MASTER'S DISSERTATION

MAKE A FEMINIST OUT OF YOU: DISNEY'S POTENTIAL TO PROMOTE BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE IN GENDER STEREOTYPING

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Much like saving all of China, writing a dissertation is not an easy task. Nor is gender equality, nor is an endless list of other things. Yet, the first was achieved by Mulan, the second was achieved by me, while the third is a legendary work in progress to which I sincerely hope to contribute towards starting with this dissertation. In the end, equality, much like saving all of China is a war, and for the sake of this metaphor, so is writing a dissertation.

No war is won without a wise commander. Similarly, this dissertation would not have happened without the great Professor Mafalda Nogueira, to whom I offer my deepest gratitude for her guidance, contributions and trust. No war is won without brave soldiers. To Catarina, Mariana and Mafalda, who fought alongside me and led the war from the trenches: *kudos, we did it*. No war is won without alliances. To Margarida, Beatriz, Catarina, Sara, Rita, and all my dearest friends, I extent my sincere appreciation for your support and encouragement.

Last but certainly not least, no war is won without devotion. To my parents, who taught me to fight and never quit. I hope to make you as proud as you make me. To my little sister, whom I can only hope to inspire as greatly as she inspires me. You, Constança, truly are a mighty warrior. To my family and our spirit, so freedom reigns. To myself, because warriors are not born, they are made. This year I became one, and to that, I promise to always stay loyal, brave and true.

ABSTRACT

Disney is a culturally powerful brand, whose products largely shape behaviour, namely children's behaviour (Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016), making it essential to critically examine the brand's impact at various levels. Hence, this dissertation aims to understand the potential of Disney films to effectively promote behavioural change regarding gender stereotyping in society. Designed as a case study, this research uses thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify and analyse the gender messages present on Disney's two adaptations of the Chinese legendary folk poem "*The Ballad of Mulan*" – *Mulan* (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) and *Mulan* (Caro, 2020). Focusing on Disney films and their potential to facilitate behavioural change, this study frames them as possible products of social marketing campaigns in the light of Fox and Kotler's (1980) argument of product development as a medium to increase the success of social marketing strategies. Results show that the two version of the *Mulan* convey contrasting views of women in society, patent on the noticeable more feminist tone of the live-action remake. Overall, Disney's new product strategy seems promising for more equitable portrayals of gender in cinema, as long as the studios ensure that all gender messages conveyed in the films reflect progressive tone to prevent latent reinforcement of patriarchal ideals.

RESUMO

A Disney é uma marca culturalmente poderosa, cujos produtos moldam comportamentos sociais, nomeadamente em crianças (Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016), tornando-se essencial examinar criticamente o impacto da marca a vários níveis. Assim, esta dissertação visa compreender o potencial dos filmes Disney para promover eficazmente a mudança de comportamento em relação à discriminação de género na sociedade. Concebida como um estudo de caso, este estudo utiliza análise temática (Braun & Clarke, 2006) para identificar e analisar as mensagens de género presentes nas duas adaptações da Disney do lendário poema popular chinês "*A Balada de Mulan*" – *Mulan* (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) e *Mulan* (Caro, 2020). Centrando-se nos filmes da Disney e no seu potencial para facilitar a mudança de comportamento, este estudo enquadra-os como possíveis produtos de campanhas de marketing social à luz do argumento de Fox e Kotler (1980) sobre como o produto é uma via para aumentar o sucesso das estratégias de marketing social. Os resultados mostram que as duas versões de *Mulan* transmitem visões contrastantes das mulheres na sociedade, patenteado pelo tom notoriamente mais feminista do *remake*. Em geral, a nova estratégia de produto da Disney parece ser promissora para retratos mais equitativos de género no cinema, desde que os estúdios assegurem que todas as mensagens de género transmitidas nos filmes refletem um tom progressivo para evitar o reforço latente dos ideais patriarcais.

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INTRODUCTION

Social marketing, put very simplistically, is to use commercial marketing strategies to promote positive behavioural change in consumers. While at first glance social marketing might unarguably be a public sector-oriented strategy, as it in theory is not expected to be a profitable enough strategy for *money-hungry* companies, whose interests *always* come before their consumers. Nowadays, as brands have shifted towards hyper customer-centric approaches (Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2020), it is the boldest move to state that companies do not attend to their consumers' needs and wants when they are *literally* rushing to build the internal capability of predicting what their customers will demand next. Defying that old-fashioned outlook on profit seeking organisations, Polonsky (2017) argued that, if executed properly and in good faith, social marketing can translate into a win-win scenario for companies and consumers alike. This angle is particularly interesting since as a strategy to achieve permanent behavioural change, social marketing as proven record of excellency in fields such as healthcare and safety (Truong, 2014). However, the possibility of its employment to break structural societal barriers to gender equality, such as internalized sexism, is dreadfully unexplored.

While social marketing practitioners seem to have overlooked gender issues, no one is ever surprised to hear that women's struggle for equal rights is a tale as old as time. From ground-breaking international suffrage campaigns in

a pre-globalisation era to digital activism and social justice movements, slowly but surely, progress is manifest. However, despite many battles won, the war is far from being over. In the current re-emergence of the battle for gender equality, the word *feminism* is finally making a comeback (Maclaran, 2015). After decades of carrying a taboo connotation, the F-word is back in vogue and *Vogue* too. In fact, media and entertainment industry is playing a pivotal role as a maverick in the fourth wave of feminism. Feminism is historically divided into periods of similar values, actions, and arguments, which scholars metaphorically call "waves" (Lorber, 2010). While the first wave officially began around the late 1800s, the fourth began in the mid-2010s with the infamous #MeToo movement. *"Me Too*" by writing this on social media people would signal that they too had suffered from any kind of sexual harassment, a symbolic way of exposing the oppression and mistreatment of women across nations and industries (Boyle, 2019). Eventually the movement evolved and is now more than a social media event – is an ideal.

During these culturally challenging times, societal myths are contested. Myths (*grand narratives that describe complex events*), explain in a succinct and intelligible manner the struggles in society at a given point in time (Kreft, Kuczamer-Kłopotowska & Kalinowska-Żeleźnik, 2019). Holt (2004, 2005) developed a brand management model – *cultural branding* – that makes sense of how brands can create value through leveraging culture. According to this model, brands become iconic when they target ideologies instead of individual

identities. Mostly this status is achieved by addressing contradictions in society that somehow cause consumers anxiety. Today, as the old gender myths are challenged by social justice movements such as #MeToo, brands that address them will, in theory, create tremendous value.

One brand that has clearly jumped on the feminist bandwagon is The Walt Disney Company (henceforth also referred to as simply "Disney") as gender portrayal has always been a major flaw of their films. As a matter of fact, many researchers have exposed how these portrayals are biased and negatively reinforce gender stereotypes (Do Rozario, 2004; England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011; Macaluso, 2018; Orenstein, 2011; Primo, 2018; Stover, 2013; Whelan, 2012). While others have shown how harmful the exposition to Disney's princess culture is for child development (Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016; Dinella, Claps & Lewandowski, 2017). Yet, through what some may call the "*marketing of dreams*", Disney capitalises on nostalgia to secure their monopoly of the fairy-tale imaginary worldwide, especially when it comes to princess stories (even if they are almost a century old) (Whelan, 2012).

Notwithstanding, negative portrayals of gender are most definitely not exclusive to Disney's content. In fact, it is very much a practice that has been institutionalised across the media industry in its various formats, including film, music, television, as well as advertising and print (Lindsey, 2015; Mulvey, 1989). These negative gender portrayals rest on stereotypical gender messages that promote the idea of biological inequality between sexes, which is used to justify

gender discrimination (Lindsey, 2015). While both men and women are affected by gender stereotyping, women are more prone to experience gender discrimination on the account of the patriarchal hierarchy, which is prevalent in most cultures. Ultimately, negative gender stereotypes jeopardize the possibility of equality between men and women, since these messages are the trigger of a vicious cycle of female oppression.

Fourth wave feminists are openly challenging gender stereotypes and norms, which endangers Disney's "nostalgia tactics" since consumers now demand for more conscious, inclusive, and diverse storytelling. As a response to the criticism, Disney is indeed evolving towards more positive storytelling regarding representations of gender, however, there is still room for improvement (Macaluso, 2018; Schiele, Louie & Chen, 2020). One way the studios is trying to renovate their stories, is through the live-action remakes of their original animation films (Schiele et al., 2020), which have been overlook by academia so far. However, no previous study has focused on the marketing potential of Disney's live-action remakes to promote social change, namely in respect to gender discrimination. Therefore, the main objective of the present research is to understand the potential of Disney films to effectively promote behavioural change regarding gender stereotyping in society. In order to approach this broad objective, two specific research objectives were defined:

1. Identify and analyse the gender messages present on Disney's two versions of *Mulan* (1998 and 2020);

2. Explore the potential of *Mulan* (2020), and by extension Disney's new product strategy, as successful social marketing instruments.

To capture complex social phenomenon such as this one, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary. Therefore, designed as a case study, this dissertation considers concepts intrinsically connected to the field of sociology, such as gender theory, and bounds them within a marketing research framework. Giving a new dimension to the already existing research, in this case study a thematic analysis was conducted on the original Disney animated full-length film *Mulan* (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) and its recent live-action remake, Mulan (Caro, 2020), to examine the endorsement of gender messages on each. Therefore, the expected contribution of this dissertation is to further knowledge in the field of social marketing by exploring how culturally influential brands can leverage their capabilities to tackle structural issues in society.

Finally, the overall structure of this dissertation takes the form of five chapters: Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, Discussion and Conclusions. Chapter one presents a comprehensive overview of the state of the art in the topics that frame the study. Chapter two, Methodology, describes the overall methodological approach followed. Chapter three, Findings, exposes the results of the analysis, while chapter four, Discussion, critically examines and connects them to the extant literature. Chapter five, Conclusion, closes this dissertation by providing a clear response to the established objective, acknowledging its limitations and shining light on possible future research.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent of this chapter is to present the state of the art of key theoretical concepts, deemed fundamental to contextualize the research topic that the present study approaches. First and foremost, the concept of social marketing is introduced, focusing on how the discipline has evolved through the years, as well as the debate on the participation of the private sector in this approach. The second section explores brand management theory and introduces the theory of cultural branding, as well as its link and influence in society. Next, a third section addresses themes of gender and feminism with a strong focus on the historical evolution of both. Finally, the last section of the present chapter is dedicated to presenting Disney. In addition to framing the historical business context and brand performance, this last section also clarifies the importance of the conversation of gender in brands marketed to young children. All in all, the four sections in this chapter are curated to outline the theoretical environment surrounding the research being presented and their aim is to enable the reader to gain understanding of those concepts and their relevance for the research objectives.

1.1. SOCIAL MARKETING

1.1.1. Origins of social marketing

It is not uncommon for marketing disciplines to draw inspiration from other fields of study, especially since marketing itself is a cohesive blend of various sciences, namely sociology, economics, communications and psychology (Donovan, 2011). Social marketing is no exception since it is influenced by various schools of thought (Wood, 2012) and its activities are often built upon techniques, strategies and models from many other fields of study (Gordon, 2013). Hence, its predisposition to attract scholars from a wide (and varied) range of research fields is not only natural, but also intrinsic and necessary. Ever since its establishment, social marketing has been the target of a serious, on-going debate regarding its nature and scope. While some authors (Andreasen, 1994; Donovan & Henley, 2010) see the field's ambiguity as the culprit for its slow growth and fragmented conceptual development, others embrace this ambiguity by advancing that complex disciplines like social marketing can only progress through the rich debate a lack of consensus provokes (French & Russell-Bennett, 2015).

Despite the overpopulation of conceptual definitions that characterises the space of social marketing, many scholars (e.g., Andreasen, 1993; Bloom & Novelli, 1981; Dann, 2010; Donovan & Henley, 2010; Gordon, 2013; Hastings & Domegan, 2014) recognize and attribute the formal establishment of social

marketing as a discipline to Kotler and Zaltman, who were the first researchers to put forward a definition for the concept in their article *"Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change*" published in 1971. The authors initially defined the concept as "the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research" (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, p. 5). However, one could argue that social marketing was being practiced long before its first formal definition (Andreasen, 1994; Lefebvre, 1997). Take for instance the efforts to abolish slavery or the suffragist movement, which could arguably be considered organic social marketing campaigns (Lee & Kotler, 2019).

Prior to the formal academic framing of the field, sociologist and researcher Wieber (1951) is often credited for having suggested the employment of marketing techniques to shape behaviour and society. In his article, Wieber (1951) reflects on how television and radio proved to have great impact in audiences' behaviour regarding their consumption patterns and puts forward the idea of channelling that power to "sell" positive behavioural change and social causes. His argument for the efficiency of this technique rested on the correlation between social marketing campaigns and commercial ones, defending that the closer their resemblance, the higher the probability of the behavioural change promoted being adopted (Wieber, 1951). In its fifty years of existence, the rising number of academic work published worldwide on the topic

of social marketing is a testament to the field's high interest and relevance for a wide range of disciplines (Truong & Hall, 2013). For instance, the use of marketing techniques has been proven useful in health (Doan & Truong, 2019; Grier & Bryant, 2005), social welfare (Algie & Mead, 2019), environmental issues (Chamorro-Mera, 2019; McKenzie-Mohr, 2000) and gender equality (Martam, 2016; Robertson & Davidson, 2013). Since its formalisation, social marketing has been subject to several reviews that resulted in the expansion of its framework beyond the bounds of its initial definition.

1.1.2. Evolution of social marketing

Stemming from the need to address the widespread confusion between social advertising and social marketing, Fox and Kotler (1980) revisited Kotler and Zaltman's (1971) seminal work. In their review, Fox and Kotler (1980) analyse the first 10 years of the discipline and argue that on the account of its first definition being deep-rooted in social advertising, more often than not it culminates on the reduction of social marketing to advertising or communication strategies by both researchers and practitioners. While Kotler and Zaltman's (1971) definition was already very much aligned with central commercial marketing principals, such as McCarthy's (1960) 4Ps (French & Russell-Bennett, 2015), from Fox and Kotler's (1980) review emerged the four key elements that position social marketing as an independent discipline and not a mere social

advertising or communication strategy. The elements as identified by the authors specifically are: sophisticated market research, product development, incentives and facilitation (Fox & Kotler, 1980). Ultimately, their article establishes how social marketing can gain distance from pure advertising campaigns by shifting to more thorough and communication-driven approaches.

In a different review of the initial 10 years of the discipline, Bloom and Novelli (1981) suggest that for a more grounded and rigorous theoretical background more studies should be conducted in the field of social marketing. They go further and point out some of the areas within the field that still needed to be worked on in order to expand it credibly, namely: overall business strategy, market research, segmentation and targeting, organisational management and planning (Bloom & Novelli, 1981). Building on Bloom and Novelli's (1981) work, Lefebvre (1997) in a 25-year review of social marketing points out different issues social marketing should address, such as the need to develop a more robust theoretical framing, expand the range of creative and innovative strategies used, pivot to start targeting children and adolescents and leveraging the private sector to increase the efficiency of campaigns.

Even though social marketing scholars, somewhat unanimously, agree that the discipline's focus is on altering behaviour (Hoek & Jones, 2011), there is a latent lack of consensus regarding the most relevant target group for social marketing activities (Wood, 2012). After the mid-1990s, scholars started to

display a growing interest on the upstream approach (Gordon, 2013). Thus far the majority of work on the field assumed a downstream approach, focusing on individual behaviour to achieve social change (Gordon, 2011; Truong, 2014; Wood, 2012). However, since it offers a holistic perspective of the social-economic environment, the upstream approach enables a more integrated view of the issue being addressed (Wood, 2012). Goldberg (1995, p. 347) draws attention to the high importance of marketing for society at large when it comes to tackling "the negative or constraining social structural influences on individual behaviour, particularly those that originate as a function of marketing activities", while Gordon (2013) reinforces the importance of an upstream approach for effective social marketing by exposing how human behaviour is influenced by its environment.

Embracing the uprising of the upstream approach in social marketing, Andreasen (1994) proposes the following definition: "social marketing is the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of society of which they are a part" (p. 110). Aside from the tendency to gravitate towards an upstream approach, this conceptualization innovated by adding a new dimension to the discipline's scope: the idea of only considering voluntary behavioural change as a product of social marketing. Overall, Andreasen's (1994) view of social marketing is aligned with the discipline's initial purpose of fulfilling the need to use more than education and advertising to accomplish behavioural change in consumers by bridging the gap

between knowledge of human behaviour and its effective application in society. Notwithstanding, from the classical and ever-present downstream-upstream dichotomy to the middle ground (a midstream approach), Andreasen (2005) argues that the field of social marketing exists in a continuum which ideally combines all three levels (French & Russell-Bennett, 2015).

