

**Judge this magazine by its cover:**

*A thematic analysis of Cosmopolitan's ideal cover girl through femvertising  
(2013-2022)*

**Student Name:** Malak Elfar

**Student Number:** 610934

**Supervisor:** Hester Hockin-Boyers

**Master Media Studies - Media & Business**

*Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication Erasmus University Rotterdam*

**Master's Thesis**

*June 23, 2022*

## Judge this magazine by its cover

### ABSTRACT

*As of 2014, the notion of femvertising has transpired to characterize pro-female messaging, empowering women through the media, and challenging traditional stereotypes associated with females in the media. Specifically, within the beauty industry, there is a heavy emphasis placed on employing models that iterate an unattainable beauty ideal for the majority of women – known as the thin-ideal. Scientifically, this has led to an array of findings that highlight the adverse implications of this approach, leading to but not limited to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, reliance on dieting habits, and depressive outlooks. This has become a recurring trend when utilizing the kind of women classified as the ideal cover girl. The consequence of this is hindering the progress that previous waves of feminism and post-feminism have fought to achieve. Thus, to ensure the continued success of their identity, many brands have opted to advocate for femvertising and include aspects of that within their advertisements. With a focus on the iconic Cosmopolitan magazine, this research investigates the ways in which Cosmopolitan applies femvertising when representing the ideal women on its covers. By conducting a thematic analysis on 104 covers ranging through the years of 2013-2022 and utilizing the five pillars of femvertising set forth by Becker-Herby, this research was able to classify the ways in which femvertising is present in Cosmopolitan. The pillars outlined are as follows: using a diverse pool of female talent; including messaging that is fundamentally pro-female in its essence; challenge the traditional gender-norm stereotypes society has grown accustomed to; reducing the unnecessary emphasis on sexuality and ensuring it does not gratify the male gaze; and holistically conveying women in an authentic manner through all aspects of the advertisement. The results led to the emergence of the following five themes and their respective subthemes. Theme 1 is that beauty can be diverse and inclusive, with the subthemes including all ethnicities are welcome and shape and size do not matter. Theme 2 entails that women are fierce and strong, through the subthemes of women can be independent, women have the power to dominate, and women can get what they want. Theme 3 is that some gender norms are here to stay, these include ways to fix your body, and control your food, do not let it control you. Theme 4 is owning your sexuality, and the subthemes consist of please men first, yourself second and all women want these things. The last theme is Cosmo inauthentically portrays women, and this is done by excessive skin exposure, sexual poses and expressions, and hindering women's potential. In answering the research question, it is clear that Cosmopolitan does not fulfil all of Becker-Herby's femvertising pillars, except for diverse and inclusive beauty (first pillar) and aspects of pro-female messaging (second pillar). Their most recent efforts illustrate an eagerness to partake in recent industry trends and transform their advertising efforts. It is difficult to argue that Cosmopolitan authentically portrays women, downplays their sexuality, nor that they challenge the mainstream perceptions of women.*

**KEYWORDS:** *femvertising; post-feminism; beauty; Cosmopolitan magazine*

Word count: 497

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> -----	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> -----	<b>4</b>
1.1 Societal Relevance-----	5
1.2 Academic Relevance-----	6
<b>2. Theoretical Framework</b> -----	<b>8</b>
2.1 Femvertising-----	8
2.2 Post-feminism-----	11
2.3 Commodity Feminism-----	13
2.4 The Cosmopolitan Empire-----	14
2.5 Summary-----	15
<b>3. Methodology</b> -----	<b>17</b>
3.1 Research design-----	17
3.2 Sampling and data collection-----	20
3.3 Sensitizing concepts-----	20
3.4 Thematic analysis-----	22
3.5 Credibility, Reflexivity and Ethicality-----	24
3.6 Summary-----	26
<b>4. Results and Discussion</b> -----	<b>27</b>
4.1 Beauty can be diverse and inclusive-----	28
4.2 Women are fierce and strong-----	32
4.3 Some gender-norms are here to stay-----	34
4.4 Own your sexuality-----	37
4.5 Cosmo inauthentically portrays women-----	40
4.6 Summary-----	43
<b>5. Conclusion</b> -----	<b>45</b>
5.1 Summary of Findings-----	45
5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications-----	47
5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research-----	48
<b>6. References</b> -----	<b>50</b>

## 1. Introduction

It is understood that the media heavily shapes the cultural ideals that societies perceive as standard norms (Yu et al., 2011). As the root of the word advertisement in Latin is ‘advertere’ – meaning ‘to turn towards’ – this iterates the undeniable power the media holds (Yin & Chin, 2020). Particularly when these ideals revolve around beauty standards for women, the media constantly serve as a reminder of their importance and the judgements they serve (Maguire, 2002). For women, attempting to meet the standard beauty ideal can result in low levels of self-esteem, eating disorders, and immense pressure and body dissatisfaction (Holmqvist & Frisé, 2009). Findings emphasize that nearly “half of women in Western societies are concerned about their body weight” with this being linked to the models used in beauty advertisements (Lenne et al., 2021, p.255). With their ease of distribution, magazine advertising demonstrates one of many ways to emphasize an idea; especially when that magazine is as established as *Cosmopolitan*. Albeit these satisfactions and social comparisons may happen consciously or unconsciously, the consensus provided by scholars is that there is a crucial link to the idealized images promoted by the media. Moreover, body capital can advance one’s stance in society by securing income, employment opportunities, and social mobility (Reich, 2018). It therefore comes as no surprise that the media tends to rely on these ideals of women, due to the assumption that the consumers will react positively towards these advertisements and products when physical attractiveness is present (Yu et al., 2011).

However, over the previous decade, women have started to become more aware of how stereotypical these representations are and thus, the demands for more realistic media images began to arise. In some cases where body image is concerned, the use of idealized models began to diminish and instead, ‘non-idealized’ or otherwise ‘imperfect’ models were used to convey subjective societal norms in the hopes of increasing positive body images within the media (Lenne et al., 2021). Since findings indicate that comparisons and low self-esteem arise significantly when thin-ideal images are employed in the media, it can be argued that this cultural shift arose alongside movements such as body positivity, fat activism, and brands adopting post-feminist ideals (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Martin & Kennedy, 1993). A novel notion that emerged to connote these newly founded marketing tactics – which serve to go beyond selling a product and more towards empowering women and embodying a pro-women stance – was coined as femvertising in 2014 by the lifestyle site *SheKnows* (Akestam et al., 2017). The crux of this concept is that pro-female advertising

aims at empowering and encouraging women to embrace and accept themselves as they are. This not only advances gender equality but also breaks down the traditional stereotypes associated with women, including the acts of being submissive, obedient, and dependent. Sheehan (2004) notes that the latter occurs in the following forms of figurative subordination by advertisers: role portrayals showcasing women as the homemakers; beauty stereotypes encouraging unattainable ideals; and “decorative and sexual stereotypes” utilizing women as passive, tactile objects with minimal authority (Sheehan, 2004, p.97).

Many brands and companies began to adopt and embrace femvertising, with Dove’s Real Beauty Campaign arguably being one of the most cited efforts. Femvertising is seen as linked to the third wave of feminism, which some scholars relate to the notion of ‘intersectionality’ – coined by Crenshaw in 1989. As this concept “proposes that all aspects of one’s identity need to be examined as simultaneously interacting with each other...this translates into the need to reflect the variety of races, ages, sizes, body types and appearances of the female body” (Pérez & Gutiérrez, 2017, p.340). Nevertheless, when it comes to a brand’s engagements in activist advertising, the balance between the marketing strategy employed and the social issue messaging is difficult to obtain (Champlin et al., 2019). It is also risky as the intentions generally remain unclear; whether the brand truly believes in the social issue or whether it is driven primarily by profit maximization. Consequently, femvertising is an essential concept within this research and serves as an important indicator when analyzing *Cosmopolitan*’s previous issues over the decade. However, this critical exploration of femvertising will be executed alongside the associated concepts of post-feminism and commodity feminism – thereby creating a nuanced and holistic understanding of the current debate. Therefore, the research question is the following: **How does *Cosmopolitan* apply femvertising when representing the ‘ideal’ woman on its magazine covers?**

### 1.1 Societal Relevance

*Cosmopolitan*, published by Hearst Corporation, is socially relevant due to its longstanding prominence within the magazine and wider lifestyle realm since the first publication in 1886. Due to its global circulation coverage, large target audience of young and adult women, and regular monthly issues, the research proposes this magazine focus will bear fruitful. Although it began as a family magazine and transitioned into a literary one, it finally fixed itself to the monthly fashion and lifestyle one it is prominently known as today. Typical content covered by *Cosmopolitan* consists of sex and relationships, beauty and

fashion, health, and careers amongst others. Furthermore, estimates outline that the magazine reaches 1 in 4 millennials globally, alongside the fact that they boast impressive engagement on their own website, with more than 4.6 million unique users per month (Cosmopolitan Factsheet, n.d.).

In this context, Cosmopolitan magazines' choice of cover girls raises concerns regarding how representative these are of the larger female population (primarily in the American context it was founded in) – as the bodies and looks on display do not represent many women. Moreover, as “women often pair the belief that thinness coincides with other successful life outcomes”, the need to explore the clear lack of (sufficient) beauty inclusivity (alongside body, racial, and ethnic inclusivity) in Cosmopolitan becomes ever more important (Bazzini et al., 2015, p.199). As mentioned above, femvertising and similar notions regarding the ideal appearances portrayed generally emerged over the previous decade. It therefore becomes important to account for these trends in Cosmopolitan magazines (between 2013-2022) and to see where the room for improvement lies within society – in terms of positive female representation in the media. Additionally, the awareness that has transpired within the consumer culture of today, conscious brands and society in general makes this shift important to study. The adoption of inclusive beauty, pro-female advertising, and diverse bodies means society and other research can benefit from such findings for it will outline the benefits brands can reap from adopting such notions. Moreover, because of the integral role magazines play in both, shaping women's conceptions of themselves and others and defining topical trends, the implications of this research will initiate a greater understanding of how the incorporation and adoption of femvertising by a leading industry player like Cosmopolitan impacts the playing field.

## 1.2 Academic Relevance

The academic relevance of this research is rooted in the ongoing research interest in the notion of femvertising and its applications within print media, advertising, brand advocacy, and post-feminist studies. Although previous literature focusing on Cosmopolitan magazine sought to understand the discourse expressed by using a multimodal discourse analytic approach, and content analyses was conducted on its covers from 1959-2014, these do not account for the notion of femvertising (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; Maslow, 2015). There is limited research on whether a magazine as successful as Cosmopolitan accounts for femvertising, particularly through the analysis of 104 covers over the years of 2013-2022. As a result, the objective of this thesis is to contribute to the scholarly realm by specifically

applying the lens of femvertising to Cosmopolitan's representations of the 'ideal' woman on its covers. Furthermore, there are potential replicability and generalization opportunities this research may bear. As Cosmopolitan magazine exists in over 35 languages, across 110 countries, and a total readership of over 32 million (Watson, 2019), this suggests that findings from the U.S. context may bear similarly elsewhere if not contribute to a greater understanding of Cosmopolitan within these various demographic contexts. Magazines as units of analysis are also worthy of exploration due to 64% of those aged 18-34 stating love for the touch and feel of a printed magazine, while around 88% of U.S. adults overall have read either a print, digital, or both versions of a magazine in 2020 (Hale, 2021).

Likewise, the objective is to conduct a qualitative content analysis – specifically a thematic analysis – on the portrayal of women in Cosmopolitan magazine covers (n=104) and analyze the ways in which beauty standards and ideals are represented between the years of 2013-2022. By applying the concept of femvertising to Cosmopolitan magazine over the last decade, this research aims to assess how a renowned magazine such as this represents the ideal woman, particularly through the lens of femvertising.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The objective of this section is to outline the key theoretical concepts and notions that underlie and shape the basis of this research and will help in guiding the findings. Particularly important in studies such as this is the aim of contributing to the wider academic realm and debate; in doing so, the paper can justify and clearly back the methodological choices and chosen dataset. For this particular research, the most significant concepts include femvertising, post-feminism, and commodity feminism. These will be explored individually in turn before concluding with a brief note on the Cosmopolitan magazine empire that we know today.

### 2.1 Femvertising

A concept central to this research is ‘femvertising’- coined in 2014 by the lifestyle site SheKnows (Akestam et al., 2017). With the rise of corporate social responsibility and the importance of meeting stakeholder expectations, many brands have been shifting towards becoming socially responsible, embodying brand awareness, and adopting brand advocacy (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This contributed to femvertising and challenging female stereotypes (Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Similarly, due to numerous changes in society and culture urging and demanding companies and brands to alter the way they operate, feminist ideals began taking on different forms, including the aforementioned commodity feminism. A multi-faceted look at femvertising provided by the literature consists of the following dimensions: transparency, consistency, identification, diversity, respect, and challenging stereotypes (Hainneville et al., 2021). Albeit the literature concludes it is a thin-line between truly advocating for empowerment and simply ‘woke-washing’ – “inauthentic brand activism” – this concept is particularly applicable to the manifestation of ideal women in magazines (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p.445). Further in line with the former is what is becoming known as ‘femwashing’ – whereby an inauthentic attempt at employing pro-female messages and the desire to secure profits results in feminine disempowerment. Scholars have begun coining this phenomenon as ‘commodity feminism’, ‘faux activism’, and ‘fempower washing’ (Hainneville et al., 2021, p.2) – as a catch-all term, I will be using ‘femwashing’ throughout. Therefore, it is important for brands to authentically utilize femvertising, otherwise it just becomes another form of disempowerment as the myriad of names above illustrate.



