Sexism in Advertising

A Qualitative Study of the Influence on Consumer Attitudes Towards Companies

MASTER THESIS WITHIN: Business Administration
NUMBER OF CREDITS: 30
PROGRAMME OF STUDY: Degree of Master of Science in Business and Economics
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JÖNKÖPING May 2017
Master Thesis in Business Administration

Title: Sexism in Advertising: A Qualitative Study of the Influence on Consumer Attitudes Towards Companies
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Date: 2017-05-22

Key terms: Women in Advertising, Sexist Advertising, Congruity, Incongruity, Gender Differences, Consumer Attitudes.

Background: Advertising is one of the most powerful influences on consumer attitudes, and for several decades, sexism in advertising and its affects on society has been a current topic. Even though the increased importance of equality in today’s society, sexism are still commonly depicted in advertising. How women are portrayed in advertising has been suggested to affect women’s perceived role in society and increased stereotypical roles defining how they should act and behave.

Purpose: The study will seek insight in consumer attitudes formed by sexist advertising, and understanding of the difference between congruent sexist ads and incongruent sexist ads. The purpose of this study is to understand how sexist advertising influence consumer attitudes of a company. The ambition is to contribute to a greater understanding of sexist advertisements’ impact on companies.

Method: An interpretive approach was adopted in order to gain deep insight and understanding in the subject. An exploratory study was conducted in the form of qualitative two-part interviews. Through a convenience sampling, 50 respondents were selected, divided into 25 females and 25 males in the ages of 20-35. The primary data collection consisted of an initial survey followed by a semi-structured oral interview.

Conclusion: The results show that sexist advertising was shown to influence consumer attitudes of a company negatively. Sexist advertising also lead to more negative consumer attitudes towards a company for females, as well as more negative consumer attitudes towards a company when the advertisement was incongruent.
Acknowledgments

A special acknowledgement is given to our tutor Tomas Müllern, for the valuable guidance during the whole process of working on this thesis. The authors would also like to thank our classmates for the feedback received during the seminar sessions.

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May 2017
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1. Introduction

This chapter aims at introducing the reader by providing a background to the chosen topic, and to motivate the relevance of the study. Subsequently, the problem discussion leads up to a presentation of the purpose and the research questions of this study.

1.1 Background

A youthful woman with blond curly hair is lying down, glancing seducingly at the camera. Her lower body is hidden, but it is obvious that she is not wearing any clothes. Her mouth is slightly open and her hands are touching her neck and chin. To the left of the woman you can read the text “You know you're not the first, but do you really care?” This is a print advertisement for BMW’s used cars from year 2008.

A young woman is sitting on the floor with her left leg bent and the foot resting under her right thigh. She is wearing white socks, and a white lace t-shirt revealing a bit of her underwear. Her left hand is gently caressing the leg and her right hand is steadily holding onto her right leg. She is leaning backwards with her head tilt to the side, as she gazes to the camera. Right in the middle, there is a text saying “I seduce in #mycalvins”. This is a print advertisement for Calvin Klein underwear from year 2016.

How do these advertisements influence the consumer attitudes of the companies?

“Successful advertising is able to manifest rich, intimate, and astute cultural and subcultural messages and representations as well as universal biological desires” (Cortese, 2004, p.23). Advertising is also used to help an organization to establish demand for their products or services, to gain profit (O'Guinn, Allen & Semenik, 2009), as well as to create awareness and favorable perceptions of companies (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016). Consequently, the message communicated through advertising will affect how companies are perceived by consumers. Advertising is one of the strongest influences on the formation of consumer attitudes (Schiffman, Wisenblit, & Kanuk, 2010), and since it might have affect on profitability, it is important to consider what message is being delivered (Ataman & Ülengin, 2003). The
relationship between the exposure to an ad and the formation of consumer attitudes has been studied in previous research, and is said to be an important factor in determining the advertising effectiveness (Edell & Burke, 1987).

Although there are many advantages of advertising, there are also several issues connected to it, including sexism (e.g. Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Boddewyn & Kunz, 1991; Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus & Berkowitz, 1996). “Sexism is any attitude, behavior, institutional arrangement, or policy that favors one gender over another” (Cortese, 2004, p.51). However, what is considered as the general definition of sexism in advertising might be rather complex to precisely define, since it is sometimes a thin line between what is seemingly right or wrong in the eye of the beholder. Goffman (1979) developed a framework for different categories on how women in advertisement are portrayed, which emphasized on the submissive, objectified and sexist way women often are depicted. Scale of Sexism is another framework that has been used in order to rank the sexist depiction of women from the lowest level of sexism to the highest level with the most extreme depictions (Pingree, Hawkins, Butler & Paisley, 1976). These theoretical frameworks try to clarify and sort out the construct of sexism towards women in advertising. Also, researchers have found differences in how men and women perceive sexist advertising (e.g. Lambiase & Reichert, 2003; Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004; Jones & Reid, 2009).

A discussed concept, when it comes to the level of sexism, is the advertising’s fit to the product, or level of congruity. Congruity means level of relatedness (Orth & Holancova, 2003), and there is congruity in an ad when there is a logical relationship between the elements used in the ad and the advertised product, and the opposite constitutes incongruity (Yoon, 2013). Sexism can therefore be more evident depending on the product category. For example, it is harder to support the logical argument for using nude women in car advertisement than for underwear advertisement where the product is best displayed on the model’s body (Sherman & Quester, 2005). What is perceived as congruent or incongruent is individual and depends on the person’s beliefs, thoughts, behaviors and prior expectations and so it may vary between people (Orth & Holancova, 2003; Skeie, 2015). In accordance, the Congruity Theory (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955) has been proved to explain the formation of attitudes. This has been further supported by Lavidge and Steiner (1961), suggesting that congruence affects the formation of attitudes towards companies.
1.2 Problem Definition and Purpose

Sexism in advertising has been a current topic for several decades. Even though there is a more implemented equality-mindset in the western world today, sexism still prevails in advertising. It is suggested that the way women are depicted in advertisements affects how women’s role in society is perceived, and how a woman should act and behave (Lafky et al., 1996; Lindner, 2004). A sexist ad would hence work against equality. Even in Sweden, a country that was ranked as number four out of 144 on the Global Gender Gap Index, indicating a highly equal society (World Economic Forum, 2016), sexist advertisements is still common. Since advertising can be destructive and immoral in different ways, there is a need for a control mechanism either with formal or informal regulation (Harker, 2008). Yet, there are no legal regulations, for example in Sweden, prohibiting sexist advertising (Stiftelsen Reklamombudsmannen, 2016).

Extensive research on the psychological effects from the use of sexist advertising has been examined previously (e.g. Lanis & Covell, 1995; Taylor, Miyazaki, & Mogensen, 2013; Vezich, Gunter, & Lieberman, 2017). However, the focus in the previous studies has, for example, been on the way sexism affects consumers or individuals, and the way they regard themselves or others. The authors of this study consequently noticed there is a lack of research regarding how sexist advertising affects consumer attitudes toward the originator of the ad, the company itself. Further, there is also a lack of research, which, in this context, compares the difference in attitudes towards, congruent versus incongruent advertisement, as well as gender differences in attitude formation. Adding the absence of legal control towards advertisements, as in Sweden, companies are not much restricted regarding their advertisement, but might not be aware on the impact sexist advertisement have on the company. Combining these issues together, this study will strive to give a valuable insight for marketing managers in order to understand the consequences of using sexist advertisement. The topic chosen was found appealing and engaging by the authors, since equality issues are in their greater interest. The ambition is to contribute to a greater understanding of the consequences for the companies using sexist advertisements, by focusing on the effects on consumer attitudes. Thus, this study will combine the concept of sexism in advertising, consumer attitudes of the different genders, and the level of congruity. The study will seek insights and understanding about consumer attitudes formed by sexist advertising, and compare the difference between congruent sexist ads and incongruent sexist ads. Further the
responses from men and women will be compared in order to understand the potential
difference in attitudes towards sexist advertisement between the genders. Thus, the purpose
of this study is to understand how sexist advertising influence consumer attitudes of a
company.

The following research questions are used in order to fulfill the purpose:

RQ1: How does sexist advertising influence the consumer attitudes of a company?
RQ2: How are the consumer attitudes of a company influenced by gender?
RQ3: How are the consumer attitudes of a company influenced by the level of congruity?

1.3 Definition

Company

In this study, the word “company” is used to describe the abstract and general notion of an
organization as an entity. In the study of how sexist advertising influence consumer attitudes
of a company, the emphasis is on a company, implying it does not focus on specific brands or
organizations. What is being analyzed is thus the general influence of companies as a
concept.
2. Method

This chapter will describe more in detail how the research was conducted and later analyzed. First, the methodology and overarching philosophical values are discussed, followed by the method describing the techniques used for gathering data and how the data was analyzed.

2.1 Research Philosophy

How researchers view the world, and their assumptions about the correct way of attaining knowledge are rooted in the research philosophy they adopt. The research philosophy is where the underlying values originate in decisions regarding strategies and methods used, and thus it affects the entire course of the study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The authors of this study made a choice between the two research philosophies they believed were the most relevant for the purpose of this study, interpretivism and pragmatism.

**Interpretivism** emphasizes the importance of understanding the research subject’s meanings, and demands an empathetic approach (Saunders et al., 2009). Collecting subjective meanings of the society, interpreting and understanding them while trying not to distort them, and then use them to construct a theory is the very core of interpretivism (Goldkuhl, 2011). In this study, the purpose is to understand how sexist advertising influence consumer attitudes of a company. In order to meet the purpose of this study, the authors strived to attain subjective understanding of how consumers think and reason regarding sexist advertisements and how it affects their attitudes. The subjective attitudes of the customers were therefore interpreted and decoded as accurately as possible, and thus an empathetic mindset was undertaken by the authors, in order not to distort the subjects’ meanings.

**Pragmatism** embraces the notion that is it perfectly possible to mix and use whatever philosophy direction, which suits the research questions. Instead of making a twist of what is the real “truth”, the pragmatist chooses the path most suitable depending on the situation (Suter & Cormier, 2013). The authors first considered the pragmatist view, since it could be argued that some parts in the research design were approaching a more objective philosophy, such as the first part of the interview session, which consisted of a survey. However, since there was no hypothesis testing or any crucial quantitative measures or conclusions made in
this study, and no intention or attempt to generalize the results, the authors were not substantially deviating from the interpretivist view. The survey was just a tool for structuring and dividing the answers in order to make them comparable. Also, since the subjective view was in focus consistently throughout the study, the choice of the interpretivist philosophy was further motivated. The fundamental philosophical arguments in this study was thus originated from the interpretivist philosophy, since the most crucial in this study was to obtain subjective understanding, which was sought through close interaction with the respondents through semi-structured interviews.

There are some variations within interpretivism including hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Dudovskiy, 2016). Hermeneutics is foremost concerned with understanding and interpreting a text, which in modern hermeneutics means any interaction such as written text, speech, and both verbal and nonverbal human communication (Mir, Willmott, & Greenwood, 2015). Throughout the conduction of this research, hermeneutics, with other words interpretation, was in main focus in order to capture the deeper meaning and subjective understanding of consumer attitudes. When evaluating the empirical information conducted in this study, the authors consequently used hermeneutics when interpreting the spoken words of the interview respondents. Evidently, hermeneutics was crucial when the authors tried to capture the individual beliefs from the respondents’ spoken words and put them in context in order to best understand their thoughts and feelings. Apart from the analysis of the qualitative information received in the interviews, hermeneutics was also regarded by the authors when interpreting the written words in scholarly journals and academic articles by other researchers. Thus, interpreting secondary data by trying to understand the researchers through immersing in the research subject more subjectively.

2.2 Branches of Philosophies

There are three branches of philosophy: ontology, epistemology and axiology (Saunders et al., 2009). The ontology and epistemology constitute the starting point of the research process, and both concepts include differences influencing the way the research process is considered. It is the combination of the ontological and epistemological views, which influence the philosophy and methods used in a study.

Ontology is “the researcher’s view of the nature of reality” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.119), that is, what the researcher thinks truth is. It could broadly be divided into realist and relativist
beliefs. According to the realist, there is only one universal truth and it does not change. Since it is not changeable it is thus generalizable. In opposite, the relativist argues that multiple realities exist which are shaped by the context in which it is studied. Hence, the subjective aspect is socially constructed and changeable (Saunders et al., 2009). In this study, the relativist view was adopted. The authors regard truth as relative, depending on the context of the situation. In this study, the authors present a truth based on this specific context, which cannot be universally generalizable. What was considered as truth in this study depended on the subjective realities of the individuals studied.

Epistemology is “the researcher’s view regarding what constitutes accepted knowledge” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.119), that is, how is knowledge created in a certain area of study. It can be divided in the objective and subjective view. The objective view is seeking truth using observable data, and the researcher is trying to interfere as little as possible keeping distance to the population being studied. The subjective view is seeking truth using subjective measures, interacting and keeping close to the population being studied (Killam, 2013). The subjective approach is investigating meanings, and social phenomena. Thus, focus is put on details of the situation and how they create subjective meaning (Saunders et al., 2009). In this study, the subjective view of epistemology was adopted and integrated through the use of close interaction with individuals and the attempt to get a deep understanding of their thoughts and feelings. In the interaction with the individuals the authors were also eager to obtain as much details as possible in order to understand the construct of their attitudes and the effect of social phenomena.

Axiology is “the researcher’s view of the role of values in research” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.119), that is, judgments about value in a research, which is much dependent on the researcher’s own values. The values of a researcher guides the decisions made in the conduction of the research. Axiology can be divided into an objective-subjective viewpoint as well. The objective view conducts research in a value-free way and is separated from the information obtained itself. The subjective view is value-bound, and the researcher cannot be separated from the study itself and therefore have a subjective stance (Saunders et al., 2009). For this study, the authors are part of the research and cannot separate from it, and thus a subjective value collection was conducted. The authors own values might had some impact since it is not possible to conduct this kind of qualitative study and evaluate it completely.
objective. With this study, the authors were not seeking to describe or predict how things works in the world, but to understand it by examine and understand the people living in it.

2.3 Research Purpose

It is of essence to be clear about the research purpose in order to choose the most suitable research design. Research purpose can be classified as exploratory, descriptive or explanatory and it is dependent on the research design what kind of research purpose is suitable (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, in order to choose the right research purpose, the researcher must consider variables related to the purpose of the study as well as the method.

Descriptive research is merely resulting in a description of characteristics of a study, meaning that it provides an answer to what the phenomena is, not how and why. Explanatory research strives to uncover causal relationship between variables. The exploratory research is advantageously used when trying to reach new insights, and finding out what happens in a given situation. Searching for previous literature, conducting interviews, or conducting focus groups are the three main ways for conducting an exploratory study. The structure of an exploratory research may change over time since new data may appear making the researcher change the direction of the study (Saunders et al., 2009).

In the attempt of this study to uncover the attitudes of companies derived from sexist advertisement, the research purpose was exploratory. The explanatory research purpose may also have been used for conducting a qualitative study, focusing more on the causal relationships, to see if there is causality between sexist ads and negative attitudes, for example. However, the focus of this study was not to find out whether or not there was a causal relationship, but aims at understand the reasoning, extent, and possible dilemmas behind customer’s perceptions and attitudes. Therefore the exploratory research purpose was considered as most suitable.

