Sexual Objectification of Women in Advertisements

The Influence of Consumer Attitudes on Brand Image

by

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Abstract

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Problematisation: Previous findings on the use of female sexual objectification in advertising have been mixed and inconsistent. A social shift in society in combination with the presence of sexually objectifying advertisements have created a need to understand consumer attitudes towards brands that make use of these advertisements in the current landscape.

Research Aim and Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate Swedish young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification of women in advertisements and how these influence companies' brand image. The study therefore aims to explore how Swedish young adults' attitudes towards female sexually objectifying advertisements influence brand image.

Theoretical perspectives: This study advances theory and knowledge in literature on sexual objectification in advertising and brand management. Prior research findings are incorporated in order to get a better understanding about consumers' attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements as well as the significance of brand image for companies. Through previous research findings, we propose an analytical framework, which suggests a potential connection between the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model and brand image.

Methodology: The study follows an abductive approach and applies a qualitative research design. The data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews using a topic guide based on the proposed analytical framework. 14 semi-structured interviews with Swedish young adults between the ages of 22-28 are conducted representing the empirical data of the study. The dimensions to analyse the influences on brand image are based on purchase intention, value, quality and awareness. Further, the analysis of the empirical data is managed using the analytical framework.

Empirical Data and Analysis: The results illustrate that brand image can be negatively influenced through sexually objectifying advertisements. More specifically, the findings show that there are four main factors influencing young adults' attitudes on brand image; lack of purpose, absence of reality, poor reflection on well-being, and misalignment of contemporariness.

Discussion and Conclusion: The four factors are shown to work as mechanisms that can be either positively or negatively triggered depending on the advertisement's content, resulting in either a favourable or unfavourable influence on brand image. These four mechanisms can work individually or together to influence consumers' brand images. Thus, on the basis of our research, we acknowledge a connection between consumer attitudes and brand image. As a result, we propose an extension of the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model with brand image.

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1   Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the study by explicating a current problematisation within literature on sexual objectification of women in advertising. First, a background is provided that gives an overview of sexual objectification in advertising in the current landscape. Thereafter, a problematisation builds upon the need to further study the use of sexual objectification in advertising in the current marketplace in Sweden. From this, the aim, purpose and the objectives of the study are presented as well as the research question of the study. Lastly, the chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis.

1.1   Background

Over the last decades, a significant shift in social roles of women and men has been discernible. Women have obtained a substantially more vigorous position within society compared to before. However, this transformation has not been visible within the marketing and advertising industry that perpetuate to illustrate women as objects (Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). Stereotypical content and imagery that portray women as helpless, unintelligent, submissive and dependent to men is ordinary (Infanger, Bosak & Sczesny, 2012; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). Evidently, it can be concluded that the claim "sex sells" is still valid and appropriate in contemporary advertising.

A term that is commonly used in such circumstances is 'sexual objectification'. The term is explained by Nussbaum (1995) who describes sexual objectification as "treating as an object something that is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being" (p. 257). Moreover, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) relate the term to situations where women are treated as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of other people. There are various forms that can be interpreted as sexually objectifying in advertising, such as nudity, stereotypical activities performed by women, or their body language (Lanis & Covell, 1995; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003). It has been found that advertisements that illustrate nudity and sexually explicit imagery may result in more favourable consumer attitudes (Reichert, LaTour & Ford, 2011). Furthermore, a strong emotional response as well as high recall about the advertising's content are other findings for such advertisements (Digout & Tayeh, 2015; Furnham & Hiranandani, 2009; King, McClelland & Furnham, 2015; Mittal & Lassar, 2000). Evidently, these findings, among others, have contributed to the accelerated and widespread use of sexually objectifying advertising in a variety of industries. However, sexually objectifying advertising may also result

in negative associations towards brands that communicate such imagery and content towards its audience (Huhmann & Limbu, 2016; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993). Consumers often associate such advertisements to a poorer corporate reputation and perceived lower quality products (Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004). Moreover, ethical concerns and the actual effectiveness of such advertisements have been questioned (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994). Evidently, the fact that they are still used this frequently comes with a surprise, as previous findings related to the use of sexual content are mixed and inconsistent (Black & Morton, 2017; Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). This is especially surprising since previous research has emphasized the importance of the adaption of advertising strategies to social change (Boddewyn, 1991; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994). For example, LaTour and Henthorne (1994) indicated that the social impact must always be taken into consideration, as the moral and ethical view of society changes over time.

One consumer group that has been analysed in some studies that discuss sexual objectification are young adults (Lanis & Covell, 1995; Mittal & Lassar, 2000; Reichert & Ramirez, 2000; Severn, Belch & Belch, 1990; Vance, Sutter, Perrin & Heesacker, 2015; Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). Young adults, commonly defined as being between their late teens and early thirties (Vespa, 2017), have experienced a vast amount of marketing and promotion during their lifetime (Christodoulides, 2009; Tai, 2007) where both sexual objectification and nudity have been frequently represented (Lanis & Covell, 1995; Mittal & Lassar, 2000; Reichert & Ramirez, 2000; Severn, Belch & Belch, 1990; Vance et al., 2015; Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). Moreover, they are in their early stages of their consumer lives and as such, start to be an ever-increasing component of companies' marketing strategies (Byron, 2016; Schwabel, 2015). This consumer group is the leading force behind innovation and trends, whereby they act as new arbiters in the advertising and marketing industry (Cornelis & Peter, 2017). Furthermore, it has been found that young adults trust people over brands, one reason being that authenticity is of significance for that consumer group (Schwabel, 2015). However, marketers still make use of sexually objectifying advertisements even though young consumers' attitudes towards such advertisements are inconsistent and inconclusive (Lanis & Covell, 1995; Mittal & Lassar, 2000; Reichert & Ramirez, 2000; Severn, Belch & Belch, 1990; Vance et al., 2015; Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). Effectively, further clarification is necessary to understand their attitudes towards such advertisements.

In current times with social movements like #metoo and Time's Up where discussions and overall awareness about sexism have increased, the concept of sexism has gained substantial importance, not only for citizens but for brands as well (Medium, 2018). The #metoo movement started on social media in October 2017 where the hashtag of 'metoo' was used to illustrate the widespread abundance of sexual assault and harassment (Williams & Lebsock, 2018). This act quickly resulted in a global social movement, used by celebrities and other public figures, as well as private citizens, such as young adults (Schroeder, 2016). Similarly, the Time's Up movement began in January 2018 where 300 women in Hollywood started a movement that attempts to fight sexual harassment in all industries (Time's Up, 2018). Both of these social movements have given rise to much more awareness about the topic of sexism for social actors (The Economist, 2017). What was once an unspoken issue, is now a global movement which has helped citizens to speak up and fight against an issue that has been present for many decades. These social movements have not only implicated society as a whole, but more specifically, brands have faced challenges in this era due to stakeholders' increasing pressure (Medium, 2018).

Given that the brand is one of the most valuable assets for any company (Tajzadeh-Namin & Norouzi, 2014), this pressure has made it a demanding time for companies (Medium, 2018). Brands are a significant component to generate higher profits as well as increased value among consumers (Roper & Fill, 2012; Tajzadeh-Namin & Norouzi, 2014). A brand can deliver various advantages, such as enhanced consumer recognition and protection against competitors with similar product offerings. Moreover, it can provide a competitive advantage and create value for the company as well as consumers (Tajzadeh-Namin & Norouzi, 2014). At the same time, negative associations with a brand can reduce value (Um, 2013). One concept that illustrates a company's quality is brand image (Lin & Lin, 2007). Brand image has been defined as "the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in associations held in the consumer's memory" (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen, 2009, p.861). Evidently, brand image is the result of the associations that consumers have with the brand, usually held in their minds, both positively and negatively. Through creating and maintaining a vigorous brand image in the consumers' minds, brands can maintain or enhance positive associations (Um, 2013). According to Kapferer (2012), "a brand image is not based on the latest advertising seen: it is the sum of all previous contacts with the brand – hence its inertia" (p.232). However, Um (2013) argues that positive brand associations can turn into negative associations in a very short period of time. Given that social movements like #metoo and Time's Up have started and

increased sensitivity towards the subject of sexism, sexual objectification in advertisements may result in these kinds of negative associations.

As discussed, sexual objectification in advertisements is still a common strategy for brands in today's world, including Sweden (Savage, 2018; Sveriges Kvinnolobby, 2016). Surprisingly, although Sweden is among the most gender equal countries worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2017), it is the only Nordic country that does not have legislation against sexual discrimination in advertising (The Local, 2016). Evidently, it is considered the poorest Scandinavian nation at handling this issue (The Local, 2016). However, social movements like #metoo and Time's Up have been very actively communicated by Swedish celebrities and citizens since its beginning (Hoikkala, Ek & Magnusson, 2017). This has partially contributed to governmental actions, such as a proposal that strives to improve legislation on sexual consent as well as a nationwide strategy that seeks to avoid and tackle men's violence against women (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018). The nation is now working towards implementing a ban on sexist advertising, starting with Stockholm (Savage, 2018). This has created heated discussions between political parties and The Association of Swedish Advertisers, an association that represents agencies and marketing professionals, because no common consensus between the two agents has yet been met (Savage, 2018). Effectively, the ban has not been put in place yet by the Swedish Government.

Evidently, social movements like #metoo and Time's Up have given rise to a more open discussion about sexism and consumer attitudes might have changed because of the current landscape in Sweden. Furthermore, the governmental actions by the Swedish government make it an interesting contemporary phenomenon to assess. These reflections contribute to the interest to assess whether Swedish young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification of women in advertisements influence brand image.

1.2   Problematisation

As can be seen, there is a significant shift in society, including social movements in Sweden. However, at the same time, female sexual objectification is still communicated in advertisements in the country. Although there are some potential legal actions that are being discussed between political actors and marketing agencies, it is not clear what Swedish citizens' attitudes towards such advertisements are and how they may influence brands. Additionally,

there are conflicting patterns of results related to consumer attitudes in relation to sexual content in advertising (Black & Morton, 2017; Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018) which is why it seems important for researchers to identify consistent findings and salient themes. Understanding the attitudes of young adults is especially significant because they make up a large portion that companies target in their marketing activities (Byron, 2016; Schwabel, 2015) and they act as arbiters in the advertising and marketing industry (Cornelis & Peter, 2017). Moreover, it is not novel to analyse the importance of consumer attitudes in relation to the success of a brand (Parker & Furnham, 2007; Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004). Previous literature has assessed a wide variety of marketing concepts in relation to consumer attitudes towards sexual objectification in advertisements. Brand recall, purchase intention and brand attitude are among the most commonly used concepts in these studies (Black & Morton, 2017; Davis & Welsch, 1983; Digout & Tayeh, 2015; King, McClelland & Furnham, 2015; Mittal & Lassar, 2000; Parker & Furnham, 2007; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). Moreover, some studies have examined the implications of sex portrayals in advertising and their implication on corporate image and purchase intention (Ford, LaTour & Honeycutt, 1997; Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004). However, within this field, brand image is a concept that has not been given much attention, although it is a vital component for a company's long-term success (Keller, 2013; Lin & Lin, 2007). As such, the advertisements' implications on brand image are uncertain within the current context.

A theoretical framework that has been frequently used to assess consumer attitudes towards advertisements is the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model presented by Edell and Burke (1987). The model has illustrated explanatory power when investigating the influence of advertisements on brand attitudes (Batra & Ray, 1986; Cacioppo, Petty & Morris, 1983; MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986; Moore & Hutchinson, 1983), and it provides a solid foundation for investigating consumer attitudes towards advertisements (Schiffman, Wisenblit & Kanuk, 2010). However, the explanatory power of the model does not cover the influences of consumer attitudes on brand image nor does it purely concern advertisements that include sexual objectifying content. Since the findings of the effect of sexual objectification in advertisements in relation to consumer attitudes have been inconsistent (Black & Morton, 2017; Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018), more clarity is required for marketers and their future strategies in order to maintain a strong brand image in the current social context.

Effectively, there are various aspects that need clarification as well as new findings in order to create a better understanding. There is a gap in understanding how companies' brand image is affected by young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification in advertisements in the current social context in Sweden. This creates a need to understand the potential connection between the concept of brand image and consumer attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements. Given the rise of the recent social movements, it may lead to a significant shift in advertising strategies for brands in Sweden.

1.3   Aims and Purpose

Following the above problematisation, the purpose of this study is to investigate Swedish young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification of women in advertisements and how these influence companies' brand image. Through this, we aim to explore the following research question:

RQ: How do Swedish young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification of women in advertisements influence brand image?

The study will be qualitative, and the data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with Swedish young adults. The study will draw on the framework of the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model by Edell and Burke (1987). Results from this study will expand on existing literature on consumer attitudes towards female sexual objectification in advertisements (e.g. Black & Morton, 2017; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994; Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004; Wirtz, Sparksb & Zimbres, 2018), which is lacking in this area. The study will further expand on the existing theory of the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model by Edell and Burke (1987). Additionally, the study will attempt to contribute to a better understanding of marketers and their advertising strategies in this area. We will provide insights for marketers that can possibly aid them to develop future advertising strategies in order to maintain a strong brand image. Further, we intend to identify factors within sexually objectifying advertisements that influence consumer attitudes in relation to brand image. Thus, we attempt to clarify current obscurities in how to address young adults through advertising strategies that incorporate female sexual objectification.

1.4   Delimitations

The focus of this study will be on young adults and will reflect the attitudes of ages ranging between their late teens and early thirties. This study will only focus on Swedish young adults, meaning that it will exclude all other cultures, nationalities and age groups. The reason why Swedish citizens will be part of this study is because sexual objectification is still communicated in advertisements throughout the country although it is among the most gender equal societies in the world (World Economic Forum, 2017). Another reason for this choice is because social movements like #metoo have been very actively communicated by Swedish citizens since its beginning (Hoikkala, Ek & Magnusson, 2017). Moreover, the proposed legal actions, such as the ban of sexist advertisements, that the Swedish government is currently developing (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018) is another reason why Sweden is a relevant and interesting country to assess at the moment.

1.5   Outline of the Thesis

The study will commence with a literature review, aiming to create a foundation for the literature relevant for the study. The sections will include literature on advertising towards young adults, sexual objectification in advertising as well as the concept of brand image. Following the literature review, the analytical framework of the study will be presented containing relevant aspects from the literature review as well as the problematisation. Thereafter, the methodology of the study will be accounted for. It will start by presenting the research approach, research design as well as the data collection method. Thereafter, the trustworthiness of the study is discussed, and the limitations related to the choices made by the researchers that may have limited the study are accounted for. The next chapter will present the empirical data and analysis. Once the results are presented and analysed, they will be compared and contrasted to previous literature in the discussion chapter. In the discussion, the aim, purpose and research question will be reflected upon. Lastly, the conclusion chapter presents the concluding points from the research as well as presenting limitations and suggestions for future research.

2   Literature Review

This chapter introduces the reader to literature related to the use of sexual objectification of women in advertising, relevant for this study. In the first part of the literature review, the practice of advertising as well as young adults' attitudes towards it is elucidated. In the second part, a background of the usage of sexual objectification in advertising is given, leading to an illustration of the current landscape. Thereafter, literature on consumer attitudes towards these advertisements are compared and contrasted. The third part of the literature review addresses advertising in relation to the concept of brand image.

2.1   Defining Advertising

Advertising is a common tool in marketing practice used by companies to raise awareness while engaging their customers with their products, services and brands (Fill, 2009). Aaker and Biel (1993) state that the principal function of advertising is to develop imagery and symbolism around the brand's product that, in the end, creates a relationship between consumers and the brand. Kotler (1984) defines advertising as "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services through mass media such as newspapers, magazines, television or radio by an identified sponsor" (p.58). Today, consumers are continuously saturated by advertising and product messages (Roper & Fill, 2012). Advertising industry experts estimate that consumers are exposed to approximately 5,000 advertisements a day (Schroeder, 2016) and similarly Roper and Fill (2012) state that each consumer is exposed to between 3,000 and 10,000 commercial messages each day. Roper and Fill (2012) state that the commercial world is cluttered and complex which is why consumers become desensitized to some advertising messages, altering out the majority of the information due to their inability to process it all. Moreover, Sassatelli (2007) argues that consumers have increasingly become more aware and critical of the advertising's powers of persuasion. As such, it can be argued that the need to create messages that are both relevant and successful to attract consumer attention are more paramount than ever.

2.1.1   Consumer Attitudes and Advertising

One area in advertising research that has received a lot of attention for many years is the relationship between consumer attitudes and advertising. This has received substantial attention

due to the fact that there is a connection between consumer attitudes towards advertisements, brands as well as purchase intentions (Ha, John, Janda & Muthaly, 2011; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Mehta, 2000; Mittal, 1994; O'Donohoe, 1995). Attitudes towards advertising is broadly referred to as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner to advertising in general" (Lutz, 1985, p.16). Moreover, an attitude is explained as a propensity to emotionally respond to something in either a more positive or negative manner (Kursan Milakovic & Mihic, 2015). There are several influences on attitude formation in which advertising has been reported to be one of the strongest influences in the formation of consumer attitudes towards a product, service or brand (Schiffman, Wisenblit & Kanuk, 2010). Kursan Milakovic and Mihic (2015) stated that attitudes towards advertisements influence the recall and recognition of brands as well as the beliefs about brands' different attributes. Similarly, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) argued that there is a strong relationship between consumers' attitudes and their attitudes towards a brand. More specifically, brand attitude refers to a positive or negative personal evaluation, emotional feeling, and behaviour tendency that a person holds about a brand (Kotler, Bower & Makens, 1999). Therefore, brand attitudes assess the positive and negative attitudes consumers have towards a brand, while being just one of the many associations that form brand image (Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001; Keller, 1993).

