

## Resistance to Profem Employer Messages in Talent Attraction: The Case of Employer Femvertising Campaigns on LinkedIn

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This study examines the phenomenon of resistance toward employer femvertising messages among recent university graduates. Building upon existing literature on employer branding, femvertising, and antifeminist resistances, this study contributes to existing scholarship by providing an exploration into resistances toward those advertising initiatives that aim to challenge gender stereotypes and promote workplace inclusivity. Qualitative data from two focus groups involving 16 participants was analyzed through thematic analysis. Results indicate ambivalence, as profemale messages generated resistance, while participants still valued companies highlighting favorable conditions for women's professional development. The resistance primarily involved questioning the credibility of the companies behind the ads and doubting the genuineness of their gender equality intentions. The findings suggest specific recommendations for implementing an efficient employer femvertising strategy, such as providing specific data and measures supporting gender equality, aligning messages with company values, and avoiding performative support. These guidelines would enable companies to effectively communicate their gender equality initiatives, creating persuasive messages to achieve their goal of attracting female talent.

*Keywords: employer femvertising, employer branding, femvertising, antifeminist resistance, profem employer*

In the contemporary landscape of talent acquisition, organizations are increasingly adopting innovative strategies to attract female employees and foster a workplace culture that challenges gender norms (Ronda & Azanza, 2021). One of such emergent strategies for female talent attraction used in employer brand building is referred to as employer femvertising. Employer femvertising involves integrating advertising initiatives into an organization's employer branding strategy, specifically designed to combat advertising stereotypes, obstacles, and address challenges that women face in the workplace to capture attention and encourage them to apply to a company where they are empowered as professionals (PwC, 2017; Ronda & Azanza, 2021). A previous study

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by Ronda and Azanza (2021) delved into employer femvertising campaigns published by top employers, categorizing them into five distinct categories: gender equality, female leadership, inclusive recruitment, female talent growth, and work-life balance. These narratives are strategically targeted to resonate with millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and generation Z women (born after 1997) who have recently entered the labor market (Drake, 2017; Henard & Rossetti, 2014). However, despite the increasing prevalence of employer femvertising, the research addressing how its target audience perceives it and responds to it is scarce. In particular, the existence of resistances toward the utilization of employer femvertising messages is still unexplored. The examination of resistances toward employer femvertising messages offers an opportunity to refine and enhance the effectiveness of employer branding. By exploring recent university graduates' perspectives, we can gain valuable insights into the complexities of employer branding strategies. In the unexplored realm of employer femvertising, studying the resistance toward such messages is not about rejecting the effectiveness of the approach but rather about refining those employer branding and femvertising strategies for greater impact and inclusivity.

The phenomenon of resistance has been a subject of research across different disciplines. In the field of gender equality and feminist discourses, resistance has been found to adopt diverse forms, attitudes, and responses. Existing literature acknowledges that antifeminist resistances are characterized by both individual and collective opposition to the social changes brought by the feminist movement. These strategies range from passive strategies aimed at maintaining the status quo, such as denial or minimizing the scope of gender inequality issues, to more active backlash involving aggressive and attacking responses (Flood, Dragiewicz, & Pease, 2020).

The existing literature on consumer attitudes toward femvertising campaigns (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Menéndez Menéndez, 2019a) has identified several forms of resistance to the gender equality propositions conveyed by these campaigns. This leads to the hypothesis that analogous resistance may arise in the context of employer femvertising messages. Therefore, audiences may show resistance to these messages by questioning the company's true intentions and perceiving the firm as using feminist discourse for commercial purposes.

The objective of this research is to test these hypotheses, responding to the following research questions:

*RQ1: What forms of antifeminist resistances do recent university graduates show toward employer femvertising?*

*RQ2: What are the positive perceptions of recent university graduates about employer femvertising?*

Although employer branding, femvertising, and resistances have been subject to research, the integration of these concepts has received limited attention. This study seeks to build on the insights from consumer-oriented femvertising and resistances studies to extend its focus to the employment context, filling that critical gap in the literature and leading a positive change in workplace and employer images. Through this examination, we can identify potential pitfalls, unintended consequences, and areas for improvement, thus contributing to a more balanced perspective on the use of femvertising in employer

branding strategies. By achieving the research objectives, this study aims to contribute valuable insights for the development of more effective and inclusive employer femvertising strategies that help organizations better align their messaging with the values and expectations of their target audience, fostering a more inclusive and supportive workplace environment.

