

Femvertising in Indonesia: Is it really empowering women? (a literature studies)

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Abstract. The feminist movement has had a positive impact on various industries, including the media and advertising sectors. When feminist values are applied in advertising, it is referred to as *femvertising*, which aims to empower women. This study aimed to examine *femvertising* practices in Indonesia and determine whether they have truly empowered women. The research used a qualitative descriptive method, with literature study as the main research approach. The research data was collected from books, news, and previous studies, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's analytical techniques. The findings of the study show that *femvertising* in Indonesia has implemented five key pillars, including the utilization of diverse female talent, messaging that promotes female empowerment, pushing gender-norm boundaries, downplaying sexuality, and portraying women authentically. Therefore, *femvertising* in Indonesia has successfully empowered women, though there are still areas for improvement, such as avoiding perpetuating unrealistic standards. The study is limited by the number of previous studies used as the main source of literature review. Further research is recommended to expand and add research sources to provide a more comprehensive view of *femvertising* practices.

Keywords: *femvertising*, *literature studies*, women empowerment

Introduction

Women are often depicted as gentle, love to dress up, are emotional, and have motherly qualities. This depiction forms a gender labeling, which indeed cannot be separated from elements of patriarchy, where women are positioned as inferior humans when compared to men (Tantina & Tutiasri, 2023). The concept of feminism then emerged as an effort to realize gender equality. Simply put, feminism carries the value that all genders have equal rights, opportunities, and treatment (Odilia, 2020; Varrial, 2023). Feminism is a process of awareness of the oppression and exploitation of women's position in society, at work, and in the family (Suryaningtyas, 2020). Feminism aims to confront conventional norms and stereotypes that restrict the roles and opportunities available to women in society. It asserts the importance of acknowledging women as autonomous individuals with the capacity to make choices and shape their destinies. Through advocating for gender equality, feminism strives to foster an environment where individuals of all genders can flourish and achieve their utmost potential, free from the constraints of gender-based societal norms.

The feminist movement has made a significant impact on the landscape of media and advertising. Recent trends reflect a paradigm shift, prompting companies to incorporate elements of gender equality and diversity into their marketing strategies. The media has become one of the "campaign tools" for spreading feminist values (Sinombor, 2023). On one hand, this has a positive impact, such as increasing public awareness of gender equality issues (Salelatu, Isnaini, & Wibawa, 2023). Moreover, the media—especially advertising industries—has a huge

influence as a messenger (Christanti & Wicandra, 2018) of trends and social norms. Advertising plays a significant role in shaping our perceptions, influencing our desires, and even defining what is considered "normal" or "desirable" in society. From promoting certain beauty standards to reinforcing gender stereotypes, the media has the power to sway public opinion and influence behavior on a large scale.

On the other hand, the phenomenon of femvertising appears. Femvertising, a term coined by combining "feminism" and "advertising," refers to the trend where brands create campaigns that empower and celebrate women. In general, femvertising is a term that describes the use of social networks by the feminist movement to spread related issues through creative content, especially in the form of audio-visual advertisements to increase awareness about issues regarding gender equality—especially for women—in society. Apart from that, femvertising also aims to strengthen women (Åkestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017) by highlighting their diverse experiences, talents, and achievements. Through femvertising, women are depicted as competent and strong individuals capable of excelling in any endeavor they undertake. This initiative not only advocates for gender equality but also inspires women to embrace their individuality and acknowledge their capabilities. Ultimately, femvertising plays a pivotal role in fostering a more inclusive and empowering society where women are appreciated and esteemed for their unique qualities and accomplishments.

However, the media industry is starting to realize that gender issues are issues that "sell"—and become issues that make money when raised. Product manufacturers have become increasingly aggressive in voicing messages of gender equality through advertisements in the mass media (Åkestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017; Christanti & Wicandra, 2018). The practice of femvertising is considered a cover for capitalism to wrap advertising with a feminist appeal so it can attract the attention of female consumers—which, if successful, will certainly increase profitable purchasing decisions for product producers. (Fauziah & Puspita, 2020).

