

# From Femininity to Feminism: A Visual Analysis of Advertisements Before and After the Femvertising Movement

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in  
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

## Abstract

*Since its inception, advertising has become a crucial way in which brands ensure that their products, positions and interests are communicated to key audiences. Recently, there has been a movement in support of female empowerment advertising — labeled “femvertising” — across the United States. This article explores the messages and design of print advertisements before and after this movement, evaluating the evolution of companies in their representation of and marketing to women. Comparing the typography, photography, and themes of communications content from the 1960s, 70s or 80s to ads published in the past five years provides a context for the way in which societal shifts influence brand positioning and consumer perception. Through a qualitative visual analysis, the study identifies key trends in femvertising, including a decline in product prominence, an increase in depictions of diversity, as well as an emphasis on the sentiment of strength across campaigns. Advertisers may find these insights valuable in defining messaging that aligns with modern feminist feedback and builds favorability with female audiences.*

## I. Introduction

Messages are infused into culture with every article read, video watched and BuzzFeed quiz taken. Since its inception, advertising has become a crucial way in which brands ensure that their products, positions and interests are communicated to key audiences. However, paid media is now straying from being used exclusively for product promotion. Companies are leaning into their influence of culture through advertisements, whether in relationship to gender equality, human rights, environmental concerns or other topics worthy of advocacy. As an area in which mass media has been historically criticized, the representation of women has become an important point of discussion in the advertising industry. More brands are choosing to break the boundaries of female stereotyping and sexualized depiction that previously ruled.

The recent movement in support of female empowerment advertising — labeled “femvertising” — has swept across the United States (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). A number of brands that market products toward women are recognizing the importance of supporting this wave of feminism that stands for fairness, acceptance, and strength. The spread of these values does not only benefit female figures, but benefits society by fostering a culture of inspiration and inclusivity.

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**Keywords:** femvertising, female empowerment, stereotypes, advertising, visual analysis  
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This research seeks to understand how femvertising is reflected in basic components of advertising design, typography and imagery. This paper analyzes creative content to understand the changes in themes and values that have been brought forth by the femvertising movement.

## **II. Literature Review**

### ***Origins of Femvertising***

Depictions of women related to Westernized beauty ideals, male desires and mothering stereotypes have long dominated advertising, perpetuating the subordinate status of women in society. As early as the 1950s, scholars began to assess the prevalence of gender bias in marketing communications content, specifically in relationship to women in stereotypical roles (Levy, 2008). Further discourse arose surrounding the “abundance of negative and/or gratuitously sexy images of women” that marketed products most often to men (Taylor, Miyazaki, & Mogensen, 2013, p. 213). However, the 1960s, 70s, and 80s also brought forth a restructuring of the labor force and family model that began to empower women outside of the home. Modern feminist movements began to vocalize disapproval of stereotyping and objectification of women, as well as anger toward the way in which advertising had long represented females as dependent on males and sexually exploitable (D’Enbeau, 2011). The actions and advocacy of these leading ladies set the stage for women to be portrayed in more positive roles and representations, subsequently affecting advertising for decades to come (Grau & Zotos, 2016).

These early conversations and critiques eventually culminated in “femvertising.” Coined by SheKnows Media at Advertising Week 2014, the movement’s label is an abbreviation of “female empowerment advertising” and refers to ads that directly contradict stereotypical depictions of women in advertising (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). The start of femvertising is considered to be Dove’s iconic “Evolution” campaign (Davidson, 2015), which preceded a number of ads calling attention to gender stereotypes and empowering women: Always’ “Like a Girl” and Under Armour’s “I Will What I Want” are other notable examples (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). Brands are leaning into messaging that supports feminist political protest, body positivity and the reclaiming of female sexuality (D’Enbeau, 2011). Increasingly, appeals to individuality and intelligence appeared and built favorability with younger audiences (Taylor, Miyazaki, & Mogensen, 2013).

While some companies may argue that social stances pigeonhole a brand unnecessarily, the research suggests otherwise. A survey on the relationship between femvertising and brand awareness found that more than half of females said they would buy a product if they approved of how the company and its advertisements portrayed women. (Castillo, 2014). Relationship building with buyers is becoming increasingly important; femvertising is proving itself a valuable avenue in relating to female consumers.

