

TRANSCULTURAL MEDIA NARRATIVES

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

EDUARDO CAMILO
KARIMA BOUZIANE
[EDS]



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THE IMPACT OF FEMVERTISING ON THE ATTITUDES OF PORTUGUESE CONSUMERS: THE CASE OF WOMEN'S SECRET

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Abstract: Messages deconstructing gender stereotypes have become increasingly prevalent in advertising discourse around the world. Their expansion has been so great that the notion of femvertising, which mixes feminism with advertising and encourages constructive communication between brands and women, was developed in 2015. Nonetheless, despite specialists claiming the effectiveness of this method in the field of communication, disagreements regarding its application have surfaced. In this context, a case study of the brand Women'ssecret was conducted with the goal of understanding the impact of femvertising on the attitudes of Portuguese female consumers toward the brand. A mixed-method approach was chosen for this purpose, incorporating, as exploratory techniques, five interviews and content analysis of advertisements; and, as primary techniques, two surveys targeting brand consumers - one featuring a femvertising advertisement and the other without femvertising - to enable a comparison of reactions to the phenomenon. The analysis of responses (n=389) allowed us to firstly identify the criteria recognized by brand consumers in femvertising

ads - Messages in favor of women, Minimization of sexuality, Use of diversity, and Coherence. Secondly, it highlighted the most prevalent emotions evoked – Trust and Bonding. Finally, it investigated their impact on customers' purchasing intentions. The results revealed that employing this strategy can have a positive impact on this regard, although it is understood that a single advertisement does not have a very pronounced influence.

Keywords: femvertising; advertising; Women'ssecret; consumer behavior; female stereotypes.

1. Introduction

In the context of advertising, the role of stereotypes in perpetuating inequalities is commonly accepted (Hainneville et al., 2022). In the specific case of the representation of women, Jalees and Majid (2009) emphasize that, by perpetuating an “ideal of beauty”, advertising is regularly blamed for feeding unrealistic expectations, an inferiority complex, and the myth that women are not only sexual objects but also inferior to men. This creates, reinforces, and disseminates stereotyped images of the feminine sex and what is socially established as women's gender roles, which led to the rise of femvertising in 2015 (Bayone & Burrowes, 2019).

Femvertising is a complex concept, and despite its proven effectiveness as a communication tactic, it continues to be the target of numerous criticisms and skepticism. On the other hand, there is scarce theoretical and empirical background on the subject in Portugal. Therefore, the goal of this study is to help close the gap that has been found in Portugal's communication sciences, particularly in the domain of advertising. To do this, a Case Study was conducted, concentrating on the Portuguese environment, and evaluating a company that incorporates femvertising into its advertising discourse: Women'ssecret.

2. Concept and Attributes of Femvertising

Resulting from the combination of the words feminism and advertising (Bayone & Burrowes, 2019), the term femvertising was coined in 2015 by the former media agency SheKnows Media, now known as She Media (Yarimoglu, 2021). It is a type of advertising that challenges traditional stereotypes of female advertising, emphasizing the importance of not only including physical aspects of females when analyzing this phenomenon but adopting a holistic view of women, including the deconstruction of stereotypes (Akestam et al., 2017). Bayone and Burrowes (2019) additionally state that the central purpose of femvertising is positive dialogue between brands and the female audience. With this strategy, brands seek to enhance their image and provide greater identification of their target audience with the products and services in question. Two good examples are the #likeagirl campaign¹ from Always, and “the fearless girl” campaign² from the State Street Global Advisers.

Dove appears to have been a pioneer in producing advertisements with a broader and more inclusive perception of beauty, featuring “real” women (Bissell & Rask, 2015; Bayone & Burrowes, 2019). However, in the last decade, brands such as Nike, Always, and Pantene, have also embraced this approach. Following this trend, She Media launched the #Femvertising competition to honor brands using stories, images, and/or messages of female empowerment in their advertising (Yarimoglu, 2021), and this phenomenon has become its own category at the prestigious international advertising festival Cannes Lions (Akestam et al., 2017).

For Becker-Herby (2016), these are the five pillars of femvertising:

- i. Use of diversity: Femvertising is intersectional, just as contemporary feminism should be. Femvertising campaigns, instead of relying on models that conform to the ideal beauty standards, showcase diverse body

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

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

- shapes, ethnicities, and ages, among other characteristics. Consequently, women feel more accurately represented.
- ii. Crafting messages in favor of women: Femvertising rejects messages in which the product is portrayed as the solution to consumers' problems. Instead, it employs inspiring and inclusive messages, aiming to instill feelings of self-affirmation and confidence in women.
 - iii. Challenging gender stereotypes and perceptions of what a woman/girl "should be": Femvertising campaigns do not depict women in situations associated with traditional stereotypes, such as performing household tasks. Instead, they often appear in competitive, leisure, working, or neutral settings.
 - iv. Minimization of sexuality: If the female body appears in a femvertising campaign, it is portrayed in a relevant, authentic manner, without exaggerating appearances through sexual poses or excessive aesthetic sophistication.
 - v. Authentic representation of women: All advertising aspects (e.g., product, talent, setting) in femvertising campaigns are authentic. The conveyed message is credible and aligns with the elements of the advertisement. Becker-Herby's (2016) pillars served as an analytical framework for several studies on femvertising and have become relevant in understanding the effectiveness of femvertising as a Marketing Communication strategy.

