



The Impact of Gender in Advertisements on the Consumers' Behaviour towards Brand Image

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ABSTRACT

Title of the dissertation: The Impact of Gender in Advertisements on the Consumers' Behaviour towards Brand Image

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Feminist movements have been undeniably present in today's society, which has contributed to a slow but steady change in the social values, norms and system. Women are starting to not be portrayed as just housewives and are actually being seen as human beings with their own thoughts, opinions and feelings. As a consequence, consumers are becoming more aware of gender stereotypes and their choices and demands are starting to shift.

The purpose of this study is to understand how gender biases work, what is the role of women in today's advertisements, how the consumers' behaviour has changed throughout the years and how do they feel when facing ads, stereotyped or not.

In order to come to these conclusions, data were collected, coded and triangulated. A focus groups was conducted, as well as structured interviews and observation of advertisements present in magazines. These qualitative data allowed to comprehend the consumers' feelings and choices behind their actions.

Overall, the results confirmed that gender inequality in ads impacts the consumers' behaviour, nevertheless this impact is mostly seen when the consumer has no or a negative association with the brand itself. Yet, if the consumer has a positive brand image, they will most likely forgive the company, by creating excuses and not overemphasizing with the ad they were just faced with.

Keywords: Advertisement, brand image, consumer behaviour, gender, gender equality, gender inequality, stereotypes

SUMÁRIO

Título da dissertação: O Impacto do Género em Publicidade no Comportamento dos Consumidores face à Imagem de Marca

Autor: Beatriz Baptista de Carvalho

Os movimentos feministas têm estado, sem dúvida, presentes na sociedade atual, o que tem contribuído para uma mudança lenta mas estável dos valores, normas e sistema social. As mulheres estão a começar a deixar de ser retratadas como apenas donas de casa e estão realmente a ser vistas como seres humanos com os seus próprios pensamentos, opiniões e sentimentos. Como consequência, os consumidores estão a tornar-se mais conscientes dos estereótipos de género e as suas escolhas e procura estão a começar a mudar.

O objetivo deste estudo é perceber como as tendências de género funcionam, qual o papel das mulheres na publicidade de hoje, como o comportamento dos consumidores tem mudado ao longo dos anos e como eles se sentem quando lidam com os anúncios, estereotipados ou não.

De modo a chegar a estas conclusões, dados foram recolhidos, codificados e triangulados. Um *focus group* foi levado a cabo, assim como entrevistas estruturadas e observação da publicidade presente em revistas. Estes dados qualitativos permitiram compreender os sentimentos e as escolhas dos consumidores por trás das suas ações.

Em geral, os resultados confirmaram que a desigualdade de género nos anúncios impacta o comportamento dos consumidores, no entanto este impacto está mais presente quando o consumidor não tem conhecimento da marca ou tem uma associação negativa à mesma. Contudo, se o consumidor tiver uma imagem positiva da marca, ele irá mais facilmente perdoar a marca, criando desculpas e não sobrevalorizar o anúncio que lhe foi apresentado.

Palavras-chave: Publicidade, imagem da marca, comportamento do consumidor, género, igualdade de género, desigualdade de género, estereótipos

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BB – Buying Behaviour

BI – Brand Image

COVID-19 – Corona Virus Disease 2019

GI – Gender Inequality

PB – Purchase Behaviour

PD – Purchase Decision

RQ – Research Question

TV – Television

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the early 70s, the criticism surrounding the stereotyped portrayals of women by the mass media started to increase (Belkaoui & M. Belkaoui, 1976). Davis asserts in his book “Dimensions of Marital Roles in Consumer Decision Making” that females were seen, by society, “in roles of wife, mother, homemaker, and hostess” or as single girls preparing themselves for the roles mentioned (as cited in Venkatesh, 1980, p. 189). Similarly, women were being portrayed in advertisements as a sexual object, with unrealistic bodies and beauty, or as just a family member (Das & Sharma, 2016; DiSalvatore, 2010).

Thus, as stated by Bristor & Fischer (1993), consumer research has misrepresented women. This is a result of the intrinsic aspect of gender biases, where society takes these assumptions without even questioning them, since they are “widely and unconsciously taken for granted” (p. 518).

This being said, ads can impact directly young women’s self-esteem, when they are shown unrealistic bodies and very thin, tall and fair models in commercials (Clay, Vignoles & Dittmar, 2005; Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008; Soni, 2020). These stereotypes of what a woman should look like only lowers women’s self-worth as well as creates a perfection on men’s minds that is far from reality.

Even though some studies from 1950 to the 1970s reveal there’s a tendency to show women in less stereotyped roles as the years go by, examples of stereotyped ads are still easily identified when watching TV. Women only need half an hour of watching TV to completely change their perception of their bodies (Myers & Biocca, 1992), and that is due to the ads they are forcibly consuming. For instance, body hairless women advertise shaving products, perfect looking skinned girls advertise acne products and thin models advertise daily clothes.

Prakash & Flores (1985) stated that the two distinctive genders process information differently. Women tend to be more subjective, so different formats should be adjusted according to the target. However, the majority of the advertising departments marginalize female creatives, filling them with mostly men (Grow & Deng, 2015), so according to Broyles & Grow (2008) that is why some advertisements just don’t hit the mark.

Despite the feminist studies already done, there's a lack of investigation regarding the role of women in today's advertisements, as well as the behaviour of consumers when faced with this situation. Because of unintentional settings like the ones mentioned above, this research aims to better understand these gender differences and emphasizes the urgent need to change some of them, in order to create a better world where little girls don't feel nor oppressed nor trapped, due to daily media ads.

1.2 Problem Statement

The aim of this research is to understand how consumers' behaviour change when facing gender inequality in advertisements seen on television or magazines, for example. Furthermore, the problem statement of this research can be summarized as:

*The Impact of Gender in Advertisements on the Consumers' Purchasing Behaviour towards
Brand Image*

In order to study this problem statement some research questions will be asked:

RQ1: Are consumers aware of gender inequality in ads?

RQ2: Does the gender publicising an ad has an effect on the consumers' purchase intention?

RQ3: Can consumers distinguish stereotyped ads?

RQ4: Does displaying gender inequality in ads impact the consumers' behaviour?

RQ5: How does brand image impact the relationship between gender inequality and the consumers' behaviour?

1.3 Relevance

According to Marken (2016), approximately half of the U.S. adult population (52%) believes gender inequality in the workplace to be over. However, despite the clear progress over the past

three decades, when looking at recent data, it shows that society, as a whole, has not reached gender equality just yet.

For instance, when focusing on the global great power, the United States, women have outnumbered men, since, in 2018, 50,8% of the population was constituted by females (Warner, Ellmann & Boesch, 2018). Although women have outnumbered men, they are still underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, mathematics fields (Meyer, Cimpian & Lesli, 2015) and leadership positions (Warner, Ellmann & Boesch, 2018). For example, only 25,58% of women hold a seat in national parliaments worldwide (World Bank, 2020), only 1,6% of women are executives, showing a difference of 1,7% compared to men (3,3%) (Hackston, 2020), women earn 84% of what men do (Barroso & Brown, 2021) and the average woman still only affords three-quarters of the legal rights the average man does (World Bank, 2020).

All of these misogynistic issues create a segregation in society that is subconsciously portrayed in advertisements, once Lazarsfeld & Merton (1948) mentioned that advertising directly channels pre-existing behaviour patterns or attitudes.

1.4 Research Methods

To be able to carefully answer to the questions in Topic 1.2, some research methods must be used, both primary and secondary data.

Regarding the primary data, qualitative methods will be included. For this research, a focus group will be conducted, where “a small group of individuals are gathered together for the purpose of discussing one (or sometimes more) topic of interest” (Barrows, 2000, p. 193).

In this case, the focus group aims to understand how gender differences in advertisements are perceived by a “group of interacting individuals” (Marczak & Sewell, 2007) cautiously selected.

Also, interviews will be carried out as this is a narrative device that allows individuals to tell stories about themselves and to turn those stories into contextual meaningful information (Denzin, 2001).

Observational research was additionally conducted, as it allows to experience a situation in first hand and this will help to interpret data and develop better insights (White, 2000). This observation has the purpose of analysing genders present in each advertisement and then catalogue the data obtained in categories such as wellbeing, cars, jewellery, clothes and so on.

Secondary sources will help in the review of literature, in order to have a more critical analysis regarding the topic of interest.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis will present five different chapters. The present section is an introduction to the dissertation, where the background and relevance are explained. The following chapter focuses on the interpretation of the literature review and the justification of the framework. Chapter 3 provides a clear description of the methodology used to better study the subject. The methods, approaches and codes will also be carefully explained. The fourth chapter aims to understand the data obtained and its results, refuting, or not, the research questions, however the explanation of these will only be presented in Chapter 5 as the final section will draw some conclusions, possible limitations of the study as well as implications.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAMEWORK

The following chapter aims to develop a methodological framework that will be focused on the research questions covered by the study. It will present a detailed insight of the existent literature, regarding several topics, such as consumers' purchasing behaviour, gender in advertisement and brand image.

