

Impact of Consumer Attitude on Consumer's Perception of Feminism in Ads

Asif Hussain Samo¹, Muhamad Asif Joyo² and Poorab Sarhan Abro³

Abstract

The growing attention on women rights, women empowerment has engulfed the marketers with its influence. Women depiction in ads has reached its nadir but consumer perception of such ads needs to be studied. This perception also varies on the bases of beliefs and values of consumers. This study endeavored to investigate consumer perception of surging women role in ads. With quantitative approach, a survey was conducted from non-random sample size of 332 through closed ended designed questionnaire. The data was analyzed with regression. It was found out that consumer's attitudes; attitude towards diversity, attitude towards liberty and attitude towards women empowerment have significantly impact on their perception of women depiction in ads. The more a consumer believes in diversity, liberty and women empowerment the more he thinks positively on such ads. Moreover, there is no moderating role of gender in perception of such ads. This study suggests regional marketers to focus on women depiction in ads in those areas in which consumers hold favorable opinion on diversity and liberty and women empowerment.

Keywords: Consumer Attitude, Consumer Perception, Diversity Attitude, Feminism

1. Introduction

People constitute the meaning of any stimuli, such as advertisement, on the basis of physical determinants or social constructs that exist in our societies. Since the perception of these constructs varies, people tend to form or take different understanding and responses from those variable constructs (Wah, 1998). Feminist theory conceives gender as social construct and therefore the variations exists in its construction in all cultures and societies (Costa, 1994). This and other socially constructed stereotypes has created a phenomenon called gender based inequality. It sometimes breeds an environment of favoritism for the males against females, especially in developing countries, and that augment the gender gap (Jayachandran, 2015). The feminist structure was thus erected to achieve social justice and community building (Bain, 2016). This campaigning of justice for females infiltrated in marketing arena as early as 1850s, and there on, kept on pushing marketing tools to assist in their movement (Scott, 2005). During 1960s-1980s, this campaign started to question the use of women's bodies and the submissive roles of women displayed in advertising (Maclaran, 2012), during this time, feminism perceived marketing as its adversary, and therefore portrayed problems for every advertising tool. Later, in 1990s, this tension between feminism and marketing started to mitigate, and feminist activists moved their prioritizing eye on form exploitative power of marketing, and considered it as viable method of empowerment movement (Maclaran, 2012). Recently, identity dimension of feminism is featured in marketing activities, in which, women are trying to inculcate that they have a separate but equal and free identity and that should not be seen from masculine perspective (Maclaran, 2015). Moreover, much is being conveyed through marketing stunts about plight of women poverty around the globe and wider gender gap in developing countries. There is mix reaction to such portrayal of identity in advertising.

What remains unresearched in this nexus of feminism and marketing, is the actually impact on the consumer perception of such feminist ads. Consumers' attitude towards advertising in general is gauged recently with the dimensions of nudity/offensiveness and gender stereotypes, the results indicate that gender stereotype only harm ads for females whereas offensiveness only harm ads males (Huhmann & Limbu, 2016). It is therefore very pertinent to gauge the consumer perception towards not advertising in general but feminist ads. Moreover, it is also possible that this perception not only changes with males and females, but also within males and within females, as an individual holds different set of beliefs, values and attitudes. Before designing the message of the ad, it is indispensable to take the fact into account whether the listener is in the tune with the message in terms of implicit assumptions about the society by large (Rotzoll, Haefner, & Hall, 2014). In this study three different attitudes of an individual have been taken as treatment; attitude towards diversity, attitude towards liberty and attitude towards women empowerment.

¹Lecturer, Business Administration Department Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi asif.samo@smiu.edu.pk

²Lecturer in Department of Business Administration ILMA University Karachi, asif.joyo@gmail.com

³ Lecturer, Sindh Madressatul Islam University psabro@smiu.edu.pk

Feminism in Ads

Internationally, advertisers are shrewd enough to gauge the audience before designing the message of the any ad, they know that mere showing of women on tv is not sufficient, it's necessary who is the audience, for example explicit portrayal of women in ads may be acceptable but it can also catch criticism from the very champions of feminism themselves (Williamson, 2003). Besides, marketers depicts of women in ads is also facilitated because of the fact that women play significant role in purchase decisions (Milner & Collins, 2000). Ads focus on women depiction in multifaced roles of life to appease the young trends of power femininity and to be vocal supporter of women cause (Lazar, 2006), Ads can also be manipulated to sell the cause of feminism, what Angela calls, "Commodity Feminism", in which ad agencies filters the selling portion of feminist values and incorporate and propagate them into ads (McRobbie, 1997). Keeping aside all the feminist debates, and looking at the matter from marketing lenses only, any advertisement contains an embossed principle that its effectiveness largely depends upon the attitude of audience towards the ad (Mehta, 2000). It plays a mediating role of effectiveness in between process and practice reactions towards advertisement (Bissell & Rask, 2010).