## Literature Review

### *Employer Branding and Female Talent Attraction*

In this study, employer femvertising is defined as a form of advertising integrated into a firm's employer branding strategy (Ronda & Azanza, 2021). Employer branding comprises the strategic efforts undertaken by companies to cultivate a positive image as desirable workplaces to become the preferred choice for potential employees (Edwards, 2010; Ronda, Valor, & Abril, 2018). The concept of employer brand was first defined as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187), and the term has been subsequently redefined by other authors, highlighting new dimensions such as ethical, developmental, experiential, and social factors (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Ewing, Pitt, De Bussy, & Berthon, 2002; Ronda et al., 2018). An attractive package of economic rewards is a critical factor that makes companies appealing to potential employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996); however, in addition to these tangible benefits, there is also a high value placed on the intangible benefits associated with the employment experience. These intangible benefits include career prospects, work-family balance arrangements, and workplace harassment management policies, among others (Edwards, 2010), contributing to employee fulfillment in both their personal and professional lives (Meeks & Howe, 2020; Ronda, Abril, & Valor, 2020).

Advertising the employer brand is crucial in reaching out to potential candidates to attract and retain highly skilled talent (Berthon et al., 2005). These advertising efforts aim to improve candidates' perceptions of a company and highlight key attributes that firms want to emphasize (Collins & Stevens, 2002). Some advertising strategies employed to enhance employer brand image include TV campaigns, entering external rankings like great place to work or the world's most attractive employers (Universum, 2023), or professional campaigns on data-driven platforms such as Glassdoor.com or LinkedIn (Awan, 2017). These tools have made it easier for employees to evaluate and compare benefit packages online by helping them make an informed decision about their preferred employers (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Implementing employer branding strategies can lead to various positive outcomes for firms. These include attracting the best talent, reducing employee acquisition costs, improving employee relations, lowering turnover rates and costs by enhancing retention, and even offering lower salaries compared with businesses with weaker employer brands (Ritson, 2002).

One of the significant challenges faced by companies with well-established employer brands is attracting female talent (Amaram, 2019). Women tend to apply less to specific business areas, such as finance and consulting (Barbulescu & Bidwell, 2013), technology (Prescott & Bogg, 2011), and science (Katila & Meriläinen, 2002). Women also seem to apply less for managerial and technical positions (Barbulescu & Bidwell, 2013; Peterson, 2010; Ronda & Azanza, 2021). In addition, it has been observed that the algorithms employed by leading job platforms exhibit a gender bias, resulting in a lower likelihood

for women to be exposed to advertisements for high-paid job opportunities (*The Guardian*, 2015; Reuters, 2018). Scholarship has pointed out that female job seekers consider organizations with effective diversity management practices more appealing workplaces (Ng & Burke, 2005). Similarly, PwC's report in 2017 focused on successful gender-inclusive recruitment and emphasized the importance of considering organizational procedures and career advancement opportunities. There has been a great deal of subsequent research into this issue, revealing that women place higher importance on workplace relationships, working conditions, internal customer orientation, employee growth and development opportunities, participative decision making, and social responsibility (Bellou, Rigopoulou, & Kehagias, 2015), and that they prioritize social value, market value, application value, and cooperation value dimensions more than men (Alniaçık & Alniaçık, 2012). Thus, it is crucial to highlight the significance of such practices in attracting female talent. Having incentive programs and policies supporting family friendly initiatives, tackling workplace discrimination and stereotypes, and offering flexible work arrangements can attract female talent to the workforce (Amaram, 2019). This conclusion highlights the importance of advertising to the labor market a work environment that is inclusive and accommodating for all employees.

### ***Employer Femvertising Messages***

Femvertising, or feminist advertising, was coined in 2014 by SheKnows, a lifestyle website, to describe advertising that challenges traditional gender stereotypes faced by women. This advertising mainly targets women and aims to promote qualities that empower women and advocate for gender equality. Female empowerment has been a key element in feminist ideologies that strive to achieve gender equality by inspiring women to take control of their identities and choices. This academic article defines employer femvertising as "advertising that employs pro-female messages and imagery to empower women and girls" (SheKnows Media, as cited in Drake, 2017, p. 594).

According to Rodríguez Pérez and Gutiérrez (2017), femvertising campaigns have grown significantly over the last two decades. Major brands are increasingly using these campaigns, from the Virginia Slims campaign in the 1960s to Dove's campaign for real beauty in 2004. Femvertising aims to use feminist values and female empowerment to promote brand consumption (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017; Feng, Cheng, & He, 2019). Such ads have been commended for challenging gender stereotypes in the media and creating awareness about issues affecting women and girls of all ages while empowering them (Drake, 2017). The reception theory can explain the positive impact of femvertising highlighting the audience's active role in interpreting mediated messages and adapting them to their circumstances (Feng et al., 2019). Femvertising, which deviates from the usual portrayal of women in advertising, has been found to have positive effects on its intended audience (Akestam et al., 2017). Studies have shown that femvertising can positively affect its intended audience (Feng et al., 2019). Female consumers, in particular, are more likely to engage with messages conveyed by brands that use femvertising, resulting in more favorable attitudes toward the brand and increased purchase intentions (Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). Brands that use femvertising messages also benefit from an improved reputation and increased profits, as they are perceived to align with consumer beliefs (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Drake, 2017).

