand trust can be defined as the promise of a brand to fulfil the expectations of its customers (Ahmed, 2014). Brand trust is pivotal in driving brand loyalty as it is said that trust creates confidence within customers around the brand and this reliability creates a loyal customer (Ledikwe, Reberts-Lombard & Klopper, 2019). It is also noted that the strength of a relationship between business and its customers are largely affected by how much the customers can trust and rely on the brand (Ledikwe, et al., 2019). This relationship can then lead to repeat purchasing, which would be behavioural loyalty, and then eventually an emotional bond between the customer and the brand, which would be attitudinal loyalty (Ramaseshan, 2006).

4.2.2 Brand Attachment

Brand attachment can be defined as the emotional bond between a brand and its customers (Ramaseshan, 2006). Brand attachment is usually self-inflicted by customers (Lam & Shankar, 2014). A customer is said to develop an attachment towards a brand when the brand is involuntarily embedded within their minds (Lam & Shankar, 2014). Studies also show that brand attachment can occur when the customers feel that the brand signifies who they are or whom they want to be and stand for (Ahmed, 2014). It, therefore, became evident that brand attachment has a link to brand loyalty as customers who already have an attachment towards a brand are more likely to become brand loyal towards that brand over their competitors (Ramaseshan, 2006).

4.2.3 Brand Commitment

Brand commitment is the customers' desire to maintain a relationship between themselves and the brand (Ramaseshan, 2006). Studies show that brand commitment is the extent of psychological brand attachment that makes customers exert extra effort into building and sustaining a relationship with the brand as well as making them even further involved with the brand's goals and ambitions past the initial goal of sales (Erkmen & Hancer, 2014). It is important to note that customers can continuously purchase from a brand and not be committed to it, and therefore, brand commitment is a key indicator of the level of brand loyalty that a customer embodies (Srivastava & Owens, 2010). Emphasised commitment also influences the buying decisions of customers (Srivastava & Owens, 2010).

4.2.4 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality looks at how the customer perceptions around the quality of the good or service influence their loyalty towards that brand (Ahmed, 2014). It is perceptions that are created by the brands' product, social media and marketing and the effect that these activities have on creating an image around the product/services offered by brands (Ahmed, 2014). This is another important driver of brand loyalty (Pappu & Quester, 2015). It is important to note that perceived quality does not speak to the actual quality of the product but rather how the customer views the quality of the brand based on their own subjective opinions (Pappu & Quester, 2015). Literature notes that a positive relationship exists between perceived quality and brand loyalty (Ramaseshan, 2006).

4.2.5 Perceived Value

Perceived value can be defined as the customers' evaluation of what they receive versus what they pay for (Lam & Shankar, 2014). It is how the customer evaluates the brand's ability to meet their needs/ wants and beyond versus their competitors or others in a similar marketplace (Ramaseshan, 2006). Perceived value can also be linked to the desirability of a product by a specific target market versus the desirability of their competitors (Ahmed, 2014). The marketing activities of a business are all aimed and showcasing the value of the brand to their customers and creating a desirable brand image (Ramaseshan, 2006). Customers who see a brand as having a perceived high value compared to other competitors are more likely to be brand loyal towards that brand than their competitors (Ahmed, 2014). The amount of perceived value will also influence the level of loyalty that the customer will have (Ahmed, 2014).

4.2.6 Customer Satisfaction

Lastly, literature states that customer satisfaction is also a driver in brand loyalty (Ahmed, 2014). Customer satisfaction is defined as a measuring tool used to determine the level of happiness felt from the fulfilment of the customers' needs or wants by the brand (Ahmed, 2014). There are three levels of customer satisfaction (Davis & Heineke, 1998). These levels include high customer satisfaction; customer satisfaction and customer dissatisfaction (Davis & Heineke, 1998).

High customer satisfaction is when the brand achieves in line with or above the customers' expectations (Davis & Heineke, 1998). Customer satisfaction is when the performance of the brand is equal to or less than the customer desired level but performs in line with what was predicted (Davis & Heineke, 1998). Lastly, customer dissatisfaction is when a brand's satisfactory levels are lower than predicted and desired from the customer (Davis & Heineke, 1998).

There is little research that directly links customer satisfaction to brand loyalty (Ahmed, 2014). It is, however, still concluded as a vital driver of brand loyalty as the level of satisfaction with a brand directly influences the purchasing behaviour of customers over other brands (Davis & Heineke, 1998). This is, therefore, how a link is formed between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

4.3 Brand Loyalty in the Fashion Retail Industry

The fashion retail industry is an important component of this study, and it is, therefore, important to include an analysis of literature around brand loyalty in the fashion industry.

It is important to note that a number of international studies have been conducted around the topic of brand loyalty within this industry. Researchers such as Su and Chang (2018); Shen, Choi and Chow (2017); Zainudin, Hasan and Othman (2019) and Anggraeni and Rachmanita (2015) have all studied brand loyalty within the fashion industry.

Anggraeni and Rachmanita (2015) discuss how fashion brands are said to have a greater emotional connection to their customers than brands within other industries. This is largely

due to the fashion brand's ability to convey the identity of its users and assist them in portraying a certain image for themselves (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015). This study further notes that retail fashion customers buying behaviour is heavily reliant on the social status and brand image that the retailer possesses (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015). The study concludes that brand loyalty towards a fashion brand is largely attitudinal loyalty as it is dependent on an emotional connection with the brand as the brand clothing needs to align with the identity of the buyer before a purchase is made (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015).

Su and Chang (2018) noted that most fashion retailers have adopted a quick response model and have therefore become fast-fashion retailers. This means that these retailers are able to stay up-to-date and deliver on the latest fashion trends whilst keeping prices low due to quicker lead times with their suppliers (Su & Chang, 2018). The study notes that the fast fashion industry is still in need of further research on customer behaviour around these retailers (Su & Chang, 2018). It is, however, noted that the fast fashion model adopted by most retailers has left many environmentally conscious customers looking elsewhere (Su & Chang, 2018). This resulted in the slow fashion movement, which has seen many environmentally conscious customers becoming more loyal towards businesses who have a 'greener' business model and has pushed the fast fashion industry into becoming more environmentally and socially conscious in order to offer their customers more value (Su & Chang, 2018).

It is also important to note that within fashion luxury branding, there is a higher amount of brand loyalty required (Yoo & Park, 2016). This is due to luxury brands being a bigger financial investment for many of their customers, therefore, needing a greater buy-in prior to purchase (Esmaeilpour, 2015). Studies also show that there is a limited number of customers that have behavioural loyalty towards luxury brands due to their price point, however, there is a strong attitudinal loyalty as customers feel a deeper psychological connection and need for these brands (Yoo & Park, 2016). Fashion luxury brands, car brands and technology brands are the few industries that have attitudinally loyal customers even before the customer makes a purchase (Yoo & Park, 2016).

5. Literature Review Conclusion

In conclusion, from the above information gathered it is clear that although there are a number of studies conducted within the fashion industry regarding brand loyalty, a gap still exists within the South African marketplace.

Through the above literature review feminism, femvertising, brand preference and brand loyalty were researched extensively. Feminism was discussed in terms of the feminist wave theories as well as feminism within South Africa, and it is clear that feminism is on the rise and becoming very apparent within the South African market. Secondly, femvertising was researched in terms of the history, contributors, effects on customers and criticism of femvertising. Brand preference was studied in terms of what affects it, the types of customer preference, shifts in brand preference and brand preference within the fashion industry. Lastly, Brand loyalty was researched in terms of the two dimensions of brand loyalty, drivers of brand loyalty and brand loyalty within the fashion industry. Through this literature review, it is evident that there is sufficient information around these topics, however, it is also evident that gaps exist. These research gaps exist in that there is a lack of research around an exploration of the perceived relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preferences and an even greater lack of research within the South African context. This study will therefore use the above literature review as a guide.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3. Methodology

Methodology can be defined as specific procedures taken during a study in order to obtain further information around the topic and answer the research questions (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This section of the dissertation sets out the research design, research plan, population and sampling, data collection method and data analysis method of this research. This chapter references the work of other researchers in the field and sets out the planned course of this study.

3.1. Research Design

This research took on an exploratory approach. Exploratory research is conducted when there is a lack of research around a topic or a lack of understanding around certain facets of a topic (Hunter & McCallum, 2018). This approach was most suitable as this research set out to explore femvertising and its perceived relationship with customer brand preferences in a South African market where there was little research conducted on this topic.

Paradigms can be defined as a certain view of the world or way of thinking (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). They are about patterns of behaviour and regulations set out around these patterns (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research was based on the interpretivist paradigm which is based on the belief that the reactions of participants changes based on the times and certain circumstances that surround them (Taylor & Medina, 2013). This paradigm was best suited for this research as it enabled the researcher to explore whether the perceived effects of femvertising differ in a South African context.

In research, there are three main conceptual approaches, mainly quantitative, qualitative and mixed method (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data in order to create generalisations that can be used to answer the research questions (Babbie, 2010). Alternatively, qualitative research is less numerical and rather focuses on exploring the motives, beliefs, and opinions around a topic (Denzin & Yvonna, 2005). Mixed method is a conceptual approach where researchers combine the quantitative and qualitative approaches in their research to gain both numerical data and a deeper understanding of motives, beliefs, and opinions around their topic (Trefry, 2019). This research took on the qualitative approach as it seeks to explore the opinions and perceptions around femvertising in the South African marketplace.

Both primary and secondary research was conducted during this study. Primary research was conducted on participants by the researcher as it allowed the researcher to collect specific information that was beneficial to the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Secondary research was conducted in order to gain a greater contextualisation around the topic of femvertising during the initial stages of this research (Maree, 2016).

Research has two main approaches for reasoning, these include inductive and deductive research (Soiferman, 2010). Inductive reasoning occurs in research where there is an observation and generalisations are drawn from these observations (Hyde, 2000). Deductive reasoning shows researchers starting with generalisations and then exploring

whether these generalisations occur in certain instances (Hyde, 2000). As this research was qualitative in design and wished to explore the perceived relationship between femvertising and customer brand preference, the researcher worked inductively. This aided the researcher in assessing commonalities amongst reactions towards femvertising, thus gathering generalisations around the topic and ultimately addressing the research objectives of this study.

This research was conducted through in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were conducted around three South African fashion retailers who sell multiple brands across their retail channels. The research focused on the main retailer's brand and not the brand sold within the retailers. The interviews were aimed at twenty-one customers that were exposed to examples of the chosen retailers' femvertising efforts. Across the three retailers, seven interviews took place per retailer, making it a total of twenty-one interviews conducted during this study. Seven interviews per retailer allowed the researcher to reach saturation level for each retailer. Interviews were conducted on the target market of the femvertising adverts in order to gain a greater understanding into whether femvertising has a perceived effect on retail fashion customer brand preference; whether retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising; whether the brand loyalty towards the fashion retailer affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference; whether the customers age affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference; and lastly whether the customers race affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.

3.1.1 Research Approach

In research design, there are three main approaches (Pratap, 2018). These approaches include explanatory; descriptive and exploratory research (Pratap, 2018). Explanatory research can be defined as research that explores and explains cause and effect relationships (Dinesh, 2014). This type of research looks into how one variable in a study is responsible for an effect on another variable within that study. This type of research focuses on explaining the different variables of a study (Cantwell, 2020).

Descriptive research is when the phenomenon being studied needs to be further described (Dinesh, 2014). It is said to be research that is conducted in order to convey an accurate portrayal of the particular unit of analysis being studied (Dulock, 1993). Descriptive research is when a researcher sets out to further explain a topic in order to expand the understanding around the subject as well as add additional information (Nassaji, 2015).

Lastly, exploratory research is the study of a new idea or phenomenon (Dinesh, 2014). It is understood that this type of approach is used when a researcher has observed something and sets out to find out more about it (Hunter & McCallum, 2018). Exploratory research is conducted when there is a lack of research around a topic or a lack of understanding around certain facets of a topic (Hunter & McCallum, 2018). Exploratory research can either be done by exploring a completely new topic or by exploring a new angle of an already existing topic (Dinesh, 2014). This type of research ultimately aims to seek new insights into a topic and see the topic in a new light (Dinesh, 2014).

