Femvertising vs. stereotypical portrayal in the lingerie industry
Exploring consumers' attitudes towards lingerie brands in Germany

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ABSTRACT

The lingerie industry faced some drastic changes throughout the last decade, with once leading brands like Victoria's Secret receiving heavy backlash and emerging brands focusing on female empowerment being the new leaders of the market. Recent research has shown that femvertising, a type of brand activism that focuses on diversity and inclusion within the portrayal of females in advertising, plays a vital role in that development. Brand activism has become a decisive factor for young adults to establish a positive attitude towards brands. However, specifically within the German market, brand activism is not present yet within the lingerie industry. This industry continues to sell sensual female underwear and still objectifies women in their advertising. Additionally, previous research has mainly focused on the US-American fashion and lingerie industry. Therefore, to predict German consumers' attitudes towards different portrayals of females in lingerie advertisements, the following question was answered: "To what extent does the use of femvertising or stereotypical portrayal of women in lingerie advertising campaigns predict the attitude of Gen Z and Millenials towards lingerie brands across Germany?" A survey design was used to measure reactions towards different lingerie advertisements and the perceived sexiness of portrayed models amongst 190 participants aged 18 to 41 years old. Relationships between participants' gender, reactions towards femvertising and stereotypical advertising and the perceived sexiness of the displayed female models with the resulting attitudes towards the presented brands were explored. The US-American brand Aerie represented femvertising, and the Italian brand Intimissimi represented the stereotypical portrayal of females. Results showed that a positive reaction towards the advertisement for both brands leads to a positive brand attitude. As expected, gender predicts attitude towards the brand representing femvertising in a way that females have a more positive attitude towards the brand. For Intimissmi, no such result was found, and gender did not predict the attitude towards the stereotypical brand. For both brands, perceived sexiness did not indicate a positive or negative attitude towards the brand. Conclusions drawn from these results are that since females are the leading target group for lingerie, brands operating in Germany should beware of the trend of femvertising and could be threatened by more empowering brands in the future. Furthermore, the choice of advertisements is pivotal for the final attitude towards a brand since a negative evaluation of an ad can result in an overall negative attitude towards the represented brand. According to the results presented within the study, the former marketing trend of Sex Sells, which portrayed mainly sexually objectified women fitting into society's beauty standards, has no decisive influence on female or male consumers' attitudes towards the brands. This study adds to the literature on consumers' attitudes towards femvertising and the stereotypical portrayal of females and covers the niche of the German lingerie market.

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1. Introduction

Advertising has been integrated into our lives for many decades and since the rise of digital media, it has become even more prevalent (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016; Ulker-Demirel, 2019). It is a tool for businesses to persuade a population and position themselves within a market (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016). Going through life, whether it is being on a train, strolling through a shopping mall, or checking the news on social media, hardly anyone can escape the exposure to advertising (Simpson, 2022). Digital data collection in the 21st century also allows the creation of more personalized marketing and targeting consumers more specifically and aggressively (Tong et al., 2019). These developments in new media and advertising lead not only to increased sales for the business but have also long-lasting effects on the population who internalize values and beliefs spread through media (Selensky & Carels, 2021). According to Simpson (2022), an average person views 10 000 ads every single day. Therefore, it is not surprising that not only do people spend money on the brands they see, but it also impacts their mental health (Li, 2022). For instance, it has been researched multiple times that women compare themselves to portrayed supermodels in advertising, which harms their self-esteem (Lou & Tse, 2020; Rochelle & Hu, 2016; Yu, 2020). Nevertheless, people have also become more critical towards advertising and are not as easy to convince anymore since they know about the use of social media for business, and critical opinions on brands are spread more easily via social networks (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

One subject that has faced a lot of criticism throughout the last decade is the portrayal of over-retouched pictures of supermodels and the glorification of thin women in advertising, which led to the marketing trend of femvertising (Åkestam et al., 2017). Femvertising encompasses advertising in which all kinds of female body shapes are portrayed to spread the message that all women are beautiful (Åkestam et al., 2017). Especially in the lingerie industry, which sells sensual underwear to women and typically shows models wearing these with little or nothing else on them, harsh criticism for showing unrealistic female bodies has led big brands like *Victoria's Secret* to lose consumers and popularity (Feng, 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018). Therefore, brands have become more sensitive regarding this topic, and the depiction of women in lingerie advertisements has evolved within the last decades from showing models according to beauty standards to promoting body positivity and empowerment of women (Convertino et al., 2016).

Research has shown that the objectification of the female body, as well as depicting the beauty ideal, can negatively influence female attitudes towards brands (Shoenberger et al., 2020). Therefore, new US American lingerie brands like *Aerie* use femvertising successfully

and record high revenues (AEO Inc., 2021). Interestingly, popular European brands (e.g., *Intimissimi*) still portray the oversexualized female image and models with highly retouched bodies and faces (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020). Although many lingerie brands work with brand ambassadors portraying different body types, showing the feminine beauty standard is still most common in European lingerie marketing campaigns (Bass et al., 2018). These brands still enjoy high revenues in Germany despite the trend of femvertising (Calzedonia Group, 2021; Davidson, 2015). One of the reasons might be that not many German lingerie brands implement femvertising (Feldkamp, 2021). Therefore, consumers in Germany do not have many options in choosing between empowering and stereotypical brands (Feldkamp, 2021). Regarding the trend in western society towards a more realistic portrayal of femininity, it can be supposed that consumers in Germany would prefer brands using femvertising in lingerie advertising (Shoenberger et al., 2020).

Since German lingerie brands usually do not use femvertising, this research will investigate the attitude of German consumers towards brands using femvertising in contrast to stereotypical femininity (Feldkamp, 2021). For this purpose, the brand attitude towards two different brands will be measured and compared. As mentioned before, *Intimissimi* is one of the most popular lingerie brands in Germany (Meliado, 2022). Belonging to Calzedonia SpA, an Italian group focusing on selling lingerie and hosiery, *Intimissimi* reached a sales increase of 4% in 2021 compared to 2019 (Textilwirtschaft, 2022). According to Textilwirtschaft (2022) the group is still expanding in Germany and is planning to open a new office in Düsseldorf in 2023. The brand's purpose is to "convey sophistication and romance, tapping into unmistakable Italian style to satisfy the desires and needs of all women seeking comfort, performance, and quality, without sacrificing glamour" (Calzedonia Group, 2018). Brand ambassadors include super models like Irina Shayk, Chiara Ferragni and Gisele Bündchen (Airoldi, 2018). What these women have in common is being famous for their everlasting beauty, social status, and glamorous style (Airoldi, 2018). Being celebrated by fashion magazines like *Vogue* as portraying female romanticism and elegance, *Intimissimi* qualifies as a brand portraying stereotypical femininity and beauty (Vogue, 2017).

Contrarily, *Aerie* focuses on encouraging women to embrace their real selves, stating that women should feel good about who they are, inside and out (Aerie, 2019). For this purpose, the brand banished photoshop for advertising purposes in 2014 and started the *Aerie Real* campaign, which is still prevailing (Kohan, 2021). The mission is to actively portray all female body sizes without retouching the pictures (Kohan, 2021). Brand ambassadors include *Aerie* employees, environmental activists, and celebrities known for being female

empowering (Aerie, 2021). Furthermore, consumers can become themselves ambassadors and spread the message of *Aerie* that beauty comes from the inside and women should accept themselves as they are (Aerie, 2021). This communication strategy has proven successful since sales increase for the brand each year, and in 2021 alone, the company achieved a revenue increase of 17% compared to 2020 (Wilson, 2022). Although the brand is mainly active in the US, *American Eagle* (the Group behind Aerie) announced in 2019 to expand to Europe within the following years, including Germany (Stich, 2019). Therefore, it can be expected that the brand will become relevant also in the German lingerie market. Due to the brand's values and marketing strategy, *Aerie* can be considered a classic example of femvertising.

The German lingerie market is expanding (Statista, 2022) and studying consumers' brand attitudes considering the highly different portrayals of women in advertising will give valuable insights into the German lingerie market. Using *Intimissimi* as the stereotypical brand is logical since it is a very successful lingerie retailer in Germany (Textilwirtschaft, 2022). The brand follows its branding strategy of portraying romanticism and promoting supermodels for many years and can be considered an established brand within the German market (Meliado, 2022). Using *Aerie* as the competitor, which is already highly successful in the US and is one of the reasons for *Victoria's Secret's* downfall, is also logical (En, 2022). The brand wants to conquer the European market and has already opened its first shop in Ireland in 2021 (Daly, 2021). The brand could become a real thread for *Intimissimi* in the near future. Therefore, the study results of this research will give insights into how consumers in Germany evaluate femvertising advertising and *Aerie* as a brand compared to *Intimissimi*.

Women feel better represented in femvertising campaigns within different industries, including cosmetics and fashion (Feng et al., 2019; Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). However, since lingerie brands sell clothing that shall inspire women to seduce men (Robson & Pitt, 2018), it will be insightful to study the differences between male and female attitudes towards these brands. Furthermore, attitudes towards brands using femvertising have not been studied in many European countries and focused more on America, where femvertising in lingerie advertising is more prevalent (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020; Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). Therefore, this study will focus on Germany, which is a country with high gender equality and where feminism is becoming more popular, also among men (Gender Equality Index, 2020; Miller et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to Petter (2019) and Overdue (2021), consumers interested in lingerie are mostly Millennials and Gen Z. These generations are also the most critical of brand values and appreciate brands taking a social stance, and fighting for equality,

diversity, and sustainability (Cristobal et al., 2022). Therefore, the population for this research will consist of Millennials and Gen Z living in Germany since this age group is the most relevant for not only the lingerie market but also the chosen marketing strategies.

Much research has already been done on the topic of femvertising, stereotypical portrayal of gender in advertising, and objectification of women (Kapoor & Munjal, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2021; Qiao & Wang, 2019; Severn et al., 1990; Sterbenk et al., 2021). The theoretical framework of this study will be grounded on the most recent findings of these studies. Results of this research will provide new important insights into consumers' perception of femvertising compared to stereotypical gender portrayal and objectification of women. Theoretical implications will be drawn that will establish a further foundation for future research, especially within the niche of lingerie advertising in Germany. The goal of this study is to answer the following research question:

RQ: To what extent does the use of femvertising or stereotypical portrayal of women in lingerie advertising campaigns predict the attitude of Gen Z and Millenials towards lingerie brands across Germany?

<center>**2. Theoretical Framework**</center>

The following chapter will give insights into previous literature and theories, focusing on femvertising, stereotypical advertising and the effects of advertising strategies on brand attitudes. To begin with, the term femvertising will be explained, and deeper insights into existing research regarding this advertising strategy will be outlined. Furthermore, the connection between femvertising and social comparison will be discussed and previous research on how femvertising influences attitudes towards brands. Following this subchapter, attitudes toward brands will be defined, as well as reactions towards advertisements and how these two concepts are related to each other. Research on the objectification of women in advertising and society's beauty standards will be outlined afterwards. Finally, the chapter will be closed by discussing the marketing strategy Sex Sells and its influence on customers' brand attitudes.

