

Gendered body positivity in the fashion industry

The case of Calvin Klein

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ABSTRACT

An expanding body positivity movement is commonly embraced by leading underwear brands to promote a more inclusive view of beauty and normalize different body types that are marginalized by societal standards. Calvin Klein is one of the brands that claim to promote inclusivity and body positivity through their unisex clothing line and inclusive sizes. However, despite the fact that men and the third gender make up a significant part of the plus-size market, the majority of studies on plus-size fashion and body positivity focus solely on women. Therefore, this research addresses this gap and explores how different genders are represented in Calvin Klein's Instagram posts in terms of body positivity. To gain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon, a qualitative content analysis was conducted. 150 posts consisting of images and captions were examined in terms of inclusivity and body positivity. The results revealed that Calvin Klein promotes inclusivity and body positivity among men, women, and the third gender by featuring models of different ages, skin colours, body sizes, with imperfections or by sharing body-positive messages in the captions of the posts. The brand appears to be truly inclusive and body-positive in relation to the third gender, not only by showcasing diverse bodies but also by running supportive campaigns and establishing key partnerships. However, the research proves that among all genders there are still more posts depicting idealization than imperfections. Although there are some examples of plus-size women, the majority of female bodies are portrayed as flawless and sexualized. Furthermore, noticed underrepresentation of plus-size men leads to the conclusion that Calvin Klein still reinforces gender stereotypes by portraying the majority of men as fit and muscular. Overall, according to the findings presented in the study, although Calvin Klein is making an attempt to create body-positive content featuring women and the third gender, there is still room for improvement in that area regarding men. This study contributes to previous research on body positivity and suggests areas that could be explored in the future. It also provides valuable insights that can benefit other underwear and fashion brands that want to incorporate body-positive and inclusive content into their social media platforms.

KEYWORDS: *body positivity, inclusivity, gender, representation, Calvin Klein*

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1. Introduction

The proliferation of social media has significantly altered the marketing communication of the brands (Jasin, 2022, p. 55). In order to effectively engage the audience and succeed in the competitive market, companies need to establish a strong and distinctive brand identity (Casidy et al., 2019, p. 651). Adapting to the current realities of social media use and following the latest trends are crucial elements in attracting a large number of customers and creating an integrated brand community which is a cohesive, interconnected network of people with a common affinity for a brand (Krizanova et al., 2019, p. 4). Nowadays, in order to enlarge their target audience, more and more companies are incorporating inclusivity and diversity into their marketing communication (Grassi & Wigley, 2018, p. 2). Recent research shows that 70% of millennials are more likely to choose a brand that promotes inclusivity and diversity (Accenture, 2018, para. 3), as misrepresenting or underrepresenting customers in brand communication can lead to customer dissatisfaction (Rosenthal et al., 2021, p. 569). As a result, many brands are beginning to adopt non-stereotypical representations both in their advertising and on social media platforms (Eisend, 2022, p. 308). However, to avoid accusations of, for example, rainbowwashing, brands must demonstrate a genuine commitment to inclusivity by remaining consistent and authentic in their communication strategy (Blackmer, 2019, p. 171).

Following this phenomenon, many brands, especially those in the fashion sector, are immersing themselves in the body positivity movement (Tsawaab, 2023, p. 2773). Today, brands are expected to have a voice on social media platforms in order to set new social and cultural norms (Grabe et al., 2008, p. 461). Integrating body-positive trend into brand communication creates a strong sense of belonging among consumers and leads to marketing success (Licsandru & Cui, 2018, p. 331). Body positivity, which focuses on promoting the beauty of the body regardless of size, shape, colour, age, or ability, seems to have become particularly popular in the lingerie industry. For instance, lingerie brand Aerie, has become popular due to showcasing models of different body types and avoiding retouching and airbrushing their photos (Convertino et al., 2016, p. 727). Although many underwear brands have become more sensitive to this issue and have started to support body positivity among women, there is still a lack of involvement of other genders in this movement, resulting in a large gender gap in underwear advertising that needs to be investigated (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1). Research has shown that only 6% of Instagram images show plus-size men (Gültzow et al., 2020, p. 284). This can be surprising given that men with high body fat

make up approximately 70% of the US population (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1). When it comes to the third gender, more than 12% of US millennials identify as transgender or gender non-conforming (Kenney, 2021, para. 2) and an increasing number of them want to see themselves represented in the content created by brands (Boyd et al., 2020, p. 1316). However, despite the fact that men and the third gender make up a significant part of the plus-size market, the majority of studies on plus-size fashion and body positivity focus solely on women (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1).

The fashion brand that has been selected for this analysis is Calvin Klein, founded in 1968 in New York and known worldwide for its iconic underwear with the recognizable CK logo. It claims to promote inclusivity and body positivity through its unisex clothing line and inclusive sizes (Calvin Klein, n.d.). This research focuses on Calvin Klein for three main reasons: 1) it is an underwear brand that creates content focused on body image, 2) it has the most followers on Instagram compared to the rest of the top underwear brands (25.1 million) (Calvin Klein, 2023), 3) it has an active profile with 6.8 thousand posts on Instagram which is one of the most popular and influential social networking sites (Miller & McIntyre, 2023, p. 3615). The present research aims to fill the research gap on body positivity in relation to different genders and to uncover gender differences in the promotion of body positivity in fashion brand communication on Instagram, using the case of Calvin Klein. Therefore, the research question can be formulated as follows:

RQ: *How are different genders represented in Calvin Klein's Instagram posts in terms of body positivity?*

The lingerie market size is estimated to be valued at US\$ 92,871.6 million in 2024 and is expected to grow in the future which makes this study relevant both to society and academic audiences (Future Market Insights, 2023, para. 1). Furthermore, regarding academic relevance, there is a lot of research analyzing online marketing communication strategies of different brands in terms of body positivity among females but limited literature is being offered on this topic when it comes to other genders (Lazuka et al., 2020, p. 85; McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1). Researching how different bodies are portrayed in underwear can provide insights into promoting body positivity for other underwear companies trying to incorporate this movement into their Instagram content.

Moreover, exploring body-positive content on Instagram is important, as social media has

a significant impact on users' attitudes towards societal developments (Akram & Kumar, 2017, p. 351). A recent search for the hashtag #bodypositive generated 19.2 million posts (Instagram, March 2024). By joining this movement, fashion brands can promote a more inclusive view of beauty and normalize different body types that are marginalized by societal standards (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1547). Additionally, when it comes to the social relevance of this study, recent research suggests that social media usage is connected with body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016, p. 100; Murray et al., 2016, p. 709). This does not only concern women, as many men also experience mental health problems as a result of negative attitudes towards their appearance (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 2). Research proved that around 10 million men might experience an eating disorder linked to negative body image (National Eating Disorders Association, 2019, para. 2). However, there are not many body-positive initiatives for men, and even fewer for people who identify as gender non-conforming (Lawler, 2019, para. 1). It is, therefore, important to examine and critically approach how a popular fashion brand presents itself as inclusive and body-positive among different genders.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Inclusivity & diversity

Consumers are more likely to perceive a brand as valuable when its communication is based on inclusivity and diversity (Wilkie et al., 2023, p. 721). These two terms are inextricably linked, as diversity refers to the multiplicity of differences, while inclusivity is based on welcoming and celebrating them (Ferdman & Deane, 2013, p. 206). More specifically, inclusivity is defined as the practice of not excluding anyone on the grounds of race, gender, religion, or age (Struve, 2019, para. 3). In the business environment, inclusivity goes beyond diversity, as it also includes a social responsibility for breaking boundaries in society (Doyle & Moore, 2023, p. 105). At the same time, by challenging different stereotypes, brands attract new customers to their products (Wilkie et al., 2023, p. 722). Social media platforms such as Instagram have created huge opportunities for today's dynamic businesses to build strong networks with diverse target audiences, as the message conveyed there reaches a large population in a short period of time (Joon & Hooda, 2022, p. 355). The key for brands in promoting diversity and inclusion is to support minority groups without alienating others (Oakenfull et al., 2008, p. 191). In order to resonate with a larger proportion of society companies need to feature non-stereotypical portrayals both in their advertisements and on social media platforms (Eisend, 2022, p. 308). In light of previous research excluding customers through misrepresentation or underrepresentation in marketing communications can lead to customer dissatisfaction with the brand (Rosenthal et al., 2021, p. 569).

The aforementioned literature suggests that the content shared on social networking platforms should be diverse and include all segments of society, as all the individuals in the society want to be represented. Stakeholders have certain expectations of for-profit organizations and companies. Licsandru and Cui (2018, p. 330) state that brands that represent different ethnic and racial groups create a more inclusive message for both customer's well-being and marketing success. Inclusive marketing involves and revolves around creating content that reflects the diverse communities of people who might buy the brand's products (Wilkie et al., 2023, p. 724). For greater influence in the social media space, brands need to conduct thorough research to understand and capture important issues in society (Lee & Yoon, 2020, p. 146). Advertising that conveys an inclusive message can have a tremendous impact as consumers believe that companies have a responsibility to look beyond profits and improve the state of society (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010, p. 2). In this approach, as articulated

by Clark (2000, p. 363), business is perceived as an actor in the environment that should respond to social pressures and demands. In response to this, models of corporate social responsibility began to emerge, with most asserting that business and society are intricately woven, and as such, businesses have a responsibility to respond to societal needs and pressures, such as inclusivity and diversity.

Similarly to corporate social responsibility, brand activism is based on aligning a company's values and actions with societal issues in order to make a positive change. Driven by a strong sense of purpose for societal change, some companies engage in brand activism to promote many different causes for instance inclusivity and diversity (Kapitan et al., 2022, p. 24). This entails employing a strategy aimed at impacting citizen consumers through campaigns rooted in political values. This approach requires a shift in how corporate communication is managed and in the practices related to social responsibility. It adopts strategies from social movements to contribute to shaping the social identity of citizen-consumers (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019, p. 345). According to Ambas and Sabada (2021, p. 220), there are four key criteria for defining a brand as an activist: it publicly highlights an issue or problem, advocates for change, supports a disadvantaged group, and disrupts established practices or systems of authority. Today, brand activism is gaining popularity, especially among fashion brands (Ambas & Sabada, 2021, p. 221). Designers and fashion companies have recognized that fashion serves as a means of expressing one's identity and values in the world, and through its communicative power, fashion engages with audiences, making fashion activism an important tool for representing marginalized groups and advocating for social change in terms of inclusivity and diversity. Thorpe (2011, p. 5) notes that activism not only disrupts but also reveals, unveils, or frames an issue. In the traditional sense, activism often exposes injustice or wrongdoing, but it can also propose a more positive alternative as it can be generative. Fashion activism transforms garments into symbolic agents of change. Fashion companies and designers use their influence and presence in both traditional and social media to participate in public discourse, relying on their customers to interact with their messages (Ambas & Sabada, 2021, p. 221).

Although promoting diversity and inclusion in brand communications has the potential to drive positive social change, there is a risk that businesses will lack authenticity and commitment to their claims. Brands are now expected to support diversity initiatives, as the consumer approach to business shifts the focus of diversity communication from reaching out

to marginalized groups to aligning with societal expectations and embodying a brand's values (Ferraro et al., 2023, p. 463). Inconsistent incorporation of inclusivity in brand communication can lead to different responses from audiences. Wilkie (2023, p. 722) identifies four possible segments of respondents such as *pro-diversity partners*, *disapproving diversity devotees*, *hostile diversity haters*, and *inclusivity indifferent*. The first group, *pro-diversity partners*, are individuals who have a strong belief in the importance of diversity and actively support the brand. Second, *disapproving diversity devotees* are those who value diversity but have interacted negatively with the brand because they notice a lack of genuine interest in diversity and inauthenticity. The *hostile diversity haters*, comprising the next group, are people who express hostility toward the brand by communicating their displeasure and disappointment with the company and diversity in general. The last group, *inclusivity indifferent*, are individuals who express the view that, while they recognize the importance of diversity, they do not consider it important and see it as a mere trend in society. They are frustrated with brands attempting to address social issues, claiming that such advertising is only aimed at increasing the brand's profits (Wilkie et al., 2023, p. 732).