Upon assessing the three different approaches, it is clear that the exploratory approach is most suitable for this study. This approach is most suitable as this research sets out to

explore femvertising and its perceived relationship with customer brand preferences in a South African market where there is currently little research conducted on this topic.

3.1.2 Research Paradigms

Paradigms can be defined as a certain view of the world or way of thinking (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). They are patterns of behaviour and regulations set out around these patterns (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The word paradigm was first used by author and American philosopher Thomas Kuhn in which he used it to describe a philosophical way of thinking (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). There are three main research paradigms which are the positivist, constructivist and interpretivist paradigms (Ponterotto, 2005).

Positivism is a philosophy that came about in the early nineteenth century and was pioneered by French philosopher Auguste Comte (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Positivism is an approach to research that relies on scientific evidence (Aliyu, Bello, Kasim & Martin, 2014). The positivist paradigm is used when researchers set out to identify repeating patterns of behaviour (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The positivist paradigm is mainly adopted in quantitative research as this type of research relies heavily on a large amount of data that require large sample groups (Aliyu, et al., 2014). Positivist thinkers believe that only physical data that can be observed and verified should be considered when trying to understand phenomena's being studied (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Positivists believe that the social world works like the natural world which looks at cause and effect relationships and uses these relationships to predict future behaviours in nature (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Many scholars criticise the following of this paradigm due to the positivist idea that social phenomena's can be studied in the same scientific manner as nature which is not always viable (Aliyu, et al., 2014).

The constructivist paradigm can be described as the approach of believing that people create their own knowledge and understanding of the world (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This knowledge and understanding were developed through different experiences and how these have an impact (Patel, 2015). Constructivism sees each individual's reality as subjective and created in the human mind (Riegler, 2012). The constructivist paradigm is used within qualitative research; however, a larger sample group is needed in order to gain a more holistic idea of the different views (Patel, 2015). This paradigm identified that research is the product of the researcher's values and cannot be separated from these values (Mertens, 2019).

The interpretivist paradigm was developed as a reaction to the shortcomings of the positivist paradigm when it came to applying this paradigm to the social sciences (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Interpretivists believe that the reactions of studied individuals are subject to change as the times change, and therefore, there is room for the evolution of the thoughts and beliefs of individuals (Rahi, 2017). This paradigm does not believe that there are any permanent, non-adapting standards that can be applied universally (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Interpretivists identified that people are different and more complex than objects, and therefore, the approach to which researchers study people needs to differ as well (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). It was importantly noted that human beings are constantly changing and evolving and so is the environment around them which has great influence on them (Rahi, 2017). The interpretivism paradigm is used within qualitative research and allows for the exploration of the sample groups individual feelings, emotions, attitudes and

opinions (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This paradigm works under the belief that researchers should be subjective in their research and that there are no right or wrong answers for the studied individuals (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014).

This research will be based on the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm is based on the belief that the reactions of participants change based on the times and certain circumstances that surround them (Taylor & Medina, 2013). This paradigm is best suited for this research as it will enable the researcher to explore whether the perceived effects of femvertising differ in a South African context.

The interpretivist approach is made up of ontological assumptions, epistemological assumption; methodological assumption and axiological assumptions (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). In research, the ontological approach refers to what the researcher believes about the reality of the world (Patel, 2015). The ontological assumption in interpretivism is that beliefs and opinions are constantly evolving and being reinterpreted (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). Epistemological assumptions refer to what is known to be true (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Within interpretivism, the epistemological assumption is that individuals react in certain ways towards different phenomena based on their interpretation of facts at the time (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The ontological approach refers to the questioning around what reality is (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The ontological assumption within the interpretivist paradigm is that reality is dependent on the social world and that it is constantly evolving depending on how individual's perceptions change (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Lastly, the methodological approach speaks to the method in which the data will be collected (Rahi, 2017). The interpretivist paradigm is used within qualitative research, and therefore, the methodological approaches include focus groups, interviews and ethnography (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This study's methodological approach will be in-depth interviews.

3.1.3 Conceptual Approaches

In research, there is three main conceptual approaches, mainly quantitative, qualitative and mixed method (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data in order to create generalisations that can be used to answer the research questions (Babbie, 2010). Alternatively, qualitative research is less numerical and rather focuses on exploring the motives, beliefs, and opinions around a topic (Denzin & Yvonna, 2005). Mixed method is a conceptual approach where researchers combine the quantitative and qualitative approaches in their research to gain both numerical data and a deeper understanding of motives, beliefs, and opinions around their topic (Trefry, 2019). This research will take on the qualitative approach as it seeks to explore the opinions and perceptions around femvertising in the South African marketplace.

Qualitative research is focused on opinions and motivations (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Literature shows that there are three main qualitative research strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). These three strategies include descriptive, theoretically grounded, and exploratory research (Maree, 2016). Descriptive qualitative research is used to summarise certain events or experiences and how they are experienced by individuals in their everyday lives (Nassaji, 2015). Descriptive research is used to study the characteristics of certain phenomena as well as how and when these characteristics occur (Kim, Sefcik & Bradway, 2017). Theoretically grounded research can be described as research that involves theory

development that is grounded in data that was systematically collected and analysed (Ahlemann & Arbi, 2012). These theories set out to explain problems and how those problems occur and are solved (Chan, 2020). Lastly, explorative research sets out to investigate phenomena that have yet to be defined (Mollick, 2014). This type of research sets out to research certain phenomena that have not yet been researched or which has very little research behind them (Ponelis, 2015). Due to the nature of this study, this research will take on an explorative research strategy as the topic of femvertising still requires more research. Explorative research sets out to explore concepts or phenomena that require a better understanding, and therefore, it is most suitable for this study which seeks to explore the perceived role between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference. It is also important to note that an explorative approach is most appropriate as it is well suited to the interpretivist paradigm of this study.

Both primary and secondary research will be conducted during this study. Primary research will be conducted on participants by the researcher as it allows the researcher to collect specific information that is beneficial to the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Secondary research will be conducted in order to gain a greater contextualisation around the topic of femvertising during the initial stages of this research (Maree, 2016).

Research has two main approaches for reasoning, these include inductive and deductive research (Soiferman, 2010). Inductive reasoning occurs in research where there is an observation and generalisations are drawn from these observations (Hyde, 2000). Deductive reasoning shows researchers starting with generalisations and then exploring whether these generalisations occur in certain instances (Hyde, 2000). As this research is qualitative in design and wishes to explore the perceived role of femvertising in retail fashion customer brand preference, the researcher will be working inductively. This will aid the researcher in assessing commonalities amongst reactions towards femvertising, thus gathering generalisations around the topic and ultimately addressing the research objectives of this study.

This research will be conducted through in-depth interviews (see Annexure 1 for Discussion Guide). The in-depth interviews will be conducted around three South African fashion retailers who sell multiple brands across their retail channels. The research will focus on the main retailer's brand and not the brand sold within the retailers. The interviews will be aimed at twenty-one customers that have been exposed to examples of the chosen retailers' femvertising efforts. Across the three retailers, seven interviews will take place per retailer, making it a total of twenty-one interviews to be conducted during this study. Seven interviews per retailer means that the researcher will reach saturation level. The saturation point of a study is reached when enough research has been conducted to no longer find any new information (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research conducted twenty-one interviews as by this point there was enough opinion and beliefs gathered to no longer find any new information. Interviews will be conducted on the target market of the femvertising adverts in order to gain a greater understanding into whether femvertising has a perceived effect on retail fashion customer brand preference; whether retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising; whether the brand loyalty towards the fashion retailer affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference; and lastly, whether the customers age affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.



Image 1: Ackermans. 2019. *I am Me Campaign Photo*. Ackermans, South Africa.

The first retailer was Ackermans with their femvertising campaign 'I am Me' (see Image 1). Ackerman worked with South African agency 99c to create this campaign that is aimed at encouraging women of all sizes and body shapes to embrace their bodies. Instead of creating unrealistic body images for women, the campaign showcases different body shapes and encourages women to embrace what was once labelled as their 'flaws'. This campaign was broadcast across multiple social media platforms; television advertisements and was also showcased on the windows of most Ackermans stores across the country. It is important to note that having a lingerie campaign photo at the window of a store is already noted as quite controversial in the South African retail market space. Furthermore, putting different body shapes and sizes and showcasing stretch marks and cellulite on an advert caused even further controversy. Ackermans wanted to depict the spirit of authenticity. The researcher chose this advertisement as it clearly showcased pro-female and feminist characteristics. The researcher also identified this campaign as one that set out to rectify the past images and ideals created for women in past media. This advertisement is also pro-female and sets out to empower women, which is the definition of femvertising.



Image 2: Foschini. 2017. *The Future is Female*. Foschini, South Africa.

The second retailer chosen for the research will be Foschini's 'The Future is Female' campaign (see Image 2). The future is female campaign looks at Foschini partnering with innovative women who are currently working on empowering other women and creating a better future for females. Foschini has brought these individuals together to tell their stories of female empowerment as well as to expand on their ideas and philosophies. The aim of the campaign was to highlight the efforts of these empowering women as well as to inspire other women to start supporting and empowering each other in every avenue of their lives. The researcher chose this advertisement as it gained great popularity during its time and was an example of femvertising as it showcased female empowerment through a campaign. It also showcased the evolution of feminism as this advertisement was a very commercial way of discussing feminism without creating any controversy compared to the very controversial Ackerman's advertisements.



Image 3: Woolworths. 2018. #OwnYourFit. Woolworths, South Africa.

The third retailer chosen for this study was Woolworths. The campaign chosen was a lingerie campaign that showcased four body positive women (See image 3). The Woolworths press release stated that the campaign was all about self-love, self-worth, and self-acceptance (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2018). The aim of the advertisement was to encourage women to love and appreciate their curves through lingerie that does not compromise on quality or fit for curvier women (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2018). The researcher primarily selected this brand's campaign as they wanted to explore whether customers of such a highly regarded brand would perceive femvertising in a different manner. This campaign was also selected as it was similar to the Ackermans campaign and therefore could possibly provide interesting insights into how femvertising is perceived across customers with different income levels.

3.2. Research Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceived role of femvertising in retail fashion customer brand preference amongst South African, female customers. Research methodology refers to how the researcher set out to achieve the objectives and purpose of this study. This section will discuss the unit of analysis (population and sampling); data collection method; data analysis; trustworthiness and ethical considerations of this study. This qualitative research was exploratory in nature, and this guided the researcher throughout the research methodology.

3.2.1 Unit of Analysis

A unit of analysis defines what the researcher will be studying (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The unit of analysis most suitable for this study will be the perceptions of female customers as this research aims to explore the perceived relationship between femvertising and customer brand preference which is a social construct aimed at customers. This study will use the perception of female customers as a unit of analysis as females are the target audience for femvertising and also make up a greater percentage of the target market of the South African fashion retail environment.

3.2.2 Population and Sampling

This section will discuss and differentiate between the population and sample of this study.

3.2.2.1 Population

A population can be defined as a group of desirable individuals that need to be studied in order to address the research objectives of the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research has one desired population as this study aims to focus on the customer perspective.

The target population of the customers will be South African females who regularly interact with South African retail fashion brands and who have been exposed to femvertising by these brands in the last five years. For the purpose of this study, there will not be any limitations on the age or race of the participants. This will allow the researcher to observe the varying opinions around femvertising amongst different age and race groups.

The accessible population for this study will be South African females who regularly interact with South African retail fashion brands and who have been exposed to femvertising by these brands in the last five years within the Gauteng and Cape Town area which the researcher had access to.

Conducting a study with one main population will allow for this to be a more focused study that will enable the researcher to understand the perceived relationship between femvertising and customer brand preference from the perspective of females who have viewed femvertising.

3.2.2.2 Sampling

Sampling can be defined as a selected group of individuals that will represent a larger population in a study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Sampling has two main categories, probability and non-probability sampling (Maree, 2016). This research will use non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is a method used in qualitative research and can be defined as non-random sampling that sees the researcher subjectively selecting certain individuals to be a part of the study, making it the most suitable for this research (Maree, 2016).

