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**International women's day, solidarity and the commercialization of
womanhood**

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MA Programme Euroculture

Declaration

I, Andrea Catalina Tafur Pedraza hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “International women’s day, solidarity and the commercialization of womanhood”, submitted as a partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

I declare that the written (printed and bound) and the electronic copy of the submitted MA thesis are identical.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

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Date: 26 August 2020

Abstract

This thesis applies elements of critical discourse analysis and visual analysis to study through the lens of a multimodal method three marketing campaigns: 1. Agent Provocateur's Pump it up for spring-summer 2019, 2. Agent Provocateur's Play to Win for spring-summer 2020, and 3. Unilever's brand Dove's campaign For Real Beauty. This research is done with the purpose of exploring how- with the use of different discursive and visual elements used in marketing for International Women's Day (IWD), companies commercialize and re-present womanhood?, how these practices resonate with (or defy) the aspiration of European gender equality and impact the development of feminist ideals, solidarity, and European advertising?, and in what way the initial goal of IWD shifted and opened a space for new ways of expressing "solidarity", through marketing and social media campaigns?.

To answer these questions, this thesis will open with a theoretical and conceptual framework that contains a historical overview of feminist thinking and the influence of the sexualized representation of the female body in the development of feminism, followed by taking a look at the importance of critical feminist studies and feminist media studies to analyze the visual and discursive representation of women and their body. Next, we will observe the sexualization of women as a marketing tool that evolved to be used as part of commodity activism and femvertising. This will be followed up by an overview of the methodology used for the research. Consequently, the thesis will present the analysis of the aforementioned campaigns suggesting that the aspirations of the European Union to promote equality of representation in marketing campaigns has not been reached completely, but companies have made efforts to advocate for eliminating stereotypes in advertisements and improve gender representation in marketing media. The results of the analysis will then be presented and finally the thesis will end with the conclusions and final remarks.

Keywords: International women's day (IWD), Feminism, Marketing, Commodity Activism, advertising.

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Chapter I. Introduction

“It is impossible to view the images and not wonder if it is really women taking charge of their own sexuality that people will see or, very strong women being reduced to their sexuality”¹

1. International Women’s Day

International women’s day is celebrated almost all around the world on March 8th. This day is traditionally recognized as an opportunity to commemorate the achievements made globally towards gender equality as well as a call to action for advancing gender parity. International women’s day has been celebrated since the early 1900’s, years that saw women actively campaigning for change against women’s oppression and inequality. Initially celebrated on the 28th of February in the United States the day was observed as National Women’s Day and was celebrated the last Sunday of February until 1913.

In Europe, International women’s day was celebrated for the first time on the 19th of March 1911 in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. It featured men and women in rallies advocating for women’s rights to vote, work, be trained, and call for the end of discrimination based on gender. In the years after the first celebration, women from different countries started participating, holding rallies to campaign in favor of women’s rights and to express solidarity. In 1913 the day shifted to be honored on March 8th and ever since, this day has been designated to honor women.

Over time, different social campaigns, movements, marches and rallies have taken place on International women’s day to give visibility to women’s issues and to celebrate their achievements, however due to the rapid expansion of consumerism and the marketing therein the day has also become a reliable and easy way for companies to attract a new market by

¹ Vanessa Friedman, “Is This What Post-MeToo Looks Like?,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2020, sec. Style, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/style/agent-provocateur-athlete-advertisement.html>.

aligning itself with the theme without necessarily producing positive results outside of increasing their own sales.

Every year, as international women's day (IWD) draws closer, companies begin targeted ad campaigns accordingly themed to exploit and extract revenue in lieu of the original intent of the celebration of women. During these months (February/March) campaigns, slogans and products are actively targeting women, typically under the guise of honoring and supporting the consumer and their cause. The notion of feminism and the intention of IWD to celebrate the economic, political and social achievements of women and men towards gender equality seems to be subverted by an underlying sole motive to increase sales as opposed to genuinely supporting its stated audience.

2. Feminism

With the quick expansion of digitalization in the last couple of decades and the implementation and propagation of new media technology, commercial companies have frequently adopted a facade of solidarity and feminism as marketing tools.² These features are then promoted in advertisements as an agreeable sentiment most individuals can identify with, engaging a broader audience and portraying itself as progressive, egalitarian, and empowering. The development and growth of digital technology has led to more communication channels (email marketing, database marketing, and social media, among others) giving companies additional opportunities to reach a larger consumer base and address them with a message that resonates with them more strongly, with the purpose of not only selling products but selling ideals that are then associated to the brand validating their decision to support it.

This practice in a way gives visibility to feminism and brings attention to their cause, making it a widespread notion that is easily identifiable and approachable.³ In turn, the more widely accepted interpretation of modern feminism distances itself from the first- and second-wave feminism that were criticized for being catered to western upper-middle class

² Antonella P Vastola, "Caused Related Marketing: Between Solidarity and Competition within the Italian Agri-Food System," n.d., 154–57.

³ Suzanne Moore, "Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto by Jessa Crispin Review – It's Time to Get Radical," *The Guardian*, February 15, 2017, sec. Books, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/15/why-i-am-not-a-feminist-by-jessa-crispin-review>.

white women,⁴ forms of feminism for well-educated women in positions of power.⁵ Third-wave feminism on the other hand is depicted as being all-embracing and a more inclusive form of the movement⁶ that is influenced by neoliberal concepts (such as, individualism, consumerism, profitability and privatization), and is characterized by the importance of empowerment, individualism, self-determination, choice and autonomy.⁷ Ideas that were adopted and embodied by advertisements being presented to customers as messages that endorse social change, justice and a modern perspective of marketing. In this way a new marketing strategy known as femvertising was created.⁸

Postfeminism, a widespread notion that states the influence of media technologies, consumerism and capitalist practice in the development of social and political change, took on the role of changing previous notions associated with feminist ideas that were considered limited to a specific group of women. The fourth-wave of feminism is born then as an attempt to transform the postfeminist approach and aims to reassess female issues, being characterized by the reassured commitment to feminist actions and the observance of diversity of feminist identities. Along with the notions presented by the third-wave, femvertising evolved to include ideas presented by the last two waves into its marketing strategy.

3. Femvertising

The concept of femvertising is used to describe the practice of including feminist ideas in advertising, and incorporates thoughts encouraged by third-wave feminism into companies' marketing agenda through messages that employ notions of empowerment, freedom of choice, self-determination and individuality in their rhetoric, influencing consumers into believing that buying and supporting specific brands contributes to a greater cause. The relevance of this issue lies in the belief that what we use, what we buy and what we wear is a reflection of who we are, creating a constant pressure to support or to protest against

⁴ Kristin J. Anderson, *Modern Misogyny: Anti-Feminism in a Post-Feminist Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 3.

⁵ Nancy A. Hewitt, "Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 662.

⁶ *Ibid.* 661.

⁷ Anderson, *Modern Misogyny*:9.

⁸ Elisa Becker-Herby, "The Rise of Femvertising: Authentically Reaching Female Consumers" (University of Minnesota, 2016), 6.

(through refusing to purchase) particular brands as a representation of who we are and what we stand for.⁹ Reinforcing the idea that our agency is reflected in the products we purchase and the brands we support.

This concept relates to the work of Edward Bernays, known as the father of Public Relations, whose aim was to increase consumption through marketing strategies that elicit an emotional response on behalf of the customer that would then influence them towards a particular brand or product, such as the *Torches of freedom* campaign, which was created during the 1920's to persuade women that the right to smoke was somehow related to the right to vote, connecting the marketing of cigarettes with the fight for equality,¹⁰ incident that reflects a similar problem to that of the campaigns I will explore.

4. Solidarity

Taking as a base the work of Durkheim, the concept of solidarity can be understood as the social unity of a group, in which the members share principles, beliefs, ideals, norms or needs that inspire them to cooperate together and act as a unit.¹¹ The notion of solidarity has been traditionally associated with the development of feminist ideals, since efforts made towards gender equality have focused their work on supporting women's rights, the creation of a sense of community and group activism. Solidarity in relation to the feminist movement has been associated with notions such as community, sisterhood and support systems that are reinforced by the creation of social bonds as well as the development of similar goals and ideals.

The "call to sisterhood" of the movement became one of the unifying factors of feminism, representing the struggle shared by women and the common aim for equality, rights and representation. Solidarity however, with the development of new media technology and communication has changed its means. For the first and second-wave solidarity was manifested by joining rallies, exchanging letters between members, and defending the rights of other women through protests and demonstrations. In the hands of

⁹ Kate Hoad-Reddick, "Pitching the Feminist Voice: A Critique of Contemporary Consumer Feminism," n.d., 130.

¹⁰ Rakhi Chakraborty, "Torches of Freedom: How the World's First PR Campaign Came to Be," YourStory.com, August 6, 2014, <https://yourstory.com/2014/08/torches-of-freedom>.

¹¹ Sister Mechtraud, "Durkheim's Concept of Solidarity," *Philippine Sociological Review* 3, no. 3 (1955): 23–27.

postfeminism, solidarity has been recontextualized, changing the means of its actions.¹² Solidarity then is expressed through consumer choices, social media posts, selfies and slogans printed on t-shirts.

5. Research aim and European dimension

Building upon these ideas, I will study campaigns and advertisements related to international women's day in which companies adopt a feminist rhetoric or message to persuade consumers into purchasing their products. These concerns arise from the belief that "feminist" has become a "vogue" term, that was co-opted by big businesses as a means to sell merchandise by simply incorporating its themes into their marketing, and today – in marketing logic – you can call yourself a feminist simply labeling yourself with it. Consumers are coerced into believing that wearing an eight hundred and sixty dollars Dior's t-shirt with the statement "we should all be feminists"¹³ is an impactful way to get involved in the movement while primarily only lining the pockets of the brand holders.

This thesis aims to explore the problematic aspects of the portrayal and representation of womanhood and femininity through marketing, along with the adoption of branding strategies that include a message that focuses not only on efficiently selling products but also tangible social influence and change through the use of commercial social marketing. Thus, the research converges issues of representation, marketing, and women's representation in Europe.

Taking into consideration the normative ambition of the European Parliament to regulate gender stereotypes in advertising¹⁴ and the focus on a positive and responsible portrayal of gender in European advertising,¹⁵ I find it motivating to explore to what extent European business companies follow the aspiration of EU policy, since Europe is

¹² Omkumar Krishnan, "Beyond National Boundaries: Towards an Internet Society," *Sociological Bulletin* 48, no. 1/2 (1999): 275–83.

¹³ "We Should All Be Feminists' T-Shirt - Ready-to-Wear - Women's Fashion | DIOR," accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.dior.com/en_us/products/couture-843T03TA428_X0200-we-should-all-be-feminists-t-shirt; Rachel Lubitz, "Dior Is Selling a Plain Cotton T-Shirt That Says 'We Should All Be Feminists' for \$710," *Business Insider*, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/dior-we-should-all-be-feminists-shirt-2017-3>.

¹⁴ "2008/2038(INI) - 27/05/2008 - Vote in Committee, 1st Reading/Single Reading," accessed January 13, 2020, <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/summary.do?id=1025626&t=e&l=en>.

¹⁵ "Portrayal of Gender | EASA," accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.easa-alliance.org/issues/gender>.

traditionally recognized as a social role model for other countries and particularly in developing countries. However, European values¹⁶ and its big businesses seem to be at odds in terms of theoretical ideals versus their practices.

On the world stage Europe is often seen as a place characterized by equality and a deep respect of the value of the individual, but in the realm of marketing, we often see a far less progressive approach along with a regressively thinking environment trivializes gender injustices and reinforces division between the genders, which is at odds with the European Union's stated ideals. Is there a benefit in the marketing of feminism in Europe without a sustainable action behind the campaign? Are European companies acting according to their concerns regarding gender equality in their advertisements? Is Europe moving toward a more equal gender representation in marketing or are companies emphasizing gender stereotypes and hiding them with creative rhetoric?

6. Problem statement and Research Question

The issue that the thesis will investigate is the creation and promotion of feminist ideals through marketing and how marketing helps to shape the public perception of womanhood and what it means to be a European woman. As explained by Jill Fields in the book *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie and Sexuality*, referring to Betty Friedan, American feminist writer and activist: "Often assailed as a major instigator of the objectification of women's bodies, advertisements notoriously sell idealized femininity as well as the products necessary to construct it."¹⁷ Starting with Betty's Friedan premise the research will explore advertisements themed mainly by international women's day, which are frequently crafted with the purpose of strengthening women's role in society and bringing attention to the need for equality, as well as advertisements that reinforce gender stereotypes but that disguise themselves as having the intent of promoting solidarity and having a vested interest in the well-being of their consumers.

¹⁶ John Richardson, "The European Union in the World — A Community of Values," 2002. 12-15.

¹⁷ Jill Fields, *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2007), 179.

To address the clashing motives versus messaging of the advertisements, the thesis will attempt to answer the following questions:

- How, with the use of different discursive and visual elements used in marketing for International Women's Day (IWD), companies commercialize and re-present womanhood?
- How do these practices resonate with (or defy) the aspiration of European gender equality and impact the development of feminist ideals, solidarity and European advertising?
- In what way has -the initial goal of the IWD shifted and opened a space for new ways of expressing "solidarity", through marketing and social media campaigns?

These research questions were formulated with the intention of analyzing the use of discursive and visual elements of advertisements promoted during IWD that use feminist rhetoric to increase the sales of products through different marketing techniques but ultimately either create a wider divide between genders or are purely intended for and result in increased sales while taking advantage of an existing societal issue.

7. Introduction of sources

For the purpose of the research and its limited scope, I will work with two companies: Agent Provocateur and Unilever. These companies will facilitate the analysis of the aforementioned problem due to their marketing approach and the perspective they take as European companies to target their audiences with the use of tools such as femvertising and commodity activism.

Agent Provocateur is a British lingerie company with over a hundred stores in different countries, the advertisements and campaigns produced by the company are popularly known for their hyper-sexualization of female bodies and the implied empowerment of wearing their lingerie. It is worth asking to which degree wearing their product actually empowers women? Moreover, knowing that Agent Provocateur is a luxury brand with items that cost between fifty to four thousand euros, make me question what kind of woman are they empowering and how? Do we all need to be hyper-sexual, purchase and wear such a type of product to feel self-sufficient, or better, to feel like we are helping

feminism and empowering other women? Aside from relying on pre-existing societal gender expectations what does this accomplish and for whom?

Unilever is a British-Dutch company, producer of a variety of food (Heartbrand, Magnum Knorr), beverages (Lipton), home care (Cif, Omo, Day2), and beauty and personal care products (Axe, Dove, Fair&Lovely, Rexona, Lux). The company is predominantly known for its campaigns like Dove's *Real beauty*, Axe's *The axe effect* and in India Fair&Lovely. Each of these brands have different approaches to its marketing campaigns, advertisements and the way they reach their target audience. For the purpose of the thesis I will focus mainly on Dove's *Real Beauty Campaign*, which with more than fifteen years of existence has inspired women from all around the world to embrace themselves, feel beautiful in their own skin, aspire for "realness" and support other women. The campaign is characterized by their call to female empowerment, self-determination and self-love, promoting workshops, conferences and online material to change the perception of the female body. However, Unilever with its other brands such as Axe and Fair & Lovely uses a narrative that reinforces established and at times problematic gender roles or stereotypes.

The material used for the research was selected in response to their pronounced impact, the application of a narrative that seems congruent with feminism, and the use of different visual and discursive elements that reinforce feminist notions and their significance as European companies. The research will take as examples the British lingerie company Agent Provocateur's campaigns for spring/summer 2019 "*Pump it up*", spring/summer 2020 "*Play to Win*" and Unilever's narrative in Dove's campaign for *Real Beauty*.

In order to study how discursive and visual elements of marketing influence the representation of womanhood, I will use a multimodal analysis that conveys elements of critical discourse analysis and visual analysis.

The campaigns selected for the research reflect the conversation created around marketing and gender equality, and work as a clear example of the problematic use of commercialization as a central aspect of the celebration of International women's day. Consequently, the research studies with a critical perspective how the aim of the European Union to promote gender equality, equal treatment and equal gender representation in

advertisements seem hindered during this day by marketing practices that focus rather on improving their sales than on the creation of a fair portrayal of womanhood.

The thesis will start with the theoretical and conceptual framework, presenting a historical overview of feminist thinking and their view on sexuality, representation, empowerment and the female body, along with the importance of critical feminist studies and feminist media studies and the development of marketing practices that use feminist ideas as a base line to improve sales. Next, will follow a chapter dedicated to the methodology used to conduct the analysis, critical discourse analysis and visual analysis will be explained as well as the multimodal method that will be carried out. Consequently, the analysis of the advertisement campaigns will then take place, outlining the corpus of the research, the steps of the research and the results. Finally, the conclusions and final remarks of the research will be presented.

