"For You and You Alone"
Investigating the construction and reception of female empowerment
and femininity in cosmetics advertisements

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<u>Abstract</u>

Advertising is one of the most influential forces shaping ideology today, having become a significant component of daily life and a multi-billion-pound industry in the UK alone. The traditional representations of women within advertisements throughout history has lead to much scholarly debate, with women often seen highly sexualised or depicted in domestic environments. No.7 is a popular cosmetic brand, and their recent advertisements show women in situations that are unconventional in cosmetic advertising. This study combines semiotic textual analysis with original interviews to investigate how modern cosmetics advertisements construct femininity and ideas of female empowerment, and how targeted female audiences respond to this.

Two age groups were interviewed, (age group 1 between 21 and 24 years of age; age group 2 between 46 and 68 years of age) in order to gauge to some extent how women understand the advertisements. This dissertation first discusses literature on advertising, feminism and audiences, followed by an explanation of its methodical approaches before analysis and discussion of the advertisements and interview findings. Finally, this study concludes that women in the UK are autonomous and empowered in their cosmetic use, but dismissive of the effects of advertising on themselves. Ultimately, the unconventional No.7 advertisements succeed in creating positive brand association as a result of their constructions of femininity and female empowerment.

<u>Keywords</u>: Advertising, cosmetics, femininity, empowerment, No.7, postfeminism, positive brand association

Contents Page

1. Introduction

Advertising has become a major component of our everyday lives, "permeat(ing) and and blend(ing) with our cultural environment" (Botterill et al., 2015, p.3), with advertising jingles as catchy as pop songs and certain campaigns as memorable as films and television shows. It is one of the most significant forces shaping ideology in modern capitalist society (Williamson, 1978), and "an integral part of modern culture" (Botterill et al., 2015, p.5). Most agree that to some extent advertisements saturate modern life (Cortese, 1999; Sheehan, 2004; Goldman, 1992), yet, despite this, "we often do not actually notice or focus on them" (Cortese, 1999, p.27). Over £21.19billion was spent on advertising in the UK in 2016 (Statista, 2017), while UK cosmetics sales topped £4billion for the first time in 2016 (The Times, 2016). Cosmetics advertisements usually perpetuate conventional and idealised beauty standards (Beck, 1993), often presenting women as subservient to men (Goffman, 1979), whilst sexualised depictions of women are ubiquitous (Gill, 2008). This can create unrealistic beauty ideals, which can be damaging to women's self-esteem and self-worth (Jacobson and Mazur, 1999).

Beauty advertisements sell us makeup and cosmetic procedures to enhance, or change, the way we look, using thin, young, tall models that are often digitally enhanced. The effects of these idealised images are difficult to quantify, as they induce "an endless self-scrutiny that is tiresome at best and paralyzing at worst" (Jacobson and Mazur, 1995, p.76). Women are commonly depicted in limiting and traditional roles, seen in sexualised positions (Cortese, 1999; Sheehan, 2004; Botterill et al, 2015; Fowles, 1996). The amalgamation of these representations works to "create an atmosphere that devalues women as people, encourages sexual harassment and worse" (Jacobson and Mazur, 1995, p.84). But are these messages solely damaging or do women feel empowered by the choice they give them? The post-feminist movement raises that empowerment through consumption is a tool of a new kind of female

liberation (Gill, 2008) as women are now beyond the earlier waves of feminism and have the autonomy to choose whether to sexualise or cosmeticise themselves.

Through semiotic textual analysis this study investigates how advertisements construct particular versions of femininity and female empowerment, considering four advertisements from the No.7 cosmetic brand, which is owned by Boots, the pharmacy–led retailer. This is combined with original in-depth interviews to investigate if this is simply pseudo-freedom disguised as "feminist consumerism" (Johnston et al., 2016, p.141), or if makeup is in fact a genuine tool for female empowerment.

1.1 **<u>Research questions and objectives</u>**

The aim of this study is to deduce through semiotic textual analysis what the No.7 advertisements communicate about femininity and empowerment, and how women respond to them. In order to investigate this, two research questions have been devised:

1. **How do cosmetics advertisements construct femininity and ideas of female empowerment?**
2. **How do targeted women respond to these advertisements?**

The four No.7 adverts that this study considers feature women who are older than the typical beauty models Gill (2008) identifies, in roles rarely seen in cosmetics advertising. These are Olympic fencer Monica Askamit, stunt woman Amanda Foster, ballerina Alessandra Ferri, and feminist writer Chimamanda Adichie. There is an abundance of literature on sexualised images of women in advertising as well as on negative and traditional representations of women. This study aims to contribute to this field as it analyses advertisements that demonstrate

unconventional representations of femininity, and there is currently a lack of academic work on these particular No.7 advertisements. It looks to contribute to existing debates of the possibilities of contemporary advertising, and illuminate potentially uncovered perspectives on this. There is also a paucity of literature that conducts studies in this way, combining semiotic analysis with interview data, thus this research aims to contribute to this field, potentially illuminating uncovered perspectives.

This study first discusses theoretical frameworks surrounding advertising, women in advertisements and audience theories, with discussion of commodity feminism and capitalism. A semiotic textual approach combined with qualitative interview research will then assess the representations of women in the No.7 advertisements and their reception. Semiotic textual analysis of these advertisements investigates the signs within the advertisements that construct a particular version of femininity and female empowerment. Interviews with 14 women uncover a plethora of differing standpoints, and a range of interpretations of each advert. It finds there are small differences between the older and younger age groups, however often similarities in response transcend the age groupings and create complex themes that do not correlate to an age range. This study argues that No.7 construct a particularly empowered version of femininity using unconventional models, finding that these efforts create positive brand association. Interview analysis finds that participants are autonomous and empowered in their makeup use, but maintain that advertising has little effect on them.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews Judith Williamson's (1978) feminist critique of advertisements alongside Erving Goffman's (1979) interpretation of gender representations in advertising. Larry Percy and Richard Rosenbaum-Elliott (2016) provide a commentary on contemporary strategic advertising which is discussed in relation to Kim Sheehan's conceptualisation of advertiser's aims (2004). Christina Spurgeon's (2008) advertising traditions are explored, followed by of the discussion of capitalism and commodity feminism, including the standpoints of Gillian Dyer (1982) and Karen Beck (1994). Feminist responses of Rosalind Gill (1991, 2008, 2011), Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2007) and Sarah Banet-Weiser and Laura Portwood-Stacer (2017) are then compared, among more, to create a feminist advertising framework. Then discussion of scholarship from Jib Fowles (1996), Michael Jacobson and Laurie Mazur (1995) and Anthony Cortese (1999) on the proliferation of images of females in advertisements is evaluated to construct an idea of the history of the landscape of cosmetic advertising. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (1973;1980) will then be investigated with reference to other scholars who contribute to active audience theory.

Despite an increase in online advertising, television is currently, and is predicted to remain, the main advertising platform (Thinkbox, 2015), as most people still spend a large majority of their time watching television (Arrazola et al., 2016). Television advertising consistently drives the highest volume of cost-effective response compared to other platforms (Thinkbox, 2015). The No.7 advertisements this study investigates are British television advertisements that have featured on mainstream television channels within the last two years.

