

# Faux Activism in Recent Female-Empowering Advertising

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## Abstract

*This study content analyzed six brands from Unilever and Procter & Gamble, whose advertisements promoted both male-targeted products and female-targeted ones. The study examined three female-empowering advertisements and three male-targeted, or “opposition” advertisements. It concluded that companies producing these female-empowering advertisements are not truly supporting the feminism activist movement, but are manipulating consumers for bigger profits with faux activism for feminism. By shedding light on this recent trend of “ad-her-tising,” this study found that not all brand activism is genuine.*

## I. Introduction

Companies have increasingly leveraged feminism as a successful selling tactic in contemporary advertising. What media once painted as unfriendly and negative has evolved into female empowerment. Recently, the term “ad-her-tising” has been coined. Some believe that the overwhelming burst of female-empowering ads is an example of faux activism rather than truly empowering the women they target.

Historically, feminism and female influence in advertising have been utilized as a marketing ploy. In the 1960s, the Virginia Slims campaign leveraged a woman’s independence to sell cigarettes with the “You’ve Come A Long Way, Baby” slogan. In 2004, the Dove Real Beauty campaign offered a modern women-empowering take; in 2014, a decade later, ad-her-tising is more prominent than ever. However, what these companies are really engaging in is not real activism, but faux activism because women are used as little more than objects. The same companies used opposite messages for male-targeted brands. By participating in this trend, companies are taking advantage of feminism as a source of activism. Thus, one advertising strategy used by companies is to make consumers believe they are passionate about a cause, while not necessarily believing in the messages they distribute.

By examining companies that produce several brands—female and male targeted—this study investigated whether these advertisers are merely leveraging a marketing fad. In other words, ad-her-tising may be nothing more than a trend that gets individuals to buy products.

## II. Literature Review

A number of researchers have studied advertising as it relates to females and sexuality portrayals

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or how feminism is portrayed by the media. This paper focused on women portrayed in women-empowering roles in modern advertising, a topic that had not been widely investigated. By examining recent advertising campaigns that promote she-power and how they fit into the modern feminist movement, this paper aimed to explore the validity of corporate activism.

## ***Feminism***

Many feminists today believe that society is in the midst of a third wave of feminism. It is important to understand the goals and components of this current wave of feminism to better understand the current audience to ad-her-tising. As Lueptow wrote in *Everyday Feminism*, an online feminism magazine, what is different about this wave compared to previous ones is that feminists have “different viewpoints on the same feminist issues” (par. 4). Mack-Canty, third-wave feminism researcher also explained, “While third-wave feminism often finds tenets from an assortment of foundational theories useful, it works to begin from the situated and embodied perspectives of different(ising) women” (155).

*Everyday Feminism* has defined the third-wave of feminism as embodying five things: knowledge, linguistics, listening, intersectionality and equality of opportunity. Knowledge of the goal of equality and sharing that knowledge is a crucial part of the movement. Linguistics is popular in the third-wave in the sense of shaping culture through gender-specific vernacular and identification by language. Listening to the cultural messages is one of the most important goals of feminism as well. In the current movement of equality, intersectionality is especially important because without the inclusion of all races, sexualities, genders and lifestyles, it is hypocritical. Lastly, equality of opportunity in the third-wave of feminism aims to shake cultural stereotypes for both women and men. It is important that equality applies to all genders because “feminism is also about men’s issues because patriarchy is detrimental to male-self actualization as well” (Lueptow, Equality of Opportunity sec., par. 14 ).

As discussed in Snyder’s “What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay,” what is different about this current wave of feminism from previous waves is: “Unlike their mothers’ generation, who had to prove themselves, third-wavers consider themselves entitled to equality and self-fulfillment . . .”(Snyder, Moving Beyond Generational Conflict sec., par. 4). With this new wave of feminism, feminists feel entitled to equality rather than making a fighting case for it as previous waves have. Relating this message of third-wave feminism to consumerism and self-fulfillment through empowerment, women may feel inclined to have the empowerment expressed in female-empowering advertisements not be so obvious and instead have it be more natural as if it wasn’t a certain sector of advertising. Overall, with third-wave feminism, rights and equality are expected to be goals already obtained.