Diversity Attitude

We intuitively know that our state of being different is not only established fact but is of utmost significance in many ways (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). This difference is manifested by social identity theory in which people shape their identities by assigning meanings, such as racial, ethnic and gender groups (Tajfel, 2010). Traditionally, race and gender determines the diversity (Julianne, 2005) but apart from many other factors, the cultural aspect of diversity is also widely recognized and implemented across the world (Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Redding, 2001). People tend to develop the perception and stereotypes based on their gender (Patterson, 2012), their belief about the gender based roles, gender diversity and gender based inequality depends upon the level of their cross gender interaction (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Diversity based on gender has been thoroughly researched along with its significance and advantages. It has been empirically tested that diverse teams not only bring better financial rewards but overall performance gets enhanced if the team included different people (Larson, 2017). People perceive their social realities, or the response they create, on the basis of the group membership they make, such as what gender they belong, what ethnic identity they have, what culture they are from (Alderfer, 1980; Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998). Moreover, their response to other stimuli depends on how strong they identify themselves with a group (Becker & Tausch, 2015), that is say how they perceive these differences among the groups also matters. This leads to our first hypothesis, in which we hypothesized that consumer perception of feminist ads is dependent upon their attitude towards diversity;

H1a. There is positive impact of consumers' attitude towards diversity on consumers' perception of feminist ads.

H1b. There is no moderating effect of gender in the relationship of attitude towards diversity's impact on consumer's perception of feminist ads.

Liberty Attitude

People tend to develop their social and political responses on the basis of their moral concerns and believes (Skitka, 2002). The continuum of liberalism and conservatism has long been a driving force for people to posture themselves in terms of their degree of social and individual freedom (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). People who have more liberty in their thoughts and actions are not only found to be more cognitive (Deary, Batty, & Gale, 2008) but they also believe in augmented political pluralism. Liberals tend to view the information more in the light of ambiguity, complexity and novelty (Amodio, Jost, Master, & Yee, 2007) rather to perceive in the preset biases. Attitude towards particular marketing ad campaign tend to be on the basis of viewers' moral concerns and degree of individual freedom, for instance, one study revealed, that not all the consumers showed negative attitude towards sexual contents in the ads, it rather depends on the sexual liberalism of the consumer which enforce them to view those ads (Mittal & Lassar, 2000). Another study pointed out the need to study women's attitude towards ads with women shown explicitly, Moreover to add the personality of the women in consideration, the researchers found out that women with positive self-schemas have more positive attitude towards such ads and those who have relatively lessor self-schemas tend to have less positive attitude (Reichert & Fosu, 2005). This takes us to our second hypothesis which says;

H2a. There is positive impact of consumer's attitude towards liberalism on consumer's perception of feminism in Ads.

H2b. There is no moderating effect of gender in the relationship of attitude towards liberty's impact on consumer's perception of feminist ads.

Women Empowerment

If the society is given a metaphor of a chain, its weakest part, surely, is women (Prasad & Maheshwari, 2018), as this part is marginalized due to have not equal might in par with their counterpart. Since then it has been roller coaster for every walk of life to embark on, but its accurate nomenclature, for instance, "gender equality", women rights", were officially championed by feminist movements during 1980s and the journey is on (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Women related, specially feminist focused, ads works on the principle that brands have social and moral responsibility to empower women (Ciambriello, 2014). Measuring the progress in empowerment of women depends only on its indicators but also on the fact that how much women have access to the sources of empowerment in society (Kishore, 2000). Among other sources, such as education and work participation, the exposure to mass media is also considered as one the vibrant sources of empowerment which helps women to excel to decision making authority, (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006), this further leads women to develop a favorable attitude towards women cause in general. This culminates into our third and fourth hypothesis;

H3a: Attitude towards women empowerment has positive impact on consumer perception of feminist ads.