Within non-probability sampling, there are six types of sampling methods. These include quanta, snowball, purposive, accidental, volunteer and convenience sampling (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research will utilise the purposive sampling method. The purposive sampling method refers to a population being chosen due to the judgement and selection of the researcher (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The researcher utilised this method as they had access to the studies population and was able to approach individuals that they knew.

The proposed sample size was twenty-one in-depth interviews. These twenty-one interviews consisted of seven interviews per retailer, as discussed in the methodology section.

3.2.3 Data Collection Method

Qualitative data collection can be conducted through focus groups, in-depth interviews, non-reactive and non-obtrusive data collection methods (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This research will use in-depth interviews as a data collection method.

In-depth interviews are defined as interviews conducted where the researcher poses questions to the sample in order to gain a deeper understanding into the opinions and beliefs of these individuals (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to have an informal conversation with the participants in which she was able to ask them open-ended questions and probe further questions in order to gain as much information from the participants as possible (Maree, 2016). This was the most effective data collection method for this research as it allowed the researcher to ask specific questions (Annexure 1) that helped obtain the objectives of the research and helped the researcher gain a greater understanding into the perceived role of femvertising in retail fashion customer brand preferences.

The in-depth interviews took place in a quiet, agreed upon setting that both the researcher and participants were comfortable with and were between 25 and 30 minutes in duration. The participant was asked to sign a consent form (Annexure 2) agreeing to be a part of the study and being voice recorded. The interviews were recorded using a recording device in order to capture the data and ensure the accuracy of the data collected. The researcher obtained permission to record the participants. The researcher also had a notebook for note-taking during the interviews and read the interview questions from a printed document. Both the voice recording and note taking aided the researcher in the coding and analysis phase of this research.

Due to the research taking place during the Coronavirus world pandemic, it is important to note that participants were given the option for the interviews to be conducted online. These online interviews took place over Skype, Zoom or Microsoft teams at the convenience of the participants. This ensured that the researcher abided by any pandemic regulations and ensured the safety of both the researcher and the participants.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, trustworthiness and confirmability are important factors to consider. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the research will remain transparent in all facets of the study. Confirmability will be ensured by making sure that the researcher will remain objective at all times during the study and that the research findings will be based on the beliefs and opinions of the participants and will not be tainted by the beliefs and options of the researcher.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis can be defined as the method used to analyse the data collected by the researcher in order to gather findings and address the research objectives of the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The data analysis method that was used during this study was thematic analysis method. The thematic analysis method can be defined as a qualitative data analysis method that is used to identify common patterns and themes amongst the data collected from participants of the study (Maree, 2016).

The recorded interviews were transcribed. These transcribed interviews were then coded and the researcher started to develop codes based on pattern recognition within the interviews. Through the patterns recognised the researcher then had to use their discretion to prioritise the patterns identified in order to extract the most essential information from the interviews to aid the answering of the research questions for this study. The pattern recognition and analysis was done by means of the qualitative research software, Atlas TI. This system assisted the researcher in creating an organised way of conducting a thematic analysis.

Researchers Zhang and Wildermuth (2009), explain the eight steps to qualitative research analysis as follows:

Step 1: Preparing the Data

In order to prepare the data, the researcher was required to transcribe all recorded interviews (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). When preparing the data, it was imperative that it was done in an organised manner in order to simplify the analysis process. The research questions and goals were kept in mind (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014).

Step 2: Define the coding units to be analysed

In qualitative research, different themes are identified and used as the unit of analysis. This step required the researcher to read through the transcribed interviews and to then pick out common themes that emerged amongst the data. In doing this, the researcher was able to analyse the collected data in more manageable pieces (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014).

Step 3: Develop categories and a coding scheme or conceptual framework

This step required the researcher to categorise the themes identified in step two (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This allowed the researcher to start making better sense of the data and therefore move the analysis process along (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014).

Step 4: Test the coding scheme on a sample text

This step required the researcher to conduct tests on the categories and coding schemes developed in step 3 (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This process involved testing and coding a sample of the data collected (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014).

Step 5: Code all text

Coding required the researcher to go through all the collected data and extract important information that was most meaningful to the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). As coding was conducted, more and more data was collected and needed to be coded, this resulted in new themes being identified that needed to be added to the coding as the research progressed (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Step 6: Access your coding consistency

This step involved checking that the coding was conducted in a consistent manner and that the researcher did not drift away from the assigned meanings of each code (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Step 7: Draw conclusions from the coded data

Step 7 referred to the researcher drawing conclusions from the themes and codes identified in the previous steps (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This step required the researcher to make sense of the themes and codes identified in order to draw conclusions. These conclusions were identified and were used to assist the researcher in meeting the research goal and answering the research questions.

Step 8: Report methods and findings

This step required the researcher to report on the methods used during the analysis and coding phases as well as to report on the findings and how these findings came about (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). It was also important that the researcher documents the methods used in order to uphold the trustworthiness and reliability of the research conducted (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014).

This data analysis method was most effective as it allowed the researcher to compare and find commonalities amongst the opinions and beliefs of the participants around the perceived preference femvertising had created between these retailers and their customers.

3.2.4 Trustworthiness

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were important factors to consider. Since qualitative research does not use numerical data, there is a new set of criteria when it comes to the trustworthiness of the research (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The criteria for trustworthiness can be broken down into credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014).

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the research remained transparent in all facets of the study. Credibility refers to the accuracy of the results obtained by the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The credibility of this study was increased by ensuring that the researcher spent sufficient time with the participants in order to ensure that their interpretation of the findings was accurate. Transferability refers to the ability of the study to be applied to a similar situation that will deliver similar findings (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). In order to ensure transferability, the researcher ensured that they had properly described the research context as well as methodology (Trochim, 1999). Dependability refers to the quality of the process involved in the data collection methods and analysis, as well as the quality of the results (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). Lastly, confirmability was ensured by making sure that the researcher remained objective at all times during the study and that the research findings were based on the beliefs and opinions of the participants and were not tainted by the beliefs and options of the researcher.

3.2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important part of research as it ensures the integrity of the study (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). The following were ethical considerations of this study.

The researcher did not view this study as harmful to herself, the three chosen fashion retailers or the participants. Participation of all participants was on a voluntary basis, and consent of participation in the study as well as to be voice recorded was required. The participants were made aware of the objectives of the research and were allowed to request a copy of the research once it had been completed. The participant remained anonymous throughout the study, and their information was kept confidential throughout the study. The participants had the right to withdraw at any time if they wished and without consequences.

Following the successful defence, ethical clearance was provided by the IIE to proceed with this research.

In conclusion, chapter 3 set out to discuss the methodology of this study in order to assist the researcher in achieving the research objectives set out in chapter 1. In the next chapter, the data collected will be analysed and discussed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction to Data Analysis

In this section, the researcher analysed the data collected by conducting twenty-one in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted on customers of three different South African retail brands, these including Ackerman's, Foschini and Woolworths. The researcher analysed the data by means of the thematic analysis method using the program Atlas TI to code and sort through the data. Thematic analysis is described as the analysis of data by identifying codes and themes throughout the data (Bezuidenhout & Davis, 2014). This type of analysis allowed the researcher to create links between the varying opinions and beliefs collected through their research.

The analysis was conducted on data received through 21 in-depth interviews conducted on female customers of three retail brands included in the study. A total of 7 customers were interviewed per retailer. Due to the current pandemic, these interviews were mostly conducted over Skype and Microsoft Teams in order to ensure the safety of both the researcher and participants during the pandemic. The interviews varied between fifteen to twenty minutes long and consisted of 20 questions in total. These questions were formulated to answer the research questions and address the research objectives of the study. The research objectives of this study were set out as:

1. To explore whether femvertising has a perceived effect on retail fashion customer brand preference.
2. To explore whether retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising.
3. To explore if the brand loyalty towards the fashion retailer affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.
4. To explore if the customer's age affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.
5. To explore the level of customer brand preference that is created through femvertising.
6. To explore if the customer's race affects the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference.

The interviews conducted were recorded, transcribed and then uploaded to Atlas TI. The transcribed documents then went through a thorough analysis in which the researcher began to pull out common themes and patterns of information gathered through the interviews. These themes and patterns were then coded to form the findings.

The findings were firstly analysed by retailer:

Retailer 1- Ackermans
Retailer 2- Foschini
Retailer 3- Woolworths

The data per retailer was then further analysed and assigned into the following categories, in alignment with the research objectives as stated above:

Category 1: Participants information's

Category 2: The perceived effects of femvertising on brand preference

Category 3: Active change in retail fashion brand due to femvertising

Category 4: The effects of brand loyalty on the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion brand Preference

Category 5: The perceived effects of customer age on the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion brand preference

Category 6: The level of customer brand preference that is created through femvertising

Category 7: Perceived effects of customers race on the relationship between femvertising and brand preference

4.2 Retailer 1: Ackermans

Ackerman's is a South African retailer that was founded in 1916 (Ackermans, 2021). Ackerman's currently has over 740 retail stores across Africa and pride themselves on "Bring Value to Life" (Ackermans, 2021). The Ackerman's customer can be described as a lower LSM customer, who is price sensitive, and family orientated (Ackermans, 2021).

4.2.1 Category 1: Participants' information

The participant's information was gathered before the interview by means of screen questions at the beginning of the interviews. This data was collected by the researcher in order to contextualise the study and ensure that the participants qualified to participate in the study.

Screening Question:			
Are you a Ackermans customer?	Yes (7)	No (0)	Total (7)

Demographics:				
Age Group:	20-30 years old (3)	30-40 years old (1)	40-50 years old (0)	50 years and older (3)
Gender:	Female (7)		Male (0)	
Race:	Black (2)	White (3)	Indian (1)	Coloured (1)

4.2.2 Category 2: The perceived effects of femvertising on brand preference

Upon analysing the data gathered, the researcher became aware that there are perceived effects on brand preference. The perceived effects were identified by means of sorting through themes and patterns gathered from within the data collected. The participant's answers were categorised, and the following themes appeared:

4.2.2.1 Theme 1: The positive effect of femvertising on brand preference

Through analysing the data, the researcher was able to identify that there were themes of participants acknowledging a positive effect of Femvertising on their brand preferences.

Patterns emerge of participants acknowledging the retailer's efforts to bring awareness to the issues that women face on a daily basis in South Africa. Participant A even noted having brand preference due to:

Brands reacting to what customers might be going through as a way of trying to empower them (R1;A)

This participant then went further to explain that their preference stemmed from the brands decision to align themselves to what the customer wants to see.

Participants also acknowledged wanting to support brands who empower women:

Yes, being a woman, you are always for brands that are about empowering women (R1;D)

Six out of seven participant's acknowledged having preferred brands who participated in Femvertising or empowered women during their business operation. The study showed a clear positive relationship between Femvertising and brand preference amongst participants of Retailer 1.

4.2.2.3 Theme 2: Inclusivity

Inclusivity can be defined as offering fair or equal opportunity to a group of individuals who may have previously been marginalized (Acharya & Ristimäki, 2019). Amongst the data, a theme of participant's feeling a sense of brand preference due to the inclusivity displayed in femvertising emerged. Participants found that the Ackermans Femvert was inclusive across body sizes; race and skin tones with one participant stating:

The advert made me feel recognized (R1;F)

and another noting that:

The more I see retailers who position women in a very empowering way and a very inclusive way, it makes me far more loyal to them (R1; E)

During a discussion around preference towards brands that use femvertising the following point was stated:

My preference towards brands that use femvertising stems from them catering to everyone and showing unity exists for everyone (R1;G)

Within the study, when participants were asked how the advertisement made them feel multiple participants stated that the advert made them feel included:

I felt very seen and included. I felt like it was taking the right steps in terms of diversifying and shouting out all different sizes and backgrounds (R1;A)

The study, further, exposed the need for retailers to have racial inclusivity within Femvertising. All participants of Retailer 1's interviews mentioned the inclusivity of different skin tones in the advertisement.