## ***Brand Activism***

Cause marketing, which aligns a brand with a cause, is becoming increasingly important for consumers to consider when choosing brands to purchase. According to a 2013 Cone Communications/Echo Global CSR Study, with comparable price and quality, 91% of global consumers are likely to switch to a brand associated with a good cause (“Statistics Every Cause Marketer”). Advertisers have been picking up on this fact and have been aligning with a cause that reflects the brand. Cone, Feldman and DaSilva agreed that brands associated with cause marketing benefit in many different areas: They are more attractive to stakeholders; are able to differentiate themselves from similar brands; “enhance their reputations, deepen employee loyalty; strengthen ties with business partners; and even sell more products or services” (par. 2).

Feminists who see the brand aligned with women-empowering advertisements may be more concerned with seeing change rather than awareness and surface-level activism. In their journal article, “Feminist Consumerism And Fat Activists: A Comparative Study of Grassroots Activism And The Dove Real Beauty Campaign,” Johnston and Taylor argued that “A feminist account of activism may be more concerned with gauging whether and how particular groups subvert the gender status quo, rather than determining whether it can be defined as political” (17).

## ***Female Consumerism***

It is important to understand the female consumer because that is the target of the ad-her-tising ads. The habits of consumerism—defined as “the buying and using of goods and services—and the belief that it is good for a society or an individual person to buy and use a large quantity of goods and services” (“Definition

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of Consumerism”) have little changed among female consumers through the decades. What have changed are the messages that are sent to the consumers through advertising.

As O’Barr explains in his “A Brief History of Advertising in America,” in the twentieth century, 80 percent or more of day-to-day household purchases were by women. In 2011, women accounted for 83 percent of consumer purchases in the United States (Bailik). Females have historically been targeted by ad agencies because consumers were predominantly female. On the other hand, advertisers were predominantly male.

Feminist consumerism has the potential to disrupt gender norms and aid in the evolution of a newer and broader cultural definition of consumerism (Johnston and Taylor). They wrote, as *Deseret News National* writer Chandra Johnson quoted in her news article: “Feminist consumerism tends to obscure and minimize both structural and institutionalized gender inequalities that are difficult to resolve and that might cause negative emotional associations with brands” (Johnson, section, par. 4).

### III. Background and Direction

#### ***Ad-her-tising***

There is little scholarly research about ad-her-tising. It is the topic, however, of popular media, trade publications and online discussions. Essentially, ad-her-tising is defined as female-targeted advertising that exhibits qualities of empowering women, feminism, female activism, or women leadership and equality. The present study approached ad-her-tising through a content analysis. Before that, however, a discussion of ad-her-tising in popular and trade media will provide an understanding of the issues surrounding ad-her-tising.

#### ***Recent Media Discussions of Ad-her-tising***

The genesis of this research began with the recent burst of articles in trade publications, news sources and opinion pieces about ad-her-tising. These articles were especially prominent between April and October 2014. Just about all of these sources had a common theme among them—marketing feminism is a trend.

In a recent article, “How Feminism Became a Great Way to Sell Stuff—A Recent Spate of ‘Feminist’ Adverts Shows Adland Belatedly Discovering Women’s Rights as a Marketing Ploy,” in *The Guardian*, Mahadawi expressed her opinion that the “brave new world of consumer-friendly feminism” is through the approaches of pseudo-psychoanalytical, sad soundtrack based feminism, sexism-positive feminism and radically literal feminism. She also mentioned the term ad-her-tising as it relates to the type of advertising that women seek.

In “Buy This, Empower Women: How Advertisers Use Feminism,” in *Deseret News National*, Polatis reported on the news and opinion articles that have surfaced from the overwhelming influx of feminist adverts. Referencing Mahadawi’s article in *The Guardian*, Polatis summarized the opinions of critics and bloggers that companies are wrong to use female-empowering ads to sell toys—notably GoldieBox’s efforts to make more girls interested in engineering. GoldieBox is a company with the main objective to encourage girls to build and engineer. The company created a main character that is described as “adorable, blonde and skinny” and the building toys are described in the article as being “girly colors” with products including “ribbons and fluffy animals.” The criticism around this GoldieBox product is that it still puts girls back in the “pink aisle” when the product aimed to get them out. This article prompted a blog post in 2014 by the James Madison University Women’s Student Caucus titled “#QuickHit: Using Feminism to Leverage Marketing Strategies.”