2.1.2 Advertising to Young Adults

Due to the rapid development of digital technology, younger generations are becoming more and more exposed to advertisements (Tai, 2007). Young adults are with their substantial buying power (Schwabel, 2015) considered a leading force in the market (Byron, 2016). This consumer segment dictates the rules related to innovation and trends, acting as the new arbiters in the advertising and marketing industry (Cornelis & Peter, 2017). As such, they can be perceived as the marketers' best allies when it comes to spreading advertising messages (Cornelis & Peter, 2017). Additionally, young adults can be described as advertising and marketing literate, being equipped with substantial knowledge that result in scepticism towards advertising (Cornelis & Peter, 2017). Similarly, it was found that advertising has, especially among the youths, been criticized for promoting materialism, falsity and corrupting as well as wrong values (Ting, de Run & Jee, 2015). Moreover, Schwabel (2015) states that since young adults tend to trust people over logos and brands, the factor of authenticity becomes of vital importance. Similarly, some studies have argued that authenticity is a must in contemporary marketing (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003; Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland & Farrelly, 2014). This is in line with other

previous literature on advertising that have highlighted how authenticity works as a value sought by consumers when processing advertising content (Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink, 2008; Napoli et al., 2014; Rose & Wood, 2005). Authenticity has been used to refer to different components such as reality or truth (Kennick, 1985), sincerity, innocence, and originality (Fine, 2003), as well as being natural, simple and honest (Boyle, 2006). Moreover, the component of authenticity is defined and experienced by consumers as well as being influenced by their individual interest and knowledge related to a specific topic (Grazian, 2005).

2.2 Sexual Objectification in Advertisements

Objectification in advertisements has been implemented by advertisers since the mid-nineteenth century and was ever since widely discussed (Black & Morton, 2017; Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, & Zavoina, 1999; Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). Already in the 1980s and 1990s, there was much research undertaken on the effectiveness and ethicability of sexism in advertisements. Soley and Kurzbard (1986) found that the usage of sexual objectification in advertisements had increased and that these became more expressive, incorporating nudity and hints of intercourse more often. It has been found that from 1964 to 1984, the number of female/male contact illustrated in advertisements tripled, confirming that the assumption "sex sells" was true and relevant (Severn, Belch & Belch, 1990). Similarly, LaTour and Henthorne (1994) argued that the use of sexual objectification had become commonplace in the 1990s, although it continued to be a controversial subject. Studies have shown that both consumers and advertisers illustrated mixed feelings towards the use of such advertisements. On one hand, consumers indicated positive responses, such as increased attention, recall and purchase intention (Reichert, LaTour & Ford, 2011; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). On the other hand, other findings recognized ethical concerns, and the actual efficacy of publishing such advertisements was questioned (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994).

LaTour and Henthorne (1994) indicated that the social impact must always be taken into consideration, as the moral and ethical view of society changes over time. What is perceived as suitable or unsuitable in advertising at a given time, has to be adapted. Similarly, other studies found that advertising that portrayed a form of female sexual objectification that was effective in the past may have resulted in the contrary at a different time in society (Boddewyn, 1991; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988). As a result, advertisers might face difficulties when developing new advertisements because they struggle to distinguish from what is perceived as 'sexist'

instead of 'sexy' (Lipman, 1991; Lysonski, 2005; Whipple & Courtney, 1981). Additionally, Sassatelli (2007) argues that advertising can reproduce the prevailing societal differences and also, although more seldom, encourage new social orientations and tendencies. This is somewhat in line with Infanger, Bosak and Sczesnys' (2012) findings. In their study, the authors analysed whether consumers preferred women who were portrayed as powerful and as leader figures or if more subtle, communal imagery of women was favoured. Their findings illustrated that powerful women were not fully accepted, and that the more stereotypical portrayal of women was preferred. However, other authors argued that femvertising, a term to describe the more powerful and realistic woman in advertising, is becoming more predominant in the industry as it reflects the shift in the roles of women in Western societies (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen, 2017; Grau & Zotos, 2016). Nonetheless, Kerin, Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia (1979) argued that sex in itself in advertising would become more common. However, the authors anticipated that the use of women as sex objects would decrease in the near future. Yet, as it can be seen today, their anticipations were incorrect (Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). As such, it is evident that it is important for brands to consider and reflect upon the content in their advertisements because the audience's attitude towards the advertisement may be influenced by the advertisements' context (Kirmani & Yi, 1991).

2.2.1 Defining Sexual Objectification

The term 'sexual objectification' can be explained by Nussbaum (1995) who describes it as "treating as an object something that is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being" (p.257). While Nussbaum (1995) emphasises the human aspect, the definition by Boddewyn (1991) revolves around the decorative and irrelevant purpose of women in the advertisements. As such, Boddewyn (1991) refers to sexual objectification as "using women (mostly) as decorative or attention-getting objects, with little or no relevance to the product advertised" (p.26). Similarly, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) state that sexual objectification refers to any incident where women are treated as bodies, and in particular, as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others. The authors further present the objectification theory which provides a framework that can facilitate the understanding for how women feel in a sociocultural context where the female body is objectified sexually. Moreover, as presented in Table 1 below, Nussbaum (1995) identified seven notions to classify sexual objectification; 'instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership and denial of subjectivity'

(p.257). These seven notions present different ways that objectification and sexual objectification might occur.

Table 1. Nussbaum's (1995) seven notions to classify sexual objectification, adapted from Nussbaum (1995)

Seven notions	Definitions
1. Instrumentality	Treatment of another as a tool for one's own purposes
2. Denial of autonomy	Treatment of another as lacking self-determination
3. Inertness	Treatment of another as lacking agency and activity
4. Fungibility	Treatment of another as interchangeable with others
5. Violability	Treatment of another as permissible to break/break into
6. Ownership	Treatment of another as something that is owned
7. Denial of subjectivity	Treatment of another as something whose feelings and experience do not need to be considered

2.2.2   Sexual Objectification in Different Industries

Sexual objectification is incorporated more often in some industries than others (Reichert, 2002; Reichert, LaTour & Ford, 2011; Vance et al., 2015). Previous studies have shown that sex is used for certain types of products and not others (Reichert, 2002; Reichert, LaTour & Ford, 2011; Vance et al., 2015). It is typically used in advertisements for fragrances, cars, tobacco, alcoholic beverages, designer clothing and accessories as well as health and beauty products (Reichert, 2002; Reichert, LaTour & Ford, 2011; Vance et al., 2015). Reichert (2002) states that there is formative evidence suggesting that sexual content is more dominant in advertisements for product categories that represent positive purchase motivations, such as entertainment, health, hygiene, beauty and fashion. However, the presence of sexual content in advertisements in industries like banking, financial services and medicine is rare (Reichert, 2002).

Within these industries, there are various types of sexual objectification that frequently appear in advertisements. One example is the male sexual gaze which occurs when men look at women, commonly unreciprocated and unwanted, and usually with the purpose of sexualizing them (Kaschak, 1992). A similar type of sexual objectification was presented by Goffman (1979) where he referred to the 'anchored drift'. This refers to the fact that media often portrays women

in advertisements looking away from a man, while the man stares at the woman from a distance. This provides an emotion of submissiveness towards the women while men are illustrated as powerful and in control (Goffman, 1979; Kaschak, 1992). Additionally, Goffman (1979) stated that media often portrays women as objects and only illustrates separate parts of their bodies. Moreover, it has been found that sexually objectifying advertisements have a tendency to exclude the woman's face entirely and instead focus on the woman's body or specific parts of her body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

2.2.3   Consumer Attitudes towards Sexually Objectifying Advertisements

A wide variety of marketing concepts in relation to consumer attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements have been assessed in previous literature. Brand recall, purchase intention and brand attitude are among the most commonly used concepts in these studies (Black & Morton, 2017; Davis & Welsch, 1983; Mittal & Lassar, 2000; Parker & Furnham, 2007; Whipple & Courtney, 1981; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). It has been found that consumers often remember and notice advertising that includes sexual themes with attractive women and explicit plots more frequently than other advertisements (Whipple & Courtney, 1981; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). As such, incorporating sexual imagery and content in advertisements has been shown to aid recall (Davis & Welsch, 1983; Furnham & Hiranandani, 2009). Similarly, Lysonski (2005) stated that both nudity and sex provoke attention and keeps the audience engaged. Dudley (1999) believed that since consumers respond more favourably to attractive models, who are commonly incorporated in advertisements that revolve around sexuality, advertisements with sexual appeals will also be assessed more positively. Similarly, LaTour (1990) argued that sexual content results in positive emotional response and sexual arousal, which creates an overall positive attitude towards such advertisements. Others, however, found that the inclusion of such content may have no effect on consumers or even produce less recall and negative attitudes (Alexander & Judd, 1978; Huhmann & Limbu, 2016; Parker & Furnham, 2007). Furthermore, some studies have shown that when sexual content is redundant or morally unjust, consumers develop negative attitudes (Dahl, Sengupta & Vohs, 2009; Mittal & Lassar, 2000). A number of studies have found that advertisements with nude or overly sexually engaged models are rated more negatively than advertisements with partial nudity or implied sexual behaviour (Peterson & Kerin, 1977; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993). However, more recent studies indicate that audience response to nudity and sexual behaviour

may be more nuanced than earlier studies suggest (Black & Morton, 2017; Wan, Luk & Chow, 2014).

One vital aspect when assessing advertisements is the significance of distinguishing 'sexy' advertisements from 'sexist' advertisements (Lipman, 1991; Lysonski, 2005; Whipple & Courtney, 1981). Reichert and Ramirez (2000) stated that in advertising, sexual appeals are not only about the way models are dressed and how nude they are portrayed, but it also revolves around the model's physical attractiveness, actions, behaviours and the overall contextual features. Lysonski (2005) defined 'sexy' as "marked by or tending to arouse sexual desire or interest" (p.116). Moreover, Nokes (1994) argued that sexy advertisements illustrate women and men enjoying each other's company, which is why these kinds of plots have been shown not to offend women (Lysonski, 2005). On the contrary, Boddewyn (1991) stated that "sexism concerns distinctions which diminish or demean one sex in comparison with the other, particularly through the use of sex-role stereotypes" (p.26). Similarly, Cortese (2004) defined sexism as "any attitude, behaviour, institutional arrangement, or policy that favours one gender over another" (p.51). The act of sexism emerges when particularly women are offended or the dignity of the female sex is hampered (Boddewyn, 1991; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). Moreover, Lysonski (2005) as well as Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008) argued that these depictions portraying women as objects of sex lead to objectification of women. Therefore, the authors argued that consumers often perceive these advertisements as demeaning and offensive (Lysonski, 2005; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). These advertisements illustrate descriptions that do not represent the modern woman (Lysonski, 2005), which is why such themes are considered as sexist.

Graff, Murnen and Smolak (2012) point out that an association between submissiveness and sexualisation might become 'cultivated'. As such, a theory that explicates connections between consumer attitudes and media exposure is the cultivation theory developed by Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli and Shanahan (1994). The theory states that repeated exposure to media messages directs frequent viewers towards a gradual acceptance of these messages where they start to perceive them as realistic. Thus, the repeated connection between the sexual objectification of women and subordinate characteristics might reinforce ideas of women being perceived as objects and degraded. For example, Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008) found that female attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertising changed over time. In their study, the female respondents found such advertisements less offensive than females from a study in

the early 1990s. However, sexism and its interpretation depend on the values of the individuals and is therefore of subjective nature (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2017). These consumer attitudes also highly depend on culture which is in line with Lipman (1991) who stated that different nationalities have diverse perceptions of sexism since cultures principally dictate the opinions of people. Therefore, the absence of a clear distinction between sexy and sexist in combination with consumers' subjective opinions and culture makes it complicated for advertisers to follow specific guidelines on how to avoid sexist themes (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2017; Lipman, 1991).

Several studies have documented negative psychological consequences for women as a result of objectification and objectified body consciousness (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Roberts & Gettman, 2004). Throughout the last decades, digitally altered images have characterized the advertising industry (Cornelis & Peter, 2017; Schirmer, Schwaiger, Taylor & Costello, 2018). Cornelis and Peter (2017) state that these have been regarded as acceptable as long as the images portrayed were not misleadingly exaggerating the effects of the product advertised. Moreover, Schirmer et al. (2018) found that consumers expect retouching in advertisements but would prefer if brands would not make use of them. Public policy makers, legislators, and academic researchers have begun to question the negative effects of some kinds of images due to the increase in different psychological and physical effects such as eating disorders and lowered self-esteem, that younger generations face (Cornelis & Peter, 2017). Similarly, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) illustrate that girls and women often adopt and internalize the observer's perspective on how to perceive their physical selves. For example, some studies found that sexual objectification in combination with wrong ideals result in negative psychological variables, such as body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety and low self-esteem (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 2011; Gurung & Chrouser, 2007; Tiggemann & Williams, 2012). Similarly, Groesz, Levine and Murnen (2002) found that thin ideals, as opposed to average size models or plus size models, resulted in more body dissatisfaction.

Consumer attitudes have also shown to be negative when advertisements portray a lack of congruity, meaning relatedness, between the appropriateness of incorporating sexual content and its connection with the product and brand (Chang & Tseng, 2013; Peterson & Kerin, 1977). Orth and Holancova (2004) argued that consumer attitudes are more positive when there is congruity between the product and sex role portrayal. Moreover, when there is relatedness

between the product and for example nudity, the chance that consumers can recall the product or brand is higher than if there is no congruity (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). Furthermore, Sherman and Quester (2005) argued that sexism in advertisements largely depends on its functionality or suggestiveness. This means that consumers might have different attitudes towards advertisements that portray nudity in underwear advertisement, where it would be functional, than in suggestive sexual, incongruent, advertising (Sherman & Quester, 2005). The authors argued that the product category that is being advertised plays a paramount factor in determining its functionality.

The above findings have illustrated that sexual objectification in advertisements is a long-standing phenomenon and much research has been undertaken in this area. However, as can be seen, the findings are mixed and inconsistent as other recent studies have also noted (Black & Morton, 2017; Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). Moreover, a variety of types of sexual objectification have been analysed in relation to consumer attitudes. Some results suggest that consumers have a positive attitude towards such advertisements (e.g. LaTour, 1990; Reichert, LaTour & Ford, 2011; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018) whereas others revealed that consumers dislike them (e.g. LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; Lysonski, 2005; Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). Furthermore, given that these advertisements have shown to impact sales and brands, it is of significance to analyse consumer attitudes in relation to those, especially since consumers are the driving force behind sales and the value of a brand (Alexander & Judd, 1978; Parker & Furnham, 2007).

2.3   Brand Image and Advertising

It is not novel that the brand is one of the most valuable assets for any company (Kapferer, 2012; Roper & Fill, 2012; Tajzadeh-Namin & Norouzi, 2014). Increased brand value from the consumers' perspective results in higher profitability for the company (Kapferer, 2012; Roper & Fill, 2012; Tajzadeh-Namin & Norouzi, 2014). Evidently, it is of high significance to control and develop the brand in a favourable way to maintain and enhance the brand (Kapferer, 2012; Roper & Fill, 2012; Tajzadeh-Namin & Norouzi, 2014). A strong brand has the possibility to stand out from competitors and differentiate itself through its brand, rather than product offerings, as the following quote suggests:

"A product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless" (King as cited in Aaker, 2009, p.1).

As such, while a product serves functional benefits, the brand strives to create an emotional attachment around the actual product (Aaker, 2009). As a result, the brand is separate from the product, whereby advertising transforms the process from the functionality of a product to the brand's immortality (Mabkhot, Shaari & Salleh, 2015). To exemplify this, Kim (1990) provides a clear distinction between product and brand:

"a product is a physical thing…a brand has no tangible, physical, or functional properties…Yet it is just as real as the product. Disembodied, abstract, ephemeral…it exists like a myth in the imagination of the consumer" (Kim, 1990, p.65).

Branding aims to build awareness and expand customer loyalty while capturing opportunities to convince consumers to choose one brand over the other (Wheeler, 2012). However, the ease of access to information has made it possible for consumers to stay up to date but also make their voices heard whenever they wish (Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak & Hofacker, 2013). Effectively, in today's world, brands and their image are much more vulnerable and under scrutiny by consumers at all times (Barwise & Meehan, 2010; Christodoulides, 2009; Kontu & Vecci, 2014).

2.3.1 Defining Brand Image

A common concept that is used in marketing and brand building is 'brand image' (Aaker, 2009; Arora & Stoner, 2009; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993). The definition of brand image has not been consistent and has been interpreted differently by authors (Aaker, 2009; Arora & Stoner, 2009; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993). Keller (1993) referred to brand image as "the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in associations held in the consumer's memory" (p.3). On the other hand, Arora and Stoner (2009) defined brand image as the emotional aspects that identify the brand, which have a strong influence on consumer purchasing behaviour. Similarly, Chien-Hsiung (2011) stated that

purchasing behaviour and brand image are closely related. Furthermore, the American Marketing Association (2018) defines brand image as the "perception of a brand in the minds of persons [...]. It is what people believe about a brand – their thoughts, feelings, expectations" (n.p.). Moreover, Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) combined various definitions of brand image to propose their own, containing the essential structures of brand image. They defined it as "the concept of a brand that is held by the consumer. Brand image is largely a subjective and perceptual phenomenon that is formed through consumer interpretation, whether reasoned or emotional" (p.20). Evidently, it implies that the concept identifies associations that consumers have with the brand, usually held in their minds and influenced by purchase intention. Effectively, the image is created by a combination of all public messages made by the brand, including brand name, visual symbols and ultimately, their advertisements (Kapferer, 2012). Moreover, it has been argued that brand image is built up over time and through continuous exposure and interactions between the brand and consumer (Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001; Kapferer, 2012). However, negative brand associations decrease brand evaluation and purchase intention, which may happen in a very short period of time (Um, 2013). Moreover, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) found that consumers place more attention on negative than positive information. Similarly, Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy (1990) argued that consumers consider negative information as more informative and indicative. Consequently, once they are exposed to negative brand associations, they change their attitude accordingly (Um, 2013). However, Aaker (1991) found that through brand image, consumers may develop positive feelings towards the brand that effectively result in increased purchasing behaviour. Moreover, brand image does not derive from functional, technical or physical matters. Instead, it is influenced and formed by marketing activities, the current context as well as individuals' perception of reality (Larsen, 2017).