H3b. There is no moderating effect of gender in the relationship of attitude towards women empowerment impact on consumer's perception of feminist ads.

3. Methodology

This research is based on positivist philosophy as the objectivity of the data will be made intake. With quantitative approach it will use explanatory strategy and relationships between the variables will be quantitatively explained. Numerical data will be conducted through survey method with close ended questionnaire. Consumers of Karachi are taken into the umbrella of population of this study, and non-probability convenience sampling technique will have used due to confinement of time and resources. Total sample size will be 400, as it is made sure it is more than the standard number of 326, from which half will be males and half females, this is because gender is taken as moderating variable. Independent variables are *Attitude towards diversity*, *Attitude towards liberty* and *Attitude towards women empowerment*. Dependent Variable is *Consumers' Perception towards feminist Ads*. Moderating Variable is Gender. Regression analysis will be used to find out the impact between independent and dependent variables.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

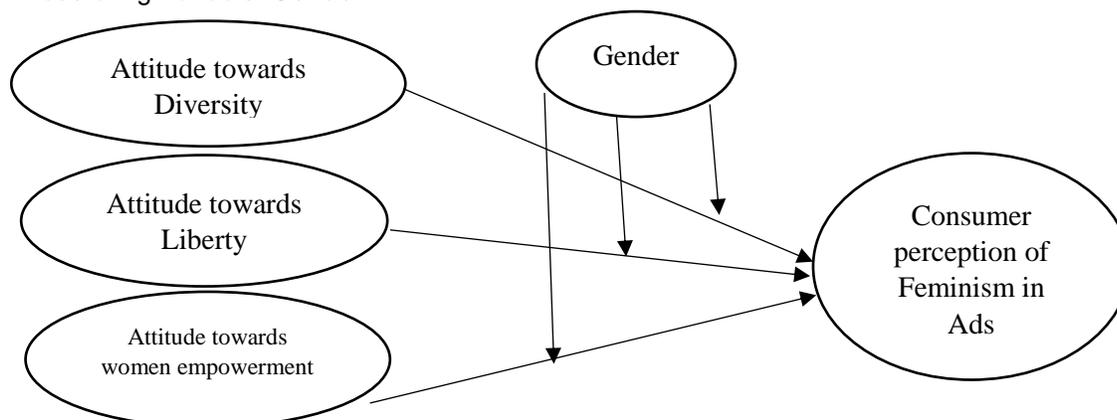
Independent Variables:

- 1. Attitude towards Diversity:** Cultural Diversity, Gender Diversity, Ethnic Diversity
- 2. Attitude towards Liberty:** Human Rights, Freedom of Expression, Socio-political Freedom.
- 3. Attitude towards Women Empowerment:** Female Bosses, Working Women, Women Rights.

Dependent Variable:

Consumers' Perception of Feminist Ads: Positive Perception, Neutral Perception, Negative Perception.

Moderating Variable: **Gender**



4. Results

There are four demographic variables which were asked from the participants, namely; age, gender, occupation and domicile background, following is the descriptive statistics on these variables.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

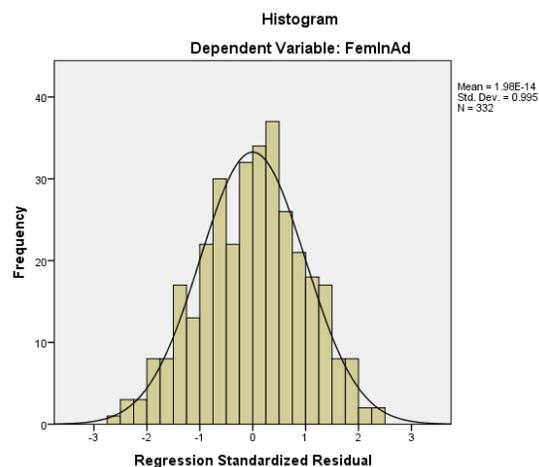
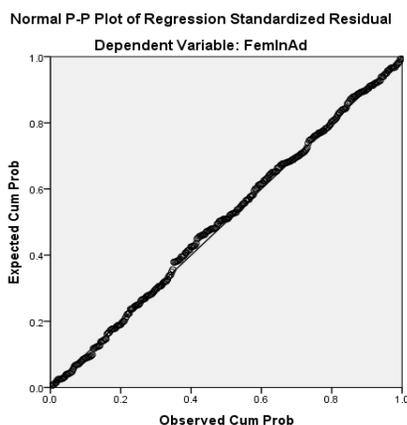
		Age	Gender	Occupation	Domicile Background
N	Valid	332	332	332	332
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.3916	1.5000	1.6717	1.6325
Mode		1.00	1.00 ^a	1.00	2.00
Std. Deviation		.50704	.50075	.73991	.48906
Variance		.257	.251	.547	.239
Skewness		.655	.000	.610	-.474
Std. Error of Skewness		.134	.134	.134	.134
Kurtosis		-1.078	-2.012	-.948	-1.577
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.267	.267	.267	.267
Range		2.00	1.00	2.00	2.00