In order to create impactful and inclusive content on social media, it is crucial for brands to strategically integrate diversity and cultural sensitivity into their approach. By educating audiences about different perspectives, cultures, and identities, companies can foster understanding and appreciation (Costa & Bamossy, 1995, p. 20). One of the most important elements is inclusive language, focusing on the use of respectful terminology that reflects the diversity of the audience without perpetuating stereotypes. Collaborating with diverse voices, both internally and externally also helps to create authentic content (Costa & Bamossy, 1995, p. 22). Importantly, brands should avoid tokenism and ensure that diversity is not just a tick-box exercise, but a genuine commitment to inclusivity (Lee, 2020, p. 387; Yoder & Sinnett, 1985, p. 413). The ultimate goal is to build a brand image that values inclusivity and actively engages in meaningful conversations about differences. By incorporating these strategies, companies can create content that not only respects and celebrates diversity, but also forges genuine connections with global audiences. This approach goes beyond superficial representation and aims to establish a brand presence that authentically embraces and champions the richness of diversity (Costa & Bamossy, 1995, p. 20).

2.2 Body image & body positivity

Body image is defined as a picture of oneself that is formed through the perception of one's body (Schilder, 1999, p. 213). It refers to the size, shape, weight, characteristics, and performance of the body, as well as the feelings it evokes (Rudd & Lennon, 2000, p. 153). Nowadays, the increasing popularity of social media platforms is having a significant impact on spreading content that directly affects body image (Lazuka et al., 2020, p. 85). This is also in line with cultivation theory, which confirms that the content seen shapes the viewer's beliefs, attitudes, and values, as well as the perception of how people see themselves (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 182). From a socio-cultural perspective, societal ideals of beauty are communicated through various channels and assimilated by individuals, influencing their perceptions of their own bodies. The degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's body depends on how closely it conforms to these standards (Tiggemann, 2011, p. 12). However, current beauty standards have become increasingly unrealistic due to mass media portrayals of the ideal body as exceptionally thin (Grabe et al., 2008, p. 460). As a result, individuals' views of their own bodies are being reshaped, potentially affecting their body image and self-perception. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997, p. 198) confirmed that exposure to media images of a thin ideal is associated with self-objectification, which involves viewing one's body from an external perspective and placing a primary value on oneself based on physical appearance. Recent research proved that social media usage especially photo-based activities, are connected with body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among adolescents and young adults (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016, p. 100; Murray et al., 2016, p. 709). Instagram is a platform that has become particularly harmful, with hashtags like #thinspiration and #fitspiration creating communities focused on appearance (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021, p. 26). This type of negative outcome from social media engagement can affect not only body confidence but also self-esteem and the overall psychological well-being of the audience.

Social media puts lots of pressure on achieving the societal thin body ideal, however nowadays the prevention of such phenomena is becoming increasingly vocal. Given the potential harmful effects of images promoting thin body ideal, it is important to explore different strategies that can protect social media users from the potential impact of this type of content on their body image. Although there are several ways to overcome this problem, there are three that are particularly effective. The first idea is adding special weight labels to thin-ideal images, as well as information about the digital alteration of certain body parts in the

photo (Veldhuis et al., 2014, p. 154). Secondly, researchers have recommended that in order to improve body esteem, it is crucial to promote respect and appreciation for one's own body (Paraskeva et al., 2017, p. 172). Therefore, another strategy is to focus on body functionality. This approach embraces the diverse capabilities of the body, shifting the focus away from its appearance to include functions related to physical abilities, health, senses, creative pursuits, communication, and self-care (Alleva et al., 2015, p. 81). In the research conducted by Alleva et al. (2015, p. 84) it has been found that a one-week intervention that trained women with negative body image to focus on their body functionality led to improvements in body satisfaction and reductions in self-objectification, as well as improvements in body appreciation. Reframing the view of the body from a potentially negative orientation to a positive one helped women to realize the importance of their bodies in living fulfilling lives.

The third solution for social media users to avoid the negative effects of the thin body ideal is to follow the body positivity trend. Body positivity is a movement widespread on social media that advocates that no one should be ashamed of the appearance of their body, especially when it comes to its size (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1548). Additionally, body-positive content normalizes features that are perceived as imperfect, such as stretch marks, cellulite, or belly rolls (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1548). In contrast to traditional media, social media is characterised by the inclusion of user-generated content. This characteristic provides an opportunity for social media users to promote a more inclusive view of beauty and normalize their bodies that are marginalised by societal standards (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1547). The body positivity trend is particularly popular on Instagram. A recent search for the hashtags #bodypositive, #bodypositivity and #bopo generated 19.2 million, 12.1 million and 1.2 million posts respectively (Instagram, March 2024). However, it is possible that some body-positive posts depict people who are more similar in size and weight to the traditional ideal, which may cause some problems in terms of the effectiveness of the movement. A content analysis conducted by Lazuka et al. (2020, p. 85) found that the majority of body-positive posts on Instagram portrayed people of average weight (54.9%) in comparison to obese (25%) and overweight (17%). This type of action can be seen as insincere when compared to content featuring bodies that deviate from size ideals. The mismatch between the characteristics of body-positive posts and the values of the movement has a negative impact on the promotion of body positivity. Nevertheless, for some viewers, the exclusion of thin or normal-sized people is inconsistent with the core of the body-positive movement, which is the celebration and acceptance of all bodies (Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 48). This approach explains to social

media users that it is acceptable for the body positivity movement to represent all shapes and sizes.

The body positivity trend is not only followed by individuals but also by brands. Thanks to becoming size-sensitive, the fashion market plays an important role in embracing confidence and strengthening dignity among customers (Tsawaab, 2023, p. 2771). Moreover, the integration of body positivity into brand communication creates a strong sense of belonging among consumers and results in marketing success (Licsandru & Cui, 2018, p. 331). It has been proved that when exposed to visuals from the body-positive Aerie Real campaign, participants reported an increased intention to purchase products from the company. This case highlights that audiences perceive representations of bodies that deviate from mainstream ideals as a favorable aspect of media content (Rodgers et al., 2019, p. 127). Following those rules, fashion brands post unedited promotional photos, expand their clothing size range and show plus-size models in their advertising as for a long time fashion has been targeted at people of “normal size” exclusively. These kinds of steps are usually associated with self-love and self-confidence claims (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021, p. 29).

While body-positive content appears to have positive effects on viewers, its impact is increasingly compromised by the growing commercialisation of the movement. Companies and social media users are exploiting the movement for self-interest and economic gain, leading to a commodification of its essence (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021, p. 25). Research shows that body-positive posts on Instagram that include self-promotion or product promotion are perceived as less morally appropriate and less effective in promoting body positivity and inclusivity (Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 42). Cwynar-Horta (2016, p. 52) argues that certain body positivity campaigns lack inclusivity and perpetuate conventional beauty standards. Companies further undermine body-positive values by digitally altering images and featuring plus-size models, who are closer to the normative ideal body. In addition, Cwynar-Horta (2016, p. 42) notes a shift among online body-positive advocates, emphasising self-promotion and product sales over the promotion of genuine body inclusivity. This shift from a focus on body self-acceptance to leveraging the movement’s popularity for economic or personal gain may hinder its original goals on social media. This phenomenon illustrates how the commercialisation of pro-social movements, such as body positivity, can undermine their effectiveness and cause negative effects.

2.3 Gendered body positivity movement

It seems that brands targeting women are making use of the body positivity trend by focusing their communications on women's empowerment. Cosmetic brand Dove pioneered the use of feminist messages for rebranding in the market with the Real Beauty Campaign in 2004. This initiative presented women of diverse body sizes and conveyed the message that all women are equally beautiful (Millard, 2009, p. 146). The campaign was a real game-changer within the communication industry as it truly helped to increase consumer engagement and drive sales (Millard, 2009, p. 161). The societal need for advertising that represents women's empowerment stems from the feminist movement and is expressed through femvertising. This term is a combination of "feminism" and "advertising" and focuses on presenting women as sufficient, talented and powerful (Varghese & Kumar, 2020, p. 441). It is a marketing strategy used for brand activism to spread the idea of gender equality and female body positivity all around the world (Varghese & Kumar, 2020, p. 445). Female empowerment in brand communication is therefore expressed by breaking gender stereotypes and rejecting traditional gender roles (Varghese & Kumar, 2020, p. 442).

Although many fashion brands embrace a body-positive approach towards women, the representation of other genders in this context is still overlooked (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1). According to Sindicich and Black's (2011, p. 460) research into the fit and sizing of business clothing, around 40% of men experience problems while shopping. What is more, some apparel companies have admitted that sizes from small to extra large only cater to around 15% of their target customers, highlighting that current pattern grading and sizing systems are outdated and do not accurately reflect the sizes and shapes of today's men (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 2). Many male shoppers are frustrated by the limited size options and question why women's sizes have become more inclusive of different body sizes, while men's sizes have not caught up (Lawler, 2019, para. 2). This leads to the conclusion that all genders would like to be embraced by the body positivity movement, recognising their value in both media representation and inclusion in the fashion size spectrum. What is more, the majority of studies on plus-size fashion and body positivity focus on women, leaving out men and the third gender, even though they make up a significant part of the plus-size market (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1). This can be surprising, especially in light of the fact that plus-size men make up approximately 70% of the US population (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1). Moreover, even though the majority of leadership positions in the

fashion industry are dominated by men (Doyle & Moore, 2023, p. 106), male consumers are still struggling with the lack of inclusive size offerings (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 2). The dominance of women in body-positive activism can also be seen by looking at the board of the Body Positive Organisation, which currently consists of 7 directors, of whom 4 are women, 2 are men and 1 identifies as another gender (The body positive, March 2024).

All genders face similar pressures to meet societal standards of beauty, largely portrayed in social media and fashion. In recent decades, there has been an increase in the number of men struggling with mental health issues related to body image (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 2). Research suggests that around 10 million men may experience an eating disorder linked to negative body image (National Eating Disorders Association, 2019, para. 2). It has been proved that men experience similar mental health challenges related to body image as women, but there are not many initiatives promoting body positivity for men, and even fewer for people of other genders (Lawler, 2019, para. 1). All genders absorb body ideals and compare their bodies to what they see on social media (Fasoli & Constantinou, 2024, p. 2). Online networking sites portray the ideal female body as thin and fit, while male bodies are presented as lean and muscular. Research suggests that men not only focus on building muscle, but also express concerns about their weight, especially when exposed to images of the idealised male body (Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2014, p. 208). This seems reasonable taking into consideration that only 6% of Instagram images show men with high body fat (Gültzow et al., 2020, p. 284). An example of this is Manual, an online platform focusing on men's health, which chose to spotlight men's body image during Mental Health Awareness Week in 2019. They launched the "Men of Manual" campaign, which presented the diversity of male bodies and advocated for male body acceptance (Manual, 2019, para. 2). However, despite examples of male body positivity, such content on social media predominantly focuses on women (Lazuka et al., 2020, p. 90).