3. Femvertising as a Marketing Communication Strategy

Several authors have suggested that femvertising is a successful strategy for reaching the female audience (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020; Akestam et al., 2017; Drake, 2017). However, other studies that question its effectiveness (Hainneville et al., 2022; Jalakas, 2016).

Drake (2017) conducted an experimental online study with a sample of 181 women aged 18 to 34. They were randomly exposed to either traditional television ads or femvertising ads from the same brand and subsequently

asked to respond to a questionnaire survey. This research revealed that, in general, femvertising has a positive impact on women's opinions of the brand, increases emotional connection, and makes them more likely to purchase from that brand. In another experimental study with 346 women aged between 18 and 40, Akestam et al. (2017) confirmed that femvertising, compared to ads portraying traditional images of women, improves women's attitudes toward the brand. Both studies emphasize that brands should challenge stereotypes associated with beauty standards and use images that contribute to increasing female self-esteem, as this stimulates and strengthens the relationships consumers have with brands.

On the other hand, Jalakas (2016) takes a more neutral stance on the topic. Through 14 interviews with women who viewed femvertising ads, her study revealed ambivalence in the results, stating that the reaction to this phenomenon cannot be generalized. According to the author, women extract different meanings from the ads, adjusting them to their individual context, and making judgments based on their prior knowledge about the brand in question.

Analyzing femvertising from a distinct perspective, Abitbol and Sternadori (2020) aimed to understand whether the degree of rurality and preference for specific ads are associated with attitudes toward this strategy. Through 418 online surveys, they concluded that the more urban the location of the respondents, the more educated they tended to be, and the more likely they were to support gender equality. However, this did not translate into a more positive attitude towards femvertising. In other words, their study suggests that companies and marketing professionals should consider transcending the more serious tone of most female empowerment messages.

Champlin et al. (2019) also delved into femvertising, this time in conjunction with the concept of brand-cause fit. After a qualitative analysis of the winning ads from the #FemvertisingAwards in 2015, they highlighted key themes that differentiate them and concluded that the effectiveness of campaigns does not depend on brand-cause fit but on how the brand addresses

the social issue. Thus, challenging female stereotypes can be beneficial not only for a limited range of products (e.g., feminine or household products) but also for a wide range of product categories (e.g., cars, intimate and sportswear, shampoos) in any advertising medium.

Hainneville et al. (2022) adopted a qualitative methodology, conducting in-depth interviews with 17 women to explore the nature of authentic femvertising and differentiated it from femwashing (inauthentic femvertising). The authors emphasize that, while some consumers perceive sincerity in brands using femvertising, others question its authenticity, motivations, and feminist nature, leading to the concept of femwashing. The results suggest that the concepts of femvertising and femwashing coexist in consumers' minds, which justifies some of the contradictions found in the literature regarding its true effectiveness (Hainneville et al., 2022). Additionally, the authors identified six dimensions of authentic femvertising:

- i. **Transparency:** implies the absence of modifications in both body shape and skin texture. Advertisements should include representations of everyday life, as elements distant from real life diminish the perceived level of realism by consumers (Hainneville et al., 2022);
- ii. **Consistency:** refers to the consistency between the brand identity (history, values, parent company), its communication, and its offering. Participants do not believe that a brand's approach is credible if it has communicated in a sexist manner in the past. On the other hand, a company that has positively contributed to the representation of women since its inception is more easily perceived as genuine;
- iii. **Identification:** the existence of a bond between the advertisement and the "self" is a prerequisite in femvertising ads. According to the study, consumers understand that an advertisement is authentic when they can recognize themselves in it;
- iv. **Diversity:** does not only refer to inclusive advertisements at the level of physical appearance (ethnicity, morphology, style), identity (age and

- gender), and health issues. It also implies the absence of justifications from brands regarding the use of inclusion;
- v. Challenging stereotypes: involves the deconstruction of gender stereotypes (career, domestic activities), physical appearance stereotypes (beauty standards), and stereotypes related to women's interests (personality, preferences);
 - vi. Respect: is based on brands respecting women (reducing sexualization without making it taboo) and women respecting themselves (encouraging self-acceptance, self-esteem, and self-confidence).

4. The impact of femvertising on women

The consequences of femvertising are not exclusively reflected in terms of the brand's emotional and purchase intention (Drake, 2017). According to Bayone and Burrowes (2019), 91% of the 628 surveyed women believe that how they are portrayed in advertising directly affects their self-esteem. Citing entertainment magazines that publish weight-loss tips and ideal body standards, also Bissell and Rask (2015) assert that the media is one of the major causes of low self-esteem in many women. This fact, encompassing body dissatisfaction and "self-objectification," can have more serious consequences, such as anorexia, bulimia, and depression.

