Attitude toward Feminism and Femvertising

Mediation Effect of Perceived Brand-Cause Fit

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Designed to examine the effects of feminism in the CRM context, this study emphasizes the mediating role of consumers' perceived brand–cause fit, specifically that between attitude toward feminism and attitude toward femvertising. Study findings suggest that attitude toward feminism has an impact on consumers' perceived brand–cause fit as well as on attitude toward femvertising. People who align their attitudes with the aims of feminism are more likely (than those who don't) to perceive a good fit between the brand and cause and to hold a more positive attitude toward femvertising. In addition, this study also found that high brand–cause fit may lead to a more positive attitude toward femvertising than low brand–cause fit. Most important, this study found that perceived brand–cause fit mediates the effect of attitude toward feminism on attitude toward femvertising. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

K E Y   W O R D S   Femvertising • Feminism • Perceived brand–cause fit • Attitude toward femvertising

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1. INTRODUCTION

Used around the world as a marketing tool, femvertising challenges stereotypical gender roles and communicates empowering messages to women. In its early iterations, femvertising was employed by female-oriented brands such as Dove, Always, Pantene, Covergirl, L'Oreal, and many other cosmetic brands. Today, though, male-oriented brands such as Dodge and gender-neutral brands such as Google, Microsoft, Nike, Under Armour, and Verizon use female-empowerment messages in their advertising campaigns.

Femvertising could be understood as one of a company's CRM (cause-related marketing) strategic areas. CRM is employed to persuade consumers to engage in prosocial behaviors in the fields of environmental efforts, community involvement, and public and gender welfare (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Recently, companies have used femvertising to make emotional connections with their consumers, hoping to not just create a positive image but to boost sales as well.

To date, the effects of femvertising have been examined within such realms as types of advertising (femvertising vs. traditional advertising), gender (males vs. females), and degrees of attitude toward feminism (feminists vs. non-feminist; Drake, 2017; Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016, 2019; Sternadori & Abitbol, 2019; Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). Thus, this study, as it delves into the effects of feminism in a CRM context, will underscore the mediating role of consumers' perceived brand-cause fit, specifically that between attitude toward feminism and attitude toward femvertising. Theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Rise of Femvertising

Female empowerment has become a significant theme in advertising, with companies employing it as a CSR (corporate social responsibility) marketing

strategy. Empowerment can be understood as the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society, and in their communities. Individuals feel empowered when, without limitations and restrictions, they have access to opportunities such as education, profession, and lifestyle choices. In this sense, femvertising—also known as female empowerment advertising—is defined as "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls" (SheKnows Media, 2016). Skey (2015), defined femvertising as "the strategic portrayal of girls and women through empowering messages and imagery."

Initially, femvertising started with female-specific products or brands, such as Dove and Always, which mainly target female consumers (Davidson, 2015). In 2004, for instance, Dove's Real Beauty campaign was launched by Unilever. The campaign aimed to celebrate the women's natural physical differences, encouraging body confidence. By 2014, after this femvertising campaign, annual sales had reached $4 billion (from $2.5 billion in its opening campaign year). Also in 2014, Proctor and Gamble launched its Always' Like a Girl campaign, turning the derogatory phrase "like a girl" into an empowering message. The campaign won an Emmy, 14 Cannes Lions including the inaugural Glass Lion, Titanium Lion and a Grand Prix (Leoburnett.com, 2020). To date, gender-neutral brands such as Microsoft, Google, Verizon, Nike, Under Armour and Lego have launched femvertising campaigns (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019). Even male-oriented brands such as the auto manufacturers Dodge (Ram trucks), Audi, and Nissan promote female empowerment messages in their advertising campaigns.

