

Female Representation in Beauty Advertising on Instagram
A Thematic Analysis of the Croatian Beauty Brands

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ABSTRACT

Although the representation of women in advertising has been studied for more than five decades, it is still considered a significant topic of academic pursuit since gender roles are redefining, which is also reflected in the portrayal of women in advertising. Moreover, advertising as a form of visual communication produces meanings within culture and, at the same time, reflects and shapes social norms and beliefs. Advertising perpetuates female stereotypes by portraying them as subordinate and passive, mostly in traditional roles as mothers and wives, and decorative ones, as well as sexual objects and sexualized, emphasizing their physical appearance and sexuality over their skills and achievements. However, such stereotypical portrayals are increasingly being challenged, particularly in new media due to the femvertising. Furthermore, femvertising is an advertising strategy that represents women more authentically by highlighting their talents and capabilities, displaying female power and diverse representation of beauty, and thus empowering them. Given the importance of female representation in advertising, which has primarily been investigated in traditional media, there is a limited body of literature examining the portrayal of women in contemporary beauty advertising on Instagram in Croatia. By narrowing the focus to the specific socio-cultural context of Croatia, this study aims to provide significant insights into how local cultural norms and values are reflected in female representation in Instagram beauty advertising. A qualitative approach was employed, and a thematic analysis was conducted. A meticulous analysis of 150 Instagram posts from official accounts of Croatian beauty brands La PIEL, Skintegra, and Immortella has resulted in three main themes. That is, 'Female submissiveness', 'Empowering women', and 'Promoting body positivity'. The findings revealed that Croatian beauty brands stereotype women by portraying female submissiveness, sexual objectification, sexualization, and promotion of beauty ideals. Simultaneously, they empower women through pro-woman messaging, portrayals of women in non-traditional roles and their power, and promotion of body positivity. Due to the fact that this research demonstrates the coexistence of female stereotypes and empowerment within female representation, future research could investigate that duality's effects on customer perceptions and behavior.

KEYWORDS: *Gender stereotypes, female representation, Instagram, femvertising, female empowerment*

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PREFACE

First of all, I would like to thank my Master's thesis supervisor, Dr. Débora Antunes, for her valuable feedback, suggestions, and support during the entire process of writing this research. Likewise, I am profoundly grateful to my parents for providing me with this priceless opportunity of living and studying in Rotterdam, and together with my sisters, for their endless support throughout every stage of this Master's study.

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1. Introduction

The depictions of gender in advertising, especially females, have been intensively studied for more than five decades, and it is still considered a relevant subject (Grau & Zotos, 2016, pp. 761-770; Middleton et al., 2020, pp. 679-698). The main reason for this is that the roles of men and women are significantly altering as a result of changes in the family and business structures, which also affects how they are portrayed in the media and advertising (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 762; Middleton et al., 2020, p. 680). According to the mirror perspective, advertising reflects prevalent values in society due to the numerous interconnected socioeconomic and political aspects that impact society's value system (Zotos & Tschla, 2014, p. 447). On the other hand, the mold perspective suggests that advertising shapes an individual's perceptions of social reality in a way that people embed stereotypes presented in advertisements into their values and belief systems (Zotos & Tschla, 2014, p. 447). However, the mirror and the mold perspectives are considered a continuum because advertising as a visual communication system generates meanings within the culture and thus both reflects and constructs it (Zotos & Tschla, 2014, p. 448). Therefore, it is significant to investigate the female representation in advertising as it reflects and signifies the anticipated societal roles for women (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1181).

By taking up the research problem, this thesis examines the portrayal of women in contemporary advertising by Croatian beauty brands. Specifically, while there has been some research on beauty advertising on Instagram (Shalaby & Alkaff, 2019, pp. 58-67), there has been limited discourse on the portrayal of women in Instagram beauty advertisements in Croatia (Labaš & Maljković, 2013, p. 301). Additionally, Instagram is chosen for this research as it is considered an influential platform for raising awareness and building online communities, as well as motivating its users to critically examine female representation there (Kasana, 2014, p. 248).

Furthermore, previous research has shown that women in advertisements are portrayed mainly in demure and traditional roles such as being oriented towards family, decorative roles that emphasize their beauty or body and thus disregard their talents and capabilities, and as being inferior and passive (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 761; Timke & O'Barr, 2017, p. 10). When it comes to advertising in the beauty industry, which is the focus of this study, it is frequently criticized for equating female power with both beauty and sexuality. In such a way, it has the potential to undermine messages about the equality of the sexes (Timke & O'Barr, 2017, p. 66). Moreover, beauty advertisements often promote unattainable standards of beauty, reinforce gender stereotypes, and sexually objectify women in order to sell their products (Laham, 2020, p. 3).

However, nowadays, the stereotypical female portrayal is increasingly being revised due to the trend of femvertising, which appears in new media and leads to their more modern and positive

representation (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 444). What is more, femvertising is recognized as an effective marketing and advertising strategy which focuses on female potential and abilities and aims to communicate pro-woman messages and imagery which upholds their rights and empowers them, thereby countering their stereotypical portrayals (Åkestam et al., 2017, pp. 795-796; Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 441). To put it more specific, femvertising attempts to combat stereotypical portrayals of women through their depictions in non-traditional roles, as well as by portraying their power, and by promoting body positivity, encompassing various physical appearances, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and female identities (Cohen et al., 2019, pp. 47-57; Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, pp. 1181-1208; Lazar, 2006, pp. 505-517; Varghese & Kumar, 2022, pp. 441-459; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014, pp. 446-454).

1.1 Research questions

Accordingly, the main research question guiding this study is: **How do Croatian beauty brands portray women in their Instagram advertisements?** The main research question is supported by the following two sub-questions that have been inspired by the theory:

1. How do Croatian beauty brands construct female stereotypes in their Instagram advertisements?
2. How do Croatian beauty brands portray female empowerment in their Instagram advertisements?

The first sub-question addresses the ways in which Croatian beauty brands create and perpetuate stereotypical portrayals of women in their Instagram advertisements in order to understand the broader societal norms and values, as well as expectations placed on women in Croatia. This sub-question is covered by following the concepts of female submissiveness and by exploring the depictions of women in traditional and decorative roles, their sexual objectification and sexualization, as well as the promotion of unattainable standards of beauty (Frith et al., 2005, pp. 56-70; Goffman, 1979, pp. 24-84; Kang, 1997, pp. 979-996; Middleton et al., 2020, pp. 679-698). The second sub-question examines the manners in which women are empowered and female stereotypes are challenged what is accomplished within dissemination of pro-woman messages, representation of women in non-traditional roles, the display of their power, and the promotion of body positivity and their physical appearances that diverge from mainstream beauty norms. Namely, this sub-question is approached by utilizing the theories on femvertising, female power portrayals, and body positivity (Cohen et al., 2019, pp. 47-57; Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, pp. 1181-1208; Lazar, 2006, pp. 505-517; Varghese & Kumar, 2022, pp. 441-459). Answers to these questions enable valuable insights into the ways beauty brands respond to shifts toward gender

equality and more authentic female representation. The theories mentioned above are used within the context of beauty advertising, its trends, and the socio-cultural context of Croatia in order to provide answers to the main research question and sub-questions (Ban, 2013, pp. 381-403; Labaš & Maljković, 2013, pp. 300-357; Lazar, 2011, pp. 37-51; Spyropoulou et al., 2020, pp. 1871–1878).

This research employs a qualitative method, respectively thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 78-79), to identify, analyze, and understand the themes, patterns, and meanings related to the portrayal of women in Croatian Instagram beauty advertisements which consist of both textual content and photos. The data from three Croatian beauty brands, La PIEL, Skintegra, and Immortella, is obtained using a purposive sampling strategy. The data set, comprising 150 Instagram posts, is meticulously examined following the sensitizing concepts related to female stereotypes and empowerment. Thus, the findings' reliability is ensured.

1.2 Academic and social relevance

While previous research has explored various facets of female depiction in print advertising (Ban, 2013, pp. 381-403; Zotos & Tschla, 2014, pp. 446-454), television advertising (Englis et al., 1994, pp. 49-64), online advertising (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008, pp. 101-112) and Instagram advertising (Shalaby & Alkaff, 2019, pp. 58-67), a limited body of literature investigates contemporary female representations in Instagram beauty advertising within the context of Croatia. By narrowing the focus to the beauty industry's Instagram advertising and the particular socio-cultural dynamics of Croatia, this study is academically relevant as it aims to contribute valuable insights into a relatively unexplored area of investigation. Moreover, focus solely on Croatia within this intracultural approach enables an in-depth exploration of how local cultural norms and values are reflected in female representation on Instagram. That contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between culture and online beauty advertising. Therefore, this thesis significantly contributes to the fields of cultural studies, gender representation and visual culture, advertising strategies, and social media and beauty industry management.

This research is also socially relevant, given that advertising reflects and shapes society. Namely, the manners in which women are represented in Croatian beauty advertisements on Instagram will provide an understanding of the dominant social norms and beliefs, as previously explained. Also, it is important to mention that female representation in beauty advertising may shape societal attitudes and impact individuals' behaviors and perceptions of themselves and others. Furthermore, stereotypical portrayal of women across beauty advertisements may affect the mental health and self-perception of women (Eisend, 2010, p. 419). Likewise, it may contribute to gender inequality by limiting women's roles and potential. On the other hand, implementing

femvertising leads to more positive and diverse depictions of women and their beauty. What is more, it challenges gender stereotypes and empowers women, ultimately advancing gender equality and women's rights. Additionally, examining the construction of stereotypes and the portrayal of female empowerment is important because advertising can "both serve significant marketing functions and mold societal attitudes internationally" (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008, p. 102). That is to say, this study assists beauty brands in providing ways to improve their advertising strategies by viewing female representation that undermines gender stereotypes and empowers women while also being profitable since femvertising is recognized as a practical and innovative marketing approach (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 441).

2. Theoretical framework

This section elaborates on crucial concepts and theories for this research: beauty advertising, female stereotypes, female empowerment, and the cultural context of Croatia. Firstly, an insight into the beauty industry and its advertising practices is provided. It is accompanied by feminist criticism and a discussion of how globalization modifies contemporary beauty ideals. Secondly, the concept of stereotypes and the construction of female stereotypes in advertising are explained. Thirdly, the notions of female empowerment and ways of challenging gender stereotypes are discussed. Finally, the cultural context of Croatia and the media's representation of women within that context are touched upon. The chapter concludes with a concise summary.

2.1 Advertising in the beauty industry

This study aims to provide insights into how the Croatian beauty industry on Instagram portrays women and establishes female stereotypes and notions of female empowerment. According to that, it is essential to provide context on the beauty industry and its advertising techniques, the criticism it receives, the impact of globalization, and the construction of beauty standards. The beauty industry includes perfumes, makeup, skincare, and personal care products (Hemby & Forney, 2020, p. 3). It encompasses the products aimed at maintaining the cleanliness and attractiveness of human bodies (G. Jones, 2008, p. 125). As a result of enhancing consumer's attractiveness, beauty products have a great potential to influence their lifestyles and perceptions of themselves and others. Notably, this influence includes the ability to attract sexual partners as well as the potential for success in career and finances (G. Jones, 2008, p. 125). Despite some progress in portraying women in media and advertising, beauty advertisements still heavily influence and represent societal perceptions of femininity, mainly by promoting unrealistic beauty standards through visual and textual components (Kaur et al., 2013, p. 62; Lazar, 2011, p. 49).

Feminists associated with the second wave of feminism criticize conventional beauty practices and the commercialized beauty industry, viewing them as tools for female oppression by men who lead beauty corporations (G. Jones, 2010, p. 2; Lazar, 2011, p. 37). The criticism centers around the idea that beauty advertising imposes a physical and mental burden on women who try hard to pursue perfection in their appearance, which is also supported by the already-mentioned fact that being beautiful and attractive are accepted and expected of women just by being women (Kaur et al., 2013, p. 62; Lazar, 2011, p. 37). In addition, some scholars claim that beauty advertising tends to manipulate women into believing that conforming to the standards of beauty is essential for gaining social acceptance (Kaur et al., 2013, p. 62; Rohmah & Suhardi, 2020, p. 464). Respectively, it creates an illusion of belonging for females, making them believe purchasing a specific beauty product is a prerequisite for inclusion within a certain social group (Rohmah &

Suhardi, 2020, p. 467). Consequently, females may develop unhealthy body image preoccupations and engage in potentially dangerous cosmetic treatments (Lazar, 2011, p. 37).

Advertising in the beauty industry also faces criticism for not only equating female power with beauty but also with sexuality, which has the potential to undermine messages about the equality of the sexes (Timke & O'Barr, 2017, p. 66). It is considered that beauty brands empower women in their advertisements merely to increase their profits by persuading women that they may succeed by buying beauty goods or by reenacting the messages about feminine beauty that are incorporated in advertisements (Timke & O'Barr, 2017, p. 66). That is to say, "advertisers arouse feelings of dissatisfaction among consumers themselves as a strategy to stimulate consumers to buy their products to improve their appearance and ultimately be satisfied" (Rohmah & Suhardi, 2020, p. 467). According to Timke and O'Barr (2017), the liberation of women derives from their capacity to consume instead of their intellect or professional success (p. 66). The utilization of celebrities in advertisements is considered another beauty industry's manipulative technique, gaining power over female consumers by associating beauty and attractiveness with power and success (Anderson, 2019, p. 86; Rohmah & Suhardi, 2020, p. 458). Namely, these beauty advertisements suggest a subtle relationship between using specific beauty products and achieving similar levels of success as the endorsed celebrities (Rohmah & Suhardi, 2020, p. 467).

Nonetheless, perspectives from the third wave of feminism and postfeminism suggest that advertised beauty practices can be empowering, satisfying, and self-chosen expressions of femininity (Lazar, 2011, p. 37). Lazar (2011) argues that women have the right to be beautiful, as beauty practices can reflect women's freedom and independence and empower them with autonomous choices (pp. 38-39). In other words, beauty advertisements clearly promote make-up choices in their ad copies and thus encourage women to exercise their choices (Lazar, 2011, p. 44). In essence, the emancipated new femininity is evident within beauty advertisements in the form of promises for releases from women's self-restrictions, such as perceived skin and body flaws and the effects of stress, which enable them to live their lives to the fullest. Also, emancipated femininity is constructed as consciousness involving personal growth and self-assurance (Gill, 2008, p. 43; Lazar, 2011, p. 42). In this manner, beauty advertising implies that emancipation lies in the hands of women (Lazar, 2011, p. 42). According to McCabe et al. (2020), women incorporate beauty advertising discourses to meet their needs, such as make-up applications to enhance their confidence and prepare themselves internally and externally for various social interactions (p. 660). Moreover, the purpose of beauty rituals is "connecting internal and external self, inner, and outer beauty, in heightened moments of self-awareness that lead to feeling confident" (McCabe et al.,

2020, p. 660). Despite the positive aspects of those beauty advertisements that empower women, they also impose an inherent pressure to consume (Lazar, 2011, p. 44).

It is essential to highlight that the globalization of American cinema has enhanced the dissemination of American hygiene and beauty standards to both Western countries and developing ones with diverse cultures (G. Jones, 2008, p. 133). This diffusion is further reinforced by beauty brands' marketing and advertising strategies, which frequently feature Hollywood stars and 'blonde and blue-eyed' models. As a result, these depictions may overshadow local female beauty discourses, perpetuating Western or American beauty ideals (G. Jones, 2008, p. 144). That is to say, creative strategies in beauty advertising have become increasingly similar across countries due to globalization and increased cultural interactions (Frith et al., 2005, p. 67). Notably, the study by Spyropoulou et al. (2020) discovered the next universally recognized female beauty standards: symmetry, prominent cheekbones, small noses, voluminous hair, flawless skin, and bright white teeth (p. 1871).

However, Frith et al. (2005) argue that the concept of beauty varies across cultures and evolves with time (p. 56). For instance, in Western beauty advertisements, a woman's body is often regarded as an indicator of her beauty, while Asian advertisements construct beauty in terms of a beautiful face. Furthermore, the advertisements in the United States are excessively centered on 'whiteness' and predominantly depict sexual objectification of white women, which is also the trend across cultures (Frith et al., 2005, pp. 65–66). This idealization of fair skin in beauty advertisements contradicts the notion of tanned beauty often associated with attractiveness (Mishod et al., 2022, pp. 31–32). In contrast, the research by Shalaby and Alkaff (2019) found a high level of diversity in the beauty advertising on Instagram, particularly in the displays of women from various cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and skin tones (p. 65).