2.4 Methodological Choice and Research Strategy

In the methodological choice, the researcher choose whether to conduct a quantitative, qualitative, or a mixed research approach. The research strategy is a plan of actions with specific goals designed to take the researcher further on in the process of answering the research questions (Saunders et al., 2009).
Qualitative studies enable the researcher to access rich, detailed, and valid data where the respondents’ perspectives can be kept intact. Quantitative studies on the other hand, produce factual and reliable information, which often can be used to generate general assumptions to a larger population (Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird & McCormick, 1992). A third paradigm, mixed methods, has been raised over the years, enabling a mix of the qualitative and quantitative approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007; Denscombe, 2008). What the authors regarded as the best source to create understanding and deepest insight possible in the subject of study was to obtain qualitative data in form of spoken words, where the authors interacted with the respondents. Thus, a qualitative approach was conducted in this study since it was considered most suited in fulfilling the purpose. In this study, two methods for collecting data were used, a survey followed by an interview. The survey did not constitute any crucial quantitative measures of the study, and neither was any hypothesis tested or attempts to generalize the results. The numbers derived from the survey were analyzed in a qualitative way, in order to understand the underlying meaning of the responses. Thus, the concept of mixed methods was not applicable. Even though two different methods were used, they were both combined and used in an interpretivist way and therefore considered as qualitative methods by the authors.

Over the years, several studies have been published regarding consumer attitudes, where most of them have been based on quantitative methods (Lin, Marshall, & Dawson, 2009; Voicu, 2013; Luna-Nevarez & Torres, 2015). However, the authors of this study intended to conduct a qualitative research in order to capture a deeper understanding about the subject regarding consumer attitudes of sexist advertising, which might be unseen using quantitative methods. Some qualitative research about consumer attitudes has been conducted previously, which supports the author’s decision to also conduct a qualitative research (Chen & Granitz, 2012; Ertekin & Pelton, 2014; Hoek, Pearson, James, Lawrence & Friel, 2017).

2.5 Research Approach

Induction and deduction are the two main research approaches used by researchers. A positivist is generally using a deductive approach, whereas the interpretivist uses an inductive approach. The purpose with deductive research is to use existing theories and form and test hypotheses. A deductive approach is often used to explain causal relationships, and is connected to quantitative research methods. With the use of qualitative data collected, the purpose of the inductive approach is to build a new theory (Saunders et al., 2009).
In this study, the inductive research approach was used, in line with the chosen interpretivist approach. That is, a limited amount of theory was used in order to construct the framework of the study, and then the collection of qualitative data was used striving to develop a new theory. However, some individual parts of the study were more deductive than inductive. For example, the theory chapter was constructed in a deductive way where the authors started out with a wide array of research and selected the few who were relevant for the study. In the opposite, the construction of the interview guide was more inductive since it was characterized by openness, and solely based on a modification of existing models and theories. The conduction of the interviews was more deductive in the start were the interviewees had to grade different statements about sexist ads, but the following part had an inductive approach where the authors wanted to find out as much information as possible for building theory. The analysis was more inductive and open, whereas the discussion section was more deductive and conclusive.

2.6 Data Collection

Data can be classified as either primary data, which is data collected by the researchers, or secondary data, which is data the researchers collect from already existing data conducted by other researchers. Most often primary and secondary data in combination are used to answer the research questions (Saunders et al., 2009). The primary data in this research is collected through a combination of an initial survey followed by an extensive semi-structured interview, in order to gain a deep insight and an understanding of the research purpose. Conducting interviews are a way of obtaining valid and reliable data tailored to, and thus relevant, for the specific case of study (Saunders et al., 2012).

Further, the authors of this study used secondary data to collect information for structuring the theoretical framework regarding sexism in advertising, attitude formation, as well as the effect of congruity and gender differences. Previous research and models were also used in this study as a framework for structuring the primary data collection, the interview guide, and in the selection of sexist ads. This will be further explained in Chapter 3. The secondary data was primarily collected from scholarly journals and peer reviewed articles obtained from databases of academic and scientific research (e.g. Emerald, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest Central). To the greatest extent, peer reviewed and often-cited articles were used in order to
retain quality research and reliable data. Due to time constraints, there is a risk that not all relevant literature available was included in the research of this study.

In this study, there are some concepts of brand theory occurring. However, the brand studies are not directly applied in this study, but have been used for comparing the results and suggesting similarities. Some models have thus been modified to match the purpose of this study, which is further explained in those sections respectively.

2.7 Sample Selection

In the sample selection, the researcher must first decide between conducting a probability sample or a non-probability sample (Saunders et al., 2012). Since this study was built on a qualitative study, the focus was not to generalize the results, and thus a probability sample was not necessary. Regarding non-probability sampling techniques, there are some alternatives among the most common, but for this study the authors considered the convenience sample most suitable. Since the interviews required a meeting in person with the participants and because of limitation in time, the authors chose to select the sample from people in their nearby environment, for example, students, coworkers, and acquaintances. This made it possible for the authors to get hold of a large number of interview respondents, and since it was people which the authors had some kind of relation to, it was easy to build rapport in order to get relaxed interviews were the respondents could feel safe to speak freely and open. As with any sample technique, there are some potential drawbacks with convenience sampling, such as the highly vulnerability to selection bias and non-representativeness of the sample. Also, convenience sampling cannot be used to represent a whole population (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Having these drawbacks in mind, the authors strived to get a diverse sample as possible, by choosing respondents of different age and gender. Unofficially, the authors also tried to pick interview respondents from different sectors of interests, employment, and areas of living, in order to attempt further diversification. The convenience sample was ultimately regarded, as the most suitable sample technique for the research purpose and its disadvantages was not considered as a risk affecting the credibility of this research.

Since this study is an exploratory study, the exact sample size was hard to set in advance. In order to gain as much insight and understanding as possible, and to detect if there was a spread in attitudes, the aim was to conduct 30 interviews. In the end 50 interviews were
conducted, since the authors were time efficient and thus did more interviews than initially thought. Also, the authors regarded the additional interviews only as creating a more reliable outcome in the analysis. As part of the purpose and formed into one of the research questions of this study is the effect of gender on how sexist advertising influence consumer attitudes of a company. Therefore, in order to get as accurate measurements as possible, there was an equal proportion of women and men among the respondents, 25 females and 25 males. This enabled the authors to distinguish whether there was a difference in the attitudes between male and female respondents. The range of ages of the interviewees were set to 20-35 years, thus people born between year 1982-1997. The aim was to reach Generation Y, or Millennials, but since the exact definition in ages differ across sources (e.g. Syrett & Lamminman, 2004; Becker, 2012), the exact age range was set by the authors of this study. Since Millennials have high purchasing power and to great extent shape the marketplace (Cone Communications, 2013), this consumer generation was considered as important and interesting to understand due to their strong power of influence.

2.8 Interview

For the purpose of this study, interviews were selected as the most useful method to collect the required data. Interviews give the opportunity to generate rich, detailed, in-depth qualitative data where the interviewer are in charge and manage the process. There are two kinds of interview structures for collecting qualitative data, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Saunders et al., 2012). In this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen most suitable, since it would make the interviews more consequent than unstructured interviews, and thus make them easier to analyze and compare. Probing was also used during the interviews, leading the discussion in the right direction. This made it possible to counteract the known challenges of using interviews as data collection method stated by Saunders et al. (2012), including analyzing large amount of information and information with much spread. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in an open way, encouraging the interviewees to elaborate the answers to obtain as much useful qualitative information as possible. Supplementary questions were used often in order to thoroughly deepen into the subject, and to receive clear insights and understandings of the customer attitudes towards companies using sexist advertising.
2.9 Interview Design

The semi-structured interviews were divided in two parts. First the respondents were asked to fill in a survey, followed by an oral interview. The reason for using the two-part interview design was to collect as much useful information as possible. The first part, the simplified survey, was for making it possible to easier set apart the different ads to easily see if there were any difference in attitudes between the genders, as well as between the congruent and incongruent ads. The survey gave a numerical presentation of all the responses, which made it easier to get an overview, and to structure the analysis part of the study. It also gave the respondents an introduction to the ads being studied by building a reference for the discussion in the second part, the oral interviews. The numbers obtained from the survey were not used in order to draw any quantitative and/or generalizable conclusions, and there was no measure on correlation or causality. The only statistical calculation conducted was the mean value, which was used in order to compound the responses into something more comprehensible. The mean values helped to compare and distinguish what adjectives stood out, making it easy to see what were in general ranked the highest and the lowest by the respondents. The authors sought the underlying meanings behind the ranked numbers, in order to create understanding of where these thoughts and attitudes originated. The discussions were then used for obtaining more elaborated answers, to uncover the underlying meanings behind their attitude rankings towards the companies.

In the first part, the respondents were exposed to sexist ads from two product categories. The first product category was underwear, which is considered more congruent with nudity and sex, and the other was automobile, which is considered less congruent with such appeals. The use of two separate product categories with different levels of congruity were for making sure the distinction of sexism in the ads becomes clear in the analysis of the results. Further, the congruity aspect was used for determining whether there was a difference in attitudes when the product group is more congruent or incongruent. In total there were 20 different ads presented, ten congruent and ten incongruent. Each ad was then separately evaluated in the survey, with basis of ten statements. For example, some of the statements were “The company is serious”, “The company is trustworthy”, and “The company is sexist”. The statements were the same for each of the ads, and the respondents were asked to rate on a five point Likert scale (1 - Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly agree) whether the statement was agreeable or not regarding the companies delivering the ads. For example, if the statement
“The company is serious” was ranked 1, the respondent did not regard the company as serious at all, and if it was ranked 5, the respondent regarded the company as very serious. All statements can be found in Appendix 3. The ratings were compiled in Excel, and then, for all responses of every ad, the mean value was calculated. Revising the responses manually, the authors discovered that none of the groups’ of responses were considered significantly dispersed, and so other statistical measures like variance and standard deviation was discarded. Those measurements was regarded as otherwise have been of minor significance for this study, and thus irrelevant. The mean value was thus the only measure considered relevant for the simple survey conducted in this study.

The only instruction given beforehand of the survey was that the respondents should focus on the ad image, and then evaluate the company. The authors knew that specific companies might bias the survey results a bit, depending on the respondents’ previous knowledge and experience with the company, but this was a way of trying to ease the impact. Using 20 ads was partly to ensure enough data was collected for being able to see whether there was a pattern in the responses. Furthermore, it was also for making sure several companies were represented, and further to minimize the risk of letting few individual companies bias the study. The risk of respondents favoring companies which they have prior knowledge of, or the like, was regarded by the authors. Even though some ads used in this study originate from the same company, the authors regard the total selection of all ads as diverse enough. The reason why some companies appear in the ads more than once was because the selection of ads was based mainly on the use of sexism. Thus, some companies evidently used sexist ads more frequently. The advertisements chosen by the authors used as reference in the conducted survey and interviews was focusing on sexist depictions of women, thus the ads almost conclusively had only women in them. The ads were selected based on frameworks regarding categories of female depictions in advertising (Goffman, 1979), and according what belonged to the two highest levels in the Scale of Sexism (Pingree et al., 1976). A more detailed description of the models and how they were used are found in Chapter 3.2. All ads used in interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

In the second part, the oral interviews were held. Each interview got designated one hour, but in the end ranged from 42 minutes to 78 minutes. The demographic information recorded from the respondents were their age and gender. A complete list of information about the respondents and their demographics can be found in Appendix 2. The oral interview started
off with two general questions about the interviewee’s overall perception of the companies based on all ads. Then followed ten questions connected to each of the statements in part one, but now the respondents got the chance to really develop their thoughts and attitudes. For example, one of the question asked was “In what way do you regard the company as sexist or not?”. All statements and questions used in both the first and second part of the interviews can be found in Appendix 3. Due to the open way of conducting the interviews and the encouragement of the respondents to develop their thoughts, some reoccurring comments regarding some other aspect than the structured questions were added in the empirical findings under “additional comments”.

2.10 Pilot Testing

Before the authors started to conduct interviews on their own, three test-interviews were held by both of the authors together. The test interviews were used as a tool to learn how to structure the interviews in the same way since the actual interviews were held separately. Using test interviews made it possible for the authors to ensure the quality of the questions, and to see if they were clear and understood by the test persons. During the test interviews, the authors took notes of what questions needed to be improved and the interviewees had the possibility to give feedback. The interview structure and questions were considered as reliable due to the use of the test interviews.

2.11 Data Analysis

The concept data analysis can be explained as the understanding of the data collected (Babin & Zikmund, 2010). According to Malhotra and Birks (2007), the process of analyzing data from the gathered first hand material includes data assembly, data reduction, data display and data verification. In the first step, data assembly, the researchers must collect all data from the research process. The data of this study were collected from audio recordings, notes, transcripts as well as the numerical rankings of the advertisements. These sources helped the authors to gather the extensive data required for this study. The majority of the interviews were held in Swedish, and therefore the authors of this research carefully transcribed the audio recordings, in order for the meanings not to be lost in translation when translating from Swedish to English. Hence, there was a lot of time put into the transcribing to secure a truthful representation of the interviewees responses. Also, the authors of this study were transcribing all data together in order to translate them in a similar way. In the next step, data reduction, the data should be organized and structured (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The data
collection for this study was extensive and it was thus required to assort and reduce material in order to determine the relevance of the different parts. Going through all the data, the authors sorted out the most interesting and relevant parts and summarized it in categories following same order as the structured interview questions. In the third part, *data display*, the data is presented and summarized in an organized way (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The numerical data collected in this study were presented in tables where the mean value was calculated, and the data from the interviews were summarized in a text reflecting the general view of the respondents. Some quotes from the interviewees were also included in the text. For the purpose of this study, the data was also separated into the opinions of the different genders. In the very last step of data analysis, *data verification*, the researchers must ensure that the data is credible (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The authors of this study strived to find other research to support the data collected to make it more credible. This step is also closely linked to data quality, which is discussed more in detailed in Chapter 2.12.

2.12 Research Quality

To ensure quality in the research, both the primary and the secondary data were collected with caution. The primary data were profound and assessed in a way to assure that enough and all useful information was obtained to make a good analysis. In order to make the data collection as unbiased as possible, the authors did not reveal the purpose of the study until after the interview. As before mentioned, the secondary data was collected from what was considered as reliable sources and was reviewed critically to assure quality. Also, the authors of this study consider that the large amount of respondents contribute to a better the quality of the findings of this study.

There are four criteria that can be used especially in the quality assessment of qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. These criteria were developed by Lincoln and Guba (1994), based on the well established quality criteria of quantitative research, and make up an equivalent counterpart (Seale, 1999). The authors of this study did their best to fulfill all four criteria to ensure quality in the research. *Credibility* is a measure of agreeability between the findings and the reality, and this factor is one of the most important for establishing trustworthy research (Shenton, 2004). In order to seek credibility the authors of this study tried their best to give the interviewees to fully express their feelings in their own words and tried to interpret these data as accurately as possible.
Whenever something seemed unclear, the interviewer asked additional questions to really get in understanding with the interviewee.

Transferability refers to how the author’s gives enough contextual information so that the research might be used in different contexts (Shenton, 2004). Throughout the study, the authors have been clear in each step of the execution in order for the reader to get a holistic view. The authors tried to establish transferability by providing a thorough theoretical framework, explaining all concepts used in the research.

Dependability is the counterpart to the quantitative reliability, which refers to the extent the research is repeatable. However, in qualitative research this is not fully possible, but the concept of dependability implies that the researcher still should try to make it as repeatable as possible (Shenton, 2004). It could be argued that the use of overlapping methods in this study, using the combination of a survey and interviews, strengthen the ability to make it more repeatable. Also, this study was described in detail, making it possible for researchers to make the same research in the future.

Confirmability refers to the attempt for the researcher to not affect the interviewee with private opinions (Shenton, 2004). The data from the semi-structured interviews was collected in a way to not angle the interviewee’s expression of their subjective perceptions and attitudes. In order not to influence the interviewees’ opinions, the authors did not put any evaluation in statements or questions, and did not express their own thoughts during the interviews.

2.13 Research Ethics

Research ethics is one of the most important aspects to consider when developing a research study (Saunders et al., 2012). When research involves human interaction, the well being of the human must be prioritized before the outcome of the study. In this research, the authors have used the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct (2010) as a guideline in conducting ethical research.


