

# Femvertising: Women Empowering Advertising or Commercialized Feminism? A Qualitative Explanation of Consumers' Reaction

Xinyi Zhang

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou 215000, China.

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**Abstract:** Femvertising is a term that refers to advertisements that promote women's empowerment through pro-feminist themes, which has become a significant subject in contemporary media marketing. However, it has also been condemned for commercializing feminism to boost financial benefits for the brand itself. Hence, this research performed 12 in-depth interviews to gain a better understanding of both consumers' reactions to women empowering advertising by gender, and the elements that lead to negative responses. The study finds out that among three femvertising from brands of various categorized products (Audi, Bumble and PROYA), female respondents reported that they detest Audi's commercial the most, despite the fact that Audi is the brand favored by male participants. Female customers rated Bumble as the most preferred femvertising while male interviewees mainly maintain a moderate attitude. PROYA gets less criticism than praise from both male and female customers' perspective. Moreover, the researcher organized the components that contribute to unfavorable customer reactions, based on brand, commercial content, consumers, societal norms, empowerment themes, and communication approach. This qualitative study addressed these concerns and provided information on consumer perceptions yet expectations of femvertising in commercials on brands and advertising institutions for social discourses.

**Keywords:** Femvertising; Marketing; Women Empowerment Advertising; Consumer Attitudes; Brand Image

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## 1. Introduction

Advertisers continue to misunderstand and distort gender by mixing sexuality and stereotypes, relying on outmoded and erroneous assumptions, and projecting unreachable expectations.<sup>[1][2]</sup> While female positions are growing, whereas marketers are not sensitive to consumer culture trends immediately. Therefore, there are still stereotypes in advertising, which drew public criticism, and businesses committed to breaking down.<sup>[3]</sup> Female empowerment has been a prevalent subject in advertising since the feminist movement and progressive social changes in the 1980s, which has been lauded for its use of female empowerment language in marketing efforts.<sup>[4]</sup> Hence, femvertising was defined as a behavior challenging stereotypical female image in commercials.<sup>[5]</sup> Nevertheless, the public has criticized its use to promote businesses without supporting or understanding feminism.<sup>[2]</sup> Most companies are unfamiliar with consumers reactions to femvertising and lack a channel for determining customer attitudes.<sup>[6]</sup> While most research has focused on femvertising's impact on businesses, fewer studies have compared female and male reactions to femvertising. This study aims to contribute to femvertising research by examining how gender-specific consumers perceive it and the factors that contribute to negative consumer perceptions of three femvertising samples.

## 2. Literature review and research questions

### 2.1 Gender role portrayals in commercials

In the 1960s, marketers started employing gender norms in ads to boost product appeal, which led to gendered portrayals

of women.<sup>[7]</sup> Media depictions of women, such as idealized model images and traditional roles, have contributed to gender stereotypes.<sup>[8]</sup> In the 1970s, the second wave of feminism scrutinized the representation of women in ads. Advertising stereotypes become problematic when they lead to unrealistic expectations and judgments that limit the life possibilities of people who belong to the social group being advertised for.<sup>[5]</sup> Also, stereotyped depictions of women in advertising were questioned.<sup>[7]</sup> By the end of the 1980s, women's rights had made significant strides at home and in the office, and gender parity seemed to be part of their daily lives.<sup>[9]</sup> In response to feminist demands, advertisers have depicted female characters with equal power and responsibility.<sup>[10]</sup> Marketers use female-targeted imagery and content to promote customer self-esteem, build customer relationships, and increase positive product and brand perceptions. In the 1990s, traditional and domestic ideas gave way to portrayals of aggressive, assertive, and ambitious women due to their increasing financial independence.<sup>[2][11]</sup>

## 2.2 Femvertising and post-feminism media culture

Femvertising refers to modern advertising initiatives that challenge established female gender stereotypes.<sup>[5]</sup> The choice to consciously challenge such beliefs may signal a sea change in how businesses advertise, given that advertising generally follows rather than challenges societal conventions and biases.<sup>[11]</sup> This relatively new marketing method produces favorable effects such as higher sales and better emotional ties with brands due to the contrast between objectifying and empowering messages,<sup>[3]</sup> which has changed how businesses interact with their clients by encouraging female empowerment and bridging gender boundaries.<sup>[2][5]</sup> Nonetheless, as a marketing technique, it promotes consumption, creating friction between capitalism and feminism.<sup>[3]</sup> Postfeminism is a word used in critical analysis to refer to factual female regularities in modern life,<sup>[8]</sup> but its rhetoric is seldom progressive in an advertising setting.<sup>[5]</sup> Six common postfeminist discourses in femvertisements were found: commodity feminism, individualization, self-surveillance, a new lens on the embrace of femininity, confidence culture, and love your body.<sup>[5]</sup> The concept of empowerment and liberty often conflicts with the practicality of the advertised product, particularly beauty brand or cleaning product.<sup>[2]</sup> The pseudo-feminist practice aims to boost female product sales. Hypocritical femvertising copying feminist philosophy was deemed as commodified feminism, which elicits unfavorable responses.<sup>[3]</sup> This article seeks to understand the factors that lead to negative consumer perceptions of female advertising beyond the critique of commodified feminism.

## 2.3 Femvertising and consumer responses

Consumers' view of femvertising affects their attitude toward brands.<sup>[12]</sup> Female depictions in commercials can directly affect a company's business outcomes; significant correlations have been found between perceived women's portrayals and purchase intentions, with women reporting that they are more likely to purchase products that exclude offensive depictions in ads.<sup>[13]</sup> Femvertising may reduce ad reactance, increase positive brand and product attitudes.<sup>[5]</sup> These findings suggest that non-stereotyped and women-empowering depictions may boost a company's female consumer sales.<sup>[4]</sup> This appeal is used in advertising campaigns for promotion, but whether and how it fails remains unknown. Despite the positive responses of female consumers, this research aims to determine how femvertising affects male customer responses and the contributing factors. There are assumptions about femvertising's relation with negative customer-brand connection.<sup>[12]</sup> Consumers sometimes doubt the authenticity of advertising, indicating that gender equality is not seen as a natural reflection, but as a sham to attract consumers and sell more items.<sup>[5]</sup> Fewer research have studied outside of beauty products or FMCG industry, hence, it is intriguing to examine how femvertising affects consumers' reaction on traditionally male-targeted or neutral items, such as cars and social media apps.