Roper and Fill (2012) argue that the measurement of brands is of complex nature. Particularly the concept of brand image has been difficult to measure in previous research, as authors have faced difficulties in how to assess it and could not come to consensus (Hsieh, 2002; Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004; Randheer, AL-Motawa & Khan, 2012; Stern, Zinkhan, Jaju, 2001). However, Randheer, AL-Motawa and Khan (2012) have attempted to provide guidance on determining how to measure brand image. The authors provided three dimensions to assess brand image, such as value, quality and awareness. Randheer, AL-Motawa and Khan (2012) stated that these three factors must be analysed in combination to determine the impact on brand

image. As such, brand image is a concept that assesses consumers' perceptions whereby companies strive to develop a strong image of their brand in the consumers' minds.

2.3.2 Advertising and Brand Image

One of the most common marketing strategies to build brands and their image is through advertisements (Aaker & Biel, 1993; Kapferer, 2012). According to Johar and Sirgy (1991), choosing one brand over the other is dependent on the emotional and intuitive feelings towards the brand and how their meanings satisfy the consumer's need. Effectively, implementing successful advertising strategies with appropriate content and imagery is of great significance for companies to generate a positive brand image (Keller, 2009). Aaker and Biel (1993) argued that advertising is one of the main components that creates brand image. Moreover, according to Keller (1993), feelings, previous assumptions and interactions, as well as the attitude towards the advertisement could affect brand image, either directly or indirectly via brand attitude. Similarly, Aaker (1991) stated that brand attitude can have a direct impact on brand image. Yet, at the same time, identifying how advertising impacts consumer behaviour is one of the most complex characteristics of understanding in marketing (Kapferer, 2012). As an example, Kapferer (2012) states that advertising, in combination with other communication by the brand, impacts brand image over an extended period of time. Evidently, the author believes that brand image is not only based on one single advertisement but rather a compilation of many brand messages over time. However, two studies anticipated to determine how advertisements can influence corporate image in a short period of time. Pope, Voges and Brown (2004) analysed the influence of provocation, in the form of mild erotica, on corporate image and attitude towards the ad. Similarly, Ford, LaTour and Honeycutt (1997) examined cross-cultural female responses to sex portrayals in advertising and how these impacted corporate image and purchase intention. Evidently, some studies have anticipated to disclose the influence of such advertisement in relation to marketing concepts that are similar to brand image.

Drawing upon implementing successful advertising strategies (Keller, 2009), publishing advertisements that may be perceived as offensive or objectified may result in damaging the brand (Christy, 2006; Ford, LaTour & Honeycutt, 1997; Um, 2013). An example of poor advertising was by Saint Laurent that created a campaign in 2017 that illustrated skinny and spread-legged women in high heels with wheels (see Appendix A) (Reuters, 2017). The brand was heavily criticized in media and the issue resulted in a demonstration in front of their stores

in Paris. Effectively, their advertisements were banned (Reuters, 2017). Evidently, it can be argued that brand image is very vulnerable and can be influenced by a company's advertisements in a short period of time. On the contrary, brands can severely enhance brand image through successful advertisements, such as Dove's Real Beauty Campaign (see Appendix B) (Taylor, Johnston & Whitehead, 2016). The brand's goal was to transform the way women are perceived and how they perceive themselves. The advertisements illustrated women in underwear that may not mirror the 'ideal' slim body type and young age but rather an older and heavier ideal (Johnston & Taylor, 2008). The brand's image was drastically improved through these advertisements ever since and largely contributed to its success (Taylor, Johnston & Whitehead, 2016).

3   Analytical Framework

Drawing upon the literature review, this chapter presents the analytical framework of the study. The chapter begins with a detailed description and explanation of the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model. Then, it will be explored why and how brand image can be connected to the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model whereby the analytical framework will be presented.

3.1   Introduction to the Analytical Framework

The analytical framework derives from the presented previous literature on sexual objectification in advertising as well as brand management. In order to provide clarity, the main findings from the literature review that guides the analytical framework are presented in Appendix C. The analytical framework draws upon the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model by Edell and Burke (1987) which is a common theoretical framework that has been used to assess consumer attitudes towards advertisements. This model has been used to illustrate its explanatory power when assessing the influence of advertisements on brand attitudes (Batra & Ray, 1986; Cacioppo, Petty & Morris, 1983; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Moore & Hutchinson, 1983). The model's purpose is to serve as a tool to analyse the impact of advertising on consumer attitudes. As can be seen in the model (see Figure 1), there are various relationships that attempt to explain the impact of advertisements on consumer attitudes. Edell and Burke (1987) suggest that once consumers are exposed to a particular advertisement, they develop a judgement (cognition) about the advertisement and feelings (affect) from the advertisement are generated. Feelings may occur very rapidly and implementing non-verbal cues in advertisements may provoke these feelings even quicker. Edell and Burke (1987) argue that judgment (cognition) and feeling (affect) are two independent evaluation systems whereby feelings may be predominant and faster than judgements. The judgements first lead to beliefs about the brand and then consumers develop an attitude towards the advertisement. At the same time, they develop feelings from the advertisement, which lead to certain attitudes towards the advertisement as well as beliefs about the brand. At the end, the judgements, feelings and attitudes towards the advertisement, as well as the beliefs about the brand, result in the overall attitude towards the brand. The process may also end up in forming beliefs about the brand directly after being exposed to the advertisement (Schiffman, Wisenblit & Kanuk, 2010).
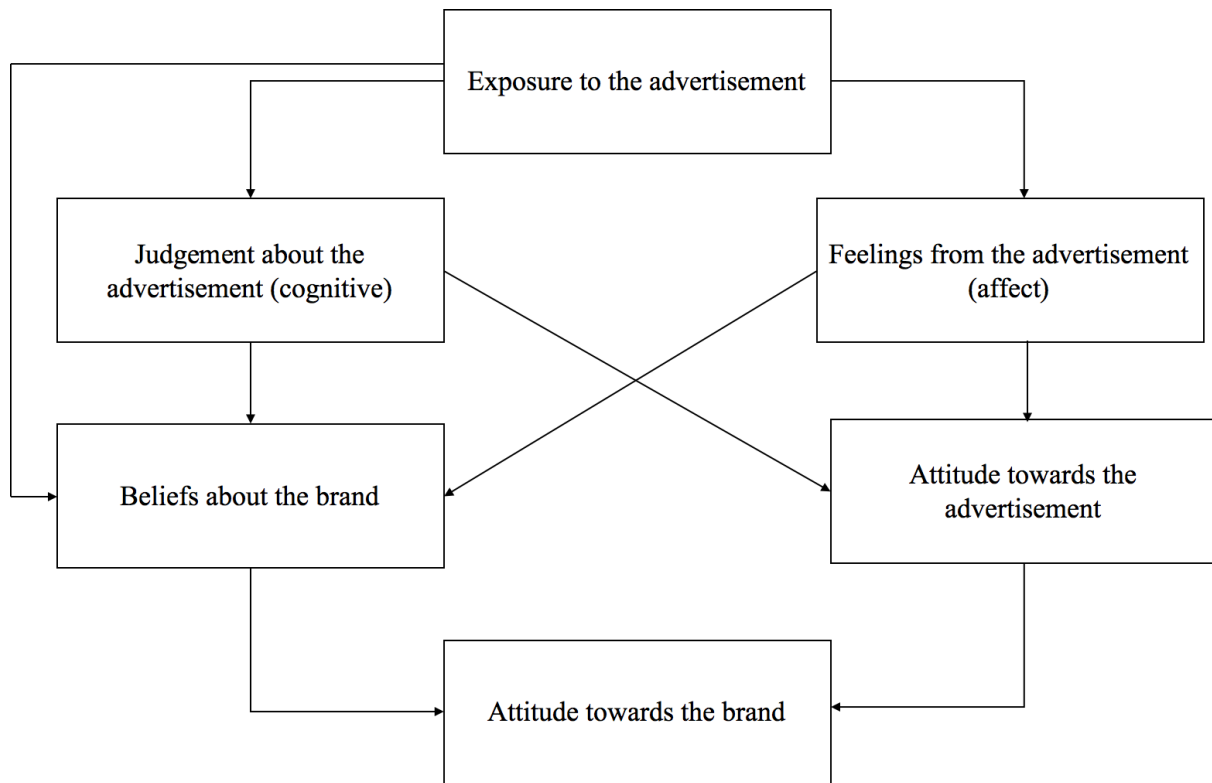
Figure 1. An illustration of the relationship between components in the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad Model based on Schiffman, Wisenblit & Kanuk (2010)

Similarly, other previous studies have shown that consumer attitudes are influenced through advertisements, either positively or negatively, which can be assessed through the model (Batra & Ray, 1986; Cacioppo, Petty & Morris, 1983; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Moore & Hutchinson, 1983). More specifically, previous authors have examined consumer attitudes towards sexual objectification of women in advertisements and came to different conclusions (e.g. Infanger, Bosak & Sczesny, 2012; Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004; Severn, Belch & Belch, 1990; Vezich, Gunter & Liebermann, 2017). Since this study attempts to understand consumer attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements, this model was identified as an appropriate basis for the analytical framework. As discussed, one aspect that has been shown to influence consumer attitudes and is of importance for advertising strategies is the social impact (Boddewyn, 1991; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994; Sassatelli, 2007). LaTour and Henthorne (1994) found that advertisers must always take current society into consideration, since the moral and ethical view of society changes over time. Similarly, Boddewyn (1991) as well as D'Emilio and Freedman (1988) argued that advertising that portrayed sexual objectification could have been effective for a specific period of time but may result in the contrary at another time. Additionally, Sassatelli (2007) argues that advertising can

reproduce the prevailing societal differences and also, although more seldom, encourage new social orientations and tendencies.

Moreover, in the current society, authenticity is a must in contemporary advertising (Cornelis & Peter, 2017; Napoli et al., 2014; Schwabel, 2015; Ting, de Run & Jee, 2015). However, in the current context, where sexism is largely discussed and women have gained a higher social position than decades ago, it can be argued that sexually objectifying advertisements are not perceived as authentic by current consumers. Various authors have highlighted that consumers seek for authenticity when they process advertising content (Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink, 2008; Napoli et al., 2014; Rose & Wood, 2005). For example, Aaker and Biel (1993) stated that advertising is a common strategy to build brands and is one of the main components that creates brand image. Similarly, Kapferer (2012) argues that brand image is strongly dependent on advertising. Given the current landscape with more debates on the social roles of women and the desire for authenticity in advertising, the use of female sexually objectifying advertisements could impact brand image. Moreover, Aaker (1991) stated that brand attitude can have a direct impact on brand image. Additionally, as discussed, negative brand associations decrease brand evaluation and purchase intention, which can happen in a very short period of time (Um, 2013). Similarly, previous literature found that consumers place more attention on negative than positive information (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Roper & Fill, 2012). Such negative associations may be evoked even stronger from sexually objectifying advertisements within current society. Effectively, an impact on brand image may be more significant in the current landscape since consumers are increasingly critical towards inauthentic, unnatural and unoriginal advertisements (Cornelis & Peter, 2017; Schwabel, 2015).

Given these arguments, we acknowledge a potential connection between the components of the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model and brand image. In other words, we recognize that there is not only a connection between consumer attitudes towards advertisements and brands, as the model suggests, but that brand image may also be influenced. As such, we sense a necessity to emphasize the difference between brand attitudes, which is already incorporated in the model, and brand image. The two concepts are often confused, which is why we further elaborate on two definitions to clarify the differences. Brand attitude refers to positive or negative personal evaluations consumers have towards brands (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 1999). Moreover, brand attitude is one of the many components that form brand image (Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001; Keller, 1993). On the other hand, brand image refers to the emotional aspects that

identify the brand, which have a strong influence on consumer purchasing behaviour (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Chien-Hsiung, 2011). Additionally, according to Keller (1993), feelings, previous assumptions and interactions, as well as the attitude towards the advertisement could affect brand image, either directly or indirectly via brand attitude. Effectively, brand image is a more holistic concept than brand attitude (Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001). As such, given the interrelatedness yet distinct differences between brand attitude and brand image, as well as previous findings that highlight the impact advertisements may have on brand image, we acknowledge a potential connection between consumer attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements and brand image.

Therefore, given the above arguments, we identify a potential connection between brand image and the existing Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model. Effectively, we recognize a potential connection between consumer attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements and its influence on brand image. A visual illustration of the potential connection to the existing model is provided below in the analytical framework (see Figure 2).
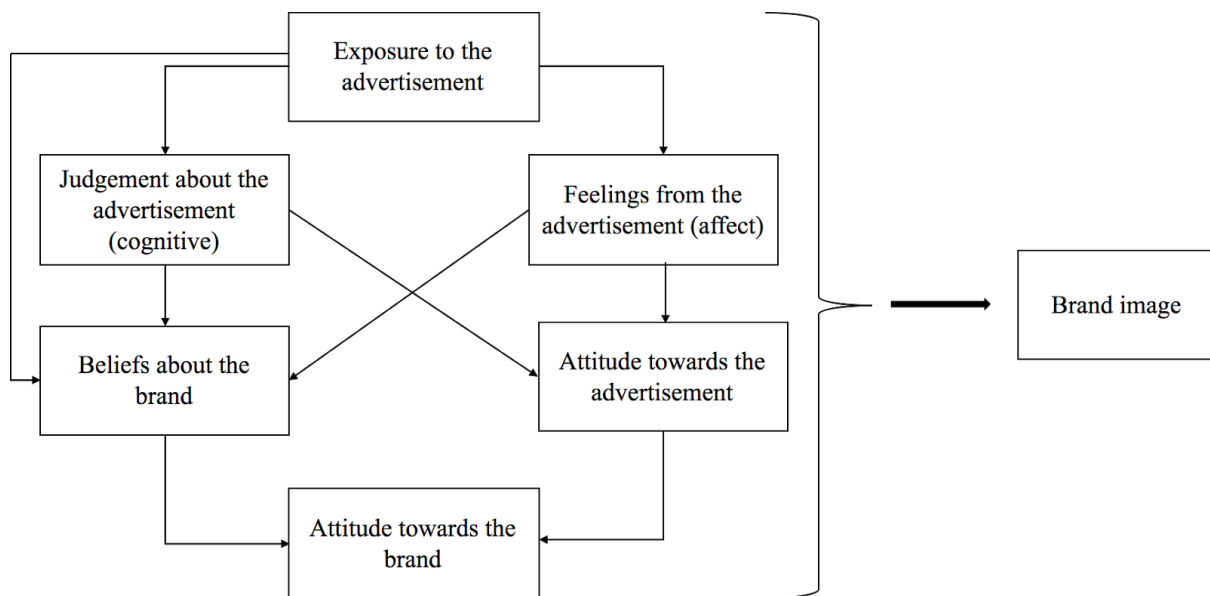
Figure 2. Illustration of analytical framework adapted from Schiffman, Wisenblit & Kanuk (2010)

4　Methodology

In this chapter the research design is presented and discussed. First, the philosophical assumptions of the research are discussed. After this, the research design, the research approach and the methods chosen for the data collection are presented and accounted for. The next section provides the reader with an elaborate description of how the data was analysed in order to systematically and comprehensively illustrate this. Moreover, specific examples of analysis material can be found in Appendix D. The link between the chosen methods and the purpose of the study is continuously enlightened throughout each section of the chapter. Lastly, the trustworthiness and the limitations of the methodological choices are accounted for and discussed.

4.1　Reflections on Research Philosophy

In this section we elaborate upon the philosophical position of the study in terms of the ontological and epistemological approaches in the research. To answer how young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification of women in advertisements affect brand image, we consider it necessary to involve several perspectives of the phenomenon. In other words, we acknowledge several truths of reality, instead of one single truth. Therefore, we assume that no definite social reality exists that can be discovered. As researchers and analysts alike, we permit the actors under study to define the building blocks that constitute reality (Latour, 2005). Thus, this study takes a relativist position in terms of ontology. Moreover, a relativist approach is said to view social reality as an ongoing process of creations where reality is continually being reshaped (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As such, we imply that social actors as well as markets are in constant change which request for the need to continually study them in order to renew the truth. Referring to this can be done by the use of the term subjectivism, an aspect of ontological assumptions which indicates that actions of social actors need to be studied in detail in different situations if one wants to truly gain an understanding for and gain knowledge about the reality (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). This aligned with the purpose of the study as well as the chosen data collection method as we aimed to collect individuals' multiple perspectives while collecting diverse views on the phenomenon.

However, we acknowledge that to enter the social world of individuals and to gain an understanding for the world from their perspective would be a challenge (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In order to understand the psychological and social factors, a deeper apprehension for the individuals' attitudes, opinions and rationales was needed. A relativist ontological position is closely linked with the social constructionist view which reflects the epistemological stance in this study. Thus, we acknowledge that the world as such is socially constructed and therefore constantly changing which creates a need to continually revise and study the world (Burr, 2015; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). This was of significant importance since we recognize the influence that the shift in society might have had on consumer attitudes. As researchers we recognized that others may grasp the reality differently (Burr, 2015; Appleton & King, 1997). Therefore, by acknowledging and including how different social context of individuals shape their opinions of the phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), we aimed to answer how young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification of women in advertisements affect brand image.