The roots of this problem lie in the field of gender studies, providing valuable insights for a deeper understanding of gendered advertising. "Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized" (Butler, 2004, p. 42). Adverts play a crucial role in shaping society's perception of reality by reflecting and modifying social norms and gender ideals (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 761). At the same time, the way men and women are depicted in advertisements has a significant impact on the creation and maintenance of gender ideologies (Goffman, 1979, p. 24). The omission of men in body

positivity is connected to the perceptions of masculinity. Usually, there is no room for plus-size models in masculine advertising, as such productions tend to focus on athleticism, strength, power and competitiveness (Goffman, 1979, p. 25). Femininity, on the other hand, is about beauty, which, thanks to current trends, can be shown with all its imperfections. Recently, however, brands have observed a growing number of consumers challenging the traditional gender binary and viewing gender as dynamic and existing on a continuum (Eisend & Rößner, 2022, p. 557). Individuals who identify as non-binary, genderqueer or third gender are challenging the standard binary of gender as strictly male or female. Instead, they may identify with a gender that is not exclusively male or female, or they may reject the idea of gender altogether (Githapradana et al., 2024, p. 1). Even though more than 12% of US millennials now identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, and half of them consider traditional binary gender concepts outdated (Kenney, 2021, para. 2), the majority of social science studies still categorise gender into two groups: male and female (Eisend & Rößner, 2022, p. 557).

However, in order to align with socially conscious values and help empower their customers, many brands have begun to feature diverse and non-binary individuals in their campaigns. On a larger scale, greater representation of the rainbow community in brand communication strategies can have a positive impact on the evolution of gender norms in society (Boyd et al., 2020, p. 1324). An increasing number of consumers from the queer community want to see themselves included in the content created by the brands they choose (Boyd et al., 2020, p. 1316). One of the previous methods of including queer representation in advertising was the so-called “gay window”, which is a technique of appealing to LGBTQ+ audiences without making them the focus of attention (Boyd et.al, 2020, p. 1319). This method, while inclusive, is now perceived as too cautious for the brand and therefore less authentic (Boyd et.al, 2020, p. 1319). Noteworthy examples of more obvious attempts include Gillette’s advertisement featuring a transgender teenager learning how to shave, Mastercard’s “True Name” advertisement featuring transgender people choosing names for their credit cards, and Starbucks’ “What’s Your Name?” campaign featuring a transgender person ordering coffee (Dua, 2021, para. 3). While these advertisements have received widespread attention for their progressive and empowering approach, they have also faced criticism and accusations of hypocrisy (Eisend & Rößner, 2022, p. 568). It highlights that brands need to remain consistent and authentic in their communication strategy in order to build a genuinely inclusive community and avoid accusations of rainbowwashing (Blackmer, 2019, p. 171), a

marketing technique of implementing different initiatives by companies to appeal to the LGBTQ+ community that does not go in line with investing in the community itself (Johns et al., 2022, p. 1).

2.4 Calvin Klein & lingerie industry

Fashion is a specific industry that offers the opportunity to convey concepts of inclusivity through the designs and created content as it has the capacity to represent and reflect all communities and cultures (Doyle & Moore, 2023, p. 105). Due to its popularity, fashion has a great potential to raise awareness for a societal cause and engage large groups of consumers in important conversations. Fashion brand activism can even defy the government and become a way to improve people's lives (Beltran-Rubio, 2019, p. 655). Like most of the market in 2020, this highly competitive industry, which is a significant part of the global economy, has also moved to digital (Gazzola et al., 2020, p. 2). Brands are now expected to have a voice on social media platforms, which are an important place for setting new social and cultural norms (Grabe et al., 2008, p. 461). Fashion brands must constantly ensure that the content they create is relevant to today's realities and reflects the world around them. Over the years, the world of fashion has been seen as extremely important in terms of self-expression, as it really helps people to communicate their self and group identity (Ahuvia, 2005, p. 171).

Undoubtedly one of the most powerful pieces of clothing when it comes to self-identification is underwear. Nowadays, a growing number of lingerie brands are striving to portray their customers in a more realistic and inclusive way as consumers prioritise the comfort and fit of their underwear (Groesz et al., 2002, p. 2). One example of a body-positive movement being incorporated into a brand's philosophy is the lingerie brand Aerie, which has stopped retouching photos as part of its promotion of body acceptance (Benberry, 2020, para. 6). However, lingerie advertising can also be a very controversial topic, leading to various paradoxes and ambiguities. Underwear is considered one of the most controversial products to advertise, along with cigarettes, alcohol and condoms (Waller, 1999, p. 288). Waller (1999, p. 293) states that the biggest challenge in promoting this type of product is to avoid offending the audience, which could potentially harm the brand. Storr (2002, p. 29) mentions that when it comes to underwear, the main ambiguities are between seduction and respectability, eroticism and romance, and the luxurious and the cheap. Overall, controversial advertisements

and campaigns can be a huge success or a huge failure, so brands need to manage them well (Waller, 1999, p. 294). Advertising on social media is particularly risky because of the speed at which information spreads and the global reach of these platforms (Wolny & Mueller, 2013, p. 565). For example, Instagram is a social media platform with over one billion active users (Clement, 2019, para. 2). As the number of users grows, brands are increasingly focusing their communication strategies on the platform, using it for promotional and advertising purposes. As a visual platform, Instagram allows users to share photos, videos, captions, hashtags, live streams and other features with a single click. All of these features serve as useful marketing communications tools, as they reinforce the brand's identity, facilitate engagement with a broader audience and enable the creation of original and unique content (Harker, 2020, para. 2).

Nowadays, inclusivity is becoming increasingly relevant as more and more popular fashion brands incorporate this approach into their marketing strategies. One example of this is the luxury fashion brand Calvin Klein, founded in New York in 1968 (Calvin Klein, n.d.). Although the company entered the world of fashion as a jeans brand, it has since diversified into a range of products, from beauty supplies to clothing, and has expanded into underwear, sportswear, swimwear, home decorations, and fragrances. Although inclusivity is now one of the most important parts of the Calvin Klein's identity, the popular American fashion brand was initially associated with using various controversial tactics such as showing sex and nudity in order to promote its products. Calvin Klein's designs and campaigns changed the cultural landscape in the 80s and 90s (Andrews, 2014, para. 9). There have been many controversies in Klein's advertising history, such as the highly provocative campaign from 1980 in which 15-year-old model Brooke Shields said: "Nothing comes between me and my Calvin's" (Allaire, 2021, para. 1). The next example of a campaign that came under fire was the "Obsession" perfume campaign in 1985, which featured a pro-anorexic female figure and was subsequently criticised for misappropriating feminised iconography. Another famous case is a campaign launched in 1995 that featured underage-looking models in a kiddie porn layout, which was eventually pulled out after a wave of criticism (Elliot, 1995, para. 3).

The brand is certainly used to producing controversial advertising, however, Calvin Klein has also had some other very successful campaigns. One example of this is the promotion of their underwear through user-generated content by creating the hashtag #mycalvins. This idea is now 10 years old and in that time has reached over 871 thousand tags

under the photos on Instagram. It is worth noting that the content has been created not only by regular customers, but also by famous musicians, models, actors and celebrities, which has led to great success and even bigger recognition (Fumo, 2015, para. 6). The real breakthrough in the fashion industry, and lingerie in particular, when it comes to inclusivity and body positivity was an unsuccessful Victoria's Secret show in 2018, which was called out by the rest of the fashion industry for failing to include models of different ages, races, sizes and abilities (Bhatia, 2019, para. 3). Around that time many fashion brands, influenced by the societal movement towards inclusivity and diversity, started making more progress towards more inclusive content (Future Market Insights, 2023, para. 2). In 2019, following the body positivity trend, Calvin Klein began incorporating plus-size models of different genders into their campaigns. Their campaign, under the slogan "I speak my truth in #mycalvins", revolved around the freedom to express oneself and challenging social norms that people encounter on a regular basis (Bhatia, 2019, para. 5). Next in 2020, they launched the #proudinmycalvins pride campaign that did not only include bodies of all shapes and sizes, but promoted them too. The project truly celebrated self-confidence and embraced all forms of gender identity. It promoted authentic expression with no limitations and acceptance of everyone's unique interests, passions, personalities, flaws, beauty, sexuality, gender and pride (PVH, 2021, para. 1).

Calvin Klein's commitment to LGBTQ+ issues does not seem to be limited to the time of Pride Month, but extends throughout the year as they work with various non-profit organizations to support LGBTQ+ advocacy, equality and safety (PVH, 2021, para. 6). For instance, in 2021 they announced a partnership with The Trevor Project, the world's largest organisation dedicated to suicide prevention and crisis response for LGBTQ+ youth. In addition, Calvin Klein supports the work of ILGA World, which acts as a global advocate for the rights of those facing discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. The brand also donates funds to the Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund (PVH, 2021, para. 7). Calvin Klein is an example of how fashion is beginning to seriously consider creating a more inclusive environment for consumers, focusing on their well-being and building a long-term relationship based on trust. Hence it is interesting to investigate *how different genders are represented in Calvin Klein's Instagram posts in terms of body positivity*.

3. Methodology

3.1 Qualitative approach

Qualitative research is considered most appropriate when studying an environmental phenomenon, which is usually supported by a social meaning that occurs naturally (Van Esch, 2013, p. 220). The core of this method is the epistemological premise that data texts contribute to the construction of social reality, rather than simply mirroring and reflecting it (Schreier, 2014, p. 374). According to Brennen (2017, p. 4), the key element of qualitative research is the meaning-making process, which helps to understand many interpretations of different phenomena. The aim of this approach is to describe a phenomenon by moving from data to interpretations about implicit and explicit constructions in the dataset (Schreier, 2014, p. 5). It focuses on uncovering the “social practices, representations, assumptions and stories” present in the data, in order to provide an interpretation of the meanings conveyed (Brennen, 2017, p. 205). Qualitative research methods allow for an in-depth analysis of the data that none of the quantitative methods could provide (Brennen, 2017, p. 3). In addition, the quantitative approach is not as dynamic as the qualitative, which allows the researcher to adjust and reassess the analysis during the process. Qualitative research is also used when there is a need to study experiences, behaviours, feelings, perceptions or new strategies in areas such as communication, marketing or advertising (Teherani et al., 2015, p. 669).

Moreover, this type of research is the most suitable to answer the research question that focuses on “why” or “how” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, to find an answer to the main question of this research, a qualitative approach was used in order to discover the patterns that fashion brands, especially underwear ones, apply on social media to be perceived as inclusive in terms of body positivity among different genders. The study also uncovered what those strategies reveal about gender in society. This overview resulted from the analysis of Calvin Klein’s official posts, which have been collected from their natural setting, Instagram profile, as the qualitative approach enables the interpretation of meaning within both images and texts.

3.2 Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is one of the most extensively employed tools in a wide range of research, including media studies. Unlike a statistically focused quantitative

approach, its quantitative counterpart, qualitative content analysis, goes beyond mere statistical considerations. This commonly used method is characterized by clarifying the meaning of qualitative data by categorizing extensive content into a concise set of categories that represent similar meanings (Schreier, 2014, p. 287). Qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method based on the subjective interpretation of the content of textual data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying patterns or themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1285). However, researchers state that it is a flexible method of analyzing both textual and visual messages (Cole, 1988, p. 53). When carrying out qualitative content analysis, researchers are not restricted to analyzing only text, but can look for themes and patterns of manifest and latent content that relate to both text and visuals, making the research more accurate. Therefore, qualitative content analysis can be used to look for the presence of concepts, words, or phrases for example in social media posts to understand their hidden meanings and relationships, what makes it suitable for this research (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 124). Its flexibility and ability to reduce large amounts of material make qualitative content analysis an ideal method for finding meaning in images and text for the needs of this Master Thesis.