In particular, cultural representations of beauty are shaped by stereotypes maintained by media gatekeepers. To put it differently, fashion and beauty editors make aesthetic decisions about specific appearances and choices of individuals, thus constructing beauty norms in advertising and editorials (Englis et al., 1994, p. 51). Additionally, it is imperative to recognize that in today's digital landscape, beauty standards are conditioned by artificial intelligence and social media algorithms (Babić, 2021, para. 2). Hence, although cultural representations of beauty may differ, including those prevalent in Croatia, the influence of globalized media and digital technology consistently shapes and modifies global beauty standards.

Although digital media, including social media, is regarded as a medium that fosters equality when it comes to the content creation and its portrayals, images illustrating female stereotypes and disempowerment still dominate there (Mishod et al., 2022, p. 29; Shalaby & Alkaff,

2019, p. 58). That can be ascribed to the idea that advertising is a type of media that exhibits significant resistance to change, with advertisers often reluctant to adopt new, modern strategies despite the proof of their profitability (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 75). Online beauty advertising promotes the idea that beauty is a prerequisite for a fulfilling life, including career success. It also reinforces the misconception that women must continuously improve and conceal their flaws, and encourage them to see their faces as masks and bodies as objects (Mishod et al., 2022, pp. 29-30).

Based on the previous research discussed above on beauty advertising practices and their role in constructing beauty ideals, this approach contributes to understanding the context of female representation in the Croatian beauty industry, specifically regarding its construction of female stereotypes and empowerment.

2.2 Female stereotypes

In order to understand how Croatian beauty brands construct and reinforce female stereotypes in their Instagram advertising, it is crucial to define stereotypes and touch upon the prior stereotypical advertising female representation, the notions of female submissiveness, and aspects of sexual objectification and sexualization. According to Hilton and von Hippel (1996), stereotypes present “beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups” (p. 240). Furthermore, gender stereotypes tender oversimplified views about the collective, respectively men and women, by overstating the alleged implications of classifying individuals solely upon their gender (Ellemers, 2018, p. 278). Aside from describing regular distinctions between men and women, gender stereotypes reflect societal expectations about men and women (Ellemers, 2018, p. 276). It is emphasized that gender stereotypes significantly affect the way people perceive and assess women (Ellemers, 2018, p. 280). It is, therefore, relevant to mention the four main components of gender stereotypes: traits, physical appearances, roles, and occupations (Deaux & Lewis, 1984, p. 992). This indicates that when it comes to traits, females are considered more emotional but less intelligent and aggressive than males. In terms of physical appearance, women should be pretty, youthful, thin, soft, and feminine, while men are not expected to demonstrate these characteristics (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009, p. 811). Additionally, different role behaviors and occupations are stereotypically expected from females and males. Accordingly, women should engage in nurturing roles and occupy lower-status jobs such as secretaries, caregiving-related jobs, and those devoid of physical work (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009, p. 811). Each component, as mentioned above, may negatively affect women. That is to say, stereotyping of physical characteristics, such as promoting beauty ideals, leads to body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, while stereotyping of role behaviors and occupational roles can restrict women’s career advancement and self-development (Eisend, 2010, p. 419).

Notably, contemporary advertising still utilizes and reinforces gender stereotypes, which contributes to gender inequality in society (Eisend, 2019, p. 73). Gender depictions in Western media and advertising are not related to biology or naturally occurring female or male physique but, as Erving Goffman (1979) revealed, to cultural ideas of femininity and masculinity (p. 3). Moreover, Goffman (1979) identified six concepts of female submissiveness: ritualization of subordination, relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, the family, and licensed withdrawal (pp. 24-84).

To begin with, *the ritualization of subordination* implies that females are depicted in inferior positions and poses, performing submissive and helplessly by usually sitting or lying on the ground, on the bed, or the sofa, which is commonly associated with eroticism and sexual availability (Goffman, 1979, p. 41). Furthermore, females are depicted while standing with one leg bent ('bashful knee-bend') or off the ground and crossing their legs, which makes them look as being ungrounded and vulnerable, as well as unprepared to respond to the current situation (Goffman, 1979, p. 45). Additionally, women are frequently portrayed while leaning against objects or men seeking their protection and while tilting their heads or bodies to one side (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 205; Goffman, 1979, p. 46). The aforementioned postures can be understood as an "acceptance of subordination, an expression of ingratiation, submissiveness, and appeasement" (Kang, 1997, p. 985). The second concept is *relative size*, meaning that men are represented as taller and bigger than women, suggesting their superiority and higher social status (Goffman, 1979, p. 28). Besides, women's touching of things or themselves in a gentle and caressing manner represents *feminine touch*. It is essential to differentiate this ritualistic self-touching, emphasizing that a woman's body is precious from the utilitarian, including gripping, manipulating, or holding (Goffman, 1979, pp. 29-31). Based on this concept, females are considered soft and delicate but also sexually accessible when touching their crotch, breasts, neck, and mouth (Goffman, 1979, pp. 29-31). *Function ranking* suggests that the man is the action's driver whose supportive but passive counterpart is a woman (Goffman, 1979, p. 32). In addition, the concept of *the family* indicates the portrayal of women with daughters and men with sons, whereas, within *licensed withdrawal*, women are physically or emotionally distanced from the current social situation by looking into the distance, withdrawing behind objects, being self-absorbed and by covering their faces with hands in order to hide an emotional response (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 205; Kang, 1997, p. 993). Accordingly, females are again considered vulnerable, gentle, fragile, and thus dependent on others (Goffman, 1979, p. 57). In order to investigate the overall representation of women in advertisements, Kang (1997) expanded Goffman's concepts by introducing *body display* as a new category (p. 985). In brief, *body display* refers to the body-revealing clothes and nudity. Indicators of body-revealing apparel are

mini and tight skirts, short shorts, low-cut and halter gowns, translucent clothes, and swimsuits. Whereas nudity encompasses females portrayed without clothes, wearing only towels or sheer garments and underwear, as well as close-up shots where the women's shoulders are bare (Kang, 1997, p. 985). Therefore, female models depicted in Instagram advertisements are tested on these concepts to discover and understand whether Croatian beauty brands represent women as submissive and thus construct female stereotypes.

According to the aspects of female submissiveness mentioned above, it is expected that a male's gaze would be intentionally focused toward another participant from the advertisement or the spectator in nowadays advertising. Conversely, within the framework of 'feminine touch', 'function ranking', and 'licensed withdrawal', the feminine gaze is more inclined to gaze off the viewer or 'non-transitively' within the image frame (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 209). Research has shown that when participants gaze directly at the viewer, a sense of connection is created between them on both a formal and imaginative level (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 122-3). Consequently, such images are considered as making 'demands' from the viewers. Besides, it is essential to take into account other means, such as the facial expressions of the individuals portrayed, when interpreting meaning. For instance, a spectator may feel inclined to establish an interpersonal connection with the participant who smiles, relate to participants who gaze with cold disdain or even feel attracted to the ones who are seductively pouting (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 122-3). However, participants looking away from the onlookers are considered to make 'offers'. Furthermore, in this regard, the participants are offered items containing information and objects for observation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 124). Significantly, the scholars coined the term 'half gaze' to describe a new trend seen in portrayals of females looking directly at the camera with one eye, suggesting a subtle challenge to conventional beauty norms within social media posts (Shalaby & Alkaff, 2019, pp. 61-65). Such portrayals fall between expressions of confidence and anxiety (Shalaby & Alkaff, 2019, p. 65).

Although Goffman's study was published over 40 years ago, it continues to be an applicable and relevant framework for scholars investigating gender depictions (Bell & Milic, 2002, pp. 203-222; Kang, 1997, pp. 979-996; Timke & O'Barr, 2017, pp. 1-119). Timke and O'Barr (2017) demonstrated the significance of Goffman's theory with their research, which revealed that female stereotypical portrayals are still present in contemporary magazine advertisements (p. 18). In essence, women were mainly represented as objects of male sexual desire and as passive and submissive participants dependent on men, while males were depicted as strong and powerful (Timke & O'Barr, 2017, pp. 10-11). Also, the prior study has shown that women are stereotypically represented in global online advertising, respectively female traditional and decorative roles,

emphasizing that inaccessible beauty standards are prevalent in websites intended for female, male, and mixed audiences (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008, p. 101). To be more specific, in *traditional* roles, women are housewives and reliant on men, while in *decorative* roles, females are represented as sexual objects focused on beauty and attractiveness (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008, p. 103; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014, p. 451). In this light, sexism relating to female representation in a manner that is inferior to their skills and potential is often established through the traditional and decorative roles in advertisements that foster inequality between genders (Zotos & Tsihla, 2014, p. 448). That is to say, advertising perpetuates sexism in order to sustain patriarchy (Glick & Fiske, 1997, p. 121). Drawing on this, female stereotypes that are reflected in photos, videos, and captions of Croatian beauty brands' Instagram posts are investigated to understand the influence of prevailing cultural norms, beliefs, and social expectations.

Middleton et al. (2020) identified six key stereotypes used in female role depictions in advertising: *housewife*, *trophy*, *object of beauty*, *professional*, *sexual object*, and *sexually powerful* (p. 685). To begin with, *the housewife* stereotype relates to women performing domestic responsibilities such as cleaning, cooking, and looking after children, whereas *a trophy* represents an appealing woman perceived as a symbol of a man's status and achievement (Middleton et al., 2020, pp. 685–686). An *object of beauty* refers to a slim physique and youthful and appealing facial characteristics of women (Middleton et al., 2020, p. 689). Also, *professionals* relate to the roles that were male-dominated in the past but are now performed by women as a result of societal shifts. However, when portrayed in a professional environment, they usually appear in conventionally feminine lower-status jobs like sales and service positions rather than in leadership, decision-making, or entrepreneurship roles (Middleton et al., 2020, p. 689; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014, p. 450). Additionally, in such cases, their confidence is usually negated by their exaggerated femininity displayed through heavy makeup, stylish attire, haircuts, and painted nails (Timke & O'Barr, 2017, p. 13). Thus, women are often seen as lacking intelligence, authority, influence, or recognition as competent experts (Middleton et al., 2020, p. 689).

Female representation as *sexual objects* implies emphasizing their bodies or body parts and portraying them through sex, eroticism, and nudity (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 174; Vargas-Bianchi & Mensa, 2020, p. 79). Furthermore, female sexual objectification is illustrated through sexually suggestive and revealing poses, accompanied by the narrative related to sex to generate men's pleasure (Middleton et al., 2020, p. 687). In brief, sexual objectification is present when a female's body or its parts are merely valued for its use and consumption by others, as well as removed from her person and considered as tools (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, pp. 174-175). According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), sexualized evaluation occurs through gaze, and it is

considered as the potential for sexual objectification (p. 175). Namely, most men sexually objectify women by their gaze, which occurs both in real life, where it is seen that women receive a greater amount of gaze than men, and in visual media and ad campaigns, where men are frequently seen gazing straight at their female counterparts. Such an objectifying gaze is beyond the control of women, and it is even shared among the consumers of media and advertising, which feature sexualized images of women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 175). It is important to mention that sexual objectification may lead to eating disorders, body shame, anxiety, depression, and sexual dissatisfaction among women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 173).

However, the *sexually powerful* stereotype relates to powerful and sexually dynamic women who embrace their sexuality, which is not the case with passive and unintelligent sexual objects. This stereotype is commonly associated with cosmetic products that target female consumers and aim to enhance their attractiveness (Middleton et al., 2020, p. 688). In this context, women reward themselves for their own attractiveness rather than being objectified as *trophies* and *sexual objects* (Middleton et al., 2020, p. 688). Also, sexualization represents an individual's awareness of their sexuality or a representation that signals their willingness to engage in sexual activities (Fasoli et al., 2018, p. 339). Likewise, Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009) argued that sexualization refers to the extent to which the female body is exposed and idealized, distinguishing it from objectification (p. 809). Additionally, sexualization can be observed through the level of nudity, seductive facial expression, sensual and provocative poses, touching oneself in an intimate manner, and sexual interaction between models (Fasoli et al., 2018, p. 347; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003, p. 124). Notably, merely showing a nude or semi-nude body does not inherently result in sexualization or sexual objectification. However, when the above-mentioned sexualized elements accompany nudity, it transmits a sexual meaning (Fasoli et al., 2018, p. 347; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003, p. 124).

Drawing on the past research and academic insights presented above, the concepts of female submissiveness and stereotypes related to women's roles, as well as aspects of sexual objectification and sexualization, can serve as a relevant basis for investigating and understanding the construction of female stereotypes within Croatian beauty brands' advertisements on Instagram. This foundation will assist in answering the main research question and first sub-question.

2.3 Femvertising

Advertising has been mirroring socio-cultural values instead of influencing them over the years, which means that the depictions of women in advertisements have adapted to societal

changes (Åkestam et al., 2017, p. 796; Eisend, 2010, p. 418). Particularly, the feminist movement's growth in the 1960s led to a redefinition of gender roles in society, advocating equality between men and women and driving changes in both household and occupational settings. Additionally, the growing number of women obtaining higher education, entering the labor force, and aspiring for executive roles primarily held by men resulted in dramatic changes, such as financial independence and enhanced social position (Zotos & Tsihla, 2014, p. 446). Accordingly, the prior literature on female stereotypical portrayals in advertisements has noted a change in emphasis toward empowered women (Kordrostami & Lacznik, 2022, p. 1182). Therefore, in the context of this thesis, it is important to scrutinize the female representation in Croatian beauty advertising to ascertain whether there has been a shift from traditional female stereotypical depictions to their empowerment and how it constitutes as a result of changes in society.

Nowadays brands across industries increasingly implement femvertising into their business contributing to the more positive female representation in advertising. The main reason for this is increasing activism for the improvement of women's representation in advertising, growing acceptance of brand activism, critiques of commodity feminism, greater awareness of female stereotypes, as well as regulatory scrutiny of gender role portrayals in advertising (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 444). Namely, femvertising combines advertising and feminism and is widely recognized as "female empowerment advertising" (Åkestam et al., 2017, p. 795). It is a style of advertising that mostly appears in new media, focuses on the talents and skills of women, and disseminates imagery and messages intended to empower them (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 441). Moreover, it is "advertising that challenges traditional female advertising stereotypes" (Åkestam et al., 2017, p. 796). As a result of meeting consumer expectations for women's empowerment and more realistic portrayals, it is regarded as an effective marketing strategy (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, pp. 441-442). Furthermore, femvertising's marketing relevance is evident in its ability to enhance ad and brand attitudes, as well as purchase intentions (Åkestam et al., 2017, p. 802; Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 443). Also, female depictions that counter stereotypes alleviate the pressure imposed on women by traditional advertising (Åkestam et al., 2017, p. 797). From this view, implementation of femvertising in Instagram advertising strategy by Croatian beauty brands can be considered as an opportunity not only for promotion and profit, but also to challenge traditional female stereotypes and common beauty standards.

2.3.1 Challenging traditional female advertising stereotypes

Femvertising attempts to combat stereotypical portrayals of women through their depictions in non-traditional and neutral roles, as well as their portrayals of power, and by

emphasizing diversity and inclusion. By paying attention to these means of femvertising, investigating depictions of women in contemporary beauty advertisements on Instagram in Croatia is significant to comprehensively understand their construction of female empowerment. Namely, research identified empowered female role categories in modern advertising, respectively *non-traditional* roles where females perform activities outside the home such as sports and masculine activities, have professional careers and authoritative positions, and *neutral* roles, meaning that women are depicted as equal to men (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008, p. 103; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014, p. 451). In addition, Lazar (2006) investigated the feminine power portrayals in beauty advertising with a specific emphasis on post-feminist displays (pp. 505-506). Although some may argue that these advertisements represent objectification, their purpose is to depict women embracing their own beauty and sexual autonomy (Lazar, 2006, pp. 505-506). This aligns with the ideology of post-feminism, which fosters the notion that women's equality has been achieved and that nowadays, women can 'have it all' while at the same time praising femininity and the beauty routines (Lazar, 2006, p. 505).