Based on its messages, themes of femvertising could be divided into four main categories—beauty, gender equality, leadership, and education (Um, 2020 a). First, brands including Dove, Maybelline, MAC, and SKII provided fresh perspectives on beauty, a domain that has been distorted by media. Second, in their femvertising campaigns, the brands Always, H&M, Nike, Under Armour, RAM, Nissan, Vodafone, and Ikea emphasized gender equality. Gender equality has been a primary theme of femvertising, encouraging people to change stereotypical gender roles and

underscoring equal opportunity. Third, companies such as Microsoft and General Electric emphasized the importance of education. In particular, Microsoft's #MakeWhatsNext campaign urged young girls to join STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) classes. Lastly, L'Oreal, McDonalds, and Girl Scout stressed the importance of women's leadership. Girl Scout's Ban Bossy campaign criticized the use of the word "bossy" to describe assertive girls and women, pointing out how stigmatizing the word can be and effectively discourage girls and women from seeking positions of leadership.

2) Effects of and Criticism over Femvertising

According to a recent industry survey conducted with women, 51% of respondents said they liked femvertising messages (Dan, 2016). More than half (52%) claimed to have purchased the advertised brand due to the positive portrayal of women (Dan, 2016). Another survey conducted by SheKnows Media with 628 women indicated that 71% of respondents believed brands should be held responsible for using their ads to promote positive messages to women and girls; 45% of them had shared a commercial or print ad with a pro-female message; 52% had bought a product because they liked how the brand and their advertising portrayed women (SheKnows Living Editors, 2014). Research by Castillo (2014) also suggested that femvertising had a positive influence on sales.

Scholarly research also suggests that femvertising elicits positive attitudes toward ad, brand, and purchase intention. Drake (2017) found that femvertising leads to more positive attitudes toward the advertised brand and higher purchase intentions than traditional advertising. Similarly, Åkestam et al. (2017) found that femvertising generated higher ad attitudes as well as brand attitude than did traditional advertising. Kapoor and Munjal (2019) found that a positive attitude toward femvertising led to the forwarding intention of ad, though not necessarily to purchase intention. Sternadori and Abitbol (2019) found that women's-rights supporters and self-identifying feminists were highly receptive to femvertising.

Lastly, Um (2020) found that females had more positive attitudes toward femvertising as well as higher purchase intentions than their male counterparts.

Despites of these known positive impacts of femvertising, the marketing strategy is not without its critics. According to Johnston and Taylor (2008), capitalism and feminism are at odds with each other and femvertising—commodity feminism—weakens the feminism movement. If a company is going to use feminism to sell products to women, then it better be authentic. Fineman (2014) suggested that "inauthentic support cheapens the ideas of women's equality, and that is dangerous not only for the purveyors of business behind those token messages, but to the feminist movement itself." For instance, Dove was criticized for being hypocritical; its parent company, Unilever, also owns Axe, which in its ads tends to feature sexy female models (Millard, 2009).

3) Attitude toward Feminism

Terms like feminism and feminists seem very self-evident and have been used frequently following the #MeToo Movement (the worldwide campaign against sexual harassment and sexual abuse). Feminism is defined as an active desire to change women's position in society (Banks, 1981). And feminism also refers to beliefs that support gender equality across cultural, economic, ethnic, political, and social areas (Beasley, 1999). Most important, feminism is viewed as a theoretical ideology that affects many people's attitudes and judgement (Choi, Yoo, Reichert, & LaTour, 2016, Ford, LaTour, & Honeycutt, 1997). Similarly, feminists refer to people who hold that women suffer discrimination on the basis of their sex (Delmar, 1986). Feminists have been playing a pivotal role in fighting against gender stereotypes and establishing educational, professional, and interpersonal opportunities and outcomes for women that are equal to those for men.

The feminist movement can be divided into four "waves." First-wave feminism can be explained as women's suffrage of the 19th and early 20th centuries, focusing on women's right to vote and hold property (Freedman, 2007; Humm, 1995).

Second-wave feminism began in the 1960s, promoting legal and social equality for women. In this second wave, feminists extended their movement into social issues such as the work environment, patriarchy, and sexuality (Freedman, 2007; Humm, 1995). Third-wave feminism began in the 1990s and focused on individuality and diversity. This third wave of feminists is characterized as advocating for women's sexual desire and pleasure (Curtin, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2011). Fourth-wave feminism started around 2012 and is characterized by a focus on the empowerment of women and the use of social media to fight sexual harassment, violence against women and rape culture (Abrahams, 2017).