4.2   Research Design

The research design was determined by the type of data that was required to answer the research question as in line with Bryman and Bell (2015). Moreover, the research design was chosen in preference to other options since it was deemed to be the most suitable to answer the research question and to fulfil the purpose of the study. In order to create an apprehension for the psychological and social factors, a deeper understanding for the individuals' attitudes, opinions and rationales was needed. It is commonly argued that qualitative approaches are well suited when the objective is to generate a better understanding with regards to a phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Mann & Schweiger, 2009; Stake, 2010), which was well suited for the aim of this study. As such, qualitative studies are said to create a deeper understanding for the research area as well as facilitating the possibility to explain a certain phenomenon from both the researchers' and the respondents' perspectives due to the depth that the data collection enables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Thus, a qualitative method is often used when there is an interest for the particular rather than the general, in which the latter rather applies to the use of a quantitative method (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Kvale, 1992). Since this study specifically aimed at creating a deeper understanding while looking at the particular rather than the general, a qualitative method was deemed to be the appropriate choice.

Moreover, most studies that have analysed sexual objectification in advertisements, took a quantitative approach (e.g. Graff, Murnen & Smolak, 2012; Infanger, Bosak & Sczesny, 2012; Lanis, 1995; Mittal & Lassar, 2000; Latour & Henthorne, 1994; Parker & Furnham, 2007; Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004; Reichert, LaTour & Ford, 2011; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008; Vance et al., 2015; Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018; Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). As such, consumer attitudes have mainly been evaluated from a quantitative perspective, which is why a deeper understanding of their attitudes might reveal yet unknown insights through a qualitative approach. Furthermore, a qualitative approach focuses on words used to analyze the society rather than focusing on measurements and numbers such as the quantitative approach which was in line with what we wanted to achieve (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Additionally, qualitative studies tend to focus more on the creation of theory rather than theory testing (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Through using a qualitative approach, the study aimed to dig deeper into meanings that individuals assign, while aiming at responding to questions of why and how. Moreover, Bryman and Bell (2015) described that qualitative research takes a view on social reality as "a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation" (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.38). As such, an additional aspect that was in line with applying a qualitative method was the desire to explore how individuals experience and interact with the current society, in other words, their social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

4.3   Research Approach

Furthermore, the study followed an abductive approach. Appleton and King (1997) expressed that a qualitative and abductive research approach is specifically essential in a social constructionist inquiry due to its flexible way in gathering data. Dubois and Gadde (2002) state that an abductive research approach can be defined through the interplay between theory and empirical material working as a constant back and forth process between the two. As such, the abductive approach enabled us to commence from an initial understanding before proceeding against the search for further knowledge (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012). We recognized that knowledge from previous literature would be useful as a starting point and foundation for the research in order to understand current standings and research gaps that needed to be filled. Consequently, we used knowledge from existing literature on sexual objectification in advertising, consumer attitudes as well as brand management, including the concept of brand image. Additionally, the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model was used as an inspiration on how to

investigate consumer attitudes towards advertisements and brands. Thereafter, through our findings in the literature, we suggested a potential new connection to the model resulting in an analytical framework. Thus, this process resulted in an abductive approach (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As such, the philosophical and axiological positions were fused accordingly (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Therefore, we avoided some risks that occur with using a strictly deductive or inductive approach. Firstly, in strictly deductive reasoning, rigidness and superficiality is prominent, which we could reduce by using an abductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Secondly, since we did not use a strictly inductive reasoning, which is based on merely unstructured research, we could reduce the difficulty related to establishing knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Drawing upon this, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) state that "with induction you have constantly to live with the fear that no useful data patterns and theory will emerge" (p.127). Therefore, through acknowledging the quality and quantity of previous theories and literature we believed that excluding them would have been an unnecessary risk for the study.

4.4   Data Collection Method

The method of collecting the primary data used in the study consisted of the conductance of semi-structured interviews as this method was deemed to produce the most relevant data for the study in order to answer the research question. The following section will present descriptions of the semi-structured interviews including information about arguments for the selected data collection method, the topic guide, choice of stimulus, the sampling strategy as well as the steps taken in the procedure.

4.4.1   Interviews

The method that was used to gather the empirical material was based on the nature of the research question and as such we identified semi-structured interviews as an appropriate method. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) define interviews as a conversation between two or more people that revolves around questions and answers related to a specific topic. We chose this method because individual interviews are a highly efficient way to gather rich empirical material (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) and it would allow us to reach an elicit depth of information (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This elicit depth of information was needed to create a deeper understanding of young adults' attitudes towards

female sexual objectification in advertisements, and how these affect brand image. Moreover, as in line with King (2004) we wanted to gain an understanding for the interviewees' perspectives including not only what their viewpoints were but also the reasons for why they held these particular viewpoints. However, although focus groups might have constituted a valid data collection method, it was considered that the opportunity to interview the individuals one by one would result in a greater depth of data. We believed that it was of importance to gain an understanding for the individual interviewees' perspectives deprived of the risks of being influenced or intimidated by others (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Additionally, since we wanted to gain a better understanding for the individuals' attitudes we assumed that trust and honesty would be higher in an intimate atmosphere. Moreover, the interviews made it possible to observe a high depth of nonverbal communication as we could focus on one interviewee at a time (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As such, the conductance of interviews enabled us to follow the specific individual's thoughts and elaborations easier than what would have been the case in focus groups.

Prior to conducting the interviews, we developed a plan for how we wanted to structure them. Firstly, we decided to concentrate on gathering information related to sexual objectification in advertising, consumer attitudes as well as brand management and brand image. Secondly, we focused on designing the structure and content of the interviews using the analytical framework as a basis in order to facilitate the procedure of the analysis. Additionally, in order for the interviews to be successful we had to decide upon the level of structure we wanted to apply (Jones, 1985). Thus, we identified semi-structured interviews as an appropriate approach since we wanted to allow the interviewees to speak freely rather than creating a situation in which they might have felt constrained to share their thoughts. Moreover, since the components in the analytical framework tend to go into each other a semi-structured approach was preferred not to restrict the interviewees. Thus, the semi-structured format aimed at directing the interviewees towards the area of interest while remaining open for possibilities of new realizations related to unexpected phenomena (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, we identified topics and formulated main questions based on the analytical framework instead of using a specific set of questions. Thus, we applied an interview design taking the form of a topic guide (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

4.4.2 Topic Guide

The topic guide, which refers to an informal list of topics and questions which are to be covered during the interview, was created before we conducted the interviews (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). With the use of the topic guide, we aimed to take advantage of its flexibility and steer the interviews in the right direction towards answering the research question. One of the main benefits with using a topic guide is its flexibility, which allowed us to adapt and modify the questions in relation to the interviewees' feelings and worldviews (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The interviewees were continuously encouraged to elaborate on their answers by giving practical examples, and supplementary questions were used in order to thoroughly investigate the topic, and to reveal hidden thoughts. Effectively, during the interviews, the interviewer used questions to elicit more specific and personal opinions and/or attitudes. Thus, laddering, a common interview technique, was continuously used (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Through this we were able to uncover subconscious motives and identify specific aspects related to the interviewees' attitudes.

The topic guide was based on the analytical framework, mainly following the components of the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model by Edell & Burke (1987). Thus, the topics and themes in the topic guide proceeded from relevant literature including the model. The structure of the analytical framework was used to cover the included components. Additionally, we acknowledged that even though the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model follows a specific structure, the components in it tend to go into each other. Therefore, we wanted to make use of the flexibility of using a topic guide since questions in topic guides can be addressed in no particular order (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As such, we did not want to limit ourselves through being too structured but rather encourage the interviewees to bring up their different viewpoints in an order that felt natural for the individual interviewee. Moreover, topic guides should be organized into at least three sections: opening questions, questions around a number of key topics as well as closing questions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, the topic guide included four sections including the mentioned sections as well as an introduction section covering our approach, ethical considerations as well a question working as an ice-breaker.

All interviewees were presented with seven pre-selected advertisements. The opening questions revolved around the interviewees' first impressions of the advertisements. The topic guide also included questions revolving around the interviewees' feelings (affect) and judgement

(cognition) towards the advertisements. Additionally, it included questions related to the interviewees' beliefs about the brands and their attitudes towards the brands. An additional topic included questions aimed at clarifying the implications on brand image. For example, the perceived value, quality and awareness of the advertisements were questioned, as in line with Randheer, AL-Motawa and Khan (2012). The factors of value and quality were covered in the interviews through different questions whilst the factor of awareness was covered through using advertisements by only internationally known brands. Moreover, since brand image influences purchase intention (Aaker, 1991; Arora & Stoner, 2009; Um, 2013), interviewees were also questioned on their buying behaviours. Effectively, these components in the topic guide enabled us to investigate the influence on brand image. The topic guide is presented in Appendix E where further details can be found.

4.4.3   Choice of Stimulus

Since the structure of the interviews was based on the analytical framework including the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model by Edell and Burke (1987) the first step consisted of "Exposure to sexually objectifying advertisement". Thus, as part of the semi-structured interviews, stimulus, in terms of visual advertisements that portray women as sexual objects, were used. The use of stimulus was deemed to be an appropriate technique for revealing the interviewees' attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements as well as brands using them. Moreover, the use of stimulus, such as photos, can facilitate discussions to move from 'the concrete' to the 'socially abstract' (Bryman & Bell, 2015) which was relevant for creating a deeper understanding for the interviewees' attitudes. The chosen advertisements encouraged and enhanced creative thinking whereby they opened up for a possibility to gain new insights, which otherwise would have remained concealed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As such, the stimulus helped the interviewees to explore their feelings and attitudes towards the advertisements since they were reflecting, explaining and commenting on what the visuals presented.

In order to find relevant advertisements, we followed a number of criteria. Firstly, we based our initial selection on previous literature. As mentioned, the use of sexual content is used more often for certain types of products. Previous studies have shown that it is typically used in advertisements for fragrances, cars, tobacco, alcoholic beverages, designer clothing and accessories as well as health and beauty products (Reichert, 2002; Reichert, LaTour & Ford,

2011; Vance et al., 2015). This gave us a direction that we could focus our search on. Meanwhile, we kept in mind that the purpose of this study was to assess consumer attitudes and their influence on brand image, which is why we directed our search to internationally known brands. We believed that being aware of the brands would facilitate the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee especially since it would reduce confusion among participants. Meanwhile, this allowed us to cover the factor of awareness used to measure brand image in the interviews. Evidently, by using internationally known brands, we wanted to evaluate whether sexually objectifying advertisements would influence their brand image. As such, we believed that the use of unknown brands would have influenced the data collection negatively. Once these criteria were met, a foundation was established to search for relevant advertisements. When searching for advertisements, we set a time frame that revolved around selecting advertisements that were published within the last two years. This ensured that the advertisements were relevant within the current landscape, which we deemed vital for the purpose of our study. Furthermore, we found it necessary to base our selection on a concrete theory that would identify components related to sexual objectification. Effectively, the theory of objectification by Nussbaum (1995), as presented in the literature review, worked as the foundation for the selection. The seven notions guided the selection of stimulus further. The aim of the selection was to present advertisements illustrating sexual objectification of women, while communicating at least one out of the seven notions presented by Nussbaum (1995). The selection of the stimulus can be summarized by the three following steps:

1. Identifying and accessing advertisements
This entailed accessing potential advertisements via different sources, such as newspapers, magazines, television and online media.

2. Selecting the stimulus materials from the advertisements
Sexualized images were collected from advertisements used by internationally known brands in accordance to the criteria of this study. A total of 63 advertisements were collected from print and online media.

3. Organizing the stimulus material
This involved selection of particular advertisements that matched this study's criteria. As a result, seven advertisements from newspapers, magazines and online media were selected. Additionally, decisions made on inclusion of particular advertisements were based on an assessment of their value in prompting rich discussion within the interviews. The chosen images were all clear in focus and sexualized in different ways.

Figure 3. Steps of selection of stimulus

4.4.4   Sampling Strategy

In order to serve the research purpose and find suitable interviewees, interviewees were sampled using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is considered as being an efficient sampling strategy when collecting rich description from smaller samples (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). When approaching relevant subjects, purposive sampling requires the researchers to have a clear view of the required units for the research, which is why specific criteria were used when collecting suitable interviewees (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, two criteria were used in order to gain the right knowledge that was needed to fulfil the purpose of the study. Firstly, interviewees needed to be Swedish citizens. Secondly, they had to be aged between 18 and 34 to match the criteria of being young adults (Vespa,

2017). As such, some predetermined preliminaries were identified which introduced homogeneous characteristics into the sampling.

The choice of only including Swedish young adults was of specific interest because of the various ambivalences related to the topic of sexual objectification applied to advertising in Sweden. As noted, sexual objectification in advertisements is still communicated in Sweden even though it is among the most gender equal societies in the world (Sveriges Kvinnolobby, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2017). However, the engagement and involvement related to social movements like #metoo have been apparent both by Swedish celebrities and citizens shedding light on the attention that this topic has gained in the society (Hoikkala, Ek & Magnusson, 2017). These factors therefore imply that a desire for change among Swedish citizens exists and with a ban on its way, brands, marketers and advertisers will need guidance in what the Swedish audience finds appropriate and inappropriate. Young adults representing the age range of 18 and 34 (Vespa, 2017) was chosen for the study since this consumer group is considered the leading force behind new trends and innovations, as well as the arbiters in current marketing (Cornelis & Peter, 2017). Moreover, they are the main targets of brands since they possess substantial purchasing power (Byron, 2016; Schwabel, 2015).

Using the technique of purposive sampling, only subjects who met the set criteria were selected to participate. In order to get in contact with the chosen target group and suitable interviewees, we applied two different approaches. Firstly, we posted on various groups on Facebook where we enticed people to take part in our interviews. Secondly, we put up posters on billboards at different locations in Lund, such as several university faculties. The information included details about the topic and the interviews as well as how to get in touch with the researchers. The reason why these two approaches were applied was due to the fact that we wanted to reach young adults in an efficient way knowing that they are active on social media platforms as well as regularly present at university faculties. When being in contact with potential interviewees, we ensured that they fulfilled the criteria before arranging an interview. This approach was considered as most relevant since there was a large number of young Swedish adults between the ages of 18 and 34 that could be recruited in a short period of time.

4.4.5 Pilot Interviews

Before conducting the semi-structured interviews that were used for the analysis of the study, two pilot interviews were conducted in order to test the structure, the topic guide and the chosen

stimulus. In the pilot interviews, two interviewees matching the characteristics of the target group were asked to participate. Therefore, two Swedish young adults aged between 18 and 34 were selected. The topic guide was pretested in the pilot interviews in order to validate its relevance and suitability for the research question. The chosen stimulus, in form of seven advertisements, were also pre-tested in the pilot interviews to see if they fulfilled their purpose. The two interviews had different forms of the advertisements; during one interview the brand logos were shown on the advertisements and in the other, the logos were hidden. This was to find out which of the two methods would result in more accurate data to answer the research question. The interview with the visible brand logos resulted in a more stimulating exchange and interesting remarks in relation to brand image. Moreover, this was also deemed to be a more appropriate approach since we wanted the interviewees to have awareness about the brands. As such, this method was chosen for the actual interviews.

4.4.6   Procedure

A total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted within a two-week period. The interviews lasted between 45 and 62 minutes as it was found that this time was adequate to discuss the topic in depth. All interviews were conducted by a female interviewer accompanied by an assistant interviewer. Additionally, all interviews were conducted in a relaxed environment to avoid distractions. All interviews were conducted in English even though this was not the interviewees' native language. However, the interviewees were given the opportunity to express themselves in Swedish if needed in order to reduce the risk of missing any relevant material. The interviews followed the outline of the semi-structured topic guide (see Appendix E) covering the main areas of interest that were set as according to the analytical framework. The interviews started with a short introduction, in which we welcomed the interviewee, had a short introduction of the topic as well as an explanation of the use and purpose of the interview. We also notified the interviewee about ethical and legal aspects (Bryman & Bell, 2015); each interviewee was asked for their consent to audio-record the interview as well as having the choice to remain anonymous. Since all the interviewees gave their consent to audio-recordings, all the interviews were fully audio-recorded. Moreover, all interviewees accepted that their first name and age could be used in the study. In addition to the audio-recordings, the interviewees were informed that field notes would be taken by the assistant interviewer in order to facilitate the structuring of the empirical data as well as the analysis. Moreover, the interviewer emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and

that the interviewees could tell us if they did not wish to answer any of the questions. Additionally, the interviewer emphasized that all thoughts and comments were appreciated.

After these formal aspects we moved on to an ice-breaker in order to make the interviewees feel comfortable with the interviewer and to ease the tension (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The interviews then moved on to the presentation of the visual stimulus, represented by seven pre-selected advertisements that portrayed sexual objectification of women based on the criteria presented under choice of stimulus. The following sections in the interviews addressed the components in the analytical framework using the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model as a basis. As such, they circulated around the advertisements since they were used to stimulate the interviewees' thoughts and to reveal their opinions and attitudes related to the advertisements as well as the brands. Thus, all the brand logos were shown in the advertisements in order to gather opinions about the different brands and their interplay with the use of their advertisements. Lastly, the interviewees were thanked for their participation and were asked for permission to contact them again if this would be necessary for any clarifications. The number of conducted interviews were decided based upon the principles of data as well as theoretical saturation (Bowen, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The conduction of interviews ended when additional data collection had diminishing returns (Bowen, 2008), which occurred when nothing new was being added in the interviews. Effectively, theoretical saturation was reached since no further insights could be obtained, no additional themes were identified, and no issues arose regarding any of the categories of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Additional information about the conducted interviews and the interviewees can be found in Appendix G.

4.5   Data Analysis

In order to increase the possibilities of generating a qualified analysis, the analysis of the interviews began during the early stages of the interview investigation as in line with Kvale (2007). The data analysis technique for the interviews was therefore chosen prior to the collection of data. Broadly, the process we applied can be described as including the steps of sorting, reducing and arguing as inspired by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015). Thus, the following steps taken will be outlined below. Additionally, since we used the structure of the analytical framework in the interviews, it also worked as a guideline when handling the sorting, reducing and arguing of the data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). Through this, we could

identify relevant findings for the research question under each component of the framework as well as identifying relevant themes.