Chapter II. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This chapter will provide the theoretical and conceptual framework needed to explore the research questions and to understand the aforementioned problem. This theoretical framework will provide the necessary notions to carry out the analysis and the contextual background as reference for the purpose of the research. In this chapter we will explore:

- A historical overview of feminist thinking about the sexualized representation of the female body, which is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the European female approach to equality, empowerment and self-determination.
- How critical feminist studies and feminist media studies developed relevant theoretical and methodological tools to make sense of the sexualized representation of the female body.
- Briefly contextualize the problem of the sexualized representation of the female body as a marketing issue that lead to the practice of “commodity activism” and the use of femvertising.

1. Empowering women. Feminism; representation, sexuality, and the female body

In this section I will explore the different phases of feminism and how issues of representation, femininity/sexuality and the female body motivated women (and still does) to organize a movement to assert their status as equals in society. With the development of feminist ideals and the achievements that women made in different aspects of their public and private sphere such issues (representation, femininity/sexuality and the female body) were viewed from a different perspective, which became defining or central components in the differentiation of the feminist waves.

Karen M. Offen, historian specialized in the field of women’s history, describes the beginning of feminism as “the campaign to end women’s subordination to men” and denotes it as an ongoing political project that has permeated almost every aspect of women’s lives in society. Offen points out that feminism as a political and social movement started in Europe where women found the need to assemble and assert their autonomy in the ‘public space’

that was then, a male dominated sphere. As such, the history and pivotal role of feminism has been unified with the history of European thought and politics,¹⁸ which is why it is relevant to start the conceptualization of feminism with a historical overview of its development and the changes and progress each wave fought for.

Women's lives in pre-modern Europe were traditionally shaped by religious values, which reinforced women's subordination, sexual abstinence and a general lower status in society.¹⁹ Women were barred from universities, and had little to no access to the public domain, with only women of high social status or in positions of power and those who were supported by men having the opportunity to attain a formal education and access to social opportunities.

The first voices of feminism were heard at the end of the eighteenth-century and were, primarily concerned with politics of the family, the configuration of relationships between men and women, and the relation of both to the state.²⁰ Key figures were women such as Olympe de Gouges, Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay, who after the French Revolution pushed for the recognition of women in a sociopolitical landscape. Women during this early stage united with other like-minded women to strengthen and spread their message but were ultimately not able to have the kind of impact initially envisioned, largely relegated to assembling behind closed doors.

It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the women's movement started to take a foothold, and turned into what we now call first-wave feminism.²¹ During the nineteenth-century women's claim to a better education, the possibility to work, better laws for married women and the right to vote began to emerge and resonated in society in the second half of the century.²² First-wave feminism aimed to unite 'all' women in a war on a society which seemed to oppress and control them, negatively interfering with women's

¹⁸ Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.

¹⁹ Marlene LeGates, *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (Florence, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 10, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rug/detail.action?docID=1024697>.

²⁰ Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950*, xiii.

²¹ During these years feminists fought mainly under the idea that "all women had similar experiences under the patriarchy" however, the question of race, ethnicity and class was not yet a core part of the discussion. Leaving the movement in the hands of upper middle-class white women.

²² Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 41.

bodily freedoms, hearts and consciences.²³ However, in the early feminist movement many women saw themselves as under-represented as matters of race, ethnicity and class were not addressed and thus did not resonate with their unique experience of discrimination. This created a divide between a large part of women, and the white western upper middle class educated women spearheading the movement.²⁴

The movement during this period focused on the right to vote, as it represented the recognition of women's rights unilaterally and furthered the systemic reform for practical changes in women's lives. Women would then acquire the right to be politically represented as opposed to being represented by their husbands or fathers, giving them a voice and autonomy in social and political spaces. Moreover the 'women sphere' associated with the idea of femininity and the 'women's place', in which women were believed to be created by God only to be wives, mothers, and daughters, would no longer confine them to such limited roles. With the acquisition of self-representation in political matters, women could then address issues that arose during this period, such as, the need for female education, the access and option to work, equal partnership in marriage and general personal autonomy.²⁵

Even though the feminist movement and improvements in the realm of women's rights were approached differently depending on each country, as a unifying theme the women's movement focused on gender equality as the end goal. The beginning of the twentieth -century marks the moment when women were given the right to vote in some European countries and North America, thanks to the 'suffragettes' and other members of society that put pressure on governors to take into account the female vote, and women's rights. Women assembled, took militant action, and organized protests utilizing new technologies and printed media²⁶ such as posters, postcards, photographs, visual records, magazines and written declarations that allowed their message to reach more women.²⁷

²³ LeGates, *In Their Time*, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 201.

²⁶ LeGates, 216. Women raised their voices addressing topics such as; the defense of prostitutes, the right for contraception or 'voluntarily motherhood' and abortion, which were, a focal point for women's autonomy over their own body. On matters of sexuality women protested against the reduction of women to sexual objects, aimed to enable women's self-determination and to fight against family violence.

²⁷ Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, 80.

During the First World War women were allowed to work outside the home in hospitals, factories, engineering and as police patrols. This was a step that was favorable for women,²⁸ and that was necessary to stimulate the economy but that simultaneously was seen by many, as negative since women became masculinized,²⁹ creating a divide in views on femininity and the ‘woman sphere’.

The women’s movement united around the idea that sex³⁰ could unite women of different backgrounds, this solidarity and a sense of community within the movement strengthened and expanded the movement to a point where it could no longer be ignored.³¹ The unifying factor of the first-wave feminist movement was the desire of women to have a sense of self-determination and to take control over their lives. Solidarity became a central notion of the feminist movement which called for a global sisterhood comprised of women from all around the world.³²

After the Second World War a second -wave of feminism slowly began to develop in several countries. In 1947 a Commission on the Status of Women was established by the United Nations. Later the Declaration of Human Rights recognized and granted equal rights for men and women to marriage, equal rights within the marriage, equal control over its dissolution, and the right for women to have access to special care and assistance in their role as mothers.³³ The 1960s and 1970s saw a rise of women fighting for their rights all across Europe. Women that wouldn’t describe themselves as ‘feminist’ but usually as part of the Women’s Liberation movement, a new movement that saw the need for civil and legal equality between sexes and empathized with women’s problems regarding their reproductive rights and social roles.³⁴ Problematizing the need for equal wages, the elimination of gender

²⁸ Ibid, 88.

²⁹ The features associated with femininity such as sensitivity, fragility, vulnerability, and motherhood among others were seen as changed to women of strong character characterized by self-determination, economically independent, hard-working and educated. The women traditionally seen as a housewife, daughter or sister became often the breadwinner, providing for themselves and society, obtaining a place as a pair to the working man.

³⁰ The notion that in present is understood as gender.

³¹ LeGates, *In Their Time*, 220.

³² Verta Taylor, “Sisterhood, Solidarity, and Modern Feminism,” ed. Diane Balsler et al., *Gender and Society* 3, no. 2 (1989): 277–86.

³³ Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, 97.

³⁴ LeGates, *In Their Time*, 330.

discrimination in the workplace, access to birth control, and abortions, along with the struggle of women trying to combine their careers with marriage and motherhood.

After more than a hundred years of the women's fight for equal rights, now in the post-war years, women were called upon to return to fulfilling a role as mothers instead of workers, but still found a similar sexual hostility toward them prevalent in propaganda and literature.³⁵ Media also took on the role of popularizing the idea of the perfect family formed of a breadwinner father, a homemaker mother and happy children, all relishing in the treats of a consumerist economy. Families surrounded by material comfort, and conservative uniformity.³⁶ This highlights the relevance of marketing and new technology in the construction and representation of womanhood, which became influential in women's lives, behavior, style, taste and ideals.

The second -wave³⁷ allowed the movement to protest against problems that weren't addressed by the previous wave. During this period, the women's movement saw diversification, taking place in several countries. Women of colour, different ethnicities and homosexuals organized their own committees to voice their unique struggles and to give a broader and more inclusive appeal to a form of feminism that was previously in the hands of a select group of women.

Third-wave feminism, also known as postfeminism, opened up a discourse around the very definition of gender, and opted to try to deconstruct gender roles and gender relations as a whole, emerging as a critique of the second wave that still seemed to restrict and confine women to certain ideals set by previous generations. Third-wave feminism was in a sense also the result of the increasing years of consumer facilities, the progress of media technology, popular culture and the desire to broaden the borders of feminism to include a

³⁵ Ibid, 329. In the words of Marlene LeGates, academic on the field of history and women's studies, "Women were both vilified and eroticized in images that ranges from diseased whores to seductive spies or a powerful but sexy Wonder Woman fighting the Nazis."

³⁶ Ibid, 336.

³⁷ One of the most influential women during the second half of the twentieth-century was the French writer Simone de Beauvoir, who in her book *The Second Sex* wrote about women's conditions and experiences, arguing that women throughout history have been seen as molded by men and for men, placed on the position of a second other, and occupying the position of the object rather than the subject. Beauvoir remarked that women, like nature, were the objects of men's actions and explained that what a woman represents is more important than what she is. She opposed the idealization of 'feminine' traits, to the contrary she saw the necessity for women to take action, work and create in the same terms as men.

more contemporary representation of it. As described by professor Kristin Anderson, focusing on women psychology in her book, *Modern Misogyny: Anti-Feminism in a Post-Feminism Era*, third-wave feminism is seen “as a more diverse, inclusive, and integrated movement with the goal of diversifying its approach to activism and social change through social media” and having a central goal of being inclusive, thus embracing a diversity of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and various disabilities.³⁸

The neoliberal version of feminism presents a variety of contributions to feminism, distancing itself from second-wave feminism. Third-wave feminism questioned and sought to redefine the ideas, words and media related to womanhood, gender, beauty and femininity, using irony, art and democracy. People under third-wave feminism see “sexual liberation” as “self-liberation” understanding sexuality and gender as socially constructed aspects, thus everyone is entitled to construct and express freely one’s authentic gender and identity. The third -wave focuses on promoting inclusion, embracing diversity and redefining women as powerful, self-confident and in control of their own sexuality.³⁹

However, among the debated issues, the idea of sexual liberation and self-liberation raised questions on whether such things as revealing clothing, pole dancing and designer heels represented true sexual liberation and gender equality.⁴⁰ Also, in postfeminism rhetoric, the use of empowerment is an element that facilitates the imagination of a more positive future, a better one. The ability to imagine new and dynamic futures, eliminates the thought of social structures that promote inequality between individuals.⁴¹ Empowerment then, in the eyes of postfeminist ideals is partly expressed through consumer choices, becoming an increasingly prevalent topic in advertising. In the defense of “choice”, third-wave feminism creates a more tolerant environment, distancing itself from imposed gender roles and expectations, providing women with control over their appearance and how they express their sexuality.⁴² However, advertisers appropriate and manipulate these ideas, designating

³⁸ Anderson, *Modern Misogyny*, 3.

³⁹ R. Claire Snyder-Hall, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay,” *Signs* 34, no. 1 (2008): 178.

⁴⁰ Bridget J. Crawford, “The Third Wave’s Break from Feminism,” *International Journal of Law in Context* 6, no. 1 (March 2010): 100.

⁴¹ Anderson, *Modern Misogyny*, 4.

⁴² R. Claire Snyder-Hall, “Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of ‘Choice,’” *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010): 256.

themselves as champions of the women's movement by simultaneously representing themselves as allies whose products appeal to women of all body types and backgrounds while preying on the same base they are empowering with their marketing. The theme of empowerment and choice in modern consumer society becomes instrumental as a marketing strategy, conveying a message of support toward women while simultaneously taking a public, and moral stance that is agreeable and easy to support and thus profit of it.

Postfeminist, a non-static term, that refers to the use of media technologies and capitalism to influence social and political change. It is a contemporary form of social movement that confronts previously stated feminist notions. Feminism has always engaged with criticism from outside and within the movement itself, making it a dynamic and responsive ideology which attempts to adapt and address the variety of women's experiences and the constant shifting political landscape.⁴³

The recently emerged fourth-wave appears as a possible transformation of postfeminism and the need for a constant evaluation of female issues. However, as noted by Nicola Rivers, scholar in the field of feminist literary and cultural theory, the appearance of a new wave that encompasses notions previously explored by past feminists, such as the use of online activism, the phenomenon of celebrity feminism, the utilization of social media and evolving technologies, and the increasing understanding of intersectional feminism, doesn't negate the innovations brought on by a new wave. It renews the commitment to feminist activities and the celebration of new feminist identities which have been incorporated into and defined the fourth-wave.⁴⁴

Taking into account the previous overview of the feminist movement it is possible to identify how the different feminist waves reacted to the gender norms in society that dictated female behavior and standards. With the aim of achieving equality, empowerment and self-determination during the years of the first -wave, white women from the upper-middle class mobilized in favor of political representation, via the right to vote. At the time women were meant to fulfil a role as daughters, sisters or wives, and their role in society and value

⁴³ Nicola Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

depended on the way they could support men, thus women were politically invisible and depended on men to achieve any kind of success, travel or study. The female body as well as sexuality belonged to the private sphere dominated by men, and women were meant to cover themselves, since modesty was a characteristic of a 'good' woman.

During the second-wave the female movement diversified and became more inclusive. Matters of ethnicity, colour and sexuality became central, and women's empowerment was channeled into accessibility for equal job opportunities, equal rights for payment, and equal rights to marriage and divorce. In the realm of the female body and sexuality, women fought for their rights over their choices relating to their own body, abortion and the free expression of their sexuality. Women in media were both eroticized and vilified, portraying them from sexual and powerful to sexual and maligned.

The third -wave grew as a critique to the previous waves, it opened up a space for diversification, inclusion and modernization. Female empowerment for this wave was characterized by the redefinition of womanhood, gender, beauty and femininity. The female body and sexual liberation were associated with self-liberation and self-determination. Women were called to express themselves freely though revealing clothing, make up, designer clothes and pole dancing, which prompted advertisers and marketing campaigns to appropriate a feminist narrative to approach their costumers and entice a new consumer base. Giving visibility to the feminist movement but problematizing the use of feminist ideals as part of a marketing strategy.

2. Critical Feminist Studies and Feminist Media Studies

In this section I will explain different aspects of feminist studies such as the critical view of power relations and the influence of media in the perpetuation of gender inequalities, their relevance in the study of women's representation and the aim of feminism to expose unequal power structures in society that oppresses women.

Women's representation, gender inequality, the female body and sexuality have been traditionally explored in the field of feminist theory. Feminist theories differ from one another on their stances regarding these topics or the approach they take to study them. However, all of them attempt to expose (obvious and subtle) gender inequalities as well as

eliminate them.⁴⁵ Critical feminist theories and feminist media studies, between them have focused on exposing power dynamics, and inequalities in the field of gender, sex, and representation.

In the conference held in 1985 by the university of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with the topic of “Feminist Studies: Reconstituting Knowledge” the letter to participants pointed out the relevance of critical feminist studies, not only for the sorely needed transformation of social discourses but moreover because of the perception that feminism was seen as “between the pockets of the economy and the intelligentsia”, the letter said:

“At a time when the women’s movement is being both integrated and quietly suffocated within the institutions, when the feminist critiques are partially accommodated within some academic disciplines and emarginated otherwise, when feminism is nudged into the pockets of the economy with one hand and of the intelligentsia with the other, it seems important and even crucial to assess the intellectual and political role of feminist studies in the production, reproduction and transformation of social discourses and knowledges”⁴⁶

Critical feminist studies then assumed the role of revealing social discourses that produced and reproduced gender inequality. Trying to overcome power relations, critical feminist explores the necessity to see through existing oppression that silences the voices and ignores the concerns of women. The critical view on capitalism, consumerism, hegemony and patriarchy were the main issues to study between the realm of critical feminist studies.

Feminist media studies have focused on practices that explore the status of women and the nature of gender in mediated messages and practices,⁴⁷ studying issues of women’s representation and the use of certain rhetoric to shape the imagination of womanhood. In her book *Selling Women’s History*, Emily Westkaemper explains, “The twentieth-century

⁴⁵ Joanne Martin, “Feminist Theory and Critical Theory: Unexplored Synergies,” in *Studying Management Critically* (1 Oliver’s Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2003), 3, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446220030.n4>.

⁴⁶ *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa De Lauretis, Language, Discourse, Society (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1986), 2.