2.1. Femvertising

2.1.1. Femvertising Definition and History

Within the 21st century, some advertising agencies and brands started to shift from the notion of *Sex Sells* to using female-empowering messages to reposition themselves (Sternadori & Abitbol, 2019). According to Becker-Herby (2016), one of the first brands that used feminist messages to rebrand itself within the market was *Dove*. After a global study revealed that only 2% of women see themselves as beautiful, the brand acted upon it and created the *Real Beauty* Campaign in 2004, which featured women with different body sizes and spread the message that all women are equally beautiful. The campaign was viewed as a game-changer within the advertising industry, and other brands followed, like the feminine hygiene brand *Always*, which launched the campaign *Like A Girl*. In 2014, the media firm *SheKnows* finally decided that this growing trend of using feminist messages for advertising needed a name and established the new term *femvertising* (Skey, 2015). According to Skey (2015), femvertising describes "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls" (para. 1). The usage of femvertising is still gaining popularity worldwide since positive effects on the brand image have been proven (Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). Additionally, research has shown that women in western society tend to be more appealed to activist brands that use feminism as part of their communication strategy (Sternadori & Abitbol, 2019).

2.1.2. *The different Elements of Femvertising*

Research on femvertising found different emerging elements that help to define an advertisement as such (Becker-Herby, 2016; Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez Almanzor, 2017). The most overarching element of femvertising can be described as *female empowerment* (Becker-Herby, 2016). Advertisements that empower women want to be inspiring and support females to take on responsibilities for themselves and be confident about their choices (Alcoff, 1988). Products advertised with female-empowering messages should assist the consumer in becoming more powerful and help gain an improved societal or financial status (Becker-Herby, 2016). The consumer should feel supported in achieving better self-confidence and a stronger identity (Tsai et al., 2019). Femvertising is a marketing strategy that falls into brand activism and engages pro-actively in spreading the wish for more gender equality and female body positivity in society (Wojcicki, 2020).

To make femvertising more tangible for marketing professionals, Becker-Herby (2016) defined five pillars that help to identify femvertising. The first pillar describes the inclusion of different female talent. Research has shown that women better identify with models in advertisements who have a similar body size, shape, age, and race (Lawrence et al., 2021; Severn et al., 1990). Therefore, femvertising campaigns display a wider variety of women instead of only using idealized supermodels with similar traits for their campaigns (Becker-Herby, 2016). To make advertisements more relatable to all women, femvertising advertisements avoid portraying stereotypical beauty standards and want to convey the message that all female physics are beautiful (Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez Almanzor, 2017).

The second pillar defines the use of intrinsically pro-female messaging in advertisement campaigns (Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez Almanzor, 2017). According to Rodríguez Pérez and Gutiérrez Almanzor (2017), the message should be empowering and inspiring, motivating the reader and enhancing self-confidence. The target group receives positive affirmations instead of a female portrayal according to beauty standards, which should make them feel not good enough and make them buy the brand's product to mend their imperfections.

The third pillar questions stereotypical gender norms and challenges society's expectations of how women should act and be. Therefore, in femvertising, females are shown outside of traditional stereotypical scenarios like doing housework or being a mother. Women are more depicted in a competitive situation, an active environment like at work, leisure activity, or a natural environment instead of a studio or an artificial scene (Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez Almanzor, 2017).

The fourth pillar focuses on downplaying women's sexuality (Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez Almanzor, 2017). In femvertising, sexuality is used subtly, and naked skin is only shown in natural sportive situations. Additionally, models are not photographed posing sexually or wearing lots of makeup. Subsequently, their appearance is not manipulated or retouched to cater to the gaze of men (Becker-Herby, 2016).

The last pillar employs an authentic presentation of females. All aspects within the advertisement, such as the talent, scenario, product, and makeup, should be not artificial and represent natural women and situations (Davidson, 2015). Creating an emotional connection between the brand and the audience is the main objective and giving the impression to women that they are represented appropriately (Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez Almanzor, 2017). To gain the consumer's trust, the brand itself should also act authentically in line with its feminist marketing approach and be supportive of women proactively within and outside of the organization (Davidson, 2015). These five pillars are crucial for marketing professionals to understand femvertising and how they can implement feminist messages into their campaigns (Becker-Herby, 2016). More recent research focused on consumers' perspectives on femvertising and how authenticity is a deciding factor for the campaign's success (Sterbenk et al., 2021; Varghese & Kumar, 2020). This consumer-oriented perspective will be discussed in the next section.

2.1.3. *Recent Research on Femvertising*

According to Varghese and Kumar (2020), previous research studied femvertising as a part of the feminist movement. They argue that some kinds of femvertising can help deconstruct stereotyping and sexism to help consumers self-reflect on their own stereotypical beliefs. However, there are also critical studies about the usage of femvertising. For example, Sterbenk et al. (2021) found that many brands use femvertising in an exploitative way and do not put any further effort into engaging in feminist movements or supporting women in their company. This misuse of pro-female messaging and feminist ideals for solely financial benefits is called *fempower-washing* (Sterbenk et al., 2021). Consumers are well aware of brands using feminism for their financial benefits (Robson & Pitt, 2018). Within the last years, where brand activism has become more common amongst brands, consumers have also become more critical of which brands are authentically spreading a meaningful message or only using this trend to become more popular (Convertino et al., 2016).

Hainneville et al. (2022) highlight the importance of authenticity within femvertising. The authors define six dimensions that help to distinguish between authentic brand activist

femvertising and fempower-washing. To begin with, consumers want transparency within the advertisement, which describes the ad's truthfulness regarding picture editing. Highly edited photos of women used in femvertising are regarded by consumers as inauthentic and contradicting the main feminism-related messages (Drake, 2017). Secondly, brands need to be consistent in their identity, values, and communication (Hainneville et al., 2022). Brands accused of female objectification will have a hard time being perceived as authentic when they start using femvertising (Feng et al., 2019).

In contrast, brands that have already started as female-empowering brands will be more likely perceived as authentic (Sobande, 2019). Next, consumers want to identify with the brand and see themselves reflected in their campaigns (Hainneville et al., 2022). Feelings of proximity create a stronger bond between the consumer and the brand and create genuine authenticity (Becker-Herby, 2016). Physical, identical, and health-related diversity shows an authentic inclusion of all women within femvertising, and consumers are more likely to believe the message the brand wants to get across (Feng et al., 2019). Last but not least, consumers want brands to show genuine respect towards women and see women who are appreciative of themselves in the advertisements (Hainneville et al., 2022). Therefore, nudity, sexualization of females, and portrayal of women to cater to the male gaze are considered inauthentic by the female consumers (Feng et al., 2019). Challenging stereotypes also means not excluding any female roles and, instead of telling women to be self-confident, portraying naturally self-confident females in different life situations (Hainneville et al., 2022).

Hainneville et al. (2022) suggest that these six dimensions are complementary. Consumers shape their understanding of an authentic femvertising campaign through the lens of these dimensions to decide whether a brand is authentic or can be considered as fempower-washing. However, according to Murray (2013), femvertising not only increases sales of companies due to a more general positive perception of brands. Female customers prefer empowering campaigns, as they can identify better with them than advertisements portraying gender stereotypes, which explains the rapid increase in popularity of femvertising amongst brands with a female target group (Skey, 2015).

2.1.4. Femvertising Effects on Brand Attitudes

Since femvertising has become more common within the last years, the literature on its effects on society and brand attitude also has become more extensive. However, for this research, the effects of femvertising on consumers' attitudes toward brands are the most relevant. According to Mitchell and Olson (1981), the attitude towards the brand can be

interpreted as an "individual's internal evaluation of the brand" (p. 318). In contrast to feelings, the attitude can be described as the enduring interpretations of brands that promote consumer behaviour (Spears & Singh, 2004).

Different case studies show that brands promoting femvertising have higher revenues and enjoy high popularity amongst consumers (Åkestam et al., 2017; Convertino et al., 2016). Recent research also studied the difference in attitude toward brands using femvertising across gender (Sternadori & Abitbol, 2019; Varghese & Kumar, 2020). According to McMahan (2005), women evaluate advertisements more emotionally, hence using femvertising can be strategically very effective for brands with female target groups. What is more, femvertising is a form of emotional messaging in advertisements that strengthens the relationship between the female customer and the brand (Rossiter & Bellman, 2012). Women are proven to evaluate brands more emotionally than on physical attractiveness compared to men. Therefore, and since women around the globe have become more independent throughout the last decades, they identify more with femvertising than with stereotypical portrayals of their gender and evaluate these brands more positively (Drake, 2017; Feng et al., 2019).

Additionally, women were more favourable towards brands portraying different female body types than men (Sternadori & Abitbol, 2019). These positive attitudes of women towards brands using femvertising align with studies that found a high percentage of women had already bought a product because of their female-empowering messages and authentic portrayal of women (Sharma & Bumb, 2021; SheKnows Media, 2016; Um, 2021). Further experimental studies in India have also shown that females had a higher purchase intention and a favourable brand attitude towards femvertising compared to brands that do not use this marketing strategy (Varghese & Kumar, 2020).

Sternadori and Abitbol (2019) examined attitudes towards brands using femvertising across gender. They found that women had a more positive attitude towards a brand using femvertising, which aligns with the previously mentioned studies. Nevertheless, there was no change in men's attitude toward brands using femvertising or stereotypical portrayal of women. One of the reasons for this result can be found in previous brand-gender-related studies, which found that men see themselves as the dominant gender (Avery, 2012; Sandhu & Singh, 2017). They feel intimidated by a new interpretation of women in advertisements in which they are portrayed as less passive and less dependent on men (Avery, 2012; Sandhu & Singh, 2017). According to Frieden (2013) and Jung (2006), females stick less to traditional

gender roles. They are more flexible to societal changes, which influences their brand attitudes towards brands using non-stereotypical gender portrayals.

2.1.5. *Social Comparison Theory and Femvertising*

An established theory that explains the different brand attitudes amongst gender towards brands using femvertising is the social comparison theory (Richins, 1991). Festinger (1957) introduced the social comparison theory, which states that people make social comparisons with portrayals of their gender where they have either upward comparisons or downward comparisons. This process happens unintentionally and subconsciously, and people compare themselves to people in real life and depictions of their gender in media. The process of upward comparisons happens when people perceive the subject of comparison as "better" than themselves, which results in a feeling of not being good enough and a decreased self-esteem. On the other hand, downward comparisons happen when the subject of comparison is perceived as "worse", which can increase self-esteem and feelings of being superior. Advertising agencies use social comparisons strategically, especially with products that inspire consumers to mend their imperfections (Richins, 1991).

One example is the beauty industry that shows retouched portrayals of women with perfect skin after using a particular beauty product (Tiggemann & Brown, 2018). Females shall be inspired to increase their self-worth by becoming more similar to the "upward" comparison subject and buying the product (Strahan et al., 2006). However, although this strategy is proven to be effective in terms of purchase behaviour, the adverse effects can be peculiar, and influence society's perception of the beauty standard women want to reach to feel better about themselves (El Jurdi & Smith, 2018). The emotions that arise with upwards comparisons are negative feelings and can cause mental health issues like low self-worth and self-esteem (Festinger, 1957). Therefore, women prefer advertisements that increase their self-esteem with downward comparisons to feel more attractive or as attractive as the model (Richins, 1991).