2.1 Advertising

The first purpose of an advertisement is to differentiate the product from others within the same category (Williamson, 1978). In addition, adverts do not only differentiate products from each other, but they give different social meanings to different products, thus signifying something about those who choose to buy them over other brands (Bignell, 2002). The text used in video and print advertisements acts as anchorage, tying meaning to the images and helping to make certain what could be a confusing selection of denotive meanings (Rose, 2001, p.81). This is necessary as there is always some "scope of indetermination" allowing for the possible interpretation of several meanings (Jensen, 1991, p.137). Schroder and Vestergaard assert that advertisements "ideologise" the commodity by framing it in an ideological context, affiliating the item with message (1985, p.155). The aim is to attach a lifestyle image to the product, implying that this is gained after purchase, and to further differentiating it from other near-identical products, in line with Williamson's (1978) purpose of advertisements as mentioned above. Advertising is usually most successful when it is able to create "an impression of a positive experience with the brand" constructing positive brand association that audiences can drawn on when later making purchase decisions (Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2016, p.9). However, it is notoriously difficult to transmit to an audience a specific message through advertising, and even when it is received in the way producers intended, it does not necessarily mean audiences will be positively influenced (Sheehan, 2004). Intended effects are those in line with the advertisers' aims, whilst unintended effects are the opposite, and may have negative consequences, such as audiences disliking a brand if they dislike their advertising messages (Sheehan, 2004).

Christina Spurgeon (2008) introduces the informational and creative traditions of advertising, the former when advertisers employ an informative 'hard-sell' technique, focusing on the

product's unique selling point, assuming the viewer is stable with reasonable spending behaviour that can be predicted through market research. In the latter, imagery prevails, and a 'soft-sell' approach emphasises the lifestyle choices enabled by consumption, reflecting Schroder and Vestergaard's (1985) work surrounding advertising ideology as discussed above, drawing on the experiences of consumers in their wider social contexts for appeal. The aim of both is brand awareness and positive brand attitudes, as outlined by Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott (2016) and Sheehan (2004).

To encourage the purchase decision in creative advertising, tactics such as association, repetition, before-and-after, and recommendation are used alongside wider themes such as love, friendship and happiness (Dyer, 1982; Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985). This is to attach the desire evoked by the adverts to the commodity itself, thus turning "the need for an identity […] into a need for the commodity" (Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985, p.73) through channelling the conscious or subconscious values of the audience. By connecting values with the products, advertisements link the abstract message with the attainable commodity, encouraging audiences to buy the product to achieve the social ideal (Bignell, 2002; Rose, 2001), as the value attached to the commodity in the advert "will be transferred to the consumer through the act of buying it" (Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985, p.154). As most advertisements are inevitably image-based, including those in this study, they "aestheticize" the commodity by associating it directly with desirable qualities for the consumer presented in the images shown (Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985, p.154). Rose asserts that advertisements deceive us into believing "that we can choose our social position through what we consume" (2001, p.93), suggesting that dominant ideologies are manipulated to appeal to the social standpoints of consumers and convince them that the product is reflective of the social messages the advert communicates, and thus that the brand must hold these values. Dyer (1982, p.5) reiterates this,

stating that adverts attempt to "manipulate people into buying a way of life as well as goods" by monitoring and appropriating social trends to induce profit and growth, creating desires within us that do not inherently exist, which we then satisfy through buying commodities.

2.1.a Capitalism and commodity fetishism

The nature of advertising is fundamentally capitalist (Beck, 1994; Botterill et al. 2015), the industry a "vital component of capitalist economies" (Dyer, 1982, p.15). Rossiter and Percy assert that the aim of advertising ultimately is, and always has been, "to sell more of the branded product or service, or to achieve a higher price that consumers are willing to pay than would obtain in the absence of advertising" (2013, p.391). As the function of advertising is to sell a commodity, on a moral basis the outcomes should include providing the audience with enough facts about the product to make an informed purchase decision. It is necessary to question whether advertisements "give us enough, or indeed *any* accurate information" (Dyer, 1982, p.4), as advertising is now less about factual informative messages and more about the "manipulation of social values and attitudes" (Dyer, 1982, p.2), in line with Spurgeon's notion (2008) that advertising favours the creative over the informational tradition as discussed. Dyer (1982) argues that advertisements are inherently harmful in the sense that they manipulate information, distorting rather than reflecting our society as the "products of decisions taken by an unrepresentative, unelected group of powerful businessmen" with many unable to "see through them and their false utopias" (p.78). Dyer (1982) is essentially critical of advertising's capitalist nature. However, Goldman (1992) argues that although they reproduce the ideology of commodity fetishism, advertisements have "sociocultural consequences and repercussions that go beyond the corporate bottom-line" (p.2), even if it is this that motivates their creation. This illustrates that although the immediate intention of advertisements is to generate profit, they resound culturally to shape ideology. Cook (1992) also contends Dyer's (1982) argument,

stating that although advertising is inevitably profit-motivated, it is "unjust to make them a scapegoat for all the sorrows of the modern world" (p.16). As this tells us, the effect of advertising on society is highly debated, thus legitimising this study and highlighting the relevance of the interview data.

2.2 Women in advertisements

According to Fowles (1996) and Gentry et al. (1999), advertising has historically presented women in different ways to men. Gentry et al. (1999) identify in Western society a "'generalized atmosphere' in which images of beauty in advertising and mass media exercise control over women" (p.166). Female models in advertisements are usually younger than male equivalents, "implying that older women were unimportant or non-existent" (Botterill et al., 2015, p.444), and they are often sexualised, appearing as decorative objects (Botterill et al., 2015; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995; Dyer, 1982; Cortese, 1999). They are slim and beautiful (Cortese, 1999), and are often featured in hyper-feminine poses, cradling the advertised product and appearing submissive (Goffman, 1979). In contrast, it is common for advertisements to depict men as powerful, sporty, confident, and career- or money-driven, whilst women are seen as beauty or image-focused, or in domestic environments (Rose, 2001; Cortese, 1999; Sheehan, 2004; Botterill et al, 2015; Fowles, 1996). Jacobson and Mazur (1995) argue that advertisers use beautiful models to generate insecurity within the audience, which they immediately offer a remedy for in the very product they are selling. Although advertising did not "invent the notion that women should be valued as ornaments", it has "joined forces with sexism" to make images of unrealistic, unattainable beauty more pervasive than ever before (Jacobson and Mazur, 1995, p.75), illustrating the relevance of this study. Similarly, Gill (2011) identifies a new landscape of sexism perpetuated by dominant media – including advertising – that

constitutes a postfeminist view of female agency and sexuality, promoting empowerment through consumption, and sexual self-objectification as freedom.

2.2.a Postfeminism and popular feminism

Postfeminism both incorporates and repudiates the initial waves of the feminist movement (Becker, Cope and Thomas, 2016; O'Brien Hallstein, 2011; McRobbie, 2004; Brabon and Genz, 2009). It rejects the notion that women are victims, insisting that earlier feminist movements have succeeded in their fight against iniquity, and that society can now move on to celebrate the equality of women and their liberation (Becker, Cope and Thomas, 2016). It concentrates on the pleasures involved with being a woman, and insists that women have power in their sexuality and femininity to assert command over men, both in the workplace and in society generally, underlining the new opportunities the 21st century has brought to womankind (Becker, Cope and Thomas, 2016). Postfeminism equates empowerment with sexual agency (Gill, 2008), asserting that women can be feminine, sexual and image-conscious as well as independent, successful and empowered. Women are encouraged to make purchases as a manifestation of their independence (Gill, 2008), as a result "collapsing the political motives of feminism into distinctly personal, private desires" (Douglas, 1994 p.248), with brands promoting products "using a discourse of empowerment" (Gill, 2008, p.36). However, it is often found that the movement largely favours the situations of white, heterosexual, middle class Western women (Tasker and Negra 2007; Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2017). Despite this, as a movement its roots are grounded in feminism, it is inherently complex and embodies the 21st century media climate (Tasker and Negra, 2007), and thus postfeminist media products cannot simply be dismissed as depoliticised replications of 'genuine feminism' (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2017). Conversely, Gill (2008) asserts that it is naïve to assume advertisements are feminist because they incorporate feminist ideas. She deems

postfeminism the 'new sexism' (Gill, 1991), explaining that it equates sexuality with agency, which encourages women to disadvantage themselves physically for example by wearing stilettos. It can be argued, however, that postfeminism does not inevitably represent feminism's depoliticisation, instead it combines critical engagement of earlier feminist movements with modern societal triumphs of equality, making it capable of carrying feminist rhetoric and dismantling patriarchal structures (Brooks, 1997). Thus it is not innately apolitical as Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017) assert, it has the potential to carry feminist ideas into the progressive 21st century media landscape.

