

THE POWER OF FEMVERTISING IN ENGAGING FEMALE GEN Z CONSUMERS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY IN UNIVERSITY OF KARACHI

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ABSTRACT

In the ever-evolving world, femvertising has emerged as a transformative tool and trend that target gender norms and tends to empower women. This study demonstrates the impact of femvertising on females' perceptions. Following a posttest-only control group experimental design, fem and non-fem advertisements were shown to female Gen Z students selected from two departments of the University of Karachi to calculate the effects of these distinct advertising strategies being approached and adopted. This research examines the attitude and emotional connection of participants with the brand and also the overall perceptions for advertisements of Pakistan comparing both groups, those exposed to fem ads to those who participated in the control group, exposed with non- fem ads. A quantitative study utilized purposive and convenience sampling technique to select 50 female Gen Z students from two departments of University of Karachi excluding the faculty of Social Sciences to eliminate the influences of other external factors. The findings of the study incorporate a valuable insight providing significant differences in the results of experimental and control groups. This study adds in the existing knowledge highlighting the role of femvertising and reveals its potential in changing consumer behavior challenging stereotypes and empowering women.

Keywords: *femvertising, female portrayal, attitudes towards ads, gen Z, emotional connection, women empowerment*

1. INTRODUCTION

Businesses use brands as a differentiator tool for grabbing public in a highly competitive market. By creating a unique brand, companies may connect with customers and they align with the values of brand that adds the value to the brand (Kotler & Armstrong, 2015).

The idea of brand activism has become a big trend as consumers shows a growing empathy to brands that do more than just offer goods or services. According to Kotler & Sarkar (2017), brand activism demands companies publicly expressing their views related to politics.

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The concept of femvertising refers to advertising that empowers women and girls through talent, messages, and imagery. It has increased its importance in recent decades (SheKnows Media's iBlog Magazine, 2014). This approach has been successful, particularly because women make up 70-80% of household purchasing decisions and they often connect these decisions to social issues (Brennan, 2015).

The advertising industry has been showing great interest in femvertising. The pioneer campaign of Dove for Real Beauty in 1994 has been a widely recognized campaign on femvertising. Since then, the idea and trend have been adopted by numerous businesses and gaining popularity over the years (Bahadur, 2014). The movement started in 2004 with Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign later followed by many companies around the world using women's empowerment themes in their advertisements, promoting women's empowerment in society through their campaigns. After Dove's success, brands like Nike, Always, Kotex, Under Armour, and Pantene continued to launch similar empowerment-focused campaigns. In 2015, SheKnows Media (now She Media) coined the term "femvertising" to describe this trend, through a contest (Yarimoğlu, 2021).

SheKnows Media (2014) conducted a study on femvertising which demonstrated a significant impact of such advertisements on women's perceptions. According to the findings, 97% of females believe that ads have a great influence on societal views.

The increasing trend and influence of femvertising show the changing patterns in consumer behavior and the efforts to challenge the past practices of sexism and objectification of women in advertisements. According to SheKnows Media record, 52% of females make their purchasing decisions based on brands' approach to portraying women in their advertising campaigns.

This study intends to evaluate female Gen Z students' overall perceptions about the portrayal of women in commercials seen in the media, the image of companies, and their desire to make purchases. Additionally, the study aims to assess the influence of empowering advertisements on consumers' perspectives regarding the depiction of women in advertising. Businesses use brands as a differentiator tool for grabbing public in a highly competitive market. By creating a unique brand, companies may connect with customers and they align with the values of brand that adds the value to the brand (Kotler & Armstrong, 2015).

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1.1 Significance of the study

Despite the growing representation of female empowerment in advertising, little research has been done to determine how beneficial it is in terms of ad attitudes and emotional connections. Given the emotional impact

of empowering marketing, it is believed that these advertisements would cause strong emotions in female consumers. This study measures brand favorability and purchase intentions to determine how female Gen Z customers perceive gender representation in advertising. The study will also investigate the strength of the emotional bond with the company and attitudes towards advertisements as a result of exposure to femvertising.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To observe the attitude of females towards femvertising.
2. To evaluate the influence of femvertising on emotional connection of females towards brand.
3. To highlight the effectiveness of advertisements those are portraying women empowerment.