With consumers becoming more aware and actively demanding certain responsibilities from brands, there are “significant correlations between perceived female role portrayal offensiveness and purchase intentions for a product” (Drake, 2017, p.593). Nevertheless, with the success that *Cosmopolitan* has garnered over the decades and the global recognition it has fortified, it is essential to gain insight into the strategies that go behind their portrayal of ideal women – and in turn, the ways in which femvertising is applied. A more concrete definition explains femvertising as employing “pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls” (Drake, 2017, p.594). As current generations like Gen Z become acutely aware of trends, stereotypes, and the powerful influence that media and advertising hold, casting women in a narrative that highlights their multidimensionality, ability to occupy a protagonist role (rather than the assumed subordinate and submissive one), and celebrating their authenticity encapsulates femvertising.

To ensure successful femvertising, there are five pillars that Becker-Herby outlines. The first is showcasing a diverse variety of female talent and not the typical “cookie-cutter, ideal supermodels”; this is due to femvertising’s intersectionality that highlights the importance of readers seeing their race, shape, body, and age reflected on these magazine covers (Becker-Herby, 2016, p.18). The second pillar is employing inherently pro-female messages that positively embrace and encourage women to embrace themselves, rather than strive to fix themselves in an attempt to secure unattainable degrees of beauty. The third pillar includes breaking down the boundaries of what women ‘should’ be; this means avoiding stereotypical backdrops that emphasize motherhood or housework and instead showcase overlooked trajectories such as women being athletic, professional, or powerful. The fourth pillar consists of “sexuality that does not cater to the male gaze” – meaning not exaggerating the exposure of skin when it is unnecessary (unlike athletes in sports bras or shorts as that is more relevant), sexual poses, or objectifying female bodily attributes (Becker-Herby, 2016, p.19). The final pillar is portraying women in an authentic manner. This entails a holistic understanding of the advertisement while considering the authenticity of the message, including aspects of the scenario at play, the styling, and the transparency and truth behind the brand at hand (in this case *Cosmopolitan*).

While the bodies we see in advertisements symbolically shape and reproduce cultural identities, accounting for the ways these are framed and conveyed to *Cosmopolitan*’s readers becomes vital to assess whether a pro-woman stance is exemplified. With *Cosmopolitan* targeting young and adult women, in addition to covering a multiplicity of topics such as relationships, health, careers, beauty and more, it is not odd to assume that their catering to a

large demographic would require an accurate representation of all these girls and women. However, this representation will diminish and will lend itself to corrupt notions if they “suggest that if you are fit, you are sexy; if you are firm, you are shapely; or in a word, gorgeous” (Eskes et al., 1998, p.319). Arguably this makes society’s concern “less about feeling good and more about looking good” (Eskes et al., 1998, p.317).

Scholars reveal that advertising has negatively contributed and shaped the very same stereotypes that femvertising is attempting to break (Richins, 1995). Notably, “high fit brands tell women to ‘fix themselves’”, this is due to the numerous media images consumers are exposed to which idealize life (Champlin et al., 2019, p.1258). Additionally, due to the difficulty in obtaining the looks on magazine covers, dysfunctional self-esteem arises when these unrealistic standards are accounted for. Particularly taking the U.S. context into account, studies reveal that body satisfaction significantly arises in wealthy countries pertaining to a more Western lifestyle – this is due to “greater access to body centred information and therefore, greater pressures to focus on their appearance and to achieve the ideal body” (Holmqvist & Frisén, 2009, p.136). In other words, magazines tend to use features of (post)feminist ideology as a means to motivate women to (paradoxically) pursue practices that breeds feminine ideals of beauty (Eskes et al., 1998). Here, post-feminism refers to the right of self-expression, economic independence, and the non-static form of women’s identities; although its paradoxical nature is something many scholars emphasize (Crusmac, 2013; Washington & Economides, 2016; Mcrobbie, 2004). Consequently, the literature reveals that the women conveyed in advertising heavily contribute to the unattainable beauty ideal (Sheehan, 2004).

Further, it is interesting to analyze the influence of advertising and the media as it has led individuals to attempt to conform with dissimilar others. Findings note that “the correlations among measures of self-objectification, objectification of others, and social comparison provide evidence of the relationship between objectification and social comparison” (Lindner et al., 2012, p.231). Building on the powerful dominance and presence of advertising, the former is arguably “a primary vehicle for physical attractiveness stereotyping ... unchallenged by viewers” (Martin & Kennedy, 1993, p.515). Findings also showcase a direct link between exposure to idealized advertisements and lower satisfaction (Richins, 1995). Thus, this serves as one of the underlying theories necessary to answering my research question.

## 2.2 Post-feminism

A crucial underlying ideology within the realm of femvertising belongs to feminism, its different waves, and specifically the notion of post-feminism. Not only is post-feminism pertinent to this research as the focus here lies on the portrayal of women in advertisements, but it is important to account for the ways in which Cosmopolitan may be employing post-feminist strategies to motivate women and empower them, ultimately employing the pillars of femvertising.

It is important to account for the role that gender plays in advertisements due to the significant link this holds with the emergence of feminism and its different waves. After all, the oppression and subjectification women were facing led to the desire of obtaining equality of the sexes. Consequently, the media's role cannot be understated as it greatly influences "audience lifestyles, values, attitudes and behaviours" (Lima & Casais, 2021, p.605). Over the years, a particular trend began to emerge with regards to how women were conveyed in the media and in advertisements. This trend revolved around stereotypes of women being submissive, dependent, housewives, sexual objects, and entities of beauty. Albeit the media tends to reflect the ongoing and immediate trends in society, (post)feminist scholars expressed frustration with the lack of progressive advertising and regulation when it came to stereotypical advertisements of women (Lima & Casais, 2021).

Therefore, the literature revolves around the existence of three waves of feminism, with the focus of this ideology being equality of the sexes (men and women). The division of the three waves of feminism is as follows: the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century comprised the 1<sup>st</sup> wave; the 1960s and 1970s comprised the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave; and the third wave entailed the beginning of the 1990s (Orolic, 2021). The first wave mainly revolved around women's suffrage and their right to vote; although it is important to note that there were other rights voiced such as reproductive rights, educational rights, and the consensus that women are not property but human beings. The second signified the women's liberation movement and broader societal and legal rights. Essentially, this can be perceived as a more elaborate understanding of why women were held back by society and oppressed by these norms. The third wave consisted of emphasizing notions like sexuality, individuality, inclusivity, and intersectionality; in addition to further addressing the successes and failures of the second wave. This wave particularly exhibited the complex mechanisms underlying the notion of intersectionality and the important interplay of the "different systems of oppression such as race, gender, class, ability and ethnicity" (Maclaran, 2015, p.1773).

Briefly providing these distinctions and different objectives showcases the difficulty of encapsulating the essence of feminism in one cohesive definition. However, what makes the matter more complex is the emergence of post-feminism – coined by scholars like Susan Douglas, Rosalind Gill, Angela McRobbie, Diane Negra, and Yvonne Tasker. They emphasize the nature of post-feminism as “ideologies, strategies, and practices that marshal liberal feminist discourses and incorporate them into a wide array of media and consumer participation” (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p.153). Scholars argued that the fourth wave of feminism emerged at the turn of the century with a renowned focus on individualism, agency, and autonomy. The rhetoric that characterizes this wave of feminism is “the individualism of women more than anything else, celebrating a kind of gendered “freedom” from both patriarchy and feminism, whereby women are apparently free to become all they want to be” (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p.154). Furthermore, because of the rise of Web 2.0, globalization, and the technological advancements of today, the media context and rise of consumer culture further exacerbated this fourth wave and facilitated its emergence.

The relevance of this specific strand of feminism is important due to its corporate-friendly nature and applicability to media and consumer participation. Regarding the latter, it has become extremely feasible to utilize digital media as a form of expressing feminism, whether that be through hashtag activism, blogs, or businesses (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). Moreover, the literature outlines that those brands employing postfeminist discourses advocate for the consumption of items rather than dismantling the status quo and achieving systemic change (Windels et al., 2021). Hence, the relevance of applying post-feminism to the Cosmopolitan magazine empire develops, as they arguably sell more than products but a particular lifestyle associated with ideal looks, femininity, and beauty. Similarly, when coupled alongside the notion of femvertising, it becomes clear that post-feminisms’ critiques hold true. Firstly, as this fourth wave symbolizes a reaction to the successes and failures of the previous waves as iterated above, scholars question the intentions of its desire to disassemble the systemic oppressions of society. While “feminism seeks changes to the structures that bring about gender inequalities, femvertisements use postfeminist discourses to draw meaning from the feminist ideology while depoliticizing that meaning on behalf of selling products” (Windels et al., 2021, p.15).

Secondly, findings also suggest that when the media employs post-feminist discourses, it exploits feminism and its attempt at equality in a way that insinuates that equality has already been achieved and that it is no longer required (Maclaran, 2015); therefore, the literature argues that post-feminism is more about ‘feel-good’ femininity. This

‘feel-good’ femininity is like the faux feminism or woke-washing notions mentioned above. The paradox of this fourth wave is also expressed through the ‘post’ in feminism, indicating a simultaneous end to feminism and a beginning for the new meanings and usages feminism exhibits today (Kavka, 2002). Albeit the emphasis that post-feminism places on women’s individuality and autonomy is essential, it becomes questionable when that is the sole source that measures the successes and failures of women today (Windels et al., 2021). As McRobbie notably highlights, “post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed” (McRobbie, 2004, p.255). This wave ultimately focuses on the multifaceted complexities of subjectification, individualism, sexuality, and consumerism (Gill, 2007).

Noteworthy campaigns often cited that encapsulate the essence of post-feminism are Dove campaigns (such as Real Beauty) and Always (Run Like a Girl). However, these campaigns do not offer insight into the vital features of feminism – instead of promoting collective changes on a larger scale, the focus is narrowed down to making yourself (as a woman) feel and look good for yourself. As a result, “women are offered recycled versions of historical feminist goals, like empowerment and freedom, as an alternative for real feminist politics and change” (Soler, 2019, p.23).

### 2.3 Commodity Feminism

Closely tied to and overlapping with femvertising and post-feminism is the notion of commodity feminism. The reason this notion is applicable is because of the lifestyle, products, and looks that Cosmopolitan magazine (in)/directly sells to its target audience. Due to the media heavily emphasizing women’s physical attractiveness as a major form of ‘currency’ (amongst other things), this further deviates women from investing their time in other empowering activities (Engeln-Maddox, 2006). As emphasized above, these magazines and the general media are vehicles that transport meanings and create specific messages; thus, by coupling images of feminism alongside “explicit descriptions of purchasing power, household income, age and lifestyle characteristics” it moves beyond selling a product and leans into commodity feminism (Goldman et al., 1991, p.339). Likewise, when these advertising magazines utilize commodity feminism, the responsibility is partially placed on the consumer through allowing them to visualize themselves as empowered through these products – otherwise known as the ‘activist self’. This activist agency is rooted in purchasing

these garments (or whatever product advertised is) rather than lobbying or petitioning (Repo, 2020).

What commodity feminism essentially entails is the act of further distancing the notions that make feminism what it is by producing “particular forms of female subjectivity necessitated by commodity production” (Dowsett, 2010, p.3). In other words, feminism has become amalgamated within the media and popular culture through selling commodities to women. Examples of these consist of women embodying their worth through L’Oréal’s makeup, expressing their strength through athletic Nike shoes, or embracing their skin through Unilever’s Fair & Lovely products (Dowsett, 2010). Goldman et al. (1991) put it simply: the market drives commodity feminism. Therefore, bearing a similar argument to Dowsett, Goldman and colleagues highlight that commodity feminism transforms the context of feminism into an object, look, or style – these “sign-objects are thus made to stand for (or made equivalent to) feminist goals of independence and professional success” (Goldman et al., 1991, p.336). The specific definition that this research relies on defines commodity feminism as “the transformation of feminism into a set of semiotic markers, such as confidence and attitude, that are inscribed onto commodities that then bear the meanings of individual freedom and independence associated with feminism” (Repo, 2020, p.218).

The obvious problematic consequences of equating feminism and its multifaceted goals to simple semiotic signifiers not only hinders the previous progress accomplished by the different waves of feminism, but it also “positions consumption as the way to achieve equality” (Windels et al., 2020, p.30). Furthermore, it becomes clear that with concepts like femvertising and commodity feminism, they bear similarity to a double-edged sword. Attempts to purely maximize profit and inauthentically employ these notions becomes known as faux activism, woke-washing, commodity fetishism, femwashing and so forth. However, when done successfully like those according to the #Femvertising Awards (Bumble’s ‘The Ball is in her Court’, Secret’s ‘Cheer for Each Other – All Strength, No Sweat etc) the results carry significant benefits for all parties involved (Femvertising Awards, n.d).

## 2.4 The Cosmopolitan Empire

Before concluding with a summary of this section, it is important to briefly summarize the Cosmopolitan magazine empire. As mentioned above, Cosmopolitan’s presence spans more than 100 countries and exists in roughly 64 international editions, making its global reach over 100 million people. Prior to its current form, it began as a family magazine in New York in 1886 without any emphasis on women nor the current array of topics covered. After

its change to a literary publication, it was eventually officially a monthly women's magazine in 1965 (Cosmopolitan Factsheet, n.d.). This was in line with ongoing societal trends at the time which welcomed articles on fashion and beauty and less on home-making and domestic life. Cosmopolitan's 1960s editor Helen Gurley Brown drastically transformed the way women were depicted in magazines (largely in domestic settings) through her best seller 'Sex and the Single Woman' which then paved the way for what Cosmopolitan became (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). After this radical takeover by Brown, the magazine normalized talking about sexuality amongst other topical matters as it set itself as a magazine suited for modern and single career-oriented women.