Before analysing the data, it was of importance to collect the data in an efficient and structured way in order to facilitate the analysis. All interviews were audio-recorded since this was essential for accurate transcripts that enabled us to listen to the interviews again, searching for details that were missed during the first time. The interviews were transcribed directly after they were conducted in order not to risk missing anything of importance related to non-verbal communication as well as immediate contextualization (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This initial process resulted in a great amount of data, leading us to the first step of sorting, including familiarizing ourselves and getting intimate with the data. Individually, we sifted through all the available data, drawing on both unrecorded and recorded information. During this process, it was of importance to continuously remind ourselves of the study's focus as well as what the data suggested. After familiarizing ourselves and getting intimate with the data, we moved on to starting to reflect upon questions like what these data are about, whether they support existing knowledge, and if they answer previously unanswered questions. Furthermore, when categorizing the data, we continuously related back to the analytical framework and the topic guide. As such, we strived towards finding relevant data for each of the components in the analytical framework. In this step, evaluation and critique was of importance as we tried to make sense of and navigate ourselves in the rich amount of data. When this was accomplished, we decided to follow an open coding approach to analyse the empirical material. The researchers independently highlighted words and quotes that were found relevant in regard to the purpose of the research. In order to do this, we used NVivo, a software used to organize, analyse and find insights in qualitative data. All of these steps were conducted independently by the researchers in order to avoid being biased by one another.

Upon this, we decided to collectively discuss the relevance of the material. Together, we identified specific data and then structured them under each component of the framework; feelings about the advertisements, judgement about the advertisement, beliefs about the brand, attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand as well as brand image. Examples of these findings presented under each component of the analytical framework can be found in Appendix D. Once the empirical data was structured under each component of the analytical framework, we moved on to identifying relevant and common findings. We sought to discover patterns among the codes that were characterized by similarities, differences, frequencies, or

sequences. Thus, we compared our findings and highlighted words to identify patterns. This comparison was of importance for us since it shed light on what empirical material should be included or reduced in the analysis. As a result, we were able to identify themes relevant for exploring the influence on brand image. However, in order to decrease the number of themes, the next step was to undergo re-coding which implied us to code and re-code large amounts of data, resulting in a reduced number of codes. We did this since we meant to frame data in a way that allowed us to come closer to an in-depth analysis of what was considered important. Further, we moved on to linking the material that we found relevant. As such, we conceptualized how key categories and themes were related to each other and started to identify patterns that emerged between the findings. Since this study aimed at exploring consumer attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements and their influence on brand image, the findings under the component of brand image received the most attention during the data analysis. This was of specific interest for us since we wanted to explore the potential connection between the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model and brand image. Further, within the component of brand image, we identified re-emerging data that deemed to influence brand image focusing on the factors of perceived value, quality and influence on purchase intention. The empirical findings that derived from the components then resulted in four identified themes that were considered to be the most relevant for us to answer the research question. This process allowed us to structure and align findings from the interviews with the analytical framework while exploring the potential connection. This step resulted in several documents representing the themes consisting of four factors deemed to influence brand image. After this, we moved on to the step of re-evaluating the material. We wanted to make sure that the material that we presented was based on more than our individual subjectivism which was why we asked others to comment upon our findings. As a natural result from these comments as well as our own re-evaluation we adapted accordingly. Thus, after these steps, the analysed data was put together in one document whereby the four themes were combined. By identifying these themes, we were able to further explore the connection between the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model and brand image as well as the possibility to develop the model. Therefore, the empirical data and analysis chapter circulate around the four identified factors since these were deemed to be the most important to address the purpose of the study.

4.6   Trustworthiness

Researchers often evaluate the study based on its replication, reliability and validity. However, qualitative researchers have argued that these criteria do not succeed to capture all relevant aspects that are present in qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Kvale, 1992). Moreover, within qualitative research, like this study, there is a debate on how to assure the quality of the research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) put forward that qualitative research does not rely on realisms' perception of the world, which means the belief in one single truth as well as an objective view of reality. As a result, this study's quality will not be assured through validity and reliability. Thus, the quality of the study was evaluated according to the framework of trustworthiness as presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Within the framework, the authors present the factors of transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability, which we therefore addressed in order to examine the trustworthiness of the study.

The credibility of the study refers to how congruent the findings are to reality as well as the value and believability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Leininger, 1994, Polit & Beck, 2006). Additionally, Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that it is of significance for researchers to illustrate credibility while conducting research. Many descriptions of a social reality might exist, which is why researchers should strive to describe the social reality as credibly as possible. Achieving this can be done in various ways, and as such we continuously strived towards being reflexive when gathering the data considering different alternatives as well as consequences related to different options. For example, the study's credibility might have been influenced by the use of purposive sampling. Shenton (2004) argued that random sampling is the most credible approach when conducting research. However, since we had a specific target group in mind and two criteria that needed to be fulfilled, we believed that a purposive sampling technique would better serve the purpose of the study. Moreover, by using stimulus in form of advertisements during the interviews, we enhanced the interviewees' ability to communicate their feelings and attitudes towards the advertisements as well as brand image, hence providing us with more credible data. Additionally, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, which increased the credibility further (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, the fact that the interviews and the analysis of the data followed the presented analytical framework, might have influenced the credibility of the study. The decision to present the empirical findings and the analysis as in accordance with the four identified themes could have impacted credibility further. However, these decisions were taken as it was deemed to be the most appropriate

approach to present the data in a structured way while emphasizing the influences on brand image. Since the components in the analytical framework tend to go into each other we believed that a presentation of the data that followed the framework would have cluttered and increased complexity instead of facilitating the understanding of the empirical material.

The transferability of the study relates to what extent the findings of the study can be applied to other situations and contexts or even the same situation at another time (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is an aspect that is often limited in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and it is therefore of importance to thickly describe the reality of the contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The transferability of the study can be considered to be limited since the study only looked at seven different advertisements by seven different brands within unique conditions. However, it can be reasoned that the characteristics of each brand made the findings more transferable than if the brands would have been identical. Moreover, the research raised the transferability by carefully describing the contexts of the interviews as well as its implications. However, being a study emerging from a social constructionist stance, the aim was to understand the phenomenon within the specific context studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), aiming at increasing knowledge obtained in a specific context rather than creating generalizability.

The factor of dependability addresses the issue of whether the research could be repeated in the same context, with the same respondents and still gain consistent results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, we focused on creating a coherent account of all phases in the research process while describing the research design as carefully as possible in order to enable future researchers to easily implement the processes to repeat the study. However, all methods used have been adopted to the studied subject. Inevitably, conducted research is dependent on situational factors which might differ between interview sessions, limiting the ability to reach identical outcomes. The dependability was enhanced by consistent interpretation of data in which our separate individual interpretations of observations and analyses of data were compared. Moreover, all the research procedures were documented in detail to increase the dependability. Lastly, listening to the audio-recordings and transcribing the data resulted in substantial documents filled with contextual data, fulfilling the purpose of avoiding to lose important information while increasing dependability.

Confirmability treats the fact that researchers cannot fulfil complete objectivity and refers to the degree of which the results are biased and intruded by the researchers' values (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). Therefore, as researchers we acted in good faith while avoiding to consciously letting our own values affect the research. However, as qualitative research entails aspects of subjectivity in defining and gaining an understanding of the phenomena, we had to recognize the limited ability to endure absolute objectivity in the interpretations made. As clarified by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), it is of great importance to reflect during the research process due to the difficulties for researchers to endure 'outside' the subject. Reflecting upon this, it was critical for us to be aware of and not neglect personal biases which could have occurred in the interview-specific contexts. Consequently, we strived to adopt a contextually relevant self-position as in line with Alvesson (2003). He states that "reflexivity for me stands for conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject matter from different angles and avoid or strongly a priori privilege a single, favoured angle and vocabulary" (Alvesson, 2003, p.25). Thus, while trying to minimize the risks of bias, we sought to avoid applying a single, favored angle as well as vocabulary aiming for a reflexive pragmatic position during all interviews. Moreover, the reflection process was enhanced by the possibility to listen to the interviews over and over again (Alvesson, 2003). Additionally, we attempted to avoid affecting the interviews with our own subjective views through not deciding on themes for the analysis until after all the interviews were transcribed. This also enhanced the possibility to reflect upon the findings while increasing the confirmability of the study. Moreover, we consciously strived towards avoiding our own subjectivity outside of the process as much as possible. Additionally, we applied inter-subjectivity by independently reflecting upon the different research processes as well as comparing our individual findings in order to enhance being receptive as well as reducing potential biases. This was also of importance while analyzing the empirical material where we first conducted steps individually before collectively discussing upon the findings.

4.7   Limitations of the Study

It was necessary to set limitations for the study in order to generate thorough analysis within set parameters. As such, this study had limitations related to the methodological choices which will be further accounted for below. One limitation was related to the chosen research approach. The choice of an abductive approach might have limited the study since inductive and deductive approaches are linear to follow, making them easier to follow than an abductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, the choice of an abductive approach enabled us to continuously revise our reasoning and therefore adapt interpretations when additional data was found. This approach also allowed us to avoid limitations related to solely applying an inductive

or deductive reasoning. However, one significant weakness with the use of an abductive reasoning is related to confirmation biases which may have limited the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This occurs when identified themes in the study may risk being biased due to previously found knowledge. However, through being aware of this risk we tried to minimize the effects of it as much as possible. Moreover, we believed that in order for us to fulfill the purpose of the study, an abductive approach was needed since it enabled us to commence from an initial understanding before proceeding against the search for further knowledge (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012).

Moreover, the limitations of the data collection particularly concerned the number of conducted interviews as well limiting the data collection only to include Swedish interviewees. However, the choice of only including Swedish interviewees was justified by the specific interest for the Swedish market due to the current situation related to engagements in social movements as well as the upcoming legislation against sexual objectification in advertising. Moreover, the number of interviews was justified by the principles of data and theoretical saturation which was reached after 14 conducted interviews. However, conducting the same research but making it more extensive, by including additional nationalities, most probably would have resulted in a greater number of interviews. Nonetheless, Swedish young adults deemed to present an appropriate sampling due to the purpose of the study. Additionally, even though our sampling strategy was aimed at young adults between the ages of 18-34, only interviewees within the age range of 22-28 signed up for the interviews. As such, this might have been a limitation with the study since young adults representing the ages between 18-21 as well as 29-34 might have given other and additional insights. Moreover, interviews as such imply some limitations. The interviews might have been influenced by aspects such as our own subjectivity and the risk of bias. However, in order to minimize these risks, the interviewer strived to fulfil Kvale's (2007) interviewer qualifications. Thus, it was of importance for the interviewer to be knowledgeable, sensitive, critical and structured.

Another limitation of the study was related to the sorting and reducing of the themes used in the analysis. The decision to sort and reduce the number of themes that were discovered in the collected data aimed at providing thick analysis with a limited number of themes. Inevitably, this had effects on the study as possible relevant other themes might have been disregarded. The researchers were aware of the possible impacts that this decision might have had on the analysis. However, the decision was still justified by the choice of analysis method since it only

aimed at including the incorporation of solid, interesting as well as underlined statements. Moreover, we believed that this approach would enable us to generate a deeper understanding for young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification in advertisements as it kept us open and intimate to the material until relatively late into the research process (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Thus, the data used was sufficient for the analysis and well-suited for the scope of the study. Evidently, these limitations must be taken into consideration when assessing the trustworthiness of the study and its findings.

5   Empirical Data and Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical findings and the analysis of the empirical data that derived from the conducted semi-structured interviews. A short introduction with general findings will be given at the beginning. Then, the four main identified themes; lack of purpose, absence of reality, poor reflection on well-being, and misalignment with contemporariness, will be presented individually. Quotes will provide specific examples and illustrations of what is meant for each theme. Finally, a summary of the main results will be provided at the end of the chapter.

5.1   Introduction to Findings and Analysis

The results from the 14 interviews are presented below. The respondents' overall feelings towards the advertisements can be summarized as angry, frustrated, bored and unengaged. Moreover, their judgements about the advertisements can be defined as 'sexist', 'objectified' and that women are used as accessories to portray wrong ideals and sell products. The respondents expressed negative attitudes towards six out of seven advertisements. Within the six advertisements, we identified four factors that emerged throughout the interviews and the following analysis using the analytical framework as a basis. These four factors were identified as resulting in the respondents' negative attitudes. However, these four factors were not reflected upon in a negative manner in the one advertisement that was reflected on positively. Below, each identified factor will first be defined and then supported by quotes from respondents to exemplify their significance on the attitudes towards the advertisements and brands.

5.1.1   Lack of Purpose

Lack of purpose can be defined as the women missing a purpose, and rather being portrayed as an object for attention purposes. The unclear purpose of the women in the advertisements was often mentioned by respondents, which can be related to congruity and incongruity in the advertisements. Respondents questioned why some of the women were placed in the advertisements in the first place since they did not seem to serve any purpose, except for the obvious reason that "sex sells". For example, some of the respondents stated the following:

Amanda (23): "It makes no sense. Why is she not wearing any clothes and holding herself? I don't even understand it. If the name of the perfume was 'naked' it would make a bit more sense" [referring to Appendix G].

Felicia (22): "The woman is more an accessory, it has nothing to with the product they're trying to sell. She doesn't make me want to buy the product at all, but rather opposite" [referring to Appendix G].

Anna (25): "Nothing else is going on other than a bottled perfume and a naked lady. She could do something! I can't see the motivation behind having her next to the bottle[...]. I don't understand it!" [frustrated] [referring to Appendix G].

This shows that respondents were not only confused about using a woman in that sense but also expressed frustration towards the brands that make use of women as objects. Moreover, respondents felt that the product in the advertisements could have been more effectively communicated without the women and that the use of the women reduced perceived quality of the brand. They expressed irritation when there was no actual relatedness between the advertisement, the sexual content and the brands. This was specifically visible in some of the advertisements (see Appendix G and Appendix H). For example, Frida (23) said "I don't see a reason why this brand [referring to Appendix G] needs to have a naked woman to support the perfume. It would be classier to only show her face." On the contrary, respondents expressed less negative associations when they viewed the women as fulfilling a purpose, such as wearing a bikini that was advertised. For example, some respondents said:

Michelle (25): "In this one, the clothes are advertised. You need someone to wear it to make it also more attractive and show the best sides. So then I think it makes sense to have this ad" [referring to Appendix I].

Ludwig (24): "When bikinis or underwear need to be advertised, it makes sense to have such ads. How else would you promote the products then?"

This means that respondents expressed that it was more appropriate to include sexual content with advertisements aimed at selling products such as bikinis than when it was unclear what product the brand was trying to sell. They accepted nudity and the portrayal of women in such a way to a greater extent because there was functionality and congruity behind the idea. For

example, Jannike (24) said that "In underwear and bikini it's more okay. I don't say it's completely okay. It depends on the angle and what else is in the picture and their positions." After all, the respondents felt that the purpose of the advertisement was to promote the product, not the woman. When there was no congruity, respondents referred to the women as an accessory and that had nothing to do with the product that was meant to be sold through the advertisement. Thus, the respondents did not understand the benefit or purpose of placing a partially nude woman on an advertisement next to the product since they could not register any correlation between partially nude women and the product. For example, Anna (25) said "If it is a suit commercial, she could also wear a suit. [...] It's a silly picture" [annoyed] [referring to Appendix H]. One respondent felt that some women in the advertisements displayed more of a pornographic purpose than a promotional purpose:

> Oskar (26): "It feels too much like soft porn. I feel guilty looking at her. What is she doing there? That's closer to porn than an advertisement should be. It doesn't seem to be right looking at it" [referring to Appendix G].

This means that respondents paid attention to the products that were being advertised in relation to the portrayal of the women. Moreover, the use of women in such a way resulted in guilt and discomfort. Respondents negatively highlighted that the women in the advertisements served as objects and were easily interchangeable. For example, one respondent stated:

> Agnes (24): "The women all look the same; thin, and it shows basically one type of woman in the world. It's not diverse in any way [...]. They can be easily exchanged with other women."

This shows that the interchangeability of the women is an element that the respondents reflected on poorly. Further, the respondents' attitudes were influenced more negatively in advertisements where both males and females were illustrated. In those advertisements, male and female respondents felt that stereotypes were enforced by communicating a powerful and active male figure and an inactive and purposeless female model. Instead of illustrating a contrast between the two genders, respondents would have preferred if both characters had a role and purpose in the advertisements that reflects current times, rather than outdated stereotypes:

Agnes (24): "They are trying to show that men can surf. Why can't women be active? Why can't she go out to surf when they are a surf brand. It's not a good way to portray them [the women]. The woman can do something as well, something sporty. Women don't lie like that on the beach!" [annoyed] [referring to Appendix L].

This is in consensus with the respondents' desire to see advertisements where the characters have a role and a purpose as well as excluding typical outdated stereotypes. As an example, the respondents mentioned it would give purpose to the models if they would undertake an activity instead of acting as a decorative object. When asking respondents to explain their frustration further, most of them stated that the absence of relatedness and an obvious lack of purpose for the women portrayed would influence their purchase intention of that specific brand:

Erik (24): "These ads reflect the brands badly. I don't see the value in having such ads. Even if they are trying to convince me through the women, the opposite happens. It just looks cheap."

Agnes (24) said "I would never buy anything from them. They don't have a good look on equality and how to do stuff. I don't really like that kind of ads. They're taking advantage of naked girls" [angry, frustrated] [referring to Appendix H].

This means that respondents felt that by removing the women or giving them a purpose in the advertisements, the value and image of the product and brand would be enhanced. Their evaluation of the advertisements did not end there, but rather they reflected past it, assessing the brand behind it. Moreover, the women's purpose had an implication on the brands' perceived value and quality. For example, one respondent said:

Felicia (22): "For me, if they wouldn't use female figures but make creative luxury advertising, that would be cooler. The brand would be more luxurious in that way. For me it doesn't make it luxurious although I know it is a luxury brand. But if they would do it differently, I would think it fits better" [referring to Appendix K].