Patton (2022, p. 453) describes qualitative content analysis as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”. This gives researchers the ability to reduce the large amount of data by coding it into smaller parts that represent similar meanings. Qualitative content analysis is an unobtrusive research method that does not require the direct involvement of other people, as it allows the analysis of existing content, in the case of this research – Instagram posts. Thanks to this approach, the researcher has the opportunity to interpret the dataset and transform it into categories (Julien, 2012, p. 121). What is important is that the content is analysed, looking not only at the use of certain words, but also at the recurrence of their meaning (Julien, 2012, p. 121). In some cases, the analysis of the data may be facilitated by the application of existing theory or previous research on the phenomenon being studied (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). This thesis also provides a theoretical framework based on a review of the relevant literature, which ultimately helps to better understand the phenomenon of the gendered body positivity movement (Bowen, 2006, p. 12). Given that some gender studies scholars agree that many content analyses seem to lack a theoretical background, this thesis builds the analysis based on the previous literature (Rudy et al., 2010, p. 707).

3.3 Framing paradigm

In the case of this present research, the data is not only organized and summarized but also deeply interpreted in order to better understand the key patterns and underlying meanings that can be identified within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). To achieve this goal, this qualitative content analysis was guided by the framing paradigm. It is an approach to data analysis that provides a way of describing the power of a communicated text (Entman, 1993, p. 51). Entman (1993, p. 52) states that framing includes two important aspects known as selection and salience. To frame is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” for the described item (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Frames are used to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993, p. 52). At the same time, one sentence may contain several of these four functions, although some sentences may not perform any of them.

Understanding framing is crucial for shedding light on many empirical and normative debates. What makes the idea of framing particularly important is that it focuses our attention on the specific mechanisms through which a communicated text exerts its influence (Entman, 1993, p. 52). In the case of qualitative content analysis that is not guided by a framing paradigm (Entman, 1993, p. 51), the analyzed data often misrepresent the media messages that most viewers actually receive. Some researchers neglect the measurement of the salience of text components and fail to define the most important frames for the audience (Entman, 1993, p. 57). Identifying and describing frames is a crucial step in determining any textual meaning. An understanding of frames helps to avoid treating all negative or positive terms or statements as equally influential and salient (Entman, 1993, p. 56). Applying framing theory to content analysis enables to highlight some empirical and normative controversies, particularly because of its focus on the power of the text (Entman, 1993, p. 55).

3.4 Operationalization

According to the research question *how are different genders represented in Calvin Klein's Instagram posts in terms of body positivity*, the main concept that this research focuses on is gendered body positivity. In this research gender refers to the socialized aspects of

femininity and masculinity and the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors, culturally associated with a person's biological sex (Fisher et al., 2013, p. 54). The majority of social science studies still categorize gender into two groups: male and female, however as previously mentioned in this thesis, nowadays over 12% of US millennials identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, and half of them consider traditional binary gender concepts outdated (Kenney, 2021, para. 2). Instead, they might identify with a gender that is not exclusively male or female (Githapradana et al., 2024, p. 1). Therefore, in this research gender was categorized as man, woman or other, which includes for example transgender men and women, as these categories were noted in the visual and textual data of this dataset.

The next crucial term in this thesis, body positivity, is operationalized as a movement that promotes acceptance of different bodies regardless of size, shape, color, features and physical abilities (Leboeuf, 2019, p. 113). As mentioned before, this movement is in line with two other concepts, diversity and inclusivity, the first referring to the multiplicity of differences and the second based on welcoming and celebrating them (Ferdman & Deane, 2013, p. 206). Body-positive content allows for normalizing features that are perceived as imperfect, such as stretch marks, cellulite, or belly rolls (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1548). For instance, Tiggemann et al. (2020, p. 129) noticed that body positivity Instagram posts depict unretouched images of diverse, usually large-size people showing their imperfections.

3.5 Coding

This analysis combines both deductive and inductive approaches. When it comes to the deductive approach, it is based on the previous theories, studies, concepts and literature and is used to examine given dataset within a new context (Snyder, 2019, p. 334). While the deductive approach works from the general to the specific, the inductive approach goes in the opposite direction, and is therefore often used to investigate phenomena about which there is little knowledge. The inductive approach is based on interpreting raw data and transforming it into themes and patterns (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 374). This method requires the researcher to constantly compare the data and classify it into different, new categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2007, p.109). The reason why this research combines these two approaches is that body positivity is a concept that has been researched before, which means that some core themes or patterns are expected to be present in the dataset. At the same time, however, the

researcher needs to be open to the additional patterns that may emerge after deeper observation and analysis. There is no doubt that body positivity is still a relatively new trend that is developing and expanding in many different aspects. Therefore, in this paper the researcher based the initial codes on the previous studies, but at the same time allowed the themes and patterns to emerge from the dataset.

In the coding phase the researcher followed the steps established by Schreier (2014, p. 174). First, the coding frame was created based on the theory and prior research. Later, other categories identified in the data were added. Next, the subcodes were created, using the data-driven approach. Before conducting the main analysis, the coding frame was applied to the 15% of data in the trial coding, the main part of the pilot phase. This crucial stage of the research involves testing the coding frame on a smaller part of the collected material, which was essential to identify and modify any shortcomings in the frame before conducting the main analysis. In the final step of the pilot phase, the coding frame was evaluated and modified before being applied to the full dataset (Schreier, 2014, p. 178). In this study, after testing out the coding frame, the main analysis was conducted, where all the material was coded. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the coding was an iterative process, meaning that the researcher moved back and forth within the sample to code any emerging elements and constantly improved the coding frame (Kock et al., 1997, p. 1).

3.6 Sample & data collection

The fashion brand that has been selected for this analysis is Calvin Klein as it claims to promote inclusivity and body positivity through its unisex clothing line and inclusive sizes (Calvin Klein, n.d.). It also has the most followers on Instagram compared to the rest of the top underwear brands (25.1 million) (Calvin Klein, 2023) and has an active profile with 6.8 thousand posts. In this research, the sample was collected using the “purposive” approach to avoid analyzing irrelevant posts that could affect the validity of the research (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). The sampling size for this research was 150 recent Instagram posts, taken from Calvin Klein’s official Instagram profile (@calvinklein) collected from March 2024 backward. Analysis of the most recent posts was the most relevant, as it provided information about the current brand's behaviours and strategies. The main criterion for a post to be chosen was that it must present a person, not only a product. Additionally, each selected post needed to feature

a different model. In the case of a carousel post, only the first photo was analyzed. Reels were excluded from the research. Posts, consisting of both photos and captions, were manually extracted and stored in the private cloud folder. Each post was analyzed individually and described in the table consisting of the following elements: post number, publication date, link, image and extracted caption. Both textual and visual content were analyzed in the Excel file.

3.7 Validity & reliability

In order to establish the validity and reliability of this research, two following procedures were applied. Firstly, as mentioned above, the sample was collected using the purposive approach, as analysing random, irrelevant posts could affect the relevance of the research and its validity. Therefore, the posts were selected purposively by applying the researcher's criteria (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). Additionally, to make the whole process of coding more transparent, the codebook with all the noticed codes and categories has been attached at the end of this paper (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 229).

4. Results

This study aimed to explore and interpret how different genders are represented in Calvin Klein's Instagram posts in terms of body positivity. The coding process resulted in a collection of 28 codes such as: man, woman, other, young, older, light, medium, tanned, brown, black, thin, average, plus-size, muscular, flawless look, sexualization/seduction, physical strength, tummy rolls, wrinkles, transition scars, stretch marks, cellulite, vitiligo, hairy, receding hairline, body-positive messages, partnerships, campaigns. The small number of codes is due to the fact that the research approach was mostly deductive. Next, the codes were gathered into 7 subcategories. The following groups were created: gender, age, skin colour, body size, idealization, imperfections, body-positive captions. In the last step, subcategories were further clustered into three main categories: inclusivity, body image, and body-positive captions, which are presented and interpreted in connection to the theoretical framework.

4.1 Inclusivity

The inclusivity of Calvin Klein's Instagram content can be seen in the 3 main categories of gender, age and skin colour. When it comes to the first category, gender was categorized as man, woman, or other, which includes for example transgender men and women (Githapradana et al., 2024, p. 1). 150 Instagram posts depicted 153 people out of which 79 were identified as women, 65 as men and 9 as other. As for the largest group, women, it is worth noting that not all of them were portrayed in a stereotypical feminine way. In some posts, femininity was combined with an athletic physique and strength, which is stereotypically associated with masculinity (Goffman, 1979, p. 25) as for example in the post from 7 March 2021. Thanks to avoiding misrepresentation or underrepresentation Calvin Klein maintains customer satisfaction with the brand (Rosenthal et al., 2021, p. 569). Although the majority of posts in the dataset feature women, the number of posts featuring men is not far behind. It is also worth mentioning that in the case of men, not all of them are portrayed in a stereotypically masculine way. For instance, on 25 April 2022, Calvin Klein posted a photo of a male ballet dancer and on 26 January 2020, they shared a photo of a male model wearing high heels, both of which are socially associated with femininity. Featuring non-stereotypical portrayals on social media platforms helps the brand to resonate with a larger proportion of society (Eisend, 2022, p. 308).

As the boundaries between male and female in Calvin Klein’s posts are not that strict, the concept of gender seems to be more fluid which makes it possible to add another gender category in this research, which is other (Githapradana et al., 2024, p. 1). In the collected dataset, 9 posts presented transgender men or women who were therefore classified as other gender. This classification was made not only based on the image, which for example showed a person with transition scars after a double mastectomy, but also based on the captions of the posts, which included the pronouns of the models or their confessions. For example, posts from 28 May 2021 and 24 June 2020 were both part of the #proudinmycalvinscampaign, with transgender people sharing their own stories in captions. One model shown in Figure 1 shares: “The first time in my life that someone had seen me before I saw myself...It was another trans woman that said to me, ‘You belong in a skirt.’ I realized at that moment that I could exist” (Calvin Klein Instagram, 28.05.2021). Fashion has always been an important means of self-expression, allowing individuals to effectively communicate both personal and collective identities (Ahuvia, 2005, p. 171). In this case, the content created by Calvin Klein responds to the needs of society and reflects societal changes.

Figure 1

Transgender woman (Calvin Klein Instagram, 28.05.2021)

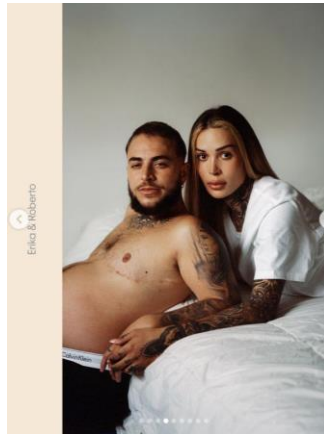


The post that stands out from the rest considering the topic of gender is the post from 8 May 2022 on Calvin Klein’s topic of realities of new families which portrays a pregnant transgender man with his partner, presented below in Figure 2. “@erikafeeh and

@roberto_bete are expecting parents from Brazil. Roberto is due to give birth to his and Erika's son Noah any day now" (Calvin Klein Instagram, 08.05.2022).