1. Researchers shall ensure that participation in their activities is based on voluntary informed consent.
2. Researchers shall be straightforward and honest in all their professional and business relationships.

3. Researchers shall be transparent as to the subject and purpose of data collection.

4. Researchers shall respect the confidentiality of information collected in their professional activities.

5. Researchers shall respect the rights and well being of all individuals.

6. Researchers shall ensure that respondents are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities.

7. Researchers shall balance the needs of individuals, clients and their professional activities.

8. Researchers shall exercise independent professional judgment in the design, conduct and reporting of their professional activities.

9. Researchers shall ensure that their professional activities are conducted by persons with appropriate training, qualifications and experience.

10. Researchers shall protect the reputation and integrity of the profession.

Before the interviews started, every participant was informed about the whole procedure of the interview, that confidentiality would be considered by keeping their identity anonymous, what the data should be used for and how, and that they could stop the interview at any time. Thus, all participants of the interviews gave informed consent. In this research, sexist advertisements were displayed and some interviewees might found it as a private subject sensible to discuss. The advertising shown in the interviews might be offending for some, since nudity and sexual allusions could be provocative. Therefore, it was essential for the interviewers to respect if the person did not want to share specific information or did not want to answer a particular question. The interviewer used probing, but not forced an answer since then the participant may felt uncomfortable or offended or answer something they did not stand for. It was also important for the researchers to be open and respectful towards the person being interviewed, regardless what he or she was expressing. In the research the authors respected the identity of the interviewees and thus keep them anonymous. This was a way for making them feel even more secure to express themselves openly without.
3. Literature Review

In this chapter the reader is presented to existing theories and models used as framework in this study. It starts with a discussion about sexism in advertising, its impact, and how women have been portrayed over the years. This is followed by a presentation of the two models used in the selection of ads for this study. The next part discusses the concept of congruity and effect on attitude formation, followed by a section discussing gender differences in the perceptions of sexist ads. Then, the concept of attitudes is explained. Lastly, two models are presented and it is also described how these models were used in forming the data collection method and the interview guide.

3.1 Sexism in Advertising

“Sexism is any attitude, behavior, institutional arrangement, or policy that favors one gender over another” (Cortese, 2004, p.51). Some visual cues are of special importance when deconstructing advertising, such as expression, posture and gesture. To express superiority or power there are some techniques used including size, attention and positioning, elements common in sexist advertising. When examining advertisements, patterns of institutionalized and symbolic sexism eventualize. Multiple meanings are widely used in advertising, mostly as humorous hooks, but they can also convey sexist meanings to a seemingly non-sexist depiction. Advertising does not only sell products, it also sells values and cultural representations, affecting the ones who are exposed to it (Cortese, 2004). Despite the increase in equality in today’s society and workforce, women are still widely depicted as the weaker gender in advertising. The way women are portrayed in advertising has not changed much over time (Boddewyn & Kunz, 1991; Levy, 2008; Taylor, Miyazaki & Mogensen, 2013).

Researchers have suggested that there is a relationship between the depiction of women in advertising and the way women’s roles in society are perceived. The way advertising describes how women should look and behave consequently influence the societal definition of femininity (Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus & Berkowitz, 1996; Lindner, 2004).

Sexism can be uttered in several ways, through stereotypical portrayals of women, objectification, degrading and abusive portrayals in relation to the opposite sex. Sexual objectification of women in advertising is used with the justification that “sex sells”
(Boddewyn & Kunz, 1991; Nelson & Paek, 2005) and is often used mainly to gain attention or because of aspirational purposes. Ads who are depicting women in revealing poses and are sexual suggestive have been found to attract attention. On the other hand, when evaluating these kinds of ads, consumers find them more offensive than others (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). Also, it is suggested that women’s attitudes are more negative towards sex appeals than what they are towards neutral appeals (Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017). The use of objectification has also been justified through the notion “what the consumer wants is what the consumer gets”, implying that “the wrong” portrayal of women exists in advertising only because it is what customers want to see (Levy, 2008).

Sexism in advertising and its effect on consumer’s perceptions and attitudes has been widely examined in research. It has been shown that even short sequences of exposure to stereotypical advertising can increase stereotypical beliefs (Lafky et al., 1996). Along with most advertising depicting women, sexist advertising is also in great extent creating distorted body images regarding beauty and slimness, creating unattainable standards for women to live up to (Lavine, Sweeney, & Wagner, 1999). Advertising depicting beautiful women only focusing on specific parts of the female body is channeling a focused beauty ideal to the audience. The sexist advertising is thus evidently affecting the way women perceive their own body.

Research has shown that if young women are exposed to sexist advertising, their attitudes towards the brand and their buying behavior possibly will change (Jones & Reid, 2011). Another study showed that consumers exposed to advertising with sexual elements had a more negative attitude towards the advertising and the brand (Latour & Henthorne, 1994). Contrary to these studies there is also suggested proof of favorable outcomes of sexist advertising. One study showed that the consumer attitudes towards the advertising and the purchase intentions were more positive if there were sexual appeals in the ad (Severn, Belch, & Belch, 1990). Practitioners have also proposed that it is a difference between when a model is passively displayed in a sexual way, whereas if she is active in the display it might express feministic power and is not negatively sexist (Amy-Chinn, 2006). Nonetheless to say, decency in advertising is an important issue that can affect the credibility of the entire industry, and it is risky since it might offended consumers and thus ruins the whole intention of the ad (Boddewyn & Kunz, 1991).
3.2 Determining Sexism in Advertising

The models presented in the following sections were used by the authors as framework when identifying and selecting sexist ads, which formed the basis of the survey and interviews in the primary data collection. The Scale of Sexism by Pingree et al. (1976) was one of the models used for determining what ads were sexist and could be selected for this study by the authors. In order to be as clear as possible in the distinction of the ads, only ads fitting into level I and II on the sexist scale were selected. The second model used in determining sexist ads was a modified version of the original framework by Goffman (1979). In the following sections, these two models are presented. These two frameworks were considered as most suitable for the purpose of the study. The authors encountered other scales such as the Modern Sexist Scale (McDonald & Yoder, 1997), and the Patriarchal Beliefs Scale (Yoon, Adams, Hogge, Bruner, Surya & Bryant, 2015). However, these other scales were considered harder to apply in this study, and therefore the Scale of Sexism was considered the best alternative. Goffman (1979) was found to be often cited by other researchers, and thus a modification of these categories of women depictions in advertising was considered as interesting and relevant for the case of study.

Pingree et al. (1976) developed a consciousness scale for media sexism for women observing qualitative indicators of sexism. The scale goes from level one to five, where one is very sexist and five is non-sexist. The scale is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  An Illustration of the Scale of Sexism

![Scale of Sexism Illustration](image)

Source: Pingree et al., 1976.
Level I is described to be characterized as “put her down” (Pingree et al., 1976, p. 194). The woman is portrayed as merely a decoration, a victim, a dumb blonde, or sex object. It also includes depictions of her as dependent of others who do the thinking for her. Level II is described to be characterized as “keep her in her place” (Pingree et al., 1976, p. 194). The woman is portrayed as strong in her role stereotypically seen as a woman’s job, such as being a wife, mother, nurse, or secretary. In this level, the woman is in opposite portrayed as weak in her role and struggling with positions which is traditionally seen as a man’s job and thus making the woman less female, such as business executives and doctors (Pingree et al., 1976).

In addition to the sexism scale, a combination of categories developed by Goffman (1979) and later added-to by other researchers (Umiker-Sebeok, 1996; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004) how women are depicted in advertising, was used by the authors determining sexist ads. The edited combination of categories used in this study was presented by Lindner (2004). Even though these studies are relatively old, they are still heavily cited, and thus regarded by the authors as yet relevant and useful in modern studies. From Goffman (1979) the categories Relative Size, The Feminine Touch, Function Ranking, The Ritualization of Subordination, and Licensed Withdrawal are used. From the study of Kang (1997) Body Display is added, and from Umiker-Sebeok (1996) Location and Movement are added. The last edition made by Lindner (2004) herself was Objectification. In total there are ten categories. How the different categories are portrayed in advertisements is explained below.

(1) Relative Size - The man is taller and or larger and taking up more space in relation to a woman when both sexes are portrayed.

(2) The Feminine Touch - The woman uses her hands to outline, cradle, or caress an object while barely touching it. It may also be the face instead of hands involved in the touching. It also involves any type of self-touching, indicating her body is precious and fragile.

(3) Function Ranking - The man is instructing the woman, or performs an executing role displaying the hierarchy of functions, when both sexes are displayed.

(4) The Ritualization of Subordination - The woman is lowering herself physically, sitting or
lying down on the floor, a sofa, or a bed proposing sexual availability or submission. It also involves canting in her posture or with her head, or bending her knees. To this category is also included childlike guises and clowning of a woman, and the dependent clinging to a man’s arm for support or leaning towards his shoulder, or the subordinate embrace by a man hindering her movement.

(5) Licensed Withdrawal - The woman is not psychologically involved in the situation of the physical scene, making her dependent on the protection of others. Included in this category are actions such as using her hands to cover the face or mouth, smiling expansively, laughing, biting or sucking on her finger, using a finger-to-finger position, or a withdrawing gaze away from the scene.

(6) Body Display - The woman is wearing something revealing of her body, or very few - if any clothes at all, often sexualizing the woman.

(8) Location - The woman appears in a domestic environment, for example the kitchen, bedroom or bathroom. Including in this category is also decontextualized environments, a room not specified for any activities.

(9) Movement - Something is inhibiting the woman to move, and she is limited in the amount of control she can perform in the environment.

(10) Objectification - The woman is depicted in a way in the advertisement so that her main purpose proposed by the image is to being looked at.

3.3 The Gender Perspective

In the study of sexism in advertising over the years, researchers have discovered clear distinctions between the sexes in the research findings. How men and women perceive sexism in different scenarios and situations have been acknowledged, leading to some interesting developments of theory. There is some evidence suggesting that women generally respond to advertising more favorably than men. However, women have been reported to dislike female sexual appeals, such as nudity and sexiness, more in general than men do (Jones & Reid, 2009). Further, women’s attitudes towards a brand have been found to change negatively if there are sexual elements in the advertising (Lambiase & Reichert, 2003).
Women are also reported to be more frequently used for sex appeal purposes in advertising than men (Huang & Lowry, 2011). When sexual themes are used in advertising, women are more critical to female models, which strongly indicate on sexual suggestiveness and explicit nudity, while men feel more positive and energized from those kinds of ads. It is found that ads often are more favored when a person of the opposite sex is portrayed rather than a person of the same sex (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003).

Further, a difference has been found in studies of provocation and nudity between the responses of women and men. It was found that heterosexual men preferred female nudity, and heterosexual women preferred male nudity. Studies have suggested that the capacity for elaborative processing of women are greater than of men, which might increase the likelihood of women to be offended by extreme sexual traits in ads more than men, despite the gender of the model(s) used in the ad. Women are thus more prone to consider the advertiser’s underlying motives with the depiction, and attach greater meaning to it in a larger extent than men, who seem to evaluate the visual appeals in the ad in a more one-dimensional way (Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004). Women have also been found to identify themselves with their gender more strongly, and consider it as impacting life outcomes more than men do. This might explain why gender discrimination has been shown to affect women more strongly than it affects men (Zell, Strickhouser, Lane, & Teeter, 2016).

In a study by Lass and Hart (2004), the reactions of 18-35 year olds to varying levels of nudity in ads were examined, and a clear difference between the genders was found, where men regarded the ads more appealing than women. It was also found that the context of the sexual or stereotypical portrayal functioned as a determinant in the women’s evaluation whether the ad was considered offensive or not, rather than the level of nudity and sexiness of the female model. Lass and Hart (2004) suggested this displayed two kinds of feminism in the study. One side of feminism opposed to any kind of sexual display of women in advertising, since it is regarded as offending and objectifies the woman. The other side of feminism did not oppose sexual display of women as long as the woman is depicted as being independent and strong, or in domination of a man. Research has shown that using less traditional depictions of the female sex role is both more effective and more preferred by women than the more traditional portrayals (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). However, both men and women have shown negative feelings towards a too distinct gender depiction of the opposite sex (Hofmann, 2016). Another type of sexual appeal that is
recurrantly used in advertising is humor (Jones & Reid, 2009), and it has been suggested by some researchers that men typically responds more positively to humor in ads than women do (Hensel & Riecken, 2012).

3.4 Congruity

Congruity can be explained as relatedness; an ad is congruent if the content is related to what is being advertised, and if the content is unrelated to what is advertised the ad is incongruent. What individuals perceive as congruent or not has to do with the person’s existing schema or beliefs, thus it varies with some degree from person to person. Information that is incongruent with prior expectations of a consumer will give effect on the consumer attitudes (Orth & Holancova, 2003). The Congruity Theory, developed by Osgood & Tannenbaum (1955), has been proved to explain attitude formation. The cognition-affection-behavior hierarchy by Lavidge & Steiner (1961) also supports the notion that congruence affects brand attitude formation. Negative feelings such as frustration and helplessness are suggested to be associated with responses from incongruities. Processing incongruent information extensively might also influence the response by making it even more negative. The Congruity Theory predicts both the degree and the direction of attitude changes, which base on the congruity with the cognitive schema of the consumer (Meyers-Levy, Louise & Curren, 1994). The consumer’s personality, interests and level of brand involvement are also something that might affect the perceptions of consumers (Skeie, 2015).

Congruity has been examined in many different circumstances and with different directions. It is suggested by research that consumers who feel that their personality and self-image matches the personality and image of a company is more likely to project favorable attitudes towards the brand, according to the ‘Self-Congruity Theory’ (Pradhan, Duraipandian & Sethi, 2014). It has been suggested that incongruity in advertising easier get stuck in consumer’s memory, since it stands out and therefore compose a positive trait. There is however no consensus over this statement, since there are opposing opinions stating that incongruity does not necessarily make the ad more memorable, and that congruent advertisement is the best alternative (Skeie, 2015).

In terms of sex role portrayals, congruence with consumer self-schema is explained as generating more positive attitudes toward the brand than incongruent relationship do (Orth & Holancova, 2003). An appeal in advertising such as nudity is believed to work effectively as
an eye-catcher, drawing attention, but it is still questionable whether this kind of advertising is effective at large. Nudity in advertising might be perceived differently depending on whether the nudity is functional (congruent) or suggestive sexual (incongruent). However, advertising displaying functional nudity, such as ads for underwear, might portray a suggestive sexual nudity display and evoke sexual reactions as a side effect. The category of product being advertised thus has instrumental value in defining functionality (Sherman & Quester, 2005). The study by Sherman and Quester (2005) showed that greater congruence with nudity in advertising resulted in more positive attitudes and increased purchase intentions. When there is congruence between the product’s use and nudity or sex, the recall for the brand or product might also increase (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). Studies have also shown that product-nudity congruence affected the perceived quality of the product and the overall appeal of the ad. The context which nudity appeals are used may also be dependent (Sherman & Quester, 2005). The media context for example, whether it is a television commercial, magazine ad, or a billboard might influence the perceptions of the ad (Skeie, 2015).

3.5 Consumer Attitudes

An attitude is a propensity to emotionally respond to something in a consistently more positive or negative manner (Milakovic & Mihic, 2015). There are several influences on attitude formation, including personal experiences, the social impact from family and friends, the Internet and advertising. Advertising is one of the strongest influences on the forming of consumer attitudes towards a product, service, or a brand (Schiffman, Wisenblit, & Kanuk, 2010). The feelings received from an ad may affect the consumer attitudes, and in turn, it might influence the purchase intention of consumers. Therefore, attitude is an important concept to understand, since it affects people’s behavior and responses. Consequently, the attitudes towards an ad influence the effectiveness of the ad. Attitudes towards an ad also affect the beliefs about the different attributes of the brand as well as the recall and recognition of the brand (Milakovic & Mihic, 2015). Research suggests, that customers whom have not previously been in direct contact with a specific brand are more likely to form attitudes toward the brand if the message is emotionally appealing (Lee, Harrell, & Droge, 2000).

