



Exploring the attitudes of South African female consumers towards Femvertising

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research report submitted for the **BCom Honours in Strategic Brand Management** to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a postgraduate qualification.

Signature:

Date: 02 December 2022

ABSTRACT

The following research report examined the attitudes of female South African generation Z consumers on Femvertising. Femvertising was based on the assertion that brands can simultaneously empower women while selling products (Green, 2020). The use of such advertisements is increasing, as such marketing communications not only curb stereotypes about females (Sternadori and Abitbol 2019) but also generate a positive attitude toward the products advertised (Drake 2017). Brands are shifting from traditional to modern representations of women to showcase personal relationships with the brand and provide a medium to express emotions through the products (Varghese and Kumar 2020).

Through an interpretivist approach, this explorative study sought to gain insight the Femvertising phenomenon and the overall attitudes of South African generation Z female consumers toward this marketing tactic via the respondents' subjective perceptions. Research was conducted through semi-structured interviews, whereby six participants were interviewed, and data saturation was met.

The findings, along with past and current research, raised the concerns about Femvertising being used as a marketing gimmick which is driven by patriarchal attitudes instead of being an authentic action for social change (Hoad-Reddick 2017). Findings indicated that brand alignment and the choice of how women were represented in the adverts played a large role in whether female consumers felt that the ad was genuine and trustworthy. These findings aim to further contribute to the existing knowledge of consumer attitudes towards Femvertising. These results offer insights to brands and into people's responses toward women-empowering advertisements and have practical implications for advertisers and marketers who are interested in using such an advertising tactic to promote products and services.

Keywords: Femvertising, South African consumers, Consumer attitudes, Brand alignment, Women empowerment.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter one includes elements that will add context to the study, along with what motivated the study. Both a problem statement and purpose statement will be discussed as well as the inclusion of the research objectives and questions.

1.1. Contextualisation

Advertising and media have a history of exploiting and negatively stereotyping women (Erasmus, 2018). Since the seventies, gender roles in advertisements had a marked tendency toward women as sexual or decorative objects, like mothers or responsible for the care of the house or children, dependent on men, weak and unintelligent (Rodriguez and Marcela, 2022). As a direct result of the criticisms received for the objectification of women within media due to the fourth wave of feminism and greater acceptance for social movements across social media and the internet, brands have started to adopt Femvertising within the marketing strategies (Wang, 2018). This type of advertising strives to offer an emancipatory discourse and show a brand's social responsibility (Menéndez, 2019) through positioning the brand as a voice against sexist content and gender stereotypes, which, through campaigns in favour of women's causes, seeks to promote equality, genuine appreciation, and empowerment of girls and women (Targonskaya, 2014).

The challenge of Femvertising lies in whether brands can demonstrate it as an authentic commitment to social change above commercial interests (Rodriguez and Marcela, 2022). The concept first emerged in 2014 and was defined by SheKnows Media as "advertising that uses pro-female talent and messages and content that seeks to empower women and girls." (SheKnows, 2014). Through adopting this marketing practice, brands hope that they can show consumers that they are socially aware and aim to be synonymous with equality and respecting women's rights (Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019). By showing consumers content that does not aim to objectify women, a brand can show consumers that they value building foundation of inclusivity and rejecting sexism in the mainstream media (Pillay, 2020).

Due to the recent rise of women's empowerment and feminist movements and the push for gender equality, females are becoming more open-minded and highly opinionated, their feminist views are being reflected in their attitudes towards the brands they support (Pillay, 2020). Through analysing and synthesising current literature surrounding Femvertising, a literature review was compiled, and relevant themes were identified to establish familiarities amongst the current literature within this field, prior to conducting new research. The literature review highlighted that no previous research had been conducted in a qualitative nature within the South African context around females and their attitudes towards Femvertising. This study therefore explored the attitudes of South African females toward Femvertising, to gain an in-depth understanding into feminism and its potential impact on South African advertising. The topic being investigated used a qualitative method to provide the desired insight.

The study consolidated past and current research and expanded the reader's knowledge on Femvertising and its relationship to consumer attitudes. As attitudes form a large component of this

research, two theories were chosen in order to guide the researcher in gaining and in depth understanding into attitude formation. The theories were The Tri-component attitude model proposed by Rosenberg and Hanland (1960) and the attitude towards the advertisement (AAd) model developed by Edell and Burke (1987). A combination of these theories aided the researcher in providing new insights/perspective and understanding the concept of attitude formation.

1.2. Rationale

Since the media has been acknowledged as an important phenomenon which has become a main reference in determining sexual “codes” and their “conduct”, in cultural and social practices, women’s representation in media has long been criticized for being the driver in stereotypical gendered roles (Zharekhina and Kubacki, 2018). Contemporary media which has already been characterised as postfeminist by Zharekhina and Kubacki (2018) have begun to use the notion of freedom, girl power, choice and empowerment which means reflecting the beginning of a new era in representational strategies of the media about women.

This research explored female consumers attitudes toward Femvertising. The significance of the need to understand the attitudes of female consumers toward Femvertising is increasing due to the rise of gender equality in the modern-day and the heightened interest in the topic of women empowerment, amongst both brands and society (Pillay, 2020). Femvertising had been previously studied quantitatively. However, this research was conducted qualitatively to gain a comprehensive understanding of this social phenomenon, and gain insight through participants direct experiences (Bezuidenhout, 2014). While Femvertising is a growing phenomenon in industry practice, research had not yet examined the extent to which female consumers within generation Z form attitudes when exposed to this type of media (Guo and Liao, 2022).

This study further explored Femvertising and attitude formation with a specific focus on Generation Z South African females residing in Gauteng (Pillay, 2020). Due to past events, South African women have been at a disadvantage within society, however in recent years due to the rise in social movements, the country is making progress in terms of empowering women (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020). Generation Z is an important generational cohort for brands to understand as young people have become a potent influence on people of all ages and incomes, as well as on the way those people consume and relate to brands (Francis and Hoefel, 2022). Thus, it was imperative that this research be conducted amongst generation Z consumer in South Africa as understanding the attitudes of women toward female empowerment advertising can aid in a better representation of women and create platforms for conversation and social change (Guo and Liao, 2022).

1.3. Problem statement

Advertising history is rife with campaigns that have exploited and misrepresented women (Timke and O'Barr, 2017). As early as the 1920s, media has exploited emerging ideals of women's liberation as well as anxieties about body image (Erasmus, 2018). The criticisms received by brands for the objectification of women within media, paired with the rise of fourth-wave feminism and a greater acceptance of social movements across social media directly resulted in brands adopting Femvertising strategies within their marketing (Wang, 2018). Through this practice, brands hope that they can show consumers that they are socially aware and aim to be synonymous with equality and respecting women's rights (Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019).

However, this pro-female advertising trend has been criticized as a marketing ploy to generate publicity and drive sales, rather than an authentic driver for social change (Hunt, 2017). Companies whose pro-social advertisements are inconsistent with their corporate actions risk losing the trust of their consumers (Francis and Hoefel, 2022). Due to the recent rise of women's empowerment and feminist movements and the push for gender equality, females are becoming more open-minded and highly opinionated, and their feminist views are being reflected in their attitudes towards the brands they support, thus it is imperative that companies understand how female consumers feel towards their adverts (Pillay, 2020). This study therefore explored the attitudes of Generation Z, South African females toward Femvertising, and gained an in-depth understanding into feminism and its impact on South African advertising.

1.4. Purpose statement

The purpose of this study was to explore generation Z female consumers' attitudes toward brands that use Femvertising within their marketing strategy. Femvertising seeks to show women a reality that counteracts patriarchal paradigms (Condon, 2015). It promotes a feminist message and breaks the stereotypical representation of women (Rodriguez and Marcela, 2022). From both, women's identity and social perception are modified, but, above all, the one they have of themselves. In today's evolving society more is expected from brands, they are required to play a role in social change (Guo and Liao, 2022).

