The Influence of Female Representation and Gender Stereotypes in Femvertising on Public Perceptions of Female Images in Digital Advertising

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ABSTRACT

The debate regarding the representation of women in digital advertising continues to grow as criticism mounts against visual practices that tend to normalise gender stereotypes and objectification. Although previous studies have examined these forms of representation, there is still a gap in understanding how the representation of women, gender stereotypes, and femverting empirically influence the perceptions of an increasingly critical digital audience. This study aims to bridge this gap by analysing the influence of these three variables on public perceptions of women's images in digital advertising. A quantitative approach was used through the PLS-SEM technique with the help of the SmartPLS application to test the relationship between variables and ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments. The results show that femverting is the only variable that significantly influences public perception, while conventional representations of women and gender stereotypes do not have a meaningful impact. These findings indicate a shift in public attitudes towards representations of women in the digital age, where narratives emphasising empowerment and authenticity are considered more relevant than traditional, normative representations. Furthermore, this study confirms that digital audiences have increasingly strong media literacy, making them less susceptible to biased or stereotypical representations. This research contributes to the development of gender and media studies by emphasising the importance of an empowerment-based approach to representation in shaping public perception. Practically, these findings provide guidance for the advertising industry to design communication strategies that are more inclusive, gender-sensitive, and in line with contemporary social values.

Introduction

The development of digital media has given rise to various new forms of representation of women in advertising. Digital advertising is not merely a promotional tool, but also a medium that shapes public perceptions of women's values, roles and image. Although there are an increasing number of campaigns promoting empowerment, most advertisements still portray women through the lens of gender stereotypes such as physical beauty, sensuality and domestic roles (Fitriani et al., 2021; Madina & Kumala, 2020).

Advances in information technology and telecommunications have been so rapid that they have enabled the implementation of new and more efficient ways of producing, distributing and consuming goods and services (Wardiana, 2002), including in terms of advertising. Digital advertising is one of the dominant media in shaping and influencing public opinion, both in terms of products, services and social and cultural values. Along with technological developments and cultural changes, the role of women in advertising has undergone a significant transformation. From being mere visual objects, women are now increasingly portrayed as strong, empowered individuals who contribute across various fields. However, challenges persist, such as the prevalence of stereotypes and often unrealistic expectations placed on women.

Advertising is a form of mass communication carried out by business companies, non-profit organisations and individuals identified in advertising messages through various mass media with the aim of providing information or influencing certain audiences and groups (Rahmawati et al., 2023). In this case, it is important to conduct a critical analysis of how women are represented in digital media advertisements. Advertisements are not merely a marketing tool, but also reflect and shape society's views on women.

The representation of women in the media and advertising reflects consistent visual and narrative patterns, such as relative positioning, eye contact, gestures, and contextual roles that shape the social meaning of gender (Signoretti, 2017). Goffman's classic framework shows that the portrayal of women in advertisements often places them in passive positions, focusing on appearance or domestic roles, thereby implicitly reinforcing traditional power relations between men and women (Bell & Milic, 2002). Recent revision studies show that although some aspects of representation have changed, many stereotypical elements remain.

Social role theory explains the emergence of gender stereotypes as a result of observation and internalisation of distinct work and social roles between men and women. These stereotypes include expectations about competence, affectivity, role location (home vs. public), and physical attributes, which then influence audience decision-making and social norms. Research in social psychology and communication confirms that repeated exposure to stereotypical representations reinforces beliefs about what women 'should' do or show (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

Conversely, the emergence of femvertising as an advertising strategy that promotes messages of equality and women's empowerment is a response to increasing gender awareness in the digital age (Kumalaningtyas & Sadasri, 2018). However, the effectiveness of this approach on public perception still needs to be tested empirically. This study focuses on three independent variables that influence public perception of the image of women in digital advertising, namely: representation of women (X_1), gender stereotypes

(X_2), and femvertising (X_3).

Femvertising (sometimes also called femverting) is an advertising strategy that emphasises female empowerment, for example by portraying women as agents, professionals, or figures who celebrate diversity in body shapes and roles (Hernández Willoughby & Lázaro Pernias, 2023). Recent literature views femvertising as the industry's response to criticism of stereotypical representation; several studies report positive effects on consumer attitudes towards brands and female identification, but research also warns of possible sceptical reactions (reactance) if the message is perceived as opportunistic or inauthentic. In other words, femvertising has the potential to change representation, but its effectiveness depends on the credibility of the message and the cultural context.