As social marketing has been the target of harsh criticism due to its many definitions leading to confusion, Andreasen (2002) made an effort to identify the three key differencing factors that clearly establish the domain of the field: (1) behavioural change as its ultimate goal; (2) extremely customer-centric approaches; and (3) focus on providing encouraging exchanges leveraged on minor costs and appealing benefits for the adopter. These elements revive the exchange aspect intrinsic to commercial marketing practices (M. L. Rothschild, 1999) and to marketing science itself (Donovan, 2011). Exchange theory was initially introduced in social marketing's definition by Kotler and Roberto (1989) with their expansion of the techniques used in the field, such as "market segmentation, consumer research, product concept development and testing, directed communication, facilitation, incentives, and exchange theory to maximize the target adopter's response" (p. 24). Overall, despite being established as vital for the practice of social marketing, seeking a value-adding exchange has not been a top priority for most practitioners, leading some scholars to believe that the reason for failed social marketing efforts is that usually there is no marketing involved (M. L. Rothschild, 1999). In an attempt to

tackle the lack of a definition consensus in the discipline, Dann (2010) suggests that "the core objective of social marketing is to facilitate social change through increasing the adoption of a positive behavior (exercise) or decreasing the use of a negative behavior (over nutrition), and attempts to facilitate the change by moving the individual's preference away from the negative actions (under exercising, over eating) towards the more positive outcomes (exercise, diet change) for the benefit of the individual, group or society" (p. 149). This definition purposefully relies on contemporary commercial marketing definitions with the aim of returning the discipline back to its roots (Dann, 2010). One should note that the author used "*facilitate*" instead of "*influence*", which also reinforces the relationship with social marketing's parent discipline. Just like exchange theory, facilitation is a core principle of marketing, which is erroneously often left out of social marketing interventions.

In 2013, a consortium of international associations in the field – International Social Marketing Association (iSMA), European Social Marketing Association (ESMA) and Australian Association of Social Marketing (AASM) – worked together on a consensus definition of social marketing. The definition approved by the boards of all three association reads "Social Marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good" (iSMA, ESMA & AASM, 2013, p. 1). As this definition identifies, social good is one of the central focus of social marketing practice. However, it can quickly become a limitation due to the subjectivity it allows and its ethical implications

(Laczniak, Lusch & Murphy, 1979). Still, finding clarity on what defines "social good" is not an easy task (Lee & Kotler, 2019) nor is ensuring social marketing is used for "good" reasons (Andreasen, 1994). Lee and Kotler (2019) advance that some authors have suggested that the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights should be considered as the standard benchmark to define a good cause or purpose, which is the case of authors Donovan & Henley (2010).

1.1.3. Involvement of the private sector

From the subjective nature of the definition of "social good", emerges the debate on whether or not to allow the adoption of social marketing strategies by the private sector. Amongst social marketing scholars there is a predisposition to reject the involvement of the private sector in social marketing activities with several authors advocating for the complete dissociation of the two (Fox & Kotler, 1980). The most common argument amongst practitioners and academics is that profit seeking organisations should not be involved in social marketing (Donovan & Henley, 2010; Hastings & Domegan, 2014). Polonsky (2017), however, notes that by definition social marketing allows the private sector to take part in this approach and rejecting the involvement of the private sector in the social marketing scene is rather hypocritical since the current models of social marketing acknowledge the importance of for-profit organisation to solve complex problems. Social marketing strategies carried out by corporate entities might be more efficient than those promoted by NGOs or

governments on the account of the private sector's knowledge and expertise regarding changing customer behaviour (Polonsky, 2017). While corporations should get involved in social marketing activities to address complex social challenges more effectively, it is undeniable that there will be instances when societal benefit might come second to profit, producing the illusion of a win-win scenario (Polonsky, 2017). In the end, the role of the social marketer is to critically consider the actual social outcomes, instead of the nature of the entity promoting them (Polonsky, 2017).

Overall, and especially in the private sector, there is a latent disregard for social marketing's potential by its own parent discipline. This is often justified by its inherent theoretical inefficiency when compared to the traditional approach of commercial marketing, reducing this approach to a less-profitable, ineffective social antic (French & Russell-Bennett, 2015). However, when intrinsic inefficiency is not the justification, authors appoint practitioners' incompetence or ignorance as the reason why social marketing is the less attractive strategy to follow (M. L. Rothschild, 1999; Wood, 2012). Additionally, a third objection that is also likely to be used by researchers when disregarding social marketing as a reliable approach to change is its supposed lack of applicability by the profit-seeking organisations (Donovan & Henley, 2010; Smith, 2000). Notwithstanding, despite its rather slow initial take-off stage, social marketing is growing to become a widely accepted discipline in marketing science, which verified a growing flow of attention by scholars and practitioners alike (Truong, 2014). However, misinterpretations of the discipline and a lack of

consensus regarding its definition resulted in many practitioners recognising their inability to perform social marketing projects (Wood, 2012). The discipline's evolution is not linear and has been the target of criticism over time, hence why it is of utmost importance to codify what social marketing entails (French & Russell-Bennett, 2015). While academia's interest in social marketing is crescent (Truong, 2014), research is still scarce regarding its genuine applicability by profit-seeking organisations. Surprisingly, little to no research has investigated how companies or brands with strong cultural influence can leverage their platform to achieve social good through social marketing.

1.2. BRANDS, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY

1.2.1. Brand management theory

Brand, as defined by the American Marketing Association (1960), "is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors". Hanby (1999) argues this definition embodies an outdated perspective in brand management, reflecting companies' ownership over brands, it is however not unexpected nor surprising since traditionally the field was grounded in

economics and the perspective of consumer rationality. In fact, while extant literature views brand management as interdisciplinary concept intrinsically connected to human behaviour and psyche, it initially emerged in the mid-80s under a positivistic approach (Hanby, 1999; Heding et al., 2020; Kapferer, 2008). It was not until the early 1990s that the discipline's paradigm shifted towards an interpretivist outlook of the field (Hanby, 1999) paving the way for a more socially inclined vision of the discipline in years to come. The first implies a perception of brand equity being unilaterally created by the marketer, while the latter embraces the idea of value co-creation, achieved through the interaction of consumers and the brand. Heding et al. (2020) identify four periods of time that reflect Hanby's (1999) belief of two contrasting paradigms in brand management history, each primarily defined by the focus of research during the corresponding timeframe:

From 1985 to 1992: company/sender focus

During this time, companies (and marketers) assumed total ownership over brands and value creation was, therefore, solely up to them (Heding et al., 2020). Researchers and practitioners understood brand management as a purely quantitative field, using an economic approach to fit the field within the classical marketing mix, which positioned companies as the senders of messages and reduced consumers to mere receivers (Heding et al., 2020).

From 1993 to 1999: human/receiver focus

Researchers' attention shifted from the sender of the message to the receiver – the consumer (Heding et al., 2020). This time was coined by innovative approaches to brand management and a growing interest on the human and subjective nature of the discipline, which translated into a wider pool of qualitative and mixed methods research in the field (Heding et al., 2020).

From 2000 to 2014: cultural/context focus

The turn of the century brought significant changes to the political and cultural landscape across the world posing a challenge for brand managers, (Heding et al., 2020). The 9/11 attacks, the birth of social media networks, the Internet boom or the subprime financial crisis, are some of the numerous events that profoundly impacted society at large and led to macro-changes on how consumers behave, triggering a new wave of theoretical frameworks (Heding et al., 2020).

From 2015 onwards: sensory/biological focus

Brand management research published in recent years, leads to the belief that today the focus is on the senses and how brands can capitalise on them to impact consumers. All-in-all, at this point in time we seem to be returning to a positivistic paradigm (Heding et al., 2020).

As to provide a more comprehensive overview of the evolution, history and development of brand management theory, alongside the four eras of brand management, it is equally relevant to present the eight approaches or schools of thought that emerge from literature, as outlined in Heding et al.'s (2020) work. Figure 1 positions each of the aforementioned approaches within the broader theoretical scheme previously introduced – the paradigm dichotomy and the four periods in brand management history – which in turn were both derived from those approaches in the first place (Heding et al., 2020).

Heding et al. (2020) defend that each school of thought indeed assumes and requires different understandings of brand, consequently resulting in various definitions of the concept. To avoid offering a fragmented or dreary portrait of the true nature of brand management, the present research will not provide an extensive overview of each approach identified in Figure 1. Instead, the elements of theory – assumptions, definitions, and methods – deemed the most suitable for the present research are the ones that shall be introduced and explored in further detail.

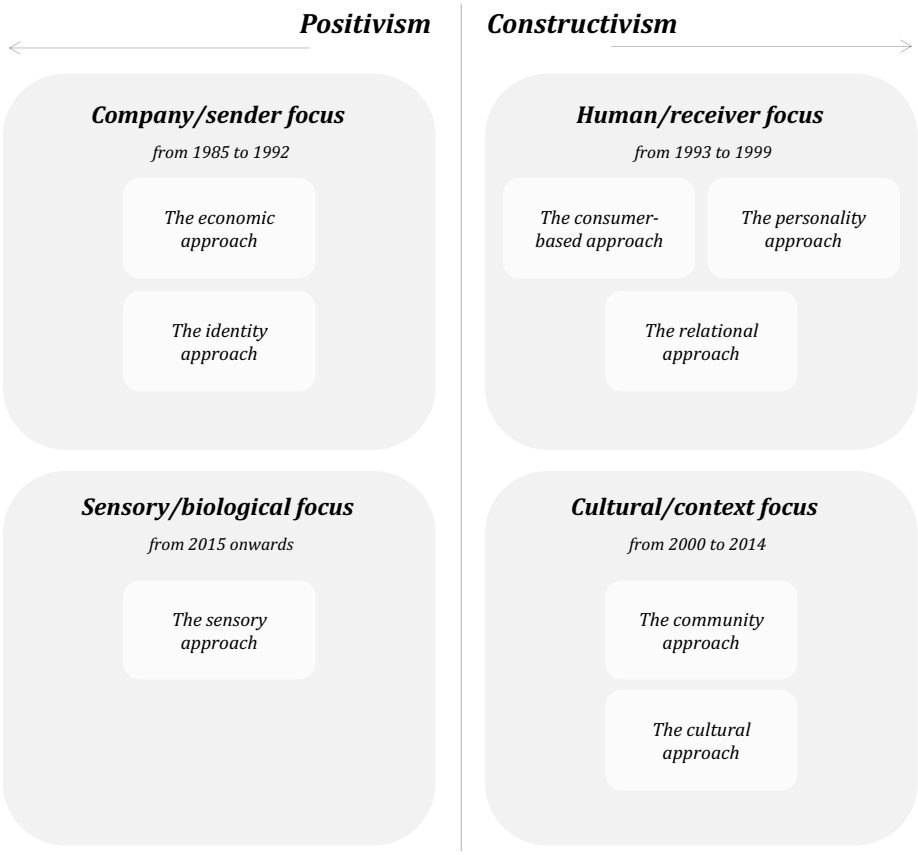

Figure 1: Brand Management landscape from 1985 until 2020

Source: Author based on Heding et al. (2020)

1.2.2. Cultural branding

Brands have conquered an extraordinary place in society, which translates into an inclination to define brand as a social phenomenon rather than a quantifiable, objective one (Schroeder, 2007). Although extensive, traditional brand management literature generally fails to acknowledge many sociological dimensions of consumer behaviour, namely culture, as well as symbolism in brands (Holt, 2005). To tackle this limitation, influenced by cultural studies,

Douglas B. Holt (2002, 2003, 2004) proposed a new branding model – *cultural branding*, derived from a set of case studies on high performing brands. This early 2000s theory is aligned with McCracken's (1986) pre-existing, yet underestimated, conceptualization of the link between consumers and culture. The central idea behind this theoretical approach is that consumption and culture work synergistically as a system, both as equally valid conveyers of cultural meaning. Drawing inspiration from various disciplines, which are classically more directly linked with societal and cultural themes – like anthropology, sociology and psychology – Holt (2004) defines cultural icons as "exemplary symbols that people accept as a shorthand to represent important ideas" (p. 11).

In the light of a cultural approach, consumption choices translate into life meaning and self-realisation to consumers because goods are fundamental carriers of cultural messages and symbolism used to build individual identity (McCracken, 1988). Since products assume this central role in the transfer of culture and meaning, cultural views of brand heavily rely on semiotics to comprehend consumers' interaction with products and brands (Heding et al., 2020). Holt's (2004) approach is, however, more assertive and robust than McCracken's (1988) since the author recognises that before becoming icons, brands must address particular cultural concerns in order create and sustain the identity myths that resonate with consumers in a powerful manner. Identity myths as defined by Holt (2004) are "simple fictions that address cultural anxieties from afar, from imaginary worlds rather than from the worlds that

consumers regularly encounter in their everyday lives" (p. 8). However, Barthes (1972, p. 107) puts it more simply by explaining that a myth is no more than "a system of communication, that it is a message".

Circling back to the initial framework of cultural branding, Holt (2004) defines that iconic brand are identity brands that have achieved the cultural icon status. In theory brand and according to Holt (2004), become iconic when they create and maintain powerful myths in society (Heding et al., 2020). In other words, to become icons, brands must elevate their identity value – a brand's ability of acting as a vehicle of consumer's self-expression – until it reaches the point of representing a valid construct of self-identity in society at large, which is the same as saying that it becomes a cultural symbol (Holt, 2003).

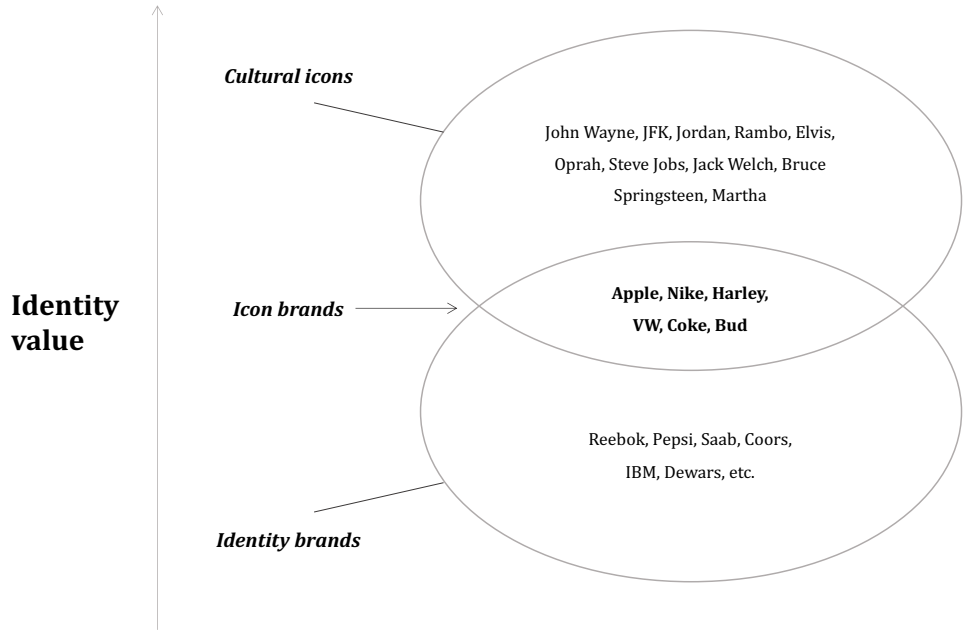

Figure 2: Conceptualisation of an iconic brand

Source: (Holt, 2004)

Overall, the core of the majority of brand management theories is brand value creation, in other words, brand equity maximisation (Kapferer, 2008). Cultural branding is a framework that enables an understanding of how brands can leverage culture to create value.

