

Macias, Klaudia

Article

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Journal of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour in Emerging Markets (JMCBEM)

Provided in Cooperation with:

Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw

Suggested Citation: Macias, Klaudia (2021) : Femvertising and its perception by Polish female consumers, Journal of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour in Emerging Markets (JMCBEM), ISSN 2449-6634, University of Warsaw, Faculty of Management, Warsaw, Iss. 1, pp. 55-69, <https://doi.org/10.7172/2449-6634.jmcbem.2021.1.4>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/311519>

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Femvertising and Its Perception by Polish Female Consumers

Klaudia Macias

Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

412939@wz.uw.edu.pl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9553-646X>

Received: 12 June 2021/ Revised: 27 June 2021/ Accepted: 1 July 2021/ Published online: 27 July 2021

ABSTRACT

The world is constantly undergoing socio-economic and cultural changes, but the existence of patriarchy and the related gender inequality remain unchanged. In response to this state of affairs, a feminist movement emerged and influenced society. Companies recognize the changes taking place in society and decide to include the feminist movement in their cause-related marketing campaigns. This is how a relatively new form of marketing communication, called femvertising, was born. This paper aims to analyze this form of marketing communication and the effect of both hostile and benevolent sexism on the perception of advertising. The research method employed in this study was a quantitative survey on a sample of 321 Polish women. The results of the survey showed that women rate advertisements portraying females in an unconventional way higher than traditional advertisements. Moreover, the perception of advertisements is influenced by the level of both benevolent and hostile sexism. The higher the level of sexism, the more negative the evaluation of pro-women advertising becomes. This is a suggestion for advertisers that diversifying an advertising message can be an effective marketing strategy.

JEL classification: M31, M37

Keywords: advertising, femvertising, feminism, ambivalent sexism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The feminist movement continues to be one of the most important trends in the contemporary world in the fight for social justice. The emancipation movement can be defined as a socio-cultural phenomenon that goes beyond the framework of political movements (Janiak-Jasińska et al., 2008). The feminist movement in advertising got its name thanks to the combination of two words – *feminism* and *advertising*. The term is defined as a type of advertising aimed at breaking down stereotypes and challenging women to break gender norms (SheKnows Media, 2018). An important element of such advertisements is their impact on emotions – they are not only intended to reach consumers with a given product, but also leave an emotional mark on women (Mamuric, 2019). Over the years, more and more companies have included feminism in their cause-related marketing campaigns.

The aim of this study is to analyze this trend in marketing communication and its perception by Polish female consumers. Its purpose is to examine women's expectations of the creation

of the world presented in advertisements, and thus show the direction of advertisers in terms of diversifying the advertising message. The hypotheses set out in the article were verified by a survey researching Polish women's perception of femvertising and the influence of the level of ambivalent sexism on it.

The paper is constructed as follows: a literature review on the impact of advertising on society, the image of women in advertising over the years, as well as the impact of both hostile and benevolent sexism on the perception of advertisements, research methods, research results and, lastly, discussion, study limitations and directions for further research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, HYPOTHESES, RESEARCH MODEL, EMPIRICAL RESULTS

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. *The influence of advertising on society*

Over the years, advertisers have tried to reach the widest possible range of female consumers. Their efforts entered the 20th century and from the very beginning had an impact on creating and defining femininity, showing women primarily as wives and mothers (Ciochetto, 2008). Advertisements not only presented women in a stereotypical way, referring to the social roles imposed on them and the necessity to conform to the beauty standards (e.g. Kelloggs' "The harder a wife works, the cuter she looks", Virginia Slims' "You've come a long way, baby") but also repeatedly referred to the activities of the feminist movement – usually unfavorably (e.g. The Shredded Wheat's "Her Declaration of Independence"). The portrayal of women in advertising has not changed in the following decades, as research has shown. Compared to men, women were more often presented as unemployed or performing jobs with lower income (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977). Moreover, the depiction of women practicing sports has become less frequent and varied over the years (Kerin et al., 1979). Furthermore, the liberalization of sex life in the 1970s was reflected in advertising – over 30% of advertisements used sex appeal or various kinds of sexual references with the participation of women (Ciochetto, 2008). It was similar at the end of the last century – advertising campaigns did not show the diversity of characters, passions, and lives of women, but continually perpetuated their image as mothers, people focused on their appearance, sexual objects (Rajagopal & Gales, 2002).