### ***Responses to Femvertising***

Audience feedback thus far has been supportive of femvertising initiatives. More than 90% of women are aware of at least one female empowerment campaign, which builds brand awareness and favorability in association with pro-woman messaging (Castillo, 2014). Furthermore, professionals in the advertising and academic spaces have noted benefits for brands breaking away from stereotypes. First of all, for women, this has offered the opportunity to reclaim traits or topics that were misconstrued in male-dominated media. Feminism focuses on equality and choice — to be a mother or not, to be sexual or not — and female consumers are being affirmed in their right to choose what paths or products contribute to this liberation (D’Enbeau, 2011). Additionally, for society as a collective, femvertising is forcing a conversation that encourages both marketers and consumers to understand stereotypes that emerge in both social and branded interactions (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017).

Scholars of media and marketing observed criticism of femvertising. One article notes that femvertising is primarily a means of reaching female consumers, potentially invalidating its sociocultural benefit (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). With tactical roots in promotion, femvertising is more about boosting sales rather than benefitting a social cause, these critics charge (Lazar, 2006). Furthermore, concern has arisen due to the way in which words like “natural” and “real” are often used in an inauthentic context (Gill

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and Elias, 2014). Such images may still be enhanced with Photoshop, or the models with makeup, making the content significantly less natural than implied.

### ***Mirroring Versus Molding Society***

From a theoretical approach, the nature of advertising is frequently disputed from a “mirror” versus “mold” perspective. The “mirror” concept suggests that advertising simply reflects the state of society; the other implies that media acts as a “mold” with the power to shape reality for audiences (Grau & Zotos, 2016). In relationship to this discussion, “femvertising can be considered novel in that it focuses on questioning female stereotypes acknowledged to be (at least partly) created by advertising” (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017, p. 796). Brands now face a paradox: to either mirror or mold, to invest in the empowerment of women, or reflect the more conventional roles that women continue to fulfill in some instances. In instances where femvertising is not a component of the marketing communications strategy, it appears companies still err on the side of the traditional (Eisend, 2010). This is reasonable in the context of advertisers producing content based on cultural values, because “as individuals, they are not immune to [socialized] gender stereotypes” (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 766).

Historically, it appears as though “portrayals in advertising have followed changes in society” rather than altering the social climate through creative (Akestam, Rosengren & Dahlen, 2017, p. 796). However, femvertising has put a twist on this, making it so brands are acting as activists for the empowerment of women. Expectancy theory, initially proposed by Victor Vroom, suggests this is crucial as roles and opportunities become less gendered. The concept states we internalize and expect out of others what is exemplified to us; therefore “advertising portrayals build social reality” (Sheehan, 2004, p. 80). If more feminist media consumption is equitable to a more pro-woman worldview, then advertising does include a molding component. Under expectancy theory, media hold power in defining consumer identity and confidence (Sheehan, 2004). The prolonged promotion of beauty stereotypes, gender roles and social expectations can all lead to a distorted sense of self, an increase in dissatisfaction, and may discourage women from striving for new opportunities that are outside of self-expectations (Eisend, 2010).

Previous research related to the portrayal of women in advertising focuses on the ways in which stereotypes, sexualization, and society confirm each other. However, this research differs in its desire to understand how corporations have caught on to the empowerment of women, and how the advertising efforts of brands have transformed under the influence of femvertising. From a comparative perspective, this study analyzes text and imagery to explore messages that ads communicate in support of women. By looking at how brands have shifted in portrayals of women, we can better understand the impact of female empowerment movements on consumer culture.

### ***Research Questions***

The following research revolves around three questions:

RQ1: How does the typography and written messaging differ in advertisements pre-and-post the femvertising movement?

RQ2: How does the photography and visual messaging differ in advertisements pre-and-post the femvertising movement, specifically in how female subjects are depicted?

RQ3: What themes are brands advertising in order to align themselves and their products with female empowerment?