Brands can play a part in social change by creating communication and messaging that does not follow the stereotyping of women but rather portray them in ways which can be empowering to its female consumers (Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019). Consumers are increasingly taking note of underlying themes and visual cues in advertising and are voicing their condemnations of brands' messages (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020); therefore, it is important for brands to become aware of how certain messages affect consumer attitudes and ultimately the relationship consumers have with brands (Erasmus, 2018). This area of marketing and branding is important as the increasing purchasing power and economic independence of women is a valuable resource for businesses in post-modern consumerism, and thus businesses should focus on a new version of femininities (Rodriguez and Marcela, 2022).

This study focused on the generation Z cohort, generation Z is action-driven and drawn to brands that reflect similar values to their own (Erasmus, 2018). Otherwise known as the social justice warriors, this generation prioritizes social change and equality (Pillay, 2020). Generation Z is reshaping the conversation around gender equality (Descouens & Gerbault, 2021); thus, it is important for brands and marketers to understand the attitudes of the females within this generation toward Femvertising (Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019). Due to the recent rise of women's empowerment and feminist movements and the push for gender equality in South Africa, feminism is gaining more awareness, therefore it is imperative that this research is conducted in a South African context (Hunt, 2017).

1.5. Research questions

The following research questions form the core of this research. They addressed the key research areas identified in the problem statement in section 1.3, this study asked the following research questions (Sirisilla, 2022):

1.5.1: Main research question

What are the attitudes of South African generation Z, female consumers towards Femvertising?

1.5.2: Secondary questions

- How do female consumers feel (emotionally) about the use of Femvertising in marketing?
- How do female consumers respond when exposed to Femvertising?
- Does Femvertising affect the attitudes of consumers towards brands?

1.6. Objectives

- To gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes toward Femvertising as a form of advertising through a literature review.
- To collect data from South African female consumers through semi-structured interviews.
- To analyse data by means of content analysis and a qualitative coding system.
- To draw conclusion and provide recommendations based on findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITREATURE REVIEW

Chapter two will address the key concepts to provide the reader with a better understanding of the core concepts relating to this study. Furthermore, a literature review will cover the theoretical foundation and how it links to the research problem. The literature review further highlights current literature relating to the topic.

2.1. Theoretical foundation

The tri-component attitude model proposed by Rosenberg and Hanland (1960).

The desire to understand consumer attitudes and their relationship with consumer buying behaviour has motivated psychologists to come up with models or theories that capture the underlying dimensions of attitudes (Chih, 2014). Rosenberg and Hanland (1960) proposed the Tri-Component Attitude Model that stipulates that attitude formation consists of three parts: a cognitive component, an affective component, and a conative component (Schiffman, 2019).

Cognitive component

An individual's cognitions (beliefs) represent the first part of the tri-component attitude model (Chih, 2014). Cognitions refer to the knowledge and perceptions that are acquired by consumers by way of a combination of direct experience with the attitude object as well as related information from various sources (Schiffman, 2019). Through cognition, individuals form judgements and evaluations of the attitude object; these, in turn, influence their attitudes and feelings about the object (Schiffman, 2019).

Affective component

The affective component of attitude refers to an individual's feelings about a particular attitude object (Chih, 2014). Feelings amplify an individual's experience with an attitude object (Schiffman, 2019). Often positive feelings amplify positive experiences, while negative feelings amplify negative experiences. In their messages, marketers aim to enhance positive experiences by stimulating positive feelings (Schiffman, 2019).

Conative Component

Conation, the final component of the tricomponent attitude model, is concerned with the likelihood or tendency that an individual will undertake a specific action or behave in a particular way regarding the attitude object (Chih, 2014). This component is usually associated with the actual behaviour and intention of the individual (Schiffman, 2019).

This theory is suitable for understanding the attitudes of female consumers towards Femvertising as it captures the different components that lead to attitude formation. Attitude formation is facilitated by direct personal experience and influenced by the ideas and experiences of friends and family members and exposure to mass media (Schiffman, 2019). Therefore, by using this theory as a guide

within this research, the researcher will be able to gain an in-depth understanding into why participants have formed certain attitudes towards Femvertising. In addition to using the Tri-component attitude model, this research will make use of attitude to the advertisement model to further enhance the role of emotions and feelings in advertising and how these may guide attitude formation (Edell & Burke, 1987).

The attitude towards the advertisement (AAd) model developed by Edell and Burke (1987)

The attitude towards the advertisement (AAd) model was developed by Edell and Burke (1987) to understand the role of feelings about advertisements (Edell & Burke, 1987). Consumers form various feelings (affect) and judgements (cognitions) because of exposure to an ad. The feelings and judgements in turn affect the consumer's attitude towards the ad and beliefs about the brand secured from exposure to the ads (Edell & Burke, 1987). Viewers' attitude is dependent on advertisement's informativeness and entertainment value amongst others.

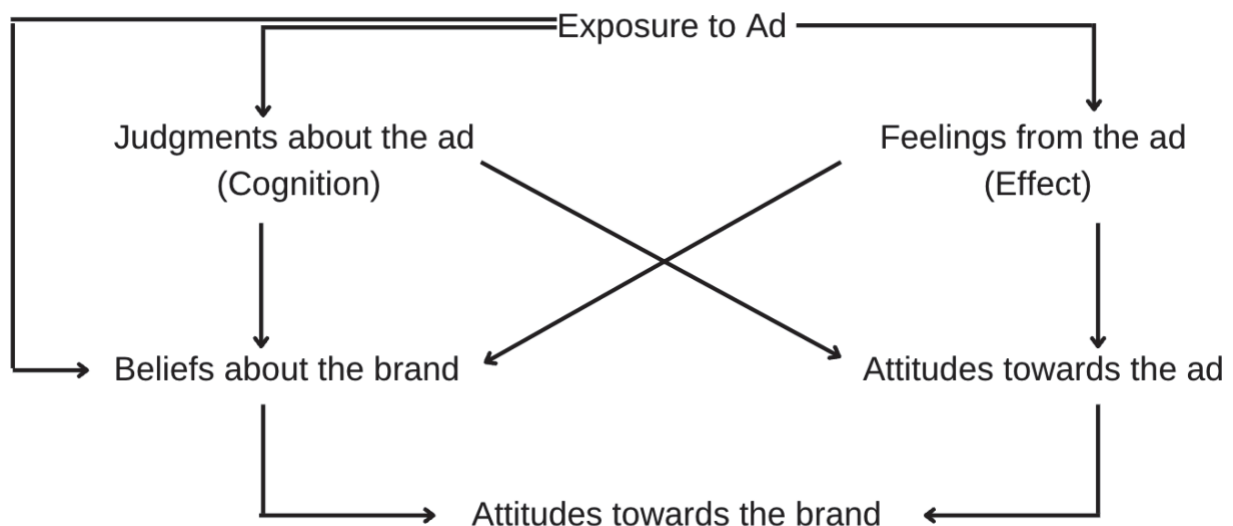


Figure 2.1: The attitude towards advertisement model (adapted) (Edell and Burke, 1987).

Consumers are exposed to numerous advertisements daily. However, what distinguishes advertisements from one another is their ability to influence consumer attitudes (Edell & Burke, 1987). Advertisements aim to provide consumers with information (to stimulate their cognitive process) and create various feelings and emotions (to stimulate their affective process) to assist them in forming attitudes to advertisements and brands (Edell & Burke, 1987). Attitudes, moreover, are formed through constant and repetitive exposure to an advertisement and are used to increase brand awareness and brand recognition. Once consumers are exposed to an advertisement, they form judgements and feelings about the advertisement (Pillay, 2020). As mentioned in The Tri-

Component attitude Model, cognition enables consumers to form knowledge and beliefs, which in turn influences their attitude to the brand (Pillay, 2020).

Many advertisements, especially those aiming to empower women, incorporate emotional appeals to stimulate affective and emotional responses in consumers who view the advertisement (Edell & Burke, 1987). Research suggests that advertisements that evoke positive emotions and feelings are more likely to generate positive attitudes and subsequently increase purchase intention (Pillay, 2020), additionally consumers who have positive feelings about an advertisement with increased cognitive content tend to perceive it as more credible and therefore develop a positive attitude to the brand (Edell & Burke, 1987) (Pillay, 2020).