To analyze the negative consequences of femvertising, Lin and McFerran (2016) conducted an experimental investigation involving 168 women and found that when there is an acceptance of a larger body, individuals exhibit lower motivation to commit to healthy behaviors and consume larger portions of unhealthy food. In another research, Varghese and Kumar (2020) conducted an experimental study to analyze femvertising as a media strategy to increase the self-esteem of both female and male adolescents and found that femvertising helps improve the self-esteem of adolescents, with no gender difference.

5. Methodology

This research aims to understand how the femvertising used in Women'secret's advertising influences Portuguese consumers' attitudes towards the brand. In this perspective, the central question was defined as: "What is the impact of Women'secret's femvertising on the attitudes of Portuguese consumers towards the brand?". Based on the tripartite attitude model referenced by Baynast et al. (2018) – which includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components – the following specific objectives were established:

1. Identify the femvertising criteria perceived by Women'secret consumers in its advertisements;
2. Evaluate the emotions evoked by Women'secret's femvertising in its Portuguese consumers;
3. Analyze the relationship between Women'secret's femvertising and the purchasing intention of its Portuguese consumers.

5.1 Study Design and Method

Since this research specifically focuses on the Women'secret brand, it is classified as a Case Study, defined by Bryman (2015) as a detailed exploration of a specific case. A mixed-method sequential exploratory design (Creswell & Clark, 2018) was adopted, consisting of two phases: an initial qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase.

5.2 Data Collection and Methods of Analysis

Two exploratory techniques were applied to complement the subsequent primary technique. In the first phase, exploratory interviews were conducted with consumers of the brand being studied. Next, a content analysis was conducted on Women'secret advertisements in 2022. Finally, a questionnaire survey was administered to the brand's consumers as the primary research technique, aiming to address the proposed objectives and the main research question.

5.3 Exploratory Interviews

Due to their exploratory nature,, five interviews were conducted to gather the perspectives of the participants regarding their stance on femvertising and identify potential criteria that could contribute to the subsequent primary technique. The target audience for the study was defined based on information collected about Women'ssecret's typical consumers in Portugal: Portuguese women, aged between 25 and 45 years.

The interview analysis identified a relevant variable to include in the questionnaire survey: Coherence. According to the interviewed women, communication must align with the brand's values and actions. Otherwise, femvertising efforts may have a counterproductive effect, distancing consumers from the brands (Table 1).

Table 1 - Femvertising criterion identified through exploratory interviews

Criterion	Description
Coherence	The brand's values are aligned with its communication. Otherwise, femvertising efforts may have the opposite effect, distancing consumers from the brands.

5.4 Content Analysis

In this research, content analysis was used as a data analysis methodology to select the advertisements included in the questionnaire. The goal was to choose two ads: one featuring femvertising and another without. After reviewing Women'ssecret's most-viewed ads on YouTube in 2022 for the Portuguese audience, two ads were selected based on a femvertising criteria analysis model constructed for the research, incorporating insights from Becker-Herby (2016) and Hainneville et al. (2022) (Table 2). The analysis concluded that the two most-viewed Women'ssecret ads on YouTube in 2022 for the Portuguese audience met the desired criteria for the research (Appendix 1).

Table 2 – Selected femvertising criteria

Criteria	Authors	Description
Crafting messages in favor of women	Becker-Herby (2016)	The product is not the solution to consumers' problems. Inspiring and inclusive messages are included, seeking to evoke feelings of self-assertion and confidence in women.
Minimization of sexuality and respect for the body	Becker-Herby (2016) Hainneville et al. (2022)	The body is shown naturally, avoiding exaggerated looks, sexual poses, or excessive aesthetic appeal. Brands prioritize respecting women by toning down sexualization without making it taboo, while also encouraging self-respect, confidence, and acceptance among women themselves.
Challenging gender stereotypes and perceptions of what a woman/girl "should be"	Becker-Herby (2016) Hainneville et al. (2022)	Deconstruction of gender stereotypes (career, domestic activities), physical appearance stereotypes (beauty standards), and stereotypes related to women's interests (personality, preferences). These stereotypes typically manifest in competitive environments, leisure settings, at work, or in neutral scenarios.
Relatability/ Authenticity	Becker-Herby (2016) Hainneville et al. (2022)	The existence of a connection between the advertisement and the "self". Consumers perceive an advertisement as authentic when they can see themselves reflected in it.
Use of diversity	Becker-Herby (2016) Hainneville et al. (2022)	Presentation of diverse body types, races, ages, among others, instead of models conforming to the ideal beauty standards. However, this doesn't only refer to inclusive advertisements regarding physical appearance (ethnicity, morphology, style), identity (age and gender), and health issues. It also implies the absence of justifications from brands regarding the use of inclusion.
Transparency	Hainneville et al. (2022)	Absence of modifications in both body shape and skin texture.

The model presented earlier was used both in the phase of content analysis and in the initial part of the questionnaire survey, as will be evident in the following subsection. Additionally, it is important to note that, to ensure impartiality during the data analysis, we chose to exclude the Transparency and Identification/Authenticity dimensions from the content analysis. These dimensions are subjective and should be evaluated only from the consumers' perspective. Similarly, we decided not to include the Coherence dimension in the content analysis since it pertains more to consumers' opinions about the brand rather than the advertisement itself. These three variables will only be considered in the analysis of the survey data.

