The ambivalence of #femvertising

*Exploring the meeting between **feminism** and **advertising** through the audience lens*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between feminism and advertising from the individual woman's perspective. In-depth qualitative interviews with fourteen Swedish women have been conducted, in which a number of feminist advertisement videos have been viewed and discussed. This has been done in order to explore which audience reactions and actions that these advertisements generate; an area of this phenomenon that is underexplored.

Femvertising, feminist advertising, is a growing marketing trend utilised by large brands such as Dove, Always and Barbie, who use feminist values and female empowerment to encourage brand activism. The campaigns are dependent on audience engagement, as they rely on consumers voluntarily participating in championing the social cause together with the brand by engaging with the content online.

There is a tendency in the existing literature to rule out this commercial use of feminism as manipulative, and as a hijacking of feminist values with the sole outcome of increasing revenue for the corporations. It is suggested that this use of feminism could damage the feminist movement, and that the female empowerment conveyed is meaningless and empty.

However, the results from this study suggest that audience reactions towards this phenomenon cannot be easily generalised. On the contrary, women extract different meanings from the advertisements, making it fit into their own individual context. They engage critically, judging the advertisements' value based on their previous knowledge of both brand, product and advertising in general.

Furthermore, the majority spoke in positive terms about sharing these videos through their social media networks online, to teach others about feminist values and with the hope of recruiting more people to the feminist cause. Thus, the videos were viewed as feminist resources.

However, the women's reactions were highly ambivalent. They balanced between a hopeful joy that feminism packaged and commodified in this way carried the potential of opening eyes of non-feminists, and a scepticism towards the commercial purpose of this strategy and towards advertising in general.

This thesis suggests that it is within this ambivalence that the understanding of femvertising is shaped.

Keywords: *Femvertising, feminist advertising, commodity feminism, Dove, Always, Barbie, Verizon, brand activism, empowerment, audience engagement, ambivalence, political resource, marketing*

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Contents

Introduction

Feminism and advertising might seem like an incompatible combination.

Limited by time and space, advertising relies on gender stereotypes that are easy to convey to create quick identification and has therefore been a central focus in advertising literature since the 1950s (Eisend, Plagemann & Sollwedel, 2014), the target of much feminist activism (Gill, 2007b: 74) and crowned as "one of society's most disturbing cultural products" (Zoonen, 1994: 67).

In Sweden, the Swedish Women's Lobby runs the project Reklamera together with the media critical network Allt är möjligt ("everything is possible") to lobby for legislation against sexist advertising, an initiative that recently spread to neighbouring countries Denmark and Norway (Sveriges Kvinnolobby, 2016). In a survey they commissioned in 2013, nine out of ten women responded that advertising makes them feel bad about their own bodies and makes them want to change something about themselves. This was three times higher than among men, which is in line with other research in the area and probably reflects the fact that women in advertising are more often shown as passive, denuded, weak, sexualised and objectified (Sveriges Kvinnolobby, 2013). This, the lobby argues, is an obstacle to gender equality.

Against that backdrop, one can breathe a sigh of relief when noting the growing trend of feminist advertising, also known as femvertising. In "femvertisements" products are sold with the help of empowering messages aimed at girls and women. Females are portrayed as active, adventurous and capable, urged to believe in themselves and encouraged to realise their natural beauty and potential (Skey, 2015). According to SheKnows Media, this strategy rests on the idea that advertising can empower women, while also selling products (Wallace, 2015).

Personal care brand Dove was a forerunner for this strategy, launching their successful Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004. The brand was credited for being bold and ground-breaking (Neff, 2014) for using models in different sizes and with different skin colours (albeit all still photo-shopped) to illustrate that all women are beautiful; it is just a matter of realising it (Dove, 2016).

It took a few years, but now many brands have followed in Dove's footsteps, using gender equality, female empowerment and feminism to sell. Last year, gender equality was one of the top social causes backed by brands (Ames, 2015) and the first Femvertising Awards was held in the US, rewarding those brands who had managed to inspire, humour, create social impact

and speak to the next generation with the help of feminist values (Monllos, 2015).

If sexist advertising is an obstacle to gender equality, then can feminist advertising pave the way for it? Is this trend what feminists have been waiting for, or is it a simple scam to lure a powerful consumer group into consumption while avoiding feminist critique?

Opinions are divided among bloggers, journalists and scholars, but there is a tendency in the literature to rule this out as a bastardised and ruined feminism, deflated and lacking of political force. Cultural theorist and feminist Angela McRobbie, for example, posits that when feminism is used in this way it contributes to disarming the feminist movement and preventing further feminist advances, a concept she calls "feminism undone" (2009).

Audiences, however, are rarely asked. On the handful of occasions that the audience perspective has come forward (Duffy, 2010; Taylor, Johnston & Whitehead, 2016; Millard, 2009; Stokvold & Andersson, 2013) it becomes clear that the complexities this strategy carries does not allow for a simple ruling. Instead, it seems these advertisements spark both feelings of scepticism and joy.

It is within this ambivalence I explore this phenomenon, by interviewing young Swedish women who have an interest in feminism and gender equality, about their understanding of these advertisements, and how they see this trend fitting into the feminist movement. To overlook the women that act and react to these types of social stimuli is to ignore a key dimension of why and how a movement lives and develops, and this is a crack which this thesis seeks to address.

An important aspect of these campaigns is that they live on social media (Gill&Elias, 2014), where they are shared and circulated, further adding to the marketing buzz. They neatly fit into this current network society, and in particular the category of brand activism, where consumers are invited to champion values and principles together with a brand (Mukjerjee&Banet-Weiser, 2012). Here, the gap in the research widens. While reactions towards these feminist campaigns have been touched upon by some scholars, the *actions* they generate are underexplored. We do know, however, that these advertisements have yielded millions of actions online. For example, Always' video "Like a girl", aimed to address girls' lack of self-esteem, has been viewed over 61 million times and commented over 42 000 times on Youtube alone (Always, 2014), and Dove's "Real Beauty Sketches", saluting women's natural beauty, was the most shared video advertisement in 2013 (Siddiqi, 2013). While it is beyond doubt that these campaigns are successful online, we lack the knowledge and

understanding of what hides behind those numbers.

I hope to remedy that by exploring femvertising from an audience perspective and explore which reactions *and* actions these campaigns generate, and how these can be contextualised. Instead of ruling this out as a faux feminism, I wish to illuminate how these campaigns fit into contemporary feminism, how young women make sense of them and how they might find use for them on social media. In a larger context, I hope to be able to say something about the online feminist engagement in Sweden, and what this trend might mean for young feminists and for feminism as a movement. My own feminist identity provides a personal entry point to this topic, as will be noticeable throughout the thesis.

Sweden makes for a good context in which to explore this phenomenon. It is praised as one of the most gender equal countries in the world (World Economic Forum, 2015) and the current government calls itself "the first feminist government in the world" (Regeringskansliet, 2016). Yet, many would agree that it is not fully equal. In 2005, the political party Feminist Initiative was founded, with a proclaimed aim to address the lack of feminist politics in Sweden (Feministiskt initiativ), a clear indication that many still see work ahead. In December 2015 the short book "We should all be feminists[1]", was distributed to Swedish high school students, with the hope of instigating a "feminist awakening" among young people and function as a stepping stone to a more inclusive conversation about gender (Flood, 2015). Sweden is in what Amanda Lotz refers to as the "intermezzo", both before and after, in a time *after* many feminist advances but *before* having reached complete gender equality (2007:72). This makes the Swedish feminist conversation particularly interesting to dive into.

In this thesis, feminist advertising will be put under the microscope and when doing so multiple areas of research will meet. Advertising, brand activism, political engagement and participation online will be drawn upon, with a strand of postfeminism spanning over them all and with a constant focus on the audience.

It will become clear that when researching femvertising from an audience perspective, complexities appear. Paradoxical content makes for paradoxical receptions. By exploring rather than condemning these often contradictory campaigns I hope to bring you on a fascinating journey exploring the meeting between feminism and advertising.

Because whether the two are incompatible or not; they have been merged.

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1 "Alla borde vara feminister" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies was published in 2015 and is based on the TED talk about her views on feminism that she held in 2013, which became a global hit online and was sampled by pop star Beyoncé in the song "Flawless" (Flood, 2015).

Research questions

This project has as its objective to answer the following research questions:

1. How can we understand the reactions and actions generated by these advertising campaigns?

2. How can we better understand the relationship between feminism and advertising through the eyes of the individual feminist?

3. How much value can we place on the concept that femvertising is undoing feminism?

4. What can this marketing trend, and the reactions it generates, tell us about contemporary feminism?

Diving into the debate about the commercial use of feminism

In order to get a better understanding of how this topic has been approached, this chapter will provide an overview of the literature on contemporary feminist advertising. It will mainly draw on the notions of post- and popular feminism, commodification, empowerment and online engagement. The chapter will take its departure in 1992 when a body of text was published that has turned out to shape much of the discussions surrounding feminist advertisements for the following decades. The chapter will then move closer to mapping out what we know thus far about audience reactions to femvertising today.

1992 was the year when Robert Goldman published his book "Reading ads socially". In this book he argues that feminism has been adopted by the advertising industry, turning it into "commodity feminism". As a response to mounting feminist critique during the 1980s, advertisers had to rethink their engagement with female consumers, and thus re-adapted their portrayal of women and incorporated feminist values into advertisements. The "new woman" featured in many ads was empowered, equal and independent and thus carried many of the feminist visions so many fought for (Goldman, 1992).

However, by incorporating "the cultural power of feminism" advertisers emptied feminism of its political value and transformed it into just another commodity on the market. Using feminism for marketing purposes turns feminism from politics to merely a style, according to Goldman. Feminism becomes a sign value that can be bought together with a product. When products can simulate female independence and equal rights, the social goals of feminism are turned into lifestyles for individuals (Goldman, 1992: 130-133). Goldman's notion of commodity feminism is an often used theoretical lens in texts examining advertisements with a feminist message.

Most writers urge a scepticism towards the phenomenon of mainstreaming feminism (Fagerström&Nilsson, 2008; Marcus Reker, 2016; McRobbie, 2009; Lazar, 2014) claiming, as Goldman, that this is a faux feminism packaged to fit the market (Baxter, 2015, Lazar, 2006) and that it is not the female consumers who will gain in the end but the corporations using it (Murray, 2012). Others suggest it would benefit women if there were more advertisements of this kind (Sirr, 2015), that it could spark and change online conversations in a positive way (Condon, 2015), function as a meaningful introduction to feminism (Hains, 2014) and that feminists should not turn their cheek to commercialisation as a useful avenue to advance the feminist cause (Scott, 2000). Somewhere in between we find writers like Sarah Banet-Weiser, who recognises the ambivalent nature of the strategy but argues it is too easy to dismiss as a capitalist hoax (2004; 2012a; 2012b).

In the vein of commodity feminism, a more elaborate marketing strategy has emerged. This

strategy, known as brand or commodity activism, invites consumers to champion feminist values together with a corporation. By using hashtags, sharing content and even producing own content, consumers can act politically while strengthening a brand. This invitation adds an interesting dimension to femvertising, and will be explored in this thesis.

While the incorporation of feminism into advertising has been explored by many scholars, the audience is rarely heard. It transpires we know little about how women themselves make sense of this type of feminism and if they consider it watered down, faux and dangerous for the feminist cause, or inspiring, necessary and even a meaningful compromise.

On the few occasions that the audience perspective has been explored (Duffy, 2010; Taylor, Johnston & Whitehead, 2016; Millard, 2009; Stokvold & Andersson, 2013), it has become clear that it is difficult, if not to say impossible, to label commodified feminism as simply good or bad. Reality seems to be much more multifaceted, and less predictable, than that.

Navigating through the postfeminist universe

In order to make better sense of the research in this area, this literature review will start with a brief theoretical untangling.

Media commentator and feminist Rosalind Gill has often called attention to the shift in portrayal of women in advertisements, situating this trend in a postfeminist discourse. According to Gill, we live in a "postfeminist media culture". She claims that the notion of postfeminism is the most important, as well as the most contested, in the feminist lexicon, and a crucial ingredient in feminist cultural analysis (2007a).

Postfeminism is certainly no easy knot to untangle, and it is not my intention to do so in this body of text. Trying to offer a coherent definition to go by could only be considered a naive attempt at simplifying a movement and body of theory that is both complicated and contested.

I will, however, present a range of feminist voices negotiating the definition of postfeminism. This is important, as postfeminism is a common prism through which female empowerment in advertising is viewed (Banet-Weiser, 2012a; Banet-Weiser, 2012b; Crymble, 2012; Gill, 2007a; Gill, 2008, Lazar, 2006; Lazar, 2014; McRobbie, 2009).

My hope is that these voices and perspectives will both illuminate the intricacies of contemporary feminism, as well as illustrate that every voice adds an enriching nuance to the discussion. This should underpin my argument that audiences need to be heard in order to make better sense of the feminism we see weaved into many advertisements today.

In the last two decades postfeminism has been understood as a historical shift after the height of the

second wave of feminism[2], a backlash against feminism, a new epistemological perspective within feminism and a sensibility made up of themes like individualism, choice, empowerment and consumerism (Gill, 2007a).

Postfeminism is a widely contested term. Shelley Budgeon (2001) offers a helpful distinction between the two main ways in which postfeminism has been understood.

Either, it can be understood and defined as a backlash against second wave feminism, even as anti-feminism. It is anti-feminist in the sense that it rests on a false notion that equality between men and women has already been achieved. Thus, when women encounter problems trying to reach their goals in life, these are constructed as problems on an individual level, and not political and common ones (Budgeon, 2001: 13).

Carisa Showden, for example, posits that postfeminism is guilty of depoliticising many of the political goals during the second wave by focusing on personal choices – and not on political action (2009: 172), and Germaine Greer has expressed it all the more bluntly: ”The future is female, we are told. Feminism has served its purpose and should eff off” (quoted in Lazar, 2009: 372).

Postfeminism, understood in this way, is more about exploring different lifestyle options and pleasures, often through consumption, than engaging in social activism (Braithwaite, 2002).