2.1 Consumers' Purchasing Behaviour

Consumer purchasing behaviour consists on the “selection, purchase and consumption of goods and services for the satisfaction of their wants” (Ramya & Mohamed Ali, 2016, p. 76).

Assael (2004) defines purchasing behaviour (PB) as the tendency to act on the object. In order to have this tendency to act, companies must ensure that they deliver a good product or service to the consumers, which is able to create a positive interest, capable to behave accordingly to what the company wants, thus generating a strengthened relationship with the consumer.

According to the purchase decision (PD) process mentioned by Schiffman & Kanuk (2010), the PB lies one stage before the PD period. Nevertheless, the PD depends on several other factors, such as the cultural aspect, the social environment, the personal traits, the psychological side (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010; Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2004 and Assael, 2004) and the economic factors (Ramya & Mohamed Ali, 2016) (see Figure 1).

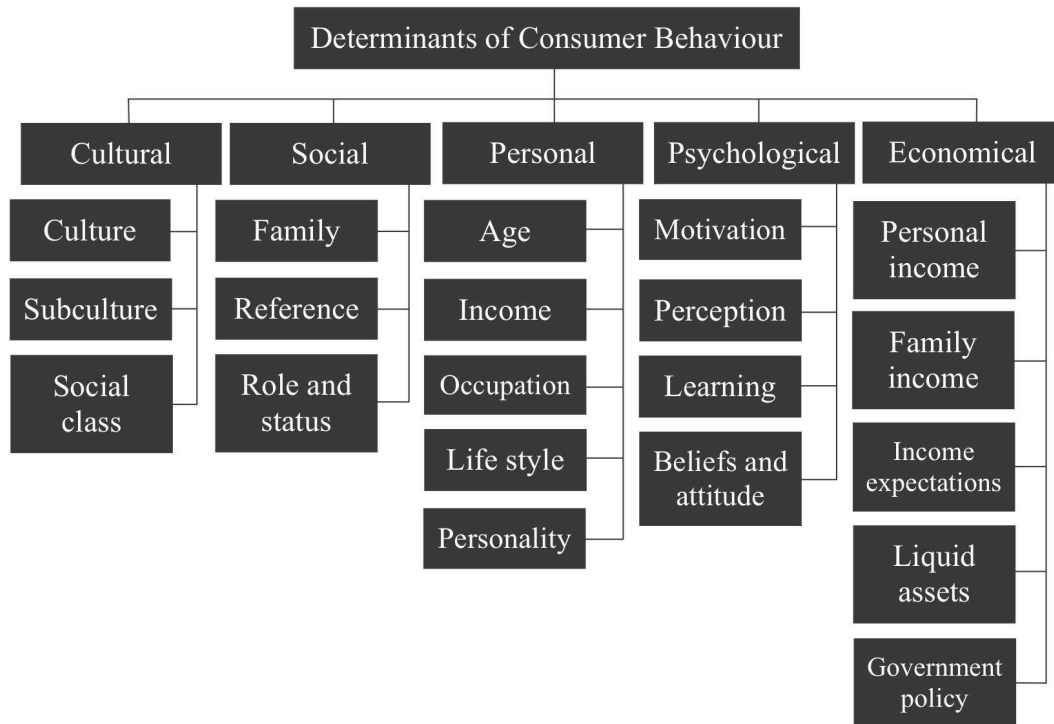


Figure 1: Determinants of Consumer Behaviour

(Retrieved from Ramya & Mohamed Ali, 2016)

However, the PB also depends on the category of the purchased item. Kotler & Armstrong (2008) separated the purchasing behaviour in four different processes (Table 1).

2.1.1 Complex Buying Behaviour

This first type of buying behaviour (BB) consists of situations where the consumer has a high involvement in the purchase and significant differences among brands (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). For example, when looking for a new TV the consumer will most likely need to learn about different brands and product features in order to make their final decision.

2.1.2 Dissonance-Reducing Buying Behaviour

The Dissonance-Reducing Buying Behaviour also implicates the high involvement of the consumer, but few differences between brands (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

In this second type, the consumer buys a good without much research, which may cause a post-purchase dissonance, meaning an after-purchase discomfort. A consumer might purchase a

curling iron very quickly, due to its good price or purchase convenience and later regret. When this happens, the company must ensure that the buyers are being supported and feeling “good about their brand choices” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

2.1.3 Variety-Seeking Buying Behaviour

In this case, the buyer has limited involvement in the process, but significant perceived brand differences (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

Consumers do a lot of brand switching, not because they regretted buying it, but because they want and seek variety. The normal consumer is not always buying the same branded cookie; they like to change, try different brands and flavours.

2.1.4 Habitual Buying Behaviour

The last type of BB is characterized by the low involvement of consumers and few significant perceived brand differences (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

Generally, buyers tend to repeat the same brand when it comes to cheap frequently purchased products, such as toothpaste. According to Kotler & Armstrong (2008), “consumers do not form strong attitudes towards a brand; they select the brand because it’s familiar” (p. 147).

	High Involvement	Low Involvement
Significant differences between brands	Complex Buying Behaviour	Variety Seeking Behaviour
Few differences between brands	Dissonance Reducing Buying Behaviour	Habitual Buying Behaviour

Table 1: Types of Buying Behaviour

2.2 Gender in Advertisement

Advertisements play a crucial role in today’s society, since they are a form of communicative persuasion able to set stereotypes into individuals’ minds (Soni, 2020).

Consumers are constantly being bombarded with daily persuasive messages, so, according to Malik et al. (2013), ads can increase any business performance, due to its sense of power and influence in positively attracting consumers. However, as Soni (2020) stated, this public

announcement, in a form of an ad, not only sells products, it also sells “images, ideals, dreams, way to live your life and stereotypes” (p. 20).

Advertisements can be broadcasted through several media platforms, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet. However, not every platform has the same effect on the consumers’ minds. When considering the one media outlet analysed during this study – magazines – this statement is clearly illustrated. In this case, a magazine will have a low but persistent impact, since its readers can go from one page to the other without being interrupted, because they are in charge of their own pace. Whereas, TV, for example, usually has a very substantial impact on customers’ minds, but it starts to fade away eventually (Berkowitz, Allaway & D’Souza, 2001).

These types of media messages, from businesses to consumers, can be very costly, since a great amount of the marketing budget is located to advertising (Sama, 2019). The content and quality of the commercial will have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of the ad (Nysveen & Breivik, 2005). This being said, ads must be selected very carefully so no more costs are added to this already expensive and crucial feature of businesses.

As affirmed by Soni (2020), if advertising departments are majority composed of men, advertisements will be biased by their own opinions and stereotyped clichés, affecting young and adult women throughout the globe. This gender gap in ads not only creates a societal rule that tells individuals how to accept women, but also negatively encourages young females to feel pressure to conforming to these body stereotypes created by much older men. For instance, Dove and several other brands are already trying to break these norms implemented in society, by showing real life women. However, the need to raise public awareness to gender inequality (GI) in ads is still high, which mentioned by Saguy, Dovidio & Pratto (2008) and Saguy & Kteily (2014), needs to be the number one step to change this status quo.

Nevertheless, addressing GI can have a negative and reverse impact of what it was initially expected. Anisman-Razin, Kark & Saguy (2018) disclosed that gender discrimination is sometimes not easy to be identified and when addressed it can have several implications for inequality itself and social change. Moreover, when exposing these urgencies, one must be very cautious, due to the fact that women who speak out about sexist remarks are perceived as “complainers” overreacting (Shelton & Stewart, 2004; Czopp & Monteith, 2003).

These much-needed changes should be brought to attention to majority group members, in this case privileged men, who are the critical audience, since “they hold the power to enact tangible changes in the hierarchical structure” (Anisman-Razin, Kark & Saguy, 2018, p. 6).

As concluded by Malik et al. (2013), advertisements are a big and vital weapon to appeal to consumers’ wishes and fantasies, having the power to stay on their minds and, consequently, cause an action, most likely a purchase. Thus, it is clear that advertisements have a positive relationship with consumers’ buying behaviour. So, considering the consumers to be aware and socially responsible, ads should not neglect gender issues, since it is expected that customers’ behaviour would result in profit increases for the company.

2.3 Brand Image

Brand image is a key concept in marketing (Keller, 1998) and it also plays a significant role in brand building (Mao, 2010), making it extremally pertinent to this study.

According to Lee, James & Kim (2014), the term ‘brand image’ has been suffering some redefinitions throughout these last six decades, which resulted in incongruences. In 1955, Gardner & Levy stated that this term is a mix of ideas, feelings and attitudes that consumers have regarding the brands. However, in the 1980s the symbolism started to gain popularity when defining the term. Several authors such as Swartz (1983) and Reynolds & Gutman (1984), talked about the messages intrinsic in the products and the meanings and associations behind them.