⁴⁷ Ingrid Bachmann, Dustin Harp, and Jaime Loke, “Through a Feminist Kaleidoscope: Critiquing Media, Power, and Gender Inequalities,” in *Feminist Approaches to Media Theory and Research*, ed. Dustin Harp, Jaime Loke, and Ingrid Bachmann, Comparative Feminist Studies (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 3.

consumer culture landscape of women's magazines, greeting cards, product packages, and store displays [...] supported dominant gender ideals, particularly the importance of consumption to female identity"⁴⁸ emphasizing the importance of how women are depicted in the creation and reinforcement of womanhood or what a woman should be. In her book Westkaemper describes how advertising created historical narratives that traditionally adopted essentialist definitions of gender⁴⁹ and how those narratives resulted in the rise and incorporation of feminist ideas into advertising and other media. Conventionally advertising has taken the role of creating and portraying the way women and men behave or should behave, constructing imaginaries of the world and human conduct. Taking into account the work of Westkaemper, this thesis will draw on the development of postfeminism and its influence in the creation of new narratives that are then used in the creation of advertising, and the influence of these representations and consumer culture in the commercialization of womanhood.

Westkaemper explained "Some narratives proclaimed modern progress, seeking to differentiate the past and the present by touching the benefits of new products".⁵⁰ Building on this idea the present analysis will focus on marketing as a tool to redefine and re-present femininity and womanhood.

3. Selling Feminism. Ads, marketing and commodity activism

In this section I will study the development of advertising and the important role that marketing plays in the creation of imaginaries and portrayal of ideas. I will also explain commodity activism, commodity feminism and the development and use of femvertising, providing some examples of brands in Europe. I will focus on the use of media technology to create a more extensive market and target a bigger audience, with the use of visual and rhetoric elements associated with support.

Hélène de Burgh-Woodman, academic in the field of visual aesthetics, consumer culture and marketing theory, explains that "Advertising is our cultural wallpaper. Emblazoned across our radios, our televisions, our bus shelters, flickering encouragingly in

⁴⁸ Emily Westkaemper, *Selling Women's History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 1.

shopping centers, on computer screens, and beckoning us from roadside billboards, advertising wraps around virtually every space in which we go about our lives”.⁵¹ Idea that indicates the relevance and prevalence of advertising in modern consumer reality, that initially aided in enabling the rise of digital technologies, media, and network facilities through the expansion of globalization but also encouraging new strategies to incorporate capitalism in every aspect of consumer society, which turned advertising into a domain dominated by the dissemination of social ideas.⁵²

Studies on advertising have paid close attention to issues related to its production, its integration into marketing⁵³ and the creation of effective advertising.⁵⁴ However, the development of new technologies such as new media platforms, social media, and the growth and popularity of the internet⁵⁵ have opened new points of interest for research in this field. In recent years different scholars like Breuer⁵⁶ and Springer⁵⁷ have found the role of advertising in contemporary consumer culture as an important one, paying particular attention to issues connected to the increasing use of online platforms for advertising,⁵⁸ the role of advertising in digital media,⁵⁹ its influence on the construction, dissemination and consumption of ideas,⁶⁰ and the use of social discourse in advertising as a brand positioning technique. In relation to this new approach, contemporary marketing practices have used feminist ideals as a method to express social stances and appeal to a wider variety of

⁵¹ Hélène de Burgh-Woodman, *Advertising in Contemporary Consumer Culture* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77944-7>.

⁵² Verena Kuni, “GENDER JAMMING. Or: Yes, We Are. Culture Jamming and Feminism,” in *Feminist Media*, ed. Elke Zobl and Ricarda Drüeke (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012), 99.

⁵³ Paul Springer, *Ads to Icons: How Advertising Succeeds in a Multimedia Age* (London ; Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2007).

⁵⁴ Ganesh Iyer, David Soberman, and J. Miguel Villas-Boas, “The Targeting of Advertising,” *Marketing Science* 24, no. 3 (2005): 461–76.

⁵⁵ Carlos Miguel Gutierrez et al., “Technology Has Changed Advertising Forever,” HuffPost, 52:51 400AD, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/technology-has-changed-advertising-forever_b_599c64d4e4b09dbe86ea3764.

⁵⁶ Ralph Breuer, Malte Brettel, and Andreas Engelen, “Incorporating Long-Term Effects in Determining the Effectiveness of Different Types of Online Advertising,” *Marketing Letters* 22, no. 4 (2011): 327–40.

⁵⁷ Springer, *Ads to Icons*.

⁵⁸ Christian Fuchs, “The Rise of Online Advertising,” in *The Online Advertising Tax as the Foundation of a Public Service Internet*, A CAMRI Extended Policy Report (University of Westminster Press, 2018), 3–11.

⁵⁹ Sara Rosengren, “Redefining Advertising in a Changing Media Landscape,” in *Making Media*, ed. Mark Deuze and Mirjam Prenger, Production, Practices, and Professions (Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 389–98.

⁶⁰ Hélène de Burgh-Woodman, *Advertising in Contemporary Consumer Culture* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

consumers. This practice is encouraged by the development of neoliberal thoughts in third-wave feminism.

The notion of ‘commodity activism’ is explained by Jemima Repo, scholar of feminist theory, biopolitics, and popular culture, as the pressure from the capitalist reality of everyday life to not only consume, but to make consumption a form of civic political engagement in which ethical and political stances are made marketable and linked to consumer products, generally with the pledge to meet ethical standards or to combine consumption with charity.⁶¹ In this regard, her perspective and understanding of commodity activism and moreover, feminist commodity activism is relevant to the analysis of advertisements and their significance on the construction, and re-presentation of womanhood. Commodity feminism, then, is explained by Goldman et al, as the transformation of feminism into a set of semiotic markers, such as confidence or attitude, that are inscribed onto commodities that then stand for meanings and ideas associated with feminism such as, freedom, independence, self-determination and empowerment.⁶² Based on the previously explained notions, feminism in the hands of capitalist consumer society has become more of a commodity that can be purchased than an ideal to fight for.

Femvertising consequently grew as a marketing method responding to the neoliberal requirements of the new wave of feminism. As explained by Katie Martell, femvertising is the use of feminist notions, messages and imagery in advertising to empower women and girls.⁶³ Katie Martell is according to herself “an unapologetic marketing truth-teller” as specified in her official LinkedIn account. She manages a website with relevant information related to marketing and “the illusion of progress in marketing to women”,⁶⁴ In Martell’s view, femvertising is characterized by:

- The misuse of feminism in advertising, as found in the *diversity campaign* by Dove.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Jemima Repo, “Feminist Commodity Activism: The New Political Economy of Feminist Protest,” *International Political Sociology*, January 17, 2020, 1.

⁶² Robert Goldman, Deborah Heath, and Sharon L. Smith, “Commodity Feminism,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8, no. 3 (September 1991): 348.

⁶³ Katie Martell, “FEMVERTISING —,” accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.katie-martell.com/femvertising>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “Celebrating Beauty Diversity with Limited Edition Body Washes,” Dove UK, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://www.dove.com/uk/stories/campaigns/dove-beauty-diversity-.html>.

- The recontextualization of metaphors related to self-determination, such as the campaign *#likeagirl* by Always.⁶⁶
- The use of common issues faced by women, as found in the campaign *Labels Against Women* by Pantene.⁶⁷
- The double standards that companies hold, advertising in favor of women's equality but not practicing it within the company.⁶⁸

Femvertising has received attention from all over the advertising field, viewing the topic from different perspectives. Some companies seem to embrace the topic, making an effort not only to create more accurate advertisements but also to treat both men and women more equally. Others however focus solely on the marketing aspect of campaigns, paying close attention to the creation of an adequate feminist imaginary, including rhetoric and visual elements that encompasses ideas of empowerment, freedom of choice, self-love, self-determination, and togetherness.

Some scholars, such as Becker-Herby⁶⁹, Hunt⁷⁰ and Drake,⁷¹ take a critical approach to the marketing method, pointing out the influence of neoliberalist ideas in postfeminism, and the relevance of consumer principles in the way contemporary feminism was manifested and marketed. Their research explores the importance of marketing strategies and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in the creation of advertising, emphasizing the relevance of brand responsibility and the analysis of campaigns that used femvertising, such as Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty," Always' "Like a Girl" campaign, and Pantene's "Shine Strong".

Finally, I would like to accentuate the importance of the aforementioned concepts and theories in the achievement of a successful analysis. All of the notions denoted are a fundamental part of through understanding of this thesis, the historical development of

⁶⁶ Always, *Always #LikeAGirl*, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs>.

⁶⁷ Cause Marketing, *Pantene "Labels Against Women" Digital Ad*, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luLkfXixBpM>.

⁶⁸ Jeff Kauflin, "Why Audi's Super Bowl Ad Failed," *Forbes*, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffkauflin/2017/02/06/why-audis-super-bowl-ad-failed/>.

⁶⁹ Elisa Becker-Herby, "The Rise of Femvertising: Authentically Reaching Female Consumers" (University of Minnesota, 2016).

⁷⁰ Alexandra Rae Hunt, "Selling Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of Femvertising," n.d., 78.

⁷¹ Victoria E Drake, "The Impact of Female Empowerment in Advertising (Femvertising)," *Journal of Research in Marketing* 7 (2017): 7.

feminism, and the fight of women for equality in the realms of representation. The power over their own body and sexuality, was perceived in different ways for generations and today's neoliberal postfeminism is the result not only of the development and changes in the women's movement but is also influenced by the ever-changing political environment and technological advancements. Critical feminist theory and feminist media studies have concerned themselves with unveiling gender inequalities, with a critical perspective of societies that oppress women, on matters of representation, the gaze, beauty and consumerism as primary focus in this field. Consequently, the relevance of advertising in a capitalist consumer society, and the influence of it in the development of notions, such as, commodity activism, commodity feminism and femvertising illustrate the backbone of the analysis and interconnect all of the concepts.

Moreover, the previously explained notions besides being explored with a European perspective, highlight the importance of European Regulations in the realm of equal gender representation. Taking into consideration that the European Union has stated in the European Parliament resolution of 17 April 2018 on gender equality in the media sector in the EU⁷² that;

- equality between women and men is a core principle of the European Union
- the media have the capacity to influence and, ultimately, shape public opinion
- the recognition of the importance of the relationship between women and the media in achieving equality between women and men
- the EU aims to increase participation and access of women to media and new technologies of communication, and to promote a balance and non-stereotyped portrayal of women by the media

Consequently, the resolution brings up the significant impact of media in the unequal gender representation, as well as problematic sexualization, erotization and objectification of the female body in advertising. Indicating also, that media has the power of impacting cultural gender norms and social representation of men and women accentuating stereotyped body images and ideas of masculinity and femininity. The resolution also indicates that gender

⁷² "Texts Adopted - Gender Equality in the Media Sector in the EU - Tuesday, 17 April 2018," accessed August 20, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0101_EN.html.

inequalities are created and replicated through language and images promoted by the media and that, it is necessary to combat and eliminate stereotypes while spreading awareness and promoting gender equality.

Such resolution as well as the European institute for gender equality,⁷³ the European Parliament aspirations,⁷⁴ and the gender equality strategy⁷⁵ are some of the efforts that the EU has made to engaged in gender equality and change stereotyped views of gender representation, promoting with this an equal portrayal of both men and women in advertising. Along with this, the European Union has stated for International Women’s Day 2020,⁷⁶ that gender equality is fundamental and a central principle of the European Union, and commemorates the celebration encouraging everyone to remember that, “progress towards equality between women and men is neither inevitable nor irreversible.” Positioning itself in favor of gender equality and the aim to support, promote and protect women’s rights and women empowerment.

Based on the previously explained concepts I would like to problematized the used of feminist notions on marketing practices promoted in Europe, since usually those advertisement campaigns and companies attempt to advocate in favor of European values and gender equality but they seem to defy the European aspiration of eliminating gender stereotypes in advertising.

⁷³ “Impacts of Advertising That Are Unfriendly to Women and Men,” European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/resources/belgium/impacts-advertising-are-unfriendly-women-and-men>.

⁷⁴ “2008/2038(INI) - 27/05/2008 - Vote in Committee, 1st Reading/Single Reading.”

⁷⁵ “Gender Equality Strategy,” Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed August 20, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en.

⁷⁶ “International Women’s Day 2020,” Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed August 20, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_404.

Chapter III. Methodology

This chapter is dedicated to introducing the data for analysis and the methodology that will be applied. The rationale for the choice of such analytical tools will be presented and discussed.

The research will be conducted with a primary focus on the way different visual, graphic and discursive elements are used in the Agent Provocateur's campaign for spring-summer 2019 *Pump it Up*,⁷⁷ Agent Provocateur's campaign for spring-summer 2020 *Play to Win*,⁷⁸ Dove's *campaign for Real Beauty*, Axe ads *the Axe/Linx effect* and Fair&Lovely advertisements. In order to explore the relation between the different discursive and visual elements of the advertisements and their purpose, the analysis will be carried out using different elements of visual analysis and critical discourse analysis, which will then be explored with the help of a multimodal method. Method that encompasses the analysis of different modes, both visual and discursive, that influence the creation of meaning in the advertisements.

1. Critical Discourse Analysis

The field of discourse analysis has taken a critical approach to research the notion of discourse, with the intent to study power relations and the asymmetrical social arrangements produced, sustained, and changed through the use of language.⁷⁹ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); explores different ways to analyze discursive elements, aiming to reveal unequal power relations that are expressed, signaled, constituted or legitimized by language or discourse.⁸⁰ As pointed out by Ruth Wodak, scholar in the field of critical discourse analysis, a complete 'critical' description of a discourse involves a theorization and description of the social processes and social structures that allows the production of a text and gives it

⁷⁷ Agent Provocateur, *Agent Provocateur Spring Summer 2019 - Pump It Up*, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAJfvDizo2E>.

⁷⁸ "Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Play To Win," accessed April 10, 2020, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/play-to-win.

⁷⁹ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 2nd ed, Language in Social Life Series (Harlow, Eng. ; New York: Longman, 2001), 1.

⁸⁰ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Introducing Qualitative Methods (London ; Thousand Oaks [Calif.]: SAGE, 2001), 2.

meaning.⁸¹ This means that the contextual creation of a text is relevant to unveil the purpose of it.

The use of critical discourse analysis is not only relevant for the study of power relations and ideology but moreover, it allows the exploration of the discursive nature of contemporary social and cultural change. With this in mind, Wodak refers to the work of Theo van Leeuwen, explaining that he views discourse as both an instrument of power and control and also as the instrument for the social construction of reality.⁸² Thoughts that are relevant to the exploration of advertising and its influence on public perceptions and subsequently the perceived reality.

Texts as seen through the lens of critical discourse analysis, should be studied not only as representations but also as interactions.⁸³ Since not only what is represented in the advertisements is relevant to the research but also how the consumer could ‘interact’ or be influenced by it. Starting with the idea that a discourse is in constant transformation through contact with other discourses, and that different discourses represent a specific way of perceiving the social world is crucial. Within the thesis CDA will facilitate the study of relations of power, ideology and context in regards to the discourse. In the words of Wodak, “critical theory intends to create awareness in agents of how they are deceived about their own needs, and interests”.⁸⁴ By this Wodak refers to the power relations that create and reinforce social necessities and preferences which are perpetrated by the use of certain discourses.

Critical Discourse Analysis is relevant not only as a theoretical backbone for the research but also because the campaigns to be analyzed are constituted by a particular discourse that describes the campaigns or images within. It is essential to examine discourse with a critical view, to have a broader perspective of the position of the participants, purpose, rationalization, and the ideology of the campaign.

⁸¹ Ibid. 3.

⁸² Ibid. 9.

⁸³ Theo van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*, Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

⁸⁴ Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 10.

2. Visual Analysis

Scholars in the field of visual analysis have emphasized how visual information is being used for the acquisition of knowledge, as images provide a description of people, places or events.⁸⁵ Studies on visual analysis explore relations of power and their significance or connection to social processes with the use of images. In relation to this idea, Gillian Rose, academic in the field of human geography, explains the necessity of visual research to explore how accurately an image replicates the real world, how an image functions to produce a particular representation of the world, how the significance of an image's representation is created, and how the meaning of an image is structured by particular social power relations.⁸⁶ Exploring the same notion Marcus Banks, professor of visual anthropology, asked the question "What do pictures really want?" inciting the researcher to explore not only the meaning of the object represented but rather the capacity of such representations to influence or act upon a set of social relations.⁸⁷

Rose in the article *Teaching Visualised Geographies*,⁸⁸ identifies three main elements in the interpretation of images, the producer(s), the text, and the audience(s).⁸⁹

- **The producer** refers to the people and equipment involved in the creation of the image.
- **The text** is the image itself.
- **The audience** is composed by all those who look at the image.

In her approach, the intention of visual analysis is to understand how meaning is produced by each of these elements, a notion that would be used in a later step in the analysis.

Through the studies of the visual mode of images scholars in the field of social semiotics, such as Theo Van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress have accentuated the importance of the visual elements of images. In their book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual*

⁸⁵ Gillian Rose, "Teaching Visualised Geographies: Towards a Methodology for the Interpretation of Visual Materials," *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 20, no. 3 (November 1996): 3.