I think I prefer the brand because they are embracing the different skin colours (R1;D)

Participant G went further with making a point of saying that they are not being racist but noticed the racial inclusivity of the advert, stating:

I'm not a racist person so it's not all about colour but if we have to talk about different colours this advertisement goes across the board (R1;G)

4.2.2.3 Theme 3: Values driven brand preference

Values can be defined as principles or standards of behaviour (Ho, et al., 2014). Within this study, participants mentioned alignment between their values and Femvertising creating brand preference. The values mentioned during the interviews largely related to empowering females and inclusivity. Participants noted a greater feeling of preference towards retailers who showcased values that aligned with the participants values.

4.2.2.4 Theme 4: An Indifference towards Femvertising

Although most participants of Retailer 1's study showed a positive relationship between femvertising and brand preference, it was important to note that there were two participants who felt indifferent toward this retailers femvertising efforts. When asked if participant C felt a feeling of preference towards brands that used femvertising to engage with female customers, they stated:

I wouldn't say I have a preference towards brands that use femvertising, but I'll just say good for them (R1; C)

Although female empowerment is important, it needs to be more of a social impact initiative than just an advertisement. (R1:D)

4.2.3 Category 3: Active change in brands due to Femvertising

4.2.3.1 Theme 1: Relationship between Femvertising and the desirability of a product

During the interviews, the researcher posed a question to the participants with relation to whether femvertising made the product the retailer was selling more desirable to customers. All participants of Retailer 1 acknowledged that they believed the products do become more desirable to them when retailers engage with them using Femvertising.

Participants found it important to note that Retailer 1's products became more desirable to them because of the body positivity displayed and inclusivity of different body shapes:

It shows the different sizes they have in stores and how pretty it can look on different woman and that they cater for everyone (R1;A)

They make their target market bigger by displaying inclusivity within their advertisements (R1;B)

The researcher also found that the empowerment displayed within the advertisement was also recognized as making the product more desirable to participants of the study.

Women take on a lot of roles in society and I think anything that's empowering you to give you the strength and the confidence in all those different roles would be appealing (R1;D)

It is important to note that although Participant C agreed that the product would become more desirable due to the use of Femvertising they found that the importance of the physical attributes of the product were more important to them at the end of the day

For me the actual product is more important than the advert (R1;C)

Within the literature it was evident that the first step to customers actively changing brands was an increase in desirability of product due to Femvertising (Couture, 2017). Within Retailer 1's data it is evident that customers all acknowledged an increase in desirability of product due to Femvertising for varying reasons.

4.2.3.2 Theme 2: Relationship between Femvertising and customers switching brands

Within the interviews, customers were asked if pro-female advertising would make them actively choose a brand over another. Four out of seven participants noted that they would choose a brand over another due to the use of Femvertising. It was found that participants that stated that they would switch brands due to femvertising made a point to note that they would not support brands that did not empower women.

I would definitely choose a retail brand that is for woman. Anything that doesn't support woman, I won't support. For the longest time woman have been trying to get into spaces that show them support (R1;A)

I certainly wouldn't be attracted to any retailer in the way that I'm attracted to a retailer that portrays women in a very empowering way. (R1;E)

Participants praised brands for using femvertising whilst simultaneously criticising other brands for not using this type of advertising to engage with their customers.

Although most of the participants noted that they would actively switch retailers due to femvertising it is important to note the participants who were opposed to switching brand purely for this reason. The researcher found that participants that were opposed to

switching retail brands noted their reasoning as advertising not being enough to make them change their brands.

Personally, I don't think femvertising would influence my decision. I think quantity, price, and product would influence me more in terms of purchasing power (R1;D)

For instance, if another company had the same advertising but their product was more expensive I would not purchase from them. I gravitate towards the cost and quality of the product rather than how they advertise (R1;G)

4.2.3.3 Theme 3: The relationship between femvertising and customers choosing one brand over another

During the study, the researcher posed the question to explore if participants were seeking to change retail brands, did they believe that femvertising would impact the brand they chose. Five out of the seven participants noted that femvertising would influence their choice if they were seeking to change brands.

Upon analysis the main theme identified was that customers who stated that Femvertising would influence them noted the reasoning as their positive reactions to the use of pro-female advertising. Participants noted the way the advertisements made them feel as a reason for being drawn towards this retailer over another:

It would make me choose a brand over another because it makes me feel happy (R1;F)

The importance of social connectivity between a retailer and its customers was also discussed as a reason for choosing a brand over another:

As customers, we want to feel connected to the retailers that we are shopping at. So, if I was shopping somewhere else, and I suddenly saw this advertisement, and reflected on the retailers that I was shopping at and didn't see that level of empowerment or inclusivity. It may make me question if I should be shopping elsewhere (R1;E)

4.2.4 Category 4: The perceived effects of brand loyalty on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

4.2.4.1 Theme 1: Acknowledgment of brand loyalty

Within the study participants of Retailer 1 were asked if they would consider themselves to be brand loyal towards the retailer. Four out of seven participants noted themselves as being brand loyal. Within literature it is also noted that brand loyalty can be split into two main levels (Ebrahim, 2013). Behavioural loyalty which stems from the habit of shopping with one retailer consistently and attitudinal loyalty which is said to be a deeper type of loyalty which stems from a sentimental attachment to the brand. Amongst the participants who identified themselves as being loyal to Retailer 1, three identified their loyalty as being attitudinal as they identified as having a sentimental attachment to the brand. A participant

noted that they believed their loyalty stemmed from both the habit of shopping and sentimental attachment stating:

My parents always bought my sister, and I clothes at Ackerman's when we were little and I think I always go there because of that (R1;B)

Three participants identified themselves as not being loyal to the brand. Participant C and D stated their reason as having only become a customer to the brand recently. Whilst another participant stated:

There are other retailers where I'm a little bit more brand loyal from a regular buyer perspective." (R1;E)

The above shows that participants of the study had a clear idea of whether they considered themselves loyal to Retailer 1 or not. Amongst all interviews there was no hesitation when answering this question.

4.4.4.2 Theme 2: The effect of Brand Loyalty on how customers accept Femvertising

During the interviews, the participants were asked if they believed that being brand loyal would affect how they reacted to femvertising. All participants agreed that being brand loyal would affect how receptive they were towards femvertising. It was also noted that participants who identified themselves as brand loyal at the beginning of the interviews had more positive feedback regarding the femvert they were shown. Participants also noted that being brand loyal made them view the advertisement in a different light.

Being loyal towards a brand, I obviously see their advertisements in a different way because I'm loyal and because the brand already makes me feel a certain way". (R1;B)

When analysing the data, it was evident that participants C and D, who identified themselves as not being brand loyal towards Retailer 1, also found that femvertising was less effective on themselves. It is also noted that whilst analysing the data, it was clear that these participants were more open to scrutinising the advertisement:

I don't really feel much emotion from the advertisement if I'm totally honest (R1;D)

As above participant C was also noted saying "good for them" as a reaction to the retailer having pro-female advertising.

Participant E was an exception for Retailer 1 as they did not identify themselves as brand loyal towards the retailer, however, they reacted positively towards the femvertising despite not being loyal.

4.2.5 Category 5: The perceived effects of customer age on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

Amongst the participants of Retailer 1, there were three participants between the ages of twenty and thirty; one participant between the ages of thirty and forty and three participants between the ages of fifty and above.

Amongst the participants between the age group twenty and thirty, there was a clear acceptance of Femvertising and the need for change in advertising as a whole. Participants in this age group mentioned that the advertisement from Retailer 1 was a step in the right direction:

I felt like it is taking the right step in terms of diversity" (R1;A)

It is applicable for our time (R1;C)

Participant D was the only participant in age group thirty to forty years that did not seem very phased by the advertisement and noted that she preferred when businesses empower women through their actions (e.g., Employing women; or supporting female charities) rather than just purely advertisements.

Amongst the participants fifty years and older, themes of the importance of quality, product and price emerged amongst the participants. Although this age group all reacted positively towards the femvertising, all participants within this age group noted the importance of the quality, product and price as factors that affected their buying decisions:

I would say because it's affordable clothing and like the quality, that's the reason I stick to Ackermans. (R1;G)

This group of participants was also noted as being very verbal about the need for acceptance of different body sizes and the need for inclusivity in advertising:

I think it is a very inclusive ad that makes you feel like an activist as a customer. No matter what colour or shape you are, it is inclusive.' (R1;E)

4.2.6 Category 6: The level of customer brand preference that is created through Femvertising

Brand preference can be defined as when a customer consistently picks one brand over another unless that brand is unavailable (Cant & van Heerden, 2017). As discussed in the literature review section of this study, in a study conducted by Tomer (1996), it is said that there are four main types of customer brand preferences. The types include actual preference, meta-preference, true preference, and unrestrained preference (Ebrahim, 2013).

Through analysing the data, it was identified that the level of brand preference that femvertising had created within participants was actual preference. Actual preference refers to when a customer appreciates and creates a need for a product or service of the brand (Ebrahim, 2013). It refers to a customer's level of appreciation for a brand and their product/services (Prem & Mohan, 2020). This level of appreciation can be seen through participants stating:

That's why I have a preference towards them because they are actually paying attention and trying their best to align themselves to what the customer wants to see (R1;A)

I have the same values, so I also want positive messages about women from the brand I use, encouraging women to feel confident in their own skin as I also try to make women feel good about themselves (R1;B)

The researcher notes that there was a link between customer values and their reasoning for having a brand preference towards retailers who use Femvertising. This showcases that Femvertising is successful in portraying a brand's values to a customer and assists customer in aligning their own values to a brand.

4.2.7 Category 7: Perceived effects of customers race on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

As South Africa is such a diverse country filled with many races, cultures, and religions, it was important for the researcher to analyse these factors. Amongst the participants, three participants were white, two were black, one was Indian, and one was coloured.

4.2.7.1 Theme 1- Culture

The participants of the study were asked if there is any part of their culture that influences the way they feel about Femvertising. The study showed that Participants A and F noted that in African cultures this advert would be considered as too revealing. Participant A, however, noted that she is "More cosmopolitan" but noted that in the rural areas of South Africa the advert would be frowned upon. Participant E noted that her culture possibly played a subconscious role in how she felt about femvertising stating:

I think culture is a significant part of anyone's makeup. Whether you acknowledge it openly or it's in your subconscious, that impacts who you are as a person (R1;E)

The rest of the participants noted that they believed that their culture did not influence the way they viewed Femvertising.

4.2.7.2 Theme 2- Religion

Christian participants in particular noted that their religion effected how they felt about the advertisement. Participants B noted that she believed that God made everyone perfect and therefor she enjoyed the advertisement because of how self-accepting it was.

Godly confidence is something that I believe in and definitely a message that I pull through in everything I do and decisions I make, just because that's who I am (R1;B)

Participant G also noted that although she is not religious, she believed that some individuals who are very religious might not enjoy the advertisement as they are more conservative and might be offended.

4.2.7.3 Theme 3- Upbringing

All participants agreed that their family upbringings affected how they responded to this type of advertising. Despite all having different upbringing the participants all agreed that their upbringing made them see Femvertising in a positive light. Participant G grew up in a very religious home that would frown upon women exposing themselves, however, she noted:

My family is more conservative but I'm not like that (R1;G)

Participant D noted that she grew up in a home where she always felt empowered as a woman and therefor that positively affected how she views femvertising.

Table 1. Summary of Findings: Retailer 1

The below table will form as a summary of the data analyzed above. The table showcases a list of key findings from Retailer 1 and how these findings address the research questions of this study. The table also shows an interpretation of the findings to conclude this section and demonstrate critical analysis.

Link to research question	Key Findings	Interpretation of Findings
Question 1: What perceived effect does femvertising have on retail fashion customer brand preference?	1. The study showed a clear positive relationship between Femvertising and brand preference amongst participants of Retailer 1.	Femvertising can create retail fashion customer brand preference amongst its intended audience.
	2. Participants found that the Ackermans femvert was inclusive across body sizes, race, and skin tones. Racial inclusivity was seen as an important part of femvertising to participants.	It is important for retailers to be completely inclusive within their advertainments in a South African environment. This includes inclusivity around body shapes, age, and race.
	3. All participants felt that femvertising made products more desirable to them.	Femvertising can be used to increase the desirability of a product amongst female customers.
	4. Participants noted the importance of the physical product attributes to them.	Retailer 1's customers note the importance of the product, and this showcases the importance of product to this market.
Question 2: Do retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising?	5. Femvertising would make a customer of Retailer 1 choose a brand over another.	It is evident that customers of this retailer would choose a brand over another based on the use of Femvertising. Femvertising can be seen as a deciding factor for customers although they still mentioned that the product plays a big role.