4.2. Reliability and Model fitness

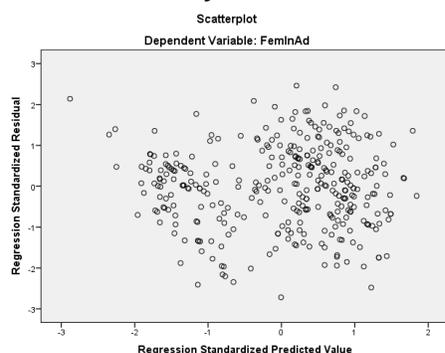
4.2.1. Instrument Reliability

Four instruments were developed, namely; Attitude towards diversity, Attitude towards Liberty, Attitude towards Women Empowerment and Consumer Perception of Feminism in Ads, Cronbach alpha for these four instruments was found to be;

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Attitude towards diversity	0.927	6
Attitude toward Liberty	0.839	5
Attitude towards Women Empowerment	0.899	5
Consumer Perception on Feminism in Ads	0.914	10



4.2.3. Normality



4.2.2. Model Fitness (R Square)

Three independent variables were identified from literature which were hypothesized to explain the variance in the dependent variable. This model fitness is represented here; Adjusted square is found to be .605 which means the three independent variables are explaining above 60% variance in dependent variable.

Table 2: Model Fitness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimates
1	.780 ^a	.608	.605	4.65060

4.2.3. Correlation

Table 3: Correlations

		FemInAd	Diversity	Liberty	WomenEmp
Pearson Correlation	FemInAd	1.000	.735	.613	.679
	Diversity	.735	1.000	.671	.691
	Liberty	.613	.671	1.000	.588
	WomenEmp	.679	.691	.588	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	FemInAd	.	.000	.000	.000
	Diversity	.000	.	.000	.000
	Liberty	.000	.000	.	.000
	WomenEmp	.000	.000	.000	.
N	FemInAd	332	332	332	332
	Diversity	332	332	332	332
	Liberty	332	332	332	332
	WomenEmp	332	332	332	332

As one of the crucial requirements for running regression analysis, is that there should be correlation between independent variable(s) and dependent variable. In this study, all of three independent variables, attitude towards diversity, attitude towards liberty, attitude towards women empowerment are having correlation of 0.73, 0.613 and 0.678 respectively with dependent variable consumer perception of feminism in ads. This shows that there can be fair ground of regression analysis among these variables.

4.2.4. Impact

From the above table we can see that p value of all three independent variables is significant. The beta value for Attitude towards Diversity is greater (0.431) which means that Diversity makes the strongest unique contribution to explain the Consumer perception towards feminism in Ads, when the variance explained by all other variables in the model is controlled for. The beta value for Attitude towards Women Empowerment is also substantial (0.292) indicating that it made around 30% variance. The beta value for Attitude towards Liberty is slightly lower (0.151) indicating that it made less of a unique contribution.