1.2.3. Brands in society

In the introduction of Kornberger's (2010) book, "*Brand Society*", the author recalls a BBC 4 documentary series by Adam Curtis, released in 2002, to justify the following statement "branding is at once one of the most artificial and yet most real forces in our society" (p. 6). The documentary – "*The Century of the Self*" – is an exposé of how companies and governments influence consumers using Freudian theory, shines light on how Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew, was a pioneer in the field of public relations by linking mass consumption to the subconscious and irrational, as well as emotional forces (Kornberger, 2010). A particularly impactful achievement of Bernays is the way he understood that to succeed at his assignment of getting women to smoke cigarettes in the early 1920s, times when these were perceived as a symbol of masculinity, he had to redefine the product by attaching emotional meaning into the act of smoking (Kornberger, 2010). Fact is that Edward Bernays got women to start smoking as a symbolic gesture for "freedom" and the break of patriarchal ideals (Kornberger, 2010), which was a pivotal instance in marketer's mindset as it marks a paradigm shift: we went from *selling functionality* to *selling values,*

symbols and *culture*. As marketers and brand managers began to appeal to consumers' deepest fears and desires, brand became an interface for connectivity between emotions in consumption and reason in production (Kornberger, 2010). Zaltman (2003) states that "brands are units of social consumption", which establishes brands both within managerial grounds but also in the social and cultural domain. Many authors (Holt, 2006; Kapferer, 2008; Kornberger, 2010; Lury, 2004; Schroeder, 2009) have called for a more social-oriented, multidisciplinary approach to brand theory on the grounds of brands being influenced (and influencing) complex societal and cultural events, such as gender stereotypes (Lindsey, 2015).

1.3. GENDER STEREOTYPES AND FEMINISM

First and foremost, it is of utmost importance for the present research to clarify the concept of feminism – what it is and what it is not. What it is: feminism "is support of social equality for women and men, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism" (Macionis, 2016, p. 366). What is not: the belief that women are superior to man, that is still sexism. Sexism is defined as "the belief that one sex is innately superior to the other" (Macionis, 2016, p. 350) and theoretically assumes a ubiquitous dimension, meaning that defending the superiority of one sex over the other is always on the domain of sexism. Despite the theoretical bilaterality the concept presumes since patriarchy is the prevalent social hierarchy in most cultures, the most likely direction of sexism is gender discrimination towards

women, which is bluntly reinforced by negative portrayal of gender in the media (Lindsey, 2015). For instance, women being portrayed as disposed to uncontrollable emotional outbursts caused by hormones, not only is a negative stereotype but also reinforces the idea of male biological superiority (Lindsey, 2015). However, the most striking characteristic of the contemporary feminist movement is how it challenges the patriarchal status quo, specially through the rupture of gender stereotyping (Boyle, 2019).

To reflect on today's feminist movement, this section approaches the topic from two complementary viewpoints: theories of gender and history of feminism. While the first one provides an understanding on why the concept of gender exists and its importance in society, the second serves the purpose of framing feminism as a social movement within the contemporary historical context.

1.3.1. Theories of gender

While it is true that biologically the human population is divisible between male and female, the idea of gender is socially constructed. Different ethnographic studies support this idea having found that gender is not perceived equally around the world. Most often than not the concepts of sex and gender get mixed up or used as synonyms, which they are not. Sex refers to the "biological distinction between females and males" (Macionis, 2016, p. 213), while gender

is “social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts” (Lindsey, 2015, p. 4). Simply put: sex is ascribed at birth, is the biological feature that makes us male or female; gender is linked to cultural contexts and must be learned (Lindsey, 2015). For instance, westernised cultures attribute feminine and masculine qualities to females and males, respectively, viewing those qualities as mutually exclusive opposites while other cultures recognize three genders or see gender as fluid like many indigenous peoples (Macionis, 2016). Hence, the vast majority of sociologists snub the biological justifications for gender discrimination, fully attributing it to processes of socialisation (Macionis, 2016). However, the too frequent mix-up between the biological concept of sex and the social concept that is gender, often leads to the establishment of rigid norms or ideals that guide the actions of people in society. These rigid rules extend to form what is known as gender stereotyping, which is the assumption that men and women’s social status is dependent of their biological attributes (Lindsey, 2015). While stereotypes can incorporate positive traits, most are negative or have a negative connotation, which can result in sexism. While men and women both are affected by sexism and gender stereotyping, women are more likely to suffer its consequences because the status they occupy is more stigmatized than the one occupied by men (Lindsey, 2015).

For a better understanding the underlying aspects of gender in society, and how gender stereotypes are governed, we can explore the topic in the light of the

three fundamental theories sociology is built on: structural functional theory, symbolic interaction theory and social-conflict theory. Despite assuming different views on why the conceptualization of gender exists, all three theories identify gender as a cornerstone of societal structure.

Structural functionalism's theoretical foundation is human behavioural patterns as systems that work synergistically to keep society organised and functioning (Macionis, 2016). From this perspective, emerges the idea that gender is a way of keeping society organised into two distinct roles that complement each other. Some anthropologists have argued that this outlook on gender originated in hunter/gatherer societies, when men initially took the role of the provider and women of the nurturer/carer. These roles were originally assigned based on the biological attributes of each. For instance, men being physically stronger than women and not having the demands of childbearing, enabled them to take on more autonomous, aggressive jobs in their communities (e.g., warfare or hunting). As society evolved these roles became institutionalised, even when physical strength was no longer a requirement for the mainstream workforce the ideal of men as "breadwinners" and women as the "homemakers" persisted (Lindsey, 2015; Macionis, 2016). Popularised in the 1950s by sociologist Talbott Parsons, this conceptualisation of gender is rooted in the expectations for the traditional white family units in western cultures (father, mother, and children) and argues that children are socialised into different behaviours according to their gender. Parsons (1942, 1951, 1954) put forward that children are encouraged to develop traits complementary to each

other, in order to facilitate the establishment of stable, productive family units. Boys are taught *instrumental* qualities, such as logic, confidence and competitiveness, as preparation to join the labour market (Macionis, 2016). Whilst girls are taught *expressive* qualities, much like empathy, sensitivity and kindness, to care for their families (Macionis, 2016). The rationale behind Parsons' thought is that a successful family unit requires individuals within the unit possess complementary skills sets and gender provides a natural principle for their distribution. At a macro-level, society encourages people to abide by these rules and conform to their assigned roles if they want to be romantically desirable, all while encouraging the rejection of those who go against these norms (Lindsey, 2015). Despite being prevalent in the mid-twentieth century, this theory has fallen out of fashion for three main reasons: (a) Parsons' based his theory on a family structure and labour division that was specific to white Americans in the 1940s and 1950s, assuming a heteronormative and western view of family life; (b) assumes gender as binary, which is again a western outlook on gender since not all cultures conform to a two-gender system; (c) overlooks the social and personal costs of maintaining strict gender roles in society, arguments against this theory revolve around the idea that men must be the ones working outside the home is arbitrary and strengthens gender power dynamics that benefit men in detriment of women (Macionis, 2016)

While structural functionalist theory offers a macro-level approach to gender in society, the **symbolic interactionism** focuses on smaller parts of everyday

life. This perspective understands gender as something that an individual does rather than something their born with or institutionalised. Hairstyles, makeup and clothes are a primary communicator of gender in society (Macionis, 2016). In western societies, dresses/skirts and long hair are symbols of the feminine, while short hair and pants are seen as men's wear. These patterns are examples of gender roles (sometimes also referred to as sex roles), which are "attitudes and activities that a society links to each sex" (Macionis, 2016, p. 351). A man wearing a skirt is an obvious rejection of traditional gender roles and often seen as ridiculous and unmanly, e.g., when in late 2020 singer-songwriter Harry Styles went viral for wearing a dress on the cover of American Vogue. By the same token, body language and social interactions also convey images of gender and are part of how people do gender. While women are socialised to be deferential, expected to smile at all times and display signs of active listening to demonstrate their interest in the conversation. Even sitting positions translate into gender messages, crossing the legs in a duchess slant position is read as ladylike while sitting with the legs spread out is known as manspreading and seen as manly. Gender roles are a good starting point to understand how society's view of femininity and masculinity is fundamentally connected to each gender's power in the overall societal structure. The same is to say that day to day interactions not only mirror gender stratification ideals but reinforces them. However, opting for a micro-level theoretical approach is a commonly appointed flaw of the theory. Critics defend by focusing on specific situations that it misses the broader sociological patterns of gender inequality (Macionis, 2016).

Social-conflict theory, or more specifically gender-conflict theory, is the one that addresses these patterns at a macro-level. Gender-conflict theory is a direct application of Karl Marx's original social-conflict theory to gender issues and its primary argument is that gender is a structural system, which distributes power and privilege to some members of society and disadvantage to others (Lindsey, 2015). The structural system considered in this theoretical framework is patriarchy, "a form of social organization in which males dominate females" (Macionis, 2016, p. 372) and the prevalent form of social organisation in today's societies. Systematic sexist behaviour towards women is reinforced by patriarchal structural systems (Lindsey, 2015) and is observable not only in institutional practices, such as limiting women's access to higher education, but also in more informal ways, namely in the skills that our society values. Masculine traits, such as assertiveness, confidence, strength, are praised as the desirable way of thinking, especially in leadership positions, and overvalued in comparison to more feminine ones (Lindsey, 2015). Men are stereotyped as more rational and women as overly emotional, these gender ideals make men falsely seem like a more natural fit for higher ranking jobs and leadership positions. These and several other examples of subconscious sexist behaviours are imprinted in society, are perpetuated by the structural system it is subject to and ultimately restrict the likelihood of men and women being treated as equals (Lindsey, 2015).

1.3.2. Feminism

As previously mentioned, feminism is a social movement that defends the equality of all genders. Largely, feminism advocates for the elimination of gender stratification, which implies a shift in how power is distributed in society. The oppression of women is historical and is perpetuated by mainstream societal structures, such as the patriarchy. Notwithstanding, many have been the activists that fought for a more equal stance for men and women is society.

Historians, sociologists, and academics from other disciplines classify the events of contemporary feminism into four waves through time, each characterised by different motives and specific goals. Feminism's first wave dates back to the 1840s, when female activists advocated for women's rights by drawing parallels between the repression of women and slavery (Macionis, 2016). The goal of the first wave was to achieve women's right to vote, which did not happen at a large scale until the 1920s and is known as the women's suffrage (Lorber, 2010). Simone de Beauvoir's work triggered the second wave around 1950, her ideas connected the social structure to the uneven distribution of power by exposing male dominance and women's subordination as the norm (Lorber, 2010). Her work set the tone for the discussion on the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideals in society, which is still a relevant topic today. Additionally, the aftermath of two world wars inspired women's entry in the labour market.

Third-wave feminism emerged to expand the fight for women's rights in the areas the first and second wave had not covered yet, namely on the topics of

sexuality and race (Lorber, 2010). Around this time postmodern thought was well developed in society, influencing many disciplines and feminism was no exception (Lorber, 2010; McRobbie, 2004). This era of feminism was coined by a broadening of the existing theories and an expansion of its approaches to introduce more intersectionality to the perspectives in the field. Third-wave activists were the first generation to grow up with less gender segregation in society, this encouraged the inclusion of men in the conversation of feminism as active advocates of women's rights (Lorber, 2010). During this time mass media also started to change how they portrayed women (Gill, 2008; McRobbie, 2008) and reflect more empowered female characters, which translated into popular cultural icons like the television series *Sex and the City* (Gill, 2007). How women are portrayed in the media, advertising, and cinema, has been for many years now a hot topic for feminist studies. Women besides being underrepresented in film, tend to be oversexualized, objectified, and overall undervalued as characters or active participants on the narrative (Mulvey, 1989). Lindsey (2015) notes that filmmakers that are concerned with fair portrayal of women in film should resort to fantasy and realism to attract the audience in the first place. In recent cinema, this tactic is identifiable on superhero films starring a female lead, such as *Wonder Woman* or *Captain Marvel*.

Without disregarding the achievements of those before us, the fight towards gender equality is far from being over. Around 2012, the emergence of social media launched the fourth wave of feminism (Munro, 2013). Liberalised access

to information and readily available platforms for content sharing enabled many people to have a voice in today's society, leading to online phenomena like the *#MeToo* campaign in 2017, which was, as already introduced, the first movement against sexual violence and harassment at a large global scale (Boyle, 2019; Chandra & Erlingsdóttir, 2020). Fourth-wave feminism advocates for the break of gender norms, equal pay, and more inclusion for all genders in positions of high power in society. During this time, significant attention is drawn to other social structures other than gender that delay gender equality, mirroring an increased concern with intersectionality – the interplay of class, gender and race in the creation and maintenance of inequalities (Lindsey, 2015; Maclaran, 2015). Privilege and accountability for one's actions are novel themes that emerged in with fourth-wave feminism (Boyle, 2019). For its great and very fast social impact, fourth wave feminism got companies to the movement react promptly (Maclaran, 2015). Maclaran and Kravets (2019) noted that the power of today's feminism is so great that even Disney princesses are speaking out against misogyny. However, as more companies jump on the feminist bandwagon, the more sceptical activist start to insurge and pose a big question: is gender equality a mere adorn for advertising campaigns? (Maclaran & Kravets, 2019).

1.4. The Walt Disney Company

The Walt Disney Company (or simply "Disney") is a multi-million-dollar media powerhouse, famous for being the number one provider of family

entertainment across the globe (Ward, 2002). Transcending the status of an identity brand, Disney is a cultural icon (Holt, 2004) and has a unique business model patented by diversified, yet integrated, revenue streams, operating on four core segments: Media Networks; Parks, Experiences and Products; Studio Entertainment; and Direct-to-Consumer & International (The Walt Disney Company, 2020). In addition to a $339.9B market value, the group registers $60.4B in sales (Murphy, Haverstock, Gara, Helman & Vardi, 2021) and ranked seventh on the 2020 World's Most Valuable Brands Forbes' list (Swant, 2020).

Founded in 1923, Disney has been the beloved companion of a generation after the other for almost a century. Their go-to distribution strategy was the fundamental enabler of this achievement since that up until recently, the group was relaunching their films on a 7-year rotation basis to specifically target the newest generation of consumers (Whelan, 2012). The bottom line of this strategy is a vertical integration of their consumer base, sustained on a deep-rooted emotional connection with the brand. In other words, Disney is present in many stages of consumers' lives, either actively (as a child watching the films) or passively (as an adult reliving their memories or encouraging their own child to watch them). Today, this process has been replaced by their own streaming service, Disney+, which liberalises the access to the studios' complete film collection, allowing consumers to watch them on-demand, which contributes to the omnipresence of the brand.

Besides immensely entertaining, Disney films are intrinsically bounded by moral teachings and commonly used as pedagogical tools by parents and other educators, such as teachers (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). This predisposition to allow a commercial brand to educate the youth is almost unheard of, transforming Disney into very a special phenomenon that must be taken incredibly seriously due to its impact on society at large. In other words, because we, as a society, have simply chosen to allow a brand to shape the mind of the young, it is important to stay critical towards their actions and messages (Do Rozario, 2004). Disney is not only responsible for the fairy tale imaginary of generations upon generations, according to Ward (2002, p. 2) the brand ultimately *"helps shape children's views of right and wrong, their morality"*. Children believe that what they watch on television is true, if those characters and narratives reflect ideals of racism, sexism or misrepresentation of historical events, the potential for perpetual hindering of positive structural social change is immense (Ward, 2002).

1.4.1. Gender messages in Disney princess films

While Disney's messages of kindness and compassion are accepted and encouraged virtually everywhere, some scholars have identified some debatable messages also present on their filmography, namely with respect to the flagrant gender stereotyping patent on their princess narratives (Coyne et al., 2016; Dundes & Streiff, 2016; England et al., 2011; Hefner, Firchau, Norton & Shevel,

2017; Hine, Ivanovic & England, 2018; Macaluso, 2018; Primo, 2018; Schiele et al., 2020; Streiff & Dundes, 2017a, 2017b; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund & Tanner, 2004). The generalised perception that Disney films are harmless (Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Orenstein, 2011), led to an oversight of films' gender messages beyond the screen (Coyne et al., 2016). Following concerns with Disney's cultural power, many have questioned the impact of these messages on children's understanding of the world and themselves, as well as their place in society and social behaviour (Coyne et al., 2016; Do Rozario, 2004; England et al., 2011; Hine, Ivanovic, et al., 2018; Orenstein, 2011).

Snow White (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937), Cinderella (*Cinderella*, 1950) and Aurora (*Sleeping Beauty*, 1959) are Disney's initial set of princesses, representing the most retrograde and stereotyped version of females on Disney princess films (S. Rothschild, 2012). Despite having been created after the first wave of feminism, these princesses are said to have undermined the entire movement and the progress made by women thus far (S. Rothschild, 2012). As a matter of fact, when people think about the "passive and submissive princess" they are usually referring to these, making them the obvious target for feminist critique. However, these films were ground-breaking at the time and gave Disney a competitive advantage on female representation in children's media (Davis, 2011; S. Rothschild, 2012). Since then, the studios have been outperforming the competition both on the overall number of female characters, as well as, the number of full-length films featuring a female lead (Schiele et al., 2020).