When it comes to advertising nowadays, the image of women portrayed in advertisements has not changed significantly. In the current media, women are 48% more likely to be represented in the kitchen than the opposite sex (UNESCO, 2021). Advertisements often show women performing household duties – they present them as people whose only concern is an insufficiently cleaned house (Leszczuk-Fiedziukiewicz, 2009). Interestingly, the description of the product's operation and effectiveness is usually presented by a man (Dziewanowska, 2004). The role of experts is played by men in 82% (UNESCO, 2021). Women are also shown as mothers, but their image has not changed either. Advertisers still present the purpose of women's consumption as caring for the family and strengthening their feminine, maternal side (Davis et al., 2019). If advertisements show modern and independent women, they portray them only as focused on their appearance – makeup or hair removal are meant to be a solution to their problems and their source of confidence (Dziewanowska, 2004; Lin & Yeh, 2009).

The discussion on the impact of advertising on society has been present for years. Two opposite ways of perceiving it have become the most popular and were often discussed: the "mirror" versus the "mold" argument (Holbrook, 1987; Pollay, 1986, 1987). The first one describes advertising as a mirror image of society, which shows dominant values in a cultural context (Holbrook, 1987) and the second is derived from the theory that the way society perceives reality is created by the

media (Pollay, 1986; Baudrillard, 1998). It can be said that the two perspectives complement each other – advertising shows the dominant behavior in society, refers to the imposed gender norms, and thus influences the behavior of its viewers, who are susceptible to its influence and unconsciously perpetuate the stereotypes depicted in it. The topic of the impact of advertising on society is particularly discussed when it comes to perpetuating gender roles (Tuchman, 1979; Eisend, 2009). The influence of advertising on the perception of gender identity, women's self-esteem has been repeatedly proven by research (Doliński, 2003).

2.1.2. Feminism in advertising

Advertisements affect how people perceive the society they live in. Human beings constantly observe the images that are present in advertisements, which contributes to their acceptance of certain behaviors and the perpetuation of specific beliefs about specific groups.

Research shows that constant exposure to unattainable beauty standards can have a negative impact on women's body image and self-confidence (Romo, 2010; Halliwell et al., 2005). Given that the global prevalence of eating disorders increased from 3.5% to 7.8% between 2000 and 2018 (Galmiche et al., 2019), this is a suggestion to include the body positivity movement more frequently in marketing campaigns.

In addition, advertising can strengthen gender stereotypes. Teaching stereotypically male or female behavior from an early age influences the behavior in the future – interpersonal relations, the direction of education (Mihalčová et al., 2015; Graff, 2001). The belief that women are emotional and lack scientific minds stifles their professional potential. This translates into reality: women are underrepresented in STEM fields both in education and careers (Christie et al., 2017).

Advertisements still create an artificial reality that does not reveal the true female nature. Even though menstruation is an integral part of most women's lives, social research shows that it is one of the taboos that is also somewhat omitted in advertising (Merskin, 1999). Many advertisements describe period as “that time of the month” and use a blue liquid to demonstrate the absorbency of a sanitary napkin or tampon (Tingle, 2018). Advertising spots featuring hair removal products also deepen the taboo on the natural female body – they do not show hair on women's bodies. This exacerbates the pressure and taboos associated with shaving. Data shows that 99% of American women voluntarily remove body hair, while over 85% of them do it regularly, sometimes even daily. These habits do not differ between groups of different ethnic or geographical backgrounds (Smelik, 2015).

Considering everything mentioned above, changes in advertising should be gradually introduced. Feminism tries to bring positive changes in all the presented spheres. Its influence is visible in many areas of social life, and it has been gaining strength over the years – it shapes the attitudes of society and thus affects its expectations towards the creation of the world presented in advertisements. These needs are met by the new marketing communication trend aimed at women, known as femvertising (Mamuric, 2019). It is also an effective way to encourage customers to buy a given product. According to the research, more than half of women had a positive attitude towards advertisements containing a pro-female message and therefore purchased the advertised product (SheKnows Media, 2015). This is an important fact because over the years women are continuously responsible for more purchasing decisions (Chopra, 2014; Silverstein & Sayre, 2009; Lawson & Gilman, 2009).

Feminism in advertising manifests itself in different ways. We can distinguish several types of femvertising. The first relates to the body positivity movement – an example of such advertising is Sport England's “This Girl Can”. This advertisement stands in stark contrast to the other advertisements presenting women exercising because the female characters do not have typically athletic bodies. The campaign shows a realistic image of the human body and includes slogans such as “Sweating like a pig, feeling like a fox” and “I jiggle therefore I am”. Other pro-women advertisements show femininity as something that goes beyond physicality. An example of this

is L'oreal's "Being a Woman Transcends the Body" advertisement, which shows a transgender woman getting ready to take a photo for a new ID card, showing her pride in being a woman. This was an extremely important step towards increasing representation in advertising campaigns, as transgender women are usually excluded from the narrative when it comes to advertising for cosmetic brands, despite constituting a large group of consumers. Another advertisement that shows different images of beauty is Dove's "Beauty on your own terms #MyBeautyMySay" one. Advertisements of this kind confront narrow Western beauty ideals, which are represented mainly by white, slim, cis-gender, and able-bodied women. It aims to show that each body, regardless of whether it fits into the narrow canon, is beautiful, and also to increase the representation of people with different appearance in the media (Leboeuf, 2019).