Question 3: How does brand loyalty towards the retailer affect the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	6.Participants who identified themselves as brand loyal to retailer 1 had more positive feedback regarding the femvert they were shown.	Retailers with brand loyal customers have a greater chance of receiving positive feedback around using femvertising.
Question 4: How does the customer's age influence the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	7.Younger participants were more open to the idea of femvertising. 8. Individuals over 50 stated the importance of the product along with the advertisement.	This showcases that femvertising is efficient when used on younger generations. It also shows that although femvertising is well received by older generation's it is not the main contributor to sales.
Question 5: What level of retail fashion customer brand preference is created through femvertising?	9.Femvertising was found to create actual preference amongst participants.	This shows that femvertising created a feeling of respect and admiration for this retailer.
Question 6: How does the customer's race influence the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	10.Participants acknowledged that their religions, upbringing, and cultures formed a part of who they are but that it influenced how they felt about the advertisements positively.	Race, culture and upbringing had little to no role in how each participant reacted to Retailer 1's femvertising.

4.3 Retailer 2: Foschini

Foschini is one of eighteen retail brands owned by the TFG group (TFG, 2021). Foschini sets out to offer their customers fashionable and contemporary clothing within a modern environment (TFG, 2021). Their customers can be described as middle to higher LSM individuals looking for fashionable clothing (TFG, 2021).

4.3.1 Category 1: Participants' information's

The participant's information was gathered before the interview by means of screen questions at the beginning of the interviews. This data was collected by the researcher in order to contextualise the study and ensure that the participants qualified to participate in the study.

Screening Question:			
Are you a Foschini customer?	Yes (7)	No (0)	Total (7)

Demographics:

Age Group:	20-30 years old (4)	30-40 years old (1)	40-50 years old (0)	50 years and older (2)
Gender:	Female (7)		Male (0)	
Race:	Black (3)	White (1)	Indian (2)	Coloured (1)

4.3.2 Category 2: The perceived effects of Femvertising on brand preference

Through analysing the data, the researcher found that there are perceived effects of femvertising on brand preference. The perceived effects were categorised and sorted into the below themes:

4.3.2.1 Theme 1: The positive effect of Femvertising on brand preference

Through analysing the data, the researcher was able to identify that there were themes of participants acknowledging a positive effect of Femvertising on their brand preferences. Participants of the study acknowledge all having had positive feelings towards the advertisement. The participants note that the advertisement made them want to go into the store and have a look at what they had to say and sell:

It looks interesting and if I saw that image, I would go into store to see what's available and what's new (R2;M)

It makes me interested in what they have to offer (R2;H)

This shows a positive reaction towards Retailer 2's femvert in drawing customers into the stores.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Pride

Within the interviews, Retailer 2's femvert also had an effect of pride upon participants of the study:

It makes me feel good. I guess good to be associated with the retailer (R2;J)

It's different from how other retailers are advertising or marketing products (R2;K)

This showed that this type of advertising made the participants proud to shop with this retailer as well as proud of the messaging they were sending out. Participants also noted a feeling of pride to be a woman:

I think it makes me feel proud to be a woman (R2;H)

4.3.2.3 Theme 3: Female Empowerment

Participants all noted a feeling of empowerment from the advertisement. When asked how the advertisement made the participants feel, they stated:

Specifically, it empowers women, which is really encouraging and makes you want to shop there more (R2;K)

I think it's about female empowerment and it's probably aimed at attracting your younger customer because it makes reference to the future (R2;J)

Through analysing the extracted data, it is clear that Retailer 2 was successful in their femvert as customers got a clear message of female empowerment from their advert.

4.3.3 Category 3: Active change in brands due to Femvertising

4.3.3.1 Theme 1: Relationship between Femvertising and the desirability of product

During the interviews, the researcher posed a question to the participants with relation to whether Femvertising made the product the retailer was selling more desirable to customers.

All participants of Retailer 2's study agreed that femvertising made the retailers products more desirable.

I think it does make it very desirable because you're wearing, firstly, what the brand is portraying. Secondly, something that resonates with you, and is important to you and I do think that has a very big impact (R2;H)

I do think so as they will attract the customer into the store and show that they stand for something (R2;N)

Participant K noted the importance of having such a strong brand message and brand image and how it is then important for retailers to align their product with the same values. The participant stated:

It feels almost like if you have such a positive brand image, you need to make sure that your product quality and the value of your product is up to par with your image (R2;K)

4.3.3.2 Theme 2: Relationship between Femvertising and customers switching brands

During the study, the researcher posed the question to explore whether the use of pro-female advertising would make a customer choose a retailer over another. Four out of seven participants agreed that femvertising would make them choose a brand over another.

Participants that believed femvertising would make them choose a retailer over another spoke to the enticement of the femvert:

I see it as a big drawcard, definitely (R2;H)

It kind of motivates you (R2;I)

Participants that said that they were willing to change brands also noted it being due to feeling empowered by the brands message:

Yeah, I think so, primarily because you want a brand that believes in women empowerment (R2;M)

If one particular retailer, like Foschini, is punting it more than another I am going to look into the Foschini. The other retailer would then lose me as a customer (R2;K)

The three participants that did not believe femvertising would be enough to make them switch brands noted the importance of the physical product to them:

I don't think that just advertising would make me choose a brand over another (R2;N)

If I were to change retail brands, I would change based on product more than branding. I think because I work in retail, and I know the process of building a brand image. Product is key for me, and product is king, so it doesn't matter (R2;K)

4.3.3.3 Theme 3: The Relationship between Femvertising and customers choosing one brand over another

During the study the researcher posed the question to explore if participants were seeking to change retail brands, did they believe that femvertising would impact the brand they chose. Six out of seven participants noted that Femvertising would influence the brand they chose.

Participants noted that the positive female messaging would influence their choice in brand:

Yes I do think so because if the two brands had the exact same products but their advertising had different messaging and one empowered females, I would choose that brand (R2;N)

Yes, because it resonates with me as opposed to another brand (R2;I)

Participant H noted that although they believed that they would choose a brand because of femvertising they stated that it is still important to them that the product is of a good quality:

It could, I think, like I said before, I think the products play a bigger role, although that is something that is really powerful, I don't know if it necessarily swings me completely, products at the end of the day still need to appeal to me and then, the fact that they are a pro-female brand, that's just the cherry on the top (R2;H)

If I were to change retail brands, I would change based on product more than advertising (R2;K)

This demonstrated the importance of product to this participant.

4.3.4 Category 4: The perceived effects of brand loyalty on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

4.3.4.1 Theme 1: Acknowledgment of Brand Loyalty

During the interviews, customers were asked if they would describe themselves as brand loyal towards Retailer 2. Six out of seven participants said that they would not consider themselves brand loyal to Foschini.

Participants that stated that they were not loyal noted their reason as being that there are other shops that they are more loyal to:

I wouldn't say brand loyal. I also do shop at other stores (R2;I)

I wouldn't describe myself as brand loyal. I think I probably don't like all the clothing, sometimes they have some really nice pieces, but I feel like you really have to search to find them (R2;H)

Participant J was the only participant who stated that they were loyal to Retailer 2 and stated their reasoning as the uniqueness of product:

I think there's items I find in Foschini that I don't necessarily find at other retailers (R2;J)

4.3.4.2 Theme 2: The effect of Brand Loyalty on how customers accept Femvertising

Although it was observed that most of the participants did not believe that they were brand loyal towards Foschini, it was still evident that participants reacted positively towards the Femvertising of Retailer 2. This displayed that the customers of this retailer did not necessarily have to be brand loyal in order to appreciate their marketing efforts.

During the interviews conducted, participants were asked whether they believe that being brand loyal would affect how they reacted to Femvertising. All participants agreed that having brand loyalty would affect how they received the advertisement. The reasons given were that the femvertising would just further reinforce your ideas about the brand:

I think if you're really loyal to the brand, then you're seeing something else as reinforcing that loyalty and reinforcing why you love to shop there (R2;H)

Participant J did note that although they believed that brand loyalty would influence how customers accepted femvertising they did note that it could go both ways. They noted that although some loyal customers may enjoy the femvertising, some may feel excluded:

Like I said, it could go either way. Some people might feel excluded in the narrative, maybe say a black woman, all skinny women, or women who have a particular body type (R2;J)

4.3.5 Category 5: The perceived effects of customer age on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

When assessing the age of the participants of Retailer 2's study, there were four participants in age group 20-30; 1 participant in age group 30-40 and two participants over the age of 50.

Amongst the participants aged between twenty and thirty there was a clear positive reaction towards femvertising. The participants in this age group felt that the femvert was empowering and spoke of inclusivity:

From a female perspective, I do think that they are trying to be more inclusive, more empowering, in a lot more ways than just gender, race, size, by the words that they use in the ad (R2;K)

Participants in this age group all acknowledged a feeling of empowerment.

Amongst the age group thirty to forty, participants felt a sense of excitement for the advertisement and the timing of the advertisement, stating:

I think it makes me feel very exciting at a specific point in time (R2;I)

Participant I also stated that she is beginning to see more women in higher positions in businesses and that she can notice the difference in the way that businesses are speaking to their female customers.

Participants in age group fifty and above noted that they had both never noticed any pro-female advertising being promoted by the retailer. Participant L failed to identify the advertisement as pro-female:

Okay. I mean, I like it. I love that it's a fun pic. I love the styling. I mean, I'm a jeans girl I love wearing jeans. Yeah, so the emotion for me it's a happy one (R2;L)

Whereas participant M just found the advertisement "interesting". It was clear from these reactions that the participants within this age group had less enthusiastic reactions to the advertisement. When analysing the advertisement, the advertisement only used models of a younger age group, and this could be a contributing factor to the lack of enthusiasm.

Women empowerment and it's probably aimed at attracting your younger customer because it makes reference to the future (R2;M)

4.3.6 Category 6: The level of customer brand preference that is created through Femvertising

As mentioned in the literature review section of this study, brand preference is said to be a level of brand loyalty that is constantly evolving (Cant & van Heerden, 2017). Studies found that customers who have positive experiences with brands are more likely to choose that brand over another thus creating a brand preference (Hwang & Cho, 2019).

Through analysing the data, it was identified that the level of brand preference that femvertising had created within participants was actual preference. Actual preference refers to when a customer appreciates and creates a need for a product or service of the brand (Ebrahim, 2013). This type of brand preference is evident in participants stating:

This advertisement is very powerful (R2;H)

I've noticed that Foschini has been empowering women in their advertisements for a while, and that's been great (R2;J)

4.3.7 Category 7: Perceived effects of customers race on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

The methodology of this research provided no limitation in terms of the age and race of the sample group. This was put into place in order to ensure the exploration of opinions and beliefs amongst the diverse population of South Africa. Amongst the participants one participant was white, three were black, two were Indian and one was coloured.

4.3.7.1 Theme 1: Culture

Amongst the participants who mentioned that their culture influenced how they felt about femvertising, it is clear that participants who identified themselves as black felt that they were most influenced by their culture. Participants J, K and M all mentioned feeling disempowered by African cultures, putting men on a pedestal:

In a traditional household, the man or the husband is put on a pedestal. I guess out of respect (R2; J)

My experience, as a black woman might not necessarily be the most empowering experiences, but when you see messages like that, from big retailers you tend to gravitate towards what is empowering you, when you come from a place of disempowerment (R2;K)

This statement embodies how participants J, K and M felt their culture influenced them to be drawn towards femvertising.