Altogether, the attitudes towards a brand will have great impact on the consumer intentions of purchase as well as the actual purchase behavior (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Madrigal, 2001;
Spears & Singh, 2004). It has been shown in other research, that the consumer attitude towards advertising and the attitude toward the company have a strong relationship (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). It is important for a company to consider the content in the advertising, since the audience’s perception and attitude of the advertisement can be impacted by the ad context (Kirmani & Yi, 1991).

3.5.1 Attitude-Toward-the-Ad Model

The Attitude-Toward-the-Ad Model by Edell and Burke (1987) was used by the authors as an underlying framework for constructing the technique used in the study for collecting primary data. Since the model depicts advertising effects on consumer attitudes, it was regarded useful for the purpose of this study. The model was considered as a theory of method, explaining the conjunction of different processes forming attitudes. This model also made up two routes showing the direct and indirect effect on attitudes, which supported the use of the two-part interview of this study. There are other measurements of attitudes towards ads (e.g. Ducoffe, 1995). However, the model by Edell and Burke (1987) felt most comprehensive and logical by the authors, and easier applied to this study.

The Attitude-Toward-the-Ad Model, shown in Figure 2 is a model by Edell and Burke, 1987 (Schiffman, Wisenblit, & Kanuk, 2010). The model is used to try to explain the impact advertising has on the consumer attitudes towards a brand. There are some specific relationships presented in the model, where the purpose is to understand the influence of advertising on attitudes. After being exposed to an ad, consumers get triggered to create feelings (affects), and judgments (cognitions) responses. Feelings are results obtained directly by the ad itself, and can occur very quickly. The use of nonverbal elements in the ad has been shown to make the feelings occur even faster. The processing of the ad will subsequently be affected by the feelings responses. Feelings provoked by the beliefs about the brand, is the second important effect displayed by the model. Here, feelings responses, the affective system, influences the brand beliefs obtained in the cognitive system, which is the judgments obtained by the characteristics of the advertisement (Edell & Burke, 1987). Consequently, these judgments and feelings will impact the consumer attitude toward the ad, and the beliefs of a brand. Thus, it influences the consumer attitude toward the brand, which is created as a combination of the beliefs about the brand and the attitudes towards the advertising (Schiffman, Wisenblit, & Kanuk, 2010).
Inspired by this model, the authors followed a similar setup for structuring the primary data collection for this study. The authors first divided the original model into two routes. The first route has the following sequence: (1) Exposure to an Ad, (2) Feelings from the Ad (Affect), (3) Beliefs about the Brand, which leads to (4) Attitude toward the Brand. The second route has the following sequence: (1) Exposure to an Ad, (2) Judgments about the Ad (Cognition), (3) Attitude toward the Ad, which leads to (4) Attitude toward the Brand. The routes are marked in Figure 3 and Figure 4 below.

**Figure 3**  Modified Attitude-Toward-the-Ad Model Illustrating Route 1

Source: The authors’ own illustration.
The Attitude-Toward-the-Ad Model was slightly modified to match the structure of this study and the research purpose. Since this study is not focusing on brands, the authors used the overall structure but changed the focus on brand to focus on companies instead. The different routes symbolize the two-part interview sessions, where route one constitutes the overall structure of the survey conducted, and route two constitutes the overall structure of the interviews. In route one, in the survey conductions, the respondents first got exposed to one ad at the time out of 20 ads (1). These ads provoke feelings (2). Feelings are the immediate perceptions of the ad and its meanings (Harlow & Stagner, 1932). The respondents were then asked to rate the ad’s agreeableness with a list of statements, reflecting their beliefs about the company (3), and in turn displaying the attitudes towards the company (4). The survey was considered as a suitable way to measure the initial attitudes, since the respondent were asked to fill in the survey based on the impressions that first comes to mind when seeing the ad. Feelings experienced when looking at ads consequently affects the consumer attitudes (Milakovic & Mihic, 2015).

In route two, in the interview conductions, the respondents first get exposed to a set of ads (1), and get to elaborate their judgments about the different ads (2). Here, the respondents got more time to process cognitive information. During the entire interview, all ads were displayed in front of the respondent. The ability to overlook the ads was important, since the mind is processing what is fixated by the eyes (Scheiter & van Gog, 2009). The respondents then expressed their attitudes toward the ads (3), and were asked to explain thoroughly and
develop their thoughts and judgments how the ads in turn reflected the attitude towards the company (4). Since the interview questions were based on the statements used in the survey, the respondents got to elaborate their attitudes towards the company regarding all adjectives studied. It is suggested that information is perceived and understood differently depending on modes regarding interaction (e.g. physical or gestural), representation (e.g. visual or audio) and communication. Also, cognitive research states that prior knowledge, experience, individual preference, and attitudes impact the way messages are perceived and interpreted (Holsanova & Price, 2012). Thus, it was important to obtain rich detailed data about how the respondents perceived the ads but also how it affected their attitudes toward the companies.

An illustration of the modified version of the model used as framework in the structuration of the primary data collection is found below in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**  A Modification of Attitude-Toward-the-Ad Model

**Route 1**  (Survey)
- Exposure to an ad
- Feelings from the ad (affect)
- Beliefs about the company
- Attitude toward the company

**Route 2**  (Interview)
- Exposure to an ad
- Judgements about the ad (cognition)
- Attitude toward the ad
- Attitude toward the company

Source: The authors’ own illustration.

**3.6 Dimensions of a Company**

The following model by Aaker (1997) was used as framework when developing the interview guide used in this study. In order to fulfill the purpose, to understand how sexist advertising influence consumer attitudes of a company, the authors had to sort out important dimensions that affect the company. In other words, the authors needed to divide the term *company* into something that could easier be measured and compared. For the term *company*, with the definition by the authors, there was no existing complying model found to be applicable for the intended course of study. The American Brand Personality Dimensions by Aaker (1997) was therefore used as framework in this study in order to choose adjectives that could
constitute a set of dimensions reflecting the overall description of a company. Even though Aaker’s model (1997) is initially meant to display brand personalities carried by products, the authors considered it to highlight important dimensions and adjectives used to describe a company, and thus it was regarded as applicable to this study as well. Thus, the intended purpose of the Aaker’s model was stretched, and the focus on brands was discarded. Also, parts of the model were also modified to better match the purpose of this study. The final design of the modified framework used in the study consisted of some of the existing adjectives from the original model, some modified adjectives from the original model, and two additional adjectives that were not part of the original model. In the next sections the American Brand Personality Dimensions by Aaker (1997) will be explained followed by a description of how the model was used in this study, and the design of the modified framework.

In order to help organizations to define their brand personality, Aaker developed a framework of personality dimensions named the American Brand Personality Dimensions (Figure 6). It is suggested that a brand has five clear personality dimensions, which are Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness. Different sub-categories are presented with a set of adjectives describing what belongs to each specific sub-category, which helps to define each brand personality dimension (Aaker, 1997). Three dimensions seem to characterize the basic tendencies found in both companies and in people: Sincerity, which is explicitly identified by warmth and honesty, Excitement denoted by activity and energy, and Competence who stands for achievement and dependability. The other two dimensions, Sophistication and Ruggedness, are focusing more on aspirational values characterized by status and wealth, which are more connected to culture carriers such as companies (Aaker, Garolera & Benet-Martinez, 2001). Further, it has been shown that positive brand personalities are more likely to produce feelings of familiarity and less risk, whereas negative, or no distinct brand personalities produce the opposite perceptions (Emile & Lee, 2012).
Out of Aaker’s five dimensions of brand personality, eight adjectives from the subcategories were chosen from each dimension and were slightly modified. These selected adjectives in turn represented the cornerstones of the survey and interviews, along with two additional adjectives. They were added by the authors due to the strong belief that they had major significance, and are supported by other research. Altogether, there are ten adjectives, which ground the ten statements used in the interview guide. The ten adjectives are serious, trustworthy, original, innovative, trendy, reliable, attractive, provocative, sexist and humorous. All adjectives are regarded as positively framed words, accept provocative and sexist, which are regarded as negatively framed words.

3.7 Company Adjectives

3.7.1 Dimension 1

Serious

In the first personality dimension from the sub-category honesty, the adjective real was selected and changed to serious. In this study the authors define “seriousness” as the level of manner or character of the company as being sincere, steady and civil.
Trustworthy
From the subcategory *honesty* of the first personality dimension, the adjective *sincerity* was chosen and changed to *trustworthy*. In this study the authors define “trustworthiness” as the level of confidence that you can count on the company, and that their advertisement contains honest information.

Original
The last adjective chosen from the first personality dimension was *original*, from the subcategory of *wholesomeness*. In this study the authors define “originality” as something that makes the company stand out, bearing some level of peculiarity and distinctiveness.

3.7.2 Dimension 2

Innovative
In the second personality dimension from the sub-category *contemporary*, the adjective *up-to-date* was selected and changed to *innovative*. In this study the authors define “innovativeness” as the level of perceived attempts to be current, or to introduce something new or different.

Trendy
From the sub-category *daring* in the second personality dimension, the adjective *trendy* was chosen and the original name was kept. In this study the authors define “trendiness” as the degree to which the company succeed to follow special trends, and use elements considered or perceived as being trendy.

3.7.3 Dimension 3

Reliable
From the third personality dimension, from the sub-category *reliability*, the adjective *reliable* was chosen and the original name was kept. In this study the authors define “reliability” as the level to which you can count on the company to deliver what the company promises.

3.7.4 Dimension 4

Attractive
In the fourth personality dimension from the sub-category *class*, the adjective *glamorous* was chosen and changed to *attractive*. In this study “attractiveness” is defined by the authors the
level which the company is perceived as a potential purchase because of aspiration or decorative purposes.

3.7.5 Dimension 5

Provocative

From the fifth personality dimension, from the sub-category toughness, the adjective ruggedness was chosen and changed to provocative. In this study “provocativeness” is defined by the authors as something the company addresses creating irritation, anger, emotional shock or something really remarkable making the receiver to react.

3.7.6 Additional Adjectives

Sexist

Sexism is one of the main themes of this study, and thus it was regarded as a self-evident part of the dimensions of adjectives affecting the attitudes towards a company. In this study “sexism is any attitude, behavior, institutional arrangement, or policy that favors one gender over another” (Cortese, 2004, p.51), and thus it is the definition used by the authors. What is more precisely defined in this study as sexist is explained using a modified model by Goffman (1979) and Pingree et al. (1976) and was elaborated and explained in Chapter 3.2.

Humorous

Humor is one type of sexual appeal sometimes used in advertising (Jones & Reid, 2009). Paradoxical enough, humor is universal but at the same time individual. Even though humor is a natural human trait, responses to humor are obtained from learned behavior. Attempted humor and perceived humor is not the same thing, and what is regarded as the latter depends on the audience (Swani, Weinberger & Gulas, 2013). The level of humor appreciation for individuals will impact the level of responsiveness from humorous ads (Riecken & Hensel, 2012). Perceiving humor is crucial for experiencing positive humorous effects. This has been found in research, which connects the advertising humor with liking of the ad, and liking of the product. Other researchers have also noticed a direct relationship effect between perceived humor and the attitude towards the ad (Swani, Weinberger & Gulas, 2013). Successful humor in ads generates more positive perceptions, such as entertaining, a “good brand”, novel and useful. On the other hand, unsuccessful attempts to humor leads to more negative perceptions of the ad, such as not useful, annoying, and “bad brand” (Swani, Weinberger & Gulas, 2013).
Sexist humor is sometimes used, and is suggested to mask the reality of prejudice used in the advertisement (Jones & Reid, 2009). As revealed in a study by Groza and Cuesta (2011), sexist humor used in advertising was perceived harmless, fun, as well as credible. The study also showed the more positive feelings acquired from the ad, the less it was perceived as offensive. When evaluating the appropriateness of humor in advertisement, it much depends on the communication goal (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Also, in a study by Ford, Boxer, Armstrong and Edel (2007), it was found that sexist humor exposed to sexist men might advocate the acceptance of behavioral prejudice against women. When slandering women with the use of sexist humor, it trivializes sexism by masking it with benign entertainment, inhibiting oppositions and challenges that likely would be provoked when using non-humorous communication (Ford et al., 2007). Humor what thus considered as an important adjective to add to the interview guide. In this study “humorous” is defined by the authors the level of perceived humor, and thus what people regard as funny.
4. Empirical Findings

In this chapter the empirical data collected from the survey and semi-structured interviews is presented and described. First, the survey results are presented followed by a summary of the major survey findings. This is followed by a presentation of the interview results, and a summary of the major findings from the interviews.

4.1 The Survey Results

In the following section, the data collected in the surveys is presented. The capital letters A-T each symbolizes the different ads separately, where A-J are the congruent ads, and K-T are the incongruent ads. The male and female responses are separated in some tables when comparing their answers. F indicates the rankings of the female respondents, and M the rankings of the male respondents. Difference indicates the difference in rankings between the two columns presented. As aforementioned, the respondents ranked each ad on a five-point scale based on how well the company agreed to the different statements (1- Strongly disagree, and 5 - Strongly agree). Consequently, the higher the number is, the more the respondent agrees that the company complies with the statement. For example, if “Serious” gets the ranking 1, the respondent did not regard the company as serious at all, while if it is ranked 5, the respondent regarded the company as very serious. A more detailed presentation containing each mean value for the congruent ads and the incongruent ads respectively is found in Appendix 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ads A-T</th>
<th>The Mean Value for all Adjectives by All Respondents, Disregarding Gender and Congruity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendy</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2  The Mean Value for Each Adjective Divided in Female and Male Respondents for the Congruent Ads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congruent Ads A-J</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendy</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocative</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexist</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humorous</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3  The Mean Value for Each Adjective Divided in Female and Male Respondents for the Incongruent Ads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incongruent Ads K-T</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendy</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4  A Comparison of the Mean Values for Each Adjective Between the Congruent and Incongruent Ads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Congruent Ads</th>
<th>Incongruent Ads</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provocative</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexist</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humorous</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Summary of the Survey Results

4.2.1 How Sexist Advertising Influence the Consumer Attitudes of a Company

The results from the survey presented in Table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents reported negative attitudes towards the companies providing the ads, due to the relative low rankings. Except for provocateur and sexist, no adjective exceeded a ranking of three, indicating no agreeableness with those statements. Thus, none of the positively framed words in the adjectives were ranked as agreeable, only the negatively framed words sexist and provocateur were. The overall lowest score belonged to humorous (2.06), indicating a low level of perceived humor, and the overall highest score belonged to sexist (3.53) indicating a relatively high perception of sexism.

4.2.2 How the Consumer Attitudes of a Company are Influenced by Gender

The results from the survey presented in Table 2 and Table 3 indicates that the female respondents rated the statements for both the congruent and incongruent ads with lower
scores for all adjectives, except for sexist and provocative. Thus, the female respondents ranked the positively framed words in the adjectives as lower than the male respondents, and the negatively framed words, sexist and provocative, as higher. The female respondents thus reported indications of higher level of sexism and provocativeness, as well as lower level of seriousness, trustworthiness, originality, innovativeness, trendiness, reliability, attractiveness, and humor than the male respondents. The differences in rankings between the two genders were larger for the adjectives for the incongruent ads, compared to the congruent ads. Thus, the attitudes between the female and male respondents differed the most regarding the incongruent ads than compared to the congruent ads. The largest difference in attitudes from the congruent ads between female and male respondents was in attractive (0.58), and the lowest in innovative (0.31). The largest difference in attitudes from the incongruent ads between the female and male respondents was in humor (0.74), and the lowest in reliability (0.53) and originality (0.53).