Femvertising can also manifest a rebellion against gender-stereotyped behavior (e.g. H&M's "She's a lady") and character traits (e.g. Bumble's "The Ball is in Her Court"). Feminism in advertisement sometimes tries to draw attention to the problem of linguistic sexism that is present in our society. Always' "#LikeAGirl" advertisement refers to the title phrase that occurs in many languages and is used to insult someone, emphasize someone's weakness. At the beginning of the video, adults and little boys are asked what it means to run like a girl – in response, they demonstrate running carelessly. However, when younger girls hear the same question, they show a committed run. The situation is similar when asked to throw a ball or fight like a girl. The creators of the campaign want to redefine the phrase "like a girl" and help young girls build self-confidence. It fights the narrative about the delicacy, innocence, and indecisiveness of women. Moreover, femvertising mentions a lack of female scientists in education. In Microsoft's "#MakeWhatsNext" advertisement, young girls are asked to name any inventors, which they do not have much trouble with. When they are asked to name women inventors, they do not remember a single person. They realize that they are only taught about male inventors at school. Another advertisement shows how seemingly innocuous words leave an imprint on young girls' career choices. In Verizon's "Inspire Her Mind" advertisement, little girls, when they want to explore the world, build models of planets or rockets, are constantly told not to get dirty, make a mess or give their tools to their male siblings. As a result, girls give up developing their interests in science.

Feminism in advertising also tries to break the silence about taboo topics. Addressing period shame, femvertising can demonstrate an authentic picture of menstruation, ranging from a variety of emotions, through portraying real-life situations, to using red fluid to present menstrual blood (e.g. Bodyform's "#bloodnormal"). Furthermore, other advertisements break the unspoken rule of showing only smooth skin in advertisements of women's body hair removal products and show hairy legs, armpits, and bikini area. An example of this is Billie's "Project Body Hair" advertisement, where hairy female legs are being shown in the first seconds of the clip. Some scenes show characters in everyday situations that many people can identify with, like one with a woman shaving only some parts of her knees and thighs, which are exposed by cut-outs in jeans.

There are no specific requirements for advertising to be considered femvertising, but the criteria for Femvertising Awards by SheKnows Media allow to define some framework for pro-women advertising. Femvertising can be attributed to long-lasting advertising campaigns aimed at women who continually set an example for other brands, as well as campaigns that took place recently, albeit they were groundbreaking. It is also worth mentioning that a given campaign does not have to refer to a specific product or service, but should focus on building awareness of the problems faced by adult women and girls (SheKnows Media, 2018).

2.1.3. The influence of ambivalent sexism on the perception of advertising

Sexism is undeniably present in our society. It can be defined as individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs, as well as institutional and cultural practices that reflect negative evaluations about someone based on their gender, and thus reinforce gender inequalities (Swim

& Hyers, 2009, p. 407). Sexist ideologies are full of myths that try to justify gender inequalities (Sidanious & Prato, 1999). The fact that there is male structural power and female power stemming from dependencies in interpersonal relationships creates ambivalent sexist ideologies composed of hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism seeks to justify traditional gender roles, sexualization of women's body and male dominance. Benevolent sexism, in contrast, encompasses feelings of protectiveness and affection toward women, and therefore its harmfulness is hard to notice. This type of sexism relies on gentler justifications of gender roles and male power (Glick & Fiske, 1997). It describes women as innocent creatures who should be protected and whose love is necessary to make a man's life complete (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