## **III. Methods**

This research sought to examine how brand messaging has changed as a result of social trends toward female empowerment. The methodology consisted of a qualitative visual analysis to examine the connotations in graphic and textual components of advertisements featuring female subjects and directed toward female consumers. A side-by-side display was used to directly compare and contrast appeals over time between two advertisements coming from the same brand.

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Methods of visual analysis used in this research were based on Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's book, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996). Kress and van Leeuwen explain their approach as a social semiotic theory. When interacting with visual works — in this case, advertisements — the consumer interprets a sentiment and message. Audiences “seek to make a representation of some object or entity” in order for the work to align with social, cultural and personal experiences (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 6). *Reading Images* discusses the two components of this process: 1) objective interpretation of shape, form, alignment, proximity and elements of visual syntax that are presented in the work; as well as 2) subjective interpretation that is specific to the culture, context and connotation of the work received. In order to address both of these components, the researcher specifically analyzes text as depicted in the ad, imagery as depicted in the ad, and their synthesized implications on the traditional or progressive portrayal of women in culture.

Print ads for brands of current Fortune 500 companies were chosen in order to ensure pervasive campaign reach and relevance. Advertisements were selected across personal care brands (Kotex and Pantene), apparel brands (Kids and Nike) and home goods brands (Tide). Since these categories are often criticized for stereotyping women, this diversity of perspectives was important in addressing how these trends have shifted over time. Additionally, the modern advertisements were selected from campaigns published in the past five years; the historic ads were chosen from campaigns of the 1960s, 70s or 80s.

## IV. Findings

The following findings are organized to describe, compare and contrast the print advertisements of five prominent brands. Looking at how the representation of women in ads has shifted over time, the analysis is segmented by brand and evaluated for typography, imagery and theme.

### *Kotex, 1972 and 2017*



Figure 1. “The beltless, pinless fuss-less generation.” 1972.

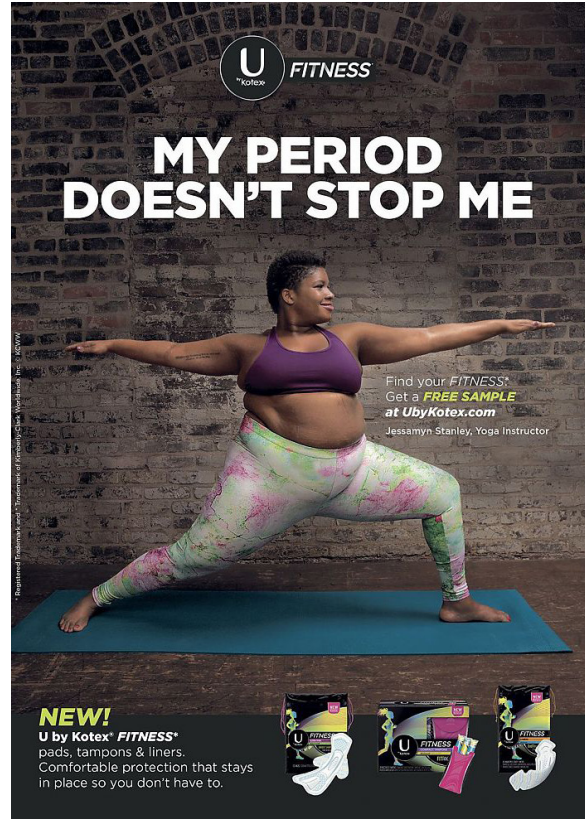


Figure 2. Jessamyn Stanley, “Doesn’t stop me.” 2017.