According to a recent study by Ronda and Azanza (2021), companies are using femvertising in their marketing strategies and how they present themselves as employers to attract female professionals.

The research suggests that the advancements women have made in their careers and society have made them more open to marketing that represents their aspirations (Sivulka, 2009). This trend has led to increased employment advertising campaigns that aim to empower women to overcome the challenges they face in their professional lives because of gender inequality. Even though women still encounter professional setbacks and stigma associated with stereotypical industries, pay gaps, and a lack of work-family balance, most companies today have implemented policies to address these issues (Ronda et al., 2018).

Traditional femvertising campaigns have proven successful and empowering, especially for younger audiences (Drake, 2017; Henard & Rossetti, 2014). However, despite women's growing economic and political power, no research has been conducted on whether employer brands effectively engage in advertising campaigns for female talent. Addressing the barriers preventing these campaigns is crucial, considering women's improved economic and political power and their integration into the workforce in developed countries (Drake, 2017). The changing demographic needs a shift in employment advertising to better resonate with this demographic, particularly in light of the millennial generation's demands for a better work-life balance and equal career opportunities for both men and women.

### ***Discursive Antifeminist Resistances***

The political movement of feminism focuses on understanding and changing the inequalities suffered by women in all spheres of society (Girard, 2009; Mohajan, 2022) on equal access for women and men to the different means of exercising power in society (Cifuentes & Guerra, 2021). And an inevitable reaction to this struggle for progressive social change is discursive resistance, understood by Flood et al. (2020) as active opposition, both individual and collective, diverse and contextual, formal and informal, to gender equality initiatives. "Antifeminist forms of resistance against changes and advances brought about by feminism are cyclical and parallel to the history of the women's movement" (Pérez-Tirado, 2023, p. 31). Efforts to enact change are routinely resisted technically and normatively (Powell, Ah-King, & Hussenius, 2018; Smolović Jones, Smolović Jones, Taylor, & Yarrow, 2021). And that resistance is ubiquitously practiced by managers, workers, and trade unions (Collison & Collison, 1996; Smolović Jones et al., 2021).

Antifeminist resistance can range from passive blocking techniques that aim to maintain the *status quo* through strategies to minimize or co-opt change efforts to active and aggressive opposition to restore the old order. The spectrum of resistance encountered when promoting gender equality includes the following forms, from more active to more passive (VicHealth, 2018): backlash, characterized by aggressive and attacking responses; repression, involves reversing or dismantling a change initiative; co-option, entails using the language of progressive frameworks and goals for reactionary purposes; appropriation, involves simulating change while secretly undermining it; appeasement, includes efforts to appease or placate those advocating for change to limit its impact; inaction, signifies a refusal to implement a change initiative; repudiation, involves a refusal to acknowledge responsibility and denial, entails denying the problem's existence or the case's credibility for change.

In their study of resistance to gender equality in discourse, Flood and colleagues (2020) state that denying an inequality problem or the need to change the situation is the least active but the most common form of resistance. Resistance to gender equality through denial can take the form of different actions:

minimizing the scope of the problem or redefining it so that it does not exist; blaming the problem on those who are its victims; denying the credibility of the message because it is supposedly irrational, false, or exaggerated since gender equality has already been achieved; attacking the credibility of the agents of change by challenging their motives and marginalizing them as a particular interest group; and, finally, reversing the problem by adopting a victim mentality (Flood et al., 2020). In this last type of resistance, men feel disadvantaged and discriminated against when compared with women (Bacchi, 2005; Lingard, 1998; Maddison, 1999a, 1999b; Meer, 2013). This is known as reverse discrimination. Men who display this kind of antifeminist resistance understand gender equality as giving equal treatment to men and women and not as the need to employ affirmative actions that redistribute resources, power, and opportunities, allowing women to overcome the effects of discrimination, which produces an asymmetrical relationship (Cifuentes & Guerra, 2021; Shanti, 2015; Suárez & Ganga-Contreras, 2022).