As such, by placing women in the advertisements without a clear purpose, respondents felt that it reflected poorly on the brand. For example, Anna (25) said "I'm angry towards the one who made this ad" [referring to Appendix H]. These findings lead to the conclusion that the women

in the advertisements having a purpose and functionality was a vital aspect for the brands' quality and value as well as the respondents' purchase intention. Thus, the advertisements containing incongruity had a negative effect on how the respondents perceived the value of the brands. Meanwhile, the element of congruity resulted in more positive influences.

5.1.2 Absence of Reality

Absence of reality can be defined as the women lacking realistic or natural components, such as their appearance. Respondents referred to the women and advertisements as unnatural and not realistic, stating that they did not reflect real-life. For example, Erik (24) said "It looks very weird. It's not natural. I prefer images that look natural." Another example was Michelle (25) who said "It seems unreal. Very shallow." Throughout the interviews, the respondents commented on the fact that they did not enjoy or appreciate the use of unrealistic advertisements, often commenting that the women and context did not look real:

Jannike (24): "It doesn't look real, it doesn't look like they're having fun. If they had fun, I would maybe relate to that. If I think of me and my friends, I can't relate. We don't pose like that" [referring to Appendix J].

This shows that respondents paid much attention to the realness of the advertisements and the women in them. They did not only look at the women but the context, activities and overall atmosphere in the advertisements. Specifically, there were several elements that the respondents evaluated as either realistic and natural or unrealistic and unnatural, such as the postures, the extreme make-up, the photoshopped faces and bodies as well as the facial expressions:

Frida (23): "They look inhuman, unnatural, the way their makeup is made. It looks too far from the reality to be representative of anything. It's not like I want to buy anything from this ad" [referring to Appendix K].

Oskar (26): "They're standing in weird, unnatural poses. It freaks me out, the closer I look at it. There are only arms and legs, that's 90% of their bodies" [referring to Appendix K].

This shows that the respondents felt annoyed and frustrated when the components in the advertisements were unrealistic and unnatural. These illustrations sometimes resulted in

negative purchase intentions. The features that the respondents most frequently commented on were the women's postures and poses, the overall context and their appearance. As an example, the postures and poses of the women were often perceived as unnatural which evoked negative feelings:

Felix (28): "It's in a beach, which is a normal setting, but their poses are weird. It's not natural. There are so many people close together...just the way they are laying down, it's strange. I guess it would be closer to normal if they would have a discussion" [referring to Appendix J].

Felicia (22): "That's not how a normal person lays on the beach" [frowns] [referring to Appendix L].

Oskar (26): "The way she is leaning over and grabbing her heel is supposed to be seductive, but it looks more manic to me. It's not natural, but rather scary" [referring to Appendix M].

This shows that respondents described some advertisements as not reflecting real-life scenarios but rather unrealistic situations that would never occur, which they also perceived as negative. The actions, behaviours and context seemed to play a significant role for the respondents to determine whether the situation was realistic or not. Although respondents viewed some advertisements as trying to convey a natural feeling of the women, they often did not manage to get the message across because the posture, the context or the body did not look realistic. Effectively, naturality and reality was not only about the women's appearance but the whole advertisement, including context, activities and their posture. However, this was different for one advertisement (see Appendix I). Here, respondents reflected on the advertisement as following:

Michelle (25): "In this ad it's more someone at the beach, someone more normal...a neighbour, she's not so skinny, and looks more natural. And I see what I get, so I could imagine buying that underwear."

Valdemar (25): "Here it feels more like I'm taking the picture and she's looking at me. So it seems more natural in a way, it could happen in real life. That makes the ad more appealing to me."

Carl-Johan (27): "I like that her posture looks natural and not so fixed like the other ones."

This shows that through using normal-looking women in regular and natural settings, their attitudes were positive. Respondents stated that real-world images that reflect realistic and natural contexts make the advertisements and the brands behind them more appealing. They preferred natural-looking women in the advertisements, meaning that women with less makeup in natural positions were perceived more favourably. Additionally, respondents stated that they preferred advertisements in which they could relate to and found realistic. This increased the perceived quality of the brand and their purchase intention. For example, lying next to the pool with friends reflected a more positive attitude than an almost fully nude woman placed next to an oversized perfume. However, some respondents stated that the use of unnatural elements in combination with women can be interesting if it is new and innovative. However, making use of women in this stereotypical way was only perceived as old and uninteresting. One respondent stated:

Felix (28): "Unnatural can also be interesting if it's new and innovative but this is just, it's old and there's nothing really special about it. It's just very obvious" [referring to Appendix G].

This shows that unnaturality could be a beneficial component if it is implemented in a positive way. However, advertisements that respondents perceived as unnatural and unrealistic, lacking innovativeness and creativity resulted in negative attitudes towards the advertisements and brand. For example, Agnes (24) said **"**We are so aware now [about sexism]. These ads are stereotypical and we know about the bad aspects that occur from them. So I also feel bad about these brands." This shows that having stereotypical content resulted in negative associations with the advertisements which then influenced their attitudes to the brands. However, respondents stated that the brands that portray women in a natural way seemed to have higher value and quality than the brands that illustrated women as unnatural and fake. For example, Michelle (25) said "I feel like this advertisement [referring to Appendix I] has good quality and you see what you get [...]. The girl is in a natural position, I could totally see myself pose like that for a picture." Similarly, Ludwig (24) said "She looks like a normal girl. This makes it easier for me to buy underwear for my girlfriend because they kind of look similar" [laughs]. Effectively, naturality was closely related to reality, value and quality. Thus, the empirical

results illustrate that reality was a significant factor for the respondents' attitudes. When the women were in a realistic and natural setting, value, quality and purchase intention increased because respondents could identify themselves with that situation. Moreover, they felt that this was more representative of what society looks like today compared to the stereotypical unreal messages that have been communicated in the past.

5.1.3   Poor Reflection on Well-being

Poor reflection on well-being can be defined as the women portraying wrong ideals, such as light body weight and unhealthy looks. This factor is closely related to the reality factor as it deals with the appearance of the women. Many of the respondents felt that the advertisements portrayed wrong ideals of women in terms of appearance not only in terms of realistic elements but also elements related to the women's physical and mental health. The respondents continuously referred to the women as very skinny and looking unhealthy:

> Jannike (24): "To use women who are so skinny I really dislike. It doesn't look appealing to me at all. Plus I know that I wouldn't look like that. So I wouldn't buy these bikinis based on this ad" [referring to Appendix J].

> Oskar (26): "The posture, they look hunched over, anaemic… it creeps me out. They are girls that are way taller than me, 45-50 kg, kind of oiled up. [...] I feel uncomfortable. They [the women] scare me. It looks weird and they actually scare me. They don't look mentally or physically healthy" [referring to Appendix K].

> Erik (24): "It doesn't give a right impression on the women on how they should look like."

The respondents stated that they were aware of the ideals that are portrayed in media and dislike those. They paid much attention to the women's appearance including body weight and their facial expressions and compared them to real life women. Respondents did again not only reflect upon the advertisements but reflected beyond them, including reflections about the brands. The respondents expressed frustration towards brands that make use of these women in their marketing strategies. They stated that their attitudes towards those brands was impacted negatively and that they would rather prefer to see healthy and 'normal-looking' women:

Jannike (24): "I wouldn't want to buy anything from this picture. They don't look appealing. None of these images actually. I don't like any of it. I don't like the way they show the items. Only the women are in focus. You can't see the items. I also don't want to be like any of them [the women]."

Amanda (23): "They are really skinny, they don't look very healthy [...]. They look very skinny. I don't understand why they use such skinny models. That world is so sad. Makes me a bit sad. They are not showing clothes for ordinary women. I feel bad for these girls."

This shows that respondents disliked how brands portrayed women in the advertisements. They even expressed pity for the women since they thought that they look unhealthy and do not reflect society as it is. Moreover, this dislike towards unhealthy ideals was further enforced by the respondents expressing positive feelings and judgement towards one of the advertisements regarding this factor (see Appendix I). In this advertisement the respondents expressed that the woman portrayed was of a normal body size, not communicating unhealthy ideals:

Michelle (25): "This advertisement feels much more normal when it comes to her health. You can see that this girl is not starving, and that she is healthy. That I think is much better than if you compare to the others."

Ludwig (24): "This girl [referring to Appendix I] looks much more happy than these girls [referring to Appendix K]. Also, I think that this girl looks way healthier. She is not that overly thin."

This shows that respondents did not understand why marketers and brands use such skinny models in their advertisements. Rather, they preferred advertisements and brands where, in their opinion, healthy women were portrayed. Through this, they felt that the women looked better and happier. Moreover, some respondents raised thoughts about other advertisements that they came across, which portrayed plus size models. With these, they expressed positive attitudes:

Jannike (24): "The other day I saw that they [a brand] had a plus size model on their advertisements and that's a thing I reacted on and thought 'Oh wow! That's good for them that they have a curvy model."

Frida (23): "More and more brands are having plus size models so it's going into the right direction, but it also makes me even angrier with the brands still using women like this [pointing at the advertisements]. They [the brands] should know better."

This suggests that respondents preferred brands that use plus size models or normal-looking women instead of the typical skinny women that portray wrong ideals. Respondents felt that the models displaying wrong ideals and illustrating an unhealthy lifestyle worried them with regards to their personal lives and confidence levels. This finding illustrates that respondents paid much attention to body weight and they stated that they preferred normal looking or plus size models. Their purchase intention decreased when skinny and unhealthy models were portrayed because they did not support these ideals and could not imagine themselves wearing those clothes. It can be concluded that the respondents disliked brands that make use of women portraying wrong ideals and prefer when brands incorporate ideals that are closer to reality, including plus size models in their advertisements.

5.1.4 Misalignment with Contemporariness

Misalignment with contemporariness can be defined as the advertisements not being in line with current society. Rather, the advertisements, and especially the portrayal of women, are regarded as outdated and remind consumers of the past, rather than the present. Respondents frequently mentioned that these advertisements were old and outdated. Reflecting upon this, they referred to the previously three mentioned factors as being part of this evaluation resulting in the advertisements being viewed as old and outdated. They communicated, through their body language as well as verbally, that they were bored, frustrated and annoyed with such advertisements. They highlighted that these advertisements reminded them of the 1990s and early 2000s. For example, some respondents stated:

Anna (25): "I guess it's for his suit but it feels very 2001, [...] Feels old-fashioned, boring. Silly picture! [...] You're a bit sick and tired of those ads" [Shaking her head] [referring to Appendix H].

Agnes (24): "I find it stupid. There are so many other ways to get attention for the product and this is such a traditional, old, stereotypical one. We're used to it."

Felix (28): "It's almost funny. It's like a joke. They are making something that's so, so stereotypical and so, so old. We all know what they're doing, it's a joke."

This means that respondents felt that these advertisements were not only neglecting current society and the actual social position of women but regarded them as stupid or funny. Further, the findings illustrate that consumers are bored, frustrated and annoyed with such advertisements, meaning that they do not accept such advertising. Moreover, respondents felt that brands that follow such marketing strategies lack innovation, originality and creativity. Carl-Johan (27) sarcastically said "It feels like lazy marketing. I [imitating the marketer] have no idea what to do, so let's photoshop that guy in front of that girl!" [referring to Appendix H]. On the contrary, several respondents implied that the advertising industry should follow societal change, which is not the case when using sexually objectifying advertisements, in their opinion:

Frida (23): "I don't think we should be using these kinds of ads [irritated]. After the #metoo and everything, it's risky to use these ads. But sadly, we do live in a world where this has been okay. It has been accepted for a long time."

Carl-Johan (27): "I hope they can go into a new direction but I don't think the world changes so quickly [thinking]. Maybe companies are stuck with the way things have been done. That tells something about our society and the people."

This means that respondents feel an urge that brands and their advertisements should be in line with society as it is, especially with social movements like #metoo. However, they also noticed that the change might be rather slow since these advertisements and strategies have been present for a long time. Out of the seven advertisements, one (see Appendix I) of them was again reflected on positively. The respondents indicated that they liked this advertisement more than the others since it showed the current society rather than the outdated and old-fashioned ways. Valdemar (25) said "This one [referring to Appendix H] seems older, and this [referring to Appendix I] is where we are trying to be now in 2018." Similarly, Frida (23) said "I feel like most of them portray women in an old-fashioned way. But this one [referring to Appendix I] is different. I could be her and I could imagine buying that bra." This shows that the way women are portrayed in the advertisements plays a significant role in how the advertisement's contemporariness is perceived. Drawing upon this desire for contemporariness, the respondents stated that they wanted brands to be innovative and creative, which they thought were factors

that did not align with partially nude women, gender stereotypes or women portrayed without a clear purpose in advertisements. For example, two respondents stated:

Ludwig (24): "It's just already done so many times. We've seen naked female bodies so many times already. The ones who are doing these ads are lazy, it's old fashioned. I would prefer something original and enticing!"

Amanda (23): "It doesn't feel genuine. I don't think any advertisements, except for the guy in the surfboard [referring to Appendix L], are genuine."

This shows that respondents did not only reflect on the advertisements as being old but they even criticized the brands and marketers behind them. This means that respondents think beyond the advertisements and rather the brands come into the focal point. Evidently, these outdated advertisements reflected poorer quality and value on the advertisements but also the respondents' attitudes towards the brands:

Valdemar (25): "It's a cheap trick and cheap advertising."

Simon (22): "I think a lot of them [advertisements] are stupid, so I start to think the brand behind it is stupid as well. Also, for me, it's about quality. If you can't have quality in your advertisements. What about your products?"

Felix (28): "Overall, I think it's [the use of these advertisements] quite negative [...]. These [brands] use old ways to grab the attention. Other ads would make me more interested. My perception to these ads have changed; what's discussed between friends and in media and I'm also more aware myself, being older. I don't think my perception wasn't better before, I just didn't think of it as much."

This shows that respondents' general awareness of such advertisements in relation to the brands was high, suggesting that brands must be careful in their strategies. However, it was clear that when respondents had positive associations with the brand from before, this somewhat minimized the negative influence on brand image. Yet, the overall attitude towards these advertisements was negative. As noted, the factor of contemporariness was closely intertwined with the other identified factors; lack of purpose, absence of reality, poor reflection on well-being. Specifically, these three factors together influenced the perceived misalignment with

contemporariness that was expressed by the respondents. These outdated strategies resulted in negative attitudes since the respondents associated poor quality and value with them. Moreover, it had a negative influence on their purchase intention. Thus, the empirical material lead to the conclusion that contemporariness, including the other factors, was significant for the reflection on quality, value and purchase intention.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

Generally, respondents were aware that sexually objectifying advertisements were implemented by companies because of the notion that sex sells. However, our interviews illustrated that the respondents were not only bored of this outdated and old strategy, but also frustrated and annoyed with brands that use this approach. At times, respondents expressed even more negative attitudes when the women in the advertisements did not bring additional value. Rather, they thought that brands who make use of these advertisements were sad and lacked creativity. Respondents were particularly frustrated with advertisements where they did not understand what product was to be sold and simply made use of women as objects. Therefore, the role and purpose of the women played a significant role for the them, which is a factor that is closely related to congruity, namely relatedness, in advertisements. Moreover, they often used words such as 'unnatural' and unrealistic' when describing the women and stated that if brands would make use of normal-looking women, they would much prefer the advertisements and brands, as it would reflect reality better. The aspects communicating 'unnatural' and 'unrealistic' can be closely related to that young adults' value authenticity since these components fail to align with the concept of authenticity. Moreover, respondents placed much focus on the appearance and well-being of the women and would have preferred to see healthier and heavier models in the advertisements. Thus, these aspects can also be related to the desire for authenticity. A common reflection by the respondents was that these brands lacked creativity and originality, which are features that young adults highly value. Moreover, many respondents voiced that their purchase intention is negatively influenced with such advertisements. Additionally, respondents stated that they perceived brands as cheaper and with less value when they make use of such advertisements. They mentioned that brands would be considered more valuable and of higher quality if the women were portrayed as they are in reality; having a purpose and an appearance that reflects women as they are in current society.

6 Discussion

This chapter commences with a discussion of the empirical findings in relation to previous research whereby similarities and differences are highlighted. Thereafter, the influences of these factors on brand image will be elucidated and explained. Furthermore, the implications on the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model will be detailed and further explicated. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with reflections on the discussion whereby expected and surprising findings will be presented.

6.1 Introduction to Discussion

This study attempted to determine how young adults' attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements influence brand image. Drawing upon this, four different factors were identified as being of significant importance for young adults' attitudes when assessing sexually objectifying advertisements. These four factors were also shown to be of significance for an impact on brands and brand image. The data that was found is broadly consistent with some previous findings in literature that assessed consumer attitudes in relation to sexual objectification in advertisements (Chang & Tseng, 2013; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994; Orth & Holancova, 2003; Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Sherman & Quester, 2005). However, there were also some inconsistencies with previous research. The identified similarities and differences for each of the identified four factors and the implications on brand image as well as the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model will be detailed below.

6.1.1 Lack of Purpose

The findings from our empirical data related to congruity largely align with previous research. Chang and Tseng (2013), Peterson and Kerin (1977), as well as Orth and Holancova (2003) found that consumers dislike advertisements when there is a lack of congruity between the appropriateness of incorporating sexual content and its connection with the product and brand. This is also what our research suggests. Young adults were annoyed and confused about brands who make use of women as objects rather than giving them a purpose and role in the advertisements. Furthermore, they placed much importance on functionality. Nudity of women was accepted when there was a reason for the product being advertised that way, such as bikini and underwear advertisements. This is in line with the findings from Sherman and Quester

(2005) who argued that sexism in advertising largely depends on its functionality and suggestiveness. The authors found that attitudes might differ towards advertisements that portray nudity, dependent on the advertisements' functionality and congruity. Moreover, the authors stated that the product category that is advertised plays a paramount factor in determining its functionality. Additionally, young adults expressed that women were objectified when they had no purpose. Moreover, the young adults also highlighted that the women were easily exchangeable with other women, whereby they were being objectified by advertisers. They thought that they were rather treated as an accessory which is in line with Nussbaum's (1995) definition of sexual objectification. She defined it as "treating as an object something that is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being" (p.257).