Based on the language in Figure 1, it is clear that “New Freedom by Kotex” is a feminine care line geared toward youth. It enthusiastically welcomes young women “to the beltless, pinless, fuss-less generation!” before reiterating “freedom” from previous menstrual difficulties. The advertisement takes an informative, yet storytelling approach, which sells readers on the idea of liberation by buying New Freedom by Kotex. In terms of imagery, the dominant graphic in Figure 1 is the young woman brightly dressed in iconic 1970s apparel, waving her arms and kicking her feet. Her activity acts as an outward representation of the freedom that New Freedom by Kotex users gain. The other image is the specially designed New Freedom by Kotex box, which mimics the vibrant colors that the young woman is wearing. Two more female figures are shown on the packaging, looking stylish and relaxed, also a testament to the easygoing consumer that Kotex is striving to attract with this product. Thematically, Figure 1 breaks from stagnant, secretive messaging that surrounded feminine care, and positions New Freedom by Kotex as a stylish solution. The messaging insinuates that this product is easy to use and wear, so that young women can maintain an easy-going spirit.

“U by Kotex” is another specialty line of feminine care products, this time for the modern day. The language of the caption in Figure 2, “my period doesn’t stop me,” is bold and framed in a manner that demands attention. It is this sentiment, in connection with the release of a fitness-oriented collection of hygienic items, which states U by Kotex’s support for ownership and independence over periods. Additionally, the image of Jessamyn Stanley is the central focus of Figure 2. U by Kotex’s choice to feature a diverse, active, body-positive representative for this line was a decision that enabled the brand to relate with women and minorities, as well as join in the discourse encouraging women to be comfortable with their body types. Stanley’s warrior pose is confirmation that her period doesn’t inhibit her; her strength makes body ownership the leading theme. With this campaign, U by Kotex takes a clear stance for female empowerment — for women to have control over what they do and when they do it. The poignant language and imagery selected for this ad reinforce the values of being strong and independent.

In a comparison of the advertisements for New Freedom by Kotex and U by Kotex, the parallel in appeal is interesting. In both, Kotex targets young consumers with ideals of freedom and uniqueness. Where U by Kotex differs is in representation. Ms. Stanley — a body positivity advocate — is a more significant voice than the model that simply represents a stylish and carefree lifestyle. Aligning Kotex with feminist causes takes a social stance and is likely attractive to its intended female audience.

### ***Pantene, 1987 and 2017***



Figure 3. Kelly LeBrock, “Because I’m beautiful.” 1987.



Figure 4. Selena Gomez, “Up for anything.” 2017.



The language in Figure 3 is front, center and clear: “Don’t hate me because I’m beautiful.” Quoted from Kelly LeBrock, an actress and model, and used as the tagline of Pantene’s mid-1980’s campaign, this statement insinuates that there’s no use being jealous of beauty; instead, invest in Pantene. The body copy suggests that the juxtaposed black and white photo below is a “before” shot, preceding a morning of preparation with Pantene. Going into depth about the strong and restorative formula of the brand, women are left with assurance that their hair can be “beautiful, just like [LeBrock’s]” if they purchase Pantene. The imagery highlights the flowing locks of LeBrock, whose look is complete with makeup and couture accessories. The smaller image (caption: “This is my hair in the morning.”) is simple, and shows the beautifying wonders of Pantene. In relation to the depictions of styled, stunning hair — the selling point — Pantene’s golden packaging is given a subdued position. The ad suggests that women who use other hair care products are less beautiful, employing inadequacy and the opportunity for beauty as sales appeals.

Contrastingly, Figure 4 featuring Selena Gomez utilizes its language to let readers know that “strong is up for anything.” Subsequent text defines this strength at “97% less breakage” with the use of Pantene, but the message extends from defining strong hair to describing strong women. The ad reiterates that “strong is beautiful” — a sentiment that can be applied broadly beyond the context of hair care. Gomez, smiling and enthusiastic, is the image that captures viewers’ attention first. Elements of Pantene’s packaging and Pro-V formula are incorporated around and behind her; this creates a dynamic environment for the ad to exist. Overall, the ad exemplifies a strong woman being supported by Pantene, working hand-in-hand with the ad’s messaging. Thematically, the typography and photo put Gomez in an excellent position to highlight not only strength, but also ease and enjoyment — critical components of a positive hair care experience. She appears styled but relaxed, a vision illustrating for audiences what is achievable with a little help from Pantene. Through this ad, the brand associates itself with rising potential for those who are ready for anything.