Known and appreciated for its colloquial, personal, and causal tone, it has garnered a large target audience of women between the rough ages of 18-40. Further, as it is published by Hearst Corporation, it briefly went by the name of 'Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan' from 1925 until 1952, although it was simply referred to as Cosmopolitan. Currently, the various topics it covers ranges from sex and relationships, fashion and movies, to careers and even astrology. As stated on their website, they are "the biggest young women's media brand in the world" (Cosmopolitan, 2022). As a result, due to its impressively long-standing (and continued) presence in the magazine industry, the research hopes a focus on this magazine will reap many findings.

## 2.5 Summary

In summary, what this chapter sought to achieve was to present the notions of femvertising, the roots of feminism, and commodity feminism as the underlying bases of answering the research question at hand. By summarizing the different stances in the literature, this section conveyed the clear objectives of the magazine industry and media generally with regards to the representation of women. Although femvertising is an emergent concept, the consensus surrounding it and its ability to enhance women's representation in the media is a further affirmation of this research's focus. Moreover, it demonstrates an interesting link to the fourth wave of feminism and the supplementary aspect of commodity feminism. This section highlighted the consequences (both positive and negative) of exercising femvertising and pro-women messages and where that decision stems from in the first place. Similarly, the ambiguity of post-feminism was emphasized as a direct reflection of present literature.

The choice of Cosmopolitan as the primary unit of analysis was justified through its widespread presence within the industry and globally. With its large presence in hundreds of

different contexts, this research hopes that the findings will prove relevance in these settings. More importantly, because femvertising emerged over the last few years (2014 specifically), the choice to analyze Cosmopolitan's magazine covers is to understand how this notion was employed over the years as a way to garner success; and to further explore the ways in which this magazine represents the ideal woman.

The subsequent sections of this study will focus on highlighting the methodology adopted and the ways in which the chosen 104 covers were analysed. This will provide the information for the following results and discussion section, before closing with the conclusion.



### 3. Methodology

The section below is dedicated to describing the methodology that was employed to provide an answer to the research question: **How does Cosmopolitan apply femvertising when representing the ‘ideal’ woman on its magazine covers?** Qualitative content analysis of 104 magazine covers was used and data was collected using purposive sampling. Data was then analysed thematically. In addition, this section will provide detail regarding the research design, data collection and sampling, the sensitizing concepts used, and analysis procedure. Before presenting the results and discussion, the final reflection will include justifications regarding the validity of this research.

#### 3.1 Research design

Qualitative content analysis is the most suitable approach to analyzing my chosen dataset and answering the proposed research question due to its ability to systematically define the meaning that qualitative data holds (Schreier, 2013). Additionally, it is known for being a flexible method that can drastically reduce data by selecting the relevant material and thus, make it more manageable for the researcher to answer their research question using “selected aspects of meaning” (Schreier, 2013, p.2). Many scholars opt for this method due to its ease in reducing many prevalent words and phrases into fewer categories that share the same meaning; it also allows the researcher to make “replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing new insights” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p.108). Albeit some underestimate the validity of this method, its flexibility has proven to be useful in terms of understanding the latent meanings behind different types of communication and accounting for the role of context. Furthermore, it is of particular use to this research due to its polysemic nature – this highlights that various interpretations arise depending on the various readers – which does not merely pay attention to the text at play but to the associated audience, media, and broader context (Macnamara, 2005). One definition that clearly explains the essence of qualitative content analysis defines it as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278).

As this project focuses on magazine covers, the qualitative method thematic analysis allows for a holistic analysis of the image as a whole and the accompanying text. Meaning making is not only confined to texts but has further expanded to visual communication (Machin & Mayr, 2012). When scholars and researchers assessed that much of the way

meaning was being communicated in a particular text was missed when the focus was purely on one element (i.e., text) and not the whole image (i.e., text and visuals), it reinforced the importance of looking at texts and visuals together, precisely for this research. Due to the heavy presence of captions and slogans on the covers of Cosmopolitan magazines, adopting a thematic analysis will ensure a more systematic and accurate response to the research question. This systematic response is accomplished through the repetitive and transparent nature of the coding process and the steps discussed below which adopt Braun and Clarke (2006) and Walters (2016) methods of analyzing the data.

Likewise, these magazine covers displayed on newsstands need to ensure a wide appeal to their audiences and seeing as that appeal will be judged by the cover of the magazine, “elements such as images, colour, the layout of pages” can heavily shape the meaning created and in turn, the chances of purchase (Machin, 2013, p.347). Arguably, all the visual features and texts displayed on these covers were strategically included for one reason or another and taking all of this into account is crucial to ensure a reliable and generalizable study. The reason the former is significant is because reliability is one of the factors that determines the likelihood of a study being replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and aiming for a reliable study is one of the many things good research aims to fulfil, alongside “validity, generalizability, and objectivity” (Tracy, 2010, p.837). Furthermore, the word connotations surrounding the visual is important to account for as that makes it easier to spot any predominance of particular words and phrases that can be associated with images. In terms of accounting for generalizability, this study focused on 104 magazine covers as this sample is large enough to spot recurring patterns and meanings. As a result, due to the difficulties of another research replicating these exact findings due to the interpretative nature of qualitative content analysis, this study sought to make the research process transparent through detailing the analysis methods while explicitly highlighting the theoretical viewpoints this study relied on and adopted.

Due to the assumed stereotypes and generalizations expected through these magazine covers, employing a thematic analysis will prove fruitful for the following reasons. Firstly, “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set”, enabling a flexible and feasible approach to analysing the data at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). Secondly, it will help express a nuanced understanding of the most prevalent themes within my data set that are most relevant to answering my research question. Albeit these understandings are subjective and heavily based on interpretation, their processing will be

grounded in data and conducting a content analysis will organize this data. Thirdly, a thematic analysis will complement the data set since I will be employing abductive reasoning. This means that the themes identified are heavily grounded in the data itself – in other words it is data-driven and is inductive in nature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Afterwards, abductive analysis entails building on the inductive form of reasoning to then re-apply them to existing literature; this is what I plan to do as I will apply the codes that I create to the framework that already exists by Becker-Herby. In this way, abductive analysis “emphasizes that rather than setting all preconceived theoretical ideas aside, researchers should enter the field with the deepest and broadest theoretical base possible and develop their theoretical repertoires throughout the research process” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p.180).

While it could be said that pictures speak a thousand words, employing thematic analysis will help me gain a deep insight into the latent meanings of the data at hand. Essentially, I will be able to identify and further examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and ideologies at play in these advertisements. This approach is in line with a constructivist’s point of view whereby the belief is that these meanings and notions that transpire from the data are heavily rooted in their societal (re)productions and constructions. Therefore, I will be able to account for the sociocultural context (U.S. based) at play here. In addition, compiling the themes that emerge from the analysis will be based on the constant comparison procedure that is frequently used when analysing qualitative data and employing a grounded theory approach (Boeije, 2009).

In terms of processing and analyzing the data, I will be relying on two approaches. The first belonging to Braun and Clarke (2006) outlines a six-step approach to consolidate the emerging themes, while the second approach by Walters (2016) focuses on specifically applying thematic analysis to visual materials. The former six approaches entail familiarity with the data; creating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing those themes; defining and naming them; writing up the analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coupling these approaches will help provide a more nuanced answer to my research question and ultimately, reveal the way Cosmopolitan represents the ideal woman whilst applying femvertising. Similarly, linking both qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis is helpful because of their overlap across many aspects including the creation of codes prior to the coding process, an interest in both latent and manifest data, and their applicability to a large range of phenomena (Neundorf, 2019). Following this, employing both offers a holistic and nuanced understanding of the data because the two approaches include aspects of constructivism in their interpretative nature. Likewise, thematic analysis offers a compliment to the findings

derived from content analysis because it focuses on the patterns which emerge because of that analysis. Ultimately, “both content analysis and thematic analysis share the same aim of analytically examining narrative materials from life stories by breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to descriptive treatment” (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p.400). Furthermore, ethicality will not be compromised within this research as the magazine covers are publicly available and my positionality as researcher will be accounted for in the reflection.

### 3.2 Sampling and data collection

With regards to the proposed sample and sampling strategy, I aim to focus on Cosmopolitan magazine due to its wide recognition globally and its longstanding influence in the magazine industry, targeting a large female audience and boasting significant readership. The average paid print subscriptions in 2021 were 1,929,249, making it in the top 10 for U.S. print subscriptions (Turvill, 2021). Likewise, the reliability of the procedure is maintained by focusing on the U.S. edition of the magazine by Hearst publishing, based in New York City. Additionally, convenience sampling will be employed in terms of feasibility and availability (Etikan et al., 2016, p.2). Due to the dispersion of these magazines over the years, the need for a subscription, and lack of sufficient content on Cosmopolitan’s social media, I will be relying on the database provided by Magzter for my suitable sample; this offers 104 covers over the years of 2013-2022 (with an average of 11 per year except for 2022 at this time of writing). Consequently, the focus of this research is derived from the world’s largest global digital magazine newsstand (Magzter). As the main criteria for this dataset entailed coverage from the last decade, Magzter provides this. Further, Magzter was chosen instead of utilizing Google Images due to the randomness of the sampling procedure of the latter and the fact that my bias as a researcher would reflect in my choices of the covers.

### 3.3 Sensitizing concepts

In terms of successfully processing and analyzing the data, simultaneously rooting the identified themes in the data to ensure an abductive approach and considering the relevant literature mentioned above is vital. Alongside this approach, I will be relying on the following five pillars of femvertising – these sensitizing concepts will help guide my analysis – famously noted by Becker-Herby (2016): Utilization of diverse female talent; Inherently pro-female messaging; Challenging gender-norm stereotypes; Downplaying of sexuality; Authentically portraying women. These serve as a starting point for multiple reasons. The

first includes their prominence within the scholarly work around femvertising. The second revolves around their relevance and ability to relate to my dataset; and the third is due to the holistic viewpoint these five pillars cover – allowing for an analysis that encompasses sufficient angles. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), engaging with the literature allows an enhanced focus on particular aspects of the data which may have been overlooked otherwise. Therefore, the sensitizing concepts above will advance my thematic analysis of the meanings which will arise from the Cosmopolitan magazine covers, in the context of femvertising and representing the ideal woman.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, it is important that femvertising embodies particular features in order to avoid being inauthentic and attracting labels such as faux feminism or femwashing. Consequently, because the essence of femvertising is employing pro-female messages and providing the space for women to embrace themselves and feel empowered, it is critical to assess whether Becker-Herby's five pillars are present in Cosmopolitan's magazine covers or absent. If the latter is the case, this research seeks to provide insight as to why that might be, in addition to what is present instead.

With regards to the first pillar comprising of diverse female talent, observing this will include assessing whether the models on Cosmopolitan's covers are white females, or whether there are other racial backgrounds included such as Black, African American, Asian, or Latino for example. Due to this research being rooted in the U.S. context of Cosmopolitan, this research assumes the majority of models will be White. However, as the timeline of these covers ranges from 2014-2022, recent trends surrounding the lack of diversity and inclusion in magazine covers suggests there may be attempts at utilizing diverse female talent.

The second pillar consists of using inherently pro-female messages. This will be assessed by accounting for the captions, headlines, and text that Cosmopolitan uses to accompany the model on the cover. Questions that will be asked during the thematic analysis will revolve around whether the statements conveyed by the magazine encourages its readers to embrace themselves and their femininity, or whether there are (subtle or direct) messages of women having to fix themselves for other people (e.g. including potential love interests, job employers, family).

Thirdly, Becker-Herby outlines the importance of dismissing the stereotypical boundaries associated with women. These include contexts revolving around motherhood, domestic work, or dependency on others to name a few. Instead, this third pillar focuses on the ways in which these models are portrayed and assessing whether the 'ideal' woman can be (for example) sporty, knowledgeable, independent, powerful, strong etc. It will be important to

recognize whether the models Cosmopolitan embraces are holistic in their expertise – in the sense that the models represent a range of industries and professions – or if they are merely on the cover because of their looks and nothing else.

Next, the fourth pillar consists of dismissing female sexuality that is specifically tailored to the male gaze. As the image of the model is the first thing the readers will take notice of (due to its large size), it is noteworthy to see whether the women adopt any sexual poses, assume sparse clothing, or whether any of their bodily attributes are objectified for the sake of the cover. Put simply, this pillar is concerned with exaggerating and reducing the female as an object (of desire and admiration) instead of as a realistic female figure capable of being related to by the magazine's readership.

The final pillar noted by Becker-Herby is portraying women in an authentic manner. As iterated in the theoretical framework above, this implies a complete understanding of the advertisement while considering the authenticity of the message.

### 3.4 Thematic analysis

As indicated above, I will be conducting a thematic analysis on Cosmopolitan's magazine covers to answer my research question and gain insight into the ways in which the magazine represents the 'ideal' woman on its covers. Similarly, the previous section outlined that processing and analyzing the data will be done by adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach and a second approach by Walters (2016).