Table 4: Regression Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics		VIF
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Part	Tolerance	
(Constant)	5.437	1.130		4.812	.000			
Diversity	.612	.076	.431	8.040	.000	.278	.415	2.408
Liberty	.308	.097	.151	3.160	.002	.109	.520	1.923
WomenEmp	.561	.094	.292	5.944	.000	.205	.494	2.023

4.3 Moderating Effect of Gender

Table 5: Moderating Effect of Gender

Gender	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF	
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
Male	1	(Constant)	3.522	1.544		2.280	.024	
		Diversity	.576	.108	.394	5.342	.000	2.616
		Liberty	.398	.134	.191	2.975	.003	1.983
		WomenEmp	.685	.131	.335	5.240	.000	1.971
Female	1	(Constant)	6.975	1.643		4.246	.000	
		Diversity	.607	.108	.442	5.641	.000	2.276
		Liberty	.253	.142	.128	1.789	.075	1.900
		WomenEmp	.484	.136	.268	3.565	.000	2.101

Table 6: Significance of Coefficients for Moderating Effect of Gender

Variable	t Value	Standard	Result
Attitude towards Diversity	0.202	< 2	Not significant
Attitude towards Liberty	0.742	< 2	Not significant
Attitude towards Women Empowerment	1.06	< 2	Not significant

By splitting the data, we have to come to know about the moderating effect of gender on variance produced by each independent variable. It was found out that there is no significant moderating effect of gender.

5. Discussion

The first hypothesis that attitude towards diversity has positive impact on consumer perception of feminism in ads is accepted. It was found out that those people who believe in diversity in society think positive about the appropriate depiction of women in product ads. This was in conformation with previous studies that people react on the basis of the groups they belong and believe they hold (Becker & Tausch, 2015). There is, however, no moderating effect of gender on this relation, that is to say that males and females having positive attitude towards diversity perceive same about feminism in Ads. The second hypothesis that attitude towards liberty has positive impact on consumer perception of feminism in Ads is also accepted. It was investigated that people having favorable opinion on liberalism values and believe they tend to have positive views about women depiction in Ads. A similar tendency was found out in previous study (Mittal & Lassar, 2000). No moderating effect was found out to qualify this relationship as males and females do not differ in their perception of feminist ads provided they both hold positive attitude towards liberty. The third hypothesis that attitude towards women empowerment has positive impact on consumer perception of feminism in Ads is accepted. People who deem it necessary for women to have equal power in society are having positive perception towards women depiction in Ads. The similar notion was identified in previous study, mentioning that women depiction in ads is more related with giving the sense of power to women (Ciambriello, 2014). In relationship, no moderating effect of gender was found out. From all these three attitudes, the women empowerment attitude of people makes them think more appropriate about women depiction in ads, as compared to other two attitudes. It is also worth pondering that those people who do not have positive attitude towards diversity, liberty or women empowerment, do not have positive perception about extra women depiction in ads.

6. Conclusion and Future Recommendation

This study was carried out to address growing women depiction in ads, to investigate that consumer perception about this growing phenomenon. Three factors were identified to explain this perception, and it was hypothesized that attitude towards diversity, liberty and women empowerment has positive impact on consumer perception towards feminism in ads. Moreover, it was also hypothesized that no moderating effect qualifies any of these three relations. From an adequate sample, these relationships were investigated and it was found out that people having positive attitude towards diversity, liberty and women empowerment have positive impact on consumer perception of feminism in Ads. It is recommended that more such studies should be carried out with different samples to validate this finding. Moreover, qualitative study can also be conducted to explore more such attitudes which might affect this perception.

