

Original Article

## "Beauty that reflects who we are": *femvertising* in Avon campaigns

"Beleza que é a nossa cara": o *femvertising* em campanhas da Avon

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The objective of this study is to investigate consumers' perceptions of *femvertising* campaigns. Specifically, the study examined whether consumers perceive themselves as represented by campaigns and the positive and negative effects of these representations.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The article is characterized as a qualitative research study of a descriptive nature, utilizing focus groups with an average of eight participants per meeting. To process the data, content analysis was conducted, with the categories of analysis including the profile of participants, women in advertising, female representation, *femvertising*, and the impact of *femvertising* on the relationship with the brand.

**Findings:** Consumers stated that Avon uses a wide variety of female representations in its advertising campaigns, showcasing people with characteristics that are considered relatable, with which they can identify. These characteristics were cited as brand differentiators.

**Originality:** This article contributes to helping companies understand women's perceptions of advertising campaigns with feminist messages, as well as understanding consumer behavior and what positioning they want from brands.

**Keywords:** *Femvertising*; Advertising; Female empowerment

## RESUMO

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**Objetivo:** O objetivo deste estudo é investigar as percepções de consumidoras sobre as campanhas de *femvertising*. Especificamente, o estudo investigou se as consumidoras se sentem representadas pelas campanhas e os efeitos positivos e negativos dessas ações.

**Desenho/Meotodologia/Abordagem:** O artigo caracteriza-se como uma pesquisa qualitativa de natureza descritiva, utilizando grupos focais, com uma média de oito participantes por encontro. Para o tratamento dos dados, foi realizada análise de conteúdo, sendo as categorias de análise: perfil das participantes, mulheres na publicidade, representação feminina, *femvertising* e o impacto do *femvertising* no relacionamento com a marca.

**Resultados:** As consumidoras explicitaram que a Avon utiliza em suas campanhas publicitárias uma grande diversidade de representatividade feminina, mostrando pessoas com atributos caracterizados como reais, com os quais elas conseguem se identificar. Essas características foram citadas como um diferencial da marca.

**Originalidade:** Este artigo contribui para ajudar as empresas a entenderem as percepções das mulheres sobre campanhas publicitárias com mensagens feministas, bem como para entender o comportamento da consumidora e o posicionamento que ela deseja das marcas.

**Palavras-chave:** *Femvertising*; Publicidade; Empoderamento feminino

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a means of communicating with individuals and groups, associating itself with the need to have a discourse aligned with the profile that adapts to the desires, perceptions, and needs of target consumers or potential consumers (Daí, Zhu & Yuan Guo, 2025; Buckley, Yannopoulou, Gorton & Lie, 2024). A recurring advertising strategy involves creating stereotypes of a particular audience. A classic example of this strategy is the representation of the female figure as a submissive being or as an object of male desire (Lourenço, Artemenko & Bragaglia, 2014; Castro, 2023; Piñeiro Otero, 2024), whose premises reflect the prevailing societal model.

Despite the persistence of stereotype construction, women’s struggle for rights and gender equality has promoted reflection on the role of women in society (Menéndez, 2020; Martínez, Torres & Zarco, 2024). In the field of advertising, societal changes have been reflected in the behavior of female consumers, who have become less receptive to brands with messages that do not realistically represent their audience. In response, changes in advertising campaigns are noticeable, intending to represent real women of

all body types, skin colors, and ages. Female strength is conveyed through empowering messages that promote self-acceptance and recognize the purchasing power of the female audience (Monte & Dantas, 2017; Menéndez, 2019). In this context, *femvertising* has gained strength in companies.

Femvertising is a portmanteau of the words “feminism” and “advertising,” which aim to empower girls and women, promote representation, and break down female stereotypes in advertising campaigns (Menéndez, 2020). The term was mentioned during a 2014 interview by Samantha Skey, the executive and marketing director of the SheKnows platform. The topic was debated that same year during the 11th edition of the International Advertising Week (Heck & Nunes, 2016; Lima & Casais, 2021).

In the academic sphere, *femvertising* has been identified as a promising topic in marketing research (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Varghese & Khumar, 2022). Other strands of the literature focus on studies of consumer behavior and advertising campaigns (Özdemir, 2021; Waqar et al., 2024; Piñeiro Otero, 2024). Research in the field highlights discussions centered on intersectionality, sports, female sexuality, and advertising practices (Vandellos, Villarroya, & Boté-Vericad, 2023).

Despite the breadth of discussions surrounding *femvertising*, significant gaps remain that invite the introduction of new applications and approaches to further explore this emerging theme. Among these gaps is the limited understanding of *femvertising* from the consumer’s perspective (Hainneville, Guèvremont, & Robinot, 2023; Buckley, Yannopoulou, Gorton, & Lie, 2024), as well as a lack of research examining contexts marked by deep gender inequality, particularly in terms of how *femvertising* impacts women (Özdemir, 2021; Török et al., 2025). Additionally, there is a pressing need for critical advancements in the field that address both commercial and social interests, offering new theoretical and practical implications regarding the authenticity of *femvertising* (Menéndez, 2020; Vandellos, Villarroya, & Boté-Vericad, 2023; Daí, Zhu, & Yuan Guo, 2025).