2.2. Literature review

The evolution of Femvertising

Advertising has played a well-documented part in endorsing and proliferating stereotyped, sexist views of women through symbolic visual cues and messages (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020). Various researchers agree that women are regularly depicted in advertisements through traditional role imagery such as that of being a housewife and reliant on male strength, as well as decorative role visuals including sexual objectification and a focus on physical attractiveness (Wang, 2018; Hunt, 2017; Åkestam, 2017).

In response to the growing backlash against this objectification of women within advertisements (Åkestam, 2017), brands started to shift their advertising messages so they convey female empowerment, rather than degradation. This practice became known as Femvertising (Erasmus, 2018). Femvertising is defined as advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls. Pillay (2020) argues that Femvertising is bringing women to the forefront and helping to even the representation score. In addition to ensuring women are represented, Hunt (2017) states that Femvertising seeks to celebrate women and showcase them in authentic scenarios, often going against traditional female gender stereotypes.

In this context of acceptance of feminism and social demands for the need to make women visible, Femvertising seeks to break the traditional representation of women in advertising content and demystify the stereotypes and traditional roles in which they were represented, accompanied by an emancipatory discourse (Rodriguez and Marcela, 2022). In addition to discarding negative representations of women and breaking stereotypes, this strategy incorporates a positive message regarding them. It also promotes advertising with social responsibility that questions the status quo of gender and female empowerment (Rodriguez and Marcela, 2022; Hunt, 2017).

Femvertising can be categorized as a type of social movement marketing that came about due to the advent of the fourth wave of feminism (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020; Varghese and Kumar, 2020). While there is no clear demarcation between the third and fourth waves, some argue that the fourth wave started in 2008 with the rise of the social media (Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019); while others credit its start in 2017 when the #MeToo movement gained global recognition (Descouens & Gerbault, 2021). The fourth wave of feminism is a period of political activism and social change seeking to expand women's civil rights and social equality (Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019).

Erasmus (2018) argues that the rise of Femvertising is a result of the fourth wave being driven by young activists (generation Z) that are fuelled by the social media, the internet, and online media. However, historically, the activism around women's representation in media is closely linked to a

combination of the three previous movements dating back to the nineteenth century (Åkestam, 2017), rooting for the need for authentic representations of gender roles, and the female body in advertisements (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen, 2017). Previous research suggests that Femvertising is becoming of utmost importance within the 21st Century as women are becoming more prone to comparing themselves to images within the media, thus it is vital that brands and marketers take responsibility to represent women in a way that will make them feel empowered (Erasmus, 2018; Descouens & Gerbault, 2021). In a study conducted by SHE Media, 52% of women indicated that they purchased a product because they liked how the company's advertisements depicted women. Nearly half said that the purchase made them feel good about supporting the brand. Majority of the women also believed that Femvertisements dismantled gender barriers (SheKnows, 2020).

Social change; empowering women through Femvertising.

Literature on Femvertising campaigns illustrates that there will never be an agreement on advertising's effectiveness and progressiveness in impacting women. However, scholars have moved towards some change in advertising that is gradually having a positive impact in women's body image, respect, and self-esteem (Pillay, 2020; Wang, 2018; Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019). Advertisements are persuasive and inspiring instruments, which can greatly affect the minds of the audience and play a main part in shaping the attitude and culture of the people (Wang, 2018). In today's age, brands are expected to do more, they are required to play a role in social change. Hunt (2017) states that brands can play a part in social change through creating communications and messaging that do not follow the stereotyping of women but rather portray them in ways which can be empowering to its female consumers. Rodriguez and Marcela (2022) highlight that due to women's demands through different channels for the reality of their lives to be communicated, brands promote their Femvertising strategy that aims to break the stereotyped cognitive structures. The standards of physical beauty and the traditional roles observed for decades now show new models of empowered women, leaders, active, independent, and professional women.

Additionally, Descouens and Gerbault (2021) agree by stating that consumers are increasingly taking note of underlying themes and visual cues in advertising and are voicing their condemnations of brands' messages, therefore it is important for brands to become aware of how certain messages affect consumer attitudes and ultimately the relationship consumers have with brands. To further enhance these statements, a study by SheKnows Media (2016) showed that 97% of women think society's perception of them is impacted by advertisements, and 90% of women believe that advertisements showing women as sex symbols are harmful. Thus, indicating that if brands change the narrative of their messaging and communications, society's perceptions of them may change and women may feel more empowered within their communities (Pillay, 2020). Given the social role

advertising plays in communication, it is possible to recognize that advertising messages can construct or modifying the perceived reality (Rodriguez and Marcela, 2022).

In a study done by Abitbol and Sternadori (2020), in terms of the outcome of Femvertising, most of the respondents within the research expressed that it Femvertising can lead to changes in the social sphere: by initiating discussions about gender roles, reshaping beauty standards and bring awareness regarding issues of equality. Amongst these respondents, Femvertising most commonly evoked positive emotions and attitudes towards the advertisement and its content. However, Rodriguez and Marcela (2022) argue that; while Femvertising has undoubtedly translated into better results for companies, and this is the result of the claims of the urgent need to break with sexist advertising content, it would be biased not to recognize how the market's interest in benefiting from social movements that, on many occasions, has been documented, makes one suspicious of the true intentions of advertising proposals. Femvertising success can be attributed to how it plays on women 's self-esteem, by acknowledging its lack thereof, and thus, building it up through; reliablell representation in advertising through which consumers can acquire confidence or self-esteem (Wang, 2018).

Consumer attitudes towards Femvertising

The advertising strategy of Femvertising rests on the idea that advertising, when done right, can empower women, while also selling products (Erasmus, 2018), thus it is important to understand what factors may lead consumers to like or dislike this advertising strategy (Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019).

A study conducted by Pillay (2020), focused on the attitudes of females towards Femvertising within specific focus on beauty brands. This study founded interesting responses when it came to the attitude that female consumers have towards Femvertising. The main findings highlighted that Femvertising invoked feelings of trust because having women in advertisements to which they could relate, increased the believability and sincerity of the advertisement. These findings are corroborated by those of a study done by Abitbol and Sternadori (2016), who found that trust positively, influences attitudes and beliefs. Moreover, feelings of confidence were evoked through these advertisements, such that participants felt that they were beautiful and could be comfortable in their own skin based on the all- inclusiveness of Femvertising.

In addition, Pillay (2020) found that participants who could relate to the women in advertisements also felt highly involved with the advertisement and the brand and therefore had a positive attitude to the advertisement. This is again supported by Abitbol and Sternadori's (2019) findings. Where participants mentioned that having advertisements that showed women doing what men could do

was empowering and positively influenced their attitude to the advertisement. Moreover, including 'average, everyday' women in feminist advertisements tended to empower participants and make them feel that if the women in the advertisements could do it, so could they (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020).

However, in contrast, Acharya and Ristimiki (2019) found that exposure to Femvertising campaigns did not necessarily lead to positive attitudes such as pride or empowerment amongst the participants. The participants within this study indicated that Femvertising portrayed the message that women should feel empowered by dismissing negative comments made to them, rather than advocating for greater rights, as if comments are the only thing standing in women's way to equality (Acharya and Ristimiki, 2019). In this sense, these brands convey that female empowerment does not happen in everyday life, that it is something to be talked about 'behind the scenes' but not in open, everyday conversations (Acharya and Ristimiki, 2019). It was overall noted within the study that as a marketing strategy, it is important that brands use realistic and authentic portrayals of women in advertisements to elicit positive attitudes towards the advert and brand (Acharya and Ristimiki, 2019).

Femvertising in a South African Context.