After Walt Disney's death in 1966, which some call "the Disney slump", the studios struggled to emulate the founder's success in full-length animated films because they were failing to adapt to consumers' needs. It was not until late 1980s when a change in leadership and a new wave of filmmakers started to challenge the old Disney storytelling formula, launching an era that became known as the Disney Renaissance (S. Rothschild, 2012). During this time the second wave of feminism was inspiring positive change in society, namely in mass media and entertainment, which in Disney's case translated on the birth of a new generation of princesses. These new films were marketed as feminist anthems, contrasting the already outdated initial set of princess stories, featuring a renovated approach to the classical princess storyline. Ariel (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989), Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991), Pocahontas (*Pocahontas*, 1995) and Mulan (*Mulan*, 1998) were introduced as strong lead female characters, with bold personalities and a defiant streak. Nonetheless, upon examination, the seemingly progressive Disney Renaissance princesses are not as progressive as they were marketed to be (Giroux & Pollock, 2010; S. Rothschild, 2012). The narrative is carried by male characters and the overall arc of the female heroine is reduced the pursuit of an unrealistic romantic ideal (S. Rothschild, 2012). Some go as far as putting forward that the bottom line of these stories is the female's journey from her father to her male romantic interest (S. Rothschild, 2012; Whelan, 2012), reinforcing the dominance of men over women. Other dangerous messages with similar connotation are found in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), as Towbin et al. (2004) argue teaches children that is acceptable for women to endure abuse from men. Towbin et al. (2004) also

put forward the dangerous oversexualisation of female characters in Disney's stories, phenomenon which others have identified too (Lindsey, 2015).

Therefore, while many scholars unapologetically defend that these characters and their stories did not live up to the expectation (Dundes & Streiff, 2016; Towbin et al., 2004), all of the Disney princess films are still widely popular amongst consumers (Do Rozario, 2004). Meaning that despite reflecting ideas from almost a century ago, these messages are still being instilled and absorbed by children today (Coyne et al., 2016). Coyne et al. (2016) go as far as putting forward that Disney's merchandise, marketing and campaigns give children "frequent opportunities to rehearse the gender stereotypes they view in the movies through playing with princess toys, dressing up in princess costume" (p. 2), which only increases the need for more conscious communication of gender in mass media, especially when the target are young children.

Many argue that even the most progressive Disney films are anti-feminist at their core and communicate powerful patriarchal ideals (Hefner et al., 2017; S. Rothschild, 2012; Streiff & Dundes, 2017a, 2017b). In 2004, Towbin et al. found that men are represented as physically aggressive or violent, lack communication skills, and those primarily responsible for heroic behaviour. While women are usually depicted as attractive, supported by men, and often engaged on domestic labour (Towbin et al., 2004). Similarly, yet many years after, England et al. (2011) and Hine, Ivanovic, et al. (2018) these stereotypes still uphold. Their research identified that across Disney filmography, traits like

bravery, athletic build, assertiveness, intelligence, and leadership are used to convey masculinity and therefore associated to male characters, whereas being physically weak, nurturing, embarrassed, troublesome, and sensitive are perceived as feminine traits and commonly used to portray females (England et al., 2011; Hine, Ivanovic, et al., 2018). This dichotomy serves to frame the romantic ideals in Disney films, delivering the idea that to be romantically desirable each gender must fulfil their expected role (Hefner et al., 2017).

1.4.2. New princesses, same messages

As the third wave of feminism hit, Disney princess films started to portray more independent, powerful women and focusing on eliminating the unrealistic romantic storyline from the character's story arc (e.g., Elsa in *Frozen*, 2013) (Streiff & Dundes, 2017a). Yet, Disney's new approach is far from flawless, as scholars keep proving that gender messaging, while improved, still reinforces a patriarchal hierarchy (Dundes, Streiff & Streiff, 2018; Streiff & Dundes, 2017a, 2017b). The shift in discourse provoked the rise of new themes in Disney's filmography, such as power. In *Frozen* (2013), the attribution of power to Princess Elsa is used as a replacement for love, subconsciously implying while men are allowed to balance power and romance, and do so effortlessly, women must choose between the two as they cannot have both (Streiff & Dundes, 2017a). As long as Elsa remains powerful, she is not suitable for a heterosexual romantic pairing because as Streiff and Dundes (2017a, p. 8) put it: "a prince that

wields less power than his wife is emasculated and therefore unappealing". Macaluso (2018) extends this idea of mutually exclusive power distribution between men and women in Disney films by arguing that these films' latent message is that for women to thrive, men around them must be weak. Conversely, when women are not held back by their own power, they are consumed by it. In *Moana* (2016), Te Fiti (symbol for mother nature), when angered, transforms into a monster, Te Ka, abuses her power and causes mass destruction. Ultimately, Disney's powerful female character is a twist on the textbook tyrannical female villain who trades romance for power and whose sole existence threatens the patriarchal social structure (Streiff & Dundes, 2017a, 2017b). Redemption is, however, achieved through the display of traditional feminine qualities, such as empathy and compassion, transforming the character into the ever compliant, nurturing idyllic Disney female (Streiff & Dundes, 2017a). The implication of these portrayals is the perpetuation of the idea that female good nature is characterised by passivity and submissiveness, while wielding power is automatically associated with monstrosity (Streiff & Dundes, 2017b). As for older Disney films, this depiction of females can be found on villain characters like Maleficent (in *Sleeping Beauty*), Ursula (in *The Little Mermaid*) or even Cruella (in *101 Dalmatians*).

A different thought on the dynamics of power and romance in *Frozen* is reaction the protagonist gets upon revealing her power, which triggers her being accused of sorcery and consequently being identified as a "witch" (Dundes et al.,

2018). Associating self-reliant, independent women to witchcraft dates back to the Middle Ages, when women that were not economically dependent on a men became the symbol of the devil and the target of the famous *witch hunts* (Lindsey, 2015). Anyhow, "witch" managed to maintain its connotation in the social-cultural context of modern western societies and is still used to disparage women who permeate a previously male-dominated field (Dundes et al., 2018). Hillary Clinton is a prime example of this phenomenon, as she became known as the "wicked witch of the left" when running against Donald Trump for the presidency of the United States of America. Once burnt at the stake, today burnt at the media.

1.4.3. Disney's new product strategy

For decades, Disney was accused of merely redesigning the posters of their old movies and marketing them to new generations without any kind of critical review of their impact on behaviour and society (Wilde, 2014). Conversely, in recent years the studio has been on a quest to revitalize their strategy by pivoting towards live-action filmmaking. After the triumph of *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and *Maleficent* (2014) and the successful acquisition of Marvel Studios (in 2009) and Lucasfilm (in 2010), through live-action films, Disney is finding innovative ways to capitalize on old and new audiences. Sean Bailey, President of Production at Walt Disney Studios Motion Picture Production since 2010, has confirmed this shift in strategy and connected the live-action adaptations of

animation films to the nostalgia Disney classics evoke on consumers (Benson, 2020). In point of fact, nostalgia has been a key factor for Disney's long-term success (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). However, with the live-action strategy Disney is not using nostalgia in the same way as before. Whilst once Disney would relaunch their films to appeal the parents' own sentiment of childhood (Giroux & Pollock, 2010; S. Rothschild, 2012), today they remake old classics to latently evoke that same feeling (Benson, 2020). With some Disney magic, these films never fail to achieve their goal, even though almost all of them are either a rewritten version of the original tale (e.g., *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) and *Mulan* (2020) or a complete reimagination of a character in context, written as prequel to the original animation film (e.g., *Maleficent* (2014) and *Cruella* (2021)).

Five princesses (Aurora (2014), Cinderella (2015), Belle (2017), Jasmine (2019) and Mulan (2020)) have already been the target of a complete reimagination in a live-action adaptation of the original animation, with Ariel (2022) and Snow White (2023) being the next in line with confirmed live-action remakes in the works. With more of less resemblance to their animation counterparts, these films focused on reworking the female lead to modernise the messages patent on these stories in the past (Schiele et al., 2020). Some have noted that Disney made some bold moves regarding gender in these new films, for instance the rewriting of Princess Jasmine in *Aladdin* (Ritchie, 2019) is said to be part of Disney's response to the #MeToo movement in Hollywood (Schiele et al., 2020). Most recently in *Mulan* (2020), the influence of the #MeToo

movement is even more obvious with Jason Reed, the film's producer, stating on an interview that Captain Li Shang (Mulan's love interest in the animated version) was split into two different characters because "having a commanding officer that is also the sexual love interest was very uncomfortable and we didn't think it was appropriate" (Szany, 2020). The emergent fourth wave of feminism that came about with the force of mainstream media, shifted the paradigm of gender messages conveyed by many organizations and businesses and Disney was no exception (Schiele et al., 2020). Thus, this newfound openness in the gender equality discourse gives marketers the chance to expand and strengthen this societal transformation, especially when targeting young audiences (Ebrahim, 2014; Schiele et al., 2020), as they are not able to discern whether these portrayals of gender are anachronic and no longer apply or are acceptable and should, therefore, be reproduced (Whelan, 2012).

1.4.4. Origin, story and themes in *Mulan*

"*The Ballad of Mulan*" is an ancient Chinese legend of a girl who disguised herself as a man to take her aged, crippled father's place in war. This is a tale of bravery and courage, of resilience and devotion with strong underlying messages with great significance in Chinese culture. Thanks to the 1998 Disney adaptation of the story, today, Mulan is known (and admired) by many around the globe. While Disney's first adaptation includes elements of the Chinese culture, many liberties were taken, namely the introduction of three sidekicks

(Mushu, the speaking dragon; Cri-Kee, the lucky cricket; and Khan, Mulan's horse) and a love interest (Captain Li Shang) — working as testament to the compliance with the tradition Disney formula for storytelling (S. Rothschild, 2012). Similarly, a much more oppressive and sexist culture was depicted in the animated film since there is no historical evidence of such behaviour in China (Towbin et al., 2004).

In the legend, before returning home, Mulan fights alongside male soldiers for 12 years and rise through the ranks without ever being found out (Wang, 2020). However, Disney's version features a westernized outlook of the tale which was perceived in China as mimicry of their culture, thus not sitting well with the Chinese audience (Dundes & Streiff, 2016). For instance, Mushu, was particularly not well received for the image he portrays of the Chinese dragon, character which was swiftly replaced by a phoenix in the remake. Hence, the second time around, in the live-action, Disney tried to redeem their cultural faux pas by correcting some of the historical inaccuracies (e.g., warriors during that time had long hair, therefore, in 2020 Mulan does not cut her hair) or just blunt misinterpretations of the source material (e.g., the original invaders where Mongols not Huns) (Dundes & Streiff, 2016). Besides the disrespect for the Chinese culture, other issues have been raised by scholars. Amongst these emerge feminism, gender, and sexuality as the core themes that worry both researchers and consumers. However, while these matters are intrinsically connected, some by their very nature, while others share the unbreakable

theoretical tie to intersectionality theory (Dundes & Streiff, 2016). Yet, the present research will focus solely on the themes that regard gender, in particular, gender stereotypes and feminism.

In *Mulan* (1998, 2020), the central point in the narrative is the character's struggle to fit in a society that does not accept as valuable who she is, or wants to be (S. Rothschild, 2012). Mulan is hindered by a society that links worth to the ability of performing gender roles in a traditional, binary way (Limbach, 2013), which is constantly reinforced throughout the film. Going to war in her father's place has been identified as a storyline of electral love (Dundes & Streiff, 2016) and filial piety (Dong, 2011), but also as the ultimate patriarchal ode (Limbach, 2013). Limbach (2013) essentially argues that Mulan returning home from battle to bring honour to her family, followed by a man which is her love interest in the film, after declining a non-domestic job offer from The Emperor, is a way of subliminally reinforcing patriarchal ideals. Lastly, an equally relevant message for children lies on the theme of heroism. Mulan was ground-breaking, as women began to occupy the role of directors and producers in Hollywood, portrayals of women began to switch into a more positive tone and Disney's female characters were no exception (Davis, 2011).

1.5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The comprehensive literature review in this chapter, introduces all the concepts deemed crucial to contextualise the present research. Starting with the presentation of social marketing's complex theoretical framework, which ultimately can be synthesised in one key aspect: social marketing aims to change social behaviour through the application of marketing techniques. Followed by a high-level overview of the contrasting paradigms in brand management theory and the introduction of cultural branding, Holt's (2003, 2004, 2005) theory which explores how brands can create value through culture.

The third section initially explores theories of gender, strongly focusing on how gender is constructed through socialisation. On a second instance, this section also introduces the historical context of feminism as a movement, emphasising contemporary events that are shaping fourth-wave feminism. Next, Disney's position in the media industry is briefly touched upon to frame the brand's strong influence in society. Finally, the debate of gender stereotyping messages in Disney princess films was exhaustively presented.

In sum, the key takeaway from this chapter is that gender messages are largely bias in most of Disney's film catalogue, favouring men over women. Despite recent research showing that gender portrayal seems to have improved on their latest films, the reinforcement of the patriarchal hierarchy is still very much present (Streiff & Dundes, 2017b). Conversely, Disney's live-action strategy has been refreshing gender messages through the reimagination of their

old-fashioned princess stories, usually by reworking the narrative and adjusting the characters to reflect contemporary ideals of diversity and inclusion. Although extensive research has been made on Disney's animation films, their live-action films have been overlooked by researchers, a gap this study intends to bridge.

Disney, as an icon brand (Holt, 2004), has great social and cultural influence (Giroux & Pollock, 2010), which has been flagged as having a direct impact on children's behaviour (Coyne et al., 2016). Therefore, since social marketing's ultimate goal is to change social behaviour, in theory, Disney fulfils the criteria to perform social marketing strategies quite effectively. Moreover, so far, despite the on-going debate regarding the participation of the private sector in social marketing activities, little applied research has been made on this topic. Therefore, this study is also set to address this gap in literature, doing so by exploring Disney's brand as a cultural and social phenomenon.

2. METHODOLOGY

Following the literature review, this chapter intends to illuminate the scientific grounds on which the present research was built upon and introduce the methodological choices made. Structure wise, it is arranged into five distinct sections, each one providing a new layer of knowledge into the research. The first exposes the research questions, establishing the empirical context of the study, while the second section sheds light on the philosophical grounds the study was built upon. Sections three to five disclose the key steps taken throughout the research with respect to the methodology followed, as well as the methods employed.

2.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the present research is to understand the potential of Disney films to effectively promote behavioural change regarding gender stereotyping in society. Supported by the literature review presented and as to attend to the main research objective, the following specific objectives were defined:

1. Identify and analyse the gender messages present on Disney's two versions of *Mulan* (1998 and 2020);

2. Explore the potential of *Mulan* (2020), and by extension Disney's new product strategy, as successful social marketing instruments.

Table 1 introduces the association between the specific research objective just presented and the theoretical dimensions exposed in the literature review.

Specific Research Objective	Dimension being studied	Key Authors
Identify and analyse the gender messages present on Disney's two versions of Mulan (1998 and 2020)	Social Marketing	Fox & Kotler (1980) Lorber (2010) Lindsey (2015) Macionis (2016) England et al. (2011) Hine et al. (2018) Streiff & Dundes (2017a, 2017b)
	Gender stereotypes and feminism	
Explore the potential of Mulan (2020), and by extension Disney's new product strategy, as successful social marketing instruments	Social Marketing	Kotler & Zaltman (1971) Fox & Kotler (1980) Lefebvre (1997) Polonsky (2017) Holt (2004)
	Brands, culture, and society	

Table 1: Outline of the relationship between the literature review dimension and the specific research objectives

Source: Author

Due to the complex nature of the social phenomenon at study, its analysis framework is equally somewhat intricate. Therefore, it is of utmost importance

that the relationships Table 1 introduces are clarified. The approach taken to the specific research objectives is interlinked and must be understood chronologically, meaning that the answer to the first objective impacts the second objective. Consequently, the same is to say that films' potential to be social marketing instruments is necessarily dependant on the gender messages they convey, which is why this research first approaches the identification of said messages before addressing the second specific objective.

Finally, it is also relevant to point out how these two narrower objectives contribute and complement each other to achieve the main research objective. From the literature review emerged that: (1) Disney animation films convey biased gender messages, which influence children's behaviour; and (2) successful social marketing instruments are those which actually achieve positive behavioural change. Thus, to understand the potential of Disney films to effectively promote behavioural change regarding gender stereotyping in society, their ability to convey positive gender messages must be approached before framing them as social marketing instruments otherwise the research has no grounds to proceed. For this effect using Disney's two versions of *Mulan* (1998, 2020) as a starting point, the gender messages in both were examined based on gender theory as presented in the literature review. From these results the remake's potential of being a social marketing instrument was then explored, having as foundation the dimensions of social marketing and brand culture in the literature review. Ultimately, the combination of these answers culminates

into the appropriate understanding of Disney films' potential to promote behavioural change regarding gender discrimination in society.

