

# Femvertising social marketing: a focus on perceived authenticity and perceived congruence of the advertising and consumers' attitudes toward female portrayal

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research studies femvertising social marketing impact on their perceived congruence and authenticity; and attitudes toward female role portrayal cross-gender.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This research used deductive quantitative research approach. Data were gathered during a sports event in Egypt made to support female empowerment; a local sports organization hosted 8K Women Race on February 26, 2022, applying a cross-sectional timeframe. The researcher approached both male and female segments with an administrated questionnaire to fill out through convenience sampling. Structural equation modeling path coefficient analysis was used to test the hypotheses.

**Findings** – The research shows femvertising perceived congruence is insignificant cross-gender; femvertising perceived authenticity is significant to female segment, not the male segment; femvertising impacts female portrayal among male segment and female segment.

**Practical implications** – The conclusions could be reference for stakeholders who have interest in women empowerment marketing strategies as brand activism; companies that look toward femvertising as effective tactic to enhance affirmative attitude and build an empowered female customer base. The results indicate that marketers can benefit from adapting a more mindful approach to the portrayal of females used in advertising.

**Originality/value** – The addition of a cross-gender perspective on femvertising (as brand activism) is a key contribution to this literature. This study adds knowledge on the how perceived congruence and authenticity of the advertising can impact significantly attitude toward women empowerment; when brands promote social matters, their underpinning motives are under microscope among consumers, and adverse attributions can hinder brand performance as consumers may not believe the brands when they engage in the activism.

**Keywords** Attitude, Ad authenticity, Ad congruence, Consumer behavior, Gender

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary market, marketers of various companies are seeking the practice of brand activism, promoting issues or problems that affect and/or influences individuals in a society and people strive to solve the same (Patel *et al.*, 2017). Brand activism is a marketing tactic used by marketers to promote their brand to the consumers, aiding the brand to stand out in a fragmented marketplace (Moorman, 2020). Through brand activism, a latest marketing

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strategy emerged that has taken on importance worldwide, which is the concept of femvertising, advertising designed to promote gender equity, empowering women. Femvertising is an advertising terminology that consists of two words put together, feminism and advertising (Drake, 2017).

The United Nations sustainable development goals (2023) mention that promoting gender equality in media is necessary as it allow citizens to perceive females as significant actors in developing stronger and more sustainable society; gender equality is persistent moral and social issue that is compulsory to face societies' economic challenges so to be able to progress. Moreover, the British Advertising Standards Authority (2018) claim that: "gender stereotypes have potential to cause harm, inviting assumptions about adults and children that might negatively restrict how they see themselves and how others see them" (p. 3), calling for advertising regulations for gender stereotypes. Correspondingly, many marketers seek to create: "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages and imagery to empower women" (Drake, 2017, p. 594). Nevertheless, studies claim that marketers that want to reduce gender stereotypes in advertising by exploring nonstereotyped gender portrayals have little guidance in terms of what to expect from such efforts as there is limited research and empirical evidence on this matter (Åkestam *et al.*, 2021).

Åkestam *et al.* (2017) and Kapoor and Munjal (2019) claim that modern women have gained more economic and political power than in previous years. Research suggests that the female roles in society have progressed and evolved in society, thus has made them more receptive to marketing and advertising that represents these changes (Sivulka, 2009). There has been prosperous amount of positive marketing messages from brands targeted to females; marketers have adjusted their advertising to resonate with the changing female characters, responsibilities, jobs and positions; "a shift in advertising portraying domesticated and/or objectified females to those who are independent, confident, and liberated, thus empowered" (Drake, 2017, p. 594).

Femvertising seeks to be an activist and make positive changes in people's perception toward the role of females in society (Patel *et al.*, 2017), building important benevolent values and morals among individuals, but limited studies have explained wherefore is its impacts (Åkestam *et al.*, 2021). While femvertising has been respected and praised for communicating positive messages about females, research that studies and assesses if and why these campaigns are effective, as well as the effects they have on individuals that are exposed to these messages are limited (Drake, 2017). Although some studies state that femvertising has the power to lead to social change, creating a positive mindset among people, there is insufficient research validating these conclusions (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2022), especially since there are several studies that disapprove and criticize femvertising, stating that this advertising is ineffective in tackling stereotypes but is "commodification of feminism and gender disparities" (Tsichla, 2020, p. 37). Further, studies claim that when brands promote social matters, their underpinning motives are under microscope among consumers, and adverse attributions can hinder brand performance as consumers may not believe the brands when they engage in the activism (Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020; Moorman, 2020).