1.3 Hypotheses

H1: Exposure to femvertising positively influences female respondents' attitude and favorability towards the ads, compared to non-fem advertisements.

H2: Femvertising create stronger emotional brand connections for female viewers than non-fem advertisements.

H3: Viewing femvertising positively influences participants' general perception of the portrayal of women in Pakistani advertisements, compared to those exposed to non-fem advertisements.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The media industry has played a significant role in spreading specific portrayals of women that usually rely on idealized images of models or reinforce stereotyping for gender roles (Jalees & Majid, 2009).

In print ads, a higher frequency of women being depicted as subordinates compared to men, revealed by Goffman (1979) studying gender advertisements.

According to the research (Crawford & Unger, 2004), television advertisements depict more sexism while projecting women as compared to television programs themselves. Women, particularly younger women and who are more knowledgeable about feminist issues, critically evaluate the portrayal of female projection in advertisements (Ford et al., 1991). They demand true and authentic representation of genders and are more likely to avoid such products that misrepresent women in their advertisements resulting bad impact on brand image and profitability (Ford et al., 1991).

Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008) also revealed same results about modern society and the patterns of women perceptions of advertisements that present unrealistic image of women in offensive and stereotypical ads.

In the modern era, women have evolved in the society and aim to make careers that make them more responsive to marketing strategies that address their goals and objectives (Sivulka, 2009). While in media, stereotyping is still being followed, there have been noticeable rises in the messages that empower women. Advertising has changed with the shift in population as women are stepping and grabbing influential positions in politics and business world as well. Now in advertisements, women are portrayed confident, self-assured, ambitious as compared to they were projected before i.e. being restricted in domestic roles or being objectified. This shift in advertising is basically a concept that aligns with empowerment and can be observe through the endorsement of product or brands promoting pro female messaging (Gill, 2008). The idea of femvertising attracts both feminist and non- feminist which is important to feminist supporters that promote gender equality and oppose stereotype and gender biasness (SheKnows Media, 2016). It empowers women to take charge of their identities and decisions in an aggressive manner (Alcoff, 1988).

Advertising that promotes female empowerment through pro-female talent, messages, and images is referred to as "femvertising". Wojcicki (2016) highlights that Google's "Think Insights" marketing research team discovered a significant correlation between effective advertising and promoting body positivity, fostering love, and advocating for gender equality. The number of empowering advertisements on the YouTube has significantly increased, and young women relate such advertisements more with a company.

Studies indicate that women have a strong ability to remember advertising campaigns that feature positive depictions of women and are influenced in their purchasing decisions based on their appreciation for how women are portrayed in the ads (SheKnows Media, 2016). Women also believe that brands should take responsibility for the way they depict women in their marketing efforts, and any brand has the potential to promote women in a positive light. Women have typically responded favorably to the inclusion of female empowerment in advertising, with initiatives like Dove's "Real Women" campaign garnering accolades for its positive image of women (Byrne, 2004). Supermoms and alpha females are two modern stereotypes that have drawn criticism for being unrelatable to the majority of women, including college-age women who feel underrepresented in advertising (Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). These findings highlight how important it is for marketers to represent

appropriately their target markets in order to strengthen the relationship with consumers and improve their perceptions.

Advertisements that support female empowerment actually question gender stereotypes, draw attention to the difficulties experienced by women of all ages, and empower both women and young girls (Wallace, 2014). From a commercial angle, companies like after launching feminist marketing efforts like the "Real Beauty" campaign through which Dove has collected multibillion dollar revenues (Wallace, 2015).

As brands have been recognized the effectiveness of influencing women's emotions during ad evaluation, the increasing trend of empowerment themes in advertisements targeting females reflects a change in marketing strategies (McMahan, 2021) and to strengthen the bond among the brand and the buyer, emotional communication is frequently used in advertising (Rositer & Bellman, 2012). According to research, enthusiasm and other emotional strategies have an impact on consumer behavior and purchase decisions (Bulbul & Menon, 2010). Successful case studies show the effectiveness of persuasive and emotional storylines in building a strong connection with customers, even for products that may not usually inspire emotions (Wood, 2012) for example an ad of P&G's Tide laundry detergent.