Furthermore, young adults expressed negative attitudes when the men seemed to have a clear purpose and more powerful role than the women. This could be related back to the sexual gaze and anchored drift explained by Kaschak (1992) and Goffman (1979). The authors suggested that in such settings, it is common that men stare at the women from a distance, demonstrating a powerful character, while the women illustrate a weaker and more submissive persona. This can be related back to the discrepancy between sexism and sexist advertising in which consumers have been noted to express more positive feelings towards sexy advertisements than sexist ones (Lysonski, 2005). Nokes (1994) stated that sexy advertisements can illustrate women and men enjoying each other's company, which is why these kinds of plots have been shown not to offend women (Lysonski, 2005). Our results indicated similar insights. Within these settings, the overall judgement was argued as sexist rather than sexy, since men took over a more powerful role, whereby women and men did not enjoy each other's company.

6.1.2   Absence of Reality

The findings from our empirical data related to the factor of absence of reality partly align and somewhat misalign with previous research. Firstly, Cornelis and Peter (2017) stated that throughout the past two decades, digitally altered images have characterized the advertising industry. According to the authors, these advertisements have been regarded as acceptable as long as the images portrayed were not misleadingly exaggerating the effects of the product advertised. However, our findings are different from this argument since it was found that young adults prefer natural and real advertisements as opposed to photoshopped and unreal images.

Our findings also align with some literature. Reichert and Ramirez (2000) stated that sexual appeals are not only about the way models are dressed and how nude they are portrayed, but it also revolves around the model's physical attractiveness, the actions and behaviours and the overall contextual features. Young adults placed a lot of significance on the overall setting and the women's behaviours within the advertisements when they evaluated the advertisements and brands. When the women were placed in a realistic context, whereby they had fun and the situation seemed natural, positive attitudes increased. This may be closely related to the fact that young adults value authenticity (Cornelis & Peter, 2012; Schwabel, 2015), which includes aspects like naturality, sincerity and reality (Boyle, 2006; Fine, 2003; Kennick, 1985).

Furthermore, as noted, Sherman and Quester (2005) argued that sexism in advertisements highly depends on functionality or suggestiveness. With this they meant that portraying partially nude women in advertisements for underwear is considered as more appropriate since functionality is high. However, illustrating a photoshopped woman in a bikini at the background of a suit advertising did not portray naturality and reality, whereby attitudes were negative. As such, our findings align with the study from Sherman and Quester (2005).

6.1.3   Poor Reflection on Well-being

Our empirical findings related to the factor of poor reflection on well-being are somewhat in line with previous research. For example, Ting, de Run and Jee (2015) found that young adults criticize advertising for promoting falsity and wrong values. This is similar to our findings which illustrate that young adults dislike it when brands portray wrong ideals, including skinny and unhealthy women. Moreover, their negative attitude might have been stronger due to their desire for authenticity in contemporary advertising (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Napoli et al., 2014; Schwabel, 2015). Additionally, as noted, LaTour and Henthorne (1994) highlighted that societal change must be taken into account. In our findings, it was evident that young adults felt that brands should make use of women who look healthy and real, reflecting the modern woman. This could further be related to femvertising, which is a term that describes the more powerful and realistic women, reflecting society as it is (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen, 2017; Grau & Zotos, 2016). Similarly, Lysonski (2005) stated that sexually objectifying advertisements often do not represent the modern women which is why they are considered as sexist. Young adults also expressed that they would prefer to see more powerful women as well as plus size models. This is in line with Groesz, Levine and Murnen (2002) who found that thin

ideals, as opposed to average size models or plus size models, resulted in more body dissatisfaction. This is similar to findings from other authors who found that sexual objectification in combination with wrong ideals result in negative psychological variables, such as body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety and low self-esteem (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gurung & Chrouser, 2007; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Roberts & Gettman, 2004; Tiggemann & Williams, 2012). For young adults, incorporating plus size models also resulted in a more positive attitude towards the advertisement as well as the brand.

6.1.4   Misalignment with Contemporariness

The empirical findings related to the misalignment with contemporariness was closely related to the other three identified factors. This relationship illustrated that the overall perception of the advertisement's alignment or misalignment with contemporariness was influenced by these three factors. The empirical findings related to the misalignment with contemporariness are somewhat different from the cultivation theory by Gerbner et al. (1994) which analyses connections between consumer attitudes and media exposure. The theory argues that repeated exposure to media messages guides consumers to a gradual acceptance of these messages where they start to perceive them as realistic. However, our findings illustrate that consumers are bored, frustrated and annoyed with these advertisements, meaning that they do not accept such advertising. As such, the cultivation theory may have been relevant for this particular area of study in the past, but the recent rise in discussions on sexism may be a reason why the cultivation theory's applicability can be questioned for this area.

Furthermore, our findings are in line with the findings from LaTour and Henthorne (1994). They argued that the social impact must always be taken into consideration since the moral and ethical view of society changes over time. This means that an advertising that may be suitable for a given time, may be unsuitable at another time period. This is also similar to what Boddewyn (1991) and D'Emilio and Freedman (1988) argued. They stated that advertising that illustrated sexual objectification might have been effective in a given time period but would have resulted in other findings at another time. Similarly, Kirmani and Yi (1991) argued that it is vital for brands to consider and reflect upon the content in their advertisements because consumer attitudes may be influenced by the advertisement's context. Young adults expressed anger, frustration and irritation with brands that make use of women in an old and outdated

way. Rather, they would prefer if brands would incorporate the modern woman, illustrating them as they are in real society. This could be explained by studies suggesting that young adults highly value authenticity, including originality (Cornelis & Peter, 2012; Schwabel, 2015), and that it is a must in contemporary advertising (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003; Napoli et al., 2014).

However, this finding is somewhat different from Infanger, Bosak and Sczesny's (2012) study. They found that consumers in their study were not fully accepting women in powerful roles but rather the more stereotypical portrayal of women was preferred. The authors conclude that although there is a shift in roles of women in Western societies, it is not incorporated in the context of advertising. On the contrary, our findings illustrate that young adults seek for powerful women and a transparent reflection of society.

6.2   Implications on Brand Image

The findings from our empirical data suggest that brand image can be negatively influenced by the use of advertisements containing sexual objectification of women. The results show that the four identified factors were of significant importance for young adults when assessing the advertisements, working as mechanisms that influence brand image. As such, their attitudes were negatively influenced when the advertisements did not align with how they wanted brands to address these factors. This was enlightened by young adults referring to decreased value, quality as well as negative influences on their purchase intention for the brands using these advertisements. These influences could occur in a short period of time which is different from Kapferer's (2012) statement who argues that brand image is not based on the latest advertising seen. Similarly, Faircloth, Capella and Alford (2001) argued that brand image is built up over time and through continuous exposure and interactions between the brand and consumer. However, our findings are more closely related to Um's (2013) findings, showing that negative brand associations reduce brand evaluation and purchase intention, which can happen in a very short period of time. Moreover, the author argued that once consumers are exposed to negative brand associations, their attitudes are altered accordingly. The findings are further related to Keller (1993) who argued that the attitude towards the advertisement could affect brand image, either directly or indirectly via brand attitude. Similarly, Aaker (1991) stated that brand attitude can have a direct impact on brand image, which our findings also suggest.

One explanation why young adults expressed negative purchase intention, value and quality, could be related to the reasoning by Eagly and Chaiken (1993) as well as Roper and Fill (2012). They stated that consumers place more emphasis on negative than positive information which might explain why brand image was negatively influenced by these advertisements. Similarly, Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy (1990) argued that consumers consider negative information as more informative and indicative. However, the young adults' negative associations were not as strongly communicated when they expressed a strong relationship with the brand from before. This can be connected to the argument of Keller (1993) who stated that feelings, previous assumptions and interactions can affect brand image. As such, the young adults indicated that their previous associations with the brand influenced their attitude to some extent even though it still had a negative influence on perceived value, quality and purchase intention. Drawing upon these findings and the four identified mechanisms, it was also clear that they can be aligned to the importance of authenticity which has been addressed by previous research. For example, Schwabel (2015) shed light on the importance of authenticity for young adults. Similarly, other studies by Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003), as well as Napoli et al. (2014) stated that authenticity is a must in contemporary marketing. Moreover, Ting, de Run and Jee (2015) argued that advertising has been criticized for promoting materialism, falsity and corrupting values by young adults. Thus, these studies are in line with what our findings suggest. Specifically, by showing the importance of authenticity for the impact on brand image. Moreover, not displaying the modern woman as she is in current society, reflects poorly on not only the advertisement but also on brand image. This could also be further connected to the American Marketing Association's (2018) definition of brand image, stating that it refers to what people believe about a brand, including their expectations. As such, seeing that young adults value authenticity, which for them is a part of the current society, they expect brands to be in line with current society. Similarly, Larsen (2017) argued that brand image is influenced by marketing activities, the current context as well as individuals' perception of reality. Therefore, the four mechanisms are closely related to young adults' views on how brands and their advertising strategies address these issues.

Effectively, brand image can be influenced through a single advertisement by triggering any of the four identified mechanisms; lack of purpose, absence of reality, poor reflection on well-being and misalignment with contemporariness. These mechanisms can be either positively or negatively triggered depending on the advertisement's content, resulting in either a favourable or unfavourable influence on brand image. Moreover, these four mechanisms can work

individually or together to influence consumers' brand images. As such, content that reflects young adults' view on current society results in more positive attitudes than when this view is overlooked. Effectively, advertising strategies that are regarded as poor, in terms of these four mechanisms, influence brand image negatively, which can also occur in a short period of time. Ultimately, the findings imply that the influence from using these advertisements does not end with brand attitude, but goes beyond brand attitude, influencing brand image.

6.3   Implications on the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model

Our findings have brought some consistency and novel insights into this specific topic, especially within the current landscape where society is experiencing a shift in sexism. Furthermore, given that our research has dealt with advertising and brand management, we have additionally contributed to the literature body in those fields. Through these findings, we propose that the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model could be extended. Unlike the original Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model, which primarily determines attitudes towards advertisements and brands, we suggest to incorporate brand image into the model. Our findings illustrated that brand image can be included when assessing advertisements that portray sexual objectification of women since it was shown to have a close connection with consumer attitudes. As such, our results showed that the influences from these advertisements did not end with brand attitudes, but further influenced the brand image. To demonstrate this, we adapted the analytical framework into a theoretical framework to match the findings derived from the empirical data.

Effectively, we propose an extension of the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model which places brand image in the centre of the model illustrating that brand image can be influenced within the attitude formation. As such, this framework incorporates the exposure to sexually objectifying advertisements, whereby feelings and judgements of consumers can be assessed. Then, the attitude towards the advertisement is formed while beliefs about the brand are developed. Once this is reached, the attitude towards the brand is created which then affects the overall brand image. Effectively, we propose that this framework can be used to assess consumer attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements in relation to brand image. The theoretical framework is visually illustrated in Figure 4.
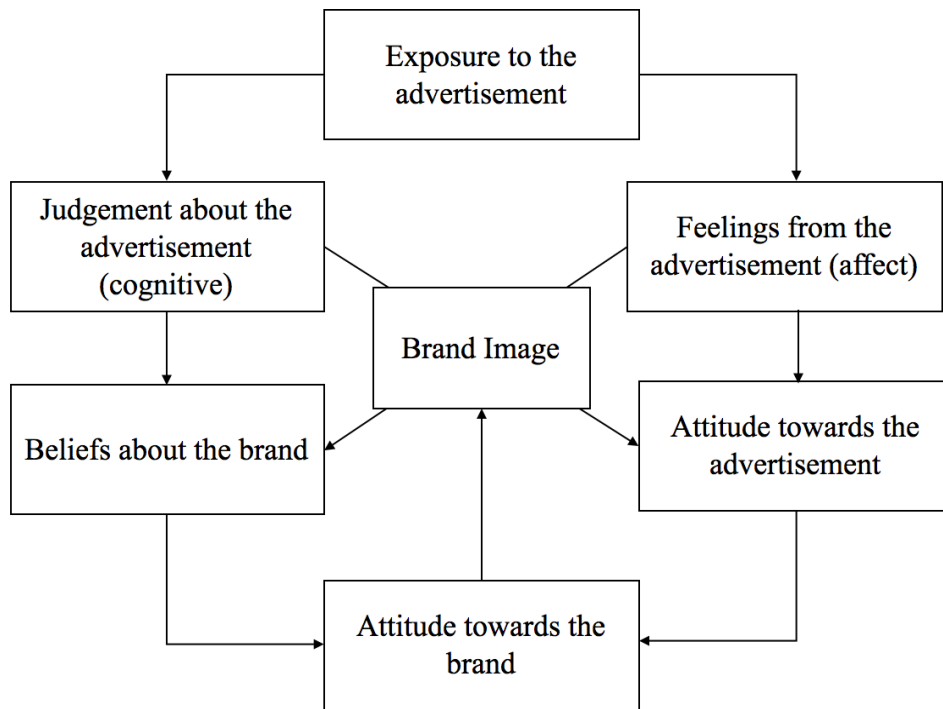
Figure 4. Theoretical Framework adapted from Schiffman, Wisenblit & Kanuk (2010)

6.4   Reflections on Discussion

This is the first study, to our knowledge, to examine sexually objectifying advertisements of women in relation to brand image. Most other studies have investigated these advertisements in combination with brand attitudes, recall and purchase intention (Black & Morton, 2017; Davis & Welsch, 1983; Mittal & Lassar, 2000; Parker & Furnham, 2007; Whipple & Courtney, 1981; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018). Moreover, to our knowledge, we are the first to extend the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model with the concept of brand image. These results describe that brand image can be influenced by the use of sexual objectification in advertisements in a negative way. Only one other study, to our knowledge, has examined the implication of provocation in the form of mild erotica on corporate image and attitude towards the ad (Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004). Moreover, one other study examined cross-cultural female responses to sex portrayals in advertising and their implication on corporate image and purchase intention (Ford, LaTour & Honeycutt, 1997).

In general, we were not surprised that young adults had negative attitudes towards these advertisements. In particular, two factors that were found in this study were expected to some extent. Given the current shift in social roles and the active debate around #metoo in Sweden, we expected the young adults to have negative attitudes towards these advertisements because

they did not reflect current society as it is. We expected that such advertisements would result in poorer value, quality and purchase intention by them. Furthermore, as many studies have illustrated that congruity plays a significant role in assessing consumer attitudes (Chang & Tseng, 2013; Orth & Holancova, 2004; Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003), we also expected negative attitudes towards the advertisements when no purpose or relatedness was shown. However, we were surprised that their purchase intentions were negatively influenced to this extent in relation to congruity.

Moreover, two other factors were also unexpected. Firstly, the young adults focused a lot on the women's appearance in terms of reality and health. Since there was little research that reflected on consumer attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements and the women's realness and well-being, we were surprised about the magnitude that young adults mentioned them. For us, these were two factors that were rather new since we did not come across these as often as other factors, such as congruity. However, they seemed very significant for the young adults since they mentioned that the usage of unreal and unhealthy women reduced their perception of the brands' quality and value as well as their purchase intention. Yet, this finding could be related back to the factor of authenticity and its significance for contemporary marketing (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003; Cornelis & Peter, 2017; Napoli et al., 2014; Schwabel, 2015; Ting, de Run & Jee, 2015). Moreover, another surprising insight from our study is that the young adults did not perceive one of the advertisements as offensive or provocative although it was chosen based on Nussbaum's (1995) objectification theory and classifications. Moreover, the advertisement that was reflected on positively was banned in 2017 in Sweden, which is an additional reason why we believed young adults would perceive it as offensive. Surprisingly however, the young adults did not reflect negatively on the advertisement but rather expressed favourable attitudes. This could be explained by the fact that this advertisement triggered the four mechanisms in a positive manner instead of a negative one like the other advertisements.

In summary, it can be concluded that these advertisements influence young adults' attitudes negatively. Moreover, we found that the young adults expressed that such advertisements reduce the brands' value and quality as well as their purchase intention, which resulted in negative influences on brand image. Reflecting upon this in relation to the research question, which aimed to assess how young adults' attitudes towards sexually objectifying

advertisements influence brand image, we were able to illustrate that there are four mechanisms that influence brand image negatively.

7 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study. Firstly, the research question, aim and purpose are referred back to while the study's findings are accounted for. Thereafter, the theoretical contributions are highlighted in which the theoretical framework and brand image are addressed. Moreover, the practical contributions of the study are accounted for, providing insights for marketers' future advertising and brand strategies. Lastly, the study's limitations and suggestions for future research are presented.

7.1 Research Aim and Purpose

The purpose of the study was to investigate Swedish young adults' attitudes towards sexual objectification of women in advertisements and how these influence brand image. An analytical framework drawing upon findings from previous literature, including the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model, was used as a basis to fulfil the purpose of the study and to answer the research question. Within this analytical framework, we proposed a connection between the model and the concept of brand image. The study was of qualitative nature in which data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with Swedish young adults. Furthermore, this study expanded on existing literature on consumer attitudes towards female sexual objectification in advertisements and drew upon the existing theory of the Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model. This study has shown that Swedish young adults' attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements are negative. Specifically, it was evident that these negative attitudes also influenced their attitude towards the brands, which resulted in negative influences on brand image. This was enlightened when respondents were asked about their purchase intention as well as the perceived value and quality of the brand in relation to the advertisements. When young adults had a positive attitude towards an advertisement, purchase intention and brand image was also reflected on positively. On the contrary, when the advertisements were reflected on as offensive or provocative, they communicated poor purchase intention and brand image. Our interviews revealed specific mechanisms that influence young adults' attitudes towards sexually objectifying advertisements and the brand, as well as brand image. We identified that there are four mechanisms within the advertisements that form young adults' negative judgement and feelings that influence brand image. These four mechanisms were defined as a lack of purpose, absence of reality, poor reflection on well-being and misalignment with

contemporariness. Therefore, when these four mechanisms were triggered negatively, it influenced brand image in an unfavourable manner.