Public perceptions are shaped by a combination of media representations, social norms, and personal interactions. Systematic reviews and recent empirical studies show that advertising and the media influence body image, self-esteem, and role expectations for women; these influences vary according to age, cultural background, and media literacy of the audience. Institutional reports (gender/media studies) conclude that an increase in representation does not always correlate with a shift in perceptions of representation quality (non-stereotypical, inclusive, credible), which is just as important as quantity.

Often, women are portrayed in stereotypical ways, such as sexual objects, symbols of beauty, or figures in the household, which can reinforce gender inequality. Although there have been efforts to portray women in a more fair and powerful light, there are still clear signs of gender bias in the images and words used in digital advertising. Therefore, this article aims to examine how women are portrayed in various types of advertising in digital media, analyse the social and cultural impact of these representations, and emphasise the influence of the media and advertising industry in shaping the image of women in today's digital age.

Conceptually, representations of women moderate and substantiate gender stereotypes, while repetitive and stereotypical representations reinforce gender beliefs. Femvertising has emerged as an industry intervention with the potential to reduce the effects of stereotypes, but its impact on public perception has been inconsistent depending on the legitimacy of the message, communication channels, and local cultural context (Föhl et al., 2025). Important gaps for further research include the effect of femvertising on perceptions in non-Western cultural contexts such as Indonesia, the role of brand credibility as a moderator, and the long-term measurement of attitude change rather than just immediate responses.

Method

This study utilises a quantitative approach with explanatory research. The quantitative approach aims to measure the relationship between variables numerically using statistical techniques (Creswell, 2014). Explanatory research is used to explain the causal relationship between several independent variables, including female representation (X1), gender stereotypes (X2), femverting (X3) and one dependent variable, namely public perception of female image (Y), primarily through a structural model (Sugiyono, 2019).

This method was chosen because the aim of this study was to measure and analyse the influence of female representation, gender stereotypes, and femvertising strategies on public perceptions of female images in digital advertising in an empirical and measurable

manner. The data in this study was obtained by distributing questionnaires to respondents who were active users of digital media and had seen advertisements featuring women. The questionnaire instrument was compiled using a 1–5 Likert scale with indicators developed based on the theory of representation, gender in the media, and femvertising from previous studies. The population of this study were active users of digital media in Indonesia who had seen digital advertisements featuring women. According to (Ferdinand, 2014), population is the totality of elements that have certain characteristics defined by the researcher for study.
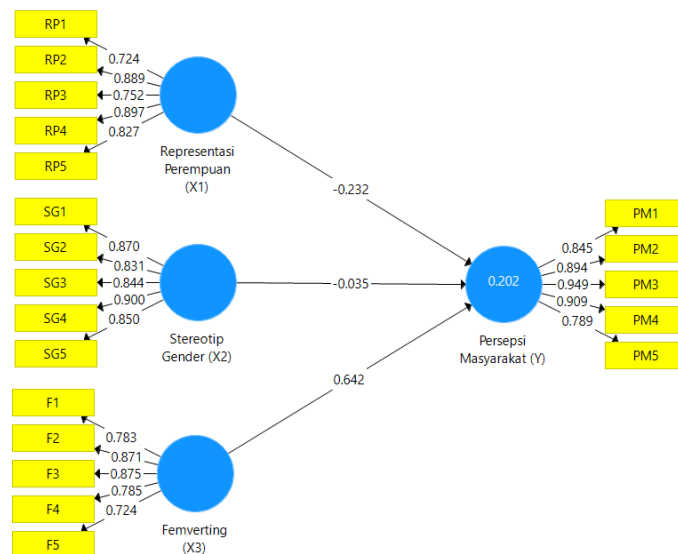
This study utilised purposive sampling, a technique of selecting samples based on specific criteria deemed relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, 2016). The sample size was set at 60 respondents. This number meets the PLS-SEM rule, which requires a minimum sample size of 10 times the number of indicators in a single variable (Hair et al., 2019). Data collection was conducted online using purposive sampling, which involves selecting respondents based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria included: (1) active social media users, (2) having seen digital advertisements featuring women, and (3) being at least 17 years of age.

The collected data were analysed using a quantitative statistical approach, including validity and reliability tests, as well as structural model analysis with Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS. The analysis was conducted to test the relationship between variables, measure the contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable, and examine the predictive power of the model. Through this quantitative approach, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on the extent to which the representation of women, gender stereotypes, and femvertising influence the formation of public perceptions about the image of women in digital advertising.