### ***Resistance to the Appropriation of Feminist Activism***

Femvertising campaigns have been shown to positively impact the target audience, as previously mentioned when discussing this type of message. However, suspicion also arises about the possible instrumentalization of feminism for commercial purposes (Menéndez Menéndez, 2019a). There is a tendency in the existing literature about femvertising to rule out this commercial use of feminist narratives as manipulative and a hijacking of feminist values to increase revenue for corporations (Menéndez Menéndez, 2019a, 2019b); often, the empowering messages are meaningless and empty (Jalakas, 2016). The more common view is skeptical (Lazar, 2014; McRobbie, 2009), seeing it as neutralizing and co-opting feminism and as commodity feminism (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991), while leaving the traditional portrayal of femininity intact (Lazar, 2009); the feminism in advertising and media is not accurate, thus lacking the potential to create real change (Gill, 2007; Jalakas, 2016; McRobbie, 2009). It is *faux* feminism packed to fit the market; the corporations gain by using it, not the female consumers (Jalakas, 2016; Lazar, 2006; Murray, 2013). Baxter (2015) labels the latest wave of women-empowerment advertisements as *faux* activism. Because few companies have a business or a mission explicitly related to gender equality, corporate social efforts related to women's empowerment have been and continue to be viewed as insincere (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016). However, some have considered the evolution of the dissemination of feminism to be positive (Sirr, 2015), as media images help empower women in front of larger audiences (Jalakas, 2016). Commodified feminism can function as a productive introduction to the fundamental feminist values of equality (Hains, 2014; Karlyn, 2006; Scott, 2000).

Concerning audience reactions toward this phenomenon, Jalakas (2016), after conducting in-depth interviews in her study with 14 women aged 16–35 who had watched videos of femvertising campaigns, suggested that audience reactions to this phenomenon cannot be easily generalized. On the contrary, women extract different meanings from the advertisements, fitting them into their contexts and experiences. They engage critically, judging the advertisements' values based on their previous knowledge of the brands and products.

The current body of literature on consumer attitudes toward femvertising campaigns thus demonstrates how there is a hopeful optimism that packaging and commodifying feminism in this way may hold the potential to enlighten nonfeminists, but there also exists skepticism about the commercial intent

of this (Jalakas, 2016). Considering whether similar reactions also occur in response to employer femvertising messages adds an interesting perspective to our research, particularly as this approach has not previously been addressed in existing literature.

### **Method**

This study employs a qualitative design utilizing focus groups and thematic analysis to examine recent graduates' discourses. The research methodology includes vignettes in the form of LinkedIn posts to facilitate the focus group sessions.

By adopting a qualitative approach, the focus groups create a safe and supportive environment where participants can freely express their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and antifeminist resistances without fear of judgment. These group discussions provide valuable insights into social interactions and the significance attributed to particular behaviors (Duggleby, 2005). Moreover, focus groups offer a cost-effective and efficient means of data collection, allowing for simultaneous interviews with multiple participants (Connelly, 2015; Krueger & Casey, 2014).

Thematic analysis (Duggleby, 2005) will be employed to analyze the data collected from the focus group discussions. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis approach that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the focus group data (Duggleby, 2005; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This technique involves inductive reasoning, themes are developed through the analysis of data collected from participants (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and it is different from traditional hypothesis testing, which follows a deductive approach. The thematic analysis allows for expanding knowledge in a particular area by examining participant data and generating a theory based on these observations. This approach is particularly suitable for research studies that seek to explore phenomena that have not been extensively studied in the literature, such as antifeminist resistance (Wilson Scott, 2004). Therefore, the use of thematic analysis in this study aligns with the research aims and objectives, as they aim to explore the existence and taxonomy of antifeminist resistance in the context of employer branding campaigns by understanding potential candidates' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs.

This study adopts Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis because of its straightforward and practical structure. Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between two levels of themes: semantic and latent. Semantic themes focus on the explicit or surface meanings of the data without seeking to go beyond what participants have stated. These themes involve describing and interpreting what is said. In this study, the semantic themes sought were the feedback explicitly given by the students toward the employer femvertising vignettes presented. Latent themes delve deeper into the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and ideologies shaping the semantic content of the data. They examine the hidden meanings beyond what has been explicitly stated. In the context of this study, the latent themes represent the antifeminist resistance that resulted from the student discourses. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide was followed:

1. Becoming familiar with the data: The focus groups transcripts were read and reread to gain a thorough understanding of the content. Notes were taken, and ideas for coding were marked for subsequent phases.
2. Generating initial codes: The data were manually organized meaningfully and systematically by coding the student responses to the vignettes. Relevant pieces of information were identified and labeled through coding. Three researchers independently coded a transcript, discussed their codes, and made necessary modifications before moving on to the rest of the transcripts.
3. Searching for semantic themes: Attitudes and resistance discourses were identified based on patterns that captured something significant or interesting about the data and research question. The researchers examined the codes and grouped them into semantic themes.
4. Reviewing semantic themes: The identified semantic benefit themes were reviewed, modified, and developed.
5. Defining latent themes: This phase involved refining the benefit themes to capture their essence as antifeminist forms of resistance.
6. Write-up: Following the analysis, the results were summarized, including a description of the data, the identified themes, and their relevance to the research question.