In “10 Worst Ways Companies Have Used Feminism to Sell Women Products” in *Mic*, Plank looked at drastic cases, including Virginia Slims, Kellogg’s, Dove and Campbell’s and explained that companies jumping on the feminist bandwagon have not reinvented the wheel. Pantene’s “*Sorry Not Sorry*” prompted Plank to write the article. Discussing the marketing phenomenon, she asked, “. . . why are so many companies these days demanding, as a marketing plot, that women change?” The essence of the article showed that corporate feminism has always mingled with feminism .

In “Brands join new wave of feminism” in *Creative Review*, Williams suggested that the new wave of feminism that has surfaced over the recent years has become mainstream and has been encouraged by advertising agencies. The recent outpour of feminist advertisements also showed that agencies are discovering

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what people might share online and what content might go viral.

In “‘Girl-Positive’ Ad Campaigns Support Feminist Consumer Discourse,” Weaver of PSFK noted that mid-June of 2014 saw a spike in girl-positive campaigns for feminine health and hygiene products. There is some question about whether or not these are a ploy, but the bottom line is that the ads have people talking, watching and listening.

In “Worst sales pitch ever: The ad industry’s shameless history of using feminism to sell products: In the age of ‘empowerizing,’ it’s worth asking whether feminism should be treated as a brand at all,” Zeisler mentioned the recent outpour of female-empowering ads from brands, including Dove, Verizon and Always. Her article suggested that what the brands are selling isn’t exactly clear. The recent push for brands to get behind a cause is prevalent, but the main question now is if consumers who buy based on the advertisements will take further steps to support feminism.

In “How feminism and marketing became bedfellows—and how it’s changing,” Johnson discussed some of the recent advertisements—Dove’s Real Beauty and Pantene’s Sorry Not Sorry—and some of the opinions that have surfaced. Some feel that feminist advertisements are raising awareness about important issues even though their end game is selling a product. Johnson also talked about faux activism and the possibility that feminism could coexist with a commercial goal. She concluded, “Feminism as a marketing tool might be an effective business strategy, but it drastically oversimplifies the issues.”

“Female Empowerment in Ads: Soft Feminism or Soft Soap? Go-Girl Marketing Is the Hot New Trend. But Are These Ads Culture-Changing or Simply ‘Pinkwashing?’” explained that industry experts expect that brands will continue to jump on the female-empowering bandwagon. With increased pressure for brands to get behind a cause and be an activist brand, there was also a concern that female-empowerment advertisements could backfire due to their ultimate goal to make a profit and sell a product.

## **History of Advertising**

According to William M. O’Barr in *A Brief History of Advertising in America*, advertising and media have had a relationship in print media since the 1600s. Advertisements have been an element that has fueled development of media and rise of consumerism. Beginning in Colonial America, advertising was directed at basic products—coffee, spices, porcelain, etc.—from around the world. As the commercial world evolved along with increased globalization, so did advertising. In the 1700s, advertising took a more personal approach and began to tell stories about the products. Newspapers began to be the most cost-efficient way to advertise, and the mid-1800s was the “age of the newspaper advertisement” (10). Moving into the twentieth century, the salesman was the new method of advertising and the slogan became popular.

Branding didn’t come into play until the twentieth century. With branding came a personality to the products. “When branding did emerge as part of marketing, it opened the door for a new kind of advertising—arguing not simply the virtues of the commodity itself but also for a particular brand” (O’Barr 7). As commercial messages became delivered via radio, illiteracy was no longer a hindrance to giving a literal voice to products in advertisements. Television in the mid-twentieth century presented a completely new perspective on how consumers view advertising with sound and sight. When the Internet took control in the 1990s, advertising was completely revolutionized with a new wave of globalization. All traditional advertising outlets have been negatively affected, with some more than others, but have not completely faded out.