Given these potential gaps, along with the significant increase in campaigns based on *femvertising*, this article adopts an exploratory approach to investigate the positive

and negative effects of such advertising on consumer behavior and their relationship with the brand. Accordingly, the following research question was proposed: What are the effects of *femvertising* campaigns on consumer behavior? Therefore, this study aims to examine consumers' perceptions of *femvertising* campaigns. Specifically, it examines whether consumers perceive themselves as represented by such campaigns and investigates both their positive and negative effects.

To conduct the investigation, the cosmetics sector was selected due to its receptiveness to the topic while simultaneously being a segment that has historically reinforced female stereotypes and established specific beauty standards (Silva, 2018). In this context, Avon was chosen as the research object of this study because of its prominence and its discourse, which encompasses *femvertising* in advertising campaigns, as a brand repositioning strategy adopted in 2015, focused on female empowerment and gender equality (Nunes & Vale, 2020; Simabuku & Campos, 2019; Pucci, 2019).

This article adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach, using focus groups to support its analysis. The paper begins with this introduction, followed by a theoretical overview of the topic, the methodological procedures, the analysis and discussion of the data, and the study's final remarks.

## **2 FEMVERTISING AND ADVERTISING**

The attribution of a landmark to the beginning of the feminist movement is generally recognized as the 19th century, when the struggle for gender equity emerged, gaining momentum over the years and adopting associated agendas (Monte & Dantas, 2017). Schaun and Schwartz (2008) constructed a timeline to help understand how women were portrayed in advertising over the decades, highlighting the objectification process. In the 1920s, owing to industrialization, there was an increased demand to encourage consumers to purchase products; thus, advertising was even more focused on women as erotic and sexualized figures. In the 1930s, there was a need to construct a national identity characterized by order and discipline, with women represented as

discreet and sensual, often as mothers and caregivers of children and as the guardians of the home. In the 1940s and 1950s, this representation persisted, with advertisements encouraging women to use household appliances, often featuring women dressed in a subtle manner to handle them (Castro, 2023).

Additionally, according to Schaun and Schwartz (2008), in the 1960s, with the emergence of the Claudia magazine, women began to openly discuss topics such as sex, abortion, divorce, freedom, pleasure, and comfort. In this scenario, advertising now shows women as “fighting and challenging figures in the public space,” but female sexualization remains. In the 1970s and 1980s, the image of women was divided into two stereotypes: on the one hand, the image of a young, single, and beautiful woman, used as a standard for other women and a sex symbol in advertisements aimed at a male audience; on the other hand, the image of an adult, married woman, and mother. Finally, in the 1990s, women gained more influence in purchasing decisions due to the increased economic growth of women. As a result, brands deemed it important to represent women in their advertising campaigns in a way closer to reality, more suited to the “new woman” (Piñeiro Otero, 2024).

Serasa and Opinion Box (2025) revealed that 93% of women actively participate in managing their family's finances, and 33% of them are either the sole or primary financial providers. As a result, women are often targeted in advertising, not necessarily because of their appearance, but rather to attract larger audiences and viewership (Lopes, Linhares, & Rocha, 2015). The decades-long use of stereotypes related to women's bodies and behavior (Mesquita, Matos, Meneses, & Monteiro, 2024) corroborates the imposition of a beauty standard and the eroticization of femininity (Oliveira-Cruz, 2017; Raiol, Sousa, & Gomes, 2016; Martínez, Torres, & Zarco, 2024).

In contemporary times, brands must recognize that propagating messages that treat certain social groups as inferior or reflect sexist ideas in their advertising are not well received by consumers (Pessoa, Silva, & Macário, 2018). Hence, there is growing discussion regarding the authenticity and reliability of the messages conveyed

in advertisements—particularly those featuring female representations (Daí, Zhu, & Yuan Guo, 2025). These debates often highlight the perception that companies use such imagery primarily as a commercial strategy to increase sales while portraying women as mere marketing instruments (Vandellos, Villarroya, & Boté-Vericad, 2023).

As a result of this social and historical context, *femvertising* emerged in 2014, widely discussed at the 11th edition of Advertising Week, where professionals gathered to debate the role advertising plays in the dissemination and perpetuation of negative female stereotypes and how empowerment could be incorporated into campaign agendas (Heck & Nunes, 2016). This debate was fueled by the realization that the female audience did not identify with the messages in advertising campaigns, perceiving the need for brands to position themselves and incorporate feminist perspectives into their discourse (Costa, 2020). Women increasingly desire to be seen in their true essence and value (Soat, 2022; Berth, 2019).

Femvertising has emerged as a strategic tool for promoting female empowerment, aiming to break away from stereotypes and shape advertising campaigns that disseminate goods and services while addressing factors related to consumption (Nascimento & Dantas, 2015; Martínez, Torres, & Zarco, 2024; Peixoto & Woida, 2024).

Femvertising is defined as the creation of advertising campaigns “focused on female empowerment that employs concepts in favor of women’s talent in messages and images to empower women and girls” (Becker-Herby, 2016, p. 18), promoting the deconstruction of aesthetic standards (Reis & Correa, 2020; Piñeiro Otero, 2024) and gender equality (Bittencourt & Gelain, 2018; Zacipa-Infante & Tur-Viñes, 2025).

