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**The Influence of Gender Equality Movements on Marketing Campaigns
and Advertisements in Beauty Industry: An Empirical Study of Iranian
and Italian Brands**

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the brave and determined Iranian women and girls who are standing up against discriminatory laws and demanding change to defend their fundamental rights and freedoms. Despite facing significant challenges and obstacles, these women have never lost their spirit and have remained steadfast in their pursuit of justice and equality. Their bravery and resilience inspire me, and I hope that my work can contribute in some way to amplifying their voices and advancing their cause.

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Chapter1. Introduction

In recent decades, new movements for gender equality and an increasing focus on sustainability goals have led to crucial changes in the marketing campaigns and advertising methods of various brands in different industries. For many years, advertising and marketing helped companies sell their products, increase revenue, and shape cultural norms and gender stereotypes. Among all sectors, gender equality within the beauty industry has always been controversial, as this sector is directly related to society's perception of beauty. Although some brands have initiated adjusting to the new feminist trends and changed their advertisement strategies to maintain their market position, others have employed this matter as a competitive advantage that has differentiated their brands' image and boosted their brand value.

Nevertheless, there are conflicting views and an overall need for more research regarding how these changes affect the marketing strategies and advertising media channels in developing countries, for instance, Iran. Also, compared to a developed nation like Italy, what procedures have each one put into action to apply these trends to their marketing plan?

It should be considered that the relationship between gender justice activities and the implications of marketing approaches is bilateral, and they influence each other; consequently, marketing and advertising angles can take a significant role in enforcing gender equality and decreasing societal stereotypes.

Moreover, the other topic that is understudied (especially in developing countries) is how the rapid evolution of technology and the advancement of social media platforms have eased how people interact, communicate and express their ideas. Also, the extent to which this growth contributed to the brands being socially responsible and attracting new customers should be analyzed. Thus, in addition to the mutual relationship between societal and political movements and brand strategies, social media plays a crucial role in communication that helps increase people's awareness and wisdom.

One great example that proves this role could be the recent political movements in Iran, starting in September 2022 due to the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini. During the protests, having used the opposing voice of the mouth and created numerous content and hashtags on social media, people decided to boycott those brands collaborating with the government and

instead support those who defended their movements. So many brands, including beauty ones, have aligned their activities with people's requests as they discovered the power of social media and its effect on their marketing strategies. For example, "ROJASHOP," a famous cosmetics retail store in Iran, published a post on Instagram supporting protests and attracting people's admiration. The result indicates how the extent brands and companies care about social and political movements can affect the brand value or even ruin it.

This thesis will analyze the recent general transformations made in the marketing tactics and advertisements by gender justice movements and investigates how these new marketing methods contributed to feminist activities to increase people's awareness. It also indicates samples of famous beauty brands' activities and explores their impacts on user buying behavior and cultural beliefs.

The study is established on two qualitative approaches. First, to explore the impact of social trends on brand activities, an in-depth analysis will be conducted based on evaluating the social media activities of four selected beauty brands from each country of Iran and Italy. In the whole body, the reference of developing and developed countries are Iran and Italy, respectively, since they have been determined as case studies.

The study will compare their marketing approach and Instagram activities linked to gender equality, aiming to comprehend which brands are accomplishing and better coping with the existing arguments and difficulties.

Then for the second part, the consequences and outcomes of those new dealing strategies on consumers, culture, and society will be evaluated through a structured interview (N = 12 , six women from Iran and six from Italy) focusing on generations Y and Z, who are Instagram users.

This chapter will introduce the research by first discussing the background and context of the analysis, which shows the area of study, providing the history and characterizations of the main ideas in the literature on the gender equality movements, marketing, and advertising, and the emergence of social media and their consequences. Then the research problems, objectives, and research questions are recognized. Followed by research problems, the study's significance will explain why exploring the topic in a new context is essential. Finally, the existing limitations of this research and its structure will be described.

1.1. Background of the Study

In the XXI century, with rising people's awareness, the development of technology, and the appearance of new media, the growth of gender justice has been a matter of debate more than before. Before the recent movements, women and people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community suffered more from Sexism principles. According to Hammond *et al.* (2018), Sexism, portrayed as a bias in dealing with distinct genders, has been a fact in many countries throughout history. Both women and men - or men and women - can be targets of Sexism. Significant gender gaps against women can be discovered in many different areas, such as education, the labor market, political power, and decision-making (2015 World Women's Report of the United Nations). Also, gender inequality manifests in multiple aspects, such as access to resources.

The importance of eliminating Sexism and gender inequality in society is also proved by the fact that it has been selected as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Goal number 5). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of 17 main goals and 169 sub-goals. These goals consider the three central dimensions of sustainable development, which are economic, social, and ecological, in a balanced way. The Sustainable Development Goals will have to be accomplished globally by all UN member countries under the 2030 Agenda.

Thanks to the efforts of UN Women and women's organizations all over the world, gender equality, as part of the 2030 Agenda, strives to build a society in which there are equal opportunities in economic development, full access to resources, and equal participation in decision-making for women, as well as women's empowerment and protecting them from all forms of violence. Besides gender justice and empowerment of all women and girls, achieving the aim of the other 16 goals is mainly linked to the status of females.

More significantly, the other group whose rights should be considered is the LGBTQ+ community. As communicated through the UN, the SDGs were signed in 2015, in which 193 governments agreed on the common opinion that the global goals would apply to each of them and "leave no one behind." The "leave no one behind" principle is particularly relevant for LGBT individuals, whom national and international growth initiatives have usually left behind.

In May 2018, a group of UN and international human rights specialists agreed to urge governments to embrace all necessary actions to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender (LGBT) persons, communities, and populations in the design, implementation, and evaluation of all related policies. However, the UN should make more effort to ensure that the developments include LGBT groups/communities to guarantee that "no one is left behind."

Biased rules and the negative mindsets of society have all united in keeping the LGBTQ+ community back. Their consequences can be found in many countries, especially in developing ones where strict laws rooted in religion ban the presence of this community.

As cited already and represented by Brandt (2011), the primary purpose of sexist ideologies is to maintain gender inequalities in society. Sexism may no longer be the most vital force in society, subculture, and authorities' guidelines, but additionally in media and communication. Many researchers have presented that the primary reason why sexist content has been used in the media is that such material is more persuasive, draws attention, and more effortlessly generates a positive mindset in the direction of the conveyed information. Therefore, the impact of sexist content on customers is more convincing and considered more effective (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020).

During the last years, women often have been portrayed in advertising in a traditional role, for example, as housewives working in the kitchen, cleaning the house, worrying about the kids, and strongly dependent on male power and money. Also, many advertisements focus on using women as sexual objects and spotlighting their physical.

Marketing incorporates individualization, targeting and segmenting customers and their satisfaction with social and human requirements, providing added value. Customers pay more attention to what they spend money on and actively estimate further benefits the market offers, such as the prices and technical, economical service, and social advantages. Hence, marketers should concentrate much more on consumer expectations and preferences and endeavor to raise their level of satisfaction.

Consequently, another contentious issue is how the modern-day context has built new challenges for brands, specifically in the beauty industry, which is more related to social stereotypes, where customer expectations and preferences constantly evolve. Furthermore, the vital role of new technologies in facilitating possible ways of social interaction and creating new means of communication is irrefutable, primarily with the increasing number of social media platform users. Nevertheless, these changes have made it difficult for

company managers and marketing planners, who struggle to keep up with the new pace of technology, customer expectations, and social and political movements.

To handle the raised challenges, brands have put into practice a new concept in the advertising industry called 'brand responsibility' or 'brand advocacy.' If a brand aims to be responsible, it must overlook social issues such as gender inequality to seem more transparent and ethical (Champlin & Sterbenk, 2018). This new socially responsible brand image separates brands from others and contributes to consumer decision-making.

The contemporary modifications of the market resulting from trustworthy brands' actions have established new kinds of advertisements, such as 'femvertisements.' As stated by Akestam *et al.* (2017), 'femvertising' ads focus on women's empowerment and aim to encounter sexist stereotypes and societal stigma to impact people's attitudes positively.

The gender justice issue has raised international awareness with the emergence of gender equality movements, such as #MeToo, disseminated through social platforms and different media in several countries and resulted in considerable changes in culture, beliefs, and law (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020).

To conclude, to thrive and survive in the rival market, brands should put sustainable competitive advantage methods into their action plans to attract the consumers' attention and make enough earnings. When a brand creates a special meaning, it could change the attitude and vision of consumers about the brand's services or products. So, brands that attempt to be socially responsible spread a more positive image that sets positive brand attitudes and makes the reception of their advertising messages more positive. Also, any brand's reactions in specific situations, especially during social or political movements, could either boost or destroy the brand's identity.

1.2. Research Problem

Gender equality remains an unfulfilled promise despite being identified as a human right by several global conventions (Sen, 2019). As mentioned before, none of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, including poverty alleviation and the fight against corruption, could be accomplished "without ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment" (United Nations, 2015).

Previous scholarships suggest that gender inequality is deeply rooted in a country's historical and political conditions (McCall, 2001). Consequently, in countries whose regulations and laws rely more on strict religious beliefs, gender inequality is revealed much more (for example, in Iran in the Middle East after the Islamic revolution in 1979 or Italy in Europe due to the presence of the Vatican).

Over the last few years, academicians such as Reyes-Menendez et al. (2020) have asserted the necessity of analyzing content created on social platforms. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have contributed enormously to brands by providing them with a space to communicate with their users and improve their engagement and impressions. So, it helps them reinforce their brand image and grow their awareness while increasing revenue.