For using two famous subjects, the tone of Pantene’s ads could not be more contrary. Figure 3 has received critique for the way in which its slogan puts down women, and for its insinuation that an edited and over-glamourized figure simply used Pantene to achieve her looks. With Figure 4, however, Pantene transitioned away from the concept of “opulence is beautiful” and toward “strong is beautiful,” a more inspiring message for potential buyers of the brand. Pantene’s 2017 campaign focused on empowering women to be strong and themselves, an appeal rooted deep in femvertising.

### **Keds, 1963 and 2016**



Figure 5. “Get that great Keds Fall feeling.”  
1963.



Figure 6. “Never underestimate a pretty face.”  
2016.

Keds uses typography as a more minimized component in Figure 5. Viewers are invited to “Get That Great Keds Fall Feeling,” falling in line with the autumn-themed “Walking Tweeds.” Small text along the bottom of the page describes the European origins and high-quality craftsmanship that go into the shoes. The most prominent imagery in Figure 5 is the large yellow-and-black-checked shoe, as well as the young woman sauntering across the page. Additionally, the product is stylized to create a connection between Keds and high-end fashion. Collectively, the minimalist design hints at a couture brand experience, and the woman seen wearing Keds is portrayed in high-esteem. The graphics shown are aloof and stylized, leaning into the concept of Keds as an exclusive retailer. Aligning the brand with a proper vision potentially lends itself to selective clientele. With its formal tone and artistic framing, Keds aimed this campaign to communicate with a mature audience.

While the previous ad was clearly to promote a product, Figure 6 takes a social stance: Its leading typographic feature daringly reminds readers to “never underestimate a pretty face.” Furthermore, in an interesting play on the traditional lockup that Keds uses, “Ladies First Since 1916” was added particularly for the pro-woman messaging of this campaign. Immediately, the text shows an intentional charge toward female empowerment. The ad features a model in a clean and casual outfit — wearing Keds, of course — that is creatively supplemented with a lion on the front page of a newspaper. This works hand-in-hand with the “pretty face” statement, which challenges the audience to not underestimate either the lion, or the woman behind it. It’s worth noting that assigning such a fierce figure to the female further develops the undertones of pride and power that are assigned to a petite person in gold Keds. Thematically, the ad is humorous with the intention of being poignant, inviting viewers to think twice about first impressions. Messages of strength and success reach out to empower female consumers, and again, the benefits of a brand binding itself to a social stance are apparent.

It’s also interesting to note the way in which these ads shift from product-focused to sentiment-focused marketing messages. This is reflective of the demand shoppers are currently making for companies to take a stance. Keds, in Figure 6, strategically and innovatively gave a voice to feminism.

### ***Nike, 1980 and 2014***

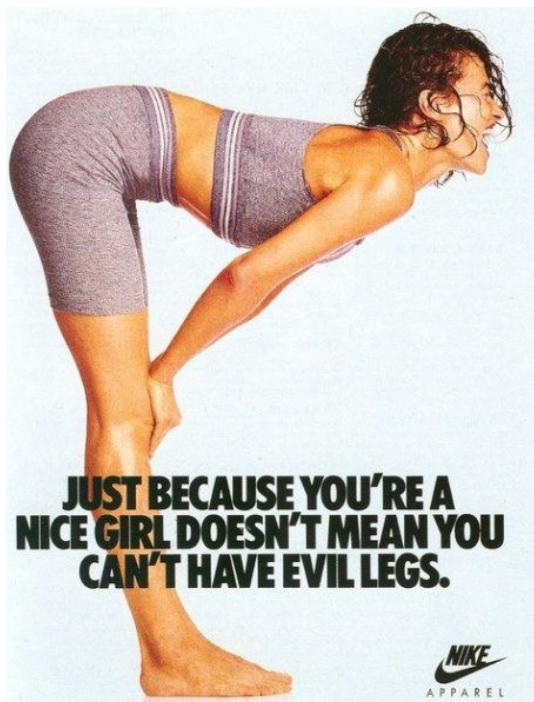


Figure 7. “Just because you’re a nice girl.”  
1980.



Figure 8. “A run with the girls shouldn’t hurt  
the girls.” 2014.