### ***Participant Sample***

A total of 16 recent European university graduates participated in the focus groups. The participants for this study were selected at a top university in Spain, targeting recent graduates from generation Z actively seeking employment or internships. The inclusion criteria included men and women aged 18 and above who are starting to apply for a job or an internship. Individuals targeting a civil servant career were excluded because of their unique experiences with job selection processes that differ from those in the private sector. Participants from different academic backgrounds were engaged to offer some diversity. Participants were recruited by the researchers in person or through e-mail. Participants were divided into two focus groups of eight people, four women and four men in each of them. The participants selected for this study were within the 21- to 23-year-old age range. Each participant held a bachelor's degree in business management, modern languages, engineering, journalism, psychology, or tourism.

### ***Procedure***

This study uses two focus groups to increase the reliability and validity of the data collected. Using more than one focus group, the study captures a wide range of opinions and experiences from different participants, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Morgan, 1997). Additionally, using multiple groups allows for exploring any variations or similarities in the data across different groups, which can help further refine the findings (Duggleby, 2005). Finally, using multiple focus groups allows for identifying and analyzing any inconsistencies or outliers in the data, which can be particularly useful in qualitative research (Barbour, 2007). The discussions took place in a safe and supportive environment, utilizing open-ended questions to encourage participants to freely share their experiences and perspectives (Krueger & Casey, 2014).



The researchers moderated the two focus group discussions. Before the discussions began, the participants completed a questionnaire to gather demographic information. During these two focus groups, the participants were shown vignettes featuring real employer femvertising posts published by top international employers' companies on LinkedIn in the first quarter of 2020 (Table 1). As a social network, LinkedIn is widely regarded as the most effective platform for recruitment processes and job applications. It has become increasingly essential for job seekers to have a LinkedIn profile, while companies also actively participate on the platform to attract potential candidates (Zide, Elman, & Shahani-Denning, 2014).

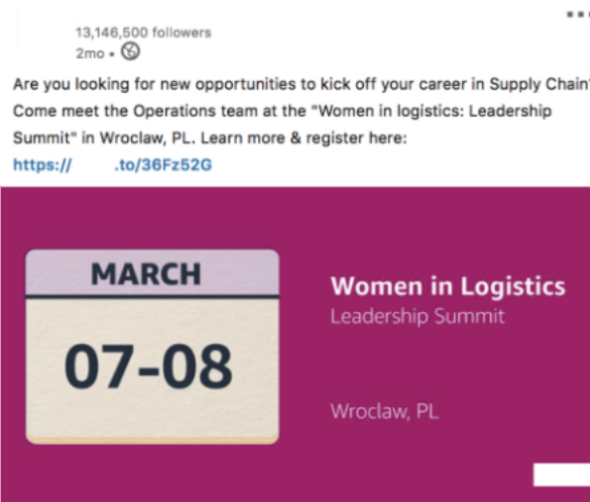
**Table 1. Examples of Vignettes Shown to Participants.**

Employer femvertising category	Vignette shown in the LinkedIn post
Gender Equality	

(Salesforce, n.d.)

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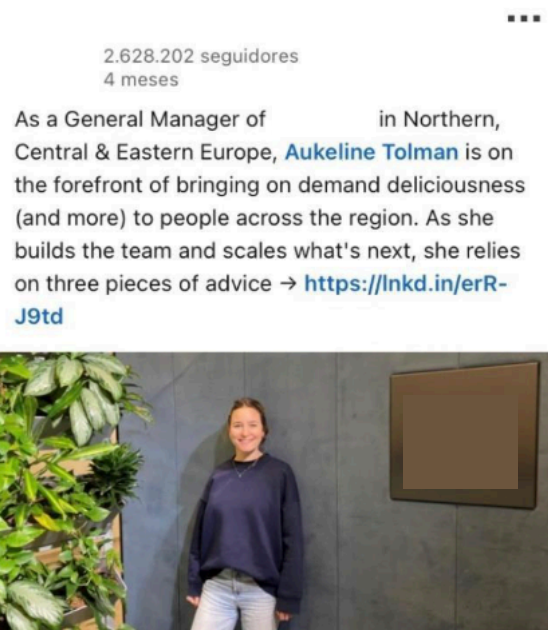
Inclusive recruitment



(Amazon, n.d.)