Moreover, Dubrofsky and Wood (2014) emphasized the importance of social platforms because, nowadays, many users use them for storytelling and communicating with others by talking about their routine activities and adventures or sharing their opinions about a specific subject. The increasing number of social media influencers and bloggers on Instagram or YouTubers results from this virility. It also creates the mainstream form of online marketing called influencer marketing. Influencers have invented a connection with their audience in which their followers trust an influencer's ideas and recommendations; therefore, if an influencer suggests buying a product, the consumer is enticed to make the recommended purchase.

According to Reyes-Menendez et al. (2020), often, making a story go viral on a social media platform leads to informing a much larger audience about that story in addition to a specific group of followers. Thus, a social network movement is formed. This phenomenon has benefited brands in different ways. First, when they aim to intentionally spread a message and build a new perception of the brand. Then, at the same time, businesses use this content to gain insights and understanding about user purposes preferences, or feedback. Companies can use this information to enhance their marketing and communication plans and improve their brand image.

Even though nowadays, the significance of gender justice is noticeable and ascertained not only in the elevation of the global economy but also in improving the brand's value, the contribution that companies can make in enhancing and reproducing gender equality is

little-studied. Furthermore, most of the studies are focused on the impacts of gender justice on economic performances or the workplace/workforce.

Therefore, more investigations should be done about those effects on the marketplace, brands' strategies, and advertising techniques, especially in developing countries where more barriers exist to overcome.

To conclude, the existing research is incomplete, firstly for brands having more interaction with gender equality arguments, such as beauty brands, and secondly, about the impacts of these feminist movements on developing countries about what plans their businesses have implemented. Marketers and brand strategists face more difficulties in such countries due to cultural and governmental barriers, in addition to needing more studies and research which support them in coping with the existing problems.

1.3. Research Objectives and Research Questions

The **objectives** of the thesis will be achieved by answering the research questions, which are the specific actions and things to investigate in order to achieve the aim, are described as follow:

Objective#1- is to identify recent gender equality movements that have had more effects on society and the media (especially those in Iran and Italy).

Objective#2- to evaluate the effects of these movements on advertisements and marketing campaigns in the beauty industry.

Objective#3- #3: To analyze the influence of social media platforms and marketing campaigns on the consumer buying behavior and perceptions.

Objective#4- to opt for two beauty brands from a developed and a developing country (Italy and Iran as the case studies) and analyze and compare the new marketing strategies and advertisement techniques they have employed in their social media accounts to align with contemporary gender justice trends.

Objective#5- to find out the effectiveness and impacts of identified marketing methods on Instagram users' insights by providing a qualitative study based on an online interview (N=12). It will conduct among Italian and Iranian Instagram users (generation Y and Z).

Therefore, the **research questions and hypotheses to which** the study will provide an answer are:

RQ #1: What are the changes and impacts that recent gender justice movements have had on marketing plans and ads for beauty brands?

Hypothesis for RQ #1: Gender equality movements have significantly affected beauty brands' business plans and advertising strategies because customers expect the companies to be socially responsible.

RQ #2: Regarding the restrictions existing in developing countries compared to developed nations, what are the main marketing strategies that beauty brands in Iran and Italy have implemented on their Instagram accounts to support gender equality and promote awareness about women's empowerment? (According to the chosen brands)

Hypothesis for RQ #2: In Iran, beauty brands face more challenges than their Italian counterparts if they want to present themselves as an advocate brand for women's rights. Nevertheless, compared to Italian brands, they have provided more creative and informative content to raise consciousness about women's empowerment on their Instagram pages (based on the chosen brands.)

RQ #3: Does the attention paid to social movements and gender rights by beauty brands on their social media platforms (Instagram) have the potential to influence cultural norms and societal views on what defines beauty standards?

Hypothesis for RQ #3: By using social media and providing content about gender rights, women's empowerment, and talking about females' struggles in society, beauty brands could find the power to change social norms and traditional beliefs.

RQ#4: To what extent do Instagram users care about the responsibility of a brand in promoting gender rights and breaking stereotypes, and how much do brand activities affect buying behavior?

Hypothesis for RQ #4: while purchasing beauty products, the priority choice of all Iranian and Italian women is to buy from beauty brands who care about gender equality and provide content to inspire change to support them as a buyer, encourage them to provide more content related to gender empowerment and help them grow.

1.4. The significance of the research

Given the lack of research regarding the effects of gender equality movements on marketing strategies and advertisements of beauty brands, especially in developing countries, this study will aim to identify and evaluate the new marketing approaches used by beauty brand companies together with providing a comparison for both countries of Iran and Italy. Moreover, it will evaluate the influences these marketing approaches have had on expanding consumers' perception of the gender equality issue and how much it affects their buying behavior.

Academia from various behavioral and social sciences fields have explored advertisement's social and cultural outcomes. Critics state that ads that show social stereotypes strengthen stereotypical values and behavior in society. The criticism believes people's perceptions, mindsets, values, and manners are strongly influenced by the content they hear and see on social media (Eisend, 2010).

During the last decades, and according to Wolin (2003), sexist content, which includes social stereotypes, has been recognized as more effective in attracting consumers' attention and is persuasive in choosing the brand. However, nowadays, because of the new trends of gender rights and raising people's awareness, brands and companies have discovered that if they want to be on the bottom line of sales, they must modify their marketing methods and turn to a socially responsible brand. Also, because of the progress made in highly masculine countries, sexist language and stereotypical messages have decreased (Eisend, 2010).

Nonetheless, not all countries have had the same growth because of the differences in cultures and value definitions. As Champlin *et al.* (2019) highlight, in the era of brand responsibility, as well as the potential for explosive viral marketing responses, many brands are using advocacy efforts to improve their consumer relationships and bottom lines.

Looking at the recent femvertising campaigns such as Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty," L'oreal's "Your Skin, Your Story," Neutrogena's "SeeWhat'sPossible," and Pantene's "Shine Strong" and "BeautifulLGBTQ" proves that the industries and companies strategies are improving and getting more intelligent.

In other words, they are more aware of their social responsibilities and try contributing to the gender equality movements by spreading slogans focusing on women's empowerment. Accessing and evaluating the comparisons between the marketing approaches of a

developed country and a developing one regarding the problems each one faces will provide an excellent resource for brands to acquire a clear insight into their performance in this area and discover their weaknesses and strengths.

Since several debates remain controversial, the study will contribute to the body of knowledge by providing answers to whether the sexist language and gender inequality in advertising run in developing countries have varied over the years and if they are dependent on and influenced by the culture.

This research will help address the current shortage of scholarships in this area and provide real-world value to brands operating in such a dynamic environment by focusing on details of the social media advertising strategies of beauty brands in Iran and Italy, together with an analysis of the user's reactance of their activities.

1.5. Limitations of the Research

Despite reviewing the previous scholarships, assessing the case studies, and evaluating the qualitative analysis, there are still some constraints to the research. The first limitation is the shortage of reliable sources about the subject in Farsi.

Secondly, because of the recent protests in Iran, the government has filtered other social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp (Twitter and Telegram were filtered already). These restrictions have caused many problems for brands' social media accounts, and most of them could not post content from mid-September. Therefore, for the case study brands, all the research on their Instagram accounts monitor their activities before September 2022.

In addition, as the study is based on qualitative data, it could be criticized since it is overly subjective. Also, the need for more resources, such as money and research experience, should be considered. Finally, the last constraint is the problem of generalization of the findings. In other words, one finding (specific beauty brands in Iran and Italy) cannot be generalized to other industries or countries.

1.6. Structural Outline

This study is comprised of five leading chapters. Chapter one will introduce the context of the study, identify the research objectives and questions, argue the value of the research, and clarify the existing limitations.

The second chapter will review the theoretical framework to identify the existing literature and critical concept. A specification is made for the essential changes in marketing campaigns and what they have done to enclose "femvertising" to their plan.

Remarkably, the effects of social media and influencer marketing on the consumer's buying behaviors and brand performances and how much the new marketing methods affect society and cultural beliefs will be examined.

Chapter three will present and analyze specific clarification of the research methodology. The first qualitative study will be conducted in which the case studies, Iran and Italy, are the representatives of developing and developed countries. Then through researching their beauty industries profoundly, two beauty brands from each country will be selected. The study will examine how these chosen brands have changed their marketing plans to affiliate with the gender justice movements and withstand cultural norms, strict boundaries, religious beliefs, and sanctions.

Chapter four will explain the rules and methods that should be applied to collect and analyze the data. An online meeting will be held with six women from Iran and six from Italy to discuss and analyze the research questions to perform the interviews and collect the most reliable and accurate data. The audience group is the Instagram users (Instagram as a representative of the social platforms) of generation Y and Z. For each country, specific questions will be asked as the contextual situation of both countries is undoubtedly different. By identifying the reliable variables and analyzing the results, the goal is to respond to the following questions generally:

- 1- In your opinion, how much progress has the advertisement content had in diminishing sexual stereotypes?
- 2- How much do these new ads affect your buying behavior and make your brand image favorable?
- 3- How much do you believe the current movements could change cultural norm and societal beliefs?

The conclusion of the thesis is explained in the last chapter, in which the correlation of the theoretical part, case studies, and interviews will be presented. Conversations with reviews and ideas about the discoveries pursue the study. In this chapter, the research results are linked to the aim and the objectives, research questions are answered, and practical suggestions for beauty companies are provided.

Chapter 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the existing literature available about the influence of gender equality movements on marketing campaigns and advertisements in the beauty industry. Starting by focusing on the gender equality movements and their history, the study will continue investigating the effects of those movements on the marketplace and advertising methods. It will then assess the impact of social media marketing on the subjects mentioned.

Then the research will concentrate more on the beauty industries and the emergence of beauty bloggers. Finally, it will conclude by explaining the basic principles on which the following two chapters are based. Since there are few research papers about the relationship between the noted topics and their correlations, especially in developing countries, the thesis aims to fill the gap and provide helpful content for future studies.