The former six approaches entail familiarity with the data; creating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing those themes; defining and naming them; and writing up the analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Firstly, in order to become sufficiently familiar with the data, I plan on deep diving into the 104 samples multiple times in order to actively search for implicit meanings, trends, and themes. By keeping note of the patterns and themes that emerge during the first phases of reading before beginning the formal coding process, I can familiarize myself with the data and engage with it. Next, I will start generating the initial codes that would transpire after going through the magazine covers multiple times. This is important because it provides the underlying foundation for the themes that begins in step 3. It also means I can code what is relevant and interesting to answering my research question whilst coding for as many potential themes as possible – this will make my final thematic map as detailed and nuanced as possible (see Figure 1). Thirdly, this is where I will search for the potential themes by compiling the initially coded data and begin sorting through it. The

objective of this phase is to create an assortment of themes and sub-themes that summarize the meanings and patterns identified in the data.

The fourth phase entails reviewing these themes and refining them to understand which ones are truly themes that are applicable to my research question, and which merely overlap and can be grouped into one. To ensure this is successful, it is recommended to review the coded extracts and consider their coherence. If this is difficult, it is vital to consider whether the problem stems from the theme itself or whether the sub-categories need to be refined. Likewise, this must also be applied to the entire data set since this thematic map is meant to reflect the meanings, patterns, and themes identified in the whole set and not just aspects of it. These two processes belong to Patton's (1990) dual criteria judging categories: internal homogeneity and external homogeneity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once a sufficient thematic map has been created, phase 5 begins by defining and naming them. This not only means providing the crux of what the themes entail and what the sub-categories offer, but it also includes providing a detailed analysis of each theme. That way it becomes clear how these identified themes support my research question and the data set. The final step of Braun & Clarke's six approaches is writing up the analysis and creating a coherent and nuanced write-up involving a story of what the data accounts for, what the themes indicate, and the arguments these themes provide for answering my research question.

The second approach by Walters (2016) is useful because it is precisely tailored for visual content. Albeit it heavily overlaps with the Braun & Clarke's six phases, it offers a clearer explanation of how to apply thematic analysis in visual material. Precisely because the article is based on a case study within tourism research using a New Zealand magazine, Walters provides clear step-by-step explanations from providing descriptions to the images to coding them and the ways in which the basic themes are developed. Consequently, coupling these two approaches will help me create a sufficient final thematic map.

Lastly, I will be relying on the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti to compile and create my themes, sub-themes, and thematic map. The reason for utilizing this particular software is because of my previous experience with it, the ease in which it stores and gathers emerging patterns and meanings, and its ability to work with visual data as well. As the literature states the importance of being systematic with qualitative research, Atlas.ti offers a solution to dealing with unstructured data through its ability to "build networks and relationships resulting in creating a graphical view of the data" while retaining all codes and findings the researcher inputs in one single place (Nglande & Mkwinda, 2014, p.3). Furthermore, it was mentioned above that this research will be relying on an abductive

approach which in turn focuses on the themes and meanings that are identified and emerge from the data – grounded within it – alongside applying these to existing theory. This further justifies the use of Atlas.ti for its creation was heavily influenced “by and designed in accordance with the principles of grounded theory” (Mehmetoglu & Graham, 2003, p.4).

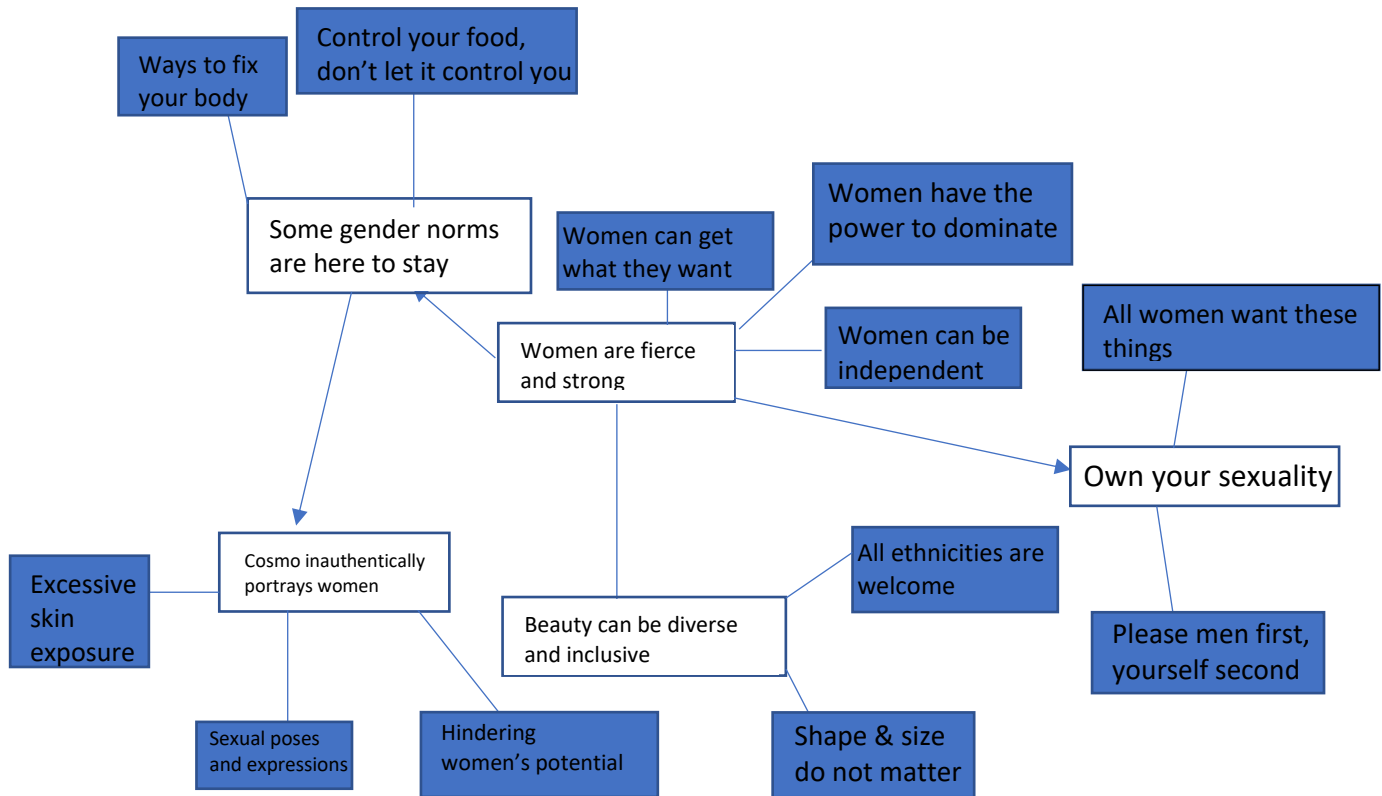


Figure 1: Thematic Map

### 3.5 Credibility, Reflexivity and Ethicality

For this research and qualitative analysis generally, it is essential to account for the credibility and ethical considerations of the study. This is particularly important with qualitative analysis because of the consensus surrounding its lack of scientific rigor and the tendency of being viewed “as a ‘soft’ science” (Cope, 2014, p.89). Likewise, because researchers’ (subjective) positionality and bias may be reflected in the data, it is important to ensure that trustworthiness and transparency are present. As a result, this makes it easier for other researchers who may want to replicate the study and generate similar interpretations or claims. This research is relying on three of the eight criteria presented by Tracy (2010) to ensure the research is valid and ethical.

The first criteria involve the credibility of the study, wherein the research findings include trustworthiness and plausibility. To ensure this, the author suggests adopting one of the



following practices: thick description; triangulation; multivocality; and member reflections. However, the most applicable one to this research is thick description. This includes the provision of “in-depth illustration that explicates culturally situated meanings and abundant concrete detail” (Tracy, 2010, p.843). Due to the importance of exploring the latent, implicit meanings in *Cosmopolitan’s* magazine covers, doing so requires diving beneath what is presented on the surface and understanding what is being implied, what is not being said, and reading between the lines. Thus, exploring the different connotations underlying the magazine covers while accounting for the matters such as the salience of the general image will ensure the first criteria.

The second criteria include the ethics of the research. Because the magazine covers were retrieved from a public source and are available to all, individual anonymity will not be affected, nor is there a major ethical issue. The most relevant form of ethics outlined by the author relates to procedural ethics, which encompasses “the importance of accuracy and avoiding fabrication, fraud, omission, and contrivance” (Tracy, 2010, p.847). For this research, accuracy and credibility are ensured by providing clear and detailed step-by-step approaches to the methodology and justifications. Likewise, this research is ethical in that the methodology and analysis are transparent and can be replicated through the different steps outlined above. Albeit the meanings derived from the magazine covers will be my own as a researcher, it is my reliance on these publicly provided magazine covers that *Cosmopolitan* strategically curated which encourages potential generalizability.

The final criteria that is important if qualitative research is to prove fruitful is termed as ‘meaningful coherence’ (Tracy, 2010). This final component of the eight criteria refers to studies that have succinctly achieved their objectives, used relevant and correctly justified methods suitable to answering the research question, and most importantly, linked the literature with the research and findings. In other words, meaningfully coherent studies “plausibly accomplish what they espouse to be about” (Tracy, 2010, p.848). By having the latter as an objective of this research, the credibility and ethicality will simultaneously transpire.

In terms of accounting for my reflexivity and positionality as a researcher to ensure sufficient ethicality, this is optimized by providing in-depth and transparent step-by-step explanations of the methods chosen. Moreover, due to the importance of accounting for my own biases and subjectivity while interpreting the data, in addition to my gender and affinity with the topics at hand including femvertising and post-feminism, this further drives my explicit descriptions of the theories, research design, sampling, sensitizing concepts, and

elaborate thematic analysis discussion. Thus, these legitimize effective fundamentals for this research.

### 3.6 Summary

To conclude, the findings derived from this research were reliant on and supported by extant literature and sufficient knowledge regarding femvertising, commodity feminism, advertising in the media, and (post)feminism. Similarly, by concisely describing the research design, the sampling and data collection, the sensitizing concepts used, and the approach using thematic analysis, this research strived to optimize its reliability and credibility. Finally, in terms of processing and analyzing the data, coupling Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach alongside Walters (2016) as discussed above helps in answering my research question. As a result, the data set in its entirety was critically analyzed with a total of five themes emerging from the coding process. These can be found in the following section which includes the results and discussion.

## 4. Results and Discussion

After completing a thematic analysis on Cosmopolitan's 104 magazine covers over the period of 2013-2022, a total of five themes were created. These themes comprise of 'beauty can be diverse and inclusive', 'women are fierce and strong', 'some gender norms are here to stay', 'own your sexuality', and 'Cosmo inauthentically portrays women'. The objective of this section is to explore the findings which emerged, as a result of analyzing how Cosmopolitan employs femvertising when advertising the ideal woman. These themes (and the sub-themes) showcase the surprising lack of femvertising that Cosmo employs. Albeit femvertising is present by attempting inclusivity and diversity with their models, encouraging certain postfeminist ideals such as independence (regarding careers), individualism, and autonomy, this diminishes with the presence of emphasizing gender norms and giving in to inauthentic portrayals of women.

Although this research hypothesized that the success Cosmopolitan garners suggests aspects of femvertising may be present, this does not seem to be the case. Showing that 'beauty can be diverse and inclusive' is positive but not when the overwhelming majority of the covers include white females, with thin and fit bodies. Likewise, empowering readers to show that 'women are fierce and strong' is insufficient when this is overshadowed by dubious language and contexts. Likewise, by implying that women need to fix themselves, their bodies, and avoid giving in to certain things (like food cravings), in addition to not putting themselves first, it suggests that 'some gender norms are here to stay'. Furthermore, 'own[ing] your sexuality' is a major aspect of Cosmopolitan's essence and underlying tone but, the magazine assumes a one-size-fits-all approach and surrenders to many generalizations and assumptions (such as all their readers being in relationships, let alone heterosexual ones). Lastly, in conjuncture with the fifth pillar of Becker-Herby's concept that outlines authentically portraying women, 'Cosmo inauthentically portrays women' by excessively showcasing skin, portraying the models in skimpy outfits, and overall hindering their potential – whether that be in the workplace or in bed. The table below shows these five themes and their respective sub-themes, which will be further discussed in more detail.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme 1</b>	<b>Sub-theme 2</b>	<b>Sub-theme 3</b>
Beauty can be diverse and inclusive	All ethnicities are welcome	Shape & size do not matter	
Women are fierce and strong	Women can be independent	Women have the power to dominate	Women can get what they want
Some gender-norms are here to stay	Ways to fix your body	Control your food, do not let it control you	
Own your sexuality	Please men first, yourself second	All women want these things	
Cosmo inauthentically portrays women	Excessive skin exposure	Sexual poses and expressions	Hindering women's potential

Figure 2: Theme Table

#### 4.1 Beauty can be diverse and inclusive

The first emerging theme is that beauty can be diverse and inclusive. As highlighted above, this is a primary feature of femvertising. The sub-themes comprise of ‘all ethnicities are welcome’ and ‘shape and size do not matter’. Due to the wide readership of Cosmopolitan and the fact that this is the U.S. edition of the magazine, one could argue that the magazine would be portraying some of the diversity that exists in American societies, including the presence of Hispanics/Latinos, Whites, Black/African Americans, Asians, or multiracial. Although this was the case to an extent, the overwhelming majority consisted of whites. Specifically, there were only 14 non-white (African American/Black/Asian/non-Caucasian) female models used, including 2 Asians and 12 Blacks. Moreover, some of the nationalities (besides American) included, Australian, Albanian, British, Cuban, Canadian, Colombian, Puerto Rican, and Vietnamese. In terms of the other subthemes, it was clear that the ideal woman is slim. This was due to the presence of only 1 plus sized model, 1 pregnant model, and 3 non-slim models. Some of these are depicted below.