The postfeminist neoliberal position is that woman can be individually empowered but still image conscious and feminine, through their use of cosmetics (Aubert et al., 2007). Advertisements can be examined through the lens of this neoliberal postfeminist position in order to investigate what is "new, unique and distinctive about media representations of gender at the current moment", and how they are "different from straightforwardly prefeminist or antifeminist portrayals" (Gill, 2011, p.64). It is a cultural norm in the UK for women to wear makeup, and it is debatable if this confines or empowers women, which this study considers in interview research.

2.2.b Models in advertisements

Typically, female models in advertising are slim, young, beautiful, and often digitally retouched (Cortese, 1999; Botterill et al., 2015; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995). Till and Busler (2000) argue that the use of attractive models encourages positive impressions, incentivising advertisers to use these models. Dove famously introduced their *Campaign for Real Beauty* in 2004 which reportedly stemmed from meetings that considered the work of the likes of Gloria Steinem and Naomi Wolf creating a goal of "redefining beauty" (Jeffers, 2005). This indicates

that genuine feminist messaging could be the motive of some advertisements, echoing Brooks' (1997) notion above, that postfeminist media products can be vehicles for feminist rhetoric. However, Murray (2013) asserts that the campaign "perpetuates an oppressive ideology of "real beauty" requiring a behaviour ("self-esteem") that underscores neoliberal self-improvement benefiting the corporation's power" (p.98). She concludes that the *Campaign for Real Beauty* endorses postfeminism as it encourages branding one's identity in a material and ideologically hegemonic way.

Johnston et al. (2016) discussed this Dove campaign in focus groups with young, feminist-identified women to see if it was accordant with their own feminist ideas and if resultantly corporations can be instrumental in inflicting feminist change. They found that the women rejected Dove's attempt to 'democratise beauty', suggesting that "genuine feminism (rather than feminist consumerism) rejects compulsory beauty and inspires empowerment by other means" (Johnston et al., 2016, p.141), implying genuine feminism and feminist consumerism are mutually exclusive. This study included only participants who already identified as feminist, creating a possible limitation in that these participants may have differing pre-existing critical ideas about the beauty industry in comparison to women who either do not identify as feminist or do not vocalise their feminist predilections. This study did not require participants to identify as feminists in order to consider a wider range of perspectives, and to hopefully be as representative as possible of the target market. In another study, Millard (2009) interviewed women for their reactions to the Dove campaign, however with the aim to assess performative functions – how women 'perform' their responses whilst in a group setting, and how Dove as a brand 'perform' their morals through advertising. While these studies are substantial and profound in their own right, this study draws on these and considers two different age groups of participants to add an element of comparison into its quantitative analysis. This study uses

interviews rather than focus groups to allow more in-depth analysis of emerging themes and opinions, concentrating on the themes of femininity and empowerment.

2.2.c Sexualised images of women in advertisements

Advertisements typically use shots isolating women's body parts (Jacobson and Mazur, 1995; Dyer, 1982; Cortese, 1999; Goldman, 1992), while lips especially have become an "abbreviation for fetishized desire" (Goldman, 1992, p.117). Resultantly, women are seen as an ensemble of parts signifying commodities (Jacobson and Mazur, 1995: Dyer, 1982), insinuating that women are "objects, and therefore less human" (Cortese, 1999, p.31). Schroder and Vestergaard (1985) assert that the advertising industry used to imply that women's main priority was motherhood, but this priority has transitioned to physical appearance, requiring women to compete for male attention, "transforming herself into a passive object awaiting the man's initiative" (p.82). This is reminiscent of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) in which he explains that in advertisements, "men act, women appear" (p.47), as women are constantly depicted under the gaze of and seeking approval from men. Alternatively, as this study considers modern advertisements decades on from these assertions, it can be argued that modern occurrences of these depictions are a postfeminist act, empowering women to harness their femininity and sexuality in order to be perceived as powerful and attractive (Becker, Cope and Thomas, 2016), in line with the perspectives explored in section 2.2.a.

Advertisers often use sexualised images to promote cosmetic products. Female bodies are commodified with intent to sell, creating an atmosphere that dehumanises and devalues women (Botterill et al, 2015; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995). In cosmetic advertisements we see women applying makeup, actively engaging in a beautification process, seemingly in control and autonomous. Simultaneously they are sexualised, in submissive positions, but alongside slogans that aim to empower them or promote beauty: 'because you're worth it', 'maybe she's

born with it'. Advertisers imply power and agency with the slogan, but enforce standardised and traditional notions of Western ideals of femininity. Images of choice and agency are tied to sexualised images of women's bodies, implying women are choosing to be sexualised because it is in line with their own liberation (Botterill et al, 2015). The female body is framed as a centre of freedom and sexual pleasure, attaching the ideology of feminism as a lifestyle choice to the commodity, to be accessed through purchase (Bignell, 2002; Rose, 2001; Dyer, 1982; Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985). It is common for advertisements to appropriate images of social discontent to appeal to consumers and appear socially conscious (Cortese, 1999; Goldman, 1992; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995; Bignell, 2002; Gill, 2008; Douglas, 1994; Beck, 1993). Advertising "attempts to co-opt and commodify the very notion of 'women's liberation" (Cortese, 1999, p.28), with corporations seeking legitimacy "by joining cherished values and social relations to their corporate images" (Goldman, 1992, p.85). This reflects Douglas (1994) and Gill's (2008) notion as explored earlier that neoliberal postfeminism encourages women to use their sexuality and femininity for power, encouraged by advertising. The debate here lies in the morals of the advertisers – is this an entirely mercenary ploy to dupe socially conscious audiences into buying into a lifestyle choice, as Bignell's statement suggests, or is it a genuine expression of feminist brand values? This study explores this later through interviews, investigating the responses of targeted women.

2.3 Advertising audiences

The way audiences create meaning from media texts is dependent on their social situation (Jensen, 1991; Bignell, 2002; Sheehan, 2004), with Hall (1973) initially conceptualising this in his encoding/decoding model. Hall (1973) investigates in particular audiences of factual television broadcasting and their interpretation of meaning, finding that it is affected by the individual's situational context and background. His theory explains that media producers

encode messages and ideologies, packaging them into texts, which audiences then decode according to their social, cultural and economic contexts. Hall (1980) identifies three ways in which this can occur. The *dominant* reading is when the reader accepts the preferred reading of the text. The *negotiated* reading refers to when the reader accepts the preferred reading in part, but modifies it in a way to suit their social context and previous experiences. The *oppositional* reading is when the reader rejects the intended meaning due to their social context as it places them in opposition to the dominant code. Hall's (1980) oppositional reading of a text is similar to Sheehan's (2004) notion of unintended effects as explored earlier, based on a different context of audience studies, however both terms describe effects that are not in line with the producer's aims. This can create negative receptions of a brand if the reader receives their messaging in the opposite way (Sheehan, 2004). Morley (2006) expands on Hall's (1980) oppositional reading, explaining that there is more than one type of meaning rejection possible. Readers can refuse to engage with a text and thus with any decoding of it, but another possibility is that they could also choose to interact with a text but disagree with its messaging (Morley, 2006). There is potential for a sign or text to be polysemic, or have multiple meanings, and in this case the reader would receive the message most in line with their personal background (Hall, 1980). This theory implies audiences are active, as they engage with and interpret media texts, receiving them in different ways.