5.5 Survey

The two exploratory techniques outlined earlier proved essential for constructing the survey. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), this is a convenient and cost-effective technique that provides a numerical description of attitudes and opinions within a population by studying a sample.

To understand if femvertising has any impact on shaping consumers' attitudes towards the brand, and considering the approach taken by Drake (2017), two surveys were administered with the same questions, but each presented one of the two selected ads: one featuring femvertising³ and the other not⁴. This approach facilitated the comparison of results, allowing for more conclusive insights.

The survey was made available via the Google Forms platform and distributed from August 20 to September 3, 2022. It was shared within the researchers' network of contacts and on their social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn). A total of 400 responses were recorded (202 for survey 1 and 198 for survey 2), with 389 considered valid (194 and 195, respectively).

3. Ad with Femvertising here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI468cNWGJU>

4. Ad without femvertising here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Crij2wGLMAo~>

5.6 Methodological Construct of the Survey

In this study, the survey was employed to fulfill the aforementioned objectives and to address the research question, as well as the study's specific goals. The sections of the survey were designed considering the Tripartite Model of Attitude.

Table 3 - Summary of the Primary Methodological Strategy

Research Question					
What is the impact of Women'secret's femvertising on the attitudes of Portuguese female consumers towards the brand?					
Primary Technique					
Survey					
Tripartite Model of Attitude	Objectives	Research Questions	Variable	Source	Question
Cognitive component ⁵	Identify the femvertising criteria perceived by Women'secret brand consumers in its advertisements.	What are the femvertising criteria perceived by consumers of the Women'secret brand in its advertisements?	Crafting messages in favor of women	Becker-Herby (2016)	1
			Minimization of sexuality and respect for the body		2
			Challenging gender stereotypes and perceptions of what a woman/girl "should be"	Becker-Herby (2016); Hainneville et al. (2022)	3
			Relatability/ Authenticity		4
			Use of diversity		5
			Transparency	Hainneville et al. (2022)	6
			Coherence	Interviews	7
Affective component ⁶	Evaluate the emotions evoked by Women'secret's femvertising in its Portuguese consumers.	What emotions does Women'secret's femvertising evoke in its Portuguese consumers?	Bonding		9
			Resonance	Rossiter e Bellman (2012)	10
			Companionship		11
			Love		12
Behavioral component ⁷	Analyze the relationship between Women'secret's femvertising and the purchasing intention of its Portuguese consumers.	How does Women'secret's femvertising influence the purchase intention of Portuguese consumers?	Purchase intention	Shimp (1981)	13 and 14

5. For the cognitive component of the tripartite model of attitude, the criteria described in the "Exploratory Interviews" and "Content Analysis" chapters were used.

6. Results

6.1 Application of the Survey- Sociodemographic profile

Among the total sample of 389 women, 37% are between 25 and 29 years old (144); 25% are 30-34 years old (98); 19% are 35-39 years old (75); and 19% are 40-45 years old (72). Regarding the residential area of the respondents, 163 live in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (42%), 20% live in the Algarve region (76), followed by 16% who live in Alentejo (63), 12% in the central region of the country (45), and 10% in the northern region (38). The remaining 4 respondents live in the Autonomous Region of Madeira (0.5% - 2); in the Autonomous Region of the Azores (0.25% - 1) and outside Portugal (0.25% - 1). In terms of academic qualifications, more than half of the respondents have completed a Bachelor's degree (59% - 229), 26% have a Master's degree (101), and 13% have completed secondary education (51). With smaller numbers, there are 5 women with a Ph.D. (1%), 1 with no formal education (0.3%), 1 with primary education (0.3%), and 1 woman with basic education (0.3%). Finally, regarding occupation, 85% of women are employed (331), which corresponds to the largest portion of the sample. 34 women are working students (9%), and the remaining 6% are evenly divided between unemployed (12) and students (12).

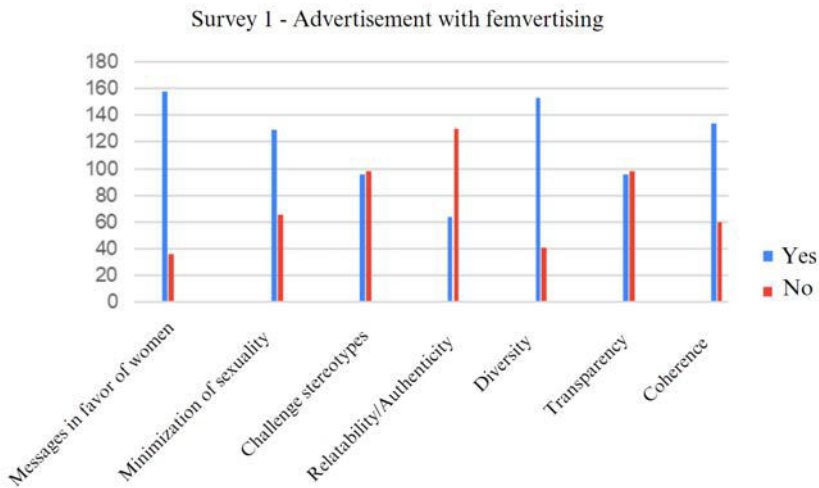
6.2 Criteria of femvertising perceived by Women's secret brand consumers in their advertisements