⁸⁶ Gillian Rose, "On the Relation between 'Visual Research Methods' and Contemporary Visual Culture," *The Sociological Review* 62, no. 1 (February 1, 2014): 4.

⁸⁷ Marcus. Banks, *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research*, ed. Uwe Flick, The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit (London: SAGE Publications, 2007), 11.

⁸⁸ Rose, "Teaching Visualised Geographies."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 4.

Design,⁹⁰ these scholars explain how elements such as color, perspective, line, composition, among others, are used to create meaning.⁹¹

From the elements of visual analysis that will be taken into consideration, I have selected a group of variables considered relevant such as participants, gaze, pose, distance, depicted context/setting, frame, perspective, and narrative. These variables were selected mainly by taking into consideration the elements presented in the advertisements selected as well as previous studies that used such variables, as in the book *Learning and communication in modern multimodal landscape* by Carey Jewitt,⁹² and the article *Multimodality, creativity and children's meaning-making: Drawings, Writings, Imaginings* by Zannie Bock,⁹³ as well as the book *Visual methods in Social Research* by Marcus Banks.⁹⁴

It is important to clarify in this step that some variables of visual analysis will be intentionally dismissed since for the purpose and length of the research they are not considered central, such as; shot length, colour, saturation and duration.

Characteristics of the studied variables:

- **Participants:** Actors that participate in a piece of marketing media. For the description of the participants, relevant features that will be defined are; the role depicted, the gender and the approximate age.
- **Gaze:** Explained by Van Leeuwen and Kress, the gaze establishes an imaginary relation between the represented participant and the viewer.⁹⁵
 - Offer/ideal: the model depicted offers herself/himself as an idealized exemplar of a class or attribute, looking away from the viewer.
 - Demand: Represented participants look directly at the viewer's eyes, establishing contact or a connection with the viewer. Acknowledgement of

⁹⁰ Gunther R. Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2. ed., reprinted (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁹¹ Ibid. 6.

⁹² Carey Jewitt, *Learning and Communication in Digital Multimodal Landscapes* (Institute of Education Press, 2013).

⁹³ Zannie Bock, "Multimodality, Creativity and Children's Meaning-Making: Drawings, Writing, Imaginings.," *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus* 49, no. 0 (December 2016), <https://doi.org/10.5842/49-0-669>.

⁹⁴ Marcus. Banks, *Visual Methods in Social Research*, 1 online resource (xvi, 201 pages) : illustrations vols. (London: SAGE, 2001), http://www.123library.org/book_details/?id=35.

⁹⁵ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 117.

the viewer, addressing it directly. Implying that the participant represented wants something for/from the viewer.

- Affiliation (equality): model looks at the viewer, directly, smiling.
- Submission: model looks down at the viewer, not smiling.
- Seduction: model looks up at the viewer, head tilted, smiling or ‘pouting’.
- **Pose:** Action represented
- **Distance:** Refers to how close or far a represented participant is from the viewer. Van Leeuwen and Kress pointed out that a participant’s distance suggests a level of intimacy with the viewer, since the proximity to the camera simulates real-world closeness.⁹⁶
 - Close: Intimate or personal relation with the viewer.
 - Medium: Social or friendly interaction with the viewer.
 - Long: Interpersonal or neutral relation. The participant represented is not closely involved with the viewer.
- **Depicted context/setting**
- **Frame:** Marcus Banks explains frame as; what is or is not relevant to be included in the shot/picture. Frame around the image, what the producer chooses to show or not to show.⁹⁷
- **Perspective:** Refers to the angle or point of view of interaction in which the viewer interacts with the participant represented.⁹⁸
 - Oblique angle: Detachment of the participant from the viewer.
 - Frontal angle: Involvement of the participant.
 - Top-down angle/High angle: Superiority or power given to the viewer.
 - Eye-level angle/ Horizontal angle: Equality, viewer is involved in or interacting with the image.
 - Bottom-up angle/Low angle: Empowers the participant represented.
- **Narrative:** Banks refers to the narrative as the intentional organization of information presented within an image or sequence of images. For the purpose of the research the

⁹⁶ Ibid 124.

⁹⁷ Banks, *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research*, 13.

⁹⁸ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 129.

narrative would be interpreted as the organization of the different shots of the advertisement's "story" told by the image, in which cultural specificity is relevant for the proper understanding of the sequence, taking into account that narrative structures are established and understood by convention and are not innate or universal. Following Banks' methodological approach, the narrative will include two main aspects: the internal narrative and the external narrative. The internal narrative looks to explore the question of "what is the picture of?" Meaning what the image is literally showing. The external narrative on the other hand addresses questions such "who took the picture?", "when was it taken?" and "why was it taken?" exploring in this way more of a contextual elaboration of the image, the brand, the purpose and the time. Based on this approach, the image would be considered a channel in a network for the understanding of the social construction of reality.⁹⁹

The necessity to apply visual analysis to the methodology lies in the understanding that such an analysis can demonstrate the purposes of the makers, what they intend to communicate, what representations are included or excluded, what notions they display as priorities or relevant; and what differences they construct between people, places, situations or things.¹⁰⁰ The use of this method, allows the description and further analysis of a defined area of representation and types of images. The image or moving image in this case will be analyzed with the idea of Van Leeuwen and Jewitt in mind, as evidence of how the image makers have (re-)constructed reality, as evidence of bias, ideologically colored interpretation.¹⁰¹

Even though the research will take into account previously explained notions related to CDA and visual analysis, the methodology will take a multimodal approach to it.

3. Multimodal Analysis

In the words of Bezemer, et al, "If a 'means for making meaning' is a 'modality', or 'mode', as it is usually called, then we might say that the term 'multimodality' was used to highlight that people use multiple means of meaning making."¹⁰² What they mean by this is that

⁹⁹ Banks, *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt, eds., *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London ; Thousand Oaks [Calif.]: SAGE, 2001), 7.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 5.

¹⁰² Josephus Johannes Bezemer, Carey Jewitt, and Kay L. O'Halloran, *Introducing Multimodality* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

different methods of creating meaning work together through different modes. The recognition that a ‘multimodal whole’ integrates a combination of different kinds of meaning makings, is the relevance of the use of a multimodal analysis for the research of advertising campaigns.

A multimodal analysis then has the purpose of understanding the power and meaning of texts which utilize a variety of modes such as inscription, rhythm, speech, and sound, among others. With the goal of analyzing the meaning or the intention of the data corpus, a multimodal approach would allow me to understand the different modes that constitute the text as a whole, consolidating both critical discourse analysis and visual analysis into a methodological whole that would facilitate the study of how the meaning is created through the use and combination of the different elements that are integrated within advertisements and make them attractive (or not) to the audience. Out of the integrating modes that I consider relevant for an effective analysis I include:

- Music
- Design environment

Furthermore, a social semiotic multimodal approach will be used, since it aims to recognize social and power relations between social actors, stressing the relevance of the sign-maker, and the ‘motivated sign’. This means that the relation between the producer and representation is always motivated rather than arbitrary. In the words of Wodak “such theories seek not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of delusion”,¹⁰³ elaborating on my thought process in the selection of an adequate methodology to analyze advertisements, since through the analysis my intention is to reveal a present problem in the marketing industry.

Banks points out how in contemporary Euro-American society, every day is primarily concerned and oriented toward privileges and endlessly produces the visual.¹⁰⁴ The goal of the study of images should not merely focus on the meaning of the visual text, but rather

¹⁰³ Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 10.

¹⁰⁴ Banks refers to the notion of *Ocularcentrism* and the saturation of images of the contemporary Euro-American society. Ocularcentrism is described as ‘the visual’ which is constantly being produced and how seeing and knowing are mutually constitutive. By ‘oriented towards privileges’ banks refers to the continual need of visual stimulation and the accessibility of Euro-America society to the visual.

focus on the way in which contemporary culture uses visual texts as a way to create and sustain those ‘meanings’.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the purpose of the methodology selected is to find an effective way to articulate why this is the case, or in other words to understand what might otherwise remain at the level of vague suspicion and intuitive response.

Due to the diverse sources of the advertisements and the multiplicity of brand content, the aforementioned methodology will be used with regard to the most appropriate purpose. The analysis of each advertisement will be based on the elements that are the most significant for its interpretation as well as how these elements highlight aspects explored in the theoretical and conceptual framework such as the representation of women’s body, femininity, sexuality, self-determination, the critical representation of gender, femvertising, and commodity activism.

¹⁰⁵ Banks, *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research*, 40.

Chapter IV. Analysis

This chapter will be dedicated to studying with help of a multimodal method¹⁰⁶ the way in which discursive and visual elements of advertising influence the re-presentation of European women in marketing campaigns¹⁰⁷ developed by Agent Provocateur, and Unilever's brand Dove. These brands are known for marketing their products with the use of feminist ideals and the promotion of female empowerment. They typically produce an advertisement campaign every year for IWD, advertisements that due to the selected date of release are seemingly intended to embrace and promote female diversity, empowerment, choice, self-determination and self-love in a European dimension. In this sense IWD becomes an opportunity to celebrate the empowerment of women through advertisements and marketing, highlighting women's struggles in search of equality while promoting consumer practices and capitalizing on a social movement in order to improving their sales, with the use of femvertising and feminist commodity activism.

This analysis will be done with the purpose of studying if certain marketing practices used by the afore mentioned companies resonate with or defy the aspirations of European gender equality and impact the development of new marketing strategies and feminist ideals in a European context.

The topic researched touches in a variety of issues that due to their complexity could be research in a bigger scope, for instance, other Unilever brand's such as Axe and Fair & Lovely portray women in a way that oppose the practice exemplify by Dove. I am aware that such brands do not produce marketing promoted during International women's day and in the case of Fair & Lovely the campaigns produced are not marketed to a European audience, and therefore the campaigns do not comply with a European context. However since Axe and Fair & Lovely are Unilever's brands, I consider it relevant to look into their marketing strategy as a whole to have a broader perspective on how European companies target non-

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter III. Methodology. Multimodal Method, 34.

¹⁰⁷ Existing literature that relates to the influence of advertising on women's representation: Westkaemper, *Selling Women's History*; Simone Weil Davis, *Living Up to the Ads: Gender Fictions of the 1920s* (Duke University Press, 2000); Angharad N. Valdivia, "Chapter 11: The Secret of My Desire: Gender, Class, and Sexuality in Lingerie Catalogs," *Counterpoints* 54 (1997): 225–50.

European audiences and analyze if their marketing campaign is similar to that of those used in Europe, along with how advertisements could set imaginaries or standards of womanhood influenced by an European view. Due to the limited extension of this thesis research I will only touch these brands lightly.¹⁰⁸

This section will be developed by taking into account notions studied in Chapter II. Theoretical and Conceptual framework such as the problematic representation of the female body in marketing, the hypersexualization of the female body as a proof of empowerment, self-determination, self-love/self-esteem, and choice encouraged by third-wave feminism, and the influence of femvertising and commodity activism on the development of marketing strategies. These concepts then will work as the back bone of the analysis along, with the aforementioned methodology, which will apply critical feminist studies as well as feminist media studies to examine the representation of women in mediated messages such as advertisements, and how the visual and discursive elements used shape the representation of womanhood, and reinforce power relations.

In this chapter the corpus of the research will be explained, and the steps of the analysis will be carried out dividing the analysis in two parts; Agent provocateur and Unilever. Each part of the analysis will present an overview of the context of the research, the self-perception of the company, the macro features of the campaigns, the familiarization of the campaigns, and lastly the analysis of the specific campaign and its results. This will be done with the purpose of understanding the influence of discursive and visual elements used in advertisements in the re-presentation of womanhood in Europe, at the same time the analysis will allow us to understand to what degree these European companies (Agent Provocateur and Unilever) comply with the European aspiration of advertisements free of stereotypes.

Selection of the data corpus

In the process of choosing the advertisements that would be used for the analysis the key factors that were taken into consideration were:

¹⁰⁸ For additional information see Appendix I and II, 86-94.

- The importance of the origin of the company, since they should be from Europe and practice their campaigns in Europe. It is relevant to clarify that not all of the campaigns are exclusively promoted within Europe itself. However, I find it relevant to present a diversity of marketing campaigns that are originally from European companies even if their audience is not European, since this could give a wider perspective to the problem of women's representation and European ideals.
- Most of the advisements selected were created and are promoted for International Women's day, which emphasizes the endorsement of feminist rhetoric and their aim to feature female empowerment, self-determination and self-love.
- The use of feminist ideals and notions in their marketing strategies such as, empowerment, choice, self-determination, and self-esteem.
- The implementation of commodity activism¹⁰⁹ as part of their commercialization strategy.
- The explicit use of feminist rhetoric¹¹⁰ to target their selected demographic or the opposite (in the case of Axe). Notions such as women's empowerment, self-determination, choice and self-esteem are constantly repeated in their advertisements.

Corpus of the research

The importance of the chosen cases to analyze lies in the relevance of the sample for the study of the problematic representation of womanhood through marketing, the use of feminist rhetoric as a marketing tool and the connection between them with the development of the feminist movement, International women's day and how critical feminist studies and feminist media studies have looked for a fair and equal portrayal of women in media. There are several advertisements and campaigns that could be used to research the topic, however many of those companies are not European and due to the limited length of the research, the selected advertisements are considered appropriate and diverse, portraying in an adequate way the issue that is being researched.

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter II. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework. 23-26.

¹¹⁰ See Chapter II. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework. 18-20, 23-26.

This thesis will focus on the analysis of the way women are re-presented through marketing and discourses promoted mainly for International women's day by the companies, Agent Provocateur and Unilever. The campaigns selected are all from companies of European origin that are promoted and have been criticized/supported¹¹¹ by consumer audiences from Europe and western countries, as well as countries that are directly targeted in their advertisements. These companies use femvertising, and encourage commodity activism in the purchase and consumption of their products, which is the reason why the campaigns selected align with the problem and theory mentioned previously.

The campaigns produced by Agent Provocateur in particular are promoted during the days leading up to IWD, and display a rhetoric that associate the advertisement with feminist ideals, which as a case study present the issues that the thesis explores. The Unilever campaign on the other hand is not solely promoted during IWD, but promotes feminist ideals and female empowerment. Unilever has compromise to work in favor of equal gender representation in marketing¹¹² and to avoid stereotypes,¹¹³ however in many cases the campaigns have worked against this goal, situation that will be analyzed in the campaigns to be studied.

The corpus of the analysis is formed by the campaigns:

- Agent Provocateur spring/summer 2019 campaign *Pump it Up*.¹¹⁴
- Agent Provocateur spring/summer 2020 campaign *Play to Win*.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Vanessa Friedman, "Is This What Post-MeToo Looks Like?," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2020, sec. Style, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/style/agent-provocateur-athlete-advertisement.html>; "Beauty Above All Else: The Problem With Dove's New Viral Ad," *The Cut*, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.thecut.com/2013/04/beauty-above-all-else-doves-viral-ad-problem.html>; Geeta Pandey, "Can Renaming a Fairness Cream Stop Colourism?," *BBC News*, June 26, 2020, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-53182169>; Sam McManis, "Amusing or Offensive, Axe Ads Show That Sexism Sells," *The Seattle Times*, December 4, 2007, <https://www.seattletimes.com/life/lifestyle/amusing-or-offensive-axe-ads-show-that-sexism-sells/>.

¹¹² "#Unstereotyping Our Ads: Why It's Important and Where We Are," Unilever global company website, accessed July 9, 2020, <https://www.unilever.com/news/news-and-features/Feature-article/2017/unstereotyping-our-ads-why-its-important-and-where-we-are-so-far.html>.

¹¹³ "Why We're Unstereotyping to Unleash Women's Potential," Unilever global company website, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.unilever.com/news/news-and-features/Feature-article/2017/Why-we-are-unstereotyping-to-unleash-womens-potential.html>.

¹¹⁴ "Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Pump It Up," accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/pump-it-up.

¹¹⁵ "Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Play To Win."

- Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty by Unilever.¹¹⁶

For a proper understanding of the campaigns, additional media news, and articles describing or reacting to the campaigns will be considered, as those sources provide additional information related to the campaigns, the production and the perspective of some of the target audience.

Agent Provocateur

For the first part of the analysis two campaigns from the British company Agent Provocateur will be studied with the use of a multimodal method. Aspects such as participants, pose, gaze, depicted context, frame, distance, and music will be relevant since for the analysis of the advertisement such elements contribute to the meaning that is created by means of the representation. These aspects will facilitate critical analysis of the campaign and what it represents, connecting in this way the visual and discursive elements, as well as the influence of them in the representation of women, sexuality and femininity. This will allow us to understand how femvertising and commodity activism relate to issues of gender equality.