Becker-Herby (2016) reported that *femvertising* aims to ensure the representation of women and celebrates them by portraying them in authentic scenarios, thereby undoing the stereotypes traditionally associated with the female gender. The author also noted that, after analyzing several *femvertising* campaigns, the majority incorporated five pillars, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Pillars of *Femvertising*

Pillars	Description
Use of diverse female talent.	<i>Femvertising</i> , like third-wave feminism, is intersectional. Women and girls are far more likely to see themselves reflected in advertisements featuring models of the same race, shape, body size, and age. <i>Femvertising</i> campaigns rarely showcase a group of conventional “ideal” supermodels instead of opting for a variety of female representations.
Inherently pro-woman messages.	The core messages of <i>Femvertising</i> campaigns are empowering, inspiring, and inclusive. The messages aim to provide the consumer with feelings of affirmation, self-confidence, and motivation rather than implying that they are not good enough and that the product at hand is the key to “fixing” their imperfections. Instead, the message reinforces and celebrates something positive.
Pushing the boundaries/ stereotypes of gender norms; challenging perceptions of what a woman/girl “should” be.	<i>Femvertising</i> campaigns portray women or girls in scenarios outside of traditional gender stereotypes. Campaigns rarely feature women performing household chores or other tasks traditionally associated with marriage and motherhood. In <i>Femvertising</i> , women are frequently depicted in athletic or competitive environments, engaging in leisure activities, professions, or neutral settings (i.e., on a white background with no discernible location).
Minimization of sexuality; sexuality that does not cater to the male gaze.	While <i>femvertising</i> is not always devoid of all sexuality, it is used in far more nuanced ways than traditional advertising featuring women. Exposed skin or female bodily attributes are displayed in a way that feels relevant and authentic (i.e., female athletes working out in sports bras). <i>Femvertising</i> rarely features excessive cleavage, makeup, or unrealistic sexual poses.
Portraying women authentically.	Authenticity refers to all aspects of the advertisement—from the talent, the product, the setting, and the styling. Furthermore, the campaign message should feel genuine and make sense with the product being advertised. The most important aspect of <i>Femvertising</i> , authenticity, is noticeably woven throughout the first four pillars as well.

Source: Adapted from Becker-Herby (2016)

The confirmation of these pillars reaffirms the intention behind *femvertising* advertisements, presenting women as the protagonists of these campaigns (Becker-Herby, 2016; Martin & Shanthi, 2024). It challenges the beauty standards commonly promoted by the media and showcases female diversity, thereby promoting self-acceptance (Hainneville, Guèvremont, & Robinot, 2023; Buckley et al., 2024). In addition to presenting them in diverse scenarios, it replaces outdated stereotypes that portray women solely as homemakers (Daí et al., 2025; Bandeira, Mesquita, Araújo, & Matos, 2021).

The Dove brand became a pioneer in using advertising to empower women with the launch of its “Real Beauty” campaign in 2005, even before the concept of *Femvertising* emerged, aiming to celebrate the consumer’s beauty and promote self-acceptance (Özdemir, 2021). A new manifestation of this type of campaign occurred only in 2015, produced by the Always brand, and the “Like a Girl” campaign was created to demystify the concept that doing something “like a girl” is synonymous with weakness or insult and to show that being a girl is also strong (Polga & Silva, 2017; Castro, 2023). The initiative of both brands contributed to other brands also adopting this practice, including the beer segment, which has a history of clearly sexist advertising.

Skol was one of those beer brands that rethought its way of communicating and, in 2017, launched its International Women’s Day campaign titled “Skol Reposter.” The campaign recalls previous advertisements from the brand, and in the commercial video, “These images are part of our past; the world has evolved, and so has Skol.” To expand the campaign, six female illustrators were invited to recreate old posters, placing women at the center (Almeida, Vouguinha & Tonidandel, 2019).

Bayone and Burrowes (2019) state that brands that apply the concept of *femvertising* in their advertising benefit from the gradual growth of social media and the possibility of viralization (wide dissemination) of their content. The representation of women has also been influenced by digital transformations, leading to new approaches to conveying advertising messages (Daí et al., 2025). According to research conducted by the National Confederation of Retail Managers and SPC Brazil (CDL, 2016), 64.8% of women stated that social media influence their purchasing habits. Sixty-three percent of women consult their social networks before making a purchase (Sophia Mind, 2010a; 2010b).

Research on *femvertising* highlights the role of advertising in the purchasing process and in shaping consumer behavior. Zacipa-Infante and Tur-Viñes (2025) examined the theme of *femvertising* through marketing strategies depicted in the Barbie movie, discussing female stereotypes and gender equality. Their analysis

revealed that, despite the persistence of traditional portrayals of women, the film's advertising achieved global resonance and strengthened the emotional connection between the audience and the brand.

Along the same lines, Daí et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review exploring the impact of advertising on women's perceptions in the context of *femvertising* and digital media. They found that, although female figures are often featured with stereotypical ideals, such portrayals remain negatively associated with psychological factors, body dissatisfaction, and self-objectification. According to Lopes, Linhares, and Rocha (2015, p. 3), "the beauty of the average woman is not addressed in advertising; only a high standard of perfection is sought to attract a larger number of people."

Studies on female empowerment have also gained prominence in various areas, such as the influence of personality traits on consumer behavior (Waqar et al., 2024), the role of *femvertising* strategies in self-identification and purchase intention (Martínez, Torres, & Zarco, 2024), the effects of *femvertising* on consumer perceptions of feminine hygiene products (Papadopoulou, Hultman, & Oghazi, 2025), and women's empowerment in brand campaigns (Piñeiro Otero, 2024).