Great efforts have been made towards accepting feminism in the United States of America and Europe, where feminism is far more advanced than in emerging nations (Laczniak and Kordrostami, 2022). Feminism has only quite recently become openly accepted in emerging nations such as South Africa (Erasmus, 2018). South Africa has been known as a patriarchal nation due to the norms, customs, and cultures of its Western and African inhabitants. The challenge in South Africa being the push against long-standing social and cultural norms. This cannot be done with a few quick campaigns or decisions. This is where the unique power as advertisers really kicks in, as architects of culture, advertising has the power to shape the ideas that consumers collectively buy into (Laczniak and Kordrostami, 2022)

Pillay (2020) argue that, despite the feminist movements such as ANC Women's League, the Black Women's Federation and campaigns that took place among South African women in the 1900s, women still struggled to access the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Erasmus (2018) further enhance this point by stating that, globally brands are starting to tap into the trend of celebrating feminism, however in South Africa brands are struggling to adapt the way that they speak to female consumers, or even to recognise the importance of the female consumer in their market. In a study conducted by Erasmus (2018), it was found that after being exposed to adverts with social messaging at its core, in the form of Femvertising, many participants argued that brands in South Africa should start using social messaging, such as Femvertising, in their advertising efforts. Social messaging, that creates conversation, pushes boundaries and highlights important social issues is lacking in a south African context (Erasmus, 2018). Due to the fact that social messaging, such as

Femvertising that address gender inequality and female empowerment are rooted in an emotional context, participants said they were more likely to relate to a brand that dives into addressing social issues as it provokes emotional connections and feelings (Erasmus, 2018).

However as raised by Wang (2018) in recent years, South Africa has made great progress in empowering women to break the traditional gender stereotypes and to see themselves as confident, strong, independent individuals. This is not only reflected in more women being represented in higher working positions and women having access to education, but is also reflected through this new wave of South African feminists, especially among Generation Z, women have become more powerful and recognized as their purchasing power increases (Wang, 2018). Thus it is imperative for marketers to explore the attitudes South African female consumers have towards female empowerment adverts. This research focused solely on South African women and their attitude formation in association with Femvertising.

2.3. Conceptualisation

Femvertising

Femvertising is defined by Acharya and Ristimiki (2019) as a marketing strategy that merges the feministic ideology of empowerment and liberty with brand image and sales. Abitbol and Sternadori (2020) further enhance this definition by stating that Femvertising is the practice of selling products to women by promising them social empowerment and gender equality. While both these definitions are valuable in research surrounding Femvertising, within the context of this research, Femvertising was defined as advertisements that have a pro-female message, imagery, and talent to empower women and girls (SheKnows, 2014) and therefore, challenge the traditional stereotypes that were proliferated by advertisements itself (SheKnows, 2014).

Women empowerment

Women empowerment encompasses various aspects that contribute towards defining the term. Pillay (2020) and Wang (2018) both define women empowerment as promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others. In addition to this, Erasmus (2018) defines women empowerment as the provision of women with the means, skills, and opportunities to be independent, make their own choices and lead a life free of all sorts of violence and discrimination. In line with these definitions, for this study women empowerment was defined as the enabling environment where a woman can raise her voice, make her own decisions, and choose the life she wants to lead (Åkestam, 2017). Women's empowerment is about women realizing that we are more than our gender and that every voice deserves to be heard (Åkestam, 2017).

Consumer attitudes

Consumer attitude as defined by Varghese and Kumar (2020) is a composite of three elements: cognitive information, affective information, and information concerning a consumer's past behaviour and future intentions. In addition to this Abitbol and Sternadori (2020), define consumer attitudes as a feeling of favourableness or unfavourableness that an individual has towards an object, because of consumers' lived experiences. For this research, consumer attitudes were defined consumer attitudes as a composite of a consumer's (1) beliefs about, (2) feelings about, (3) and behavioural intentions toward some object within the context of Femvertising (Descouens & Gerbault, 2021).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter three covers an outline of the paradigm chosen for this study, along with why this paradigm is best suited for this study. In addition to this, the chapter highlights the research methodology used, which will include a detailed explanation as to the relevant research questions and design used to investigate the research problem and data collection methods used. Furthermore, this chapter will provide details about the population and sampling method used within this study. Details pertaining to procedures used during data collection and specifics of materials/ resources used during data collection will be discussed. The data analysis technique used and how it was implemented to analyse the data will be reviewed. Trustworthiness of the findings will be considered since a qualitative research approach will be employed.

3.1. Research Paradigm

The paradigm most suited to the exploration of Femvertising and consumer attitudes was Interpretivism, as this paradigm aims to understand human behaviour (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Interpretivism focuses on the idea that humans are fundamentally different from objects and can therefore not be studied in the same way. Unlike objects, humans are continuously changing and reacting to external social forces (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). According to Interpretivism, individuals are intricate and complex, different people experience and understand the same objective reality in very different ways and have their own, often very different, reasons for acting the way in which they do (Nieuwenhuis, 2019).

This research adopted the interpretivist paradigm as the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding (Nieuwenhuis, 2019) into the experiences and attitudes of South African female consumers in association with Femvertising. This was achieved through qualitative methods as the researcher was able to have close interactions with the participants through interviews and observations (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The desired in-depth understanding could not be obtained using quantitative research as these methods were not helpful when wanting to understand detailed reasons for behaviours in depth. It is also possible that assigning numbers to abstract constructs such as personal attitudes risks making them falsely precise and thus distorts the analyses (Nieuwenhuis, 2019).

Ontology: The ontological assumption of interpretivism believes that each individual experiences external realities differently. Individuals' reality is a social construction and is dependent on the meanings that people give to their own experiences and interactions (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Within interpretivism, a single phenomenon, can have multiple interpretations rather than a truth that can be determined by measure (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Within this research, the central phenomenon is Femvertising, different females may associate different feelings and emotions with female empowerment advertising based on their own lived experiences.

Epistemology: The epistemological stance used for this research highlights that knowledge is not regarded as an insight into an objective reality, but instead constructed by humans, through social interactions (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Thus, to understand female consumers attitudes towards Femvertising, this research was conducted subjectively to understand each participants lived experience (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Interpretivism believes that truth is dependent on people's interpretation of facts, thus this approach is not aimed at generalising (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Interpretivism challenges the idea of objective knowledge and objective truth, rather this approach sees facts as fluid and embedded within a meaning system (Nieuwenhuis, 2019).

Axiology: Interpretivism value the complex understanding of unique realities, this research did not attempt to conduct value-free research (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Interpretivism approaches rely heavily on naturalistic methods such as interviewing, observations and analysing existing literature (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). These methods ensured an adequate dialog between the researcher and South African female consumers with whom they interacted to collaboratively construct a meaningful reality in association with Femvertising (Nieuwenhuis, 2019).

3.2. Research approach and design

The research design used for this study was qualitative, qualitative research involved collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences (Bezuidenhout, 2014). This method was suitable as it was used to gather in-depth insights into consumer attitudes and female empowerment with regard to the use of Femvertising in branding and marketing.

This research was conducted as a cross-sectional study, meaning that the data collected was from one specific population at one specific time to observe what is happening in the current population (Bezuidenhout, 2014). This research followed an inductive approach, whereby the research involved the search for patterns and trends from data collected (Nieuwenhuis, 2019).

This study was exploratory in nature, as it investigated a research question that had not previously been studied in-depth (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). While there was previous literature on Femvertising, there was limited research on how the use of this advertising techniques affects consumer attitudes. Previous literature had focused on purchase intentions, brand resonance and brand authenticity, furthermore, previous literature had focused on specific examples of pro-female advertising, whereas this study did not (Pillay, 2020; Wang, 2018; Acharya & Ristimiki, 2019). In addition to this, this research was focused on South African females within the Generation Z cohort, unlike previous research.

There was limited existing research on Femvertising within a South African context, consequently brands were not aware of influence of Femvertising on South African female consumers attitudes towards this advertising technique. Consumers attitudes directly influence on the brands in which they support and the degree of connection a consumer has with a given brand (Åkestam, 2017). Thus, it was vital to establish which advertising tactics result in a positive consumer attitude toward the brand.

3.2. Population and sampling

3.2.1. Population

Target population: In this study the target population was Generation Z female consumers in South Africa who are exposed to advertising.

Accessible population: The accessible population for this study was those that fit the population parameters that the researcher has access to.

Population parameters: The population parameters for this study were female consumers residing in South Africa that fall within the Generation Z cohort and are frequently exposed to advertising.

Unit of analyses: For this study the unit of analyses was Generation Z South African female consumers.