According to Lazar (2006), there are four categories of feminine power: empowered, agentive power, expert or knowledge power, and sexual power (pp. 506-513). However, Kordrostami and Laczniak (2022) pointed out athletic or physical power and family power as two additional categories (pp. 1199-1200). To begin with, empowerment and power are distinct concepts. Power, known as 'power over', involves controlling resources to influence other individuals, and it encompasses expert or knowledge and sexual and family power. On the other hand, empowerment, referred to as 'power to', signifies the ability to change oneself, and it includes the empowered category, as well as agentive and athletic or physical power (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1186). Similarly, Kordrostami and Laczniak (2022) stated that empowerment relates to females engaging in actions aimed at improving themselves and controlling their actions, thoughts, and emotions (p. 1186). Besides, it corresponds to women's perception of themselves and their capabilities as having the power to be confident and comfortable with their identity as women (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1201). In short, the *empowered* advertisements category involves promoting products that help to enhance the beauty of female consumers, hence increasing their power (Lazar, 2006, p. 506). When it comes to the concept of *agentive power* it encompasses advertisements that indicate that females have authority over the choices and decisions they make (Lazar, 2006, p. 510).

In the context of women portrayed in advertising, *expert* or *knowledge* power is associated with their education and expertise, which act as sources of power (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1199; Lazar, 2006, pp. 508-509). As explained in the previous chapter, *sexual power* implies that

women possess the capacity to influence others due to their attractiveness (Lazar, 2006, p. 512). Furthermore, the portrayed female “might have power over men since she is sexually attractive, but also she may have power over women since they might want to look like her and they may like to follow her” (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1200). Significantly, as opposed to the depictions of women in the past, where they were passive and non-active, modern advertising trends increasingly present women as professional athletes and promote their *athletic* or *physical* power (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1185). This type of power depicts women as sporty, active in outdoor sports, fit, and having command over their bodies (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1200). Regarding *family power*, women might attain power by embodying the role of mother figures, being reliable and caring, and raising future generations (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1199).

In addition, the promotion of diversity and inclusion emerges with the third and fourth waves of feminism, and it provides a means to challenge stereotypical depictions of both women and men and contributes to a more authentic representation of individuals (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 446). Notably, diversity and inclusion manifest across multiple dimensions, including body positivity and the challenging of beauty norms, considerations of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, the LGBTQ community, and diverse female identities (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 446). An example of this approach is Dove’s 2006 advertisement campaign, which promotes positive body images for women and discloses the truth about the media and various beauty conceptions (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1183). This campaign aligns with the broader 'body positivity' or 'body positive movement', a prominent movement that opposes rigid and unattainable body standards in favor of more inclusive and positive ones (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 48). It fosters acceptance as well as the admiration of “bodies of any shape, size, or appearance; including rolls, dimples, cellulite, acne, hairy bodies, bleeding bodies, fat bodies, thin bodies, and (dis)abled bodies” (Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 38). In this regard, usually underrepresented bodies in traditional and social media are normalized and made more visible (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 48).

2.3.2 *Commodity feminism*

Femvertising is often criticized as being commodity feminism or corporate feminism strategy, meaning that it exploits feminist topics in advertising solely for profit and marketing purposes (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 442). Accordingly, female power is commercialized, commodified, and reduced merely to a tool for purchasing goods (Fineman, 2014, para. 5). It is pointed out that customers feel empowered when engaged with brands that incorporate femvertising, leading them to utilize their purchasing power as an impactful activism act (Marcus Reker, 2016, pp. 5-6). Brands, particularly beauty products, are criticized for gaining profits on

femvertising without genuinely supporting the cause. For instance, Pantene's 'Labels Against Women' advertisement raises concerns about how promoting shinier hair may combat the negative stereotypes presented in the advertisement. To put it more specific, the message appears contradictory to the product being advertised (Bahadur, 2014, para. 16). Such false support lacking real intent for social change is referred to as 'faux-feminism' (Martell, 2019, section "High-risk", para. 2). It devalues the notion of women's equality, posing a threat both to the companies endorsing such messages and to the feminist movement broadly (Fineman, 2014, para. 5). That is to say, it creates the false impression that gender equality has been reached and thus hinders actual progress. Taking this perspective into account, there is a significant risk that the women's rights movement may not be acknowledged as a vehicle for accomplishing real equality but rather be reduced to a mere tagline or hashtag (Martell, 2019, section "High-risk", para. 1). Overall, it is pointed out the need to distinguish between faux feminism and genuine corporate female empowerment, which encourages women to enhance themselves and their families, resulting in beneficial shifts in attitudes towards females (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 452).

On the whole, based on the femvertising literature discussed above, the Instagram content of Croatian beauty brands will be examined to determine whether it challenges gender stereotypes by representing women in non-traditional roles, displays of power, and appearances that deviate from conventional beauty ideals, thereby fostering diversity and inclusivity. This approach will elucidate the construction of female empowerment in Instagram beauty advertising in Croatia and thus provide answers to the second sub-question and main research question.

2.4 Cultural context of Croatia

This study examines Instagram beauty advertisements from Croatia to also understand how particular national and cultural norms, values, and beliefs are reflected in the representation of women there. In such a way, it aims to understand which underlying factors contribute to the construction of female stereotypes and portrayals of female empowerment. Drawing on this, it is imperative to provide the socio-cultural context of Croatia within this research by gaining insights from Hofstede's renowned cultural dimensions framework. Hofstede et al. (2010) define culture as the "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 5). As a result, culture is primarily shaped by the shared values inherent within a society (Rajh et al., 2016, p. 311). Geert Hofstede's study on culture was conducted among IBM employees from 1967-1978, and it identified four primary aspects: power distance, individualism or collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity or femininity (M. L. Jones, 2007, pp. 2-3). Moreover, it is considered valuable for both practitioners and researchers as the

aforementioned dimensions became the framework for the cultural characterizations of each country (M. L. Jones, 2007, pp. 2-3). In addition, later cultural studies incorporated a fifth dimension known as 'long or short-term orientation' (M. L. Jones, 2007, p. 3).

It should be noted that Hofstede's observations and analysis often draw criticism due to their reliance on surveys. Moreover, they are considered inadequate instruments for accurately establishing and assessing differences between cultures (M. L. Jones, 2007, p. 5; Shaiq et al., 2011, p. 103). Additionally, his approach is heavily criticized for assuming cultural homogeneity in a way that it overlooks the diversity within nations composed of multiple ethnic groups and generalizes the findings of individual evaluations onto the entire community (M. L. Jones, 2007, p. 5; Shaiq et al., 2011, p. 103). Despite the criticisms, Hofstede's study is still relevant today because he is considered a highly influential scholar providing credible insights into culture (M. L. Jones, 2007, p. 6). His research is widely cited and respected, and the majority of replication studies validate his predictions. While 'individualism' is the only cultural aspect that could not be conclusively confirmed, Hofstede openly acknowledged this limitation, highlighting the dynamic nature of cultures and their capacity for change. Furthermore, numerous studies developed in a manner comparable to Hofstede's research have examined the validity of his questions and supported the accuracy of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Søndergaard, 1994, pp. 450-453).

According to Hofstede's five dimensions of culture, Croatia has a high power distance score, indicating that its population accepts and adheres to a hierarchical structure where each individual has a defined role that does not require additional justification (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", para. 2). Thus, Croatian women may easily conform to their predetermined societal roles and accept such media depictions. Moreover, Croatia is regarded as a collectivistic country characterized by a strong dedication to the family and other member groups in return for loyalty (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", para. 4). Additionally, Croatian society is relatively feminine, which means that their success is measured by the quality of life rather than standing out from the crowd. The Croatian population values soft values such as equality and unity and resolves conflicts through compromise and negotiation (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", paras. 5-6; Rajh et al., 2016, p. 318). That may suggest that women in beauty advertisements from Croatia may be depicted in traditional roles, such as mothers, family-oriented, and submissive. Significantly, the previous scholar Rabrenović (2013) emphasizes the five key aspects of female representation in Croatian advertising: motherhood, male dependence and manipulation, physical perfection, attractiveness, and sensuality (Rabrenović, 2013, pp. 203-204). In addition, the media in Croatia often emphasizes that motherhood is the woman's primary role in life (Ban, 2013, p. 392). Women featured in most cases

are journalists, actresses, and musicians, while traditionally male occupations such as scientists and politicians are notably absent (Labaš & Mihovilović, 2013, p. 122). Also, Croatia is strongly inclined towards avoiding uncertainty, which can be observed in its commitment to rigid norms and values. Consequently, society demonstrates a low tolerance of unconventional behaviors and ideas, driven by an emotional need for rules and conformity. Besides, there is a predisposition to reject innovation (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", para. 8; Rajh et al., 2016, p. 318). Croatia is a relatively normative country where people emphasize discovering the absolute truth. They greatly respect customs and traditions and prioritize immediate outcomes over long-term achievements (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", para. 10; Rajh et al., 2016, pp. 318-319). As a result, one would anticipate that themes associated with femvertising, a successful marketing strategy signifying societal shifts in female representation, may not be prominent in Croatian beauty advertisements. Instead, the advertisements may be more likely to perpetuate female stereotypes and reinforce conformity to traditional beauty ideals.

2.4.1 Female representation in Croatia

Advertising in Croatia often depicts women stereotypically, portraying them as submissive, objectifying them sexually, and thus perpetuating sexist attitudes (Sever Globan et al., 2018, p. 83). Generally, women are stereotyped through photos and texts that guide how to successfully fulfill their predetermined societal roles, such as being mothers, wives, and objects of desire. That is, the stereotyping of women is achieved by imposing a particular image of what a woman should be (Ban, 2013, p. 390). It is pointed out that Croatian media frequently present gender stereotypes as contemporary insights and understanding of gender, whereas they also use humor to justify them, thereby reinforcing and endorsing them (Labaš & Mihovilović, 2013, p. 125). For instance, beer producer 'Zagrebačka pivovara' employed gender stereotypes in its advertising campaign called 'Men's Laws', which resulted in accusations of being discriminatory (Sever Globan et al., 2018, p. 83). Furthermore, the meat products company 'Gavrilović' produced sexist billboards depicting women's breasts, between which there are two salamis in the sign of the cross. Also, the exploitation of the female body is present on a billboard for car tires by a Croatian manufacturer, where a naked woman is shown with the slogan 'Adaptable to every surface', thus equating tires and the female body as commodities that will eventually wear out (Sever Globan et al., 2018, p. 83). For the most part, women are sexually objectified in a vulgar way, where they are dehumanized and reduced exclusively to physical attributes, reflecting deeply rooted sexism in Croatian society (Labaš & Mihovilović, 2013, p. 123; Sever Globan et al., 2018, p. 86). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the individuals accountable for promoting the gender stereotypes presented are

predominantly men, authors of the articles, magazine editors, and owners of publishing houses (Labaš & Mihovilović, 2013, p. 126).

In addition, Croatian women's magazines construct the ideal woman by emphasizing her attractive physical appearance, a successful career, and the importance of mental and physical well-being as a prerequisite for beauty (Ban, 2013, p. 390). Moreover, contemporary standards of female beauty portrayed in fashion-advertising photos in Croatia depict a slim, pale woman with an accentuated waist, a perfect face without any irregularities, flawless makeup, long and brown, well-groomed hair, and a broad smile with white and regular teeth (Labaš & Maljković, 2013, p. 331). Although none of the women featured appear to be older than thirty years, portraying eternal youth, it should be emphasized that most photos undergo retouching (Labaš & Maljković, 2013, pp. 323-332). Accordingly, it is evident that Croatian media also engages in manipulating its audience, especially women, by promoting unrealistic and unattainable beauty standards. Notably, there are no particular Croatian beauty ideals; instead, Westernized standards dominate what can be attributed to globalization. The aforementioned female depictions are often accompanied by texts advising on achieving the desired appearance quickly and efficiently, alongside beauty advertisements promoting products as essential tools for reaching these goals. Besides, the content includes discussions on sex and love, suggesting that readers should aspire to resemble the models to be desirable and worthy of love (Ban, 2013, p. 393; Labaš & Mihovilović, 2013, p. 125). Interestingly, most media texts about successful women begin by praising their beauty and attractiveness instead of their professional accomplishments (Ban, 2013, p. 395). Overall, a woman's place in society is to be in the role of a passive but beautiful, well-groomed, and seductive woman, as they are often depicted alone and are rarely placed in the working environment. Furthermore, it is suggested that their physical appearance is a crucial factor in shaping their destiny (Ban, 2013, p. 397; Labaš & Maljković, 2013, p. 332; Sever Globan et al., 2018, p. 86).

On the other hand, such a portrayed woman is self-aware and confident and controls the situation with her gaze. Specifically, a beautiful and well-groomed woman is aware of being watched and looks straight into the lens (Labaš & Maljković, 2013, p. 322). What is more, research indicates the shift in female representation in Croatia as advertisements portray women as being equal with other characters, as well as positioned at the reader's eye level, indicating their equal status in modern society and independence, as exemplified in Croatian edition of *Cosmopolitan* (Labaš & Maljković, 2013, pp. 321-324). Despite the pervasive female stereotypes portrayed in Croatian media and advertising, there is a discernible shift towards challenging gender stereotypes and embracing elements of 'femvertising' in their strategies. That is evident within the

aforementioned depictions of sexually empowered women who are confident and who enjoy their sexuality and femininity.

It is crucial to look back at Croatia's cultural landscape and its broader female representation in media and advertising because it provides essential context for interpreting the specific representations found in Croatian beauty advertisements on Instagram. What is more, it points out the influences of culture, helps identify patterns and trends relevant to the research at hand, and helps in answering the main research question.

2.5 Summary

To summarize, this chapter shows the overview of beauty industry advertising and the criticism it faces from feminists' perspectives, how both female stereotypes and female empowerment are constructed within advertising in general, as well as the cultural context of Croatia. Furthermore, the concepts of female stereotypes and empowerment serve as the overarching frameworks guiding this research on female representation in online beauty advertising. Besides, the theory of beauty advertising and the cultural context of Croatia contribute to additional understanding by emphasizing prevalent beauty advertising practices and their role in the construction of beauty standards and the specific socio-cultural factors shaping female representation, respectively, societal perceptions of femininity and beauty in Croatia.

This thesis studies the representation of women in beauty advertising on Instagram in Croatia. Namely, the ways in which female stereotypes are constructed or confronted in these advertisements provide significant insights into the prevailing cultural norms and patterns of the society in which they are created, as well as the role of women there. Moreover, this research demonstrates how Croatian beauty brands perceive and portray females and answer to shifts toward equality of gender, which is important considering that advertising influences societal attitudes and individual perceptions of oneself and others. Although there are numerous studies on the topic of female advertising representation, especially in traditional media, this study fills the research gap by focusing on the beauty industry and the socio-cultural context of Croatia. This research is particularly crucial given the scarcity of studies on visual content in Croatia, especially relating to female stereotypes and femvertising. Within this framework, the following chapter will demonstrate how these Instagram beauty advertisements will be thematically analyzed and how the main research question and sub-questions will be answered.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents and explains the qualitative research approach in order to address the main research question and sub-questions. Using purposive sampling, 150 posts were gathered from the Instagram accounts of prominent Croatian beauty brands, namely @la_piel, @immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, and @skintegrabeauty. The posts were examined through a thematic analysis. The research design, sampling, process of data collection, sensitizing concepts, and data analysis are thoroughly defined and supported with justifications. Furthermore, this chapter provides a comprehensive explanation and reflection on the research's credibility and validity.

3.1 Research design

A qualitative approach is chosen for this research because it enables the interpretation of the themes, patterns, and meanings identified and analyzed within both texts and images (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 78-79). Qualitative research is suitable for providing in-depth analysis and multi-faceted understandings of phenomena by recognizing the contextual nature of gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 14). Within the media studies field, qualitative research investigates the broad spectrum of meanings and values that arise across media, new media, public relations, advertising, and entertainment while striving to understand numerous relationships between media and society (Brennen, 2022, p. 5). Considering that this study focuses on Instagram posts, employing a qualitative approach allows the researcher to discover the nuanced meanings of female portrayals conveyed within the posts of Croatian beauty brands.

To put it more specific, the thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and summarize recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It is emphasized that the theme “captures something important about the data concerning the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Thanks to its flexibility, it is an appropriate method for examining and understanding rich and descriptive media texts like social media posts with written and visual features (Walters, 2016, pp. 107-108). As Instagram posts serve as advertisements by integrating written texts in captions alongside images, thematic analysis is considered a suitable approach to analyze the data set. Nevertheless, to facilitate a well-balanced interpretation of underlying meaning, intertextuality between textual and visual components in Instagram posts was carefully considered (Walters, 2016, pp. 107-108).