Studies on *femvertising* highlight the importance of advertising in the purchasing process and consumer behavior. Park, Koo, and Kim (2023) researched female empowerment in luxury brands via social media. The results indicated a positive relationship between brand messaging, brand attitude, and purchase intention, as well as high recognition among women regarding their involvement and perception of value in luxury brands. Hainneville, Guèvremont, and Robinot (2023) presented conceptual approaches to *femvertising* from a consumption perspective, exploring its nature and differences from femwashing. To do so, they conducted in-depth interviews with 17 women. They concluded that the concepts of *femvertising* and femwashing coexist according to the consumer's perspective. They cataloged six dimensions that confirm this authenticity: transparency, consistency, identification, diversity, respect, and challenging stereotypes. The scope of this

topic is relevant from the perspective of female empowerment, adding to the way brands have been explored, as well as their manifestations of advertising on social media, which is considered the primary communication tool in the market.

### 3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Given the primary objective of this research—to analyze Avon consumers’ perceptions of the *femvertising* present in advertising campaigns—this article is characterized as descriptive qualitative research. This approach was chosen due to the importance placed on detailing phenomena and the testimonies of the involved actors, as well as its flexibility for greater depth during data collection. The chosen method for data production was the focus group. This technique involves conducting group interviews, which are based on communication and interaction among participants, allowing for the collection of detailed information that fosters an understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about a topic, product, or service (Kitzinger, 2000).

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A poster was displayed at a public educational institution, inviting participants to join the study. It was open to any individual who identifies as female. The institution offered programs at various educational levels, including high school, technical courses, and higher education, which allowed for a diverse range of participants in terms of age and background. The focus groups were conducted in person at a research laboratory that had been prepared in advance to accommodate the sessions.

A preliminary test was first conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the focus group guide. We observed that the script was appropriate and encouraged fluid discussion. Subsequently, four in-person focus groups were organized in

the research lab, each consisting of 8 to 10 participants. Sessions were held on different days throughout May 2022 and lasted up to 90 minutes, concluding once response saturation was reached.

At the beginning of each session, the concept of *femvertising* was introduced to participants, followed by the screening of two advertising videos: “Olha de novo” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9MxcYl9Fpg>) and “Beleza que é sua cara” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4PCzdehLoQ>). In addition, visual materials from the campaigns “Beleza que é a Nossa Cara” and “Olhe de Novo” were presented, as they reflect more recent campaigns that directly convey the brand’s current positioning.

The focus group was conducted by a moderator who, after the participants were settled and the topic was introduced, asked the questions and facilitated group discussions. For the analysis of the data collected, we employed relational content analysis, also referred to as the analysis of relationships, co-occurrences, or contingency (Bardin, 2016). Unlike traditional categorical analysis, which focuses solely on identifying and quantifying thematic categories within the discourse, this technique delves deeper into the connections established among the various elements of the messages under study (Fonseca Jr., 2011). The emphasis is placed on detecting patterns of co-occurrence—that is, the frequency and context in which specific categories appear simultaneously. This approach enables the construction of networks of meaning, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced interpretation. It seeks to understand not only what is being said but also how the contents interrelate, uncovering underlying meanings in participants’ responses and supporting a more integrated and interpretive analysis of the empirical material.

The participants in this research were individuals with a female gender identity who consumed Avon products and were aged 18-40 years, allowing for the collection of perceptions from people of different generational contexts. The participants are from the middle social class, as this characterizes Avon’s target audience.

Table 2 – Categories and Questionnaire

Categories	Questions
The Feminine in Advertising	What do you typically imagine when you think of advertising that features women (traditional advertising)?
	In your opinion, have women been portrayed differently from men in advertising over the years?
	What female stereotypes in advertising bother you? Why?
Female Representation	How would you like to be represented in advertising campaigns?
	For you, what does empowering women through advertising mean?
	Do you consider that Avon’s advertisements deviate from the aesthetic standards commonly seen in cosmetic brands?
	In your opinion, does Avon celebrate female diversity in its campaigns? How? Do you consider yourself represented in Avon’s advertisements?
<i>Femvertising</i>	What thoughts do these advertisements evoke in you?
	What do you think about brands that seek to empower women through their advertising?
	Does the <i>femvertising</i> used in Avon’s campaigns have any effect on how you see yourself?
	How do you feel when you consume Avon’s advertisements?
	Do you think it is important to include representations of real women, with all their diversity, in advertising campaigns?
Impact of <i>Femvertising</i> on Brand Relationship	Do Avon’s advertisements evoke empowerment in you?
	How would you describe your relationship with the Avon brand?
	How would you describe the Avon brand concerning its advertising campaigns?
	In your perception, does the use of <i>femvertising</i> in the brand’s communication have any negative points?
	Does knowing that Avon cares about the cause and works with empowering campaigns influence you to continue consuming its products?
	Would you share Avon’s advertising content? Why?

Source: Prepared by the authors

## 4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of the study. Four categories were defined for analysis: feminine in advertising, female representation, *femvertising*, and the impact of *femvertising* on brand relationships. Sociodemographic information was collected to characterize the profile of the focus group participants.