According to Richins (1991), downward comparisons in advertising positively impact the attitude towards the brand and stimulate positive feelings in female consumers, which make them feel sympathetic towards the brand. However, since lingerie advertisements mainly depict female models, men do not socially compare themselves. Therefore, it can be expected that social comparison does not affect men's attitudes towards the brand. Due to the previously found results in recent research and the application of social comparison theory in advertising, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1A: Women have a more positive attitude than men towards the brand Aerie which uses femvertising.

H1B: Women have a more negative attitude than men towards the brand Intimissimi which uses stereotypical advertising.

2.2. Attitudes towards Brands and Reactions towards Advertisements

Advertising research has found that reactions and attitudes towards different advertising campaigns directly influence the overall attitude towards a brand (Shimp, 1981; Sternadori & Abitbol, 2019). This is especially true for advertising within the lingerie and fashion industry (Entwistle, 2015). These markets sell aesthetic products, and imagery within the advertising plays a key role since it is "above all a visual phenomenon that consists of a constructed image – whether on the runway, in a celebrity photo, as clothing worn on the street, or in the pages of a fashion magazine" (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2011, p. 100). Therefore, it is logical that advertisements within the lingerie industry also predominantly consist of images. They portray mainly models wearing the newest fashion piece, creating a direct connection between the advertisement and the brand it stands for (Santaella et al., 2012).

Attitudes towards advertising can be defined as individuals' emotions and opinions about specific advertisements in which their reactions to advertisements can be cognitive and emotional (Petrovici & Marinov, 2007). The emotional characteristics within an ad impact the reactions towards the ad. Consequently, the emotional bond between the consumer and the brand and the overall attitude towards the brand is influenced (Allen et al., 1992; Morris et al., 2002). Furthermore, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) already found that the attitude towards an ad predicts its effectiveness and the likeability of the consumer to buy the promoted product. The authors found two different ways that attitudes towards an ad can predict brand attitude. Firstly, through the simple influence in which the likeability of an ad can transfer to the likeability of the brand, and secondly, through the more complex influence in which the credibility of an ad can cause favourable attitudes towards a brand. Positive reactions to campaigns improve attitudes towards the brand (Moore & Hutchinson, 1983).

Sternadori and Abitbol (2019) focused on the role of reactions to advertising messages displaying femvertising on attitudes towards the brands. Positive reactions towards femvertising advertisements positively influenced the attitude towards the brands. Furthermore, Phillips and McQuarrie (2011) found that compelling and emotional images within fashion advertising are the key to success in creating a positive brand attitude amongst

consumers. According to Santaella et al. (2012), images do not solely bring attention to the advertisement but also convey meaningful messages about beauty ideals, cultural values and emotional narratives. Therefore, images reach consumers on a deeper emotional level than informative texts about the product. Therefore, the advertising within the lingerie industry is one of the most pleasurable for viewers and results in favourable brand attitudes if the message conveyed is perceived as positive by the viewer. Because of the discussed literature on the importance of effective advertising for a positive attitude towards brands, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H2A: A positive reaction towards Aerie's femvertising advertising predicts a positive attitude towards the brand Aerie.

H2B: A positive reaction towards Intimissimi's stereotypical advertising predicts a positive attitude towards the brand Intimissimi.

2.3. Objectification of Women and Beauty Standards

Gender stereotypes, especially femininity, have been extensively researched throughout the last years (Åkestam et al., 2017; Amy-Chinn, 2006). Especially the objectification of women for marketing purposes has been investigated repeatedly, and the manifestation of beauty standards in western society (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020; Trivedi & Teichert, 2021). According to Rodríguez Pérez and Gutiérrez Almanzor (2017), today's female beauty standards include young, white women with a thin body type. These are also the traits of women in stereotypical advertisements (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020). Goffman (1979) conducted a qualitative content analysis of gender portrayals in advertisements and found that women were portrayed as significantly more passive, dreamy, and vulnerable than men. Focusing on non-verbal elements, including body appearance, positioning, and gaze, Goffman (1979) found men depicted as more dominant and independent and women as objects of sexual desire without any strength. This portrayal of women did not change until the early 2000s (Lindner, 2004). Lindner (2004) found in a quantitative content analysis of fashion advertisements within the *Vogue* magazine from 1955 till 2002 that 40% of the ads portray women adopting "body postures that suggest a need for protection and control" (p. 413). Furthermore, 60% of all these advertisements showed females as objects (Lindner, 2004). These stereotypical portrayals of women in advertisements affect brand attitudes and society's overall perception of females (Amy-Chinn, 2006). Plenty of research conducted throughout the last decades has found that society judges women who are portrayed sexually as less intelligent, competent, and mindful (Archer et al., 1983; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009;

Zhou et al., 2021).

However, in recent years, objectifying women in advertisements has become less popular, and many brands are criticized by society for portraying females as catering to the male gaze (Feng, 2019). Lingerie brands like *Victoria's Secret* faced heavy criticism for objectifying women and promoting the wrong values to young men and women who adopt belief systems and values from the media (Feng, 2019). Although the lingerie industry sells underwear for women, brands like *Victoria's Secret* initially focused on creating an appealing shopping experience for men (Kotalawala, 2022). When the brand emerged in 1991, the goal was to open lingerie shops for men to buy underwear they like for their partners without feeling shame (Kotalawala, 2022). Therefore, when the brand achieved more popularity, the aim was to sell the dream of sensual young women to men (Robson & Pitt, 2018). According to Convertino et al. (2016), in the early 2000s, most lingerie brands portrayed women as sexual objects. However, when the #Metoo movement started in 2017, brands like *Aerie* emerged, focusing on more inclusion in lingerie advertisements. The analysis of multiple lingerie advertisements in the US shows that new brands focus more on women feeling empowered than on men having a sensual experience (Zhou, 2022).

One of the reasons is that consumers are more considerate of what the brand stands for, and especially Millennials and Gen Z generations prefer brands that take a societal stance (Backman & Lundgren, 2021). Since equality across gender has become more of the norm within the 21st century and women are more career-oriented and more educated than before, consumers now are more critical of stereotypical gender portrayals and objectification of women (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Therefore, according to Rodríguez Pérez and Gutiérrez Almanzor (2017), women in advertisements are now depicted in more natural contexts. Although thin models are still used to portray femininity, lingerie brands like *Aerie* and *Savage X Fenty* show more diverse women and share empowering messages on their social media advertising campaigns in the 21st century (Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez Almanzor, 2017).

2.4. Effects of the Sex Sells Marketing Strategy on Consumer Attitudes towards Brands

The lingerie industry mainly focuses on inspiring women to seduce men with decorative underwear (Amy-Chinn, 2006). Therefore, many lingerie brands still follow the business model 'Sex Sells', which objectifies women and shows them in sensual poses and in line with beauty ideals (Keller et al., 2020). The marketing concept of Sex Sells has been

proven to be effective, especially amongst the male gender, throughout the past decades. According to Kozak et al. (2009), men engage more in objectifying females than the other way around. Therefore, they are also more likely to be attracted to visuals that feature the opposite gender.

Further studies show that depicting female nudity and sexual posing appeals to the male consumer and lead to an increased feeling of energy and arousal (Severn et al., 1990; Trivedi & Teichert, 2021). On the other hand, females have been found to assess the attractiveness of a person based on personality traits and not solely because of the visual attraction (Severn et al., 1990). Further studies also claim that men are more likely than women to develop a purely pleasure-seeking and instrumental attitude regarding sexual relations, which leads to cognitive connections between physical attractiveness and the attitude towards a brand (Baumeister et al., 2001; Yoon & Lee, 2018). Additionally, further studies on advertising note that the male consumer is more likely to see women as desirable physical objects, which results in pleasure-seeking feelings and intense reactions towards the portrayal of the opposite gender in visual advertisements (Greer & Buss, 1994; Reichert & Walker, 2006). Female nudity has been proven to inspire the male consumer to form positive attitudes towards the product, advertisement, and overall brand, making the concept of Sex Sells especially effective for brands targeting men (Peterson & Kerin, 1977).

Not only do men exhibit an increase in arousal but also form more positive attitudes and emotions towards the nude female stimuli (Latour et al., 1990). For instance, in a study about body soap, Patzer (1980) found that the male consumer shows more positive affective, cognitive, and conative responses toward a sexually appealing female model than the female consumer towards the sexually appealing male model. Almost thirty years later, Kim et al. (2007) found similar results when they studied consumers' reactions to the nudity of the opposite gender in advertising. Males in their research responded positively to advertising using female nudity to promote a product. More recent studies documented similar effects of female nudity on male consumers. According to Sabrina et al. (2018), suggestive female nudity in advertising was followed by more positive responses from the male consumer. Trivedi and Teichert (2021) found that men develop a more positive attitude towards a brand if they find the female model sexy.

Contrarily, the female consumer reacts more negatively to female nudity in advertising (Gould, 1994; Sabri, 2015). According to Kapoor and Munjal (2019), women prefer emotional messaging in advertisements and are less attracted to nudity and sensual content (Latour et al., 1990). Moreover, Choi et al. (2016) found that women tend to be offended by

nudity in advertising. Rupp and Wallen (2008) suppose that this difference between the reaction of both genders to sexiness and eroticism in advertising results from the more frequent exposure to pornography by males. According to Regnerus et al. (2016), 46% of males in America watch pornography at least once a week, whereas only 16% of women access pornography weekly. In that study, it was also documented that men are more willing to pay for and watch explicit pornography than women, who are more likely to fantasize about romantic relationships for their arousal. Furthermore, Kobayashi et al. (2021) found that males are more inclined to view sexual images of the opposite gender to receive short-term gratification. Women prefer depictions of couples where the romantic relationship is more important than the male's attractiveness. Therefore, females tend to be less appealed to advertising using sexuality.

Although the lingerie industry mainly targets women and marketing specialists are aware of the prevailing trend of femvertising, brands like *Intimissimi* still focus on portraying models according to beauty standards and objectifying women, depicting them as the passive gender (Kennedy, 2020). Whereas the trend of Sex Sells is dying in most product categories, especially European lingerie brands like *Intimissimi* still hold on to objectifying women for their campaigns (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020). However, because of the previous findings, it is logical to assume that the perceived sexiness of a model has different effects on the attitude towards lingerie brands across gender. Therefore, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H3A: Perceived sexiness of models is positively associated with attitude towards the brand Aerie.

H4A: Gender moderates the association between perceived sexiness of models with attitude towards Aerie in a way that a positive association is stronger for male participants.

H3B: Perceived sexiness of models is positively associated with attitude towards the brand Intimissimi.

H4B: Gender moderates the association between perceived sexiness of models with attitude towards Intimissimi in a way that a positive association is stronger for male participants.