Benevolent sexism reinforces the adoption of traditional gender roles and offers prosocial treatment of women who fulfill them (Fiske & North, 2015). Its higher level correlates with the presence of conservative views (Christopher & Mull, 2006), which are more often represented by the elderly. Similarly, in the case of the place of residence, the level of liberalism increases in inhabitants with the size of the city (CBOS, 2007). Additionally, research shows that marital status also influences the level of sexism (Ogunleye & Adebayo, 2010). Moreover, studies show a positive correlation between the level of benevolent and hostile sexism in both women and men (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Society uses stereotypes to simplify and systematize information and understand an ever-changing world (Fedor, 2014). This becomes particularly problematic at a time when these stereotypes lead to the emergence of various types of expectations regarding one social category, which are difficult to oppose or contribute to limiting the possibilities of a given group. While hostile sexism is associated with a negative attitude towards behaviors that do not fit into the stereotypical gender roles, benevolent sexism praises women that fit into them (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Sexism is related to gender stereotypes and thus affects our perception of reality. Ambivalent sexism contributes to gender disparities that manifest in the workplace (Jones et al., 2014) and may limit women's ascent to senior positions (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). Furthermore, it plays a role in perceptions of the quality of one's romantic relationship (Lachance-Grzela et al., 2021).

There is still a lack of research that would analyze women's attitude to femvertising or the connection between ambivalent sexism and the perception of advertising. However, several studies address similar issues. One study was conducted on Chinese students in 2020. It showed that there is a relationship between the level of one type of sexism and the response to femvertising. The study confirmed that people with different levels of hostile sexism responded to female advertising differently – people with lower levels of sexism were more positive towards them. Interestingly, benevolent sexism was not predictive of consumer responses toward femvertising (Teng et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a study conducted on Polish students aged 18 to 25 concerned the perception of advertisements presenting traditional and non-traditional images of men. It showed that the non-traditional advertising message was more effective than the one based on the portrait of a man who conformed to the patriarchal gender norms. The ad with a man shown as a householder was rated higher than the one presenting a man in the role of a businessman (Zawisza et al., 2006).

To reach the widest possible audience, advertising creates a mixture of appropriate values, cultural context and reflects the needs of individuals, but refers to the most typical case (Lin & Yeh, 2009). However, recent research shows that women are more favorably disposed towards advertisements showing female representatives in a non-stereotypical way (Um, 2020). Female consumers pay attention to a pro-women message in advertising, which causes a better rating of both the ad and the brand (Åkestam et al., 2017).

As a result of the literature review presented above, three hypotheses were established as follows:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Femvertising is perceived more positively than traditional advertising.

- **Hypothesis 2a:** The level of benevolent sexism is positively related to the perception of traditional advertisements.
- **Hypothesis 2b:** The level of benevolent sexism is negatively related to the perception of femvertising.
- **Hypothesis 3a:** The level of hostile sexism is positively related to the perception of traditional advertisements.
- **Hypothesis 3b:** The level of hostile sexism is negatively related to the perception of femvertising.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

To verify the hypotheses, a quantitative study in a form of an online survey was conducted. The questionnaire was completed by 321 Polish women.

The research questionnaire was divided into six sections. The first four concerned the evaluation of viewed advertisements. The first two commercials featured different portraits of female body hair. Gillette's "Venus Breeze" commercial shows a smiling, slim woman hanging out on the beach. Her body is hairless. The operation of a razor is also shown on hairless armpits and legs. Billie's "Project Body Hair" advertisement shows hair on different parts of the female body – under armpits, in the bikini area, on legs. Subtitles say that the world pretends that female body hair does not exist, which is not true. The advertisement also reminds its viewers that shaving is not a necessity, but only a woman's own choice. The next two advertisements presented different images of the female body and exercise. Nike Women's Commercial presents a slim, athletic woman who runs and does boxing. Despite being tired, she does not give up and keeps practicing. Sport England's "This Girl Can" commercial features women with different body types practicing all kinds of sports. It shows scenes where characters are completely focused on exercise, as well as moments when women enjoy exercises and widely smile. It also shows moments of fatigue – women stop for a moment to catch a breath and then return to training. This advertisement depicts a realistic image of the female body and exercise.

Some of the statements from the scale created by C. Puto and W. Wells called "Informational and Transformational Ad Content" (ITAC) (1984) were used for the assessment. The fifth part contained questions about views on women and men – to analyze the level of both hostile and benevolent sexism, a part of the scale constructed by P. Glick and S. T. Fiske called "The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory" (ASI) (1996) was used. Each item was measured using a five-point Likert scale. The last part included demographic data. The reliability statistics (coefficient alphas) for all three scales are presented in Table 1 and all are above the threshold of 0.7.

Table 1
Reliability of the scales

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha
The rating of advertisement	Alpha = 0.836
The level of benevolent sexism	Alpha = 0.738
The level of hostile sexism	Alpha = 0.709

Source: own research.

The linear regression was employed for hypotheses testing. For linear regression assumptions testing, the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were tested for each of the three models. The analysis of P-P plots and scatter plots of the residuals

in each case show that the residuals follow the normal distribution and are equally distributed. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values are below 1.5, which points to no multicollinearity issues.