This study aims to shed light on how gender-specific customers perceive femvertising and investigate the components that contribute to negative consumer perceptions of three femvertising commercials for female-dominated/male-dominated/neutral commodities by proposing the subsequent research questions:

- (1) What are the perceptions of both male and female consumers towards women empowering commercials?
- (2) If negative responses exist in their reactions to the femvertising, what are the determinants of such passive reactions?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research sampling and design**

Given the objectives of the study, the first stage employs general purposeful sampling, which is regarded as an excellent method as it adheres to the recommendations for Grounded Theory research. Gender, age, and educational background serve as filters for the participants in this investigation. The respondents were chosen from a cross-tabulation of the most salient features relevant. To saturate the data set, 12 interviewees were selected, including 6 males and 6 females from Generation Z and Millennial group. Due to limitations in related subject cognition, pre-millennial consumers and respondents without a post-secondary or higher degree were excluded from the study. Interviewees are recruited through an online pre-questionnaire and then accepted invites to participate in a one-on-one in-depth interview, with the understanding that they may refuse to answer specific questions, or withdraw their consent anytime. Furthermore, incentive prizes (in this case, allowance) were used for interview participants to thank them for their support, which improves the feasibility of the study.

#### **3.2 Data collection and analysis**

The whole interview procedure was sequential. 12 semi-structured interviews that lasted 40 minutes were conducted. All discussion followed a pre-written agenda with questions designed to elicit information regarding the interviewees' opinions to femvertising, brands, and criticism towards them. To build rapport and engage the interviewees, 3 gender-stereotype-related questions were asked. Then, 5 questions on femvertising were introduced to contextualize and assess consumers' understanding. Finally, 3 selected empowerment ads were presented to the participants and followed up with 27 questions to investigate their perceptions about femvertising and responses to different types of brand commercials. All interviews were performed and recorded online. By the final interview, theoretical saturation is reached and new significant results are no longer revealed. The researcher has begun data coding with interview simultaneously as it allows for continuous comparison of changing data and to detect parallels and contrasts within the data set. NVivo 11.0 was used for transcribing and coding as the analysis tool.

### **4. Discussion and Analysis of Results**

#### **4.1 Selected femvertisements**

**PROYA - It's gender, not border**

As a Chinese skin-care company, PROYA conducted a collaboration with China Women's Daily for Women's Day, launched campaigns focusing on gender equality, which gained over 25 million views and 103,000 comments. By combining insights into the current state of gender in society, PROYA is not limited to female bias but also includes the social bias against men in the discussion. While other brands were still immersed with discounts and promotions in the Women's Day campaign, PROYA was the first to take brand marketing to the level of social issues through precise insights, gaining wide acclaim and brand favorability.

**Audi - Daughter**

Audi launched the ad in 2017 as a progressive statement of the pay gap post-election. The femvertising portrays a father telling the narrative of his daughter racing in a cart race. As he watches on the sidelines optimistically watching her outsmart opponents to win the race, he gains newfound confidence in her success and the promise of equality in her future. The ad ends with a strong message about 'fair compensation for equal effort' and 'progression is for everyone.' The motto of the advertisement is 'Progress is for everyone,' and the official hashtag is #DriveProgress.

**Bumble - The ball is in her court**

The title of the ad was one of the earliest slogans for Bumble four years ago. As a female-focused dating app, it encourages women to take the initiative. The Bumble ad is centered on women making the first move in all aspects of life, including romance, friendship, and work by highlighting Serena Williams' personal journey to become a tennis

player, model, and fashion designer. Her role as the global adviser for Bumble strives to reaffirm the brand's objective to combat sexism and empower women worldwide with the lines, 'Don't wait to be told your place, take it.' 'Don't wait for people to find you, find them. In work, in love, in life.'

#### Comparative discussion

Firstly, all of these campaigns fit the definition of post-feminism elements "commodity feminism". Commodity feminism is an effort by marketers to channel elements of feminist discourse into signals or semiotic markers that can be connected to commodity brand names, thereby selling feminism.<sup>[8]</sup> These brands have become symbols of certain facets of feminism. For instance, the core campaign proposition of PROYA and Bumble is highly pertinent to their main products, skin care products and pro-female dating apps. As for Audi, "Audi of America is dedicated to equitable compensation, diversity, and the growth and development of all workers." The corporation has publicly committed to advancing women's wage equality in the workplace and to fostering an inclusive work environment for all workers. In these cases, feminist principles just serve as an additional means of branding or positioning a product.

Secondly, three commercials all demonstrated the post-feminist elements of "individualization". The media offered tales about women's triumphs, extolling the virtues of high-achieving, exemplar women who achieved success on their own terms.<sup>[8]</sup> PROYA has presented multiple female characters that were considered "powerful", "hard-working" and "successful", Audi also aims to create a "brave" and "competent" girl character, while Bumble directly puts Serena Williams as the actor and encourages women to be "energetic", "aspiring" and "proactive". They emphasize the individual's contributions and qualities as the key determinant of their success or failure instead of gender<sup>[8]</sup>, and the rhetoric conveys the message that women live lives free of societal constraints or power imbalances.<sup>[10]</sup>

Unlike Bumble, PROYA has integrated the discourse of "new lens on the embrace of femininity". The new perspective on femininity embracement involves an extension of who should embrace their femininity, "reaching out to incorporate new temporalities (males, old age, women in pregnancy, and transgenders) that were previously viewed as 'beyond' the beauty industry's conquering reach".<sup>[14]</sup> With the goal of breaking the shackles of so-called "what women should be" and "what men should be," PROYA has mentioned the male depiction. Compared to what Audi characterized - the father image, PROYA presented more male casting, covering the stereotypical roles like male nurses, ballet dancers and men with quiet and sensitive personalities, to encourage them to embrace their own femininity in this way.

Bumble fits the discourse "confidence cult(ure)", which addresses the societal issues that contribute to women's self-doubt and insecurity, such as many commercial messages that highlight women's trivialities,<sup>[8]</sup> or put women into passive characters. Instead, it encourages women to make the first move, as a self-monitoring and self-improvement technique for girls and women.<sup>[8]</sup> Its commercial is highly compatible with the pro-women's product, and the dating app is still considered a neutral category.

Various tendencies emerged from the data analysis, and several exemplars were highlighted to demonstrate how postfeminist features and discourses were utilized (Table 1). The analysis examined the visual and verbal aspects of the selected femvertisements, which were treated as primary sources or texts.

Year	Brand	Product Category	Content/messages	Post-feminism Discourses Employed
2017	Audi	Male-dominated	Equal payment	Commodity Feminism Individualization
2020	Bumble	Neutral	Female being proactive	Commodity Feminism Feminism Confidence Cult(ure) Individualization
2021	PROYA	Female-dominated	Break gender stereotypes	Commodity Feminism Individualization New Lens on the Embrace of Femininity

Table 1. Themes of selected femvertisements

## 4.2 Consumer's perception, reaction and relation with femvertising

Initially, 883 open-ended nodes based on keywords were coded in the original interview data set. Accordingly, 56 secondary nodes were formed, and the core themes of this study, 'positive attitudes' 'negative attitudes and factors' were extracted based on the formed associative nodes and the pertinent theoretical foundations, then all the nodes were adjusted collectively, finally summarized and formed a certain structure.

### 4.2.1 Consumers attitude

Attitudes were divided into two sub-categories which represented: (1.a) consumers who complimented the campaign; and (1.b) consumers who criticized the campaign. Findings show that 149 occurrences (55.4%) out of a total of 269 categorizations fell under theme 1.a and 120 occurrences (44.6%) out of a total of 269 categorizations fell under theme 1.b.