Sternadori and Abitbol (2019) found that women's rights supporters and self-identifying feminists are highly receptive to femvertising. The authors suggested that consumers being active in the feminist movement tend to show the most positive attitude toward femvertising (Sternadori & Abitbol, 2019). Um (2020 b) found that feminists had more positive attitudes than non-feminists toward femvertising. It is plausible to assume that feminist supportive attitude is positively related to femvertising. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H1: Attitude toward feminism will positively influence perceived brand–cause fit.
H2: Attitude toward feminism will positively influence attitude toward femvertising.

4) Perceived Company–Cause Fit

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is defined as a way for companies to profit while doing good through a blend of philanthropy, promotion, sponsorship, and other communication activities (Varadrajan & Menon, 1988). Seen as having an impact on brand loyalty, CRM represents a component of corporate social responsibility campaigns (Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011). Prior research has focused on the effects of brand-cause fit, finding that a high match between a brand and a cause leads to more positive responses (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Pracejus & Olson, 2004; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

In the areas of sponsorship, celebrity endorsement, and brand extensions, the term "fit" or "match" has been used interchangeably (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Nan & Heo, 2007). In the sponsorship context, Rodgers (2003) found that fit between sponsor and event is likely to enhance sponsor recall, favorable attitude towards sponsor, and purchase intention. In the celebrity endorsement context, a match between a celebrity endorser and an endorsed brand enhances attitude towards ad, brand, and purchase intention (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Misra & Beatty, 1990; Erdogan & Baker, 2000; Till & Busler, 2000). In the brand extension context, consumers view a brand extension as an exemplar of the parent brand category (Boush & Loken, 1991); thus, higher fit is related to more positive extension evaluation (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; MacInnis & Nakamoto, 1991).

"Fit" or "match" between a brand and a cause can have three dimensions (Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007; Nan & Heo, 2007). First, a functional match exists when consumers perceive the functions of a product being connected to the brand selling it. Second, an image match exists when consumers perceive a match between the type of personality a brand conveys and the image of the social issue. Third, a target-audience match exists when the brand's consumers perceive a match between themselves and those backing the social cause.

This study is interested in the image match because researchers will measure only the match between the brand and the image of the social cause (i.e., female empowerment). Based on prior research, we surmise that company-cause fit would be positively related to attitude toward femvertising. In addition, company-cause fit will mediate the effect of attitude toward feminism on attitude toward femvertising. This study, therefore, proposes the following hypotheses.

H3: Perceived brand-cause fit will positively influence attitude toward femvertising.
H4: Perceived brand-cause fit will mediate the effect of attitude toward feminism on attitude toward femvertising.
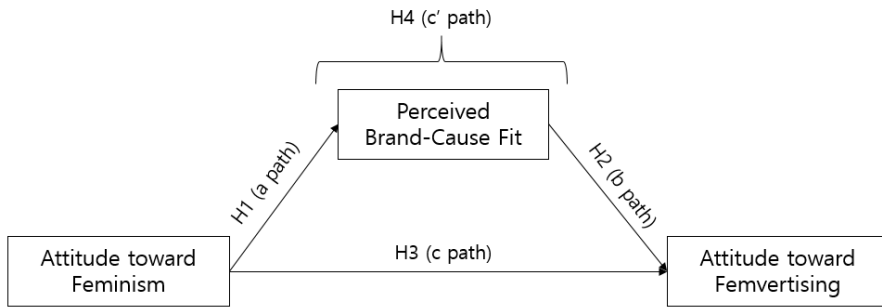
Figure 1. The proposed research mode

3. METHOD

1) Participants and Procedures

To collect data for this study, the research team hired a professional market research firm. Participating in this study (in return for money) were a total of 325 adults. Of these, 154 were male (47.4%) and 171 were female (52.6%). In terms of participants' ages, the highest percentage (25.5%) were in their 20s (n = 83), followed by those in their 30s (25.2%, n = 82), those in their 50s (24.9%, n = 81), and those in their 40s (24.3%, n = 79). The mean age for all participants was 39.2 years old. Table 1 indicates participants' demographic information.

