

# Empowerment in Advertising: The Rise of Femvertising in Social Media

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## Abstract

*This paper explores the multifaceted relationship between femvertising and social media, examining how advertising strategies aimed at empowering women have evolved in the digital age. Femvertising combines feminist ideals with marketing practices, seeking to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote inclusivity and representation. Through an analysis of notable campaigns such as Dove's "Real Beauty" and Always' "#LikeAGirl," the paper highlights the role of influential brands and marketing teams in reshaping societal perceptions of gender roles. It investigates the impact of technological advancements, particularly social media platforms, on the reach and engagement of femvertising campaigns. Additionally, the paper discusses the cultural implications and significance of femvertising, including the positive and negative representations of women in advertising, as well as the challenges brands face related to authenticity and backlash. By considering the future prospects of femvertising in an ever-changing social landscape, this study underscores its potential to drive both meaningful social change and brand success, thereby contributing to ongoing conversations about gender equality in marketing and beyond.*

**Keywords:** Femvertising, Gender Equality, Social Media, Marketing Strategies, Representation.

## Introduction

Femvertising, a portmanteau of “feminism” and “advertising,” refers to marketing initiatives that promote female empowerment and challenge traditional gender stereotypes within advertising campaigns. Conceptually rooted in feminist principles, femvertising seeks to resonate with women by addressing their social realities, aspirations, and experiences (Glick & Fiske, 2001). This approach has gained prominence in contemporary advertising as brands increasingly recognize the necessity of aligning with socially conscious consumers who value authenticity and social responsibility (Baker, 2016). By catering to this demographic, femvertising not only enhances brand loyalty but also positions products as integral to the pursuit of gender equality.

The intersection of femvertising and social media has emerged as a potent avenue for reaching and engaging with target audiences. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok,

offer brands unprecedented opportunities to disseminate their messages broadly and interactively (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These platforms amplify the impact of femvertising campaigns by enabling real-time feedback and fostering community dialogue around gender-related issues. For instance, campaigns like Always' "LikeAGirl" or Dove's "Real Beauty" have not only challenged traditional perceptions of femininity but have also sparked important conversations across social media, thus enhancing their effectiveness (Berman, 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to explore various facets of femvertising and its implications in the realm of social media. By examining the historical background of femvertising, its evolution, and notable figures in the field, this research aims to illustrate how this strategic approach has influenced contemporary advertising. Additionally, the analysis will address technological advancements that have facilitated the rise of femvertising, as well as its cultural impact and significance. The final sections will discuss the challenges and future prospects of femvertising, providing insights into its sustainability and authenticity in promoting true gender equality.

The sections that follow will delve deeper into these critical aspects, beginning with a historical overview of feminist movements and their influence on advertising.

### **Historical Background**

The journey toward femvertising is deeply intertwined with the evolution of feminist movements, which have sought to challenge gender inequalities and reshape societal perceptions of women's roles. The first wave of feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries primarily focused on women's suffrage and legal rights, laying the foundation for future movements. As women gained the right to vote and became increasingly visible in public life, their portrayal in advertising began to slowly shift, though often still limited to traditional gender roles (Anderson & Lears, 1996).

By the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, which addressed broader issues such as workplace equality and reproductive rights, advertising started reflecting the changing social landscape. During this period, many brands began to realize that targeting women as empowered consumers could be financially beneficial (Holliday & Chandler, 2016). Notable advertising campaigns, such as those from brands like Max Factor and Mary Kay, began to emphasize women's independence, aligning their products with the burgeoning feminist ethos. However, these early attempts were often criticized for being superficial and failing to address the substantial issues women faced (Wolf, 1990).

Key milestones in advertising that paved the way for femvertising include the introduction of campaigns that authentically addressed women's experiences and struggles. In 1985, Revlon launched its "1 Selling Lipstick" campaign that illustrated female empowerment through self-expression, marking a shift from purely product-oriented advertisements to campaigns that resonated on an emotional and societal level (Cramer, 2016). Fast forward to the 2000s, Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign (2004) represented a monumental shift in advertising strategies by using real women of various shapes, sizes, and backgrounds to promote body positivity. This campaign not only garnered significant praise but also sparked a broader movement within the beauty industry to portray women more authentically (Douthat, 2017).

The role of social movements in shaping media narratives surrounding women's empowerment has been pivotal. The rise of digital platforms in the early 21st century provided new avenues for feminist discourse to flourish, enabling the dissemination of messages that challenge stereotypes and advocate for gender equality (Gill, 2007). Social media became a fertile ground for movements like BlackGirlsRock and MeToo, which highlighted women's struggles and successes. Brands began to recognize the potential of aligning themselves with such movements, leading to the advent of femvertising, where corporate marketing strategies now embrace feminist narratives not just as

trends but as integral parts of their identities (Wright, 2019). As brands like Nike and Always adopted these feminist messaging strategies, they found that authenticity and ethical practices resonated remarkably well with consumers, fostering brand loyalty and social change simultaneously.