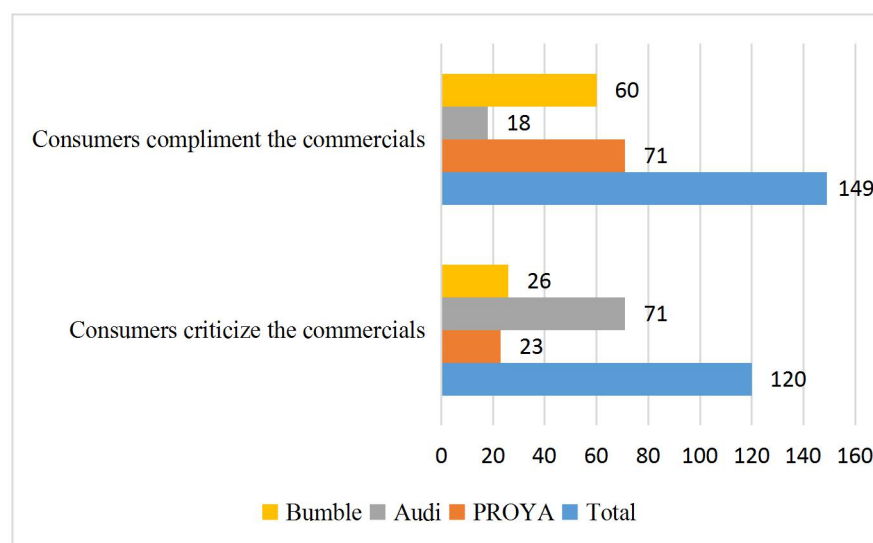


Figure 1. Consumers' attitude towards the campaign

(1) Consumers who compliment the commercials

The positive attitude between male and female participants is distinguishable in terms of the three femvertising. Of the three ads, the most popular one is PROYA. Among the 71 occurrences (47.7%) that belong to PROYA, 34 reference points (48%) come from female participants and 37 (52%) from male participants, which shows male consumers slightly more prefer PROYA's campaign than females (Figure 1). Specifically, Figure 2 shows that Generation Z and Millennials have about the same number of nodes, with 35 (49.3%) and 36 (50.7%) nodes each.

On the contrary, Audi is the least favored one, with only 18 occurrences (12%). The remaining 16 occurrences (89%) belonged to male participants, indicating that male customers make up the majority of Audi's supportive audience (Figure 1). More precisely, the number of participants who have positive opinions about Audi from Generation Z is twice as high as the number of Millennial interviewees (Figure 2).

Among the 60 occurrences (40.3%) of Bumble, 39 reference points (65%) come from female participants and 21 (35%) from male participants (Figure 1). The number of occurrences for Generation Z is higher than the figure for Millennials. This data demonstrated that Generation Z holds a more positive attitude towards Bumble compared with the Millennials, especially for Gen Z female participants with the highest frequency (Figure 2).

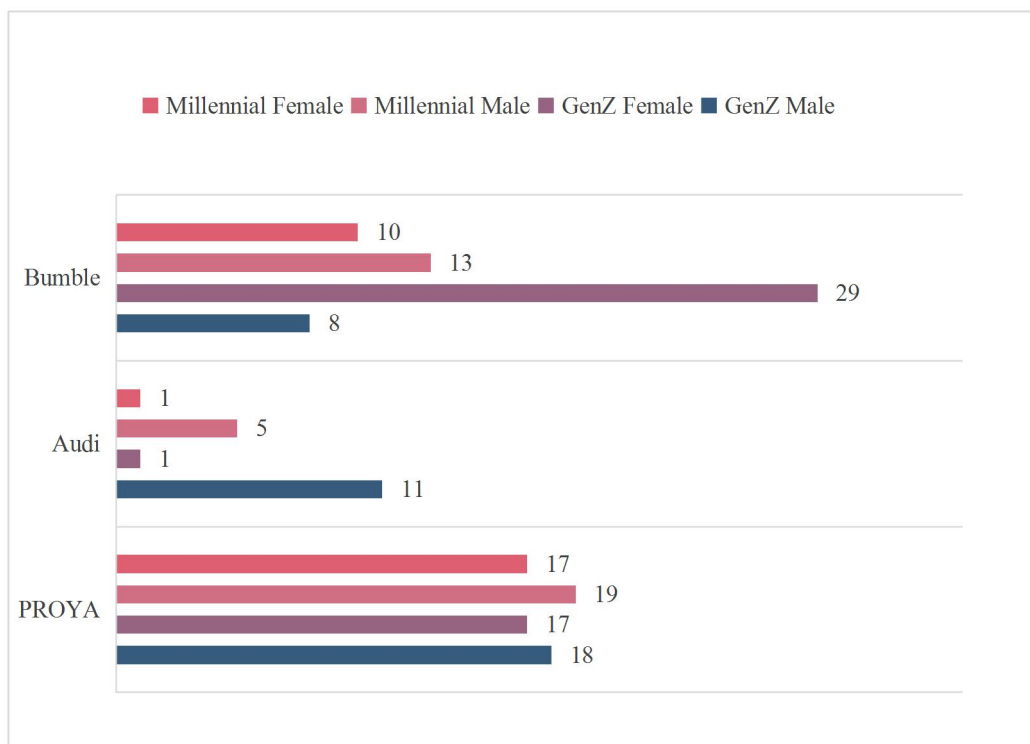


Figure 2. The occurrences of positive attitude for femvertising of PROYA, Audi and Bumble

71 out of the 149 occurrences that fell under sub-category 1.a positive attitude were directed towards PROYA through the “It’s gender, not border” commercial, 60 to Bumble and only 18 to Audi (Figure 2). Consumers applaud corporations for developing advertising campaigns that communicated and embodied women's strength, challenged and combated prejudices, and sparked a self-confidence movement. The following are some instances of responses classified under sub-category 1.a: GenZ Female A: “PROYA's advertisement is very fascinating from the start, and it raises issues that strike me emotionally, with questions that I have experienced as a woman. The ad's pace is excellent, with layers of growth, particularly in the conclusion, when it crosses out the gender adjective in the text and emphasizes the people themselves, which is very emotional. The manner in which the questions are asked is wonderful, and it makes the audience more participatory.” GenZ Male D said:“PROYA is disseminating ideals and restoring skewed values, not emphasizing the product, but most likely merely developing a brand image for the firm and articulating the notion that the corporation wants to export in order to make people feel good about it. The notion being conveyed is to attempt to improve customers' perceptions of the firm, not to advertise the product, but to create the sense that the company cares about the cause of women's empowerment. Indeed, this

company's advertisement is on target; each point is realistic, so it doesn't seem showy.” Millennial Male K claimed: “I was quite impressed with the lines in Bumble’s ad. Although it was encouraging to women, guys could hear it and also agree with it, thinking that the choice is in my hands, take the first step, don't let others tell me what to do. It was very well said and inspiring to me.”