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 40 years, with a predominance of women between 18 and 25 years old, who accounted for 72.4% of the sample. Five of the 29

participants had children, and the majority were single; three were married, and two were divorced. Most reported a household income of up to three minimum wages. Six of the women resided in the state of Ceará, while twenty-three lived in the state of Piauí.

#### 4.1 The feminine in advertising

Historically portrayed in advertising as fragile, confined to domestic responsibilities and child care, dependent on their husbands, or objectified as sexual symbols, women—despite now being depicted more often as independent and empowered—continue to be represented in ways that emphasize physical appearance and aesthetic procedures, which demonstrates persistence in the valuation of women's image based on beauty standards in commercial content. Women have been portrayed in advertising as fragile, solely responsible for housework and childcare, dependent on their husbands, and as sexual objects (Bayone & Burrowes, 2019; Castro, 2023; Peixoto & Woida, 2024). Similarly, women see themselves as objectified and not represented by the exposed standard.

The interviewees highlighted what they usually imagine when they think of advertising that features women, and some participants alluded to changes in how women have been represented in advertising. One participant made a historical account of her relationship with the campaigns, highlighting that her identification with the women portrayed by the brands was a recent feeling.

“When I think about it, I remember that I only started to feel truly represented in advertising a few years ago, in the last 5, 6, 7 years. Because when I was a child, the type of woman I saw on television, that I saw in catalogs, in magazines even, I didn't see on the street, I didn't see in my family, it wasn't the type of woman I knew. So, for me, that was a somewhat unreal image; I kept wondering: my God, will I ever be like that, will it be possible, or is it just media, how does it work?” (Interviewee 13).

During this discussion, comments emerged about how traditional advertising impacted, at some point, the way participants saw or thought about themselves. The participants stated that, upon encountering traditional advertising, they often

found themselves comparing their physical appearance to that of the women depicted, which generated a desire to emulate their physical appearance to achieve the body type (Papadopoulou, Hultman, & Oghazi, 2025).

The participants were asked if they believe that women have been portrayed differently from men in advertising over the years, and they all agreed that there is a difference in representation regarding the roles assigned to each gender. According to Oliveira-Cruz (2017), men are still commonly portrayed as the primary target audience in advertisements, especially those related to banking services, sports products, automobiles, and even alcoholic beverages. In contrast, women are predominantly featured in campaigns promoting cleaning supplies, cosmetics, food products, clothing, accessories, and other related items. These portrayals are consistent with findings reported by Zacipa-Infante and Tur-Viñes (2025) and Török et al. (2025), which complies with the interviewees' statements that advertising associates women with the roles of homemaker, mother, vain, and delicate people. In contrast, men are assigned the roles of businessman, in corporate positions, and sports enthusiasts. Men are more commonly seen as figures of authority in advertising than women are.

“Homemaker, of the home, of the children. It’s very difficult to see a woman in a corporate position. It’s more clothes, makeup, that’s all. It’s very difficult to see, let’s say, a bank advertisement, and there’s a woman right in the front; no, there will be a man. I think there’s a lot of inequality in that” (Interviewee 3).

“When we remember advertising directed at men, we see men playing sports, being big businessmen, and that sort of thing. For women, it’s something more feminine, delicate; it doesn’t even make sense sometimes; it focuses on the woman’s neck, focuses on her feet, focuses on her body, and then the perfume advertisement shows” (Interviewee 13).

However, some participants emphasized that, despite the portrayal of men in authority and dominance in advertising, aesthetic issues are also present in advertisements for both genders, establishing a beauty standard that applies to both men and women. However, other participants have different opinions and believe that

even concerning aesthetics, men occupy a space of privilege, where women suffer greater pressure to fit in and meet the imposed beauty standards.

Concerning the female stereotypes present in advertising that bother the participants, the most prominent problem was the sexualization of the female figure, with other attributes also mentioned, such as the stereotype of extreme femininity attributed to women. These findings align with broader discussions in the literature that highlight the persistence of stereotypical representations of women in advertising (Piñeiro Otero, 2024; Martínez, Torres, & Zarco, 2024; Menéndez, 2020). According to Oliveira-Cruz (2017, p. 184), “advertising naturalizes the androcentric view, representing women as emotional, passive, docile, or sensual.” However, attributing only these characteristics to women in their advertising does not match what consumers want to see in campaigns; in contrast, it generates discomfort.

“It’s this thing of sexualizing women so much; they have to be in short shorts, they have to be in a bikini, in a low-cut dress; the woman has to be showing off” (Interviewee 3).

“The woman is always involved with sexuality” (Interviewee 5).

“To get things, they always have to show some part of their body” (Interviewee 2).

“For me, too, it’s more the issue of the woman’s exposure, of the body; it doesn’t show the woman as a person, with thoughts, with ideals, with a vision of the future” (Interviewee 20).

“The issue of the extremely feminine woman” (Interviewee 13).

“Yes, I think it doesn’t exist anymore; obviously, it exists, but there are many women who are not and don’t feel the need to be extremely feminine” (Interviewee 8).

Some participants expressed discomfort with advertisements specifically for makeup and beauty products, citing the unreality depicted in these advertisements (Vandellos, Villarroya, & Boté-Vericad, 2023; Daí et al., 2025; Menéndez, 2020).