4.3.7.2 Theme 2: Religion

During the interviews, participants were asked whether or not their religion played a role in how they perceive femverts. Six out of seven participants stated that their religions had nothing to do with how they felt about femvertising:

I grew up in a very religious home and that has influenced the way that I view things. When I see a retailer selling an image that does not sit well with my religion it makes me doubt whether it's a good place to shop (R2;L)

I don't live by rules that were created 100 years ago, I live by rules that make sense for me in this current climate and the type of world I live in (R2;J)

4.3.7.3 Theme 3: Family Upbringing

When discussing family upbringing, it was clear that amongst some participants, it was an important influencer in how they view femvertising:

I've always been around very strong females in my house and these females are my role models, that has pushed me to see the world differently (R2;H)

I grew up in an environment that made me feel empowered and that influences how I feel about advertisements like these (R2;M)

Table 2. Summary of Findings: Retailer 2

The below table displays a list of key findings from Retail 2. These findings are linked to the research questions and further interpreted in order to show critical analysis of the data collected.

Link to research question	Key Findings	Interpretation of Findings
Question 1: What perceived effect does femvertising have on retail fashion customer brand preference?	1.The participants note that the advertisement made them want to go into the store and have a look at what they had to say and sell.	Femvertising has the ability to draw customers into the store to see what products they have to offer.
	2.Retailer 2's femvert also had an effect of pride upon participants of the study.	Retailer 2's femvert provoked a feeling of pride amongst it's customers. This creates an emotional connection between retail fashion brands and their customers.
	3.Participants all noted a feeling of empowerment from the advertisement.	Femvertising made Retailer 2's customers feel a sense of pride for the retailer and pride for being a customer of the retailer.
Question 2: Do retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising?	4. All participants of Retailer 2 study agreed that femvertising made the retailers products more desirable.	Femvertising can increase the desirability of a product. Participants felt that femvertising on it's own would not be enough to

	5. most participants did not believe femvertising would be enough to make them switch brands and noted the importance of the physical product to them. 6. Participants noted that femvertising would influence the brand they chose.	make them switch brands how ever if they were looking for a new brand it would have some influence on the brand they chose.
Question 3: How does brand loyalty towards the retailer affect the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	7. Even though most participants did not identify themselves as brand loyal to Foschini they still reacted positively towards the Femvertising of Retailer 2.	This showed that brand loyalty had no effect on how participants reacted to the pro-female advertising displayed by this retailer.
Question 4: How does the customer's age influence the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	8. Amongst the participants aged between twenty and thirty there was a clear positive reaction towards femvertising. 9. Amongst the age group thirty to forty, participants felt a sense of excitement for the advertisement and the timing of the advertisement. 10. Participants in age group fifty and above noted that they had both never noticed any pro-female advertising being promoted by the retailer.	Individuals in the younger age groups were more accepting of femvertising and open to this type of advertising. Participants in the older age group of Retail 2 showed negative responses towards the femvertising. This could be related to the youthful nature of the models used within this advertisement.
Question 5: What level of retail fashion customer brand preference is created through femvertising?	11. Actual preference was created through Retailer 2's femvertising.	Femvertising creates a sense of pride and admiration in customers thus resulting in actual preference.
Question 6: How does the customer's race influence the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	12. Participants who identified as black felt the most negatively affected by their culture as they felt they came from a place of disempowerment so seeing a retailer empower them resonated with these participants.	Femvertising resonates with individuals from both empowering and disempowered backgrounds.

4.4 Retailer 3: Woolworths

Woolworths is a South African retailer that was founded in 1931 (Woolworths, 2021). Woolworths is best known for their high-quality products and offer a range of goods from food products to clothing (Woolworths, 2021). The Woolworths customer is middle to higher LSM, is less price-sensitive, and appreciates quality.

4.4.1 Category 1: Participant's information

The participant's information was gathered before the interview by means of screen questions at the beginning of the interviews. This data was collected by the researcher in order to contextualise the study and ensure that the participants qualified to participate in the study.

Screening Question:			
Are you a Woolworths customer?	Yes (7)	No (0)	Total (7)

Demographics:				
Age Group:	20-30 years old (0)	30-40 years old (3)	40-50 years old (1)	50 years and older (3)
Gender:	Female (7)		Male (0)	
Race:	Black (2)	White (2)	Indian (0)	Coloured (3)

4.4.2 Category 2: The perceived effects of Femvertising on brand preference

Once the researcher had gathered the data, she began to sort through themes and patterns within the data. These themes and patterns showed that there are perceived effects of Femvertising on brand preference. The following themes occurred from the analysis:

4.4.2.1 Theme 1: The positive effect of Femvertising on brand preference

When asked how the advertisement made each participant feel, all participants reacted positively towards the advertisement. Participants acknowledged all having positive feelings towards the advertisement and, in turn, Retailer 3 themselves. Participant T stated that "I think it's great. I think it's wonderful that all women with all different body shapes and sizes are being promoted and made to feel good about the size of their body".

4.4.2.2 Theme 2: Body Positivity

Participants of the study felt positively affected by the femvert due to the body positivity displayed within the advert:

It's just about encouraging us to be natural, but also, at the same time, just embrace oneself for who you are (R3;S)

I think it's great. I think it's wonderful that all women with all different body shapes and sizes are being promoted and made to feel good about the size of their body. Actually, not just the size everything about their bodies (R3;T)

It's all about embracing who you are, love yourself and don't try to be something that you're not, you can look hot and be comfortable (R3;U)

Upon analysis, participants of the study all picked up on elements of body positivity and it is clear in the comments above that they viewed the femvertising in a positive manner.

4.4.2.3 Theme 3: Inclusivity

Amongst the participant's responses a theme of inclusivity also emerged. Participants noted the femvertising not only for inclusivity of body shapes but also of skin tone and race:

I think the intentions are to reach a broader market and to promote a positive image of the people of different shapes (R3;O)

I think the one thing it makes me feel is nice because of the inclusivity (R3;Q)

Participant R, however, scrutinised the femvert for not being racially diverse enough stating:

I liked it, I thought it was diverse, in the sense of like colour as well as body shapes. There is room for more races, I guess they could have used maybe, black; coloured; white and Indian instead of just doing black and white. But in terms of body shapes, I feel that it is nicely diverse and inclusive (R3;R)

When asked further whether this participant felt there was a lack of representation of colour individuals in marketing she said yes and noted that she has noticed it getting better.

The themes of racial diversity in femvertising within the South African market is highly evident as a need within the country as seen through the participants comments.

4.4.3 Category 3: Active change in brands due to femvertising

4.4.3.1 Theme 1: Relationship between femvertising and the desirability of product

During the interviews the researcher posed a question to the participants with relation to whether Femvertising made the product the retailer was selling more desirable to customers.

Four participants responded that femvertising would make the product desirable:

That's the whole point of marketing, to make the product more desirable (R3;O)

Definitely, because I think that this brand is focusing on improving the fit of the items, and you can go into that shop and buy something, they fit you well, and I think they will make any customer really glad to be associated with their product and make the brand more appealing to them (R3;R)

Participant P noted that she believed that the desirability of the product was dependent on the target market that was being reached as some individuals might think the brand was supporting unhealthy behavior.

Three participants noted that they do not believe that femvertising would make the product more desirable:

It is showing customers the products that they want to buy. It is showing them that it doesn't matter what your body looks like we have something for it (R3;Q)

4.4.3.2 Theme 2: Relationship between femvertising and customers switching brands

During the study the researcher posed the question to explore if the use of pro-female advertising would make a customer choose a retailer over another. Five out of seven participants agreed that femvertising would make them choose a brand over another.

Participant U noted that femvertising would make her switch brands:

I'm in support of training and developing women (R3;U)

You know as a female, I respond to advertising that makes a difference to women (R3;O)

Participant P also stated that she would switch brands and she liked to see brand supporting women through their initiatives.

Participant Q stated that she would not change brands because of femvertising stating

No because as a female, I respond more to product than advertising (R3;Q)

This showed that the only reason this participant felt that the advertisement would not successfully make her switch brand was due to product being more important to her.

4.4.3.3 Theme 3: The relationship between femvertising and customers choosing one brand over another

During the study, the researcher posed the question to explore if participants were seeking to change retail brands, did they believe that femvertising would impact the brand they chose. All participants noted that Femvertising would influence the brand they chose.

Participants of the study all noted that femvertising would help steer them towards what brand to change to:

I think it would help emphasize what brand I should choose (R3;Q)

It would definitely get me into the store, and it would make me interested where I might not have been interested before (R3;T)

The above analysis shows that femvertising can be a persuader to customers who may be considering changing brands. It entices them into the stores and then further reiterates the need for them to change brands.

4.4.4 Category 4: The perceived effects of brand loyalty on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

4.4.4.1 Theme 1: Acknowledgment of Brand Loyalty

During the interviews, customers were asked if they would describe themselves as brand loyal towards Retailer 3. Six out of seven participants said that they would consider themselves brand loyal to Woolworths.

Participants noted their reason for being brand loyal as the products and quality:

Certain products are just better, they taste better, their quality is better and also the clothing actually has a good amount of quality associated with it (R3;T)

Yes, I am brand loyal because I love their products and everything that they sell (R3;S)

When analysing the brand loyalty behind Woolworths it was clear that there is definitely a perception around the quality of the brand.

Participant R was the only participant who did not believe she was brand loyal to retailer 3 and stated her reasoning as:

I'm not brand loyal to anyone. If I see something I like, I buy it, but I don't actively go to a specific place for something (R3;R)

4.4.4.2 Theme 2: The effect of Brand Loyalty on how customers accept Femvertising

The above analysis shows that most participants acknowledged having brand loyalty towards Retailer 3. This could correlate with the positive responses identified when asking the participant's how the advertisements made them feel.

During the interviews conducted, participants were asked whether they believe that being brand loyal would affect how they reacted to Femvertising. Five out of seven participants believed that being brand loyal towards a brand would affect how they perceived their advertisements.

The participants who stated that brand loyalty would affect how they perceive femvertising stated that the reasons would be because of the familiarity of the brand and things that the brand is associated with:

Brands are experienced with a more biased approach when you are brand loyal (R3;O)

This shows this participant thought that brand loyalty towards a brand would make you automatically look at their femvert with a good perspective.

What the brand stood for before that as well, will give the context in which you're going to see femvertising (R3;P)

Participants that thought brand loyalty would have no effect was also evident with participant R, who believed that she would not be affected by brand loyalty as she is not brand loyal and participant S felt that brand loyalty would make no difference:

Quite frankly, for me it doesn't matter whether they were wearing Woolworths, I just saw a group of beautiful, diverse ladies (R3;S)

This shows that although these participants felt brand loyalty wouldn't affect how they felt, they were still able to praise and relate to the advertisement.

4.4.5 Category 5: The perceived effects of customer age on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

When assessing the age of the participants of Retailer 3's study, there were zero participants in age group 20-30: three participants in age group 30-40 and four participants over the age of 50.

Within the age group of 30-40 participants, all noted the importance of the products from the retailer and the perception of quality associated with Retailer 3. Participants within this age also all noted the inclusivity and body positivity within the advertisement:

Yes, I do have a preference towards brands that use femvertising, because again it's about inclusivity and it's not about the usual stereotypes (R3;Q)

I do. Because I'm a curvy woman, and if I see a brand, or retailer that is showing imagery of women that look like me, or people I identify with, I do feel like a stronger sense of support towards them (R3;R)

Within age group fifty and above customers, were more open about their brand loyalty to the brand and their preference towards the brand. Participants within this age group felt a strong feeling of support towards the body positivity of this femvert:

I think it's time for campaigns to actually really focus on women and female empowerment, women have got a lot of insecurities about themselves, and it's important to be innovative around how a retailer would actually create its adverts and stories around those themes and those lines (R3;S)

I think that women have been suppressed for so many years and this is seen in them just not being able to really be real and be natural. So, any kind of upliftment always inspires me (R3;T)

4.4.6 Category 6: The level of customer brand preference that is created through Femvertising

The types of brand preference include actual preference, meta-preference, true preference and unrestrained preference (Ebrahim, 2013).

Through analysing the data, it was identified that the level of brand preference that femvertising had created within participants was actual preference.

This is evident in participants identifying a sentimental attachment to the brand as well as stating their appreciation for the brand quality and use of body positivity in an advertisement:

Basically, showing you that as a company, and a retailer they are embracing and encouraging diversity, and just being very gender positive (R3;S)

4.3.7 Category 7: Perceived effects of customers race on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

As South Africa is such a diverse country filled with many races, cultures, and religions it was important for the researcher to analyze these factors. Amongst the participants two were white, two were black, zero were Indian and three were coloured.