Graph 1, which includes the femvertising criteria marked by consumers in Survey 1 (with femvertising), reveals that the majority of participants perceive messages in favor of women in the ad they viewed, where the

6. For the affective component of the Tripartite Model of Attitude, we relied on the contribution of Rossiter and Bellman (2012). Regarding emotion, Rossiter and Bellman (2012) conducted a large-scale study with over a thousand participants, measuring consumers' emotional bond with certain brands. To do this, they administered a questionnaire survey based on five variables - Trust, Bonding, Resonance, Companionship, and Love. Each of these variables was associated with a brief description. Participants had to choose which of the descriptions, in their opinion, applied to the brand: "I trust this brand" (trust), "I consider this brand as mine" (bonding), "I use this brand because it fits the image I have of myself" (resonance), "It's like a companion to me" (companionship), and "I would say I feel deep affection, like love, for this brand and would be really upset if I couldn't have it" (love).

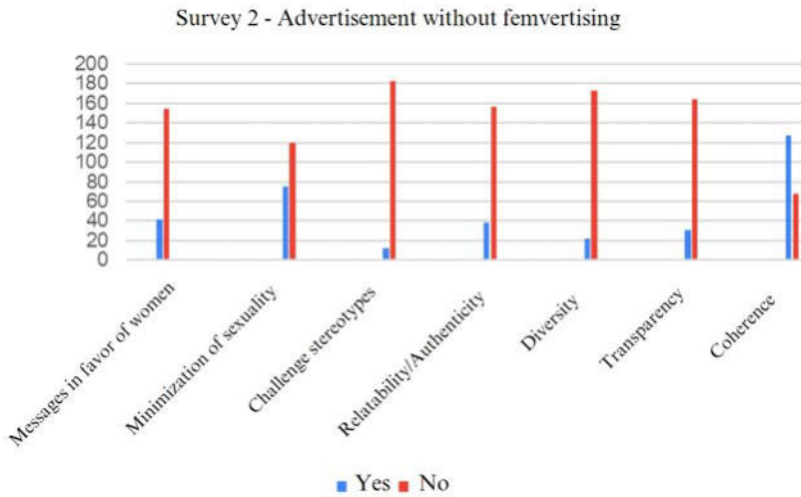
7. For the behavioral component, we relied on the contribution of Shimp (1981), who proposed that attitude toward an advertising message plays a significant role in consumer brand choice. Shimp argued that consumers' attitudes toward advertisements can have a significant impact on their evaluations of advertised brands and, ultimately, on their purchase intention.

product is not presented as the solution to problems, sexuality is perceived as minimized, the body is respected, there is diversity among women, and there is coherence with the brand's values. However, challenging stereotypes and transparency regarding body modifications are not as obvious to consumers, with responses being quite divided. Finally, the least selected criterion was reliability with the ad.



Graph 1. Summary of femvertising criteria marked by consumers in Survey 1.

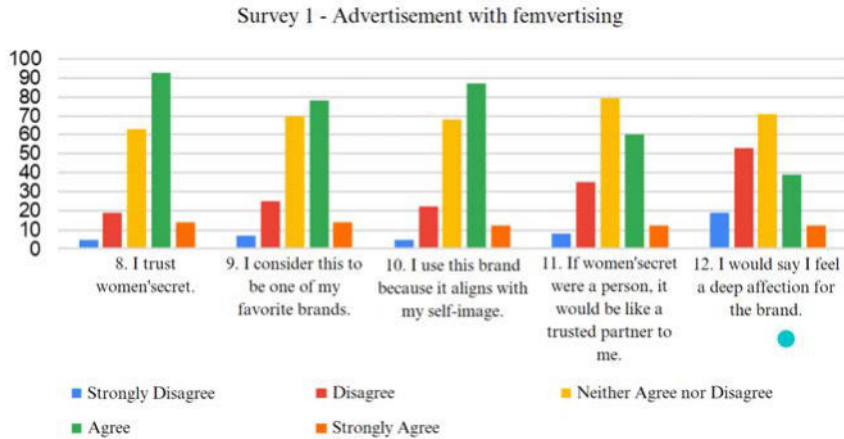
In the case of consumers who saw the ad without femvertising (Graph 2), the criterion that stood out was the coherence between the message conveyed in the ad and the brand's values. Minimizing the sexuality of the body, with authentic poses and without exaggerating appearance, was identified by some women, but still, the majority did not mark it. Finally, the remaining five criteria were selected only by a small portion of women, with most respondents not relating to what they saw. For a large part of the brand's consumers, the ad is not transparent and does not include inspiring and inclusive messages, does not challenge stereotypes, and does not use diversity.



Graph 2. Summary of femvertising criteria marked by consumers in Survey 2.