2.5.   Conceptual Models

The following figures illustrate how the concepts presented in the Theoretical Framework are connected as hypotheses in the analysis:
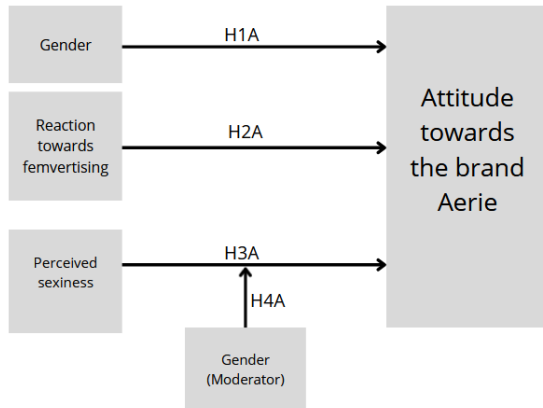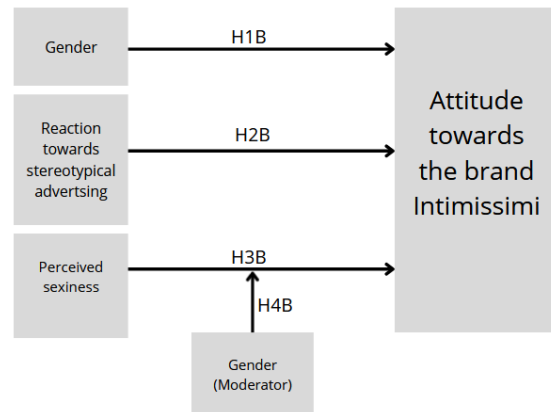
Figure 2.1. Conceptual model Aerie

Figure 2.2. Conceptual model Intimissimi

<center>**3. Method**</center>

3.1. Procedures

3.1.1. *Quantitative Research*

The research question asks for correlations between variables, which makes it a question of quantitative nature (Holton & Burnett, 2005). Subsequently, a quantitative research design is the most suitable to answer the research question. According to Neuman and Robson (2014), a quantitative research design investigates the effects and the associations between independent and dependent variables. The usage of quantitative methods allows researchers to study a phenomenon on a large scale within a specific target group, which enables the generalizability of observations to a larger population (Stockemer et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the two conceptual models will test the moderating role of *gender* on the association between the *reaction to advertising* and *attitude towards the brand*. Finally, the outcomes for both brands will be compared to answer the research question. A deductive approach allows the researcher to test hypotheses, prove them right or wrong, and base the research on already established theories and concepts (Stockemer et al., 2019).

3.1.2. *Research Design*

A survey design will answer the research question (see Appendix A). Surveys seek to find quantifiable outcomes and belong to the pool of quantitative research methods (Bowling & Ebrahim, 2005). According to Bowling and Ebrahim (2005), surveys collect standardized quantitative data. They are suitable for researching individuals' attitudes, using pre-existing knowledge to define the concepts of interest and measure them accordingly. Furthermore, surveys within advertising research seek to understand people's attitudes towards specific brands and draw conclusions about the associations between different variables like opinions, feelings, and demographics like gender and age (Malhotra et al., 2016). A survey is the most suitable method for this research. It has been approved as a valid and reliable method for researching brand attitudes in previous studies throughout the last years (Ahn et al., 2019; Pauwels & van Ewijk, 2020).

Qualtrics was the primary online tool to collect the data and create the survey. The survey was distributed with an anonymous online link that would lead the participant to the survey, accessible from electric devices like mobile phones, tablets and laptops. The collection time for the data began on the 26th of March and ended on the 28th of April 2022, when the initial goal of 250 respondents was reached. The questionnaire for this survey consisted of 25 questions, and respondents took on average 7 minutes to complete the survey.

The first page of the survey introduced the topic, gave information on the purpose of the study, and introduced the researcher and the institution. In addition, the respondent received information about the confidentiality and anonymity of the research, which is a crucial part of ethical research (Mandal, 2019). Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their data would be processed according to the German data regulations since the survey is only distributed in Germany. Citations from the German general data protection regulation gave more detailed information on participants' right to data privacy in the country of interest. Lastly, contact details of the researcher were provided in case further issues or questions arose before, during, or after completing the survey. After consenting to participate in the survey, respondents were forwarded to start the questionnaire.

Since the population for this survey consists of German Millennials and Gen Z the first question asked about the age. Participants could select their age in years, ranging from 18 to 41. Participants younger than 18 or older than 41 could only select that they were younger or older and were redirected to the end of the survey. Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996 (Baum, 2019), meaning all participants aged 26 to 41 are Millenials. Gen Z were born between 1997 and 2012 (Baum, 2019), meaning all participants aged from 18 to 25 are Gen Z.

For ethical reasons, participants under the age of 18 were excluded. According to Mandal (2019), ethical issues in research include physical and mental harm to the participants. As this research employs an online survey, physical harm can be excluded. However, data privacy and transparency about the research goal needed to be considered and were addressed on the first introductory page of the survey. Furthermore, no harmful questions were asked, which could trigger emotionally vulnerable participants. Only including respondents over the age of 18 also ensures the safety of vulnerable age groups. Therefore, respondents under the age of 18 ($n = 2$) were redirected to the end of the survey in which it was explained that they do not belong to the relevant target group of this research.

Participants falling into the relevant age group were directed to the next question, asking if they lived in Germany. Participants not living in Germany were again redirected to the end of the survey, where an apology explained that they did not meet the necessary survey criteria ($n = 35$). Participants living in Germany were directed to the following questions, asking for their gender and education level. After demographics were collected, participants were led to a new screen that introduced the brand *Aerie*.

The screen showed the first picture of *Aerie* advertising (see Figure 3.1) and explained to participants that they shall answer the following questions about this ad. After viewing the ad, participants were asked about their reactions to this ad. The question consisted of a matrix

table with five statements, which participants could agree with or disagree with on a 7-point Likert scale. The following two questions measured the perceived sexiness and the perceived attractiveness of the portrayed model. Participants could choose between very attractive and very unattractive on a 7-point Likert scale and do the same for the sexiness of the model. The same questions were asked for the two further advertising pictures of the brand *Aerie* (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3). In the next step, participants were asked about their attitude towards the brand *Aerie* on a 7-point Likert scale after viewing the three pictures.

This procedure used for the brand *Aerie* was then repeated for the brand *Intimissimi* by showing the three advertising pictures of *Intimissimi* (see Figures 3.4, 3.5, 3.6) and asking participants about their reactions and the perceived sexiness of the models for each ad. As the last question, participants were asked about their attitude toward the brand *Intimissimi* after viewing the pictures. To close the survey, the last screen showed the end of the survey, acknowledging the participant's time and effort to take part in the questionnaire.

3.1.3. Selection of Advertising Pictures

Three advertising pictures were selected for each brand to measure the reaction toward advertising (femvertising/stereotypical advertising). Since the brand *Aerie* represents femvertising, three advertising pictures were chosen that portray women according to the outlined criteria for femvertising in the Theoretical Framework.

Figure 3.1. First Ad Aerie   *Figure 3.2.* Second Ad Aerie

Figure 3.3. Third Ad Aerie

For *Intimissimi*, three advertising images were selected that represent the objectification of women and beauty standards according to the criteria mentioned in the Theoretical Framework.

Figure 3.4. First Ad Intimissimi

Figure 3.5. Second Ad Intimissimi

Figure 3.6. Third Ad Intimissimi

The brand's name was included in each advertising picture in the image. Hence, an association between the brand and the image was created for the viewer to avoid confusion about the two brands. All advertisement pictures are original and have been publicly distributed by the two brands. They all were published between 2017 and 2021. Older advertisements have not been included to have an up-to-date image of the two brands.

Pilot tests have revealed that the initial inclusion of four pictures for each brand was tiring for participants, and they took over ten minutes to complete the survey. Participants in the pilot tests included five individuals who fall into the population, meaning they live in Germany and are between 18 and 41 years old. Before participating in the pilot test, they were asked to take notice of the survey's length, clarity of questions and comprehension of the overall research goal and data privacy information. Furthermore, they were asked if they could see a clear difference between the portrayal of females in the advertisements of both brands. The feedback from the pilot tests revealed that the questions were straightforward, and

respondents were sufficiently informed about the use of their data and the protection of their privacy. They could identify the different portrayal of females between the pictures for both brands. However, given that questions were repeated for both brands and a total of eight pictures were displayed, they found the survey too lengthy and tiring, making them less attentive towards the end. Therefore, the data set has been reduced to three pictures for each brand.

3.1.4. *Scale Translation*

Because the research population is German, the survey and the items of the scales were translated and written in German. To achieve an accurate translation of all items, the Back-translation method was used in which first the researcher translates the items into the target language (Ozolins et al., 2020). Then, according to Ozolins et al. (2020), in a second step, a second person translates the item back to the original language. If the back-translation is identical to the original item, the translation in the target language can be identified as valid and used for the translated scale. In the case that the translated word does not match the original word, the second translator offers another translation, and both translators discuss which translation grasps the meaning of the original item most accurately. For this survey, most translations of items were straightforward, and only small adaptations had to be made by the two translators. This was true specifically for the scale attitude towards the brand. For the scales reaction towards advertising and perceived sexiness all items were clear.

3.2. **Sampling Strategy**

The population and the unit of analysis for this research are Millennial and Gen Z women and men in Germany. A non-random sampling method was used to collect the responses, which means that the sample is not representative of the whole population. As a method, convenience sampling was used since the population is vast, with 80 million people (Countrymeters, 2022), and it would have been challenging to provide a valid randomized sample (Andrade, 2021). Most participants have been invited to participate in the survey through social media like Facebook and Instagram. The survey link was posted in the researcher's story on Instagram. The story included a short introduction to the research topic, its goal, and an encouragement to participate and further share the survey link. On Facebook, the link was shared within Facebook groups focusing on bringing together students from Germany who need participants in their studies. The posts again included an introduction to the research goal, the researcher and the topic. Furthermore, the link was shared on LinkedIn,

where a post similarly to Facebook included an introduction and an encouragement to participate in the survey. On Whatsapp, the researcher shared the survey link with existing groups, friends and relatives and encouraged them to reshare the link to find as many participants as possible. A follow-up was posted on all social media channels after one and after two weeks to remind participants to finish the survey and reach new respondents.

3.3.   Sample

In total, 252 participants filled out the survey, of which 190 (75.4%) completed the survey without being led to the end of the survey before. One participant was led to the end of the survey because he or she disagreed with the terms and conditions. Two participants were led to the end of the survey because they were under 18. A total of 22 participants were led to the end of the survey because they were older than 41, and 35 participants were led to the end of the survey because they were older than 41. Of the valid sample, 126 (66.3%) participants were female, and 64 (33.7%) were male. The most frequent education level was a bachelor's degree with 44.8%, followed by the German highest high-school degree Abitur with 15.1% and a master's degree with 11.9%. The most frequent age in the sample was 25 years old with 16.8%, followed by 24 with 15.5% and 23 with 11.1%. The mean of the age scale was 25.78 ($SD = 3.761$). 111 participants were Gen Z (58.4%), meaning they are aged between 18 and 25, and 79 participants were Millennials (41.6%), meaning they are aged between 26 and 41. Table 3.1 provides a more detailed overview of the sample characteristics.

Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics of respondents ($N = 190$).

Variable	Value	Count	Percent
Gender	Male	64	33.7%
	Female	126	66.3%
Education	Secondary School	4	2.1%
	High School	38	20.0%
	Apprentice	25	13.2%
	Bachelors	92	48.4%
	Masters	30	15.8%
	Doctoral or higher	1	5%
	Range	**M**	**SD**
Age	18 - 41	25.78	3.761

3.4. Measurements

All scales used for this research come from previous studies and have been used for studies related to advertising using survey design as a research method. The scales and their source will be discussed below. For scales composed of more than one item, a mean across the items was measured and used as the construct score. Therefore, a comparison between variables with varying numbers of items is possible.