7.2   Theoretical Contributions

These findings contribute to the development of the literature on sexual objectification in advertising as well as brand management. More specifically, many studies that have dealt with the issue of sexual objectification were published in the late 1980s, 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. Given that society has experienced a significant shift, including the recent social movements, we have contributed to the body of literature with novel findings about this topic. Additionally, since previous studies have reported mixed and inconsistent findings, this study has given some contemporary clarification in the area. Moreover, brand image has not been included in previous studies. However, our study revealed its significance in relation to sexual objectification in advertisements. Evidently, we illustrated that our theoretical framework provides further insights into consumer attitudes and its effects on brand attitude and image. Moreover, our results showed that brand image can be negatively influenced by seeing a sexually objectifying advertisement within a short period of time. As such, these findings added new insights and understandings for theoretical constructs between advertising and brand management.

7.3   Practical Implications

This study reinforced the recommendation that in today's society in Sweden, sexual objectification in advertisements should be avoided. These findings can contribute to the development and evaluation of marketers' future advertising and brand strategies. Especially in the current situation in which the Swedish government and The Association for Swedish Advertisers have come across disparities that create uncertainty, we have identified some clarity. Our research shows that marketers can and should avoid advertisements that portray sexual objectification that negatively trigger the four identified mechanisms. However, presenting advertisements that trigger the four mechanisms in a positive manner might result in favorable attitudes and influences on brand image. Our findings revealed that young adults value brands that create original, authentic and creative advertisements, which for them is not represented in sexually objectifying advertisements. Evidently, Swedish marketers should place more emphasis and importance on advertisements that revolve around new, innovative and

authentic elements. Moreover, the findings can be considered in the development of the Swedish government and media industry policy and practice. However, some brands may not be able to go around this issue because of their product offerings, such as bikinis and underwear, where nude skin is common. In these instances, we recommend to consider the four identified mechanisms. Effectively, the advertisements should illustrate the modern woman, whereby they have a purpose, look healthy and are realistically portrayed. Through this, brands could maintain and foster their brand image in the eyes of Swedish young adults.

7.4   Limitations and Future Research

Given that, to our knowledge, this is the first study that investigates the implications of sexually objectifying advertisements in relation to brand image, it is recommended that additional research further investigates this relationship. A main limitation of this study is that it only incorporated one consumer segment, thus neglecting other age groups. Evidently, these findings may not be generalizable among other generations, which is why future research should also focus on other generations. Furthermore, given that this study only analysed Swedish consumers, culture was another significant limitation, in which other nationalities may have contributed to other results. Effectively, several questions remain to be resolved; in particular it is of interest to determine how culture and age influenced the results. As such, further research could follow a similar approach by incorporating different cultures as well as age groups. Moreover, this study only analysed female sexual objectification, which is why further studies could base their research on both genders or solely male sexual objectification. This could provide further insights into the implications that these advertisements have on brand image, which could be relevant for practitioners and marketers alike. Moreover, an additional limitation of the study could be the choice of brands and advertisements. Effectively, the findings might have had different outcomes if other brands and advertisements were shown to the respondents. Furthermore, given that our study showed that sexual objectification has an impact on brand image, it could be of interest to test the theoretical frameworks' applicability in other delicate areas, such as racism in advertising. As such, our proposed theoretical framework should be tested in further research, either investigating sexual objectification or other forms of advertisements. Lastly, although our findings provide some clarification within the body of literature that examines sexual objectification in advertisements, more research within this topic is necessary. Evidently, further studies are required to establish more consensus.

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Appendix A

Source: https://www.rt.com/viral/379646-yves-saint-laurent-campaign/
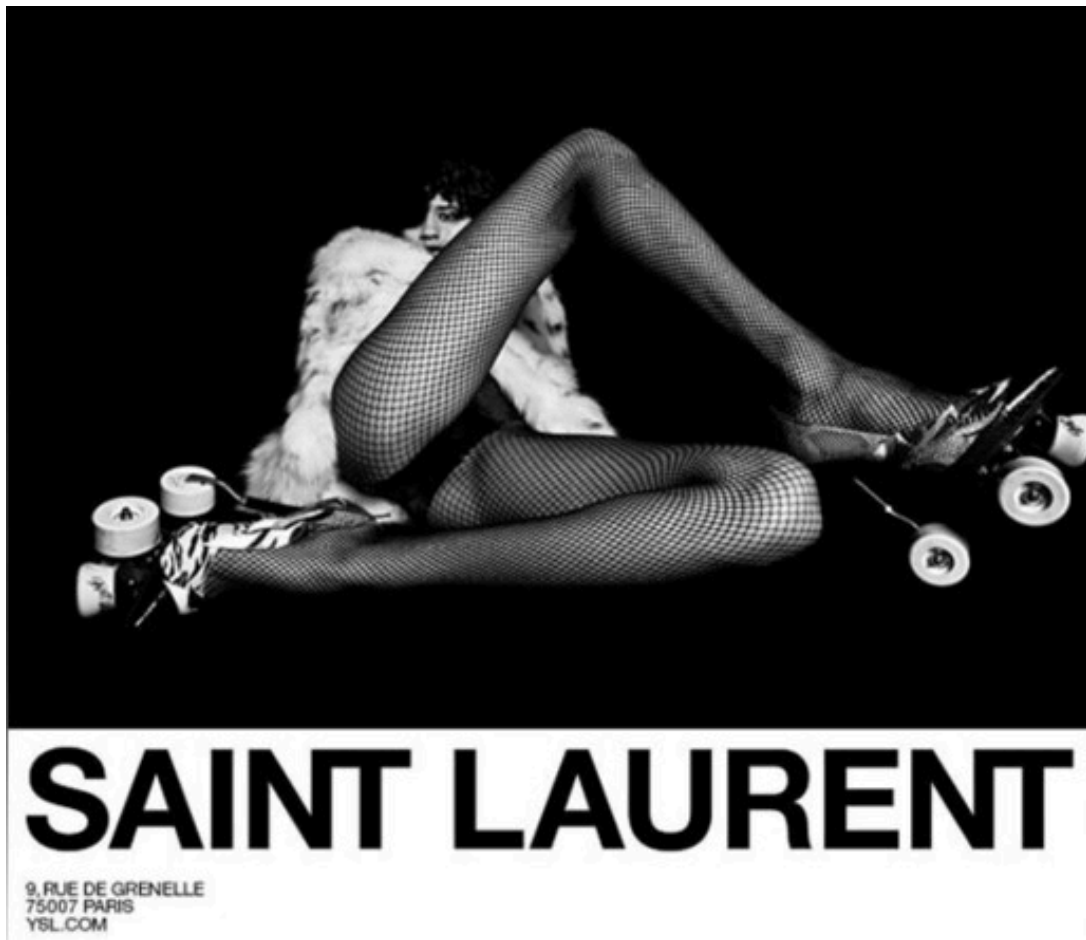
Appendix B

Source: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/21/dove-real-beauty-campaign-turns-10_n_4575940.html

Appendix C

Study/Studies	Context	Findings
Black & Morton, 2017; Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018	Current Landscape	Previous findings related to the use of sexual content are mixed and inconsistent.
Boddewyn, 1991; D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994	Social Impact	It is important to adapt advertising strategies to social change and the social context needs to be taken into account when assessing consumer attitudes towards advertisements.
Sassatelli, 2007	Social Impact	Advertising can reproduce the prevailing societal differences and also, although more seldom, encourage new social orientations and tendencies.
Beverland et al., 2008; Napoli et al., 2014; Rose & Wood, 2005	Authenticity	Consumers seek for authenticity when they process advertising content
Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Cornelis & Peter, 2017; Napoli et al., 2014; Schwabel, 2015; Ting, de Run & Jee, 2015	Authenticity	Young adults place a lot of emphasis on authenticity in brand and their marketing strategies.
Black & Morton, 2017; Vezich. Gunter & Lieberman, 2017; Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres, 2018	Consumer Attitudes	Previous findings related to the use of sexual content in advertisements are mixed and inconsistent.
Batra & Ray 1986; Cacioppo, Petty & Morris, 1983; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch	The Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model	The Attitude-Towards-the-Ad model by Edell and Burke (1987) is a theoretical framework that has been frequently used to assess consumer

1986; Moore & Hutchinson 1983		attitudes towards advertisements. The model has illustrated explanatory power when investigating the influence of advertisements on brand attitudes.
Kotler, Bower & Makens, 1999	Brand Attitude	Brand attitude refers to a positive or negative personal evaluation, emotional feeling, and behavior tendency that a person holds about a brand.
Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001; Keller, 1993	Brand Attitude	Brand attitude is defined as being just one of the many associations that form brand image.
Aaker, 2009; Arora & Stoner, 2009; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993	Brand Image	Brand image is a common concept that is used in marketing and brand building. The definition of brand image has not been consistent and has been interpreted differently by authors.
Aaker, 1991; Arora & Stoner, 2009; Chien-Hsiung, 2011	Influence of purchase intention on brand image	Brand image can be assessed through purchase intention.
Randheer, 2012	Influence of quality, value and awareness on brand image	Brand image can be assessed through perceived value, quality and awareness.
Aaker & Biel, 1993; Kapferer, 2012	Advertising and Brand Image	One of the most common marketing strategies to build brands and their image is through advertisements.
Barwise & Meehan, 2010; Christodoulides, 2009; Kontu & Vecci, 2014	Advertising and Brand Image	In today's world, brands and their image are much more vulnerable and under scrutiny by consumers at all times.
Kapferer, 2012	Advertising and Brand Image	Advertising, in combination with other communication by the brand, impacts brand image over an extended period of time. Brand

		image is not only based on one single advertisement but rather a compilation of many brand messages over time.
Um, 2013	Advertising and Brand Image	Negative brand associations reduce brand evaluation and purchase intention, which can happen in a very short period of time. Consequently, when consumers are exposed to negative brand associations, they change their attitude accordingly.
Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Roper & Fill, 2012	Advertising and Brand Image	Consumers place more attention on negative than positive information
Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993	Advertising and Brand Image	Brand image can be, either directly or indirectly, influenced through brand attitude.

Appendix D

The following tables show examples of the thematisation derived from the empirical data using the analytical framework as a basis. The tables therefore include the addressed components presented in the analytical framework.

Feelings from the advertisement (affect)
Examples of words used: angry, frustrated, bored, unengaged, provoked
Examples of quotes: Anna (25): "I guess it's for his suit but it feels very 2001, [...] Feels old-fashioned, boring. Silly picture! [...] You're a bit sick and tired of those ads." [Shaking her head] Anna (25): "I'm angry towards the one who made this ad" Ludwig (24): "It doesn't give me anything. I'm just bored of these ads." Michelle (25): "These ads actually provoke me! I really, really don't like them."

Judgements about the advertisements (cognitive)
Examples of words used: Sexist, objectified, outdated, unoriginal, reinforce stereotypes, portray wrong ideals
Examples of quotes: Agnes (24): "I find it [advertisement] stupid. There are so many other ways to get attention for the product and this is such a traditional, old, stereotypical one. We're used to it" Frida (23): "I don't think we should be using these kinds of ads [irritated]. After the #metoo and everything, it's risky to use these ads. But sadly we do live in a world where this has been okay. It has been accepted for a long time." Felix (28): "It's almost funny. It's like a joke. They are making something that's so, so stereotypical and so, so old. We all know what they're doing, it's a joke" Ludwig (24): "I find these ads unoriginal. They don't excite me at all, rather the opposite to be honest."

Beliefs about the brand
Examples of words used: lazy, outdated, old, unoriginal, misaligned, ignoring current society
Examples of quotes: Ludwig (24): "The one who is doing this ad is lazy, it's old fashioned. I would prefer something original and enticing!"   Michelle (25): "It feels like these brands lack creativity. Otherwise they wouldn't have to come up with such outdated strategies."   Erik (24): "Nowadays we see so many cool ads. Why do brands still show women in this way? There are so many other ways."   Frida (23): "This is a luxurious brand but this ad really don't look luxurious at all. I would have expected something else."

Attitude towards the advertisement
Negative attitude formation
Examples of quotes: Felix (28): "Overall, I think it's [the use of these advertisements] quite negative. [...] These [brands] use old ways to grab the attention. Other ads would make me more interested. My perception to these ads have changed; what's discussed between friends and in media and I'm also more aware myself, being older. I don't think my perception wasn't better before, I just didn't think of it as much."   Michelle (25): "This advertisement feels much more normal when it comes to her health. You can see that this girl is not starving, and that she is healthy. That I think is much better than if you compare to the others"   Erik (24) said "It doesn't give a right impression on the women on how they should look like"   Frida (23): "I don't like ads when they make use of women this way."

Attitude towards the brand
Negative attitude formation
Examples of quotes: Jannike (24): "The other day I saw that they [a brand] had a plus size model on their advertisements and [...] that's a thing I reacted on and thought 'Oh wow! That's good for them that they have a curvy model" Simon (22): "I think a lot of them [advertisements] are stupid, so I start to think the brand behind it is stupid as well. Agnes (24): "We are so aware now [about sexism]. These ads are stereotypical and we know about the bad aspects that occur from them. So I also feel bad about these brands." Ludwig (24): "I just don't get why brands still do this. […] There are so many other cool ways"

Negative influence on Brand Image
Reduced purchase intention, reduced perceived quality and value
Examples of quotes: Felicia (22): "The woman is more an accessory, it has nothing to with the product they're trying to sell. She doesn't make me want to buy the product at all, but rather opposite" Jannike (24): "I wouldn't want to buy anything from this picture. They don't look appealing. None of these images actually. I don't like any of it. I don't like the way they show the items. Only the women are in focus. You can't see the items. I also don't want to be like any of them [the women]." Frida (23): "They look inhuman, unnatural, the way their makeup is made. It looks too far from the reality to be representative of anything. It's not like I want to buy anything from this ad" Agnes (24) said "I would never buy anything from them. They don't have a good look on equality and how to do stuff. I don't really like that kind of ads. They're taking advantage of naked girls" [angry, frustrated] Erik (24): "These ads reflect the brands badly. I don't see the value in having such ads. Even if they are trying to convince me through the women, the opposite happens. It just looks cheap."

Appendix E

Topic Guide

<u>**Section 1**</u>

1. Approach:

Introduction, friendly greeting and explanation including; who we are, thank the interviewee for agreeing to take part in the interview, a short introduction of the topic, explain the use and purpose of the interview, description of the structure of the interview. Mention the approximate duration of the interview.

2. Ethical considerations:

Ask the interviewees if they wish to be anonymous, whether they accept to be audio-recorded during the interview. Explain that there are no right or wrong answer and if they do not wish to answer any of the questions they do not have to. Before starting the interview, ask if they have any questions.

3. Ice-breaking question

Start off with an ice-breaking question in order to make the interviewee feel comfortable with the interviewer and the setting as such.

<u>**Section 2**</u>

Opening questions

Exposure to sexually objectifying advertisements

Present the seven advertisements to the interviewee.

Example of questions:

    a) What are your first impressions of these advertisements?

<u>**Section 3**</u>

Key topics

Topic 1: Feelings from the advertisements

Example of questions:

    a) What do you feel when looking at these advertisements?

    b) What features/elements make you feel this way? What is it in the advertisements that makes you feel this way?

Topic 2: Judgement about the advertisements

Example of questions:

a) What do you like/dislike about these advertisements?

b) How would you refer to similarities and differences in these advertisements?

Topic 3: Beliefs about the brand

Example of questions:

a) What's your general impression of the brand?

b) How would you describe the brand (e.g. with adjectives, experiences, etc.)?

Topic 4: Attitude towards the advertisements

Example of questions:

a) How would you describe your attitude towards these advertisements (e.g. negative, positive)?

Topic 5: Attitude towards the brand

Example of questions:

a) How would you describe your attitude towards these brands (e.g. negative, positive)?

Topic 6: Influence on brand image

Example of questions:

a) How do these advertisements influence your perception of the brands? (e.g. trust, quality, originality, etc.)

b) How would these advertisements influence your purchase intention?

Section 4

Closing questions

a) Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank the interviewee for his or her participation!

Appendix F

Information about the interviewees

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Date	Duration
Agnes	24	Female	April 16th	45 minutes
Felicia	22	Female	April 16th	49 minutes
Jannike	24	Female	April 16th	61 minutes
Amanda	23	Female	April 17th	54 minutes
Anna	24	Female	April 17th	49 minutes
Frida	23	Female	April 24th	56 minutes
Michelle	25	Female	April 26th	51 minutes
Felix	28	Male	April 17th	61 minutes
Valdemar	25	Male	April 16th	57 minutes
Oskar	26	Male	April 17th	60 minutes
Simon	22	Male	April 24th	50 minutes
Carl-Johan	27	Male	April 24th	55 minutes
Ludwig	24	Male	April 26th	58 minutes
Erik	24	Male	April 26th	62 minutes

Appendix G

Source: http://hollywoodlife.com/2016/08/22/lily-james-burberry-fragrance-topless-burberry-black-campaign-pics/

Appendix H

Source: http://www.dailyedge.ie/suit-company-2622611-Feb2016/

Appendix I

Source: https://www.fashiongonerogue.com/marloes-horst-lindex-lingerie-2016/

Appendix J

Source: http://wardrobetrendsfashion.com/hm-summer-2017-campaign/

Appendix K

Source: https://i.pinimg.com/originals/bd/5a/5a/bd5a5aee297e395b3937f767ec5ae406.jpg

Appendix L

Source: https://metro.co.uk/2017/08/20/billabong-ran-these-two-surf-adverts-and-people-got-angry-6863285/

Appendix M

Source: https://www.fashiongonerogue.com/jimmy-choo-resort-2018-campaign-shop/