2.3.a Active audiences

Jacobson and Mazur (1995) and Sheehan (2004) argue that advertising audiences are active receivers, as meaning interpretation is required which is an innately active process. Sheehan (2004) explains that viewers are innately active as if they see an advert they are intrinsically taking some meaning from it, and resultantly "consumers are in control because we make the meaning of the messages ourselves" (p.32). Similarly, Schroder and Vestergaard (1985) also

identify audiences as active, as viewers are likely to dismiss representations they cannot relate to, accepting those supporting the values they already hold. Sheehan (2004) and Schroder and Vestergaard (1985) suggest that audiences will to some extent remain unaffected by representations they disagree with, not because they are passive, but because they are active and conscious enough to dismiss them. However, Hall's model is complex, and as his model describes it is possible for audiences to partially understand or negotiate the message they receive according to their social context (Botterill et al. 2015; Millard, 2009).

Advertisements appoint stimuli that are predicted to stimulate emotions in audiences, including humour, narrative, and music, which are more interesting and easier to remember than rational argument (Tellis, 2004), or the informational tradition in Spurgeon's (2008) terms. Tellis (2004) explains how these emotions then encourage the audience to react in one of three modes of emotional action: "implicit, explicit, or associative" (p.148). In the *implicit* mode, the advert uses characters and a plot to elicit empathy from the viewer, and the message is disguised in the story. It is argued that the emotional tactic here lowers the audience's defences against the appeal as it is disguised within the plot. The *explicit* mode makes outright emotion-based arguments that are direct and tangible, eliciting sympathy rather than empathy, with an unambiguous message. Finally, the *associative* mode "arouses emotions with stimuli that are only tangentially related to the product" (Tellis, 2004, p.148), and these only make sense in relation to these specific adverts. This is where the brand arouses emotion and warmth without making claims about product benefit, the purpose being to capture attention and associate the brand with a general feeling of positivity. There are disadvantages to using emotion in advertising however, as it takes longer to communicate the message than in rational, straightforward arguments, or Spurgeon's (2008) informational tradition, and viewers may

miss the intended message due to their emotional involvement distorting what they receive (Tellis, 2004).

Through original interview research this study investigates the response of viewers to No.7 advertisements, measuring the extent to which the use of these modes elicits positive brand association that Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott (2016) describe as discussed earlier. Through semiotic textual analysis this study investigates the use of Tellis' (2004) modes to communicate female empowerment and femininity and, through participant research, it then explores how this messaging is received.

3. Methodology

This study combines semiotic analysis of four advertisements with original interview research to investigate how No.7 cosmetic advertisements are received by targeted women. When trying to understand what an advert is communicating, it is necessary to consider "not only the elements of which it is made up, but also the overall impression that it creates" (Dyer, 1982, p.74), demonstrating the benefit of this interview research alongside semiotic analysis, as it aims to gain an insight into this impression. There is a value to multi-method work (Fielding and Fielding, 1986; Kumar, 2011), and it is useful to combine more than one type of research in a study of audience response (Briggs, 1986; Knight, 2002; Jensen, 1991), further substantiating the combination of these two methods.

While advertising is "too various and vast an activity for any study to be comprehensive" (Tellis, 2004, p.11), this study illuminates a variety of women's responses to popular brand advertising. Bovey (1994) and Chandy et al. (2001) argue that young people are more influenced by advertising than older age groups as they are more likely to take advertisements literally. To explore this, this study used two different participant age groups, age group 1 (21-24) and age group 2 (ages 46-68), to identify differences and similarities of their responses. In a society where historically self-perceptions of attractiveness have been "decidedly more negative among female adolescents than male adolescents" (Gentry et al., 1999, p.167), this study uses female participants to investigate the relevance of this notion today.

3.1 Semiotics

For Judith Williamson (1978), semiology is a science that can be used to analyse ideology. Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure are widely regarded as the "founding fathers" of semiology (Berger, 2014, p.22). Peirce introduced a model of three signs (Indiana

University, 2000), in which a sign can be an icon, an index, or a symbol, the first when the signifier has a likeness to the signified, physically resembling what it stands for; the second when there is a relationship between signified and signifier; and the last when there is a conventional but arbitrary relationship between them.

Saussure (1959) conceptualised the signifier/signified model, separating signs into two parts – the sound or image as the signifier and the ideas generated from this as the signified. Margaret Iversen favours Peirce's model over Saussure's, deeming it "richer" (1986, p.85), enabling the user to explore how signification works, whilst Robert Goldman (1992) and Williamson (1978) use Saussure's signifier/signified model, with each approach abundantly still used in modern scholarship. Each approach is valid depending on the context, because the interpretive results of a semiotic analysis are inherently subjective. The semiologist must consider "the wider ideologies at work in a society" (Rose, 2001, p.89), these being ideological systems that contextualise signs, called 'dominant codes' by Hall (1980) as explored in the literature review, and 'referent systems' by Williamson (1978). This is similar to Hall (1980), Bignell (2002) and Jensen's (1991) notions that audience reception is influenced by situational context within culture and historical periods, as discussed earlier. Rose (2001) asserts that these codes and dominant ideologies can be challenged by "the diversity of ways of seeing" (p.99), grounding the relevance of this study and its aim to delve into broad audience responses to advertisements, and their position to dominant codes.

There is some argument that semiotic studies rely on their analytic integrity, with less concern for the degree to which findings apply to wider material (Bignell, 2002; Rose, 2001). Cook (1992) proposes that a semiotic approach risks simplification or partial analysis, and that its insights are "useful but incomplete" (p.71). A semiotic reading, then, is not necessarily

inaccurate or redundant, but these make for important considerations. Although this study recognises these possible limitations, the combination of a semiotic textual analysis alongside interviews reduces the risk of simplification, in line with Fielding and Fielding (1986) and Kumar's (2011) support of multi-method work, resulting in a multidimensional approach that assesses the adverts and their reception from different perspectives.

3.2 Interviews

This study assesses audience responses to advertisements with in-depth interviews, as advertisements have cultural and social repercussions that "go beyond the corporate bottom-line" (Goldman, 1992, p.2). In-depth interviewing is the most common method of data collection in qualitative research as it is proficient in helping researchers to "understand the meaning people make of their lives from their own perspective" (Darlington and Scott, 2002, p.48). It is more beneficial to interview people with a range of perspectives in order to develop a broader understanding of the phenomena (Bogdan and Taylor, 1998). Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott (2016) advise against the use of focus groups for assessing responses to advertising as they inevitably overexpose the participants to the advertisement in comparison to how they would be seen naturally. Although both interviews and focus groups give target audiences an unnatural amount of time to explore these advertisements that they would not reach in their usual, expected exposure, in-depth interview research can access intricate first-person narratives (Kumar, 2011). In addition, "people process advertising as individuals, even if they are watching TV with others" (Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2016, p.341), further legitimizing this study's use of interviews. As Millard (2009) asserts, the purposeful research setting may influence data outcomes, but talking with these women about their cosmetics habits and thoughts on advertisements "is not unlike the everyday experiences of women who flip through

magazines and stand with their girlfriends in the drugstore, wondering what moisturiser to buy" (p.166).

Interview questions must generate relevant feedback without being leading or coaxing unnatural responses (Jackson and Usher, 2014). An interview format allows both parties to explore meanings of questions and answers (Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985; Atkinson and Coffey, 1996) which is often not a part of less discursive audience research methods such as questionnaires. This study used a standardised interview format with open-ended questions to enforce a reasonable limitation for focused discussion whilst creating the potential for extended and multidimensional results (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995; Darlington and Scott, 2002). The discursive nature of the method means that related data may not emerge at the same time in each interview (Knight, 2002). In order to efficiently make comparisons between interviews, themes can be identified and data categorised to identify recurring patterns or outliers (Atkinson and Coffey, 1996; Atkinson and Weaver, 1994), which this study practises with themed subheadings in section 4.2. However, when research is designed in this way, there is a tendency for the researcher to only see results relevant to their hypotheses (Darlington and Scott, 2002). To prevent this, interviews should be regarded not only in comparison with each other, but as whole entities to identify overarching themes that may be undetected with a cross-sectional approach (Briggs, 1986; Knight, 2002; Huberman and Miles, 1994). This study recognises this and looks for overarching themes between interviews as well as more nuanced, smaller-scale similarities.