3.4.1. Demographics and Control Variables

Demographical questions included gender, where participants could choose between female and male, age, and level of education. Whereas gender was one of the independent variables, level of education and age served as further demographical variables. Participants could select their age in years and choose between different typical education levels in Germany. Age was used as a control variable. Participants younger than 18, older than 41, and people not living in Germany were excluded from the data analysis.

3.4.2. Advertising Reaction Scale

The *reaction scale* was first used and established by Wells (1964) as an advertising rating scale. Since research on femvertising has become more extensive throughout the last years, Sternadori and Abitbol (2019) implemented this scale in a survey design to measure reaction to femvertising advertising messages across men and women. The scale includes five items, which measure positive and negative reactions with a 7-point Likert scale (Wells, 1964). The five items include "This ad is very appealing to me"; "I dislike this ad" (reverse); "I would probably skip this ad if I saw it again on TV" (reverse); "This ad makes me feel good"; and "This ad has little interest for me" (reverse). The scale was measured with a 7-point Likert scale, where participants could choose on a range between strongly agree or strongly disagree after viewing an advertisement.

For this research, the item "I would probably skip this ad if I saw it again on TV" was changed to "I would probably skip this ad if I saw it again on Social Media". Since the population consists of Millennials and Gen Z, who spend more of their free time on social media than on TV, it is logical to ask about social media (Munsch, 2021). Since the hypotheses measure advertising from different brands, the scale was used two times. Firstly, to measure reaction to *Aerie* advertising (femvertising) and secondly to measure the reaction to *Intimissimi* advertising (stereotypical). The scale for measuring reaction towards *Aerie* advertising was significant with α = .73 and had a mean of 4.20 and a standard deviation of

.81. The scale for measuring reaction towards *Intimissimi* advertising was significant with α = .79 and had a mean of 4.29 and a standard deviation of .85.

3.4.3. Perceived Sexiness Scale

The *scale for perceived sexiness* was first used by Fasoli et al. (2017). The goal was to examine the consequences of the sexualization of models in advertising images on consumers' perception of women and men in society. The scale consisted of two items and was used within a survey research design. Participants were asked to rank the attractiveness and sexiness of men or women displayed in advertising messages. On a 7-point Likert scale, respondents ranked the sexiness and the attractiveness of the displayed model from "very sexy" to "not sexy at all" and from "very attractive" to "not attractive at all".

For this research, the scale was used two times. To begin with, the sexiness of models in *Aerie* advertising was measured. This scale was significant with α = .69 and had a mean of 4.63 and a standard deviation of 1.18. Then, the scale was used to measure the sexiness of models in *Intimissimi* advertising, and it was found to be significant with α = .61 and had a mean of 4.74 and a standard deviation of .70.

3.4.4. Attitudes towards Brands

To measure the attitude towards the brand's *Aerie* and *Intimissimi*, the scale from Spears and Singh (2004) was adopted, which includes five items. Spears and Singh (2004) conceptualize attitudes towards a brand as a person's inner evaluation of a brand in which the attitude is directed towards an object. The attitude lasts for at least a short period and is defined as an internal state. Furthermore, they state that attitudes have always either a positive or a negative direction. Therefore, the scale consists of 5 items measuring positive and negative attitudes on a bipolar matrix scale. The items include bad/good, appealing/unappealing, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavourable/favourable, and unlikeable/likeable. The scale was used to measure the brand attitude towards *Aerie* and was highly significant with α = .94 and had a mean of 5.21 and a standard deviation of 1.36. For measuring the attitude towards the brand *Intimissimi*, it was found that the scale is also highly significant with α = .93. The mean was 4.83, and the standard deviation was 1.36.

3.4.5. Descriptive Statistics

The table below provides an overview of the descriptive statistics of the measures as discussed in section 3.4. (see Table 3.1). Furthermore, a correlation matrix is given to gain

insights into how the variables are correlated to each other (see Table 3.2). For the demographical variable age significant correlations were found with reaction towards femvertising ($b = -.18$, $p < .05$), and attitude towards Aerie ($b = -.15$, $p < .05$). Therefore, it can be assumed that the younger the participant within the sample, the more positive the attitude is towards the brand *Aerie* and their reaction towards the brand's advertising. Gender was significantly correlated with the variable's reaction towards femvertising ($b = -.39$, $p < .01$), perceived sexiness of *Aerie* models ($b = -.19$, $p < .01$), attitude towards *Intimissimi* ($b = .15$, $p < .05$), and attitude towards *Aerie* ($b = -.46$, $p < .01$). It can be assumed that women evaluate femvertising advertising, the sexiness of models portrayed in *Aerie* advertising and the brand *Aerie* more positively than men within the sample. Contrarily, men evaluate their attitude towards *Intimissimi* more positively than women. Overall, the reaction towards stereotypical advertising was more positive ($M = 4.29$) than the reaction towards femvertising advertising ($M = 4.21$). Furthermore, models portrayed in stereotypical advertising were evaluated as more sexy ($M = 4.73$) than models portrayed in femvertising advertising ($M = 4.63$). However, the overall attitude towards the brand *Aerie* was more positive ($M = 5.21$) than towards the brand *Intimissimi* ($M = 4.83$).

Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics of measures ($N = 190$).

Measure	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's Alpha
Reaction Intimissimi Advertising	4.2926	.8474	2.13	6.73	.79
Reaction Aerie Advertising	4.2060	.8127	2.07	6.20	.73
Perceived Sexiness Intimissimi	4.7351	.7018	1.83	7.00	.61
Perceived Sexiness Aerie	4.6307	1.1755	1.00	7.00	.69
Attitude towards Intimissimi	4.8274	1.3574	1.00	7.00	.93
Attitude towards Aerie	5.2158	1.3574	1.00	7.00	.94

Table 3.2. Pearson correlations between measures (*N* = 190)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Reaction Intimissimi Advertising	1							
Reaction Aerie Advertising	-.05	1						
Perceived Sexiness Intimissimi	.12	.035	1					
Perceived Sexiness Aerie	-.16	.46**	.18*	1				
Attitude towards Intimissimi	-.51	-.30**	.12	-.19**	1			
Attitude towards Aerie	-.19**	.73**	.03	.38**	-.31**	1		
Gender	.13	-.39**	.08	-.19**	.15*	-.46**	1	
Age	.00	-.18*	-.05	-.01	-.03	-.15*	.10	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the $p < .01$ level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the $p < .05$ level (2-tailed).

4. Results

This chapter will provide an overview of the results. To begin with, exploratory analyses using independent samples t-tests will give insights into significant mean differences for the variables between the two brands *Aerie* and *Intimissimi*. The main focus is on comparing differences between men and women since the variable gender serves as an independent variable and also as a moderator. Results will give crucial insights into how females and males differ in their attitude for both brands and how they perceive stereotypical advertising, femvertising and sexiness of models. Then, the eight hypotheses introduced in the Theoretical Framework will be tested. To conduct the analyses, the software IBM SPSS version 27 was used. The two outlined conceptual models were tested with separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses, and several significant correlations between the variables were found.

4.1. Exploratory Analyses

Exploratory analyses using independent samples t-tests found significant differences between the outcome variables for both brands. The results are presented in Table 4.1. The independent samples t-test revealed that women react significantly more positive to femvertising ($M = 4.43$, $SD = .73$) than men ($M = 3.76$, $SD = .78$), $t(188) = 5.89$, $p < .001$. The effect size for reaction towards femvertising was high ($d = .87$). Contrarily, no significant difference was found for reaction towards stereotypical ads between women ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .85$) and men ($M = 4.45$, $SD = .78$). Therefore, it can be assumed that women react significantly more positive to female-empowering advertising than men. However, there is no significant difference between men and women for the reaction towards stereotypical portrayal of women.

For perceived sexiness of models portrayed in *Aerie* advertising a significant difference between women ($M = 4.79$, $SD = .94$) and men ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.50$) was found, $t(88.97)= 5.89$, $p < .05$. However, the effect size for testing perceived sexiness of models portrayed in *Aerie* was moderate ($d = .37$). There is no significant difference for perceived sexiness of models portrayed in *Intimissimi* advertising between women ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .67$) and men ($M = 4.81$, $SD= .76$). Therefore, it can be assumed that women evaluate females portrayed in femvertising as sexier than men. Contrarily, there is no significant difference regarding the perceived sexiness of models in stereotypical advertising amongst gender.

Regarding the attitude towards *Aerie*, the exploratory analysis revealed that there is a

significant difference between women (*M* = 5.68, *SD* = 1.25) and men (*M* = 5.12, *SD* = 1.24), *t*(188)= 7.08, *p* < .001. The effect size for testing the attitude towards *Aerie* is huge (d = 1.07). These results indicate that women have a significantly more positive attitude towards the femvertising brand *Aerie* than men. Significant differences were also found for the attitude towards the brand *Intimissimi* between women (*M* = 4.68, *SD* = 1.39) and men (*M* = 5.12, *SD* = 1.24), *t*(140.58)= -2.21, *p* < .05. The effect size for testing attitude towards *Intimissimi* is moderate (d = .33). It can be concluded that men have a significantly more positive attitude towards the stereotypical brand *Intimissimi*. However, the effect is not as high as for the attitude towards *Aerie*, in which women have a more positive attitude.

Table 4.1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Independent Samples T-Test Results Comparing Gender on Main Survey Variables

Variables	Women (*N* = 126)		Men (*N* = 64)		*t (df)*	*d*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Reaction towards femvertising	4.43	.73	3.76	.78	5.89*** (188)	.87
Reaction towards stereotypical ads	4.21	.85	4.45	.83	-1.82 (188)	.28
Perceived sexiness Aerie	4.79	.94	4.32	1.50	2.30* (88.97)	.37
Perceived sexiness Intimissimi	4.70	.67	4.81	.76	-1.05 (188)	.15
Attitude towards Aerie	5.68	1.25	4.29	1.35	7.08*** (188)	1.07
Attitude towards Intimissimi	4.68	1.39	5.12	1.24	2.21* (140.58)	.33

Note. *p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

4.2.   Main Results Aerie (H1A, H2A, H3A, and H4A)

A hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted to test the four hypotheses related to the brand *Aerie* (Table 4.2). Running a hierarchical regression analysis allows testing the conceptual model for *Aerie* by including all relevant variables at once. Thereby, all four hypotheses can be answered with the same analysis while also controlling for other variables.