The typography on Figure 7 is crisp and bold, allowing attention to fall to the photography and words themselves: “Just because you’re a nice girl doesn’t mean you can’t have evil legs.” “Evil” refers to fit and toned rather than mean, stating that it is okay to work hard for great legs. However, this statement also poses a relationship between personality and physique. Pop culture references to “mean girl” and “nice girl” archetypes suggests a negative correlation between fitness and kindness, which Nike implies are best to break. Furthermore, the stance of the woman being photographed is unclear. She may be stretching out after an intense workout; from another angle, she seems to be relaxed and laughing vibrantly. Ultimately, while further context is needed to clarify Figure 7’s sentiment, the casual stance and affable countenance does not seem to correlate with the actions of a serious, breaking-a-sweat athlete. Finally, Nike’s chosen model for this messaging fits the slim, Caucasian stereotype that one would expect of mass advertising.

In comparison, 34 years later, Figure 8 charges audiences to think deeply about their workout experience. The primary typography featured says that “a run with the girls shouldn’t hurt the girls” — in one sense referring to friends, and in the other referring to one’s breasts. This advertisement for Nike’s Pro Bra line encourages women to consider quality in their athletic apparel. To accompany this message, an image of a concentrated athlete owns the spread. She is sporting Nike apparel, but appears absorbed in her workout. Overall, the choice of the model reflects on Nike’s values of diversity, while her positioning showcases the intention of this apparel for individuals on the move. Figure 8 comes back to the theme of support, with the Nike and the Pro Bra collection created to give women the boost they need. For high-achieving athletes, an opportunity to train harder and perform better is always desirable. Nike highlights the Pro Bra in a way that recognizes and solves a common pain point for women, so female athletes can focus on their training instead of their chest.

The activity and intensity in the 2014 Nike ad reflects a societal shift in which respected female athletes have become more common and celebrated. In a male-dominated industry, creating a campaign around sports bras shows Nike’s commitment to female consumers. Figure 8 illustrates a woman who is invested in fitness, addressing the perception of females as competitors and continuing the necessary conversation about equality in sports.

### *Tide, 1978 and 2016*

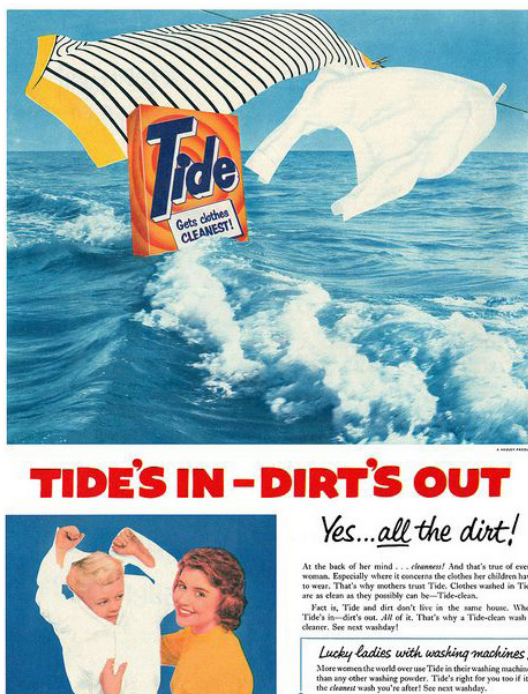


Figure 9. “Tide’s in — dirt’s out.” 1978.

