

# AN EXPLORATION OF MEN'S ATTITUDE REGARDING BRANDS PURSUING BRAND ACTIVISM THROUGH FEMVERTISING

**Name: Dr.Komaldeep Randhawa**  
**Designation: Assistant Professor**  
**Name of the Institute: GSSDGS Khalsa College**  
**Badungar Road, Patiala**  
**Email id: komalrandhawa14@gmail.com**

## *1. Introduction*

Advertising is characterised as ubiquitous, repetitive, and professionally designed to gain attention and form consumer behaviour, and these characteristics make it highly likely to penetrate a person's consciousness and influence their behaviour. Advertising has been accused of using covert deception techniques to manipulate the feelings of its target audience. The audience plays an active role in decoding and interpreting the messages sent through advertising.

Daily encounters with the highly sexualized, idealised, and objectified representation contributes to personal and political ramifications for women's lives and culture as a whole. Advertising was initially used to promote consumption among the public using compelling and widespread communication techniques (Dyer, 1988)<sup>6</sup>. Dyer also wrote that since advertisement is more likely to strengthen rather than alter a person's beliefs, pro-female messages delivered through femvertising will only reinforce certain ideas among people who already believe women are equally competent, for example. An adult man, who went through his entire life being conditioned to see women as different, will probably need more than a reinforcement to accept feminist ideas in his life.

As second-wave feminists began to express their outrage at women being viewed as artifacts, the trend in the representation of women in ads began to change. Advertisers started to reconsider their advertising strategies by the end of the 1980s, as women's financial independence grew. That's when what's now known as femvertising gained traction. Advertisements selling products from sanitary towels to cigarettes began portraying women in more empowering roles and sharing pro-female messages.

The study's main subject is femvertising. While it is not a new technique in mass media, little research has been done to examine its impact on the audience. Its association with the feminist movement is also murky: it uses the term "feminist" in its name, but it has been accused of being a commodified version of the feminist movement (McCleary, 2014)<sup>17</sup>. Femvertising is often used of recruit new members to the feminist movement (Jalakas, 2016)<sup>11</sup>. According to Jalakas (2016)<sup>11</sup>, women see pro-feminist advertising as resources, tools for nourishing fellow feminists as well as educating and inviting more people into the movement.

Men were more likely to be perceived as more intelligent than women, both in terms of their qualifications and their actions. Simultaneously, the sexually exploitative use of women in ads increased - one out of every two commercials depicting women at the time portrayed them as sex objects. Commodity feminism is a business strategy that promotes products and services to women by using feminist themes like empowerment. Anything from sanitary pads to vehicles is sold using the values associated with the feminist movement (McCleary, 2014)<sup>17</sup>. Organizations are becoming more involved in their advertising by aligning their brand name and logo with current events and topics that matter to consumers, a movement known as brand activism.

In today's setting, brands must attach importance to people's lives in ways that go beyond product characteristics or user benefits; it is becoming increasingly important to customers around the world. Communicators' role is to start societal discussions by defining and discussing societal problems, allowing them to engage with consumers on a deeper level. Brands must take responsibility for how they represent women and recognise that every brand can be pro-female. Female empowerment messaging and influence are often used by brands in this emotional ploy. Consumers form strong relationships with brands that emotionally connect with them, and brand resonance can play an important role in the brand building and

equity of a brand. It is therefore critical for the brand to retain its authenticity, which is especially important when using social messaging techniques like femvertising. Advertising has become one of the most influential means of communication in the world, and it is an unavoidable characteristic of western societies. (Gill, 2007a)<sup>9</sup>. It is also one of many communication tools used by organisations to promote products and services to their customers. The word “advertising” itself means “drawing attention to something” or notifying, informing somebody of something, however it has seen different definitions throughout time. Advertising has been defined with a focus on sales (Starch, 1923)<sup>24</sup>, the goal of persuading the consumers (Richards and Curran, 2002)<sup>21</sup>, and recently as a “brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people” (Dahlen and Rosengren, 2016)<sup>5</sup>.