In terms of audience, ads have always been female targeted since women make up the majority of consumers. Even though the vast majority of consumers was female, and is still female, it has been the male voice that was behind the selling. How to make housework easier, how to be “proper” mothers and wives, how to be passive and domestic were all messages of twentieth century advertising until the 1970s. “It was not until the rebirth of feminism in the 1970s that advertising began to let women speak for themselves, use women as authority figures, and employ women in decision-making and creative roles in the advertising industry” (18). The shedding of the housewife image and the introduction of a woman authority figure were brought in by a new wave of feminism, changing the way advertisers market to women forever.

## **IV. Methodology**

Content analysis was used to examine portrayals of women in recent video advertisements for six

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brands owned by two different companies, Procter & Gamble and Unilever. These two were chosen for analysis because, according to Forward of *Seeking Alpha*, they are “two of the world’s largest and most successful suppliers of consumer goods” (Forward par. 1). The companies offer large selections of brands that can be used in a research sample. The companies also market gender-specific products. By looking at brands distinctly targeting men and women and the messages their ads send out, this study tried to find out whether companies distribute the same messages regardless of the products advertised or they send out messages just for more profits to the extent that ad-her-tisements represent faux activism.

### **Advertisement Campaigns To Be Analyzed**

The advertising videos from the following six brands were analyzed: two ad-her-tising cases and two male-targeted advertisements from Procter & Gamble and one ad-her-tising and one male-targeted advertisement from Unilever.

- *Ad-her-tising*: Pantene “Not Sorry | #ShineStrong” 2014 and Always “#LikeaGirl” 2014 from Procter & Gamble; and *Ad-her-tising*: Dove “Patches” 2014 from Unilever
- *Male-targeting brands*: Gillette “First Girlfriend vs. First Real Girlfriend” 2014 and Oldspice “Hot Tub” 2014; and *Male-targeting brands*: Axe “The Clean Cut Look” 2014 from Unilever

The ad-her-tising sample above was selected based on articles by *Creative Review*, *Ad Age*, *The Guardian* and *PSFK*, which covered the most prominent ad-her-tising videos between April and October 2014. The male-targeting sample was selected among prominent and notoriously male-targeted brands from the same two companies when their brands were advertised in the same time frame of the corresponding ad-her-tising advertisements. The male-targeted ads of Gillette, Oldspice and Axe have been previously noted for producing advertisements exhibiting the opposite of female-empowering ideals.

### **Research Questions**

Ad-her-tising is nothing more than a trend that gets people to buy products. By participating in this trend, companies take advantage of feminism as a legitimate source of activism. The goal of the companies is to make the consumer believe they are passionate about a cause while not necessarily believing in the messages they send.

In order to examine this thesis, the following research questions were raised:

- RQ1: *Are the parent companies (Unilever and Procter and Gamble) of the ad-her-tising campaigns promoting the same message regarding female empowerment through both female- and male-targeted brands?*
- RQ2: *Are the parent companies supporting gender equality across all advertising messages?*
- RQ3: *How does the answer to RQ2 reflect their motives, morals and behaviors as a company and brand?*
- RQ4: *Are the ads for feminine beauty products that empower women contradicting the messages they send with the products they sell?*

## **V. Findings**

First, the author described how coding was done and what she found through content analysis of the six advertisements.

### **Coding**

After viewing the advertisements, the author saw the following two categories of themes emerge: categories hinting at the stereotypes associated with female-empowering behavior and submissive female behavior/male-dominating behavior. These two categories represent advertisements that manifest empowerment or submissive characteristics as their main themes by incorporating the following undertones:

#### **Empowerment undertones:**

- 1) The woman/women is/are shown in a position of power.
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- 2) The video blatantly shows a breakthrough of traditional gender norms and societal-perceived perceptions.
- 3) The woman/women in the video is/are highlighted for their “natural beauty.”

**Submissive undertones:**

- 4) The woman/women in the video is/are seen as subservient to the man/men.
- 5) The woman/women in the video is/are defined as a prop.
- 6) The woman/women in the video is/are sexualized.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Since the terms are abstract, the author operationalized them for this study.