4.2.3 How the Consumer Attitudes of a Company are Influenced by the Level of Congruity

The results from the survey presented in Table 4 show that the attitudes from the incongruent ads were ranked as more agreeable to the negatively framed words, sexist and provocative, than the congruent ads. Also, the adjectives original, innovative, and humorous were ranked higher in the statements for the incongruent ads, indicating these adjectives were perceived as more agreeable with the incongruent ads than the congruent. However, the difference between the congruent and incongruent ads was lowest for the adjectives original (0.18), followed by innovative (0.20), indicating a very slight difference. A relatively small difference between the congruent and incongruent ads was also shown for the adjective sexist (0.25), thus both ad groups were in general reported agreeable to the statement sexist, but the incongruent ads were reported as slightly more sexist. The largest difference between the congruent and incongruent ads was found for the adjective humorous (0.70), indicating the incongruent ads to have been ranked as considerably more humorous than the congruent ads. The remaining adjectives serious, trustworthy, trendy, reliable, and attractive were ranked lower in the statements for the incongruent ads, indicating these adjectives were reported less agreeable with the incongruent ads, than the congruent ads. Thus, in general, the rankings of the congruent ads were indicated as more positive than to the incongruent ads.
4.3 The Interview Results

In the following sections, the responses from the interviews are summarized and presented. The data is presented in the same order and with the same structure as the questions asked during the interviews. It starts off with general impressions of the ads, followed by a reflection by each of the ten adjectives, and finishes off with recurring additional comments. In the summary of the interviews, there are some quotes from interview respondents. When there is a quotation, it follows with either the letter $M$ or $F$, indicating whether it was a quote from a male or female respondent. There is also a number presented after the letter, and this further represents whom of the 25 respondents from the specific gender group who made the statement. For example, $M2$ indicates male respondent number two. The complete list over all respondents and their demographics can be found in Appendix 2.

4.3.1 General Impression

The respondents’ general impression of all the ads at first glance can be summarized as “offensive towards women”, “sexist”, that women was used to “sell” the product with their sexuality and bodies. Some respondents thus implied that most companies believed in the notion that sex sells.

“I think many of them lack in creativity. It is as if they’re not even trying. It feels like they choose the easy way for attracting attention. You feel stupid as a consumer.”

(M19)

It was also found that most respondents thought the majority of ads were directed towards men. Most ads were considered as alluding to sex, and a majority of the respondents found them provocative, but mostly it was the female respondents who were personally offended and provoked. When the respondents were asked to separate the two product groups and point out the most significant difference between the congruent advertisement (CA) and the incongruent advertisement (IA), a few clear differences were stated. The CA was generally considered as more focused on sex and some of the respondents even perceived them as close to pornographic images. However, some respondents rather perceived the CA as containing more passion and romanticism compared to the IA. What were stated and generally agreed among all the respondents were that the women in the CA were more legitimate to be lightly
clothed than the women in the IA, and that women did not have anything to do with the car.

“Even though the underwear ads sometimes can be perceived as sexist, it feels more legitimate because it is underwear and the model have to be more naked in order to display the products. But in the car ads, the woman has no direct function.” (F21)

The IA was in general considered more extreme and vulgar in the use of women in a seemingly more apparent sexist way. Some said that the IA was depicted with more focus on humor, however hardly any of the ads actually succeeded to be funny in the eyes of the respondents. Some words used to describe the IA were “distasteful”, “degrading”, and “humiliating towards women”. A clear difference could also be detected from the interpretation and attitudes between the male and female respondents. The female respondents were faster in the conclusion that the ads were sexist, while the male respondents were keener to comment the intended humor and sexiness of the advertisements.

4.3.2 Serious

The general opinion among the respondents was that the company was perceived as more serious when the product was in focus, and therefore, in general the companies in the CA were perceived as more serious than in the IA. The level of seriousness also depended much on how the woman was portrayed. There was not much of a difference between what the female and male respondents thought regarding the seriousness of the ads. The respondents thought the company was less serious when the ad was perceived as sexist, and when the texts in the ad were too tacky, when the ad was excessively sexual, or overall degrading.

“It feels more like the women in the ads tries to sell themselves and not the product. It does not make the company feel very serious.” (F8)

For the CA, some respondents stated that the company itself affected the level of perceived seriousness through recognition and previous experiences with the company. This effect weared off to some extent when the authors told the respondent to make their evaluation based on the ad image itself, rather than previous knowledge of the company.

“I don’t think this ad is serious, but I know that Victoria’s Secret is a serious company, and thus I regard the company as serious.” (F3)
What made the companies behind the CA less serious in general, were when the focus was primarily on sex and when it was too vulgar or even pornographic.

"I think it is a difference. When the woman is in a more provocative position, spreading her legs, it feels less serious. But if the ad is more sensual but still sophisticated, the company is perceived as more serious.” (F9)

The companies behind the IA were in general perceived as very unserious, since there were hardly even any cars displayed in the ads, but the focus was mostly on the women. Also when the IA had attempted humor, but it was too inappropriate and exaggerated, it got the opposite effect and became less serious and more offensive instead. In the IA, the recognition and previous knowledge of the individual companies had less impact, since other more obvious reasons played a bigger role in deciding the level of seriousness.

4.3.3 Trustworthy

In the same manner as seriousness, the trustworthiness of the company depended much on the level of product focus or relatedness the advertisement had to the product, according to the respondents.

“It feels like the company has not even made an effort, it is just a half naked woman in front of a car. It is not trustworthy. Thinking it would be enough just showing a woman posing, the company is underestimating the consumer.” (M17)

Some of the respondents said that trustworthiness almost conclusively depended on the company, and the previous experiences and knowledge about it. Although the strong connection between trustworthiness and the previous experiences and knowledge of the company, the authors asked the respondents to make their evaluation based on the ad image itself. Some factors mentioned as affecting the perceived trustworthy negatively were when the ad did not reflect the product, or when the woman was displayed in more daring positions.

"Overall, I think people have great trust in car companies, and even if the ads are very distasteful, you still have a strong preconceived image about the company trust.” (M6)
The majority of the respondents thought that trustworthiness and seriousness were related, meaning that the ads where the respondents perceived the company as more serious, they also perceived the company as more trustworthy. The overall quality and aesthetics of the ad also influenced the level of trustworthiness of the company. When the ad was perceived as more professionally made it was also regarded as giving a more trustworthy impression of the company. In general, the companies behind the CA were considered more trustworthy than the companies behind the IA. The female and male respondents had similar opinions regarding trustworthiness.

4.3.4 Original

The company was considered by the respondents as more original when the ad was more unique and stood out among the other ads. Even though some of the companies behind the IA were considered original, most respondents were fast to add that they were still “bad ads” for containing sexist elements such as tacky jokes and exaggerated sexual depictions. However, in the evaluation of originality, the respondents primarily mentioned what visually stood out at a first glance.

“I want to change the word original to odd instead, because the ad is sexist, so I don’t mean that the company is original in a positive way.” (F16)

However, about half of the respondents did not think the companies behind the IA were original even if the ads were visually standing out, and this was due to their belief that the concept of using women as bait is not original.

“It feels kind of worn out and old fashioned to use sexist ads, especially when using tacky slogans. I think it is the opposite of being original.” (F19)

Also, some considered the companies behind the CA as not being original since the ads pretty much looked the same, or as “underwear ads usually look”. Some also mentioned that the company was perceived as more original if they used humor in their ad. The perceptions of the male and female respondents were similar but there were only female respondents that mentioned the diversity of the women’s bodies in the ads in the CA. When the woman was either curvier or less curvy than average, and had a more ordinary look, the company was ultimately considered as more original.
4.3.5 Innovative

The companies who were perceived as more innovative were in general the ones who used original advertisements perceived in a more positive sense. Some respondents meant that it was innovative in a sense to use models that does not look super skinny or stereotypical for the type of product being advertised. In one of the CA in particular, the woman’s body is more covered, and you cannot really see her underwear that well. This was something that made both female and male respondents perceive the company as innovative.

“The use of a more ordinary model who makes it feel very natural and not only focus on being sexy makes the company feels more innovative.” (F7)

The respondents said that sexist elements are the opposite of innovative. One of the strongest viewpoints was that equality is such a hot topic in today’s society, and to use elements that shows the opposite does not reflect a perception that the company is innovative and progressive. Yet again some of the female respondents expressed that if the stereotypical sex roles were inverted it would have been more positive and innovative.

“It would have been more innovative if they had changed the whole sex thing and focused on men instead, with the woman in charge. That would have been more innovative.” (F8)

In general, most companies were not perceived as innovative either by the male or female respondents. The reason was often explained as the overall ads had the same overall theme, and contained “nothing new”, and even if some ads were seen suggested innovative, the very concept of using women in ads were not considered as making the company appear especially innovative. The perception between female and male respondents was similar in general.

4.3.6 Trendy

A company was in general considered more trendy when it appeared to be “cutting edge”, “modern”, “new”, or when using It-girls and famous models. When the female model was portrayed in another way than the ordinary, the company appeared to be trendier as well, according to the respondents.
“Calvin Klein has a hashtag in their ad, that is a bit trendy. The model is also more dressed. You already associate Calvin Klein with their specific underwear, so this way of ad is more trendy in my opinion.” (F15)

The company was in general considered as less trendy when it was perceived as sexist and oversexualized. The companies of the IA were foremost commented as least trendy in their use of extreme sexism and objectifying of women.

“The car ads feels very old fashioned and therefore they do not give the impression of being trendy. Been there, done that. It is done. Do they have to use women?” (F21)

Very few of the companies were considered as trendy in general. A larger amount of the companies behind the CA were perceived as more trendy compared with the ones of the IA, in general. The female respondents had more to say about what was trendy in the CA than the male respondents, who sometimes commented it was hard to evaluate what is trendy regarding women’s wear.

4.3.7 Reliable

The respondents perceived the companies as more reliable when it was clear in the ad what the company offering. Some respondents mentioned that it might raise concern and make the consumers suspicious if the company does not want to be clear with what they are selling.

“If the company don’t dare to show the product in the ad, you start wondering what’s wrong with it.” (M23)

When the ad signaled “safe”, “serious”, “classy”, and a “quality context”, the company was considered as more reliable according to the respondents. In the opposite direction, the company was perceived as less reliable when it was too sexual, not clear what they are selling or offering, and when it is sexist and objectifying of women.

“I can rely on companies that have a sound view on equality, however, many of the car companies here are too sexist. It’s so unnecessary, and makes me think the company is not reliable, and have not thought through their marketing strategy.” (M14)
“I can’t see any characteristics of the cars in the advertisements, that is not reliable. I look at other things than girls when I am about to buy a car.” (M3)

In general, the companies were perceived as more reliable when the product or company was well recognized by the respondents. There was a clear division between the respondents’ opinions regarding reliability in the IA. One part reasoned that the automobile companies were in fact reliable regardless of the advertising used, since the companies are well known, and that the respondents knew from experience or from other people that the company can deliver according to the customer expectation. The other part reasoned that it did not matter that it were car companies, they still became perceived as less reliable when using such bad ads.

“I know that they make good cars, but that does not mean that I like their advertisement campaigns.” (M21)

However, when the respondents were asked to ignore the specific companies and only focus on the ad itself, the number of seemingly reliable companies was close to nonexistent. The CA was for the most considered as reliable, which was motivated by good product focus in most ads making no doubt what the company is selling. However, when the CA was too sexualized and pornographic, or using any elements making it perceived as sexist, the company was considered less reliable by the respondents. It was no major difference in the reasoning between the female and male respondents regarding what was perceived as reliable or not.

4.3.8 Attractive

The respondents perceived a company as more attractive when the ad was of quality, and the ad itself had the impression it was professionally made. The specific companies were also a factor, which, especially in the CA, affected the perception of what was the most attractive company. When evaluating company attractiveness, there was a difference between factors considered by the male and female respondents. The male respondents tended to focus more on the colors, lights and aesthetics.
“I think companies which have focused on colors and styling, but still get their message across and clarity in what they sell, appears more attractive.” (M18)

The female respondents thought company attractiveness depended more on where the respondent usually buy their underwear. Even though the male respondents said they usually do not buy female underwear, they also tended to favor companies they were familiar with or recognized.

“If the underwear look good, but also the model in the ad looks comfortable, the company is perceived as more attractive to me. It’s mostly about how the woman is portrayed.” (F19)

The female respondents also regarded specific companies, using ads where the female model is more natural and look comfortable in her pose, to be more attractive in general. Some female respondents mentioned that the CA portrayed very beautiful and thin models whom in most ads were acting very seductingly and sexual. This was also mentioned making them feel bad about their own body and that ads like that might lower their self-esteem.

"I don't have a body like this. The ad makes me feel uncomfortable with my own body. Do I need to look and act like that to attract a man?” (F4)

When the product was clearly displayed in the ad, both the female and male respondents in general perceived the company more attractive. In most IA, the automobiles were not in focus or even displayed at all, which made those companies appear less attractive according to most respondents. The companies were also perceived as less attractive when the ad was too unserious, tacky, ugly, and when it crossed the line and became untasteful. Some of the respondents were clear that they would not buy any of the automobiles based on the IA, and thought that none of them made the company seem attractive. In general, the CA was considered as giving a more attractive impression than the IA.

**4.3.9 Provocative**

Regarding companies who were perceived provocative, there was a quite clear difference between the responses from the female and male respondents. In general, the companies behind the IA were perceived as more provocative than the companies behind the CA. This
was mentioned by some respondents to depend on the fact that it is more justifiable for underwear ads to display women in a more lightly clothed and more sexual way.

“I don’t feel provoked by the underwear ads, but maybe it has to do with the fact that you are used to see this kind of ads. I guess it is hard to display underwear without the models being lightly clothed. But I would not be provoked by these ads if I walked past them. They would not shock me.” (F14)

The female respondents tended to feel more personally provoked by the advertisements than the male respondents, even though not all female respondents were affected. More female respondents felt offended and irritated than the men, and even if some of the men also got provoked, it was for other reasons than what were reported by the females in most cases. The use of the “ideal beauty”, the skinny and perfect woman, provoked some of the female respondents.

“All girls used in the ads are very thin and perfect, and that can be quite provocative. The majority of women do not look like that in their underwear.” (F13)

Also when the ad was oversexualized and the woman was merely used as eye-catcher, and did not have any functional use whatsoever with the product displayed, most of the female respondents reacted. The majority of the female respondents thought it was provocative when the woman was displayed almost implying she comes with the purchase, or when the ad gave the impression the woman is not independent or equally intelligent as men. Similarly, the respondents mentioned that it was provocative when it seemed as if the man got the power, and that the woman was subordinate and/or dependent on men.

“It is provoking how they portray women in general, and the role of females, as if the only thing we are good for are posing in front of a damn car. They emphasize on everything a woman should not want to be perceived as.” (F15)

“It feels like the companies only focus in the underwear ads is for it to be sexy, and that is provocative, or at least I get provoked. I guess it is because I am a girl, and there are only women who are portrayed like this, and men “have the power” in all ads.” (F2)
Some of the female respondents did not feel very provoked by any of the ads, mostly by motivating that they have seen it before, or because they simply does not let advertisements get to them. Some respondents mentioned that the IA was clearly targeted to men, which in itself was provocative, since women could just as well be interested in buying the advertised car.

“In the car ads they try to attract their target group with the use of women, but that provokes me, because I think I might as well could drive this car. It bothers me.” (F4)

The male respondents reacted a little differently than the female respondents did. What provoked some of the male respondents were the impression that companies using women for seductive purposes made them feel stupid, since the companies appeared as thinking it would simple be enough for luring male consumers.

“It feels almost as if they treat the consumers as idiots. I get provoked by the way they are trying to sell the car to me, by thinking I am so stupid that it only takes a beautiful woman to convince me.” (M12)

In some cases, male respondents mentioned that they got provoked because the ad itself was so crappy, and not so much because they got offended. Most male respondents mentioned ads they thought might be provocative in general, or toward women, but added that they did not get personally offended or provoked.