## 4.2 Female representation

Despite the changes in the representation of women in advertising, the use of women’s images in an objectified and sexualized manner has been increasingly used in campaigns. However, with the growing approach of *femvertising*, the dissatisfaction caused by this type of representation has gained visibility. As a result, brands have come to recognize that female consumers seek campaigns with messages that reflect their perspectives and experiences, crafted with their needs and viewpoints in mind (Raiol, Sousa & Gomes, 2016; Peixoto & Woida, 2024).

In this context, when asked how they would like to be represented in advertising campaigns, the participants most frequently cited the word “empowered.” In addition, the responses of some participants further highlight the discomfort with the female sexualization present in some advertising campaigns.

“Not necessarily showing parts of your body, unlike what has already been portrayed, always with cleavage and short clothes; it has to be something different, right?” (Interviewee 5).

“Show more reality, show more how women really are” (Interviewee 27).

Empowerment varies depending on each individual or group of individuals, shaped by their life experiences and the context in which they are situated. It is highlighted as a mechanism aimed at increasing the visibility of women’s representation in advertising activities (Martínez, Torres, & Zarco, (2024; Wagar et al., 2024). Regarding what the participants believe empowers women through advertising, although the statements are divergent, their meanings are quite similar: showing women as they are, not highlighting only subjective beauty, but valuing real women and their daily

efforts. One participant highlighted the fact that she believes representation and empowerment are not necessarily present in advertisements where women perform tasks considered exclusively or commonly performed by men but rather in the exaltation of the activities women perform in their daily lives.

“I think that demystifying these standards is already a way of empowerment, not necessarily putting a woman doing something impossible or putting a woman doing something that a man would do, no. I think it’s enough to exalt what the woman already does, which is very incredible and often not recognized. The fact that she can work, have her rights, have her independence, her financial independence, and so on. Not necessarily showing the woman being a stonemason, being I don’t know what” (Interviewee 8).

They do not want to be men. They want to be women, and they want to be observed for their voice and individualism. They want programs that see them and communicate with them instead of being wrapped up in a competitive group with men. Another participant cited Avon as the first brand in which she identified female representation and inclusion in advertising campaigns; she believes that the mere existence of representation in a brand’s advertising already characterizes it as empowering owing to the identification it provokes in the female audience (Vandellos, Villarroya & Boté-Vericad, 2023; Piñeiro Otero, 2024).

“Avon was one of the first channels where I saw this, exalting Black people, truly Black people, women who are homemakers, people who had blotchy skin, had scars, didn’t have a leg, you understand? So, for me, inclusion in advertising is empowering, because the fact that a large group of people can identify with that, that is empowering, showing that there’s no problem with those people using makeup, using perfumes, normal things, normalizing that. Because we mystify people who are different a lot: ‘Oh, but seriously, people like that use such a thing?’ Yes, they use it, and it’s normal; everyone uses it; it’s not just a specific type of person who uses this type of product or consumes this brand” (Interviewee 13).

The focus group members were invited to watch videos and view images from two Avon advertising campaigns. After viewing, the participants stated whether they considered Avon’s advertisements to deviate from the aesthetic standards commonly seen in cosmetic brands. Most participants affirmed that they did, highlighting the representation and diversity they detected in the brand’s advertising campaigns. Conversely, some participants believed that, despite advertisements that deviate from the standards, the Avon brand does not differ from others, as other brands also use this type of advertising.

One participant reported that brands are adapting to introduce this message into their campaigns, but Avon did it much faster. Another participant reported that in other brands, the use of advertisements featuring female diversity is limited to product lines with lower prices, which ultimately conveys a negative message that the brand associates those women with cheaper products.

“At Natura, which I also sell, there’s that expensive line, and there’s that cheaper line, and it doesn’t bring as much diversity as Avon, but then you see right away [...] but if we analyze the Luna products, it’s more expensive than the other products, so why does it have to be in the cheaper one?” (Interviewee 14).

“Oh, that’s right. There are many brands that do this, associating that type of woman with the cheaper product, another with the middle-class product, and another with the top-of-the-line” (Interviewee 11).

Regarding the participants’ opinions on whether Avon celebrates female diversity in its campaigns, all agreed that it does. Participant 19 stated that “they bring it in a very positive way, that it is not bad for us to be that way.” Another participant highlighted the protagonist used in one of the advertisements shown in the focus group, who had a scar on her face, and another recalled that Avon was one of the first brands she saw that cared about creating foundations for various skin tones. To address the issue of diverse skin tones in makeup, one of the participants, a cosmetics reseller, recalled

that some of her clients had difficulty choosing the right foundation color; however, this issue had been resolved, and now her clients no longer experience this difficulty.

The participants were also asked if they felt represented by the Avon brand, and given all that has been presented and their experiences with the brand, all, without exception, stated that they feel represented and that it is impossible not to feel represented, given all the plurality of women present in the brand's advertisements.

### **4.3 Femvertising**

Immediately after viewing the advertising videos and images from the two Avon campaigns, the interviewees were asked about what these advertisements evoked in them, to which they reported feelings such as comfort, closeness, acceptance, self-love, and a sense of overcoming.

“I felt comfortable; as soon as I saw the first plus-size person there, I felt very comfortable. I've always had a very big problem with my body, so to see myself in advertisements, people similar to me or at least a little different from what we've already seen, I feel very comfortable when I see that [...]” (Interviewee 13).