Some of the new age ads trying to annihilate the gender stereotype actually end up perpetuating it. Therefore, a brand needs to be extremely careful with what they are depicting in these femvertising ads and how it will be interpreted by the audiences. While the representation of women as multidimensional beings is praised globally, the campaigns must relate to the company as a whole as well.

### **1.1 Attitude toward Brands**

Brands are increasingly being used as differentiators to drive purchasing behaviour in the overwhelming competitive world of goods and services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2015)<sup>14</sup>. The term "attitude toward the commercial" was coined to describe how customers felt towards advertising (Kirmani & Campbell, 2009)<sup>15</sup>. When it comes to shaping attitudes toward advertising and consumer buying attitudes, emotional characteristics of an ad can have a big effect (Allen, Machleit & Kleine, 1992)<sup>2</sup>. According to MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986)<sup>18</sup>, there is an interdependence between attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand. Brand attitudes can be influenced by ad attitudes in two ways: on the one hand, through a simplistic influence (e.g., the ad's likeability is transferred to the brand), and on the other hand, on a more nuanced influence (e.g., the ad's likeability is transferred to the brand) (e.g. the credibility of the ad causes favourable opinions towards the brand) (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986)<sup>18</sup>. Mitchell and Olson (1981)<sup>14</sup> interpreted brand attitude as a "individual's internal assessment of the brand." Attitudes, unlike emotions, are long-term perceptions of products that influence customer behaviour. (Spears & Singh, 2004)<sup>25</sup>.

### **1.2 Brand Equity**

Since brand awareness is so closely linked to brand equity (Keller, 1993)<sup>13</sup>, it's critical for brand managers to assess and evaluate how the company's social advocacy affects its brand image. Since brand image is one of the main concepts in research on branding and value development, it is important to continue researching the subject. It is critical for a brand to convey its brand image to customers clearly and efficiently in order to create brand equity (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986)<sup>20</sup>. As a result, marketing researchers have emphasised the importance of understanding how consumers shape their perceptions. Research by Faircloth, Capella and Alford (2001)<sup>8</sup> has been shown that a person's attitude toward a brand has an indirect impact on the brand's reputation and, as a result, on brand equity. Keller's (1993)<sup>13</sup> results on the relationship between brand image and brand attitude are consistent with this.

As consumers become more conscious of underlying concepts and visual signals in ads and voice their disapproval of brands' advertisements, it is critical for brands to understand how these messages influence customer expectations and, eventually, the relationship consumers have with brands.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Femvertising has been defined as the incorporation of women empowerment initiatives into advertising campaigns in order to have a significant business and social impact by Abitbol and Sternadori (2016)<sup>1</sup>. They go on to say that women empowerment advertising has become one of the most important aspects of corporate social responsibility, not just because of its positive social effect, but also because of its impact on revenue, brand awareness, and loyalty. Their study concluded that the majority of consumers show a positive correlation with the feminist messages in femvertising. Further adding to this thought, Kapoor and Munjal (2019)<sup>12</sup> suggested that the term femvertising is a term coined by combining feminism and ads, which employs ideals synonymous with women's empowerment while Bharadwaj (2017)<sup>3</sup> stated that some of these new age commercials, while attempting to eliminate the gender stereotype, end up reinforcing it. As a result, a company must be highly cautious about what they represent in these femvertising advertising and how consumers will view it. Although the portrayal of women as multidimensional entities is lauded around the world, the promotions must be relevant to the business as a whole. Hamelin, Moujahid & Thaichon (2017)<sup>10</sup> in their study stated that brands can create and strengthen emotional and brand personality associations over