 The second approach to postfeminism is to see it as yet another stage for feminism, a movement and body of theory constantly in flux. This is a more productive perspective, according to Budgeon, and the one that will be adopted in this thesis. In this way of seeing it, the *post* in postfeminism does not signify the end to feminism, but implies that it is in a process of transformation. It should not be read as “death”, but rather as “after”. Adopting this view means engaging with the limitations of more hegemonic forms of feminism, and to seek understanding in how feminism is changing and evolving. It is not, as Showden posits above, a depoliticisation of feminism, but instead a political shift in its theoretical framework (Budgeon, 2001).

Thus, postfeminism can be described as the socio-political climate of contemporary feminism following the advances made during the second wave. Postfeminism can be understood as a term which encompasses all feminisms and which invites one to explore the contradictions and

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2. While **the first wave** of feminism in the beginning of last century focused on legal rights for women, most notably the right to vote, **the second wave**, peaking in the 60s and 70s, expanded the movement to focus on every area of women's experiences, such as family life, sexuality and work. This has been followed by **the third wave**, when a younger generation brought attention to the differences *between* women, and **the fourth wave**, centring around feminist advances online and on social media (Munro, 2013). However, many feminist writers are reluctant to speak of the feminist movement in terms of waves as it undermines the advances made in between grander events and does not serve as a particularly useful metaphor.

opportunities that women face (Robinson, 2008: 39-40), and to challenge earlier feminist frameworks (Budgeon, 2001: 14).

What some choose to call third wave feminism can be situated within this larger postfeminist frame. Third wave feminists depart from the notion that there are as many different versions of feminism as there are women, and that analyses must start from individuals' often varying experiences (Budgeon, 2011: 282). Women must be allowed to identify their own feminism, in a way that makes sense to them. It is more about the emotional and personal than about public policy and marching on the street (ibid: 283). However, third-wavers argue that their feminism is not merely individual, but also collective and political. They claim that a focus on the individual lifestyle and on the pleasures of contemporary cultural practices is not simply fun and self-indulgent, but rather they recognise the tensions in this and attempt to explore the contradictions within these practices (Braithwaite, 2002). Feeling empowered by an advertisement aimed at selling body lotion can certainly be labelled a postfeminist contradiction, and one that deserves exploration.

Furthermore, third wave feminists welcome commercial media visibility and embrace the power that comes with that. Consumer culture is regarded as a place for female empowerment and not solely a platform for misogynistic expressions (Banet-Weiser, 2004: 122). Thus, cultural production is a key sites of both analysis and activity for third wave feminism (Gillis et al, 2007).

It is not my aim here to present a clear cut distinction between second, third and even fourth wave feminism (see Cochrane, 2013, for an interesting journey through this latest tide) and what others call postfeminism. Instead, I will do as Penelope Robinson (2008) and situate contemporary feminism within a larger postfeminist frame. To me, this is a feminism in the Western world, where women in many ways enjoy the same legal rights as men, but where inequality still resides. Where gender roles are challenged and negotiated, but still left largely untouched.

Regardless of what we call it, I consider this latter approach to postfeminism a more productive entry point as it allows me to explore, and not condemn, the exciting and often disturbing contradictions women face today.

Popularising feminism: a doing or an undoing of feminism?

The theorists who align themselves with the second perspective of postfeminism have been interested in exploring how postfeminism has been involved in popularising feminist ideas through mainstream media, often called "popular feminism". There is widespread disagreement about whether feminism will gain or be disadvantaged when popularised. The impact that the popular has on feminism is a major concern for feminist critics (Hollows&Moseley, 2006: 2), and as Gillis et al

posit: "for feminism to be popular means engaging with some pretty thorny ambiguities" (2007: xviii). Many have viewed the development of popularising feminism as positive, as media images help empower women in front of larger audiences. However, the more common view is more sceptical, seeing it as neutralising and co-opting feminism while leaving the traditional portrayal of femininity intact (Lazar, 2009).

Whether one wants to call it recuperation, incorporation or hijacking of feminism into mainstream media, it is a trend that can be seen in music, magazines, films, television and advertising. I will primarily focus on what we know about feminism in advertising, but I will borrow examples from other genres as well.

Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie has gone from saluting the emergence of popular feminism to condemning it. In the 1990s, she saw opportunities for further feminist success and predicted that if popular mass media started to address feminism and women's issues it could lead to a positive development for the movement itself (2009: 13-14). However, as she noticed, it was a different kind of feminism that was taken into account and it led to a displacement of feminism as a political movement (ibid: 15). McRobbie accuses herself of failing to recognise the need for popular culture to constantly reinvent itself, meaning that feminism would only last as long as a fashion season (ibid: 5).

She has since developed the concept of feminism undone (2009). According to McRobbie, the postfeminist era we live in should be defined not only as a backlash against and an undermining of the gains made during the second wave, but also a much more viciously calculated turn of events. By taking feminism "into account" a range of institutions, including the media, have created a faux feminism to thwart feminist critique and prevent a new women's movement from rising. This means that feminism has become undone. McRobbie directs harsh criticism towards the recuperation of feminism into mainstream media (2009), in a way that she herself admits sounds almost like a conspiracy theory (ibid:1).

According to Rosalind Gill, it is the mixing of feminist and anti-feminist ideas that makes contemporary media culture postfeminist (2007a). McRobbie has described this as double entanglement, arguing that young women are offered versions of feminist goals such as freedom, empowerment and choice as a substitute for real feminist politics and transformation (McRobbie, 2009). This entanglement can be seen in the shift in portrayals of women and women's sexuality in advertising, which is crucial in understanding postfeminism, according to Gill. Women have gone from being portrayed as passive, dumb sex *objects* to active, desiring sexual *subjects*. They are no longer judged by men, but instead it is about feeling good and attractive for yourself. This construction is full of contradictions, according to Gill. On the one hand girls and women are told

they can do anything, but on the other their bodies are still subject to scrutiny and surveillance (2007a). This double entanglement is anti-feminist, yet feminist, seemingly progressive but also regressive (Lazar, 2009).

In fact, Gill argues, advertisers not only use, but revise, empty and even attack feminism just to sell more products. Feminist goals like independence and choice are being "sold back to us as choices about what to consume" (2007b: 95). In this advertising landscape, feminism is just another style to choose from. It is an offer to young women to take control of their lives through consumption, instead of through collective struggle for real political change. This is not, Gill affirms, a case of advertising gone feminist (2007b: 94-95). That feminism in advertising cannot contribute to any real changes in society, or empower women in a significant way, is echoed by many others (see for example Crymble, 2012; Lazar, 2006; 2009 & Murray, 2012).

Sarah Banet-Weiser is less pessimistic with regards to commercialised feminism when analysing the girl power produced by cable network Nickelodeon. She considers this a representation of feminism, albeit full of tensions and contradictions, and argues that to call this feminism anti-feminist is untrue. It still represents a version of feminist ideology, even if it is suited to fit the limits of commercial media (2004).

In contrast to this, Gill and McRobbie both argue that the feminism in advertising and media is not real, thus lacking the potential to create real change. In fact, "real" and its synonyms are used all too often. It is a problematic term to use (up there with meaningful and useful) as it means little unless used in a personal context. Realness is a subjective perception, and the use of this word implies that the writer using it possesses the rare skill of defining what real is.

According to media professor Catharine Lumby, it is problematic that both Gill and McRobbie rest their arguments on generalisations of both young women and media content. She calls for a recognition of the diversity of both media production and consumption, and a stronger attention to context. Without this, it is too easy to use popular culture and its consumers as evidence for a feminist position, when in fact reality is not that one-dimensional or simple to grasp (2011).

I am sceptical of a firm categorisation of "real" and "less real" feminism, and Gill and McRobbie's dismissals of popularised feminism, as they do indeed rest on generalisations. Here, I find Banet-Weiser's argument more compelling, as she recognises that feminism comes in many shapes and variations and does not consider her own feminism the only measurement stick to go by.

Still, the notions of feminism undone and double entanglement have value, as it sheds light on a framework's impact on the content. A feminism used for the purpose to sell will always be adjusted to exactly that: selling. It will come with limitations and alterations and it is highly plausible that

this results in a weakened and partly depoliticised version of the ideology, simply because the feminism in advertising does not have a political purpose - but a commercial one.

Commodified feminism as a resource

After highlighting some of the main arguments against this use of feminism, this section seeks to illuminate a more positive approach to the phenomenon.

In the anthology "Marketing and feminism" Linda Scott nuances the view on commodity feminism, by challenging the idea that feminism and capitalism are incompatible. She claims that the anti-market prejudice within feminist thought prevents positive developments within advertising (such as changing the portrayal of women), and that this attitude "shuts off an avenue for the advancement of feminism already shown to be broadly effective" (Scott, 2000: 17). An oppression of women sadly occurs within all economic systems, Scott continues, and complex gender phenomena should not merely be attributed to an economic ideology. "Capitalism is not the cause: it is merely the current circumstance" (Scott, 2000: 35).

The market can in fact be used in order to advance the feminist cause, according to Scott. Furthermore, ever since the first wave of feminism the movement *has* been part of the market and often benefited from it. It is therefore not only counter-productive but also hypocritical to claim there is or should be a binary division between feminism and capitalism. To claim that nothing truly feminist can be produced in a capitalist consumer culture is to strive backwards (2000).

Rebecca Hains adds an interesting dimension to the debate about commodified feminism and suggests that it can function as a productive introduction to basic feminist values. After interviewing young feminist-identified women who listened to both the British pop girl group the Spice Girls (often accused of hijacking the term "girl power" for commercial purposes) and to the feminist underground punk band Riot grrrls, she suggests that the chronology of encounter, as well as social context, should be taken into account when analysing commodity feminist texts. Her study revealed that the women's consumption of Spice girls inspired them to fight back against inequalities in society and also sparked their later interest in feminism and the Riot grrrls (2014). This shows that there is value and merit in feminism existing in varying forms.

In line with this, Professor Kathleen Karlyn testifies to how useful popular culture is when introducing feminism to young students. She argues that using music, films, TV and magazines to discuss feminism is a way of "putting gender on the table" and facilitating a political view on gender among students (2006: 65). Zooming out slightly to a broader view on political engagement, this goes hand in hand with Liesbet van Zoonen's claim that popular culture can lower the threshold

to political engagement (Zoonen, 2005), also explored by Joke Hermes who speaks of "cultural citizenship" (2005) and touched on by Peter Dahlgren (2013: 140). Hermes even argues that popular culture, more than any other form of culture, allow us to bond and build communities since the stories provided are of actual use to us (2005: 155). Especially disempowered citizens, like the young and the feminine, can benefit from the popular as it offers possibilities to build collectives across borders, in which shared hopes and dreams can be produced (ibid: 141).

In earlier work, however, Rebecca Hains has argued that once female empowerment is used to sell something ("anything and everything") it is emptied and rendered meaningless, useless and without a chance to effect or inspire change (2009). This change in Hains' perception shows that her earlier reasoning, although insightful, was flawed. After questioning young women on their meeting with commodified girl power, and how it influenced them, she changed her views.

This suggests that commodified and commercialised feminism cannot simply be ruled off as capitalist ploys, but demand more careful exploration. It also hints that getting in touch with women directly can alter theoretical positions. Is it possible that there is a significant disconnect between how scholars and everyday women contextualise these advertisements?

Perhaps even media content produced within a "dirty" framework like advertising, a core of capitalism, can be utilised as a feminist tool and as doorway into more substantial feminisms. This possibility should not be overlooked, but rather explored.

"I'm actually crying because this is such a great video[3]"

My stance should be clear by now, that commodified feminism needs to be researched through an audience perspective before ruling it out as meaningless and faux, of which I have myself been guilty of doing in the past (Jalakas, 2014b; 2015a & 2015b). Nonetheless, we cannot ignore that advertising has as its main purpose to influence us to buy. That statement is neither controversial nor contested. If feminism did not sell, it would hardly be used as a marketing strategy. Hence, while we may argue that feminism in media and advertising come with benefits, we must also recognise that it is a trend with a monetary purpose.

The last couple of years have seen a rising trend of companies promoting social causes to increase revenue. It seems that in the vein of commodity feminism, feminist activism too has been appropriated by corporations. In fact, according to the American Marketing Association, gender equality was one of the main social causes backed by brands in 2015 (Ames, 2015). This takes its shape in advertising campaigns like Always #LikeAGirl campaign, Barbie's #YouCanBeAnything

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3   The quote is a comment to Always' video #LikeAGirl on Youtube, posted 17th of February 2016 (Always, 2014).

or Pantene's #ShineStrong. Many of these campaigns encapsulate much more than merely advertisement videos, but also teaching, seminars, TED talks (Always, 2016), workshops, research (Dove, 2016), advisory councils and Instagram albums (Barbie, 2016). They are multifaceted, global and present on multiple sites and platforms. Here, consumers are invited to champion women and girls' self-esteem and belief in themselves together with the brand. Focus lies less on the products for sale and more on the feminist message the brand claims to support, possibly reflecting the public's discomfort with seeing the two side by side in equal measure.

An evident theme in these campaigns is the use of the word "empowerment", a cornerstone in the postfeminist vocabulary (McRobbie, 2009). According to Gill, women of today live in a constant state of empowerment. Even the most meaningless and trivial actions, like buying a pair of shoes or eating a particular brand of cereal, is seen as a gesture of female empowerment (2008). Indeed, many of these campaigns are focused on feeling good about yourself and your body. The discourse in which these videos are situated is what Gill and Elias call the "Love Your Body-discourse". These are affirmative, carrying what seems to be feminist messages and are targeted at girls and women to help them realise their beauty and encourage them to redefine beauty norms. A theme that runs through these campaigns is the message that what women lack and need is better self-esteem (2014). Sarah Banet-Weiser too concludes that self-esteem is remarkably brandable in this century, and has become a postfeminist product attainable through consumption. To borrow her words: "girls' self-esteem is hot" (2012a: 18).

This marketing strategy is one step further than merely harnessing the cultural power of feminism. It is an invitation to those consumers who are critical of unrealistic body ideals to contribute in changing the narrative together with the corporation (Banet-Weiser, 2012a: 49). This lucrative trend is referred to as brand or commodity activism and has emerged in the current meeting between neoliberalism and digital media, where the boundaries between culture and the economic have been blurred. Activism is not what it has been before, but has been incorporated and reshaped by the power of capitalism. Now, to consume is also to act politically, which adds a strong emotional dimension to consumption (Sturken, 2012).