References

- Alderfer, C. P. (1980). The methodology of organizational diagnosis. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 11(3), 459–468. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.11.3.459>
- Amodio, D. M., Jost, J. T., Master, S. L., & Yee, C. M. (2007). Neurocognitive correlates of liberalism and conservatism. *Nature Neuroscience*, 10(10), 1246–1247. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn1979>
- Bain, J. (2016). "Damn right I'm a feminist. . . Sew what?" the politics of contemporary home dressmaking: Sewing, slow fashion and feminism. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 54, 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2015.11.001>
- Barak, M. E., Cherin, D. A., & Berkman, S. (1998). Organizational and personal dimensions in diversity climate: Ethnic and gender differences in employee perceptions. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 34(1), 82–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886398341006>
- Becker, J. C., & Tausch, N. (2015). A dynamic model of engagement in normative and non-normative collective action: Psychological antecedents, consequences, and barriers. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 26(1), 43–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2015.1094265>
- Bissell, K., & Rask, A. (2010). Real women on real beauty: Self-discrepancy, internalization of the thin ideal, and perceptions of attractiveness and thinness in Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty. *International Journal of Advertising*, 29(4), 643–668. <https://doi.org/10.2501/s0265048710201385>
- Ciambriello, R. (2014). How Ads That Empower Women Are Boosting Sales and Bettering the Industry. *ADWEEK*.
- Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A. M. (2015). From "gender equality and 'women's empowerment'" to global justice: reclaiming a transformative agenda for gender and development. *Third World Quarterly*, 36(2), 396–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1013341>
- Costa, J. A. (1994). *Gender issues and consumer behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Deary, I. J., Batty, G. D., & Gale, C. R. (2008). Bright children become enlightened adults. *Psychological Science*, 19(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02036.x>
- Fowers, B. J., & Richardson, F. C. (1996). Why Is Multiculturalism Good? *American Psychologist*, 51(6), 609–621. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.51.6.609>
- Gupta, K., & Yesudian, P. P. (2006). Evidence of women's empowerment in India: A study of socio-spatial disparities. *GeoJournal*, 65(4), 365–380. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-006-7556-z>
- Huhmann, B. A., & Limbu, Y. B. (2016). Influence of gender stereotypes on advertising offensiveness and attitude toward advertising in general. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(5), 846–863. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2016.1157912>
- Hunt, V., Layton, D., & Prince, S. (2015). Why diversity matters | McKinsey & Company. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>
- Jayachandran, S. (2015). The Roots of Gender Inequality in Developing Countries. *Annual Review of Economics*, 7(1), 63–88. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115404>
- Jost, J. T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A. W., & Sulloway, F. J. (2003). Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339>
- Julianne, M. (2005). Dimensions of Diversity. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 22(19). Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/openview/b91d59d7cce32f77a7e4579b532e7528/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=27805>
- Kishore. (2000). Empowerment of women in Egypt and links to the survival and health of their infants. In H.B & Sen (Eds.), *Women Empowerment and Demographic processes*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Larson, E. (2017). New Research: Diversity + Inclusion = Better Decision Making At Work. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/eriklarson/2017/09/21/new-research-diversity-inclusion-better-decision-making-at-work/#1b0150354cbf>
- Lazar, M. M. (2006). "Discover The Power Of Femininity!". Analyzing global "power femininity" in local advertising. *Feminist Media Studies*, 6(4), 505–517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770600990002>
- Maclaran, P. (2012). Marketing and feminism in historic perspective. *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 4(3), 462–469. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17557501211252998>

- Maclaran, P. (2015). Feminism's fourth wave: a research agenda for marketing and consumer research. *Journal of Marketing Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1076497>
- McRobbie, A. (1997). More! New sexualities in girls' and women's magazines. *Back to Reality*, 190–209.
- Mehta, A. (2000). Advertising attitudes and advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 40(3), 67–72. <https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-40-3-67-72>
- Mittal, B., & Lassar, W. M. (2000). Sexual liberalism as a determinant of consumer response to sex in advertising. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 15(1), 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007723003376>
- Patterson, M. M. (2012). Self-Perceived Gender Typicality, Gender-Typed Attributes, and Gender Stereotype Endorsement in Elementary-School-Aged Children. *Sex Roles*, 67(7–8), 422–434. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0184-9>
- Prasad, A., & Maheshwari, M. (2018). Role of cooperative societies for women empowerment in rural areas. *IJARIIIT*.
- Redding, R. E. (2001). Sociopolitical diversity in psychology: The case for pluralism. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 205–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066X.56.3.205>
- Reichert, T., & Fosu, I. (2005). Women's Responses to Sex in Advertising. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 11(2–3), 143–153. https://doi.org/10.1300/J057v11n02_10
- Ridgeway, C. L., & Smith-Lovin, L. (1999). THE GENDER SYSTEM AND INTERACTION. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25(1), 191–216. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.25.1.191>
- Rotzoll, K., Haefner, J., & Hall, S. (2014). Advertising and Classical Liberalism. In *Readings in Advertising, Society, and Consumer Culture* (pp. 14–14). New York: Routledge.
- Scott, L. (2005). *Fresh lipstick: Redressing fashion and feminism*. New York: NY: Palgrave.
- Skitka, L. J. (2002). Do the means always justify the ends, or do the ends sometimes justify the means? A value protection model of justice reasoning. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(5), 588–597. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167202288003>
- Tajfel, H. (2010). *Social Identity and intergroup relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wah, C. (1998). Feminism in Singapore's advertising, 6612(June), 2–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.1998.11726567>