Due to the evidences of impactful advertising, further analysis also point out the relationship of emotional impact and brand success (Martinez-Fiestas et al., 2015). Even the product categories which are generally produce less emotional response can enjoy benefits from sentimental advertising that result strengthening connections with consumers by influencing them.

Fennis and Stroebe (2010) also revealed the relationship between consumers' attitudes that are influenced by their emotional reactions and experiences with goods and advertising. According to research (Bulbul & Menon, 2010), the use of emotional appeals in commercials has a promising effect on consumers' attitudes and engagement. The positive sentiments towards an advertisement may have an effect on purchase decisions (Fennis & Stroebe, 2010) and it is also reflecting the fact that attitudes towards advertisements are closely associated with attitudes towards a brand (Mackenzie et al., 1986). The depiction of women empowerment in advertisements often focuses on feeling of women trying to convey self-acceptance, self-realization and self-empowerment of women. The case studies on Nike's Boundless Girls program and PROYA's program highlights that femvertising offer mainstream media a way to present a new cultural message by creating a safe space for women to explore their own path toward gentle and harmless self-empowerment (Liu & Shao, 2022). By portraying

women as "businesswomen," these ads encourage women to accept the limits that society sets for them.

In order to build positive brand perceptions, it is necessary for marketers to use advertising successfully result achieving favorable consumers' attitudes and influencing to make a purchase. The case study done by Yao (2024) on Japanese beauty brand SK-II's #CHANGEDESTINY highlight the effectiveness of , storytelling strategy that has a positive impact on brand building by improving consumers' affection and loyalty towards a particular brand. Consumers who have an emotional connection with brands not only demonstrate a higher tendency to make purchases but also reveal brand loyalty that remains unaffected by price or promotional offers (Rossiter & Bellman, 2012). To effectively engage with consumers, brands can employ various emotional themes in their advertising, including aspirational messaging. Aspirational ads have a strong impact on Millennial and Gen Z consumers and have gained popularity (Henard & Rossetti, 2014; Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising, 2015). The empowering, upbeat, and inspirational characteristics of the most effective emotional advertisements in 2015 were indicative of a current marketing trend. These advertisements successfully arouse emotions, heighten favorability, and influence how consumers view the advertised brands (Zazzi, 2015). The success of emotional elements in femvertising advertisements implies that female millennial consumers respond favorably to them.

Especially, working and educated women are more likely to influence and interested to follow femvertising than Women with high age groups. It indicates independent women are more prone towards advertisement message (Acharyya & Sadhukhan, 2023) while according to Negm (2023) men see it more as a marketing technique aimed at changing societal behaviors.

There is a limited research has been done on femvertising and its impacts yet especially in Pakistan. There are numerous brands in Pakistan which are following femvertising as a new marketing strategy. This research focuses on much needed topic of a time. It aims to investigate the immediate impact of femvertising on young females and to explore its potential gaining emotional connection, positive attitude for the femvertising and its role in changing perceptions for overall Pakistani ads.

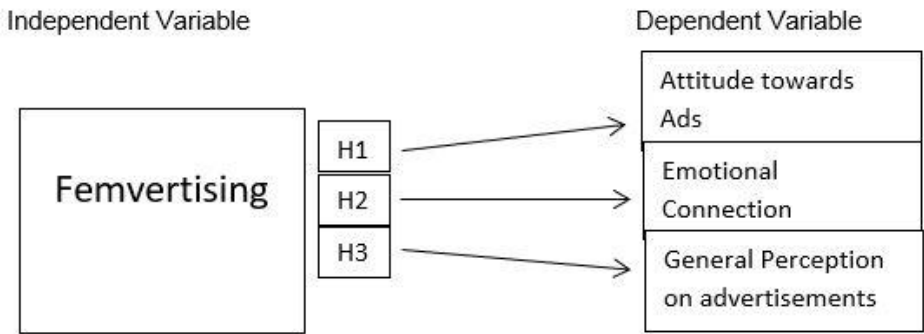
3. Theoretical Framework

This research follows Excitation transfer theory, first explained by Zillmann (1971). The theory demonstrates that feeling excited or aroused from one situation can affect how we react to something that happens afterward. If the person does not identify where that excitement came from, it might

mistakenly have connected to the next thing a person experience. In the context of advertising, this means that the excitement or emotional response generated by an ad can create an impact towards the product being advertised. As a result, consumers may develop stronger feelings towards the product for instance, positive emotions that have been developed because of ad. This theory highlights the value and importance of creating emotionally engaging advertisements to achieve a more favorable influence of the brand or product (Kardes, 2002).