2.2. Research Paradigm

Research suggests that children retain and perform the representations of gender they watch on television and film (Lindsey, 2015), which supports the idea that gender is constructed. Therefore, constructivism is the most suitable approach for the present research since this stance suggests that social phenomena, such as gender, as well as their meanings are not only continuously created by social actors through interaction but are also mutable and under constant revision (Bryman & Bell, 2011). If representations of gender in film, embrace extreme versions of gender stereotypes, these are the messages that children learn, shaping how they act in society in the long run. On the other hand, culturally influential brands, such as Disney, by promoting feminist messages help to revision these ideas. In sum, due to the complex nature of the phenomenon under study and its possible implications on social structures, a constructivist perspective was assumed.

2.3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As previously mentioned, this section aims to expose the methodological approach followed throughout the study. Therefore, it is deemed crucial to, first and foremost, expose its qualitative nature.

Aspers and Corte (2019, p. 155) define qualitative research "as an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied". Despite being a largely debated topic, a unified view or agreement within the scientific community has not yet been reached regarding the exact definition of qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Stake, 1995). Nevertheless, its most commonly accepted defining traits are that it focuses on data that cannot be translated into numbers (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and uses a small, purposeful sample (Patton, 2005). Consequently, qualitative research is the methodological choice best suited to cover the essence of the matter at study.

As for the type of research conducted, the present study is of applied and exploratory nature. Applied since it is a direct application to Disney's films, namely *Mulan* (1998, 2020) and exploratory research because it takes the understanding of the facts a step further by demonstrating a concern with understanding causal relationships behind the phenomena (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), it logically emerged as the most fitting approach for the present study.

Regarding the relationship between the present research and theory, adopting an inductive approach was deemed the most suitable option. Induction is a methodological approach that focuses on generating universally applicable theory from a set of observed data to justify specific, particular instances (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and is usually closely associated with qualitative research methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The contrasting approach would be deductive reasoning, which begins with the formulation of hypothesis derived from pre-existing theory to be proven or disproven (Bryman & Bell, 2011), resulting on a "top-down" approach designed with the primary purpose of testing propositions to understand the relationships between variables (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). While inductive reasoning enables the researcher to gain understanding of complex social relationships through the exploration of data collected for that effect (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This approach supposes a "bottom-up" approach, where theory is the main outcome of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which is reached through the analysis of collected data (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Ultimately, an inductive approach is used when it is of utmost importance to comprehend the context of the events and the researcher wants to apprehend the relevance humans attribute to the phenomena in study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). These key characteristics reveal themselves as a benefit for the present study since its main objective is to understand the potential of Disney films to effectively promote behavioural change regarding gender stereotyping in society.

All things considered, since the object of interest is rooted in a complex social environment, the data gathered will essentially be qualitative by nature. Given that in scientific research the methodological choice and the data collected are intrinsically connected and theoretically indissociable (Yin, 2003), the present study assumes, therefore, the form of qualitative research.

2.3.1. Case study

As Yin (2003, p. 20) put it "the [research] design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions". According to Yin (2003), a case study should be the preferred method if and when, any or all of the following conditions are verified: (a) the central research objective suggests a question starting with "how" or "why"; (b) the researcher does not have the ability to exert control over the phenomena; (c) the occurrence is contemporary and bounded within a certain real-life context. Therefore, as per the research objective being addressed, the researcher's absence of control over the matter being studied, as well as, the temporality of the facts, the present research is reasonably designed as a case study.

Frequently used in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011), the case study method can be defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries

between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). One of the defining characteristics of this research strategy is that an idiographic approach is usually taken, meaning that it primarily focuses on highlighting the unique features of the subject in analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Nowadays, the case study is a wide-spread and well accepted research design in business and management research, so much so that some of the most popular studies in the field have been conducted using this approach (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Nevertheless, in order to produce robust and reliable conclusions, Yin (2003) also put forward that for a given case there are multiple relevant data sources, resulting in the need to "converge in a triangulating fashion" (Yin, 2003, p. 14). Stake (1995) also defends gathering data from different sources, using different methods, for triangulation of results as a best practice for case study research. In the present study, document analysis was used to tackle this need. Since one of this method's specific purposes is the verification and corroboration of findings to attest credibility (Bowen, 2009), it emerged as an appropriate option.

Case research designs can be classified into different types, Yin (2003) using a two-by-two matrix technique, identifies four distinct case designs according to the following two variables: context (single- or multi-case) and units of analysis (holistic or embedded). A multi-case design allows the researcher to follow an experiment replication logic to study the same phenomena in various contexts, whereas single cases are used when the focus is one critical case in one particular context (Yin, 2003). Regarding units of analysis, an embedded design is reserved

for when inside a case there are different subunits, while a holistic design is chosen when the case is approached as a whole (Yin, 2003).

Each and every case study design type has its strengths and weaknesses, for instance, while a single-case design enables an in-depth approach to a unique occurrence, it offers very limited generalisation potential (Yin, 2003). Multi-case studies bridge this constraint, these are, however, a more expensive and time-consuming approach (Yin, 2003). Regarding the holistic versus embedded approach, the first allows an integral outlook into the phenomena being studied and is particularly useful when no specific subunits can be distinguished within the case (Yin, 2003). A downfall of this design is that the researcher incurs the risk of conducting too much of a high-level approach and end up with very abstract results (Yin, 2003). As for embedded cases, this design adds value by enabling a more comprehensive analysis of a situation through the use of different subunits, however, the researcher has to face the challenge of not getting lost and failing to return to the broader unit of analysis (Yin, 2003). Since only one context is of interest for the present study, a single-case approach is the most adequate one to follow. When it comes to units of analysis, two can be identified: the original animation film (*Mulan*, 1998) and the live-action remake (*Mulan*, 2020). Therefore, the present case study assumes the embedded format.

While the type of a case varies according to the phenomena and context being investigated, Stake (1995) defends that one of the primary selection criteria for cases should be the learning opportunity a particular case poses. However, turning to Yin's (2003) perspective on the selection criteria, he argues that the

most relevant one is the uniqueness of the case when it comes to exploratory, theory-building grounds. These two perspectives on case selection, complementary frame the choice of *Mulan* (1998, 2020) as the focus of the study.

All in all, case studies have been considered one of the most challenging research methods to follow, this argument is sustained on the complexity of the phenomena worthy of this approach but also due to the flexibility it intrinsically allows (Yin, 2003). Having said this, and now that it has been established that a case study is the most suitable method for the present research, is important to introduce the case, by elaborating on its components, i.e., Disney's two versions of *Mulan*, to prevent drifting from the focus of the research.

2.4. THE CASE: DISNEY'S TWO VERSIONS OF *MULAN*

Released in 1998, the first *Mulan* produced by Walt Disney Studios is an animated musical feature film directed by Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook. The second, while being largely inspired by the first one, is a retelling of the original *Ballad of Mulan* directed by Niki Caro and released in 2020 is not a shot-by-shot adaptation of the animation version. Also, the latter is part of the new wave of live-action remakes Disney has been exploring in the past decade.

Beginning with some production-related observations, Table 2 summarises some of the most relevant metadata of the two films. However, a complete

description of both film's information can be found as an appendix (Appendix III). Comparing the two versions, besides the obvious difference of animation versus live action, there is another major distinguishing factor: the 2020 version was directed by a woman. Niki Caro was the second female director to be hired by Disney and the first women ever to direct a film with a budget over $200 million. Caro is known for her previous work, such as *Whale Rider* (2002) and *North Country* (2005), which are films patented by feminist themes and heavily associated with feminist film theory. Her films usually reflect a break from the subconscious communication of patriarchal ideals in cinema by focusing on the story and trajectory of the female character on her own right instead of the secondary, objectified part that women usually play.

	***Mulan* (1998)**	***Mulan* (2020)**
Release date	18 June 1998	04 September 2020
Director	Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook	Niki Caro
Genre	Musical, Kids & Family	Adventure, Action
Rating	G	PG-13
Production budget* *Source: IMBd	$90.000.000	$200.000.000
Gross revenue worldwide** *Source: Box Office Mojo	$304.320.254	$66.800.000

Table 2: Summary form of the films' key metadata

Source: Author

Shifting the focus towards the characters and plot, there are also some noticeable differences. Starting with the characters, the most striking change was the split of Mulan's original love interest (Captain Li Shang) into two separate characters: Commander Tung and Honghui. The reason for this exchange was, as mentioned before, because in the light of the #MeToo movement it felt wrong that Mulan's romantic interest was her superior officer. Mulan's sidekicks from the animation movie were adapted to better fit the tone of the new film, or in the case of Mushu, the dragon, he was replaced for a phoenix. Behind this swap there is also some cultural fundament, since Chinese consumer did not like how this character and viewed him as mockery of their culture. Lastly, while Mulan's grandmother was cut from the remake, two new female characters were introduced: Xiu, Mulan's sister, and Xianniang, a new villain inspired by the original villain's pet falcon. Additionally, a list of the characters with relevant speaking roles can be found as an appendix (Appendix IV).

Regarding the plot, the films are overall quite similar. Since both adaptations were inspired on the same source material, their plots reflect the same storyline. Both films begin with Mulan failing to fulfil her predestined role as a perfect bride, however, she then decides to disguise as a man to join the army in her father's place to save him from going to war. In the army, Mulan trains with the rest of the soldiers while hiding her identity. Then there is a first battle with the enemy, in which she saves ser battalion by causing an avalanche that buries most

of their opponents. Mulan's identity is then revealed, and she is expelled from the army. Next, Mulan realises the Emperor is still in danger, which spurs her to go back to her battalion and warn them. Her announcement is initially dismissed. However, she ends up succeeding by saving the Emperor, therefore, all of China. Despite the similitudes, there is one manifest difference: the elimination of the songs in the live action remake, which in contrast with the original animation is not a musical. Overall, the stories touch the same plot points, diverging more on other filmmaking aspects, such as mise-en-scène and screenplay (i.e., actual dialogue, not the narrative).

2.5. Data Collection

As it is common practice in qualitative research, the sample for analysis was chosen in a purposive sampling fashion (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This approach should be taken in critical cases when the subject of interest is more likely to happen on the sample selected or the sample is vital for the study to proceed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In this light, and following this approach, for the present research were considered two full-length feature films produced by Walt Disney Studios: the original animated film *Mulan* (1998) directed by Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook, and the correspondent live-action remake *Mulan* (2020) directed by Niki Caro. Appendix II provides a comprehensive summary of both film's metadata. Additionally, the official promotional posters and trailers used to promote the two films were also analysed (Appendix IV). The

researcher used Disney's streaming platform, Disney+, to access both films and their respective trailer. For *Mulan* (2020), the posters analysed were retrieved from the film's official media kit, found on Disney's Media & Entertainment official website for the film. In the case of *Mulan* (1998), the movie posters were retrieved from The Movie Database (TMBd), an online community-built extensive database of film metadata. In respect to film data, the two films were watched a total of six times each. The researcher transcribed all spoken dialogue for both *Mulan* (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) and *Mulan* (Caro, 2020) during two viewings purposefully solely dedicated to this task.

Additionally, to strengthen the investigation through triangulation, other materials (Niki Caro's press interviews for *Mulan* (2020)) were examined to better understand the intention of the change of tone between films. A description of these materials can be found as an appendix (Appendix I), where their category, type, title, source, and unique key are identified. Additionally, it is important to clarify that the attributed key consists of a concatenation of the letter "T" (for "Triangulation") and an integer (e.g., 1, 2, …) and serves no other purpose than to simplify the identification of data extracts from these sources.

2.6. Data Analysis

2.6.1. Thematic analysis

Humans have the innate ability to create meaning through interaction, which is often materialized in content such as film, literature, advertising, or music. Necessarily associated, and as a complement to the capacity of creation, humans are equally able to interpret and analyse those meanings (Rudy et al., 2010). Naturally, scholars started to capitalize on this aptitude to develop methodologies that enabled this type of analysis in a credible, academic fashion.

Even though some of preceding studies of gender stereotypes in Disney materials have been done using quantitative content analysis (e.g., England et al., 2011; Hefner et al., 2017), the present study takes a qualitative approach in the form of thematic analysis. While qualitative approaches in content analysis are viable and rooted in critical theory, which is particularly significant for feminist theory research due to its association with symbolic interactionism (Krippendorff, 1984), social research using content analysis often times tends to latently follow a positivistic approach (Braun et al., 2019), which would not fit the main objective of the present research. Since thematic analysis may be an evolution of quantitative content analysis (Braun et al., 2019), it was deemed the most suitable method to adopt. Furthermore, the terms “content analysis” and “thematic analysis”, despite being conceptually distinct methods of analysis, have often been used as synonyms and even compounded into a hybrid solution (“thematic content analysis”), which only attests for the similitude of the two

(Braun et al., 2019). Notwithstanding, the researcher opted for the adoption of a pure thematic analysis for the evident relevance of the method when conducting social research of feminist theory. For instance, as of 2019, thematic analysis was the most popular analytic method used in qualitative feminist research (Clarke & Braun, 2019), which confirms the relevance of this choice.

Despite being widely used before, thematic analysis was initially credibly defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) with the purpose of demarcating the grounds of the approach to increase its reliability and robustness. Today, thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used methods in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013), with applicability in a variety of disciplines, including marketing (e.g. Mogaji & Yoon, 2019). To this extent, themes indicating how gender is communicated in *Mulan* (1998, 2020) were generated from the analysed film dialogues, news articles and film reviews using the six-phase process for thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013, 2020).

Braun and Clarke (2006) initially defined thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79), which can be used to answer most types of research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Similarly, this method is applicable to a wide range of qualitative data, such as textual data from secondary sources, and is flexible enough to analyse either small or large datasets from a top-down/theory-driven perspective or alternatively taking a bottom-up/data-driven approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006,

2013). The method followed in the present study, as designed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013), is composed of six phases: familiarisation with data; generation of initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. Braun and Clarke (2006) focused their approach on the flexibility thematic analysis intrinsically allows, arguing the method's great advantage was not being tied to a particular theoretical standpoint. Nevertheless, the authors see as vital the establishment of a strong theoretical ground, which must be well delineated and clearly presented to ensure the quality of the research, to prevent the derailing of the investigation from theory. Therefore, and as exposed previously in this section, it is important to reinforce that the present study was conducted under a constructivist viewpoint, in an inductive manner and through the analysis of secondary qualitative data. Finally, thematic analysis emphasizes the importance of context and reality when analysing a phenomenon, as well as the researcher's role as mediator and interpret of meaning in data. By embracing subjectivity in a transparent way and following a methodical process, such as Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, research conducted through thematic analysis obtains a high degree of credibility and integrity, which might be difficult to achieve through other methods of qualitative data analysis (Braun et al., 2019).

In the present study, the first phase was accomplished concurrently to the data collection process. Firstly, the researcher transcribed the full extent of the spoken dialogue in *Mulan* (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) and *Mulan* (Caro, 2020), having watched both films twice to accomplish this task inevitably allowed for

an initial immersion with the data collected. Secondly, regarding the other documents included in the investigation for triangulation purposes, materials such as written interviews were read multiple times while the video interviews included were, just like the films, fully transcribed by the researcher. Throughout the entire process, notes on important or unique aspects of the data were taken just as suggested as best practice by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013, 2020).

Phase two entails the systematic and comprehensive coding of data, the initial codes are mutable and can evolve throughout the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). An important feature of coding for thematic analysis is codes can be "semantic" or "latent", the first capture meaning in data at a superficial level while the second is concerned with implicit meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Codes are words or phrases that refer the researcher to the feature of interest in the data and will primarily be used for theme development, which is why these must be intelligible outside the data's context (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

For the present study, the researcher opted for a "complete coding" approach, which as a process involves the identifying and labelling of features deemed relevant to answer the research question across the entirety of the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As previously mentioned, an inductive approach is the most suitable for the present research. Therefore, the coding followed an inductive logic since the aim of the analysis was not to fit the data into a given pre-existing framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which resulted into codes that

are strongly connected and particular to the data (Patton, 1990). However, one is never truly detached from previous knowledge, thus, some authors' work inspired the researcher during the initial coding stage. Table 3 introduces the emerging themes, which will be explored in detail throughout the next chapters and presents the key authors whose work inspired the initial coding of gender messages in *Mulan* (1998, 2020). To perform the initial coding, the films were watched two more times each. Appendix II provides a detailed outline of the initial codes (first column) used in the analysis, as well as the corresponding theme each ultimately generated (last column).