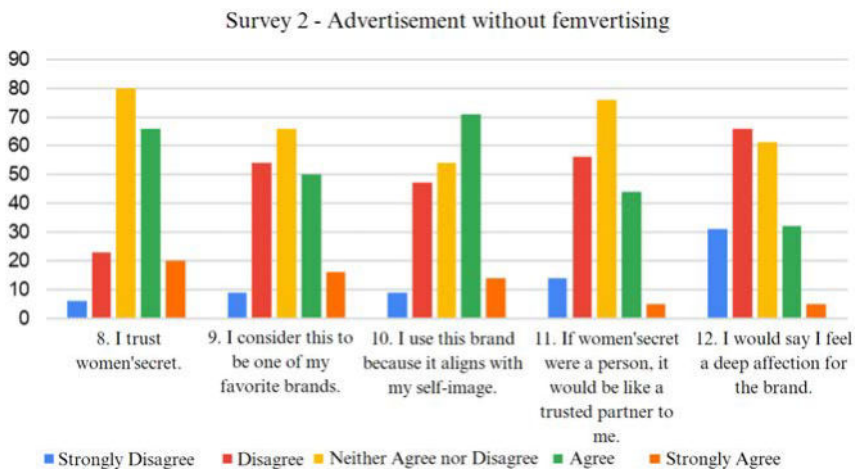
6.3 Emotions evoked by Women’ssecret’s femvertising in its Portuguese consumers

As can be seen in graph 3, which includes the synthesis of responses to questions associated with the second objective of the research, the most frequently selected responses in the Confidence, Bond, and Resonance variables was “Agree.” In these three cases, the second most recorded option was “Neither agree nor disagree.” This was also the most recorded response in the questions associated with Companionship and Love from consumers towards the brand. While in the Companionship variable, the second preference was “Agree,” in the case of Love, it was “Disagree.”



Graph 3. Synthesis of emotions evoked in respondents from Survey 1 - With femvertising.

The responses given most frequently by women who watched Ad 2 were quite different from the above, as can be seen in graph 4. “Neither agree nor disagree” was the favorite option for women regarding statements about the Confidence, Bond, and Companionship variables. In the Confidence variable, the second most frequent response was “Agree,” unlike the others, with the “Disagree” response being the most voted for. The statement of Resonance was the only one that more frequently recorded the “Agree” response, and Love was the only one that recorded the “Disagree” option in greater numbers.



Graph 4. Synthesis of emotions evoked in respondents from Survey 2 - Without femvertising.

6.4 Influence of Women'secret's femvertising on the purchase intention of Portuguese consumers

The first question in the section associated with the behavioral component of the Tripartite Model of Attitude was “Does the ad you viewed influence your intention to purchase products from the brand?” 55% of respondents who viewed the ad with femvertising answered yes (107), while 45% answered the ad does not influence on their intention to purchase products from the brand (87). No participant responded that the ad had a negative impact.

Of the 130 consumers who viewed the ad without femvertising, 67% responded that it did not influence 23% considered the ad had a positive impact, and the remaining 10% considered that the ad negatively influenced their intention to buy Women'secret products.

At this stage of the survey, the concept of femvertising was introduced. After reading its definition, consumers answered the question, “Do you think the use of this strategy can influence your intention to purchase products from the brand?” The responses to this question from participants in both groups were very similar. Most women consider this a strategy that can positively

influence their intention to purchase products from the brand, with 77% of participants choosing this response in the survey that included the ad with femvertising and 73% in the one that included the ad without femvertising. 26% of women who viewed the latter consider that this strategy has no impact, with 1% of women considering that it may have a negative influence. It is also worth mentioning that 21% of brand consumers who saw the ad with femvertising responded that the strategy does not influence their purchasing behavior, with 2% considering that it has a negative influence.

7. Discussion of Results

The first objective of this study was to identify the femvertising criteria perceived by Women'secret consumers in their advertisements. Survey responses revealed that most women who viewed the femvertising advertisement confirmed the presence of various criteria proposed by Becker-Herby (2016) and Hainneville et al. (2022): Messages in favor of women; Minimization of sexuality and Respect for the body; and Use of diversity. Coherence (a variable identified in the interviews) was also observed. However, most participants in this study did not relate to the advertisement. Additionally, the Challenge of stereotypes and Transparency in body modifications were not as evident for these consumers, with responses being divided on these two criteria.

This indicates that, on the one hand, the fact that the advertisement meets femvertising criteria is not a guarantee of relatability with it. This is just one criterion, among many other factors that impact what a woman may feel. Among these factors are the product itself, quality-price ratio, accessibility – as revealed in the exploratory interviews – as well as individuals' permanent characteristics (personality, self-image, lifestyle), individual variables (perceptions, needs, motivations, attitudes), and sociological and psychosociological variables (group, social class, cultural variables, family) (Baynast et al., 2018).

On the other hand, although a significant portion of consumers recognize the diversity of women, about half believe that body modifications might have occurred. This might explain why most women did not consider that stereotypes are being deconstructed. In other words, the existence of diverse bodies in the advertisement does not necessarily imply that consumers perceive the brand as challenging stereotypes.

Nevertheless, when comparing the results obtained by the first group with the group of women who saw the ad without femvertising, it is evident that relatability was higher in women who saw the femvertising ad. The only criterion that consumers considered relevant was coherence between the video's message and the brand's values, with the remaining six criteria identified in the ad by only a small portion of the group. For most respondents, the ad was not transparent, did not include inspirational and inclusive messages, did not challenge stereotypes, and did not use diversity,, indicating that the chosen ad fulfilled its purpose.