Drake (2017) used this theory in the research to evaluate the impacts of femvertising on millennial females’ opinion, favorability, purchase intention and emotional connection.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study evaluates the effect of femvertising on female Gen Z respondents' impressions of female portrayal in Pakistani advertising. It used a quantitative cross-sectional design with a posttest only control group experimental setup. Based on the commercial they were instructed to watch, participants were divided into the experimental group (femvertising conditions) and the control group (non-femvertising conditions). The experimental group consisted of advertisements promoting female empowerment, specifically Glow & Lovely Fem and Shan Foods Fem, while the control group consisted of non-femvertising advertisements, namely Glow & Lovely Non-Fem and Shan Foods Non-Fem.

4.1 Sampling

The sample's age and gender were selected through purposive sampling, specifically targeting females who represent Generation Z, born in the years 1997 to 2012.

Convenience sampling was used to select 50 female students from two different departments at the University of Karachi, with 25 participants in each group. The experiment was conducted in students' real life settings at their respective departments with a break of an hour. The students of one department were considered experimental group while the other one was taken as a control group hence, the assignment of participants for experimental and control group was not done by researcher.

Prior to the experiment, participants provided informed consent and were then shown the assigned advertisements. Following the viewing, participants completed various measurement scales related to attitudes towards brand, emotional connection with the brand, and the overall perception of the advertisements.

4.2 Selection of Brands & Ads

The selected brands for this study were Glow & Lovely and Shan Foods following a purposive sampling technique including 20 advertisements in total. Among these, 10 were fem ads, comprising 5 Glow & Lovely Fem ads and 5 Shan Foods Fem ads. The remaining 10 ads were non-femvertising, consisting of 5 Glow & Lovely Non-Fem ads and 5 Shan Foods Non-Fem ads.

4.2.1 Process of Selecting Ads

For the experimental session, a careful approach was adopted to select the ads used in the study. The focus was on the representation of both femvertising and non-femvertising content from two specific brands. For a balanced comparison, all fem ads from the official YouTube channels of both brands were carefully watched and included in the experimental session. Additionally, an equal number of non-femvertising ads were selected to establish a baseline for comparison between the experimental and control group. This systematic selection process was attempted to provide a fair and objective evaluation of the influence of femvertising on participants.

4.3. Scales

The study utilized three scales in total aiming to calculate three dependent variables.

1. Attitudes of viewers towards ads were calculated using the Ad Attitudes Scale developed by Hoffmann et al. (2012). The scale consists

- of 10 items with 7 points bipolar adjectives of semantic differential scale to record the response.
2. To calculate the influence of fem and non-fem ads on emotional connections with brands, the 5 item Emotional Connection Scale was used adapted from the work of Rossiter and Bellman (2012). The scale used dichotomous questions (Yes, No) to record the responses.
 3. The study examined the overall perception of both the femvertising and non-femvertising groups regarding the ads they view in the media using Lundorstorm and Sciglimpaglia's (1977) 17 item scale comprised of gender role depiction in ads, the image of the brand, and buying intention of viewers. The responses were collected using 7 point likert scale (1= Strongly disagree – 7= Strongly agree).

4.4. Data Analysis

Using SPSS version 23, an independent sample t-test was run to analyze the data. The means of the variables were compared between the two groups, the femvertising group and the non-femvertising group.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Responsive Attitudes

H1: Exposure to femvertising positively influences female respondents' attitude and favorability towards the ads, compared to non-fem advertisements.