Scholars and practitioners have highlighted the importance of brand authenticity and congruence in these types of advertising and the dangers of brands not "walking the talk" (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2022). Edelman (2019) claims that many consumers believe that numerous brands use societal issues mainly as a marketing strategy to sell more of their product. Nevertheless, Hoppner and Vadakkepatt (2019) claim that brands are required to participate in the sociopolitical domain, playing a potential and progressive role for social change arising from this strategy. Despite the growth of femvertising, not much research has been conducted on femvertising (Lima and Casais, 2021). Since femvertising has been recognized as an important marketing strategy to attract consumers and build a strong emotional and empowering connection with future consumers, it is important to investigate which factors influence in evaluation of femvertising.

Differing from most studies, the current research focuses on how consumers of different gender recognize and perceive femvertising, highlighting the need to consider the reactions across gender, regardless of target audience; the male segment is also exposed to these advertising and has an opportunity to perceive the brand activism toward females roles and the promotion of gender equity (Drake, 2017). Nevertheless, Åkestam *et al.* (2021) claim that few studies have examined the male segment response to nonstereotyped gender depictions of females in advertising. Thus, existing studies call for the need to further investigate cross-gender opinions on gender role and the female portrayals found in the media (Eisend, 2019); this research topic is growing as gender role in advertising are becoming closely aligned with the current societal and cultural changes, where a clear distinction between gender is prevalent (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2022).

Based on the above reasoning, the purpose of this research is to develop empirical evidence to provide the knowledge needed and extend the research on femvertising to include a cross-gender outlook, increasing the relevance of the advertising research in the contemporary development of how female empowerment are considered in advertising study and practice. This research seeks to grasp how femvertising works, drawing upon congruence theory and trust, so to be able to explained wherefore is its impacts (Drake, 2017). Accordingly, three research questions are set:

*RQ1.* Do cross-gender perceive femvertising as authentic?

*RQ2.* Do cross-gender perceive femvertising as congruent?

*RQ3.* Do femvertising impact cross-gender female perception?

In this paper, the upcoming sections include a literature review that reflects femvertising studies, and audience perceived authenticity and congruence in which the research used to develop the hypotheses that are to be tested. The following section illustrates the research methods used for data collection and analysis. The succeeding section illustrates the research results. The final section discusses the research findings, research implications, research contributions, research limitations and suggested future direction to build theoretical links with the existing literary work.

## 2. Literature review

Since early times, researches claim that advertising aims for: “drawing attention to something” (Starch, 1923), brands are using advertising and its various appeals as a vehicle to notify, inform and persuade consumers about conceptions and solutions to their assorted needs, with a focus on sales (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2022). Dahlen and Rosengren (2016) rationalize advertising as: “brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people” (p. 334). Many advertisings communicate society’s constructed gender relations, displays and roles; they are set to mimic real life but hold false perceptions of gender fantasy and reality (Elhajjar, 2020). Goffman (1976) explains that gender-stereotypical images that appear in advertising do not look so strange to the audience as society has provoked this gender philosophy; advertising takes these gender conceptions and highlights these recognized and understood norms (commercial realism) in an eye-catching manner to sell products and services; thus, advertising assists in gender-distorted reflection that is already found in society, specifically the female stereotype: decorativeness, submissiveness, powerlessness and childishness. The cultivation theory explains that social reality a consumer believes in is refined through gender portrayals in the media; the concept of reality cultivation is showcased in advertising, impacting people’s mindset (Shrum, 1996). Thus, feminist theories state that initiatives are needed to promote the true representation of females (Lerman and Porter, 1990).

### 2.1 *The notion of femvertising*

As more brands have adopted the gender-stereotypical advertising, the dominance of Goffman (1976) images of females: “soft, vulnerable, fragile, powerless, dreamy, child-like, and submissive”; it has led to controversy and many feminism movements against it (Gill, 2008; Drake, 2017). Feminist supporters have voiced concern over the content used for stimulating audiences as it challenges conventional morals and cultural standards (Åkestam *et al.*, 2017; Kapoor and Munjal, 2019). Thus, marketers have moved toward social responsibility in an ethical theory to raise prominent representations of feminine power; advertising that illustrates women to exemplify being confident, powerful, controlling in action is known as femvertising (Lima and Casais, 2021).