2.1. Feminism and Recent Gender Equality Movements

Gender equality and the defense of women's rights have been among the most important movements in the world for more than 200 years. From when women were fighting for the right to vote in the 1990s until the significant campaign of #Metoo, feminists and activists had difficulty persuading people that what they sought was equal rights, not excessive "special treatment." One of these problems has been how the word "feminist," especially in the digital age, is understood. However, feminism is still seen negatively on social media by many users who believe it to be misandry or man-hatred.

Nevertheless, some individuals declare and hold to equality but they still feel ashamed to call themselves feminists because, despite recent advancements and growing public awareness of equality rights, feminists—both online and offline—are still marginalized, disregarded, and threatened with violence because they are fighting for rights.

Fortunately, over the past ten years, more academics have begun incorporating a feminist methodology into various disciplines, especially in the academies—from economics to public health. According to Hunt (2017), feminist movements were said to have occurred in four waves. The movements for gender equality did not necessarily begin with the first wave of Feminism; instead, it was the first large-scale, coordinated effort to advance political changes that would provide women equal opportunity. The suffrage movement dominated the first

wave, which began in the 19th century and lasted until the early 20th. Women were prohibited by law from owning property, getting a divorce, voting, going to college, and even having legal custody of their children.

The first wave most likely ended in 1919 with ratifying the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, which gave women the right to vote. The 1960s saw efforts for gender equality between the first and second waves of Feminism, but these movements lacked clear leadership and adequate organizational structures (Hunt, 2017). The first wave established a solid basis for political equality, and the second wave had the potential to expand that movement beyond the suffrage movement.

As explained by Paglia (2008), as part of the second-wave movement, which concentrated on gender equality in education, occupations, and at home, women fought to escape the stifling stereotype of the demure American housewife, which became even more established in western culture throughout the 1940s and 1950s. However, feminist theorists criticized the second wave of the feminist movement retrospectively for preaching a shared female experience while speaking mainly to white, upper-middle-class women, many of whom also had college degrees, as claimed by Beail and Goren (2009). Additionally, because of this linguistic divide, many women, especially women of color and women who wanted to stay at home, women who enjoyed being sexually active, and women who upheld traditional feminine ideals, felt abandoned by the so-called women's liberation movement.

The third wave strived to protect women's agency and celebrate their different options rather than portraying themselves as a response to the feminine home sphere. The basis of third-wave Feminism was that gaining knowledge from other women's experiences may enhance and inform the fight for gender equality. The self-declared supporters of third-wave Feminism have a solid connection to pop culture. Celebrities like Miley Cyrus and Beyonce have made it possible for women to embrace two identities—sexual and feminist—that were previously contradictory.

The fourth-wave feminist movement, founded in 2012, is characterized by its emphasis on women's empowerment. Its main areas of interest were gendered norms and the internet's role in the social marginalization of women. So, the fourth wave, according to many detractors, was made possible by the internet and has entered the digital era due to social media activities. Varghese and Kumar (2020) stated in their work that the internet and social

media are considered vital components of the fourth wave of Feminism, which stresses topics like sexual harassment, rape culture, and violence against defenseless and disadvantaged women. Therefore, it raised challenging questions about what empowerment, justice, and freedom mean by speaking out against sexual harassment and objectification of women and workplace sexism (such as #Metoo movement). Moreover, what the fourth wave emphasized was the concept of intersexuality and the ways the movement could be open and accepting of all people regardless of sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, gender, or any other factors (Pruitt, 2022).

The current period, known as the fourth wave of Feminism, is encouraging public participation by providing a larger spectrum of people with a platform to practice Feminism. The #Metoo campaign, a global network of women sharing their experiences with sexual harassment in public areas and everyday life, has rekindled women's activism. Also, they emphasized that the fourth wave has dramatically impacted businesses and advertising because they quickly responded to the new ideological environment. For example, leading corporations like Google, Adobe, Facebook, and Johnson & Johnson, among others, supported the project "The Girls' Lounge," which aimed to create a network of women working for change (Rodrigues, 2016).

As one of the most helpful communication channels, social media can empower women and raise awareness of the sexism that permeates private and professional communication. Pro-women organizations and companies in different sectors can take advantage of these platforms (The Female Quotient, 2018).

All people, not just women, are impacted by gender equality. Men and women should cooperate in devising a solution because it involves human rights. The last few decades have seen a rise in movements favoring gender equality. In order to build a more just society and increase the representation of women in the economy and politics, these initiatives were created and supported by regional movements and non-profit organizations. Their goals were often location-specific because the central goal of their work was to improve the lives of girls and women in underprivileged areas. These organizations have multiplied over the years; collectively, they now support millions of women worldwide (Girlpower, 2015).

One of the most critical endeavors that helped women and girls acquire a strong voice at the UN was the founding of UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, by the UN General Assembly in 2010 (Magazine, 2011).

Another movement that functioned on the same principles was "He for She." By enlisting the support of boys and men, the project, which UN Women started in September 2014, offered a novel method for bridging the gender gap. President Obama and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon were among the strong leaders who supported the effort.

These supports developed a toolbox to help community organizers start "He for She" campaigns in various cities. In addition to depending on men to support the program, UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson served as one of its primary representatives (Girlpower, 2015).

Moreover, during the final week of September 2015, the UN General Assembly hosted the movement's introduction, created by 193 nations. An international agreement outlined its objectives, which were to be accomplished by 2030. The three main objectives were addressing climate change, fighting injustice and inequality, and stopping extreme poverty. One of the 17 objectives outlined to do this was to achieve gender equality, which included eradicating prejudice against women, developing technology as an empowering tool, and putting an end to forced marriage and gender mutilation. International leaders vowed to back the project, and well-known celebrities like Jennifer Lopez and Bono actively pushed it. The movement was significant because it concentrated on five essential aspects of a girl's life: education, health, financial security, safety, voice, and rights. Additionally, it was pertinent due to its commitment to resolving the plight of 250 million females by 2030.

2.1.1. MeToo Movement

Governments and civil society organizations place a high priority on women's empowerment in the modern world. The finest example is the # MeToo campaign, which exposed how American corporates only cared about women's rights if they were not asking for too much, despite it being one of its leading causes.

As reported by Nguyen (2019), in 2006, civil rights activist Tarana Burke started the #MeToo campaign on Myspace. Since then, it has become one of the most important and influential

movements toward gender equity, confronting sexual assault worldwide. Burke's hashtag received considerable attention—from someone else—after white actress Alyssa Milano urged black women to use the hashtag #MeToo to give folks a sense of the magnitude of the crisis. In reaction to Milano's tweet, several well-known people—including Jennifer Lawrence, Angelina Jolie, and Gwyneth Paltrow—shared their personal stories, bringing attention to the struggles faced by Hollywood's mostly white female cast.

The movement's emphasis on involving everyone in the cause has made it powerful and significant. By using mass media to spread ideas more quickly and make them accessible to more people worldwide, #MeToo distinguished itself from earlier waves. When the movement first appeared on Myspace, Burke understood the value of spreading the word since it would take a solid community to advance. Furthermore, the movement also developed as social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter expanded into the 2010s.

The #MeToo movement aimed to guide survivors on their pathways to healing by providing tools like those found on the organization's website. Since the #MeToo hashtag became widely recognized on Twitter in 2017, a long-overdue conversation about sexual assault and harassment has been started. In her 2014 book, "We Should All Be Feminists," Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie described feminism as the "political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes." Notably, expanding the population that should be involved in the feminist struggle during the fourth wave is vital.

#MeToo has united many individuals from more diverse backgrounds than earlier waves of feminism. However, silencing people who witness gender discrimination, such as gay women, transgender women, black women, Latina women, and anybody else, undermines the goal of the #MeToo movement by limiting their collective voice.

While advancements for cisgender identities are being accomplished, #MeToo has had difficulty engaging transgender individuals in the conversation and has kept many of them in the dark. Transgender women, in particular, frequently suffer from this pressure to be "tough" and to absorb the agony when it is implied that sexual assault is a regular aspect of womanhood.

In conclusion, it has always been a struggle to advance gender justice, even before the #MeToo tweet uprising. Third-wave feminism, prevalent from the 1990s to the 2010s, brought new perspectives to the movement and attempted to make it more inclusive of all

racism and generations of women. Even though this strategy had difficulties being completely inclusive, it was a vital step in leading us to where we are now. Following significant political unrest on a national scale, #MeToo has had an impact on both men's and women's daily lives in the typical workplace. Due to increased access to the labor force, women now account for nearly half of the workforce, according to studies.

Fourth-wave feminism gave us ideas like "manspreading" and "mansplaining," names for realities that women experience but are unable to discuss, and #MeToo, a powerful political movement that has (at least temporarily) brought down some of the biggest names in media for sexual predation. In truth, these women were exceptional because they had advanced, as their age demanded, to fight where fighting had never before been permitted (Bossi, 2019).

2.1.2. Sexism and Recent Gender Equality Movements in Iran

According to Brandt (2011), multilevel modeling found that sexism was a critical factor in the growth of gender inequality. Research demonstrates that sexism not only upholds the current quo but also actively worsens the gender hierarchy, which can cause societies to become unequal. Sexism, which also justifies gender disparities, causes them to be accentuated on purpose. According to the concept of sexism, social gender imbalance measurements and societal sexism are related.

The findings of Brandt (2011) indicate that less developed countries experience more gender disparity and pervasive sexism overall. On the other hand, gender equality is constant mainly throughout time, with improvements more likely to occur in more industrialized countries. The fifth wave of the World Values Survey, which includes representative samples from 57 nations and highly autonomous regions, was used by the World Values Survey Association in 2009 to compile data for a practical study carried out in 2005. A total of 82,905 people (47.9% men, 52.0% women, and 0.1% with no response; mean age = 41.4 years, SD = 16.5) participated in face-to-face interviews between 2005 and 2007 in order to obtain information (Brandt, 2011).