This study practiced snowball sampling, which helps to expand participant groups through asking interviewees to nominate people they know that would be suitable for the study (Knight, 2002; Darlington and Scott, 2002). Through interviewing seven people from each age category,

this study is as representative as possible while also contained enough to analyse data in depth, ensuring consistent depth of analysis and that the attention given to each participant's response is as thorough as possible.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Informed consent is a "core principle" in research ethics (Darlington and Scott, 2002, p.25), and it is vital to obtain participants' consent by fully informing them of the research objectives and why their input is valuable (Knight, 2002). It is important participants are treated with empathy and understanding, so the interviewer must not persist if the participant indicates that they are uncomfortable, as respect of participants is the most crucial element in in-depth interview research (Adeney and Lewis, 2014). As Darlington and Scott (2002) assert, when attempting to make qualitative data confidential, it can be difficult because responses could be recognisable to those who know them, and anonymity and confidentiality must be ensured (Kumar, 2011). This study acknowledges these assertions, and thus gives pseudonyms to each participant so that they cannot be identified. The real names of participants were substituted throughout with these pseudonyms, from data collection and storage to analysis and conclusion processes, and audio recordings were stored in a password-protected file that was accessible only to the researcher. No unnecessary personal information was collected, with all other information deleted after the study.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section will first provide a semiotic textual analysis of four No.7 advertisements to determine how they depict femininity and construct ideas of female empowerment, followed by analysis of interview data to assess how targeted women respond to these advertisements.

4.1 Semiotic analysis

Each advertisement features a woman between ages 28-54 performing their occupation. These are the following:

Advert 1: Monica Askamit, an Olympic fencer, fences an opponent on a cliff face, cut with dramatic shots of clenching teeth and swipes of makeup mirroring the swipe of their blades, anchored with the text 'Makeup For You and You Alone', followed by 'Ready for Anything'.

Advert 2: Alessandra Ferri, a ballet dancer, is seen dancing next to a hologram of her 19-year-old self, executing the same routine with the same grace and agility, anchored with the text 'Ready for More'.

Advert 3: Amanda Foster, a stuntwoman, jumps out the window of a skyscraper in a white dress onto a crash mat before walking towards the camera, anchored with the text 'Ready as Ever'.

Advert 4: Chimamanda Adichie, a feminist writer, walks through a picturesque field of flowers and trees speaking about how makeup makes her feel and why she wears it, anchored with the text 'Ready to Speak Up'

According to Tellis' (2004) modes of emotional action, these adverts use the associative mode, as they "arouse emotions with stimuli that are only tangentially related to the product" (p.148) and none of the action involves directly applying cosmetic products. No.7 are arousing emotion without making claims about product benefit, the purpose being to capture attention and associate the brand with a general feeling of happiness and fondness. The adverts are connected with the 'Ready for...' text, acting as anchorage. Rose (2001) and Jensen (1991) explain that anchorage is necessary to regulate meaning transfer, and in this case it has the effect of tying the messages to the brand and linking them together as a collective campaign. Spurgeon's (2008) creative tradition is exhibited here as imagery prevails rather than information, the adverts using a soft-sell approach that appeals to audience's social experiences. The repeated use of the 'Ready for…' anchor illustrates Dyer's (1982) notion that repetition is used to encourage purchase decisions. This slogan, in comparison to other iconic cosmetics brand slogans as identified earlier – 'because you're worth it', 'maybe she's born with it' – is more active, which can be decoded as referring to a prepared mental and physical state rather than image. As Jacobson and Mazur (1995) suggest, adverts historically have aimed to generate insecurity within the audience to then provide a remedy for it, yet these adverts do not subscribe to this model. Instead their messaging is of enhancing your own ability, doing things because you want to, wearing makeup 'For You and You Alone', as the slogan suggests. This corresponds to the neoliberal feminist viewpoint that women can choose to subscribe to traditional feminine tropes, use cosmetics, and be empowered by it (Aubert et al., 2007).

Through showing 'older' women who are powerful, physically strong, and not models by profession, there is a collective subversion of typical cosmetics advertising tropes that employ very young and thin models (Cortese, 1999; Botterill et al., 2015; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995; Till and Busler, 2000). This appears to be a deliberate rejection of idealised beauty standards,

an effort to display diverse images of female empowerment. It attaches an empowered version of modern femininity to their products, and thus seems to engender a progressive move towards a broader definition of beauty. Similarly to Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty* as discussed earlier, the models are not models by profession, however unlike the Dove campaign, the women are famous for their sporting, professional or literary achievements. Again, this confirms the messaging that women can use cosmetic products and be feminine but also empowered and successful, and most importantly are not defined by their appearance.

The trend of beauty adverts isolating women's bodies into parts (Jacobson and Mazur, 1995; Dyer, 1982; Cortese, 1999; Goldman, 1992) is demonstrated in advert 1. The usual effect leaves the models unidentifiable and dehumanised, however this advertisement clearly identifies Monica with her name and occupation as text at the beginning of the sequence as anchorage. She is in a vigorous fencing battle with another female opponent, alongside powerful music and dramatic jump cuts between long shots of the cliff face, mid shots of their battle and close ups of her mask, sword, and uniform, which act as signifiers of her sporting skill (Saussure, 1959), or icons, according to Peirce (Indiana University, 2000). Close ups of her eyes, mouth, and face either with makeup applied or being applied signify her femininity unconventionally, as these are created with stab-like brush strokes, mirroring her sport but confirming her use of the brand's products. For Goldman (1992), lips are an "abbreviation for fetishized desire" (p.117), but this use of close-up shots is complex. Her mouth is seen lipsticked but with clenched teeth in an expression that could signify the intense physical effort that comes with her sport, but also the "fetishized desire" Goldman describes as a result of traditional sexualisation of this body part (1992, p.117). The interesting duality of this image communicates that women can be both empowered and sexual, self-governing and feminine, reflecting the postfeminist, neoliberal perception of female empowerment as explored above

(Gill, 2008; Tasker and Negra 2007; Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2017). Semiotic textual analysis reveals the polysemic possibilities of these signs, creating these multiple possible readings which mean different things to different viewers dependent on their social context (Hall, 1980).

Advert 2 conveys a message that age is not a limit to physical ability and strength, with the older and younger versions of Alessandra dancing alongside each other acting as signifiers of this (Saussure, 1959). The theme of love is used here as is traditional in advertising narratives to gain emotional responses from viewers (Dyer,1982), and there is a powerful moment when the two dancers look at each other in a touching sequence. The process of reminiscence is attached to the narrative, evoking emotion in older viewers who can remember being younger, encouraging them to indulge in sentimental memories. This is in line with Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliot's (2016) notion that brands attempt to create a positive brand identity through presenting positive or relatable messages with the aim that viewers will draw on these feelings when later making a purchase decision. Similar to advert 1, we see a woman performing demanding physical exercise, rejecting historic advertising tropes which normally depict men as sporty (Bignell, 2002; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995).

In advert 3 professional stuntwoman Amanda completes a high-octane stunt on a movie set, unlike traditional cosmetic advertisements that depict women in submissive positions (Berger, 1972). Unlike Monica in advert 1, she is in an elegant white dress, further reflecting the neoliberal postfeminist viewpoint that she can be feminine but also powerful and strong. She gracefully walks towards the camera after performing the extreme stunt, the juxtaposition highlighting her physical ability but also her femininity. This symbolises a modern femininity that insists that both can be empowering, simultaneously 'aestheticizing' the product advertised

by associating it directly with these qualities (Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985, p.154). The text 'Ready as Ever' seems to be a reference to her age, signifying that she is just as physically able as she has been all her life, giving an empowering message to women of all ages that they can harness their femininity in order to be perceived as powerful.