The second objective of this investigation was to evaluate the emotions evoked by Women'secret's femvertising in its Portuguese consumers. In the interviews, emotional connection with an ad proved to be an important factor for women to identify with a brand. As in Drake's (2017) conclusions, the emotional responses of Women'secret consumers after seeing the ads were generally better for women who saw the femvertising ad, primarily in terms of Trust and Bonding. However, in both questionnaires, most respondents admitted to using the brand's products because they are associated with their self-image (Resonance). Furthermore, Love and Companionship recorded indifferent responses in questionnaire 1. In questionnaire 2, the responses were similar, with less emphasis on Love towards the brand. In general, for women who saw the ad without femvertising, the responses were mostly indifferent. This analysis highlights the fact that it is not necessary to have Love towards the brand for Women'secret consumers to purchase their products and consider them a fit regarding their self-image. However, women who saw the femvertising ad appeared to trust the brand more and have a stronger emotional connection with it than those who did not see it.

After the previous reflections, a new question arises: does the femvertising ad positively influence the purchasing intention of Women'secret products for consumers? According to the survey results, to some extent, yes. This is the focus of the third and final objective of this investigation: to analyze the relationship between Women'secret's femvertising and the purchasing intention of its Portuguese consumers. A large part of women indeed consider that the ads had some influence on their purchase intention (55% positive influence for those who saw the femvertising ad; and for those who saw the ad without femvertising, 23% positive influence and 10% negative influence). These results are consistent with those obtained by Shimp (1981), who suggests that there can be an attitude transfer from an ad to the brand's attitude.

It is noteworthy that the femvertising ad did not negatively impact the purchasing intention of any consumer, but the ad without femvertising negatively impacted a small percentage of women (10%). Advertisers, by portraying an ideal beauty standard, suggest that women are not on the same level as the models depicted (Jalees & Majid, 2009), hence understanding why some consumers might have a negative experience when looking at such ads (Myrén & Danås, 2022). This information is consistent with the majority of opinions from the interviews, where most respondents emphasized their desire to see beauty standards challenged in advertisements. Nevertheless, most of the participating consumers in the survey consider that the ad had no impact on their purchasing intention (45% for those who saw the femvertising ad and 67% for those who saw the ad without femvertising).

Not resorting to femvertising is neither beneficial nor detrimental to Women'secret, but employing it seems to have some positive impact, as the results of the next question appear to demonstrate. After explaining the concept, most respondents confirmed that the use of femvertising positively influences their purchasing intention, in both questionnaires (77% and 73%). However, cross-referencing this data with the results of the previous question – where high levels of indifference were recorded – reveals that a single femvertising ad alone does not have a profound impact. Several

interviewees pointed to Dove as a brand whose ads they appreciate, and this could be justified by the fact that a broader and more inclusive perception of beauty is evident in all communication from this brand (Bayone & Burrowes, 2019; Bissell & Rask, 2015).

According to interviewed consumers, the best way for brands to use femvertising is through a real representation of the target audience in ads. A representation not tied to stereotypes can, in addition to benefiting brands in terms of purchasing intention, influence how women perceive themselves – as mentioned by Bayone and Burrowes (2019) – and impact how society views women (Heilman, 2012). According to the study by Ferreira et al. (2021), advertising messages play an important role in creating new meanings, especially in moments of social change.

Nevertheless, for a percentage of 21% and 26% of women, using femvertising is indifferent, and there is still a negligible percentage (2% and 1%) that disagrees with the use of this strategy. For Hainneville and colleagues (2022), this may be because some consumers question the authenticity, motivations, and the feminist nature of the messages.

Thus, returning to the third objective of this investigation, we understand that the purchasing intention of a large portion of the brand's consumers seems to be, to some extent, impacted by using femvertising in ads. However, despite the apparent trend, the positive results of femvertising reactions cannot be generalized. According to Jalakas (2016), women extract distinct meanings from ads, adjusting them to their context and making judgments based on the prior knowledge they already have about the brand in question. The present study aligns with the conclusions of this author: most respondents agree that femvertising can influence their purchasing behavior for the brand's products, but not everyone.

8. Conclusion

The present study aimed to understand the impact of Women'secret's femvertising on the attitudes of Portuguese consumers towards the brand. The novelty of the femvertising concept and the limited research on the concept in Portugal justify the choice of the theme, which is increasingly present in current brand communication. The relevance of this study is highlighted by filling a gap in the field of communication sciences at the national level, particularly in advertising.

The first objective of this research was achieved, as the results of the first section of the surveys identified the femvertising criteria most strongly present in the minds of consumers: Messages in favor of women, Minimization of sexuality, Use of diversity, and Coherence.

Furthermore, the second objective was also achieved, as it was proven that femvertising appears to bring a higher emotional connection in terms of Bond and Trust of consumers with the brand. Nevertheless, the results in terms of Resonance (using products because it is associated with self-image) were high for both consumers who saw the femvertising ad and those who saw the ad without femvertising.