As for Audi, the appreciation is mainly caused by the “Father” character, the achievement made by the little girl, and the most “calm” empowering theme instead of the company itself. It could be seen in responses from Millennial Male J: “The Audi one was definitely the best. I think if you are a parent, or even not a parent, just a relative, you are just connected. You can see how it would feel as a father explaining to your daughter how the world is prejudiced against women. It’s heartwarming.” GenZ Female A stated: “The role of a female racer in a racing context offers career possibilities. Combined with the fact that I've only seen male racers in my life, it makes me think that the world should see more of those female racers.” Moreover, GenZ Male E said: “I like the Audi one the most because I think it's more peaceful and conveys values that I can accept a bit more than the other two. Whether it's from a father's point of view or whether it's mainly about equal pay for equal work and equality, I think it's better.”

## (2) Consumers who criticized the campaign

Findings show that 120 occurrences (44.6%) out of a total of 269 categorizations fell under theme 1.b which represents individuals who indicate a negative attitude towards the campaign.

The male and female participants' unfavorable attitudes towards advertising are distinct in terms of the three types of femvertising as well. In particular, Audi has the most negative comments, with 71 occurrences (59%). The number of men and women who have expressed unfavorable feelings is comparable, with 33 reference points (46.5%) from female participants and 38 occurrences (53.5%) from male participants. As Figure 3. presented, Generation Z indicated more critical reviews than Millennials, 44 occurrences (62%) occurred in the GenZ interviewed group and 27 (38%) were observed in the Millennial group (Figure 3).

Noticeably, with the post-feminism discourse “new lens on the embrace of femininity”, PROYA tends to get the least number of critiques. It has 23 occurrences (19.1%) out of a total of 120 negative categorizations. 16 reference points (69.6%) are listed by male respondents and 7 (30.4%) from female respondents. The data sets of Generation Z and Millennials are fairly distinct. Figure 4. shows that 14 comments were coded from GenZ males and 6 from GenZ females, which is almost seven times higher than those from Millennial participants (2 for Millennial males and 1 for females).

Bumble is also mediate among the three femvertising with 26 occurrences (21.7%), which is composed of 21 negative reviews (80.8%) from males and 5 (19.2%) from females (Figure 3). In this case, four times more men than women dislike Bumble ads. Compared with the other two campaigns, male respondents expressed the most contempt for Bumble's ad. GenZ expressed criticism 16 times (61.5%), while Millennials did so 10 times (38.5%).

The instances of responses classified under sub-category 1.b: negative attitude will be discussed in the following chapter 5.2.2. Component of Negative Attitude as a demonstration.

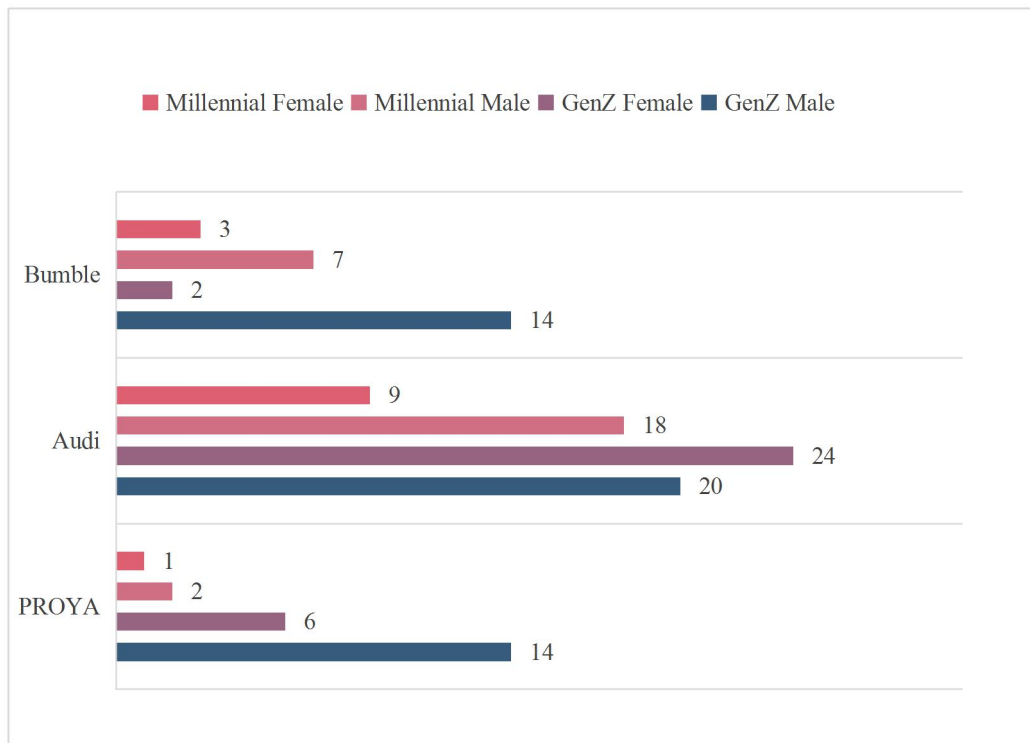


Figure 3. The occurrences of negative attitude for femvertising of PROYA, Audi and Bumble

In summary, female participants indicated that they dislike Audi's advertisement the most; PROYA comes in second, and Bumble receives the least criticism. As for male participants, the exact opposite is true. Male respondents detest Bumble's commercial the most. While PROYA comes in second, Audi gets the least negative comments, which addresses RQ1 by identifying consumers' attitudes towards femvertising by gender. In particular, the results above present the attitude of male consumers, which has rarely been studied in earlier research. Additionally, GenZ respondents indicated more positive sentiments than Millennials and also indicated more unfavorable sentiments than Millennials despite their gender (Figure 4) (Figure 5). As for the ad for PROYA, both males and females indicated more compliments than critiques in GenZ and millennial groups. Opposite to this, both male and female interviewees indicated more negative comments than positive ones towards Audi despite their age. Although Gen Z females rarely criticize these commercials, they have the most negative comments on Audi's female advertising when compared to the others. Furthermore, GenZ males expressed more criticism than appreciation for Bumble, whereas GenZ females and all millennial groups expressed the opposite sentiment. Previous research done by Branchik, Chowdhury, and Sacco (2021) illustrated that women of various ages have different value systems when reacting to femvertising, which is consistent with this research. In addition, GenZ female consumers tend to be more critical than millennial females.