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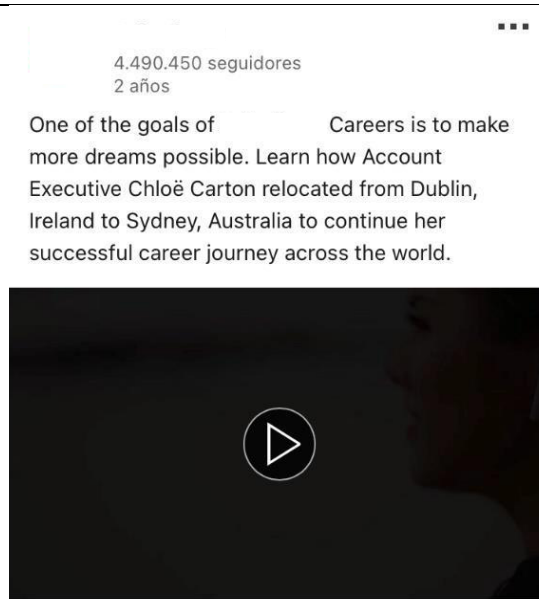
Female leadership



(Uber, n.d.)

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**Female talent growth**

(Salesforce, n.d.)

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**Work-life balance**

(Amazon, n.d.)

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The facilitator used an open-ended and nonleading guide, allowing the participants to bring up any topics. In the focus group, three posts per category were presented without identifying the company, and participants were given two minutes before initiating the debate. The facilitator asked questions such as, "What do you think of these posts? What do they have in common? What do you think the company aims to achieve with this type of post? Why do you think the company has made these posts? What do you infer about the companies from these posts? What does it reveal about the work conducted in those companies? If you saw these posts on LinkedIn, would you feel that they are directed toward you? (Why do you believe so?) How would seeing this type of post influence your decision to work for that company?" After examining all the categories, the participants were asked if they thought the messages addressed any specific issues and what were their general opinions about them. The facilitator continuously encouraged participant elaboration and group input by using probing questions, such as, "Could you elaborate on that?" and "What are the opinions of the rest of the group on the subject?" Focus group interviews lasted 40 to 60 minutes and were conducted in Spanish.

### ***Data Analysis***

The discussions were audio and video recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis to identify patterns in participants' perceptions of employer femvertising messages to attract female talent. The three researchers analyzed the transcribed data from the focus group discussions through a systematic coding process, where codes were assigned to the different themes arising from the analysis. Each transcript was examined to identify those responses related to the research questions. Data were analyzed in the original language, and the coding process was informed by the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

### **Results**

#### ***Research Question 1. Resistance to Employer Femvertising Messages.***

Through our qualitative content analysis of the participants' discussions in the focus groups, we identified different types of resistance (themes) to employer femvertising messages. Table 2 includes these kinds of resistance, along with a clear indication of the specific category of employer femvertising to which each form of resistance relates. Additionally, we have included relevant example quotes that illustrate each type of resistance.

The first form of resistance involves a lack of belief in the message sender. For example, one participant indicated: "It doesn't convey anything to me. I read it and it seems fine, but I just can't believe it." This distrust can stem from several reasons: (1) Questioning their motives behind undertaking feminist initiatives. Participants perceive employers as appropriating feminist activism solely to attract female talent without genuinely believing in the cause. They view their actions as insincere, intended to create an impression of commitment to gender equality. Some participants referred to this behavior as "posturing":

On LinkedIn, there is a lot of posturing. Presenting it as a plus, when it should be inherent in the company's values and the employee's conditions, seems a bit odd to me. They say it not because they consider it important but to enhance the company's image. (Female participant, 22 years old).

The posts aim to improve the company's image, often described by participants as "washing its image." One of them mentioned the term "purplewashing." (2) Perceiving a mismatch between the company and the cause, where participants believe that situations of inequality may still exist within the company. (3) Lack of confidence in the companies' abilities to change inequality since those with the power to act are mainly men. Example quotes illustrate participants' skepticism about the sincerity of employers' concerns for women and their doubts about fulfilling promises made in LinkedIn posts. This form of resistance was observed across all the categories of employer femvertising messages.

The depreciation of the scope of the inequality problem characterizes the second form of resistance. This was noticed when participants were shown messages concerning work-life balance. On the one hand, example quotes express disappointment toward campaigns that bring attention to women's work-life balance, as it should already be an inherent aspect of the professional sphere in companies and not require explicit highlighting. On the other hand, the age of the participants in the focus groups led them to perceive this gender equality initiative as unimportant; it would not be a factor that would influence their decision to apply for a job in a company.

The third kind of resistance arises from women, who perceive that the visibility of female achievements as exceptional highlights the ongoing inequality women still experience in companies compared with men. Example quotes underline the sadness expressed by some individuals who view the need for companies to showcase the validity and success of women as an indicator of underlying inequality within organizations. This resistance was observed in employer femvertising messages focused on female leadership and talent growth.