The study used a non-probability sampling method – convenience sampling. This decision was motivated by the convenience of access, however, it limits the possibility of interpreting the obtained results to draw conclusions for the entire population. Therefore, the research sample cannot be defined as representative.

321 women born between 1966 and 2003 participated in the study. Most of the respondents were women born between 1996 and 2003, and they accounted for 60.4% of the respondents. 75.7% of the respondents live in cities – 24.3% of the surveyed women live in the countryside. The vast majority of women who completed the questionnaire have higher (53.3%) or secondary (41.4%) education. When it comes to marital status, 65.7% of the respondents are in a relationship, 31.8% are single, and 2.5% are divorced (Table 2).

Table 2

Characteristics of survey respondents

		N	Percentage
Year of birth	1966–1979	31	9.66%
	1980–1995	96	29.91%
	1996–2003	194	60.44%
Level of education	primary	2	0.62%
	lower secondary	4	1.25%
	vocational	11	3.43%
	secondary	133	41.43%
	higher	171	53.27%
Marital status	single	102	31.78%
	in an informal relationship	146	45.48%
	in a formal relationship	65	20.25%
	divorced	8	2.49%
Place of residence	village	78	24.30%
	city with fewer than 50,000 residents	52	16.20%
	city with 50,000–100,000 residents	19	5.92%
	city with 100,000–500,000 residents	45	14.02%
	city with over 500,000 residents	127	39.56%

Source: own research.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

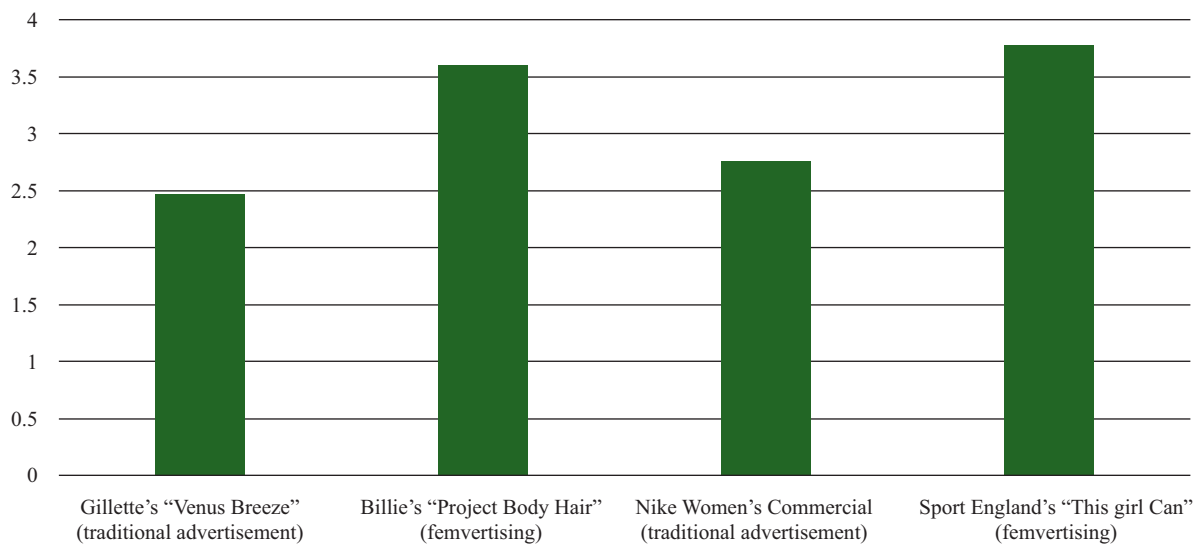
4.1. Ratings of femvertising and traditional advertising

The conducted research showed that women perceive femvertising more positively than traditional advertisement. The average ratings of the respondents indicate a better rating of femvertising – advertisements where one of them broke the taboo of female body hair and the other showed a body-positive message – compared to traditional advertisements. In the case of advertisements presenting a stereotypical image of women, the average score is close to 2.5 – the

average score for the first advertisement is 2.47, while for the third one it is 2.76. The situation is different in the case of pro-female advertisements – the second ad, breaking the taboos of female hair, was rated on average at 3.61, and the fourth, containing a body-positive message, at 3.79 (Figure 1). These results confirm the H_1 hypothesis that femvertising is perceived more positively than traditional advertising – the averages of these two groups differ by about 1 point.