The study results placed Norway and Sweden first and second, whereas Iran and Italy—the case studies for this thesis—ranked 52 and 13, respectively, out of 57 nations. The findings

demonstrated that sexism and discrimination against women are related and that this relationship may directly link sexism to the rise of inequality (Sibley & Perry, 2010; Swim et al., 1995). Moreover, sexist attitudes put women at a lower risk of achieving social status and financial security.

In order to explore the sexism situation in Iran, the period following the Islamic revolution in 1979 will be explored. Several activists in Iran have started fighting for gender equality due to the strengthening of the radical Islamic dictatorship. When irrational and excessively religious leaders gained more significant influence, women's situation started to worsen every year. One of these injustices was the punishment for the mandatory Hijab rule. On International Women's Day, March 8, 1979, over 100,000 women demonstrated against the law that required women to cover their heads with the Hijab. Nevertheless, the new Islamic Republic finally ruled that women were not allowed to leave the house without Hijab.

The most restrictive gender roles for women in civil society were also imposed by the Iranian government in 1979, based on an antiquated interpretation of Islamic texts. Even though the Islamic Republic's pledge to restore Iranian women's dignity was ultimately rendered in strict patriarchal and Islamist terms, they continued to demand a voice in politics and society during the previous several years. Significantly, between 1989 and 2005, women who could vote used it to elect presidents and legislators who supported liberal legal reforms. The new regulations have not significantly influenced women's social standing, though, for many reasons.

Two feminist strategies—the Muslim Modernist and the Reconstruction movements—emerged by the late 20th century in response to Iran's patriarchal and authoritarian governmental and social systems. Modernists divided these areas due to significant issues, such as the pace of reform and the development of social and economic policies to solve Iran's widening imbalance.

Iranian women produced many scholarly and creative works during those years. For instance, Shirin Neshat, a celebrated Iranian filmmaker, created three split-screen films in

2000: Turbulent, Rapture, and Fervor. These works emphasized the stark differences between men's and women's experiences in contemporary Islamic culture.

In Iran, noteworthy gender rights projects have emerged in recent years due to technological advancement and a rise in social media use. Among the best was the "White Wednesday" campaign. The concept was created by Iranian activist Masih Alinejad, who started the internet movement "My Stealthy Freedom" to oppose the mandated dress code. The concept was simple: Women wear white on Wednesdays and openly remove their hijabs to express their opposition to Iran's law requiring them to cover their heads in public. These protest videos spread worldwide thanks to social media, particularly Twitter and Instagram (Baker, 2019).

Consequently, Iranian women from around the nation uploaded pictures of themselves in public with their hair free to be shared on social media. What campaign's message was it? Iranian women are free to wear the headscarf or not. Alinejad maintains that she only gives Iranian women a platform to express themselves and takes no credit for their accomplishments in Iran (Ghattas, 2018).

In addition, the protest known as "woman life freedom" is among Iran's most significant and recent gender equality movements. It began in September 2022 with the death of Mahsa Jina Amini, an Iranian-Kurdish young woman who passed away in a hospital in Tehran at the age of only 22. Iran's Guidance Patrol had detained her, or the "morality police," three days earlier for donning her hijab "improperly." After being pummeled in the police vehicle transporting her to the Vozara Detention Center, she fell into a coma. People gathered outside the hospital in shock and demanded responsibility in response to her passing. Her death sparked protests in a country that had been sharply divided for years, and soon the demonstrations expanded to neighboring cities (Al Jazeera, 2022).

The slogan "Zan, Zendegi, Azadi" (Woman, Life, Freedom) has been used by Iranians since September 2022 to oppose the regime's discriminatory laws that limit women's rights. Eventually, civil unrest spread throughout Iranian cities and villages and on social media. The protests' initial emphasis expanded to include the many complaints of Iranian women,

many of whom ritualistically took off and burned their hijabs in front of applauding crowds. The regime appears to be prepared to avoid displaying any signs of weakness, yet it is difficult to ignore the signals of the protesters.

This movement has gained widespread attention because of the usage of social media. Other initiatives have been started to support Iranian women internationally. For instance, the hairstyles of Iranian women protestors from the start represented defiance. Celebrities and other foreign women began shaving their heads in support of Iranian women. Oscar-winning actors Marion Cotillard and Juliette Binoche, as well as other French film and music celebrities, initiated this trend by posting videos of themselves shaving off their hair in support. Additionally, a museum in Rome was gathering hairpieces to deliver to the Iranian Embassy (Willsher, 2022).

To conclude, over the last decades, Iranian women and activists have sought to improve their situation by initiating protests, petitioning, and mounting legal challenges. Emerging social media as a new means of communication enabled them to boost their knowledge about women's rights and break the unrealistic norms of society. It also worked as a channel in which they could expand their fights and show their protests.

2.2. The Effect of Gender Equality Trends on Market Place and Advertisements

The global economy has always included women. So, rather than women themselves emerging, it is their contributions that are being recognized. Furthermore, even though this title may empower certain women, it might highlight societal and economic disparities. Although there is a ton of transformative literature on Gender from disciplines like women's and gender studies, few studies in marketing have addressed the complexities of Gender, the influences of policies and markets, and, in particular, how these influences can come together to lessen places of gender injustice (Hein et al., 2016).

Globally, several initiatives have been trying to address gender issues over the past few years as the importance of gender equality, primarily as a sustainable development goal, has grown. The commercial and policy discourses include diversity, inclusion, femvertising, and mainstreaming. While marketing and policy may occasionally clash in the fight for gender equity, both are crucial to its manifestation and successful resolution.

Based on Hein *et al.* (2016) research, while markets and marketing frequently have the potential to sway gender portrayals in developing nations, legislation may impact the transfer of resources and attract attention to places where people's talents are being denied. Consider how gender issues (such as sexual assault) and brands interact by choice or association. Social justice recognizes gender imbalances as being grounded in unequal rights around body ownership and sexuality. In this situation, markets can offer revolutionary platforms that give voice to these injustices. Additionally, societal gender stereotypes are revealed to be entirely accurate and detrimental and are connected to marketing efforts (Zayer & Coleman, 2015). However, changing them will be difficult because of their pervasiveness. As a result, to end injustices, policymakers and marketers must collaborate. In addition to incorporating people and social organizations, the rise of gender equality measures in society greatly influenced businesses and advertising techniques. From the point of view of McCleary (2014), advertisers could spread and perpetuate gender stereotypes because marketing and advertising can build, mold, and reinforce cultural norms. However, campaigns for gender equality may also have a significant impact on marketing plans and public relations efforts. With more people using social media and paying attention to what companies are doing, it is harder for brands to hide their immoral deeds, such as posting gender-biased advertising.

According to Cone Communications' 2017 report on corporate social responsibility (CSR), 84% of Americans believe that businesses should support "women's rights," which is a higher percentage than for other urgent issues like immigration, climate change, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) rights (Champlin et al., 2019).

The present trend in brand advocacy is the development of cause-related marketing. Through a combination of charity, promotion, sponsorship, and other communication efforts, Varadarajan and Menon (1988) define cause-related marketing as a means for businesses to make money while behaving well. Gender equality, particularly as it concerns women, is a societal issue that has been a cornerstone of activist advertising (Zeisler, 2016). In a period of political polarization, businesses are under pressure to express their opinions on social and political topics, and advertising is the most direct and widely disseminated platform. The recent revolution in Iran and the protests for gender equality are solid examples to support this claim.

As previously said, social media networks, particularly the informative channels on Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram, the sole mediums informing people about reliable news and the truth about the government's crimes, have helped this movement spread more widely. The involvement of businesses in assisting people's demands and reflecting their voices via their marketing strategies and commercials has been surprising and relevant to this study.

Two weeks after starting the protests with the increasing number of victims and brutality of the government forces, Iranian people started paying close attention to the brand's actions and commercials. They compiled a list of the names and details of the brands whose commercials were airing on national television (in Iran, the national TV called IRIB is working directly under the supervision of the government, and there are no private channels on TV).

After the list went viral on social media with the help of active influencers and celebrities, people ran a boycott campaign against the brands listed. This campaign's audience kept growing to include all brands and companies, from food manufacturers and fashion merchants to private businesses and cosmetics companies. Since they were losing revenue, clients, and the value and reputation of their brands, the movement terrified many businesses, and some of them started taking action. Companies were in a complicated situation because, on one side, the government increased its pressure and threatened them that if they decided to join the protest and have their back, they would lose money or even get close. On the other side, people were their customers; they decided whether to buy their products and expected the brands' support.

The first action was taken by Nazari Food Company, a well-known manufacturer of bakery goods in Iran, to terminate its advertising contract with national TV. This news was released and quickly became popular on social media. As a result, people began buying Nazari products to show their appreciation for the company's choice of granting their request. Because the contract was ended earlier, the brand lost money but received positive feedback and praise from the people.

The Mihan Company could be an additional intriguing case. Mihan is a famous and influential multi-brand company with different lines of products, such as dairy products and juices. After the release of pictures and news proved that Mihan was helping the regime security

forces with their trucks to carry them out secretly, people launched campaigns and created bashtags to boycott the Mihan products. Social media such as Instagram and Twitter were the primary sources of activities for Iranian people in posting content and creating hashtags to raise awareness and spread messages.

As a result of the massive protests and people's anger, on Instagram, users started posting informational content about the different products and sub-brands of Mihan. They spread the message on their social media networks, asking friends and families not to buy the Mihan products. Therefore, the brand faced numerous financial problems and lost its image and value, so on November 1, 2022, the company released a video asking people to end the boycott. These movements prove how much people's political beliefs and social changes, with the help of emerging technology such as social media platforms, could influence a brand's marketing strategy and value. Also, the extent to which the reactance of the brand in critical situations could alter its market positioning.