“I think some of these ads provoke women, since they are very sexually displayed, and some use bad, distasteful jokes. However, it does not provoke me personally. I think it is unnecessary, but it does not provoke me very much.” (M10)

In some cases, the male respondents regarded the more provocative approach as something that could be positive for the company.

“It is shocking. Did they really say that? You start to wonder. Did they really dare to do this? (...) They do however evoke a feeling, something I think ads should do.” (M7)
Something both the male and female respondents seemed to agree with, was that the use of bad and sexist jokes made it more provocative, and hence the texts used in the ads increased the provocativeness in most cases.

4.3.10 Sexist

The respondents generally agreed that when the primarily focus was on sex and the woman’s body the company was perceived as sexist. Stereotypical sex roles, objectification and offensive traits towards women contributed to the respondents increased perceptions of the company as sexist. The pose and expression of the model were also factors mentioned to affect the perceived sexism, for example when the woman was arching her back or spreading her legs, as well as the perceived sexual suggestiveness. In general, the texts and slogans used in the ads made the company appear even more sexist according to the respondents. When a respondent considered an ad as sexist, he or she also tended to perceive the company as less serious, less trustworthy, and more provocative.

“The ad does not make me want the product more just because it is naked women in the picture. S-class is a nice Mercedes model, but this picture is awfully unprofessional.” (M2)

There was a general difference between the perception of sexism in the ads between female and male respondents and what they remarked upon. The female respondents rather than the male respondents mentioned the woman's posture, or submissiveness, and when the woman was perceived to have less power than men, regarding when the company was considered more sexist.

“It may be hard for underwear ads to not appear sexist, even if it is not their intention. But I think it depends much on the performance and posture of the model.” (F17)

The male respondents were in general more forgiving and did not consider the companies as sexist as the female respondents did.

“Of course it can be a little sexist trying to sell a car using beautiful women, but at the same time the company have to stand out and be seen.” (M11)
Some female respondents commented the focused use of women in the sexist ad, and meant that the message would have been different if it was men who had been ridiculed in a sexist way instead, due to the still existing power of men in society. When asking one respondent what she would have thought of a particular ad, which she earlier stated was very sexist, if the company replaced the woman in the ad with a man, she responded:

“Of course it would have been sexist too, but it would have been humorous instead of provocative, because the man still have the power in today’s society. It puts things in perspective. If a man would have been ridiculed, maybe the ad would have been seen as more original instead.” (F4)

Even though it was evident that more female than male respondents in general reacted and perceived a larger amount of companies as sexist, there were still some of the female respondents who did not find the ads particularly sexist. Some of the respondents also mentioned that they were considering the context when determining if the company was sexist or not.

“I think that it depends on the context, where it is published. I can’t say the companies are sexist just by looking at these pictures here in front of me. Maybe I would have a different opinion if I saw them in a magazine.” (F22)

4.3.11 Humorous

All respondents were certain that the companies had attempted to use humor in some ads, but most of them did not succeed in the eyes of the respondents. There was a consensus between all respondents that when the ad was too weird, too sexist, too rough, and if the purpose of the ad was not clear, the ad was not perceived as funny either. Some of the female respondents raised the equality question and the difference between the male and female sexes and how they perceive the intended humor in the ads differently.

“If there would have been an equal society for men and women it might have been humoristic, but that is not the situation today.” (F16)
“It’s a bit too much. It does not have to be so rough. But I don’t know, maybe men would find it funnier.” (F13)

However, some of the respondents thought that even sometimes when the ad was sexist, the company still spoke with their tongue in cheek and balanced the humor and sexism so that the humor outweigh the sexism. These respondents meant that you become more forgiving of the use of the sexist elements in the ads when the joke is on spot and cannot be taken as a serious statement, implying the humor is obvious.

“This is the reason they become even more sexist. Most respondents however thought that none of the companies had really succeeded to be funny, and some respondents explicitly said that none of the ads were funny at all.

“The level of this humor is so low, it just becomes awfully bad, and then it gets the opposite effect.” (F21)

Some of the respondents found some of the ads humorous, but still had scattered opinions about the companies behind it.

“I giggled a little when I saw some of the car ads, but the more I saw the worse they became and the more angrier I got. It’s about seeing it from everyone’s perspective, and they have not. Some of them I laughed at, but they are totally insane.” (F14)

In general, the companies of the IA were considered as focusing more on attempted humor than those of the CA, but most of the companies failed in the eyes of the respondents. The male respondents were in general more forgiving of the sexist humor than the female respondents who were feeling a bit more offended when women were portrayed in a certain way, even for humoristic purposes and intentions.
4.3.12 Additional Comments

During the interviews, the respondents talked very freely, and oftentimes returned to the topic of whether the ads would in fact affect a potential purchase or not. Regarding the automobiles, most respondents said that it would not affect an actual purchase. This was motivated by some respondents by reasoning that a car has multiple characteristics weighing in the purchase, and since it is a relatively large expense, when buying a car the decision can simply not be based on one single ad, in reality.

“I guess you start to look at the technology and features of the car, and you stop caring what made you look at the ad in the first place.” (M13)

Some of the respondents said that some of the sexist ads would have positive impact for the companies, since they make you notice the car if you get encountered by it.

“I don’t think it would impact me in a car purchase. But if I saw that car in the city I think I would react and recognize it from the advertisement. It makes you notice the car when you see it. But I don’t think I would buy it just because of that.” (M1)

While not all respondents got impressed, some of them said that some ads actually would increase the likelihood to purchase that particular brand.

“Advertisement P would have increased the likelihood of me buying a BMW. It would affect me positively, because it feels elegant and luxurious at the same time. It’s a nice car and if you drive a car like that you live a luxurious life.” (M12)

Some of the respondents were unsure whether it would affect their purchase or not. However, the majority of the respondents said their image of the company based have changed because of the advertising displayed in the interviews not living up to their expectations.

“The image of some of these companies has really changed. The car ads gave me a cheap impression of what I thought were classy car companies. I got really disappointed by these companies.” (F5)
While most respondents stated their opinions about some companies had changed, there were also some respondents that thought it would be really hard to change an established image of a company only due to some ads that went wrong.

“It has to be extremely bad marketing to really make you change the perception of the company. Even if it’s something controversial, you still know what the brand really stands for.” (M11)

The brand recognition and previous knowledge and liking of the brand also were mentioned to play a part when evaluating the effectiveness and/or damage a sexist ad can have.

“I think that you are more forgiving towards a brand you like and which you usually buy from. If it’s a brand you are not familiar with I think you would be quicker to judge and opt out.” (F6)

When the respondent were asked what the target audience was for the IA, all of the respondents thought it was generally directed towards men. Even though the CA displayed female underwear and was regarded as most definitely targeting women in general, the majority of the respondents said they thought some CA were directed towards men as well.

“Most of the car ads are directed towards men, but some of the underwear ads gave the impression it was targeting men buying underwear for women, but mostly they are targeting women.” (M25)

4.4 Summary of Key Findings of the Interviews

4.4.1 How Sexist Advertising Influence the Consumer Attitudes of a Company

Generally, the respondents had negative attitudes towards the companies behind the ads for all adjectives. Most ads were considered as sexist and oppressing women by focusing on their bodies and sexuality. The degree of sexism was much dependent on the posing of the woman as well as the product focus in the ad. The companies who were regarded as most offensive, humiliating and degrading towards women, vulgar, and distasteful generated the most negative attitudes. The attitudes of the respondents were sometimes said to depend on the previous experience and expectations of the company. Most respondents regarded the ads as
directed towards men. Some respondents perceived the women in the ads as the weaker gender. Most respondents considered some ads as having multiple meanings, mostly by using texts that could be interpreted differently, which affected the respondents’ attitudes differently. Some respondents said the ads changed their attitudes about the company and might affect their purchasing intentions, while most respondents said the advertising was disturbing but would not affect purchasing intentions.

4.4.2 How the Consumer Attitudes of a Company are Influenced by Gender

The female respondents were in general more negative towards the companies using sexist advertisement than the male respondents. The female respondents also regarded the companies as more offensive, more provocative and more sexist compared to the male respondents. In turn, more men than women considered the companies as humorous and sexy. Further, the female respondents were in general more sensitive to how the women’s bodies were displayed in the ads, and got more personally offended by the companies than the male respondents, when using sexist ads. The ads containing extreme sexual appeals or nudity generated more negative attitudes to the companies for female respondents.

4.4.3 How the Consumer Attitudes of a Company are Influenced by the Level of Congruity

The incongruent ads generated more negative attitudes towards the companies in general, compared to the congruent ads. The incongruent ads were mentioned to contain more humorous elements compared to the congruent ads, however the majority of the respondents did not consider the humor as successful. The humor was thus suggested to give the opposite effect of the intention. The congruent ads were considered as more justifiable of the use of nudity since it was more functional, compared to the incongruent ads where the woman was perceived as merely an eye-catcher and decoration. Some respondent mentioned that the incongruent ads probably would get stuck more easily in their mind, compared to the congruent ads, which did not stand out as much. In general, the congruent ads were perceived as containing more sex and nudity, while the incongruent ads were perceived as containing more vulgar, distasteful and oppressing characteristics making it more evidently sexist.
5. Analysis

In this chapter the empirical data collected are analyzed by drawing parallels from previous research and theoretical frameworks. The analysis is divided in four parts where the first three sections analyses the focused theories connected to the three research questions of this study separately. Lastly, the two routes and their implementation in practice, as well as a summary of the analysis are presented.

5.1 How Sexist Advertising Influence the Consumer Attitudes of a Company

In general, the respondents’ perception and attitudes towards the companies were affected negatively by the sexist ads. The findings of McKenzie and Lutz (1989) comply with the results from the interviews of this study, which is that the consumer attitudes toward the ad have strong relationship with the attitude toward the company. In the majority of cases, the respondents’ attitude toward the ad and company was homogenous. However, it was not always the case. For example, there were times when the respondents said they did not like the ad, but stated it did not affect their attitude towards the company. Most often in these cases, the respondents referred to the specific company and reasoned in the following fashion: “I don’t think this ad is serious, but I know that Victoria’s Secret is a serious company, and thus I regard the company as serious.” (F3). These kinds of responses were known by the authors as a factor that might bias the intended study to an extent, since the purpose of this study is to understand consumer attitudes towards companies as a general term, and not focusing on any specific companies. However, when receiving these kinds of responses, the authors asked the respondents to disregard the previous knowledge and experience with specific companies, and only evaluate the company by the ad itself. When doing so, the majority of respondents reported a negative change in attitudes immediately. Consequently, the respondents’ attitudes towards the company were then complying more with the attitudes towards the ad. The findings of this study were further in line with previous research, which shows that exposure to sexist ads might change young women’s attitude toward the company and their purchasing behavior (Jones & Reid, 2011), and it was applicable to the male sex as well.

The level of perceived unseriousness, low trustworthiness and low credibility, were said to be due to the low product focus, and excessive focus on the woman and her body. This might
connect to the level of fit between the elements in the ad and the product being advertised (Sherman & Quester, 2005). When the ads were regarded by the respondents as very sexist, overall degrading or overly sexualized, the companies were considered even less serious, less trustworthy and less credible. These three adjectives were also said to depend on the specific company behind the ad, and the quality of the ad itself. Especially reliability was said to be dependent on what the respondents knew about the company from experience. This complies with previous research stating that personal experiences impacts attitude formation (Schiffman, Wisenblit, & Kanuk, 2010).

When the respondents reflected over the use of overly sexualized images of women, some mentioned that they thought the company was behind the idea that sex sells. This notion is commonly suggested by previous researchers (e.g. Boddewyn & Kunz, 1991; Nelson & Paek, 2005), but the respondents did not seem convinced by the notion themselves. Most of the respondents thought that the companies using ads focusing too much on sex were regarded sexist, did not use an optional marketing strategy, and considered them as old fashioned and to only use cheap tricks to attract customers. It implies that the respondents did not perceive sex, or sexist advertising as a unique selling point, rather the opposite. Further, with this reasoning, most respondents did not regard the ads as innovative. In general, the respondents reported low ratings regarding innovation and originality in the surveys, and commented further in the interviews, that the companies lacked in these adjectives. The respondents thought some of the companies of as original, but a minority of these cases were said to be original in a positive sense, but rather stood out since they were odd. Most respondents said that due to the perception of the ads having quite the same theme and sexist focus, none of the companies were regarded as being innovative. The authors suggest that these critical attitudes of might origin from the fact that the respondents are part of Generation Y. This is a young generation which the authors believe to be more critical to advertising in general, and who demand a higher level of creativity in companies’ marketing strategies. Furthermore, sexual portrayals of women were reported from most respondents to not be in line with today’s society where females and males ought to be treated equally. This was a common reasoning among the respondents why they did not perceive most ads as trendy.

Also, when the women in the ads were perceived overly sexualized and objectified, the respondents regarded the ads as more offensive in general, as well as creating negative
attitudes towards the company. For example in ads where the woman had a more challenging and unnatural posture, spreading her legs or arching her back. These negative effects on attitudes from the sexist ads comply with previous studies (e.g. Latour & Henthorne, 1994; Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). It was a connection between what was considered as offensive and was what considered provocative by the respondents. In turn, what was regarded as offensive and provocative were mostly regarded as highly sexist. The more extreme elements used in the ads, according to the respondents, the more sexist the company was regarded. Extreme elements were described by the respondents as when the ad was very sexual suggestive, objectifying, humiliating, degrading, and stereotypical. These companies were also reported to be the most provocative and offensive as well. Also, the level of provocativeness was reported by some respondents as depending much on the justification of nudity, in accordance with congruity theory (Sherman & Quester, 2005) and the ad’s fit to nudity. Provocativeness also depended on the level of which the female model was regarded independent or subordinated men (Lass & Hall, 2004), if the ad was imposing feministic power (Amy-Chinn, 2006), or appeared as targeting men. The use of excessively skinny models creates unattainable beauty standards (Lavine, Sweeney, & Wagner, 1999) were also considered provocative. The findings from this study were also in accordance with Groza and Cuesta (2011), stating it the other way around, that the more positive feelings the respondents got from the ad, the less the company was perceived as offensive.

It was evident that not all respondents found all ads as sexist, and consequently not all companies were perceived as sexist. This supports the notion that attitudes are individual, and influenced by several factors such as personal experiences and interactions (Schiffman, Wisenblit, & Kanuk, 2010). Yet, these responses might open up to the questioning of the framework by Goffman (1979) and its reliability, and how effectively and evidently these categories of sexist depictions of women actually are for consumers today. It could be discussed whether these factors and their effect have changed over the years. However, as stated in the Scale of Sexism (Pingree et al., 1976), there are difference levels of sexism depictions, where some are more extreme and evident than others. The ads chosen for this study, regarded by the authors as belonging to level I, and the most extreme level of sexism, were also to a larger extent regarded by the majority of the respondents as sexist. The objectification of a woman in the most obvious way, focusing on a specific part of her body, was defined by all respondents as sexist. However, the interpretations were different for some ads where the distinction of sexism was seemingly not as obvious. The decorational use of
the woman was more evident for the incongruent ads, where the women did not have any functional use, and might be the reason why those ads were perceived more sexist in general. The objectification of women for the congruent ads was less evident, since the women had a functional use, displaying underwear meant for female consumers.

Thus, it might be that the ads chosen from the level II of the Scale of Sexism were not as evidently sexist. Further, women have been reported to be more frequently used for sex appeal purposes in advertising than men (Huang & Lowry, 2011), and most respondents said they were used to see women portrayed in sexist ways in advertisements. Some respondents even stated that most of the ads were considered as what have become standard ads, and how women usually are portrayed. Since the respondents were so accustomed to these kinds of ads, the authors suggest it is yet one of the reasons why not all ads were perceived as sexist.