Steps of the Analysis

Step 1. Analysis of the context of the research

The texts selected for the analysis are campaigns launched for Spring-Summer 2019 and 2020, usually during the last weeks of February, meaning that they were intended for international women's day. They are produced by the British lingerie retailer Agent Provocateur, company that was founded in 1994 and has over 100 stores all over the world. Agent Provocateur's products have a price range between fifty to four thousand Euros, indicating that people with a high income are targeted in the purchase of the products. The target market of the company are mainly females between twenty to fifty years old. The largest number of stores are located in western Europe and North America. Agent

¹¹⁶ "Dove," Unilever global company website, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.unilever.com/brands/personal-care/dove.html>; "The 'Dove Real Beauty Pledge,'" Dove US, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/about-dove/dove-real-beauty-pledge.html>; "2004: Dove Breaks Barriers with 'Campaign for Real Beauty,'" The Drum, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2016/04/21/marketing-moment-25-dove-breaks-barriers-campaign-real-beauty>.

Provocateur is defined by confidence, sensuality and irreverence, with the motto “empowering women and pushing boundaries since 1994”.

The advertisements produced by Agent Provocateur are characterized by the hypersexual depiction of women, the showcase of famous models, singers, actresses and other celebrities, and the provocative portrayal of the female body and female behavior. Some of the company’s advertisements have been banned for “being degrading to women”, criticized for objectifying them and depicting an over-sexualized image of women.

Step 2. Macro features of the campaigns

- Time of publication: Spring-Summer 2019 and Spring-Summer 2020.
- Author: Agent Provocateur, British lingerie company founded in 1994.
- Medium of publication: Online (Official website, Facebook, Instagram)
- Genre: Advertisement
- Purpose: The producer (company) is using a particular set of visual and rhetorical elements to promote their products. The use of feminist notions and the message of self-determination and empowerment reveals a power dimension in the use of consumerism and commodity feminism.

Step 3. Familiarization/ Self-perception of the campaigns

The campaigns selected are targeted at young women, between 18 to 30 years old. The themes of the campaigns are related to empowerment, self-determination, self-love and self-expression, focusing on the celebration of strength and womanhood. The purpose of the campaign is to advertise the company’s lingerie. However, the campaigns barely mention the lingerie itself and instead associate the use of that lingerie with a sense of freedom, empowerment and choice.

Both of the campaigns were produced, directed, shot and executed by a female-only group, showcasing female empowerment. The campaigns portray a hypersexualized image of women, a concept that is depicted as a form of self-determination. The use of specific rhetoric associated with female empowerment enhances the company’s own image as progressive, empowering, and supporting. The campaigns are reinforced by consumerism and tainted with feminist ideals such as, empowerment, choice, self-determination, and

togetherness among others. The use of commodity feminism and femvertising is clear through the visual and linguistic elements, supporting women while promoting feminism through consumerism.

The analysis of the campaigns will focus particularly on the use of feminist rhetoric¹¹⁷ to advertise Agent's Provocateur lingerie, identifying in the process the key themes of the campaigns and visual elements which set up a basis to expose the use of commodity feminism and femvertising in the advertisements. Using a multimodal method, such analysis will allow us to understand with the help of critical feminist theory and feminist media theory, the visual and rhetorical elements used to commercialize and re-present womanhood, identifying the intentions behind the advertisement.

Agent Provocateur's campaign *Pump it Up*

The Agent Provocateur's video advertisement for the campaign *Pump it up* presents a group of women dancing and exercising at the rhythm of *Pump Up the Jam* by technotronic. In some shots the group of women dance synchronously, moving like stretching on the floor or practicing a choreography with sensual movement. Other shots show only one woman, a woman of dark skin exercising on weight machines, and a ballerina dancing in front of a ballet barre sometimes hanging from it or crawling on the floor, moving in a sexual way. All of the women of the advertisement wear Agent Provocateur lingerie, make up and in some cases high heels, which makes them seem self-confident, hypersexual and independent, however, the lingerie and high heels look restrictive and not the most appropriate garments to exercise or dance. Some of the shots are close, displaying only parts of the body of the dancers, usually their breast or buttocks, detaching the body parts from the women, making the focus of the advertisement the sexualized female body while associating lingerie with notions of self-determination, self-esteem, self-confidence and sexiness. In the final part of the video the women gather together in a circle to take turns to dance freely, which seems a playful scene in which all of them are having fun, highlighting the sense of togetherness and sisterhood of the advertisement.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter II. Theoretical and Conceptual framework. 14-21.

Step 4. Identification of key themes

In the process of watching the video of the campaign, reading the description of the campaign, and acquiring additional information from online fashion magazines¹¹⁸ related to the campaign some main themes were identified. These themes are constantly present both visually and rhetorically in the campaign and emphasize the message that the campaign is portraying. The main themes are:

- Empowerment: *“Find your fire and what inspires you and show the world who you are”*
- Sexuality: *“Floor play”, “Express yourself through movement and dance like no one is watching”, “Our dance squad gets down to the pounding beat in a raunchy erotic aerobics class”*
- Self-determination: *“Express yourself” “Akin to dancing, sexuality is a performance, one that every woman has the power to act out.”*
- Individuality/Uniqueness: *“show the world who you are”*
- Unity/ Togetherness: *“coming together”, “The aim is to make women everywhere feel powerful and energetic”.*
- Self-love: *“we call on you to own your sensual side, love your body and be unapologetic in your sexuality”*

The identification of key themes highlights the relevance of the neoliberal thought and its influence on postfeminism, since all of the notions previously mentioned are closely related to feminist ideas but simultaneously connect them with a consumer reality. The key themes help to start the process of “discovering” ‘*what the image really wants*’ and allowing us to identify the most relevant notions that the producer is emphasizing through the campaign.

Step 5. Multimodal Analysis

The aforementioned multimodal method will be applied to study the relation of the different modes in the creation of meaning. The use of feminist rhetoric such as empowerment, self-

¹¹⁸ Karrie W, “Agent Provocateur - Pump It Up,” *LAUNDRY MAGAZINE*, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://laundrymagazine.co/articles/2019/3/1/agent-provocateur-pump-it-up>; Estelle Puleston, “Agent Provocateur’s Pump It Up Campaign & SS19 Collection,” *Esty Lingerie* (blog), March 14, 2019, <http://estylingerie.com/2019/03/14/agent-provocateurs-ss19-pump-it-up-campaign/>.

determination, self-esteem, choice and sexualization will be relevant, as well as the influence of the different variables/elements that constitute the advertisement campaign in the reinforcement of power relations and the endorsement of gender stereotypes. The aspects to be analyzed in these campaigns will help us recognize the influence of feminist media studies, feminism, and commodity activism in the production of advertisements to target a particular audience while creating a specific reaction to them.

To carry out the multimodal analysis, the video, and the pictures that accompanied the campaign will be used¹¹⁹ along with the information provided by fashion magazines that discussed the campaign.

Participants:

For the purpose of the campaign, the company hired an all-female group composed of; the creative director, producer, choreographer, videographer, photographer, and a group of 22 female professional dancers.¹²⁰ In the advertisement we see the group of female dancers, all between 22 to 35 years old (approx). The group formed by only women seem to not only have the purpose of advertising lingerie but moreover create awareness regarding International women's day and portrayed the idea of togetherness, friendship and solidarity among women.



Figure 1. Group of 6 female dancers in front of a swimming pool, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie and high heels.

Image taken from "Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Pump It Up," accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/pump-it-up.

¹¹⁹ The pictures presented in this research were taken from the video advertisement and the promotional campaign on the website. "Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Pump It Up," accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/pump-it-up.

¹²⁰ W, "Agent Provocateur - Pump It Up."

Gaze:

The participants in the advertisement rarely look directly at the viewer, mostly looking away from the viewer on both the video and pictures of the campaign, addressing the viewer in an indirect way. In the words of Van Leeuwen and Kress, this means that the participant is the object of the inspection, and the viewers looking at them are seen as an ‘invisible onlooker’. This form of representation is called ‘offer’, in which the represented participant is offered to the viewer as an object of information or contemplation,¹²¹ presented simply with the intention of displaying some kind of information or product, similarly to a mannequin.



Figure 2. Group of 22 female dancers dancing in a basketball court, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie and high heels. Shot from minute 1:12 of the official video advertisement.



Figure 3. Female lifting weights while wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie.

Image taken from “Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Pump It Up,” accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/pump-it-up.

¹²¹ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 119.

The other gaze present in the campaign is the one described by Van Leeuwen and Jewitt as demand/seduction, in which “the model looks up at the viewer, head canted, smiling or ‘pouting’”.¹²² This kind of gaze simulates a sense of having a close relation between the viewer and the represented, since they look directly at each other. However, in the case of the campaign the models in the pictures and video look at the viewer with their mouths partially open, seducing the audience, likely indicating that the use of lingerie will imply a sexual demand.



Figure 4. Female "exercising" on a seated chest press machine, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie.

Image taken from "Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Pump It Up," accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/pump-it-up.

Pose:

The participants are dancing during the whole video, but the pictures of the campaign are of the participants taking part in some kind of exercise or sport; boxing, weight-lifting, stretching. However, due to the presentation style of the participants (all the participants are wearing lingerie, high-heels and undergarment that looks quite restrictive and impractical for exercising), the actions portrayed seem more like a static pose than an action.

¹²² Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, 31.

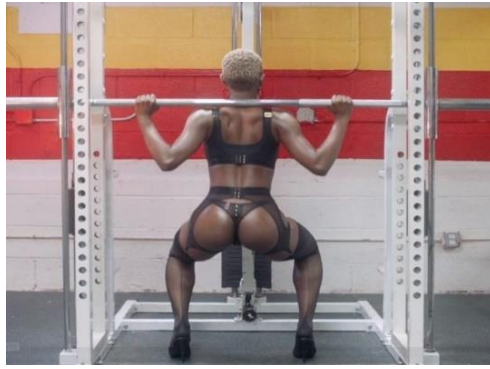


Figure 5. Female exercising on a Smith machine while wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie and high heels.

Image taken from “Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Pump It Up,” accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/pump-it-up.



Figure 6. Female doing a split facing away, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie.

Image taken from “Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Pump It Up,” accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/pump-it-up.

Depicted context/setting:

The depicted context of the campaign is that of exercise, sports and physical activity, which indicates characteristics of the participants connected with the key themes, notions like empowerment, strength, self-determination and individuality. The settings displayed are associated with public events (a public swimming pool and a basketball court), however all of the scenes are rather dark and only the women participate, making the setting seem private or secretive. In the depicted context it is possible to see weights in some pictures, a basketball court, a swimming pool and a barre (handrail used in ballet), objects that suggest or imply a general idea of health, fitness, and togetherness, since some sports require coordinated teams. However, the pose of participants is not associated with the context since none of them are

seen playing basketball or actively exercising. The participants are rather seen as ‘pretending’ to exercise, transforming the material into a pose rather than a practice.



Figure 7. Female boxing, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie and high heels.

Image taken from “Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Pump It Up,” accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/pump-it-up.



Figure 8. Female ballerina dancing in front of ballet barre, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:14 of the official video.

Distance and Frame:

For the purpose of the campaign most shots of the advertisement are either medium or close distance, which creates an intimate/personal or social/friendly connection with the viewer.

In relation to the notion of frame explained by Banks and the understanding of it as what the producer chooses to show and not to show, it is relevant to see its connection with ‘distance’, since depending on how close or far the shot is different elements can be included or not. In this regard, several shots of the video and the pictures are from a very close/intimate distance, framing only body parts of the participants such as the breast or buttocks. The use of such a distance and frame, reduces the participant to body parts, emphasizing the attention to the female body and the hyper-sexualization of it, in turn reducing them to sexual objects.¹²³

Some other shots have a medium distance, which represents a social or friendly interaction with the viewer. Such a distance allows a frame to include more elements into what is shown so that it is possible to distinguish the participants, the setting and the design environment.



Figure 9. Group of females dancing, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:57 of the official video of the campaign.

¹²³ Van Leeuwen and Jewitt,, *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, 84–85.



Figure 10. Breast of a female wearing a swimsuit. Shot of minute 0:11 of the official video campaign.

Perspective:

The angles used the most for the campaign were the frontal angle, which refers to an involvement of the audience with what is represented, and the high angle which attributes superiority or power to the viewer. The frontal angle associates the viewer with the action displayed, but due to the lack of visual contact (gaze) it gives the impression that the viewer is an outsider, watching women while they dance privately.



Figure 11. Group of 22 female dancers dancing in a basketball court, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie and high heels. Shot from minute 1:12 of the official video advertisement.



Figure 12. Group of females stretching on the floor, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:45 of the official video advertisement.

Narrative

The Agent Provocateur's campaign *Pump it Up* was launched for spring-summer 2019 during the last week of February of that year. The campaign was received by the public with a variety of reactions, some valued their effort towards female empowerment and the “diverse” portrayal of women, while others criticized that all of the participants had the same body type and the campaign was falling into the same stereotype of female beauty associated with “thinness”.

The advertisement of the campaign is a video that portrays a group of 22 professional dancers dancing in lingerie. The campaign is depicted in sport backgrounds such as a swimming pool, a basketball court, and a gymnasium for aerobics. It gives the impression of women having fun while dancing in lingerie, but due to the shots and movements of the dance, the video seems rather sexual and inappropriate.

Music:

The music used for the advertisement of the campaign is the song ‘Pump up the jam’ by the Belgian band Technotronic, which is why the campaign is named “Pump it up”. The single was released in 1989, quickly becoming a worldwide hit that is still memorable and referenced today, the beat and rhythm of the song is widely recognizable and catchy.

The lyrics repeats:

Pump up the jam, pump it up

While you feet are stompin'

And the jam is pumpin'
Look at here the crowd is jumpin'
Pump it up a little more
Get the party going on the dance floor
Seek us that's where the party's at
And you'll find out if you're too bad
I don't want a place to stay
Get your booty on the floor tonight
Make my day

Inciting the audience to dance and “join” the party, inviting them to turn up the volume and make the party more “exciting”.

Step 6. Results

Explained by Theo Van Leeuwen, “as discourses are social cognitions, socially specific ways of knowing social practices, they can be, and are, used as resources for representing social practices in text”.¹²⁴ With this in mind, and taking into consideration the different visual and discursive elements that were studied with the help of a multimodal method it is possible to understand how certain aspects of the advertisement influence the imaginary that the company creates around the idea of womanhood. In the campaign it is possible to see how the combination of the different elements create a specific representation of femininity, sexuality and the female body. Knowing that all of the participants are female highlights feminist notions such as unity, sisterhood and solidarity, the gaze as well as the pose of the participants displaying them as static objects to be looked at rather than actively exercising. Other elements such as the distance, the perspective and the music as well as the depiction of the participants (clothing) add a very sexual connotation to the advertisement that makes the campaign seem almost like softcore pornography due to the erotic characteristics of the

¹²⁴ van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 6.

dance and shots. The representation of strong athletic women wearing lingerie gives the impression that using this kind of clothing and feeling comfortable in it is a way of being a strong “empowered” woman.¹²⁵ Some of the undergarments marketed with the campaign seem restrictive and extremely sexualized as opposed to functional, portraying the models as strong and dominant but simultaneously sexy and feminine, almost akin to dominatrixes or perhaps femmes fatales.

Agent Provocateur’s campaign *Play to Win*

Agent Provocateur’s campaign *Play to Win* was launched for International Women’s Day 2020 (at the end of month of February). The campaign consists of a video advertisement that last one minute and pictures that were displayed in the official website and social media such as Facebook and Instagram. The advertisement features four female Olympic athletes practicing different sports (hurdles, pole vault, climbing, and gymnastics) with the song *Oh Yeah* by the Swiss duo *Yello* as a soundtrack. The sportswomen are displayed exercising while wearing Agent Provocateur’s lingerie and make up, looking strong and sexy. In the advertisement the women are introduced by presenting their name, country, and sport expertise, however several shots are close distance focusing only on specific body parts of them (their breast, buttocks, or back side), which diminish the strength of the athletes to their sexual parts that seem more relevant than the sport practiced. The shots barely feature the face of the participants, and when they do, the sportswomen seem overly sexual, roaring at the viewer or looking directly at them with sensual gaze.

Step 4. Identification of key themes

The key themes of the campaign are notions that are constantly repeated, presented or reinforced through the campaign’s description, news media or commentaries. The identification of key themes facilitates the understanding of the meaning of the campaign and the intentions of the producers. The notions that were constant during the *Play to Win* campaign are:

¹²⁵ Rachel Wood, “‘You Do Act Differently When You’re in It’: Lingerie and Femininity,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 25, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 10–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2013.874942>.