**1) Position of power:**

Position of power for the purpose of this research is defined as a role in which one possesses a noticeable authority. Positions of power in the professional setting would include top executives, group leaders, top discussants during meetings and top decision makers within a profession. Leading a talk, introducing an idea, or making final decision can indicate this position. A position of power outside of a professional setting is defined as noticeably having the ability to directly influence others' behavior throughout a course of events. This definition also covers another layer, such as a woman's power of her own thoughts, body, decisions, actions, feelings, etc.

**2) Breakthrough of traditional gender norms and societally perceived perceptions:**

Traditional gender norms usually follow stereotypes indicated by society. According to *Boundless*, a large online academic resource for multiple disciplines including psychology, “masculine roles are usually associated with strength, aggression, and dominance, while feminine roles are usually associated with passivity, nurturing, and subordination” (Key Points section, par. 1). A breakthrough of these roles is defined as a gender possessing those opposite to their own stereotypical roles. This also includes a breakthrough of societally perceived perceptions and traditional gender norms of women. For example, this happens if a woman changes her perception on a traditional female stereotype about herself or females in general. This includes societal perceptions of women often not regarding themselves as beautiful, lacking confidence or downplaying their intelligence.

**3) Natural beauty:**

Natural beauty, for the purpose of this research, includes personality and internal attributes as well as physical appearance. Natural beauty refers to a woman/women who exhibit(s) beauty through confidence, self-awareness and comfort within her skin. This can be done with the absence of additives to their appearance including excessive makeup or hair care. However, this does not mean that physical upkeep and physical appearance with cosmetic aid dismisses natural beauty entirely.

**4) Subservient to man/men:**

For the purpose of this research, the women/woman portrayed as subservient to the man/men in the video are seen as secondary, submissive, less important, passive, obedient and compliant in relation to the male(s). More specifically, this includes cases where a woman speaks less than the men/man, does what the men/man command(s), modifies her behaviors because of the behaviors of the male, and is blatantly seen as secondary to the male. This also includes a woman being seen as a “prize” or being something the male obtains.

**5) Prop:**

This covers cases where a woman shows little emotion, mimics her actions to the desire of the male, speaks very little to not at all, and uses her body as the main representation of herself.

**6) Sexualized:**

For this study, a woman would be defined as being sexualized in a video if she has minimal clothes such as a bra, underwear, or bikini; tight-fitting clothes, including tight dresses, skirts or shirts; excessive skin exposure, including cleavage from low shirts and dresses, high slits in skirts or dresses or exposed midriffs. This definition includes comments on a woman's appearance by a male as well and any verbal language pertaining to the sexualization of women, such as desire, lust or irresistibility for a man.

The six video advertisements were analyzed along the six categories. When the theme of each category was manifested through the advertisement, yes (Y) was chosen; no (N) was chosen otherwise; and

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change (C) was chosen if there was a shift in how a person was perceived between the beginning of the video and its end.

**Table 1: Themes of six advertisements from Procter and Gamble (P & G) and Unilever**

	Pantene (P & G; Ad-her-tising)	Always (P & G; Ad-her-tising)	Dove (Unilever; Ad-her-tising)	Gillette (P & G; male-targeted)	Old Spice (P & G; male-targeted)	Axe (Unilever; male-targeted)
1) Position of power	C	C	C	N	N	N
2) Breakthrough of traditional roles	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
3) Natural beauty	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
4) Subservience	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
5) Prop	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
6) Sexualized	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y

## VI. Analysis

The content analysis of ad-her-tising and opposition videos of the Unilever and Procter & Gamble brands answered the four research questions:

Regarding RQ1--*Are the parent companies (Unilever and Procter and Gamble) of the ad-her-tising campaigns promoting the same message regarding female empowerment through both female and male brands?*--the parent companies of the ad-her-tising campaigns are not promoting the same message of female empowerment through both the female and male brands they represent. The ad-her-tising advertisements have strong messages of female empowerment (9 out of 6 areas above) and negation of secondary female roles (9 out of 9 areas), while the male brand advertising displays strong messages of female subordination and negate female empowerment (in all areas). In the Dove "Patches" advertisement, the conclusion of advertisement is with a woman exclaiming, "I'm beautiful, I'm strong, I'm independent, and I can be whoever I want to." Pantene makes similar nods to women empowerment with its "#ShineStrong" advertisement at the end telling women, "Don't be sorry. Be strong and shine." Always similarly says in its "#LikeAGirl" advertisement, "Let's make #LikeAGirl mean amazing things. Join us to champion girls' confidence at Always.com." Both parent companies make blatant efforts to show the strength and highlight a woman's confidence through the messages they send in their advertisements for women's products.