2.2.1. Gender in Advertising

The majority of gender identity is widely considered to be a social construction, and representations encourage and perpetuate the cycle of ideology that emerges in behavior. Images and advertisements in the media and on television can change viewers' perceptions of themselves and society (Knoll, Eisend, and Steinhagen, 2011). Also, advertising has proved to be a powerful medium that uses language, pictures, and representational constructions to carefully mold the audience's perception of reality and effectively mirror their desires to influence purchase decisions.

This process, driven by financial gain, frequently results in inaccurate portrayals of women, the maintenance of negative stereotypes, and the development of arbitrary norms. Body-cropping images of women that show them as objects are one way that advertisers support the perpetuation of negative gender stereotypes. In commercials, women are frequently praised for their mere looks and are represented as having no personalities or complex selves. Women's innate worth is discounted, and females are positioned behind men as their value is determined by what the males around them can give to them.

Conforming to Groza and Fernández Cuest's (2011) opinion, in several advertisements, women were presented in a few clearly defined positions, such as being unemployed or working in typical female roles like wife or mother, who rely on others and playing ornamental duties at home. In contrast to the "sexy" type, described as youthful, slender, smiling, provocative, and sexually accessible, the "housewife" kind of woman is classified as submissive, reliant, caring, tidy, gentle, and unconfident.

When examining the consequences of sexism in advertising, the main problem with it is that it has become so commonplace that no one can even detect it (either because it is subconscious, dressed up as artistic, or so widespread). Additionally, since repeated exposure to advertising stereotypes has been linked to the emergence of sexist beliefs, sexual harassment, violence against women, eating disorders, and stereotyped perceptions of behavior toward men and women, advertisements have the potential to influence the thoughts and beliefs of their audiences (Groza & Fernández Cuesta, 2011). Advertisers today strive to produce commercials that are original, funny, or otherwise draw the viewer's attention. In these circumstances, humor is one of the most extensively employed marketing strategies worldwide, with almost one in five television commercials using hilarious appeals. Furthermore, Groza and Fernández Cuesta (2011) sustain that humorous advertisements are more effective for already-available items rather than brand-new ones. However, it is believed that there are obvious hazards associated with using comedy as the main message in advertising. The public finds it amusing and inoffensive when exposed to a commercial that uses sexist comedy. At the same time, the perception of being less sexist is closely tied to the excellent emotion that may have inspired sexist humor in advertising. Additionally, the likelihood that it will make people feel good is closely tied to how credible sexist humor in advertisements is.

To conclude, throughout the past decades, while addressing all of the criticisms, advertisers and advertising agencies have been looking for a way to cease using sexist content in their commercials and make feminism work for them rather than against them. Companies began keeping an eye on and reorganizing their advertising to remove sexism and sex humor or even to focus on empowering women. In order to fully appreciate the significant shift that femvertising signifies, it is essential to comprehend how women have historically been portrayed in advertising.

2.2.2. Femvertising

The 21st century has seen the growth of the financially independent, sexually active, professional woman who, despite all odds, can "have it all" (Hunt, 2017). In the 1960s and 1970s, the second-wave feminist movement made systematic progress, making advertisers realize that women were financially independent and had more influence over consumer purchases than their husbands. When it became apparent that objectifying women might not be the ideal strategy for drawing in female consumers, advertisers started reevaluating how they interacted with female audiences (Gill, 2008).

In his 1992 book "Reading Ads Socially," Robert Goldman introduced the concept of commodity feminism, which he used to describe the various ways that marketers try to "incorporate the cultural power and energy of feminism while simultaneously neutralizing or domesticating the force of its social/political critique" (Gill, 2008, p. 41). Every aspect of capitalism, including movies, television, apparel, beauty goods, political campaigns, and gatherings of women in business, has commodified feminism as a social movement.

Femvertising is "advertising that utilizes pro-female talent, messaging, and images to empower women and girls" (She Knows Media, 2014). Femvertising manifests the third-wave feminist's consciousness regarding their purchasing power and rejection of their objectification. In other words, women began demanding more from the brands they brought into their lives and homes. Third-wave feminist language is made more accessible to the general public by femvertising messages that promote gender equality visually and rhetorically. However, when these messages are explicitly used to promote consumption, there is a conflict between the two ideologies that serve as the foundation of these messages: capitalism and third-wave feminism (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016).

Moreover, femvertising is a prime example of how commodity feminism can weaken a movement and influence individuals who are a part of it, according to several media and cultural studies theorists who contend that capitalism and feminism conflict with one another (Johnston & Taylor, 2008).

Femvertising is regarded by Hunt (2017) as a means for the third-wave feminist movement to be portrayed in the media and to affect the messages forming society's values favorably. Also, third-wave feminists have been working to establish the concept of intersectionality as it pertains to the female experience since the early 1990s. The second wave received harsh

criticism for being a movement aimed at a specific group of women—white, educated, upper-middle-class women. Therefore, the third wave aims to value and celebrate the diverse experiences of women of color, women who identify as LGBTQ, and any other women who are otherwise underrepresented in the mainstream media.

The third wave considers some commonplace experiences that are particular to women. However, it also recognizes essential differences between people's experiences that cannot be disregarded or generalized. As a result, if femvertising is to be used as a tool for the third-wave feminist movement, then the ads need to address—or at the very least, reference successfully—third-wave feminist concepts like intersectionality, narrative, sexuality, and female agency (Hunt, 2017).

According to the investigations of Varghese and Kumar (2020), the main drivers of femvertising are:

1. Growing advocacy for better representation of women in advertising,
2. Brand activism and conscious capitalism,
3. Criticism of corporate and commodity feminism,
4. Increasing awareness of gender stereotyping,
5. Growing regulatory scrutiny of gender role representations in advertising.

Thus, femvertising is a phenomenon due to the interaction of the five elements mentioned above.

For several reasons, brands that use femvertising are wise. The first thing they do is portray their brand as being devoted to gender equality and politically and culturally aware. Secondly, the company can also openly support women while meeting a quota for so-called corporate social responsibility. Third, it has been demonstrated that femvertising increases sales (Hunt, 2017). Registered data demonstrates that 71% of women believe brands should be in charge of advertising to spread positive messages to women and girls, according to the 2014 She Knows Media survey. Perhaps more concretely, for marketing managers, 52% of the surveyed women said they bought a product because they liked how a brand portrayed women in their advertisements (SheKnows Media, 2014).

Additionally, femvertising, as opposed to traditional advertising, minimizes ad reactance, which improves ad and brand perceptions among the female target audience, according to

Davidson (2015). Advertising that dispels (female) gender stereotypes and empowers women has become more popular over the past ten years, starting with Dove's campaign Evolution in 2006.

Researchers found that about 46,000 Google searches for "femvertising" were made in April 2017, including results from reputable news sources, including CNN, The Guardian, and Huffington Post. It even got its category at the 2015 Cannes Lions awards (The Glass Lion) (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen, 2017). The expansion of femvertising demonstrates that modern marketers view it as a fruitful tactic for attracting female consumers.

Importantly, it has led industry media to proclaim that "gender sells" (Mahdawi, 2015) and that marketers can now "cash in on feminism" (Davidson, 2015). Consumer judgments of whether or not the advertisement employs stereotyped depictions are also demonstrated to act as a mediating factor in the impacts. Furthermore, marketers are not only challenging gender preconceptions right now, and many advertisers say they want to include more varied depictions in their advertising, whether for sustainability or other reasons.

Advertising professionals find themselves in a new situation where they must be mindful of the societal function of advertising and its direct effects on consumers. What makes a successful advertising campaign (one that empowers companies and consumers simultaneously) is undoubtedly a new one (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen, 2017).

2.2.3. Examples of Famous Femvertising Advertisement

Women frequently judge themselves negatively because they think they are less attractive than commercial models, which leads to irritation and worry. When creating commercials, all businesses should have women's health in mind, especially those with sizable female customer bases. Fortunately, companies are increasingly frequently claiming to be feminists in their advertising campaigns than merely defensively saying they are not anti-feminist (McCleary, 2014).

Over the past 10 to 20 years, femvertising has become more significant. As believed by Hunt (2017), the company's marketing interest in empowering women and girls must be appropriately and strategically mirrored in their business operations if femvertising is deemed a viable approach towards attaining social responsibility and building brand loyalty.

By presenting women and girls in realistic, positive, and multifaceted ways, femvertising seeks to empower women and girls. Marketing managers who employ femvertising work to complicate these standards by using accurate representations of women that capture their complex experiences as women.

Throughout the 20th century, advertisers created a set of beauty standards that were, at best, narrow and, at worst, dangerous and unrealistic. Advertisers may do this visually by using real people, actors, or women who deviate from conventional notions of beauty, showcasing the complete female body, and using a diverse range of racial backgrounds in their casting.

In addition, women should not be too sexualized or objectified; they should be shown in active rather than passive roles. The primary goal of feminist marketing is to sell a product, but it is crucial to remember that this is true of all advertising and marketing initiatives (Hunt, 2017).

Although research on the female response to and engagement with femvertising has been published, pertinent research on its complex relationship with the third-wave feminist movement has not yet been completed. Femvertising is a relatively recent phenomenon that primarily began to emerge between 2004 (the year Dove unveiled their "Campaign for Real Beauty") and the present (Jalakas, 2016).

It has emerged as a contentious trend that has been praised for changing how women are portrayed in the media and attacked for packaging and simplifying the third-wave feminist movement and selling it back to the people who started it. Three of the numerous companies that have opted to use femvertising since the early 2000s are **Dove**, **Always**, and **Pantene**.