4.3.7.1 Theme 1: Culture

Within the interviews participants were asked if there was any part of their culture that influenced how they felt about this sort of advertising. Amongst the participants a common pattern accorded of participants who grew up in conservative cultures. These conservative cultures effected their views on femvertising positively as it created a need for normalizing body positivity within them:

I think for me, if I look at that picture it wasn't offensive in any way (R3;P)

I think as a coloured person in South Africa, it would be nice if there were all kinds of people in advertising. In South Africa there is more than just black and white there's asian there's indian, there's coloured, you know, we are such a diverse country, a rainbow nation. But, yeah, so I think that part of my culture, like, whenever I see people who look like me being advertised, or in advertising, it does help me identify with it (R3;R)

4.3.7.2 Theme 2: Religion

When discussing whether religion played an important role within how customers interpreted femvertising most participants of Retailer 3 noted that it personally did not affect them, however, participant O did state:

I always believe that peoples religious affiliations and how they've been brought up does make a difference in terms of how they react to anything in life (R3;O)

Participants within the study did, however, note that although religion did not affect their views, they did know of very religious individuals that would not be happy with the advertisement:

I could imagine that in some cultures like Muslim culture you're not supposed to show a lot of skin which could be a problem (R3;P)

Table 3. Summary of Findings: Retailer 3

The below table summarises the key findings and interpretations of these findings from Retailer 3. The key findings are linked to the research questions in order to display how the objectives of this study were achieved.

Link to research question	Key Findings	Interpretation of Findings
Question 1: What perceived effect does femvertising have on retail fashion customer brand preference?	1.Participants of the study felt positively affected by the femvert due to the body positivity displayed within the advert.	Femvertising has a positive effect on retail fashion customer brand preference particularly when body positivity is included.
	2.The themes of racial diversity in femvertising within the South African market is highly evident as a need within the country as seen through the participants comments.	Racial inclusivity is still a need within South African marketing and is still important within Femvertising. Customers want to see inclusivity across the board.
	3.Participants of Retailer 3 were less open to acknowledging that Femvertising would make the product more desirable.	Participants of Retailer 3 did not believe that femvertising could make this retailer products more desirable. This could be linked to the customer's already holding this retailer's products to such high standards.
Question 2: Do retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising?	4. Participants of the study all noted that femvertising would help steer them towards what brand to change to.	Femvertising can be used by retailer to obtain a greater market share.
Question 3: How does brand loyalty towards the retailer affect the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	5. When analysing the brand loyalty behind Woolworths it was clear that there is definitely a perception around quality of the brand and that made customers view the femvertising with quality.	Most participants of Retailer 3 acknowledged being brand loyal to the retailer and held the retailer to high standards which they agreed effected how they perceived this advertisement positively.

Question 4: How does the customer's age influence the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	6.The younger age group spoke about the importance of the product and the quality offered by Woolworths. 7.The older age group had great focus on discussing the importance of the body inclusivity displayed within the advertisement.	Retailer 3's younger customers stated the product as being very important to them. This could be due to the price point of these items. The older customers of this retailer were more open towards the femvertising, and the body inclusivity included within this advertisement.
Question 5: What level of retail fashion customer brand preference is created through femvertising?	8.The level of preference created was actual preference amongst all customers.	Within Retailer 3, participants had a level of admiration prior to the advertisement, and this was just increased by the advertisement. This shows that femvertising can reinforce the actual preference amongst customers.
Question 6: How does the customer's race influence the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference?	9.Participant noted the need for racial inclusivity within advertising. 10. Amongst retailer 3's participants race, religion and culture were not seen as contributing factors to how they felt about femvertising. The did note that more conservative individuals might be offended.	Racial inclusivity is crucial within advertising in the South African market.

4.5 Cross case comparison

The research above was conducted across three different retailers to gain a general idea of the role of femvertising in retail fashion customer brand preference across different fashion retailers within the South African market. The below table showcases the similarities and differences of the data collected from each retailer.

Table 4: Cross case comparison

Categories of Analysis	Similarities across findings	Differences across findings
Category 1: Participants' information	There was diversity of participants for each retailer. The participants included individuals of different races, religions, income, occupancy, and upbringing.	Retailer 3 lacked a participant in the age group 20-30 years old.
Category 2: The perceived effects of femvertising on retail fashion customer brand preference	Across the three retailers there was a positive perceived effect of femvertising on retail fashion customer brand preference.	Retailer 1's participants showed themes of inclusivity as building preference towards this brand. Retailer 2's customers felt proud of the retailer and pride for being a customer because of the use of femvertising. Retailer 3's customers felt that body positivity was the effect of the femvertising.
Category 3: Active change in brands due to femvertising	Participants from Retailer 1,2 and 3 agreed that femvertising would help them choose a brand over another if they were seeking to change brands.	Participants from Retail 2 stated that femvertising would not be enough to make them switch brands if they were not looking to change brands.
Category 4: The perceived effects of brand loyalty on the relationship between femvertising and brand preference.	Retailer 1 and 3 both had brand loyal participants and this had a positive effect on how customers reacted to femvertising.	Retailer 2's participants did not identify as being brand loyal towards the retailer. They, however, still reacted positively toward the femvertising.
Category 5: The perceived effects of customer age on the relationship between femvertising and brand preference.	Within Retailer 1 and 2 there was a theme of younger customers being more accepting of femvertising than the older customers who still stated that product was the	Within Retailer 3's interviews it was clear that the younger customers were product conscious whereas the older participants were more open to the femvertising.

	number on deciding factor for them.	This could be due to the price point of the items at this retailer.
Category 6: The level of customer brand preference that is created through Femvertising.	Across the three retailers' actual preference was created due to the admiration of participants for brands using femvertising.	As Retailer 3's participants already had admiration for the brand and it's levels of quality the advertisement further reinforced the actual preference amongst it's customers.
Category 7: Effects of customers race on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference.	Within Retailer 1 and 2 participants acknowledged that their race, religion and upbringing influenced how they perceived this advertisement. The need for inclusivity was a common theme that occurred across all three retailers' participants.	Retailer 3's participants did not see their race, religion or upbringing as contributing factors that influence how they felt about the femvertising.

Chapter 4 set out to analyze the data collected from the study. Through this analysis, many patterns and themes emerged for each retailer as well as across retailers. Key findings were extracted from the data and critical analysis was conducted in order to provide insightful interpretations of the findings. The proceeding chapter sets out recommendations and concludes the study.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will form as a summary of the research concluded as well as key findings from the study. This chapter will also explore the implications to all practitioners; limitations of the study; suggestions for further research; and lastly, a conclusion.

5.2 Research Summary

Femvertising is a concept that is used to describe advertising that empowers women, and it is on the rise (Herby, 2016). Due to the international and local trend and movement of feminism, there has been a rise in brands participating in empowering women through femvertising (Varghese & Kumar, 2020). The rise in gender based violence has also resulted in increased feminism in South Africa which has increased the amount of Femvertising being used within the country (Yesufu, 2022). Due to the contemporary nature of femvertising, a problem existed in that there was a lack of research around the perceived relationship between femvertising and brand preference across industries (Zawisza, et al., 2018). Furthermore, there was a lack of research around femvertising within South Africa.

This study aimed to contribute to academia whilst simultaneously being available to practitioners in the branding and communication industry when referring to femvertising. The study aimed to gain greater insights into the concept of femvertising and its potential influence on brand preference in a South African context. The study had objectives to explore whether femvertising has a perceived effect on retail fashion customer brand preference; explore whether retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands due to femvertising; explore if the brand loyalty towards the fashion retailer has perceived effects on the relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference; and to explore the perceived level of retail fashion customer brand preference that is created through femvertising.

This study wished to add to the currently limited amount of research done on femvertising, particularly in a developing country such as South Africa. The research also aimed at informing businesses within the South African market by providing them with research on the topic.

5.3 Key Findings

Through analysing the data collected, the research had the following key findings.

5.3.1 The perceived effects of Femvertising on brand preference

The study determined that there was a positive perceived effect of Femvertising on brand preference. This was analysed in the participants of the study showing preference towards brands who used femvertising. This links to literature that showed that femvertising provoked feelings within its viewers and how they felt about certain brands (Abdallah, et al., 2018).

Femvertising created a preference amongst the participants towards these brands, and there were themes identified amongst participants reasoning for showing preference across the three case study retailers. These themes included inclusivity; values driven brand preference; pride; female empowerment; and lastly, body positivity.

When analysing the data, it became clear that participants acknowledged femvertising for its inclusivity across body types. The study found that although the advertisements were quite clear around body inclusivity, the participants also recognised the advertisements for their inclusivity around race and different skin tones. This showcased that within the South African market, femvertising requires inclusivity across all avenues in order to be fully successful in creating brand preference.

Another perceived effect of femvertising was identified as value driven brand preference. This was evident in participant's identifying femvertising as being aligned with their personal values and therefore becoming their preferred brands. Participants of the study found that femvertising spoke to their internal values and therefore they felt more closely aligned to the brand. This corresponded with the theme of pride that was identified within the study. Participants found that the advertisement made them feel proud to be associated with the brand as well as proud to be a woman. This pride was linked to the brand standing for what the participants believed in.

Furthermore, the study found that femvertising provoked feelings of female empowerment and body positivity. Participants of the study felt positively towards brand due to the themes of female and empowerment and body positivity across the retail case studies. The study found that women not only showed a preference towards brands that made them feel this way but also noted having negative feelings towards brands not empowering females through their advertisements and daily practises.

This key finding directly addresses the research question around what perceived effect femvertising has on retail fashion customer brand preference.

5.3.2 Active change in brands due to Femvertising

The study explored the perceived effects of femvertising on customers changing brands by identifying three main themes, mainly product desirability; switching brands due to femvertising; and choosing a brand over another due to the presence of femvertising. This

addressed research question two which set out to explore why retail fashion customers acknowledge an active change of brands.

The study found that all participants of retailer one and two acknowledged that femvertising made products more desirable. In retailer 3 majority of participant's agreed that it would make the products more desirable, and the only reason the rest disagreed was due to them already believing the product was desirable on its own. Increased desirability of product is said to be the first step in creating brand preference (Ebrahim, 2013), and therefor, this study shows that femvertising displays those effects.

The study also found that a majority of participant's acknowledged that they would switch brands on the premise of femvertising. Participants stated their reasoning as the empowerment and difference that this advertisement style makes. Participants that stated that they would not switch brands noted the importance of the quality of the physical products in their decision-making process. This relates to previous literature which showed that femvertising had a link to the brand image of a product (Abitbol, 2016).

The last theme explored was whether participants would choose a brand with femvertising over one without if they were seeking to change brands. The study found that most participants across the three case study retailers would choose a brand with femvertising.

Through the above three themes, the key finding was that femvertising would make customers actively choose one brand over another, thus creating brand preference.

5.3.3 The perceived effects of brand loyalty on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

The study found that brand loyalty had little impact on how participants reacted to femvertising (Acharya & Ristimäki, 2019). This finding directly addressed the research question three which explored whether brand loyalty towards the retailer affects the perceived relationship between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference. This was especially evident within retailer two's study as only one participant identified themselves as brand loyal, however, all participants of this retailer's study reacted positively towards their femvertising.

The study also found that most participants agreed that being loyal towards a brand would have an effect on how they perceive femvertising. The participant's believed that it would have an impact as they felt that being brand loyal would mean that they would view the femvertising in a biased manner. This contradicts with the findings of this study which shows that participants who did not identify themselves as brand loyal still had a positive reaction towards the advertisement.

5.3.4 The perceived effects of customer age on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

Customer age was explored within the study in order to identify if marketers should be targeting their femvertising towards a specific age group.

The study found that age had little impact on how the participant's felt about femvertising. Across all age groups, there was a positive reaction towards femvertising.

The study did, however, find that age groups over the age of thirty, although reacting positively toward femvertising, did express the importance of the product when making buying decisions. It was also found that some participants in the older age groups found femverts less effective on them. The study further found that the age group younger than thirty expressed the need for change in today's environment and current circumstances.