“It brings you closer; it's a real image, so the person starts to see that not as something unattainable but as something more accessible, a brand that everyone can use. So, in a way, the brand sells, it sells the image, it sells the product, and it ends up linking it to social action as well” (Interviewee 8).

“In the first one, it was a matter of self-love; it emphasizes that beauty is already within us. In the second one, it already talks about overcoming, about everything we've talked about here, about achievements, right, that they were seeing everything that they didn't have before, they were recovering” (Interviewee 2).

“Acceptance; the brand encourages the person to love herself the way she really is, and not...” (Interviewee 27).

Some participants highlighted the issue of female representation and diversity in these campaigns. One of them highlighted a moment in one of the advertisements that caught her attention, conveying the message that women's characteristics should be highlighted rather than hidden. The participants' responses converge with the statement by author Becker-Herby (2016, p. 19) that “*femvertising* campaigns are empowering, inspiring, and inclusive. The messages seek to provide the consumer with feelings of affirmation, self-confidence, and motivation, instead of implying that she is not good enough and that the product at hand is the key to ‘fixing’ her imperfections.”

“They included all types and patterns there: curly hair, kinky hair, more wavy curly hair, that really curly hair. It's all included in this campaign” (Interviewee 16).

“I think different people with different personalities, different stereotypes. But each one with her own beauty” (Interviewee 25).

“Representation” (Interviewee 27).

“It's already very interesting, the issue of not hiding but rather highlighting what you already have, your characteristics; there's even a part there that says ‘highlight what I have best,’ you understand? It's about highlighting and not hiding; if you want to hide too, that's fine. But you have that option now, you have that possibility” (Interviewee 13).

Regarding the participants' thoughts on brands that seek to empower women through their advertising, most made positive comments. One participant stated that this practice attracts not only customers to the brand but also admirers, who consequently end up doing free and even more effective marketing. Female empowerment extends beyond a simple commercial advertisement; companies must demonstrate genuine involvement with the cause for it to be truly effective (Martínez, Torres, & Zarco, 2024).

When asked, the participants stated that the *femvertising* used in Avon's campaigns affects how they and other women see themselves. Some participants also

believe that it generates interest in the brand and its products, owing to the inclusion of women with similar characteristics to theirs in this type of campaign, providing a better visualization of how the products look on them.

“Yes, I think women feel welcomed and start to see that particular brand as representative” (Interviewee 29).

“It generates interest; it’s as if it opens up a possibility that you didn’t see before. ‘Look how interesting, a person similar to me using that kind of thing,’ ‘Wow, how beautiful it looked on her.’ I’m going to try using that kind of thing too. It generates a possibility; it opens up that range of possibilities, and you start to consider that brand, that product, that type of clothing, that type of makeup” (Interviewee 13).

“My thought is very similar to hers because if I see a person similar to my style or my body and face profile using such a thing, I’ll be interested; maybe it will work for me too; if it works and if I like it. I opened myself up to the possibility of getting to know other products from the brand; maybe I’ll like them and become a customer” (Interviewee 11).

“There’s also the issue of comparison; sometimes we want to see how something looks on us, but sometimes we don’t want to risk seeing how it looks, so when we see another person who is similar to us and who is wearing something, whether it’s clothing or makeup, and we see that it looks good on her, there’s a greater possibility that it will look good on me” (Interviewee 21).

The participants were also asked how they felt when consuming Avon’s advertisements. They cited positive feelings such as “represented” (Interviewee 5), “flattered” (Interviewee 2), and “proud too, to have a brand representing us in a good way” (Interviewee 3). While other participants expressed concern about knowing how to differentiate the brand’s intention—whether it is inclusion or just marketing—and in a divergent thought, one of the participants stated that, regardless of whether it is just marketing or not, she chooses to prioritize brands that contain this representative content over those that do not.

Regarding whether participants believe it is important to include representations of real women, with all their diversity, in advertising campaigns, they consider it extremely important, both because representation helps women and because of the impact these advertisements have on consumers' minds.

“[...] very important today, and if brands focus on this, on showing empowered women, a woman working, a self-assured woman, it will help other women; I think it's very important; I believe that all advertising should have it, they should be well-represented. These advertisements can help many women; it helps one another” (Interviewee 3).

“Extreme importance, not only because of the marketing itself, selling and trying to sell that brand, that product; I think it's more about linking this to other information and, in a way, trying to bring these minorities, so to speak, closer to other people. And people are changing; as this happens, people are changing that thought or that certain ignorance they have about it. So, I think it's breaking things down little by little, and then until all of that becomes a normal thing to see, normal to find in society without being surprised” (Interviewee 8).

Nascimento and Dantas (2015, p. 3) highlight that “empowerment is not a state that can be achieved once and for all, as it refers to a perspective of continuous change occurring in the present time”, which aligns with the participants' thoughts on whether Avon's advertisements awakened a sense of empowerment in them; all claimed that they did. Some participants stated that these advertisements do not have an instantaneous effect, but rather, this feeling of empowerment begins to emerge from advertisement to advertisement.

In addition to agreeing that the impact of these advertisements on female empowerment is not felt immediately but rather through a continuous process, one of the participants added that they have the power to generate change and demystify some of the thoughts of people from different generations. As Piñeiro Otero (2024) states, empowerment requires recognizing the social limitations imposed on women

and the need to modify this scenario; promoting empowerment contributes not only to the change of one person but also to the transformation of the entire society.