Brands and advertising have been contributing to the norm of female stereotypes in society, showing women as subordinates than men (Goffman, 1976). Presently, brands have become more aware and started taking an active stand in feminism, changing gender role portrayal in advertising (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012). Brands are creating advertising that illustrate: “(1) utilization of diverse female talent; (2) messaging that is inherently pro-female; (3) pushing gender-norm boundaries/stereotypes and challenging perceptions of what a woman/girl ‘should’ be; (4) downplaying of sexuality; and (5) portraying women in an authentic manner” (Becker-Herby, 2016, p. 19). Even though there are still advertising that display females in stereotypical manners, there are progressive emergence of positive messages inspiring females (Gillespie, 2016). Many brands use feminism in their marketing campaigns whereas, historically, many marketing have created insecurities due to their stereotypical gender images (Kapoor and Munjal, 2019). Research show that feminism is trending, creating more brands to mount on this bandwagon marketing technique (Drake, 2017), so to stand out as well in markets (Elhajjar, 2020).

### 2.2 *Perceived authenticity and congruence in femvertising*

Current researches have pinpointed that some brands are facing criticism in their femvertising practice (Åkestam *et al.*, 2017; Feng *et al.*, 2019). For example, research claim that some brands market feminism in their advertising but do not practice or embrace the company culture that supports the advertising message (Lima and Casais, 2021). Some brands’ femvertising have been disliked by consumers as they perceive the brand as being a fraud or hypocrite when it is done merely for profits and sales, and it does not reflect the brands’ real ethical values and promises (Mukherjee and Althuisen, 2020). Some femvertising are accused of reinforcing sexism, prompting the use of stereotyped products, instead of prompting real female empowerment and gender equalities (Kohrs and Gill, 2021). Many femvertising are perceived doubtful as they are not congruent with brand personality or product functionality being sold, particularly with beauty brands or cleansing products (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2019; Champlin *et al.*, 2019). Other studies demonstrate that some brands use femvertising that illustrate puffery female imagery (super moms or alpha females) to symbolize the hard-working and high-achieving female, but this portrayal backfires and demotivates females as they cannot reach this standard (Feng *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, these messages that hold exaggeration and/or hyperbole are criticized for not being relatable to consumers (Kapoor and Munjal, 2019). It is criticized for not being authentic, leading to frustration in female portrayal (Abdallah *et al.*, 2018). According to research, when social responsibility is misunderstood, consumers show hostile responses (Vollero *et al.*, 2020).

The theory of congruence claims that individuals are content and satisfied with stimuli that are congruent with their actual or desired self-concept (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). The theory explains that individuals seek to avoid behaviors that are conflicting and irrelevant to who they are or what they believe in; they simply seek to care and behave in ways that allow them to achieve greater individuality and an accurate portrayal of their

self (Lima and Casais, 2021). Therefore, individuals are likely to focus on supporting their image and role as well as avoiding products and/or brands that are not congruent with their self-concept (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2019). Hence, advertising congruence/similarity is key in providing the desired feeling that are sought by consumers, making them more engaged and attracted with the advertising (Feng *et al.*, 2019). In the context of femvertising, females are able to participate and contribute to many tasks as they hold various personal esteemed powers, so it is important that advertising illustrate these similar portrayals so to gain their attention and support (Gill, 2008). Kordrostami and Laczniak (2021) claim that consumers will support advertising that represent comparable and relatable representation of females that they know. Femvertising is effective as they are perceived as congruent (Drake, 2017).

Some studies claim that femvertising is effective if it is perceived as authentic (Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020). Achieving and communicating the authenticity of brand activism is significant; it is vital that brands that use femvertising align their purpose and values with this activist marketing messaging and prosocial corporate practice (Sterbenk *et al.*, 2022). Moorman (2020) claims that authenticity of the marketing message is vital for the marketing success as well as potential for social change arising from this strategy. If brands are to use femvertising, then they must prioritize the delivery of social benefits beyond immediate economic interests of the brand (Sarkar and Kotler, 2018). Therefore, researchers claim that for a brand to be perceived as having message, authenticity leads to effective advertising perception; an authentic brand is transparent, consistent and genuine in its communication and behaviors (Sterbenk *et al.*, 2022), so when consumers perceive femvertising as authentic advertising, it helps build trust and loyalty with them as the brand represents reality rather than aspirational marketing (Lima and Casais, 2021).