Table no. 1: Group Statistics

	Experimental and Controlled Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Attitudes towards Ads	Experimental	20	5.5325	.85074	.19023
	Controlled	20	4.3200	1.31293	.29358

Table no. 2: Independent Sample Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
Attitudes towards Ads	Equal variances assumed	3.729	.061	3.466	38	.001	1.21250	.34982	.50432	1.92068
	Equal variances not assumed			3.466	32.564	.002	1.21250	.34982	.50041	1.92459

The t-test results show a significant difference ($p < 0.005$) between the two groups' opinions towards advertisements. Participants exposed to the fem ads specifically indicated considerably better attitudes towards advertisements than participants exposed to the Non-Fem ads. The mean difference was 1.21250, with a standard error of 0.34982. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in attitudes towards ads ranged from 0.50432 to 1.92068, suggesting a substantial positive impact of Fem ads on participants' attitudes. The results of the t-test provide support for H1 that exposure to femvertising positively influences female respondents' attitude and favorability towards the ads, compared to non-fem advertisements.

5.2. Emotional Connection:

H2: Femvertising creates stronger emotional brand connections for female viewers than non-fem advertisements.

Table no. 3: Group Statistics

	Experimental and Controlled Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Emotional Connection	Experimental	20	1.3500	.25443	.05689
	Controlled	20	1.5950	.17614	.03939

In table no. 3, the calculated mean score of Experimental group (M= 1.3500, SD=.25443) and Control group (M= 1.5950, SD .17614) demonstrate the emotional connection of both groups with the brands understudied after watching fem and non-fem ads. The responses were recorded using 5 dichotomous questions (Yes=1, No=2).

Table no. 4: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Emotional Connection	Equal variances assumed	3.988	.053	-3.541	38	.001	-.24500	.06920	-.38508	-.10492
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.541	33.810	.001	-.24500	.06920	-.38565	-.10435

When comparing the two groups (femvertising advertisements vs. non-femvertising commercials), the independent samples t-test showed a significant difference in the emotional connection ($t(38) = -3.541, p < 0.005, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.38508, -0.10492]$). The mean difference was -0.24500, indicating that participants who viewed femvertising ads had significantly higher emotional connection compared to those who viewed non-femvertising ads. This result provides support for H2 that Fem ads create stronger emotional brand connections for female viewers than Non-Fem ads.

5.3. General perceptions on Gender Portrayals in Advertising

H3: Viewing femvertising positively influences participants' general perception of the portrayal of women in Pakistani advertisements, compared to those exposed to non-fem advertisements.

Table no. 5: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Gender Portrayal	Equal variances assumed	3.692	.062	1.384	38	.175	.39167	.28307	-.18138	.96472
	Equal variances not assumed			1.384	32.959	.176	.39167	.28307	-.18427	.96761
Company Image	Equal variances assumed	1.158	.289	106	38	.917	.05000	.47393	-.90941	1.00941
	Equal variances not assumed			106	36.339	.917	.05000	.47393	-.91085	1.01085
Purchase Intention	Equal variances assumed	.015	.904	-.328	38	.745	-.11667	.35572	-.83678	.60345
	Equal variances not assumed			-.328	37.094	.745	-.11667	.35572	-.83736	.60402

The perception of how women are portrayed in Pakistani advertisements was compared between participants who saw femvertising advertising and individuals who watched non-femvertising ads using an independent samples t-test. The statistical results of the tests that were run on the "Gender Portrayal," "Company Image," and "Purchase Intention" variables are shown in Table 3. None of the three variables—gender portrayal ($F = 3.692$, $p = .062$), company image ($F = 1.158$, $p = .289$), and purchase intention ($F = .015$, $p = .904$)—showed any statistically significant variance variations.

Additionally, the t-test for Equality of Means indicated no significant differences in means between the groups for Gender Portrayal ($t = 1.384$, $df = 38$, $p = .175$), Company Image ($t = .106$, $df = 38$, $p = .917$), and Purchase Intention ($t = -.328$, $df = 38$, $p = .745$).

These results imply that there are no statistically significant differences between the groups in terms of their general perceptions of gender depiction, company image, or purchase intention in Pakistani advertisements.