Theme	**Example of initial codes used in analysis**	**Key Authors**
Feminine gender stereotypes (A1)	Women must be passive	Lorber (2010) Lindsey (2015) Macionis (2016) England et al. (2011) Hine et al. (2018) Coyne et al. (2016)
	Women must be obedient	
	Women's word is valued less than men's	
	Women's worth rests on their beauty	
Masculine gender stereotypes (A2)	Men are natural leaders	Lorber (2010) Lindsey (2015) Macionis (2016) England et al. (2011) Hine et al. (2018) Coyne et al. (2016)
	Men are independent	
	Men cannot express themselves	
	Men must be muscular	

Reinforcement of patriarchal ideals (B1)	People who do not fit the stereotype are marginalised	Streiff & Dundes (2017a, 2017b) Dundes et al. (2018) Schiele et al. (2020) Towbin et al. (2004) Rothschild (2012)
	Women are men's property	
	Women are inferior to men	
	Men are scared by powerful women	
Feminist attitudes and behaviour (B2)	Gendered behaviour is teachable	Streiff & Dundes (2017a, 2017b) Macaluso (2018) Dundes et al. (2018) Lindsey (2015) Mulvey (1989) Maclaran (2015)
	Women are allowed to not aspire to marriage	
	Men break away from the hypermasculinity expectations	
	Power comes from owning your identity	

Table 3: Theoretical support for the initial codes used during in analysis

Source: Author

During the third phase, the codes defined in the previous phase must be organised and compared to begin the theme development stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). This is an iterative process and themes can either result from the collation of the codes as previously mentioned or from the "promotion" of relevant, more complex codes to themes (Clarke & Braun, 2014). After the initial coding process, the researcher reorganized the codes to reduce the number of available coding options, thus, avoiding a scattered output in the form of too many themes. As for the rationale behind the code rearrangement, the researcher sought to combine the initial codes into broader, more abstract, ones respecting the thematic content of each. For instance, "Women must be passive",

“Women must be obedient”, “Women must be silent”, “Women must be dutiful” and “Women must please others, especially men” were initial codes that during the refinement stage were grouped into a new code: “Respectable women are submissive and docile”. All the refined codes can equally be found discriminated in Appendix II (second column). After reviewing of codes, the researcher watched the films a fifth time to revisit the entire dataset using the new codes and generate the initial themes.

Phase number four, refinement and revision is achieved through the validation of themes by reviewing them against the coded data and them a second time against the entire dataset in order to evaluate their pertinence and fit (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). From the previous phase, early themes emerged after the aggregation of codes with similar meaning. However, after watching the films a sixth time and juxtaposing the coded data with the generated themes, the researcher found that while the themes were well identified, their naming was not reflecting their essence. Therefore, the biggest adjustment done at this stage was in respect to themes’ names. Once the researcher was confident that the themes achieved are the most adequate, proceeded to the final two phases of the analytical process. These being phase five, which is the final definition and naming of themes, followed by phase six, producing the report, which involves the gathering and assembling of results and data extracts relevant for the description of the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2014).

2.6.2. Document analysis

According to Bowen (2009, p. 27), document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic", which is achieved through an iterative process that combines elements from content and thematic analysis. The method entails skimming, reading, and interpreting documents to uncover relevant information, as well as coding, which many a times is done using the codes applied to other data sources (Bowen, 2009). When used as a triangulation tool, if the documentary evidence converges with pre-existing results, then the research has a greater level of confidence, being, therefore, more trustworthy (Bowen, 2009). In this light, and as to increase both credibility and reliability of results, the present study resorts to document analysis for triangulation of findings. Accordingly, the analysed documents (Appendix I) were reviewed by the researcher to validate the change of tone in *Mulan* (2020) that was identified in the thematic analysis. Ergo, the codes used in thematic analysis were verified in the document analysis to assess the director's intention in conveying the identified messages, namely themes B1 and B2, which will timely be presented in the next chapter.

3. FINDINGS

The present chapter serves the purpose of exposing the findings, i.e., emerging themes, of the thematic analysis conducted on Disney's two versions of *Mulan*, the animated version (1998) and the live-action remake (2020). As previously mentioned, the researcher scrutinized all spoken dialogue, as well as symbolic elements and other filmmaking components, such as mise-en-scène, deemed relevant to identify and analyse the gender messages present in the films. From the analysed data, the following four themes were identified:

- Feminine gender stereotypes (A1)
- Masculine gender stereotypes (A2)
- Reinforcement of patriarchal ideals (B1)
- Feminist attitudes and behaviour (B2)

All four themes are present in both *Mulan* (1998) and *Mulan* (2020). However, the distribution of themes in the coded content varies significantly between films. As presented in Table 4, Feminine gender stereotypes (A1) is the most prevalent theme in *Mulan* (1998), while in *Mulan* (2020) the strongest theme is Feminist attitudes and behaviour (B2). Regarding Masculine gender stereotypes (A2), this theme's presence is noticeably less relevant in *Mulan* (2020). Lastly, the presence of Reinforcement of patriarchal ideals (B1) is virtually the same on both films.

		Percentage of the coded content by film	
Theme	**Code**	***Mulan* (1998)**	***Mulan* (2020)**
Feminine gender stereotypes	A1	43,04%	29,11%
Masculine gender stereotypes	A2	22,78%	7,59%
Reinforcement of patriarchal ideals	B1	29,75%	29,11%
Feminist attitudes and behaviour	B2	4,43%	34,18%

Table 4: Distribution of the emerging themes in the coded content by film

Source: Author

Overall, *Mulan* (2020) seems to portray not only women but also men in a more positive light than the original animated version of the film. It is paramount to further elaborate on what each theme entails before moving forward to the discussion of the findings. Ergo, the next four sections of the present chapter are dedicated to exposing the identified themes. For each theme, a brief description is presented, followed by extracts from the coded that serve as examples of the theme. Lastly, the fifth section is dedicated to exposing the findings obtained from the triangulation of results.

3.1. FEMININE GENDER STEREOTYPES

Feminine gender stereotypes are ever-present and explicit throughout the two films. Thereby, this theme captures all instances where there is evidence of gender stereotyping of females, such as when women are referred to or portrayed as objectifiable, submissive or weak (Lorber, 2010). Instances of this theme can be found on Table 2:

Data extract	**Context**	**Film**
I ask you, what man will want to marry a girl who flits around rooftops, chasing chickens?	Hua Li, Mulan's mother (00:04:14)	*Mulan* (2020)
I couldn't care less what she'll wear or what she looks like *It all depends on what she cooks like* *Beef, pork, chicken...*	Chien-Po during a "A Girl Worth Fighting For" (00:48:16)	*Mulan* (1998)
A girl can bring her family *Great honour in one way* *By striking a good match*	Lyrics of *"Bring Honour to Us All" (00:06:58)*	*Mulan* (1998)
Quiet. Composed. Graceful. Elegant. Poised. Polite. These are the qualities... we see in a good wife.	Matchmaker (00:16:31)	*Mulan* (2020)

Table 5: Examples of the theme *Feminine gender stereotypes*

Source: Author

3.2. MASCULINE GENDER STEREOTYPES

Similarly, stereotypes of masculinity are also present on both films. This theme condenses all messages that relate to masculine gender stereotyping evidently present throughout the films, such as the glorification of physical strength and the idea that only men are suited for non-domestic jobs (such as warfare) (Macionis, 2016). Table 3 contains data extracts that exemplify this theme:

Data extract	**Context**	**Film**
(Be a man) *With all the force* *of a great typhoon* *(Be a man)* *With all the strength* *of a raging fire*	Lyrics of *"Make a Man Out of You"* (00:39:28)	*Mulan* (1998)
It is my duty to fight. My honour to sacrifice for the emperor	Hua Zhou (00:24:08)	*Mulan* (2020)
My manly ways and turns of phrase are sure to thrill her	Ling during "*A Girl Worth Fighting For*" (00:49:07)	*Mulan* (1998)
My girl will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars	Yao during a *"A Girl Worth Fighting For"* (00:48:11)	*Mulan* (1998)

Table 6: Examples of the theme *Masculine gender stereotypes*

Source: Author

3.3. REINFORCEMENT OF PATRIARCHAL IDEALS

This theme aggregates messages that, either explicitly or implicitly, suggest a male-dominated social structure, which is by definition a patriarchy (Lindsey, 2015). Under this theme were included all instances where female characters are mistreated, disrespected, or discriminated against based on their biological condition. Table 4 illustrates presents data extracts that exemplify this theme:

Data extract	**Context**	**Film**
Silence! You would do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man's presence	Chi Fu (00:15:25)	*Mulan* (1998)
I know my place! It is time you learned yours	Fa Zhou (00:17:11)	*Mulan* (1998)
I am the father. It is my place to bring honour to our family on the battlefield. [yelling] You are the daughter! Learn your place	Hua Zhou (00:21:07)	*Mulan* (2020)
And I am Yao, king of the rock. And there's nothin' you girls can do about it	Yao (00:43:34)	*Mulan* (1998)
Make no mistake... the witch serves me, therefore, all of us. She knows who her master is	Böri Khan (00:44:14)	*Mulan* (2020)

Table 7: Examples of the theme *Reinforcement of patriarchal ideals*

Source: Author

3.4. FEMINIST ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

This theme abridges all messages that convey progressive ideas towards gender. The messages from which stems this theme reflect a sense of unity, equality, and freedom in respect to gender, both in the language used in discourse and the way characters address each other, but also symbolic components present in the film, such as the phoenix, which represents Mulan. Table 5 provides examples of this theme's presence in the data:

Data extract	**Context**	**Film**
I know my place. And it is my duty... to fight for the kingdom and protect the emperor	Mulan (01:16:18)	*Mulan* (2020)
Hua Mulan... your actions have brought disgrace and dishonour to this regiment... to this kingdom and to your own family. But your loyalty and bravery are without question. You will lead us as we ride to the Imperial City. Ready the horses.	Commander Tung (01:18:49)	*Mulan* (2020)
Not witch. Warrior	Xianniang (00:12:36)	*Mulan* (2020)
Rise up. You are a mighty warrior. Rise up like a phoenix. Fight for the kingdom and its people	Emperor (01:31:55)	*Mulan* (2020)

Table 8: Examples of the theme *Feminist attitudes and behaviour*

Source: Author

3.5. TRIANGULATION OF FINDINGS

The present research views the films as a product of Disney. Therefore, the brand has ownership and control over the messages the audience gets from their films. Additionally, Disney seems to be putting branding effort towards better representation of women on their marketing narrative (Macaluso, 2018; Schiele et al., 2020). For these reasons, and because the main findings suggest a shift towards a more positive portrayal of women on the latest version of *Mulan* it was deemed relevant to assess the director's intention and perspective regarding this topic. For this effect, several interviews and statements given by Niki Caro were analysed to assess the pertinence and validity of the previous findings. All materials considered are listed as an appendix (Appendix I).

Overall, the validation was positive. The director revealed to have a strong feminist agenda in the making of *Mulan* (2020). From the analysed interviews, it became apparent that Caro's connection to the story drew a parallel to her own career as a female director in Hollywood, which she often describes as a "men's world". Another finding that corroborates the feminist tone of the live action of *Mulan* is that Disney seems to have fully trusted Caro with the task of updating the tale of Mulan within the brand's universe (evident in T4). Also, from the analysed data it seems that the 2020 film was being marketed almost as *auteur* cinema, given the importance of Caro in feminist film theory due to her previous work in *Whale Rider* (2002) and *North Country* (2005), which narratives' basic premises are similar the one in *Mulan*: the journey of a woman in a man's world.

Table 6 presents relevant examples of these findings in the analysed data.

Data extract	**Key**
the studio felt I was somebody that could handle the creative imperatives of a movie like this and the cultural responsibility	T4
the character played by Gong Li says to Mulan "Impossible a woman leading a man's army "and… and this is what I do! Despite my best efforts to make it a woman's army, a film is still a man's army and…and but in this case all my generals were women	T7
this story is fantastic because Mulan's journey from village girl to male soldier, to warrior, and hero speaks for all of us but what is so moving and important to me is that here is a story of a young woman who comes to recognise and appreciate her own power	T1
[Interviewer] Niki, I mean you have been the first female to direct the highest live-action budget ever. What does that mean to you? *[Niki Caro] Um well. It means… it means a lot in particularly today. Today is International Women's Day and today I get to acknowledge to myself and… and you and… and all your viewers that, that this is what it looks like when women make movies of this scale.* […] *I hope that this movie encourages other studios to give other women the opportunity to work at this level*	T2
we approached making this film as a completely new reimagining of the classic Chinese legend, which is over 1000 years old, but also acknowledging the beautiful DNA of the animation	T8
as far as the film industry goes, it occurs to me that 50% of the people are holding 100% of the power and are not necessarily willing to give that up easily. I, I also think that there's something, very disturbing at some primal level about giving women power and to be a director is to hold a lot of power and we learn to use it wisely and well, I think	T9

Table 9: Examples of Niki Caro's perspective in the making of *Mulan*

Source: Author

4. DISCUSSION

The findings previously presented suggest that there has been a shift from the animated version to the live-action remake, with the overall messages reflecting a more progressive tone regarding gender.

After introducing and justifying the methodological options, as well as the findings of the research, this chapter discusses the emerging themes identified, critically connecting them to the literature review presented when fitting. Therefore, and structure wise, the chapter is divided into five sections. The first three are dedicated to the discussion of a framework that conceptualises the relationship between the emerging themes previously presented. The remainder of the chapter frames the two versions of Disney's *Mulan* (1998, 2020) as products and explores the potential of Disney films as social marketing instruments, linking this approach to the brand's cultural power and its ability to influence social change.

4.1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEMES

Albeit how inevitable gender stereotyping messages may be in *Mulan*, as seen by the findings previously presented, their articulation results into distinct, mutually exclusive, views of women in society. Figure 3 shows the relationship between themes that emerged from the results as presented in the previous

chapter. From the analysed data, evidence suggests that the interaction between ***Feminine gender stereotypes*** (A1) and ***Masculine gender stereotypes*** (A2) not only sets the tone of the film but ultimately influences the presence of the two other identified themes in the films – ***Reinforcement of patriarchal ideals*** (B1) or ***Feminist attitudes and behaviour*** (B2). Which is a perfect reflection of what literature describes as the effect of negative gender stereotypes in the media, i.e., negative gender stereotyping results in sexism, which not only enables but justifies gender discrimination (Lindsey, 2015). From this research emerges that negative gender stereotyping results in theme B1, whose messages latently provide justification for gender discrimination.

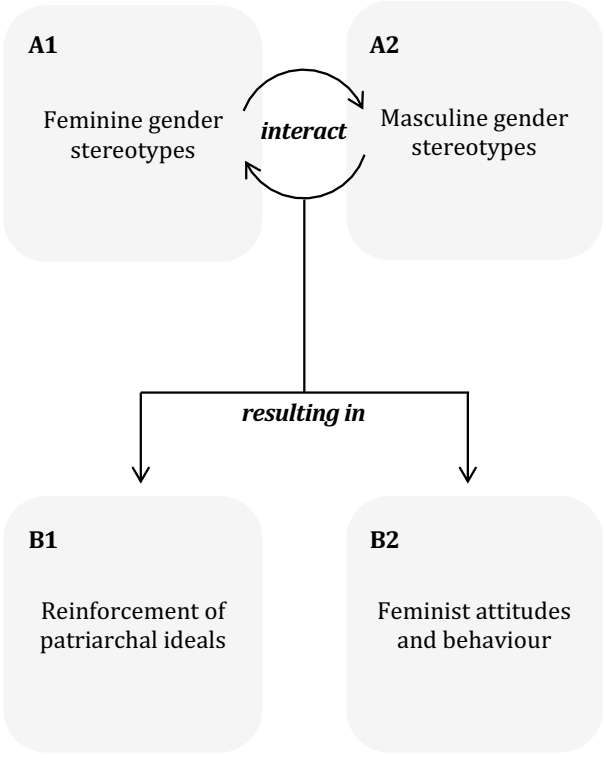

Figure 3: Proposed conceptual framework for the relationship between emerging themes

Source: Author

Themes A1 and A2 are patently semantic as their presence is easily identifiable throughout the text by the language used, whereas B1 and B2 are latent, capturing the underlying meaning of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Sharing synergies to establish the narrative, themes A1 and A2 explicitly establish the tone of the masculine versus feminine exchange in the films, while B1 and B2 are a product of the resolution of the first two. For instance, during the musical number of "*Bring Honour to Us All*" (00:07:22) in Mulan (1998), the villagers mention how each gender can serve the country: "*A man by bearing arms, a girl by bearing sons*". This passage undoubtedly explicitly reinforces gender role from a structuralist perspective and according to Parson's (1942, 1951, 1954) theory of gender.