Indeed, we cannot shy away from the emotional impact these types of advertising campaigns intend to have on us, and often succeed with creating. In fact, even Gill and Elias admit to being moved to tears by many of these LYB videos (2014: 180), and I have found myself deeply moved by some of them. It begs the question whether this emotional dimension changes our perception of these advertisements, and if it makes us more likely to support the brand behind it.

Dokyun et al would suggest it does. Through a large-scale content study, coding 100 000 messages from 800 different companies on Facebook, they have detected a trend. A large part of companies'

posts on Facebook contain emotional appeals and stories about the companies' philanthropic outreach. The study concludes that this in turn does in fact have a positive impact on engagement, as these posts are more likely to be liked, shared and commented (2015). Thus, warm and touching videos with a feel good-factor are more likely to create engagement online, than videos with pure informative content. That many of the campaign videos mentioned above have been viewed millions of time supports this conclusion.

A cynic would say that advertisers intentionally play with our emotions, by using values close to us, merely to get us to support their brand and buy their products. While that might be true, we cannot rule out the possibility that women might feel they gain something positive from being exposed to these messages and that they see value in this version of feminism, nor can we dismiss that women can shift between these two perspectives, seeing it as both good and bad.

#SpeakBeautiful[4]: advertisements with a request to act

If these emotional advertisement videos are designed to make us act, it is important to look at what type of engagement that is expected and how we can view that engagement, which will be done here.

As a result of us spending more time on social media platforms, corporations spend more time and money engineering content to create engagement with consumers (Dokyun et al, 2015). Recommendations from friends or family members on social media are important sources of information that we deem credible. Corporations capitalise on this by encouraging consumers to recommend the brand through so called "word-of-mouth marketing" (Jenkins et al, 2013: 76).

The campaigns explored here rely on consumer participation and consumer-generated content, made possible through digital developments and the rise of Web 2.0 platforms. A vital part of these campaigns is the strategic incorporation of consumers, who are invited to take part in, help shape and influence the campaign – and in doing so, building the brand. This demands further exploration of where this type of activism fits into our contemporary culture, and the forms of citizenship enabled by these corporations (Banet-Weiser, 2012a). Here, it will be my attempt to explore what type of feminism that is enabled, if any, and where advertising fits into the struggle for equality.

Using Always' #LikeAGirl campaign as an example of the brands' strategic use of social media, the audience is offered three choices on how to act after viewing the video on Youtube: "Share – to inspire girls everywhere. Tweet – the amazing things you do #LikeAGirl. Stand up – for girls'

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4   In Dove's video "Speak beautiful" viewers are requested to help change the way we talk about beauty on social media (Dove US, 2015), in a way resembling what some authors see as an exploitation of online users by requesting them to perform free digital labour (see for example Terranova, 2004 and Fuchs&Sevignani, 2013).

confidence at Always.com" (Always, 2014). Many argue that this type of marketing is an exploitation of consumers, using them to push the brand forward and increase profit, relying and even assuming that they are there to spread the word for you. Others put more emphasis on the power given to consumers by inviting them in to play (Duffy, 2010).

These campaigns, promoting equality, feminism and empowerment, are often credited for going viral, and listed on online viral charts, seen in headlines like "Always' '#LikeAGirl' goes viral and claims the no. 2 spot on the viral chart" (Chung, 2014), and "How Dove's 'Real Beauty Sketches' became the most viral video ad of all time" (Stampler, 2013).

However, Jenkins, Ford and Green argue that talking about media content as "viral" is to belittle the active decisions made by viewers, listeners, readers and consumers. Calling it viral assumes a passive audience, helplessly infected by a virus. It says little about how we assess content and how we come to the decision to share or not. To speak of content as viral distorts the understanding of the power relation between media producers and consumers, overestimating the power of the former (2013: 20-21). By judging content, valuing it and deciding whether to pass it along or not we jointly decide whether content should spread or not, live or die. Media content is no longer merely distributed *to us*, but circulated *by us* through our social networks, and we all contribute to ongoing discussions and online phenomena by sharing, re-framing and modifying media texts (ibid: 22-23).

Sarah Banet-Weiser, using Dove's campaign as an example, aligns herself with this latter camp and argues that since the campaign asks consumers to act (empowered through choice) it cannot be dismissed as a mere manipulative attempt by advertisers. Yes, she argues, the labour that Dove asks for is a form of uncompensated labour and therefore exploitative. At the same time it is a product of emotions and affective desire and a form of creative activity (2012b: 51). The labour requested, such as interacting, sharing and even producing content, should therefore not be seen as either exploitation or empowerment, but as a compromise between the two.

Brooke Duffy interviewed women who entered a competition by Dove which challenged "real women" to make an advertisement of their own. Her findings suggest that the participants contextualised the creativity, empowerment and authenticity of the contest in highly nuanced ways. Some women believed they were supporting the feminist cause, while others recognised that there was an exploitative nature to the contest. Several women stated that they felt empowered, and they all endorsed Dove in the process. Duffy concludes that since every participant contextualised their participation differently, and made the commodified empowerment work for them, the contest could successfully both empower and exploit (Duffy, 2010).

This coin clearly has two sides. We could look at commodity activism as a paradoxical strategy,

carrying too many unrealistic promises, meant to fool us into consumption; not for a social cause but for a profit (Mukherjee&Banet-Weiser, 2012: 3). It is easy to shrug this off as feminism undone, depoliticised and hijacked, a manipulative strategy meant to make us dip into our wallets.

However, we can also characterise it as a new and innovative way of activism, a popular form of resistance in a social and political landscape constantly in flux (Mukherjee&Banet-Weiser, 2012: 3). We can view it as a feminism full of contradictions and tensions, but still useful, and one step in the right direction.

Perhaps it is not capitalist power on the one hand and popular resistance on the other, but a little bit of both. Hypocritical, yet a meaningful and productive force.

What do women think?

When it comes to feminism in advertising, Gill continuously stresses the importance of the audience perspective, which she considers a crucial area of study in order to make sense of the complexities and contradictions in these postfeminist advertisements (2008; 2007b: 25). While arguing that advertisements have a *huge* influence on audiences as well as on the contemporary media landscape (2007b: 73), she also departs from the notion of polysemic readings of texts and that advertisements cannot *impose* meaning on us (ibid: 50). Thus, this huge influence must come in many different variations.

When speaking of media influence, McRobbie argues in a way that make young woman appear uncritical. Analysing an advertisement for Wonderbra, which she holds as an example of the undoing of feminism, McRobbie argues that "the younger female viewer" is not angry and critical when she sees this advertisement despite the fact that it is clearly sexist. According to McRobbie, the new female subject uses her freedom to withhold critique and stay silent, in order to fit in (2004). I would argue that this is a straw man argument, and therefore only as strong as the realness of the subject McRobbie has created. This argument relies on young women being uncritical, because otherwise the argument does not hold. If we discover that women do in fact engage critically the straw man ceases to exist and the argument dies.

There have been few audience reception studies done in relation to these types of campaigns. One campaign, however, has been more explored than others: Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty.

Through this campaign, launched in 2004, Dove claims to want to make women realise their natural beauty. It has been blamed for failing in liberating women from an oppressive beauty ideology (Johnston&Taylor, 2008; Murray, 2012), while others have claimed it has been effective in questioning social norms and body ideals (Infanger, 2009).

According to Banet-Weiser, this campaign is clearly a product of a postfeminist environment, full of contradictions, asking consumers to act politically (as feminists) by supporting the brand and buying Dove's beauty products. Dove's promotion of self-esteem and "real beauty" while capitalising on women's insecurities is precisely the type of paradox one can expect to meet in this postfeminist environment (2012a). Obviously, it is difficult to merge the idea of a corporation selling beauty products (such as intensive firming cream) with one that claims to want to critique the beauty industry – of which Dove itself forms an integral part. As Gill and Elias point out, many of the companies using this strategy are the same ones who are invested in maintaining female body dissatisfaction (2014).

It is undoubtedly easy to criticise the hypocrisy of this campaign and others like it, and question their influence on gender equality outside the screen. However, the studies exploring audience reception suggest this is not an either/or-phenomena.

The young feminists interviewed by Taylor et al (2016) seem to somewhat make peace with the idea that feminist messages in advertising is a necessary paradox to live with. While most women agreed that Dove's campaign was not truly feminist, in a pragmatic sense they still considered it "better than nothing". The women expressed contradictory feelings towards the campaign, feeling it was inspiring yet frustrating, and many women expressed a powerlessness when it came to imagining alternatives to feminist ideals being incorporated into marketing (2016).

Stokvold and Andersson (2013) identify similar themes in their thesis: the Swedish women interviewed considered the campaign one step in the right direction, but questioned the main goal of increasing commerce by using feminist ideals. Similarly, the women interviewed by Millard (2009) agreed that Dove's campaign is a gimmick to increase commerce, but that it still has value and that it adds something to the world of advertising.

There is a "on the one hand, but on the other hand" type of reasoning among the women interviewed, which clearly shows that this strategy cannot be ruled off as merely a manipulative use of feminism. I consider it unproductive to cast these campaigns off as a destroyed and empty feminism meant to lure us into consumption. Female consumers need to be given more credit than that. To call this feminism manipulative assumes an audience there to be manipulated.

These reception studies all suggest that women do critically engage with the campaign, and goes against McRobbie's claim that young women consume media content uncritically. At the very least it rules out generalisations. The women interviewed in these studies are not tricked into consumption, nor are they completely satisfied with feminism being used in this way. They experience mixed feelings: this strategy is not ideal, but it is better than nothing.

Conclusion

It has been my attempt to illuminate a long-running, still current and increasingly relevant debate among feminist writers. The incorporation of feminist values into mainstream media and advertising has been explored by many scholars. With a few exceptions, the verdicts are harsh: when feminism is used in this way it is no longer real. It is a deflated feminism with the sole purpose of making us consume.

However, when women are asked a much more nuanced image appears. It seems women do interact critically with these advertising campaigns, seeing them as paradoxical and recognising their commercial purpose, yet considering them one step in the right direction. Similarly, I expect women to be aware of the content they interact with on social media. After all, we are not robotic machines compulsively hitting the like button whenever a comforting message infiltrates our feed.

With one exception (Duffy, 2010), the audience studies on femvertising do not focus on how women might utilise these campaigns. The conversations are centred on how they interpret the messages, but not if the messages make them act in a certain way. This is where I hope to carry on the exploration, and to join Duffy in trying to identify which social mechanisms come into play when young women are faced with advertisements asking them to act, and how they view that request. Do they believe that sharing an advertisement video can advance the feminist cause?

Analysing Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, Murray argues that while feminists might welcome this campaign as a positive change in the advertising landscape, it is not the feminist task to support corporate strategies aimed at creating brand attachment. The feminist task, Murray argues, is to struggle for social changes that revolutionise structures in society (2013). In other words: this is not true feminist activism.

However, after interviewing young women about feminism, Budgeon concludes that feminism nowadays may operate as a form of decentralised resistance. Through small everyday actions young women do contribute to push feminism forwards. These women might not march on the streets, or even call themselves feminists, but they still practice a form of "micro-politics". They speak of both women as a group, and about the responsibilities of each individual (2001). Could we view activities on social media as a form of micro-revolutionising?

It seems highly unproductive to speak of feminism and feminist actions as real or unreal, when we will never, and should never, agree on the meaning of these terms. It will be my attempt to move beyond a "this is and that isn't feminist" discussion (Braithwaite, 2002) by recognising the diversity of feminism and exploring what happens on an individual level when a woman is confronted with a feminism packaged to sell.

Methodology: my approach to unpacking femvertising

Before digging into the method and methodological approach, I find it an appropriate time to situate myself within this research.

In the previous chapter I clarified which strand of postfeminism I will use as my lens. If I may resort to some navel-gazing, this positioning has a lot to do with my own relationship to feminism. I am 27 years old and have grown up in the aftermath of the second wave, which represents a feminism I very much respect but cannot identify with. My feminist identity is packed with contradictions. I care about my appearance, while seeing the problems of society's focus on female beauty. I joyfully watch series like Sex and the City, while recognising the strange mix of women's independence with a constant reliance on men. I can applaud an advertisement celebrating women's self-esteem, while feeling sceptical about its true aim. Indeed I feel empowered when told I can be anything and everything, while also wondering why it is me who needs this boost and not my male peers.

The feminism I see around me is not a dead anti-feminism, but very much alive and evolving. It is as diverse and multifaceted as feminists themselves.

The acknowledgement of my own standpoint is important as I agree with the critique that objectivity is an illusion (Davies&Spencer, 2012: 2). I do not claim to be on an unbiased path to knowledge, but I also reject that the acceptance of subjectivity means giving up on knowledge construction. I believe that this acknowledgement can be of analytical help. Furthermore, not acknowledging it would be to hide important facts about the main analytical tool in this thesis; me. I am the interpretive subject and as such my influence will be pervasive (Bruhn Jensen, 2012: 266).

Choosing in-depth interviews as a method

Since I hold that expressions of feminism are as diverse as women are, I realise that if I wish to understand the reactions and actions generated by these campaigns, the most logical step is to turn to women and ask them. In this respect my research borrows from feminist standpoint theory, departing from the notion that knowledge is socially situated and that we can reach more truthful accounts of the world by turning to marginalised people and start off from their experiences and activities (Harding, 2004). The knowledge I am seeking cannot be found by performing the "God trick" as famously put by Donna Haraway (1988) and assume an objective view of the world from above. I am not interested in creating straw women to build an argument, but want to seek

understanding in the complex meaning-making of these campaigns with respect to those who are considered part of the target audience.

As Brinkmann and Kvale put it: "If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?" (2015: 1). It is through the qualitative research interview one can attempt to understand the world from people's point of view.