time with clear communication. Their findings have revealed that emotion has a significant effect on how people respond to a message and as a result, brands strive to reach out to potential consumers on a more emotional basis. Suggett(2017)<sup>26</sup> confirmed that organizations are becoming more involved in their advertising by aligning their brand name and logo with current events and topics that matter to consumers, a movement known as brand activism. Dahlén & Rosengren (2016)<sup>5</sup> highlighted that brands have begun to use their ads to take a stand on social issues and engage with future and current customers on an emotional level. Strandberg & Quinn (2015)<sup>23</sup> in their study elaborated that one way for brands to contribute to social change is to develop communications and advertising that avoids stereotyping women and instead portrays them in ways that are empowering to their female customers. Consumers are becoming more aware of underlying trends and visual cues in ads and are publicly criticising brands' messages, therefore it is important for brands to become aware of how certain messages affect consumer perceptions and ultimately the relationship consumers have with brands. Zha, Li and Yan (2015)<sup>27</sup> also proved that consumers who have positive feelings towards an advertisement with more cognitive content perceive it as having more credibility, and as a result, their attitudes about the brand are positively affected. Interestingly, Castillo (2014)<sup>4</sup> stated in a survey on the relationship between femvertising and brand awareness, that more than half of females admitted that they would purchase a product if they liked how the business and its commercials depicted women. Also, more than 90% of women were aware of at least one female empowerment campaign, which builds brand awareness and favorability in association with pro-woman messaging. Eisend, Plagemann & Sollwedel (2014)<sup>7</sup> explained that gender stereotypes have been a key focus in the advertising industry since the 1950s, in order to establish an immediate sense of identity with the target audience. To develop a rapport with the viewer, some commercials have illustrated typecasts that have existed between men and women throughout history. Lewinski, Fransen & Tan (2014)<sup>16</sup> argue that capitalism being our current mode for existing and inseparable from the fight for gender equality, and therefore selling a product is a small price to pay for a better representation of women in advertising.

### ***3. Statement of the Research Problem***

The past decade has seen the rise of women empowerment as a predominant theme in advertising in India. While these advertisements celebrate and emancipate womanhood and encourage a progressive mentality in the Indian society, there is a scarcity of factual research for the marketing implications of these advertisements, in contrast to regular advertisements. Moreover, it will also try to shed light on how men view such advertisement and whether femvertising is contributing to alter the traditional Indian mindsets.

### ***4. Objectives of the Study***

1. To understand the effects of femvertising on men's attitudes of the brand.
2. To understand the effects of femvertising on brand equity of brands that employ femvertising.

### ***5. Research Hypothesis***

Based on the literature review the next section will discuss the hypothesis of the study. Abitbol and Sternadori in their research concluded that femvertising could have an impact on the brand, issues related to customer personal characteristics play a significant role in the effectiveness of this new strategy. Rodrigues (2016)<sup>22</sup> also elaborated that women who were exposed to femvertising messages were more likely to applaud the brand for its effort and positively associate with the brand. Lewinski, Fransen & Tan (2014)<sup>16</sup> examined that when it comes to the consequences of femvertising, authenticity seems to be the most important factor, as the brand's message should be reflected in its business practises. Hence, to assess the efficacy of such ads, one must examine and assess customer attitudes toward the advertisement, the brand, their intentions, and, finally, their actual behaviour.

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between femvertising and improvement in the men's attitude towards the brand.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between brand equity for men and Femvertising.

### ***6. Research Methodology***

#### **6.1 Area of study**

The study has been conducted in five major cities of Punjab i.e Patiala, Jalandar, Bathinda, Amritsar, Ludhiana. Cities have been identified on the basis of convenience. Non-Probability sampling technique such as convenience sampling technique is used due to non-availability of appropriate and official data of impulse

buying behavior of consumers. Cost and time constraints are important factors for deciding the size of sample. At the same time accuracy of results is very important.

## 6.2 Data Collection

The present study is primary data based. The data was collected through investigator administered structured questionnaire. The method of data collection was direct personal interview.