Scholars and practitioners suggest that both perceived congruence and perceived authenticity are necessary to allow advertising to be positively influential (Champlin *et al.*, 2019; Lima and Casais, 2021). When consumers perceive that the brand's marketing messages are corresponding with the company's brand persona and the content are authentic, it increases consumer level of trust, resulting in positive attitude toward advertising likely to increase, impacting consumer behaviors (Cornelis and Peter, 2017; Drake, 2017; Sterbenk *et al.*, 2022). Without a direct evaluation of the effectiveness of these advertisements, it is difficult to generalize business benefits from these findings, indicating a need for the present study. Accordingly, the following hypotheses emerged:

- H1. There is a significant relationship between perceived authenticity and femvertising.
- H2. There is a significant relationship between perceived congruence and femvertising.
- H3. There is a significant relationship between femvertising and attitudes toward females.

### 3. Research methods

This study is sought to be conducted in the Middle East, specifically Egypt as gender inequality is deemed high, and femvertising is rising to play a role in this social issue in the Arab region (Abdallah *et al.*, 2018). Egypt is taking initiatives to eliminate gender inequality but still struggles to improve gender disparities; gender inequality in Egypt has ranked 134th out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (2022). USAID (2022) claims Egypt's labor force is predominantly male. According to the World Bank, studies predict that the GDP (country's standard of living) would rise if the labor force participation of women was as high as men. Therefore, female motivation to build their confidence and encourage their role in society is needed (Eisend, 2019).

Quantitative descriptive research was used to clarify the perceived authenticity and congruence on femvertising, which impact the attitude toward female-roles in society. This study compares the differences between males and females' stances. With a positivist approach, the study used objective statistical analysis to develop the research conclusions, testing the hypotheses.

Data were gathered during a sports event in Egypt made to support female empowerment. A local sports organization, Cairo-runners, hosted an 8K Women Race Saturday on February 26, 2022, at Alburouj compound (located in Cairo Ismalia Road). The event theme was ladies-only race made to support and encourage all women to run for themselves and to recognize other strong women in the community. This event was considered one of the first sport events held in Egypt to celebrate women's achievement, raising awareness about discrimination and to inspire gender parity.

Convenience nonprobability sampling was applied for the data collection. The researcher approached both male and female segments at the event and asked if they would like to participate in an academic study on femvertising. Those who agreed to participate were given an administrated questionnaire on the spot to fill out, which took an average of 15 minutes for completion. The respondents were given the choice to fill in the questionnaire in either the English or the Arabic language (through back translation), whatever suited the respondents' preferences in questioning. The participants who responded to the questionnaire were the easiest for the researcher to access due to the willingness to participate in the research and their availability.

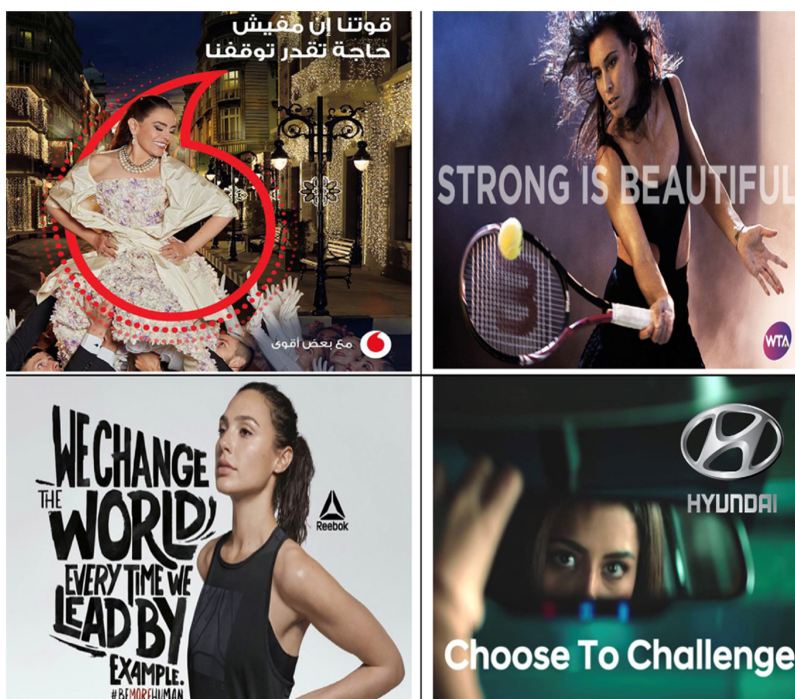
The questionnaire covered three sections. *Section 1* of the questionnaire had an introduction paragraph, explaining and giving illustrations of femvertising (several women empowerment advertisings were presented: female empowerment at work, sports, family life and their overall womanliness) as shown in [Figure 1](#). The introduction paragraph also clarified how to fill-in the questionnaire, confirmation of response confidentiality, the validation of discretion of the respondent's identity and the consent to withdraw from the study at any point if they choose to. This paragraph reflected the ethical procedures of research. The next section, *Section 2*, asked several nominal questions regarding the respondents' sociodemographics. The final section, *Section 3*, contained five-point interval scales, assessing the studied variables: advertising affective response, perceived congruence, perceived authenticity and female portrayal attitude.