Dove is one of several companies that profess to support progressive, feminist ideals while promoting products designed to enhance female appearance, the ultimate goal for any modern woman. The campaign sought to redefine beauty standards to accommodate people with various skin tones, body shapes, heights, weights, wrinkles, rolls, and defects. The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (CFRB) was introduced in 2004 in response to a Unilever-commissioned study titled "The Real Truth about Beauty" and is regarded as one of the first commercials to go viral on social media (Bahadur, 2014).

This campaign blurred the lines between advertising and corporate social responsibility by emphasizing a clear objective—female empowerment—and by enjoining its viewers to

continue the discussion about beauty standards after the advertisement had ended. Dove incorporated social outreach into their marketing strategies by using femvertising. The first CFRB advertisements were seen in the United Kingdom and featured ladies who did not adhere to the conventional beauty standard.

As represented in Figure 2.1, these women all had "flaws" that the general public finds to be unattractive: they were "freckled, pregnant, had stretch marks, or would be considered as overweight" (Johnson & Taylor, 2008, p. 942). Others had grey hair or flat chests, and according to Dove, no photographs in the campaign had any digital manipulation done to them. These representations of "genuine women" acquired popularity in the UK and swiftly traveled to North America and Europe.



Figure 2.1 Dove real beauty campaign

Dove's international marketing initiatives are built on the CFRB. In addition to creating advertisements, the CFRB "promotes itself as a progressive force for women, aligns itself with certain feminist ideals and scholars, and engages in 'grassroots' partnering to raise millions of dollars for eating disorder organizations and Girl Scouts programs to build self-esteem" (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 943). CRM tactics have been successful: from the campaign's launch more than ten years ago, it has resulted in economic success, celebrity endorsements, accolades from professional groups and gender academics, and general media recognition (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 942). Nevertheless, from the campaign's inception in 2004, there has been subdued pushback from feminist academics and skeptic customers.

"No surprise our impression of beauty is twisted," is the sentence after the video commercial. Using the collective pronoun unifies the brand with the audience in fighting against restrictive female depictions by blaming other advertising and promoting Dove as a brand for real women. Different casting was crucial since Dove's advertising has always aimed to challenge the beauty standards its brand has contributed to upholding (McCleary, 2014).

The campaign, which supports a post-feminist, claims to want to boost women's and girls' self-esteem and confidence worldwide. On the other hand, Dove supports what Naomi Wolf called the "beauty myth" rather than upending the standard in beauty advertisements. "A violent pushback against feminism that leverages female beauty as a political weapon against women's growth," according to Wolf, is what the beauty myth is (Wolf, 1991, p. 10). Additionally, Johnston and Taylor (2008) suggest that businesses like Dove, which promotes uplifting messages to women, practice feminist consumption (also known as commodity feminism). Feminist aims such as "decentering the importance of beauty in women's life, resolving unpleasant emotions, or questioning men's connection with feminine beauty" are prioritized over commodity purchases under feminist consumerism (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 960). In summary, the CFRB was intended to convey to customers that the company cares about the health and happiness of women. Target audiences drawn to the campaign's themes will be encouraged to purchase.

Pantene is another business that pioneered female-centric advertising. In 2013 and 2014, respectively, it aired two video ad campaigns, "Shine Strong, Labels Against Women" and "Shine Strong, Not Sorry," which targeted the discrimination against women—particularly those in leadership roles—as well as their inclination to apologize repeatedly for weak justifications. Originally broadcast in the Philippines, "Shine Strong, Labels Against Women" quickly gained popularity on a global scale. The fact that the actresses are Southeast Asian women represents the only attempt the creative team made to diversify or flesh out female representation visually. Given that the advertisement was created in Southeast Asia, McCleary (2014) argued that this demonstrates little concern for challenging beauty standards.

Instead of sexuality or subordination, strength and determination begin to characterize success. The second Pantene commercial, "Shine Strong, Not Sorry," depicts women apologizing for routine, daily gestures like a lady giving her child to her husband, resting her

arm on an armrest, or starting a conversation, furthers this point. The identical situations are then played out again with the ladies without offering any excuses; occasionally, they may say "excuse me" in place of an apology, but frequently they will say nothing at all.

Mccleary (2014) claimed that the creative team's choice to adhere to traditionally strict beauty standards contributed to the success of the casting for the advertisement. They enabled the material and conducted to stay front and center using conventionally attractive ladies. If Pantene continued to use exaggerated depictions of women, they could only partially empower their female viewers. However, their ad was still effective in challenging society's norms for female conduct, which was a significant accomplishment in and of itself. However, their failure to do so cheapened the brand's attempt at femvertising.

Another succinct example includes femvertising ads belonging to the menstrual product brand Always and its #LikeAGirl campaign, which has made headlines for being at the forefront of menstrual liberation, championing female empowerment and gender equality. The P&G Company first debuted a three-minute commercial in June 2014 in which men and women are asked to act like women. The short film quickly illustrated to viewers that the phrase "like a female" was frequently interpreted as an insult as many of the men and women in the movie giggle, flip their hair, and flail their arms around when asked to run, throw, and fight like girls. The outcomes, however, were remarkably different when young females were forced to run, fight, and throw like a girl. Always asked: When did doing anything "like a female" become offensive? One little girl answered when asked what it meant to run "like a girl," "it means go as quickly as you can."

This campaign was "Always" first "brand advocacy campaign" (Champlin et al., 2019), which right once sparked a lot of industrial, social, and cultural discussion (Joy, 2014). Young girls approaching puberty, which 'Always' study revealed as the period of greatest vulnerability in the development of feminine identity, are the focus of the campaign, which has as its central theme their empowerment (Marketing Society, 2016).

As specified by Campbell, Freeman, and Gannon (2021), Always' has taken a stance as an activist brand, helping to redraw the boundaries for advertising in the menstrual product industry and refocusing the conversation from one of shame to one of the feminist ideals. Historically, traditional civilizations and religious texts have viewed menstruation as taboo. There are indications of societal transformation in both emerging and established countries,

even though it was linked to shame and humiliation even in wealthy economies in the 20th century.

The recent efforts did not just target menstrual health issues or break taboos; they also tried to encourage a more positive dialogue around menstruation. The campaign set new benchmarks in 2015, climbing to the second spot on the rankings for viral videos, earning an advertising Emmy, several international advertising prizes, and significant global attention. *On-Time* magazine's selection of the top 25 most memorable Super Bowl ads, the advertisement comes in at number 13. With over 90 million views, the original YouTube ad has inspired additional "Like a Girl" campaign media through partnerships, video, print, and social media material (Campbell, Freeman, and Gannon, 2021).

"#LikeAGirl" campaign was praised for being at the forefront of a change in advertising norms that questioned traditional gender categories and widened the definition of what it means to be a girl by transforming the derogatory term "#LikeAGirl" into an expression of empowerment (Hynds, 2017). So the #LikeAGirl campaign was a managerial success, and the UN acknowledged its contribution to female empowerment in 2015 (Marketing Society, 2016).

In order to recognize companies that, via innovative advertising campaigns, aim to challenge gender stereotypes and uplift women and girls, She Knows Media, a digital lifestyle media firm focused on women, launched the first-ever #Femvertising Awards in 2015.

These efforts were widely acknowledged as examples of the new femvertising phenomena. Despite their enormous popularity and financial success, the advertisements nonetheless drew criticism from individuals who thought the brand's messages of empowerment were manufactured and insulting. Marketers must acknowledge and critically assess how the marketplace affects consumers' views of gendered images, roles, and expectations if they are to behave in a socially acceptable manner.

In conclusion, femvertising is becoming a significant example of brand advocacy. This strategy can increase bottom-line sales, but it can also attract the attention of the female target market and encourage them to respond favorably. Femvertisements are featured on cable television, large-scale print, and outdoor media, as well as through online platforms like YouTube or Instagram. As a result, we are receiving more attention in advertising practice and research in an era of brand responsibility and response to a greater societal

focus on gender equality issues. However, it may be dangerous for a business to utilize femvertising, and the firm can need help to balance its marketing plan and social problem messaging (Champlin et al., 2019).

2.3. Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behavior

The development of social media as a tool for marketing has altered how companies communicate with their clients and disseminate brand information. Consumers are no longer only passive recipients of advertising. Customers are now using social media to communicate with businesses, which boosts customer engagement and forges new kinds of business-customer interactions. With the rise of social media, businesses now have a very inexpensive tool to attract new clients and strengthen existing ones (Stephen, 2016).

"Social" and "media" are the two terms that make up social media. The first term, "social," indicates what it means since using social media sites entails being sociable. Everything is uploaded to the internet, a form of media; therefore, the second term is "media." As a result, the term "social media" is appropriate for a platform that facilitates interpersonal communication. Marschall (2022) in his study explained that clients are participants in the market, and since they started acting in marketing, their roles have changed significantly. In the 1920s, the emphasis on what to produce moved from supply to demand.

Today, the customer controls what businesses produce and offer to the marketplace (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 14-15). The business must ascertain the customers' needs and preferences rather than only producing what it can (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 5). Instead of just creating what it can, the company needs to learn about the wants and preferences of its consumers (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 5). The business must understand its customers' demands and desires rather than merely producing what it can (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 5). To do this, they should increase customer relationship management efforts (Kumra, 2007, p. 1). Relationship management, based on principles like commitment and trust, aims to maintain customers and cultivate connections with them to promote better collaboration between the parties (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 8).

According to Marschall (2022), data is a valuable resource for learning more about customers and how to see threats and opportunities and decide whether to take them.

Additionally, it aids business owners, and marketers in understanding customer shopping patterns, demands, and motivations.

Social media is a technology that can assist in achieving this goal by mixing consumer behavior with advertising. In addition to attempting to sell items or get them to interact with the business or brand, social media may be used to directly contact the customer (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 68). The majority of customers use social media extensively in their everyday lives. Some spend almost 25% of their time on social media (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 159). Companies have previously admitted that using it may strengthen their position in the market, personalize their brand, and forge stronger bonds with their existing clientele while also attracting new ones (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 1570).