Chimamanda's poetic and powerful words in advert 4 express that makeup is an autonomous choice for the wearer, followed by a voiceover encouraging the audience to 'discover your perfect colours'. Her message touches on themes of self-love and confidence, describing her transition through stages of her life and how her relationship to cosmetics has changed, ending now where she explains she only uses it for herself. The bright colours of nature, which compliment her pink-lipsticked lips, signify and echo her message that the only meaningful beauty comes from within. Again we are drawn to her lips but they simultaneously signal a "fetishized desire" (Goldman, 1992, p.117) similar to advert 1, but within it is a message of independence and autonomy, implying a feminist re-defining of desire and sexual agency. Ultimately the message of the advert is that makeup can help rather than hinder women's efforts to feel empowered, again reflecting the neoliberal postfeminist viewpoint. As Goldman (1992) suggests, adverts do go beyond corporate bottom-line to send ideological messages to those watching, however it is important to remember that the main aim of advertising is always to generate profit, and naturally these messages are appropriated to sell products. However, if the received messaging uncovered in interviews is one of empowerment, ultimately the question is does it matter if the motive is profit based if it is legitimizing the idea that real women can feel empowered through using makeup and engaging with traditional cosmetic practices? The following interview analysis considers this.

These signifiers of female ability, strength and power in adverts 1 to 4 contrast with a history of traditional cosmetics adverts that objectify women and limit them to image-consciousness and domestic environments (Rose, 2001; Sheehan, 2004; Botterill et al, 2015; Fowles, 1996), and there is no competition for male attention as Schroder and Vestergaard (1985) assert is a notable historic advertising them as discussed earlier. This study recognises that the brand's aim is profit, and signifiers of feminism and empowerment are inevitably commodified in order to encourage audiences to buy into an intangible social ideal through purchasing the advertised commodity (Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985; Bignell, 2002; Rose, 2001). However, these advertisements constitute a radically different representation of women than uncovered in the literature review within the history of advertising (Fowles, 1996; Cortese, 1999; Dyer, 1982). Through using unconventional models, No.7 communicate that older women are far from "unimportant or non-existent" as Botterill et al. (2015, p.444) argue is the effect of the absence of older models in the general history of the medium. This textual analysis has offered a detailed exploration of the significance of the semiotic aspects of each advertisement and an interpretation of their meaning. It has sought to illuminate how themes of femininity and female empowerment are constructed within these texts. This is complemented by qualitative research, incorporated to assess to an extent the actual received messaging of these advertisements. The following analysis of interview data seeks to complement these findings and provide an impression of how targeted women understand these messages.

4.2 Interview analysis

4.2.a Women in advertisements

Each participant discussed in some detail the extent to which they felt they could relate to the models. Responses from age group 1 and age group 2 were both varied, with mixed positive and negative feedback. All participants in age group 2 and most participants in age group 1

found at least one model particularly relatable, and most expressed the feeling that they could relate to the models because they are not models by profession as well as being of more average, representative body shape and build. Jacobson and Mazur (1995) argue that advertisers use beautiful models to generate insecurity within the audience, however participants in both age groups did not mention any feeling of intimidation or insecurity, only that they were able to relate to them because of their more representative size and age. From age group 1, Tammy (21) said that she could relate to the models as "they weren't like the stereotypical stick thin model you see in a lot of adverts (…) they all seem like normal women", whilst Sara (21) said "other portrayals of women are so perfect (…) they're so pristine, so skinny that it's just not relatable", finding the No.7 models more relatable as they are more representative of the average body size and shape. From age group 2, Juliet (46) similarly expressed that "it's nice to see normal people… not your normal models, the skinny, beautiful… just your normal average person who gets up in the morning and does a day's work". A few responses indicated that participants could relate to one or some of the models, but not all of them. Amanda (53), Ciara (68) and Chloe (22) said they could not relate to adverts 1, 2 and 3 but could relate to Chimamanda in advert 4. They did not identify the aspirational qualities that including professional sportswomen could achieve, instead they identified the difference between their own physical ability and that exhibited by the women in adverts 1 to 3. Two participants in age group 1 did contend that they could not relate to the women in the adverts because their age and occupations were too distant from their own. Phoebe (22) said "I can't relate to them because of their age and achievements". Daisy (21) echoes this: "they're not really relatable models 'cause you'd never be in those situations yourself". This suggests that younger audiences could reject the messaging because they feel immediately unlike the women featured in the advert due to their age difference. As there is deliberate emphasis on their occupational achievements, this could alienate them further.

The outcome that every participant in age group 2 said that they felt they could relate specifically to at least one of the models, whereas some of group 1 could not, indicates that age-association could be a significant factor in advertising to women. It suggests a benefit of using models that are of a similar age to the target audience in order to allow them to relate to the model, and resultantly achieve positive brand association (Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2016). The variation in the responses indicates that the intended effect of choosing diverse and unconventional models does not entirely resonate universally with a female audience, instead it is subjective and dependent on their social context, reflecting the earlier discussion of active audiences and social contexts affecting readings (Hall, 1980; Jensen, 1991; Bignell, 2002; Morley, 2006).

Between the series of four advertisements, each participant did strongly indicate that at least one advert particularly stood out to them, not necessarily because they related to the model, but because they liked the advert itself for its narrative or aesthetic qualities. This indicates that No.7 have succeeded somewhat in creating a broad enough range of representation between these adverts to resonate in part with most women. Whilst each model is different enough to mean that the majority of female viewers will have qualities in common with at least one of the models, No.7 still successfully evoke positive brand association for even those who feel they cannot relate, like the participants of age group 1 identified above.

4.2.b Feminism and female empowerment

Three women in age group 2 identified the profit-driven nature of the advertisements, with Juliet (46) asserting that "they're trying to sell their products, (…) they're there for making money", with Margaret (52) and Ciara (68) issuing similar thoughts. From age group 1, five out of seven women directly spoke about feminism in relation to the advertisements:

"I guess you could be like, are they just using makeup to make a feminist point? But I don't know, I kind of believed it" (Sara, 21)

"I think it must be genuine, if you asked me a few years ago I might have answered differently but there's been a real shift in the last few years of female empowerment and feminism (…) it seems to have more weight behind it because its part of a bigger movement, rather than just a publicity stunt. It doesn't feel like they're just doing it for the sales" (Chloe, 22)

"I think its moving along with societal views, there's been like a massive post-feminist movement to just do and wear whatever you want, so I think they're definitely attune to that' (Sarah, 22)

"They want you to know they're a brand for strong feminist women, and you should wear No.7 because you're proud of who you are" (Tammy, 21)

"I like the idea behind it, but like so many brands are trying to do that at the moment, like all brands are trying to suddenly be feminist and like really inclusive of all ages and races and that kind of thing so its not really anything new" (Phoebe, 22)

Each discusses feminist themes, with Chloe, Sarah and Phoebe expanding to ground their responses in the current social period. This reveals a deeper knowledge of the current feminist landscape and understanding that advertisements commodify feminist themes, reminiscent of postfeminism and commodity fetishism as discussed in the literature review. This data reflects the idea that advertising appropriates feminist rhetoric (Brooks, 1997; Bignell, 2002; Gill, 2008; Douglas, 1994; Beck, 1993) in order to appeal to consumers. Sara and Chloe are optimistic about the messages of feminism and female empowerment in these advertisements, indicating that they believe them to genuinely represent the brand values. On the other hand, Sarah and Phoebe show scepticism towards the inclusion of feminism in something ultimately created for profit. The most notable outcome here is that most of age group 1 directly discuss feminism while participants in age group 2 do not. Juliet, Margaret and Ciara of age group 2 indicate that they are aware of what are ultimately profit-oriented motives, but they do not

identify the social relevance or possible reasoning for the appropriation of images of female empowerment.