Figure 2

Pregnant transgender man (Calvin Klein Instagram, 08.05.2022)



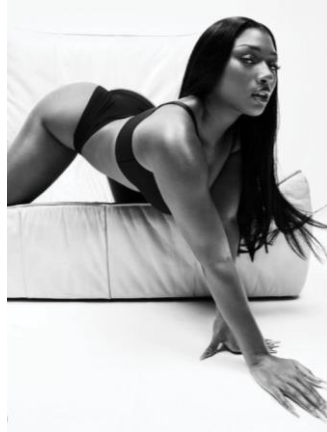
Pregnancy for transgender men is associated with many physiological and social challenges. Due to a lack of understanding, society tends to discriminate and stigmatize pregnant transgender individuals (Obedin-Maliver & Makadon, 2016, p. 4). Although it is not as widely discussed as pregnancy in cisgender women, the concept of pregnancy in transgender men is now gaining more recognition and acceptance in medical circles. In recent years, transgender people have become more visible and accepted in society, which is why the discussion on this topic is getting more open (Obedin-Maliver & Makadon, 2016, p. 4). In this specific case of Roberto and Erika, the fashion brand strongly supported the idea of transgender men getting pregnant and became an activist on the issue of gender inclusivity and body positivity in general (Kapitan et al., 2022, p. 24). This is a perfect example of how fashion has a great power to unite people, raise awareness for a social cause and engage large groups of consumers in important conversations. Thanks to this kind of action, fashion brand activism can become a way to improve people's lives (Beltran-Rubio, 2019, p. 655). In this case, Calvin Klein is not only supporting an important social cause, but also promoting a sense of community and responsibility among its consumers.

When analyzing Calvin Klein's inclusivity in terms of gender, it is also important to note its support for different sexual orientations and the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. In most of the posts, the sexual orientation is not obvious and was therefore not coded, however, in some photos, it is possible to identify the sexual identity of the model if the person is known and speaks publicly about it. Brandon Flynn, posted on Calvin Klein's feed on 23 March 2023, and Troye Sivan, posted on 4 February 2023, are representatives of the LGBTQ+ community who became the faces of the brand's 2023 Pride campaign. As a leading underwear brand, Calvin Klein recognized that fashion is a means of expressing one's identity but also sexuality. Fashion, through its communicative power, engages with audiences, making fashion activism an important tool for representing marginalized groups and advocating for social change in terms of inclusivity and diversity (Thorpe, 2011, p. 5). Other examples of the representation of the LGBTQ+ community are photos featuring drag queens, who also share their own experiences in the captions of the posts, such as the one from 29 July 2020. In this way Calvin Klein uses its influence and presence in social media to participate in public discourse, relying on its customers to interact with its messages in the comments (Ambas & Sabada, 2021, p. 221). This post shows how diversity and inclusivity can be used to break boundaries in society (Doyle & Moore, 2023, p. 105). At the same time, by challenging stereotypes, Calvin Klein attracts new customers to its products (Wilkie et al., 2023, p. 722).

The second of the 3 main categories of inclusivity at Calvin Klein is the age of the models. Although the majority of models are young, in their twenties or thirties, there are also models of different ages. Out of the 153 people in the pictures in the collected dataset, 148 were classified as young and only 5 as older. It has been shown that the fashion industry continues to focus its advertising efforts on the youthful population and rarely includes images of older people (Lewis et al., 2011, p. 101). Most models, especially in the lingerie industry, are young because youthfulness is simply considered more attractive and reflects societal ideals of beauty (Kozar & Damhorst, 2009, p. 198). In addition, lingerie advertising is usually associated with sensuality and seductiveness, which are perceived to be easier to achieve when working with younger models (Storr, 2002, p. 29). One of many examples of this is a post from 4 March 2021, Figure 3.

Figure 3

Seductive woman (Calvin Klein Instagram, 04.03.2021)



Nevertheless, in the dataset there are 5 examples of depicting older people in the posts. In this way, Calvin Klein shows that its products are available to people of all ages, not just the young. Although the number of older models is still small, it is an attempt by the brand to be more inclusive and body-positive (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1547). In this case, the images were sufficient to identify the approximate age of the models through grey hair or wrinkles, as for instance the post from 19 May 2022, which shows an elderly man and woman. It is also worth noting that in all 5 cases, the bodies of older models were covered as they were promoting items other than underwear. When it comes to the age category, it is also interesting how Calvin Klein portrays young people, showing that some of them can be in very different stages of life, living in different realities. For example, the post from 2 December 2020 shows a mother breastfeeding a small baby. In this case, Calvin Klein follows the rule that for greater influence in social media space, brands need to capture important issues in society (Lee & Yoon, 2020, p. 146).

Furthermore, the content of Calvin Klein's Instagram seems to be inclusive also in terms of skin colour. In the dataset analyzed, there were representatives of all skin colours on the universal scale: light, medium, tanned, brown and black as all the individuals in the society want to be represented by the brand they are choosing. The largest number of people were classified as having a medium skin colour (47), followed by light (38), brown (26),

tanned (22) and black (20). The variation in skin colour was similar across genders: women, men and others. In some posts, for example the one from 2 June 2021, Figure 4, skin colour was also mentioned in the caption, highlighting the importance of the inclusion of people of colour in brand communication. Model shares: “Just being Black, femme, plus-size is super important for me” (Calvin Klein Instagram, 02.06.2021). In this particular case of Figure 4, skin colour is also linked to the representation of plus-size women and therefore to the body positivity trend (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021, p. 29).

Figure 4

Black plus-size woman (Calvin Klein Instagram, 02.06.2021)



Skin colour is a characteristic that can be easily coded from the visual, although the problem can arise when it comes to an individual’s ethnicity. Therefore it was not coded in this research. Nevertheless, it seems that Calvin Klein’s Instagram posts include the majority of ethnic groups such as: White (Caucasian), Black (African American), Hispanic (Latinx), Middle Eastern (Arab), Asian (Pacific Islander), Mixed (Multiracial) or Native American (Indigenous) whose representative was posted on 17 October 2020 with a meaningful caption below: “There’s not just one race here in America” (Calvin Klein Instagram, 17.10.2020). Nevertheless, it is very important that brands do not disseminate this type of content for no reason, but with a genuine commitment to inclusivity, otherwise they can be accused of tokenism (Lee, 2020, p. 387). However, in the case of the Figure 5, it was linked to Calvin Klein’s campaign, in which the model, Quannah, raised the issue of protecting the Arctic

Wildlife Refuge. Therefore, it is an example of how Calvin Klein promotes diversity and inclusion through its Instagram posts, in order to support minority groups (Oakenfull et al., 2008, p. 191). In the case of marketing material, Calvin Klein's approach seems to go beyond superficial representation and aims to establish a brand presence that authentically embraces and champions the richness of diversity (Costa & Bamossy, 1995, p. 20).

Figure 5

Native American woman (Calvin Klein Instagram, 17.10.2020)



It is also worth mentioning that among 38 people with light skin, 15 were Asian. There were also some popular Asian celebrities in the posts, such as K-pop star Jung Kook, whose photo was posted on Calvin Klein's Instagram on 14 August 2023 with the caption about confidence. Through this type of content, Calvin Klein conveys concepts of inclusivity, as fashion has the capacity to represent and reflect all communities and cultures (Doyle & Moore, 2023, p. 105). By presenting different ethnic and racial groups in the brand's advertising, Calvin Klein tries to create an inclusive message and protect the well-being of customers (Licsandru & Cui, 2018, p. 331). It seems that Calvin Klein's marketing success comes from engaging and revolving around the creation of content that reflects the diverse communities of people who might buy its products (Wilkie et al., 2023, p. 724). By showcasing a variety of genders, ages and skin colours, Calvin Klein tries to demonstrate its commitment to diversity and affirm the value of every customer. The brand seems to be inclusive not only externally but also internally. Zippia, which is a job research site, calculated

the company's diversity score to be 9.2 out of 10 (Zippia, 2024, para. 2). In its measurements, Zippia takes into account several factors such as the ethnicity, gender identity and language skills of the workforce. For example, the gender ratio of Calvin Klein's workforce reflects the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion, as it is approximately 55% female and 45% male. In terms of ethnic background, the most common ethnicity at Calvin Klein is White (53%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (26%) and Black or African American (10%). According to these data, inclusivity seems to be a part of Calvin Klein's wider strategy as it aims to cater for a diverse audience and promote equality.

4.2 Body image

Theoretically, body image is defined as a picture of oneself that is formed through the perception of one's body (Schilder, 1999, p. 213) and it refers to one's size, shape, weight, characteristics and performance (Rudd & Lennon, 2000, p. 153). In this part of the thesis, body image is a broad category that shows how models and their bodies are represented in Calvin Klein's Instagram posts. This category consists of the following 3 subcategories: body size, idealization and imperfections, which will be analyzed in detail in this part of the thesis. When it comes to the first subcategory, body size, there were 4 main codes within it: thin, average, plus-size and muscular. Thin was used to describe a person with a slim or skinny body. There were 51 thin models in the dataset. This body type was also the most popular together with the average (also 51). The majority of the thin models were women (47). The rest of the thin models were men (2) and other gender (2).

Fashion is undoubtedly an industry driven by trends and ideals. Calvin Klein's images promoting thin body ideal reflect current beauty standards that have become increasingly unrealistic (Grabe et al., 2008, p. 460). Over the years, thinness has become the norm for models, especially in lingerie and underwear, where there has always been a demand for models who embody traditional standards of beauty (Storr, 2002, p. 29). In addition, the demand for thinness and attractiveness has been driven by consumers who associate lingerie with certain looks (Reaves et al, 2004, p. 64). Within the dataset, there are examples of posts featuring famous supermodels posing for Calvin Klein, such as Kendall Jenner or Bella Hadid. The first one, posted on 17 August 2023, has a caption about confidence, which can be interpreted as a reference to showing off her perfect body. On the one hand, this type of post

might seem to go against the body positivity trend. However, as mentioned before, for some viewers the exclusion of thin people is inconsistent with the core of the body-positive movement, which is the celebration and acceptance of all bodies (Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 48). Thin people may also struggle with some complexes because they would prefer for instance to have more curves or more body weight to look better and healthier. That is especially when it comes to men, whose ideal of beauty is a lean and muscular body, not a skinny one (Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2014, p. 208). This approach explains that to remain truly body-positive, a brand should represent all shapes and sizes.

The code average was used to describe a person with medium body size and was the second most common body size among models next to thin, as both reached the amount of 51 models. The amount of average body size among men and women was almost the same as the amount of 22 average size men and 23 average size women. The other gender reached the amount of 6 average size models. Linking these findings to the body positivity trend, a content analysis conducted by Lazuka et al. (2020, p. 85) found that the majority of body-positive posts on Instagram portrayed people of average weight (54.9%) compared to obese (25%) and overweight (17%). Similarly, in this dataset, thin and average models make up about 67% of all models, which is a majority. Another code, plus-size, is the code that describes someone with a so-called plus-size or thick body. In the present dataset, 9 people were described as having a plus-size body. The majority of them, 6, were women, 2 were men and 1 was the representative of the other gender. By becoming size-sensitive, Calvin Klein aims to promote self-confidence and strengthen the dignity of its customers (Tsawaab, 2023, p. 2771). Furthermore, it has been proven that posts featuring models with bodies that deviate from mainstream ideals are the content that audiences prefer to see (Rodgers et al., 2019, p. 127). Therefore, this top underwear brand, which has marketing success as its goal, integrates body positivity into its communication (Licsandru & Cui, 2018, p. 331). Calvin Klein has been already featuring plus-size models in its advertisements for a few years, as fashion has long been exclusively targeted at people of 'normal size'. The data collected showed that most of the plus-size models were women. Their photos were sometimes accompanied by captions associated with self-love, self-confidence or comfort (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021, p. 29), as in the Figure 6 with the caption: "No lines. All comfort" (Calvin Klein Instagram, 26.10.2023) presented below.