3.2.2. Sampling

The sample method appropriate for this study was non-probability sampling, whereby not all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected (Pascoe, 2014). Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique in which the researcher selects samples based on the subjective judgment of the researcher rather than random selection (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This method was chosen as getting responses using non-probability sampling was faster and more cost-effective than probability sampling because the sample was known to the researcher (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Participants in this study were selected using namely purposive sampling, the researcher relied on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study. This method for sampling was done by the researcher with a purpose in mind (Pascoe, 2014). In the case of this research, the researcher targeted those who fell within the generation Z cohort, who are South African and who are female, furthermore the researcher selected women who are exposed to advertising on a regular basis.

The intended sample size for this research was six participants, this sample size was chosen due to limitations with respect to cost and time. Through this sample size, data saturation was possible. Data saturation in qualitative research is when, through the course of interviewing, the researcher notices the same themes coming out, repeatedly (Tay, 2020). As the researcher interviewed more and more participants, they stopped finding new themes, ideas, opinions, or patterns (Tay, 2020). Since it is not the researcher's objective to generalise these findings but rather create a remarkable

account of consumers' attitudes towards Femvertising, there was no need to have a large sample (Maree, 2019).]

3.3. Data collection and instrument overview

The data collection method used for this study was semi-structured interviews (Refer to Annexure A). Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility as they were open-ended, this type of data collection allowed for more detail and richness as it allowed participants to clarify and elaborate (Strydom, 2014). The interview was structured in a way that encouraged participants to recall an example of their own, which they had been exposed to.

A semi-structured interview was chosen for this research as it allowed for researcher to guide the interview based on pre-set core open-ended questions, to achieve optimum interview time, the researcher used core questions to focus the interview on the desired line of action (Nieuwenhuis, J. 2019). In addition to this, semi-structured interviews allowed for the participants to freely express their views on their own terms, thus lending to a more in-depth data collection. This method of data collection allowed for two-way communication and provided an opportunity for the interviewer to learn answers to questions and the reasons behind these answers (Nieuwenhuis, 2019).

The aim of these interviews was to gain in-depth insights into how Femvertising is perceived amongst South African females and its subsequent effect on consumer attitudes. Advantages of these interviews included the in-depth nature of responses as well as the emergence of unanticipated findings and insights (Strydom, 2014). A key element of explorative study was that responses were not limited to specific questions, this was evident in semi-structured interviews (Strydom, 2014). The sample for this study was six participants who met the population characteristics and who were known to the researcher. The sampling method appropriate for this study was non-probability sampling, whereby not all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected (Pascoe, 2014).

The researcher contacted seven individuals through WhatsApp that they believed to fit within the target population parameters. However, of the seven potential participants, only six individuals were able to participate in the study. These participants were notified by the researcher of the set date, time, and venue of the interview.

3.4. Data analysis

This study made use of qualitative content analysis as the data analysis method; this method was suitable since the content being analysed is text derived from the interview transcriptions. A qualitative content analysis was used to explore and derive themes and patterns embedded in text (Luo, 2022). Content analysis was used through a step-by-step approach that compiled and refined substantial bodies of text into clear and distinguishable content classifications for analysis. Through qualitative content analysis and interpretation, data was transformed into findings, the researcher was immersed in the data and identified and described the patterns and/or themes emerging from the data, by interpreting their meaning (Luo, 2022).

The following process is followed when doing a qualitative content analysis.

Familiarisation with the data: Data analysis began with the transcription of recordings, which were safely stored. The transcripts were grouped accordingly to 1-6 titles to protect the anonymity of participants. Through thematic data analysis the researcher can translate the interviews into interpretive and digestible findings that are easy to read and understand. The researcher then, thoughtfully, read through each transcript and made initial notes. Once all six transcripts were read, the researcher read each interview transcript again and highlighted certain words, ideas, and actions repeated throughout the data in different colours depending on the theme or topic.

Code development: To commence with data analysis, the researcher commenced with coding, a process of organising and sorting the data so that broad volumes of data could be placed into smaller segments, making the data more manageable to work with (Medelyan, 2021). Through coding the information, the researcher broke down the raw data into a more organised system that was logical and coherent with the objectives of the researcher's study. Further, by coding the information, this process allowed the researcher to understand that each participant has a different perception and understanding of what the concept of femvertising entails, their attitudes towards the marketing technique, and whether their attitudes translate into purchase intention.

Developing themes: Codes were related/interconnected were sorted together to start creating overarching themes/ideas of the codes slowly. This process was repeated until the researcher had achieved a logical induction of information that could be presented in an appropriate variation of examines the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up. the researcher closely repeatedly (Caulfield, 2022). These themes were then defined and described to ensure each code was appropriately allocated to the correct theme. The researcher consistently referred to the study's questions, objectives, and key theory to provide the information within each theme to answer the study's research questions (Medelyan, 2021).

Define and name themes: Following the review of themes, the researcher began typing up each theme on a Microsoft Word document in a table. The researcher then summarised the essence of each theme within a few sentences making use of the codes, making sense of each, and clearly stating what was specific and unique about each and how each theme would assist in the understanding of the data, the researcher then provided an example from the interview of each theme (Medelyan, 2021; Caulfield, 2019).

Produce final report: The final phase of the six-phase thematic analysis approach involved compiling the data analysis. The researcher produced this final report which provided a compelling and complex analysis that answered the research questions and addressed the objectives and research purpose. The report's conclusion explained the research's primary takeaways, showing how the data analysis answered the current study's research questions and objectives (Caulfield, 2019). Additionally, the conclusion also included suggestions by the researcher to further the current study findings.

It is imperative that qualitative research was conducted in a rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaningful and useful results. To be accepted as trustworthy, the researcher demonstrated that the data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis (Medelyan, 2021). When conducting data analysis, the researcher became the instrument for analysis, making judgments about coding, theming, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data. The researcher in this study followed specific techniques for conducting, documenting, and evaluating data analysis processes, and took responsibility to assure rigor and trustworthiness

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF FINDINGS

Chapter four will discuss the findings based on analysed data presented in a narrative format. An interpretation, discussion and insight of the findings will be discussed and linked back to previous literature and findings.

4.1. Findings and interpretation

4.1.1. Presentation of findings

Defining and understanding femvertising

Prior to the interview, a definition from She Know Media (2014) was given to the participants to ensure that participants had a clear definition of what femvertising was within this study. Participants had a general idea of what femvertising was however were not aware that women empowerment advertising was associated with the term femvertising.

Q.1: Please give me an example of Femvertising that you have been exposed to. As much detail as possible. For example: the brand, the product being advertised.

Participants were asked to recall an example of a women empowerment advert that they had been exposed to, all participants were able to briefly explain a different example of femvertising. In their explanation participants were not able to recall a specific product being advertised but rather the overall message being portrayed by the brand. All participants were able to recall a different brand example of femvertising.

Q.2: Can you describe your thoughts about this specific femvertising example?

While half of the participants were first sceptical of the advert upon first viewing it, all participants ended up stating that they thought the concept behind each advert was brilliant and positive, despite being hesitant in the beginning. Two participants felt the advert was good as it represented women of different body shapes and different career, while the other participants mentioned that they supported the advert due to the message aligning with the brand and the brands values.

Q.3: What if any judgements did you have towards this femvertising example?

Participants highlighted that their chosen example elicited positive judgements as it stood out to them and they could remember the messaging communicated by the brand, however in contrast, participants highlighted their hesitations to support femvertising as it may not be genuine or authentic. Participants highlighted that when the campaign and then brand aligned, they had more positive feelings towards the advert.

Q.4: Can you explain how these judgements informed your beliefs of the brand?

While some participants stated that they tended to not support femvertising, their specific example left them feeling positive and thus had a positive impact on the brand. The most common judgement expressed was positivity towards the brand post seeing the pro-female advertising.

Q.5: What were your feelings towards this femvertising example? Were you aware of any emotions associated with the femvertising example?

The most common feeling expressed across all three advertisements was positive feelings. Feelings of excitement, curiosity and pride were common amongst the participants. While only one participant stated that they felt overwhelmed and sceptical when exposed to their brand example.

Q.6: In what way did these feelings shape your attitude towards the femvertising example?

Those participants that stated that they were excited and curious went on to further explain that this femvertising example made them more aware of femvertising and they would keep an eye out for what brands do in the future in this regard, however the remainder of the participants said that their feelings had no impact on how they viewed the advert.