Figure 3-6: Cosmopolitan Magazine Covers

What is clear is that by portraying beauty as an appearance that includes “high eyebrows, large eyes, high cheekbones, a small nose, and a narrow face” – in other words, a Western-centric ideal – any appearance that falls short of that is rarely represented and if so, is done insufficiently (Yan & Bissell, 2014, p.195). Although Cosmopolitan does attempt to showcase diverse and inclusive beauty, it is alarming that the models can be counted on fingers. Similarly, it was only in 2020 that Black/African American models were used consistently, including Normani on the December/January 2020 cover, Issa Rae on the June 2020 cover, Keke Palmer on the July/August 2020 cover, and Chloe x Halle on the October 2020 cover. What is noteworthy here is the power of prevalent media standards, which have resulted in the social construct of beauty to mean very few things whereas prior to globalization and the advanced level of integration present today, beauty was multifaceted. Likewise, it is important to note that up till August 2016, with the feature of Ashley Graham, all the models fulfilled the thin ideal, with a large chest, relatively thin waist, and toned arms. An overweight model in Korea signified abundance, round faces suggested health in China and Japan, and oversized or curvy women were seen as striking and fertile in Hispanic cultures (Yan & Bissell, 2014). Yet, although size and body shape should not matter in inclusive beauty, and even though Cosmopolitan did utilize 1 plus sized model, 1 pregnant model, and 3 non-slim models, these are arguably not enough when the number of thin models used are considered (which constitute the majority).

The reason representation is significant is because certain sects of society currently knowingly prefer the representation to be expressed through thin models. A study notes that those “exposed to a thin model developed more favorable attitudes toward the brand than those exposed to a fat model...with the brand being promoted by a medium thin model preferred over that of a medium-fat model” – conversely, this same study also highlights how

the use of non-thin models stimulated respondents' comfort with their bodies (D'Alessandro & Chitty, 2011, p.869). Thus, brands should focus on advocating for the latter due to its proposed benefits; in addition to the notion that a "positive body attitude was a means to facilitate bodily change" (Markula, 2001, p.160). Albeit this will be explored further in theme three, it is important to highlight an example of how *Cosmopolitan* expresses that body shape and size does indeed matter. In the February 2013 cover, the cover states 'curb your cravings' implying we should not be having them in the first place. In December 2013, Miley Cyrus' cover is featured with the caption 'celebrate without gaining weight'. This is a paradoxical comment that might trigger many readers who exercise celebration through their love of food. These examples signify that shape and body size does matter for *Cosmopolitan's* interpretation of the ideal woman. Similarly, it is not a suitable approach for readers who utilize the magazine expecting to read messages that revolve around nutrition or healthy lifestyles and are instead, met with a visualization that health equates to thinness (Conlin & Bissell, 2014).

Furthermore, aside from the thin-ideal used, the unattainability of such looks is further exacerbated by retouching and correcting computer techniques which further expand "the gap between media images of women intended to portray beauty ideals and the reality of most women's appearance" (Engeln-Maddox, 2006, p.258). This complicates matter even further because in order for beauty to be inclusive and diverse, intersectionality must be at play. In May 2014, the cover stated 'living the dream' – the model featured was a white female with flat abs and a toned body. This brings to light the pivotal role that body satisfaction can have on our daily lives and the potential for it to contribute to a dream life. Specifically for females, research illustrates that body-related anxiety increases significantly when model advertising images are used, precisely "within the fashion industry ... women exposed to figures highlighting the body are more likely to report decreased body satisfaction" (Sabiston & Chandler, 2009, p.173). Likewise, body comparisons arising from bodies in the media plays a mediating role "between self-esteem, depressive mood, friend dieting, magazine message exposure, and BMI" (Berg et al., 2007, p.264). Most importantly, one study asking women to reflect on the ways their lives would differ if they encountered the beauty standard advocated for by the media indicates their belief that "their lives would change in important, positive ways" (Engeln-Maddox, 2006, p.263).

Not only is it crucial for the models to reflect the age group, ethnicity and racial background, body size, and shape – the readers must be able to recognize themselves as reflections of these advertisements (Becker-Herby, 2016). One could argue this is difficult to

accomplish with Cosmopolitan due to the minimal number of diverse models they employ. A concept that is closely related to what Cosmopolitan tends to do is called tokenism – it is a symbolic effort involving “a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality” (Olsen, 2020). Albeit it is intended for the workforce context, I believe it is relevant here as the magazine pursues a symbolic effort to include people with various body sizes, shapes, races, ethnicities and ages, but when all is assessed the overwhelming majority is still an unattainable version of an ideal woman.

Nevertheless, it is significant to outline what Cosmo did positively when diverse talent was employed on their covers. For starters, with the issue featuring Keke Palmer in July/August 2020, the captions accompanying the model included ‘Change Happens Now’ and ‘Keke Palmer on BLM, standing together, and our better future’. Albeit politics is one of the many topics Cosmopolitan focuses on, it is empowering that they opted for plural language with ‘our future’ showing that this is a topic concerning all. Likewise, there is an explicit attempt to be inclusive with the caption ‘The black girl’s guide to SPF, keep that magic \*magical\*’. This is a clear expression towards black girls to embrace their magical skin. With their sister issue that featured Chloe x Halle on the October 2020 cover, it is significant that it was two black sister’s embodying female power and not white females. Albeit they are significantly shaping the music industry, putting them on the ‘the sisters issue dedicated to the women we love and cherish’ is an open and public portrayal of the magazine’s respect towards these women. On Normani’s December/January 2020 cover, an arrow pointed towards her body with the text asking ‘motivated yet?’. This suggests black women and their bodies are worth striving for and are worthy of admiration. Another interesting way diversity was showcased was in the May 2019 cover, featuring Yara Shahidi and Charles Melton. The former is African American and the latter is mixed race (Asian American). With the cover stating ‘Hollywood just got hotter’ it not only advocates for diversity within Hollywood but for acceptance in general with regards to non-whites and their fusion with society.

Thus, this first theme showcases the importance of fulfilling authentic femvertising – both through the choice of models employed and the texts accompanying these visuals. What Cosmopolitan lacked prior to their pivot towards explicitly employing non-thin models and adapting their terminology was the use of inclusive beauty standards, supporting language, and encouraging the belief that women of all shapes, sizes, and colors are beautiful and welcome.



## 4.2 Women are fierce and strong



Figure 7-10: Cosmopolitan Magazine Covers

This second theme consists of an amalgamation of Becker-Herby's third and fifth pillars, whereby the former includes breaking down gender stereotypes and the latter consists of authentically portraying women. This is specifically regarding all aspects of the advertisement (the model/product, the styling and props, the backdrop and context etc.). The three subthemes that arise from this are 'women can be independent', 'women have the power to dominate', and 'women can get what they want'. Depicted above are four covers which meet this theme but also paradoxically showcase the stereotypical conventions Cosmopolitan assumes.

The first subtheme entails the independence of women, which is a crucial feature within the different waves of feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Orolic, 2021). A prevalent way that Cosmopolitan emphasizes this is by encouraging their readers to 'make money, save it, and spend it'. Perhaps this is because the ability for women to provide stability and security for themselves independent of the man is seen as a steppingstone into empowerment and liberation (Windels et al., 2021; Mcrobbie, 2004). Particularly the four models chosen on figures 7-10 all exhibit fierceness and strength in their own ways. Venus Williams is an esteemed tennis player renowned for her incredible mark on the sport; Mariah Carey is distinguished for her musical success; Jessica Alba is recognized within the television and movie industry for her expertise and nominations; similarly, Sarah Jessica Parker is also prominent within the movie scene and has accumulated numerous awards for her performances. Not only did these women manage to break into the world of sports and television that may have been previously dominated by men, but they have made a global name for themselves that encourages young women to do the same. The underlying thread regarding this theme as well as the chosen models on these covers is that women are capable



of dominating; whether that entails the industry, work life, careers, success, love, or happiness, *Cosmopolitan* is advocating for it all. But this does not diminish the skepticism that arises when one considers whether this advocacy is authentic; since it does not touch upon the true structural barriers that women are faced with when attempting to obtain success. Leaving out the vital factors that contribute to the struggle women face to achieve success such as gender inequality, lack of equal pay, the role of motherhood and childcare, or harassments within the workplace arguably hinders the effectiveness of the magazine's mission with regards to women's ability to dominate.

Moreover, Parker's cover specifically includes empowerment attempts such as 'nice girls finish fierce', 'be happier and in control at work', and 'you're your best in a bikini in just 5 moves'. Particularly significant here is the deviation away from previously used terms like 'bikini body' or 'hot body'. Similarly, the cover includes the statement 'the sex move he will worship you for' which touches on the subtheme of domination albeit in a sexual context. In Williams' cover, it states that 'your roaring 20s are here' which may be suggesting an ambience of fun, freedom, and independence that women experienced during that time. Mariah Carey's cover is one of the few that includes no mention of sex. Finally, Alba's cover portrays fierceness through the dominant pose and red suit worn to match the strong feminine energy on the cover, whereby it states to 'live like a boss' and 'find your happy place'. Dominance within the sexual realm is also mentioned here as 'awaken your force'.

While it is clear that the facial expressions these women express are more candid and authentic than the majority of the posed ones embodying desire and temptation, the outfits chosen, and the accompanying texts are still left to question. Particularly for the third and fourth covers (figures 9 and 10) featuring Jessica Alba and Sarah Jessica Parker – though the poses exemplify domination and strength their bodies are still sexualized with regards to the exposed skin and bare chest. Moreover, excluding Carey's cover, the rest all refer to sex quite explicitly. This emphasis raises the question of whether it is possible for women to be fierce and strong outside the domain of sex and love, and onto other important things such as their careers, happiness, friendships and so forth. It also brings to light the thin-line between authentic femvertising and femwashing – whereby the latter consists of the "corporate hijacking of feminism for profit-making which is using feminism as a means to profiteering without any real intent of social impact" (Varghese & Kumar, 2020, p.9).

Regarding the third subtheme of this category, the magazine highlights that women are capable of getting what they want but as mentioned previously, this is only limited to the

domain of love and sex, rarely is it extended to the realm of anything more constructive. When that is the case, such as within career life the motives in doing so and the texts chosen to indicate this are questionable. On the one hand, this may be an indication of commodity feminism highlighted above whereby the focus is solely on the purchase of commodities and products as an alternative to devoting resources to other more empowering efforts. This phenomenon is promoted further when one accounts for the global consuming culture prevalent today. Similarly, it can also be interpreted as femwashing due to most of Cosmopolitan's efforts' inability to cater to all females but only a select few. Namely those consisting of women with certain looks, body shapes, sizes, and ethnicities. It is important to note this for the crux of post feminism as iterated previously, is towards a constructive effort from all females towards furthering their cause and their equality.

Arguably, the problematic nature of this theme is that, albeit it is a fact that women can be fierce, strong, independent, and dominant, the magazine resorts to stereotypical tendencies in expressing these notions. This is additionally exemplified with the choice of clothing, poses, and texts accompanying these covers. As iterated by the literature, in order to be considered a successful femvertising campaign, it is important for the distinction between “mainstream brands embracing femvertising as a perfect blend of selling goods with empowering women” versus those genuine brands adopting a pro-female stance to be discernable (Varghese & Kumar, 2020, p.2). However, what seems to be the case here is that notions of “objectification, body shaming, stereotyping of women”, and the popularization of the feminism movement is prevalent (Varghese & Kumar, 2020, p.2). Likewise, the ways in which Cosmopolitan encourages women to get what they want is through quick fixes and fast means – as indicated by some of the texts above.

#### 4.3 Some gender-norms are here to stay

Within the literature, what arises is that the media and advertisements usually conform to outdated stereotypes surrounding women; whether that be in the way they dress, or the contexts associated with women, or their poses amongst other things. Below are just previews curated to show how Cosmopolitan fulfills the typical gender-norms: including the provision of ‘ways to fix your body’ and emphasizing the need to ‘control your food, do not let it control you’.

The reason the first subtheme transpired was due to the heavy emphasis on the fitness pursuit Cosmopolitan was incentivizing – for the wrong reasons. It is clear that choosing to employ the majority of the cover models (over the years of 2013-2022) as thin and fit ones

hinders the overall empowering message that fitness and the body can do. At first glance, it can be argued that healthy eating habits, daily exercise, and wellness is empowering – these “ways of exercising choice, command, control, and mastery over one’s body, and consequently, one’s life” motivate women to see themselves as more than just objects of desire but physical whole-beings (Eskes et al., 1998, p.319). But this is hindered when such acts of taking care of your body and health are equated with notions of sexy or gorgeous – in other words beauty and looks. Consequently, what this does is put forth the belief that “the ‘properly shaped’ female body is taken as evidence of achievement and self-worth” whereas “personal strength (physical or social) which can be seen as an avenue to female independence, a feminist goal, is repeatedly refigured as a means to attaining sexual attractiveness” (Goldman et al., 1991, p.338).