Female participants solely expressed the fourth type of resistance to messages in which cases of women whose family lives had been favored by initiatives carried out by the companies were published. By specifically targeting these initiatives toward women, female participants perceive that it implicitly communicates that the situations to be improved—work-life balance—do not pertain to men.

**Table 2. Resistances Identified.**

<b>Resistances</b>	<b>Employer femvertising category</b>		<b>Example quotes</b>
1. Questioning the credibility of change agents	Challenging the motives for undertaking that initiative.	Inclusive recruitment Work-life balance Female leadership Female talent growth	Participant 1: <i>I believe there is not really genuine concern for women. The advertising might look nice, but I would need to see what happens behind the scenes to determine if it is actually fulfilled or not.</i>
	Perceiving a mismatch between the company and	Work-life balance Female leadership	Participant 4: <i>I feel like they're selling me the</i>

	the cause: perceiving that inequality between women and men may still occur within the company.	Female talent growth	<i>idea that I will find gender equality values within the company, but when I actually get there, it's just a facade for selling purposes and not the reality.</i>
	Lack of confidence in the message sender's ability to address and correct the attitudes/situations of inequality in the company, as those who have the power to act are mostly men.	Work-life balance Female leadership Female talent growth	Participant 6: <i>In many cases, it is very difficult (for the inequality) to be corrected because the one who has the power to correct these attitudes is a man.</i>
2. Minimizing the scope of the problem.		Work-life balance	Participant 10: <i>I find it unfortunate that there are campaigns just to bring visibility to women's work after having a baby when this is something obvious.</i>
3. Questioning the positive visibility of women.		Female leadership Female talent growth	Participant 12: <i>I find it really sad that companies have to dedicate posts to women to prove that we are valid and successful when it's something that should be taken into account from the beginning. That reflects an inequality within the companies.</i>
4. Opposing directing an initiative exclusively toward women because it implies that the situation to be improved pertains solely to them.		Work-life balance	Participant 9: <i>There are no posts for a man after paternity leave. They forget that children also have fathers. But of course, the emphasis is always</i>

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*on women because it seems like they are the only ones who face more repercussions, more consequences, while fathers are not given that role of being a father.*

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**Research Question 2. Positive Perceptions Toward Employer Femvertising Messages.**

Table 3 provides an overview of the themes related to the participants' positive perceptions toward employer femvertising. The table includes example quotes illustrating the participants' recognition of employer femvertising to promote equality, empower women, address male-dominated industries, and create an attractive workplace.

About contribution to gender equality, participants perceived that the companies using employer femvertising might reduce the gender gap and implement policies to achieve equality. Concerning female employment promotion, participants observed that the messages might attract female talent in male-dominated industries, making them more appealing. Finally, participants recognized that seeing employer femvertising posts may make the company more attractive to them because of the clear messages toward gender equality. In one of the focus groups, the employer femvertising messages showing specific initiatives of the company to encourage gender equality were perceived positively by all the participants, and no resistance was identified.

**Table 3. Positive Perceptions.**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Example quotes</b>
Contributes to gender equality	<i>They are trying to promote social inclusion and women's empowerment.</i>
Promotes female employment	<i>They are promoting women's work in a sector that is male-dominated.</i>
Makes the workplace attractive	<i>I prefer coming across these messages and job offers rather than others where it's clear that there are no inclusion or promotion opportunities for women.</i>

**Conclusion**

This study marks an exploratory investigation into the phenomenon of resistances toward the emerging strategy of employer femvertising among recent university graduates, with a particular focus on generation Z. Despite the growing scholarly interest in the last decade about both employer branding and antifeminist resistances, a notable research gap exists in combining these two fields.

The primary aim of this study was to examine the attitudes of recent university graduates toward employer femvertising, exploring whether they exhibited any resistance to messages encompassing

initiatives for gender equality within companies. The findings reveal ambivalent reactions. Employer femvertising messages generated notable resistance among the participants; however, individuals still acknowledged the positive aspects of companies highlighting favorable conditions for the professional development of women and supporting gender equality as a strategy to attract female talent.

The resistance expressed by more participants, both men and women, was about the credibility of change agents, also identified by Flood and colleagues (2020) in the spectrum of resistance encountered when promoting gender equality. The context in which these messages are issued, a business and employment-focused social media platform, gives them intentionality outside the cause of feminism itself, and this generates suspicion among recipients about their instrumentalization to obtain other objectives, such as improving the company's image.