There are few rules or standard methodological conventions for qualitative interview research, and it is hard to do well (Brinkmann&Kvale, 2015:19). The lack of standardised procedure demands a high level of skill from the researcher, but the fact that I piloted my study was one way of strengthening it. According to Ann Gray, piloting is invaluable as it helps you decide on your approach (2003: 102). Piloting can provide important warnings about where your research can fail and tell you if your chosen method is appropriate. While a pilot study does not guarantee a successful end result, it does increase the chances significantly (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

My pilot interviews were done over the phone, with two 20 year old women. These interviews are not included as part of my data, but have contributed to the final shaping of my approach, as I quickly identified some problems with my earlier scope. For example, I realised it was insufficient to only discuss one campaign, as the conversation quickly dies if the woman in no way relates to the content. My interest has not been to analyse a specific campaign, but rather the phenomenon of femvertising as a whole.

Furthermore, piloting allowed me to understand the difficulties of demanding from your respondents the ability to speak rationally, and almost from the outside, about everyday practices such as viewing and sharing videos online. After conducting these interviews I decided that all interviews would need to be done face to face, with a computer at hand, in order for the interviewee to be able to show me, if needed. This adds an ethnographic touch to the study, almost observational. The computer was not always used by the interview subject herself, but often enough for it to be worthwhile and for me to get a better understanding of their online behaviour.

The piloting helped me decide to do individual interviews instead of focus groups. The contextualisation of these advertisements seemed so dependent on the woman's life situation, that I felt I would miss an important nugget by putting several women together. While group discussions could have unravelled other interesting dimensions, I am not certain the personal contextualisations I was seeking would have come forward in that setting.

The choice to do individual interviews connects to my postfeminist approach; exploring medial expressions of feminism from an individual perspective. The multiplicity of feminism that I assume could be claimed to decrease consistency and reliability, but since my aim is not to make

representational claims I find it necessary to recognise the various and diffuse ways feminism can be exercised. As Budgeon notes, by analytically moving away from the understanding of women and feminism in collective terms means we must start from every woman's experience (2011: 282).

Doing research: from recruiting to analysing

To recruit I posted a request on Facebook looking for women, aged 15 to 35[5], who were interested in gender equality and/or feminism and who used social media.

According to The Internet Foundation in Sweden, this age group (16-35) considers the internet the most important source of information, uses it to seek political information and are active in passing on content to others (Findahl&Davidsson, 2015).

There are many reasons I wanted women who had a pre-existing interest in feminist issues. Again, if I may resort to a subjective perspective, I have always felt feminism to be a very affectional political stance. To be a feminist is to invest emotionally in beliefs and values that lie close to your heart. It penetrates many aspects of your life and it is personal as well as political. To ask women how it feels when feminism is used in advertising requires them to have a vested interest in the feminist cause. If I were to ask women who did not care about these issues, it is unlikely they would care about this marketing strategy just as they might not care about advertisers using the environment or anti-racism to sell. Therefore I wanted to direct my questions towards women who live and breathe feminism, and who care about the future of it.

The reason I only recruited women was simply because these videos are targeted towards a female audience.

There was a big interest in participating and I strategically included women in different life stages and with different backgrounds to get a broad range. This resulted in a great diversity. The women were everything from hardcore feminist activists, participating in demonstrations, giving lectures on the topic and using social media to engage others, to those who merely reflected on feminism by themselves and who occasionally would discuss it with friends. Some were anti-capitalist and therefore anti-advertising, while others enjoyed advertising as a cultural form in its own right. Some were students, others were working. The youngest was 16, the oldest 35. All were Swedish, but many had roots in other parts of the globe. Some focused merely on the power struggles between men and women, while others pointed out intersectional perspectives such as class, ethnicity and disabilities. All women were attending or had attended university education.

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5   The women were of the following ages: 16, 17, 22, 22, 23, 25, 25, 25, 26, 26, 26, 30, 31 and 35 years old. A shorter presentation of all women can be found in appendix I.

My interviews were semi-structured in the sense that I had general areas[6] I wanted to touch upon, but these were so diffuse that the interviews could almost be characterised as unstructured. Dependant on where the conversation led, I fed the conversation with videos[7], showing an average of six videos per interview. With an arsenal of videos and questions at my disposal I was able to cater for every conversational eventuality. Topics included how the women felt about the advertisements, if they felt they were a fair representation of feminism, if advertising is an appropriate arena for feminism and what kind of potential they saw in these advertisements.

Every interview ran as long as it needed to, until we both felt everything was said and topics started reoccurring. The interviews ranged from 50 minutes to just over an hour and a half. I told all women to contact me if they had any more thoughts but only one woman did so and emailed me to say she had shared two of the videos discussed.

My strategy was to conduct as many interviews as needed to answer my research questions and to be able to fully explore my scope. According to Brinkmann and Kvale, a researcher needs as many interview subjects as necessary to find out what she needs to know, but that it is common that it lands around 15 (2015: 140). After only a handful of interviews, patterns started to emerge. After 14 interviews I decided to stop collecting data, start analysing and then rethink the sample size. When I started analysing it became clear that the data I had gathered was enough to see both patterns as well as individual contextualisations. I therefore decided to not go back to interviewing, but move into the analysis phase completely.

All interviews were transcribed, printed and read multiple times. Midway through the analysis I went back to the recordings to make sure I had not missed important pieces such as revealing pauses, tone of voice or laughter. Re-listening became a way of bringing life to the interviews again.

Using colours to visualise themes, I identified key areas to focus on. Many of these overlapped and I had to return to the data multiple times to make sense of the patterns. A comforting thought at this stage was Ann Gray's claim that the richer the data, the more open it is to multiple interpretations (2003: 147). This openness required me to be experimental while analysing, exploring different paths, often meeting dead ends and constantly questioning my conclusions.

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6   See appendix II for the interview guide leaned on.
7   The following videos were showed in the interviews: ”Like a girl” (Always, 2014), ”Unstoppable” (Always, 2015), ”Imagine the possibilities” (Barbie, 2015), ”Inspire her mind” (Verizon Wireless, 2014), Dove's ”Evolution” (Zephoria, 2006), ”Real beauty sketches” (Dove US, 2013), ”Speak beautiful” (Dove US, 2015), ”Legacy” (Dove US, 2014), ”Underwear for perfect men” (Dressmann Official, 2015), ”The camp gyno” (HelloFlo, 2013), ”Better for it – inner thoughts” (NikeWomen, 2015), Pantene's ”Not sorry ShineStrong” (Best Ads Channel, 2014), “Courage is already inside” (Ram Trucks, 2015), ”Own it” (Special K Canada, 2015) and ”More than a number” (SpecialKUS, 2013). Four are the described after this chapter, and the rest are described in appendix III.

Throughout the process of data collection and analysing, I developed my theoretical framework further, letting it feed off the data and vice versa. In a way this research is inspired from grounded theory, as I let the data "speak to me" before deciding on which theoretical concepts to work with (Bruhn Jensen, 2012: 278). I did not want to shoehorn in a theoretical perspective not suitable for the data. Instead, I identified themes and then went back to the literature in order to find concepts and frameworks to work with.

Going beyond reception

An important aspect was that I asked the women if they would share the videos on social media. In today's digital media climate, it seems insufficient to merely analyse the *meeting* between people and content, when the relationship does not stop there. We do not merely view content and engage with our minds, but we share, talk about and allow it to influence us in different ways depending on our context. With regards to commodity activism this becomes particularly clear, as the content asks us to act in a specific way, to stand up for ideological principles and buy products attached to those principles (whether it's coffee to help save the rainforest or tampons to demonstrate the importance of girls' confidence) or spread the word by using a pre-designed hashtag or simply passing on a video. Thus, to simply ask women what meaning they make of this type of content would be a job half done.

Celia Lury suggests that this type of social marketing requires us to view the relationship between producer and consumer as a relationship based on exchange, and not merely see it in terms of stimulus-response. The mere presence of corporations on social media signifies this change (Banet-Weiser, 2012b: 7), and these campaigns are dependent on people engaging. Therefore, it seemed necessary to include discussions about what happens *after* the content has been viewed and judged.

However, my choice to interview feminist-interested women about sharing practices is likely to have strengthened what sometimes is called the third person effect (Eisend, 2015). This set-up encouraged the women to speak about these videos' influence on others, rather than on themselves, as the decision to share factors in your own audiences online. It seemed the respondents often believed that the videos would mean more for those who might not know or care about feminism as much as they did. It was hard to avoid this approach as I was interested in both the consumption and the circulation of these texts, but I believe this limitation has somewhat mitigated the conclusions. Still, as the analysis will show, this approach revealed other dimensions, as the interviewees - perhaps unknowingly - revealed a lot about themselves and their own view on the videos while discussing third parties.

Validity: painting a fair picture of reality

"Wow, it is so interesting to hear myself talk about these things!" Melanie exclaimed midway through my interview with her. I could only agree: it was interesting to hear her reasoning, and clearly not just for me.

This realisation by Melanie pinpoints how difficult it is to get a true picture of how the interview subject judges these videos, as some opinions might be shaped then and there. According to Bruhn Jensen, one of the difficulties with interviewing is that people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say. An interview might be the first time the interviewees articulate their view on a certain phenomenon (Bruhn Jensen, 2012: 270).

It is important to consider what kind of knowledge that can be obtained through qualitative interviews. Brinkmann and Kvale separate between *knowledge collection* and *knowledge construction* where the researcher can be viewed as either a miner, mining for knowledge that is already there and merely hidden, or a traveller, exploring the topic together with the interview subject, constructing knowledge together (2015: 57). Here, I adopt a social constructionist view and view myself as a traveller. My aim has been to construct a shared understanding of this phenomenon together with these women, an approach referred to as "intersubjectivity" (ibid: 365). This has allowed me to explore the meaning of these advertisements, recognising the problems of objectivity while respecting both mine and the interviewees' subjective understandings.

However, I must recognise that not only the interviewees construct their understanding and interpretation, but that I do too. This interpretation of other people's interpretations is referred to as double hermeneutics (Brinkmann&Kvale, 2015: 354), and could justly be labelled an epistemological limitation. It cannot claim that my interpretations are any more valid than anyone else's, and that I produce knowledge any more "real" than others. This becomes even more complex when taking into account the specific context in which these understandings were constructed.

Context is crucial in understanding accounts given in interviews (Brinkmann&Kvale, 2015:103). Clearly, the interview itself is an unusual situation for most people. These women had to be taken out of their everyday context, where advertisements constantly penetrate their lives and where sharing a video can be done swiftly while lying in the sofa, and asked to lean forward and critically engage with the advertisements. This, I believe, has led to a self-fulfilled prophecy. I assume women to be critical, but I also ask them to be. The difficulty with respondents articulating their own experiences (Gray, 2003: 200) means I cannot be sure of how authentic their accounts are. It connects to Goffman's notion of impression management, which holds that people both consciously

and subconsciously manage and try to influence the perception of their image in order to give a good impression (1959).

It must also be noted that simply stating that you will share media content does not mean you actually will or would, which is another aspect to keep in mind.

However, lacking the opportunity to situate myself inside the interview subjects' minds, asking them to think out loud is the best I can do. As a researcher, I have to settle with only capturing a version of the truth and then represent this for others to consider (Gray, 2003: 21). Asking women was the most valid method in order to get a fair and at least party representative image of reality. The fact that I gave everyone time and opportunity to revisit topics might have increased the likelihood of their accounts being in correspondence with their true emotions. Furthermore, if every context is constructed then what makes an interview context less valid than any other?

Ethical considerations

The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002) urges researchers to consider four ethical principles when conducting a study: providing the interview subjects with proper *information* regarding the study and their participation (informationskravet), obtaining their *consent* (samtyckeskravet), protecting their *confidentiality* (konfidentialitetskravet), and to only *use* the data for research purposes (nyttjandekravet).

All women were informed of the terms of their involvement before the interviews. They were informed of the total sample size, and I loosely explained the aim of the study, but could not give exact parameters as I was not certain of which direction this study would take at that stage.

Consent was obtained verbally. Two participants were minors, but since they were both over the age of 15 their parents' permission was not needed in accordance with Vetenskapsrådet's recommendations (2002: 9).

All women were granted anonymity and therefore their names have been changed in this thesis. While the results were discussed in detail with my supervisor, and more broadly with a student friend, I would not refer to the women by their full name or in any way give information that could reveal who they were.

I was open with the fact that while the women were granted both anonymity and confidentiality, the interviews would be transcribed and their accounts interpreted and analysed by me. All interviewees were offered to read the transcripts to make sure these were loyal to their statements, as well as listen to the recordings from their own interviews. The majority of them availed of this.

Beyond these principles, I have considered the ethical consequences of my own position as a feminist woman. I share many attributes with the women interviewed, but we are still different people with different feminisms at hand. To think that our shared gender would mean that I understand them any better than a male counterpart would, would be an oversimplification of the female identity – precisely what I have tried to sidestep in this thesis.

Related to that, I have reflected on how much of myself I should let shine through in the interviews. In many ways these interviews were like conversations, which is common for qualitative interviews (Brinkmann&Kvale, 2015: 27). However, even though it can be described as a conversation there is a power dimension that must be acknowledged, when one person controls the recordings, takes the material home and interprets it (ibid: 37). While reading the transcripts it dawned on me that I had often shared my own personal stories during the interview. Perhaps this made them open up more, as it would make the interview even more conversation-like, but is it ethical? Did I use myself and my own feminism as a bargaining chip to get more from them?

In all fairness, I do think that all these women had enough awareness of the situation that prevented me from involuntarily taking advantage.

The videos: four examples

To give the reader an understanding of what type of videos that were discussed, four of them[8] are described below.

Always' "Like a girl"

Part of Always' #LikeAGirl campaign, which is an "epic battle to stop the drop in confidence girls experience during puberty" (Always, 2016), this video shines light on young girls' self-esteem.

In the advertisement, a number of adults and teens in a TV studio are asked by the director to run, fight and throw "like a girl". The participants do so in an overly girly manner, thus ridiculing girls. Next, young girls come in and are asked to perform the same actions. When they do it, however, they do not pretend or exaggerate. They simply do it as they normally would, putting their best effort into it. "When did doing something like a girl become an insult?" Always asks, and goes on to claim that the company wants to change that (Always, 2014). This message directly echoes the one conveyed in Iris Young's article "Throwing like a girl", in which she argues that girls grow up falsely learning that they are less physically capable than boys, thus making the phenomenon of "throwing like a girl" culturally and socially constructed (2005).