From the beginning of the 1990s, the term gained another significance and it started to separate itself from the product’s image. To define the term, Aaker (1996, p. 68), referred to it as “a unique set of associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain”. For example, the characteristics of an iPhone cannot occur without the customers’ evaluation of them. Meaning, if a consumer had a positive experience with the characteristics of the product, they will start to make favourable associations with the brand and, consequently create a positive and impactful image, separating the company from other competitors.

Keller (1993) argues that when the consumers have their needs and desires met, they create a positive attitude towards the brand. However, in order to avoid competitive disadvantage,

companies must create and depend on the uniqueness of brand associations (DeShields, Kara & Kaynak, 2005; Aaker, 1997). A positive association could also arise from good reputation, popularity, credibility and the ability and willingness to always provide the best service in the market (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1997).

Therefore, BI is “a set of beliefs held about a particular brand” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008) where cognition, affection and evaluation cannot be proceeded separately (Lee, James & Kim, 2014).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this third chapter, the methodology used will be explained by ensuring the reach of conclusions regarding the research questions described in the previous chapter, that will be answered to in Chapter 5. The use of qualitative research will be explained, as well as the data collection and analysis will be described.

3.1 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was chosen as it helps to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2007, p.40). As Tuner (2013) metaphorically commented, the data collected helps researchers to see the bigger picture; and to interpret the meaning behind their actions (Denzin, 1989).

Since its nature is interpretative, empirical, descriptive and ethnographic, the validity of the research paradigm is ensured by the rigorous process of clarification, definition or the use of pilot experiments (Atieno, 2009). Since this is a flexible method, the design can be constructed and reconstructed over time (Maxwell, 2012).

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated, the findings from this approach do not come from statistical procedures nor other means of quantification, instead they incorporate multiple realities that Van Maanen (1979, p. 520) defines as “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world”.

Human behaviour cannot be understood without firstly understanding the framework where the subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings and actions (Atieno, 2009). So, in order to answer to the research questions, a phenomenology framework will be used. The aim of using this methodological framework is to better understand how individuals experience things (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This study ought to “understand and describe the participants’ experiences of their everyday world as they see it”, without creating any prejudgment (Daly, 2007, p. 98; Carpenter & Suto, 2008).

In order to ensure both validity and reliability, a number of qualitative methods was used, such as a focus group, interviews and observation. Validity will be confirmed once the research questions and goals are fully answered and achieved, while reliability will be established if there is consistency, research and similarity in findings (White, 2000).

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Secondary Data

To better understand the topic to be studied, secondary data were gathered from academic journals and books. Also, the information collected from the bibliographic research showed to be essential when coming up with the research questions and drawing conclusions.

3.2.2 Primary Data

Three studies were conducted in order to gather reliable and valid information specific to the purpose of the research. Qualitative methods were used as primary data, such as a focus group, interviews and observations, already mentioned above.

3.2.2.1 Focus Group

The focus group was the first study of the primary data to be conducted. According to Masadeh (2012), this technique is a qualitative method that is normally defined as a structured discussion with a small group of people, run by one or more moderators that use a set of open-ended questions to generate debate. The interviewees must brainstorm together while challenging each other, leading to in-depth and rich data (Alsaawi, 2014). Also, Carey (1994) believes that this format is the best approach for sensitive topics.

During a one-hour length interview, divided in four parts, the gender differences in advertisements were studied to better comprehend how society perceives ads and if they do have a power to change people's buying criteria.

The first part of the discussion was more introductory to the topic and broader. Whereas the last few sets of questions were more specific, explanatory through an example and utopic when asked hypothetically about how to make a difference in the world of advertisement.

The six respondents, carefully chosen, were needed to be consumers above 20 years old and have purchasing power. In order to not be biased by others responses, they were asked to firstly answer in a Word document. This way, the one-hour session would facilitate the understanding of the topic in a more unbiased in-depth approach (for more information see Appendix 3).

Also, before starting the focus group, three pilot tests were conducted, with participants from different age groups, in order to check potential misunderstandings, where two changes were suggested by the contributors. Firstly, the necessity of creating organized blocks of questions, instead of questions with no flow; this information was also relevant and taken into consideration when undertaking the structured interviews. Secondly, some adjustments were created regarding the wording, in order to not confuse the final respondents and to not lead to misinterpretations.

3.2.2.2 Structured Interviews

Interviews must be carefully prepared in advance and scheduled (Robson, 2011); also, they are the most flexible method when it comes to qualitative research (Bryman, 2008). However, structured interviews tend to be less flexible due to the lack of variation among responses. This being said, one can only choose this type of interview if already aware of the information to be sought (Dörnyei, 2007).

According to Bryman (2008), this format is very effective to keep the interview briefly focused on the topic to be studied while being comparable among interviewees. It also helps to conduct a larger sample, since its data are easier to be analysed (White, 2000). Structured interviews are also seen as more reliable than unstructured ones, because as Arvey & Campion (1982) stated, the attitude of the interviewer may impact the interviewee's responses, ruining the goal, which was honesty.

The interviews were also divided into two groups, where the first one was more general, whereas the second one became more specific through examples of real-life advertisements, where some were stereotyped and others weren't (Appendix 6). In total, 16 structured interviews were able to be collected.

3.2.2.3 Non-participant Observation

This type of observation is achievable when the observer remains detached from the situation observed (White, 2000). However, observation was only integrated as an auxiliary method to help interpret the results.

This process was achieved by studying 19 advertisements, with the goal of analysing the gender representation in several magazine ads, published from July to October 2021, which target included both genders – men and women.

3.3 Data Analysis

Once the collection of data was completed, a coding approach was chosen. This process enabled the creation of several codes, whose goal is to summarize a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2016).

When the coding from the literature review was completed, the preparation and the analysis of the interviews became much simple. Also, after coding both primary and secondary data, this was compared and conclusions were able to be drawn.

For example, word of mouth was one of the codes from the literature review, where Kotler & Armstrong (2008) stated that “It’s rare that an advertising campaign can be as effective as a neighbour leaning over the fence and saying ‘This is a wonderful product’” (p. 178). Additionally, Respondent 13 indicated, during the interview, that “If it’s brands or products that I don’t know, I get aware of launches of new products through friends or family recommendations, which lead me to go check that product”. The remaining codes can be found in Appendix 1.

As previously mentioned, phenomenology framework will be used to better comprehend the data collected and their codes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present chapter intends to analyse the data collected through qualitative methods. Firstly, the sample will be characterized and, then, the results will be presented and discussion will occur.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Sample Characterization

Purposive sampling was the strategy used, since the study required specific individuals, who were consumers above 20 years old, as this is thought to be an age where people tend to start having more financial resources, and so more purchasing power that allows individuals to focus not only on the price variable. Also, the information provided by these specific individuals, is crucial since it cannot be obtained so easily through other channels (Carpenter & Suto, 2008). This being said, a selection of possible respondents was conducted and, for the interviews, the data were divided into four categories. These categories were labelled based on the generations of the respondents. And, even though the nomenclature used to label the generations is not standardized, the generations were divided as can be viewed in Table 2, according to Oblinger & Oblinger (2005).

Baby Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y (Millennials)	Gen Z (Post-Millennials)
1947-1964	1965-1980	1981-1995	1995-present

Table 2: Generations

(Retrieved from Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005)

For each category, four participants were selected, giving a total of 16 respondents for the interviews (Appendix 5).

Regarding the focus group, the ages were also taken into consideration, having six participants from 23 to 78 years old, however the data were not labelled into generations, since the focus group is more of a discussion within a group and less of a personal and private experience; also the number of participants in the focus group is less representative, so categorising the respondents into generations would just create time constraints, since some generations would only have one person representing it (Appendix 2).

4.1.2 Results Focus Group

The results of the focus group showed a positive understanding in the Introductory Questions (Appendix 4) regarding the word ‘feminism’. However, one of the six respondents, a 78-year-old lady, was not aware of the meaning of the word, even though she confessed to have already heard of it.

The participants defined the term as a search for gender equality and the main conclusion was that everyone, including men, should fight for this cause. However, some pointed out that this term is getting too mainstream, excessive and it is starting to become a “crazy movement of hairy naked women” (Respondent 4).

When asked if they perceive themselves as feminists, 66.66(6)% of the sample confirmed to be so. The fifth respondent, a 27-year-old woman, went as far as to say that she not only perceives herself as a feminist, but also as an activist for women’s rights.

Regarding the main drivers to become, or not, a feminist, the group divided itself. Some affirmed that we are humans who should have the same opportunities and these prospects should not be based on sex, rather on competences and attributes. Others were conflicted mainly because of the premise that we are biologically different, so it’s normal that men are better at something and women are worse at it, and vice versa.

When entering the Transition Questions, the respondents were firstly questioned on how are they involved in creating a safe and equal environment for every gender. The majority of the answers were based on treating everyone as their equal and trying not to discriminate people, only their attitudes. The 49-year-old female stated that she created an equal environment by raising her daughter to become a conscious human being. Also, the 23-year-old young man, indicated that after a night out he usually walks his girl friends home, so they feel safer and are less of a target.