Postfeminist media texts like these cannot simply be dismissed as depoliticised replications of 'genuine feminism' (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2017), as postfeminism does not equate to feminism's depoliticisation. Rather, it combines critical engagement of earlier feminist movements with modern triumphs of equality, with Brooks (1997) arguing that it is then capable of dismantling patriarchal structures. Sara, Chloe, and Tammy's positive reactions reflect this positively, their acknowledgement of feminism indicates that they are not simply naïve to any profit-motive. They appear optimistic about the presence of alternative constructions of femininity that reject the traditional, in which women are seen as sexualised objects or in domestic environments (Rose, 2001; Cortese, 1999; Sheehan, 2004; Botterill et al, 2015; Fowles, 1996). These participants are conscious of the currency of social movements used in advertising and optimistic about the potential for feminist cosmetic advertising.

4.2.c Positive brand association

All participants at some point in each interview indicated that they believe advertising has little effect on them, with some explaining that they actively do not pay attention to advertisements. Six participants in age group 1 and six in age group 2 said that the No.7 adverts, although enjoyable, would not immediately encourage them to buy the product. Despite this, every participant demonstrated some kind of emotive response to at least one of the advertisements. From age group 2, Amanda (53) stressed her appreciation of the creative and aesthetic elements of the advertisements but asserted that "it wouldn't necessarily make me want to go out and buy the makeup, its quite pretentious really, for what it is". Similarly, Robyn (62) appreciated the landscapes in advert 1, noting that it seemed abstract in relation to the product it was

advertising and for this reason it caught her attention, but would not initiate a purchase. From age group 1, Sara (21) said "I'd probably think oh that's a cool advert and then move on with my day", with Sarah (22) and Phoebe (22) echoing this. Although this demonstrates that both age groups were similarly reluctant to say that advertising had any effect on them, most displayed an emotional response to at least one advert. Advert 4 was the advertisement that elicited positive reactions from all participants. In response to this advert, Margaret (52) explained "it made me quite emotional actually because its true what she says about not wearing makeup… beauty comes from within, you want women to look at you, and feel part of the sisterhood", while Sara (21) said "I'm not doing it [cosmetic application] for a man and that video kind of confirmed that I'm not, I'm just doing it because I enjoy it… yeah, I found it [advert 4] empowering", indicating a positive reception evoking a sense of empowerment. Similarly, Sarah (22) explained that, although she did not feel a strong emotional impact from adverts 1-3, "the last one did spark some emotion, like memories". This implies that this advert in particular had an emotional effect on these participants, indicating positive brand association through emotion that could be drawn on when making future purchase decisions. This relates to Dyer (1982) and Schroder and Vestergaard's (1985) assertion that advertisements employ emotional tactics to elicit responses from viewers, ultimately creating the positive brand association that Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott (2016) state is the main goal of advertising. Lydia (24) noted:

> 'I've always thought that Boots adverts were for female empowerment, like they sometimes play *Here Come the Girls*… I've always remembered them being quite girl power.'

This demonstrates the potential for the lasting impact an advertising campaign can create. During future purchase decisions audiences are likely to draw on the positive feelings they experienced in viewing these No.7, echoing Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott (2016) and

Sheehan's (2004) arguments surrounding positive brand association as discussed earlier. As this data illustrates, during interviews participants reacted emotionally to at least one advert, but every participant was to some extent dismissive that advertising in general has any effect on them. By connecting values and emotions to the products, advertisements aim to link the abstract message of empowerment with the product advertised (Bignell, 2002; Rose, 2001; Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985). Advert 4 in particular appears to have succeeded in this, ultimately evoking positive brand association, even within those insistent that advertising does not effect them.

4.2.d Meaningful makeup

A resounding theme emerging from the responses of all of the participants was the enthusiasm in which they spoke about their reasons for wearing makeup. During the course of the interviews the women revealed much about their personal reasons for using cosmetics, prompted initially by questions but also unfolding throughout the discussion. From age group 2, Sue (52), Margaret (52), Ciara (68) and Juliet (46) expressed very similar notions that they use makeup as it makes them feel more confident, and not to impress anybody else. Sue (52) explained:

> "seeing someone with loads of makeup, even blue lipstick or something experimental (…) next to a woman with not much make up at all, who's to say either one is better than the other, you know?"

This indicates that using cosmetics is an independent, autonomous choice, and it neither adds nor detracts from your value as a person. Margaret (52) noted the traditional notion that women would wear makeup to impress men, asserting that "if my man ever told me, or commented why am I putting makeup on, I would probably even just put a little bit more on". This confirms that she wears it only for herself and not to look attractive for her male partner, opposing the

historic trait in advertising that women aim to look appealing to please men (Schroder and Vestergaard, 1985), and reflecting the slogan in advert 1, 'For You and You Alone'. From age group 1, Phoebe (22), Chloe (22), Tammy (21), Lydia (24) and Sara (21) expressed similar ideas. Phoebe explains that "people used to get a bad rep for using makeup and now that's changed… you can just wear what you want, guys can wear makeup and it's not thought to be weird". Lydia asserts "you shouldn't feel ashamed to want to wear makeup, because everybody knows it's a bit material and it doesn't mean anything". These responses also reflect the slogan in advert 1, 'For You and You Alone'. It relates to the overarching messages of female empowerment within the No.7 adverts, that women can be feminine and use makeup but also empowered, independent and strong, further reflecting the neoliberal postfeminist view as explored earlier. Most participants, as discussed above, were partly sceptical of advertising and sure that they were not easily susceptible to it, but overall their reasoning for using cosmetics was in line with the message of the No.7 advertisements that earlier semiotic analysis uncovered. This illuminates the autonomy of women today, who make purchase decisions for themselves and use makeup for themselves, and who are in charge of their own femininity and conscious of their decisions.

Sarah (22), Tammy (21) and Margaret (52) each noted that when they were younger, they felt it was bad to wear makeup, and that it was a negative thing to seem image-focused, however now they feel makeup is celebrated in society. The transcendence of age grouping in this assertion indicates it a universality to these findings, that a wide range of women can feel empowered through using cosmetics. For Johnston et al. (2016), genuine feminism "rejects compulsory beauty and inspires empowerment by other means" (p.141), but these responses show that women feel empowered by their decision to conform (or indeed to not conform) to beauty trends, thus beauty and empowerment are not mutually exclusive.

Sarah (22) and Tammy (21) identified the proliferation of cosmetics advertising on prominent social media sites including Instagram that have normalised beauty culture in a public arena. This demonstrates that today's media landscape is a notably different arena from that of the time of Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty* in 2004. It is clear that makeup is meaningful for women in 2018 in a way that does not fit the theory of traditional cosmetics advertisements that exhibit limited and traditional confines of femininity, with a lack of active construction female empowerment. These participating women understand that makeup is a choice, but feel it is their own autonomous decision to wear it or not. Gentry et al. (1999) explain as discussed earlier that females have lower self-perceptions of attractiveness than males, but this does not seem to be mirrored in this data. The women are empowered by their choice to use, or not use, cosmetic products, reflecting the messages unveiled through semiotic analysis of these No.7 advertisements.