Figure 6

Brown plus-size woman (Calvin Klein Instagram, 26.10.2023)



The dataset included also an example of a plus-size representative of the other gender, who was a transgender woman portrayed in a post from 24 June 2020. However, in the future, in order to build a truly inclusive community and avoid possible accusations of rainbowwashing, Calvin Klein would need to post more than just one photo of a plus-size transgender person (Blackmer, 2019, p. 171). Next, analyzing the dataset in relation to plus-size men, Calvin Klein seems to be an example of the overlooks this topic (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1). Despite 2 examples of posts featuring plus-size man, one of which is a Figure 7 presented below, Calvin Klein in terms of body size predominantly focuses on women (Lazuka et al., 2020, p. 90).

Figure 7

Plus-size man (Calvin Klein Instagram, 18.07.2021)



This is also in line with the research that states that only 6% of Instagram images show men with high body fat (Gültzow et al., 2020, p. 284). In the case of this research, only 2 out of 65 men are plus-size. This can be surprising, especially in light of the fact that Calvin Klein is an American brand and plus-size men make up approximately 70% of the US population (McKinney & Thompson, 2020, p. 1). The explanation of this misrepresentation is connected to the perceptions of masculinity as usually, masculine advertising tends to focus on athleticism, strength, power and competitiveness (Goffman, 1979, p. 25). Muscular was the way to code a person with an athletic body and visible muscles. 42 models were described as muscular and the majority of them, 39, were men. Muscularity is a characteristic stereotypically associated with men. 39 of the 65 male models were athletic and well-built. Some of them also have tattoos, which gives them an even tougher look. In most cases, their bodies are sculpted, with visible veins showing their strength, as shown in a post from 4 January 2024, Figure 8, which was a part of Calvin Klein's new Spring 2024 campaign,. In this picture the famous actor, Jeremy Allen White, climbs the stairs to the roof of a building in downtown New York while stretching and flexing his muscles.

Figure 8

Jeremy Allen White (Calvin Klein Instagram, 04.01.2024)



On the other hand, only a few women were presented in a muscular way, which was linked to the athlete campaign from 2023. An example of it is a Figure 9 presented below, which is photo of a fit and well-built woman with the caption: “Icons seen naturally. A new lens on some of the world’s greatest athletes” (Calvin Klein Instagram, 27.06.2023).

Figure 9

Athletic woman (Calvin Klein Instagram, 27.06.2023)



The reason for this imbalance lies in gender ideology and perceptions of masculinity and femininity (Goffman, 1979, p. 24). In Calvin Klein's Instagram content there is no room for plus-size male models as masculine advertising usually tends to focus on athleticism, strength, power and competitiveness (Goffman, 1979, p. 25). Femininity, on the other hand, is about beauty, which, thanks to current trends, can be shown in many different dimensions.

The next subcategory identified within body image was body idealization, which in this research is an impression of an ideal body achieved through sexualization, seduction, showing someone's flawless looks or impressive physical strength. As mentioned before, nowadays many photos are edited, enhanced and certain features of models are exaggerated and emphasized in order to keep up with unrealistic beauty standards spread by social media (Grabe et al., 2008, p. 460). In this case, Calvin Klein is no exception, as 35 posts from the present dataset feature models whose appearance can be described as flawless, i.e. perfect. An example of this is a photo of American supermodel Bella Hadid posted on 25 August 2020. Not only does the model look extremely thin with her ribs out, but there is not a single hair or blemish on her shiny body. It seems that in the case of this and 34 other posts, Calvin Klein did not care about the negative impact on the body confidence, self-esteem and general psychological well-being of the audience. This is also because that was not the main purpose of these images. In this case, the aim was to present the products on the models in a way that made them more attractive and desirable. The same method was used in 17 other photos, which presented models coded as sexualized and seductive, a very typical characteristic of lingerie advertising. This is not surprising given that lingerie is considered one of the most controversial products to advertise (Waller, 1999, p. 288). In many of Calvin Klein's Instagram posts, female models are half-naked, for example, wearing only the bottom of the underwear and no bra. For instance in the post from 4 March 2021, the seductive body of the model advertises the product, which is not fully presented.

In terms of flawless look, sexualization and seduction, the majority of coded posts featured women, while in terms of the last code, physical strength, the majority were portraying men, the same as in the case of the muscular body. Here, however, the body was presented not only as athletic but also as very strong with the veins around the arms or even bruised fists, giving the impression of an aggressive look, as in the Figure 10, post from 27 February 2023. Some models, predominantly men, also have many tattoos on their bodies, which in some cultures are also stereotypically associated with traits such as rebellion or

aggression. Some experts believe that by portraying strong, very masculine and physically trained men, Calvin Klein is reinforcing gender stereotypes and emphasising toxic masculinity (Steele, 2020, p. 5). This concept is known as a set of harmful behaviours and attitudes, such as aggression, emotional suppression, and dominance, that are stereotypically associated with men (Haider, 2016, p. 558).

Figure 10

Muscular man (Calvin Klein Instagram, 27.02.2023)



The next subcategory identified within body image was imperfections, which is the opposite of the previous idealization subcategory. Posts coded within this category are in line with the body positivity trend, which normalizes features that are perceived as imperfect (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1548). In this dataset the following imperfections were coded: tummy rolls (2), wrinkles (6), transition scars (3), stretch marks (1), cellulite (1), vitiligo (1), hairy (armpits, chest) (4), receding hairline (1). Calvin Klein appears to be one of the underwear brands trying to portray its customers in a more realistic and inclusive way, as consumers today tend to prioritize comfort and fit in their underwear (Groesz et al., 2002, p. 2). An interesting thing about tummy rolls is that they do not only appear in photos of plus-size models, but Calvin Klein shows that it is also normal for thin models to have them when their body is in a certain bent position, as in the case of the photo of American model Gigi Hadid published on 10 September 2020. This image proves that no one's body is always perfect and that tummy rolls are something normal that every person has. When it comes to wrinkles, they

are present on the faces of most people categorized as older. It is a natural sign of aging that has not been removed during the photo editing process. In this way, Calvin Klein refers to the age-inclusivity of its content, an example of which is a post dated 8 April 2022. Through this kind of content, brand promotes the acceptance of wrinkles as a natural part of life and the aging process.

Transition scars, another code found in the imperfections subcategory, refer to the results of mastectomy or breast augmentation, which are popular surgeries among transgender people. Some people may be ashamed of their scars, which symbolize their past and all the experiences they have gone through, but in the light of the body positivity trend, these scars are beautiful as they show the diversity of human bodies and their life stories (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1547). In the presented dataset, there were 3 models with transition scars. 2 of them showed the scars, while one of them had them covered with a bandage. In this way, Calvin Klein is not only raising the awareness of its audience and promoting a body-positive approach but also supporting diversity when it comes to gender by supporting transgender people. An example of this is a post from 24 July 2021, shown below as a figure 11.

Figure 11

Transgender man with covered transition scars (Calvin Klein Instagram, 24.07.2021)



Other body imperfections that many people experience are stretch marks and cellulite, especially common among women, presented in Figure 12. Both of them can affect women's

self-esteem and body image as these types of features deviate from the societal standards of beauty. However, thanks to the body-positive trend, fashion brands, especially lingerie ones, are trying to normalize these features. Calvin Klein is one of them, posting a photo of a woman with stretch marks on 28 October 2021 and a different model with cellulite on 2 January 2020.

Figure 12

Woman with stretch marks (Calvin Klein Instagram, 28.10.2021)



The next code noticed in the dataset, vitiligo, is a name for the loss of pigmentation in certain areas of the skin, visible as white patches, shown in Figure 13. Due to its striking appearance, vitiligo can be socially stigmatized and discriminated in some cultures, which can have a negative psychological impact on people affected by this skin condition. Nowadays, however, thanks to the body positivity movement, people with vitiligo are becoming more visible in the media, which is why many brands, such as Calvin Klein in the post from 14 February 2020, want to feature them in its social media content as a statement of acceptance for all skin types.

Figure 13

Man with vitiligo (Calvin Klein Instagram, 14.02.2020)



When it comes to the next imperfection, a hairy body, it is worth mentioning that it is a very subjective issue that varies depending on culture and society. From a Western point of view, it is preferable for women to remove their hair from their whole body as it is associated with being clean and hygienic. For men, on the other hand, a hairy chest or unibrow can be perceived as unattractive, but it depends on personal perception and preferences of what people find attractive. Nevertheless, Calvin Klein tries to show all preferences and aesthetics in its Instagram content, for example by posting photos of a woman with hairy armpits on 27 May 2021 or a man with a hairy chest on 28 May 2021. The last code in the imperfections subcategory, receding hairline, is most common among men, although women can also experience it. This type of hair loss is usually associated with aging and can therefore be distressing for some people who experience it. Calvin Klein posted an example of a man with a receding hairline on 2 August 2021, which may have helped other men to deal with their own insecurities about hair loss.

4.3 Body-positive messages

The final category that emerged from the analysis of the textual layer of the dataset was called body-positive captions. It consists of three main codes: body-positive messages,

partnerships and campaigns, which were mentioned in the descriptions of the posts. The first code, body-positive messages, refers to the quoted text written by a person in the photo that conveys the idea of body positivity and inclusivity, especially regarding the LGBTQ+ community. In the case of this code, the brand elevated the voices of the models, giving them the opportunity to share their thoughts on body positivity and inclusivity with a wider audience. In the collected dataset, there were 7 posts with body-positive messages in their descriptions. The first one from 2 February 2020 presented below, shows a white plus-size woman standing in a confident pose with her arms raised and her hands behind her head. She proudly exposes her body in front of the camera, wearing a set of Calvin Klein underwear in red, which is a colour that in Western culture is usually associated with love, sensuality, seduction, sexuality and above all confidence, which is how message in the caption begins: “Confidence is having the certainty that you deserve love and respect, no matter what. That there’s nothing you need to do, correct, or work on, to earn it. You deserve love because you have the ability to give love (...).” (Calvin Klein Instagram, 02.02.2020). In the case of this message, connected with the Figure 14, body positivity is associated with claims of self-love and self-confidence (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021, p. 29).

Figure 14

Plus-size woman in red underwear (Calvin Klein Instagram, 02.02.2020)



Another example of the plus-size model sharing her thoughts on body positivity was posted on 2 June 2021. In the caption of the post (Figure 4), the black woman stresses the

importance of being comfortable with one's body. The next example of a body-positive message, shared by another model in the post from 28 October 2021, relates to accepting one's imperfections, such as the stretch marks or tummy rolls visible in the post. Model shares: "It's trusting in yourself and your ideas without the need for validation from others...comparing yourself to others is a non-starter" (Calvin Klein Instagram, 28.11.2021). Although the model appears a little shy or even insecure due to her pose and body language, her message to the audience is very powerful as it draws attention to the harmful effects of comparing oneself with others, which is very common nowadays due to the emergence of social media (Fasoli & Constantinou, 2024, p. 2). The model emphasizes that self-validation should not come from social comparisons but from confidence in oneself (Figure 12). Another example of the body-positive message in the caption of the post is from 26 June 2020. As part of the #proudinmycalvincampaign, the photographer featured in the picture shared her experience from photoshoots in the description of the post. She says that before taking pictures she likes to ask her models what they like about themselves. She believes that it is very necessary to have that second or two of reflection to look at yourself in the mirror and appreciate yourself by saying what you love about your body. It helps her models to connect with themselves not only physically but also mentally.