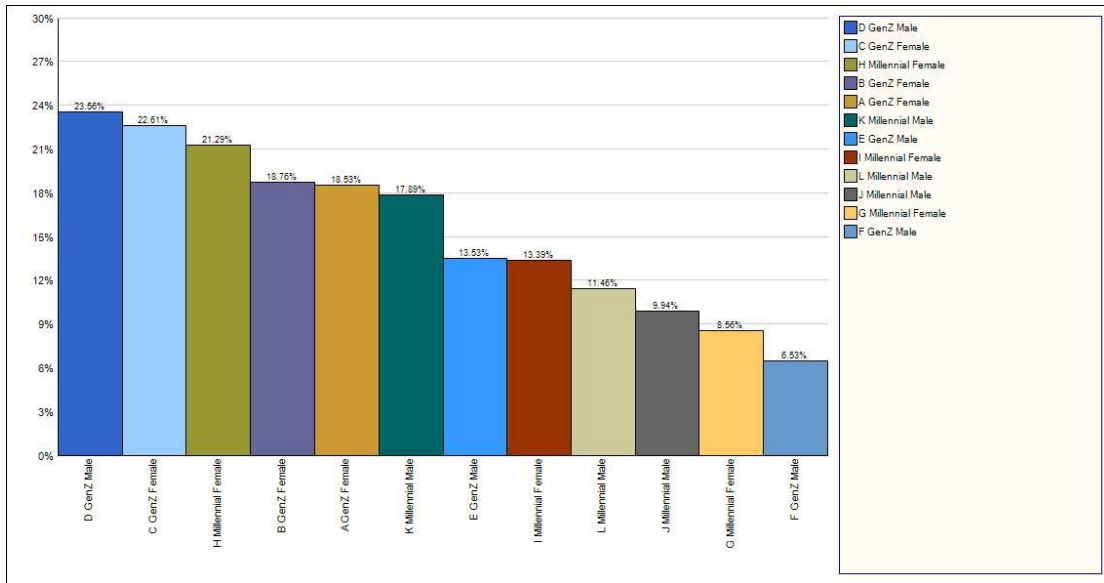


Figure 4. Occurrences of positive attitudes by each participant

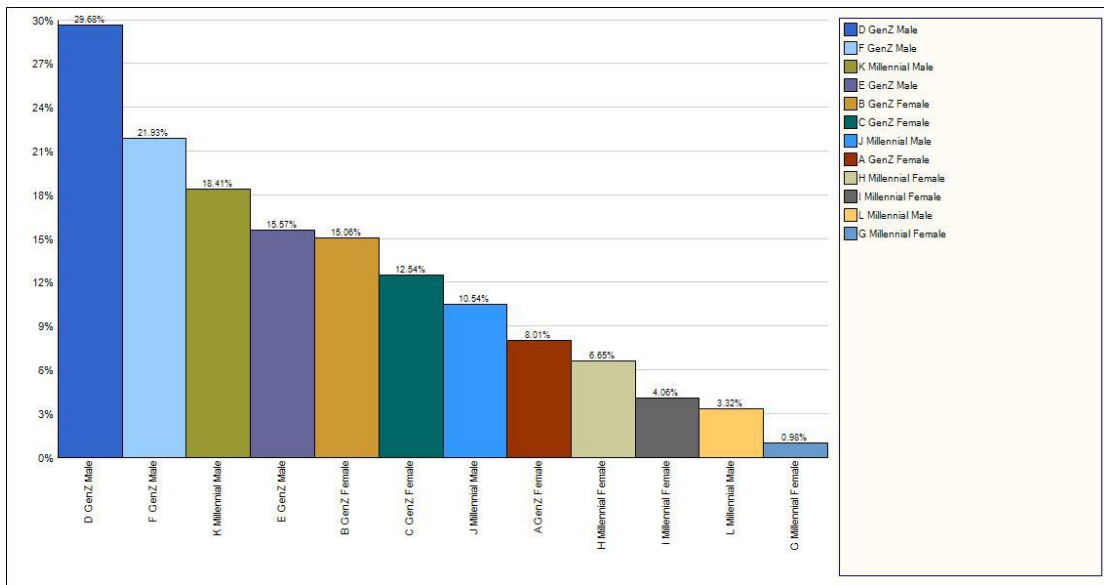


Figure 5. Occurrences of negative attitudes by each participant

## 4.2.2 Component of Negative Attitude

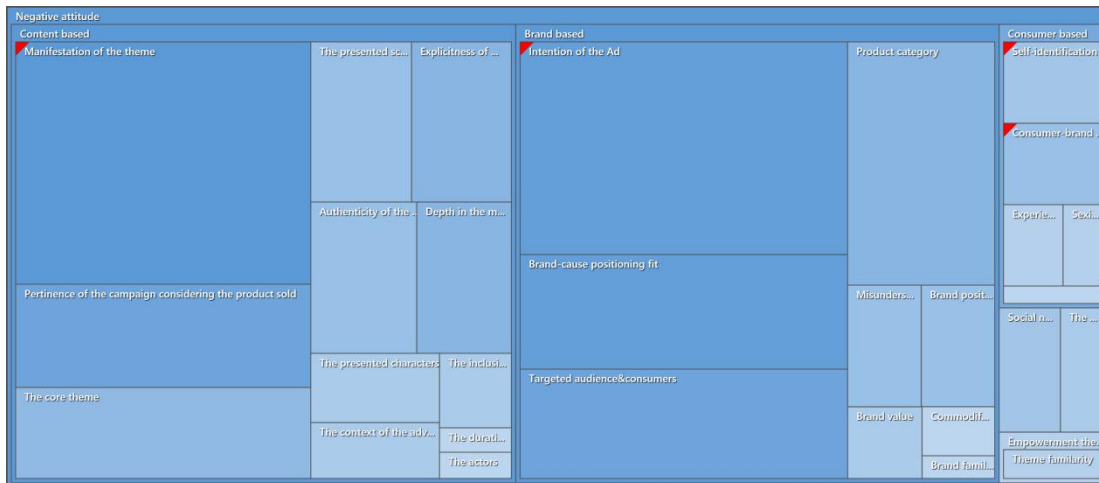


Table 2. Structure of Factors Contributed to Negative Consumer Attitude

Based on the coding results, the structure of factors that contributed to the negative attitude towards women's empowering commercials is presented in Table 2, which indicates the number of responses classified using colors, with deeper hues representing a greater number of items coded. The primary nodes include content-based, brand-based, consumer-based, social norms-based, empowerment theme-based, and communication approach-based factors, which are listed from the most to the least occurrences (Figure 6).