## 6.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study employed multi stage sampling technique. The state of Punjab was divided into five cities – Patiala, Jalandar, Bathinda, Amritsar, Ludhiana. From each city, sample to be interviewed were selected using non-probability sampling technique that is convenience and judgement sampling. Further selection of the customers was carried out by using convenience and judgement sampling. A sample of 500 participants was selected based on the criteria of gender (males older than 18) and brand awareness in Punjab. 50 samples were rejected. To meet the requirements of objectives, a sample of 450 were considered.

## 6.4 Statistical tools used in the Research

The statistical techniques used to test the Hypothesis were Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) , Multiple Regression Analysis, Correlation Analysis, Factor Analysis.

### 7. Scope of the study

The scope of the study is restricted to men residing in Punjab and may not be representative of the entire men population in India. In particular, it is possible that the members of the control group have seen the femvertising ad before the experiment and may have formed their perceptions and attitudes accordingly. Due to the smaller scale of this study findings will not be generalised. This study was greatly dependant on primary the Indian context.

### 8. Data Analysis and Results

The data collection was done for about 500 samples out of which about 50 were rejected because of some errors. So the researcher was left with about 450 samples. It was found that maximum numbers of respondents of the survey were of the age of 18-40. These covered more than 80 percent of the male respondents. Education of the respondents is also an important factor of the study. This is one of the most significant factors as it may also shed light on the impact of femvertising vis-à-vis education of men. Maximum of the respondents i.e. 60.45% were found to be graduate and about 39.55 % were post graduate. Next observation about the respondents is the monthly income of the respondents .When asked about the average monthly expenses of the respondents, maximum respondent's monthly income lies between 10000 to 50000 rupees per month. Only 20 percent of the respondent has monthly salary between 50000 to 100000. The research on femvertising and its impact on men leads to a very interesting observation. This was related to the marital status and femvertising behavior pattern. It was seen that out of a sample of 450 respondents only 22.66 % were single and 77 .33% were married. This gives a behavioral aspect of married buyers who are sensitive to the social issues raised by femvertising. The femvertising campaigns should be designed accordingly.

### 8.1 Factor Analysis

Though the factor analysis justifies the Hypotheses, accepting the Hypotheses will depend upon the statistical significance of the outcome of the factor Analysis and reliability of the factors derived. The reliability of the factors is determined by Cronbach's Alpha. The value of Cronbach's Alpha indicated the total variance explained by the grouped attributes in a factor compared to the total variance. Value of Cronbach's Alpha in Table 1 is 0.872 which is more than 0.7 is considered as strong enough to justify the association between the attributes in a factor.

The following section discusses the various constructs/ parameters of the study i.e. find out the impact of femvertising on men's buying behavior that employ femvertising. On the basis of literature review the following two constructs have been finalized for the study.

1. Brand Equity(BE)
2. Attitude (ATT)

Using these constructs a structured questionnaire was filled from Five major cities (Patiala, Jalandar, Bathinda, Amritsar, Ludhiana) in Punjab will be surveyed. Convenience sampling method is used, which is a non-probability sampling method where the most relevant and accessible respondents fulfilling the criteria will be selected. Cost and time constraints are important factors for deciding the size of sample. At the same

accuracy of results is very important. To meet the requirements of objectives, a sample of 500 participants will be based on the criteria of gender (males older than 18).

The structured questionnaire were filled and the data collected was filled in the excel sheet. After proper cleaning of data, reduction technique which is commonly known as factor analysis was applied. It resulted into grouping of the factors into four factors.

### Factor1 Brand Equity

The third significant factor explaining the variance is brand equity that measured by loyalty, awareness, association and perception. Many respondents disclosed that they think that using fem-vertising is a good strategy and such brands are easy to recall. They clearly mentioned that they believed that fem-vertising brands do build a positive brand image and that it does help in recognition of a femvertising brand from a non-femvertising brand. Hence, the recognition and recall of a brand in itself is a win-win situation for the fem-vertising brand and the respondents also agreed that fem-vertising helps in creating a stronger brand also.