This shows that although all age groups were accepting of femvertising, the customers age affected what messages they were receiving from the advertisements.

5.3.5 The level of customer brand preference that is created through Femvertising

The study found that the level of brand preference created by femvertising was actual preference. Actual preference refers to when a customer appreciates and creates a need for a product or service of the brand (Ebrahim, 2013). This was confirmed through the admiration for the brand created through the femvertising. Participants found that the advertisement made them appreciate and admire the brand's efforts to make a change, therefore, creating a preference towards the brand. This directly addresses research question five which looks at exploring the level of retail fashion customer brand preference that is created through femvertising.

5.3.6 Effects of customers race on the relationship between Femvertising and Brand Preference

The study found that race inadvertently presented itself as an important consideration within femvertising in the South African marketplace (Colombini, et al., 2021). This was showcased in customers noting racial inclusivity in their discussions as well as race playing an important role in the acceptance of femvertising.

When exploring participants background, it was evident amongst most black participants that there was a need for empowerment through advertisement. This was noted as important due to the gender inequality that is presented within African cultures. The inequalities that these participants were exposed to growing up reinforced their need to see female empowerment in advertisements, and therefore played a strong role in which retailers they gravitate towards.

When exploring race, it was also evident that racial inclusivity was indicated as important within femvertising in the South African marketplace. This shows that racial sensitivity still occurs within the country and should not be forgotten within the use of femvertising.

The study further shows that although participants had varying racial identities and upbringings, there was a clear need for femvertising expressed across all participants.

When exploring the perceived effects of religion on participant's views of femvertising it was found that most participants felt unaffected by their religion but noted that more conservative individuals might be opposed to this type of advertising.

Table 5: Summary of key findings and possible implications on further research

Key Findings	Implications of the study	Implications on further research
The study determined that there was a positive perceived effect of Femvertising on brand preference.	The study found that there were various reasons why participants found femvertising positively affected their brand preference. These reasons were identified as being inclusivity; values driven brand preference; pride; female empowerment; and lastly, body positivity. This can be used as important information for fashion retailers when trying to execute femvertising within a South African market.	There is an opportunity for further research to determine if there is a perceived effect of Femvertising on brand preference in a different industry.
Femvertising would make customers actively choose one brand over another, thus creating brand preference.	Practitioners within the field can use this study to guide their use of femvertising to increase their market share.	There is an opportunity for further research on the extent to which advertising perceived effects customers choices in retail brands.
The study found that brand loyalty had little impact on how participants reacted to femvertising.	This study showcased that customers did not have to be brand loyal in order to appreciate the femvertising of a brand. This information can be used by brands who perhaps do not have a large amount of brand loyal customers but who want to	The researcher found there was a lack of research exploring the perceived effects of femvertising on customer brand loyalty within the South African market. This therefor present an opportunity for further research in this regard.
Although all age group were accepting of femvertising the customers age effected what messages they were receiving from the advertisements.	This can be used by fashion retailers who wish to aim their femvertising at a specific target market.	There is an opportunity for further research exploring the role of age on customer brand preference.
Actual preference was achieved through femvertising,	This can be useful in understanding exactly	There is opportunity for further research into what

and this is seen through the admiration for brands created through the femvertising.	what level of brand preference is created within customers.	perceived effects a customer's level of brand preference in a South African context.
The study found that race inadvertently presented itself as an important consideration within femvertising in the South African marketplace.	This information can be valuable to international retailers in South African who could be trying to execute femvertising to engage with their South African customers.	There is an opportunity for further research into a set of criteria to ensure the success of femvertising in a South African marketplace.

5.4 Implications of the Study

This study presents various implications for both academia and practitioners. This section will discuss these implications.

5.4.1 Implications to Academia

The study aimed to gain greater insights into the concept of femvertising and its potential influence on brand preference in a South African context. This study aimed to add knowledge to practitioners in the marketplace and therefore fulfilled a need within the sector.

There is the opportunity to extend the study into different industries within the South African marketplace as this study focused on the retail sector. This could prove beneficial for practitioners wanting to execute femvertising within a different industry.

Through conducting research, the researcher found there was a lack of research exploring the perceived effects of femvertising on customer brand loyalty within the South African market. This therefor presents an opportunity for further research in this regard.

Furthermore, the perceived effects of femvertising on male customers could pose an interesting study within the South African marketplace in order to gain further information on the subject of femvertising and its perceived effects on all genders.

Lastly, there is an opportunity to conduct more granular research in terms of racial groups and femvertising messaging and style, to better understand cultural nuances and interpretation of what is arguably a highly heterogeneous market.

5.4.2 Implications for Practitioners

This studies key findings are beneficial to multiple stakeholders and could be vital in influencing the way in which femvertising is actioned within South Africa. These stakeholders include marketing professionals, agencies, and retailers.

5.4.2.1 Marketing practitioners

This research has shown the importance of femvertising and the effect this type of advertisement can have on building brand preference. Marketing practitioners can use the key findings of this study to streamline how they create femverts for their different clients. Furthermore, practitioners can use these studies finding as an aid to further reiterate the need for this type of advertising within the South African marketplace. This study also shows the positive perceived effects of retailers using femvertising to engage with their female customers and which is important given the growing customer spending power of the female market.

5.4.2.2 Agencies

Marketing agencies can benefit from this study as the findings of this research can be used to encourage clients into recognising the benefits of engaging with female customers through femvertising. Agencies can also use this study as a guide to produce a successful femvertising campaign for their clients.

5.4.2.3 Retailers

This study proves to be beneficial to South African retailers as it will form as a base for how they communicate with a large portion of their customer base. The finding of this study will serve as a guide to retailers around what their female customers are sensitive about and will ultimately assisting in repositioning their brand and communication strategy. This study will also form as an aid for retailers to understand the correct ways in which to execute femvertising in order to be most beneficial in creating brand preference. As this study found that femvertising helps create brand preference amongst retailers it will form as an important aid in winning over this customer base.

5.5 Limitations of the Research

As discussed in Chapter 1 on this study, there are a number of limitations that exist within this study and its findings. This influences the relevance of this research within a different sector and a bigger population.

As an extension of the limitations presented in Chapter 1, the following is highlighted as limitations of the study:

- Access to a large enough sample group as the data collection method is through in-depth interviews, which are lengthy therefore making individuals more reluctant to participate.
- A lack of previous research conducted around femvertising in the South African market as this could have added to the theoretical framework from which this study was based upon.
- This research was confined to the retail fashion sector and therefore cannot be automatically generalised across other retail segments in terms of the findings.
- This study was conducted in the height of the Carona Virus Pandemic, which presented challenges in getting participants to agree to conducting interviews in person. This meant that the research had to conduct a large portion of their interviews

over video calls. This presented limitations in terms of the research not being able to fully engage with the participants.

- The context of a pandemic also meant a shift in customer thinking and spending habits. This indirectly influenced the study as customers views were tainted, and this represents perceptions at a moment in time.

5.6 Conclusion

The lack of understanding around femvertising within the South African marketplace was a problem highlighted when commencing this study. The researcher set out the study to explore the perceived relationship between femvertising and brand preference through this studies objectives. This was explored with the use of three case studies from South African retailers Ackerman's, Foschini and Woolworths. The research aided in reaching the research objectives and answering the research questions.

The qualitative study was conducted across three South African fashion retailers across twenty-one participants. The finding of this research shows a positive relationship between femvertising and brand preference whilst simultaneously exploring what makes femverts success. When exploring the participants reasons for appreciating femvertising themes of inclusivity; racial diversity, body positivity, pride and female empowerment occurred. Femvertising was also found to be a persuasive tool in getting participants to change brands. Participant's loyalty had little to no influence on how participants reacted to femvertising. The study found that although participants of varying ages were all accepting of femvertising, the messages that they picked up on from the femverts varied. This showcased the different ways in which femvertising can be received across ages. Lastly, the study found that race was an important factor to most participants. Participants wanted to see diversity within the femverts and particularly wanted to see a representation of all race groups within the advertisements.

When evaluating the research, it is clear that the research was successful as all objectives were met and all research questions answered. The study contributes to literature as it demonstrates the relationship between femvertising and brand preference in a South African context and delivers both practitioner insights as well as recommendations for further academic research. The research also has a valuable contribution to South African fashion retailers and could also be very valuable to international fashion retailers wishing to engage with their female customers in the South African marketplace.

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Annexure 1: In-depth Interview Discussion Guide

Screening Questions:

- Do you shop at Ackermans/Foschini/Woolworths?
- How old are you:
- Gender:
- Race:

Interview Question Guidelines:

1. Would you consider yourself a Foschini/Ackermans customer and how often would you say you shop at this retailer? (RQ3; (Severi & Choon Ling, 2013)) (If the participants answer to this question is no, they do not qualify to be a part of the study).
2. Would you describe yourself as brand loyal towards Foschini/Ackermans and why? (RQ3; (Tellis, 2019))
3. If yes, would you say that your loyalty stems from the habit of shopping at Foschini/Ackermans often or a certain sentimental attachment to the brand? (RQ3; RQ4; (Lu & Xu, 2015))
4. Have you noticed any pro-female advertisement's being promoted by Foschini/Ackermans? (RQ4; (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017); (Abitbol, 2019))
5. Looking at this example of a Foschini/Ackermans campaign, how does this advertisement make you feel? (RQ1; RQ4; (van Deest & van der Stelt, 2019))
6. What do you believe are the intentions behind this advertisement? (RQ1; RQ4 (Herby, 2016))
7. Do you believe that this retail brand was successful in portraying a message of female empowerment? (RQ4; (Akestam & Rosengren, 2017))
8. Do you have a strong feeling of preference towards retail brands who choose to empower women through their advertisements such as Ackermans/ Foschini? (RQ1; RQ2; RQ4; RQ5 (Ebrahim, 2013))
9. Where do you believe the preference towards this retail brand stems from? (RQ1; RQ4; RQ5 (Tomer, 1996))
10. How do you think this advertisement effects this retail brand's public image? (RQ5 (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009).)
11. Does the retail brands image have any effect on your preference towards this brand? (RQ5; (Ho, Awan & Khan, 2014))

12. Do you believe that brand loyalty towards a retail brand would have an impact on your perception of advertisement's like this and why? (RQ3 (Lu & Xu, 2015).)
13. Do you believe that brands that use this type of advertising make their products/services more desirable to customers? (RQ2; (Ebrahim, 2013))
14. Do you believe that pro-female advertising would make you actively choose this retail brand over another? (RQ1; RQ2; RQ4 (Hwang & Cho, 2019)).
15. If you were seeking to change retail brands do you believe that an advertisement like this would impact the brand you chose? (RQ1; RQ2 (Hwang & Cho, 2019)).
16. Do your personal values play a role in whether you have a preference towards this brand and this type of advertising? If so, please explain with examples of your personal values. (RQ5; RQ6 (Ho, Awan & Khan, 2014))
17. Is there a particular part of your culture that influences how you feel about this sort of advertising? (RQ6 (Ho, Awan & Khan, 2014)))
18. Is there any other aspect of your religion, family upbringing or community tradition that influences how you feel about this sort of advertising? (RQ6)
19. How do you think that the South African public will react to advertisement's like this and why? (RQ6)
20. Do you believe that more South African businesses should use pro-female advertising to engage with their female customers? (Abitbol, 2016).

Annexure 2: Consent Form

To whom it may concern,

My name is Megan Naidu and I am a Masters student at Vega Pretoria. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Sean McCoy regarding an exploration into the perceived role between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the perceived role of femvertising on customer brand preference in the retail fashion sector.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you fit the sample group of my study and will add knowledge to the field. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to conduct an in-depth interview with you. This interview will be 45-60 minutes in duration and will consist of 10 Questions.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experiences with femvertising and their perceived role on your brand preferences towards these brands. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Vega, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will transcribe all recorded interviews to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Masters in Creative Brand Leadership. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Megan Naidu

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

My Supervisors details are as follows:

Dr Sean McCoy

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Megan Naidu 'An exploration of the perceived role between femvertising and retail fashion customer brand preference'.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

1. I agree to be interviewed by the researcher.
2. My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
3. My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
4. I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
5. I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date

Participant: _____