Establishing gender roles is pivotal for the narrative in *Mulan*, however, the example presented does so all while reducing women to reproductive labour, which is an argument frequently used to place women below men in the pecking order (Lindsey, 2015). Another instance is the line "*Men want girls with good taste, calm, obedient, who work fast paced. With good breeding and a tiny waist*" (00:07:09) the meaning behind this intervention is not exactly dependant of interpretation or context, the audience easily understands that women to be desirable are passive, submissive and must aim to please men. These messages are explicit, therefore, rapidly understood by the viewer. By the same token, highly controllable by the filmmakers and other people involved in the process, such as producers. This converges with the idea of gender stereotypes being

filtered by the media as defended by several authors (e.g., Lindsey, 2015; Macionis, 2016; Mulvey, 1989; Whelan, 2012).

All things considered, the findings suggest transforming Hollywood's portrayal of women requires more female participation behind the camera (Davis, 2011), not only directors but also cinematographers and producers. In the case of *Mulan* (2020), Caro made sure to have a team of women behind the scenes and during press-junkets reinforced the importance of having women working on this film, in her words "*yes, I led this army, but I had many, many generals all of whom were females. So [Mulan (2020)] it's very female-led filmmaking*" (Caro in T2). Thus, it is apparent that higher female representation in production translates into more positive portrayals of women in film, and consequentially, more progressive gender messages. In other words, the interaction between gender stereotyping messages in the films is of the responsible of the filmmaker and can ultimately culminate into distinct, verging on contradictory, gendered messages conveyed to the audience. The framework introduced reflects this concept, which shall nonetheless be elaborated further in the next two subsections.

4.1.1. Gender stereotyping messages

An objective (and very succinct) way of explaining the premise of Mulan is it is a story of a woman pretending to be a man to fight in her crippled father's

place in the army. Hence, making a film devoid of gender messaging in its narrative is virtually impossible (Davis, 2011). Mulan is seen growing alongside her fellow soldiers, all of whom are male, building strength and furthering her own skills on both films. The audience never sees Mulan struggle to achieve anything because she is a woman, but because she must hide it. Therefore, the core message the audience should get is: *men and women are fundamentally equal and all gender-based discrimination is developed through socialisation*. While this is an incredibly powerful message, most of the dialogue in *Mulan* (1998) prevents it from shining through as much as it should. As for *Mulan* (2020) this message is loud and clear. Overall, what stands out as a clear similarity between films is both document a transition from a structuralist view of gender to a constructivist one, as Whelan also identified (2012). By the end of both films, the audience understands that the journey of Mulan is built on the idea that gender is learnable through socialisation and failing to fit the traditional gender stereotype does not demise a person's value.

Establishing gender roles is vital for story and character development in *Mulan* (1998, 2020). As the plot is heavily reliant on the heroine's arch of overcoming gender norms and stereotypes, the gender messages encapsulated in these themes are, therefore, very evident and necessary to provide the audience with context. As *Mulan* is set in medieval China, it is important that the viewer understands men and women were viewed and valued, first and foremost, by their ability to fulfil gender roles otherwise Mulan's struggle in the army would not make sense and the story would cease to exist. Being set

hundreds of years ago, obviously way before the first wave of feminism, one could argue that the gender portrayal is perhaps not aggressive enough. However, as mentioned in the literature review, the 1998 version of *Mulan* presents an inaccurate depiction of Chinese society (Towbin et al., 2004). Nevertheless, the target audience of the film, i.e., children, might not be exactly aware of the historical context of the original story, and as Rothschild (2012) notes it is here where the danger of these messages rests.

In *Mulan* (1998), the manifestation of beauty ideals and standards for men and women is present predominantly on the discourse but not exclusively. While it is understandable the need for hyperbole that the genre (animation) calls for, there are many instances where male characters are encouraged to project exaggerated physical strength to be seen as a romantically desirable, whilst for women thinness is encouraged. Figures 4 and 5, provide visual examples of this ideas being reinforced through imagery in the film. According to England et al. (2011), as well as Hine et al. (2018), these traits are associated to masculine and feminine traditional gender performativity and as Lindsey (2015) put it they are vehicles of highlighting the fit of men for non-domestic jobs and women for domestic ones. Additionally, from Hefner et al. (2017) work it is know that this dichotomy frames the romantic ideals in Disney films, sustaining the subconscious argument for the dominance of males over females as Mulvey (1989) identifies is common practice in mainstream cinema.

Figure 5: Exaggeration of masculine physical features in *Mulan* (1998)

Figure 4: Exaggeration of feminine physical features in *Mulan* (1998)

From the entirety of the analysed data, the most evidence of negative gender stereotyping was found in the songs "*Bring Honour to Us All*", "*Make a Man Out of You"* and "*A Girl Worth Fighting For*". For instance, looking the last two, the titles alone suggest strongly bias gender messaging. Overall, songs in the animated version serve as fast ways of moving the narrative forwards, and since the narrative is founded on the opposite roles of men and women in society, the lyrics of the songs are where the most stereotypical depictions are logically found. Giroux and Pollock (2010) recognised Disney's is very much aware of the impact music and has mastered its used on their films. This is particularly disturbing when put together with the fact that in *Mulan* (1998) the worst portrayals of gender are found on the song lyrics, but also on the imagery that accompanied the musical number in the film. Additionally, it is known that the soundtrack of *Mulan* (1998) is one of Disney's most successful ones. Eventually, stemming from the findings presented in the previous chapter, is known that negative gender stereotyping messages are less prevalent in *Mulan* (2020). Since in *Mulan* (1998) most of the gender stereotyping discourse was found in the

musical numbers, and the remake is no longer a musical, the reduction of weight of these messages might be partially attributed to that decision of cutting out the song completely. Additionally, a significant part of the exaggerated imagery that is characteristic of animated films (as portrayed in Figures 4 and 5) is naturally not present in the live-action version.

Overall, in *Mulan* (2020) the establishment of gender roles is done in a more natural and "healthy" fashion instead of using dialogue to establish gender stereotypes rather negatively. For example, in the animated version characters repeatedly bolster the idea that women are desirable when silent (The Matchmaker to Mulan when she answers to being called: "speaking without permission"). This message of passiveness, submissiveness (England et al., 2011) or even the aforementioned promotion of unachievable physical ideals (Coyne et al., 2016) is not apparent in *Mulan* (2020). The live action remake uses more pedagogical ways to portray traditionally feminine imagery, such as the nurturing nature of Mulan when she is brushing her sister's hair at the beginning of the film, or her affectionate side when during the same scene (and then again when meeting the Matchmaker) Mulan "saves" her sister from a spider. In fact, this scene also demonstrates Mulan's protective nature, which as England et al. (2011) and Hine et al. (2018) categorize as masculine. Blending femininity and masculinity as non-mutually exclusive traits is, therefore, much more present in *Mulan*'s (2020) narrative of exploring gender fluidity as it was one of the director's intention ("*the gender fluidity in this story is fantastic*", Niki Caro in T1).

4.1.2. Resolution of gender stereotypes

As already explored, from the interplay of the two gender stereotyping themes (A1 and A2) emerge the second set of themes (B1 and B2), which are the ones that ultimately contribute to define the messages of women's place in society. These either embrace an old-fashioned view, reinforcing an unfair distribution of power between males and females, or convey a vision of equality and freedom. Referencing back to the findings' chapter, the first is the prevalent one in *Mulan* (1998), whereas in the new *Mulan* (2020) the second takes over.

Mulan (2020) wins the battle for progressive messaging by resorting to metaphors and symbolic meaning to convey feminist undertones, besides using less biased and exaggerated language in dialogue. The inclusion of two brand-new female characters, Mulan's sister (Xiu), and a villain (Xianniang), as well as the replacement of Mulan's dragon sidekick (Mushu) for a phoenix, were all decisions that on top of the elimination of the songs, contributed to the reduction of latent negative gender messages in female representations on the live-action remake. However, what is criticisable is that not everyone in the audience will understand these messages since they are not obvious and require a heighten critical perspective over the materials. Notwithstanding, *Mulan*'s (2020) director, has on several occasions confirmed the feminist symbols of the film, namely the replacement of Mushu, the dragon, for a phoenix: "*the dragon is representative of the masculine, and the phoenix is representative of the feminine*" (Niki Caro in T6).

Above all else, *Mulan* (2020) features a female lead character that portrays gendered traits as non-mutually exclusive in a natural manner. This is, while Mulan in the animated version is introduced as clumsy and a misfit by her lack of coordination and odd ways, live-action Mulan is an oppressed warrior. Naturally gifted, Mulan in 2020 is born with a "*powerful chi*", however, throughout her life is told that displaying that power was only for man, revealing her power would make her a "*witch*". Following the symbology and connotation Streiff and Dundes (2017a, 2017b) have identified in previous Disney films. This concept is materialised on addition of a new villain, Xianniang, who is a perfect critique of how society views powerful women.

Xianniang, a *witch*, is an older woman and is used to draw a parallel of good versus bad, between her and Mulan, both powerful women that were repressed and undervalued by the society they live in. However, Xianniang is bitter and turns to a less honourable path to stay true to who she is. Once she revealed her powers, Xianniang was marginalised for being a threat to male dominance, as she told Mulan "The more power I showed, the more I was crushed. Just like you. You saved them today and still they turned on you" (01:15:14). In contrast to the examples found in *Frozen* (Streiff & Dundes, 2017a) and *Moana* (Streiff & Dundes, 2017b), Xianniang was not portrayed as a being unable to control her powers. There are direct reflections of the power themes introduced in the literature review, such as the marginalisation of women who wield power and are, therefore, a threat to the patriarchal structure (Dundes et al., 2018). In fact,

it was quite the opposite: because she never hid who she was, she had complete control of her power.

Some references to how Xianniang is enslaved and lives under Böri Khan's subjugation are found on the dialogue. "*A woman. A warrior. A woman leads the army. And she's no scorned dog*" is how Xianniang describes Mulan's achievement (getting the support of her male counterparts) to Böri Khan (01:28:36), her primary oppressor. These references help to frame Xianniang's ultimate redemption arc as payback for the real villain (Böri Khan), as she finds freedom in death. Streiff and Dundes (2017a, 2017b) noted that the "out-of-control" powerful woman finds redemption through the display of traditional feminine traits, however, in *Mulan* that is not the case. Xianniang sacrifices herself for Mulan, while the action was triggered by emotion, the behaviour was ultimately heroic and, therefore, traditionally masculine (England et al., 2011; Hine, England, et al., 2018). The symbolic value of this act can also be read from an historical perspective on feminism, Xianniang, from an older generation fought for acceptance as a female without hiding, ultimately failing to gain men's respect despite fighting alongside them. Used as a symbolic passage of torch, what Xianniang says to Mulan after being shot ("Take your place... Mulan.") is a recognition of her worth and shows Xianniang's hope for positive change. From a liberal feminist standpoint, women can work together within the existing power structure to mobilize forces to effectively achieve positive social change (Lindsey, 2015).

Alongside new the characters, the narrative was also altered. In the original telling of *The Ballad of Mulan,* Mulan is not found out by her peers. One of the most striking scenes in *Mulan* (1998) is exactly when Mulan's true identity is discovered. In a horrifying scene of public humiliation right after her heroic moment of saving everyone from the Huns, Mulan is exposed by Chi Fu to the rest of the troops. His rampage goes from calling her a "*Treacherous snake!*" to demanding her execution and dishonour, all while only having mentioned that she is a woman not that she is a liar. Imperative to the story is that Mulan lied, the moral lesson behind this scene should be: *Mulan lied, therefore, she must be dishonoured*. However, and despite of how historically accurate this treatment of Mulan reflected the western ideals of the era, it is not the message to still be promoted in the 21st century mainly because, as already exposed, children cannot discern the historical context of the content they watch (S. Rothschild, 2012). This behaviour clearly conveys the idea that is acceptable for women to endure abuse from men, a message previously identified on other Disney films by Towbin et al. (2004). The shot-by-shot comparison between this episode in 1998 (Figure 6) and 2020 (Figure 7), shows a drastic difference that reflects a completely unfair treatment of women in society, here represented by Mulan. In the animation, Mulan is mistreated for being a woman (whilst it should be for lying, nevertheless, that *small* detail is never mentioned in the dialogue), in a disturbing scene that had been shot in live action would have shocked the audience. Yet perhaps because it is a cartoon, this seems to be acceptable. In contrast, in the remake Mulan hands herself to be true to who she is and honour

the warrior's oath of being "loyal, brave and true". The reaction from her superiors is still authoritative and mean, while being respectful towards Mulan.

Figure 6: Revelation of Mulan's identity to the army in *Mulan* (1998)

Figure 7: Revelation of Mulan's identity to the army in *Mulan* (2020)

As a matter of fact, the attitudes of men toward women in *Mulan* (2020), are altogether vastly different from the ones portrayed in the 1998 animated version. For instance, in *Mulan* (1998), "You said you'd trust Ping. Why is Mulan any different?" is a line said by Mulan (01:07:00), which is quickly dismissed by Li Shang. However, the remake pays tribute to this moment by having Chen Honghui say it to Commander Tung on behalf of Mulan ("You would believe Hua Jun. Why do you not believe Hua Mulan?" (01:18:08)). Having a male character interject for Mulan in this instance showcases the support and respect of her peers, addressing the gender-based violence theme from a perspective of unity by not reducing it to the "women fighting alone" narrative. This scene continues with all of Mulan's fellow soldiers repeating "I believe Hua Mulan", which could be read as an influence of the events of the #MeToo movements and a direct reflection of fourth wave feminist ideals (Maclaran, 2015). However, it should be noted that male characters in *Mulan* (1998) are also the target of objectification, which is exemplified by the interventions of Grandma Fa when Captain Li Shang visits them after Mulan's return ("*Woo, sign me up for the next war*" after seeing Shang, who plays the archetypical handsome male in the film).

Figure 8: Example of objectification of women in *Mulan* (1998)

Ultimately, Davis' (2011) definition of Mulan as "the good daughter" still upholds in the 2020 version. After saving the Emperor, Mulan still rejects his job offer to return to her family and make amends. However, three significant plot differences are identifiable between films. Firstly, in the 2020 film, Mulan is offered the same position any other great warrior would be offered, not the Emperor's council job. This moment in the animation version serves as poetic justice for the council's, (Chi Fu) misogyny and misconduct. However, this "punishment" is given by the Emperor, which in a way is the ultimate symbol of the patriarchal structure. The second difference is Mulan does return home, but she does so alone. Although some romance between her and Honghui was hinted at throughout the film, it was never the central focus of the action, therefore, did not detract the audience from Mulan's achievements as a war hero, which was one of the many critics the animation film received (Dundes & Streiff, 2016; S. Rothschild, 2012). While at the same time, not conveying the message that for women power and romance are mutually exclusive, which has been the case in Disney's previous films (Dundes et al., 2018). Lastly, upon her arrival Mulan is greeted by her family in from of the whole village, in the same spot she was shamed, and her family dishonoured by the Matchmaker for her lack of ability to fulfil traditional gender roles. In the animation, despite having been publicly shamed in front of the entire village (not once but twice in the first fifteen minutes of the animation film), Mulan returns home and is received by her family on their backyard. This moment in *Mulan* (2020) plays out differently: Mulan was recognised as a warrior by her village, delivering once and for all, in a cinematic full-circle moment, the entire moral of the story: *men and women are*

fundamentally equal and all gender-based discrimination is developed through socialisation.

4.2. DISNEY'S NEW PRODUCT STRATEGY AS SOCIAL MARKETING

Polonsky (2017) put forward that the participation of powerful companies in social marketing activities is vital to achieve positive social change. By the same token, so did Kornberger (2010) recognise the authority of brands in society through shaping consumer behaviour according to their commercial agenda. Schroeder (2007) interjected for the role of brands in defining culture, as Holt (2004) put forward that brands, too, can not only shape culture but *be* culture in the form of icons by sustaining myths. Given that Disney is a cultural icon (Holt, 2004), consequently, generates and sustains myths. Analysing the gender messages present in Disney's initial different versions of *Mulan* is discernible that there was a clear adaptation of the product to convey a more feminist message. By reinventing the story of Mulan for the live-action, Disney signalled a stance regarding their previous portrayal of the heroine, considered by many anti-feminist at its core (Dundes & Streiff, 2016; S. Rothschild, 2012; Schiele et al., 2020). Having done this for multiple films, Disney's live-action remake strategy can be approached as social marketing since: (1) its primary focus seems to be to update the stories to include progressive gender and race depictions; and (2) it is known that these films influence social behaviour (Coyne et al., 2016).