This research discusses femvertising practices that occur in Indonesian commercials through literature studies by describing previous research and linking it to theories of social construction, feminism, and commodification; also the general concept of femvertising. Femvertising, in general, describes as a form of advertising that challenges stereotypes of women in traditional advertising (Åkestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017).

The social construction initiated by Berger and Luckmann was motivated by the question of what is called reality. Each particular group, community, or culture develops its own knowledge about reality—which is referred to as social reality (West & Turner, 2018; Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017). The concept of gender, whether male or female, is not a natural phenomenon but a social construct that requires a process of socialization. Society plays a significant role in shaping our values, norms, and culture, which are then accepted and re-socialized. This process leads to the identification of feminine and masculine traits, the division of public and domestic roles, and the existence of dominant and subordinate positions (Maulidia, 2021)

Feminist theory proposes that women should be both the subjects and objects of social life (Maulidia, 2021), demanding justice and equality for all parties involved, rather than striving for absolute "sameness" (Caprino, 2017). Feminist theory is a broad and diverse field of study that encompasses a variety of perspectives on gender, power, and society. Simply put, feminism is working towards a future where equality is not just a concept, but a lived reality. Feminism symbolizes a beacon of hope soaring toward a future where equality transcends rhetoric to become ingrained in societal norms. Its essence lies in dismantling gender constraints, fostering a realm where every individual can radiate their brilliance.

Commodification is the process by which an object, quality, or sign transforms into a commodity, which can be bought and sold. Under capitalism, advertisements featuring women become commodities that benefit multiple parties. Women are objectified and sold in the

market as valuable commodities (Cahya & Gabriella, 2022). Regrettably, this portrayal frequently reduces women to objects for consumption, perpetuating damaging stereotypes and reinforcing the notion that a woman's value lies in her physical appearance and ability to captivate an audience.

There are five pillars used to review various forms of femvertising campaigns, including 1) Utilization of diverse female talent; 2) Messaging that is inherently pro-female; 3) Pushing gender-norm boundaries/stereotypes; 4) Downplaying of sexuality; 5) Potraying women in an authentic manner (Becker-Herby, 2016). Thus, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How is the *femvertising* practices in Indonesian advertisements industry?
2. Is the *femvertising* practices in Indonesia really empowering women?

Methods

This study is a descriptive qualitative research that uses literature review as the research methodology. The focus of this type of research is to understand the meaning, reasoning, and definition of a particular situation. Descriptive qualitative research is commonly used to examine issues or situations related to everyday life (Rukin, 2019). The aim of this type of research is to provide a detailed understanding of the subject under study. Descriptive qualitative research focuses on capturing the richness and complexity of human experiences, emotions, and behaviors.

The primary data for this research was obtained from four previous studies (as listed in Table 1) that explore *femvertising* of various products in Indonesia. Additional data was collected from recent books and web articles. The collected data was then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's analysis, which involves data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). During the data condensation phase, researcher summarized and categorized information to discern essential patterns and themes, simplifying data for better comprehension. Subsequently, in the data display stage, visual aids such as charts, graphs, and tables were employed to present findings systematically, aiding in the elucidation of significant trends and relationships within the data. Finally, in the conclusion drawing phase, researcher derived insightful conclusions based on the analyzed data, offering implications for further research or practical applications

Table 1. Previous Studies regarding *Femvertising*

Article Details	Theories and Concepts
<i>Femvertising dalam iklan: Kampanye #livewithoutlines Olay Indonesia</i> (2023) by Almira Hakim	Feminism as commodity, <i>Femvertising</i>
<i>Analisis wacana kritis femvertising dalam iklan Instagram MKS Shoes edisi "What Makes Us Women"</i> (2023) by Arin Tantina & Ririn Puspita Tutiasri	Feminism, Discourse analysis, <i>Femvertising</i>
<i>Representasi cantik dalam iklan video digital Dove "Rambut Aku Kata Aku"</i> (2022) by Dian Risma Dara & Dewi Maria Herawati	Representation, Feminism, <i>Femvertising</i>
<i>Feminisme dalam iklan "After 11" Bukalapak</i> (2020) by Rully, Abdul Basit, & Muji Prabella	Feminism, Cultural studies, Semiotic

Source: Personal research, 2024.



Result and Discussion

Result

How is the *femvertising* practices in Indonesian advertisements industry?