Among the six participants, they feel like the advertisements are offensive when women are portrayed as dumb, unworthy and as “small human beings”.

Nevertheless, when asked, in Key Questions – In General, if they buy products that lack some gender inequality in their ads, the group was unsure and hesitant to talk. Some affirmed that they don’t buy products based on their ads, some said “I don’t know” and some said “I don’t

think so”. Only one respondent remembered a brand that had advertised a product by focusing on gender inequality. The 52-year-old man, said that once Nivea advertised a soap with only women on it, and he felt excluded, because he actually uses the soap.

When going through the Key Questions – An Example, the group was shocked with BIC’s advertisement, stating that it is sexist, ridiculous and that the team missed their goal. Some even laughed at the irony of the ad, since it was created for Women’s Day.

According to the participants the message the company was trying to convey was a miss, however they understood that the company’s main goal was to say that “women can be everything they want to be: we are pretty, smart and know how to work”, said the 49-year-old.

Concerning the question “Do you perceive the company any different now?”, 100% of the respondents affirmed that their opinion has shifted for the worse. Some say they didn’t expect this type of behaviour from this huge company and some think that there is not a right policy, regarding this topic, inside the company.

Nonetheless, everyone from the sample, will still buy its products, because, has stated during the discussion, “they are good products”.

To the question “What if it was a company you could substitute easily without losing quality?”, 100% of the respondents agreed to try to substitute, while indicating “I would change brands in a heartbeat”.

When approaching the end of the focus group, the sample was asked, in the Ending Questions, what would they do differently, if they could be in charge of the advertisement world. The unanimous answer of the group was that they would try to make ads as gender neutral as possible or make them impersonal.

Also, the solutions the respondents came up with, on how to stop the stereotyped ads, was that we, as a society, could boycott and stop buying products from such companies. And some also stated that if we try to change our behaviours as a society the ads would have to follow.

4.1.3 Results Interview

Regarding the first question “Can you tell me how you are aware of the launch of new products in the market?”, Boomers clearly focused themselves on the TV ads, whereas Gen X apparently

prefers social media ads. In what concerns Gen Y, they pay attention to both TV and social media ads, while also focusing on the word of mouth, mostly. Similar to Gen X, Gen Z is also keen on social media ads, however this generation shows more diversity regarding their awareness. They consult brands' websites, have brand knowledge, are attentive when shopping and rely on recommendations and word of mouth.

When asked about the drivers to buy a product instead of another from the same category, Boomers showed an emphasis in their familiarity with the brand and product, which contradicts what Coomes & DeBard (2004) stated concerning this generation as cynical regarding their loyalty to institutions. Gen X and Gen Y care mostly about how affordable a product is and its quality. Alternatively, individuals born after 1995, show how online reviews can be incremental in their buying decision, also considering recommendations and their familiarity with the brand of importance.

The challenges that each generation faces when deciding which product to buy relies mostly on the price and quality. However, Gen Y cares less about the price and even less about the quality. Brand is also important to 50% of the Boomers, whereas the other generations also care about the products' features, the store location, the shipping costs, the brands' value and the products' availability.

For the fourth question "Do you think products advertise better with certain genders?", 75% of the Boomers stated "No", however their statements contradict their positions, showing sexist stereotypes, like Respondent 1 stated:

A man can also advertise a cleaning product, for example. But, I think a woman would look better. Cleaning products fit better on women.

Nevertheless, the next generations consider that gender still plays an important role.

Consequently, when asked about the role of genders in advertisements, Boomers remain truthful to their previous opinion and so 75% stated that gender does not influence them in their purchasing decision. However, half of Gen X admitted to be influenced by the gender. Respondent 6 affirmed that:

Unconsciously, the gender affects my purchasing decision. If a girl is advertising a certain product, I will see it as a girly product, whereas if it is a man in the ad, it surely is to be addressed to a man.

Half of Gen Y says it influences to a certain degree, while the others declare that it does not influence their purchasing decision. Gen Z is the only generation that 100% of the respondents stated that gender does not influence them, as revealed by Respondent 13: “Gender is such a fluid concept that brands shouldn’t assume that using one gender would be better for their campaign”.

Regarding question six, “Do you believe a product sells better if its brand is well positioned and liked?”, every single respondent showed positive unanimity.

In what the next question is concerned, Gen Y and Gen Z both agree to buy products because of their brand, stating it is because of the quality provided and the whole experience that comes with it, as Respondent 14 refers:

I would have to say that the branded products will be better, so yes, I do buy products because of their brand. For example, when I buy pasta I always buy it from the brand Milaneza, and I can see its quality just by the fact that it comes with a sticker to close the package, whereas if it’s a no brand pasta I would have to get a clip.

Although only 50% of Boomers and Gen X admit to do it as well, expressing that they buy products that work for them, not based on brand.

As for the last general question, “Would you buy products from a brand even though you don’t agree with their policy?”, only Boomers showed a higher percentage (75%) on the negative answer. The other generations, all agree that they do buy products from a brand they don’t agree with, mentioning mostly the precarious jobs done by brands such as Zara and Shein, whose labour force is mainly children. However, these generations are aware of it and they try to find substitutes for their needs, however they will continue to buy from it if no substitute is available, like Respondent 16 revealed: “If I can’t find any substitutes and it’s a product I need, then I will continue to buy it”.

Gen Z shows a lot of social responsibility and awareness, however this generation still purchases from brands they know they don’t agree with, mainly due to the need and quality-price relation, since Respondent 15 disclosed that:

I am working on it, but I still buy clothes from Zara, even though I don’t agree with the fact that the brand is using children to produce them. And I still buy make up that is tested on animals.

The first part of the interviews is represented through graphs in Appendix 7, since this is the easiest approach to view all the data collected and all of the variables that were able to be

extracted from the interviews. On the second part, the interviewees were shown some examples of advertisements done in the past by real companies. Then, they were questioned about their opinions regarding the examples presented.

The first advertisement displayed was one by Dolce & Gabana, where only two participants agree with it, one didn't form a concrete opinion and the 13 left did not agree at all, stating it perpetuates male chauvinism and, as expressed by Respondent 13: "I think it's oversexualizing the woman while also portraying impossible body standards, both female and male".

However, approximately 81% of the respondents are aware of the brand, nonetheless nine don't know if they like the brand – mostly because they never bought a product from it – three do not like the brand and four do. Since this brand is premium, 12 of the interviewees have not bought from it in the past and only four have. When asked if, after seeing the ad, they would (still) buy from it again, nine affirmed they would, however most of the individuals mentioned their only intention was to buy the brands' perfumes. Five would not buy from it again and two were not quite sure.

Nando's India was the second ad to be viewed where the interviewees could read "Try something you can grab with both hands. We don't mind if you touch our buns, or breasts, or even our thighs. Whatever you're into, enjoying any Nando's meal with your hands is always recommend". This example was able to divide the opinions in half where eight respondents didn't agree and the other eight did agree or were confused, however 100% of Gen Y agreed with it. The ones who agreed, for example Respondent 14, talked about the humour behind the ad: "I think it's funny and it's not affecting or undervaluing anyone, apart from sexualizing the food itself".

Six respondents were aware of the brand and 10 were not, however 13 did not know if they liked the brand, since it's a foreign company and they have not tried it yet. 100% of Boomers and Gen Z don't buy products from the brand, however these results change when asked if they would buy from it, 25% of Boomers would and half of Gen Z would too. This shift is mainly due to the fact that Nando's India is a restaurant that sells chicken and people see it as a necessity, a basic need, so they would actually purchase from the company if they were hungry, as mentioned by Respondent 1.

Dove's example was agreed by 12 of the 16 participants. This ad has the particularity of creating two main opinions among the respondents, some who agreed stated it was extremely inclusive, while the others stated quite the opposite. For instance, Respondent 13, who did not agree, referred that, in the ad, only one black woman, amongst seven, was represented. Even though, four did not agree, 100% of the interviewees are aware of the brand, 15 like the brand and buy from it and 100% would (still) buy Dove's products, which shows how popular the brand is in Portugal.

In the fourth example, presenting Mr. Clean, the statement is "This Mother's Day, get back to the job that really matters", while a woman and a child are portrayed washing a shining glass. When viewing this example, most of the respondents were astonished and perplexed, saying "it is not a mother's job to clean" (Respondent 13). This being said, 14 did not agree with the advertisement, being almost unanimous. Also, 13 were not aware of the brand, 15 did not know if they liked the brand, the full 16 did not buy from the brand and 12 wouldn't buy from the brand after seeing the ad. This high level of negative responses to a possible purchase combined with the almost non-existing knowledge of the brand, is an indicator that individuals are more affected by publicity when they do not have a preconceived thought of the brand. For instance, Respondent 5, when talking about Nando's India – brand that the individual knew and consumed – stated that: "It is not because an ad was misfortunate that I would stop buying the products it advertises".

However, when talking about Mr. Clean – brand that he had never heard of or used – the interviewee said: "I don't think I would [buy products from this brand in the future], because it gives me the feeling that it is a sexist brand".