The research goes to show that fem-vertising positively alters the respondents perception of what is advertised and also they believe that the company and people who stand behind such brands are socially responsible. This finding underlines the importance of fem-vertising for brands as well as customers who give due weight-age to the message that is spread by the brands and these messages do have a bearing on the brand equity. Customers have implicitly learned that fem-vertising brands are more reliable and hence these brands have a higher quality.

### Factor 2 Attitude

Fem-vertising significantly influences men's attitude towards the brand. Respondents strongly believed that fem-vertising has the potential to influence people and gives behaviour a new direction. Respondents are also convinced that fem-vertising is well suited to make long term changes in their attitude and also convinces them to actively change their personal behaviour. This positive change is itself extremely relevant in a country like India where the major hurdle towards women empowerment is rigid attitude and resistance to change towards accepting new attitudes.

## 8.2 Regression Analysis of Factor obtained

Table 1: Variables Entered/Removed

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	FV <sup>b</sup>	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: BE

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary of Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.060 <sup>a</sup>	.054	.041	1.07014

a. Predictors: (Constant), FV

ANOVA<sup>a</sup> Analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.806	1	.806	.704	.002 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	226.749	198	1.145		
	Total	227.555	199			

a. Dependent Variable: BE

b. Predictors: (Constant), FV

Table 2 : Variables Entered/Removed

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	FV <sup>b</sup>	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: ATT

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary of Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.091 <sup>a</sup>	.08	.073	.92550

Predictors: (Constant), FV

Table 3: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.188	.199		16.041	.000
	FV	.079	.061	.091	1.289	.199

a. Dependent Variable: ATT

The adjusted R-square (coefficient of determination) value is 0.041 as shown as shown in the table 1 is its maximum value. This validates that the data fits very well to the model. The variable persuasiveness though not strong but it is positively contributing towards femvertising but it is significant at 5% and 10% level of significance (P-value = 0.030 < = 0.05, 0.10). The above values are calculated at 5 degree of freedom and at an Fvalue of 0.704.

The adjusted R-square (coefficient of determination) value is 0.073 as shown as shown in the table 2 is its maximum value. This validates that the data fits very well to the model. The variable persuasiveness though not strong but it is positively contributing towards femvertising but it is significant at 5% and 10% level of significance (P-value = 0.030 < = 0.05, 0.10).

### 9. Hypothesis Testing

The results of the hypothesis are derived by doing the factor analysis and regression analysis. The factor analysis was done to find out the significant factors which affect the dependent variable. Multiple Regression analysis was further done to establish relationship between dependent and independent variables.

**H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between femvertising and improvement in the men's attitude towards the brand.**

In this hypothesis a relationship between femvertising and improvement in the men's attitude towards the brand is established. The total variance explained by the independent variables show a contribution of 42.61 percent in explaining the variance in the dependent variable i.e. femvertising by the independent variable attitude. It is seen that in order to influence attitude of men, femvertising plays a pivotal role. Hence it can be said that there is significant relationship between attitude of men towards brands and femvertising. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

**H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between brand equity for men and Femvertising.**

In this hypothesis a relationship between brand equity for men and femvertising is established. The total variance explained by the independent variables show a contribution of 65.61 percent in explaining the variance in the dependent variable i.e femvertising by the independent variable brand equity for men. Experts say that the importance of femvertising cannot be ignored in this era where many purchase decisions are influenced by brand equity. This also helps to attract the customers, towards the products and also improves the brand image for customer by sending the right message and presenting it in a unique manner with

effective creative quotient. Hence it can be said there is significant relationship between brand equity for men and femvertising. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

### ***10. Findings and Conclusion***

This research was conducted to inspect the factors that are affected by femvertising. To investigate the relation further the learning attempted to explicate the affiliation among the fem-vertising and attitude and brand equity with respect to men. The key discovery of this learning was that fem-vertising positively contributes to altering the attitude and brand equity.