Finally, the last objective of the study allowed for the most surprising conclusions to be drawn: not using femvertising seems to neither harm nor benefit the Women'secret brand, but its use can positively impact consumers' purchasing intentions. However, it is important not to overlook that a single ad does not, by itself, have a very marked influence. Brands looking to benefit from this strategy should ensure harmony between their purpose and the concrete actions that which showcase the messaging conveyed through their communication.

Regarding the study's limitations, there is some difficulty in objectively verifying the existence of femvertising criteria in content analysis. The responses from the first part of the survey revealed that, even though biased, consumers' perception of the criteria is not unanimous.

As for future work suggestions, conducting more national-level case studies is recommended to increase the theoretical framework and further understand this phenomenon, as well as effectively verify its effectiveness in the advertising field. Additionally, studies on the stereotypes that may emerge from the femvertising phenomenon are proposed. Although it may seem paradoxical, the analysis of interviews raised this question, which appears to have the potential to be a new research field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Ad with femvertising

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI468cNWGJU>

With the title “We are all extraordinary women by Women’ssecret” and a duration of 10 seconds, this advertisement takes place in a forest, with a violin sound in the background and a voice-over declaring: “Extraordinary women wanted. Surprising, powerful, just like every single woman.” Throughout the advertisement, various women with different skin tones (e.g., white, brown, black) appear, although white is undoubtedly the predominant color. There are different body types (e.g., slim, curvy, athletic), with various hairstyles (e.g., straight, curly, tied up), performing possible and impossible actions: aerial acrobatics, making fire with their hands, standing on horseback, running, and doing cartwheels. The body is always represented from a distance, and there is no specific type of clothing that stands out: dresses, sportswear, pajamas, lingerie, sweaters, skirts, pants, among others, are shown. The video ends with the phrase “We are all extraordinary women.” Regarding the femvertising criteria, it’s important to note that in this advertisement, the following criteria were almost fully met.

Regarding the femvertising criteria, it’s important to note that in this advertisement, they are almost entirely met:

1. Elaboration of messages in favor of women - besides the product not being presented as a solution to consumers’ problems, an inspiring message

of self-confidence is included, focusing on the fact that all women are equally powerful, talented, and amazing.

2. Minimization of sexuality and respect for the body - the body is not sexualized nor prominently featured in the advertisements. There are no sexual poses or any aesthetic sophistication.
3. Challenge to gender stereotypes and perception of what a woman/girl “should be” - women are shown performing “extraordinary” and unconventional actions in a forest - a neutral setting - without room for gender stereotypes. In terms of physical appearance, the existence of more than one body type is noticeable, not just the stereotypical one.
4. Use of diversity - different body shapes, races, hair types, and clothing are shown in the advertisement, instead of just models within the ideal beauty standard. The brand in the advertisement does not emphasize or provide justification for the use of inclusion. Despite this, it’s noted that the white and slim body type appears more frequently than others.

Although the fourth criterion was not fully met, it was considered that the overall message of the advertisement is congruent with femvertising.



Image 1. Frame of the Ad with femvertising.



Image 2. Frame of the Ad with femvertising.



Image 3. Frame of the Ad with femvertising.

Ad without femvertising

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Crij2wGlMAo~>

The second most-viewed advertisement is titled “Sorte que te deixei para trás by Women’ssecret”⁸ and has a duration of 20 seconds. The advertisement, set in a house, begins with the following sentence written in the video: “7 out of 10 women wear underwear in the wrong size.” Throughout the video, Spanish music is heard, and in the subtitles, one can read the translation: “You were always so tiny. We never fit together, damn it... Luck that I didn’t give up and found one for me. One my size at last.” To conclude, it appears written in the video “At Women’ssecret, we are specialists and help you find your ideal size.” During the video, nine women appear: eight white and one black, all with a slim and similar body type. Some are blonde and others brunette, and their hair is straight or wavy. All appear in close-up shots and wearing lingerie, performing tasks such as playing music, taking off a towel from their hair, looking at themselves in the mirror, dancing, eating, petting a cat, taking selfies, and attempting juggling. Regarding the femvertising criteria, it’s important to note that in this advertisement, the following criteria were not met:

1. Elaboration of messages in favor of women - in the case of this advertisement, the product is presented as the solution to consumers’ problems, as the brand positions itself as an expert in finding the ideal bra size. There doesn’t seem to be a direct inspirational and confidence-building message for women.
2. Minimization of sexuality and respect for the body - some of the women appear with very natural poses, while others have more carefully crafted poses with some aesthetic sophistication. All women are shown in lingerie. There isn’t a direct encouragement towards self-acceptance and self-esteem.

8. “Lucky that I left you behind by Women’ssecret”

3. Challenge to gender stereotypes and perception of what a woman/girl “should be” - all women are depicted in domestic settings, engaged in routine actions such as looking at themselves in the mirror, eating, and playing music. The representation doesn’t clearly challenge gender stereotypes or stereotypes associated with beauty standards.
4. Use of diversity - The women portrayed correspond to a thinness ideal, with the majority having white skin. There isn’t a great variety in terms of body type, race, age, among others.



Image 4. Frame of the Ad without femvertising.



Image 5. Frame of the Ad without femvertising.



Image 6. Frame of the Ad without femvertising.

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