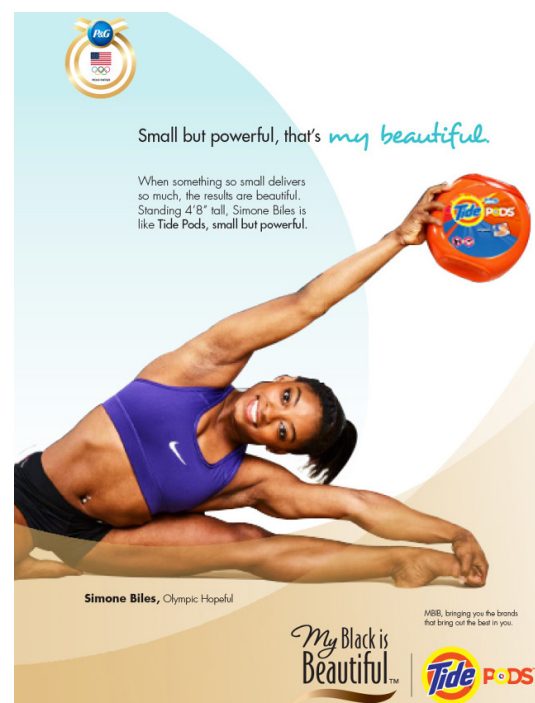


Figure 10. Simone Biles, “Small but powerful.” 2016.



“Tide’s In — Dirt’s Out” is the bold headline that acts as a precursor for the primary focus in this ad. The typographic hierarchy in Figure 9 calls viewer attention to phrases such as “All the dirt” and “Tide — clean clothes are cleanest of all.” Collectively, the verbiage of this campaign is fixated on the cleaning power of Tide, while also using female-centric references and pronouns throughout the body copy. “Mothers trust Tide” only confirms this advertisement’s intended audience, comprised of housewives. The dominant imagery is a box of laundry detergent riding the tide while clotheslined apparel flies in the background, connecting back to the product’s purpose and brand’s namesake. Beach visuals bring forth a more relaxed tone. However, a female subject is featured in the bottom left quadrant, smiling with her son. Again, this creates an association between Tide and successful motherhood; the son’s bright white shirt illustrates cleaning capabilities. Thematically, Figure 9 is casual but clean, with cues suggesting that women who use Tide have more time to invest in leisure and their families. Happiness goes hand-in-hand with ridding your home of dirt and trusting Tide.

In contrast, Tide’s 2016 campaign surrounding the Olympics takes on an energetic tone. The language in Figure 10 announces that Tide Pods, like gymnast Simone Biles, are “small but powerful” and “the results are beautiful.” Connecting cleaning results with athletic strength brings a connotation of intensity and vigor to the audience. In terms of imagery, Biles is the focal point, appearing in a gymnast’s stance with a container of Tide Pods. However, beyond her posing, the logos in the bottom right hand of the layout are important to investigate. Tide made an intentional placement of its logo next to the “My Black is Beautiful” mark, undeniably aligning the brand with the racial equality movement. Biles, as an Olympic athlete and woman of color, is a perfect face for Tide in building a socially aware voice. The theme of this advertisement emphasizes strength, on behalf of both empowered women and the product. The ad focuses on the message of “small but mighty” and leans into a supportive, solid attitude that encourages target audiences — including young female consumers and socially conscious homemakers — to be determined, drive for success and turn to Tide for a confirmed clean when need be.

Showing female figures across two eras, Tide juxtaposes family-focused with individual-oriented. Figure 9 comments on the needs of mothers for efficient, effective laundry solutions, and while that desire is still prevalent in Figure 10, it is extrapolated in a way that notes that all populations require detergent that can pack a punch. Featuring a model mother versus a world-class athlete expresses the way in which Tide’s global perspective has expanded as an organization — working hand in hand with supporting “My Black is Beautiful” and placing the brand in a more progressive light.

## V. Discussion

Comparing portrayals in advertisements gives insight into the appeals used by companies to communicate with women. The following are trends in femvertising that emerged through this comparative research process.

### ***Strength as a Relevant and Recurring Theme***

All five modern ads that were analyzed promoted a sentiment that relates back to strength, power or energizing women. Some ads did this through a direct call to action — “Strong is Up For Anything” in Figure 4 and “Small but Powerful” in Figure 10 stand out as messages that charge audiences to be adventurous and ambitious. However, in instances where empowerment was more subtle, design decisions were made that revealed the pervasiveness of femvertising. In Figure 2, Stanley stands strong in a warrior’s pose; in Figure 6, the king of the jungle is selected as a symbol of prowess and grace. Additionally, Figure 8 showcases an intense athlete. Each of these brands has taken strides to feature females in a way that highlights strength as a factor in femininity.