Figure 1

Ratings of advertisements



Source: own research, N=321

4.2. Relation Between the Level of Sexism and the Perception of Advertisements

4.2.1. Relation between the level of sexism and perception of traditional advertisements

To test the 2a and 3a hypotheses concerning the relation between the perception of traditional advertisements and the level of both benevolent and hostile sexism, regression analyses were performed (Table 3). A simple linear regression was calculated to predict rating of the first traditional advertisement based on the level of benevolent and hostile sexism. A significant regression equation was found ($F(2, 318) = 61.059, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .277. A simple linear regression was also calculated to predict the second traditional advertisement rating based on the level of two types of sexism. A significant regression equation for predicting rating of the second traditional advertisement based on the level of both benevolent and hostile sexism was found ($F(2, 318) = 25.717, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .139.

Table 3

Results of regression analyses for the traditional advertisements

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	p	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Level of sexism → perception of the first traditional advertisement							
Constant	0.701	0.167		4.208	0.000	0.373	1.029
Level of benevolent sexism	0.416	0.064	0.372	6.492	0.000	0.290	0.542
Level of hostile sexism	0.248	0.065	0.220	3.844	0.000	0.121	0.375
Level of sexism → perception of the second traditional advertisement							
Constant	1.392	0.202		6.880	0.000	0.994	1.791
Level of benevolent sexism	0.379	0.078	0.304	4.864	0.000	0.226	0.532
Level of hostile sexism	0.132	0.078	0.106	1.690	0.092	−0.022	0.287

Source: own research, N = 321.

The analysis showed that in the case of the first traditional advertisement, the evaluation of the advertisement was influenced by both the level of benevolent and hostile sexism – in each case the probability value was below 0.05. A positive coefficient indicates that as the value of the independent variable increases, the mean of the dependent variable also tends to increase. The coefficient value signifies how much the mean of the dependent variable changes given a one-unit shift in the independent variable while holding other variables in the model constant. Participants' ratings of the first traditional advertisement increased for each level of benevolent sexism. With an increase in benevolent sexism by 1 point, the rating for the first traditional advertisement improves by 0.416. The result was similar for the second type of sexism. Participants' ratings of the first traditional advertisement increased for each level of hostile sexism. With an increase in hostile sexism by 1 point, the rating for the first traditional advertisement improves by 0.248. In other words, the higher the level of the two types of sexism, the higher the rating of the first traditional advertisement.

In the case of the second advertisement not containing a feminist message, only one independent variable had a significant impact on the perception of advertising. The probability value was below 0.05 only in the case of benevolent sexism. With an increase in benevolent sexism by 1 point, the rating for the first traditional advertisement improves by 0.379. Hostile sexism did not affect the advertisement's rating.

In the case of the first traditional advertising, the perception was influenced by both the level of hostile and benevolent sexism. As for the second traditional advertising, only the influence of benevolent sexism was statistically significant. This allows for positive verification of hypothesis 2a and partial positive verification of hypothesis 2b.

4.2.2. Relation between the level of sexism and perception of feminist advertisements

To test the 2b and 3b hypotheses concerning the relation between the perception of traditional advertisements and the level of both benevolent and hostile sexism, regression analyses were performed (Table 4). A simple linear regression was calculated to predict rating of the first feminist advertisement based on the level of benevolent and hostile sexism. A significant regression equation was found ($F(2, 318) = 44.637$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of .219. A significant regression equation for predicting rating of the second feminist advertisement based on the level of both benevolent and hostile sexism was found ($F(2, 318) = 14.945$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of .086.

Table 4

Results of regression analyses for the feminist advertisements

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	p	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Level of sexism → perception of the first feminist advertisement							
Constant	5.545	0.213		25.974	0.000	5.125	5.965
Level of benevolent sexism	−0.277	0.082	−0.201	−3.376	0.001	−0.439	−0.116
Level of hostile sexism	−0.452	0.083	−0.326	−5.473	0.000	−0.615	−0.290
Level of sexism → perception of the second feminist advertisement							
Constant	4.946	0.219		22.573	0.000	4.515	5.377
Level of benevolent sexism	−0.183	0.084	−0.139	−2.165	0.031	−0.348	−0.017
Level of hostile sexism	−0.253	0.085	−0.192	−2.978	0.003	−0.420	−0.086

Source: own research, N = 321.

In the case of the first feminist advertisement, showing the image of female body hair, the evaluation of the advertisement was influenced by the level of both hostile and benevolent sexism, as indicated by a probability value lower than 0.05 in both cases. A negative coefficient suggests that as the independent variable increases, the dependent variable tends to decrease. With an increase of the level of benevolent sexism by 1 point, the rating of the first feminist advertisement decreases by 0.277. Furthermore, with the increase of the level of hostile sexism, the rating of the advertisement decreases by 0.452. In other words, the higher the level of both hostile and benevolent sexism, the lower the rating of the first feminist advertisement.