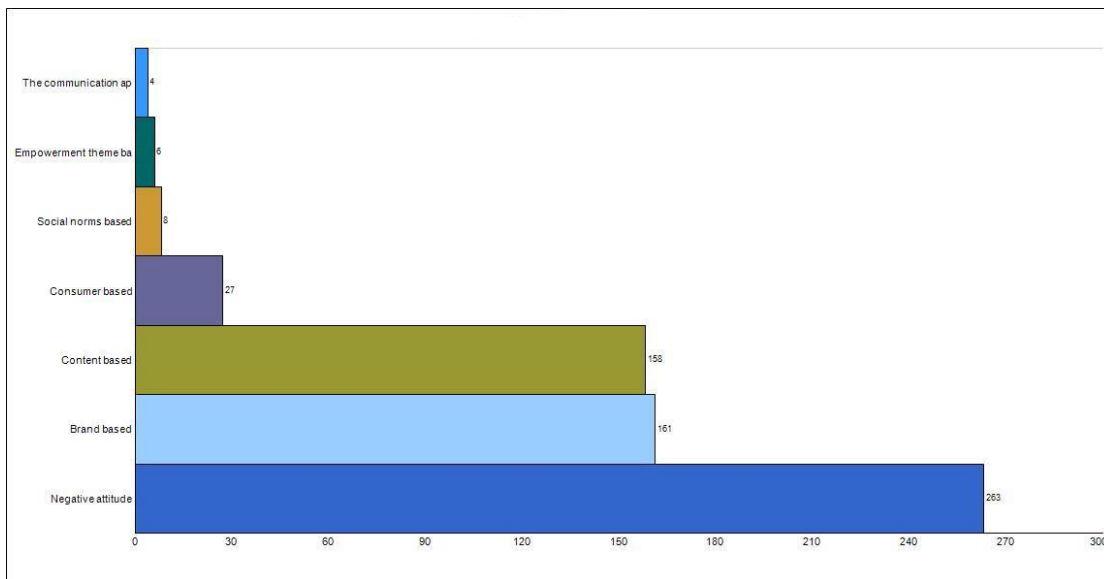


Figure 6. Component of negative attitudes based on different subjects

(1) Component of negative attitudes based on brand

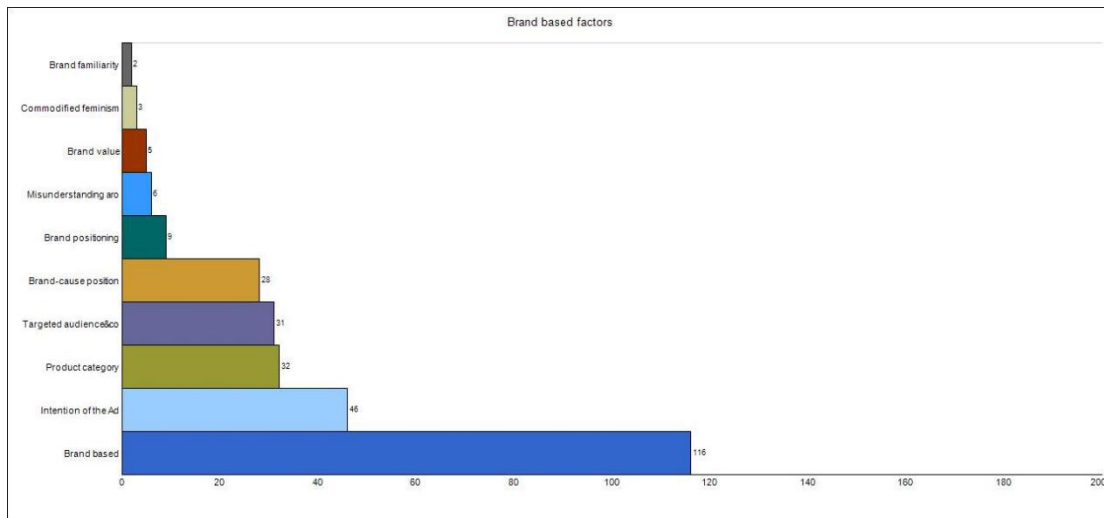


Figure 7. Component of negative attitudes based on brand

To begin with, brand is the single most powerful factor influencing consumer attitudes toward female empowerment advertising. Among all primary nodes, brand nodes contain the greatest number of reference points and are the most influential element. There are 161 brand nodes among the 263 reference points, accounting for 61.2 percent. The brand node is composed of nine secondary nodes: advertisement intention, product category, target audience, brand-cause fit, brand positioning, misunderstandings of feminism, brand values, commodified feminism, and brand familiarity (Figure 7). Advertising intention contains the greatest number of reference points, 46. Consumers' negative attitude toward campaigns is largely due to their mistrust of brands' intentions to create female empowerment advertisements, and the three ads were all labeled with “commodity feminism.”

For example, participant D claimed that many brands doing campaigns in the name of female empowerment are only doing so because they saw the benefits that women's empowerment advertising has brought to other competing brands. The purpose is not to transfer power or break prejudice, but to try to occupy the female consumer market under the influence of brand competition. Additionally, the product category also impacts the negative attitude. Interviewee A indicated: “If the product in the advertisement is unrelated to women, I will be disgusted, it may just be a marketing tool to attract the attention of female consumers.” Similarly, the targeted audience of the ad has been questioned. Interviewee F: “I don't really understand who the audience for PROYA's advertisements is, it seems like it's deliberately made for women only, it's very purposeful and has nothing to do with men. But if the brand wants to change the world's perception of women, it has to plan for both male and female audiences, so men will not feel indifferent by watching it.”

Brand-cause fit is an item mentioned by Lima and Casais (2021), who claimed that consumers would accuse companies of hypocrisy and exploitation to promote products if there was no authenticity and brand-cause fit. Respondent I said: “The idea Audi was trying to convey doesn't fit with the brand, it refers to the issue of pay inequality as a common social phenomenon, but cars are not associated with equal pay for equal work and the ad has little brand identity, it's perfunctory.”

Brand positioning and values are key factors cause critiques, as Interviewee K commented: “If I didn't know anything about Bumble's background, which is actually a female-oriented APP instead of a normal social platform, I'll probably think it's another gender-opposing ad. If some men are stereotypical or patriarchal, they would be particularly offended by this ad and dislike the brand.”

Moreover, Interviewee D doubted that Bumble has misunderstood feminism and commercialized the proactivity for women to choose a relationship through social software: “It is also a bit abrupt to show women's right to choose through the ad, it is a forced addition of two concepts, making it feel like the product was designed first and then combined with this empowerment theme, showing the concept through the ad rather than focusing on women empowerment. There is a sense

that the product comes before the values.”