The same parent companies display the opposite themes in advertisements for male-targeted products. In Gillette's "First Girlfriend vs. First Real Girlfriend" advertisement, the brand objectifies women while comparing them to razors. The advertisement says, "At some point every man is ready for his first real girlfriend, just as he's ready for his first real razor." Old Spice's "Hot Tub" advertisement shows a robotic man in a hot tub with three women wearing only bikinis. The point of this advertisement is that one doesn't even have to be a human male to attract women. The tagline, "Smell like a man from head to toes," denigrates a woman's judgment by suggesting they don't know the difference between a real man and a robot because of the smell of Old Spice. Additionally, Axe's "The Clean Cut Look" advertisement for Axe hair products opens the advertisement with a statement that directly negates women empowerment with, "Every single lady on earth is powerless to resist the well-travelled gentleman."

All of the advertisements studied were between the months of April and October 2014, when the current trend of ad-her-tising was at its peak. This means that the parent companies of Unilever and Procter & Gamble do not promote the same messages of female empowerment in their advertisements both for female-targeted and male-targeted brands.

Regarding RQ2--*Are the parent companies supporting gender equality across all advertising messages?*--the two companies do not support gender equality across all advertising messages by exhibiting female-empowering behavior in female-targeted advertisements, and female-disempowering behavior in

male-targeted advertisements.

*Regarding RQ3--How does the answer reflect their motives, morals and behaviors as a company and brand--* it is important to consider brand activism. As discussed in the literature review, Cone, Feldman and DaSilva explained how brand activism attempts to “enhance their [brand] reputations, deepen employee loyalty, strengthen ties with business partners, and even sell more products or services” (par. 2). Any company’s chief motive is to generate a profit and drive sales. Recently, this has been accomplished more effectively by a brand latching on to a cause and promoting activism to increase sales by jumping on feminist themes. This does not mean that they truly believe in the messages they incorporated in the female-targeted advertisements because they send out opposite messages through male-targeted advertisements.

What is important to note is the change that occurs in the Dove, Pantene and Always advertisements in relation to the first coding category: “The woman/women is/are shown in a position of power.” To make a point of addressing the gender barrier that feminism is trying to overcome, all of the ad-her-tising videos start with a woman/women in a somewhat powerless position and end with her/them in a powerful position. In the Dove “Patches” advertisement, the women feel powerless over their own confidence, strength and beauty. After the two weeks with the beauty patch and through video diaries, the women realize they have power over their own beauty. In the Pantene “#ShineStrong” advertisement, it begins with the statement, “Why are women always apologizing?” This is followed with a series of scenarios of women who lack power, apologizing to men, taking over an arm rest, handing a child over, asking a question, talking at the same time, etc. The scenarios are later replayed with the women asserting power and not apologizing.

Similarly, Always does this by asking women and men to act out scenarios, such as run like a girl, hit like a girl, and throw like a girl. The responses highlight stereotypical gender portrayals with the participants flailing their arms when running, playing with their hair, or pretending to drop a ball. They are asked to do this again at the end after being asked why they exhibited that behavior to portray women. This time they acted as they would do it normally with no stereotypical exaggerations. Looking at this change throughout the ad-her-tisements can relate back to one of the goals of third-wave advertisements discussed by Lueptow. Linguistics in the sense of shaping culture through gender-specific vernacular and identification by language is what this change throughout the course of the ad-her-tisement alludes to.

This finding shows how the brands Dove, Pantene and Always are creating their messages to mimic feminist views of society, but their motives and morals for these advertisements remain the same, that is, to create a profit.

*Regarding RQ4--Are the ads for feminine beauty products that empower women contradicting the messages they send with the products they sell?—*the answer is positive. The feminine stance of the brands analyzed in this study is negated with the products they sell. This was distinctly seen with Dove.