The historical development of femvertising is rooted in the convergence of feminist movements and advertising practices, evolving from overtly traditional portrayals to authentic and empowering narratives. The shifts in advertising tactics reflect broader societal changes, driven by a desire for gender equality, as brands adapt to resonate with increasingly empowered consumers.

### **Evolution of Femvertising**

Femvertising has significantly transformed over the years, evolving in tandem with cultural shifts surrounding feminism and gender equality. Initially, advertising perpetuated traditional gender roles, often portraying women solely in domestic contexts or as objects of desire. However, as feminist movements gained traction and societal attitudes shifted, the advertising industry began to recognize the need to appeal to women's growing demand for representation and authenticity. This transformation has propelled femvertising into a mainstream marketing strategy, wherein brands leverage feminist ideals to create powerful connections with their audience.

One of the earliest and most notable examples of a femvertising campaign is the Dove "Real Beauty" campaign, which launched in 2004. This campaign sought to redefine beauty standards by showcasing women of various ages, sizes, and ethnicities, challenging conventional beauty norms that had long dominated advertising (Dove, 2004). Instead of relying on images of unattainable beauty, Dove emphasized self-acceptance and body positivity, sparking significant conversation around women's self-image in the beauty industry. The campaign's success highlighted an emerging trend where brands began to align themselves with feminist values as a means of differentiation in a crowded market.

The evolution of femvertising further accelerated with the rise of digital and social media platforms. The transition from traditional media, such as television and print, to digital platforms created opportunities for brands to engage with consumers directly and authentically (Edelman, 2010). In particular, social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook allowed brands to foster community discussions, thereby influencing public perceptions of gender and empowerment. Campaigns could now be shared virally, generating discussions that would previously only occur within specific demographics or communities. This democratization of media led brands to rethink their marketing strategies, pushing them toward more inclusive and empowering messages.

Key trends influencing the evolution of femvertising in this digital era include a heightened emphasis on authenticity, intersectionality, and social responsibility. Consumers today are more informed and critical than ever, demanding that brands take a stand on pressing social issues, including those related to gender, race, and sexuality (Wright, 2019). As a result, successful femvertising campaigns now integrate diverse voices and experiences, highlighting the complexities of womanhood in a globalized society.

For instance, Always' "LikeAGirl" campaign (2014) aimed to challenge the negative connotations of the phrase "like a girl" by showcasing young girls in empowering scenarios, thereby reframing how society perceives femininity and strength. This campaign not only garnered widespread acclaim but also served as a prime example of how femvertising can leverage social media's engagement capacities to foster cultural change (Patterson & Elliott, 2018).

Evolution of femvertising has been marked by a shift from traditional portrayals of women to more authentic and inclusive representations. As brands adapt to cultural shifts and embrace the power of social media, femvertising continues to grow as a vital strategy aimed at promoting gender equality while capturing the attention of a socially conscious consumer base.

### **Notable Figures in the Field of Femvertising and Social Media**

Femvertising has seen notable contributions from influential brands, marketing teams, and individual activists who have championed messages of empowerment and gender equality. Among the leading brands in this arena is Dove, which revolutionized the beauty industry with its “Real Beauty” campaign launched in 2004. Created by the marketing agency Ogilvy & Mather, this campaign featured real women of diverse body types, ages, and ethnicities, challenging traditional beauty standards commonly portrayed in media (Dove, 2004). The campaign not only promoted self-acceptance but also sparked broader conversations about body positivity and the representation of women in advertising (Tiggemann, 2014). Dove’s commitment to authentic representation has influenced numerous other brands to reconsider their marketing strategies and embodiments of femininity.

Another significant example of femvertising is Always’ “LikeAGirl” campaign, launched in 2014. This campaign sought to redefine what it means to do something “like a girl,” by highlighting that actions and behaviors commonly linked to femininity should not be perceived as inferior (Patterson & Elliott, 2018). Created in partnership with the advertising agency Leo Burnett, the campaign utilized powerful storytelling and social media engagement to inspire young girls to embrace their capabilities and challenge negative stereotypes. The campaign received widespread acclaim and generated more than 85 million views on YouTube within its first year, illustrating the effectiveness of a socially conscious message paired with strategic marketing (Keller, 2016).

Outside of these influential brands, notable activists and marketers have also played critical roles in promoting femvertising. For instance, activists like Emma Watson, who launched the HeForShe movement in 2014, have helped elevate discussions about gender equality and mobilize support for feminist causes (Watson, 2014). By leveraging their platforms, such activists create ripe environments for brands to engage with social issues authentically.