Table 1. Subjects' Demographic Information

Demographic Categories	Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender		
Female	171	52.6
Male	154	47.4
Age		
20 - 29	83	25.5
30 - 39	82	25.2
40 - 49	79	24.3
50 - 59	81	24.9

Demographic Categories	Frequency	Valid Percent
Highest Level of Education		
High School Degree	35	10.8
Currently in 4-year College	21	6.5
4-year College Degree	226	69.5
Graduate Degree	39	12
Religion		
Catholic	21	6.5
Protestant	69	21.2
Buddhist	40	12.3
Atheist	190	58.5
Others	5	1.5
Political Orientation		
Liberal	205	63.1
Conservative	120	36.9
Total	325	100

For those unfamiliar with the concept of femvertising, researchers provided a short definition before they took the survey. In addition, they were asked to watch some 60-second Nike's femvertising TV ads.

2) Measure

Attitude toward feminism

Attitude toward feminism was measured using 10 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." For the purpose of this study, researchers modified the Attitudes toward Feminism and the Women's Movement (FWM) scale by Artimage and Conner (1999). Favorable attitudes toward feminism were represented by a high score on the FWM. Items were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale. The reliability of this scale was .79 (Cronbach's alpha coefficient).

Perceived Company-Cause Fit

For this study, perceived company-cause fit was measured with five items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The scale, which was based on the "company-cause fit" scale created by Abitbol and Sternadori (2019), was modified for the current study. The reliability for this scale was .88.

Attitude toward Femvertising

To measure attitude toward femvertising, researchers used seven items scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This scale, adapted from a study by Abitbol and Sternadori (2019), was modified for the purpose of this study. The reliability for this scale was .85.

4. RESULTS

To investigate the direct, indirect, and mediation effects of perceived brand-cause fit, the research team used the bootstrap method with an SPSS application (PROCESS, Model 4) provided by Preacher and Hayes (2004). PROCESS is an observed variable OLS (ordinary least square) and logistic regression path analysis modeling tool. It is widely used through the social, business, and health sciences for estimating direct and indirect effects in single and multiple mediator models. This study employed PROCESS because it makes it easier to commit to one structure for analyzing a hypothesized mediation model. And it provides a relatively simple way to analyze relatively complex models using bootstrapping confidence intervals.

As seen in Table 2, the results indicate a significant relationship between attitude toward feminism and perceived brand-cause fit (a path): $\beta = 1.03$, $p < .001$. In addition, perceived brand-cause fit was significantly related to attitude toward femvertising (b path): $\beta = .56$, $p < .001$. The results also show there is a significant relationship between attitude toward feminism and attitude toward femvertising (c path): $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$. Findings suggest that attitude toward feminism positively influences consumers' perceived brand-cause fit and attitude toward femvertising. Findings also suggest that consumers' perceived brand-cause fit positively influences

attitude toward feminism. Thus, H1, H2, and H3 were supported in this study.

Table 2. Results of Mediation Analysis

	β	SE	t	R^2
Direct and total effects				
Perceived brand–cause fit regressed on attitude toward feminism (a path)	1.03***	.08	13.75	.37***
Attitude toward femvertising regressed on perceived brand–cause fit (b path)	.56***	.09	6.50	.39***
Attitude toward femvertising regressed on attitude toward feminism (c path)	.44***	.08	5.30	
Attitude toward femvertising regressed on attitude toward feminism, controlling for perceived brand–cause fit (c' path)	.53***	.05	10.48	.54***
	Bootstrapped Indirect effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Bootstrapped result for indirect effect Perceived brand–cause fit	.55	.08	.40	.71

Note: Standardized regression coefficients are reported. Likewise N=325. LLCI = lower level confidence interval; ULCI = upper level confidence interval. Bootstrapped sample size = 5,000. ** $p < .001$.