When the captions associated with these near-perfect models and commodified bodies include ‘supermodel abs workout’, ‘the workout that makes you better at sex’, ‘the bikini body plan – 4 steps to smokin’!’, and ‘look sexy now, make them obsessed with you’, the focus shifts from partaking in these activities to feel good, but it likens these with looking a certain desirable way. This raises a question regarding the ethicality of such texts and the scientific backing behind them. Albeit the suggestions *Cosmopolitan* expresses are well-researched, this is critiqued when they value rapidness and efficiency over value. In other words, almost every time a certain workout or movement was recommended, a timestamp was accompanying it: ‘prettiest skin and hair 5 minutes max’, ‘5 minute flat abs workout’, ‘flatter abs in 9 minutes flat’, ‘flat abs in 4 moves’, ‘flat abs fast’, ‘beach body shortcuts’, ‘sexier abs in 5 moves’, ‘easiest workout for an epic ass’ amongst others. Skeptics may argue that by emphasizing and phrasing such fitness pursuits like this, it assumes women should do these only for the sake of getting better at sex or to have a bikini body. Moreover, providing such short timestamps implies women should not dedicate more than those to focus on their health. Particularly with one cover of January 2014, it stated ‘trick yourself into going to the gym’ – suggesting that women cannot go purely for the fitness aspect but that they need deception to do so.



Figure 11-14: Cosmopolitan Magazine Covers

Regarding the second subtheme which revolves around accounting for weight, Cosmopolitan lacks a positive sentiment regarding healthy eating habits for most of the timespan analyzed. Indeed, scholars highlight “the use of thinner idealized stereotypes ... was shown generally to elicit more interest in the advertised brand” (D’Alessandro, 2011, p.870). This may hold true with Cosmopolitan playing a key role within the magazine industry but, with the emergence of body positivity and self-love movements, it is surprising that their language surrounding food continued to be negative for a large number of years. For example, when they introduced the ‘Cosmo body’ in Lucy Hale’s September 14<sup>th</sup> issue (figure 11), they chose ‘get tight and toned fast’ as opposed to anything excluding speed or health. In another cover of 2015, an arguably triggering text was chosen to accompany Kylie Jenner: ‘hungry girls guide to losing weight’. This can be triggering for people with eating disorders – especially naming and shaming ‘hungry girls’ and including the emoji of a taco to signify this. Similarly, another cover in 2015 mentioned ‘be the smartest girl at the salad bar’, suggesting being at any other food bar would be a dumb move to make. In 2016, a month apart, they captioned their January issue ‘no fail ways to drop 5 lbs’ and then followed this in February with ‘look hotter naked’. Looking at these showcases the pattern that Cosmopolitan implies women are not attractive when they are dressed (whether this be due to the way they look or their shape/body size). More examples include ‘feed your cravings, still lose weight’, ‘the confidence issue, love your body’ (while using a near perfect model’s body on the cover), and ‘the wellness issue, mind right body tight’ using Kate Hudson’s perfectly toned body.

The literature generalizes wellness as a holistic pursuit going beyond physical wellbeing to include emotional wellbeing as well. Specifically, according to Ardell (1977), “wellness is described as a lifestyle geared to maximizing one’s physical and emotional well-being”

(Bloch, 1984, p.10). This pursuit, often viewed as multidimensional “required harmony between these three areas [body, mind, and spirit] and the recognition that each impinged on the other” (Miller, 2005, p.91). However, Cosmopolitan negatively frames this notion with the above-mentioned texts. In this instance, wellness is arguably a means to an end, whereby that end seems to manifest itself through an ideal representation of women represented on Cosmo’s covers. However, whether this is due to changes in their Editor-in-Chief – three different ones held the position throughout the analyzed period – or femvertising becoming more prevalent, there was a drastic shift in their language and in the inclusion of food on their covers. For example, in March 2019, a large pizza was featured with the model Lana Condor on the cover, with the statement ‘so sorry about the pizza craving ur having rn’. In July 2019, ice cream was featured on a fun and candid cover of Aubrey Plaza – who was stated will ‘eat u alive’. The sentiment surrounding food seems to be more humorous and light-hearted in comparison to before. Next, in February 2021, they introduced their food section. In April 2021, they intensified this by having ‘snack awards’ in this issue. Interestingly enough, the emojis that were once used to associate certain types of food (like tacos, pizza, burgers) are now shaping a new light.

#### 4.4 Own your sexuality

A fourth theme that transpired from the thematic analysis is the seeming importance of females owning their sexuality. Two subthemes were created as a result of the coding process, including ‘please men first, yourself second’ and ‘all women want these things’. Regarding the former, this subtheme is concerned with the prevalent emphasis the magazine established in its former years regarding the act of doing almost everything in order to ensure male pleasure; this will be elaborated on below. The latter consists of the assumed stereotypes and generalizations Cosmopolitan adopts concerning its women readership. Aspects of this theme tie into the femvertising pillars because they oppose the stereotypical ways in which female bodies are understood and are a direct display of the hypothesis set by Diekman and Eagly (2002) – whereby gender stereotypes and female representations transform alongside society’s evolution (Becker-Herby, 2016). Owning female sexuality is also one of the vital pillars of the third wave of feminism and post-feminism as iterated above.

Firstly, what the four covers below have in common is the unapologetic ambience surrounding the models; their poses, facial expressions, and outfits exhibit confidence, sexiness, and femininity. At first glance, these may seem empowering for female readers, but

when the captions are considered the interpretation of the cover is altered. Regarding the first subtheme, this was heavily emphasized in the earlier years of *Cosmopolitan*. In numerous covers. The texts on display entailed a heavy focus on sexually fulfilling the male's needs. Some of these examples included: 'stuff you think he wants in bed', 'crazy hot sex, be the best he's ever had', 'turn him on without saying a word', 'make him roar', 'men only need 2 things – grilled cheese and sex', 'the sex move he will worship you for', and 'it's sex time o'clock, the time he wants you most'. The common thread between these is that the male is the focal point whereas this magazine is for women, by women. Essentially, *Cosmopolitan* prides itself on being the go-to magazine for young women but is largely tailored towards pleasing men. Instead of prioritizing women solely, it implies men are more worthy of entertaining.

By placing the responsibility on these women to please the man, it is succumbing to everything that the different waves of feminism worked hard against. Post-feminism specifically arose to counter the patriarchy, subjectification, and lack of independence that women faced. By stating that 'your new secret weapon for hotter sex...he'll love it too', it is reassuring the readers that women cannot just be pleased but that the man must too – it is almost a transactional notion rather than an emotional one. The magazine also expresses a prevalent sentiment that assumes a gender norm and a heterosexual one regarding their readership; it was only in the year of 2017 onwards that the male association decreased and instead, broader terms were used like: 'your people' and 'you & boo'. In addition, the years of 2013-2015 were roughly centered around enjoyable sex for the male, with the female coming second – as the above examples indicate. Yet, it was only in 2016 onwards that women were put forth as a priority. This was expressed with captions like: 'awaken your force', 'discover your o-zone', 'how to turn yourself on', 'hotter sex...for you!', 'orgasms made easy, enjoy one every single time', and 'hot solo sex tricks'.

These examples provide an accurate representation of *Cosmopolitan* objectifying women whereby sexuality is the crux of the female image. Not only are these examples showcasing the sexualization of the female body in an idealized way, but the women are objectified when the above-mentioned captions are taken into account. The literature highlights that "the representation of femininity tends to center on a restricted set of exaggerated roles, character traits and body types" including motherly roles, sex objects, good wife, traits like lack of independence and unintelligent consumers (Patterson et al., 2009, p.12). Following this, it becomes unclear why this phenomenon continues to be expressed by many brands like *Cosmopolitan*, for employing female sexuality and objectifying women does little to remembering the brand name, potentially adversely impacts the message at hand, and "does



not increase brand promotion neither makes the brand more noticeable nor more memorable” (Vargas-Bianchi & Mensa, 2019, p.80). Moreover, the essence of femvertising is that it should be pro-woman and should not succumb to these stereotypes. Linking this back to the third and fourth pillars of femvertising which include breaking down the boundaries of what women ‘should’ be and sexuality not catering to the male gaze, it is arguable that Cosmopolitan fails at this because by encouraging women to own their sexuality only to gratify men and not themselves, they are reigning in the clichés that post-feminism and femvertising are attempting to defeat.



Figure 15-18: Cosmopolitan Magazine Covers

Regarding the second subtheme, there are many assumptions by the magazine regarding the things that women want. These are exemplified by the several tripartite that are stated on their covers, including ‘love, money & sex’, ‘love, sex & style’, ‘money, man & baby’, ‘self-love, church & sex’, ‘work, love & play’ and ‘love, fun & butterflies’. Not only do these hold assumptions for what their readership may be attracted to, but it also degrades women in two ways: by assuming that they deserve a one-size-fits-all approach and by depicting women as two-dimensional when they are more multifaceted. In the July 2013 cover featuring Kelly Osbourne, the quote chosen out of the entire interview was ‘I just want to be in love’. In the October 2014 cover featuring Emmy Rossum states ‘get the ass you deserve’ instead of career, life, fun, friends etc. Even when the Cosmo Careers is mentioned, the accompanying text reads: ‘the #1 thing men are good for - besides you know’. Thus, it seems that sexuality is the focal point here and it is always the means to an end. Following a similar vein, it is arguably clear that Cosmopolitan does not see the endless potential of women as an opportunity, but as a potential threat to the fulfilment of men’s wants, needs, and desires. When viewed through a post-feminist lens, it is difficult to recognize the notions of individualism, agency, and autonomy that characterize this wave of feminism. Likewise,

how can women achieve and become all they want to be when Cosmopolitan emphasizes the importance of the male presence; in addition, how can Cosmopolitan claim it caters to all women when it assumes a generic approach to the likes of women. Albeit their terminology improved as mentioned under the previous themes, their choice of cover does not compliment the efforts they should be making in empowering women to embrace and own their sexuality for themselves first.

#### 4.5 Cosmo inauthentically portrays women

According to Becker-Herby, “femvertising is very rarely over-the-top with cleavage, makeup or unrealistic sexual poses” (Becker-Herby, 2016, p.19). Although the magazine covers included here are only a sneak-peek, these provide an accurate insight into how most of Cosmo’s covers looked like over the years. The subthemes of this fifth theme outline ‘excessive skin exposure’, ‘sexual poses and expressions’, and ‘hindering women’s potential’. Regarding the first, most of the models on these covers are wearing skimpy clothing that not only reveals a lot of skin, but it was made apparent that the chest was almost always exposed in the center. As with the first cover below featuring Emily Ratajkowski (figure 18), the eyes immediately stray to the center of the image which happens to be an exposed chest in a very low button-up. Madonna (figure 19) is also featured in a very sensual cover (aided with the colors chosen, accessories worn, and props including the chair and her pose on it) which features a close-up on her body. Her position is one suggesting a sexual activity about to commence or the like. The third cover (figure 20) including Nina Dobrev incorporates a flirtatious pose that implies attention to the backside and chest. Moreover, slipping on the shoe could be interpreted as a compliment to the age-old stereotype that women are merely decorative objects. Nevertheless, such poses abide by ‘the ritualization of subordination’ which notes “the tendency for women to be presented in inferior positions and poses...often recumbent on floors or beds performing submissive or appeasement gestures such as head or body canting, bending one knee inward, smiling, clowning and acting less seriously” (Yin & Chin, 2020, p.4). One could argue that the sex appeals exemplified below encourage certain principles of (post) feminism like choices and empowerment but, on the other hand, it may seem that Cosmopolitan is conveying “women as objects of consumption to be consumed by other women” (D’Enbeau, 2011, p.55). This is further affirmed when the texts are considered.





Figure 18-21: Cosmopolitan Magazine Covers

Further, what all of these have in common are the facial expressions implying sensuality and flirtatious body language. This is clear when one considers the patterns of gender stereotypes within advertisements that convey females in ways which include but are not limited to hyper-sexualizing the female body, sexual merchandise, portraying the female body as an object to be viewed and/or being used (Patterson et al., 2009; Vargas-Bianchi & Mensa, 2019). Additionally, what Cosmopolitan tends to adopt is either a sexual depiction that explicitly and aggressively focuses on the women’s lips, breasts, or groin area as seen in figure 19 above; or adopting an alluring depiction which is one that, although less explicit, might feature the model using a piece of furniture or the floor to recline on submissively or part her lips suggestively as with figure 15 previously (Chisholm, 2013). When accounting for the captions on these covers too, this suggests Cosmopolitan inauthentically portrays women for it succumbs to the stereotypical underpinnings that have characterized women for decades. For example, many of the poses these models do is passive as opposed to static or dynamic; whereas the latter refers to what the model can do with her body, the former is focused on the aesthetic composition of the body and revolves around objectifying it (Lenne et al., 2021). Similarly, cover 18 and cover 21 above fall suit to the frame of women’s bodies employed as an “object to be viewed” (Patterson et al., 2009, p.13). Openly displaying what these women have to offer would not be problematic if it were not for the captions chosen by the magazine which only imply things in a sexual context.