6. Discussion

The results of the t-test analysis revealed significant differences in participants' attitudes towards ads and their emotional connection based on the type of ads they were exposed to. Specifically, participants who were exposed to femvertising reported significantly higher and positive attitudes towards ads compared to those who viewed non-fem ads. This indicates that ads shown women empowerment have a positive impact on Gen Z participants' perceptions. Similarly, participants watched femvertising, demonstrated a significantly higher emotional connection with the advertised brand compared to those in a control group. This finding suggests that femvertising is effective in evoking emotions and establishing a stronger bond between female viewers and the brand being advertised (Drake, 2017).

These results are similar to previous researches that highlight the power of emotional appeals and positive portrayals of women in advertising. Femvertising often focuses on themes of empowerment, inclusivity, and gender stereotypes, which motivate viewers and cause positive emotional responses. By presenting a more authentic and positive representation of women, these ads raise a stronger connection with the audience and contribute to more encouraging attitudes towards the brand. These observations also support the theory of Excitation Transfer (Zillmann, 1971) that how the attitude and emotional connection were influenced by the content projecting positive image of women. The excitement and motivation transferred through the empowerment messages that encouraged females' sentiments to be positive towards the brand.

However, it is important to note that the experimental session did not reveal a significant change in the general perception of females about overall Pakistani ads. This finding raises interesting questions about the impact of short-term exposure to specific ads on existing perceptions of advertising. It suggests that femvertising may be effective in influencing attitudes toward individual ads or brands; they may not necessarily alter the overall perception of advertisements on a larger scale. There could be several contributing factors to this observation. The limited duration of the experimental session and the small sample size might fail to record a comprehensive shift in the general perception. Additionally, internal and external factors i.e. participants' pre-existing attitudes, cultural influences, experience with the product, and exposure to a variety of advertisements outside the experimental session could have influenced their overall perception making it difficult for the experimental ads alone to create a considerable change in participants' perception for overall Pakistani ads.

7. CONCLUSION

The study's findings demonstrate that femvertising is effective for influencing attitudes towards advertisements and help brands building a stronger emotional bond with female viewers. However, the limited impact on the general perception of Gen Z females about overall Pakistani ads highlight the involvement of other internal and external factors which made femvertising unsuccessful to change perceptions of viewers about overall Pakistani ads, proving them unsatisfied with ads they watch on their Pakistani media channels. The results also reflect the developed sentiments of females of connected to women portrayal in ads, supporting the projection of empowerment that demonstrates the approach of females living in a modern society, how they want to be shown and what would be their perceptions to those who support empowerment.

The findings suggest brands to focus the understudied independent variable and its relationship with dependent variables and convert their advertising campaigns into femvertising campaigns to build a strong connection with consumers. But as per the fact, the strategy and action to add female empowerment in ads is only focused to achieve positive brand image rather than truly support women. The brand should truly adopt this practice for social benefit instead of taking it as an marketing strategy for business purposes.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are a few limitations to the current research that must be considered. The sample size was only taken from the University of Karachi which would limit the generalizability. The results would be validated using larger and more diverse groups and different age groups. Furthermore, the duration of ad exposure in the experimental session was limited. As per the nature of the experimental research, the calculated attitude and emotional connection might be short-term due to the immediate attempt of posttest after variable exposure. This observation also supports the theory of Excitation Transfer (Zillmann, 1971) that how the immediate response could be influenced by femvertising. To elaborate this theory more, research following the survey method would help obtain the valid and long-term impact of femvertising on consumers' attitudes and emotional connection to the brand.

8.1.1. Future Directions

Based on the study's findings, the following suggestions can be made to improve the effectiveness of advertising campaigns:

1. Advertisers should continue to practice femvertising strategies to empower women and challenge gender stereotypes due to its positive impact on attitudes and emotional connection with brands.
2. Marketers should carefully select and craft femvertising ads to ensure they are relatable and representative of diverse women to maximize their effectiveness and to create an impact on wider audiences.

Additionally, it is advised to do additional research with bigger and more varied samples to improve the generalizability of the findings. Future research should also use triangulation research methods to examine the impacts of femvertising from multiple angles on customer behavior and brand perception.

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