The scales used in this study's questionnaire were taken from prior studies and adjusted to suit this study's topic of investigation. Perceived congruence was measured using three items five-point Likert-type scale established by [Fleck and Quester \(2007\)](#). Perceived authenticity was measured using three items five-point Likert-type scale established by [Schallehn et al. \(2014\)](#). Affective response was assessed with three items, five-point semantic differential scale developed by [Kim et al. \(1998\)](#). Gender portrayals were assessed with four items, five-point Likert-type scale developed by [Ford and Michael \(1993\)](#).

A pilot test (small scale-study of 50 respondents) was conducted prior to steering the actual data collection to check if the refined scales were reliable and valid; to verify if the tailored designed scales work in the Egyptian context as well as studying femvertising. Once the verification was confirmed, the actual data collection took place.

Collecting an appropriate questionnaire sample size is crucial for research; if a sample is too small, it will not allow the research to develop and gain reliable insights. The size of the population and the amount of error the researcher is willing to tolerate is what determines the size of the sample. Thus, this study used the [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#) sample size table within 5% points (with 95% certainty) of what the results would have been if the entire population had been surveyed. Based on the Cairo-runner's statements of the sports event, 2,000 individuals were present at the event; thus, a minimum sample size of 322 was targeted in this study.





Source(s): Advertised images collected by the current research for assessment

Figure 1.  
Examples of  
femvertising

Once the researcher collected the necessary information that was required, the statistical analysis took place. Various statistical analyses were conducted through IBM statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 22 and structural equation modeling (SEM) from IBM-Amos version 16. These analyses aided the researcher to develop the needed empirical evidence.

#### 4. Research analysis and results

Out of 600 questionnaires that were distributed during the event, only 500 questionnaires were returned accurately and completed, making this study receive 83% response rate. Based on the statistics shown in Table 1, the respondents were of different sociodemographic traits.

As shown in Table 2, the majority of the respondents were in agreement that advertising in the Arab world no longer focus on traditional roles of women as housewives only (women are no longer portrayed as inferior to men in advertising), but there are prominent representations of feminine power; advertising can exemplify females as confident, powerful, controlling in action in whatever position they participate and apply in society. The respondents claim that advertising show females: family power, expert power, sportif power and sexual power.

The normality tests were conducted to confirm if the dataset in this study was modeled by a normal distribution. Several analyses (Table 2) were performed to assess normality: Kolmogorov–Smirnov test of normality, skewness and kurtosis values and assumption of assumption of multicollinearity, using variance inflation factor (VIF). Hair *et al.* (2017) claim that if the *P*-value was greater than 0.05 for Kolmogorov–Smirnov test of normality, then the

Table 1.

Respondents'  
sociodemographic trait

Sociodemographic trait	N	%	Socio-demographic trait	N	%
<i>City of residence</i>			<i>Gender</i>		
Cairo	291	58.200	Female	268	53.600
Alexandria	201	40.200	Male	250	46.400
Other	8	01.600			
<i>Age</i>			<i>Level of education</i>		
Less than 18 years of age	15	03.000	Elementary school	2	00.400
18 below 30 years of age	352	70.400	High school	97	19.461
30 below 45 years of age	114	22.800	College degree	308	60.000
Above 45 years of age	19	03.800	Graduate degree	87	17.400
			Other	6	01.200
<i>Job status</i>			<i>Average household monthly income</i>		
Student	369	73.800	Less than 5,000 L.E.	135	27.000
Graduate	43	08.600	5,000 less than 15,000 L.E.	98	19.600
Newly employed	55	11.000	15,000 less than 25,000 L.E.	167	33.400
Other	33	06.600	over 15,000 L.E.	100	20.000
<i>Marital status</i>			<i>Number of children</i>		
Single	240	48.000	None	324	64.800
Married	206	41.200	One	54	10.800
Widowed	15	03.000	Two	52	10.400
Divorced/separated	39	07.800	More than two	75	14.000
<i>Are women still portrayed inferior to men in advertising?</i>			<i>Most advertising portray females as</i>		
Yes	175	35.000	Sexual power	20	04.000
No	325	65.000	Expert power	150	30.000
			Family power	230	46.000
			Physical/sportif power	100	20.000