### ***Stereotypes are Being Supplemented, Not Replaced***

Motherly messages (Figure 9), easy-going energies (Figure 7) and glamorous get-ups (Figure 3) are clearly present in ads from the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Each of these archetypes does its part in earning advertising the criticism it has historically received for perpetuating stereotypes and misrepresenting women. While the femvertising movement has improved the way females are featured in marketing and media, the progressive campaigns this study looked at also confirm that stereotypes have not entirely disappeared.

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Figure 10 illustrates an Olympian, seemingly thrilled to be working out with a pack of Tide Pods; Figure 4 turns to a styled and overjoyed celebrity to sing the praises of drugstore shampoo. While more examples are emerging of ads in which women are empowered, those instances do not negate the ways in which women are still propped up and stereotyped for the purpose of sales. This is particularly highlighted by the continued depiction of traditional beauty standards — bare skin and thin figures are still disproportionately represented in this collection of content. Overall, this research indicates the ways in which advertising has both molded pro-woman conversations, while reflecting the sexist and stereotypical undertones that plague Western populations. The ad industry can only do so much pushing before society has to lead suit and fight collectively for female empowerment.

### ***Product Features are in Less Prominent Places***

While advertisements of earlier decades nearly all focused around promoting a product, verbiage that connects to social issues ahead of sales is increasingly apparent in modern marketing materials. For example, the earlier Keds ad is dominated by the new style of shoe that has been released; attention is almost exclusively dedicated to the item for sale. On the other hand, the later Kids ad includes a pair of shoes, but the prevailing message is one that puts women at the center of the conversation, and notes human nature's ability to be both delicate and dominant. In the earlier Kotex ad, significantly more space is used discussing product benefits, while later, photos at the bottom suffice. In the 1978 Tide ad, the most prominent selling point is one of cleanliness; nearly 40 years later, an ad for the same product speaks much more to the beauty of power and strength. Overall, the value of product features to advertising is decreasing, and the importance of brand positioning is increasing. This suggests that values alignment is essential to modern advertising success and establishing consumer loyalty, specifically when it comes to connecting with female consumers.

### ***Diversity Dominates Later Ads***

A total of ten female figures are shown across the ten ads. In consideration of the five retro ads, all five women are white and homogeneous. Comparatively, three of the five modern layouts include black women, with another representing Latina populations. This increase in diverse subjects is not specific to the femvertising movement, but rather a cultural demand for representing different styles, personalities and ways of life in mass media. Femvertising supports this motion by stressing the importance of exposing audiences to minority groups, based on gender, race, sexual orientation, body size and other previously underrepresented identifiers.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This research takes a comparative lens to nearly five decades of women depicted in advertising. Looking at ten ads from five brands, the researcher sought to understand the ways in which messaging and appeals have evolved alongside feminist critique and calls for female empowerment. Ultimately, the analysis suggests that brands and society continue to mirror and mold each other. We cannot entirely separate changes in society from creative decisions (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). However, in instances where social change is leading the way, the femvertising movement has been a driving factor in more progressive marketing to women.

A few limitations in this research should be addressed. First, in the selection of individual brands and advertisements, samples were constrained by what was available online through search engines and advertisement databases. This proved especially restrictive in finding ads from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Additionally, based on time constraints, the scope of the research was confined to a limited number of industries and brands. With additional time and resources, this study could cover more content, including expanding beyond print ads. Finally, the researcher was the only individual analyzing ads and drawing conclusions, so diversifying researchers could be valuable in revealing interpretations across identity groups and backgrounds.

Opportunities for continued research are plentiful. While this research aimed to make generalizations across categories and products, a stratified study that delves deep into the way in which women are represented in a particular industry, or the evolution over years of a particular brand's positioning, could prove valuable in understanding where and why stereotypes prevail.

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## Acknowledgements

The author would like to express her appreciation to Daniel Haygood, associate professor at Elon University, for his supervision of this research, as well as his support of her personal and professional endeavors over the past three years. Additionally, the author is grateful to her parents — Chris and Carrie Case — for their encouragement of her passions and empowerment of the women around them.

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