Q.7: Describe your attitude towards femvertising.

The responses to the above question were mixed, as half the respondents stated that they find that femvertising is a tactic adopted by companies to stay relevant or to stay up to date with the trends, these participants don't see femvertising as genuine and authentic but rather a profit driving marketing technique. On the contrary, other participants stated that femvertising can be hugely impactful to society in breaking down traditional stereotypes as women have never been the in the forefront of marketing before, these participants think femvertising presents a good opportunity for social change.

Q.8: In what way has this femvertising example shaped your tendency to support or purchase from this brand?

When asked if femvertising could impact their purchasing decisions with regards to their brand example, participants agreed that their purchase decision depends on several different factors however all but one stated that they would most likely not be influenced by this kind of cause stance. Participants highlighted that brand loyalty; brand preference and perceived quality are more important factors.

4.2. Interpretation of findings

4.2.1. Theme and code table

Table 4.1: Theme and code table

Theme	Codes	Number of participants	Examples
Brand alignment	Genuine, obligated, trust, mismatched, two-faced, curious.	All	“Femvertising doesn’t really attract me because I don’t know how genuine it is” (Participant 1). “it (the advert) doesn’t really resonate with their (a certain brand) message they just do it because they obligated to” (Participant 1). “The main source of trust would be does it match with your brand and brand message” (Participant 4). “but it (the advert) did make me curious as to do they live up to what they say within their advert” (Participant 4)
Representation of women	Resonate, every day, traditional, embrace, advocate, inclusiveness, average	All	“I think it’s easier to trust and fit into the brand when you can see yourself within the brand, for example women who have the same struggles and women who have everyday roles I can resonate and trust more.” (Participant 3). “I don’t have to be one of those fit models for me to recognize myself as a strong women” (Participant 6).

4.2.2. Theme one: Brand alignment

During the data collection and analyse process, one of the strongest themes to be discovered was brand alignment. The theme of brand alignment stemmed from all six participants noticing an evolution in the representation of women in media, however questioning how genuine and authentic this use of women is in combating the effects that gender stereotyping has proliferated in the past. The following words/phrases were extracted from the interviews to describe how participants view femvertising and brand alignment; “two-faced” (Participant 2), “brands feel obligated to” (Participant 1), “cookie cutter women empowerment campaigns” (Participant 3), “I don’t know how genuine it is” (Participant 1) and “their actions do not align with their messaging” (Participant 6).

Beyond the obvious scepticism, it is evident that participants display emotions of distrust and lack of transparency amongst brands that misuse femvertising techniques within their marketing. All of the participants stated that femvertising can be seen as a dishonest, hypocritical practice that misleads customers, and thus hampers the social progress that femvertising is trying to put forward. Although brands seek these changes in advertising as progress towards a pro-female portrayal, participants see this as marketing for profit. However, despite a significant portion of the advertisements still unrepresentative of the concerns of women, participants state that femvertising is still credited for the creation of a responsible, inclusive and gender non-conforming imagery that changes the way the advertising industry has been in the past.

“I think it’s such a good idea, I think it’s empowering, traditionally I think we have seen a lot of men being in the forefront of things, women were quite reserved in adverts before so I think it’s quite an empowering thing to see women being the focus for some of the campaigns” (Participant 2)

“Mostly I am on board with it because there is not many opportunities for women to be at the forefront of advertising” (Participant 4).

In line with Descouens and Gerbault (2021) findings that stated consumers are increasingly taking note of underlying themes and visual cues in advertising and are voicing their condemnations of brands’ messages, it was noted that two participants in particular made a conscious effort to keep track of the brand to see whether or not the messaging portrayed within their pro-female advertising was consistent throughout the brand and their future actions. Participant 6 highlighted that they will no longer support their brand example due to actions the brand had taken that went against their pro-female messaging. Below is an extract from their interview:

“I think the brand really does have an alignment issue to be honest, and I think that’s the challenges with these big corporates because they want to set a certain narrative at a certain point in time and sometimes that consistency does not carry through. If women empowerment is not a core belief, then it won’t carry through in everything the brand does” (Participant 6)

On the contrary, another participant stated that they are more likely to support their chosen brand example due to them carrying out their messaging and being consistent in both their marketing and their actions. Below is an extract from their interview:

“It (the brands actions) defiantly made me feel like oh they actually believe in what they are doing in terms of empowering women, it wasn’t just a one month thing because even after woman’s month, they still have different campaigns that are also in line with the same thing that are directed towards women” (Participant 2)

The above-mentioned findings show that the participants are fully aware of the issues companies face when it comes to brand alignment and brand messaging and can therefore use this information to help them make an informed decision on which brands to support. In line with the Cognitive component of the Tri-Component Attitude Model; knowledge helps lay the foundation for an attitude, and therefore plays a crucial role in aiding in the formation of a strong attitude that can be translated into a behaviour intention.

4.2.3. Theme two: Representation of women.

While it was discovered that participants judgements are influenced by Femvertising, there are mixed feelings in this regard, mainly surrounding the type of women chosen to represent within the adverts. Participants felt that their judgements and opinions about the advertisements were positively influenced, when exposed to advertisements that incorporated women of all shapes, colours and sizes. This all-inclusive advertising meant that participants were able to relate to the women in the advertisements and thus had a positive image of the brand. The participants further mentioned that being able to resonate with the women in advertisements meant that their perception of the advertisement and the brand was enhanced, along with their interest in the advertisement. Some excerpts from the interviews are presented below.

“I think I was mostly excited about who they had as guests and who they chose to represent them in the campaign. The people were relatable and easy for me to resonate with, yeah, I think it’s easier to trust and fit into the brand when you can see yourself within the brand, for example women who have the same struggles and women who have everyday roles I can resonate and trust more.” (Participant 3)

“For me, it’s extremely positive and I think I take it personally because I’m not one of those people that been categorized as the ideal body type, so if a brand like Nike then starts advocating for people like me I feel empowered to be active, I don’t have to be one of those fit models for me to recognize myself as a strong women” (Participant 6).

These findings highlighted that women and girls who were not overtly 'girly' and their femininity was not a focus of the message along with women who were depicted in everyday attire made the most positive impact on participants and lead to a more positive judgement towards the brand. This findings are synonymous with those found in a study conducted by Pillay (2020), in order to have a positive judgement towards an advertisement, average women and feminists needed to be part of the advertisement in order to resonate with the feminist consumer. These findings further emphasized that if advertisers and brands actually care about women's empowerment, they need to get real and raw. Women want products that work for them, and ads that reflect them. It is the difference between seeing the female consumer as weak, hesitant and in need of a pep talk, and portraying women as strong, smart, discerning and socially motivated.

One participants mentioned that even though femvertising tried to be all-inclusive, every individual was different and had their own, unique self-image. This participants suggested that part of them still felt left out when they saw advertisements to which they could not completely relate. However, those participants who had positive feelings felt empowered as women since femvertising was breaking down gender stereotypes and social norms, which in turn made some participants feel proud. This contradicts the results from Acharya and Ristimiki (2019) as these findings stated that exposure to Femvertising campaigns did not necessarily lead to positive attitudes such as pride or empowerment amongst the participants.

Two participants suggested that femvertising that made use of women with whom they could resonate invoked feelings of trust because having women in advertisements to which they could relate, increased the believability and sincerity of the advertisement. These findings are corroborated by those of Abitbol and Sternadori (2016) who found that trust positively, influences attitudes and beliefs. This is supported by the Tri-component attitude model as it suggests that advertisements that evoke positive emotions and feelings are more likely to generate positive attitudes and subsequently increase purchase intention (Edell & Burke, 1987), additionally consumers who have positive feelings about an advertisement with increased cognitive content tend to perceive it as more credible and therefore develop a positive attitude to the brand (Edell & Burke, 1987; Pillay, 2020).

Through the above data analysis and the recognition of two main themes; brand alignment and representation of women, it is clear that when femvertising is done right it can have a positive impact on consumers and that positive impact can be translated into consumers having a positive attitude towards brands. However, if a brand does not portray their message in their correct way or align their business practices with their messaging as a whole it can impact the brand negatively as consumers then feel as though the brand is dishonest and profit hungry. This is supported by participants stating that having a positive feeling about an advertisement created a positive attitude to the ad and, in turn, led to a positive attitude towards the brand. The participants also affirmed that if they had a positive attitude to the brand, they would be more likely to trial and purchase the brand.