The second pro-female advertisement showed a realistic picture of women's bodies and exercises. The rating of it was also influenced by the level of both benevolent and hostile sexism – the probability value is less than 0.05, which indicates statistical significance. Participants' rating of the second pro-women advertisement decreased 0.183 for each level of benevolent sexism and 0.253 for each level of hostile sexism.

As already presented above, the two types of sexism influenced the perception of both of feminist advertisements. The higher the level of both hostile and benevolent sexism, the lower the rating of the feminist advertisements. Thus, hypotheses 2b and 3b are positively verified.

5. DISCUSSION, STUDY LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Femvertising is a relatively new way of marketing communication. The conducted research allowed for the formulation of several interesting conclusions regarding advertisements' perception by the surveyed Polish women, as well as the influence of some factors on their rating of pro-female and traditional advertising.

5.1. Discussion

The aim of the study was to understand the role of portraying women in advertising and its impact on the perception of advertising by Polish women. In addition, the study investigated the relationship between advertising rating and the level of both benevolent and hostile sexism. The results obtained allow for several conclusions to be drawn.

The first conclusion concerns the general evaluation of advertising. The surveyed Polish women rate higher advertisements that break taboos and contain a body-positive message compared to traditional advertisements that present women in a stereotypical or idealized way. The use of a feminist message in advertising improves its perception by women, and there may be several reasons for this. This type of marketing communication allows women to identify with the heroines of advertisements thanks to greater inclusiveness – these advertisements present different types of bodies and beauty. Moreover, they show various pictures of femininity, the situations that female representatives face daily. This is what sets them apart from traditional advertising. All this shows the importance of a pro-female message in advertising – femvertising is an effective strategy that contributes to distinguishing a given brand from others.

Another area of analysis concerned the relation between the level of the two types of sexism and the perception of advertising. Regression analyses have shown that benevolent sexism affected the perception of both traditional advertisements. The higher the level of this type of sexism, the higher the rating of commercials showing conventional images of women. Women presented in traditional advertisements fit the imposed beauty standards and did not break gender stereotypes, therefore the respondents with a higher level of benevolent sexism rated traditional advertisements higher. However, the difference in the strength of the aforementioned influence is visible. In the case of the advertisement with a woman with a shaved body, a change in the level of benevolent sexism by 1 point improves the perception of the advertisement by 0.416, while in the case of the second advertisement, where the idealized image of exercise was presented, the rating of the advertisement increases by 0.248. This may be due to the fact that the woman in the first advertisement fit the imposed gender stereotypes more than the second one, who was athletic.

As for hostile sexism, it only influenced the assessment of the first traditional advertisement, which showed a woman with no body hair. In the case of the ad portraying an athletic woman, the influence of hostile sexism on perception was not statistically significant. This might again be due to the fact that the woman in the advertisement for the razor matched gender stereotypes, and the portrait of the other woman who exercised did not refer to them that much.

When it comes to the feminist advertisements, both types of sexism influenced the perception of each of them. It should be noted, however, that there is a visible difference in the strength of this impact. In the case of the first advertisement, where female body hair was visible, with a higher level of benevolent and hostile sexism by 1, the advertisement rating decreased by 0.277 and 0.452, respectively. In the case of the second ad, it decreased by 0.183 and 0.253. The respondents' reactions could be intensified by the fact that the female characters of the first pro-women advertisement did not fit the image of femininity imposed by the patriarchy – they had visible hair on their legs, armpits, or in the bikini area. Even if male body hair is not controversial, female body hair is still associated with uncleanness, a lack of proper hygiene (Smelik, 2015), and has become an elicitor of disgust (Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004). In the case of the second feminist advertisement, where a realistic image of the human body and exercise was shown, the influence of the level of benevolent and hostile sexism was smaller. This could be due to the fact that the image of women presented in the advertisement of sportswear did not oppose the vision of femininity created by the patriarchy as much as the advertisement of razors.

The results of the study conducted on Polish women were similar to those from the study presented on Chinese students in 2020. Both studies showed the influence of hostile sexism on the perception of advertising – the higher the level of this type of sexism, the worse the perception of feminist advertising. However, for a study conducted in China, benevolent sexism was not predictive of consumer responses toward femvertising (Teng et al., 2021). Perhaps differences in results between studies appeared due to the type of advertisements presented. One of those presented to Chinese women showed smartphones – the first ad from this group showed women in non-traditional roles (e.g. a woman riding a motorcycle or practicing martial arts), while the second one did not contain any characters and only showed a telephone. The advertisements

presented to Polish women were different – the first group broke the taboo of female hair, while the second one contained a body-positive message. This may have contributed to a stronger influence of hostile sexism on the judgments of Polish women.