The third subtheme is arguably one of the most interesting for it ironically objectifies men and portrays women as dismissive. The former is executed by sardonic comments here and there on various covers which paint men in a negative light. The first is portraying them as less than women, which goes against the equality notion of feminism in general. In the October 2013 cover featuring Jennifer Lopez (figure 14), it states ‘the ambition gap when

your dreams are bigger than his'. Asides from making this an issue when it should not be one because it is no problem for women to have more ambition than men, it belittles men and suggests that they may not be worthy of us due to that ambition gap. In the previously mentioned example of men only wanting grilled cheese and sex, it is undermining the many things they are capable of providing and it hinders women's potential because it suggests that women will fulfill their sexual needs. Other examples include 'decode his crazy mind tricks', 'the one line that'll make him commit', 'surprising reasons guys really stay', 'the #1 way to tell if he's truly into u', 'how to find a normal dude on a dating app', 'hot guys + surfboards, trust us you'll want to ride both', and 'guys confess why they cheat'. What all these comments have in common is an underlying ridiculing tone setting back the decades of effort that feminism achieved in terms of equality between the sexes. Similarly, not only are these comments objectifying men, but they also instigate a sense of doubt and fear among female readers for it suggests men have trouble committing, cannot truly like someone, struggle being normal, and partake in infidelity. Although this is not mentioned in Becker-Herby's five pillars, this paper argues that femvertising should not come at the cost of dismissing males – embracing a pro-female stance should not connote an anti-male one.

In terms of portraying women as dismissive, this is done in the form of downplaying serious issues and adversely misusing a playful tone. In doing so, Cosmopolitan is conveying an image that women do not care for serious issues and are only concerned with things surrounding sex and love. Although this is in line with what many third-wave feminists advocated for, it was a liberation that centered upon "sexual satisfaction based on individual choice and preference" rather than sexually satisfying the male (D'Enbeau, 2011, p.56). Exhibiting the argument that women are dismissive of important topics are the following statements: 'discover your o-zone', 'climax change is real', 'trust in the erectoral college', 'what's your sex IQ', 'the sexcellence awards' and 'how to please the dating-app robots to give you all the matches', 'our definitive guide to doing it for the first time, voting we mean voting'. Transforming the (political, environmental, and professional) context of some of these into one which revolves around love and sex may be conveying the notion that women do not care for these contexts. Likewise, it seems there is an attempt at embodying certain features of post-feminism such as stability and independence with the magazine's emphasis on acquiring money but this too, is hindered in the ways in which it is expressed. For example, '15 easy ways to score an extra 2k' may not be problematic but with that particular issue emphasizing sex and the inclusion of captions like 'sex tapes' and 'keeping her clothes on', it lends itself to become interpreted in many adverse ways. Another example includes

‘how to scam your boss, not really but kind of’ which suggests unusual habits in the workplace, perhaps that it should not be taken as seriously. Albeit they also talk about being ‘happier and in control at work’, it is only one empowering example amongst many negative ones.

Next, there is a fascinating emphasis with regards to fast consumption and instant gratification – specifically with regards to obtaining money. This is in relation to the overarching theme of the magazine inauthentically portraying women because of the ways in which Cosmopolitan implies women should acquire it. Albeit this research does not dive into the magazine pages and is solely focused on the cover, the examples below raise some questions regarding the context surrounding women acquiring profit. The notion of instant gratification is not surprising due to the consumption culture we live in today. For starters, the three basic characteristics that sum up consumption culture also happen to prevail our everyday lives: self-production ceases to exist in the face of exchanged goods and services; mass production; and the consistent introduction (and obsolescence) of new products and services (Drogö et al., 1993). In addition, the emphasis placed by Cosmopolitan in securing profit, purchasing the items recommended on these covers, and adopting the marketed beauty and fashion tips lends itself to several features of consumption society. As highlighted in the literature, these range from the “commercialization of leisure” to identities built out of material things, and that “economic growth depends on consumption” alongside the belief that consumption “is the surest perceived route to personal happiness” (Firat et al., 2013, p.197-198). Therefore, when the magazine includes statements like ‘little tricks that add up to the big \$\$\$’, ‘up your cash flow, no side hustle required’, or ‘easy money - 4 ways to get cash fast’, this casts a doubt on the ways in which readers should obtain this money. Arguably, before readers dive into the pages of the magazine, they judge it based on its cover; that is why this research is solely focused on the interpretations that arise from their covers.

#### 4.6 Summary

What this chapter sought to achieve was to highlight the main patterns and meanings that emerged from the thematic analysis which identified five emergent themes. In addition to rooting them in the relevant literature. After analyzing 104 of Cosmopolitan’s magazine covers throughout the years of 2013-2022, it was clear that only a few of Becker-Herby’s pillars of femvertising were present, albeit insufficiently. Moreover, what was initially evident was the presence of covers heavily annotated with captions including negative connotations of body shapes and sizes that did not meet the ideal body type (slim and

slender), a heavy focus on the act of sex and pleasing the man, an assumption that the readership were all dating and were involved in heterosexual relationships, and that women should focus on capitalizing instantaneous results over healthy motives regarding healthy bodies and beauty looks. What came next from the years of 2015/2016 onwards was a divergence away from these habits onto ones that began employing a diverse group of models, body shapes and sizes, and the move away from discouraging food to encouraging eating habits. Moreover, one could argue the vast difference in the layout of the covers and their content may have been due to the different Editor-in-Chief's (3 over the timespan analyzed) – as previously indicated. Nevertheless, the introduction of notions of independence, fierceness, strength, diverse and inclusive beauty, the defiance of certain gender norms, and the importance of owning their sexuality do not lend themselves as sufficient to successfully embodying all aspects of femvertising. The section that follows will elaborate more while providing an answer to the research question before concluding with the limitations of this study.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary of Findings

The objective of this study was to provide an answer to the initial research question how Cosmopolitan applies femvertising when representing the ‘ideal’ woman on its magazine covers. In this section, an answer will be provided alongside an overview of the implications of this study and directions for future research.

This research generated five overall themes which transpired from the thematic analysis of the 104 Cosmopolitan magazine covers, in addition to utilizing the theoretical framework outlined by Becker-Herby (2016) regarding successful femvertising. The first theme comprises of beauty that can be diverse and inclusive. The subthemes include all ethnicities are welcome and that shape and body size do not matter. This emerges as a result of the industry move away from thin-ideal models to other non-idealized or imperfect models. It is also in line with Becker-Herby’s first pillar which is the utilization of diverse female talent. Following this, this first theme focuses on conveying intersectionality and allowing for readers to not only recognize themselves in these covers and models, but to feel empowered and liberated through doing so. Essentially, it is about moving past the exclusivity which typically categorizes the advertising realm and embodying diversity and inclusivity.

The second theme follows the belief that women are fierce and strong. Three subthemes emerged with regards to this, including that women can be independent, that they have the power to dominate, and that they can get what they want. Ultimately, these attempt to breakdown many of the stereotypes which surround women and also draw on the third pillar that belongs to Becker-Herby: challenging gender-norm stereotypes. The crux of this theme is that of the feminist waves – in particular, post-feminist tendencies – which highlight the landscapes of subjectification, individualism, sexuality, and consumerism (Gill, 2007). Furthermore, it becomes clear from the years of 2015/2016 onwards that Cosmopolitan realizes that women do not have to be solely reliant on their male counterparts in order to thrive and feel empowered. That is why the remainder of the covers till 2022 offer a more positive emphasis on the characteristics that make women as fierce and strong as they are.

The third theme entails that some gender-norms are here to stay, whereby the meaning here is that albeit there are some attempts by the magazine in empowering women and adopting a femvertising approach, the subthemes which emerge here suggest that stereotypes like ‘pleasing men is important’, ‘ways to fix your body’, and ‘control your food, do not let it

control you' are still prevalent today. More significantly, this implies that the magazine has not successfully met the inherently pro-female messaging nor authentically portraying women as indicated by the pillars that Becker-Herby highlights. As highlighted by certain post-feminist scholars, 'love your body' discourses are common within femvertising where the focus is "on the production of positive affect, in which girls and women are asked to improve their own thoughts and confidence" (Windels et al., 2021, p.4). Cosmopolitan does not embody this sufficiently as indicated by several examples above, but it has begun to gradually encourage this discourse in recent years. Likewise, another notion inherent to post-feminism but absent in Cosmopolitan is 'confidence culture' whereby self-confidence is positioned as a vital factor capable of shaping women's success – both personal and professional (Windels et al., 2021). However, what is clearly shown in the analysis is that women's confidence is heavily shaped and reliant upon the male and, paradoxically, the analysis exhibits that the roots of this lack of confidence culture is a result of the advertising industry's choices.

The fourth theme is the overarching category of owning your sexuality, which is in line with post-feminist beliefs and the importance of embracing femininity and autonomy. However, as Becker-Herby notes the importance of downplaying the sexuality of women, the two subthemes show that the accompanying texts Cosmo chose to include on their covers revolve around the notions of pleasing men first over themselves, and a large stereotype was in place regarding what all women want. Essentially, the magazine which posts itself as catering to a large group of women, comprised of various ages, tends to heavily generalize the needs and wants of their readership. This is not only done through the trends and beauty tips they market, but it largely assumes that their readership is in a heterosexual relationship. It was only in the last 3 or so years that the terminology Cosmopolitan employed changed to more general terms such as 'boo'.

The final theme this research generated was that Cosmopolitan inauthentically portrays women, and this is to summarize the final pillar of Becker-Herby's framework. More specifically, this was executed by the magazine adopting 'excessive skin exposure', 'sexual poses and expressions', and an overall sense of 'hindering women's potential'. As this theme was more wide-ranging, the subthemes that were generated depicted the overall recurring patterns throughout the years of 2013-2022. In the framework Becker-Herby created, femvertising campaigns that authentically portray women do so by ensuring that "that depictions are honest and representative of women as individual people" and more importantly, is meaningful to the broader case of advertisements catered to women (Becker-

Herby, 2016, p.62). This was arguably not the case here as it seemed that Cosmopolitan was commodifying female empowerment and was “disincentivizing our collective response to structural issues” (Windels et al., 2021, p.14).

The breakdown of these five themes helps in providing the following answer to my research question. Firstly, there are aspects of femvertising which are in place when Cosmopolitan represents the ideal woman on its covers. Specifically, this includes showcasing diversity and inclusivity. Due to the research question not posing a specific threshold necessary to consider it a success, this research deems the different body shapes and sizes, and ethnicities present as diverse. Arguably they could be much more than those included but for the sake of this research and its scope, the magazine successfully includes different models in an attempt to bring to light the intersectional complexities which women face today. This is done by including a pregnant model, a plus-sized model, a few models who are not considered slim and slender, and then other ethnicities and nationalities besides the typical white American. The second aspect of femvertising which Cosmopolitan partakes in is the pro-female messaging. Although this only starts to occur towards the beginning of 2016 and heavily picks up in 2019, their efforts show they are eager to stay up to date with trends and are willing to make a change in their advertising tactics. It is difficult to argue that Cosmopolitan authentically portrays women, downplays their sexuality, nor that they challenge the mainstream perceptions of women. This is because it would have to be a consistent and ongoing effort in order to be truly authentic and this is not the case with the analyzed magazines.

## 5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Regarding the implications of this research, this study contributes to the wider theoretical debate which revolves around femvertising within the magazine industry. More specifically, it focuses on post-feminism, commodity feminism, and the ways in which popular magazines express support towards the female audience. By analyzing 104 magazine covers spanning the years of 2013-2022, this study showcased how a prominent lifestyle and fashion magazine such as Cosmopolitan maintains its success while also facilitating the portrayal of prevalent norms within our society.

The results of this study illustrate the thin and blurred lines of true femvertising and commodity feminism or femwashing; thus, outlining the importance of fulfilling the five pillars of femvertising by Becker-Herby (2016) in order to be considered authentic. One interesting finding is that magazines can still garner success even though they do not fulfill



all five pillars of the femvertising framework. However, this should not encourage brands to deviate away from including all the pillars as they are feasible and will guarantee long-term success.

The research also highlights that some brands exercise (post)feminist ideals while actually illustrating the very same gender stereotypes that feminism and post feminism attempt to break down. This finding is in line with what Champlin and colleagues explain, whereby brands dealing with a primarily female audience may acknowledge the challenges females face but do not go beyond transforming the discussion surrounding these issues (Champlin et al., 2019). Other scholars state that certain uses of post-feminism actually result in disempowerment rather than liberation, in addition to the outcome that “postfeminist discourses taint the authenticity of femvertising campaigns” (Hainneville et al., 2021, p.2). Additionally, it is clear that the thin ideal is arguably not as prevalent as before, due to the presence of other non-ideal models on Cosmopolitan’s covers, as outlined by Varghese & Kumar (2020).

In terms of the practical implications of these findings, this research attempted to explore Cosmopolitan’s magazine covers through a thematic analysis while employing the lens of femvertising. Albeit the former has been done before, the latter has not. Conversely, as this research solely focused on Cosmopolitan, a more nuanced understanding of femvertising within the advertising and magazine industry could have been accomplished through a comparative analysis of another prevalent magazine such as Glamour or Seventeen magazines. Another thing worth considering is that this research focused on the U.S. version of the magazine due to its prominence and origin, but the findings may have differed across different regions and countries – this would be worth exploring further.

Albeit this research may be used to generalize certain findings, it was also qualitative in nature which decreases the likelihood of exact findings emerging as my positionality as researcher played a significant role. Nevertheless, these findings are significant for those interested in exploring femvertising, in addition to brands aiming to gain insight into the do’s and don’ts’ of captions and cover language.

### 5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The most significant limitation of this research is that it focused on 104 magazine covers and due to the qualitative nature of the research, my stance as a researcher played a role in shaping the findings which emerged from the data. Therefore, it would be of great interest for further studies to include Cosmopolitan’s stance and input – this would further justify their



advertising choices. Additionally, it would also expand the current academic debate for most of the scholarly research revolving around Cosmopolitan fails to account for their side of the story, making such research around brand discourses one-sided and unilateral. However, by outlining the research design and methodology as clearly and detailed as possible, the study aims to have fulfilled the validity of the findings.