This advertisement won an Emmy for outstanding commercial in 2015 (Diaz, 2015), and SheKnows Media's award for best femvertising video in the category "Next generation" (Monllos, 2015). It has over 61 million views on Youtube, along with almost 40 000 comments, and a total of 80 million views worldwide (Griner&Ciambriello, 2015). When it was showed during Super Bowl in 2014 it was declared the winner of the evening by social media analysts as it received over 400 000 mentions on various social media platforms within just a few hours (Bayley, 2015).

Dove's "Real beauty sketches"

This video is part of Dove's campaign for real beauty, aiming to make women realise their natural beauty (Dove, 2016).

In the video, a forensic artist with experience from the FBI sketches pictures of a number of women, based on how they describe themselves to him. He then draws new pictures of the same women, but this time based on how strangers describe them. When the women are brought in to see the result they realise they have not understood how others see them. The video ends with the words "You are more beautiful than you think" (Dove US, 2013).

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8 The remaining eleven videos are briefly explained in appendix III.

This video has been viewed more than 165 million times and was the most shared video advertisement in 2013. It brought home 19 awards at the Cannes Lions, including the Titanium Grand Prix and the price for "Best use of social media" (Siddiqi, 2013). It also won the American marketing award "the Grand Effie" and a "Grand Brand Genius" from Adweek (McMains, 2014).

Barbie's "Imagine the possibilities"

This video is part of Barbie's "You can be anything"-campaign, with the proclaimed aim to empower young girls in their discovery of themselves (Barbie, 2016).

In the video, a number of girls are shown in adult situations; guiding a group through a museum, teaching at university and coaching a football team. Lines like "the dog brain is smaller than the human brain, cause there is no high school for the dog" and "knees up like a unicorn!" make the adults around these young girls giggle in excitement. At the end of the video, the viewer is made to realise that the girls are in fact only imagining these situations with the help of her Barbie dolls. The video ends with the words "When a girl plays with Barbie, she imagines everything she can become" (Barbie, 2015).

On Youtube, this video has been viewed over 20 million times. YouTube Ads Leaderboard selected it as one of the most iconic ads of 2015, and it won Youtube's advertisement contest in the category "TheYouTubeAd That Restores Your Faith in Humanity Category" (Mattel Inc, 2015).

Verizon's "Inspire her mind"

Verizon, an American broadband and telecommunications company, launched the advertisement "Inspire her mind" in 2014 to encourage girls' love for science, engineering and maths. It sought to address the gap between the amount of girls interested in science in school, and the few who actually pursue it as a career.

In this video, girls are shown doing different adventurous things and being discouraged as a result. A girl handling a drill is told to hand that to her brother, a girl climbing outside is warned her dress might get dirty, and a girl who built a mini solar system is told that "this science project has gone too far". At the end of the video, a teenage girl approaches a poster framed in glass, advertising a science fair. The viewer might think she is contemplating attending, but instead she uses the glass as a mirror while putting on lip gloss. The video, seemingly directed towards parents, asks its audience if it isn't time we start telling girls that they are pretty brilliant too (Verizon Wireless, 2014).

The video has been viewed just over 4 million times on YouTube.

Tool or theft? Exploring the reactions towards femvertising

In this chapter it will be my attempt to present the variety of reactions these women expressed, while also illustrating common patterns. In doing so, I hope to succeed in balancing between letting every woman leave her stamp on my conclusions and also highlight the many similarities in their approaches to this phenomenon.

Almost every woman interviewed had come across one or several of these videos before, or were at least familiar with a campaign (most often Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty). Some women had already shared videos after first seeing them, or said they would when asked in the interview. It became clear, however, that sharing these videos does not merely come down to the quality of the content but also on your digital behaviour. As Maja, 16, replied when I asked if she would share one of the videos: "No. It's a good video so I don't really know why. But it's against a habit", or Ann, 26, who said that she did not need a video or a hashtag to make a political statement.

The belief in one's own power to influence online varied greatly between the women, ranging from Alexandra, 17, who believed that every individual's action online has an impact, and Cecilia, 30, who stated that "our worlds are only as big as our Instagram feeds", to Anita, 25, who said that since everyone shares so much it is unnecessary to do it yourself as "no one can be bothered to read".

Only two women stated that they would not share advertisements out of principle to not run errands for corporations. For the other 12, this was secondary to the message the advertisement carried, often with a reasoning that it is too hard to avoid passing on messages that benefit someone else. For them, it was not the format that was of importance, but instead how much value that was transmitted through its message.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first will centre on advertising as a feminist resource, and the second on the ambivalent reactions these videos generated. These were the two strongest themes emerging from the data.

Advertising as a (compromised) feminist resource

The first part of the analysis will discuss how these videos were viewed and referred to as resources, albeit compromised resources, and how discussions about sharing them or not revealed what potential they might carry.

This comment from Melanie, a freelance lecturer and feminist activist, highlights a theme running through the interviews: the belief that this version of feminism might reach non-feminists:

Everything that reaches people who might not read or aren't interested is a huge progress that contributes incredibly much to society. Because then you invite those questions and thoughts into areas where the discussions might never have been held, in front of the TV on a weekend or with the family. I really think that has a lot more power than books or lecturers.

There's a certain kind of people who come to my lectures, they have a certain knowledge, they are somewhat interested. So if you can reach out with such simple means, it will do everything in the world.

(Melanie, 23)

The hopefulness that Melanie expresses here was carried by *every* woman interviewed; that when feminism infiltrates advertising, a genre of the media often considered invasive and hard to avoid, it has the chance of awakening an interest in someone, somewhere.

A feminism packaged in a way that makes the ideology and its values easy to understand was believed to have the potential to "open eyes" (Maja, Ann, Joanna, Cecilia, Stina), "wake people" (Alice), "switch on a light-bulb" (Alexandra), "awaken a thought" (Julia), "create awareness" (Viola, Sara) and "put thoughts in motion" (Maria). This made many of the women positive to sharing one or several of the videos, as spreading this content means participating in awakening others from their ignorance. It seems the ability to possibly make a difference – even if just reaching one or two people in your network – was a strong reason for this type of engagement. Always' video "Like a girl" stood out as an advertisement believed to be able to have this impact, often credited for being well made, clear and powerful.

Those who wanted to share a video wanted to do so not only to inspire and strengthen like-minded people, but also with the hope that these commodified feminist texts could stimulate others to re-evaluate their views on gender roles and feminism. Many women had specific people in mind who they felt should see it, but as these examples illustrate, the influence they sought varied:

I would have hoped that people saw it and started thinking. Especially people who might need to.
Are there those people on your Facebook?
I think so. People who think feminism is just for girls who harass men, who haven't gotten a clue what it's about. I would really like them to see this.

(Alexandra, 17, about Always' "Like a girl")

I have shared it on Facebook, this "Run like a girl".
Why?
Partly so that others in my surrounding, women, can feel identification and get the eye-opener I got. That we constantly have to hear this […] And I was moved and thought others would like to see it. And also that there are people around me who need to see it, who need these three minutes to piece it together with other things.

(Stina, 25, about Always' "Like a girl")

One of my sisters is quite... She loves stuff like changing tires on the car. Like all those things that actually

aren't... Like building shacks out in the forest, those things that aren't super feminine. I think it would be good to show her this, to like, show her that it's okay, that there's nothing wrong with it.

<p align="right">(Maja, 16, about Verizon's "Inspire her mind")</p>

That these advertisements could both strengthen women, as well as help mainstream the debate, was echoed in many interviews. Some women were more enthusiastic than others, like Melanie above, who thought that if the challenging of norms in advertising was done in the right way it could "do everything in the world" and that we should not view advertising merely as "a crook within capitalism" but try to view it as an asset too. Others were more careful in their optimism, like Alice, 35, who feared that her audiences on Facebook would stay in their anti-feminist bubble regardless, but that she would still share Verizon's "Inspire her mind", feeling that her responsibility ended there.

Not one woman thought that these videos would revolutionise the world, but many seemed to put them in their feminist tool box and think of them as a potential resource to use alongside others.

As touched upon in the literature review, the postfeminist generation is often blamed for being too focused on individual pursuits and for not caring enough about the common goals of feminism (Showden, 2009). This is encapsulated in many of these campaigns, where the empowerment aimed for is personal and individual, and not collective and civic (Banet-Weiser, 2012b:17), urging women to improve their self-esteem, take up more space and realise their inner and natural beauty. This is criticised by many (see for example Crymble, Gill, Lazar and McRobbie) and used as an example of why this commodified feminism cannot contribute to any "real" social change. However, as Budgeon (2001) concludes after interviewing young women about feminism, the individual perspective does not always emerge at the expense of the collective. Rather, the two perspectives co-exist.

This was evident here too. While some women said they felt empowered on a personal level, feeling strengthened (Maja), a "hell yeah"-feeling (Viola), stoked (Alice) and inspired to change (Alexandra), the majority of women spoke about the empowerment of *others*, as Cecilia, 30, clearly expresses here with regards to Always' "Like a girl":

There's a message in it that's damn power... what do you say? Empowering.
Do *you* feel empowered?
Good question. I feel like it's more directed towards younger girls, but that's also because I feel like I'm already aware of these issues.

Partly, this could be due to the third-person effect (Eisend, 2015), and that these women perceive the advertisements as having a bigger effect on other people than on themselves. However, talking

about these videos as resources to pass around to reach, convince and, perhaps most importantly *invite* suggests a different kind of empowerment. It seems self-empowerment does not have to be ruled off as an empty ploy that will not benefit the collective, but can also be viewed as a collectivising force strengthening the movement, democratising it through accessibility. The fact that this feminism has been packaged and made easier is in itself empowering to those who are not already accepted into the feminist circle.

When the women speak about how these advertisements can influence *others* they are hinting at an empowered ability to nourish their own movement and standpoints with new recruits, and should thus be considered a counter-weight to the belief that this use of feminism merely enables a meaningless self-empowerment reached through consumption.

 Sharing content online reflects one's judgement of its value, which is why this dimension of the analysis is so revealing. Of interest here is not how the videos might influence others, but how these women viewed the videos' prospective and how this in turn made them act. As Jenkins et al argue, the reasons to spread content online are multiple and complex which is why speaking of content as "viral" fails to recognise the decision-making happening in front of every screen (2013: 20-21). They argue that communities tap into creative resources available online and use them for their own purposes, pursuing their own agendas (ibid: 292), which is evident here.

While there were variations among the women with regards to *how much* these advertisements could impact, everyone carried a hopefulness that maybe it could influence slightly. Even Amanda, who was highly sceptical of this marketing strategy, had a somewhat positive outlook:

Hopefully [the videos] can plant something, even if it doesn't impact so much in-depth. It could plant something that someone else picks up. If there are loads of them and you become fed with them, one could hope that some woman sees them and wants to get involved. And maybe there is a sensible organisation or network who picks them up and then they get another perspective and become more... get their eyes opened and get a more critical perspective.

(Amanda, 26)

Here, Amanda displays remarkable resourcefulness by opposing this commercial use of feminism, but still seeing possibilities when companies choose to do it. The idea that a woman would see advertisements carrying feminist messages, turn to a feminist organisation nearby and exercise her critical thinking cannot be described as anything but pure optimism.

Throughout the interview, Amanda was adamant that we do not have to accept capitalism and roll over, but rather learn to live with it and make the best of it. The smaller actors in society, like the grass-root movements (Amanda herself was involved in at least two), could pick up the pieces that

advertisers leave behind, walk on the road the corporations have paved, filled with people who have gotten their eyes opened to feminism but who require more stimuli to become a true activist. This implies that even the more radical feminist, eager to revolutionise the patriarchal structures that sustain the current gender order, is willing to work within the existing framework and even sees ways of benefiting from it.

"It feels very American but you probably have to accept that[9]"

Many women were indeed positive towards feminism in advertising, seeing the combination as suitable and in some cases even necessary. One factor in particular generated this response: its reach, both in terms of the number of eyeballs but also in terms of reaching new audiences.

Right now, we are so far from being equal that the feminist struggle, and the struggle for gender equality, probably has to be fought on several different levels. If a company chooses to go into it and speak out, demonstrate inequalities and attitudes, then why not? They are already such big players, companies, they are already out there. Why not use the reach they have to reach out with a good message?

(Ann, 26)

Those who are already adherents probably find lots of criticism for all sorts of things here. But with new target groups they might start to question or "oh, why is it like this?", and like, that's the biggest strength with this. Because it's such a simple format, watching a video for a couple of minutes.

(Maria, 26)

All women recognised that this version of feminism is not perfect, and that it has as its main purpose to sell products. In relation to different videos, this commercialised feminism was described as "easily absorbed" (Alice), "superficial" (Amanda), "not feminism full-out" (Stina), "not very challenging" (Joanna), "disingenuous" (Melanie), "Americanized" (Maria), "simple", "twisted" (Anita), "mild" and "lacking political force" (Julia). Yet, despite this, all women agreed that these alterations do not automatically mean it is no longer feminism. With regards to different advertisements, this commercialised feminism was considered to stand for one part, or one version, of the movement and ideology and therefore at least partly representative.

Common for all women but one (Amanda) was that they recognised, with mixed amounts of displeasure, disappointment and pragmatism that feminism might have to be adjusted in order to reach new target groups.

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9   Maria, 26, about Always' "Like a girl".

You get a better analysis in an article but if people aren't gonna read that anyway, because it's not as easily accessible, then maybe it's better to share films like these than to do nothing at all. No one has got the patience any more, me neither […] I would rather see film clips without an aim to sell behind, but this might be a necessary adjustment to make it easily accessible.

<div align="right">(Julia, 22)</div>

I might not agree with myself at the end of this argument, but I do think that feminism could be marketed a bit more, not commercialised, but what the hell, become a bit more adjusted to fit the market [...] Ultimately, if you're to push a political campaign or struggle you need to be able to sell it, get people into it, otherwise you won't get anywhere.

<div align="right">(Cecilia, 30)</div>

That lots of academics are sitting on a lot of difficult words is not going to help someone who hasn't even gotten half a foot in. But if you see it in a simple format where my little sister can talk about it just as well as my mother or my brother, then that is where change can happen, we can meet and discuss something […] My five year old brother could probably absorb this message without a problem.