In the first step, the demographical variables age and gender were included (Model 1). The model was found to be significant, $p < .001$. The two demographical variables, gender and age, explain 22% ($R^2 = .22$) of attitude towards *Aerie*. In the second step, the reaction towards femvertising was added to the analysis. The results are represented with Model 2, which was found to be significant, $p < .001$. It can be indicated that 56% ($R^2 = .56$) of attitude towards the brand *Aerie* can be explained with this model, and adding reaction towards femvertising ($\beta = .65$, $p < .001$) significantly improves the predictive value of the model, $\Delta R^2 = .34$. In step three, the perceived sexiness of models in *Aerie* advertising was added to the analysis. However, adding perceived sexiness ($\beta = .06$, $p = .254$) to the model did not improve the predictive value of the model, $\Delta R^2 = .00$. In the last step, the interaction effect of gender with the perceived sexiness of models was added to the analysis. This model encompasses all variables and was found to be significant, $p < .001$. However, adding the interaction effect of gender with perceived sexiness ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .473$) did not increase the predictive value of the model, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $F(1.18) = .52$, $p = .473$. Model 4 explains, in total, 57% ($R^2 = .57$) of attitude towards *Aerie*.

To answer the four hypotheses, conclusions are drawn from Model 4, which includes all variables (see Table 4.2). To begin with, H1A was tested, which states that gender predicts the attitude towards *Aerie* so that women have a more positive attitude towards that brand. As reported in Table 4.2, this hypothesis can be supported ($\beta = -.20$, $t = -3.82$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H1A can be accepted.

H2A states that the reaction towards femvertising positively influences the attitude towards *Aerie*. This hypothesis can be supported, as seen in Table 4.2 ($\beta = .62$, $t = 10.44$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H2A can be accepted. The more positive the reaction towards femvertising is, the more positive the attitude towards the brand *Aerie* will be.

H3A was tested with Model 4 and states that the perceived sexiness of models portrayed in femvertising positively correlates with the attitude towards the brand *Aerie*. As seen in Table 4.2, perceived sexiness is not a significant predictor for attitude towards *Aerie* ($\beta = .08$, $t=1.32$, $p =.188$). Therefore, H3A cannot be accepted.

Lastly, H4A was tested with Model 4 and suggests moderation of gender on the regression of perceived sexiness of models on attitude towards *Aerie*. As seen in Table 4.2, no moderating effect of gender on the predicting effect of perceived sexiness on attitude towards the brand *Aerie* was found (β = -.04, t=-.72, p =.473). Therefore, H4A cannot be supported. Furthermore, Model 4 tested for the control variable age, which is not a significant predictor of the attitude towards *Aerie* (β = -.02, t = -.43, p = .665).

Table 4.2. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Attitude towards the brand Aerie

Variables	Model 1 (controls + H1A) β	Model 2 (H2A) β	Model 3 (H3A) β	Model 4 (H4A) β
Gender	-.45***	-.20***	-.20***	-.20***
Age	-.10	-.12	-.02	-.02
Reaction towards femvertising		.65***	.62***	.62***
Perceived sexiness			.06	.08
Perceived sexiness*Gender				-.04
R^2	.22	.56	.57	.57
F for R^2 change	26.42***	80.35***	60.69***	48.53***

Note. For all models, N = 190. β's are regression coefficients for models in which all continuous variables are standardized. H1A = Hypothesis 1A; H2A = Hypothesis 2A; H3A = Hypothesis 3A; H4 = Hypothesis 4A. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

4.3. Main Results Intimissimi (H1B, H2B, H3B, and H4B)

A hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted to test the four hypotheses related to the brand *Intimissmi* (Table 4.3). Running a hierarchical regression analysis allows testing the conceptual model for *Intimissimi* by including all relevant variables at once. Thereby, all four hypotheses can be answered with the same analysis while also controlling for other variables.

In the first step, the demographical variables age and gender were included (Model 1). The model was found to be insignificant, $p = .091$. The two demographical variables, gender and age explain 3% ($R^2 = .03$) of attitude towards *Intimissimi*. In the second step, the reaction towards stereotypical advertising was added to the analysis. The results are represented with Model 2, which was found to be significant, $p < .001$. It can be indicated that 27% ($R^2 = .27$) of attitude towards the brand *Intimissimi* can be explained with this model, and adding reaction towards stereotypical advertising ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$) significantly improves the predictive value of the model, $\Delta R^2 = .25$. In step three, the perceived sexiness of models in *Intimissimi* advertising was added to the analysis. However, adding perceived sexiness ($\beta = .05$, $p = .403$) to the model did not improve the predictive value of the model, $\Delta R^2 = .00$. In the last step, the interaction effect of gender with the perceived sexiness of models was added to the analysis. This model encompasses all variables and was found to be significant, $p < .001$. However, adding the interaction effect of gender with perceived sexiness ($\beta = .04$, $p = .537$) did not increase the predictive value of the model, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $F (1.18) = .38$, $p = .473$. Model 4 explains, in total, 28% ($R^2 = .28$) of attitude towards *Intimissimi*.

To answer the four hypotheses, conclusions are drawn from Model 4, which includes all variables (see Table 4.3). To begin with, H1B was tested, which states that gender predicts the attitude towards *Intimissimi* so that men have a more positive attitude towards that brand. As reported in Table 4.3, this hypothesis can be rejected ($\beta = .09$, $t = 2.17$, $p = .177$). Gender does not predict the attitude towards *Intimissimi* in a way that men will have a more positive attitude towards that brand.

H2B states that the reaction towards stereotypical advertising positively influences the attitude towards *Intimissimi*. This hypothesis can be supported, as seen in Table 4.3 ($\beta = .50$, $t = 7.97$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H2B can be accepted. The more positive the reaction towards stereotypical advertising is, the more positive the attitude towards the brand *Intimissimi* will be.

H3B was tested with Model 4 and states that the perceived sexiness of models portrayed in stereotypical advertising positively correlates with the attitude towards the

brand *Intimissimi*. As seen in Table 4.3, perceived sexiness is not a significant predictor of attitude towards *Intimissimi* (β = .05, t =.76, p =.446). Therefore, H3B cannot be accepted.

Lastly, H4B was tested with Model 4 and suggested moderation of gender on the predictive effect of perceived sexiness of models on attitude towards *Intimissimi*. As seen in Table 4.3, there is no moderating effect of gender on the predictive effect of perceived sexiness on attitude towards the brand *Intimissimi* (β = .04, t= .62, p =.537). Therefore, H4B cannot be supported. Furthermore, Model 4 tested for the control variable age, which is not a significant predictor of the attitude towards *Intimissimi* (β = -.03, t = -.52, p = .604).

Table 4.3. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Attitude towards the brand Intimissimi

Variables	Model 1 (controls + H1B) ß	Model 2 (H2B) ß	Model 3 (H3B) ß	Model 4 (H4B) ß
Gender	.16*	.09	.09	.09
Age	-.04	-.04	-.03	-.03
Reaction towards stereotypical ads		.50***	.50***	.50***
Perceived sexiness			.05	.05
Perceived sexiness*Gender				.04
R^2	.03	.27	.28	.28
F for R^2 change	2.43	23.32***	17.64***	14.14***

Note. For all models, N = 190. ß's are regression coefficients for models in which all continuous variables are standardized. H1B = Hypothesis 1B; H2B = Hypothesis 2B; H3B = Hypothesis 3B; H4B = Hypothesis 4B. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The following chapter will provide a summary of the findings and answer the research question of this study. Theoretical implications will follow and give insights into how this research adds to existing findings and theories related to femvertising, advertising, and stereotypical portrayal of females. Limitations and suggestions for future research will be outlined, and practical implications for the lingerie market will be discussed.

5.1. Summary of Findings

The study aimed to answer the research question, "To what extent does the use of femvertising or stereotypical portrayal of women in lingerie advertising campaigns predict the attitude of Gen Z and Millenials towards lingerie brands across Germany?" Since femvertising is becoming more popular across different regions and Gen Z and Millenials are very aware of brands social stance and positioning, this research has a remarkable value for the lingerie industry in Germany (Cristobal et al., 2022). Whether consumers' attitudes towards a lingerie brand are intertwined with the portrayal of models will help established and newly created brands re-evaluate their communication strategy in Germany and adapt to consumer preferences. Previous findings regarding femvertising, stereotypical advertising, new developments in the lingerie industry, and advertising-related theory were the foundation for creating eight hypotheses, which predicted the relations between the different variables in this research.

The data collected with a survey and analyzed with IBM SPSS revealed that significant differences between the brands *Aerie* and *Intimissimi* are evident. The relations between participants' attitudes and the independent variables gender, age, reaction towards advertising, and perceived sexiness of models differ across both brands. It can be indicated that gender predicts attitude towards the brand *Aerie*. Female consumers have a more positive attitude towards the brand *Aerie* and femvertising advertising. Furthermore, females evaluated models portrayed in femvertising advertising as sexier than men and, overall, as sexier than models portrayed in stereotypical advertising. Therefore, it can be concluded for the brand *Aerie* that females have a more positive attitude towards lingerie brands using femvertising. Furthermore, they have a more positive reaction towards femvertising and evaluate models in femvertising advertising as sexier than men.

Surprisingly younger participants evaluated femvertising advertising and their attitude towards the brand *Aerie* more positively than older participants. It was found that age is negatively correlated with the reaction towards femvertising advertising and the attitude

towards *Aerie*. However, the regression analysis revealed that age is not a significant predictor of the attitude towards *Aerie*.

The sexiness of the model depicted in the *Aerie* advertising was positively correlated with the attitude towards the brand *Aerie*. Nonetheless, perceived sexiness does not predict attitude towards *Aerie*, and no interaction effect of gender on the relation between perceived sexiness and attitude towards *Aerie* was found. Therefore, it can be concluded that for *Aerie*, gender and the reaction toward femvertising influence the attitude towards the brand in a way that a positive reaction towards the advertising leads to a more positive attitude towards the brand, and women have a more positive attitude towards *Aerie*. Furthermore, women perceive femvertising models and advertising as more attractive and have a more positive attitude towards a brand using femvertising than men. People in this study who were younger had a more positive attitude towards *Aerie* than older participants.

Contrasting, for *Intimissimi*, gender was not found to be a predictor for the attitude towards *Intimissimi*. However, comparing the means, male participants had a significantly more positive attitude towards the brand than women. A positive reaction to the advertising resulted in a more positive attitude towards the brand *Intimissimi*. Reaction towards stereotypical advertising was found to be the only significant predictor of the attitude towards *Intimissimi*. Hence, perceived sexiness was unrelated to the brand attitude towards *Intimissimi*, and no interaction effect was found with gender. Therefore, it can be indicated that other unknown variables might relate to the attitude towards the brand *Intimissimi*, which have not been included in this research.

Overall, it can be said that women evaluated the femvertising-related brand more positively than men, and men evaluated the stereotypical brand *Intimissimi* more positively. However, the relation between gender and brand attitude has been more substantial for *Aerie.* The perceived sexiness of models was not found to be predicting the attitude towards any of the two brands. For both brands, a more positive reaction towards the advertising resulted in a more positive attitude towards the brand. Hence, reaction towards advertising, whether it is femvertising or stereotypical advertising, is associated with the attitude towards the lingerie brand.

Comparing attitudes towards *Aerie* and *Intimissimi*, the sample had a more positive attitude towards *Aerie*, although the brand is not established yet in Germany. Therefore, to answer the research question, it can be said that the use of femvertising or stereotypical advertising predicts the attitude towards lingerie brands in a way that positive reactions towards both advertising strategies also lead to a more positive attitude towards the brand.