When initially suggesting the use of marketing tools to promote social change, Wieber (1951) noted that the higher the similitude between these campaigns and commercial ones, the higher their probability of success. Fox and Kotler (1980) identified product development as a core component of efficient social marketing campaigns, while Lefebvre (1997) pointed out that social marketing campaigns should target younger audiences. Therefore, and in this light, Disney's films could emerge as products in a social marketing campaign, aligned with McCarthy's (1960) 4Ps framework (Kotler & Roberto, 1989; Kotler & Zaltman, 1971).

As a tool to achieve social change, Disney's films not only benefit from the brand's marketing expertise, which Polonsky (2017) argues is an advantage of the private sector in social marketing, but also its cultural influence and power. Dann (2010) observed that "facilitation" is the key to success to change behaviour, now, this places Disney's beloved filmography in a privileged p9osition to achieve this goal. Watched by millions around the globe, now available in streaming format, Disney's films can subconsciously reframe societies' views on a variety of topics, including gender stereotyping. As Coyne et al.'s (2016) research showed, children's behaviour and image of self is influenced by their exposure to Disney films, indicating that there indeed is precedent of behavioural change triggered by these films. Ergo, there is hope that positive change in society can be achieved through the adaptation of the messages in Disney films.

Furthermore, regarding the upstream/downstream debate in social marketing Disney's vertically integrated customer base, i.e., from grandchildren to grandparents, gives them access to an entire social environment to influence. On the other hand, their market position as an industry leader and monopoly holder of the princess narrative (Whelan, 2012), allows them to influence other studios and potentially define the new female portrayal in mainstream media looks like. The power to combine these two forces (consumers and market) leaves Disney in a particularly privileged place to carry out successful social marketing campaigns.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins by delivering the final conclusions of the present study, in the form of objective answers to the proposed research objectives, as well as a final reflection on the results of the study. Then, both the theoretical and practical contributions of the work are presented. Lastly, the study's limitations and possible paths for future research are introduced.

5.1. CLOSING REMARKS

To understand the potential of Disney films to effectively promote behavioural change regarding gender stereotyping in society was the main objective of the study. To tackle this objective, Disney's two adaptations of *Mulan* (1998, 2020) were used as a starting point for the present research, which assumed a case study design. Specific objectives were established:

1. Identify and analyse the gender messages present on Disney's two versions of Mulan (1998 and 2020);
2. Explore the potential of Mulan (2020), and by extension Disney's new product strategy, as successful social marketing instruments.

Through a thematic analysis of the films, four themes referent to gender messages were identified, analysed, and then discussed. Now, a sharp response to the already introduced objectives is apropos.

5.1.1. Identify and analyse the gender messages present on Disney's two versions of *Mulan* (1998 and 2020)

Superficially, *Mulan* (1998) is a revolutionary film about a village girl that defies gender stereotypes to join the army in her father's place and ends up saving China from invaders. As heart-warming as the tale sounds, upon further examination the real, yet silent, villain – *patriarchy* – of the film appears to remain undefeated. However, a new adaptation of the story was released in 2020, a live-action remake with promising potential to re-establish justice for gender portrayal in Disney films. Through thematic analysis, this research uncovered the four themes referent to gender messages present in both adaptations of *Mulan* (1998, 2020): Feminine gender stereotypes (A1), Masculine gender stereotypes (A2), Reinforcement of patriarchal ideals (B1), and Feminist attitudes and behaviour (B2). The initial two regard objective gender stereotyping messages, while the second set encapsulates messages with respect to the portrayal of women's place in society. In the light of current feminist ideals, this study found that gender portrayal assumes a more positive, progressive tone on the most recent version of *Mulan*.

As previously discussed, while the setting of gender stereotypes is pivotal for the narrative, how these are communicated greatly impacts the overall impression a less critical mind gets from viewing the films. Since A1 and A2, are plot-establishing messages, these are mainly explicitly found throughout the films (in dialogue and imagery). Therefore, these are highly dependent on the

perspective and experience of the team behind the films. From the 1998 to the 2020 adaptations there is a noticeable muting of negative gender stereotypes being bluntly displayed in the film, which in turn reflects in a more progressive tone, materialised in the findings for B1 and B2. The fact that *Mulan* (2020) benefited from a female-led team, corroborates the literature angle that higher female participation in film production results in more equitable portrayals of women in media (Davis, 2011; Lindsey, 2015; Mulvey, 1989).

5.1.2. Explore the potential of Mulan (2020), and by extension Disney's new product strategy, as successful social marketing instruments

Disney is a powerful brand with great social, economic, and cultural impact (Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Holt, 2004). The studios' new product strategy, i.e., the production of live-action adaptations for old narratives (Benson, 2020), poses a phenomenal opportunity for social marketing. As identified by Fox and Kotler (1980), and later by Kotler and Roberto (1989), product is a core component of a successful social marketing campaign, which ultimately are campaigns that achieve positive behaviour change (Donovan & Henley, 2010). Therefore, since the studios are entirely responsible for the messages conveyed in their products, i.e., their films, these can be leveraged to communicate progressive views of gender. All-in-al, there is no denying that Disney films are influential products, capable of carrying powerful messages, which have impact in children's social behaviour (Coyne et al., 2016). Therefore, as far as underlying social structures

go, Disney as the power to target an entire ecosystem of socialisation, from parents to teachers, from toddlers to teenagers, everyone loves Disney.

5.1.3. Understand the potential of Disney films to effectively promote behavioural change regarding gender stereotyping in society

Mulan (2020) successfully altered the latent negative gender messages conveyed in *Mulan* (1998), indicating that change in female portrayal in Disney films is at bay. Slowly but surely, Disney is renovating their long-standing film catalogue to correspond to today's demand for more diverse and inclusive storytelling. Amidst the current cultural turmoil, while many brands can simply ride the wave, market leaders must create it. Disney's new product strategy, i.e., their live-action remakes, have the potential to make waves.

As it has been exhaustedly mentioned throughout this study, Disney not only is a cultural icon (Holt, 2004) but there is proof that their films do influence behaviour (Coyne et al., 2016). Thus, the most important requisite of a social marketing campaign, which is to influence social behaviour, is met a priori. However, one vital condition must also be met: the messages have to be positive, otherwise it does not contribute to the greater social good. Ultimately, if Disney films were to be used as a social marketing instrument the studios would have to ensure that all gender messages present in the films are positive. While

nothing is guaranteed, especially since gender is a complex concept that is intrinsically bound to cultural context, this research found that higher female participation on film production roles significantly improves the tone of the gender messages conveyed in the film.

5.1.4. Final reflection

If there is one key takeaway that must be taken from this case is that: through renovated gender messages, Disney films are culturally influential enough to provoke discussion, inciting a behaviour change in society as they benefit from the brands marketing expertise and cultural prowess. Therefore, now, more than ever, Disney films can and must be used to motivate change in the heat of the fourth wave of feminism.

Looking forward, despite how difficult it may be, the emotional bond to Disney stories must be broken (or at least left on pause) to critically analyse their content and messages. When it was release *Mulan* (1998) was indeed a ground-breaking film that shaped an entire generation of young women. Disney brought to the west a great warrior, who fought for her place and did not conform to her designated role as a traditional woman. The film's overtones matched the feminist movement of the decade, reflecting the ideals of "girl power", insurgence, rebellion, and non-conformism. Mulan is a symbol of resistance, a signal of change, and ultimately a landmark in modern cinema: *she was the first*

girl that single-handedly saved the world. Notwithstanding, iconic as it might have been, the original animation film falls short on the portrayal of today's feminist ideals of breaking from patriarchal oppression. However, there is hope as the new *Mulan* bridges this gap. Whilst still telling the so familiar tale of a brave young woman who risked everything and became a war hero, *Mulan* (2020) introduces the audience to the new paradigm of gender equality: *freedom*. In the end, if anything, the contrast between the two versions of *Mulan* reflects how far we have come in two decades and how long still is the road ahead. The world needed that Mulan in the 90s. Today, amidst the eminent cultural chaos, we need this new Mulan and many other powerful portrayals of women in cinema.

5.2. CONTRIBUTIONS

Before this study, no research had explored Disney films' potential of influencing positive behavioural change regarding gender discrimination in society. In this section, is exposed how the present research's theoretical and practical contributions to further knowledge in the field of social marketing by exploring how culturally influential brands can leverage their capabilities to tackle structural issues in society.

Regarding theory, this research ultimately advances that Disney films have the potential to be used as social marketing instruments, as long as the gender stereotyping messages found in the film have a net positive overtone.

Additionally, research findings corroborate that more female representation in film production translates into progressive feminist messages. Overall, this research contributes to the expansion of social marketing literature in two ways. First, by conceptualising an empirical instance where a profit-seeking can utilise their market position and cultural power to benefit society at large. Second, by exploring gender theory, namely gender stereotypes and discrimination, which despite the importance of the theme is still often overlooked in the discipline.

On the other hand, regarding recommendations for industry practitioners, two key takeaways can be identified. First, the inclusion of the private sector in social marketing cannot the underestimated. When it comes to influencing behaviour, the private sector as unmatched expertise (Polonsky, 2017). Therefore, powerful brands can serve as influencers and catalysts of social change. Second, the results of the present research show that the participation of females in "backstage" media production roles, can significantly contribute for more equitable portrayal of men and women in film. Therefore, social marketers to guarantee sustainable social change regarding gender stereotyping must fight for female representation, participation, and perspective across the board.

5.3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Even though this master thesis might be finished, it ideally will inspire further exploration of gender issues in the field of marketing. Ergo, it is of utmost

importance to outline possible future research routes. It would be interesting to replicate this case study approach to compare other Disney original animation films and the corresponding live-action remakes. The researcher suggests, for instance, *Aladdin* (1997 and 2019) or *Beauty and the Beast* (1991 and 2017), as literature also seems flag the originals as anti-feminist and pro-patriarchal. Therefore, just like *Mulan,* the live-action adaptations of these stories are promising regarding gender messages. Another possible path for future research is to conduct a similar analysis focusing on race, ethnicity and/or religion instead of gender since these are also highly criticised themes in Disney films. A different, yet equally interesting approach, would be to analyse consumers' reception of the live-action *Mulan* (2020) and equate its impact on Disney's brand. This would add a new dimension to the present research by possibly confirming the effect of the new Disney films as agents of change.

Finally, a number of considerations must be made regarding the shortcomings of this study. Inherent to all qualitative research there is the phenomenal advantage of achieving more meaningful results, however, some of its limitations must be addressed. Firstly, the generalisation potential of the results is scarce, since the study not only followed a qualitative methodology but is designed as a single case study (Yin, 2003). And secondly, since thematic analysis was the approach taken, one must acknowledge that the flexibility it intrinsically allows might have left space for some researcher bias to permeate (Braun & Clarke, 2006.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I. Niki Caro's interviews used for triangulation of results

Category	Type	Title	Source	Key
Press-junket	Video	"Mulan": Yifeiv Liu und Niki Caro im Interview	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3f1Gnzc5MXA	T1
Press-junket	Video	Yifei Liu Feels "Honor" Being Chosen to Play "Mulan" Role | E! Red Carpet & Award Shows	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAb5G_t64d0	T2
Press-junket	Video	Niki Caro Exclusive Interview for MULAN	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThpkX3EidpE	T3
Press-junket	Video	Niki Caro, directora de Mulán: "Hay muchos cambios, pero también muchas similitudes" | LOS40	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvfBvbqIM0g	T4
Official Disney+ promotion	Video	Start Streaming this Friday | Mulan Featurette with Director Niki Caro | Disney+	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKLyMh87VX8	T5
Interview	Written	*Mulan* Director Niki Caro Explains Why Mushu Was Left Out of the Live Action Remake of the Film	https://people.com/movies/mulan-director-niki-caro-explains-why-mushu-was-left-out-of-the-live-action-remake-of-the-film/	T6
Interview	Video	MULAN Cast Interview / Kim Crossman - The Project NZ	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJOvDzG3CZc	T7
Interview	Video	'Mulan' director Niki Caro on reimagining the animated classic l GMA	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqQfi1pwTzo	T8
Interview	Written	Mulan Director Explains Why She Was the Right Choice for the Disney Remake	https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2020/02/mulan-disney-niki-caro-chinese-filmmaker	T9
Conference	Video	In Conversation with Niki Caro - The Power of Inclusion Summit	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIOFznVrYWU	T10

Appendix II. List of codes used by corresponding emerging theme

Initial codes	Refined codes	Theme
Women must be passive	Respectable women are submissive and docile	A1
Women must be obedient		
Women must be silent		
Women must be dutiful		
Women must please others, especially men		
Women are not allowed to speak without permission	Women are not heard	
Women's word is valued less than men's		
Women bring honour through marriage	Women's greatest accomplishments in life are marriage and succeeding at domestic responsibilities	
Women's purpose is to find a husband		
Women are domestic		
Women need protection		
Women are an object of desire	Women's appearance is valued more than her intellect	
Women's worth rests on their beauty		
Men bring honour by going to war	Men are expected to fight and are prone to displays of violence	A2
Men are natural warriors		
Men have a predisposition to violent behaviours		
Men cannot control impulses		
Men are natural leaders	Men are the most natural fit for positions of power	
Men are confident		
Men are independent		
Men are mysterious		
Men conceal their emotions	Displays of emotion are a liability	
Men cannot express themselves		

Men showing emotion is seen as weakness		
Men must be agile	Men's worth rests on their physical skills	
Men must be muscular		
Men's duty is to fight		
Tradition must be respected	No hope for progress	B1
People who do not conform to traditional roles are not respectable		
People who do not fit the stereotype are marginalised		
Only men can be soldiers	Only men have non-domestic jobs	
Housework is punishment for men		
Men are scared by powerful women	Women with free will are a threat to the social order	
Powerful women risk dishonour		
Women must conceal their power to be respectable		
Women are men's property		
Public humiliation of women is acceptable	Women rank low in the social pecking order	
Femininity is mockable		
Women are inferior to men		
Anyone can be a hero	Gender-based discrimination is a product of socialization	B2
Gendered behaviour is teachable		
Men and women can be treated equally		
Women perform rescues		
Love goes beyond physical attraction	New romantic relationship paradigm	
Women are allowed to not aspire to marriage		
Power comes from owning your identity	Owning who you are makes you powerful	
Women become powerful when they take ownership of their lives		
Women get support from male counterparts as equals		

Men break away from the hypermasculinity expectations	Redefinition of masculine behaviour	
Men show vulnerability		
Physical strength does not define a person's worth		

Appendix III. Extensive film metadata for Mulan (1998) and Mulan (2020)

	***Mulan* (1998)**	***Mulan* (2020)**
Release date	18 June 1998	04 September 2020
Director	Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook	Niki Caro
Runtime	1h 28m	1h 56m
Category	Animation	Live Action
Genre	Musical, Kids & Family	Adventure, Action
Rating	G	PG-13
Screenplay	Rita Hsiao, Chris Sanders, Philip LaZebnik, Raymond Singer, and Eugenia Bostwick-Singer	Rick Jaffa & Amanda Silver and Lauren Hynek & Elizabeth Martin
Producers	Pam Coats	Chris Bender, Jake Weiner, Jason Reed
Production company	Walt Disney Studios	Walt Disney Studios
Production budget* *IMBd	$90.000.000	$200.000.000
Gross revenue worldwide** *Box Office Mojo	$304.320.254	$66.800.000
Plot summary (On Disney+)	Disguised as a male soldier, a young girl bravely takes her father's place in the Imperial Army.	In Disney's MULAN, a fearless young woman risks everything out of love for her family and her country to become one of the greatest warriors China has ever known.

Appendix IV. Film characters in Mulan (1998) and Mulan (2020)

Film & Characters	Male	Female
Mulan (1998)	Fa Zhou Captain Li Shang Mushu Cri-kee Khan Yao Chien-Po Ling General Li The Emperor Chi Fu Shan-Yu	Mulan Fa Li Grandmother Fa The Matchmaker
Mulan (2020)	Commander Tung Emperor Böri Khan Honghui Zhou Sergeant Qiang Cricket Yao Po Ling	Mulan Xianniang Li Matchmaker Xiu

Appendix V. Film posters for Mulan (1998) and Mulan (2020)

Original poster for *Mulan* (1998)

Remastered poster for *Mulan* (1998)

Main poster for *Mulan* (2020)

Secondary poster for *Mulan* (2020)