Findings

The structural model diagram shows the relationship between three independent variables, namely female representation, gender stereotypes, and femverting, and the dependent variable of public perception of female image. This model illustrates the direction and strength of each construct's influence based on the path coefficient values obtained through the bootstrapping process in SmartPLS 3.0. In general, the path coefficient values indicate the extent to which each independent variable contributes to the formation of public perception. In this model, the femverting variable appears to have the greatest and most statistically significant influence, while the other two variables do not show a meaningful influence.

First, the femverting variable provides a path coefficient of 0.642, indicating a strong positive influence on public perception. This means that the stronger the application of femverting in advertisements, for example, by portraying women as powerful, confident, and free from traditional stereotypes, the more positive the image of women will be in the public eye. This finding is in line with the trend that today's audience is more responsive to visualisations of women that are empowering and progressive than to traditional representations. The statistical significance of these results confirms that femverting is an effective communication strategy in shaping public perception.

Figure 1. Variable Calculation Results
Source: Data output processed with SmartPLS 3.0, 2025

Secondly, the variable representing women shows a path coefficient of -0.232. Although it has a negative relationship, this result is not statistically significant. This means that the representation of women in media that is more descriptive or normative does not have a direct influence on public perception. This can be interpreted to mean that audiences may have become accustomed to the variety of representations of women in advertisements, so that changes in the form of representation do not necessarily affect their perceptions; or it may be that these representations are not yet strong enough to have a perceptual impact without the support of an empowerment narrative such as that found in femverting.

Third, the gender stereotype variable has a path coefficient of –0.035, which is also insignificant. This indicates that the presence or absence of gender stereotypes in advertising content does not have a significant effect on public perception. One possible interpretation is that gender stereotypes are so common in everyday life that audiences no longer consider them a factor that influences their assessment of women's image. In addition, people with higher media literacy tend to have the ability to critically assess stereotypes without changing their perceptions of women in general.

On the other hand, all indicators containing constructs in the model show outer loading values above 0.70, indicating that these indicators are valid in representing each construct. The public perception variable has very high indicator values, such as PM3 (0.949) and PM4 (0.909), indicating that these indicators are very strong in measuring public perception. The R-square value for the Y variable is 0.202, indicating that the three independent variables together explain 20.2% of the variance in changes in public perception. Although this value is moderate, it shows that there are other variables outside the model that have the potential to influence the formation of public perception.

Overall, this model shows that femverting is the only factor that has a significant influence on public perception, while the representation of women and gender stereotypes do not have a significant direct impact. These findings reinforce the conclusion that society now values visual communication that depicts women in a progressive and empowering

manner more than conventional representations that are merely descriptive or normative. The table showing the validity of the variables can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Variable Validity

	Femverting (X3)	Public Perception (Y)	Representation of Women (X1)	Gender Stereotypes (X2)
F1	0,783			
F2	0,871			
F3	0,875			
F4	0,785			
F5	0,724			
PM1		0,845		
PM2		0,894		
PM3		0,949		
PM4		0,909		
PM5		0,789		
RP1			0,724	
RP2			0,889	
RP3			0,752	
RP4			0,897	
RP5			0,827	
SG1				0,870
SG2				0,831
SG3				0,844
SG4				0,900
SG5				0,850

Source: Data output processed with SmartPLS 3.0, 2025

Based on Table 1, all indicators in the variables of Femverting (X3), Public Perception (Y), Representation of Women (X1), and Gender Stereotypes (X2) have a factor loading value > 0.70. These values indicate that all indicators meet the convergent validity criteria because they are above the minimum threshold of 0.70, so the indicators are considered capable of representing their constructs well. The AVE results in Table 2 show:

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Criteria	Description
Femverting (X3)	0,655	>0,5	Valid
Public Perception (Y)	0,772	>0,5	Valid
Representation of Women (X1)	0,674	>0,5	Valid
Stereotip Gender (X2)	0,739	>0,5	Valid

Source: The data output was processed using SmartPLS 3.0, 2025

Since all AVE values are > 0.50, each variable has excellent convergent validity, indicating that more than 50% of the indicator variance can be explained by its latent construct.