Source(s): Analysis done be the current research

Table 2.

Testing of normality

Research variables	Descriptive statistics		Skewness Statistic	Kurtosis Statistic	VIF Statistic	Kolmogorov–Smirnov <sup>a</sup> Sig.
	Mean	Std. deviation				
Perceived congruence	3.180	1.300	0.457	−0.796	0.361	0.000
Perceived authenticity	3.240	1.250	−0.211	−0.618	0.308	0.000
Femvertising exposure response	4.020	1.070	0.596	0.017	0.309	0.000
Attitude toward female role portrayal	3.583	1.073	−0.808	0.225	0.262	0.000

Source(s): Analysis done be the current research

data were normally distributed; if kurtosis value was of  $\pm 1$ , it was considered suitable; if skewness value was greater than  $\pm 1$  or lower than  $-1$ , this indicated skewed distribution; if the VIFs values were less than 5, then there is no problem of multicollinearity between variables. In this study, the analyses showed accurate no problem of multicollinearity between variables and data were normally distributed.

Reliability and validity analysis were conducted next. According to Bryman (2012), the reliability analysis examined that the scale yields the same results over multiple trials; validity examined whether the scales measures what it was designed to measure. In this study, several reliability analysis and validity analysis were conducted: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin



(KMO), average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and discriminant validity. According to Hair *et al.* (2017), for scales to be reliable and valid, the alpha should be above 0.700. In this study, adequate convergent validity, reliability and discriminant validity were emerged (Tables 3 and 4).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted subsequently in this study so to test the hypothesis (relationship between observed variables) and their underlying latent constructs existence. CFA is a special form of factor analysis, which is used to test whether measures of a construct are consistent with a researcher's understanding of the nature of that construct.

According to Hair *et al.* (2017), the research model is acceptable if the Bentler–Bonett normed fit index (NFI) and goodness of fit index (GFI) exceed 0.900 and if the comparative fit index (CFI) exceeds 0.930, and when the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) is less than 0.080. In this study, the numbers met the criteria; the analysis showed: minimum discrepancy or chi-square divided by the degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF) was 1.843; the probability of getting as larger discrepancy as with the present sample ( $P$ -value) was 0.000; GFI was 0.91; adjusted GFI was 0.90; NFI was 0.92; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) was 0.962; CFI was 0.93; RMSEA was 0.078.

SEM path coefficient analysis was used to test the hypotheses. In the current study, hypothesis 1 posits that there is a significant relation between perceived authenticity and femvertising. This hypothesis was assed once among the female respondents and second among the male respondents. As shown in Table 5, the study results show that the relation is significant among the female respondents ( $\beta = 0.252, p < 0.001$ ) but insignificant among the male respondents ( $\beta = 0.187, p > 0.001$ ). Hypothesis 2 posits that there is a significant relation

Variables	Item	Factor loading	AVE%	KMO	CR	$\alpha$
Perceived congruence	PC1	0.890	0.786	0.890	0.936	0.909
	PC2	0.910				
	PC3	0.921				
Perceived authenticity	PA1	0.930	0.600	0.700	0.855	0.838
	PA2	0.900				
	PA3	0.890				
Femvertising exposure response	FER1	0.920	0.773	0.729	0.931	0.902
	FER2	0.880				
	FER3	0.900				
Attitude toward female role portrayal	AF1	0.920	0.600	0.741	0.855	0.838
	AF2	0.910				
	AF3	0.900				
	AF4	0.880				

Source(s): Analysis done be the current research

**Table 3.**  
Validity and  
reliability test

Variables	1	2	3	4
Perceived congruence	(0.927)			
Perceived authenticity	0.405**	(0.874)		
Femvertising exposure response	0.391**	0.627**	(0.887)	
Attitude toward female role portrayal	−0.151**	0.269**	0.338**	(0.827)