Empowerment: “Our heroine in the uneven bars”, “Hone it. Control it. Push it. Own it. Feel it burn. Anything is possible. It’s time to give this everything you’ve got”

Self-determination: “If not now, then when?! If we don’t push limits, break barriers and expectations, it will do nothing but hold us back from our true selves!”

Sexuality: “I feel like a goddess, I feel like I am a statue, I feel like I am a trophy. I feel powerful sexy.”

Individuality:

Step 5. Multimodal Analysis

Participants

For the campaign, Agent Provocateur featured a group of four female athletes, composed of Queen Harrison Claye, American hurdler and sprinter, Alysha Newman, Canadian pole-vaulter, Sasha DiGiulian, American climber and Georgia-Mae Fenton, British gymnast. The participants are mostly seen in individual shots/photographs, never all together as a group but more as individual participants of a similar event.

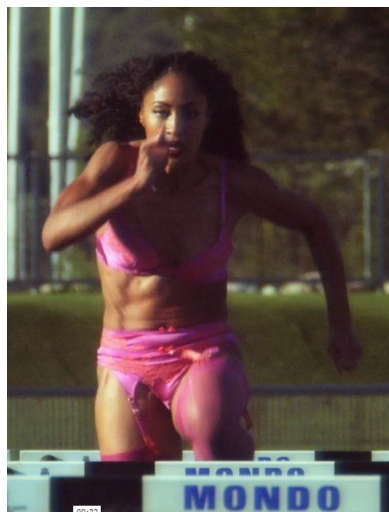


Figure 13. American hurdler and sprinter Queen Harrison Claye, sprinting while wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:26 of the official video advertisement.



Figure 14. Canadian track and field athlete Alysha Newman, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie.

Picture taken from “Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Play To Win,” accessed April 10, 2020, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/play-to-win.



Figure 15. American rock climber Sasha DiGiulian, climbing while wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie.

Picture taken from “Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Play To Win,” accessed April 10, 2020, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/play-to-win.

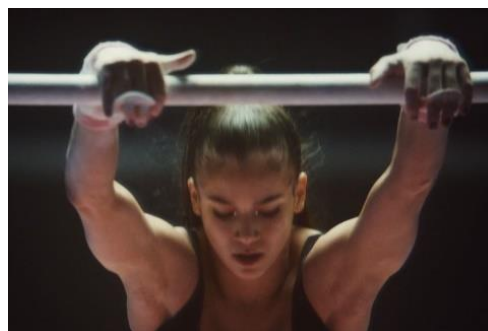


Figure 16. British artistic gymnast Georgia-Mae Fenton. Shot of minute 0:19 of the official video advertisement.

Gaze

In the advertisement the participants rarely have direct visual contact with the audience, presenting them mostly as an “offer” and as previously explained, the sportswomen are seen as providing information or to be observed.

The only moment in which visual contact with the audience is made very explicitly, is in the final shot in which athlete Queen Harrison Claye looks directly at the audience moving her mouth as though she is roaring. A gaze that has been described as “demand/seduction” in which the represented is demanding something from or even seducing the viewer, bringing together the idea of sportswomen as strong and fierce while being overtly hypersexual.

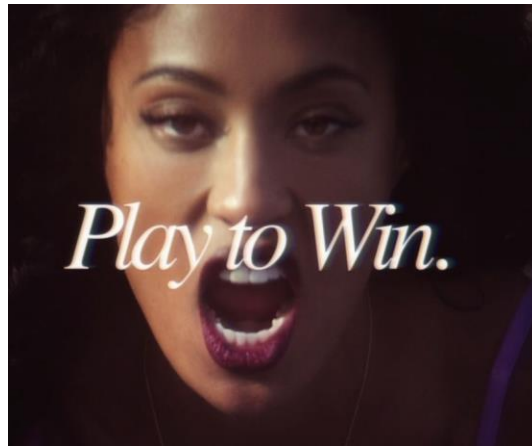


Figure 17. Face of sportswoman Queen Harrison Claye looking to the camera with her mouth open, and the phrase "Play to Win" in front of her. Shot of minute 0:57 of the official video advertisement.

Pose

During the advertisement the participants are mostly practicing a sport such as; sprinting, climbing, running, gymnastics, riding bicycles, and hurdling. The sports depicted are one person or individual sports, which are practiced without the need for an entire team, emphasizing a sense of individuality, and self-determination present in the campaign. In this case, even when all of the participants are wearing lingerie, they have other clothing that facilitate the activities or sports, like tennis. Despite being unlikely for women to practice any sport wearing lingerie, the action represented is seen as dynamic and energetic, not simply a static depiction but an actual action.



Figure 18. Alysha Newman, running with a pole while wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie.

Picture taken from “Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Play To Win,” accessed April 10, 2020, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/play-to-win.



Figure 19. Sasha DiGiulian, climbing while wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:26 of the official video advertisement.

Depicted context/ setting

The setting/depicted context of the campaign is that of the exercise, but in this case, it looks more like the setting for an Olympic competition, such as a stadium. Some of the participants are located outside, in a running court or a climbing wall, while others are located in an indoor gymnastics room. As noted before, all of the depicted sports are individual ones, indicating the sense of self-determination, individuality and competition.



Figure 20. Image of *Queen Harrison Claye* duplicated. The athlete is sprinting while wearing pink Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:24 of the official video advertisement.



Figure 21. Image of *Georgia-Mae Fenton* duplicated. She is doing gymnastic exercise in the uneven bars wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of the minute 0:32 of the official video advertisement.

Distance and Frame

As well as Agent Provocateur's campaign *Pump it up* 2019 in which the shots of the advertisement are mostly close distance, in Agent's Provocateur campaign *Play to Win* 2020 most shots are close or medium distance. Creating an intimate and personal relationship to the viewer. Such shots focus mainly on parts of the female body, or the specific undergarment that is marketed, which reduces the sportswomen that have been introduced by name and expertise in the same video, simply to their body parts being on display. The use of this distance and frame moves away from the stated intention of the campaign, that of empowering and recognizing the strength of women, more toward reducing these women to the parts of the body which are commonly considered 'sexy'.



Figure 22. Female back and derriere, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie.

Picture taken from "Agent Provocateur | Spring Summer | Play To Win," accessed April 10, 2020, https://www.agentprovocateur.com/eu_en/campaign/play-to-win.

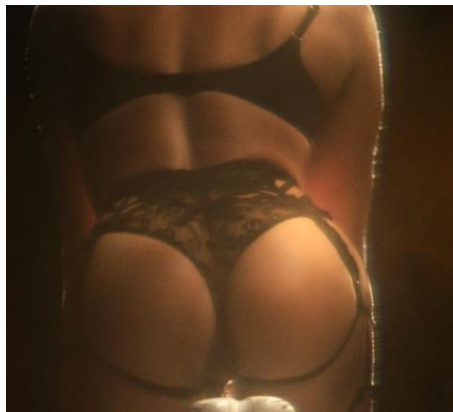


Figure 23 Female back and derriere, wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:44 of the official video advertisement.

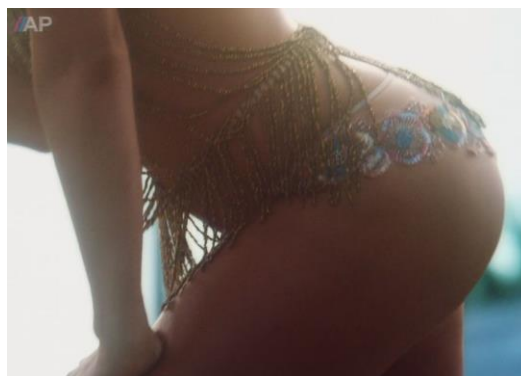


Figure 24. Side view of a female's buttocks, with Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:19 of the official video advertisement.



Figure 25. Frontal shot of female breast, with Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:09 of the official video advertisement.

Perspective

In the campaign, the most common angles are the frontal angles, which creates a sense of involvement of the viewer with the action represented, and the low angles that suggest or imply superiority and power to the represented since the viewer sees the represented as looking down on them or as the viewer being beneath the subject.¹²⁶ In the case of this campaign, this signifies empowerment for the sportswomen, and a close involvement of the viewer with them, making the action familiar and engaging the audience.

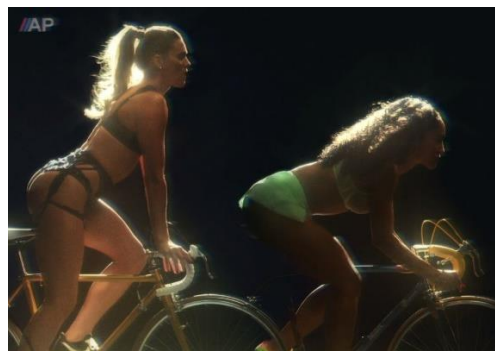


Figure 26. Queen Harrison Claye and Alysha Newman riding bicycles wearing agent provocateur lingerie. Shot of the minute 0:41 of the official video advertisement.

¹²⁶ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 129–49.

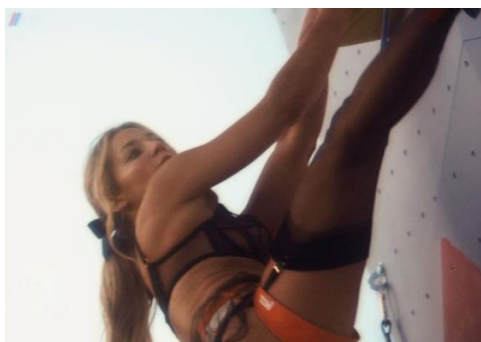


Figure 27. View of Sasha DiGiulian from an oblique angle from below while wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie. Shot of minute 0:28 of the official video advertisement.

Design environment

The design of the environment is that of a stadium in which sportswomen are competing/practicing. The color of the advertisement, music and even font of the letters make reference to the 80's, with the use of synthesizers, neon or bright colours for the clothes, with vibrant and colorful makeup.

Narrative

Agent Provocateur's campaign *Play to Win* was released for spring-summer 2020 during the first week of March. The advertisement portrays four Olympic athletes from Europe and North America practicing a specific sport, while wearing Agent Provocateur lingerie and make up. The participants are displayed individually, specifying their name, country of origin and sport expertise, they look strong, self-confident and powerful, while simultaneously appearing sensual, feminine and sexy. The campaign seems to portrait a hyper-sexualized image of the female athletes accentuating their sexual body parts, while endorsing the empowerment of women. Almost like reinforcing the idea of empowerment by the use of lingerie and actively choosing to be sexual.

Music

The music used for the campaign is the "Oh Yeah" single released in 1985 by the Swiss electronic duo Yello. The song is a mix of electronic music and manipulated vocals, which were popular during the 80's. The single is well known in pop culture for being featured in the film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* in a scene in which the main character gets a new Ferrari. Due to its popularity and lyrics the song is commonly associated with lust and avarice, as

described by Jonathan Bersteing, “Every time a movie, TV show or commercial wants to underline the jaw-dropping impact of a hot babe or sleek auto, that synth-drum starts popping and that deep voice rumbles, 'Oh yeah’.”¹²⁷

Step 6. Results

In the New York Times article about Agent Provocateur’s campaign *Play to Win* Vanessa Friedman, fashion director and chief fashion critic for the New York Times, makes reference to the campaign and the idea of femininity in fashion, questioning the intention of portraying women simultaneously feminine as well as amazons.¹²⁸ A concept that takes us back to the second-wave of feminism and familiar interpretations of ideals of women like Wonder Woman, who was strong, powerful, independent and even a goddess but at the same time extremely hypersexualized, beautiful and feminine, wearing a sexy armor that looks uncomfortable and quite impractical within the context of her actions.

The key themes analyzed associate the campaign with notions such as empowerment, self-determination, and self-confidence, which are embodied by the strength of the athletes and their boldness by practicing sports while using lingerie. However, the modes that were studied, depicted the sportswomen in a rather sexual way, aiming their attention at their sexualize body parts, and the seductive aspects of such garment.

It is relevant to highlight that the sole present of women in sports challenged traditional gender roles that associated sports with masculinity, since only until the 1900’s women were admitted to participate in the Olympic games in sports that were recognize as appropriate for women’s femininity and fragility.¹²⁹ In this sense if the advertisement aimed to defy stereotypical gender roles that connected the idea of athleticism with masculinity, it fell flat at archiving this goal. Since once again the sportswomen are displayed as highly sexual and hyper-feminine by the use of lingerie, make up and their sensual expressions, perpetuating with this the idea that women can be strong but should be at the same time attractive and ladylike.

¹²⁷ “OH YEAH!!!! The Phrase of the 80’s...,” *100.9 Totally Awesome 80’s* (blog), accessed July 26, 2020, <https://totallyawesometulsa.com/prom/oh-yeah-the-phrase-of-the-80s/>.

¹²⁸ Friedman, “Is This What Post-MeToo Looks Like?,” March 10, 2020.

¹²⁹ “Women and the Olympic Games | EHNE,” accessed July 26, 2020, <https://ehne.fr/en/article/gender-and-europe/gendered-body-expression-european-identity/women-and-olympic-games>.

The campaign studied emphasizes aspects of the sexualize representation of the female body and challenges the stereotypical portrayal of female athletes. However it makes me wonder if such representation has the intention of empowering women, by revealing both the feminine and powerful aspects of athleticism or if it is rather a matter of ‘mainstream sex’ by advertising lingerie and perpetuating the position of women as ‘sexual objects’.

Step 7. Analysis of Agent’s Provocateur advertisements

To facilitate a proper interpretation of the previously studied text (advertisement campaigns) an study that encompasses the analysis of the relation between the advertisements will take place, this will be done with the aim of outlining the discourse used by Agent Provocateur and see how the different elements relate to each other. Taking into consideration the key themes of the campaigns, the institutional background¹³⁰ and aims of it, as well as the modes analyzed it is possible to observe the following results:

The key themes addressed in both of the campaigns as well as the online magazines that focused on the campaigns are empowerment, self-determination, togetherness, individuality, and sexuality, notions that were easily noticeable thorough both the visual and discursive elements. Analyzing all of the elements that are part of the campaign as well as the goal of the producers, it is possible to understand how the discursive and visual elements of these marketing campaigns that were promoted for International Women’s day work as a medium for the commercialization, re-presentation and re-construction of womanhood as well as that of femininity. In both of the campaigns the use of visual elements such as the gaze, the pose, the frame and depicted context influence the representation of womanhood in relation to the represented women as signs of womanhood. The rhetorical elements used to describe both the participants represented and the publicity of the campaign affect the way in which the audience perceive the campaign.

Thus, knowing that all of the participants in both of Agent Provocateur’s advertisements implicitly (the ones that we can see in the advertisements) and explicitly (the ones that participate in the production of the advertisements) are women implies the sense of togetherness, unity and female empowerment. In the *Pump it Up* campaign this notion of

¹³⁰ By institutional background I mean the main characteristics and aims of the company.

togetherness and the sense of group is reinforced by the choreography in which all of the participants dance together, the similarity of their outfits and the omission of names or characteristics of each participant. On the other hand, in the *Play to Win* campaign each of the participants represented are specified by their name, and are shown practicing individual sports. Each of them being in their respective shots implies a sense of individuality and self-determination. Both campaigns seem to highlight different aspects explored by feminism. On one hand the idea of togetherness, sisterhood and solidarity is portrayed with the group of female dancers and on the other, the notion of individuality and self-determination is displayed in the advertisement that specifies and differentiates each of the four participants,

The most common theme that defined both of the campaigns is that of empowerment, showing the participants dancing and practicing sports irreverently wearing lingerie and high-heels as if it was the norm to wear nothing but lingerie in a public gym or a sports competition. This disassociates the idea that lingerie is meant to be used in a private sphere, and bring it to a public space, in which the use of this garment becomes a matter of sexual representation associated with exhibitionism and voyeurism. The perspective as well as the rhetorical elements of the campaign helped emphasize how Agent Provocateur empowers women with the help of lingerie and how being sexy, feminine and feeling comfortable with being hypersexualized is part of women's empowerment. However, elements like the distance and frame, along with such hypersexualization and hyper-feminization of the female body reduces strong sportswomen and professional dancers to body parts without identity or purpose outside of being sexy. This undermines the objective that the company highlights through their rhetoric of empowering women and pushing boundaries¹³¹ to instead simply use feminist ideals¹³² so that the company can utilize commodity activism¹³³ to improve their sales and takes away from the impact on women's status of equality¹³⁴ as well as detach stereotypes from gender representation.

¹³¹ See page 39, 31-42.

¹³² Erin Hatton and Mary Nell Trautner, "Images of Powerful Women in the Age of 'Choice Feminism,'" *Journal of Gender Studies* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 65–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2012.681184>.