Furthermore, the data in this research was analyzed by combining deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive thematic analysis is driven by the researcher's theoretical approach to the given issue, whereas inductive thematic analysis is data-driven, which means that the coding

process was not sought to adapt to an already existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 83-84). The main reason for employing this approach is to allow the research to be guided by both underlying theory and the research question, facilitating the emergence of new themes from the data. In such a way, thematic analysis provided a “more detailed and nuanced account of one particular theme, or group of themes, within the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Furthermore, it enabled the discovery of repetitive patterns, essential concepts, and latent meanings of Croatian beauty brands' Instagram photos and captions.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

This research aims to provide insights into the contemporary portrayal of women in the beauty industry through Instagram posts from Croatian beauty brands. Therefore, beauty companies and Instagram posts are chosen based on purposive sampling, enabling the researcher to select the companies and posts based on their relevance and usefulness for the study (Babbie, 2020, p. 193).

The inclusion criteria were applied to the sample in terms of the beauty brands' country of origin and their number of followers and posts on Instagram, which serve as indicators of brand relevance. Specifically, only beauty brands founded in Croatia were considered to ensure a comprehensive understanding of specific cultural context. According to Instagram marketing statistics, accounts with 10 to 100 thousand followers often exhibit micro-influence and high engagement rates (West, 2023, paras. 4, 11). That is to say, accounts with at least 10,000 followers and a frequent posting schedule were chosen. In addition, the sampling criterion was that the Instagram posts must feature at least one adult woman, while the posts within products or messages only were excluded. The sample also included Instagram videos and photographs along with textual descriptions representing the main concepts or one of the concepts of this study, respectively, female stereotypes, empowerment, and power. In the case of posts consisting of multiple photos, each photo was treated as an individual post. Also, similar posts, such as those belonging to the same beauty campaign, were not observed in order to avoid repetition. The sampling time frame was from 2021 to 2024. The units of analysis were posted on the following Croatian beauty brands' official Instagram accounts: @la_piel, @immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, and @skintegrabeauty.

The data collection was performed from April 1st, 2024, to April 10th, 2024. Firstly, the researcher logged into her personal Instagram account and searched for the aforementioned official Instagram accounts. Afterward, the researcher scrolled down to each selected beauty brand's posts from January 2021. Following that, posts from January 1st, 2021, to April 10th, 2024,

were meticulously selected using the abovementioned sampling criteria. Notably, the screenshots of all selected 150 Instagram posts were stored on the researcher's laptop, mobile device, and Google Drive, which allowed the data to be accessible during the research process. Below, a brief description of each selected beauty brand is provided.

To begin with, La PIEL is a Croatian beauty brand founded in 2018 by famous Croatian pop star Lana Jurčević (La PIEL, 2024, section O Nama, para. 3). It produces organic and natural beauty products for the face and body, such as shower gels, body lotions, bubble balls, shiny water, face cream, and masks (La PIEL, 2024, section O Nama, paras. 3-4). The La PIEL's production is mainly handmade and excludes unhealthy constituents such as parabens, paraffin, silicones, and petroleum. Furthermore, the mission of this brand is to take care of women by encouraging them to use natural beauty products. As stated by La PIEL, "The mission is to follow you in your needs and make sure you feel even more beautiful, confident, and nurtured. No fear for your health" (La PIEL, 2024, section O Nama, para. 5). In addition, La PIEL has an Instagram following of 122 thousand and 2650 posts at the time of writing (La PIEL, n.d.).

Secondly, Immortella Mediterranean Beauty (hereinafter referred to as Immortella) represents a natural Croatian handmade beauty brand inspired by Mediterranean nature (Immortella, 2024, section O Nama, para. 2). The brand's symbol is the Immortelle plant, which signifies strength and quality found in nature. Furthermore, this beauty company includes a broad spectrum of products: natural cosmetics, essential oils, vegetable oils, floral waters, and deodorants (Immortella, 2024, section O Nama, para. 2). Also, when writing, Immortella had 16.5 thousand followers and 1739 posts (Immortella, n.d.).

Thirdly, Skintegra was founded in Croatia in 2017, and its products are formulated for reactive and problematic skin (Skintegra, 2024, section O Nama, para. 5). Moreover, due to the carefully selected ingredients, it aims to improve skin function and appearance. In addition, Skintegra acts within the framework of social responsibility by donating its products to women and children in Croatian safe houses and helping small non-profit causes (Skintegra, 2024, section O Nama, paras. 10-12). Besides, Skintegra has a follower base of 46.2 thousand and 1728 posts (Skintegra, n.d.).

3.3 Sensitizing concepts

The thematic analysis employed an inductive approach. That is to say, it was guided by the research question that enabled the emergence of themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 83-84). However, to ensure a comprehensive data analysis, it was imperative to draw upon theories from previous research and sensitize the data with significant concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.

87-88). Sensitizing concepts, derived from the theoretical framework presented in the chapter above, served as guiding principles for the research problem and provided a foundation for data analysis. Therefore, the data analysis was also conducted by following these sensitizing concepts: female stereotypes, sexual objectification, sexualization, female empowerment, and female power.

Namely, the first concept identified in this research was female stereotypes and their construction within Croatian beauty brands' Instagram content. That was approached by aspects of female submissiveness, including ritualization of subordination, feminine touch, the family, and licensed withdrawal, as well as aspect of body display (Goffman, 1979, pp. 24-84; Kang, 1997, p. 985). Notably, the concepts of relative size and function ranking were not observed since they refer to portrayals of both genders, which is not the case within this research, which encompasses posts featuring females only. The concept of female stereotypes was also approached through traditional roles encompassing housewives and decorative roles implying objects of beauty and professionalism. Overall, those elements were examined to determine whether Croatian beauty brands perpetuate female stereotypes by portraying women as submissive, vulnerable, and dependent on others while also emphasizing their beauty and physical attractiveness.

When scrutinizing theories relevant to beauty advertising, sexualization and sexual objectification of women proved to be important concepts. The literature highlighted the distinction between them, which was utilized in the analysis process. Furthermore, sexual objectification was operationalized through the representation of bodies or body parts merely through sex and eroticism (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 174; Vargas-Bianchi & Mensa, 2020, p. 79). Namely, a post was labeled as sexually objectifying if it featured a sexualized model appearing passive, looking aside, or if her face was not shown as the focus of the photo was only on the body or specific body part. Additionally, sexualization was approached through the degree of nudity, seductive facial expression, sensual and provocative poses, and touching oneself in an intimate manner, as well as the sexual interaction between models (Fasoli et al., 2018, p. 347; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003, p. 124). In brief, a post was categorized as sexualization when the female model displayed awareness of her sexuality and exhibited agency, usually by looking directly into the camera and when the focus was on her sexual characteristics or behaviors.

Another concept analyzed in this study was female empowerment, which was guided by the theories about femvertising (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, pp. 441-459). This concept was observed through the pro-woman messages that Croatian beauty brands communicate through Instagram captions and photos, challenging gender roles and promoting diversity and inclusion. In particular, the captions and photos in posts were analyzed to understand whether beauty brands emphasize the talents and skills of women to empower them, whether representations of women challenge

the traditional female roles and prevailing beauty standards within the beauty industry by depicting women in non-traditional roles and showcasing a wide array of body and face appearances, as well as different races, ethnicities, and sexual orientation.

Finally, female power appeared to be an important concept related to female empowerment. Instagram posts were tested on empowered beauty, agentive power, expert or knowledge power, sexual power, athletic or physical power, and family power (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, pp. 1199-1200; Lazar, 2006, pp. 506-513). By scrutinizing those female power dimensions found in Instagram posts, an understanding of how beauty brands in Croatia influence and potentially reinforce female empowerment can be gained.

Figure 3.1
Coding Frame

Concept	Open Code	Description
Female stereotypes	The ritualization of subordination	The female model is in an inferior pose (sitting or lying on the ground, bed, or sofa), stands with one leg bent off the ground or crosses her legs, leans against objects, or tilts her head or body to one side
	Feminine touch	The female model touches objects or herself in a gentle and caressing way
	The family	The female model is present with daughter
	Licensed withdrawal	The female model is physically or emotionally distanced from the current situation (looks into the distance, withdraws behind objects, is self-absorbed, or covers her face with her hands)
	Body display	The female model wears body-revealing apparel or is nude
	Housewife	The female model cleans, cooks, or looks after children

	Object of beauty	The female model is slim, young, and has an appealing face
	Professional	The female model performs lower-status jobs (sales, service positions) or male-dominated with exaggerated femininity
Sexual objectification	Emphasis of the body or specific body part, averted gaze, sex, and eroticism	The female model is passive; her face is not shown or she looks aside, as the focus is on her body or specific body parts
Sexualisation	Nudity, seductive facial expressions, sensual and provocative poses, touching oneself in an intimate manner, and the sexual interaction between models	The female model exudes awareness of her sexuality and demonstrates agency, often by maintaining direct eye contact with the camera while emphasizing her sexual characteristics and behaviors
Female empowerment	Pro-woman messaging	Narratives that emphasize women's talents, skills, strengths, and achievements
	Challenging gender roles	The female models engage in non-traditional roles such as sports, masculine activities, professional careers, and authoritative positions
	Diversity and inclusion	The portrayal challenges conventional beauty ideals by showcasing diverse body shapes, sizes, appearances (cellulite, acne) races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations

Female power	Empowered beauty	The female models engage in actions aimed at improving themselves, including enhancing their beauty, which increases their power. Overall, the female model is confident and comfortable with her identity as a woman
	Agentive power	The female models have freedom of choice and decision-making
	Expert or knowledge power	The female model displays expertise and professionalism in her field, demonstrating high education and knowledge
	Sexual power	The female model is sexually attractive and uses her allure to control her environment. The female models are considered powerful and sexually dynamic, often rewarding themselves for their attractiveness
	Athletic/physical power	The female model is sporty, active, and fit and has command over her body
	Family power	The female model embodies a mother figure characterized by reliability, care, and nurturing, symbolizing the role of raising future generations

3.4 Data analysis

The thematic analysis, which identified three themes, was conducted by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guidelines to provide answers to the sub-questions and the main research question about how Croatian beauty brands depict women in their Instagram advertisements (pp. 77-101). To begin with, the Instagram posts were looked at carefully several times so that the researcher could become familiar with the content and its depth and complexity. What is more, the data was looked at in an active way to identify meaningful patterns relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In particular, a detailed description of each Instagram post's photo was made at a semantic or explicit level to enable the researcher's orientation during analysis.

Furthermore, approximately 1260 initial codes, such as 'Ritualization of subordination', 'Absence of face', and 'Woman as leader', representing a feature of the content interesting and important to the research subject, were developed from both the semantic or explicit, and latent or interpretative meanings of descriptions mentioned above, and Instagram posts' captions. Afterward, the multiple detected initial codes were consolidated into approximately 730 codes. For instance, 'Direct gaze' and 'Half-open pouty lips' were combined into the overarching code 'Seductive facial expression', while the codes 'Acne', 'Pimples', 'Wrinkles', 'Scars', 'Moles', 'Redness', 'Cellulite' and 'Stretch marks' were compiled into the code 'Skin imperfections'. These codes delve into the underlying assumptions and notions related to themes of female representation in order to uncover their significance. This process involved linking these interpretations to the theoretical framework, enhancing the depth of analysis and understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Notably, the data was approached using the sensitizing concepts explained in the operationalization part. In essence, coding was done manually using the same colors to mark the data extracts relating to the same subject. This method facilitated the identification of prospective themes and their preliminary definitions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89).

Using a table, addressed codes were arranged into potential themes and sub-themes based on their usage and frequency in the data, and all the relevant coded data extracts were compiled within them. Significantly, sub-themes gave each theme a structure and displayed "the hierarchy of meaning within the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). For example, the codes 'Skin imperfections', 'Curvy women', 'Fat women' and 'Black women' were put together under the sub-theme 'Diverse representation of beauty'. This sub-theme, along with others like 'Self-love and body acceptance' and 'Taking care of the body and mind', was classified within the broader theme 'Promoting body positivity'. It is important to mention that the codes which were not fit the identified sub-themes and themes were put under a category named 'miscellaneous'.

In the next phase, the themes and sub-themes were refined and evaluated to ensure that they were clear and consistent with both the coded extracts and the whole data set. A few themes were combined to create the main theme, while other themes were split up to differentiate from each other. Due to the similarities and overlap, the sub-theme 'Taking care of the body' was combined with 'Mental well-being' to form the sub-theme 'Taking care of the body and mind'. Furthermore, this process considered both their internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, which culminated in the creation of a comprehensive thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 91-92).

Later, the names and definitions of themes underwent changes so that they could reflect the specifics of each of them. It should be pointed out that the themes and sub-themes were

developed based on previous literature and research on the Croatian cultural context and female portrayal in Croatia. Specifically, a thorough analysis was provided in order to answer the research question for each theme, accompanied by their clear definitions and names. Finally, a report of the analysis providing sufficient evidence of the themes and arguments concerning the research question was produced and presented in the following chapter (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 92-93). Prominent examples from the Instagram captions and photos were included to illustrate the themes. Also, the cited Instagram captions in the results and discussion section were freely translated into English because they were initially written in Croatian. The final coding tree can be seen in Appendix A.

3.5 Credibility and ethical considerations

It is crucial to take into account the researcher's responsibility to conduct credible research, namely to conduct meticulous research that will produce convincing arguments that connect claims with supporting data (Silverman, 2011, p. 359). Based on this view, the study's findings were supported with evidence encompassing strong arguments and thorough knowledge of the construction of female stereotypes and female empowerment in beauty advertising within a specific cultural context of Croatia through critical thinking and analysis. In order to ensure transparency for this research, reflexivity is fostered by clearly outlining the theoretical viewpoint from which the researcher's interpretation originates and by acknowledging the researcher's positionality (Silverman, 2011, p. 360). Therefore, the theories utilized in this study were precisely discussed and derived from previous scholarly articles addressing gender stereotypes, beauty advertising and its formation of beauty ideals, female empowerment, and cultural aspects within Croatian society. Moreover, the acknowledgment of the researcher's positionality as a Croatian woman with feminist values further mitigated the risk of subjectivity in data examination and interpretations, respectively, thus maintaining the research's credibility (Brennen, 2022, p. 8).

In order to provide a reliable qualitative paper, the research process was open and transparent, offering a detailed description and justification of all the steps taken, including the theory, sampling, data collection, thematic analysis, and coding procedures, as exemplified in the paragraphs above. Overall, the constant comparison was conducted by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, which implies going through the entire data set multiple times by utilizing sensitizing concepts, continuously analyzing codes and themes, and then comparing the results with scholarly sources in order to ensure both their reliability and validity (pp. 86-93). In addition, to ensure the credibility of the research, the researcher made notes in a short notebook. They were used as a means for the researcher to reflect on each stage of thematic analysis and all research

decisions, assisting in following the researcher's thoughts and justification and offering a basis for future studies (Silverman, 2011, p. 362). Finally, the data was objectively assessed as posts were sourced from the official Instagram accounts of beauty brands, which were publicly accessible so that ethical or privacy issues were not violated.

4. Results and discussion

This chapter elaborates on the findings of the thematic analysis, respectively three identified themes that provide answers to the sub-questions about how Croatian beauty brands construct female stereotypes and portray female empowerment in their Instagram advertisements. The results contribute to answering the main research question about how Croatian beauty brands portray women in their Instagram advertisements. Firstly, the theme ‘Stereotyping women’ points out the negative and restrictive female portrayals that emphasize their passive and submissive behavior, promote unattainable beauty ideals and physical perfection, as well as sexually objectify and sexualize women. Secondly, the theme ‘Empowering women’ is about countering female stereotypes and empowering women through positive messages, depicting women in non-traditional roles, and displaying female agency and power. Finally, the third theme is ‘Promoting body positivity’, which advocates for positive body image and mental well-being among women, including diverse representation of beauty, fostering self-love and acceptance, and encouraging body and mind care. The table below illustrates the findings, while a detailed thematic map can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 4.1

Thematic Analysis Results

Themes	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2	Sub-theme 3	Sub-theme 4
Stereotyping women	Female submissiveness	Beauty ideals and physical perfection	Sexual objectification	Sexualization
Empowering women	Pro-woman messaging	Challenging gender roles	Female power portrayals	-
Promoting body positivity	Diverse representation of beauty	Self-love and body acceptance	Taking care of body and mind	-

4.1 Theme 1: Stereotyping women

The first theme identified within Croatian beauty Instagram advertisements is 'Stereotyping women'. It is about negative and restrictive female representation, which highlights their passivity and submissiveness, sexually objectifying and sexualizing them, alongside the promotion of unrealistic beauty standards and physical perfection. This theme aligns with the notions by Sever Globan et al. (2018) that Croatian advertising frequently stereotypes women by depicting them as submissive, sexually objectifying them, and thus perpetuating sexist attitudes (p. 83).