Furthermore, femvertising will achieve more positive attitudes towards that brand from females. The perceived sexiness of a model is not relevant for the attitude towards a lingerie brand using femvertising or stereotypical advertising. The research supports previous studies on femvertising that found women more attuned to a more diverse and empowering portrayal of females in advertising.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The research adds to the existing theory in different ways. First and foremost, the results support previous findings on femvertising and the positive effect on females' attitudes towards a brand. As Sternadori and Abitbol (2019) found, women are more attuned to advertising showing females in natural surroundings without objectifying their bodies and portraying women as catering to the male gaze. The present research shows that this is also true in Germany's lingerie industry which has not been studied yet. Furthermore, the brand's decision for an ad also directly influences the overall attitude towards the lingerie brand, supporting the previously discussed effectiveness of advertising for more positive brand attitudes. Therefore, it can be said that within the lingerie industry in Germany, using femvertising advertising influences the positive attitude towards the brand.

Next to supporting existing theory and extending its relevance for the lingerie industry in Germany, the research also implies that younger consumers could be more attuned to femvertising advertising and brands using this strategy. One of the reasons for this outcome may be that especially Gen Z is sensitive to brand values and how they position themselves in the market. According to Cristobal et al. (2022), Gen Z value brands that take a social stance and transmit diversity and gender equality authentically. Research has also shown that younger generations are more aware of the manipulation tactics of brands, and criticism amongst Gen Z spreads more quickly and openly through social media (Kim & Austin, 2019; Witt & Baird, 2018). This research is no exception to this phenomenon and shows that the younger the participant, the more sensitive they are to transmitting diversity and empowerment values in advertising.

The perceived sexiness of models in the femvertising advertising was positively correlated with the attitude towards *Aerie*, which is contrasting to recent research that claims Sex Sells is dying (Antoniou & Akrivos, 2020). However, the same is not true for stereotypical portrayals of women in the *Intimissimi* advertising. Furthermore, for both brands perceived sexiness was not a predictor for attitude towards the lingerie brand. One reason might be that consumers have become sensitive to the objectification of women for

advertising purposes and can more easily identify with the sexuality of women in empowering advertising pictures. The lingerie industry sells sensual underwear that shall spark fantasies and emotions in women and men (Robson & Pitt, 2018). According to this logic, if models were perceived as sexy within the ad, it would help reach that goal. This is not supported in this study. Therefore, it can be indicated that a shift in consumers' preferences within the lingerie industry has happened, which is also in line with recent studies examining the downfall of stereotypical and female diminishing brands like *Victoria's Secret* (Feng, 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018). Lingerie brands are expected to support female rights, equality, and diversity and portray authentic and natural women who transmit sexuality and attractiveness naturally by showing how they love themselves (Zhou, 2022). Therefore, it can be concluded that although lingerie brands promote sensual underwear for women, the likeability of an ad is more important than the perceived physical appeal towards the portrayed model.

Interestingly, gender does not predict the attitude towards the brand *Intimissimi*, which contradicts the theoretical framework and previous studies outlined in this research. Although men had a significantly more positive attitude towards the brand than women within this sample, no significant effect was found. One reason for this outcome could be that consumers are becoming more attracted by emotional messaging instead of sexual stimuli and the perfect portrayal of women (Teng et al., 2020). Men and women are aware of the extensive photoshopping of models in advertising and are less stimulated and affected by these pictures (De Lenne et al., 2021). Retouched pictures of women are in this age not only visible in advertisements but also all across social media, where friends and strangers use retouch filters every day (Abbas & Dodeen, 2021). Therefore, seeing a sexually attractive woman in a lingerie advertisement is not as exclusive anymore. People are more aware that these women do not look like that in reality (De Lenne et al., 2021). It is likely that, therefore, men's reaction toward an ad is less intense and has little effect on the attitude towards the brand. To attract consumers and stimulate their attention, brands need to use emotional messaging, which sends authentic messages consumers can sympathize with (Teng et al., 2020). This also explains why perceived sexiness did not correlate with the attitude towards the brand *Intmissimi*. Seeing a sexually attractive woman is not as unique anymore and does not align with what consumers seek in a brand, even if it is a lingerie brand.

5.3.   Limitations and Future Research

Like any other research, this study knows a couple of limitations that will be acknowledged in the following. To begin with, the number of participants was limited to 190

valid responses, which does not represent a sample that could give insights into the whole population of Germany. According to Sarstedt et al. (2017), achieving a sample that represents a large population like Germany is almost impossible since there will always be selection biases. However, increasing the sample would help in coming closer to the ideal of a generalizable sample. Furthermore, a randomized sample would have been necessary to collect responses from participants from all regional parts of Germany. Including all characteristics of a population within a sample and having a similar ratio like in the population is necessary to reach generalizability. Therefore, a cluster and strata sampling strategy would have been the most reliable kind of sampling strategy to create a sample that allows generalizations to the whole population. Creating clusters would have helped to achieve similar distributions in the sample to the population. However, due to the limited financial resources of the researcher, a convenience sample was the only realistic strategy. Through the sole distribution on social media, the participation was limited to respondents with an internet connection, and a social media account on either Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn or WhatsApp. Future research should try to reach a more diverse sample by inviting people to the survey through different communication tools including letters, phone calls and emails.

In addition to the sampling strategy, an equal distribution would have provided more reliable results. Since the participation was not equally distributed across gender (33% men and 66% women), it is not sure whether the results would have been different with a higher male participation rate. For instance, for *Intimissimi*, a higher participation rate of men might have led to more significant relationships between variables since the mean for men has indeed been higher for perceived sexiness, attitude towards the brand and reaction towards stereotypical advertising. Still, no significant conclusions could have been drawn.

Since age was correlated with the attitude towards *Aerie*, it might have also been interesting to include older generations within this study. Given that older generations are not as involved in brand activism, it could be expected that they still prefer stereotypical portrayals of women to femvertising (Backman & Lundgren, 2021). One reason might be that older generations, including baby boomers, have been raised in an age in which stereotypical advertising has not been questioned like in the 21st century (Cristobal et al., 2022). Therefore, portraying women sexually might be considered "normal" by this generation, aligning more with their belief systems when it comes to advertising. Furthermore, researching with a sample that has a higher variety in age could have also influenced the significance of age as a

predictive variable since the disparity in brand attitude might have been bigger between young and older participants.

A more significant sample with an equal distribution might have also resulted in more reliable scales. The scale for perceived sexiness had for *Intimissimi* a Cronbach's Alpha of .61 and for *Aerie* .69, which is acceptable according to Taber (2017) but could have been improved with a larger sample. Using more advertising images might also have increased the reliability of this scale. Furthermore, according to Eisinga et al. (2012), using a scale with only two items can lead to limited construct validity since the likelihood decreases that the two items sufficiently identify the construct of interest. However, two-item scales are standard and result from survey time constraints or researchers having to remove items from the scale due to their limited quality of assessing the construct. Considering that people decide on whether they find someone attractive within only 100 ms, it becomes clear why no additional items have been included (Olson & Marshuetz, 2005). Rating someone's attractiveness stems from an emotional impulse and adding more items might have led to biases due to rethinking an immediate response (Olson & Marshuetz, 2005).

The scale Reaction towards Advertising had for *Intimissimi* a Cronbach's Alpha of .79 and for *Aerie* .73. Using more pictures of femvertising and stereotypical advertising might have increased the reliability. However, including more pictures would have increased the length of the survey, which could have resulted in survey fatigue. Future research should consider this issue and could split the research into two surveys or experimental groups that do only answer questions about one of these brands.

Another limitation within this study is that *Intmissimi* is a well-established brand in Germany, well known by many consumers since stores already exist since the 90s (Textilwirtschaft, 2022). In contrast, *Aerie* is a newly created US American brand that does not operate yet on a significant level within the German market (Stych, 2019). This circumstance might lead to biases amongst participants since they could already have an established brand attitude towards *Intimissimi* but no existing opinion about *Aerie*. However, the use of these both brands was still the best choice since no other established lingerie brands in Germany use femvertising like *Aerie*, which made it difficult to find a brand with the same popularity in Germany as *Intimissimi*. Nevertheless, this incident could also be one of the reasons why for the attitude towards *Intimissimi* less significant relations were found. Previous shopping experiences or advertisements viewed by participants might influence participants' attitudes toward this brand. Therefore, future research should use brands that have the same reach within the population or use brands that are not on the market yet to

ensure that the presented pictures are the only factor influencing the attitude towards the brand.

Using an experimental design for future research might also be interesting since it would be possible to compare groups and have a more nuanced overview of participants' reactions to both advertising strategies. Since *Intimissimi* was presented after *Aerie* within the survey, it might also have affected participants' attention to the survey and therefore resulted in less significant outcomes. This limitation could have been prevented with an experimental design where participants focus only on one brand and have no direct comparison.

Another suggestion for future research would be to consider other control variables and variables related to brands like purchase intentions, the credibility of the brand and a general interest in lingerie. Further demographic questions could also bring critical insights like the cultural background, sexual orientation, and job description. Including scales like overall self-esteem and overall body satisfaction would also dive deeper into the social comparison theory and how women with low or high body satisfaction react to stereotypical or femvertising related lingerie advertising. Furthermore, future research should extend this study to the presentation of men in advertising for male underwear since there are also significant differences between brands. For instance, *Calvin Klein* still portrays strong, very masculine, and physically trained men, which according to critics, emphasizes toxic masculinity and strengthens gender stereotypes in society (Arymami, 2020; Steele, 2020). Brands like *Savage X Fenty* portray men with different body types to counteract the stereotypical depiction of men (Gorman, 2020). Examining how men react to different depictions of masculinity in underwear advertising would also give fascinating insights into femvertising and the development of gender stereotypes in advertising on a broader level.

Comparing the variables for both models with an independent samples t-test brought interesting results. However, future research should compare both models, not only the tested variables. According to Sarstedt et al. (2022), one way to accomplish this would be to use additional software like, for instance, AMOS 22, which allows for structural equation modelling. Structuring equation modelling would be an efficient tool to compare the two models and examine causal relationships between the variables. Furthermore, this technique is commonly used in marketing research. It has been approved recently as an effective method to conduct analyses with high validity and to identify complex patterns within relationships across variables and models.

Lastly, approaching this phenomenon of femvertising and stereotypical portrayal of gender within lingerie advertising with a qualitative research method like interviews or focus

groups would bring more nuanced and deep insights into how participants feel about lingerie advertising. Questions about emotions and previous experiences with this kind of brands could also answer how emotional messaging is related to creating a positive or negative attitude towards a brand. Furthermore, it would answer if more established brands are, in general, more preferred to newly created brands like *Aerie* even if their social values are not as strong.

5.4.   Practical Implications

There are practical implications from this study for practitioners despite the outlined limitations. To begin with, it has become clear that females have a more positive attitude towards lingerie brands using femvertising. Considering that lingerie brands often target not only women but also their male partners to buy lingerie for their girlfriends or wives, brands should consider that males could prefer lingerie brands using less empowering messaging in their branding. Generally, females are still the overarching target group for lingerie brands. Since lingerie brands using femvertising are not prevalent yet in the German lingerie market, it has become clear that females positively evaluate femvertising in lingerie advertising, implying that these brands might also become successful in Germany.