In the case of research on students from Gdańsk, examining the perception of advertisements presenting traditional and non-traditional images of men, the advertisements breaking gender stereotypes were rated higher. The analyses showed similar results to the research carried out on Polish women. Additionally, a study on students showed that people with more liberal views responded more positively to the non-traditional portrait of the advertising hero compared to people with conservative views (Zawisza et al., 2006). Conservatism is connected with the traditional vision of gender roles, and thus with sexism – this suggests the connection of these factors, but to clearly define this relationship, it is necessary to conduct further research.

Each of the studies mentioned above has one thing in common – the respondents rate higher the advertisements that show people who do not fit into traditional gender roles and break the imposed gender norms. Although over the years the tactic of presenting a stereotypical image of advertisements' heroes has been used to build some kind of credibility, as well as to make it easier for consumers to identify with them by showing the “most common case” of a specific category (Leszczuk-Fiedziukiewicz, 2009), the latest research suggests using a different tactic. They are a suggestion for advertisers that diversifying the advertising message can be beneficial and contribute to a better assessment of both the product and the brand. However, it is unknown if a more positive perception of femvertising compared to traditional advertising is a permanent change in the expectations of consumers or it is because that this form of marketing communication is relatively new.

5.2. Study Limitations and Directions of Further Research

This study on Polish women was limited by several factors. The first one is the method of selecting female respondents – convenience sampling was used here. Therefore, the sample is not representative for the entire population – it limits the possibility of generalizing and presenting conclusions concerning the whole population. In addition, the study does not take into account factors that may affect the respondents at the time of filling in the questionnaire – these may be differences in mood, fatigue and carelessly reading the questions. It was also impossible to control external factors, for example noise. Another limitation of the study is the inability to deepen the answers – all questions contained in the questionnaire were closed, single-choice and the respondents could not provide any additional explanations regarding their choices. As for the advertisements presented to the respondents, they did not show products of the same brand – this could have influenced their rating of advertisements. Further research should take into account these limitations and check the mood level of the respondents, as well as conduct the survey in conditions that limit the influence of external factors on the responses. In addition, if possible, respondents should be shown advertisements of the same brand. Additionally, a stratified sampling method should be used to be able to transfer the results of the study to the entire population.

The conducted research did not investigate the impact of using a pro-female marketing message on consumer behavior. There were also no issues related to the perception by Polish women of the impact of femvertising on society and possible changes introduced thanks to this type of marketing communication. All this points to a possible direction for further research that would help in a deeper analysis of the perception of femvertising and its impact on consumers.

5.3. Conclusion

Research showing the perception of femvertising is important to our understanding of this relatively new phenomenon in marketing communication. This study extends the literature on the

topic of the impact of ambivalent sexism on the evaluation of advertising by providing support for the idea that the level of sexism influences the rating of advertisements. A higher level of benevolent sexism is related to the lower rating of pro-women advertisements and higher rating of traditional advertisements. In the case of the level of hostile sexism, it influences the perception of feminist advertisements. It is worth mentioning, however, that Polish women evaluate feminist advertisements better than advertisements showing gender stereotypes.

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APPENDIX

Rating of advertisement

1. The commercial did seem to be speaking directly to me.
2. There is nothing special about (this brand) that makes it different from the others.
3. This commercial did really hold my attention.
4. This commercial did remind me of experiences or feelings I've had in my own life.
5. It is the kind of commercial that keeps running through your head after you've seen it.
6. It's hard to put into words, but this commercial leaves me with a good feeling about using (this brand).
7. I could really relate to this commercial.

Benevolent sexism scale

1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.
2. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.
3. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.
4. Women should be cherished and protected by men.
5. Men are complete without women.
6. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.
7. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste.

Hostile sexism scale

1. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality".
2. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.
3. Women are too easily offended.
4. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.
5. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.
6. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.
7. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.

The advertisements used in the study

1. Gillette's Venus Breeze: [youtube.com/watch?v=IXVWp3yujoA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXVWp3yujoA)
2. Billie's "Project Body Hair": [youtube.com/watch?v=P4DDpS685iI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4DDpS685iI)
3. Nike Women's Commercial: [youtube.com/watch?v=E2-efiAcS3w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2-efiAcS3w)
4. Sport England's "This Girl Can": [youtube.com/watch?v=jsP0W7-tEOc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsP0W7-tEOc)