4.1.1 Female submissiveness

This theme tests female submissiveness by identifying the next concepts: ritualization of subordination, feminine touch, the family, licensed withdrawal, and body display (Goffman, 1979, pp. 24-84; Kang, 1997, p. 985). Accordingly, posts from La PIEL, Skintegra, and Immortella feature women as submissive. Firstly, in the majority of Immortella's posts, women are depicted in non-active poses and inferior positions by enacting 'ritualization of subordination' (N=40). That is also the case with female models within La PIEL (N=27) and Skintegra (N=20). Respectively, women are portrayed as sitting or helplessly lying down on the floor, chair, boat, beach, and bed, suggesting that they are eroticized and sexually accessible (Goffman, 1979, p. 41). Moreover, women are portrayed while standing with one leg bent, what is known as a 'bashful knee-bend', crossing their legs while lying down on a bed and chair, and while leaning against a wall, kitchen counter, and sink, as well as tilting their bodies and heads to one side (see Figure 4.2). Literature suggests it means that women are unbalanced and vulnerable and thus not ready to respond to the current situation, as well as that they accept their subordination and appeasement (Goffman, 1979, p. 45; Kang, 1997, p. 985). Additionally, women softly touch and caress their bodies mainly when applying beauty products such as SPF and face creams, lotions, and sun-tan oils to their skin, which is identified as a 'feminine touch', and points out that a woman's body is precious. Notably, it is highly present within Immortella's posts (N=32), then Skintegra's (N=17), and lastly, La PIEL's (N=13). Furthermore, in those posts, women gently hold beauty products or touch themselves, their pregnant bellies, cheeks, and shoulders, which suggests that females are soft and delicate but also sexually available in cases of touching their waist, neck, bust, thighs, and lips (Goffman, 1979, pp. 29-31) (see Figure 4.3). Besides, 'licensed withdrawal', another indicator of women's submissiveness, is addressed among females in the posts by Immortella (N=29), La PIEL (N=16), and Skintegra (N=12). Considerably, in those posts, women thoughtfully look aside into the distance and withdraw behind beauty products and flowers, which means that they are emotionally distanced from the present social situation, disoriented within it, and reliant on the protection of others.

What is more, women partly cover their faces with their hands as a sign of emotional response avoidance. Conversely, in some posts, they close their eyes as a sign of withdrawal by emotional response, respectively as being immersed within the laughter, a moment of relaxation, pleasure, and delight after utilization of the beauty product promoted (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 205; Kang, 1997, p. 993). Significantly, some females gaze directly into the camera with one eye as it is cropped out of the photo or covered with hand, hair, beauty product, flowers, or lemon. That is identified as 'half gaze', and it appears across brands La PIEL (N=1), Skintegra (N=6), and Immortella (N=4). According to Shalaby and Alkaff (2019), that is the new trend within beauty social media posts that challenges prevailing beauty standards, and it can be interpreted as a female expression between confidence and anxiety, respectively, an inherent desire for confidence and autonomy (pp. 61-65). Also, it is noticeable that only half of the women's faces are shown due to sideways posing, while they are disassociated from the scene by looking aside what can be addressed as 'half face' and is present among brands as follows: La PIEL (N=3), Skintegra (N=5) and Immortella (N=11). It emphasizes the women's emotional disengagement from immediate social interactions.

Figure 4.2

Examples of 'ritualization of subordination'



Figure 4.3

Examples of 'feminine touch'

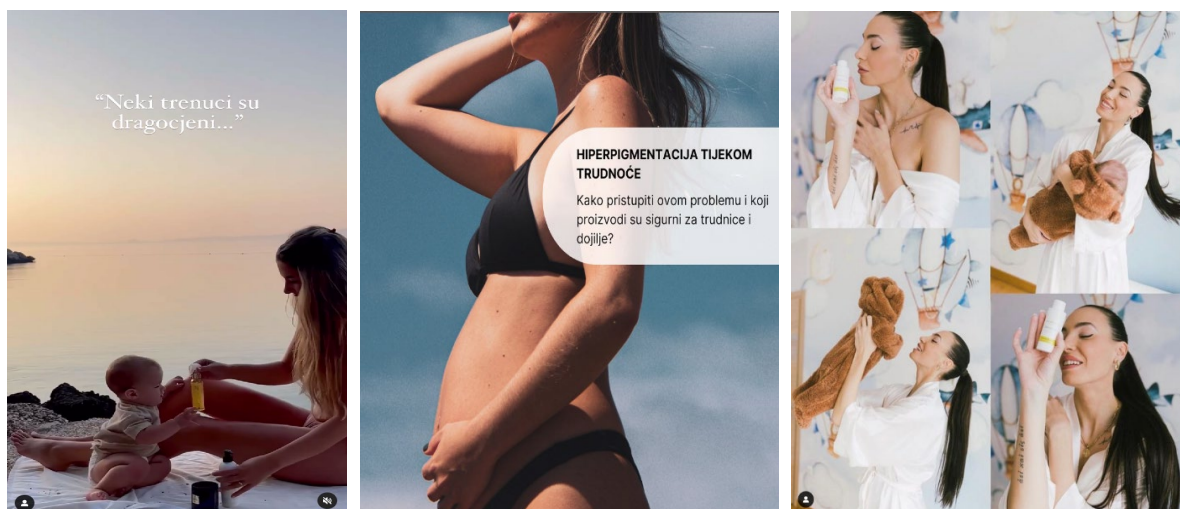


Regarding 'body display', beauty brands portray women dressed in bikinis, one-piece swimsuits, leotards, pareos, low-cut tops and dresses, short miniskirts and shorts, but also wearing only a shirt and thus revealing their legs and bare shoulders. Specifically, female models wearing body-revealing clothes are noticed in the posts by Immortella (N=23), La PIEL (N=20), and Skintegra (N=4). However, nudity is also present within brands as follows: La PIEL (16), Skintegra (15), and Immortella (N=6). Namely, women are nude, with bare shoulders visible in close-up shots, dressed only in a towel and wearing transparent underwear, which contradicts the notions by Kang (1997) that the number of nude female models is decreasing in beauty advertising (p. 992).

Besides, women are portrayed in traditional roles as being family-oriented, pregnant, and mothers who care for their children by holding and playing with them. That is tagged as 'the family' and is found as follows: La PIEL (N=3), Skintegra (N=2), and Immortella (N=3) (see Figure 4.4). Significantly, pregnant women are depicted with the absence of their faces, therefore emphasizing pregnancy status over their identity. This reflects their submissiveness and their primary role as mothers. This aligns with scholar Rabrenović (2013), who points out motherhood as one of the crucial aspects of female representation in advertising in Croatia (pp. 203-204). That can be explained by the fact that Croatia scores high on Hofstede's cultural dimension of power distance, meaning that women in Croatia readily accept and conform to their predetermined societal roles such as mother and such advertising portrayals (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", para. 2).

Figure 4.4

Examples of 'the family'



Additionally, Croatia is recognized as a collectivistic and feminine nation, valuing equality, unity, and commitment to family and social groups (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", paras. 5-6; Rajh et al., 2016, p. 318). That is to say, Croatian beauty brands mirror these cultural values and societal expectations surrounding motherhood and family roles (Zotos & Tschla, 2014, p. 447). Accordingly, it can be concluded that Croatian beauty brands depict women as submissive, vulnerable, fragile, and thus dependent on other people (Goffman, 1979, p. 57). Interestingly, females' dependence on men is highly suggestive in one of La PIEL's posts upon its description:

Lately it seems that I have too much of everything. Both business and private. I admit, it just piled up... HE is my best friend in all of this. Who's he? HE can be a part of your life... It costs nothing, but it's worth a lot... (@la_piel, 2023, October 26th)

Namely, this description uses a play on words. It addresses the beauty product in the masculine gender, implying that a woman depends on men and needs their assistance and that his presence will add value to her life and improve its quality.

4.1.2 Beauty ideals and physical perfection

Croatian beauty brands often stereotype women by promoting unattainable ideals of beauty and physical perfection. These ideals, characterized by youthfulness, flawless face and body skin, and a slim figure, are prevalent across the industry. However, it is interesting that the tanned skin ideal is slightly imposed within La PIEL's and Immortella's posts, suggesting a potential shift in beauty standards. Moreover, La PIEL, Skintegra and Immortella stereotype women by imposing a

particular image of what a woman should be (Ban, 2013, p. 390). These findings are in line with Rabrenović (2013) who highlights physical perfection as one of the key aspects of Croatian female representation in advertising (pp. 203-204). Starting with La PIEL, almost all posts portray women as young (N=43) with flawless and shiny face and body skin (N=37), as well as being white race (N=45). However, the slim physiques of female models (N=24) are less prominent. Notably, La PIEL displays the highest number of posts among analyzed brands promoting tanned skin as a beauty ideal (N=8). To illustrate, the post features a woman with a natural skin tone before using a self-tanning product and after, when her skin appears darker. This post is followed with quotes such as “Woow what a difference! Our new GLAM TAN body self-tanning foam gives you an instant tanned bronze skin tone”, “Grab your copies and feel GLAM with a darker complexion”, and “#IfeelGlam” (@la_piel, 2021, June 17th). Also, one post encourages women to achieve and maintain darker skin in a quick and effective way by providing tips, as revealed by the caption “HOW TO KEEP OR GET A DARK TAN after the summer? ✨” (@la_piel, 2022, August 26th). Overall, these posts suggest that tanned skin is desirable and that women should strive for such an appearance, fostering an idea of tanned skin as a beauty ideal. That is in line with the notion that women should strive for such promoted appearances to feel glamorous, desirable, and thus worthy of love (Ban, 2013, p. 393; Labaš & Mihovilović, 2013, p. 125). In addition, Skintegra’s female models have youthful appearance (N=44), are white skinned (N=50), and are without skin irregularities (N=27) in slightly more than half of posts. Promoting the tanned skin ideal is not integrated into Skintegra’s posts, whereas the representation of a slim figure (N=5) is infrequent. This can be explained by the prevalence of close-up shots that focus on women’s faces rather than their entire bodies. Also, in the majority of Immortella’s posts, women are young (N=44), have flawless and smooth skin on both face and body (N=43), and have a slim physique (N=27). Nevertheless, all posts feature white females (N=50), whereas tanned skin (N=3) is promoted as desirable in several posts.

All things considered, Croatian beauty brands portray eternal youth, women having slim figures, perfect and pale skin, brown and well-groomed hair, and white and regular teeth, which aligns with the findings by Labaš and Maljković (2013, p. 331). Also, that is in accordance with the finding by Frith et al. (2005) that ‘whiteness’ is a beauty advertising trend across cultures (pp. 65-66). Furthermore, it can be argued that Westernized standards of beauty prevail among depictions of women and that there are no specific Croatian beauty ideals what can be attributed to globalization. However, it seems that Croatian beauty brands La PIEL and Immortella are starting to challenge the dominant idealization of fair skin by implementing the idea of tanned skin as desirable and attractive.

4.1.3 Sexual objectification

Beauty advertising in Croatia sexually objectifies women with a noticeable emphasis on their bodies or specific body parts, followed by an absence of their faces or averted gaze, which implies their passivity and eroticism. To put it more specific, La PIEL (N=23) has the highest number of posts displaying sexual objectification, Immortella (N=17) demonstrates a moderate number, while Skintegra (N=7) has the fewest. The absence of women's faces is evident across beauty brands, encompassing La PIEL (N=15), Skintegra (N=9), and Immortella (N=9). This is characterized by the heads of the female models being cut off the photo or covered by objects such as a phone or hat, as seen in La PIEL's and Immortella's posts. Consequently, the focus is on women's bodies or specific body parts such as their torso, legs, thighs, hips, and buttocks, which makes them sexually objectified. In this manner, females are anonymous and dehumanized, with their bodies and sexual attractiveness emphasized over their personalities. Thus, they primarily serve as tools for attracting potential customers' attention to beauty products. That is in line with the theory by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), who claim that sexual objectification occurs when a female's body or its specific parts are detached from their human identity and valued solely because of their utilization by others (pp. 174-175). Such portrayals can be interpreted as reflecting deeply ingrained sexist values within Croatian society (Labaš & Mihovilović, 2013, p. 123; Sever Globan et al., 2018, p. 86). It is crucial to point out that La PIEL's posts exhibit contradictions (N=4), as they, at the same time, perpetuate female stereotypical portrayals through sexual objectification and empower women through the promotion of body positivity. That is to say, these posts display various female body sizes and shapes, skin irregularities like cellulite, stretch marks, and belly fat that challenge prevailing beauty norms and foster body positivity. The accompanying captions are empowering as they reinforce not only self-love and body acceptance but also the importance of taking care of body, as revealed by: "Why be anyone else when you can be YOU? 😊 SHINE on the beach like the Greek goddess you are with our Beach BABE! With all the flaws, we love you the natural way you are - PERFECTLY IMPERFECT ❤️ #realME" (@la_piel, 2022, August 9th). This description will be further discussed under the theme 'Promoting body positivity'. On the other hand, by cropping out women's faces and thus emphasizing their bodies and physical attributes revealed by wearing swimsuits, bikinis, and lingerie, those posts can be interpreted as a form of sexual objectification (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5

Examples of sexual objectification



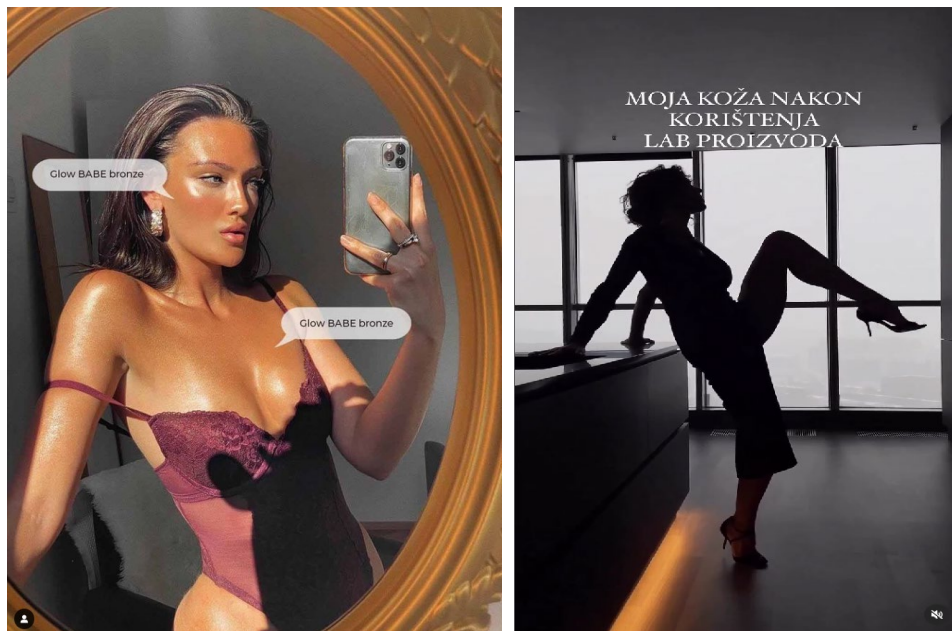
4.1.4 Sexualization

In addition, sexualization is notable across the posts by La PIEL (N=11), Skintegra (N=4) and Immortella (N=5). In essence, the sexualization of female models depicted is observed in nudity, their seductive facial expressions, sensual and provocative posing, touching oneself in an intimate manner, sexual interaction between models, and sexual connotation within Instagram captions. For instance, two of La PIEL's posts exhibit duality (see Figure 4.6), indicating the presence of both sexual objectification and sexualization, as these two distinct concepts are interconnected. In one post, it can be argued that a woman is sexually objectified as the emphasis is placed on her body, which is dressed in transparent lingerie, revealing her body attributes, breasts, hips, and buttocks. Also, her averted gaze implies her passive role, potentially suggesting that she offers herself as an object for observation. That aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) perspective, who argue that participants looking aside either make 'offers' or are offered items (p. 124). However, it can also be argued that she is sexualized as she has a seductive facial expression visible upon her pouty and slightly open lips. Moreover, she demonstrates awareness of her sensual appeal and beauty since she is confidently and provocatively posing and taking photos of herself in the mirror. This is in accordance with the notion proposed by Fasoli et al. (2018) regarding sexualization, which pertains to an individual's awareness of their sexuality (p. 339). To put it more specific, this woman knows she is being looked at in virtual reality and desires to be seen, which is the reason for taking the photo. In other post, a woman is considered sexually objectified because the silhouette of her body and curves are in focus, while her face is not visible as she is in the dark. That suggests that her sexual attractiveness is emphasized over her personality. Besides, it can be argued that a

woman is aware of her sexuality and attractiveness because she dances confidently and seductively. Her dance includes eroticized and sexually inviting poses, such as spreading her legs and raising them in the air, which contributes to an overall portrayal that is sexy, sensual, and seductive. Significantly, sexual connotations within Instagram captions are only detected with the La PIEL's posts (N=2). For instance: "HOT SUMMER is here!" (@la_piel, 2022, May 25th), simultaneously implying the heated environmental atmosphere and the sexual attractiveness of the depicted woman. Similarly, "It's sexiest when the skin smells 'on its own' but with a little extra..." (@la_piel, 2022, March 25th) suggests one's inherent sexual allure.