In terms of possibilities for future research, as mentioned above, a comparative analysis with other similar magazines or other international Cosmopolitan editions may allow for a greater understanding of femvertising and the ways in which the domain of magazines expresses the notion of the ideal woman. As iterated previously, different cultures have vastly different understandings and conceptions revolving around what the ideal woman should look like and what that beauty consists of. Consequently, accounting for these different societal norms and understandings would further enhance society's acceptances and tolerances of diverse beauty portrayals. It would also provide an interesting finding which accounts for the different successes of Cosmopolitan globally. Similarly, it would be interesting to couple a qualitative study alongside in-depth or expert interviews with Cosmopolitan employees or avid readers. This would facilitate a bridge between the intent of the magazine and the ways in which its readership recognizes this, thereby reducing any potential bias or partiality within the domain. Finally, as the literature regarding femvertising is still relatively limited, applying other theoretical frameworks besides Becker-Herby's (2016) five pillars or coupling this with other frameworks from similar domains may generate new findings.

## 6. References

- Akestam, N., Rosengren, S. & Dahlen, M. (2017). Advertising “like a girl”: Toward a better understanding of “femvertising” and its effects. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34, 795-806. 10.1002/mar.21023
- Banet-Weiser, S., Gill, R., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation. *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3–24.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700119842555>
- Bazzini, D., Pepper, A., Swofford, R., & Cochran, Karly. (2015). How Healthy are Health Magazines? A Comparative Content Analysis of Cover Captions and Images of Women’s and Men’s Health Magazine. *Sex Roles*, 72. 10.1007/s11199-015-0456-2
- Becker-Herby, E. (2016). The Rise of Femvertising: Authentically Reaching Female Consumers. *University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy*,  
<https://hdl.handle.net/11299/181494>
- Bloch, P. (1984). The wellness movement: imperatives for health care marketers. *Journal of Health Care Marketing*, 4(1), 9-16.
- Boeije, H. (2009). *Analysis in Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3. 77-101. 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Champlin, S., Sterbenk, Y., Windels, K., & Poteet, M. (2019). How brand-cause fit shapes real world advertising messages: a qualitative exploration of ‘femvertising’, *International Journal of Advertising*, 38(8). 10.1080/02650487.2019.1615294
- Chisholm, S. (2013). Gender and Advertising How Gender Shapes Meaning.
- Conlin, L., & Bissell, K. (2014). Beauty Ideals in the Checkout Aisle: Health-Related Messages in Women’s Fashion and Fitness Magazines. *Journal of Magazine Media*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmm.2014.0004>
- Cope, D. (2014). Methods and meanings: credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology nursing forum*, 41(1), 89–91. <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.89-91>
- Cosmopolitan. (2022). Hey You, Meet the Cosmo Team.  
<https://www.cosmopolitan.com/about/a26950060/about-us-contact-information-masthead/>

- Cosmopolitan Factsheet (n.d.). [https://resource.download.wjec.co.uk/vtc/2016-17/16-17\\_1-32a/pdf/\\_eng/unit7/2-cosmopolitan-factsheet.pdf](https://resource.download.wjec.co.uk/vtc/2016-17/16-17_1-32a/pdf/_eng/unit7/2-cosmopolitan-factsheet.pdf)
- Crusmac, O. (2013). Post-Feminism and Specialized Media: A Content Analysis of Cosmopolitan Headlines. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1(15).
- D'Alessandro, S., & Chitty, B. (2011). Real or relevant beauty? Body shape and endorser effects on brand attitude and body image. *Psychology & Marketing*, 28, 843-878.
- D'Enbeau, S. (2011). Sex, Feminism, and Advertising: The Politics of Advertising Feminism in a Competitive Marketplace. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 35(1), 53–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859910385457>
- de Lenne, O., Vandebosch, L., Smits, T., & Eggermont, S. (2021). Framing real beauty: A framing approach to the effects of beauty advertisements on body image and advertising effectiveness. *Body Image*. 37. 255-268. 10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.03.003
- Dowsett, J. (2014). Commodity Feminism and the Unilever Corporation: Or, How the Corporate Imagination Appropriates Feminism.
- Drake, V. (2017). The Impact of Female Empowerment in Advertising (Femvertising).
- Dröge, C., Calantone, R., Agrawal, M., & Mackoy, R. (1993). The Consumption Culture and Its Critiques: A Framework for Analysis. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 13(2), 32–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027614679301300205>
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H.A. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107-15.
- Engeln-Maddox, R. (2006). Buying a Beauty Standard or Dreaming of a New Life? Expectations Associated with Media Ideals. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 30(3), 258–266. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00294.x>
- Eskes, T. B., Duncan, M.C., & Miller, E.M. (1998). The Discourse of Empowerment: Foucault, Marcuse, and Women's Fitness Texts. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 22(3), 317–344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019372398022003006>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S., & Alkassim, R. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. 10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.1
- Femvertising Awards. (n.d.) <https://www.femvertisingawards.com/>
- Firat, A., Saltık, I., Kutucuoğlu, K., & Tunçel, Ö. (2013). Consumption, consumer culture and consumer society. *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, 13, 182-203.
- Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147–166.

- Goldman, R., Deborah, H., & Smith, S. (1991). Commodity feminism. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 8(3), 333-351. 10.1080/15295039109366801
- Hainneville, V., Guèvremont, A. & Robinot, E. (2021). Femvertising or femwashing? Women's perceptions of authenticity. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*.
- Hale, S. (2021, October 26). Magazines read by 90 per cent of young adults in the US, says MPA Magazine Media Factbook 2021. <https://www.fipp.com/news/magazines-read-by-90-per-cent-of-young-adults-in-the-us-says-mpa-magazine-media-factbook-2021/#>
- Holmqvist, K., & Frisé, A. (2010). Body Dissatisfaction Across Cultures: Findings and Research Problems. *European Eating Disorders Review: The Journal of the Eating Disorders Association*. 18. 133-46. 10.1002/erv.965
- Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Kavka, M. (2002). Feminism, Ethics, and History, or What Is the “Post” in Postfeminism? *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 21(1), 29–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4149214>
- Lewallen, J., & Behm-Morawitz, E. (2016). Pinterest or Thinterest?: Social Comparison and Body Image on Social Media. *California Management Review*, 97–124. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cm.2013.55.2.97>
- Lima, A., & Casais, B. (2021). Consumer reactions towards femvertising: a netnographic study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 26(3), 605-621. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-02-2021-0018>
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. SAGE Publications. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Lindner, D., Tantleff-Dunn, S., & Jentsch, F. (2012). Social Comparison and the ‘Circle of Objectification’. *Sex Roles*. 67. 10.1007/s11199-012-0175-x.
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2014). How to do Critical Discourse Analysis. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(1), 131–133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323113511002e>
- Machin, D., & Thornborrow, J. (2003). Branding and Discourse: The Case of Cosmopolitan. *Discourse & Society*, 14(4), 453–471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926503014004003>
- Maclaran, P. (2015). Feminism’s fourth wave: a research agenda for marketing and consumer research. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(15-16), 1732-1738. 10.1080/0267257X.2015.1076497
- Macnamara, J.R. (2005). Media Content Analysis: Its Uses, Benefits and Best Practice Methodology. *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, 6(1).

- Mehmetoglu, M., & Graham, D. (2003). Atlas/ti and content/semiotic analysis in tourism research. *Tourism Analysis*, 8,1-13. 10.3727/108354203108750120
- Maguire, J. S. (2002). Body Lessons: Fitness Publishing and the Cultural Production of the Fitness Consumer. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37(3–4), 449–464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690202037004896>
- Magzter. (2022). <https://www.magzter.com/helpnfaq/faq?id=9abdec830c24ea085039b0527136aaf6>
- Markula, P. (2001). Beyond the Perfect Body: Women’s Body Image Distortion in Fitness Magazine Discourse. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 25(2), 158–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723501252004>
- Martin, M., & Kennedy, P. (1993). Advertising and social comparison: Consequences for female preadolescents and adolescents. *Psychology and Marketing*, 10, 513-530. 10.1002/mar.4220100605
- Maslow, A. (2015). Depictions of Beauty on Cosmopolitan Magazine: Content Analysis of Covers (1959-2014). *UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones*, 2381. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/7645955>
- Mcrobbie, A. (2004). Post-Feminism and Popular Culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4. 10.1080/1468077042000309937
- Miller, J. W. (2005). Wellness: The History and Development of a Concept. *Spektrum Freizeit*, 1, 84-102.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2019). Content analysis and thematic analysis. In P. Brough (Ed.), *Research methods for applied psychologists: Design, analysis and reporting* (pp. 211-223). New York: Routledge.
- Ngalande, R., & Mkwinda, E. (2014). Benefits and challenges of using ATLAS.ti.
- Olsen, S. (2020, December 10). Tokenism: What It Is & How It Affects Our Workplaces. <https://www.inhersight.com/blog/diversity/tokenism>
- Orolić, P. (2021). Three waves of feminism: challenging the patriarchal society and influencing society’s view on “gender” and “queer”. <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:162:215762>
- Patterson, M., O'Malley, L., & Story, V. (2009). Women in Advertising: Representations, Repercussions, Responses. *Irish Marketing Review*, 20, 9-22.
- Pérez, M.P., & Gutiérrez, M. (2018). Femvertising : female empowering strategies in recent spanish commercials.

- Reich, K. (2018). Surplus Values – A New Theory of Forms of Capital in the Twenty-First Century, *Cologne: University of Cologne*; Chapter 5: Body Capital, 268-314.
- Repo, J. (2020). Feminist Commodity Activism: The New Political Economy of Feminist Protest. *International Political Sociology, 14*. 10.1093/ips/olz033
- Richins, M. (1995). Social Comparison, Advertising, and Consumer Discontent. *American Behavioral Scientist, 38*. 593-607. 10.1177/0002764295038004009
- Sabiston, C., & Chandler, K. (2009). Effects of Fitness Advertising on Weight and Body Shape Dissatisfaction, Social Physique Anxiety, and Exercise Motives in a Sample of Healthy-Weight Females. *Journal of Applied Biobehavioral Research, 14*, 165-180. 10.1111/j.1751-9861.2010.00047.x
- Schreier, M. (2013). Qualitative Content Analysis. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, 170–183.
- Sheehan, K. (2004). Cats and dogs on venus and mars: gender and advertising. In *Controversies in Contemporary Advertising*, 91-114. SAGE Publications. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452233130.n7>
- Shilling, C. (1991). Educating the Body: Physical Capital and the Production of Social Inequalities. *Sociology, 25*(4), 653–672. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038591025004006>
- Soler, C. (2019). Femvertising and postfeminism: An investigation of postfeminist female consumers' engagement with femvertising-led campaigns.
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis. *Sociological Theory, 30*(3), 167–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914>
- Tracy, S. (2010). Qualitative Quality: Eight “Big-Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*. 837-851. 10.1177/1077800410383121
- Turvill, W. (2021, October 29). US magazine circulations: America's largest titles retained 95% of sales through Covid-19. <https://pressgazette.co.uk/biggest-us-magazines-by-circulation/>
- Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T.E. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Sciences, 15*(3), 398-405 .
- van den Berg, P., Paxton, S.J., Keery, H., Wall, M.M., Guo, J., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2007). Body dissatisfaction and body comparison with media images in males and females. *Body Image, 4*(3), 257-68 .

- Vargas-Bianchi, L., & Mensa, M. (2020). Do you remember me? Women sexual objectification in advertising among young consumers. *Young Consumers Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers*, 21, 77-90. 10.1108/YC-04-2019-0994.
- Varghese, N., & Kumar, N. (2020). Feminism in advertising: irony or revolution? A critical review of femvertising. *Feminist Media Studies*. 10.1080/14680777.2020.1825510.
- Vredenburg, J., Kapitan, S., Spry, A., & Kemper, J. A. (2020). Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing? *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 39(4), 444–460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915620947359>
- Walters, T. (2016). Using Thematic Analysis in Tourism Research. *Tourism Analysis*, 21, 107-116. 10.3727/108354216X14537459509017
- Washington, M. S., & Economides, M. (2016). Strong Is the New Sexy: Women, CrossFit, and the Postfeminist Ideal. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 40(2), 143–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723515615181>
- Watson, A. (2019, September 12). Number of Cosmopolitan readers in the United States in September 2017, by platform. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/191726/us-magazine-audiences-2010-cosmopolitan/>
- Windels, K., Champlin, S., & Makady, H. (2021). Deferring gender equality until the next generation: evidence of the persistence of postfeminist discourse in advertising, *Feminist Media Studies*. 10.1080/14680777.2021.1944256
- Windels, K., Champlin, S., Shelton, S., Sterbenk, Y., & Poteet, M. (2020). Selling Feminism: How Female Empowerment Campaigns Employ Postfeminist Discourses. *Journal of Advertising*, 49(1), 18-33. 10.1080/00913367.2019.1681035
- Yan, Y., & Bissell, K. (2014). The Globalization of Beauty: How is Ideal Beauty Influenced by Globally Published Fashion and Beauty Magazines? *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 43(3), 194-214. 10.1080/17475759.2014.917432
- Yin, L., & Chin, L. (2020). Females in Print Advertisements: The Cultural Stance. *Journal Wacana Sarjana*, 4(1), 1-10.
- Yu, U., Damhorst, M., & Russell, D. (2011). The Impact of Body Image on Consumers' Perceptions of Idealized Advertising Images and Brand Attitudes. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*. 40. 58-73. 10.1111/j.1552-3934