The respondents might have considered the ads as more sexist if they had been compared to more neutral, non-sexist, ads. This would probably have created a greater contrast between the more diffuse sexist depictions as well, making them stand out more as well. When all ads were spread out next to each other on a table, several times the respondents only pointed out the ads containing the most extreme elements as sexist. However, this was also one of the reasons why congruent and incongruent ads were used, so that the sexism would not be missed out entirely by any respondents. In the determination of sexist ads, the respondents sometimes commented the portrayal of the woman in the ads.

Some of the female respondents regarded the women in the ads as being portrayed as belonging of the weaker sex, and that the ads conveyed the notion that females are meant to please the desires of men. Also, the majority of the respondents regarded the ads sexist where the women were kept in place physically. This complies with the category of women’s portrayal in advertisements by Goffman (1979), Movement, indicating the inhibition of movement by the woman, or amount of control she possesses in the situation. This also connected to The Ritualization of Subordination where the women are physically depicted lower than the men, which were shown in the ads of women lying on the floor or bed, proposing submission and sexual suggestiveness. Further, Feminine touch, was used in some ads involving self-touching, Body display, with the heavy use of lightly clothed women, and Objectification which was seen when the main purpose of the use of the woman was for her to be looked at.
The authors of this study found that most respondents perceived some of the ads as having multiple meanings, and depending on how the image was interpreted, it could appear as sexist. This is in accordance with Cortese (2004), stating that a seemingly non-sexist image could appear as sexist if the advertiser was using an element conveying multiple meanings. This was for example mentioned in some cases where the text in the ad was reported by the respondents as having multiple meanings, giving a more or less sexist impression depending how the text was perceived. Thus, in the same way as the respondents thought some ads were perceived more sexist by using multiple meanings, some respondents also stated that the use of multiple meaning could ease the level of sexism, when for example, humor was added. This is in accordance of previous research suggesting humor has the ability to mask sexism (Jones & Reid, 2009). This was something the authors found interesting, that adding humor was possibly a way for companies to decrease the level of perceived sexism and make it more acceptable, however in this study the majority of attitudes towards the companies’ use of humor were negative. In general, the respondents regarded the companies as more sexist when they tried to make the ads funny using texts or other attributes. The reason behind it for most respondents, which was mentioned, was that the attempted humor was too much, using too extreme elements or exposing images, and some respondents added it got offensive instead of funny. Thus, what was attempted humor by the companies was to a large extent not perceived as humor by the respondents. This complies with the research by Swani, Weinberger and Gulas (2013) that perceived humor is determined by the audience, and that unsuccessful humor might generate negative attitudes. The companies attempt to use humor were thus generally not appreciated by the respondents. It complies with the findings of Boddewyn and Kunz (1991), suggesting decency in advertising is risky and might ruin the intention of the ad. The authors further believe that sexism is a sensitive topic, and therefore it is a fine line of when it is acceptable or not for companies to joke about it. As found in this research, the use of multiple meanings in the ads generally affected the attitudes of the respondents in a negative way.

As aforementioned, advertising in general, as well as sexist ads might change the attitudes towards the company (McKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Jones & Reid, 2011). The authors found changes in attitudes very interesting, since the respondents reacted very differently. Generally, as aforementioned, the sexist ads contributed to the formation of negative attitudes towards the companies, and this included attitudes towards already familiar companies as
Some of the respondents felt disappointed when a company they were familiar with used sexist advertisement. The respondents reported having a predetermined image of what the known company represented, and generally this attitude was changed after being exposed to the advertisement. This is in accordance to previous studies implying attitudes get affected when a consumer’s prior expectations are not lived up to (Orth & Holancova, 2003). Even though most respondents said the automobile ads would not affect a potential purchase, implying it would be hard to change the attitudes toward a company simply based on advertising. This might be due to the respondents existing schema (Meyers-Levy, Louise & Curren, 1994), or simply due to difference in personality, interests or level of involvement (Skeie, 2015) with the particular companies. However, some respondents meant their attitudes had changed to such high degree that they would not consider buying from those companies in the first hand. Thus, for the respondents who did change their attitudes toward the company, it was complying with previous research stating that attitudes impact intentions of purchase, and suggests it might affect actual purchasing behavior (e.g. Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Madrigal, 2001; Spears & Singh, 2004). A minority of the respondents even had positive attitudes toward the company after being exposed to the sexist ads, motivated by the addition of originality and sex appeal. The latter is in line with previous studies, which show consumer attitudes to become more positive towards the ad when sexual appeals are used in the ad (Belch & Severn, 1990). Although, these attitudes belonged to a wast minority of the respondents since the sexual appeal used in the ads most often was regarded as too extreme and vulgar and thus was not perceived positively in most cases. The sexist ads clearly contributed to an attitude change among the respondents towards the company, with the majority perceiving a negative attitude change, with a wast minority finding it more positive.

### 5.2 How the Consumer Attitudes of a Company are Influenced by Gender

In general, the female respondents reported even more negative attitudes towards the companies behind the ads, as indicated by their lower rankings reported than the men in the survey. As found in the survey results of the compound mean values, the female respondents ranked the statements for all adjectives as lower than the male respondents, for both the congruent and incongruent ads, with the exception of provocative and sexist which were ranked higher. This implies that the female respondents had more negative attitudes towards the ads and the companies than the male respondents. The survey results also showed that the difference between the male and the female respondents was larger for the incongruent ads.
than for the congruent ads. For the incongruent ads, the largest difference between the male and female responses was what they regarded as humor, and least difference between what they regarded as trustworthy and original. For the congruent ads, the largest difference between the male and female responses was what they considered attractive, and least difference between what they regarded as innovative.

As suggested by Jones and Reid (2010), humor is a commonly used sexual appeal in advertising, and this was also true among the ads of this study. In the interviews, most respondents commented that several companies tried to use humor in the ads, most commonly among the incongruent ads. From the interviews, a difference between the female’s and male’s reported perceptions and attitudes regarding the humor used in the ads was shown, in accordance with the survey results. More female than male respondents were negative towards the humor which was used in the ads, compared to the male respondents. Most women motivated their negative attitudes by the inappropriate context of the humor used in the ads. As suggested by Weinberger and Gulas (1992), the appropriateness of humor in advertisement is much depending on what the communications goal is. This was for example mentioned in the incongruent ads, when the communication goals of the company supposedly were to explain a feature of the car but instead focused on the women’s bodies. The use of this kind of ads was commented as irrelevant for the product, and thus considered more inappropriate, mostly by the female respondents. Most respondents regarded the ads as containing attempted humor, which were regarded as over the top, distasteful, and humiliating towards women. The majority of the respondents who found the humor as positive and suitable for its purpose were men, who regarded it as in some cases making the ad less sexist. Reicken and Hansel (2012) found in their study that men responds more positively to humor in ads, which might explain why the male respondents had a more positive response to the humor than the female respondents. It can probably also relate to the concept of multiple meanings (Cortese, 2004), where the humor might be a factor making the ad perceived as carrying multiple given meanings. Multiple meanings thus opens up for several ways of interpreting the image, and might further explain why most women found the incongruent ads offensive and sexist, while the male respondents saw the humor in the ads and thus oppressed the sexist and offensive meaning in the ad.

For the adjectives where the answers between the female and male respondents were rated in the survey as more similar, a distinction could still be made when analyzing the data gathered
in the interviews, regarding their focused attention. It often differed between what factors were regarded as relevant, for example, there were times when female respondents put more focus on the female model in the ad, and the male respondent rather discussed the quality of the advertisement itself. The authors thought this phenomenon was very interesting. The same company was sometimes regarded as less attractive by both sexes, but where the females regarded the sexist attributes of the ads as the cause, while the males rather considered the ad as using bad colors and aesthetics. More common among the female respondents than the male respondents were thus the reflection over the variety of body types among the female models in the advertisements. The female respondents found the companies more original, and attractive when they were using advertisements where the female model had a body type which deviated from the beauty standard and slim ideal. This might comply with the findings by Feiereisen, Borderick and Douglas (2009), which state that female consumers are more positive and favors the use of models, which they can identify themselves with more easily.

Most women reported that the companies who did not use too skinny models were more innovative, original, and more attractive. However, when the companies used the typical skinny model in accordance with the beauty ideal, the ad and companies were instead perceived as more provocative. It has been found that sexist advertising most often use depictions which aid the creation of distorted body images, portraying unattainable standards (Lavine, Sweeney, & Wagner, 1999). This was mentioned by some of the female respondents, who felt that sexual suggestive images made them feel as if they also had to be and act as seductively, and look like the model in the ad. They reported concerned about their own body, and compared themselves with the women in the advertisements, indicating that the advertisement had a deeper impact on them than the male respondents. Female depiction in advertising and the way the woman’s role in society is perceived, suggests to be related according to previous research (Lafky et al., 1996; Lindner, 2004). This can thus be suggested to comply with the findings of this study, at least for the female respondents.

The reactions and attitudes from the ads containing nudity and sexual appeal were thus in general reported in the interviews as more negative by the female respondents than the male respondents. This is in accordance with previous research suggesting that women have a greater tendency to dislike nudity and sexual depictions of women in a greater extent than
men (Jones & Reid, 2010). The male respondent motivated they were used to it, implying to female nudity, when explaining their lack of graver reaction to nudity and sexual depictions. While women are more critical, it has been suggested in previous research that men feel more energized and positive from ads containing explicit nudity and sex appeals (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). This might be another part of the explanation why the male respondents reacted less negative towards the companies than the female respondents regarding those kinds of ads. Further, research suggests that female nudity is most preferred by heterosexual men, and likewise, male nudity is most preferred by heterosexual women (Hofmann, 2016). This might also be part of the explanation in the difference of the reactions between the female and male respondents, however it cannot be known for sure in this study since the ads being analyzed only contained female nudity, and thus the effect of male nudity was not recorded. The male respondents also discussed in the interviews, to a larger extent than the female respondents that the ads added positive sexual appeal, humor, and were more original.

However, the female respondents were not being negative to nudity in general, as long as the ad was not too revealing nor too sexual suggestive. In accordance with the findings by Lass and Hart (2004), it was rather the level of stereotypical or sexual suggestive depiction making the female respondents decide whether the company was perceived as provocative and offensive, not just nudity itself. For example, the underwear ads containing female models had basically the same level of nudity, but only the ones having women who posed in an unnatural way, arching their back or spreading their legs, or depicted stereotypical female sex roles were regarded as offensive by most females. Some opposing voices of the female respondents said that regardless of the sexual expression of the ad, as long as the woman was regarded as being dominant, in charge, or in power, they did not regard the ad as sexist or offensive. This might comply with the two kinds of feminism suggested by Lass and Hart (2004), who meant that one group of feminism is against any kind of sexual display of female models in advertising, as it is regarded offensive and objectifying of women. The other group of feminism did not regard those kinds of ads as offensive or objectifying as long as the woman was portrayed as independent, and strong, and/or dominating a man. Its has been further proposed by researchers that it is a difference between passive and active sexual display, meaning the latter might convey feministic power rather than degrading women (Amy-Chinn, 2006).
The female respondents were in general reporting more negative attitudes towards the companies than the male respondents when sexual elements were used in the ads. This notion complies with previous research by Lambiase and Reichert (2003) who examined sexual elements effects on attitudes towards brands. When the female respondents reacted negatively on the sexual elements of the ad, the majority said it affected their attitudes toward the company negatively and made the company appear sexist, not very innovative nor original. In accordance with Hofman (2016), who found that both women and men reacted negatively when a too distinct gender depiction was displayed on the opposite sex, was also true in this study. Some respondents mentioned that they had possibly changed their opinion if it would have been a male model instead of a female model depicted in the ads. The majority of those respondents were females. The majority of the respondents reported the use of female models to increase the perception that the ads were only meant to appeal to men, and that men were the intended target market to buy the products. This upset some of the female respondents and made them doubt if the companies believed in equality. The respondents considered the ads as old fashioned since the companies used sexual depiction of females as a selling point. When ads deviated from this notion, the companies were regarded more original, innovative and attractive by the female respondents, which comply with previous research showing women prefer less traditional portrayals of sex roles (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). What was found very interesting in this study was that some of the respondents, most of them women, were convinced that the target group of the female underwear ads was men. They argued that since the women in most ads were depicted in a seductive and sexual way, it made them think that the underwear ads were supposed to attract male consumers, and not directed towards female consumers directly. Previous research has also suggested that women’s attitudes are more negative to sexual appeal than to neutral appeals (Vezich, Gunter & Lieberman, 2017). Suggested by the authors, is if the ads were only intended to be directed towards women, it would have been more logical to use a more neutral approach.

Even if there were some deviating attitudes, it was most often women who explicitly said that the ads were offensive. It became especially evident in the underwear advertisements, where hardly any male respondent reported them as offensive. However, female respondents were in general commenting the most revealing and sexual suggestive ads as perceived offensive, which is in accordance to research stating those kinds of depictions often are (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). According to Pope, Voges and Brown (2004), the reason why women gets more offended by over sexualized images than men, are because women
process the information more elaborately attaching greater meaning to it, while men evaluate visual appeals more one-dimensional. This might be an explanation to why the female respondents reported more ads to be offensive than the males. In general, the female respondents seemed to process the information, apply it to different situations, and evaluated it on a deeper level than the men who gave more straightforward answers. As suggested by Zell et al. (2016), one reason why gender discrimination hits women harder might be due to their stronger identification to their own gender, since they perceive it to affect their life outcomes to a larger extent than men do. For example, sexist depictions might create a standard image of women, and normalize sexism. As suggested by Lafky et al. (1996), stereotypical beliefs can increase solely by short sequences of exposure to stereotypical ads. Advertising is not only used to sell products, but also to affect the audience and by selling cultural representations and values (Cortese, 2004). Some of the female respondents mentioned that they perceived most ads as conveying male power and domination, regardless if the ad contained a man or not. This conformed to the trend found in previous studies of women being depicted as the weaker sex (Boddewyn & Kunz, 1991; Levy, 2008; Taylor, Miyazaki & Mogensen, 2013). In the ads containing both a man and a woman, some female respondents perceived the man as being in charge or power over the woman, portrayed as the stronger sex. As suggested by Cortese (2004), superiority or power can be conveyed in advertising using positioning in the ad, attention or size, and is common in sexist advertising.

5.3 How the Consumer Attitudes of a Company are Influenced by the Level of Congruity

As with previous studies, which have shown congruity to impact attitude formation (e.g. Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1995), congruity was found to contribute to differences in consumer attitudes to sexist ads in this study. According to the survey, the companies behind the incongruent ads were considered as less serious, less trustworthy, less innovative, less trendy, and less reliable compared to the companies behind the congruent ads. Further, the companies behind the incongruent ads were considered more provocative, more sexist, as well as more humorous and original. However, it was discovered in the interviews, that the humor was mostly regarded as attempted humor but not perceived humor, and so the majority of the respondents did not find the humor successful. Regarding the originality, most respondents said in the interviews that some of the incongruent companies were very original, but not in a positive way. Thus, for every adjective, the incongruent ads were perceived worse than the congruent ads. Consequently, the incongruity of this study
thus influenced the attitudes of the companies negatively, complying with the findings of the negative impact of incongruity by Meyers-Levy, Louise and Curren (1994).

Frustration and helplessness are responses suggested to be associated with incongruities (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). The incongruent ads had this effect on the majority of the female respondents but also for some of the male respondents. The female respondents mostly felt frustration over the inequality setting of the ads and the sexist depiction of women, and some respondents implied it felt as if it always has been like this and felt lack of innovation and change. The male respondents mostly felt frustrated towards the incongruent ads where they perceived that men in general are treated like idiots when only focusing on women, or women’s bodies, when they are about to look for a car. Even though the survey implied even more negative attitudes toward the incongruent ads than the congruent, it seemed as if the respondents’ attitudes were reflected as even more negative in the interviews, were they got the chance to elaborate their answers even more. Meyers-Levy, Louise and Curren (1994) suggest that extensive procession of incongruent information might increase the negative response. This might explain the reason why some respondents did not rank the survey as high in rank as their later expressed attitudes in the interview. The consumer’s cognitive schema are also dependent on to what degree the attitude change, and in what direction, when regarding congruity (Meyers-Levy, Louise & Curren, 1994), and is dependent on whether positive attitudes are generated (Orth & Holancova, 2003).