“When I need to start need to start considering insurance and medical aid it will be one of my choices, I like the direction they are going in, in helping women achieve success. Yeah, I like the brand.” (Participant 6).

“With the femvertising I felt they did it correctly, so I wanted to support them, and I wanted to know whether they were living up to those standards or was it just another campaign to use, the fact they spoke the truth and actually live up to those messages made me a bit more favourable” (Participant one).

The above mentioned findings further enhance the Tri-component attitude model as the concept of trust (affective) stipulates that consumers that feel amplified and excited when exposed to an advert will translate into positive attitudes and purchase intention thus marketers aim to enhance positive experiences by stimulating positive feelings (Schiffman, 2019). The researcher further suggests that level of trust with the brand may contribute to consumers' attitude and could potentially play a role in translating the attitude towards femvertising.

4.3. Discussion

The researcher attempted to address the identified research problem by exploring South African Generation Z females consumers attitudes towards femvertising. More specifically, investigating whether these attitudes translated into purchase behaviour and understanding the contributing factors towards these attitudes. The answer for each research question will be discussed below:

Secondary research questions

The following secondary research questions will aid the researcher in answering the main research question.

4.3.1. How do female consumers feel (emotionally) about the use of Femvertising in marketing?

Corresponding objective: To analyse data by means of content analysis and a qualitative coding system.

While all participants within this study indicated that they have positive judgements towards their chosen brand example of femvertising, it was noted that participants did have hesitancy to support these marketing efforts due to them having underlying feelings of dishonestly and a lack of transparency. Conversely, the researcher discovered that despite the feelings of uncertainty and hesitancy, participants expressed that they are excited about the introduction of femvertising into the branding industry and look forward to seeing how brands use this technique to challenge traditional norms and change gender stereotypes. Thus, addressing the problem of how brands can further understand female consumers and their attitude formation when using pro-female messages within their marketing. Participants also, generally viewed the media and advertising to shape people's perception about gender roles, albeit if femvertising and its ideals are implemented for the long-term. Participants further highlighted that FemVERTISEMENTS pop up on occasions like Mother's Day and International Women's Day, brands appear to be participating in a race of pro-female advertising to put out their women-centric ads where they want their consumers to know that the brand believes in female empowerment.

4.3.2. How do female consumers respond when exposed to Femvertising?

Corresponding objective: To analyse data by means of thematic analysis, and a qualitative coding system.

A common theme of hesitancy and doubt was highlighted when participants were first exposed to Femvertising. However, these themes were overridden by participants highlighting that they thought the concept behind each advert was brilliant and positive, despite being hesitant in the beginning.

While participants felt the advert was good as it represented women of different body shapes and different career, other participants mentioned that they supported the advert due to the message aligning with the brand and the brands values. The insight derived from this finding indicates that brands using femvertising should be aware of the traditional roles and norms and try and go beyond that in order to resonate and include larger consumer bases. Interestingly, it was brought up that that when comparing femvertising with marketing towards men, it can be seen that ads for men don't carry the same patronising tone. Advertisers show men how their products can work for their lifestyle and treat the consumer as smart enough to decide if it does or not. Further emphasizing the reality that brands are still treating women as passive consumers, rather than discerning, active consumers who don't need to be told who to be, what to do or how to behave.

4.3.2. Does Femvertising affect the attitudes of consumers towards brands?

Corresponding objective: To analyse data by means of thematic analysis, and a qualitative coding system.

A common answer amongst participants was their purchase decision depends on a number of different factors however all but one stated that they would most likely not be influenced by this kind of cause stance. Participants highlighted that brand loyalty, brand preference and perceived quality are more important factors. However, should a brand misalign themselves in terms of social messaging and business practices, participants stated that they will no longer support that brand. Within this, respondents also urged brands to 'walk the talk' and implement the portrayed ideals within their own businesses' functioning for larger impact. Women within the sample are looking for ads that engage them, treat them as equals and as real people. When ads get it right, consumers notice. Underlying attitudes alluded to femvertisements rather being used a watered-down, de-clawed idea of feminism that agitates little for actual social change. These companies actively convince that with the consumption of their product, consumers are supporting the feminist cause.

Main research question

4.3.4. What are the attitudes of South African generation Z, female consumers towards Femvertising?

Corresponding objective: To draw conclusion and provide recommendations based on findings.

The above reflection reveals in many ways what most agencies and brands are still struggling with regarding being representative not only of race but also of gender issues that are key in society. While the role of advertising is understood as driving brand awareness of products in the market and influencing consumers' buying behaviours, its role in society has evolved from being mere punters

of the functional benefits of brand products. The sentiments expressed by the participants highlights that consumers are looking beyond a brand messaging and are diving into all the brand practise and whether or not these align with the message being portrayed. What has increasingly resonated with consumers and audiences is brand advertising that is meaningful and purpose lead. Brand advertising should not merely reflect to society what it is and what it knows. Rather, it should empower consumers to think differently about the world they live in. Female consumers in South Africa are changing their perceptives on what makes a good brand and what separates the good brands from the rest. They are starting to value inclusivity and diversity, which is translating into their purchase decisions and attitudes towards brands. The most effective femvertisements broaden and diversify representations of women and womanhood with more realistic and accurate reflections.

In this day and age it is crucial for brands and agencies to recognise that issues of gender do not merely arise when there is a need to tell brand stories. Actually, gender matters are everywhere and dealing with them in sensitive and sympathetic ways would be an opportunity to realise that they exist in every aspect of marketing and should thus be considered throughout the value chain, thereby achieving psychological connections and ultimately a positive attitudes towards the brand. Furthermore, the findings imply that, even in the approach to functional versus emotive advertisements, there needs to be an evolution in how the advertisements produced are treated to deliver to a higher purpose that will resonate with all consumers.

Finally, within the fieldwork narratives, it was recognized that young women are concerned that brands are more concerned with breaking traditional stereotypes and configuring new roles for women's participation and development than with their capacity to make individual decisions. In other words, cultural prejudices are maintained, in which it is assumed that women can be influenced and manipulated and that their capacity to exercise their productive and reproductive rights is minimized. More importantly, when brands claim to be stewards of feminist ideals in their advertising, but do not live up to those ideals in practice, it has a direct impact on the women's rights movement. There is a very real danger in companies exploiting feminism's message without taking action to further the movement by diminishing feminism to a tagline, or a hashtag, instead of a mechanism to engage in the real, hard work of promoting true equality. This trend contributes to an illusion of progress. It allows the millions of consumers who see these ads to believe equality is closer than it actually is, creating a diversity blind spot and obstructing the progress being made.

Results indicate that femvertising plays an important role in the emotional connection between women and brands, but consumers may react negatively to femvertising when brands do not show knowledge about the real feminist values, maintaining sexist stereotypes. Consumers also blame companies of hypocrite and exploitation to sell products if there is not authenticity and brand-cause fit.

Indeed, it is complicated to answer the rhetorical question about the existence of feminist advertising, given the theoretical contradictions of both premises. However, it is possible to recognize that this advertising strategy seeks brands to transform historical advertising content to break stereotypes derived from the sexual division of labour, for instance, objectification, hyper sexualization, and the standard of feminine beauty, by using messages close to women's realities, which project a new individual and collective reality for women.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter provides the implications of findings for future practices. Final conclusions will be given including an evaluation of the success of the research and possible future actions and/or research, to examine and determine the heuristic value of the study. It also covers the ethical implications as well as limitations and how they were addressed.

5.1. Trustworthiness

As this study was qualitative and aimed to gain an in-depth understanding into a particular phenomenon within a specific context, it did not aim to generalise results to a broader population, therefore trustworthiness and credibility are used (Middleton, 2020). Trustworthiness can further be divided into credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. It was pertinent for the researcher to establish that the study's findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable, to corroborate the research in terms of trustworthiness (Middleton, 2020).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interpreted the data that was collected (Middleton, 2020). Credibility was increased by the amount of time the researcher spends with the participants to gain an in-depth understanding into their lives. This can also be enhanced when one or more data collection is used (Frost, 2022). Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to spend 45 minutes or more with the participants, as these interviews are less structured and more flexible, the researcher was able to better understand the participants and their answers. Field notes were made which assisted in the identification of emerging patterns of the data collected and to ensure that all data was recorded (Middleton, 2020).