Although *Intimissimi* is already established in Germany as a famous and trustworthy lingerie brand (Textilwirtschaft, 2022), *Aerie* was the more preferred brand in this survey. Since *Aerie* is not very known in Germany and new in the market, it can be indicated that overall, femvertising in lingerie advertising positively impacts brand attitude amongst Millennial and Gen Z consumers in Germany. Furthermore, perceived sexiness had little to no correlation with attitude towards lingerie brands. Only for the brand attitude towards *Aerie*, which does not objectify women by showing them in sexual poses, a positive correlation was evident with the perceived sexiness of models. This implies that brands should focus more on the overall likeability of advertising and the emotional messaging instead of the model's attractiveness. This study supports previous claims of researchers and critics that Sex Sells is outdated and that brands need to rethink their communication strategy to attract Millennial and Gen Z consumers. Therefore, it can be concluded that lingerie brands in Germany using stereotypical gender portrayals and objectifying women might get into danger when other more diverse brands enter the market in Germany.

Consumers might draw direct comparisons between new brands and established brands like *Intimissimi*. A backlash could be the consequence, like in the case of *Victoria's Secret* in the US when the female-empowering brands *Savage x Fenty* and *Aerie* became more

popular and known in that country (Kohan, 2021). Lingerie brands competing in the German market should be on the lookout and rethink their branding before it is too late and adapt to consumers' needs. They are still flourishing, and consumers still have a positive attitude. However, this may change when other more empowering options emerge. German consumers might give *Intimissimi* trust and credibility because of their longevity and because they know the brand. However, regarding the results of this study, this might change when new players enter the market, and consumers will get more aware of the difference in gender portrayal and more sensitive to femvertising in the lingerie industry.

In conclusion, this research has theoretical and societal value as it adds to the research on femvertising, advertising effectiveness and stereotypical gender portrayal within the niche of the German lingerie market. The relation between gender and the attitude towards the empowering brand *Aerie* is confirmed as well as the importance of reaction to chosen advertising strategy on attitudes towards lingerie brands. Furthermore, perceived sexiness has not been a deciding factor regarding attitude towards lingerie brands. Therefore, it can be concluded that more attractive models do not lead to a more positive attitude towards the lingerie brand, neither for women nor for men. Brands operating in the German lingerie market should be aware that empowering brands are favourable to females and that the attractiveness of a model is less important than an overall positive reaction towards the chosen advertising for a final positive attitude towards the brand.

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Question 1 | Confirmation in participation

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this survey! This questionnaire is about different advertising in the lingerie industry and will not take more than **10 minutes** of your time.

The survey is being created as part of a master's thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam and data may be viewed by the supervisor of the academic thesis for performance evaluation purposes. According to Art. 89 (1) DSGVO, the data may be stored for an unlimited period. There is a right of access by the person responsible for this study to the personal data collected, as well as the right to rectification, deletion, restriction of processing of the data, as well as a right to object to processing and the right to data portability.

Before the questionnaire starts, you will see detailed information about your rights in the course of this survey and will be asked again for your consent. Your data will be collected and processed exclusively on the basis of the legal provisions (Section 2f (5) FOG). You have the following personal rights in the course of this survey:

- Participation in the study is voluntary. You can cancel the questionnaire at any time.
- Your participation is anonymous, your answers cannot be traced back to you. This also means that your personal record will not be identifiable to us after the survey is completed.
- If you wish to have information about your data after the study or withdraw your participation, we ask you to contact the researcher.
- Your data will be used for scientific purposes only.
- The research does not follow any commercial interest. We will treat all your data strictly confidential.

If you have any questions about this survey, please feel free to contact the person responsible for this research:

Mona Madusiok - 575054mm@student.eur.nl
Student at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Van der Mandeleplein, 3062 PA Rotterdam.

In order for you to participate in this study, I need your consent.

- I agree to participate.
- I do not agree to participate.

Question 2 | Age

How old are you in numbers?

Question 3 | Place of residence

Do you live in Germany?

- Yes
- No

Question 4 | Gender

What is your biological sex?

- Female
- Male

Question 5 | Education

What is your highest education?

- Without graduation
- Hauptschulabschluss
- Realschulabschluss
- Fachabitur/Abitur
- Apprenticeship
- Bachelor
- Master
- Doctor or higher

Questions reaction to advertising (Aerie/Intimissimi)

In the photo you can see an advertisement for the brand Aerie/Intimissimi.

Please answer the questions asked about it.

(foto)

How much do the following statements apply to you? (Aerie/Intimissimi)

"This ad is very appealing to me"
"I dislike this ad"
"I would probably skip this ad if I saw it again on Social Media"
"This ad makes me feel good"
"This ad has little interest for me"

Answer options: Do not agree at all | Not agree | Slightly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Slightly agree | Agree | Very much agree

How attractive do you find the depicted model? (Aerie/Intimissimi)

Answer options: Not attractive at all | Not attractive | Slightly unattractive | Neither attractive nor unattractive| Slightly attractive | Attractive | Very attractive

How sexy do you find the depicted model? (Aerie/Intimissimi)

Answer options: Not sexy at all | Not sexy | Slightly unsexy | Neither sexy nor unsexy| Slightly sexy | Sexy | Very sexy

Questions Brand Attitude (Aerie/Intimissimi)

Now that you have seen the 3 advertising images of the brand Aerie/Intimissimi, how accurately do the following expressions describe how you feel about the brand?

Unappealing /Appealing
Bad/Good
Unpleasant/Pleasant
Unfavourable/Favourable
Unlikeable/Likeable

End of Survey

Thank you very much for your participation! You are helping me to learn more about the lingerie industry in Germany.
You have now reached the end of the questionnaire.

If you have any further questions about the content, purpose or research ethics of this survey, please contact me at 575054mm@student.eur.nl.

Thank you again very much for your time and effort!

Frage 1 | Einverständniserklärung

Liebe Teilnehmerin, lieber Teilnehmer,

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Umfrage! Dieser Fragebogen befasst sich mit verschiedener Werbung in der Damenunterwäsche Branche und wird nicht mehr als **10 Minuten** Ihrer Zeit einnehmen.

Die Befragung wird im Rahmen einer Masterarbeit an der Erasmus University Rotterdam erstellt und Daten können von der Betreuerin der wissenschaftlichen Arbeit für Zwecke der Leistungsbeurteilung eingesehen werden. Gemäß Art. 89 Abs. 1 DSGVO dürfen die Daten grundsätzlich unbeschränkt gespeichert werden. Es besteht das Recht auf Auskunft durch den Verantwortlichen an dieser Studie über die erhobenen personenbezogenen Daten sowie das Recht auf Berichtigung, Löschung, Einschränkung der Verarbeitung der Daten sowie ein Widerspruchsrecht gegen die Verarbeitung sowie des Rechts auf Datenübertragbarkeit.

Bevor der Fragebogen startet, sehen Sie detaillierte Informationen zu Ihren Rechten im Zuge dieser Befragung und werden nochmals um Ihre Zustimmung gebeten. Ihre Daten werden ausschließlich auf Grundlage der gesetzlichen Bestimmungen (§ 2f Abs. 5 FOG) erhoben und verarbeitet. Sie verfügen über folgende persönliche Rechte im Rahmen dieser Befragung:

- Die Teilnahme an der Studie ist freiwillig. Sie können den Fragebogen jederzeit abbrechen.
- Ihre Teilnahme ist anonym, Ihre Antworten können nicht auf Sie zurückgeführt werden. Das bedeutet ebenfalls, dass Ihr persönlicher Datensatz nach Abschluss der Befragung für uns nicht identifizierbar ist.
- Falls Sie nach der Studie Auskunft über Ihre Daten haben wollen oder Ihre Teilnahme zurückziehen, bitten wir Sie, dies dem Verantwortlichen mitzuteilen.
- Ihre Daten werden ausschließlich für wissenschaftliche Zwecke verwendet.
- Die Forschung folgt keinem kommerziellen Interesse. Wir behandeln all Ihre Daten streng vertraulich.

Wenn Sie Fragen zu dieser Erhebung haben, wenden Sie sich bitte gerne an den Verantwortlichen dieser Untersuchung:

Mona Madusiok - 575054mm@student.eur.nl
Studentin an der Erasmus University Rotterdam, Van der Mandeleplein, 3062 PA Rotterdam

Damit Sie an dieser Studie teilnehmen können, benötige ich Ihr Einverständnis.

- Ja, ich stimme zu.
- Nein, ich stimme nicht zu.

Frage 2 | Alter

Bitte geben Sie Ihr Alter in Zahlen an.

Frage 3 | Wohnort

Leben Sie in Deutschland?

- Ja
- Nein

Frage 4 | Geschlecht

Welches Geschlecht haben Sie?

- Weiblich
- Männlich

Frage 5 | Bildung

Was ist Ihr höchster Schulabschluss?

- Kein Abschluss
- Hauptschulabschluss
- Realschulabschluss
- Fachabitur/Abitur
- Berufsausbildung
- Bachelor
- Master
- Doktor oder höher

Fragen Reaktion Werbung (Aerie/Intimissimi)

Auf dem Foto sehen Sie eine Werbeanzeige für die Marke Aerie/Intimissimi.

Bitte beantworten Sie die dazu gestellten Fragen.

(Foto)

Wie sehr treffen die folgenden Aussagen auf Sie zu?

"Dieses Werbebild ist sehr ansprechend für mich."

"Ich mag dieses Werbebild nicht."

"Ich würde dieses Werbebild wahrscheinlich überspringen, wenn ich es in den sozialen Medien oder wo anders sehen würde."

"Diese Werbung gibt mir ein gutes Gefühl."

"Diese Werbung ist für mich uninteressant."

Antwortmöglichkeiten: Überhaupt nicht zutreffend | Nicht zutreffend | Wenig zutreffend | Weder noch | Etwas zutreffend | Zutreffend | Sehr zutreffend

Wie attraktiv finden Sie das dargestellte Model? (Aerie/Intimissimi)

Antwortmöglichkeiten: Überhaupt nicht attraktiv | Nicht attraktiv | Etwas weniger attraktiv | Weder noch | Etwas attraktiv | Attraktiv | Sehr attraktiv

Wie sexy finden Sie das dargestellte Model? (Aerie/Intimissimi)

Antwortmöglichkeiten: Überhaupt nicht sexy | Nicht sexy | Etwas weniger sexy | Weder noch | Etwas sexy | Sexy | Sehr sexy

Fragen zur Brand Attitude (Aerie/Intimissimi)

Nachdem Sie nun die 3 Werbebilder der Marke Aerie/Intimissimi gesehen haben, wie zutreffend beschreiben die folgenden Ausdrücke Ihre Gefühlslage gegenüber der Marke?

Nicht ansprechend /Ansprechend

Schlecht/Gut

Unangenehm/Angenehm

Negativ/Positiv

Unsympathisch/Sympathisch

Ende des Fragebogens

Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme! Sie helfen mir damit, mehr über die Unterwäsche Branche in Deutschland zu erfahren.

Sie haben nun das Ende des Fragebogens erreicht.

Falls Sie noch Fragen zum Inhalt, Zweck oder Forschungsethik dieser Erhebung haben,
wenden Sie sich bitte an 575054mm@student.eur.nl.

Ich danke Ihnen nochmals herzlich für Ihre Zeit und Mühe!