Consumers’ perceptions are said to be affected by their own personality, interests and level of brand involvement (Skeie, 2015). Different levels of involvement with the companies were detected in the interviews, and a clear difference could be seen in the division of congruity and incongruity and the female and male respondents. Quite expectedly, the female respondents mentioned specific underwear ads (congruent ads), and evaluated the companies differently depending on their previous experience with the company and what they usually buy. Even though the male respondent to a high degree also recognized some of the underwear companies, they did not have the same involvement level as the female respondents. The same relationship could be found in the automobile ads (incongruent ads), even though the distinction was not as clear. More of the male respondents mentioned their relationship to the car companies and their level of involvement, which consequently affected their attitudes towards some specific companies. However, this fact is not something that can
be connected to the level of congruity entirely, since in this case it is rather the product group appearing more appealing, and more commonly consumed, by either of the sexes.

The level of congruity of nudity in advertising is suggested to affect how the ad is perceived differently, thus depending on the functionality of the nudity (Sherman & Quester, 2005). This was discovered in the interviews, where the respondents found the underwear ads with the women posing normally and displaying the product as congruent (functional nudity). These ads were considered as more favorable and creating more positive attitudes towards the companies, which were also the findings by Sherman and Quester (2005). While in the underwear ads, where the women were posing in an unnatural way conveying sexual suggestive vibes, the respondents regarded it as incongruent (non-functional nudity). These ads were instead regarded as less favorable, creating more negative attitudes towards the companies. Another standpoint was found where some of the respondents were more forgiving of the sexual elements connected to the nudity based on the fact that it indeed were advertisements for underwear. Some respondents also stated that these kinds of underwear ads were rather commonly, and thus did not provoke any significant reactions. Some respondents thus implied that their attitudes towards the company were not affected due to the sexual elements from the nudity. This complies with Sherman and Quester (2005) meaning that sexual reactions from underwear ads can be seen as merely a side effect. The context where nudity appears has also been found to have effect on attitudes (Sherman & Quester, 2005). This was something that some respondents reflected over, that probably they would have different attitudes towards the ad and the company depending on in what context the ad is found. Some respondents for example said that depending on what kind of media the company uses to convey their ad might have had an impact on their attitudes. The ad context is also found to be an important factor to consider in advertising, since it affects consumers’ perceptions and attitudes (Kirmani & Yi, 1991).

Something suggested by researchers is that incongruity easier stick in the consumer’s mind if used in advertising, making it a positive attribute (Skeie, 2015). This was something which some of the respondents reflected and mentioned. Some started to criticize the ad, but then added that they probably would remember the ad and might come to think of it when seeing something that makes them think of the specific company or product category where it belongs. Some respondent also said they thought it was a good ad, since it had elements which made it stand out. However, this was not part of the structured interview questions, and
so the authors do not have enough material to see whether it actually was true for all respondents. This was further stated by Skeie (2015), meaning that there is no consensus over this statement, where others oppose the fact that incongruent ads would be more memorable and suggest congruent ads are more suitable. Previous studies have also suggested that the recall might increase if there is congruence between a product’s use and sex or nudity (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003). Whether this was not explicitly discussed in the interviews, the congruent ads were considered as more attractive in general, which complies with previous research suggesting congruence between product use and nudity increases perception of quality and a more appealing perception of the ad in total (Sherman & Quester, 2005).

Even though there were some opposing thoughts regarding the underwear ads (congruent ads), whether the nudity was legitimate or not and its effect on the respondents attitudes, the biggest difference was found between the two product groups. As aforementioned, the automobile ads (incongruent ads) were the ones that explicitly affected the attitudes of the respondents most negative. The women were considered by the respondents as being used as an eye-catcher, as bait or sexual being used for adding sexual appeal to the product. Thus, most respondents highlighted the extreme incongruity between the use of the woman and the car, meaning that the women did not add any functional value. This complies with the fact that product categories have been found to have an instrumental value in determining functionality, i.e. the level of congruity (Sherman & Quester, 2005). In general, the congruent ads were perceived as more focused on sex, whereas the incongruent ads were perceived as more vulgar in general and more evidently sexist by the majority of the respondents.

5.4 Attitudes-Toward-the-Ad

The notion that what the consumer wants is what the consumer gets, which has been used as justification of objectification or sexist depictions in advertising (Levy, 2008), was not found true in this study. All respondents in general did have negative attitudes towards the sexist ads exposed to the respondents in this study, and in turn affected their attitudes towards the companies. As aforementioned, a modified version of the Attitude-Toward-the-Ad-Model (Edell & Burke, 1987) was used in the structure of the primary data collection. Divided into two routes, where route one structure the overall execution plan of the survey, and the route two structures the overall execution plan of the interviews. The construct is built on the
notion that consumer attitudes towards the company are created by a combination in beliefs about the brand and the attitudes of the advertisement.

5.4.1 Route 1

In route one, the respondents were exposed to the ads for the first time in the study. The direct feelings generated from the ads were measured using the survey. Feelings are the immediate perceptions of meanings in an ad, according to Harlow and Stagner (1932). According to Edell and Burke (1987), feelings are important when determining effectiveness of an ad, and also it affects the cognitive processing. This were shown when the effects of route one and route two were combined, where some respondents mentioned they had got an impression in the first part which was further developed in the second. A summary of the results from the survey shows that all respondents had relatively negative attitudes towards all adjectives in general. Also, the female respondents were generally shown to have more negative feelings towards the adjectives than the men. The respondents also regarded the incongruent ads as evoking more negative attitudes compared to the congruent ads. Due to the insignificant variances detected between the respondents of each gender group, the authors of this study believes the intention of the survey rankings were successful.

5.4.2 Route 2

As for route two, the respondents were given the opportunity to develop their thoughts and feelings. Since they already were familiar with the ads from route one, it formed a ground as basis for a good discussion. After the initial feelings responses obtained from the ads, a cognitive processing of the information make up the beliefs about the brand. This is thus the judgment based on attributes in the ad (Edell & Burke, 1987). Since previous experience, knowledge, preferences and previous attitudes influences how a message is interpreted and how it is perceived (Holsanova & Price, 2012), the interview session was a way of getting deep understanding, giving the respondent a chance to thoroughly explain their feelings and judgments. When the respondents were making their beliefs about the companies, their attitudes were said to depend on what expectations they had, based on previous experiences with the company. This complies with the findings on the effect of previous experience (Schiffman, Wisenblit, & Kanuk, 2010). When the responded evaluated an ad of a company they did not know anything about, the authors suggest their attitudes towards the company were based on prejudice about how the company should be.
The survey and interviews showed that in general the respondents had negative attitudes towards the companies for all adjectives. How the woman in the ad was portrayed was commented as the most prominent determinant if the company was perceived negatively. Negative attitudes were thus derived from ads, which were perceived as offensive, as when the woman was objectified and her body and sexuality was used for selling the product. Most respondents thought the companies regarded sex as a good selling point, but the respondents mainly regarded it as cheap tricks trying to lure the consumers. Another negative impact on attitudes was sexist humor, which in general made the respondents perceive the company as more negative. The female respondents had more negative attitudes towards the companies in general compared to the male respondents. This was mainly due to the women having more negative attitudes towards nudity in the ads, as well as the sexual appeals. Sexist humor also generated more negative attitudes towards the companies for the female respondents. Regarding the incongruity aspect, the companies behind the incongruent ads were in general perceived as more negative compared to the companies behind the congruent ads. The same reasons why the ads were perceived negative in general was mentioned, but that the incongruent ads were more extreme compared to the congruent ads. The companies behind the incongruent ads were thus perceived as more offensive, more objectifying towards women, and contained more sexist humor in general than the congruent ads. The incongruent ads were perceived as more original and innovative, however most respondents meant it was because they stood out but were still regarded as negative in general.

5.4.3 Credibility of the Study

In this study a total number of 50 respondents participated in the surveys and interviews. The relatively high number of respondents consequently affects how the authors can evaluate the findings and conclusions of this study. This study is not a quantitative study, and the sample size is not large enough to generalize the results and thus not statistically binding. However, using 50 respondents were perceived by the authors to increase the quality of the study, since the findings of this study were confirmed repeatedly by several respondents and thus strengthen the results. The authors believe this study to build on a firm ground, giving weight to the study. The large sample size indicates the findings are not random, and thus the authors regards this study and the conclusions drawn as reliable, and to be capable of being stretched and applied to areas outside this study as well.
6. Conclusion

This chapter attempts to answer the research questions in order, using the main findings from the empirical and theoretical material derived from the analysis. Further, managerial and societal implications are discussed, followed by suggestions on future research.

6.1 Conclusion

**Sexist Advertising Influence Consumer Attitudes of a Company Negatively.**

It can be concluded from the results of this study, that consumer attitudes are generally negative towards companies using sexist advertising. This was true for almost all respondents, and thus a clear majority. The negative attitudes mainly originated from how the women were portrayed in the ads. The respondents evaluated the pose and expression of the model, and whether she was objectified for decorative purposes only, and if this was too evident and extreme it affected the attitudes toward the company negatively. The advertisements who were regarded most sexist were also regarded offensive, and the companies gave the impression that they used the notion sex sells in order to lure the consumers using cheap tricks. The respondents also showed dissatisfaction towards companies using ads where the woman was exposed. It can be further concluded that companies using sexist advertisements are not regarded serious, trustworthy, original, innovative, trendy, reliable, attractive, or humorous in general. However, these companies are generally considered provocative and sexist.

**Sexist Advertising Leads to More Negative Consumer Attitudes for Females Toward a Company.**

It can be concluded from the results of this study, that consumer attitudes are generally more negative for women than for men, regarding companies using sexist advertising. It was a clear difference between the reported attitudes between the genders. There was a majority of female respondents over the male respondents who reported more negative attitudes towards the companies. The women regarded the companies as more sexist and more provocative, as well as less serious, less trustworthy, less original, less innovative, less trendy, less reliable, less attractive, and less humorous compared to the men. The women considered the companies as more offensive in general when using sexist advertising, compared to the men.
Further, the women had more negative attitudes towards companies than men, when nudity and sexual appeals were used in the ads, and regarded the ads as more oppressing towards women.

Sexist Advertising Leads to More Negative Consumer Attitudes Toward a Company When the Advertisement is Incongruent.

It can be concluded from the results of this study, that consumer attitudes are in general more negative towards companies using incongruent sexist advertising, compared to congruent sexist advertising. The majority of the respondents regarded the incongruent ads as generating more negative attitudes towards the companies, however there were some difference in the interpretation regarding some of the statements. The incongruent ads were regarded more sexist, more provocative, less serious, less trustworthy, less trendy, less reliable, and less attractive compared to the congruent ads. However, humor, originality and innovation were adjectives ranked as more agreeable with the incongruent ads. The incongruent ads were regarded as containing more humorously created content than the congruent ads. Thus, the majority of the respondents did not regard these humorous components as successful, and did not regard the incongruent ads to a large extent as being funny. It the same manner, originality and innovativeness were regarded more agreeable to the incongruent ads since they contained elements which stood out, to a larger extent than the congruent ads. However, the majority of the respondents still had negative attitudes toward the companies behind those incongruent ads, since they were in general perceived more sexist and having less product focus. Thus, it can also be concluded that product focus is important in determining consumer attitudes.

6.2 Managerial Implications

It is important for marketing managers to understand the impact on consumer attitudes associated with the use of sexist advertisements, since the message sent through advertising will affect how the consumers perceive the company. Using sexist advertising might create buzz and make more consumers notice the ad. However, as noted in this study sexist advertisement could also lead to unexpected outcomes such as affecting the perceived attractiveness and reliability of the company negatively. Further, since it was found that women had more negative attitudes towards companies using sexist ads, it should be of the marketing managers interest to regard this matter when targeting female consumers. Also, it is suggested by the authors that marketing managers should consider the fit between using
ads that may appear more sexist, and the product. This is because sexist incongruent advertisement has been shown to affect consumer attitudes toward the company negatively, and might harm the company reputation. Further, the companies should be aware that the product focus is another element for evaluating the level of sexism in ads when using female models in the advertisement. Even though the use of sexist advertisement might lead to profitability, companies must be aware of the ethical impact it might have. A company must consider the influence of what values they sell through their advertising, which might contribute to a societal acceptance of those values. The authors hope to highlight these issues with this study.

6.3 Societal Implications

Sexism is a subject that might implicate ethical issues. The use of sexist advertisement might affect how the woman’s role in society is perceived, and contribute to the acceptance of sexist beliefs. In order to work against inequality, it is suggested that actors on the market have to take the lead in creating a new standard of advertisements. The authors of this study hope to create awareness of the drawbacks of sexist advertisements and inspire further research on the negative effects of sexism to further enlighten the societal issues it bring. The more extensive research conducted regarding these issues, the larger impact on society. The authors of this study wish to be part of a movement of research, which consequently will make companies stop using sexist advertising, and thus contribute to a more equal society.

6.4 Further Research

Sometimes the respondents brought it up for discussion, whether the sexist ads would have impact on purchasing intentions. This could be an interesting subject to examine in future research, to further see how negative attitudes of sexist advertising, as found in this study, impact companies in practice. To further contribute to the existing research on sexist advertising, future researchers could focus on comparing both female and male depictions in sexist advertisement and the way they are interpreted by consumers. This could be a way of seeing if women and men react differently depending on what gender is portrayed. As suggested by some respondents in this study, the incongruent sexist ads were perceived as more memorable, and suggested to be stuck in the consumer’s mind more easily. According to this study, as well as in previous research as aforementioned, there is no consensus regarding this matter. Thus, it might be interesting to do an extensive quantitative study examining the correlation of congruence and recall in sexist advertisements.
Reference List


**Advertisements**


Appendix 1

The Congruent Ads
(Underwear)

Ad A (ETC, 2016)

Ad B (English 408B - Advertising Blog, 2012)

Ad C (Mirror, 2015)

Ad D (Celebs Now, 2008)
Ad E (Coloribus, n.d.)

Ad F (Kylie J. Ryu, 2016)
The Incongruent Ads
(Automobile)

Ad K (BMW Blog, 2016)

Ad L (Reklamombudsmannen, 2015)
Ad M (Coloribus, n.d.)

Ad N (International Business Times, 2013)
Ad O (News Activist, 2016)

Ad P (Paul Valentine, n.d.)
THE NEW ŠKODA OCTAVIA. AVAILABLE WITH 2 ZONE AIR-CONDITIONING.

Ad S (Independent, 2013)

You know you’re not the first.

But do you really care?

Ad T (CNN, 2008)
### Appendix 2

<table>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Time in minutes</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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Interview Part 1 - The Survey

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Interview Part 2 - Focused Questions

Demographics
Gender
Age

General Questions
What is your general impression of these companies?
Is there any difference between the ads in group 1 and group 2?

Focused Questions
What in these ads make you perceive the company as serious or not?
What impact your level of trust (high or low) for the company?
In what way is the company original or not?
What aspects in the ad make you feel that they are innovative or retrogressive?
In what way is the company trendy or not?
What in these ads makes the company seem reliable or not?
What in the ad makes the company feel attractive?
In what way is the company regarded as provocative?
In what way do you regard the company as sexist or not?
In what way are the ads humoristic or not?
Appendix 4

*Each row shows the mean of all the female and male responses for each advertisement and category.*

Congruent Ads
(Underwear)

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M= Male

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