When moving to the next advertisement, by Colgate, 14 of the respondents showed a positive response regarding if they agreed or not, nevertheless two of the participants, labelled as Boomers, were sceptical regarding Colgate's promises, stating that "they do a lot of ads that are not true" (Respondent 2). 100% were aware of the brand, approximately 94% liked and bought from the brand and 100% would still buy from Colgate. These data only corroborate with the findings mentioned above, where people decide to buy due to their awareness and knowledge of the brand.

The last advertisement was by Ray-Ban, and it presented some solid data, as well. 12 agreed with it, two did not, one stated "I don't know" and another didn't agree nor disagree. 15 were

aware, 13 liked the brand, however opinions divided when asked if they buy from the brand, eight said they do and another eight said they don't, mainly due to its high price. Nonetheless, 13 would (still) buy from Ray-Ban, only two wouldn't and one didn't know.

4.1.4 Results Observation

From the 19 advertisements analysed, 15 represented women, three represented men and only one represented both. The categories of the ads were labelled as such: car, clothes, hair, insurance, intimate hygiene, jewellery, lingerie, skincare, swimwear, watch and wellbeing. From these categories only two were directed to men and portrayed by the gender itself, being 'hair' and 'watch'. Jewellery was the only label which showed both male and female characters in its ad.

Additionally, 'skincare' was the most represented, followed by 'car', 'clothes', 'lingerie' and 'swimwear'. These findings can be seen in Appendix 8.

4.2 Discussion

According to the focus group, people tend to perceive ads as offensive and sexist when women are portrayed as "dumb, unworthy and as 'small human beings'", this was also discovered when looking at Example One and Four of the interviews, where the participants described the overexposure, sexualization and the stereotyping of women and their role in society.

Furthermore, people are inclined to believe that products advertise better with certain genders, as Respondent 14 stated: "If it's an ad about a mechanic shop it would be weird to see a woman underneath a car, for example".

Also, Respondent 15 affirmed that: "When it comes to categories like watches, jewellery and perfumes gender does count and I believe it is a decisive factor when purchasing or intending to".

While also blaming it on the companies, like Respondent 6 acknowledged: "Companies tend to advertise cleaning products with female stars and outdoor stuff, like cars and activities, are mostly advertised by men".

Thus, people become confused when asked, in the focus group, if they buy products that lack some gender equality in their ads, however when actually viewing a considered stereotyped ad, in the interviews, the participants who know the brand, liked it or use it, tend to dismiss the ad as sexist; however, if they are not aware of the brand, they will most likely acknowledge it and chose not to buy from the brand, while also trying to find substitutes. This corroborates with Keller's views, from 1993, when stating that consumers who have their needs met will most likely create a positive attitude towards the brand; and will favour it, separating the liked brand from its competitors.

Additionally, familiarity was found to be crucial to not dismiss a product based on its ad, which verifies Kotler and Armstrong's views regarding the selection of brands, based on how well the consumer knows of the company. The participants, in both studies, will only perceive a company as sexist and not focused on women's rights if they don't know about the brand – not familiarised with it – as it most happened in Mr. Clean's example. Like Kotler & Armstrong (2008) believe, consumers select well-known familiar brands – called the Habitual Buying Behaviour – while also buyers tend to have a repetitive buying behaviour when it is an affordable brand, like BIC or Dove. So, if it's a very well-known brand, such as BIC or Dolce & Gabana, or a necessity good brand, like Nando's India, the sample will continue to buy from brands that publicised somewhat sexist advertisements.

When comparing the findings mentioned above and the positive and unanimously responses of the interviews to the question “Do you believe a product sells better if its brand is well positioned and liked?”, the methodological triangulation of the data shows that the validity in the findings has been established, while strengthening the overall argument.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to better understand the behaviour and feelings of consumers to the stereotyped advertisements by brands and what is the role of women in publicity, in order to make the industry more equal and empathic, while focusing on the phenomenology framework to better comprehend how individuals experience the tasks of the day to day life. To support this thesis, a qualitative approach was chosen and literature was reviewed.

5.1 Main Conclusion

Even though in the past stereotyped portrayals of women by the mass media were increasing exponentially, some previous studies reveal there's a tendency to show women in less stereotyped roles as the years go by and that is now clear when watching TV or social media ads, for instance. However, brands still to this day create gender biased ads, that can lead to lower self-esteem when being a woman, since the representation of the gender is misleading and creates a pedestal that not all can reach. The consumers' behaviour to stereotyped ads can be acknowledged below, while also responding to the research questions proposed in Chapter 1.

RQ1: Are consumers aware of gender inequality in ads?

This study included practical examples, both in the focus group and in the interviews, so the results obtained suggest that consumers tend to realise and be aware there is inequality in ads, however their behaviour doesn't necessarily follow accordingly.

RQ2: Does the gender publicising an ad has an effect on the consumers' purchase intention?

The findings show that the gender portrayed in publicities effects positively the consumer's intention to buy. The consumers still have a gender biased categorization when it comes to certain products. The goods mostly mentioned were cleaning products, jewellery and perfumes for females and cars and outdoor activities for males.

RQ3: Can consumers distinguish stereotyped ads?

Consumers can distinguish stereotyped ads and that was mainly noticed in Example One and Four of the interviews and BIC's Example of the focus group, where people did not agree with the ads presented.

RQ4: Does displaying gender inequality in ads impact the consumers' behaviour?

The investigation and literature confirm that GI in ads impacts the CB, however this is only visible when the customers have a negative or no association with the BI. If the consumers have no BI their behaviour is going to shift, and, in this case, the GI will impact negatively the CB and will push away potential buyers, which will end up being very costly for the company.

RQ5: How does brand image impact the relationship between gender inequality and the consumers' behaviour?

BI impacts positively the relationship between GI and the CB. According to the findings, from the interviews and focus group, and the review of literature, consumers who have a positive BI will most likely keep buying the product even though they don't agree with a certain ad created by the brand, because of their created comfort zone, enabled by familiarity, affordability and status.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The inclusion of women and the equality of the gender in the brands' policy will impact the BI positively, while the non-inclusion will create the opposite if the consumer doesn't have a mindful image of the brand.

The research has also revealed that the creation of neutral and diversified ads and the presence of unsexualized women would result in higher purchasing intentions. Nevertheless, consumers don't feel morally obligated to only buy products from brands whose policy is similar to their values.

At last, companies should try to develop and create inclusive advertisements, by investing in highly qualified members of advertising departments, since they can benefit from it; it is highly appreciated and valued by consumers, while also communicating the message to their clients that everyone is equal in this society. The subject of this research is interesting for companies already existing and also for new players who wish to enter the market, this will bring a great advantage regarding their knowledge of the audience and its wants and needs.

5.3 Academic Implications

Past research has shown the impact of stereotypes on women and how genders process information differently, however there was a lack of investigation regarding the role of women in today's advertisements and how consumers are affected by it.

Hence, this study contributed to the lack of literature concerning this topic, while also differentiating itself from others already done, due to the way it was conducted.

This dissertation could be used as a starting point for several other studies regarding this topic, in the field of marketing and management, in hopes to address and better comprehend consumers' behaviour when facing gender disparities.

5.4 Limitations & Future Research

Due to the nature of this study, several limitations were discovered.

Firstly, the pandemic situation, we are currently facing due to COVID-19, created some restrictions as it led to the focus group being conducted through an online meeting, which didn't allow for a personal interaction between the participants. The fact that it was not face to face, might have cause some potential discomfort and uneasiness throughout the meeting, even though the introductory part enabled the respondents to get as comfort as possible with each other, through the introductions.

Secondly, the data collected might not express the consumers' actual behaviours and common practices, since there is a gap between what consumers express and what they really do. So, future research could invest on field experience, where the researcher could follow the participants on a shopping spree as a practical way of better analysing their behaviour.

In addition, in some future research, this study could be repeated using a larger and more representative sample and the interviews could have been more in-depth and less structured, however this was not possible because of time constrains and lack of resources.

Finally, the fact that this study only uses qualitative research might be a limitation, however triangulation was used to ensure the validity of the thesis and to strengthen it. In the future,

variables such as Gender in Advertisements, Consumers' Purchasing Behaviour and Brand Image could be used to test hypotheses that would corroborate with the studies already done through qualitative methods.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Coding Table

Source	Code
Literature Review	Satisfaction
Literature Review	Pre-existing behaviour
Literature Review/Interviews	Affordability
Literature Review/Interviews	Needs
Literature Review/Interviews	Stereotypes
Literature Review/Interviews	Products' attributes
Literature Review/Interviews	Products' quality
Literature Review/Interviews	Word of mouth
Literature Review/Interviews	Branded products
Literature Review/Interviews	Well-known brand
Literature Review/Interviews	Social responsibility
Literature Review/Interviews	Familiarity
Focus Group/Interviews	Sexism
Focus Group/Interviews	Society
Interviews	Loyalty
Interviews	Credibility
Interviews	Substitutes
Interviews	Trust
Interviews	Status
Interviews	Past experiences
Interviews	Customer service
Interviews	Location
Interviews	Shipping costs
Interviews	Durability

Appendix 2: Focus Group – Participants Demographics

#	Age	Gender	Education	Nationality
1	52	Male	Secondary school	Portuguese
2	49	Female	Bachelor's degree	Portuguese
3	78	Female	Primary school	Portuguese
4	23	Male	Bachelor's degree	Portuguese
5	27	Female	Master's degree	Portuguese
6	35	Male	Master's degree	Portuguese

Appendix 3: Focus Group – Guide

Due to today's world, changed by the COVID-19, this focus group was held via Zoom, where six participants, meticulously selected, openly shared their opinions. The presented focus group took one hour to be completed, where the instructions were given in advance and the participation request was a must.