¹³³ Michelle Juergen, "Celebrity Feminists Are Hurting Feminism," *Mic*, accessed July 26, 2020, <https://www.mic.com/articles/74211/celebrity-feminists-are-hurting-feminism>.

¹³⁴ Jaimee Swift and Hannah, "Not An Object: On Sexualization and Exploitation of Women and Girls," UNICEF USA, accessed June 17, 2019, <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/not-object-sexualization-and-exploitation-women-and-girls/30366>.

Unilever

For the second part of the analysis the research will focus on a campaign of the Unilever company, in this section the research will not only focus on one video advertisement but a campaign that consists of a large group of videos, photographs, and advertisements, among others. The use of a multimodal method will be central for a proper understanding of the advertisements, however due to the large variety of advertisements and the long timespan of the campaign, the analysis will focus on a limited amount of aspects such as participants, gaze, pose, depicted context, distance and frame, perspective, and narrative, paying particular attention to the narrative since in the case of Unilever, the campaigns focus on the way information is organized and expressed in form of a “story”, letting us know how the product functions and the outcome of using it.

The study of this marketing campaign has the intent of analyzing the way in which the product is advertised and how it differs from other marketing campaigns. This is with the intention of unveiling the goal behind the marketing strategy and understanding whether Unilever is advertising its products in the same way, looking to empower their customers, or if advertising campaigns are simply a way to approach a target group more directly and improve sales.

Steps of the Analysis

Step 1. Analysis of the context of the research/ Self-perception of the company

Unilever is a British-Dutch multinational consumer goods company with over 400 brands, operations in approximately 100 countries and sales in more than 190 countries. Unilever was founded in 1929 and owns over 400 brands that are distributed worldwide. The company is one of the oldest multinational companies. The company has brands from different categories such as food, refreshments, home care, and beauty & personal care. They are the creator of many of the world’s most popular brands such as Dove, Knorr, Magnum, Lux, Vaseline, Axe, Signal, Ponds, Fair&Lovely, Hellmann’s, among others. Unilever has developed facilities and research in China, India, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, among others.

The company sells its brands internationally, applying similar marketing strategies all around the world. Unilever has dedicated itself to helping in various environmental and social aspects, utilizing commodity activism to promote and sell their products. The company is widely known for the creation of many campaigns to advertise and create awareness. In 2016 the company committed itself to creating a more progressive portrayal of people in their advertisements, implementing #Unstereotype.

Some of the advertisements are popular for portraying what is seen as “real women”. Unilever is known for very insightful campaigns promoted through Dove, which look to empower women, embrace natural beauty and improve women’s self-esteem. The company is well known for the creation of highly sexualized advertisements with brands such as Axe/Lynx which utilize marketing that reinforces stereotypical behavior of both men and women. The text selected for the analysis is a campaign from one of the most popular brands, Dove.

Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty

Dove’s campaign for *Real Beauty* was initially launched in 2004 with the aim of portraying a more realistic representation of women in advertisements. The campaign was created with the goal of improving women’s self-esteem and self-confidence, and empower them by helping them embrace their own beauty. The first advertisement of the campaign displayed a group of women from different ethnicities and body size, posing together in underwear and naturally smiling, which broke the stereotypical view of female models as rigidly posing. Dove’s campaign is known for using ‘real’ women, meaning that professional models are not hired for their advertisement, during the years the same kind of picture has been repeated including a wider variety of women including different ages, cultures, and styles.

The characteristic image associated with the campaign is that of the group of women smiling with a white background, however the campaign has produce a series of videos, workshops, meetings, images, advertisements and products, that are part of this campaign and highlight aspects of it, like the self-esteem campaign for IWD.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ “International Womens Day,” Dove UK, accessed July 26, 2020, <https://www.dove.com/uk/stories/campaigns/international-womens-day.html>.

Step 2. Macro features of the campaign

- Time of publication: The campaign was launched in 2004 and is still active.
- Author: Dove/Unilever
- Medium of publication: TV commercial, printed media, online.
- Genre: Advertisement
- Purpose: The campaign for Real Beauty was created with the intention of portraying “real” women in Dove’s advertisements, aiming to help women embrace themselves, and criticizing how advertisements use and reinforce unrealistic expectations of the female body and beauty.

Step 3. Familiarization/ Self-perception of the campaign

Dove as a brand was created in the 1940’s. The brand aims to speak to women with a friendly and compassionate message. The campaign for Real Beauty was launched in 2004 and has been active for over 15 years. The campaign for Real Beauty aims to be inclusive and target all kinds of women. Initially the campaign was popular for displaying ‘real women’ and no ‘traditional’ models. For the campaign the use of different media was used: a combination of surveys, print media, TV commercials, short films and online videos is applied. The website of the campaign became a central part in the development of the campaign and the interaction with its consumers. The campaign aims to portray a diverse range of women’s body types, ages, and ethnicities, distancing itself from the stereotypical look of models. The campaign was created with the purpose of empowering women, making them feel comfortable in their own skin and self-sufficient.

Step 4. Identification of key themes

During the more than fifteen years of the production of the campaign for Real Beauty, Dove has launched a variety of products, videos and advertisements that contain key features that are the basis of the campaign. These key features are notions or ideas that are presented and reiterated several times during the totality of the campaign’s existence, highlighting the intentions of the producers and the reason behind the campaign. The key themes of the campaign are:

- Self-esteem: "help ... women develop a positive relationship with the way they look"

- Self-determination: “helping them raise their self-esteem and realize their full potential”
- Uniqueness
- Empowerment
- Diversity

Step 5. Multimodal Analysis

Participants

Initially when the campaign was launched in 2004, the advertisement focused on women of all shapes and colours, however later on in 2007 the campaign grew to include women of all ages. Women from different walks of life, ethnicities, sizes and backgrounds have participated in the creation of the campaign, the group of women represented has become more and more diverse over time.



Figure 28. Group of women with different skin colours and body types, posing in underwear and smiling.

Image taken from Bridget March, “A Decade of Shifting Beauty Attitudes,” Cosmopolitan, May 19, 2014, <http://www.cosmopolitan.co.uk/beauty-hair/news/beauty-news/>

Gaze

For the photographs of the campaign and many of the videos the characteristic gaze of the participants has been “demand/affiliation”, meaning that the participants look directly at the viewer’s eyes, establishing a connection with them. Addressing in this way the viewer directly, as an equal, usually indicated by a smile or friendly look in the participants’ face.

In the campaign the use of this gaze creates a sense of familiarity between the audience and the participant, making the viewer feel like they are looking at their mother, daughter or close friend. Helping female viewers relate more easily with what the company is marketing: self-

esteem, self-confidence, self-determination and self-love that could be achieved or supported through Dove products.



Figure 29. Group of women in a close shot smiling in underwear.

Taken from Canvas8, "The Changing Face Of Beauty: 2004 to 2024.," 2014, <https://www.canvas8.com/static-assets/media/docs/canvas8-dove-the-future-of-beauty.pdf>.

Pose

The participants portrayed are usually smiling or laughing, which gives the impression of them having a lot of fun with their female friends, feeling comfortable, beautiful and included. The photos do not look like the participants are holding a static pose but rather like a casual interaction between friends.



Figure 30. Group of women from different ethnicity and different body types laughing in underwear.

Picture taken from Nina Bahadur, "How Dove Tried To Change The Conversation About Female Beauty," HuffPost, 44:19 500, <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dove-real-beaut>

Depicted context/setting

The depicted context of most of the advertisements of the Real Beauty Campaign does not exist. The women are photographed with a white background that does not specify any specific context or setting but that gives the impression of simplicity and cleanliness.

Distance and Frame

The shots of the campaign are mostly long or medium, which indicate a social or friendly interaction with the viewer. The long-distance shots allow the viewer to have a distant view of the participants, making it obvious the intent to portray women's diversity by including a lot of different women in a single shot. The medium shots make it easier for the viewer to perceive the expression of the participants, their smiles and happy gestures, creating a sense of familiarity and connection between the participants and the viewer.



Figure 31. Group of women from different ethnicity and different body types laughing in underwear.

Picture taken from Olivia Bowman, "The Evolution Of Beauty Standards And Fashion Over The Years," The Odyssey Online, August 1, 2017, <https://www.theodysseyonline.c>

Perspective

The campaign is characterized for the use of frontal angles, creating the impression of connection and involvement between the viewer and the participants represented, giving the campaign the ability to express a sense of familiarity and friendliness.



Figure 32. Diverse group of women with different ethnicities, ages, and body sizes.

Picture taken from “Announcing the Dove Real Beauty Pledge,” Unilever global company website, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.unilever.com/news/news-and-features/Feature-article>

Narrative

Starting in 2004, Dove’s campaign for real beauty launched with a series of ads that portrayed non-professional models and invited the viewer to participate in voting.¹³⁶

Following the success of the campaign, in 2005 Dove produced a series of photo advertisements challenging women to “Stand firm to celebrate their curves”. In these photos a group of 6 women of different ages, shapes and sizes were photographed in their underwear while smiling and embracing themselves. During the more than 20 years of existence of Dove’s campaign for real beauty the company has promoted the idea of embracing the real beauty in each woman, pointing out how in the advertising world many models’ photographs are modified to satisfy a stereotypical standard of beauty, as shown in the video “Evolution”(2016)¹³⁷. Another important remark made by Dove is that women’s self-perception is overshadowed by low self-esteem and comparing themselves to others, a problem that is being addressed through videos like Dove’s real beauty sketches (2013).¹³⁸

For the purpose of the campaign Dove’s official website has provided a variety of material to support and encourage women, such as self-esteem development material for

¹³⁶ “2004: Dove Breaks Barriers with ‘Campaign for Real Beauty,’” The Drum, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2016/04/21/marketing-moment-25-dove-breaks-barriers-campaign-real-beauty>.

¹³⁷ “Dove Short Film: Dove Evolution - YouTube,” accessed May 22, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKGixw_ml3Y.

¹³⁸ *Dove Real Beauty Sketches | You’re More Beautiful than You Think (6mins)*, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=litXW91UauE&t=15s>.

young girls, self-esteem training materials for mothers and mentors, video campaigns, workshops, online discussions, and a self-esteem fund.¹³⁹ This demonstrates that the campaign not only looks to improve sales with their advertisements but also to support women with a more real representation of the female body as well as material for female awareness and self-development with a tangible impact past simply improving their sales.

Step 6. Results

Dove's campaign for Real Beauty has been popularized for their 'unusual' and non-stereotypical representation of women and the female body. In the process of analyzing the different modes that come together in the creation of the campaign it is possible to recognize how the company has made an effort not only to come closer to their customers with the use of feminist notions with the aim to empower women and the implementation of commodity activism to improve their sales, but the company has also enabled a series of tools and programs such as workshops, videos, manuals, and discussions among others, that support women and help them embrace themselves, creating a more concrete impact on their customers and supporters.¹⁴⁰

Step 7. Analysis of Unilever's campaign

To facilitate a proper interpretation of the previously studied text (advertisement campaigns) the analysis will encompass the understanding of the relation between the advertisements. Taking into consideration the key themes of the campaigns, the institutional background and aims of it as well as the modes analyzed it is possible to observe the following results:

The Unilever brand that was studied, Dove advertise different products with the use of linguistic and visual elements that associates the campaign to feminist ideals and female empowerment. I am aware that these campaigns are not always or solely promoted for and during International women's day, however I find it relevant to look into them since Unilever uses strong elements of femvertising and commodity activism to promote their products.

¹³⁹ "The 'Dove Real Beauty Pledge,'" Dove US, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/about-dove/dove-real-beauty-pledge.html>.

¹⁴⁰ "Dove," Unilever global company website, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.unilever.com/brands/personal-care/dove.html>.

Dove's *For Real Beauty* campaign focuses on the way in which women's bodies are commonly displayed in advertisements, the producers intend to portray or work in their campaigns only with "real" women in a realistic setting and representation, which in the marketing climate represents a big change, moving away from a photoshopped and altered ideal of the female body to a more real and relatable subject, creating a more healthy standard for how girls and women in general are represented and seen. However, the implication of working only with "real" women reinforces the idea that models are not real women, as if the profession of being a model is outside of the realm of "realness" of womanhood.

Dove's campaign has made an impactful contribution to the way in which women seen themselves and other women, creating workshops, leaflets, online talks, conferences and advertisements that impact the way the female body is perceived by its consumers and the general public. Many of the advertisements and products that have supported the campaign have opened the arena for a new perception of women, age, race, body shape, femininity, and a redefinition of beauty. Nonetheless, despite all of their efforts some of their marketing strategies have fallen flat in these aspects, such as Dove's limited edition body wash¹⁴¹ that intended to celebrate the diversity of the female body by creating bottles of different sizes and shapes, a gesture that not only simplifies the representation of women's bodies but also in some ways compares them to objects which in this case are plastic bottles. Another advertisement that was highly criticized was the marketing for a body wash that showed a black woman turning into a white woman,¹⁴² something that made many wonder if Dove was using notions like 'diversity' to be part of the feminist trend or if they were making a real effort to create change and diversify women's representation.

Another aspect of Dove's campaign that is important to highlight is the lack of inclusion of a real diversity of women, such as women with disabilities, scars, skin conditions, athletic body types and even tattoos. All of these different types of women are then left out of the idea of "realness" and remain still very confined when contrasted with true real-world diversity and reinforces in some ways the traditional understandings of female

¹⁴¹ "Celebrating Beauty Diversity with Limited Edition Body Washes," Dove UK, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://www.dove.com/uk/stories/campaigns/dove-beauty-diversity-.html>.

¹⁴² Nicola Slawson, "Dove Apologises for Ad Showing Black Woman Turning into White One," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2017, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/08/dove-apologises-for-ad-showing-black-woman-turning-into-white-one>.

bodies and beauty, in which the idea of ‘real women’ is represented mostly by white and stereotypically beautiful women.¹⁴³

Unilever is also the owner of brands such as Axe¹⁴⁴ and Fair & Lovely,¹⁴⁵ companies that produced advertisements that have been criticized for the sexualized portrayal of the female body as well as the use of narratives that reinforce stereotypical gender standards. Axe’s campaign the *Axe Effect*¹⁴⁶ is designed to target young males with the idea that the use of Axe’s products will improve their confidence as well as their chances of attracting women. The key themes of the campaign are confidence, self-determination and hypersexualization, notions that reflect in what way men and women are portrayed in the advertisements.

Axe aims to represent nerdy or average men as women-hungry, defined many times by their uncontrollable sexuality, capable of attracting incredibly sexy women with the simple use of Axe products, and gaining confidence with the help of them. This kind of representation however defies the aspiration of equal gender representation urged by Unilever with Dove’s campaign for Real Beauty. Since in the case of Axe men are stereotyped as hypersexual, dominant, masculine and achievers while women are portrayed as traditionally beautiful, slender, attractive, highly sexualized and as objects to be obtained, which is the complete opposite representation from that of Dove’s campaign.

Axe promotes the “slim ideal” as well as the sexualization of women, which are seen as sexual beings out of control, reinforcing stereotypes associated with both men and women. Even though Axe has made an effort to diversify the notion of masculinity and what defines an attractive man with new campaigns, the old and highly successful campaign *The Axe Effect* still remains in the collective memory representing the way in which male and women behave.

¹⁴³ “Beauty Above All Else: The Problem With Dove’s New Viral Ad,” The Cut, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.thecut.com/2013/04/beauty-above-all-else-doves-viral-ad-problem.html>.

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix I, 87.

¹⁴⁵ See Appendix II, 92.

¹⁴⁶ Axe/Lynx advertisements usually develop around a small story that describes the ‘essence’ of the product as well as the effect of the product on those who use it and who have contact with it. These stories commonly evolve around a young male that uses Axe/Lynx and women start following him, staring at him, touching him, flirting or insinuating an interest in him. Displaying to the viewer how the smell of Axe/Lynx makes it impossible for women to control themselves, portraying women in a hypersexualized way, losing control at the sight/smell of a man using the product.

The Fair & Lovely advertisements¹⁴⁷ are characterized by representing how the life of women can improve by having fairer skin. The key themes of the campaign are choice, empowerment and self-determination which are usually achieved after using the Fair & Lovely cream and obtaining a lighter skin. However, the way in which women are represented in the campaign goes once again against Unilever's mission statement for an equal gender representation. The message of the campaign also is a direct contradiction to the message that Dove's campaign is aiming to promote which is the diversification of beauty ideals as well as a positive body image, making the campaign very instrumental and profit oriented rather than having a central element of and inclusivity as its aim.