Transferability

This refers to the ability of the findings to be applicable to other contexts, thus the extent to which the results and analysis could be applied beyond a specific research project. These contexts can include similar situations, similar populations, and similar phenomena (Middleton, 2020). Transferability was achieved by using in depth description to show that the study's findings can be justifiably applied to another setting (Middleton, 2020; Frost, 2022). Therefore, it was the responsibility of the researcher to describe the findings described in sufficient detail to be applied to similar situations. Within quantitative studies, the reliability and validity can be tested through conducting the same research within a different sample of the population, as the results will be similar (Middleton, 2020). However, within qualitative research, one is not able to conduct the same research to a different sample as answers are not objectively measured, due to each participants having a unique experience (Frost, 2022). To enhance transferability, an in-depth description of the phenomena investigated was provided in the literature review to ensure that replication of the study can be easily transferred in different contexts.

Dependability

This refers to the quality of the process of integration that takes place between the data collection method, data analysis and the theory produced from the data (Middleton, 2020). Therefore, it was imperative for the study to be able to be repeated, enough information from the study should allow

for similar findings to be obtained if the study was to be replicated (Middleton, 2020). Within this research, a comprehensive description of the research design was provided, detailing the data collection process. Dependability can be achieved when an outside audit is conducted, therefore an outside person can review and examine the study in question to ensure that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Frost, 2022). A pilot study was conducted prior to the interview being held, to ensure that the questions being asked were ethical and topic related. Post- conducting this research, a reflective journal was compiled after the data collection process to evaluate the success of the overall process (Middleton, 2020).

Confirmability

The role of the researcher is an important part of a qualitative study. One of the challenges in addressing data saturation is about the use of a personal lens primarily because researchers assume that they have no bias in their data collection and may not recognize when the data is indeed saturated (Frost, 2022). Thus, confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings; therefore, researchers must take steps to ensure that findings emerge from data and not their own predispositions (Middleton, 2020). It was imperative that the interpretation of the phenomena represent that of participants and not of the researcher for the data to be saturated. To achieve confirmability the researcher ensured that personal bias and motivation did not skew the interpretation (Middleton, 2020). Furthermore, an in-depth description of the data collection process was provided to ensure integrity of the study. In addition to this, shortcomings of the study were recognised in section 5 limitations of the study (Frost, 2022).

5.2. Implications for future research

This exploratory cross-sectional study intended to gain a deeper understanding of South African, Generation Z female consumers attitudes femvertising, to gain a deeper understanding and add to the qualitative body of knowledge on the subject. This study was conducted only on female generation Z participants in Johannesburg, but further studies could include members of any sex or gender, covering the whole of South Africa various perspectives.

As a result of this study, marketers and society may better understand current social issues regarding female empowerment and the misrepresentation of women within the media; and thus, go on to further support social change in an authentic and meaningful manner. Furthermore, this research can assist brands wishing to adopt Femvertising within their strategy into understanding how consumers form attitudes towards their brand and advertising efforts. This research can guide brands on how Femvertising can be done in an effective way to entice positive attitude formation amongst female consumers. The two important themes that emerged should be of interest to brand managers who must navigate consumer attitudes and how these attitudes may affect the overall image and reputation of the brand.

As the local qualitative research on this topic is seemingly lacking, the researcher is satisfied that the study has successfully ascertained a deeper understanding into the attitudes of female consumers towards Femvertising from a uniquely South African perspective. The research is relevant in the current climate of gender equality and thus could be valuable to those involved in the fields surrounding the marketing and advertising disciplines. This value is derived from exploring the different dimensions of attitude formation and how women feel about the use of female empowerment as an advertising technique. The insights derived from this research can contribute to the body of South African Femvertising knowledge by offering a new perspective that could be used as a foundation for brand marketers to improve their advertising appeal to the feminist consumer.

Further investigation can be done to analyse the impact of femvertising on building brand image and actual purchases done because of femvertisement. Researchers can investigate the impact of femvertisement in breaking the stereotypes in Indian families. India is a country of mixed cultures, so it is recommended to conduct such research in different parts of the country keeping in mind social, economic, and cultural differences to strongly generalize the results.

5.3. Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in line with the ethical criterion prescribed by the IIE. Considering the nature of qualitative studies, the interaction between researchers and participants can be ethically challenging for the former, as they are personally involved in different stages of the study. The subject under study, Femvertising, embodies current social issues regarding women's status in society and its empowerment through marketing strategy (Åkestam, 2017). The use of women's bodies and beauty has always been an issue and raises a lot of ethical dilemmas (Åkestam, 2017). When collecting data from participants, their physical and psychological comfort will be of top priority, meaning that the participants are fully informed on how their identities and personal information will be protected throughout the proposed study (Louw, 2014). Furthermore, the interviews are conducted in a natural place for both the researcher and the participant to ensure that the participant felt comfortable throughout the interview. Due to interviews being a lengthy process, the researcher ensured that the time of the participants' time is not being wasted by being prepared prior to (Louw, 2014; Bhandari, 2022).

Participation of all participants is on a voluntary basis, and consent of participation in the study as well as to be voice/video recorded is required (Bhandari, 2022). 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 (Louw, 2014). The participants have the right to withdraw at any time if they wished and without consequences. It was important for all participants to be made aware of the academic purposes of the study and what their responses will be used for (Louw, 2014).

It was important that no respondents' mental state was put into harm's way and that respondents do not feel offended in any sort of way (Bhandari, 2022). Thus, the questions asked in the interview were reviewed prior to the research being conducted to ensure that no harmful/offensive language was being used, due to this being a sensitive topic (Louw, 2014; Bhandari, 2022). The questions have a specific flow which was intentional, so the participant is made to feel comfortable to share their answers openly, honestly, and uninhibited with a desire to not over-complicate their answers due to intimidation of being a part of an academic study (Louw, 2014). The researcher will ensure that the work submitted is free of plagiarism or research misconduct, and the results are accurately represented (Bhandari, 2022).

5.4. Limitations

Although this study sheds light on the influence of Femvertising on consumer attitudes, as with all research, it is not without its limitations. The methodology for this study followed an in-deductive, qualitative approach, thus this research opted for a smaller sample size due to the data collection method. Future research could use the findings from this study to inform quantitative studies to further investigate the relationships between each construct and then replicate these in the greater South African population.

This study was limited to female Generation Z consumers. Future studies could explore the influence of Femvertising on older generational cohorts to provide valuable insights into generational targeting and ways to advertise to them. Future research could also be conducted in other specific industries to get male feminists' opinions about Femvertising.

This study applied gender segregation as it focused more on women than men. The study suggested that women are misrepresented in the media and thus gender stereotyping is more prevalent. However, while this issue is more geared towards women and their attitudes, it could be beneficial to gather insight into other genders perspectives to further investigate if the messaging brands portray enhance social issues and consumers mindsets.

5.5. Final conclusions

Femvertising is making huge waves as large numbers of brands are launching campaigns marketing feminism. While promoting products brands are selling empowerment to women through marketing campaigns. As women purchasing power is increasing they provide bigger opportunity to marketers, this is the reason femvertising is the hottest trend used by advertisers to attract women customers.

This study investigates generation Z female consumers attitude towards femvertising. It further sheds light on the effect of attitude towards femvertising on forwarding intention of ad and purchase intention of the advertised brand. Qualitative data collection and analysis was conducted to fully investigate how female consumers form attitudes when exposed to Femvertising. Results indicated that while participants feel that Femvertising is a step in the right direction, doubt and hesitation remained at the forefront. Participants highlighted two main themes, brand alignment and the representation of women; these themes formed the foundation of how attitudes were formed and whether trust was granted.

The results of the study will give managers an idea about viewpoint of women towards femvertising and its impact on their brand. It can help them build their future campaigns according to the women perceptions.

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