As mentioned above, some of the messages written by models are not only about body positivity but more broadly about inclusivity, especially in relation to the LGBTQ+ community. The post from 24 June 2020 features a transgender woman, who shares her transition story in the caption of the post. The caption carries a warning as it refers to suicidal thoughts, which may be triggering for some readers. Therefore, first Calvin Klein published a support number that might be helpful to people in crisis and then shared the model's message. Overall her message is very empowering and gives readers lots of hope as it is about unshakable self-love, acceptance, compassion, respect and support, which should always be a priority when it comes to the body-positive approach (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021, p. 29). Another example of a body-positive message from a transgender woman was posted on 28 May 2021 (Figure 1), and refers to being comfortable with one's body despite socially constructed standards (Grabe et al., 2008, p. 460).

The next code from the body-positive captions, partnerships, includes posts that capture the brand's partnerships with some of the organizations that promote body positivity and inclusivity, proving that Calvin Klein does not just pretend to care but knows how to walk

the talk. Post from 23 March 2023, which is part of the Pride 2023 “Let It Out” campaign, mentions three organizations that Calvin Klein cooperates with. “This year we’re proud to continue our partnerships with @ilgaworld, @pflag, and @translawcenter in their efforts toward LGBTQIA+ advocacy, equity and safety.” (Calvin Klein Instagram, 23.03.2023). The first, ILGA World, known as the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, is a federation of over 1900 organizations working for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex human rights. The next, PFLAG, is a network of hundreds of chapters working to create a world where every LGBTQ+ person is included, safe and empowered. The last, Transgender Law Center, is the largest national transgender-led organization dedicated to empowering all people. In 2023, Calvin Klein partnered with these NGOs and donated over \$220,000 USD to them (PVH, 2023, para. 4). Additionally, to show its support, Calvin Klein also designed t-shirts with the phrases “Empower Each Other” and “Show Up For Trans Youth”. The other post from the same Pride campaign, from 4 February 2023, mentions another organization, BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation. “(...) A portion of proceeds will benefit @blaqmobs. (...). Learn more about our partnership with BlaQ at our link in bio.” (Calvin Klein Instagram, 04.02.2023). BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation is a non-government organization working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQI+ people towards a future where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the LGBTQ+ community are valued and safe. In 2023, Calvin Klein Australia and the PVH Foundation began a three-year partnership with the organization and donated \$55,000 to them (PVH, 2023, para. 4). In addition, Calvin Klein donated A\$0.30 from every Pride Collection item sold in Australia throughout the partnership (PVH, 2023, para. 4). These and other Calvin Klein partnerships mentioned above prove that the brand is consistent and authentic in its communication strategy, which protects it from accusations of rainbowwashing (Blackmer, 2019, p. 171). Calvin Klein’s marketing initiatives targeting LGBTQ+ people seem to be in line with its investment in the community itself (Johns et al., 2022, p. 1).

The last code from the body-positive captions category, campaigns, relates to the posts which descriptions mention some hashtags and campaigns created by the brand to promote body positivity and inclusivity, especially when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community. The first campaign noticed in the dataset is the one associated with the hashtag #confidentinmycalvins, which refers to the action based on sharing body-positive user-generated content. Members of the Calvin Klein community, i.e. owners of CK items, were encouraged to post their body-revealing photos in order to promote the feeling of body

confidence. Some of the posts, like already mentioned before post from 2 February 2020 featuring a plus-size woman, have been reposted on Calvin Klein's Instagram feed (Figure 14). "(...) Today we're talking representation and self-love with members of the #CONFIDENTINMYCALVINS community. Scroll through to see their powerful stories." (Calvin Klein Instagram, 02.02.2020). The next campaign, in June 2023, was accompanied by the caption: "Icons seen naturally. A new lens on some of the world's greatest athletes" (Calvin Klein Instagram, 27.06.2023) and featured 5 international female footballers Alex Morgan, Chloe Kelly, Kenza Dali, Mana Iwabuchi and Mary Fowler. Mentioned models represented their respective countries (United States, England, France, Japan and Australia) during the 2023 World Cup. Calvin Klein presents them all in black and white in an intimate setting, with the aim of revealing their sensuality and vulnerability, as they are usually portrayed as strong and confident (Dale, 2023, para. 2). It is also interesting to look at these photos in terms of body positivity, as athleticism is usually culturally associated with masculinity rather than femininity. What makes Calvin Klein progressive on this issue is that they show women in a non-stereotypical way, showcasing the diversity of female bodies. An example of this is a photo of Kenza Dali from 27 June 2023.

Another campaign that promotes inclusivity and body positivity at the same time is the one that shows the reality of new families, which was carried out on Mother's Day in 2022. The post that got the most attention from the audience was the aforementioned photo of pregnant transgender man Roberto with his partner Erika from 8 May 2022 with the caption: "Today, in support of women and mothers around the world, we're shining a light on the reality of new families" (Calvin Klein Instagram, 08.05.2022). In this campaign, Calvin Klein focused not only on non-traditional families but also on different dimensions of love. For example, a post from 20 May 2022, Figure 15, shows another couple, a transgender man and woman, who also call themselves a family: "Holli Smith and Pony are family. They met online, it was anonymous and exciting. Their only definite plans are being together. This is Love. Was there a moment you knew you were chosen family?" (Calvin Klein Instagram, 20.05.2022). Through this campaign Calvin Klein shows its support for LGBTQ+ community and at the same time tries to have a positive impact on the evolution of gender norms in society (Boyd et al., 2020, p. 1324).

Figure 15

Transgender man with a partner (Calvin Klein Instagram, 20.05.2022)



The last Calvin Klein's campaign in the dataset was recognized by the hashtag #proudinmycalvins, which was created to celebrate queer and trans people's defining moments that have had a big impact on their lives. It focuses not only on the inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community but also on the acceptance of one's own body, which is an important postulate of the body positivity movement. This can be seen for example in the caption of the post from 28 May 2021, in which a transgender woman shares her moment of defining her gender (Figure 1). The other example is a post from 27 June 2020, featuring a gay man who, in the caption of the post, not only shares his experience of coming out but also raises the issue of societal beauty standards for men, which he did not meet. He admits that he never wanted to be masculine, but liked to wear make-up instead. His body was never thin enough or as muscular as culturally expected. However, the model shares that he never changed who he was, but accepted his true self, which made him the most beautiful person he could ever be. By sharing these kinds of stories, Calvin Klein not only represents and supports an increasing number of consumers from the queer community (Boyd et al., 2020, p. 1316) but also spreads the body-positive mindset among its customers: "(...) there is truly nothing more beautiful than taking every single thing that you were told about yourself and who you can and can't be, and to create your own rules and to write your own story (...)." (Calvin Klein Instagram, 27.06.2020).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of findings

The aim of this thesis was to answer the research question *how are different genders represented in Calvin Klein's Instagram posts in terms of body positivity?* To begin with, it has become clear that the idea of gender in Calvin Klein's Instagram content is fluid. Not all the women were portrayed in a feminine way, nor were all men presented as masculine. There were a few female models featured as strong, athletic, or even muscular, which is usually stereotypically associated with masculinity (Goffman, 1979, p. 25). On the other hand, some male models were shown in a more feminine setting, such as wearing high heels or practicing ballet. Nevertheless, when it comes to men, in most of the pictures there was a strong focus on masculinity. In the analyzed dataset there was also a representation of a third gender, for instance, transgender men and women, whose photos were usually combined with meaningful captions, for instance related to their personal stories. Surprisingly, there was an example of a pregnant transgender man, which can be understood as a support for the LGBTQ+ community as well as a body-positive statement. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Instagram content of fashion brand Calvin Klein appears to be inclusive in terms of gender. Moreover, the company is also committed to gender inclusivity on the internal level as approximately 55% of Calvin Klein's workers are female and 45% are male.

The data collected and analyzed revealed that although underwear brands usually choose models with flawless, youthful bodies (Storr, 2002, p. 29), Calvin Klein still tries to include older people in their Instagram content. In the dataset analyzed there were a few examples of older models whose wrinkles and other skin imperfections were not retouched. Therefore, it can be said that Calvin Klein is trying to approach the topic of aging in a body-positive way. In the analysis, it was also found that Calvin Klein's Instagram is also inclusive in terms of skin colour. In the present dataset, there were representatives of all skin colours on the universal scale: light, medium, tanned, brown, and black, which is also an important component of body positivity. Although the ethnicity of the models could not be coded from the dataset, there also seems to be a large diversity in that area. Diversity seems to be important to Calvin Klein not only externally but also internally. According to Zippia, Calvin Klein's diversity score is 9.2 out of 10 (Zippia, 2024, para. 1). In terms of Calvin Klein's internal diversity, White workers are the majority (53%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (26%) and Black or African American (10%). By showcasing a variety of genders, ages, and

skin colours, Calvin Klein tries to demonstrate its commitment to diversity and affirm the value of every customer. At the same time, the brand seeks to promote social cohesion by challenging stereotypes and celebrating the richness of human diversity in society.

When it comes to the body sizes of the models, the research supports the study on body positivity conducted by Lazuka et al. (2020, p. 85) which found that the majority of body-positive posts on Instagram portrayed people of average weight (54.9%) compared to obese (25%) and overweight (17%). Similarly, in this dataset, thin and average models make up about 67% of all models, which is a majority. When it comes to plus-size models, which Calvin Klein has been already featuring in its Instagram content for a few years, the large majority of them were women. This observation confirms the previous findings that the inclusion of men and third gender in the body-positive movement is still overlooked (Gültzow et al., 2020, p. 284). Despite of 2 examples of posts featuring plus-size men, Calvin Klein in terms of bigger body sizes predominantly focuses on women (Lazuka et al., 2020, p. 90). On the other hand, men are mostly portrayed as muscular, physically strong, or sometimes even aggressive which leads to the conclusion that in this case Calvin Klein is still emphasizing toxic masculinity and reinforcing gender stereotypes in society (Steele, 2020, p. 5). Therefore, it can be concluded for the brand Calvin Klein that there is room for improvement when it comes to body sizes of models other than women.

This research also proved the tendency to idealize the bodies of underwear models (Grabe et al., 2008, p. 460). Calvin Klein seems to follow unrealistic beauty standards spread by social media, portraying most of their models as flawless, fit, and seductive. Bodies of some of them are also being sexualized, for example models are being captured while undressing themselves. Sometimes it seems that the naked body is advertising the brand more than the product itself. In many of Calvin Klein's Instagram posts, female models are half-naked, for example, wearing only the bottom of the underwear and no bra, which is also a typical characteristic of lingerie advertising focusing on sensuality and seductiveness (Storr, 2002, p. 29).

Research has also shown that Calvin Klein appears to be one of the underwear brands trying to implement body positivity in their communication strategy trough showing models with body imperfections such as tummy rolls, wrinkles, transition scars, stretch marks, cellulite, vitiligo, hairy armpits or chest and receding hairline. Imperfections were related to all genders, for instance, stretch marks and cellulite were noticed among women, hairy chest

and receding hairline among men, and transition scars in the posts featuring representants of the third gender. An analysis of the subcategory of imperfections found in 19 posts proves that Calvin Klein is trying to implement a body-positive approach among different genders, promoting a more inclusive view of beauty and normalizing bodies that are marginalized by societal standards (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1547). Nevertheless, there is still a large difference between the number of posts depicting idealization (60) and imperfections (19), which leaves room for improvement for Calvin Klein in the future.