#### **4.4 Impact of *femvertising* on brand relationships**

When asked to describe the Avon brand in terms of its advertising campaigns, the participants characterized it as innovative and prominent, citing the representation and diversity present in Avon as a key factor contributing to this prominence. According to Raiol, Sousa & Gomes (2016, p. 6), “it is necessary for the brand to be genuinely engaged with the subject and to convey to its audience that its concern with the theme is social and not merely commercial” One participant reported that although she does not know the reason why Avon uses these advertisements, the feeling they evoke in her is that they genuinely believe in the messages they convey through these advertisements.

“A relationship of love and care because whoever loves takes care, and in a way, a person has to take care of beauty not only externally but internally as well. Because of this talk of self-esteem, of care. That’s how Avon’s advertisements are; they make people value themselves; it empowers and encourages, and the person’s self-esteem increases” (Interviewee 2).

“In love” (Interviewee 15).

“Avon reaches all social structures; that’s what makes it more valuable as well; it’s not only high-class people who can acquire the products” (Interviewee 1).

“That’s why women feel a very strong identification with Avon; everyone has used Avon; it’s difficult to find someone who hasn’t started with Avon” (Interviewee 1).

“The first catalog I sold was Avon’s; today I already sell Eudora, Boticário, Natura. But the first was Avon, and they are good products; it’s not because it’s cheap and accessible that it doesn’t have quality” (Interviewee 2).

“We don’t know why they make these advertisements, whether it’s because they’re forced to innovate or if it’s really because they want that in the advertisements, but what they convey to us is lightness, that that’s really what they believe. So, I think they convey a lot of truth in what they show in the advertisement” (Interviewee 19).

Regarding the participants’ perception of whether the use of *femvertising* in the brand’s communication has negative points, some participants reported that a possible negative point is the loss of customers who feel uncomfortable with this type of advertising or from a more conservative audience. However, the participants believe that there are more positive than negative points.

When asked whether knowing that Avon cares about the cause and works on empowering campaigns influences their decision to continue consuming its products, all respondents replied positively. One participant even stated that she not only buys but also recommends it to other people. Advertising campaigns can awaken emotions and stimulate latent desires; consequently, they encourage consumers to acquire a product or service (Schaun & Schwartz, 2008).

“Certainly, Avon’s makeup is perfect. I have a sister who is much darker than me, and every foundation she looked for never worked, but she finds it at Avon” (Interviewee 3).

“Every month I’m buying and I’m calling someone to buy with me” (Interviewee 15).

“I believe so; if it were a company that didn’t update itself, they would only lose their audience, and when we see that it’s updating itself, that that’s what they believe, we end up believing in the brand and having the courage to invest in their products” (Interviewee 19).

“Although the products are good or the quality is good, if it were only for the products, I wouldn’t stick around” (Interviewee 15).

The participants also stated that they had already shared or would share Avon’s advertising content, some with friends and others using their social networks. According to Nascimento and Dantas (2015, p. 13), an advertising format that differs from traditional formats features a plot rich in experimental stimuli and symbolism, eliciting empathy from the audience, which in turn results in identification with the advertising message. Thus, this audience creates involvement and, consequently, shares that content spontaneously.

## 5 FINAL REMARKS

Although there is still a long way to go for brands in terms of how women are portrayed in advertising, some brands are seeking to be agents of change in society. Among them, the Avon brand, which has adopted *femvertising*, is committed to contributing to the cause. In this context, this article analyzed Avon consumers’ perceptions of the *femvertising* present in advertising campaigns. Therefore, we concluded that the brand has an efficient application of *femvertising*, which positively impacts women’s perception and their relationship with the brand. Consumers stated that Avon uses a wide variety of female representations in its advertising campaigns, showcasing people with characteristics that are considered relatable, with which they can identify. These characteristics were cited as brand differentiators.

Thus, *femvertising*, with its empowering messages present in Avon’s advertisements, generates not only a feeling of identification but also of closeness, affinity, and affection for the female audience, directly impacting the consumer-brand relationship. Consequently, these women intend to continue consuming the brand’s products, share their content, whether on social networks or within their social circles and recommend the brand so that more people become consumers. Notably, Avon’s use of *femvertising* is not limited to empowering messages in its advertising campaigns, considering that the company has, since its inception, an operational structure geared toward women to contribute to the financial independence of its female audience.

As a limitation of this article, the difficulty of encompassing a wider variety of women is highlighted, as it focuses on a group of consumers from Piauí and Ceará. Moreover, the research was limited to investigating the perceptions of female consumers of the Avon brand only. Therefore, for future studies, we recommend that research be conducted to address these limitations by analyzing advertisements from other cosmetic brands or other sectors. We also suggest studying how the adoption of social discourses affects brand consumption, making it feasible to observe both the consumers' perspective and that of the brand itself.

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1. Definition of research problem	✓	✓			
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	✓	✓			
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	✓	✓			
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	✓	✓		✓	✓
5. Definition of methodological procedures	✓	✓			
6. Data collection	✓				
7. Statistical analysis					
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	✓				
9. Critical revision of the manuscript			✓	✓	✓
10. Manuscript writing	✓		✓	✓	✓
11. Other (please specify)					

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