Brand equity is also proved to be significantly impacted by fem-vertising. According to the research that brand equity which is studied with the help of factors like loyalty, awareness, association and perception disclosed that the respondents thought that using fem-vertising is a good strategy and such brands are also easy to recall. They evidently reveal that they believed that fem-vertising brands do construct a positive brand image and that it does assist in recognition of a femvertising brand from a non-femvertising brand. For this reason, the recognition and recall of a brand in itself is an encouraging situation for the fem-vertising brand and the respondents also agreed that fem-vertising aids in fashioning a stronger brand also.

It is also concluded that fem-vertising drastically influences men's attitude towards the brand. The fact that fem-vertising has the potential to influence people and gives behaviour a new direction is extremely relevant in India and this shall further pave the way for upliftment of women in the society.

All this data effectively suggest that by addressing and highlighting various gender inequalities and by pointing out stereotypical gender roles, companies that endorse fem-vertising are paving a road for more brands to follow on their footsteps as their efforts are proving to be fruitful to the company as well as for the society. As a result, female empowerment has and can become even more present in companies' advertisements, challenging the more traditional ways of advertising.

Femvertising leads to an improvement in the men's attitude towards the brands:

The findings of this study verifies sufficient evidence that marketers can employ femvertising to raise desirability of brands and to aid customers being aware of the femvertising brands as well as to create favourable attitudes. Femvertising enhances the brand image and appeal. In other words, having a consistent femvertising campaign, which is communicated in a subtle way and is inclusive of both genders, can lead to better attitude of men towards the ad and the brand behind it. Hence, femvertising is well suited to make long term changes in customer's attitude and also convinces men to rethink their personal behavior.

Femvertising improves the brand equity for men:

The research shows that femvertising affects the brand appeal and attractiveness of the brand. At the same time this could potentially also be due to the incongruence between the brand personality and the advertisement. From a marketing perspective, this research offers insights into the perception on femvertising and how it should be constructed. In a society where people buy brands based on their values it is important to take a stance in regard to social issues and authentically support them, which will ultimately affect the bottom line. As consumers are showing more loyalty towards brands that go beyond providing them with a mere product and/or service, the concept of brand equity has become an emerging trend. The research highlighted that brands employing femvertising are considered more reliable, which can prove to be very beneficial strategy for marketers.

### ***11. Implications of the study***

In terms of practical implications, the research shows that femvertising is indeed an interesting strategy for companies that can afford to sustain the image of feminist. This research also adds to literature by examining femvertising from the perspective of men. As this had not been researched before, the study improves the understanding of using femvertising by brands that target men. The result of the study shows that the use of femvertising needs to be used cautiously in order to improve the brand appeal for men. However, if it is not consistent with the brand image, done aggressively and none-inclusive of men, it can lower the brand appeal. Femvertising is a great way of increasing brand resonance and by extension maintain loyalty. However, brands must ensure that they only make use of femvertising if it is in line with their brand identity, and therefore be authentic as a brand. Brands should extend their use of social messaging in general as it creates an in depth understanding, where a message can truly relate to a consumer, taking into account the identity of the brand and the various social causes it can be related to, shows that it builds a better connection with consumers who can relate to brands on an emotional level.

## 12. Scope for Future Research

To expand on the present study, future researchers may want to run this study on a larger sample across various locations for a greater effect or to determine differences between demographic segments such as age, income, or employment status. Additionally, future research could explore how the effects of femvertising vary by industry, for instance in higher involvement purchases such as cars. Another avenue for further research would be a whether the identified factors differ in various cultural settings. The relationship between femvertising initiatives and the role of consumers' personal value system offer promising avenues for further research.

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