<div align="right">(Melanie, 23, about Always' "Like a girl")</div>

This commodification as a necessity also ties in with Hains' study (2013), and with Karlyn's experiences in the classroom (2006), that commercialised and popularised feminism can be a way of putting gender on the table, and that a "lighter" feminism can function as an introduction to feminism. While many women noted that the feminism was skewed, this was not viewed as something purely negative. Instead it was often viewed as the reason that it could succeed in reaching more people. Advertisers package, dramatize and make it a bit cheesy, but as Alice noted "they know what they are doing" and "they build it up so nicely".

When van Zoonen (Zoonen, 2005) discusses entertaining citizenship, a citizenship made pleasurable by mixing politics with popular culture, she does not include advertising as a genre within the popular. However, I would argue that her theory still has value, as products of popular culture and advertising involve many similar ingredients, such as dramatization, realism and simplification. Both are cultural products with monetary purposes, borrowing from our everyday life while supplying us with inspiration on how to live (O'Donohoe, 2001). Thus, when van Zoonen argues that popular culture "needs to be acknowledged as a relevant resource for political citizenship […] that can make citizenship more pleasurable, more engaging, and more inclusive" (2005: 151), one could transpose this idea to the relationship of feminism and advertising.

Many women did however, like Amanda above, express concern that the feminist interest sparked by these advertisements might not be very deep. van Zoonen uses political drama series as an example of how popular culture can be a resource for political engagement, arguing that shows like The West Wing can help people understand and reflect on politics (2005). One could justly argue

that a political intrigue running over multiple episodes has more potential to create a substantial interest. However, a limitation I have pointed out elsewhere (Jalakas, 2014a), is that political drama series often attract viewers with a pre-existing political interest and a high level of education. Thus, if a prerequisite is that people are already somewhat interested it is perhaps only reaching the already inaugurated.

Is it possible that short advertisements, often shown to us whether we like it or not, could have greater potential in preaching to the unconverted? After all, the first step towards combating unfair power relations, norms and structures in society is to be made aware of them. Many women directly stated, or hinted at, the influence they believed advertising has on themselves and on society as a whole, claiming that it sets the agenda (Ann), feeds us with stereotypes (Julia), and possesses power over us (Viola). That advertising is influential due to its pervasiveness was brought up in almost every interview, just as Gill suggests that "adverts are the heart of our social existence" (2007b: 73). This is probably one of the key factors contributing to advertising, above any other type of media content, having received so much feminist critique.

It begs the question: if we recognise that negative influences form advertising exist, must we also logically recognise that positive influences can too?

This could explain why these advertisements are considered powerful resources. If we accredit advertising as one of the main suppliers of norms and stereotypes, change must start there. If advertising is seen as an intrusive element in our lives, it could also be seen as an intrusive ideological alarm clock awakening people from their non-feminist slumber.

Ambivalence – a tug of war between cynicism and hope

While it may be concluded that feminism made light can function as a doorway to the movement, this would surely be the case for any similar short video managing to sugar-coat and simplify the complexity that makes up any ideology. The fact that these videos are advertisements for everything from lotions to tampons to cars to dolls makes them more paradoxical, as the very existence of them in many ways strengthens anti-feminist structures. As pointed out by other authors, some corporations using this strategy are invested in maintaining female body dissatisfaction (Banet-Weiser, 2012a; Gill&Elias, 2014).

This brings me to the second theme: ambivalence. As noted among other audiences too (Duffy, 2010; Taylor et al, 2014; Millard, 2009; Stokvold & Andersson, 2013) these advertisements bring forth contradictory feelings, even if not always manifested as clearly as in this quote:

But hell, if I feel empowered? No. Although, it is also empowering that one of the largest brands in the world wants to bring up these issues, or build on them. It's damn cheap that they want to build on it but, I don't know, no, my spontaneous... I think I like it actually. But I'm not agreeing with myself. I think it's difficult.

<div align="right">(Cecilia, 30)</div>

By discussing the ambivalence these campaigns generate I hope to highlight their paradoxical and complex nature, as they mix good with bad, feminist with anti-feminist, in a way that makes their value harder to judge. This is made even more complicated when taking into account that we all express our feminisms differently and have different feminist yardsticks available to us.

Many studies show that we are suspicious and cynical when watching ads, but that our attitudes are often contradictory. Positive feelings coexist with disbelief (O'Donohoe, 2001). As stated earlier, I do not wish to condemn these advertisements because they are paradoxical, and therefore can be considered manipulative, but rather explore what makes us so ambivalent towards them, what hides within that ambivalence, and why we struggle to unpack them in an adequate way.

When disbelief meets hope: advertising literacy at use

Advertisements are inherently polysemic and open to multiple readings and interpretations, not necessarily consistent ones. We cannot experience advertising in isolation from our outside world. O'Donohoe suggests that our attitudes are shaped by our beliefs about how advertising can influence society, as well as our experiences of advertising (2001: 93).

This was noticeable, as many interviewees drew on previous experiences as a way of judging these videos.

When I saw that it was Always I thought "oh, typical", but on the other hand I guess it's good that a company like this does this type of advertising and not the typical "now we have some blue liquid in which we dip the tampons".
So this is still better than what we are used to?
Yes, absolutely. I would absolutely say so.

<div align="right">(Maria, 26)</div>

Specifically with regards to car commercials this feels very positive cause you've seen these old car advertisements where they've tried to sell the car with a woman lying on the bonnet. And here they have tried to sell a car to active, adventurous women instead, and they are like strong, adventurous and do different things.

<div align="right">(Joanna, 25, about Ram Trucks' "Courage is already inside")</div>

I'd much rather see this than many other advertisements that are sexist and where women are used as decoration. It feels better to see this. Rather a mild but pretty meaningless feminism than sexist, absolutely. That's a pleasant development.

<div align="right">(Julia, 22)</div>

I'm very positive to Dove because of their campaign. I've been completely fooled by that! Because they include women in different sizes, in different colours. As soon as I, who have a different skin colour, see a company, a product, make advertising that includes different types of people and where I am represented, I become positive. Because it's so rare.

<div align="right">(Ann, 26)</div>

In the same way that women interviewed in previous audience studies have done, the women interviewed here compared these advertisements to others and then concluded that this is one step in the right direction. "The alternative" was often mentioned in one way or another, signifying a cumulative exposure to advertising. In connection to that pattern, it was also common that the women pragmatically reasoned that products will be advertised regardless, so advertisers can rather do it in this way than in the more common way using degrading stereotypes. Viola, 31, even suggested that "if there is anything companies can do, it's to counteract all the years of negative advertising".

This implies a rooted idea of advertising as a negative influential power in society, with slim models, stereotypes of femininity and a sexualisation of women's bodies. Against that backdrop, these campaigns easily impress, as noted by for example Murray (2013) and Gill & Elias (2014). That simple messages like "you are beautiful as you are" (Dove), "girls are just as capable as boys" (Always) and "girls are courageous" (Ram trucks) impress so easily paints quite a sad picture of the advertising women have become used to.

The disbelief these women seem to have against "standard" advertising is pinned against the hopefulness that these new advertisements carry; a promise of change. Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that corporations capitalise on our ambivalence (2012b: 218) and that could well be true. Many of the women displayed both scepticism and enthusiasm when reading these commodified feminist texts. It seems it is at the heart of this dialectic that their views on this phenomenon are negotiated and constructed: where cynicism meets hope.

Ann, 26, captured this when asked if she believes that Always truly finds the issue of girls' self-esteem important: "It would be cynical to think something else. I have to hope that, otherwise I think they can stop" and at the very end of the interview she stated that when everything in the world seems so terrible, these videos spread hope. Ann was far from the only one demonstrating a balancing act between a fostered cynicism and a hopefulness. In fact, hope pierced through many of the accounts.

Do you think that this message can change anything outside of the video?
Yes, I actually think so. Maybe not concretely but it's a start of something, maybe. Maybe start... Well, it's a

good basis for something else. But it's not like a real action. But it's good that it exists.

<div align="right">(Anita, 25, about Always' "Like a girl")</div>

Is it a problem that feminism is used to sell? Is it to take advantage of these messages?
Yes, of course. But I try to see it as not taking advantage of [the message] to sell, but trying to spread it and *also* sell. But of course, you get a bit fooled by it […] But at the same time, if other brands see that [Dove] succeeds with this, it will create a positive spiral.

<div align="right">(Maja, 16)</div>

Do you think that Always has a genuine will to change?
Well, I hope so. I really hope so.
But you're sceptical?
I'm just... I think I have become... People always say that I am naive. I have become more bitter. A little more cynical […] But regardless, I think it's great that they are doing this.

<div align="right">(Alice, 35)</div>

Sarah Banet-Weiser suggests that ambivalence does not have to be understood as a problem, defined by doubt and lack of certainty, but could instead be viewed as a carrier of a generative power and potential. She posits that feelings like hope, anxiety, pleasure and desire can be nurtured within ambivalence (2012b: 218). Banet-Weiser has an optimistic view on our ambivalence towards branding and marketing, since it means that consumers create meaning that extends beyond the economic goal of the content. This makes our response to these campaigns both unpredictable and unexpected. This can be tied to Jenkins et al's notion that online users pursue their own agendas with the material available, using it to fit their own needs (2013: 294).

Judging from these interviews, it seems that some of these advertisements are carriers of more than a feminist feel good-message aimed to sell, but that they are also vehicles of hope, filled with promises of a better and more equal future. Perhaps that is precisely what feminists of this generation need so that is what they will extract.

Feminism undone – for who?

The women's reactions varied greatly depending on which video they saw during the interview, and how it fit into their own context. Some missed the mark, were not viewed as feminist at all or did a poor job in conveying an important message, while others could be great, generate identification and the comforting feeling of "it isn't just me" (Stina).

To be able to recognise yourself in the video was an important factor by which to judge it.

I feel I almost wanna start bawling.
Why?
I guess it's because of the struggle I've had myself. I've always had to fight for the right to exist within my

area. I started thinking computing was fun when I was pretty young, and then people started to tease me […] It's very painful. I would like other girls not to have to go through that.

(Alice, 35, after seeing Verizon Wireless' "Inspire her mind")

It bothered me a bit because it was so white, that's all I could think about. It's a fun and catchy advertisement but it falls flat for me when all I see are cookie-cutter white children, with big eyes and flowing blond hair. I find it difficult to have an opinion about this.

(Melanie, 23, after seeing HelloFlo's "Camp Gyno")

I've seen this before and I react the same way now and almost begin to cry because... They have found something. It's powerful.

(Stina, 25, after seeing Always' "Like a girl")

When Stina says "they have found something" this can be interpreted as "they have found something that rings true for me", just as Alice clearly expresses. For Melanie, when she does not feel represented it becomes a feminism that is not hers, nor is it *for* her. She is not included and therefore cannot judge it.

Experiencing identification and feeling moved appears to be important reasons to pass on the video in your social network. You were moved, so you see potential in others being moved too. As Alice put it; "at least no one will be left unaffected" as a response to why she would share Always' video "Like a girl".

Clearly, however, and hardly surprising, content moves us in different ways. For example, Cecilia thought Dove's video "Legacy" was "tremendously provoking", as she felt it blamed women for badly influencing their daughters by projecting their bad self-esteem on them. Viola, on the other hand, said she felt very moved by it as it reminded her of her own mother. Viola recognised that the video might strengthen current gender roles, but said she still wanted to share the video with the hope that her friends would see it and stop complaining about their thighs and muffin tops in front of their children.

Similarly, Julia disliked Ram Trucks' "Courage inside" as she felt it was trying to push the idea that for women to succeed they must become like men, while Alexandra thought it would be great if this video was spread as it could loosen up the strict rules of what a woman or man must be like. Melanie considered Special K's "Own it" disingenuous and meaningless, while Maja thought it was the best one of all the videos she saw and wanted to share it with her friends to help them feel better about their own bodies. Amanda was disappointed that it was Always, out of all actors in society, that had come out with the message that girls are just as capable as boys and saw it as proof that

money equals power. Viola, on the other hand, thought it was great to see a company get actively involved and thought it could strengthen these positive feminist values.

It was evident that each woman extracted different meanings from different videos, depending on how it related to their lives and personal context. This illustrates the difficulties of making generalisations.

This brings me to the theory of feminism undone. Both Gill (2007a) and McRobbie (2009) argue that while feminism is taken into account, many sexist patterns persist in media, popular culture and advertising. In this way feminism can be said to become undone, as displaying an awareness of it thwarts critique and thus disarms the movement, while the same old sexism and discriminatory patterns are kept alive.

To some extent the women interviewed expressed criticism of this kind. One video in particular brought forward this concern; Barbie's "Imagine the possibilities". Here, Barbie's campaign serves as a useful example of a mismatch between corporation and the feminist cause. This again hints at a cumulative exposure to brands and advertising, as a previous dislike for Barbie as both brand and product makes it difficult to like their advertisements. The response "I liked it until I saw it was Barbie" became comically reoccurring in the interviews.

Evidently it is important who is behind the campaign, and how feminism permeates the rest of the company. A feminist message simply does not match a doll who is so thin she would be considered in danger if real and with feet who will not allow her to stand up without wearing heals. If Barbie equals feminism, then what has feminism become?

Always opens up the discussion without saying that the solution is Always, but Barbie says that "buy Barbie and we'll solve this". This is to steal the discussion about girls and women's rights and equal opportunities for consumption […] It is as if they equate Barbie with the struggle for feminism and gender equality. It becomes very strange.

(Ann, 26)

Does it feel problematic that Barbie tries to take this feminist role?
Oh yes, very very problematic. Barbie stands for everything that our feminist generation has gone against. It should be pink, you should talk with a cute voice, have a dream boyfriend, wait for Prince Charming. The norm of what a family should look like […] Everything packaged in pink.

(Melanie, 23)

"You can be anything", I guess it's a good message. But I'm a bit surprised that it's Barbie who comes out with it. Because it's not exactly what I think of when I think of Barbie, that that's what they promote, what they stand for. I connect it to a freakishly thin... a doll with inhuman proportions.