Welcoming Talk and Guidelines

Hi everyone and welcome to this focus group, your attendance is very much appreciated and valued. My name is Beatriz and, today, I'm going to be your moderator, we will hopefully brainstorm so we can create a healthy discussion and possibly reach a conclusion and implement a solution.

So, the topic that we are about to go through is the gender inequality – or possible equality – in advertisements. But, in order to do that, I must tell you that every opinion is valid, there is no right or wrong answers and you are not being evaluated. Moreover, your responses and names will remain anonymous, I will be recording this session and taking notes, so I don't miss any of your opinions. In order to ensure a smooth process, I kindly ask you to turn off your phones and I also encourage you to speak to each other, but always having in mind that only one person must be speaking. Subsequently, even if you don't agree with someone else's opinion you must remain calm and wait for your turn to speak.

Participants' Introduction

I think we are ready to begin! You already know my name, but you don't know each other's names. So, I suggest that we take turns and introduce ourselves.

Appendix 4: Focus Group – Questions

Introductory Questions

Do you know what the word 'feminism' stands for? If so, how do you define it?

Do you perceive yourself as a feminist?

What are the main drivers that make you want to be or not to be a feminist?

Transition Questions

How have you been involved in creating a safe and equal environment for every gender?

What kind of portraits of women in advertisements do you perceive as offensive?

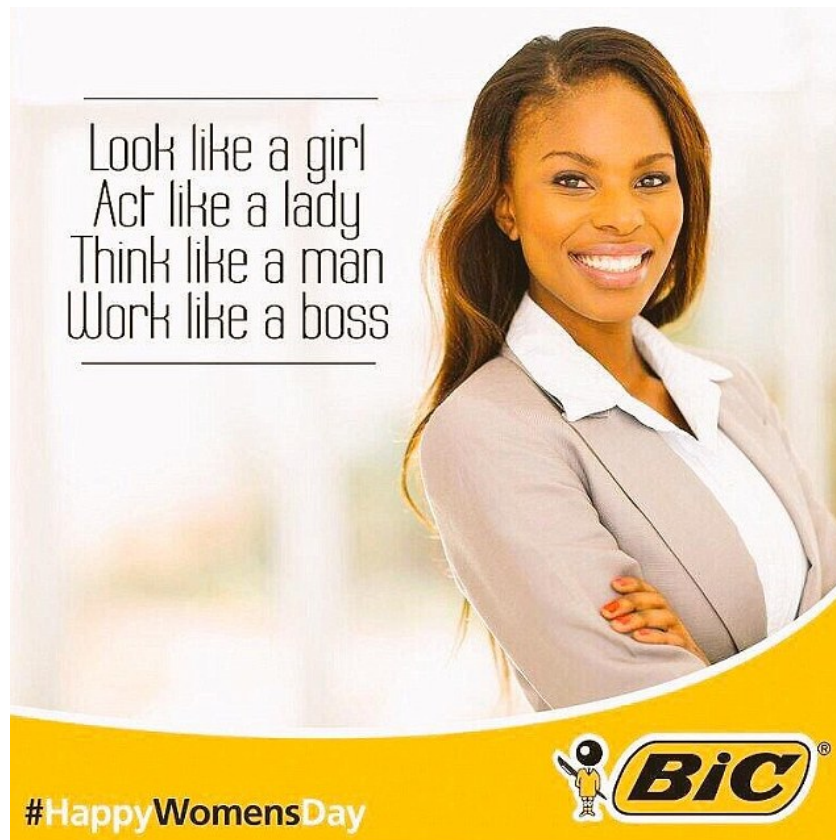
Key Questions

1. In General

Do you buy products that lack some gender equality in their ads?

Which brands do you remember to have advertised a product by focusing on gender inequality?

2. An Example



Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33893386>

What do you think of this BIC's advertisement?

What message do you think the company was trying to communicate?

Do you perceive the company any different now?

What if it was a company you could substitute easily without losing quality?

Ending Questions

Suppose you were in charge of the advertisement world and that you could really make a difference for the better. What would you do?

What can we all do to stop the stereotyped ads?

Final Question

Have we missed anything?

Conclusion

If there's nothing else that you want to add, I declare this session over and I thank you, once again, for taking your time to be here with me for, now, one hour. The results gathered from your input will be extremely valuable for my thesis. I hope you enjoyed the discussion as much as I did.

Appendix 5: Interviews – Participants Demographics

#	Age	Gender	Education	Nationality
1	81	Male	Elementary school	Portuguese
2	79	Female	Primary school	Portuguese
3	72	Female	Secondary school	Portuguese
4	69	Male	Bachelor's degree	Portuguese
5	52	Male	Secondary school	Portuguese
6	50	Female	Bachelor's degree	Portuguese
7	49	Male	Bachelor's degree	Portuguese
8	43	Female	Bachelor's degree	Portuguese
9	35	Male	Secondary school	Portuguese
10	31	Female	Master's degree	Portuguese
11	27	Male	Master's degree	Portuguese
12	28	Female	Master's degree	Portuguese
13	23	Female	Bachelor's degree	Portuguese
14	22	Male	Secondary school	Portuguese
15	23	Female	Bachelor's degree	Portuguese
16	23	Female	Master's degree	Portuguese

Appendix 6: Interviews – Questions

General Questions

Q1: Can you tell me how you are aware of the launch of new products in the market?

Q2: What drives you to buy a product instead of another from the same category? (e.g.: a black BIC pen or a black Uni-Ball pen?)

Q3: What are the challenges you face when deciding which product to buy?

Q4: Do you think specific products advertise better with certain genders? (e.g.: cleaning products advertised by a woman is better than by a man?)

Q5: What role does the gender portrayed in the advertisement play in your purchasing decision?

Q6: Do you believe a product sells better if its brand is well positioned and liked?

Q7: Do you buy products because of their brand?

Q8: Would you buy products from a brand even though you don't agree with their policy?

Example Questions

Q1E: Do you agree with this ad?

Q2E: Are you aware of the brand?

Q3E: Do you like the brand?

Q4E: Do you buy products from this brand?

Q5E: Would you (still) buy products from this brand in the future?

E1: Dolce & Gabbana



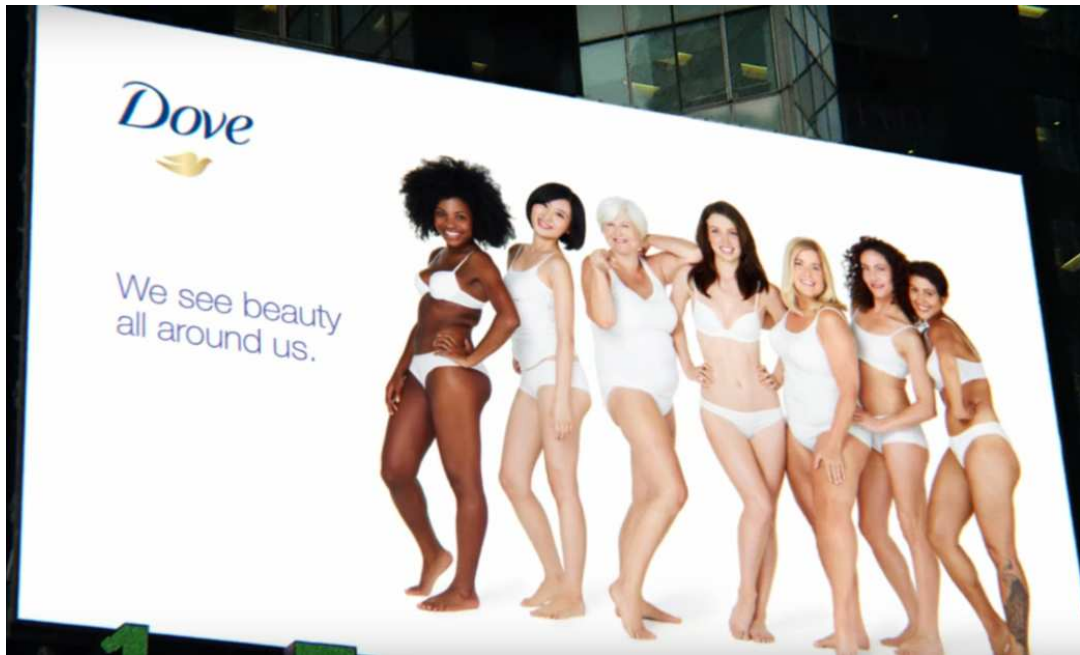
Retrieved from: <https://www.thegentlemansjournal.com/the-10-most-sexist-advertisements-ever/>