Advertising and strategically placed postings can help this growth because customers may experience psychological effects such as a need for change or an overexcited condition. (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 5). Customers acquire products early due to this overstimulation, which reduces their research (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 27). Understanding these consequences can help businesses further solidify their dominance in the market and increase their revenues (Yarrow et al., 2014).

Besides, as specified by Khan, Dongping, and Wahab (2016), social media has changed the interactions underpinning this partnership between businesses and customers. One particular strategy the businesses use is managing brand fan pages on social networking platforms. On these sites, users may follow a company and show their support by liking its postings, sharing them on social media, or leaving a comment.

Thus, consumers believe social media is more reliable than traditional media because they feel more controlled by what they see (Marschall, 2022). When people feel more in control, they are more likely to accept requests or offers (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 95). Also, Marschall (2022) shows that due to the prevalence of social media, businesses can now rely on social media more than conventional ones to distribute their ideas since marketing has evolved into a two-way dialogue.

The use of the internet, social media, mobile applications, and other digital communication tools has ingrained itself into the daily lives of billions of people. Significant issues in marketing literature include social media, marketing, and digital advertising. In terms of

consumer behavior, consider how users react to different elements of digital advertising (Stephen, 2016).

Social media marketing is a cross-functional, multidisciplinary notion that uses social media (typically in conjunction with other communication channels) to further organizational objectives by generating value for stakeholders. On a strategic level, social media marketing encompasses an organization's choices regarding governance, culture, and the breadth of social media marketing (from defenders to explorers, conservatism to modernity) (ranging from autocracy to anarchy) (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017).

Businesses can use social media through social media marketing to connect with consumers, workers, communities, and other stakeholders (i.e., when they act as explorers). At the same time, businesses may see social media as just another channel for communicating with consumers, allowing them to push information and give them something of value.

In his research Stephen (2016) demonstrated that businesses should include social media marketing consistent with their larger strategy and that marketing managers must go beyond content creation to engage customers online. In addition to raising awareness, social media allows managers to continuously build interactivity and engagement online. It also serves as a source of market information that helps businesses improve their operations.

It is essential that managers carefully watch their clients, rivals, and surroundings when monitoring social media and responding to online behavior. If the information gathered is correctly evaluated and action taken promptly, monitoring social media may aid businesses in producing more effective advertising materials and social media content and enhance business operations. Successful social media marketing requires understanding the meaning of the data collected and the ability to make judgments regarding whether, how, and when to respond to online activity (Malthouse et al., 2013).

It is a challenging process. Businesses frequently struggle, and many create and maintain pages on various social media platforms or pay for advertising on social media sites to generate a social media presence (Hodis, Sriramachandramurthy, and Sashittal, 2015). Even people aware of the advantages of social media confront difficulties that limit their ability to make full use of being online (Drury 2008). It is not exceptionally comforting for managers to use social media effectively. Managers today face many challenges when using social media in their marketing strategies.

In their research, Parsons and Lepkowska-White (2018) introduced a novel approach to help managers create and apply social media as a marketing tool. This framework includes four components: messaging/projecting, monitoring, assessing, and responding. These four components are connected to managers' actions when implementing and interacting with social media. Depending on the strategic direction or emphasis of the company, each dimension of the framework may be implemented differently. The framework gives a company a chance to assess the complete social media marketing landscape from both a broad strategic viewpoint and a more tactical perspective.

In conclusion, social media should be a part of any business's marketing plan. Something unique happens when social media is incorporated into this advertising mix. Social media are fundamentally reorienting economics. In addition to opening up new opportunities for businesses, brands, and corporations, it significantly changes how customers engage and behave. Consequently, businesses are increasingly adopting social media as a new tool for advertising. Because everything is happening online, this transformation has advanced much further, particularly in the ongoing epidemic. Because of the critical situation, the COVID-19 pandemic has created since 2020, the importance of social media has grown considerably due to the decreasing chance of face-to-face interaction between buyers and sellers (Hunt, 2017).

2.3.1. Social Media Effects on Culture

The foundation of any civilization is communication. The role of the media has always been to transmit a people's cultural heritage across generations and geographic borders as it goes through its many stages of development and evolution. Many media communications nowadays are expressed on many social media platforms. Social media has also become so ingrained in our daily lives that it significantly shapes our perceptions, understandings, the construal of meanings, and overall perspective on reality or the universe.

As stated by Ohiagu and Okorie (2014), the development of the Internet has aided in the rapid development of intricate contacts amongst scattered groups of individuals worldwide who have similar interests or occasionally opposing objectives. The dynamic and strange compositions that make up the virtual world give it its strangeness; these connections and

intimacy usually break preexisting boundaries. Because of this, the virtual world is a helpful environment for constructing culture. According to detailed anthropological research, these products completely meet the criteria for being considered cultural forms in and of themselves. Moreover, social media interactions substantially influence the creation and dissemination of popular cultural expressions in the virtual world. Social media do this by developing a global culture by inventing and disseminating slang and other new language forms that most internet users can understand across national boundaries.

Coleman (2010), in his paper on "culture and economy in the age of social media," explained that various cultural representations, experiences, and identities would be circulated, magnified, deleted, translated, revised, and remade whenever and wherever individuals and groups use digital media to communicate. However, it is impossible to predict how these dynamics will play out fully. Additionally, cultural identities, representations, and imaginaries—such as those associated with youth, diaspora, nation, and indigeneity—are reconstructed, subverted, transferred, and disseminated through individual and group use of digital technologies (Coleman, 2010). Many ethnographic studies of digital media provincialize and hence concentrate on certain facets of how these mediums help to create sociocultural worlds, group identities and representations, economic exchange protocols, communication genres, and phenomenological experience.

Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017) argue that companies using social media marketing must know that other parties can control and influence social media content. Companies should thus consider the trade-offs between customers' desire to connect and interact with businesses demonstrating a more progressive, permeable culture and an enclosed social media marketing culture (conservatism), which affords more control over crucial brand constructs (i.e., modernism). The writers also emphasized that consumers' usage of social media varies among cultures, according to prior studies.

In conclusion, the phrase "social media" is now frequently used to describe the use of social networking sites, microblogs, blogs, and websites that share user-generated content (UGC). To understand social media, it is also essential to interact with the unique and universal meanings that various stakeholders and players assign to platforms. It also necessitates examining how social media firms attempt to turn a profit, the processes and labor involved in making those profits, the origins of social media ideology, and the environments in which

they develop. In essence, grasping the connection between culture and the economy requires comprehending social media (Fuchs, 2015). Customers' cultural identities are routinely taken into account by iconic companies. For managers aware of the cultural backdrop, developing a brand myth that promotes cultural activities will be achievable; furthermore, they could notice new cultural opportunities.

2.3.2. Influencer Marketing

Consumers interact with and are influenced by the digital worlds in which they live. Nowadays, the time of using the internet among people has increased significantly. As an illustration, the UK's adult population now spends an average of 20.5 hours per week online, more than doubling over the past ten years (Stephen, 2016).

According to Saima & Altaf Khan's (2021) studies, social media websites and platforms have proliferated since the beginning of the previous decade, and we are rapidly moving toward a digital world. Today, people surf endlessly on their iPhones or type furiously on their PCs. Not a day goes by that they do not check their social media accounts regularly. For many people, social media has evolved into a fundamental requirement.

It has risen to an all-time high, particularly after the outbreak of the still-active Covid-19 epidemic. More than half of the world's population uses social media, and almost everyone is familiar with Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and many other platforms (Marschall, 2022). Thus, it is no surprise that social media networks have become an important marketing platform today. Companies have noticed this as they increasingly integrate social media into their portfolio (Saima and Altaf Khan, 2021). Advertising on social media is prevalent today. No website is completely free of advertisements. Short-spoken individuals use social media extensively, spending an average of 2.5 hours daily (Datarportal, 2022a; Statista, 2022a).

The highest rise occurred just before the pandemic when the average daily time jumped by almost 50% in five years. These statistics are still rising (Statista, 2022a). Social media is used actively by more than 50% of the population. (Statista, 2022b). Considering that there are 4.62 billion people on earth, 3 out of 5 people utilize social media (Business Wire, 2022; Datareportal, 2022a).

These are enormous numbers, mainly because they include infants and older adults who cannot utilize social media. Notably, over half of all users said they use social media to connect with new people and keep up with their favorite businesses and brands (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 159). When just those under 35 are considered, this percentage increases to 63% (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 159). Consequently, social media may strengthen the brands, reputation, and name (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 157). Additionally, this develops a more customized brand in collaboration with the client (Yarrow et al., 2014, p. 139).

As described in Saima & Altaf Khan's (2021) work, there has been much study on topics like internet marketing, social media, and celebrity endorsement. Social media's enormous popularity has piqued the attention of academicians and marketers, who are discovering new ways it might be used for promotional activities.

The use of social media influencers in digital marketing is a recent development. Spending on influencer marketing has skyrocketed in recent years. Social media influencers are online personalities with a significant following on one or more social media platforms (such as YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or personal blogs) and may affect their followers' behavior (Agrawal, 2016; Varsamis, 2018). Posting images, videos, and other updates on social media channels influences how customers view a company or a product.

In other words, social media influencers are "ordinary individuals" who have become "online superstars" through generating and publishing material on social media, as opposed to celebrities or public figures who are well-known through traditional media. They often possess some knowledge in niche fields like active living, travel, cuisine, lifestyle, beauty, or fashion.

Influencer marketing is advertising in which businesses and marketers pay carefully chosen influencers to produce and advertise their branded content to both the influencers' following and the brands' target consumers (Yodel, 2017). Branded content created by influencers is seen to have more natural, authentic, and direct contact with potential customers than brand-generated commercials (Talavera, 2015).