(2) Component of negative attitudes based on content

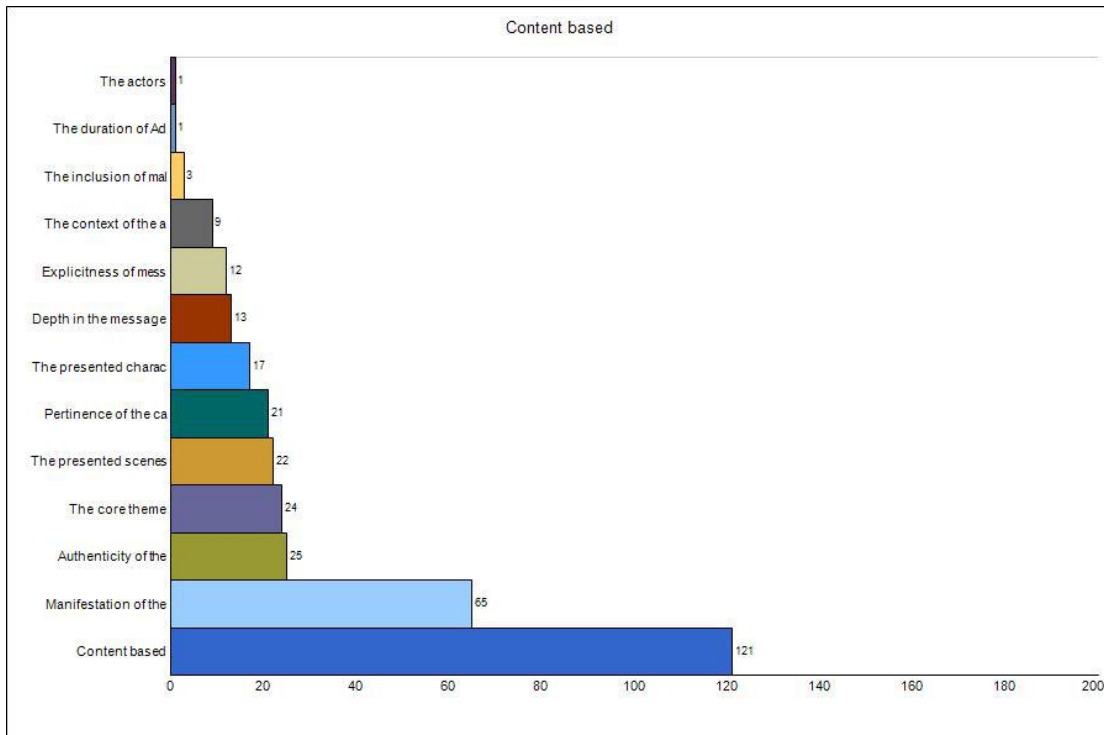


Figure 8. Component of negative attitudes based on commercial content

Commercial content is important at the start. There are 121 commercial references in the 263 references, which makes up 46% of the total. The content node is composed of 12 secondary nodes: manifestation of the theme, authenticity, the core theme, presented scenes, pertinence of the commercial considering the product sold, presented characters, depth of messages, explicitness of messages, context of the ad, the inclusion of males, actors, and the duration of the ad (Figure 8). The manifestation of the theme contains the greatest number of reference points, and consumers' negative attitude toward campaigns is largely due to their dislike of how the empowering theme was presented in the ad. Interviewee C claimed: “For Audi, apart from its line, I think it's more of a sport ad, the copy doesn't match the images, and it's only when you read the copy that you understand its theme is equal pay for equal work.” In addition, Interviewee E also stated: “Although PROYA expresses a lot of themes, both male and female, but the way it is expressed in the ad is that there are a lot of questions, and the questioning words are just a little bit aggressive, which made it feel a little bit unlikeable.”

Furthermore, criticism towards the core theme is varied, but is more linked to the lack of creativity. For instance, Interviewee G indicated: “The commercials in this genre are all rather similar and it feels boring to listen to them too much, and it feels like the brands are all talking about the same point without going any deeper to see some of the different stuff.”

The doubt about authenticity and the dislike for the presented scenes, characters, and context in the commercial could be interpreted as unrealistic. Interviewee D claimed: “Especially the shots, the brand's products appear out of place and the image of the father and daughter is out of place in the scene and feels exaggerated.” “The images are not quite to my personal aesthetic, driving in a wilderness race, a scene full of sand and dust, although at the end there are subtitles expressing that Audi is supporting the theme of equal pay for equal work, but the image of a luxurious car comes out to me as a contrast, it appears in such a bad setting, the image of the ad is different from the title, the shooting is not very likeable and makes people feel abrupt.”

Additionally, failed in containing deep information and conveying the theme explicitly may lead to negative comments as well. Interviewee F's opinion supports the category: “The Bumble ad left me feeling that the theme was not very clear so it

did not resonate very much with me.”

### (3) Component of negative attitudes based on consumers

From the consumers’ perspective of themselves, their self-identification in the ad, connection with brands, experiences in life, sexism level, world view, and emotional connection with the empowerment theme determine their negative attitude towards the femvertising (Figure 10). Among the 16 consumer-based categorizations, self-identification and consumer-brand bond are the most influential. For example, participant A stated: “There is no sense of identification in the Audi commercial, and I am not very interested in racing and cars, so I feel indifferent towards Audi and its ad.” Similarly, Interviewee D pointed out: “I can not feel identified in all of the ads. It doesn't fit my self-portrait, and I don't have a lot of experience of the issues mentioned in these ads”, which contributed to the factor based on individual’s self-identification and life experience.”

Moreover, how consumers criticize the femvertising is linked with the personal disposition. Interviewee L stated: “Although I think women's empowerment is a very positive and meaningful thing, men and women should be equal, but in fact I think women are better placed to do more detailed work, so I only connected partially with PROYA’s ad.”

### (4) Component of negative attitudes based on the social norms, empowerment themes and communication approach

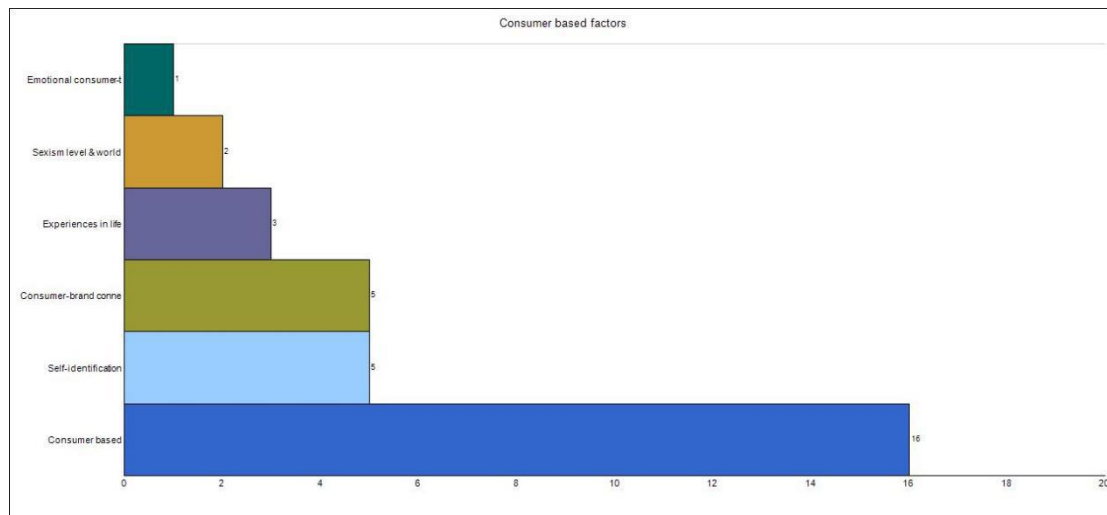


Figure 9. Component of negative attitudes based on consumers

18 occurrences (6.3%) out of a total of 263 categorizations fell under the theme representing factors contributed to consumers’ negative attitude towards the campaigns (Figure 9). Brands are continuously promoting the single idea of female empowerment and sometimes it might be overvalued. As the public requires diverse representation in commercials, companies would be ‘punished’ if the brand fails to claim their stands for not to keep to the correct political orientation. Interviewee J indicated: “Right now there is a diversity push especially in the western countries, there's a lot of instances whether the femvertising is just too much aimed at minority groups and the majority were excluded in advertising, generally femvertising is just trying to represent everybody.” Furthermore, the perception of unchanged empowerment themes are mentioned by Interviewee G, who claimed: “Relatively speaking, such (women empowering) voices have been propagated for a long time, even back in the 1970s, when it was propagated that women are strong and were recognized as the main workforce. Although technology and the economy are developing, the situation on this topic in commercials remain the same or even backward.”