Table 3. Discriminant Variables

	Femverting (X3)	Public Perception (Y)	Representation of Women (X1)	Stereotip Gender (X2)
F1	**0,783**	0,363	0,643	0,615
F2	**0,871**	0,345	0,671	0,646
F3	**0,875**	0,354	0,735	0,578
F4	**0,785**	0,253	0,651	0,480
F5	**0,724**	0,373	0,629	0,537
PM1	0,309	**0,845**	0,249	0,229
PM2	0,414	**0,894**	0,220	0,209
PM3	0,414	**0,949**	0,269	0,245
PM4	0,415	**0,909**	0,283	0,231
PM5	0,276	**0,789**	0,153	0,144
RP1	0,545	0,195	**0,724**	0,674
RP2	0,789	0,274	**0,889**	0,650
RP3	0,625	0,095	**0,752**	0,611
RP4	0,787	0,248	**0,897**	0,677
RP5	0,604	0,221	**0,827**	0,604
SG1	0,627	0,219	0,728	**0,870**
SG2	0,630	0,189	0,692	**0,831**
SG3	0,617	0,191	0,668	**0,844**
SG4	0,598	0,199	0,638	**0,900**
SG5	0,597	0,237	0,615	**0,850**

Source: Data output processed with SmartPLS 3.0, 2025

Based on Table 3, each indicator has a higher loading value on its construct than on other constructs. For example:

- Indicator F3 (Femverting) has a value of 0.875 on X3, higher than the cross-loading on Y (0.354), X1 (0.735), and X2 (0.578).
- Indicator PM3 (Public Perception) shows a loading of 0.949 on Y, much higher than the values on other constructs.

This shows that each variable has strong discrimination and is able to distinguish itself from other constructs, thus meeting the criteria for discriminant validity.

Table 4. Reliability Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Femverting	0,867	0,904
Public Perception (Y)	0,926	0,944
Representation of Women (X1)	0,880	0,911
Stereotip Gender (X2)	0,911	0,934

Source: The data output was processed using SmartPLS 3.0, 2025

Table 4 shows that all variables have Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70 and Composite Reliability > 0.80. These results indicate that all instruments have excellent internal consistency and are reliable for use in structural model analysis. The bootstrapping test results in Table 5 show the following inter-variable effects.

Table 5. Bootstrapping Method Test

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Femverting (X3) -> Public Perception (Y)	0,642	0,628	0,204	3,142	0,002
Representation of Women (X1) -> Public Perception (Y)	-0,232	-0,133	0,235	0,989	0,323
Gender Stereotypes (X2) -> Public Perception (Y)	-0,035	-0,073	0,201	0,172	0,863

Source: Data output processed with SmartPLS 3.0, 2025

The quantitative interpretation of the table above is that the variable of femverting (x3) on public perception (y) has a positive and significant effect (p < 0.05). This means that the higher the application of femverting in advertising, the more positive the public's perception of women's image. The coefficient value of 0.642 indicates a strong influence, making femverting an important predictor in shaping public perception. The representation of women (X1) on public perception (Y) has an insignificant effect (p > 0.05). Although the coefficient is negative, it is not statistically strong enough to prove that the representation of women in advertisements directly influences public perception. This may indicate that the public is not yet fully sensitive to forms of representation, or that the effect depends on other contexts such as stereotypes or cultural values. Gender stereotypes (X2) on public perception (Y) show no significant influence between gender stereotypes and public perception (p > 0.05). The coefficient value is very small and negative, indicating that gender stereotypes in advertisements are not strong enough to shape public perception. This may be because stereotypes are already considered commonplace and no longer influence judgement, or because the audience has sufficient media literacy to make critical judgements.

Discussion

The results show that the femverting strategy (X3) has a significant and strong influence on public perception (Y), with a path coefficient of 0.642. This finding indicates that the portrayal of women that emphasises empowerment, courage, and personal agency can generate a more positive public perception of the image of women in digital advertising. Conversely, the variables of female representation (X1) and gender stereotypes (X2) did not show a significant effect on public perception. This insignificance indicates that these two forms of presentation, although still frequently appearing in digital advertisements, are no longer the main factors determining how the public assesses the image of women. This can be understood because traditional and stereotypical representations have been so repetitive that they no longer directly influence assessments, or the audience has become increasingly immune to patterns of representation that are considered normative and biased.