When it comes to the last subcategory, body-positive captions, there are many posts which descriptions include body-positive messages shared by the models featured in the pictures. The captions are about self-love, self-confidence, body appreciation, acceptance, and tolerance, which strengthen the images that they accompany. Some of them are also connected with body-positive campaigns conducted by the brand as #confidentinmycalvins, #proudinmycalvins, realities of new families, or world's greatest athletes campaign. Some captions mention also partnerships established by Calvin Klein, mostly with organizations that promote body positivity and inclusivity, like for instance: ILGA World, PFLAG, Transgender Law Center, or BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation. Therefore, it can be said that Calvin Klein's marketing initiatives targeting LGBTQ+ people seem to be in line with investment in the community itself (Johns et al., 2022, p. 1). This suggests that the brand is consistent and authentic in its communication strategy, which protects it from accusations of rainbowwashing (Blackmer, 2019, p. 171).

Taking all these results into account Calvin Klein seems to promote inclusivity and body positivity among men, women, and the third gender by featuring models of different ages, skin colours, body sizes, or with imperfections, and by sharing body-positive messages, campaigns, and partnerships in the captions of the posts. However, the number of idealized posts far outweighs the number of images showing imperfections. Although there are some examples of plus-size women, the majority of female bodies are portrayed as flawless and sexualized. The research suggests that men are underrepresented in terms of the body positivity movement, with the majority of them being portrayed as fit and muscular. This leads to the conclusion that Calvin Klein is still reinforcing some gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, when it comes to the third gender, Calvin Klein seems to be truly inclusive and body-positive, as not only does the brand showcase a wide range of different bodies, but it also runs supportive campaigns and establishes key partnerships. Overall, according to the

findings presented in the study, Calvin Klein is making an attempt to create body-positive content featuring women and third gender. However, there is still room for improvement in promoting equality and expanding brand's appeal to a broader and more diverse audience, especially regarding men, who are still underrepresented in the body positivity movement. Challenging societal perceptions of beauty among all genders should be a key part of the marketing communications strategy of the modern, open-minded underwear brand that wants to succeed in the fashion market.

5.2 Limitations and future research

Like any other research, this study had some limitations. While conducting this qualitative research, the role of the researcher was to examine reality, which is a matter of perspective (Silverman, 2011, p. 271). The Polish upbringing and Eastern European perspective of the researcher may have influenced the interpretation of the presented dataset, for instance in the case of imperfections category. The main limitation of this type of research is that everyone's interpretations are in some way culturally dependent, which influences the results of the study. In order to maintain credibility, the researcher strived to conduct research that was accurate and trustworthy, even though everyone's perception of the world is somewhat subjective (Silverman, 2011, p. 271). For example, when it comes to the category of gender, it was coded based on the images and captions of the posts, but in some confusing cases, the researcher's choice could be debatable. The same problem occurred while coding skin colour from black and white images. Therefore, in future research, in order to prevent this problem and maintain the objectivity of the coding process, it could be beneficial to involve multiple researchers, preferably from diverse backgrounds, to enhance intercoder agreement (Lombard et al., 2002, p. 588).

Another suggestion for future research would be to consider a larger sample size than 150 posts. Collecting more posts could provide a broader overview of Calvin Klein's Instagram content, which would also result more in-depth findings. Moreover, for the future, it would also be interesting to examine how Calvin Klein's body-positive content has changed over the years in relation to gender. This type of study would be very insightful as it would provide a broader perspective on the evolution of gender in the body positivity movement in one of the most influential underwear brands. Lastly, in order to obtain more precise and

generalizable results, future research can use quantitative methods, using a random sample instead of a purposive one, in order to make the research more objective.

Overall, since body positivity is becoming more and more popular among different fashion brands, this research has significant value for the lingerie industry (Tsawaab, 2023, p. 2773). This study contributes to previous research on body positivity, supports existing theories and suggests areas that could be explored in the future. This research confirms previous claims of researchers and critics that the integration of the body positivity trend into brand communication is key to the marketing success of modern fashion brands (Licsandru & Cui, 2018, p. 331). Carried out analysis of the Instagram content of one of the leading underwear brands can help other companies diversify their audience without the risk of accusations of rainbowwashing.

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Figures

Figure 1 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (28.05.2021). *Transgender woman*. [Photograph].

Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPbOht2DMof/>

Figure 2 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (08.05.2022). *Pregnant transgender man*.

[Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CdTEVzluOw1/?img_index=4

Figure 3 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (04.03.2021). *Seductive woman*. [Photograph].

Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMAAdP6ijBqm/>

Figure 4 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (02.06.2021). *Black plus-size woman*. [Photograph].

Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPnnDpejuUD/>

Figure 5 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (17.10.2020). *Native American woman*. [Photograph].

Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CGdYcNbjz98/?img_index=1

Figure 6 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (26.10.2023). *Brown plus-size woman*. [Photograph].

Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy3Ok6AORSA/?img_index=1

Figure 7 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (18.07.2021). *Plus-size man*. [Photograph]. Instagram.

https://www.instagram.com/p/CRFK0ujYrV/?img_index=1

Figure 8 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (04.01.2024). *Jeremy Allen White*. [Photograph].

Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/C1rjOR4uGg2/?img_index=1

Figure 9 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (27.06.2023). *Athletic woman*. [Photograph]. Instagram.

https://www.instagram.com/p/CuANS8CJH1X/?img_index=1

Figure 10 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (27.02.2023). *Muscular man*. [Photograph].

Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CpKq8SOOBaB/?img_index=1

Figure 11 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (24.07.2021). *Transgender man with covered*

transition scars. [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CRtjKByDO-P/?img_index=1

Figure 12 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (28.10.2021). *Woman with stretch marks*.

[Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVktACsJA2R/?img_index=1

Figure 13 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (14.02.2020). *Man with vitiligo*. [Photograph].

Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8huaoQJuJq/>

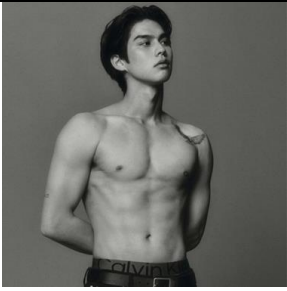
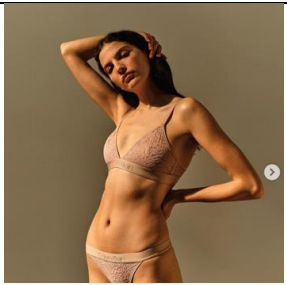

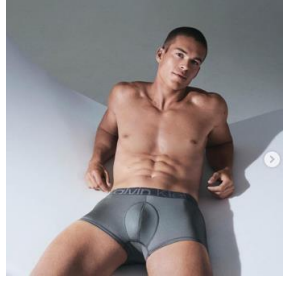

Figure 14 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (02.02.2020). *Plus-size woman in red underwear*.

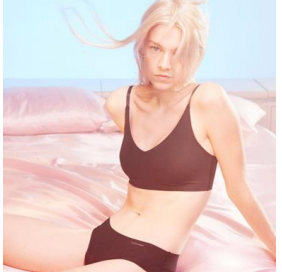


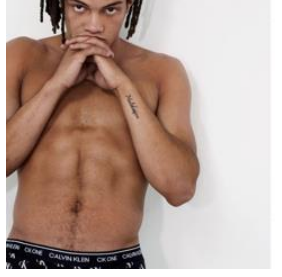


[Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/B8EdjXyp3b-/?img_index=1

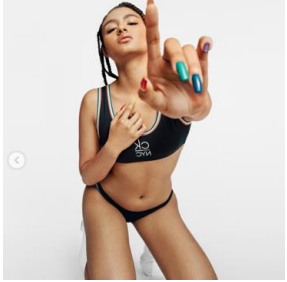
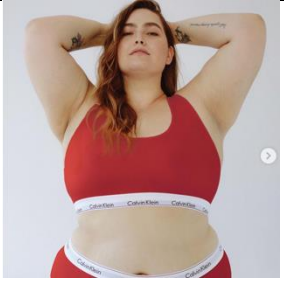




Figure 15 Calvin Klein [@calvinklein] (20.05.2022). *Transgender man with a partner*.

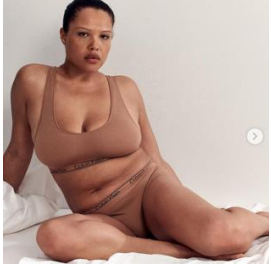

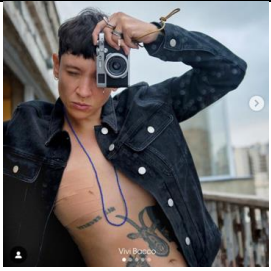

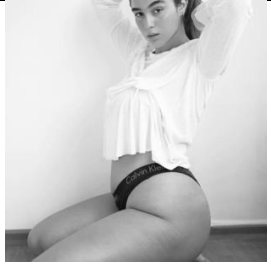

[Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CdyLIIUOfJ/?img_index=1

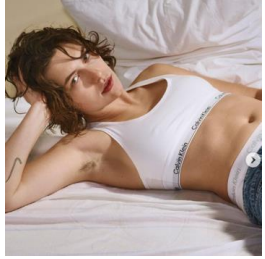

Appendix – Codebook

Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Descriptions	Examples
Codebook A – visual part				
Inclusivity	Gender	Man	Person identified as a male.	
		Woman	Person identified as a female.	
		Other	Person identified as other, for example transgender. (This code is based not only on the image, but also on the caption).	
	Age	Young	Person without signs of aging.	
		Older	Person with signs of aging.	

	Skin colour	Light	Person with a fair/pale skin.	
		Medium	Person with an intermediate colour of skin.	
		Tanned	Person with an olive colour of skin.	
		Brown	Person with a dark colour of skin.	
		Black	Person with a very dark colour of skin.	
Body image	Body size	Thin	Person with a skinny body.	

		Average	Person with a medium size body.	
		Plus-size	Person with a plus-size/thick body.	
		Muscular	Person with an athletic body.	
Idealization	Flawless look	Person whose body looks perfect.		
	Sexualization, seduction	Person whose body is seductive and sexualized.		
	Physical strength (veins, fists)	Person whose body is strong and powerful.		

Imperfections	Tummy rolls	Person with visible tummy rolls on their belly.	
	Wrinkles	Person with visible wrinkles on their face and body.	
	Transition scars	Person with visible transition scars on their chest.	
	Stretch marks	Person with visible stretch marks on their body.	
	Cellulite	Person with visible cellulite on their legs.	
	Vitiligo	Person with the skin disease characterized by the loss of pigment.	

		Hairy (armpits, chest)	Person whose body is covered with hair for example their armpits or chest.	
		Receding hairline	Person whose hairline is receding due to the hairloss or aging.	

Codebook B – textual part

Body-positive captions	Body-positive captions	Body-positive messages	Sharing a quoted text message written by a person featured in the picture that conveys the body-positive idea.	"It's trusting in yourself and your ideas without the need for validation from others...comparing yourself to others is a non-starter."
		Partnerships	Mentioning in the caption of the post partnerships that present the brand as inclusive and body-positive.	This year we're proud to continue our partnerships with @ilgaworld, @pflag, and @translawcenter in their efforts toward LGBTQIA+ advocacy, equity and safety.
		Campaigns	Mentioning in the caption of the post campaigns run by the brand that promote inclusivity and body positivity. Also supporting the LGBTQ+ community.	#proudinmycalvins "Just being Black, femme, plus-size is super important for me."