The impact of influential figures extends to agency leaders as well. Creative directors and marketers at agencies like Anomaly and Wieden+Kennedy have been instrumental in shaping impactful campaigns that resonate with consumers on a personal level. Their emphasis on emotional storytelling and inclusive branding has not only driven brand success but also contributed to the ongoing discourse around gender in advertising (Swadley, 2018).

The landscape of femvertising is marked by the contributions of influential brands like Dove and Always, the creativity of marketing teams that bring these campaigns to life, and the advocacy of individuals committed to promoting gender equality. Collectively, these figures have worked to redefine the narrative surrounding women in advertising and have harnessed the power of social media to inspire and mobilize audiences.

### **Technological Advancements**

The rise of technology has played a pivotal role in the evolution and proliferation of femvertising, fundamentally changing how brands communicate with consumers. In particular, advancements in digital technology and the widespread adoption of social media have enabled brands to create impactful marketing campaigns that resonate with contemporary audiences, particularly women seeking empowerment and representation.

Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, have emerged as essential tools for brands aiming to implement femvertising strategies. These platforms allow brands to reach vast audiences quickly and directly, facilitating real-time engagement and interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For example, a social media campaign can go viral, extending the reach of a femvertising message across geographical boundaries and demographic segments almost instantaneously. Campaigns like Always’ LikeAGirl not only gained millions of views but also prompted discussions around gender stereotypes, allowing for immediate feedback and participatory interaction from audiences (Patterson & Elliott, 2018). This kind of engagement

fosters a sense of community among consumers and encourages deeper connections to the brand, proving that socially conscious messaging can also enhance brand loyalty.

Moreover, the integration of data analytics and targeted marketing strategies has further strengthened the efficacy of femvertising. Brands can now utilize advanced analytics tools to understand consumer behavior, preferences, and engagement patterns, allowing for more personalized marketing approaches (Matz, 2016). By analyzing data from social media interactions, brands can tailor their messages to align closely with the values and interests of their target audiences, creating campaigns that feel relevant and authentic. For example, beauty brands can analyze user-generated content and hashtags to gauge how consumers are responding to certain body positivity messages, which can inform future advertising strategies.

Additionally, the use of algorithms and machine learning in digital marketing enables brands to optimize campaign performance by identifying which elements resonate most with consumers. This data-driven approach not only maximizes the impact of femvertising campaigns but also helps brands refine their messaging to ensure it is empowering rather than exploitative. The combination of real-time data analytics and adaptive marketing strategies fosters an environment where brands can continually evolve their femvertising efforts to address shifting societal conversations about gender and representation.

Technological advancements, particularly in digital communication and data analytics, have been instrumental in the rise and effectiveness of femvertising. The ability to engage consumers authentically through social media, coupled with the power of data-driven marketing strategies, has transformed how brands approach advertising, allowing for greater alignment with feminist values and consumer expectations.

### **Cultural Impact and Social Significance**

Femvertising has played a significant role in reshaping societal perceptions of gender roles, challenging long-standing stereotypes through creative and authentic representations of women. By foregrounding narratives that celebrate diversity and empowerment, femvertising campaigns have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of femininity in modern society. This shift reflects a broader cultural movement toward gender equality, where the portrayal of women in advertising is increasingly recognized as a powerful force that can influence societal norms and values.

Historically, advertisements often reinforced traditional gender roles, depicting women primarily as homemakers or objects of desire. However, the advent of femvertising has prompted a critical reassessment of these representations. Contemporary campaigns such as Dove's "Real Beauty" challenge the narrow definitions of beauty that have long dominated media landscapes, instead embracing a wide range of body types, ages, and ethnicities in their messaging (Dove, 2004). This has empowered women to embrace their unique identities and fostered a culture of inclusivity, promoting the idea that beauty is diverse and personal rather than a singular standard (Tiggemann, 2014). Such campaigns have a profound impact, as they not only change how women view themselves but also influence how society perceives femininity and empowerment.

While the emergence of femvertising certainly has positive implications, it is essential to acknowledge the potential for negative representations as well. Some campaigns, although well-intentioned, can perpetuate stereotypes or dilute feminist messages by focusing primarily on commercial outcomes rather than genuine empowerment. For example, brands sometimes utilize feminist rhetoric in a manner that feels disingenuous or exploitative, leading to accusations of "femvertising-washing," where brands co-opt feminist ideals for profit without substantive commitment to the cause (Wright, 2019). This phenomenon raises important questions about the authenticity of femvertising efforts and the potential risks of oversimplifying complex social issues.