These empirical findings are consistent with the dynamics of female representation in the digital age, which has undergone significant transformation. Amidst the massive penetration of digital media, women are no longer positioned solely as symbols of beauty (Ekawati et al., 2025), but rather becoming a figure who is considered capable of attracting

the audience's attention and strengthening the product's selling power (Prihatiningsih & Mudrikah, 2020). In this context, the paradigm shift towards more progressive representation is important to note. The theme 'Not Just Pretty' reflects public concern over advertising practices that tend to reduce women to aesthetic objects. Representations limited to the body, sensuality, or domestic roles have long bound women in narrow patriarchal social constructs. The findings of this study support this view: normative representations are not strong enough to influence public perception; instead, more empowering and autonomous approaches such as femverting have a significant impact. The finding that femverting has a significant influence ($\beta = 0.642$; $p < 0.05$) can be understood through the perspective of contemporary Gender Theory, which views women not merely as visual 'objects' but as subjects with authority over their identities.

In many examples of digital advertising, women are still often portrayed in stereotypical roles such as housewives, faithful partners, or objects of sensuality, as seen in the AXE Effect or Cat Avian 'Awas Cat Basah' advertisements, which are laden with the male gaze. (Fitriani et al., 2021; Madina & Kumala, 2020). However, this study shows that such representations are no longer powerful enough to shape public perceptions. This can be interpreted as a sign that digital audiences are becoming more critical and have new expectations for images of women that are more complex, modern, and relevant to the values of equality.

Conversely, various campaigns that adopt a femvertising approach, such as Dove's 'Real Beauty' or Wardah's 'Brave Beauties', show that the portrayal of women as strong, independent, and influential subjects is more accepted by the public. The consistency between the findings of this study and this phenomenon reinforces the assumption that inclusive and empowering representations have greater transformative power in shaping public perceptions. Through personal, authentic, and value-oriented narratives, women are not only portrayed as consumers but also as empowered agents of change. That is why femvertising emerged as the most influential variable in this study.

However, this change is not entirely linear. The digital advertising industry still often uses representations of empowerment as a mere marketing strategy, such as in Pond's Age Miracle advertisements, which appear progressive but still emphasise physical beauty as the core message (Rahmawati et al., 2023). This condition indicates an inconsistency between the ideal practice of femvertising and the commercial reality of advertising, which is still bound by the logic of capitalism and consumerism. Therefore, the findings of this study provide an important insight that society is more influenced by progressive and empowering representations of women, while traditional and stereotypical representations are no longer the main determinants of public perception. This is an indication that the digital media ecosystem needs to continue to promote narratives that are more authentic, inclusive, and transformative for women. Thus, the representation of women in advertising is not only changing cosmetically, but truly reflecting the values of equality that are developing in today's digital society.

Conclusion

This study aims to understand how representations of women, gender stereotypes, and femverting in digital media advertisements influence public perceptions of women's image. Based on the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that changes in the digital media landscape have created new dynamics in reading and interpreting representations

of women. The findings show that the public is no longer automatically influenced by traditional patterns of representation or gender stereotypes that have been common in advertisements. Conventional representations that portray women as visual objects, domestic figures, or symbols of sensuality have not been proven to have a significant influence in shaping public perceptions in the current digital media context. This shows that audiences are becoming more critical, have greater media awareness, and demand representations that are more relevant to the social reality of women today.

In contrast, femverting has emerged as a representational approach that can have a real impact on public perception. This approach depicts women as empowered, independent individuals who have authority over their own identities, which is more in line with the values of gender equality that are developing today. Femverting not only offers different visuals, but also presents narratives that are meaningful, authentic, and in line with contemporary social aspirations regarding women's roles. The results of this study confirm that the public is more accepting of and appreciative of forms of representation that empower rather than simply beautify or reinforce old stereotypes.

This research also highlights that digital media has provided a new space for women to express themselves, negotiate their identities, and challenge the patriarchal constructs that have long dominated the advertising industry. This change has created a more open and interactive media ecosystem, enabling women and audiences to actively participate in redefining the image of women. Therefore, effective representation of women in the digital age is no longer merely visual representation, but representation that contains values, social relevance, and a commitment to empowerment.

Thus, this study emphasises that the future of women's representation in digital media advertising is highly dependent on the industry's ability to adopt a more inclusive, progressive, and gender-sensitive approach. Empowering representations are not only more appreciated by the public, but also have the potential to contribute to broader social change. These findings open up opportunities for further research to explore other factors that may influence public perception and to explore how femverting practices can be implemented more consistently and ethically in the advertising industry.

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