Figure 4.6

Examples of interconnection between sexual objectification and sexualization



When discussing the brand Skintegra, examples of sexualization are evident in specific posts (N=4) (see Figure 4.7), such as one where a woman is depicted nude, lying down on the floor surrounded by white rabbits. By directly looking into the camera and having pouty lips, the woman appears confident and aware of her sexual attractiveness, possibly demanding male viewers' attention and being attracted to her. This aligns with the research by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), which revealed that a direct gaze from a participant towards the viewer establishes a connection on both formal and imaginative levels, implying that the participant may assert 'demands' from the viewers (pp. 122-123). Also another instance of sexualization is a close-up shot of a woman with a bare shoulder, which implies her nudity. With a direct gaze into the camera, accompanied by a pouty and half-open mouth, she conveys readiness for engagement in sexual

activities. The seductive touching of her lips further enhances this impression. Finally, Immortella (N=5) features sexualization as shown by posts where women are provocatively posing in front of the mirror, wearing a rolled-up T-shirt that exposes a stomach and unbuttoned jeans or low-cut top accentuating a woman's bust. Also, in those posts, women also have seductive facial expressions, gazing directly into their reflections in the mirror with half-open mouths, indicating confidence and awareness of their attractiveness. Furthermore, one of the models depicted is applying red lipstick on her lips in a provocative manner (see Figure 4.7), while another is shown spraying her face, further reinforcing their sexuality and sensuality.

Figure 4.7

Examples of sexualization



To summarize, Croatian beauty brands perpetuate female stereotypes, addressing the sub-question of how these stereotypes are constructed in their Instagram advertisements. This perpetuation can be attributed to the fact that Croatia is a relatively normative country with a strong inclination to avoid uncertainty. Specifically, this means that Croatian society highly values tradition and is motivated by an emotional need for rules and conformity, as visible in the beauty industry's posts reinforcing female stereotypes by depicting women as submissive, sexually objectifying and sexualizing them, and adhering to conventional beauty ideals (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", para. 8; Rajh et al., 2016, pp. 318-319). Interestingly, since the owners of those beauty brands and social media managers are mostly women, the findings

contradict Labaš and Maljković (2013), who argue that men as journalists, editors, and owners of publishing houses are responsible for promoting female stereotypes (p. 126).

4.2 Theme 2: Empowering women

The second theme identified within the Instagram posts by Croatian beauty brands is 'Empowering women'. This theme is part of the broader idea of "female empowerment advertising" (Åkestam et al., 2017, p. 795). It relates to the challenging of female stereotypical portrayals by promoting positive and empowering messages, displaying non-traditional female roles and power portrayals.

4.2.1 Pro-woman messaging

Pro-woman messaging is present among beauty brands, with the brand Skintegra (N=17) leading in the number of posts featuring it, followed by La PIEL (N=11) and Immortella (N=3). Firstly, Skintegra acknowledges notable women's awareness days such as Women's Day, National Day of Combating Violence Against Women, and Mother's Day. For example, on Women's Day, Skintegra displays a post with several women smiling and holding each other hands, symbolizing mutual support, cooperation, and solidarity (see Figure 4.8). Also, that post highlights women's independence, power, and capability to persevere through different challenges and employ multiple roles and responsibilities, as evident within the caption:

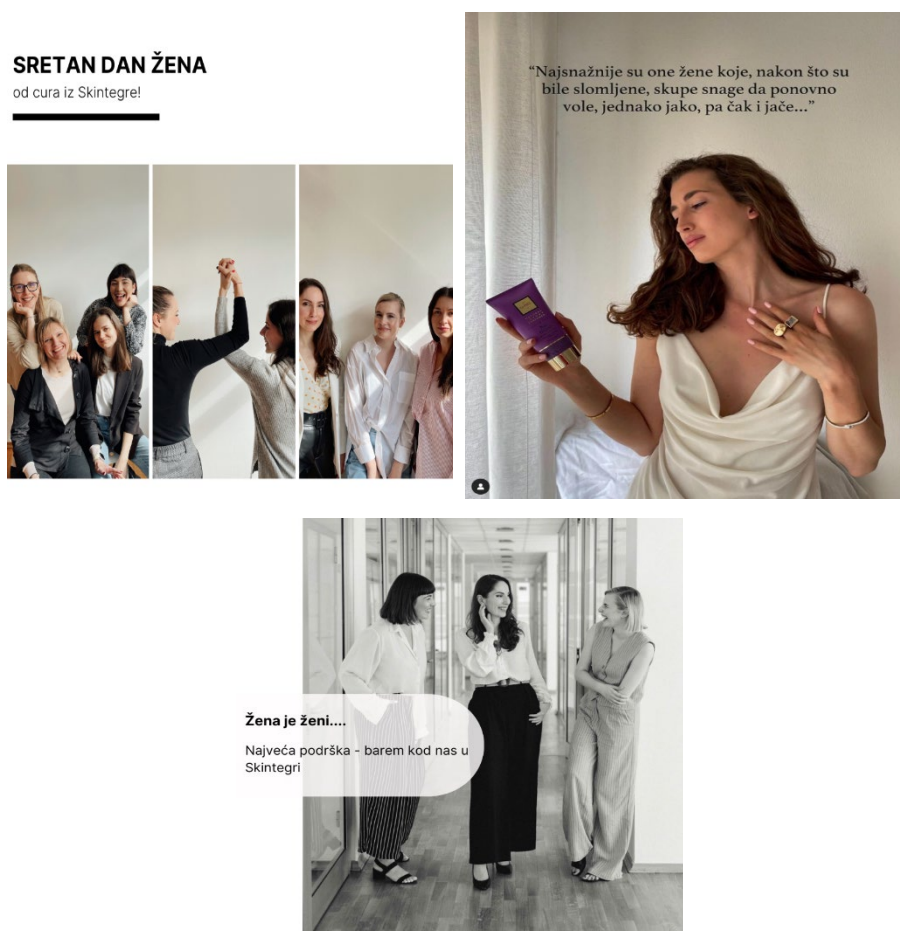
A woman goes to school even when she has menstrual pains. A woman goes to work when she is pregnant and nauseous. A woman is herself and proud regardless of the pressure of society. A woman is a friend, ready to listen and be a comfort, even after a sleepless night. A woman is a traveler, and on the journey of life, she discovers her strength and ability. And all that - the woman works with a smile! By all accounts - the happiest Women's Day to you. Because you are powerful. Because you are independent. Because you can do absolutely anything! 🧡😊#skintegra #womensday (@skintegrabeauty, 2023, March 8th)

Besides, Immortella empowers women by also mentioning Women's Day in a post featuring women enjoying cocktails and laughter in a bar. The caption includes the quote: "We wish our dear Immortella a happy Women's Day!" (@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2023, March 8th). Significantly, those posts are published on International Women's Day, which is a worldwide observance held on March 8th. Acknowledging those observances is empowering as they celebrate women, advocate for their rights, raise awareness about significant female-related issues, and promote gender equality by highlighting women's accomplishments, strengths, and contributions.

Regarding La PIEL, the brand repeatedly uses hashtags #PushingMyLimits and #IamPushingMyLimits (N=6), thus emphasizing women's strength and potential and suggesting that women are capable of challenging themselves. In such a manner, women are empowered and motivated to strive for their goals. Namely, those hashtags are part of La PIEL's #PushingMyLimits campaign aimed to encourage its followers to take cold showers daily and thus challenge themselves and improve their physical and mental health. Also, La PIEL empowers women by highlighting their strength and perseverance despite all the struggles they may face, as shown by the quote: "Strong women never give up, we might need a coffee, we might need a good cry, we might need a day in the bed, but we will always come back stronger" (@la_piel, 2022, November 18th). That is followed by the hashtags #strongwomen, #motivation, #inspiration, #beautycommunity, #womenpower, #girlpower, and #coldshower, further fostering female empowerment. Similarly, the woman's vulnerability is pointed out as strength as revealed by this caption: "The strongest are those women who, after being broken, muster up the strength to love again, just as hard, and even stronger..." (@la_piel, 2022, September 8th). Furthermore, this caption celebrates the power of resilience and women's strength, which can be seen not only by enduring difficulties but also by being brave enough to love and be vulnerable again despite previous negative experiences. However, the accompanying photo features women as vulnerable and submissive by displaying ritualization of subordination, feminine touch, and licensed withdrawal (see Figure 4.8). Likewise, Skintegra showcases women engaging in conversation and laughter in the office hallway, emphasizing the importance of the culture of mutual support, solidarity, and motivation among women by stating: "Women for women is our motto, and thank you once again for all the positives! You're the best!" (@skintegrabeauty, 2023, September 6th) (see Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8

Examples of pro-woman messaging posts



Additionally, Croatian beauty brands aim to empower women through the display of female inspirational models such as the brand’s social media manager – Petra, and CEO – Jelena, thus celebrating their skills, knowledge, achievements, and dedication. This is evident within the caption: “Jelena. Initiator. Visionary. Enthusiast. She is not afraid of challenges” (@skintegrabeauty, 2022, April 20th). Similarly, Immortella introduces inspiring and successful women (N=2) to its followers and their skincare routine as part of its ‘IMBEAUTY advent calendar’ campaign. Namely, it portrays women as resilient, confident, and autonomous individuals who take charge of their beauty and pursue their aspirations, as shown by the caption: “In the IMBEAUTY advent calendar, we present four wonderful and successful women who inspire us - they think outside the box and rise above personal limitations. ✨ They are self-confident, know their worth, and follow their dreams. They are also loyal users of Immortella products and will reveal their IMBEAUTY routine according to skin type. Thank you for being one of them 🌟” (@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2022, December 2th).

4.2.2 Challenging gender roles

Croatian beauty brands La PIEL (N=5), Skintegra (N=5), and Immortella (N=2) challenge conventional gender roles by showcasing women in diverse and non-traditional roles, such as being in leadership and professional positions, as well as scientists. Those findings are in contrast with the previous scholars who argue that women usually appear in traditionally feminine lower-status occupations rather than in leadership, decision-making, or entrepreneurship positions when featured in a business context (Middleton et al., 2020, p. 689; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014, p. 450). Also, they contradict the research by Labaš and Mihovilović (2013), which revealed that women depicted in Croatian media are largely journalists, actresses, and musicians, whereas conventionally male jobs such as scientists and politicians are absent (p. 122). Notably, La PIEL, Skintegra, and Immortella are beauty brands founded by women present in posts, visually, and through captions. Consequently, such depictions inspire women to pursue leadership positions in their respective fields. For instance, La PIEL (N=9) features its CEO, famous Croatian pop star Lana Jurčević both in visuals and captions, which are mainly written from her perspective, as revealed by the captions: “I don’t know how we managed this and how I managed to work on this for the last 7 months, but if something has always saved me and made me happy, it’s what I do: the music I’m also working on and the development of beautiful formulas for products that are mainly mine and make women feel and look better and more beautiful and confident ❤️” (@la_piel, 2024, March 27th). This example illustrates the non-traditional role of leading the beauty company and the La PIEL founder’s passion and dedication towards her professional career and female empowerment within her brand, aiming to improve not only women’s looks but also their feelings and confidence. In this specific post, the founder’s femininity is emphasized through glamorous makeup, fashionable attire, and painted nails, which could undermine the founder’s professional competence (Timke & O’Barr, 2017, p. 13).

However, the posts by Skintegra and Immortella contradict the research by Ban (2013), which demonstrated that Croatian media texts about successful women typically begin by praising their beauty instead of their professional achievements (p. 395). Namely, Skintegra (N=5) incorporates its CEO, Jelena Skendžić Ratkajec, in its posts, such as one where she poses dressed in a black blazer and gazes directly into the camera, thus conveying her confidence and authority as a leader of the company (see Figure 4.9). That photo is followed by the caption written from her perspective: “This year we launched VOLCANICA and CICA-CERA...In 2021, we won several awards...We are happy and proud that you recognize our interaction as friendly and that you have given us this recognition...” (@skintegrabeauty, 2021, December 31st). Overall, the post empowers women by highlighting the success stories and launches of Skintegra and its CEO in recent years.

Also, Skintegra features women in scientific roles, showcasing them in laboratory settings and as presenters at scientific conferences (see Figure 4.9). Regarding Immortella (N=3), the brand challenges traditional gender roles by portraying its CEO – Marija Tomas, as shown by the caption where she introduces herself: “My name is Marija, and Immortella is my story about love for nature and desire to create. Nature is what we always return to as a safe heaven when we want to choose the best for ourselves. That’s exactly how I imagined Immortella...” (@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2021, June 25th). This caption is accompanied by a photo featuring Marija sitting on the chair and confidently looking directly at the camera.

Figure 4.9

Examples of women in non-traditional roles



4.2.3 Female power portrayals

In addition, displays of female power are noticeable in posts by Croatian beauty brands. Expert or knowledge power is found in La PIEL (N=1), Skintegra (N=2), and Immortella (N=2) posts. For example, La PIEL features highly educated women who serve as experts, sharing their knowledge and expert advice. This approach empowers women, as demonstrated by the caption: “Just for you, 7 tips on how to detox your mind, written by our dear Jelena Marković, psychotherapy consultant @smartchange.me 🧠📖” (@la_piel, 2022, January 10th). In addition, Skintegra portrays a woman, a master of pharmacy, giving a speech about acids at a professional meeting, thereby sharing her knowledge (see Figure 4.10). That can be seen within the next quote: “Our wonderful Tea had a lecture about acids and how to use them properly!” (@skintegrabeauty,

2023, November 6th). Similarly, Immortella introduces the woman's educational background and thus displays expertise and professionalism in her field, as evident in this caption: "...I am currently completing a specialist study in Dermatopharmacy and Cosmetology at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry in Zagreb. Happy, because I can use my knowledge to create products that make the skin beautiful as well as healthy..." (@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2021, June 25th). These examples indicate that women's education, competence, and knowledge serve as power sources, possibly impacting others (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022, p. 1199; Lazar, 2006, pp. 508-509).