5. Conclusion

Through semiotic textual analysis and qualitative audience research this study has sought to investigate the construction and reception of female empowerment and femininity in four No.7 cosmetics advertisements. Themes of love and reminiscence are employed to elicit emotional reactions from audiences, whilst the use of unconventional models acts to subvert traditional images of the idealised beauty seen throughout the history of advertising as discussed in section 2. The models are depicted as physically strong, and do not conform to the submissive, sexualised and passive positions of models identified in scholarship (Berger, 1972; Cortese, 1999; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995; Goffman, 1979). As a result, a sense of female empowerment is created through the focus on their abilities and careers rather than just their use of the cosmetic product. Advert 1 also subverts a typical beauty advert trope of separating the model's features into parts, but within the unconventional setting an interesting duality of sexuality and power is introduced. A contemporary depiction of femininity is offered, as it is communicated that women are empowered and made to feel 'ready' through their use of the No.7 products, and they can excel professionally whilst conforming to traditionally feminine trends such as makeup use. Semiotic analysis of these four advertisements reflects the neoliberal postfeminist viewpoint that women can be feminine and use cosmetics, but also be powerful, independent and strong.

Interview analysis revealed that a notable difference between the two participant age groups was the discussion by those in age group 1 of wider social factors that influence the construction of femininity in the advertisements. The majority participants in age group 1 discuss feminist themes and some ground their assertions in the current feminist climate. Age group 2, although some discussed the ultimately profit-oriented motive of the advertisements,

they did not articulate to the same extent the social resonance or possible reasoning for the appropriation of images of female empowerment.

Some of age group 1 felt they could not relate to the women featured in the advertisements because of the difference in their age the deliberate emphasis on their occupational achievements, whilst every participant in age group 2 said that they could relate to at least one of the models. This indicates that age-association is a significant factor in advertising to women, in that when models are of similar age to the targeted audience it increases the chance that they feel they can relate to the model, increasing the possibility of positive brand association.

All participants interviewed identified the feeling of empowerment that makeup gives them when they choose to wear it, as well as the feeling of autonomy they feel they have in this decision. Each dismissed the idea that these advertisements would directly influence them to purchase No.7 products, however all participants exhibited an emotional response to at least one of the advertisements. These women are active in their advertising consumption and believe themselves to be able to filter messaging to create meanings that suit them, reflecting Hall's (1980) negotiated audience reading that depends on social context of individuals. As discussed earlier, Murray (2013) argues that Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty* demanded neoliberal self-improvement to benefit the corporation; however, through combining interviews with semiotic analysis this study finds that women seem to genuinely feel like cosmetic use is an autonomous and empowering decision. No.7's efforts to construct female empowerment and femininity successfully create positive brand association as demonstrated in the participants' emotional responses in section 4.2.d. These advertisements, whilst conforming to the traditional Western notion that women should care about their image, open

up a broader spectrum of what beauty, femininity and empowerment can mean in the current age – 21st century women in the UK can be simultaneously feminine, image conscious and powerful.

If these adverts are a manifestation of neoliberal postfeminism, but bring empowerment and happiness to women, allowing them to enjoy and embrace their femininity, this study argues that this is a positive reflection of the current climate of female agency and empowerment in 2018. Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017), and Tasker and Negra (2007) raise the notion that this standpoint champions the perspectives of western, middle class, white, heterosexual women, which this study recognises, however it also realises that advertisers will inevitably conform to the zeitgeists of the current time. Certainly, postfeminism does not intrinsically signify a depoliticisation of feminism, instead it combines critical engagement of earlier feminist movements with modern societal triumphs of equality, making it capable of dismantling patriarchal structures (Brooks, 1997), and contending that women are empowered by wearing makeup (Aubert et al., 2007) – as this study suggests, it is 'For You and You Alone'. For those perturbed that advertising manipulates images of feminism as means of profit-generation (Goldman, 1992; Cortese, 1999), this study has aimed to illuminate the potential for the construction of empowering feminist messages in advertising. These No.7 advertisements pave the way for a more representative advertising landscape as well as more socially conscious buyers through progressive, unconventional and ultimately celebratory cosmetics advertising.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Participant information and interview details

Age group 1 (21-24)

Name*	Age	Interview length
Tammy	21	26.01
Sarah	22	26.37
Chloe	22	25.13
Lydia	24	28.36
Sara	21	36.49
Daisy	21	29.50
Phoebe	22	39.21

Age group 2 (age 46 – 68)

Name*	Age	Interview length
Margaret	52	33.32
Juliet	46	19.51
Susanne	59	24.08
Robyn	62	35.17
Ciara	68	37.29
Sue	52	26.45
Amanda	53	26.52

*All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants

7.2 Interview Questions

1. Do you use makeup? What makeup do you buy?

2. What influences your makeup purchasing decisions? How do you make your choices?

3. What brands do you use? Do you shop with No.7? Who do you think No.7 is aimed at?

   - *Adverts are played to participants*

4. Have you seen these adverts before?

5. What did you think of them when you first saw them? Did you like them?

6. How do these adverts make you feel?

7. Which of these adverts is your favourite, and why?

8. Do you think these adverts are trying to communicate something?

9. What message do you think the brand are trying to express about themselves?

10. Do you feel like you can relate to the women in the adverts?

11. Are you more likely to shop with No.7 after seeing these adverts?

12. How do these adverts compare to other female-targeted adverts you have seen recently?

13. Do you think other make up brands should change their advertising techniques?

14. Do you have anything you would like to add?

7.3 Participant information sheet

Research Questions:
1. **How do cosmetics advertisements construct femininity and ideas of female empowerment?**
2. **How do targeted women respond to these advertisements?**

You are invited to participate in this research project. Before you decide whether to participate or not, it is important for you to understand what this research will involve and why it is being carried out. Please take time to read the following information and to discuss it with others if you wish. If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, please ask me. Take time to decide if you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this project?
No.7 uses advertising to send ideological messages, using models who are not models by profession. This study is a semiotic analysis of No.7 advertisements, combined with interviews with members of their target market to assess the reception of their advertisements. Age group 1 includes women between 21 and 24 years of age, while age group 2 includes women between 46 and 68 years of age. The aim is to evaluate how these advertisements construct a particular version of femininity and female empowerment, and how women in their target audience understand them.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen as you fall into the target market of No.7 products. As a female in the 21-24 or 46-68 age range, your age and gender make you a relevant subject for this research project.

What will happen/will I have to do if I take part?
Should you wish to participate in the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions, during which you will be shown four advertisements. The interview should last no more than an hour, and you are free to stop at any time. You will not need to discuss any personal information. The information is relevant because it will help to gauge how these advertisements are received by the brand's target market.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?
The interviews will be audio recorded, which will require your permission. I will use a digital recorder to record our meeting. I will do this so that I am not distracted by trying to remember what you have said in the interview, and I will solely use it to help me write about what we have discussed. No one else will have access to the recording – I will store it on a password-protected device, and no one but myself will know the password. The recording will be deleted at the end of this study. Some of your words will be transcribed for use within my study, but your name will be changed to a pseudonym of your choice to protect your identity.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The nature of the interview questions will revolve around topics such as female empowerment, makeup use and feminism. If you feel sensitive or uncomfortable about any of these topics you can opt out of answering any questions that you do not wish to answer, and you will be able to terminate the interview at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Although there may be no immediate benefits to taking part in this interview, there is the aim for increased discussion and understanding of how effective advertising is in communicating positive messaging.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this study, this is entirely down to you to decide. If you do decide to participate, you may keep the information sheet provided, and will need to sign the consent form. You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and all of your information along with the recorded interview will be deleted.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Throughout this study, all of your information will be kept anonymous. Your identity will be protected by a pseudonym, and your interview recording will be deleted after the study is completed. The research will be used in my dissertation which will be read by professionals at the University of Leeds.

7.4 Participant consent form

Dissertation Title: How do No.7 adverts construct female empowerment and does this resonate with women in the UK?

Please initial next to each statement if you agree:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet explaining the research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

- I understand that, should I not wish to answer a question, I am able to decline.

- I consent to my responses being used in the study anonymously. I understand that my input in this study will remain anonymous for the duration of, and beyond, the length of this study.

- I understand that relevant sections of my responses used in the study will be looked at by teaching staff at the University of Leeds where appropriate.

- I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of participant:

Participant's signature:

Date:

Name of researcher:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant. Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.