Dove, the brand of feminine beauty products that aim to make women more beautiful with softer skin and smoother and silkier hair, promotes “real beauty,” and sells products to make women more beautiful. At the end of their advertisement “Patches,” it states, “Beauty is a state of mind.” It claims that beauty is a state of mind, but if this is true, why would women need to buy any of its beauty products? This statement directly contradicts the products it sells.

Johnston and Taylor, who addressed this finding in their case study, wrote, “Dove’s approach, which we term feminist consumerism, encourages women to channel dissent and practice self-care by engaging with corporate marketing campaigns and purchasing beauty products. Although broadly accessible, Dove’s critique of beauty ideology is diluted by its contradictory imperative to promote self-acceptance and at the same time increase sales by promoting women’s consumption of products that encourage conformity to feminine beauty ideology. The Dove campaign does not decenter the role of beauty in women’s lives, but rather suggests that beauty and self-acceptance can be accessed through the purchase of Dove beauty products.”

With Pantene, the brand’s “#ShineStrong” advertisement sends women the message to be strong, don’t apologize, and instead take command over situations. Thinking back to the products Pantene sells—shampoo, conditioner and other hair products—are women supposed to achieve confidence and power by using their products? The connection doesn’t make sense because there is no final call to action other than to stop apologizing and also use Pantene’s Pro-V shampoo. Always similarly exhibits this same product-message disconnect.

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## VII. Discussion and Limitations

The content analysis led the author to conclude that the content analysis supports the initial thesis that ad-her-tising is nothing more than a trend that gets individuals to buy products. By participating in this trend, companies are taking advantage of feminism as a legitimate source of activism. The goal of the companies is to make the consumer believe they are passionate about a cause while not necessarily believing in the messages they publicize.

This is especially apparent in examining the male-targeted advertisements in which women are treated as no more than a prop and exhibit vast anti-feminist ideas. Women in the male-targeted advertisements analyzed said no more than one sentence in each advertisement. The women were also either scantily clad in bikinis, presented as a prize in a tight-fitting evening dress, or shown in what is commonly discussed as one of a man's favorite outfits, a sundress. The images of women in these advertisements show the opposite of feminist ideals and contradict their sister-company's efforts to promote female empowerment.

Ultimately, faux activism exists within the beauty industry and even within ad-her-tising. What is important is to recognize that companies practice faux activism and only jump on a trend if it contributes to profits. The trend of brand activism is also elevating the ad-her-tising trend and making it more pronounced as it reached new heights during the summer months of 2014. In the midst of a third-wave of feminism, brands' faux activism can cloud messages that are actually important to the feminist movement in order to gain consumers and larger sales. Arguably, while ad-her-tising does increase awareness of feminism through female-empowering advertisements, which does aid in the third-wave movement, ad-her-tising is indeed more like a marketing trend with little substance behind it.

Ultimately, the findings show that it may not be possible for a company with multiple brands to extend empowerment views across all of them without alienating certain consumers. When the same parent companies manage different brands with different goals, it may not be possible for a brand to have a completely valid stance in activism.

This study has some limitations. As part of requirements for a semester course, this research was conducted in a short time frame of 14 weeks. If more time were allowed, additional data could have been gathered directly from research participants who could testify to consumer projections of ad-her-tising. This information would have aided in defining how consumers perceive the ads and if they think companies are practicing faux activism. More studies on ad-her-tising can be conducted to analyze not only the messages the brands send out and the faux activism they practice, but also their effects on society and the consumer. Of course, the sample size of videos could have been larger for more valid results.

## VIII. Conclusion

Following this study, it can be concluded that while brands seem to support gender equality and feminism through female-empowering advertisements, the companies are actually practicing faux activism. This is seen through the contradicting messages of the brands Unilever and Procter & Gamble promote and the anti-feminist messages their male-targeted brands send through advertising.

The implications of this research is that ad-her-tisement messages do not have a ring of validity to them when the brands send them out to participate in a trend as a tactic to turn a profit. The result suggests that caution should be taken when consumers support a brand solely because of its ad-her-tisement.

While this research does support the notion that companies are jumping on the feminist advertising trend to turn a profit, this study cannot be generalized to all brands that have practiced ad-her-tising as a marketing tactic since this study highlighted only two companies.

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