(Maja, 16)

The reactions to Barbie's campaign highlight a crucial aspect of these women's responses. That even if there is a light feminist message conveyed, it will not be swallowed without critical reflection. This shows that the women have a set of criteria to be considered, and these criteria were surprisingly similar. For example, visibility of the product appeared as a factor, and there was general discontent with the Barbie doll being in focus in this advertisement while other videos (Always and Dove primarily) were credited for not including the product in the video. Furthermore, the history of messages that the company has put out in the past played in. Cecilia noted that "Barbie has an incredible uphill to climb", and Viola compared it to Dove who she felt was more serious as they had released multiple videos of this kind, demonstrating a commitment to these issues.

Based on previous knowledge, the women made judgement calls. This shows real contextual thinking, to the point where you are thinking about the time-line of the corporation and your own relationship to their products. There was a perceived disingenuity with Barbie, but more trust in Dove and Always.

However, what makes matters more complex when speaking of feminism undone is the diversity of feminism today. As Gill posits, "there is no stable, unchanging feminist perspective from which to make a cool appraisal of contemporary gender in the media" (2007b: 2). After interviewing fourteen Swedish women about feminism in advertising, I would say Gill is absolutely right. The short examples above showing how the women extract different meanings from the advertisements illustrate that. Therefore, when applying McRobbie's notion of feminism undone one must recognise its limitation of relying on there being one feminism to be undone.

Stina, 25, pinpoints the complexity of using this theory when discussing "Like a girl":

Is feminism and advertising a combination that works?
Like this it does. I think so. But in many cases it doesn't. It still becomes stereotypes.
I know many people who do not want to identify as a woman. How do they fit into this advertisement? Now we could see dark skinned women, but no transgender. Now [Always] takes a stance, does that mean they take an active stance against transgender? Or forgot them? Regardless it becomes excluding.
It depends on which feminism one wants to pair with advertising.

Melanie and Amanda reason in similar ways:

Not everyone is represented, because everyone who is on their period cannot run or hit hard. We live in a society that continues to be very simplistic in its intersectional analysis […] As an asthmatic I didn't run very fast as a child. There are so many perspectives.

(Melanie, 23, about Always' "Like a girl")

Dove falls on the fact that besides being a multimillion corporation, all women are extremely beautiful. Even

if they have different body shapes, the reason that their bodies are accepted is because they are beautiful. Everyone looks very good in that film. It's the same in the Always advertisement.

It is still just one type of woman?

Yes, exactly. Beauty forgives everything.

<div align="right">(Amanda, 26)</div>

It is clear that when speaking of feminism undone, it depends on who's feminism you refer to, just as Stina suggests. Doing feminism does not mean doing it for everyone. Undoing it does not mean undoing it completely. Therefore these advertisements might be a case of doing feminism for some while undoing it for others.

When spoilt for choice with media content we do have the ability to cherry pick online depending on our own needs and agendas. Within the ambivalence generated by these advertisements hides a set of criteria based on previous knowledge mixed with the emotions and feelings of identification that these videos generate. Corporations can surely capitalise on that, but viewers in turn can use it to their advantage, extracting the meaning they need and use the content to pursue their own goals. Another option, of course, is to opt out and choose not to engage at all.

Conclusion

This thesis has been an attempt to shine light on what it means for the individual person to live in a world where brands are almost everywhere, and where feminist engagement is blurred with consumption. The aim has been to illuminate how advertising fits into the feminist movement, by asking young Swedish women how they make sense of a number of advertisement videos utilising feminist values and if they might interact with the videos on social media. After interviewing fourteen Swedish women some clear patterns have emerged. In this concluding chapter the main results from this research will be presented in relation to my research questions.

How can we understand the reactions and actions generated by these advertising campaigns?

There was a tendency in the interviews to speak about these videos as resources, as a political tool used to both strengthen like-minded people but also to recruit and invite more people into feminism and into a critical awareness of gender inequality. It is highly plausible that this tendency was strengthened by the fact that much of the conversation centred around sharing the content on social media platforms, which invited the women to factor in their own audiences online. It is not surprising that one's decision to share content is based at least partly on your belief and hope that someone will be influenced by it. Research even suggests that to persuade and teach others are two of the main reasons to share content online (Berger, 2014).

Still, it was evident that the main focus for these women was the empowerment of others, as well as the inclusion of others. The empowerment of oneself had to make way for that, and it was common that the women reasoned that while the videos might be eye-openers for others, they already had their eyes opened themselves. Another layer of empowerment emerged however, when the women discussed the sharing of these videos. It seems the possibility to share the material and use it for your own purpose can provide an empowered ability to perform a political action online, and in doing so strengthening the feminist movement.

This is interesting, as much of the existing literature within this area criticises these campaigns for being too focused on individual pursuits. In contrast to that, emerging from these interviews was a clear concern for the collective. This supports Budgeon's idea of young feminists performing a kind of micro-politics in their everyday life (2001), struggling for feminism on individual terms but with the collective at heart. While I sought to explore these women's own reactions to these videos, the conversations often ended up involving other parties too.

All women expressed hope and resourcefulness when discussing these videos, seeing them as

carriers of a lightly packaged feminism that could be easily absorbed by almost everyone. The videos were often contrasted with heavy books, academic conversations and difficult political reasoning. Even Amanda, the most sceptical woman, saw possibilities and found ways of working through and dealing with the existence of these campaigns, even though she was adamant that some people would still enjoy reading a doctoral thesis on the subject and that feminism must not be simplified to enjoy success. Nevertheless, it was evident that the majority saw merit in feminism existing in varying formats. As Alice put it: "Everyone has the right to their process and you must respect that […] When you make it so easily accessible everyone has a chance to keep up." This type of reasoning was common, and statements like this shows a great concern for others.

However, the women also expressed sceptical, often ambivalent and even cynical reactions towards this marketing trend, often referring to advertising as not only a pervasive genre aimed to push us into consumption, but also as a reinforcer of negative stereotypes and body ideals. As I have argued, these reactions seem to stem from an intuitive idea of what advertising is and what it stands for. It is hardly a coincidence that advertising is so often analysed from a gender perspective and viewed as the most disturbing cultural product by many feminist writers (Zoonen, 1994). We are fostered into a critical understanding of advertising since we know that what it seeks is to make us buy products and services often expendable, and that while corporations may claim to want to improve the world, in a capitalist world: money trumps everything. All women showed an awareness of this.

However, as I have also tried to illustrate, the reactions and actions were underpinned by an optimistic hope, both with regards to the corporations' aim but also how they might influence audiences. It did not escape anyone that the main aim is to increase revenue, but the women expressed hope that this trend could lead to real change. That hope indicates two things: that these women have a vision for the future, and that they are discontent with the present.

I believe it is in this dialectic between a cynical view on advertising and a hope for a gender equal future that these women construct their understanding of this phenomenon.

Politics is not possible without hope, since it is the hope for change that makes us come together and act (Ahmed, 2014: 184). Even if all women defined their feminisms somewhat differently they share a concern with the future, fearing that equality will not be reached yet hoping it will. Perhaps the hope displayed in these interviews is not a chosen attitude, but a mere necessity. Without it, the feminist future strived for would become impossible.

This hope, however, could also signify a sense of powerlessness. Corporations are using feminism to sell, and who are women to say they cannot? If there is money to be made it will be used, and as an individual there is little one can do to stop it. All one can do is hope that it will not bring

anything bad with it.

Along with the hope came a pragmatic resourcefulness. I think this connects to the fear detected in many interviews that good messages online drown in the media buzz and that it is hard to penetrate an arena where people share memes and videos at a rate which becomes annoying. Concision is a key word here, to be able to quickly get across a message in a world where both content and ideas are fighting for our attention, according to the logic of mediatisation. Concision seems to be the strength of these advertisements, and a reason many women were eager to pass them on in their network. The better packaged the message is, the more credible and powerful the sender is, the higher the chances that people will actually click on the link. In a way, one could argue, ideologies too fight for our attention in this constant buzz and need to be sold to us in a convincing way. This could be a reason that advertising is considered a powerful resource, as it is a genre mastering the art of conciseness.

How can we better understand the relationship between feminism and advertising through the eyes of the individual feminist?

A columnist in the British newspaper The Guardian recently wrote that the current focus on female self-empowerment and the individual focus it brings will lead to "a great big pile of nothing" and that the term itself has become disempowered (Freeman, 2016). I think this view, which is echoed in much of the literature, is an elitist and reductionist approach to this phenomenon. While we may think it is silly to suggest that women will be empowered by washing their hair with a certain brand of shampoo or playing with a Barbie doll, we should not reduce this phenomena to the use of the word empowerment but rather explore how this marketing strategy fits into the lives of women and how they extract usage from it.

While there were clear commonalities between the women's reactions to femvertising, it was evident that each woman contextualised the advertisements differently, judging them based on previous experiences of advertising and how the video fit into one's own life situation. The women extracted various meanings from the content, which speaks against any attempts to generalise female audiences engaging with these campaigns. When both media content and the human mind are complex, generalisations will fail.

The example of Barbie highlighted the women's contextual thinking, showing that while the message itself often trumped the sender of it, this did not come without limitations. It might feel okay to pass on a message for a brand, but not just any brand. The videos were judged based on the women's previous experience of both brand, product and advertising in general, making the reading of these commodified feminist texts highly individual.

It may seem fruitless and unsatisfying to land in the conclusion that "every woman makes of these advertisements what she wants and needs" and thus take polysemic readings to an extreme. Crediting every viewer with the ability to deduce positive feelings from advertising, more or less regardless of the content, is a slippery slope. Clearly, I believe that media and advertising do influence us, or else I would not care to analyse audience responses to it. However, feminism is just as individual as it is collective and it is only when we allow every woman to contextualise these videos for herself in a way that makes sense for her, that we can analyse their potential, meaning and place in our lives in a fair way.

A movement lives through people, and people find strength in various ways. A collective movement, after all, is nothing but a group of like-minded individuals. Irish writer Oscar Wilde once wrote that "individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. There lies its immense value. For what it seeks is to disturb monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine" (1891). The value of femvertising can only be reasonably judged when departing from every woman's experience, which is what I have attempted to do here. Still, among the fourteen women were many commonalities binding their responses together, where critical reflection and individual contextualisation are the two main examples.

How much value can we place on the concept that femvertising is undoing feminism?

I consider the value of this theory to be limited, simply because it rests on generalisations which I would claim are not possible to make here. When respecting each woman's individual feminism and her contextualisation of the content it becomes too easy to claim that the entirety of feminism becomes undone when feminism is used in this way. However, the theory still has value, albeit constrained, as some women were clearly uncomfortable with certain videos, feeling they rather strengthened than combated anti-feminist values. Thus, the theory should not be used in a sweeping way with regards to media's use of feminism in general, but rather only for certain specific situations. While one woman could consider a video an undoing of feminism, her friend could place an entirely different value on it.

A fair question to ask, however, is to what extent feminism will have to be changed in order to fit into the format of advertising, and what this compromise will lead to. A compromise, after all, assumes cost. As Julia pointed out in my interview with her, women *die* due to unfair gender structures and so feminism is not "a fun club or some fun trend" up for grabs for anyone who wants to sell more tampons. Will feminism benefit from being mainstreamed? Will it enjoy greater advancements in the world if it becomes more like a "fun club" easy to require membership for?

Is this a win-win situation where both advertising and feminism walk away with advances made, or will one rise above the other? It sparks the question if advertising will have the power to determine the fall of feminism, by contributing to its success in reaching the masses and therefore also being capable of contributing to make it run out of fashion.

We would need to look long-term to see if this use of feminism rebalances the ideology itself. Here, I will have to settle with channelling the optimistic hope detected when questioning these women on the matter. Interpreting their reactions to these advertisements, one would be selling feminism short if assuming it could be "destroyed" or become undone by advertising.

What can this marketing trend, and the reactions it generates, tell us about contemporary feminism?

I would argue that the pragmatic, resourceful and hopeful view on feminist advertising that emerged in these interviews says a lot about this generation of Swedish feminists. Sweden is a country often praised for its gender equality, leading the charts as one of the most equal countries in the world (World Economic Forum, 2015). The groundwork has been laid, there is little left to change legislatively and on paper women and men have the same opportunities. Still, inequality resides here just as everywhere else in the world. This status quo, seemingly so difficult to dislodge, might make feminists turn to other options and more willing to explore new paths. It hints at a fatigue of sorts, a tiredness of trying to move forward but feeling like merely running on the spot. A type of asymptotic progress.

Third-wave feminist Jennifer Baumgardner argues that most of the feminist struggle today is fought on personal frontiers (Love&Helmbrecht, 2007: 45). I do agree with her. We are not on the barricades like our mothers were during the second wave. In fact, I would argue that those barricades do not exist anymore. In my own feminist struggle I often find myself running on the spot, trying to fight for change but rarely seeing concrete results. I have tried to convince so many to join me, to see what I see, understand what I understand, and failed. I felt this feeling was echoed in these interviews, and this status quo requires hope, resourcefulness and openness to new avenues. In Sweden we are no longer fighting to change laws, but mind-sets. And that requires a whole other arsenal of tools.

While the use of this marketing strategy suggests feminism is deemed important, exciting and meaningful enough to use, the reactions towards it demonstrates a hunger among feminists for more tools to use, which in turn suggest advances towards equality are not made fast enough.

I do not wish to idolise these advertisements. It is important to stress that while these videos might invite a kind of feminist engagement, it is an engagement orchestrated by a corporation aimed to strengthen a brand. This marketing trend captures the current feminist Zeitgeist, and while feminists might use the trend for their own purposes and agendas, they are in turn being used as marketing tools by mixing their feminist activism online with brand support.

Bringing in the fourth wave of feminism

The current feminism, increasingly present online, is sometimes referred to as the fourth wave of feminism (Cochrane, 2013). Women all over the world are using social media to shed light on the oppression of women and on gender inequality. Popular feminism lives not only in drama series and advertisements, but in hashtags, blogs, Facebook groups and events, and through celebrities' online social media profiles (Banet-Weiser&Miltner, 2016). Through social media, women combat sexism (#EverydaySexism), misogyny in the gamer community (#GamerGate) and injustices in salary (#LetsDoMore). They urge men to get involved in the feminist struggle (#HeForShe), nuance the image of domestic abuse victims (#WhyIStayed) and criticise sexism in advertisements (#NotBuyingIt).