Finally, the presumed effects of femvertising also leads to negative comments on the campaign itself since its nature of communication media. This could be concluded from Interviewee D’s view: “Whether women are empowered by advertising as a form of propaganda is a question mark, and the power brought about through the ads viewed is not powerful, so I think these femvertisings are not necessary.”

In brief summary, results showed a drastic difference in the structure of how each factor contributed to negative

consumer attitude. When discussing the elements based on brands, suspicion of advertisers' intentions and femvertising modified according to different commercial contexts have the essential impact on consumers' reactions<sup>[5]</sup>. The findings of the present study are consistent with these. Furthermore, congruence between shareholder views and the selected cause, which is defined as the brand-cause fit, has negative correlations with consumers' negative attitudes<sup>[3]</sup>, and is also confirmed in this research. When consumers perceive the high relation between a brand and a women's empowering cause, they tend to indicate appreciation towards the brands. Additionally, individuals' private and public self-consciousness, as well as their need for emotion, alter their perceptions of female advertising.<sup>[12]</sup> This research finds that consumers with low self-identification and emotional connection with the ad have more negative comments on femvertising. What is worth noticing is that the current study explores integrally all perspectives, including brand, ad content, consumers, social norms, empowerment themes, and communication approach, and especially the last three aspects, which have been rarely mentioned in previous studies. The results have addressed the RQ2 by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the factors that determine a negative consumer attitude towards femvertising.

## **5. Conclusion, limitations and recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The focus of this study is to explore the differences between male and female consumers' attitudes towards femvertising and the component factors that lead to negative responses. Most companies are unfamiliar with consumer reactions to female empowerment advertisements by gender, and they lack a channel for determining customer attitudes toward various types of femvertising. Fewer research have examined the reactions of both female and male customers to women empowering commercials. Additionally, prior research has concentrated on a subset of the factors that lead to good customer reactions and how these factors influence the impact of femvertising via forwarding and purchase intention. This study aims to contribute to the current body of knowledge about femvertising by shedding light on how gender-specific consumers perceive it and examining the various factors that contribute to negative consumer perceptions of three femvertising commercials featuring female/male-dominated/neutral products. Moreover, the sampling covers generation Z and millennial consumers, which makes it practical to explore their attitudes towards the latest marketing themes. Firstly, the interviewees in this study demonstrated attitudes towards three different types of women's empowerment advertisements after they were familiar with the context of the research.

According to the results, female participants indicated that they disliked Audi's advertisement the most, which is the brand in the male-dominated product category, with the post-feminism discourses "commodified feminism" and "individualization". Audi's campaign presented the main character as a little girl and also included a male depiction as a father, to support the movement for equal pay for females. Nevertheless, female consumers considered it unrealistic and criticized the intention of the campaign. On the contrary, male consumers have the least negative comments on Audi's ad and perceive it as a "heart-warming" commercial, where some customers could be identified in the content. Bumble receives the most preference among female consumers, with the most post-feminism elements: "commodified feminism" "feminism confidence culture" and "individualization". Female consumers considered it an "interesting and aspiring" femvertising while claiming that they preferred the scenes and manifestation of the themes.

Male interviewees tend to have a mild attitude when it comes to criticizing or complimenting Bumble's commercial. As for PROYA, it receives less criticism than appreciation among both male and female consumers. It has talked about "commodified feminism," "individualization," and "a new lens on the embrace of femininity," and it has been the one that people have talked about the most when they talked about positive self-identification and emotional consumer-theme connection. Furthermore, the research has observed a difference in preference among consumers of distinguished ages. Despite their gender, GenZ respondents indicated more positive sentiments and unfavorable sentiments than Millennials. In addition, the researcher has structured the component factors that lead to negative consumer responses, including aspects of brand, commercial content, consumers, social norms, empowerment themes, and the communication approach. Negative comments are primarily triggered by brand critiques, such as skepticism about the intent of advertisements, brand-cause

positioning misfit, and a mismatch between commercial themes, product category, and targeted audience. Continuing, the second component of critiques is the content presented in femvertising, which is largely influenced by the manifestation and authenticity of the chosen theme, as well as the implicitness of the message conveyed. Correspondingly to the third section based on consumers, failing to represent an individual's self-identification in the femvertising would also generate rebuttals or indifference among customers. Likewise, a lack of connection between brands and customers could result in unfavorable sentiments. In particular, social norms, empowerment themes, and communication approaches have been discussed as the emerging factors that impact on negative consumer reactions.

Consumer responses to these advertising campaigns confirm the effectiveness of these strategies, as the majority of consumers responded positively to these commercials across different genders. While the data did not demonstrate a direct correlation between customers' favorable perceptions of these ads and actual product purchases or a shift in consumers' relationships with companies, it is reasonable to presume that customers' favorable attitudes regarding brands have a beneficial effect on companies' performance and execution in the market.

For the implications, the authors identified a critical viewpoint on apparent corporate hypocrisy and the intentions of such campaigns, given that the offered items are gender stereotyped or exclude one gender. Consumers sometimes doubt the genuineness of advertising, indicating that gender equality is not seen as a natural reflection by consumers but rather as a sham designed to attract consumers and sell more items. Additionally, feminist and post-feminism are misconstrued through the perspective of feminist beliefs. The data also indicates that demographics are not always the cause of people's support or opposition to stereotypes and advertisements; rather, any reaction is more about personalities or the brand itself.

## 5.2 Limitations and Recommendations

As with all studies, the current study had some limitations. It is difficult to say whether the findings can be extrapolated to the general population, as not enough information was collected to determine how nationally representative the current sample is. Moreover, because there were no available programs to conduct analysis automatically and because of the available time and space for this specific investigation, content analysis was "hand-made," making it difficult to have a larger and representative sample. In this sense, further studies would benefit from having a larger sample by increasing the number of interviewees in a larger timeline in order to generalize the results. Future findings that could not confirm factors between consumers' perception and themes of these campaigns would certainly benefit from this, making it safer to confirm the effectiveness of these campaigns and providing practical improvement for marketing agencies or marketers of different categorized brands for their marketing activities.

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