E2: Nando's India



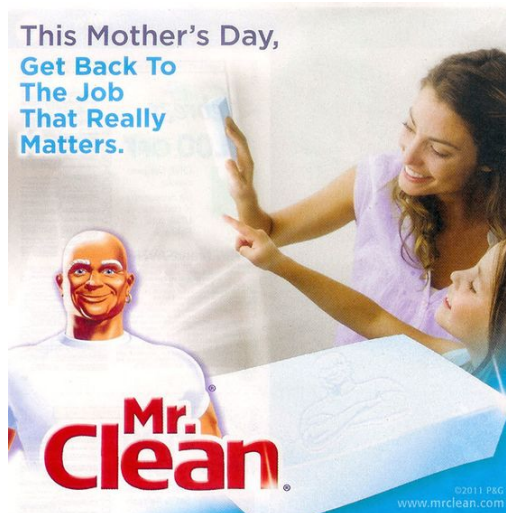
Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/trending-in-india/nandos-cheeky-print-ad-stirs-up-trouble-ends-in-public-apology/>

E3: Dove



Retrieved from <https://time.com/4629671/dove-raise-the-beauty-bar/>

E4: Mr. Clean



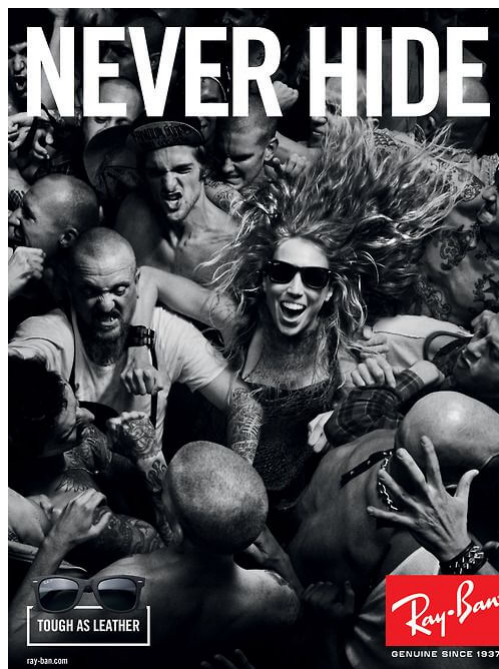
Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@mcole6100/is-mr-clean-for-the-mrs-f3347ef3d574>

E5: Colgate



Retrieved from <http://www.leahrenbaum.com/colate-enamel>

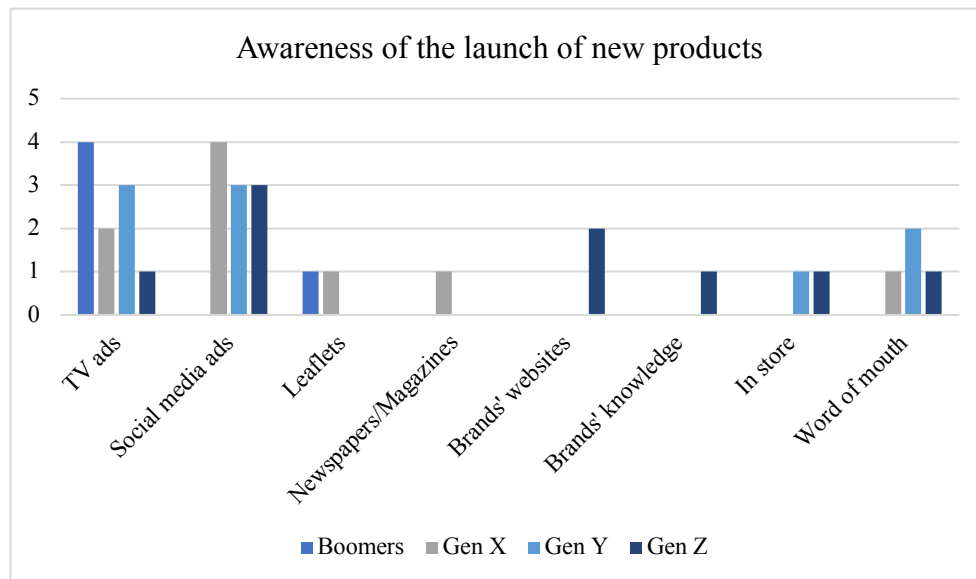
E6: Ray-Ban



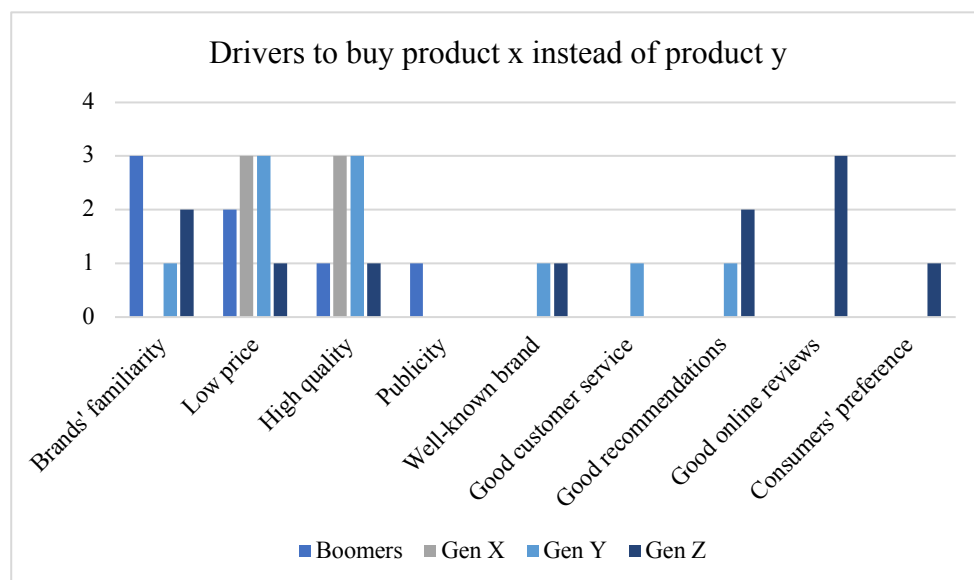
Retrieved from <https://www.novavisao.pt/sol/rayban>

Appendix 7: Interviews – Results

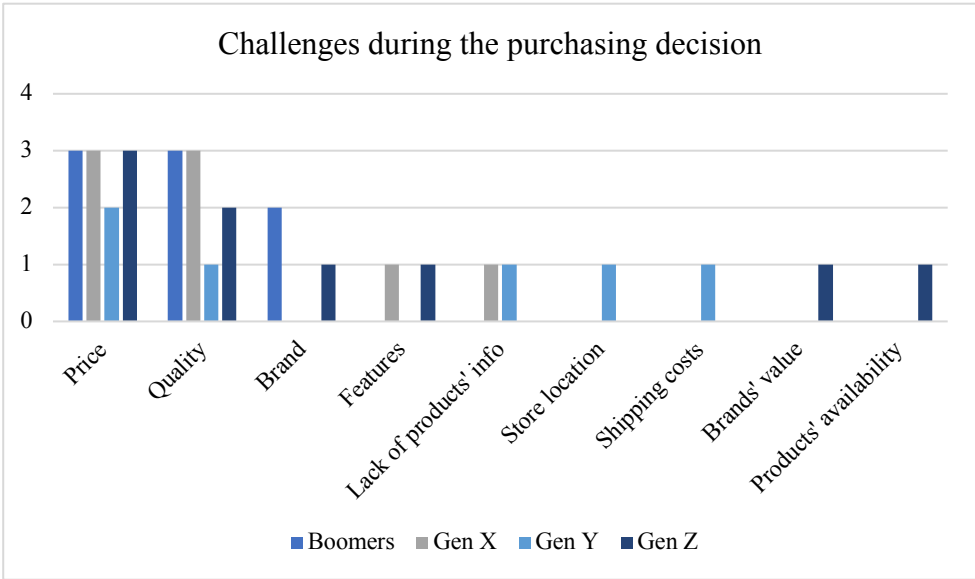
Q1: Can you tell me how are you aware of the launch of new products in the market?