Figure 1. Olay Ads
(Source: Hakim, 2023)

As seen in Figure 1, Hakim's research result highlight that Olay seems to only provide anti-aging solutions for women instead of criticizing the limitations placed on them. Their advertisement creates a narrative about women's career paths and the nature of women. Experts suggest that Olay's advertising promotes the idea that an appearance that meets beauty standards, without wrinkles, can solve other problems. In essence, Olay is perpetuating social constructions around beauty standards and stereotypes about women's ideal age for marriage by ignoring the negative impact of their advertising.



Figure 2. MKS Shoes Ads
(Source: Tantina & Tutiasri, 2023)

As seen in Figure 2, Tantina and Tutiasri's research result highlight that the advertisement for MKS Shoes features a diverse group of women, with differences in race and body shape. The messages conveyed in the ad highlight the positive aspects of women, through existing monologues that portray them as passionate, fresh, consistent, and fearless. The women are depicted as being able to break free from traditional stereotypes and be whoever they want to be. They are not portrayed as sensual objects covered in makeup or in unrealistic poses.



Figure 3. Dove Ads
(Source: Dara & Herawati, 2022)

As seen in Figure 3, Dara and Herawati's research's result highlight that one such advertisement by Dove showcases that beauty is not limited to women with long, straight, black, and shiny hair. Additionally, Dove refrains from objectifying women's bodies through the clothing they wear.



Figure 4. Bukalapak Ads
(Source: Rully, Basit, & Prabella, 2020)

As seen in Figure 4, Rully, Basit, and Prabella's research's result highlight that the advertisement embodies a nuanced representation of women that seeks to challenge gender stereotypes by showcasing women as multi-dimensional beings who can balance their personal and professional lives with ease. The advertisement titled "After 11" by Bukalapak employs female talent as the central character to portray women as strong, capable individuals who work as secret agents, while also exhibiting their nurturing and gentle nature as mothers. This portrayal highlights the agency of women, and underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating their contributions in all spheres of life.

Is the femvertising practices in Indonesia really empowering women?

According to Hakim's (2023) research, Olay's efforts towards empowering women have been deemed insufficient. Despite portraying a female character as the "Chef of the Year" in one of their advertisements, Olay also perpetuates societal beauty standards by emphasizing the importance of appearing youthful and flawless. This creates a sense of insecurity and pressure among women to conform to these standards.

On the other hand, Tantina and Tutiasri's (2023) study highlights the empowering message conveyed by MKS Shoes' advertisement, "What Makes Us Women." The advertisement celebrates women for their strengths and weaknesses, providing a platform for self-expression and empowerment. The study concludes that MKS Shoes effectively represents the voices of women, encouraging them to create and take ownership of their identities.

Similarly, Dara and Herawati's (2022) research focuses on Dove's efforts to promote self-confidence and affirmation among women. Rather than depicting their products as a solution to perceived physical "deficiencies," Dove features women of diverse backgrounds and appearances, including those without hair, to challenge societal beauty norms and encourage self-acceptance.

Finally, Rully, Basit, and Prabella's (2020) study highlights Bukalapak's efforts to empower women by showcasing their ability to maintain both masculine and feminine traits. The company's advertisement depicts women as strong, stable, and responsible mothers who are also capable of pursuing their professional aspirations. This challenges traditional gender roles and encourages women to aspire towards their goals and potential.

Discussion

The advertising industry in Indonesia has witnessed the emergence of femvertising as a powerful tool to empower women. This innovative approach has provided a platform for women to be portrayed in a more authentic and empowering light, challenging traditional gender stereotypes. The practice of femvertising in Indonesia has incorporated the pillars of femvertising as proposed by Becker-Herby (2023). These pillars include 1) The use of diverse female talents that are not limited to specific races, ethnicities, or religions. However, not all advertisements implement this first pillar. Some advertisements use female talent that conforms to the beauty standards that apply in Indonesia; 2) Conveying pro-women messages that promote gender equality, for example, women can be whatever they want, women can work and be mothers and wives so that women are free to dress and express themselves. However, there are still advertisements that indirectly support values that "demean" women, for example, women cannot have wrinkles if they want to be considered beautiful by society, and women must marry at a certain age; 3) Pushing existing gender boundaries and stereotypes, for example, women can have short hairstyles, women can do work that is generally done by men; 4) Avoiding the emphasis on women's sexuality through clothing that is not revealing; and 5) Showcasing women's values and authenticity.