Participants in our study expressed concerns about the message's trustworthiness because of the appropriation of feminism for commercial purposes. In the advertising literature, femvertising has also been criticized for strategically appropriating feminist values, and putting their political potential at the service of brands (Gill, 2007; Lazar, 2006; Marcus Reker, 2016). Menéndez Menéndez (2019a), accepting this possibility that brands use femvertising messages only for commercial purposes and not for social change, proposed not to speak of elaborating feminist advertising but of generating feminism from advertising; to construct advertising messages capable of encouraging the public to reflect on these from a feminist perspective and to act accordingly, what she refers to as *profem advertising*. Based on our findings, we agree with the author and recommend using the term *profem employer messages* instead of *employer femvertising* in the companies' communication strategies to highlight the focus on social change.

Together with this appropriation of feminism, the other causes of the lack of credibility lie in the potential contradiction between the companies' identities and the employer messages being promoted and in doubting that the companies, directed mainly by men, really implement measures to advance gender equality.

Employer femvertising messages did not generate reverse discrimination. Male participants did not feel discriminated against by women because of the policies promoted by companies to achieve gender equality in the job performance highlighted in the posts. However, they did provoke an adverse reaction from women. They consider that the exclusive visibility of women's achievements makes them exceptional. Likewise, proposing initiatives specifically aimed at improving women's situations was seen by some participants as isolating the issues and making them appear as if they only concern women. For instance, participants questioned why no posts were aimed at everyone or highlighted opportunities for men to achieve work-life balance within the company. Some posts were also interpreted as presenting an advantage for women because of the assumption that women are solely responsible for childcare and household duties.

This study contributes valuable insights into the underlying resistance dynamics shaping the perceptions of gender-gender-inclusive employer branding strategies and provides an improved understanding of how resistance might influence the effectiveness of such initiatives in attracting and retaining diverse talent. Overall, employer femvertising holds promise as a tool for attracting female talent and promoting gender equality. However, companies must navigate the identified challenges and resistances



by aligning their messages with organizational values, addressing antifeminist biases, and fostering a more inclusive workplace environment.

To achieve this, companies can adopt the recommendations in Table 4, focusing on creating effective and impactful employer femvertising to combat antifeminist resistance. These recommendations emphasize the importance of providing specific data and measures supporting gender equality, as positive reactions were mainly observed in those posts that specifically addressed the companies' initiatives toward gender equality and those that included data to support their messages. Likewise, participants reacted favorably toward posts encouraging their active participation in gender equality initiatives within the workplace, indicating a preference for messages that go beyond mere promotion. In this regard, participant 6 indicated:

These are promotional messages. But the posts about the specific initiatives through which the company tries to reduce the gender gap and invite you to participate seem more real and credible. In other posts, they show you a specific woman who has succeeded in the company; here, they invite you: join us!

Another recommendation would be to demonstrate the fit between the company's values, culture, and the reality that women face within the company. Previous studies have highlighted the significance of congruence between a company's messages and its internal values and culture (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Nan & Heo, 2007). Therefore, to build trust, companies must ensure that their messages align with the employer's brand, values, and overall image, thereby increasing the credibility of such messages (Matzler, Grabner-Kräuter, & Bidmon, 2008).

To reduce resistances, employer femvertising should be part of the company's communication strategy, and exclusively publishing posts on specific dates like International Women's Day should be avoided, as this may give the impression of performative or tokenistic support. By following these guidelines, companies can enhance their employers' femvertising initiatives' effectiveness and contribute to a more inclusive and equal workplace.

***Table 4. Recommendations for Effective Profem Employer Messages.***

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<b>Guidelines</b>
1. Specify the measures implemented in the company to support gender equality and the professional development of women, along with the achieved results.
2. Invite to participate and contribute to the initiatives carried out in favor of gender equality in the workplace included in the posts.
3. Provide global data instead of just presenting a single case, as it can be interpreted as an exception. Combine specific cases with a broader overview of the global situation.
4. Demonstrate alignment between the company's values and culture and the reality of women in the organization, ensuring that the messages conveyed in the posts reflect this coherence.
5. Focus on sustained efforts throughout the year rather than being limited to designated days or events.

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Future studies should overcome the limitations of the present research. Firstly, the findings of this research are based on data collected from two focus groups. While focus groups provide valuable qualitative insights, the sample size was limited, and the generalizability of the findings may be constrained. Secondly, the study focused solely on recent university graduates. This particular group may have distinct perspectives and experiences compared with other demographic groups or individuals at different stages of their careers. For instance, the antifeminist resistance observed in the work-life balance posts may respond to the participants' particular needs because of their age. Therefore, future studies could benefit from a more extensive and diverse sample to obtain a broader understanding of recent university graduates' attitudes toward employer femvertising. Future research may also benefit from including participants from different generations, educational backgrounds, and diverse professional experiences to understand the topic comprehensively.

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