Figure 4.10

Example of expert or knowledge power



Furthermore, empowered beauty is only visible in La PIEL's posts (N=10). For instance, in La PIEL's reels, a woman wakes up and joyfully engages in her skincare routine, constantly smiling and, in the end, spinning around. That suggests that engaging in beauty practices such as skincare routine can be empowering and fulfilling, contributing to happiness, fulfillment, and satisfaction (see Figure 4.11). According to Lazar (2011), this aligns with the third-wave feminism and postfeminism perspectives, asserting that advertised beauty practices can be empowering, enjoyable, and self-chosen representations of femininity (p. 37). Also, the empowered beauty is identified within this caption: "Wherever you go, we're sure you'll shine, and for the final touch, there's Glow BABE, which never goes unnoticed. ✨ It completes every outfit and makeup look, smells wonderful, and also moisturizes the skin" (@la_piel, 2021, October 23rd). It conveys a message of empowerment, suggesting that a woman possesses inherent attractiveness and the

potential for its enhancement through the use of a beauty product (see Figure 4.11). Additionally, the quote by La PIEL, “Mystical, strong, powerful and sensual just the way YOU are! 😊” (@la_piel, 2024, March 15th), suggests that using the promoted beauty product can further enhance these qualities, thereby reinforcing the idea of empowerment through beauty. That is in line with the notion by Lazar (2006) that empowered beauty advertisements endorse products that enhance the beauty of women and thus increase their power as well (p. 506). The agentic power is only noticeable within La PIEL’s posts (N=2). The caption “We always have a CHOICE. I know which one is mine, but I’m interested in which one is yours and how will you support me in the new story and movement ‘Satisfied in your skin?’” (@la_piel, 2022, August 3th) raises awareness about women’s freedom of choice and decision-making in everyday’s life, thus empowering them. Besides, the hashtag #SmartSkincareForSmartPeople (@la_piel, 2023, March 13th) motivates women to have control over their skincare routines and make proper choices for the health of their skin. According to Lazar (2006), these examples indicate that females have autonomy in their choices and decisions (p. 510).

Figure 4.11

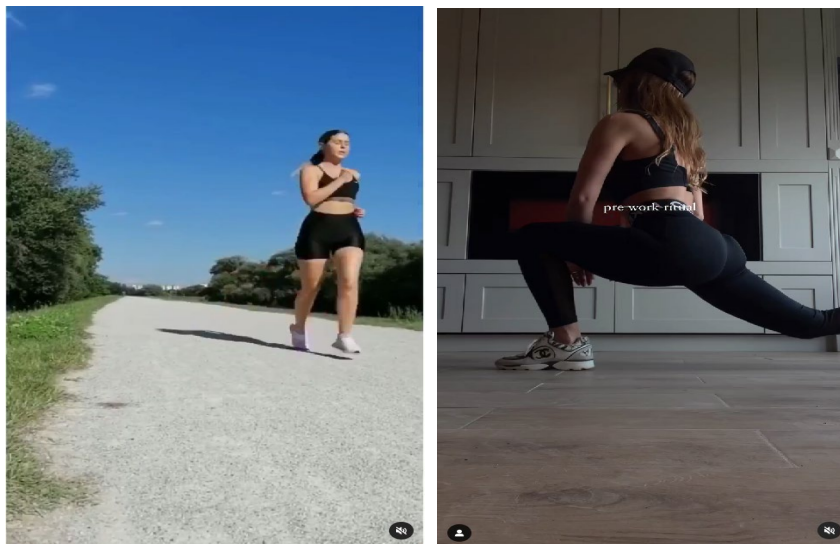
Examples of empowered beauty



Furthermore, La PIEL’s posts (N=2) feature women being sporty and active individuals, displaying athletic or physical power by engaging in activities such as running and exercising at the gym as part of their morning routines (see Figure 4.12). This portrayal suggests that these women have command over their bodies, symbolizing their ability for self-transformation (Kordrostami & Lacznia, 2022, p. 1186).

Figure 4.12

Examples of athletic or physical power



To summarize, this theme indicates that despite the present stereotyping of women, there is an apparent trend across Croatian beauty brands toward promoting more positive female representation. That is achieved by implementing femvertising in their Instagram advertisements. Moreover, this theme answers the sub-question: “How do Croatian beauty brands portray female empowerment in their Instagram advertisements?”. Namely, female empowerment constructs through pro-woman messaging, the portrayals of women in non-traditional roles, and female power. That is in contrast with the research by Hofstede (2023), revealing that Croatia is strongly inclined towards avoiding uncertainty, which leads Croatian businesses to be resistant to innovation, such as incorporating femvertising into their advertising strategies. This can be explained by the fact that culture and, thereby, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are dynamic and have the capacity for change (Søndergaard, 1994, pp. 450-453). Also, it is important to understand that algorithms influence the social media realm, respectively, the dissemination of trends like femvertising and, therefore, beauty brands’ content (Babić, 2021, para. 2).

4.3 Theme 3: Promoting body positivity

‘Promoting body positivity’ represents the third theme. It advocates for positive body image and mental health of women and encourages them to love and accept themselves, as well as to take care of their bodies. This theme aligns with the ‘body positive movement’, which is known for challenging of unattainable norms of beauty and demonstrating more diverse and often marginalized bodies in media (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 48).

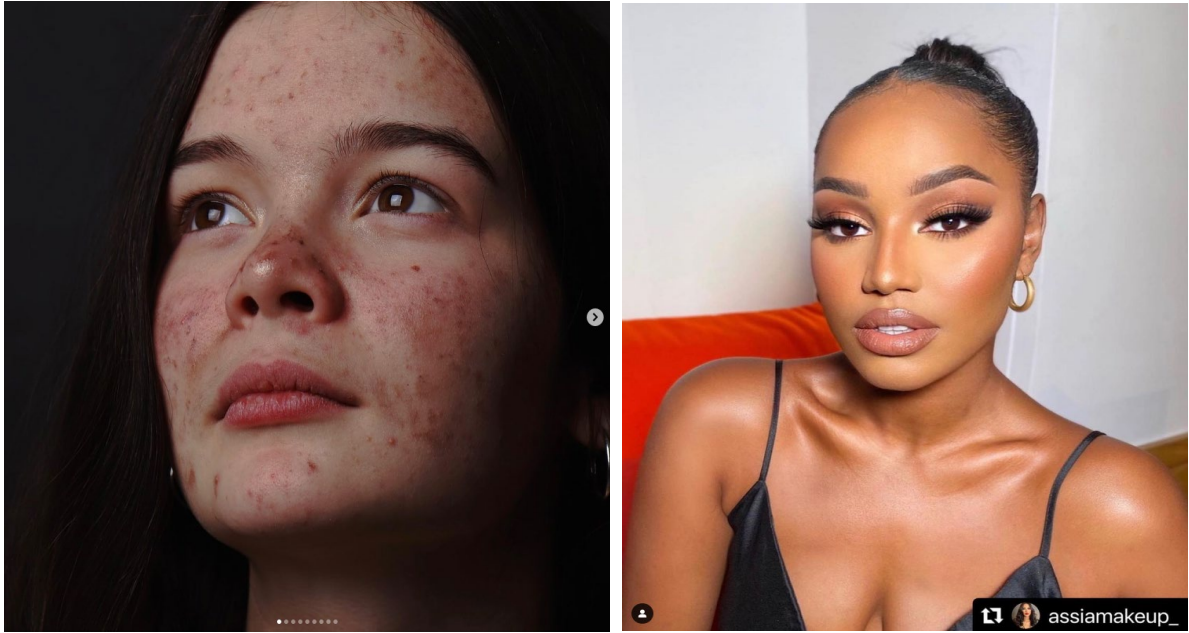
4.3.1 Diverse representation of beauty

Croatian beauty brands promote diverse representations of beauty, visible upon women having skin imperfections, different body types encompassing curvy and fat women, and different skin colors relating to the portrayal of black women (see Figure 4.13). Namely, those portrayals challenge conventional beauty norms in Croatia, as exemplified by Labaš and Maljković (2013), including a slim, white woman with an accentuated waist and flawless face (p. 331). Starting with skin irregularities, Skintegra (N=18) predominantly depicts women having acne, redness, moles, freckles, wrinkles, spots, and scars. Those depictions can be attributed to the fact that Skintegra's products are aimed at problematic and reactive skin (Skintegra, 2024, section O Nama, para. 5). Afterward, La PIEL (N=9) shows women having acne, cellulite, freckles, and stretch marks, whereas Immortella (N=6) portrays women having wrinkles and freckles only. Also, there are different body types present within La PIEL (N=6), Skintegra (N=2) and Immortella (N=1). Mostly, females portrayed are curvy, emphasizing their thighs, buttocks, and breasts, or they are depicted as having larger body proportions and belly fat and thus are considered fat. Finally, La PIEL (N=2) and Skintegra (N=1) feature black women. These portrayals of different skin colors are in line with the perspectives of third and fourth-wave feminism, which advocate for more authentic representations of individuals and diversity across bodies, faces, and races (Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 446).

Figure 4.13

Examples of diverse representation of beauty





4.3.2 Self-love and body acceptance

Moreover, posts by La PIEL (N=22), Skintegra (N=19), and Immortella (N=13) promote self-love and body acceptance. That is to say, those brands promote one body positivity's aspect, encouraging women to cultivate love and acceptance of their bodies, irrespective of the idealised media representations (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 48). To begin with, La PIEL shows a close-up shot of a woman without make-up, revealing her skin imperfections, acne, scars, and hair. Flower petals are placed on her face, symbolizing the importance of gentleness and self-compassion towards the skin. The post encourages women to embrace and accept their imperfections without feelings of shame, thus reinforcing the notion that everyone is valuable, regardless of physical appearance (see Figure 4.14). That is evident within the quote: "No matter what you are going through regarding your skin, just remember that that does not determine your worth and that that is not to reason to feel shame..." (@la_piel, 2023, March 27th).

Figure 4.14

Example of self-love and body acceptance



Notably, La PIEL raises awareness of digital manipulations such as Photoshop and camera manipulations, thus fostering love and acceptance towards real appearances, including skin irregularities, and contributing to women's well-being. Moreover, this aligns with information filtering, which entails rejecting the portrayal of mainstream beauty standards and embracing information, fostering confidence and positive emotions (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 48). This is exemplified in a video where a woman shows her face close-up under strong lightening, revealing her skin imperfections, and then she moves away from the camera, where she is illuminated by another light, making her skin look flawless. The accompanying caption is: "Skin texture is normal, we all have it, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't take care of it! ♡ The online world is a game with a camera that almost never shows the real situation, love yourself and your skin because you are beautiful just the way you are and in your "home" version, as we like to say! 👑 #LoveTheSkinYouReIn" (@la_piel, 2024, February 20th). Additionally, Skintegra motivates women to establish a positive attitude toward the functions and capabilities of their skin. That is, it encourages them to love and accept themselves and their visible flaws because they contribute to their uniqueness. That is revealed by the caption:

What do you see in the mirror? 🧐 Too often the previous list is what you don't like about your skin - pores, wrinkles, blemishes, blackheads, acne, scars... 📷🧐 We want to change. Accept the smile lines, the recognizable scar, the dimples on the cheeks, the texture that is real. We want you to see your skin: healthy. Resistant. Unique. Change your perspective. ❤️ (@skintegrabeauty, 2022, April 13th)

Moreover, Skintegra highlights that real perfection lies in owning and embracing one's unique skin, as the caption shows: "My skin is perfect because it is cared for. No wrinkle, no pimple, or blemish can diminish that. My skin is perfect because it's mine" (@skintegrabeauty, 2021, May 30th). Likewise, Immortella promotes self-confidence, positive self-perception, and feelings among women. It underscores the importance of feeling comfortable in one's skin, regardless of societal beauty standards. That is evident within the next quotes: "Beauty is feeling good in your own skin 🌟" (@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2023, March 8th) and "No skin is perfect, but your imperfections are what make you beautiful and special. Get to know your skin, take care of it in the best possible way, and show it off proudly. Be what you are. Be happy with yourself. Be gentle with your skin" (@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2022, November 29th).

4.3.3 Taking care of the body and mind

In addition, La PIEL (N=21), Skintegra (N=16), and Immortella (N=19) consistently advocate for taking care of the body and mind among women. That refers to healthy lifestyle practices and self-care rituals like skincare routines, baths, relaxation, and socialization aimed to enhance women's physical and mental health (Lazuka et al., 2020, p. 88). Furthermore, Croatian beauty brands raise awareness about women's health by acknowledging various initiatives (see Figure 4.15). For example, La PIEL empowers women by showing an event supporting the breast cancer fight where women pose and attend an organized gathering. It raises awareness about breast cancer, and it encourages women to take care of their health by doing self-examinations and ultrasounds. That is evident within the caption: "👩🏻 Have you performed a breast self-examination or had an ultrasound? We are happy to be involved in PINK month and to be able to contribute in several ways to this story for all women in the fight against breast cancer" (@la_piel, 2021, October 10th). Similarly, Skintegra promotes awareness of polycystic syndrome and underscores the importance of self-care by advocating for women to undergo ultrasound checks, as revealed by the caption: "Self-care is important. September is the month of raising awareness about polycystic ovary syndrome, and that is why, in cooperation with the Zagreb polyclinic @gynnova, we are giving you 3 polycystic ovary ultrasound examinations as a gift. Because one review can make a

difference. Take care of each other - tag a friend, mom, sister and win a review" (@skintegrabeauty, 2022, September 26th).

Figure 4.15

Examples of women's health awareness initiatives



In the same way, Immortella points out the significance of gentle and natural skincare routines, thereby alleviating the effects of stress on the skin. That is apparent within the post displaying a woman with her eyes closed and a trace of cream on her cheek (see Figure 4.16), accompanied by the caption: "As the years pass, the stress of modern life leaves its mark on our skin. Give her deep care with products signed by nature - because she deserves it. Our renewing face cream has a light texture and is enriched with natural ingredients that act on the visible signs of skin aging. The skin is strengthened, revitalized, radiant, and - grateful. Be gentle with your skin! 🌿" (@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2021, October 16th). Moreover, Skintegra encourages women to prioritize self-care and their well-being by dedicating sufficient time for themselves and their skin through skincare routines and relaxation after a busy schedule, as shown by the caption: "You deserve time for yourself! At Skintegra, we formulate, but you adjust. You adapt our products to your routines, your hard training, long-awaited weekends, night shifts, canceled plans. Skincare is more than a cleanser, more than a serum, more than a cream, it's your time. Take it for yourself. Breathe in. Start your day" (@skintegrabeauty, 2021, April 9th).

By the same token, Croatian beauty brands promote mindfulness and inner positivity. This supports Ban's research (2013) findings, demonstrating that Croatian media emphasizes physical

and mental well-being as an essential component of female beauty (p. 390). This focus on holistic well-being is evident in the messaging of these brands, which advocate for self-care and a positive mindset alongside beauty and skincare routines (Lazuka et al., 2020, p. 88). For instance, La PIEL invites women to disconnect from the outside world for a while and use it as an opportunity for self-reflection and mindfulness, contributing to their emotional wellness and inner peace. That is revealed by the caption: “For me, special moments are when I come home, take off everything, disconnect from everything, and turn on all my senses. The smell, the atmosphere, me in my own skin... Sometimes it’s enough to be with myself...” (@la_piel, 2022, March 8th). Afterward, the hashtag commonly used across La PIEL’s posts, #OurSmallRituals, is introduced. This hashtag encourages women to incorporate personal self-care rituals into their everyday lives to maintain their general health.

Additionally, Immortella depicts women in cozy settings, while sitting on the bed wearing pijamas and bathrobes, having masks on their faces, and laughing what suggests that they enjoy the relaxation moments with their friends. Thus, Immortella encourages women to prioritize spending time with their friends and engaging in self-care practices such as skincare routine and SPA treatments as ways to relax and enjoy, contributing to their well-being and positive energy (see Figure 4.16). This encouragement is further underscored by the brand’s recognition of World Friendship and World Laughter Day, as shown in the following captions: “Did you know that today is World Friendship Day? Spend it with your best friend, relax with a SPA treatment and enjoy 😊🌟” and “🌟 Today is World Laughter Day!🌟 Tag the friends you invite tonight to a movie night with a SPA treatment and laughter to tears 😊” (@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2021, July 30th; @immortella_mediterraneanbeauty, 2021, January 10th).

Figure 4.16

Examples of taking care of body and mind



To conclude, this theme addresses the sub-question of how Croatian beauty brands portray female empowerment in their Instagram advertisements. In brief, the analyzed beauty advertisements also construct female empowerment by promoting body positivity, including diverse beauty portrayals, advocating for self-love and acceptance, and caring for body and mind. This noticeable shift towards more accurate female representation suggests that Croatian beauty brands recognize the significance of femvertising as both a profitable advertising approach and an opportunity for social impact. This supports the idea that such female depictions, which counter stereotypes, aim to reduce the pressure on women caused by traditional advertising (Åkestam et al., 2017, p. 797).