Unilever has opted to create advertisements with less stereotypes following the European directive for a better gender representation in advertising,¹⁴⁸ with this the company has aimed to portray both men and women in an equal way. This is an attempt to distance themselves from hypocrisy and a bad public perception, since as pointed out by Susan Linn, director and co-founder of the Campaign for a commercial-Free Childhood "There's an inherent hypocrisy in promoting the well-being of girls with one product and promoting degrading sexualized stereotypes with another."¹⁴⁹

During the more than fifteen years of development of these campaigns Unilever has changed its perspective and approached the problem of representation with new intentions, looking to reach their audiences and empowering both men and women with the idea that "we all are beautiful", which has made a change not only in the marketing sphere but also in the way people see themselves and the products they consume. However, I question whether the goal (besides selling products) should not only be to get people to focus on the way they look and how beautiful, feminine or masculine they are but rather to inspire their audiences

¹⁴⁷ In the Fair & Lovely advertisements the narrative typically develops around a young woman that is trying to achieve a goal or pursuing her dream, however due to being in a disadvantaged situation and her darker skin which is pointed out by her friends or family, she is not able to reach her dreams. The main character then, is favored by the advice of her close ones to use Fair & Lovely cream and obtain with its help a fairer skin and a happier life. After using the cream, the main character is able to fulfil her goals, resolve her problems and gain the admiration that she wanted.

¹⁴⁸ "2008/2038(INI) - 27/05/2008 - Vote in Committee, 1st Reading/Single Reading."

¹⁴⁹ "Taking the Axe to Unilever's Hypocrisy," thestar.com, November 28, 2007, https://www.thestar.com/opinion/columnists/2007/11/28/taking_the_axe_to_unilevers_hypocrisy.html.

to look at others and themselves based on intelligence, ethical sensibility and their own value and not just based on their faces and bodies.

Chapter V. Conclusions and Final Remarks

The 8th of March is widely known as International Women's Day, a world-wide celebration of the economic, political and social achievements that both men and women made towards gender equality. International Women's Day and the notion of feminism is traditionally connected to manifestations of solidarity that have been associated with a sense of community, empowerment, equality and sisterhood. These concepts have been highlighted year after year during the celebration encouraging the creation of different campaigns and slogans to support them.

The use of new media technologies as well as the diversification of digital platforms facilitated the expansion and creation of new marketing tools that, using notions associated with social movements, improved their sales with the help of visual and discursive elements. In the last decade a big variety of marketing campaigns have incorporated feminist ideals that associated the brand with the goals inspired by the feminist movement, a practice that popularized feminism but left behind many of the broader concerns of the movement.

This thesis intended to research the problematic aspects of the portrayal and representation of womanhood and femininity through marketing, as well as the implementation of branding strategies used not only to improve sales but also to inspire social change with the use of commercial social marketing, and femvertising. The thesis explored issues of representation, marketing, and women's representation in Europe. Moreover, this thesis aimed to analyze if European companies were complying with the European normative goal to regulate gender stereotypes in advertising,¹⁵⁰ or if they were defying such aspirations.

To approach the aforementioned problem, the purpose of this study was to illustrate:

- How, with the use of different discursive and visual elements used in marketing for International Women's Day (IWD), companies commercialize and re-present womanhood?

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter II. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework, page 27-28.

- How do these practices resonate with (or defy) the aspiration of European gender equality and impact the development of feminist ideals, solidarity and European advertising?
- In what way has -the initial goal of the IWD shifted and opened up a space for new ways of expressing “solidarity”, through marketing and social media campaigns?

These questions were posed with the intention of analyzing the use of visual and discursive elements in advertisements that were promoted mainly during International Women’s Day or that use feminist rhetoric as part of their marketing strategies but that usually fall short in implementing equal gender representation and creating a long-term change in the way womanhood is perceived in advertisements.

With these questions in mind, two companies were taken as examples of such problem, Agent Provocateur and Unilever. From these companies three marketing campaigns were selected to be studied; Agent’s Provocateur campaign *Pump it up* 2019, Agent’s Provocateur campaign *Play to Win* 2020, and Dove’s campaign *For Real Beauty*. To analyze the previously mentioned campaigns the conceptual and theoretical framework included a historical overview of feminism as well as the problems of representation, sexualization and the female body addressed by the movement, an explanation of critical feminist studies, feminist media studies and their approach to a critical perception of women’s representation and finally a presentation of marketing strategies that utilize feminist rhetoric to their benefit such as femvertising and commodity activism. The theoretical background gave the thesis the context needed to understand the broader scope of the issues associated with women’s representation in marketing and the commercialization of womanhood through advertisement campaigns, as well as the historical background for the understanding of the precarious vision of women’s sexuality and the female body.

In order to study the issue outlined in this study, the use of discourse analysis and visual analysis was applied in a multimodal method. A multimodal method facilitated the understanding of the different modes that create meaning in the advertisements, since all of the meaning making elements influence the whole perception of the campaign and what is represented in it. Between the different variables/modes studied we find: participants, gaze, pose, distance, depicted context, frame, perspective, narrative and music.

Through this analysis it was possible to identify how companies employ a series of discursive and visual elements to inspire and facilitate consumer engagement that implements commodity activism as well as feminist ideals to resonate with the daily lives and ethics of the audiences. However, the efforts made by these companies have limited potential to make a long-term and meaningful change, since many of the ways in which women (and men) are portrayed in these advertisements are stereotypical and reinforce the traditional idea of what femininity, masculinity, beauty and the female body are.

The campaigns and companies analyzed for the thesis serve as an example of how marketing strategies adopt and appropriate ideas originally associated with feminism such as empowerment, choice, equality, diversity, solidarity and self-determination, while being supported by Europe with the aim of promoting a reimagination of equal gender representation.¹⁵¹ This approach repurposes these notions into a flat group of ideals that while serving capitalism and encouraging a consumer society, do not uphold a fair and objective representation of womanhood. Femvertising and the use of commodity activism provide only a temporal perspective and solution to feminist concerns and problems related to women's representation. These marketing strategies work by making both men and women comfortable with their purchases and consumer practices but do not create an impactful change since usually they ignore bigger concerns of how to properly influence gender equality on a broader scale.

¹⁵¹ See Chapter II. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework, page 27-28.

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Appendix I

Axe's The Axe Effect / The Lynx's Effect

Macro features of the campaign

- Time of publication: from the 1990's to current day.
- Author: Unilever/ Axe
- Description of the campaign:
- Medium of publication: Online videos, TV commercials, print media, social media
- Genre: Advertisement campaign.
- Purpose: The Axe effect campaign was created with the purpose of making Axe the #1 male antiperspirant/deodorant brand. The brand uses visual and rhetorical elements to portray women as extremely sexual beings that lose control at the smell of Axe products, and men as being in constant search of female attention.

Step 3. Familiarization/ Self-perception of the campaign

Axe was launched in 1983 in France. Considered the most popular men grooming brand. Unilever's best selling brand during 2005 and 2007.

- Target audience: Young male demographic between 15-25 years old.

For the campaign Axe uses sexually explicit images and humor to make the campaign approachable, young and "cool". Axe is widely known for the general concept of "helping men to attract women" and the use of suggestive language to advertise and describe their products. In the campaign mostly young men attract many women by simply using Axe products. The campaign is popular for endorsing celebrities. Use of print media on male dominated magazines such as Playboy, Rolling Stone, and Maxim. Use of online platforms and social media to spread the advertisements. Along with the TV advertisement the Axe Effect campaign provided online games and downloadable promotions on the official website.

Identification of key themes

The Axe/Lynx Effect has existed for over twenty years. During this time the advertisements, photos and videos have used a series of concepts that are stated and reproduced constantly. These key ideas become part of the central composition of the marketing strategy, reinforcing notions showcased by the company in the production of the campaign. The key themes emphasize the intentions of its producers and allow us to identify the main topics of the advertisements.

- Self-determination
- Confidence
- Hypersexualization
- Stereotypical
- Masculinity

Complementary Analysis

The participants of the Axe Effect advertisements are men and women that are portrayed in a stereotypical way, which favors the brand and the creation of a particular image of the product. With this, they facilitate the delimitation of the target group, both creating a need for the product while offering itself as the solution.

The men that are represented in the advertisements were categorized as “the insecure novice — he has absolutely no clue what he’s doing, and things get awkward fast — the geeks and the nerds”¹⁵² and were determined to be Axe’s main target group due to their need for help attracting women, whose representation was relatable to young men who would be easily persuaded into buying the products. Men then are portrayed as average men but with an abundance of self-assurance as Axe users.

¹⁵² Martin Lindstrom, *Brandwashed: Tricks Companies Use to Manipulate Our Minds and Persuade Us to Buy*, 1st ed (New York: Crown Business, 2011), 102.



Figure 33. Man spraying AXE on his back while a crowd of women in bikinis run towards him.

Picture taken from Rebecca Paramo, "Constitutive Rhetoric: 'The AXE Effect,'" Medium, March 2, 2015, <https://medium.com/@rebeccaparamo/constitutive-rhetoric-the-axe-effect-a2b20595c>



Figure 34. Fat man getting slimmer by spraying AXE.

Picture taken from "15 Years of Axe Effect: The World's Most Sexist Advertising Campaign," This Is Not ADVERTISING (blog), November 7, 2011, <https://thisisnotadvertising.wordpress.com/2011/11/07/15-years-of-axe-e>



Figure 35. Man smiling while showing the Axe click with a big number.

Picture taken from "15 Years of Axe Effect: The World's Most Sexist Advertising Campaign," This Is Not ADVERTISING (blog), November 7, 2011, <https://thisisnotadvertising.wordpress.com/2011/11/07>

Women are portrayed in the advertisement as “man hungry”. Women are depicted as extremely sexualized and objects of sexual satisfaction. All of the women on the advertisements are noticeably attractive, slim and beautiful.



Figure 36. Man applying Axe soap on his body, while being compared with a woman putting whipped cream on her body. With the slogan "the cleaner you are, the dirtier you get".

Picture taken from "15 Years of Axe Effect: The World's Most Sexist Advertising Campaign," *This Is Not ADVERTISING* (blog), November 7, 2011, <https://thisisnotadvertising.wordpress.com/2011/11/0>



Figure 37. Cartoon of a man of the jungle with a group of women hanging from him, portraying the Axe Effect.

Picture taken from "15 Years of Axe Effect: The World's Most Sexist Advertising Campaign," *This Is Not ADVERTISING* (blog), November 7, 2011, <https://thisisnotadvertising.wordpress.com/2011/11/0>

Final Remarks

As described in Unilever's website, Axe has helped men for over 34 years to look, feel and smell their most attractive.¹⁵³ The brand is recognized in over 90 countries, and has gained popularity over the years among both men and women, however young men initially with intent of conquering women with the help of Axe/Lynx used it not as a deodorant but more as a perfume or 'special' essence to get women's attention.

In the process of studying the selected modes for a more in-depth analysis of the campaign it was possible to understand different aspects of it. Initially the brand created a

¹⁵³ "Axe," Unilever global company website, accessed July 9, 2020, <https://www.unilever.com/brands/personal-care/axe.html>.

collective subject that in this case functioned as a representation of the ‘average’ male, to which the product was targeted.¹⁵⁴ This man was depicted in most cases as woman-hungry and with few ‘real’ possibilities of charming women, a man that needed Axe (or some kind of help) to get women’s attention.¹⁵⁵ The use of such a subject and the way they were represented creates simultaneously a collective problem that links the subject with the product advertised. In the case of the Axe Effect the problem posed is that these men are not able to attract women on their own. Axe creates a solution for such a problem which is Axe products, the product then portrays women as something to be acquired in mass¹⁵⁶ and objectifies¹⁵⁷ them while manipulating males' sexuality, representing women as out of control sexual beings as a result of the “Axe Effect”.

The discursive and visual representation used by Axe during the campaign suggests that with the use of Axe, men are set for success. In other words, “use Axe and have sexual success”. Some slogans such as, “Spray more, get more”, “The cleaner you are, the dirtier you get”, “It can happen anywhere” among others, exemplifying the aim of Axe to represent women as desperate sexual objects.

The Axe Effect advertisements and campaign were considered a big marketing success due to their effective visual and rhetorical strategy which analyzed and took advantage of male sexual fantasies and the reduction of women to sexual objects to boost sales and connect the brand with a specific idea of the product’s qualities. However, due to the misrepresentation of both men and women Axe/Lynx encountered a backlash of criticism¹⁵⁸ and the brand in the last years has made efforts to move to a more positive image of men and women, creating new campaigns and improving the way in which they portray their products such as the 2019 campaign ‘bathsculinity’¹⁵⁹ and the 2017 campaign ‘Find your magic’¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ *Axe Fireball Commercial*, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv0Ja4y2h2k>.

¹⁵⁵ *Commercial Axe Click - Ben Affleck (Completo)*, accessed April 23, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tomg9UmYGNs>.

¹⁵⁶ *AXE Chocolate Man*, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqGCC498yoU>.

¹⁵⁷ *AXE Touch Ad*, accessed April 23, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ji8Ozie0pU>.

¹⁵⁸ McManis, “Amusing or Offensive, Axe Ads Show That Sexism Sells.”

¹⁵⁹ “Axe Invites Men to Celebrate Their ‘Bathsculinity,’” *The Drum*, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2019/04/17/axe-invites-men-celebrate-their-bathsculinity>.

¹⁶⁰ *Lynx Find Your Magic*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ4KNrCkDH0>.

Appendix II

Fair&Lovely

Macro features of the campaign

- Time of publication: the 2000's to the present days
- Author: Fair&Lovely/Hindustan Unilever.
- Description of the campaign:
- Medium of publication: Online, TV Commercials.
- Genre: Advertisement
- Purpose: The producer uses a specific set of elements and a 'story' in its advertisements to promote the products. Feminist notions such as empowerment, self-determination and self-sufficiency are constantly used, however the product and the narrative of their marketing reveals a different reality.

Familiarization/ Self-perception of the campaign

The brand was introduced and marketed for the first time in India in 1975. The product is advertised and available in India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, among other Asian countries. The target consumer group are women between 18 to 50 years old. The brand took up 80% of the lightening cream market in India as of 2012 and is one of the most popular brands in Asia currently.

The marketing campaigns have been criticized in several countries for colorism, a notion that implies that whiter skin associates with beauty and self-confidence. The advertisements produced by the company usually imply that a fairer skin correlates to better education, a better socio-economic position and beauty. The name of the product 'Fair&Lovely' creates a connection equating the idea of a fair skin with a lovely or beautiful person. In 2020 after years of criticizing Hindustan Unilever rebranded the company to change the name from 'Fair & Lovely' to 'Glow & Lovely'

Identification of key themes

In the process of studying different videos and photos of Fair & Lovely advertisements, a group of key themes were identified. These help us identify the ideas that are more present

in the marketing campaign and what the producers are aiming to endorse. The key themes present in the Fair & Lovely advertisements are:

- Self-determination
- Empowerment
- Choice
- Self-esteem

Complementary Analysis

The majority of participants of the advertisements are women mainly from India or other Asian countries. These women are usually in contact with males that are in a higher or powerful position.



Figure 38. Picture of a women progressively getting a lighter skin by using Fair & Lovely.

Picture taken from "Unilever Dropping 'Fair And Lovely' Name From Skin Lightening Products," accessed June 25, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/adeonibada/unilev>

There are two kinds of advertisements on which this analysis will focus, the video commercials and the images that promote the brand. In the images typically the participant is looking off in the distance or to the side and gradually turns the look to the viewer. During this transition the participant shifts from a sad or serious look to a friendly smile, a gaze explained by Van Leeuwen and Jewitt as demand/affiliation in which the represented participant looks directly at the viewer's eyes while smiling, suggesting a sense of equality or parity with the viewer. In the case of this transition however, the participant is initially a distant object that represents sadness that is supposedly (due to the marketing) caused by their unfair skin while the change (thanks to the use of the product) leads to a fairer and whiter skin which then makes them happier. The represented participant is inviting – with a

smile – the viewer to use Fair & Lovely, suggesting that the viewer also has the option of using the product and seeing that the fairer they get the happier they are.



Figure 39. Women seemly getting happier by obtaining a fairer skin.

Picture taken from "Meet the 22-Year Old Mumbai Girl Who Filed the Petition Against Fair & Lovely," accessed June 30, 2020, <https://in.makers.yahoo.com/meet-the-22-year-old-mumbai-girl-who-filed->

Final Remarks

The Fair & Lovely advertisements' intent is to portray the idea that women feel more comfortable and confident in their own skin by using their products, however the initial aim of empowering women and helping them develop a better self-esteem and self-assurance is coerced by the use of a narrative that implies that women's power lies in the color of their skin or that only women who has a fairer skin could achieve their dreams. Which makes me question the real intention of the company and the idea behind their advertisements since the majority of them are promoted in Asian countries and reinforce the idea that white (foreigners/colonizers) have more power, status and beauty.