Note(s): \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source(s): Analysis done be the current research

**Table 4.**  
Discriminant validity

Table 5.  
SEM-path analysis

Hypotheses	Female respondents			Male respondents		
	Estimate	P	Hypothesis output	Estimate	P	Hypothesis output
Femvertising exposure → perceived authenticity	0.252	***	Supported	0.187	0.123	Not supported
Femvertising exposure → perceived congruence	0.010	0.886	Not supported	0.086	0.367	Not supported
Femvertising exposure → attitude toward female	0.033	***	Supported	0.049	***	Supported
<b>Note(s):</b> ***Reflects Hypothesis is significant						
<b>Source(s):</b> Analysis done be the current research						

between perceived congruence and femvertising. The results show that the relation is insignificant among the female respondents ( $\beta = 0.010, p > 0.001$ ) and the male respondents ( $\beta = 0.086, p > 0.001$ ). The final hypothesis posits that there is a significant relation between femvertising and attitudes toward females. The results show that the relation is significant among the female respondents ( $\beta = 0.033, p < 0.001$ ) and the male respondents ( $\beta = 0.049, p < 0.001$ ).

5. Research conclusion

Brands are becoming activists, using their advertising as a significant vehicle for the dissemination of information to trigger positive community change devoted to women’s interests, problems, roles, empowerment and activism (Drake, 2017). Akestam et al. (2017) state that femvertising is looked-for to abolish gender stereotypes; it is a valuable determinant of attitude development toward gender equality. This study investigated cross-gender femvertising response and its impact on their perceived congruence and authenticity; and their attitude formation toward female portrayal. Correspondingly, three research questions were steered to achieve this aim: (RQ1) *do cross-gender perceive femvertising as authentic*; (RQ2) *do cross-gender perceive femvertising as congruent*; (RQ3) *do femvertising impact cross-gender female-perception*.<sup>2</sup> The current study’s results submit that femvertising perceived congruence is insignificant cross-gender. Femvertising perceived authenticity is significant to female segment, not the male segment. Femvertising impact gender role portrayal among male segment and female segment. With the growing gender equality issues, the emerged conclusions from this study could be considered as a reference for stakeholders (marketers, managers, scholars and other practitioners) who have interest in women empowerment marketing strategies as a brand activism; companies that look toward femvertising as effective tactic to enhance affirmative attitude and build an empowered female customer base.

6. Research discussion

This study contributes to clarifying femvertising as a social marketing and activism tactic that promotes constructive responses and attitudes toward female empowerment. This study clarifies wherefrom these campaigns are effective, as well as the effects they have on individuals that are exposed to the messages; it has the power to lead to social change, creating positive mindset among people (cross-gender fruitful attitude toward female roles). The following paragraphs discuss the theoretical and managerial implications that are concluded from the research outcomes.

### 6.1 Theoretical contribution

The cultivation theory explains that social reality credited by citizens is refined through the media, so people exposed to media that normalized women empowerment would themselves reduce gender bias (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2022). Femvertising seeks to be an activist and make positive changes in people's perception toward the role of females in society (Patel *et al.*, 2017); the concept of gender reality cultivation is showcased in advertising, impacting people's mindset (Shrum, 1996; Lima and Casais, 2021). This study contributes insights that show femvertising (as a marketing and communication strategy) has the capability to change society's attitude on women empowerment, supporting the cultivation theory and playing a role in the promotion of feminism.

Feminist theories examine women's social characters, roles, experiences, welfares and securities in the community; its goal is to analyze gender inequality and promote women's interests (Lerman and Porter, 1990). Researches claim that citizens (males and females) need to come together to empower each other in a healthy manner so to create a better future (Alcoff, 1988); males and females should support the progression of women and disapprove gender bias (Lerman and Porter, 1990). This study contributes in exemplifying that feminism can be done through businesses. Businesses can use the advertising technique known as femvertising to promote their brand as well as women's capabilities, competencies and significance. This study provides empirical evidence that femvertising impacts attitudes on female gender role among both male and female segment.

This study clarifies that femvertising is a marketing and communication strategy used by businesses to enthuse and inspire women of any age with pro-female messages (so to deliver a positive social impact) while breeding brand engagement, which can be good for the bottom line. This study supports Porter and Kramer (2002) statement that "social and economic goals are not inherently conflicting but integrally connected" (p. 5), contradicting early research that claim traditionally, advertising would not be considered corporate social responsibility because the aim of advertising is to encourage and persuade people to purchase the product advertised (Goffman, 1976), contradicting social initiatives, which should come from the "heart" (Cochran, 2007).