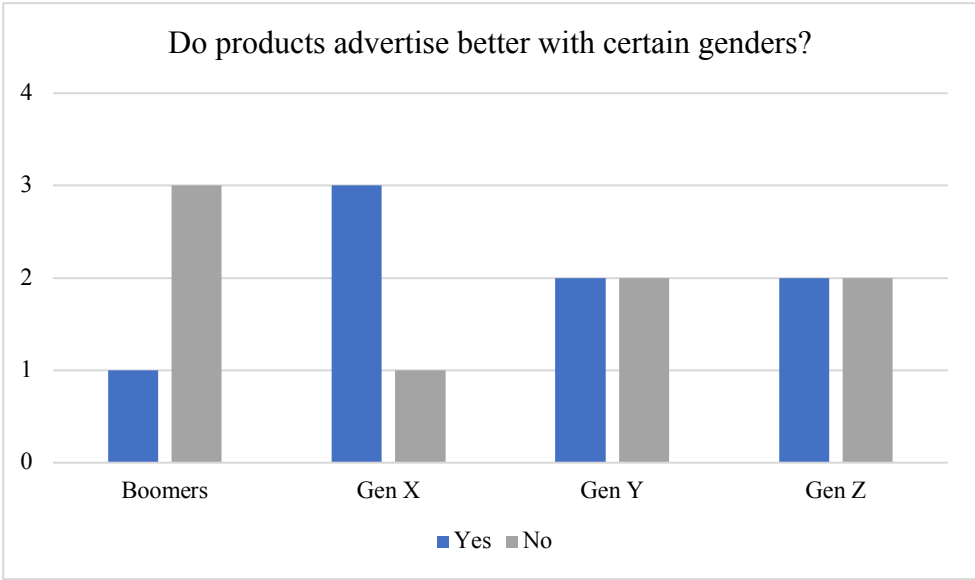
Q2: What drives you to buy a product instead of another from the same category?



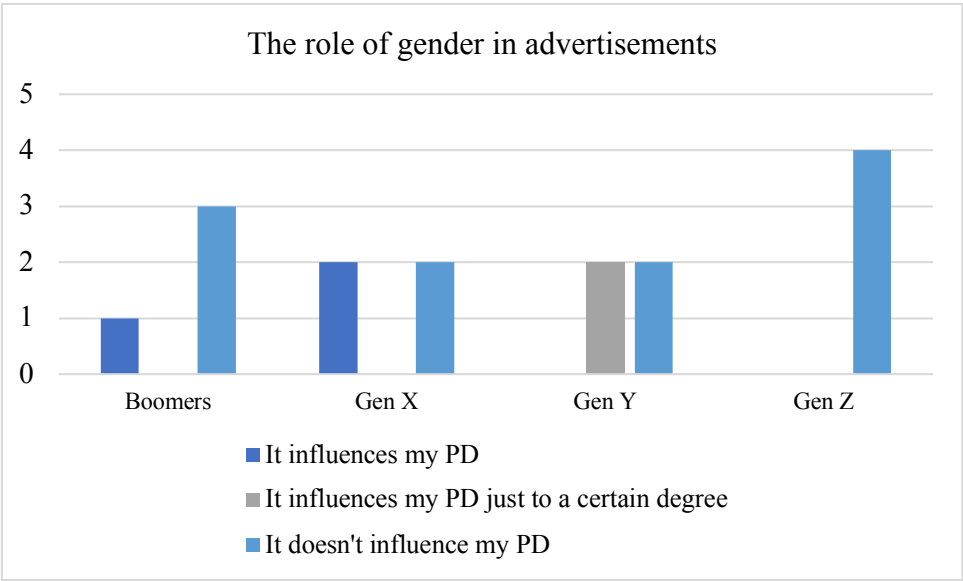
Q3: What are the challenges you face when deciding which product to buy?



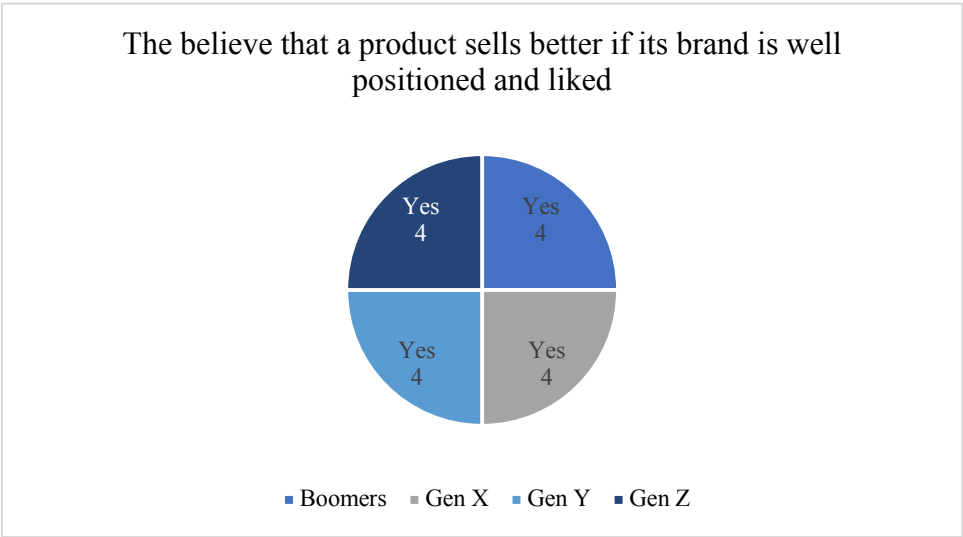
Q4: Do you think products advertise better with certain genders?



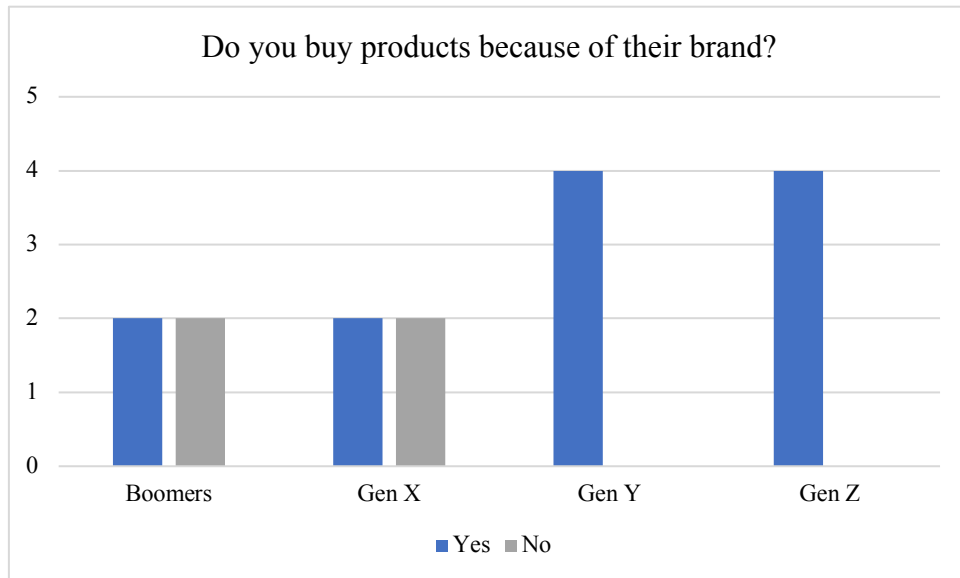
Q5: What role does the gender portrayed in the advertisement play in your purchasing decisions?



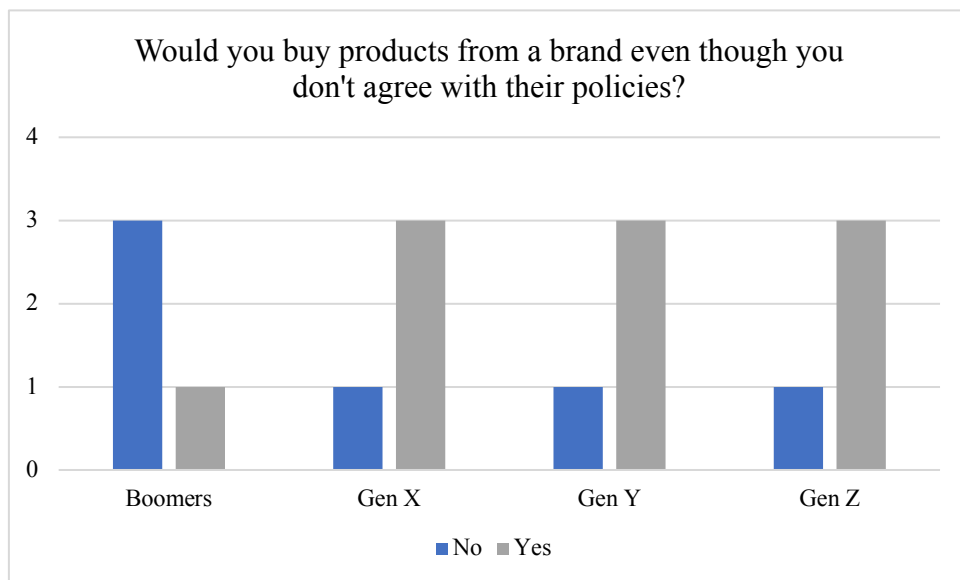
Q6: Do you believe a product sells better if its brand is well positioned and liked?



Q7: Do you buy products because of their brand?



Q8: Would you buy products from a brand even though you don't agree with their policy?



Appendix 8: Non-participant Observation