Moreover, femvertising's impact is interwoven with broader cultural conversations surrounding

feminism and intersectionality. Increasingly, brands are called upon to consider intersectional identities in their marketing strategies, acknowledging that experiences of oppression and empowerment vary widely among individuals (Crenshaw, 1989). Campaigns that fail to address these complexities risk alienating audiences by presenting a one-dimensional view of femininity. For instance, brands that highlight diversity in their campaigns must also ensure that they are engaging with and uplifting marginalized voices rather than merely using them as marketing tools. The challenge lies in crafting messages that resonate with diverse audiences while remaining true to authentic feminist ideals.

Femvertising has significantly reshaped cultural perceptions of gender roles, offering both positive representations and presenting challenges related to authenticity and intersectionality. As the cultural landscape continues to evolve, the marketing industry must remain vigilant in promoting messages that align with genuine empowerment, navigating the complexities of feminist discourse in a rapidly changing society. By doing so, femvertising has the potential not only to transform advertising but also to contribute meaningfully to the societal dialogue around gender equality.

### **Challenges and Future Prospects**

While femvertising has emerged as a powerful tool for promoting gender equality and empowerment, brands face several significant challenges in effectively implementing these strategies. One of the most pressing issues is the question of authenticity. Today's consumers are increasingly skeptical of corporate messaging, particularly when it comes to socially conscious campaigns. Brands may find themselves accused of "femvertising-washing" or "performative feminism" if their marketing messages do not align with their company practices or if their commitment to feminist values seems insincere (Wright, 2019). For instance, if a brand promotes gender equality in its advertisements but fails to implement equitable hiring practices or pay equity within its own organization, it risks backlash from consumers who value authenticity and transparency.

Criticism can also arise from various stakeholders regarding the depiction of women in femvertising campaigns. Some critics argue that while femvertising seeks to empower women, it can sometimes reinforce superficial standards of beauty or perpetuate narrow definitions of femininity. For example, campaigns that celebrate diversity yet still adhere to conventional beauty norms may inadvertently marginalize those who do not conform to these ideals (Whelehan, 2016). Moreover, as brands strive to appeal to a broad audience, they may struggle to engage in more complex discussions regarding race, disability, and intersectionality, which could alienate segments of consumers seeking true representation (Crenshaw, 1989).

The limits of femvertising in genuinely empowering women are evident in its tightrope walk between commercial interests and social ideals. While brands have the potential to enact positive change through femvertising, the primary goal of profitability often conflicts with the true empowerment of women. As such, the challenges of staying true to authentic feminist values while simultaneously aiming for market success can dilute the effectiveness of femvertising initiatives (Glick & Fiske, 2001). When femvertising becomes more about selling products than about enacting social change, it risks losing its meaning and can even lead to disillusionment among consumers.

Looking ahead, the future of femvertising lies in its ability to adapt to the rapidly evolving social and technological landscape. As consumers become more empowered and informed, they will likely demand that brands take meaningful action beyond mere marketing. This may involve incorporating sustainability and ethical considerations into their business practices and establishing genuine community involvement (Wright, 2019). Additionally, technological advancements in AI and data analytics present opportunities for more personalized and targeted campaigns that resonate authentically with diverse audiences.

Moreover, brands that prioritize inclusivity and intersectionality are well-positioned to thrive in the evolving market. By engaging in ongoing dialogue with their audiences and being responsive to their concerns, brands can cultivate a loyal consumer base that values authenticity and advocacy. Moreover, addressing issues such as mental health, body positivity, and social justice in a nuanced manner can lead to deeper connections and ultimately foster empowerment.

While challenges remain for brands employing femvertising strategies, there is also significant potential for growth and positive impact. By committing to genuine representation and aligning their business practices with feminist values, brands can navigate the complexities of modern advertising while contributing meaningfully to the pursuit of gender equality.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the evolution and impact of femvertising within the context of advertising and social media. Femvertising represents a significant shift in marketing strategies, where brands leverage feminist ideals to engage consumers on deeper emotional and social levels. Through key campaigns like Dove's "Real Beauty" and Always' "LikeAGirl," femvertising not only challenges traditional gender roles but also fosters inclusivity and representation, resonating with a progressively aware consumer base.

The significance of femvertising lies in its potential to reshape societal perceptions about women and encourage positive cultural conversations around gender norms and equality. However, brands also face challenges related to authenticity, backlash, and the risk of superficial engagement with feminist ideals. As consumers demand greater transparency and accountability, the future of femvertising will depend on brands' ability to align their marketing messages with meaningful social practices.

Ultimately, femvertising holds the promise of driving both brand success and social change, making it a vital component of modern advertising strategies. By genuinely committing to empowerment, brands can not only enhance their market presence but also significantly contribute to the ongoing fight for gender equality in society.

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