Literature claim that a growing trend in advertising is brand responsibility (Sterbenk *et al.*, 2022), and a prominent application of these messages is gender equality, specifically female empowerment (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2022). Theory claims that marketers utilize "femvertisements" to highlight their support of women (Champlin *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, this study contributes empirical evidence, suggesting that brands' that seek to use women empowerment as their social responsibility motive is often called into question (mostly by the female consumers), given brands' natural desire to sell products. Therefore, this study support Sterbenk *et al.* (2022) notions that the overall promoted brand message and the overall social issue message should be also applied in the company as well to be an effective marketing campaign.

When it comes to the existing literature and frameworks related to social responsibility, they claim that: "cause and brand pairings that will be formed most easily will be those in which there is a perceived natural or plausible fit between the brand and cause" (Till and Nowak, 2000, p. 477). Many studies claim that congruence between a brand and a cause (natural fit or match-up) is necessary to gain support from individuals (Fleck and Qvester, 2007; Champlin *et al.*, 2019). Though, this study showed otherwise, contradicting these researchers. This study supports existing studies, like Rifon *et al.* (2004), clarifying that individuals significantly respond to social marketing when they perceive incongruence between brand and cause; they claim that individuals may be suspicious toward a brand that backup causes related to the products it sells, so individuals are supportive, fulfilled and loyal when brand and cause are not linked to its core business.

### 6.2 Managerial implication

In this study, *femvertising perceived congruence is insignificant cross-gender*. This result implies that femvertising, as social activism, is progressive among brands regardless of the incongruence between brand identity and feminism. High gender inequality still exists, making this advertising a prerequisite for gender role development. Femvertising construct benevolent values among individuals to make society a better place, increasing its demand and airing among consumers; it is an activism to shed light on gender taboo, dismissing social views and limitations that restrict women. Based on this implication, marketing practitioners can seek to represent females as empowered in their advertising to inspire females regardless of what they sell.

The current study concludes that *femvertising perceived authenticity is significant to females, not the males*. This result implies that males grasp that femvertising is marketing techniques to change mindsets and behaviors of citizens; marketing ideas that assist in solution to social problem in society. However, for brands to make a stronger impression on females, the social and ethical idea (female empowerment) that are advertised must also be priority and present in the brand's everyday business practices; females' overall brand trust, support and loyalty will be in jeopardy if advertising authenticity does not exist within the company. Therefore, if marketing practitioners invest in femvertising as a path toward achieving social responsibility, their female liberation should be adequately and strategically reflected in business practices to earn females' support.

This study shows that *femvertising impact female role portrayal cross-gender*. The results imply that many brands and citizens support promoting females' sense of power and self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices and their right to influence social change for themselves. Many advertisings seek to expose women as confident, special, feminine and strong, but in diverse perspectives and roles. In modern society, traditional gender roles are blurring; men and women are splitting the housework as both of them have careers and earn money; thus, females are competent of masculine power. But it should be recognized that femininity on its own is another form of empowerment as well (femininity has equal weight as masculine power). Being strong and feminine are not mutually exclusive. Accordingly, it is advocated that marketing practitioners depict females in advertising as they truly are: females have always had power, in obscure, profound, graceful, sensual, subtle ways; but society have just never emphasized its significance as much like the masculine power. Emphasizing both masculine and feminine power can be an opportunity to mold/build healthier mindsets in society that are keeping women disempowered.

## 7. Research limitation and suggestions for future studies

Several limitations were faced in this study in which future research can amend. During the data collection, this study was limited when it came to the population of focus; the data collection took place in one event; and the data collection was among Egyptians citizens. Future studies could analyze other Arab nations as [Elhajjar \(2020\)](#) mentions that every culture portrays female roles differently and holds subjective opinions related to how female empowerment should be rationalized. This study focused on assessing perceived authenticity and congruence of femvertising. This study focused on how does femvertising impact cross-gender attitude toward females. Future studies could explore different independent or dependent variables, such as national culture, brand/product category, consumer loyalty, religion, advertising methods, brand attitudes or even purchase intention. [Drake \(2017\)](#) hinted that femvertising praised as a marketing technique that has the capability to build brand image, increase purchase intention, sales, etc.

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