In the next chapter, the results of the thematic analysis will be summarized, and theoretical and practical implications contributing to discourse on female representation in beauty advertising on Instagram will be provided. Additionally, the next chapter will point out this research's limitations and recommendations for future studies.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate how Croatian beauty brands represent women in their Instagram advertisements. A total of 150 posts were meticulously collected and thematically analyzed from the official Instagram accounts of three Croatian beauty brands, La PIEL, Skintegra, and Immortella. This chapter answers the main research question and sub-questions based on the findings of this research. Also, the study's theoretical and practical implications are addressed. Finally, the limitations of this study are discussed, and future research suggestions are provided.

5.1 Summary of findings

This research is guided by two sub-questions that aim to obtain insights into the answer to the main research question. The first sub-question is: "How do Croatian beauty brands construct female stereotypes in their Instagram advertisements?". Drawing on the results of the analysis, Croatian beauty brands construct female stereotypes through depictions of female submissiveness, promotion of physical perfection, sexual objectification, and sexualization. Furthermore, Croatian beauty brands stereotype women by portraying them as passive, vulnerable, fragile, unbalanced, and thus submissive and in need of the protection of others. That is in line with the previous research on female submissiveness (Goffman, 1979, pp. 1-84; Kang, 1997, pp. 979-996). Also, they emphasize motherhood by depicting women in traditional roles as family-oriented, pregnant, and mothers. Besides, La PIEL, Skintegra, and Immortella construct unrealistic beauty ideals by depicting women as young, predominantly pale, having a flawless face and body skin, and slim figures, which demonstrates the dominance of Westernized standards of beauty caused by globalization. Significantly, La PIEL and Immortella encourage women to strive for darker skin tones, reinforcing the belief that tanned skin is a desirable beauty standard. In addition, Croatian beauty brands sexually objectify women by dehumanizing them and reducing them primarily to their bodies and their attributes. Likewise, they sexualize women by representing them as seductive and being aware of their sexuality and allure. Those female stereotypical portrayals are in line with the research by Rabrenović (2013), who points out motherhood, male dependence and manipulation, physical perfection, attractiveness, and sensuality as crucial aspects of female advertising portrayals in Croatia (pp. 203-204).

The second sub-question is constituted in the following way: "How do Croatian beauty brands portray female empowerment in their Instagram advertisements?". It should be noted that Croatian beauty brands empower women by implementing femvertising into their advertising strategies. This involves utilizing topics of pro-woman messaging, challenging gender roles,

portraying female power, and promoting body positivity. Namely, Croatian beauty brands disseminate positive and empowering messages and imagery that celebrate women's potential, capabilities, talents, and success and even point out their vulnerability as strength. Moreover, Croatian beauty brands feature women as inspirational role models and raise awareness about significant occasions like Women's Day, National Day of Combating Violence Against Women, and Mother's Day, thereby advocating for women's rights and gender equality. Additionally, they depict women in non-traditional roles as being leaders, professionals, and scientists. This illustrates a shift from their past representations of typically feminine, lower-status jobs (Labaš & Mihovilović, 2013, p. 122; Middleton et al., 2020, p. 689; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014, p. 450). Besides, Croatian beauty brands empower women by showcasing female power portrayals, respectively empowered beauty, agentive power, expert or knowledge power, and athletic or physical power.

Furthermore, they promote body positivity in a way that they portray women with skin imperfections, larger body sizes, curvy figures, and black skin. Also, they advocate for self-love, body acceptance, and overall well-being. That is to say, Croatian beauty brands empower women by displaying diverse physical appearances deviating from prevalent beauty standards in Croatia, which encompass a slim, white woman with an accentuated waist and flawless face (Labaš & Maljković, 2013, p. 331). They also encourage women to accept and embrace their flaws since they contribute to their uniqueness and take care of their body and mind by engaging in self-care rituals, such as skincare routines, and raising awareness about women's health. This is in line with the research by Ban (2013), which reveals that Croatian media emphasizes physical and mental well-being as a crucial aspect of feminine beauty (p. 390).

The above sub-questions facilitated answering the main research question: "How do Croatian beauty brands represent women in their Instagram advertisements?". In essence, Croatian beauty brands both stereotype and empower women, and thus demonstrate their female representation's duality. Moreover, they portray women as subordinate and embodying the traditional role of mothers, as sex objects and sexualized alike, promoting unattainable standards of beauty. Notably, this construction of female stereotypes by beauty brands in Croatia reflects society's adherence to deeply rooted sexist and traditional values and a strong commitment to family, as well as its emotional need for rules and conformity, such as the hierarchical structure where women are expected to perform their predetermined roles of mothers, wives, and objects of desire (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", para. 2; Rajh et al., 2016, pp. 318-319; Sever Globan et al., 2018, p. 86).

On the other hand, they challenge these stereotypes through pro-woman messages, showing diverse female bodies and imperfections, displaying female power and women in non-

traditional roles as CEOs and scientists, and encouraging them to love, accept, and take care of their bodies. Although Croatian society is strongly inclined towards avoiding uncertainty and is, therefore, less receptive to innovative practices like femvertising, this use of femvertising in Instagram advertising by Croatian beauty brands proves that culture is dynamic and capable of change (Hofstede, 2023, section "Country Comparison-Croatia", para. 8; Søndergaard, 1994, pp. 450-453). This female representation in Croatian Instagram beauty advertising which is more accurate, authentic, and positive than before, can be attributed not only to the influence of algorithmic processes but also to the fact that beauty brands recognize femvertising as both a profitable advertising strategy and an opportunity for social impact (Babić, 2021, para. 2; Varghese & Kumar, 2022, pp. 441-442).

It can be argued that this duality emerges because Croatian beauty brands reflect the cultural environment, which is evolving as traditional values and ingrained sexist beliefs are starting to be replaced with new principles to embrace innovation and global advertising trends. Overall, this contradiction illustrates the multifaceted nature of contemporary Instagram female representation, where old and new values clash yet manage to coexist.

5.2 Theoretical and practical implications

This research has theoretical implications since its findings contribute to the fields of cultural and visual studies, gender representation, advertising, social media, and beauty industry management. It provides valuable insights about female representation in advertising and thus fills a gap in the existing research on female representation by specifically focusing on Instagram beauty advertisements within the socio-cultural context of Croatia.

Furthermore, the previous research on female representation in advertising often exhibits a one-sided viewpoint, revealing the presence of female stereotypes or empowerment. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates the duality, indicating that those phenomena are not mutually exclusive but can coexist. Additionally, this study identifies the concept of 'half face'. This refers to the female models having only half of their faces visible because of the sideways posing, further reinforcing their emotional disconnection. As a result, it expands upon the concepts of female submissiveness introduced by previous scholars (Goffman, 1979, pp. 24-84; Kang, 1997, pp. 979-996; Shalaby & Alkaff, 2019, pp. 62-63). It is important to mention that Westernized standards of beauty dominate female representation in Croatia and that there are no specific local beauty ideals that can be ascribed to the process of globalization. Also, Croatian beauty brands challenge the dominant idealization of fair skin by promoting tanned skin as desirable and attractive. This contributes to the

current theories on beauty ideals (Frith et al., 2005, pp. 56-70; Labaš & Maljković, 2013, pp. 300-357).

The results have practical implications for global beauty companies, providing data from the under-researched market of Croatia. Besides, this study is important for beauty firms that may contemplate redefining female representation in their social media advertisements by implementing femvertising. The incorporation of femvertising not only helps brands meet consumer expectations for female empowerment and their more diverse and authentic depictions, thereby contributing to social progress, but it also enables brands to stand out in the market as it enhances advertisement and brand attitudes, as well as consumers' purchase intentions (Åkestam et al., 2017, p. 802; Varghese & Kumar, 2022, p. 443). Furthermore, the implications of the findings encourage not only beauty brands but also society to discuss reshaping traditional female roles and beauty standards in order to suppress female stereotypes and thus enable gender equality, diversity, and inclusion.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study's primary limitation is the small sample consisting of 150 Instagram posts, which required the application of inclusion criteria in order to generate an adequate and as diverse as possible sample. Accordingly, the sample included photos featuring females only, while the Instagram posts displaying males were not considered. That is to say, photos featuring both women and men could provide valuable insights into gender representation and their power dynamics and thus enhance the sample's diversity and inclusivity. In addition, the positionality of the researcher as a Croatian woman with feminist principles might have influenced the process of analysis and interpretation of findings. However, in order to ensure the research's validity and reliability, sensitizing concepts, thematic analysis, coding procedure, and theoretical and researcher positionality were comprehensively explained, justified, and conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-101). Specifically, analyzing only textual components through critical discourse analysis or focusing only on photos by employing visual analysis will provide more in-depth insights into the studied phenomena. However, thematic analysis is chosen for this research as it is a suitable method to examine rich and descriptive media texts such as Instagram posts, which integrate both written and visual features (Walters, 2016, pp. 107-108).

Future research might explore female representation, respectively, the construction of female stereotypes, and empowerment in more Croatian beauty brands. Also, the research could compare the portrayal of women in beauty advertising across multiple countries since that may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how various cultural contexts influence the

construction of female stereotypes and empowerment and their potential coexistence. Another possibility is to explore the effects of the duality of female representation in Instagram beauty advertisements on customers' perceptions and behavior, such as self-esteem and female identity. In addition, research should investigate how other Croatian businesses, such as fashion or household products industries, depict women in their Instagram advertisements. Finally, future research could examine the portrayal of women in advertising on other novel platforms, such as TikTok, and thus expand and enrich the current knowledge of the research topic.

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Skintegra [@skintegrabeauty]. (2022, September 26). *SKINTEGRA X GYNNOVA: together against PCOS! [GIVEAWAY ENDED from September 26 to 28] If this sounds familiar, your skin is*

[Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ci9uAshszw-/>

Skintegra [@skintegrabeauty]. (2023, March 8). *A woman goes to school even when she has menstrual pains. A woman goes to work when she is pregnant* [Photograph]. Instagram.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CphanOqlwQz/>

Skintegra [@skintegrabeauty]. (2023, September 6). *Recently, as we are exposed more and more on social networks, we are often faced with ugly comments about our* [Photograph]. Instagram.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cw18mLSom6h/>

Skintegra [@skintegrabeauty]. (2023, November 6). *Listen carefully because Tea has revealed a very important piece of information to you! 😊 Put your ears up! 😊* [Video]. Instagram.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CzTIQT8sLMO/>

Appendices

Appendix A

Coding tree

Themes	Sub-themes	Open codes
Stereotyping women	Female submissiveness	Ritualization of subordination
		Feminine touch
		The family
		Licensed withdrawal
		Body display
	Beauty ideals and physical perfection	Youthfulness
		Flawless skin
		Slim figure
		White women
		Tanned skin
	Sexual objectification	Emphasis of the body
		Emphasis of specific body part
		Absence of face
		Eroticism
	Sexualization	Nudity
		Seductive facial expression
Sensual and provocative poses		
Touching oneself in an intimate manner		
Sexual interaction between models		
Empowering women	Pro-woman messaging	Women's resilience and persistence
		Empowerment through female solidarity and vulnerability
		Women as inspirational role models

		Notable women's awareness days
	Challenging gender roles	Women in leadership positions
		Women in Science
		Women as professionals
	Female power portrayals	Empowered beauty
		Agentive power
		Expert or knowledge power
		Athletic or physical power
		Family power
	Promoting body positivity	Diverse representation of beauty
Curvy women		
Fat women		
Black women		
Self-love and body acceptance		Stop skin shaming
		Imperfections make you beautiful and unique
		Stop comparing to others
		Acknowledge your worth
		Value functionality and abilities of skin
Taking care of the body and mind		Self-care rituals
		Healthy lifestyle practices
		Women's health awareness initiatives
		Tips for skin problems
		Awareness of social media manipulations
		Mindfulness
		Feeling happy and confident

Appendix B

Coding frame

Concept	Open Code	Description
Female stereotypes	The ritualization of subordination	The female model is in an inferior pose (sitting or lying on the ground, bed, or sofa)
		The female model stands with one leg bent off the ground or crosses her legs
		The female model leans against objects
		The female model tilts her head or body to one side
	Feminine touch	The female model touches objects or herself in a gentle and caressing way
The family	The female model is present with daughter	
Licensed withdrawal	The female model is physically or emotionally distanced from the current situation (looks into the distance, withdraws behind objects, is self-absorbed, or covers her face with her hands)	

	Body display	The female model wears body-revealing apparel or is nude
	Housewife	The female model cleans, cooks, or looks after children
	Object of beauty	The female model is slim, young, and has an appealing face
	Professional	The female model performs lower-status jobs (sales, service positions) or male-dominated with exaggerated femininity
Sexual objectification	Emphasis of the body or specific body part, averted gaze, sex, and eroticism	The female model is passive; her face is not shown or she looks aside, as the focus is on her body or specific body parts
Sexualisation	Nudity, seductive facial expressions, sensual and provocative poses, touching oneself in an intimate manner, and the sexual interaction between models	The female model exudes awareness of her sexuality and demonstrates agency, often by maintaining direct eye contact with the camera while emphasizing her sexual characteristics and behaviors
Female empowerment	Pro-woman messaging	Narratives that emphasize women's talents, skills, strengths, and achievements
	Challenging gender roles	The female models engage in

		non-traditional roles such as sports, masculine activities, professional careers, and authoritative positions
	Diversity and inclusion	The portrayal challenges conventional beauty ideals by showcasing diverse body shapes, sizes, appearances (cellulite, acne) races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations
Female power	Empowered beauty	The female models engage in actions aimed at improving themselves, including enhancing their beauty, which increases their power. Overall, the female model is confident and comfortable with her identity as a woman
	Agentive power	The female models have freedom of choice and decision-making
	Expert or knowledge power	The female model displays expertise and professionalism in her field, demonstrating high education and knowledge
	Sexual power	The female model is sexually attractive and uses her allure to control her environment.

		The female models are considered powerful and sexually dynamic, often rewarding themselves for their attractiveness
	Athletic/physical power	The female model is sporty, active, and fit and has command over her body
	Family power	The female model embodies a mother figure characterized by reliability, care, and nurturing, symbolizing the role of raising future generations

Appendix C

Overview of the data set

Immortella [@immortella_mediterraneanbeauty]. (n.d.). Posts [Instagram profile]. Instagram.

Retrieved April 1, 2024, from

https://www.instagram.com/immortella_mediterraneanbeauty/

La PIEL [@la_piel]. (n.d.). Posts [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved April 1, 2024, from

https://www.instagram.com/la_piel/

Skintegra [@skintegrabeauty]. (n.d.). Posts [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved April 1, 2024,

from <https://www.instagram.com/skintegrabeauty/>

To begin with, La PIEL is a Croatian beauty brand founded in 2018 by famous Croatian pop star Lana Jurčević (La PIEL, 2024, section O Nama, para. 3). It produces organic and natural beauty products for the face and body, such as shower gels, body lotions, bubble balls, shiny water, face cream, and masks (La PIEL, 2024, section O Nama, paras. 3-4). The La PIEL's production is mainly handmade and excludes unhealthy constituents such as parabens, paraffin, silicones, and petroleum. Furthermore, the mission of this brand is to take care of women by encouraging them to use natural beauty products. As stated by La PIEL, "The mission is to follow you in your needs and make sure you feel even more beautiful, confident, and nurtured. No fear for your health" (La PIEL, 2024, section O Nama, para. 5). In addition, La PIEL has an Instagram following of 122 thousand and 2650 posts at the time of writing (La PIEL, n.d.).

Secondly, Immortella Mediterranean Beauty (hereinafter referred to as Immortella) represents a natural Croatian handmade beauty brand inspired by Mediterranean nature (Immortella, 2024, section O Nama, para. 2). The brand's symbol is the Immortelle plant, which signifies strength and quality found in nature. Furthermore, this beauty company includes a broad spectrum of products: natural cosmetics, essential oils, vegetable oils, floral waters, and deodorants (Immortella, 2024, section O Nama, para. 2). Also, when writing, Immortella had 16.5 thousand followers and 1739 posts (Immortella, n.d.).

Thirdly, Skintegra was founded in Croatia in 2017, and its products are formulated for reactive and problematic skin (Skintegra, 2024, section O Nama, para. 5). Moreover, due to the carefully selected ingredients, it aims to improve skin function and appearance. In addition, Skintegra acts within the framework of social responsibility by donating its products to women and children in Croatian safe houses and helping small non-profit causes (Skintegra, 2024, section O Nama, paras. 10-12). Besides, Skintegra has a follower base of 46.2 thousand and 1728 posts

(Skintegra, n.d.).