This online presence of feminism raises questions for the future, particularly when many different stakeholders are involved. Can we fairly label passing on an advertisement as a political action? If the answer is yes, then what kind of societal change can we expect from this micro-politics? Will audiences be influenced towards a feminist engagement or rather immunised towards this type of stimuli? Is this marketing trend merely a fad, with a short lifespan, or will advertisers continue to progress in their use of these values?

What adds to the curiosity of the future from a Swedish perspective is the latest results from the annual Swedish media investigation, Medieutredningen. It shows that 70 % of the Swedish public considers it completely or partly wrong to pass on advertising through your social network, but that younger generations, and particularly younger females, are far more positive towards it (Bengtsson&Johansson, 2016: 196). In line with previous research, this report shows that younger audiences are more positive both towards digital advertising and towards commodification online (ibid: 200). Furthermore, The Swedish Institute for Advertising and Media Statistics, IRM, recently stated that investments in social media marketing have never been higher, and that it is increasing at a record speed (Fredén, 2016). Combined with the fact that we spend an increasing amount of our life in the digital world, and that younger generations are leading the charts (Bengtsson&Johansson, 2016), this begs for further research within this area.

According to Korn and Kneese, the current wave of users on online social media sites, combined with the current postfeminist era, means that it is the right time to reflect on how feminists use the online world for the feminist cause (2015), which this thesis has partly done. However, this phenomenon, its influences and the ripple effects it could have deserves further exploration and would benefit from being analysed with a closer attention to the digitalisation of feminism. I would, however, urge anyone who seeks a better understanding of femvertising to be careful with condemning it before taking into account the heterogeneity of audiences and respecting the individuality within a political movement.

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"Viola". (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 25th of February.

Appendix I: List of respondents

The following women were interviewed for this study. Note that their names here have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

Maja, 16
First year high school student in Lund. Often thinks about gender equality and discusses it with friends, but does not "march in demonstrations or anything like that". Uses Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter, mainly to stay in touch with friends.

Alexandra, 17
Second year high school student in Lund. Thinks gender equality and feminism is something one should talk more about. Reflect a lot on norms and sexism. Considers advertising to be propaganda conveying strange body ideals. Uses Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter to stay in touch with friends and keep updated.

Julia, 22
Law student at Lund University. Vegan, feminist and socialist. Spends a lot of time on political engagement, and is involved in two feminist organisations. Would like to use her law degree to help women, not to help people who are after money. Does not like advertising. Uses Facebook, mainly to administrate the pages of the organisations she is involved in.

Sara, 22
Communications student at Lund University. Interested in culture, and considers advertising a form of culture with its own entertainment value. Has started thinking about gender equality quite recently, after getting to know a girl who is interested in it. Uses Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, but rarely posts anything herself on these platforms.

Melanie, 23
Feminist activist by profession. Gives lecture, speaks on the radio and attends panel debates about feminism and in particular black feminism. Post-colonialism, intersectionality and feminism are the three corner stones in her activism. Gained notoriety through Instagram, and is still very active there as well as on Facebook.

Joanna, 25
Studies development studies at Lund University. Not formally involved in any feminist organisation but reflects on these issues a lot, especially now when she has a boyfriend and thinks about her future with him. Often discusses feminism with friends. Uses Facebook, both to keep updated and to post things herself.

Stina, 25
Technician, about to start her own company. Kick boxes. Considers gender equality a natural part of her life, thinks about it often but feels like there is a long way to go. Does not like advertising as she feels it often disrupts and tries to push things on her. Uses LinkedIn and is active on Facebook but is sick of debating issues with people there.

Anita, 25
Studies media and communication at Lund University. Considers herself to be the most feminist in her circle of friends. Often thinks about advertising when abroad, especially when she goes to visit relatives in Hungary, as it is a lot more sexist there than in Sweden. Often applies a working class perspective when analysing advertisements. Watches many feminist videos on Youtube. Uses Linkedin, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Amanda, 26
Feminist and environmental activist, working at a cultural and social centre in Malmö. Involved in several grass-root organisations related to refugees, the environment and feminism. Labels herself as anti-capitalist. Uses Facebook and Instagram, to keep updated but also to post political content.

Ann, 26
Works at an organisation in Lund focusing on integration. Interested in issues to do with development and fairness. Reflects a lot about what it is like to be a woman in different situations, depending on skin colour, background or class. Uses Instagram and Facebook, the latter to find separatist forums where she can exchange views with similar-minded people.

Maria, 26
Studies psychology in Denmark but lives in Lund. Gender equality has always felt very important to her, ever since she was a child growing up with her single mother and three sisters. Has then started to reflect more on how differently men and women are treated. Uses Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Jodel.

Cecilia, 30
Works with digital marketing in Malmö. Has been a feminist since she was "tiny", and considers it a big and important part of her identity. Does not considers herself to be very active, and she is tired of feminist discussions on social media because the climate is so tough and discussions don't lead anywhere, but it was online that she first started discussing feminism as a teenager. Leans left politically. Uses Instagram and Facebook.

Viola, 31
Works with insurance in Malmö. Labels herself as sci-fi and fantasy-geek. Blogger. Applies a feminist perspective to everything, and reflects on gender roles a lot. She does not like advertising because she feels it dumbs people down. Uses Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, to talk to friends and market her sci-fi organisation.

Alice, 35
Works in IT in Malmö, and reflects on the fact that it is a male dominated field. Has long been afraid to call herself a feminist out of fear to be misunderstood, but has come to accept that she is a feminist who believes that the current gender order is damaging to all sexes.
Uses Facebook, and the chat forum IRC to talk to people about technical stuff.

Appendix II: Interview guide

Initial discussion about:
Views on feminism
Views on advertising
Use of social media

Watch a video, if possible relating to what respondent has told about herself

Discuss content

Discuss reactions and emotions

Would you share this movie?

Discuss the answer

Other questions
Does it matter which brand it is? Test by showing different videos
Other films you have shared? Show
Have you seen feminism used in this way before? How do you feel about it? How do you think it contributes to the goals of feminism?
Dialectic approach: Discuss every possible negative aspect, vs every positive

What I would like to find out:

How do women understand these types of advertisements?
What feelings and reactions to these advertisements evoke?

How do these women reflect on whether to actively engage or not? What makes one go from merely viewing and consuming the content to actually responding to it, getting involved or passing it on?

Do the women engage in campaigns of this kind?
If so, HOW do they engage? Why do they do it? And how do they value their own engagement?

How do they feel about it being advertising?

If they choose not to engage, what factors into that decision? Has it to do with the company behind the advertisement, is it the content itself or something else?

Can they show me another video, image or media content, containing a similar message that they would engage with, and tell me how the two differ?

How do the women interpret the feminist message within the advertisement? How do they feel about feminism being used in this way?

Appendix III: Summary of the advertisement videos

Always' "Unstoppable"
Product: Menstruation products
This video is a follow-up to "Like a girl" and is part of Always' #LikeAGirl campaign.
It was released in 2015, and echoes the same themes and format; that girls are told they are less capable and boys and that this must be changed. In the video, several girls are invited into a TV studio to tell how they have been discouraged in different situations but how they still keep pushing, feeling unstoppable (Always, 2015).
It has been viewed over 38 million times on Youtube.

Dove's "Speak beautiful"
Product: Personal care products
In this short video, released in 2015, Dove encourages the viewers to make social media "a more positive place". A number of domino tiles with hurtful tweets are shown to illustrate some of the foul language online (Dove US, 2015). The video is part of a larger campaign involving a cooperation between Dove and Twitter, and it won the Femvertising Award 2015 in the category "Social impact" (Monllos, 2015).

Dove's "Legacy"
Product: Personal care products
This video was released in 2014 and tackles the issue of girls' low self-esteem. A number of mothers are interviewed about which parts of their bodies they are unhappy about and are asked to write these down. When their lists are compared with the lists written by their young daughters, they realise that they have projected their own bad self esteem on them. The video ends with the words "The way a girl feels about her body starts with how you feel about yours. What's your beauty legacy?" (Dove US, 2014).

Dove's "Evolution"
Product: Personal care products
Evolution was released in 2006 and shows, through time-lapse imagery, how a "normal" woman is photoshopped into looking completely different for a photo shoot.
For example, her neck is lengthened, her eyes enlarged and her skin made smooth. It ends with the words "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted" (Zephoria, 2006).
This advertisement was highly successful, gained millions of views, topped many viral charts online and won several marketing awards, for example two Cannes awards and Board's Magazine's "Most watched Ad of the year 2006" to name a few (Adage, 2007).
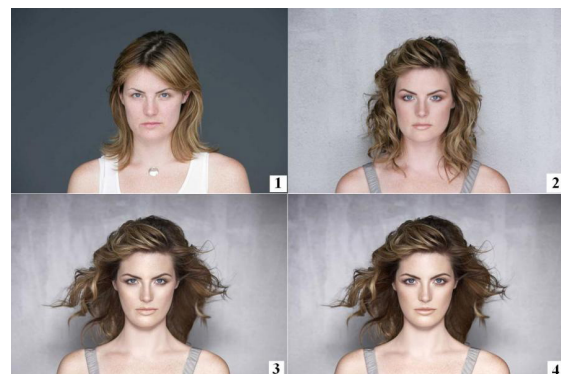
Dressman's "Underwear for perfect men"
Product: Clothing for men
Dressman echoes the themes of Dove's Real Beauty Campaign in this advertisement from 2015, in which a variety of male models are used; thin, large, young old etc. The song in the background, with lyrics like "I love you just the way you are" help bring out the message that men do not need to change to be perfect (Dressmann Official, 2015).

Dressman claimed to do to shine light on that not only women suffer from trying to live up to unattainable body ideals (Dressman).

HelloFlo's "The camp gyno"
Product/Service: A box of menstruation products delivered to your home once a month
This advertisement, released in 2013, tells the story of a young girl who is the first to get her period on summer camp. Instead of feeling embarrassed or trying to hide it, she takes great pride in this and refers to herself as "the camp gyno". She distributes tampons and gives pep talks around camp, until the other girls discover the services of HelloFlo. She must then come to the disappointing realisation that her powerful days as the camp gynecologist are over (HelloFlo, 2013).

This video has been viewed over 11 million times on Youtube and was an online success. Its follow-up "First Moon Party" gained even more success and won the Femvertising Award in the category "Humour" in 2015 (Monllos, 2015).

Nike's "Better for it – inner thoughts"
Product: Sports goods
In this advertisement, released in 2015, the viewer gets to hear the inner dialogue of women as they are attending spin class, running a marathon and trying out yoga for the first time. They are all insecure and doubting themselves, but in the end they realise they can do it and they feel eager to keep going (NikeWomen, 2015).

The video is part of a series of advertisements, all part of the "Better for it"-campaign, aimed to inspire women to improve their training results.

Ram Trucks' "Courage is already inside"
Product: Car/truck
In this advertisement, released in 2015, a number of women are shown performing physically challenging tasks like climbing a mountain and surfing a big wave.

The speaker poses the question "Have you ever thought, 'I could never do that?'" and then assures the viewer that they can break a stereotype because the courage is already inside (Ram Trucks, 2015).

The advertisement won the Femvertising Award 2015 in the category "Inspiration" (Monllos, 2015).

Pantene's "Not sorry ShineStrong"
Product: Hair care products

This advertisement was released in 2014 and tells women to stop minimising their strength and power by apologising. A number of scenes illustrate how women apologise for interrupting, asking questions, or for handing their child to its father. The viewer is told that instead of apologising, she should shine strong (Best Ads Channel, 2014). The president of P&G Global Hair Care & Color stated that "Pantene is committed to helping women across the globe be strong and shine both inside and out," after the release of the video (quoted in Pantene News, 2014), and thus draws a parallel between inner and outer beauty which perfectly fits the product.
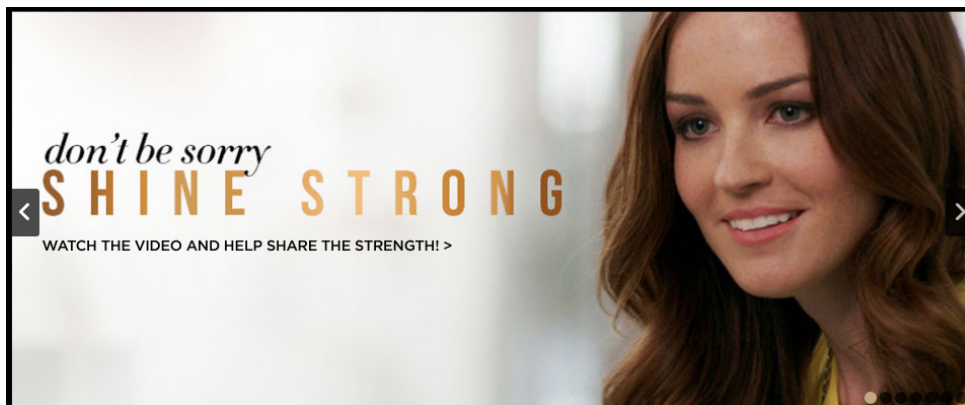
Special K's "More than a number"
Product: Cereal

This video is part of Special K's "More than a number"-campaign, urging women to adopt a positive attitude towards weight management. In this particular advertisements from 2013, women in a pop-up jeans shop are surprised to see that the sizes on the jeans are not mentioned in numbers but instead in complimentary words. A pair size 10 cannot be found, but instead the women laugh at finding "Size: Strong" or "Size: Sassy".

The words at the end encourages the viewers to rethink what defines us and remember that we are so much more than a number (SpecialKUS, 2013).

Special K' "Own it"
Product: Cereal

In this advertisement from 2015, several women are shown watching themselves in the mirror, looking very sad and disappointed. Statistics are presented, such as "97 % of women have an 'I hate my body' moment every single day". The speaker voice then announces that Special K believes that 100 % of women have the power to change their own perception. The mirror breaks and women are shown feeling confident (Special K Canada, 2015).

All of these videos can be found on Youtube.