Researchers also performed a mediation test for perceived brand-cause fit. The lower part of Table 2 indicates that the result of the bootstrap confirmed H4. Specifically, the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval (CI) around the standardized indirect effect ($\beta = .55$, SE = .08) did not include zero (.40, .71).

5. DISCUSSION

This study shows that attitude toward feminism has an impact on consumers' perceived brand-cause fit as well as attitude toward femvertising. Consumers' attitudes toward feminism, defined as an active desire to change women's position in society (Banks, 1981), influences how consumers evaluate the relationship between the cause a company supports and its brand image. In short, people who align their attitudes toward the aims of feminism will evaluate a brand more

positively (than people who don't) when they perceive a fit between it and the cause.

In a similar vein, people who align their attitudes toward the aims of feminism will have more positive evaluation of femvertising than people who don't. In addition, study findings suggest that a fit between the brand image and the cause may lead to different evaluation of femvertising. When there is a good fit between the brand image and the cause, people will evaluate femvertising more positively than when there is a poor fit. In addition, this study found that perceived brand-cause fit mediates the effect of attitude toward feminism on attitude toward femvertising.

These findings are consistent with social identity theory. Social identity theory posits that part of a person's concept of self comes from the groups to which that person belongs and a person might act differently in varying social contexts according to the groups they belong to (Tajfel, 1982). People may trust a company that support the beliefs or social values they hold dear. Thus, people are likely to support the company by purchasing its brands and preferring its advertising campaigns. In fact, a recent survey found that female consumers purchased a brand because of its positive portrayal of women (Dan, 2016).

For marketers, this study provides practical implications. Companies can use femvertising as a strategic marketing tool when they are really interested in beliefs about feminism. When consumers perceive that a company tries only to capitalize on feminism, they may develop negative attitudes toward its brand and ads. In particular, millennials appear to be more brand conscious and savvy than their forebears. When making a purchase decision, they look for more than just quality. They scrutinize brands to see whether they support a purpose that resonates with them. With many striving to be ethical consumers, a significant portion of these millenials are likely to pay more for brands that are socially responsible. Hence, companies must build a reputation for responsibility to not just have a positive social impact but to gain customers' loyalty.

Future research may look into how product categories such as female-oriented

products, gender-neutral products, or male-oriented products have a differential impact when their companies use femvertising. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate how different types of product categories may influence consumers' perceived brand-cause fit. Much research has focused on the effects of perceived brand-cause fit. However, it would be also meaningful to delve into effects of perceived fit between the brand's target audience and the cause. It is carefully assumed that the perceived target audience-cause fit may have an impact on advertising and brand evaluation.

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페미니즘과 펨버타이징 태도

인지된 브랜드–명분 조화의 매개효과

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명분관련 마케팅 차원에서 페미니즘의 효과를 알아보기 위한 본 연구는 구체적으로 페미니즘과 펨버타이징 태도 사이의 소비자들의 인지된 브랜드–명분 조화의 매개효과를 살펴보는 것을 목표로 하고 있다. 연구결과, 페미니즘에 대한 태도는 소비자들의 인지된 브랜드–명분 조화뿐만 아니라 펨버타이징 태도에 까지 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다. 페미니즘의 목적과 부합하는 태도를 가진 사람들은 그렇지 않은 사람들보다 브랜드와 명분 사이의 조화를 더 잘 인지하고 있으며, 펨버타이징에 대한 태도도 더 긍정적인 것으로 나타났다. 또한, 본 연구는 높은 브랜드–명분 조화는 낮은 브랜드 명분–조화보다 더 긍정적인 펨버타이징 태도를 이끌어 낸다는 것을 밝혀냈다. 본 연구에서 가장 중요한 결과는 인지된 브랜드–명분 조화는 펨버타이징 태도에 있어 페미니즘 태도가 매개효과를 가지고 있다는 것이다. 본 연구는 이론적 그리고 실무적 시사점을 제시하고 있다.

KEY WORDS   페미니즘 • 펨버타이징 • 인지된 브랜드–명분 조화 •
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