Thus, the practice of femvertising in the advertising industry in Indonesia has empowered women (as seen in MKS Shoes Ads, Dove Ads, and Bukalapak Ads). However, sometimes there is still direct or indirect support or statements for values that tend to demean women, for example, the application of beauty standards and the ideal age for carrying out marriage (as seen in Olay Ads). Despite the progress made through femvertising in the Indonesian advertising industry, challenges still remain when it comes to combating the perpetuation of traditional gender norms. The emphasis on beauty standards and the pressure on women to conform to societal expectations regarding marriage age continue to be prevalent issues. This ultimately creates an unrealistic picture of the image of women, thus indirectly encouraging women to achieve the same thing (Sharma & Bumb, 2021).

Unrealistic depictions of female figures are part of the social construction that applies in society. In Indonesia, there is a construct that women are said to be beautiful if they have long, black, and shiny hair; have white skin; to have a proportional body. In addition, gender construction in Indonesia shows that women are responsible for the kitchen and household. Women rarely have jobs outside of domestic work, let alone doing certain jobs, such as secret agents in Bukalapak advertisements. By confronting detrimental narratives and advocating for diverse portrayals of women in advertising, we can enhance female empowerment and cultivate

an inclusive, supportive atmosphere for everyone. Advertisers play a crucial role in advancing gender equality and dismantling stereotypes to generate a more constructive and influential societal influence.

On the other hand, the practice of *femvertising* can be viewed as a form of commodification of feminist values. While often seen as a positive step towards promoting gender equality and empowering women, *femvertising* can also be critiqued for its potential to commodify feminist values. By using feminist ideals as a marketing strategy, there is a risk of diluting the true essence of feminism and turning it into a mere selling point. According to Drake's research (2017) on "The Impact of Female Empowerment in Advertising (*Femvertising*)," women tend to purchase products that display positive images of women. This trend can be attributed to the empowerment that comes from seeing representations of strong, confident women in advertising and media. When women see themselves reflected positively in the products they purchase, it reinforces their sense of self-worth and self-perception. Consequently, this heightened intent to purchase can yield substantial advantages for the advertised products. Hence, it is imperative for companies practicing *femvertising* to ensure that their messaging aligns with authentic endeavors to advocate for gender equality rather than exploiting the movement solely for commercial gain.

Undoubtedly, femvertising has significantly contributed to the progress of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Indonesia. While femvertising has been instrumental in empowering women, it is crucial to prevent advertisements from perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes or setting unrealistic standards for women. By persisting in advocating for gender equality, highlighting women's worth and authenticity, and avoiding detrimental gender biases and unrealistic portrayals, advertisements can foster a more inclusive and empowering social environment. Thus, femvertising stands as a powerful tool for female empowerment and the breaking down of gender barriers in society.

Conclusion

The practice of *femvertising* has gained momentum in Indonesia, with the existing pillars of this practice empowering women. However, some advertisements in Indonesia still propagate unrealistic beauty standards and notions regarding the ideal age for marriage, which contradict feminist principles and have the potential to negatively impact women's self-perception. It is imperative for advertisers to be conscious of the messages they convey, striving for authenticity and inclusivity in their campaigns. On one hand, *femvertising* has the potential to increase public awareness and understanding of feminist values such as gender equality. However, it is important to acknowledge that feminist values are often commodified in order to increase sales. *Femvertising* may sometimes be seen as a shallow marketing tactic rather than a genuine commitment to promoting gender equality. Moreover, advertisements that portray women in a positive light tend to encourage women to purchase products that empower them and boost their self-esteem. When women see themselves represented in a positive way in advertisements, they are more likely to feel a connection with the brand and the product being promoted. This can lead to a stronger sense of confidence and empowerment in their purchasing decisions. Nevertheless, the scope of research on this subject is currently limited to four previous studies. Further research is needed to provide a complete and nuanced picture that expands on prior studies.



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