From the viewpoint of Lou and Yuan (2019), when compared to content- and source-related criteria, it is noteworthy that followers' trust in influencers' branded posts demonstrated the most considerable effect on purchase intentions. Social media users' confidence significantly influences brand awareness and purchase intent in influencer-branded content. Therefore,

marketers may focus more on choosing influencers whose material is well-trusted by their followers.

Brands can determine how trustworthy, appealing, or similar influencers are seen by followers in order to evaluate this trust. Social media influencers with specific knowledge of topics relating to their line of business may be sought out by brands that want to boost their visibility across a significant portion of their target market.

Lou and Yuan (2019) found that social media users seek influencers for informative and entertaining material, influencing their decision to purchase. Influencers' credibility, attractiveness, and perceived likeness (to their followers) favorably impact their followers' confidence in their branded postings. They also explain that since influencers frequently create trustworthy and alluring online personas, it is not unexpected to find that followers' perceptions of influencers' reliability and attractiveness might affect their confidence in sponsored material. Unexpectedly, followers' ability to influence others did not affect their confidence in sponsored content. This may be the case since influencers already have a well-informed audience, but this does not mean that this group of people would automatically trust what the influencers have to say when it is sponsored (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

If followers watch influencer-generated branded content, their knowledge and attractiveness can increase brand recognition. It is feasible that influencers' specialization in particular fields qualifies them to promote particular businesses or goods effectively. However, the influencer's credibility negatively impacted brand awareness and purchase intentions. One approach to describe this is as follows: Even though followers typically trust the informative value of the content that influencers create when it comes to their branded posts, they may have ambivalent or skeptical beliefs about the influencers' motivations (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Such views could lead them to discredit influencers when forming consumption-related reactions.

Moreover, influencers must be cautious when selecting a company to work with or a product to support. They must uphold the standard and validity of the content they offer. Influencers should keep in mind that today's consumers are technologically savvy. If they are given inaccurate information, they will cease believing them since, in the end, the product's price and perceived worth matter most to them.

Saima and Altaf Khan (2021) also emphasized that influencers must continuously preserve their credibility, quality, and trustworthiness. An effective long-term relationship between the customers and the companies through the influencers can only be created if the consumers trust the influencer and the information offered in his or her posts is quality and entertaining. The need for a product, perceived value, price, brand perception, and other factors, in addition to the influencer's attributes, affect buying intention. Because of this, a consumer may not be able to purchase a product based on an influencer's traits, but he or she may contemplate doing so if the other circumstances are favorable.

All in all, influencer marketing is beneficial for establishing long-term relationships with clients for businesses seeking to expand their clientele and turn them into loyal customers. Any company can use influencer marketing to achieve its unique goals. For instance, it may raise awareness of a recently introduced product, encourage online or offline sales of the company's current items, or even generate a positive reputation in the market. People may ignore a brand's social media posts about its products because they perceive them as pure advertisements. However, if the same brand pays an influencer to recommend or post a product review, they may pay attention because the post no longer feels like an advertisement coming from the influencer; this reaction demonstrates the importance of influencer marketing.

2.4. Beauty Industry and Gender Equality Trends

Women nowadays are frequently reminded of what is deemed attractive. This elusively attractive ideal is presented in several advertisements for women of all ages, body types, and sizes. Society has created unattainable beauty standards by using computer-enhanced and photo-shopped models in ads, making women feel inadequate. This beauty obsession has given rise to a billion-dollar business that can influence how women view beauty.

As Britton (2012) claims, most of the research done to determine how media influences women's self-image today demonstrates that it has a negative impact. However, the cosmetics industry and its impact on consumers' self-image have received less specialized investigation. Given that \$7 billion is spent on cosmetics annually, it is clear that the cosmetics sector has some impact on consumer behavior. Less is known about the direct

impact of cosmetic advertising on customers, although much of the earlier study has implications for the cosmetic business. Girls are trained to experiment with cosmetics early to make themselves more appealing. It serves as a temporary boost in self-esteem, and different dosages can be used as needed. The fact that cosmetics may be a quick and straightforward solution to short-term aesthetic issues is what most women find so alluring about them (Britton, 2012).

The academic literature provides extensive documentation of the connection between aesthetic practices, femininity, and feminism. In many countries, 'doing' beauty is essential to 'doing' femininity. As defined by society's standards, it is an acceptable (and expected) aspect of what women do as part of "being "women." For example, in terms of skin type and complexity, and body form, size, and look.

In her book "The Right to Be Beautiful: Postfeminist Identity and Consumer Beauty Advertising," Lazer (2011) describes that normative beauty standards and the highly lucrative marketed beauty business that supports them have been attacked by certain feminists (particularly those linked with the "second wave") as repressive toward women in general. The beauty business has come under fire for maintaining stringent and limited notions of beauty, aggravating the weight of "lookism" on women (i.e., the ongoing evaluation of women's appearances), and encouraging unhealthy body image obsessions and potentially dangerous aesthetic operations. Other feminists, who are considered part of the "third wave" and whose perspectives readily align with post-feminism, have recovered beauty practices as pleasant, self-determined, and competent feminine hobbies (Lazer, 2011).

Elsesser (2019) made his argument quite clearly, stating that women's beauty rituals may be a form of amusement and self-expression. However, the researchers claim that "beauty practices become socially coercive, an obligation women must perform" when extreme societal pressure turns chasing beauty into a mandate rather than a decision women make on their own. Gender equality in the workplace is hampered if males are not held to the same standards as women, which leads to discrimination based on looks. Never discuss how women may be prevented from reaching more essential goals by the absurd amount of time necessary to follow many beauty standards.

The impact of advertising in the fashion and beauty industries on women has been the subject of much research. Many women have experienced anxiety, low self-esteem, and low self-confidence due to commercials featuring unrealistic depictions of beauty. Most of these unpleasant feelings are caused by body and attractiveness dissatisfaction (Britton, 2012)

In addition, since the cosmetics sector has long been associated with femininity, many companies operate their products according to accepted sexual dualism. Gender neutrality, particularly in many western countries, is not just a tool for empowerment but also a more considerable cultural transformation as gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles are vanishing at an increasing rate. Even if the societal roles of the two sexes have radically altered over the past several years, many advertisements for cosmetics still feature men and women in conventional settings to sell companies and goods.

From the standpoint of Hämäläinen (2019), the way products are advertised to current customers in the cosmetics sector has to evolve in light of this new move toward less gendered cultures. The new trend mandates that things be displayed and marketed differently to appeal to contemporary consumers, especially the younger generations. Gender has historically been critical to the marketing methods used by the cosmetics sector, including its advertisements, from the planning stage through segmentation and targeting. It signifies a significant change for the industry. Advertising is one of the most often used strategies for business and marketing. In many societies, it is seen as relatively ubiquitous, almost everywhere, including the streets, the internet, television, and periodicals. It is a potent tool for imbuing brands with symbolic meaning and simply connecting brands with visuals to create the desired image of an item or a service since it draws on cultural, social, and visual traditions.

In addition, research indicated that visual imagery has potentially powerful effects on human psychology and physiology as it affects consumers' ideas, perceptions, beliefs, feelings, overall behavior, and even health (Branthwaite, 2002). As mentioned by Rietveld *et al.* (2020), social media, which is most visually based, is expanding at an exponential rate and is increasingly being used by many companies as part of their consumer interaction strategies. On Instagram alone, users like posts 1.65 billion times a day and submit 42 million photographs on average each day. Since 70% of firms have an active Instagram account and

80% of customers follow at least one brand, brands are a part of this widespread visual interchange.

In his research Hämäläinen (2019) also emphasized that overall, the primary goal of advertising is to influence people to purchase goods and services. Gender plays a big part in advertising a lot of the time. Women are typically portrayed in traditional gender roles and stereotypes as being younger, more dependent, and in domestic responsibilities. On the other hand, men are often represented as being older, authoritative, and in autonomous roles outside of the house. Even when the sexual picture has little to no connection to the product, cosmetics advertising frequently exploits libido by putting more emphasis on sexuality than the actual product.

Women appear to be shown in more powerful and masculine roles across time due to shifting social conventions around gender (e.g., businesswoman, head of the family, decision maker, athletic, and so on). Images of strong, self-assured women attract contemporary female customers by serving as role models for them to emulate (Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2010).

Generally, advertising messages have considerably constrained both genders' consumption by restricting and organizing options for male and female consumption (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). These restrictions have probably increased the gender gap by reaffirming gender norms and stereotypes for both men and women. Particularly in the cosmetics sector, where most hair care and skin care businesses use female models and celebrities in their advertising, the depictions leave the average male customer with nothing to relate to, alienating the majority of male consumers.

Advertising for cosmetics frequently uses messages that evoke negative emotions in consumers, such as social failure and rejection, should they decide not to use a particular product. According to Connelly (2013), these advertisements frequently encourage unrealistic and excessive expectations regarding the physical characteristics of beauty and the efficacy of the featured cosmetics products, which may then affect consumers' perceptions of themselves.

Although customers in older and more traditional sectors are probably less likely to have good thoughts regarding non-traditional gender roles in advertisements, it is stated that these feelings are still optimistic as they are above the middle of the negative-positive scale. On a management level, the degree of unfavorable reactions may be less than one might first

assume. On the other hand, this suggests that society may be more accepting of non-traditional gender roles than previously thought. The acceptability of non-traditional roles depicted in advertising relies on customers' acceptance of these positions and societal ideas and values (Hämäläinen, 2019).

The central theme of this special issue of Marketing and Consumer Research (MCR) is gender knowledge creation. Adopting a feminist viewpoint on marketing and consumer behavior requires considering men's roles within gender power structures, including those of superiors in terms of consumer power or the power of marketers and managers. The term "culture" nevertheless frequently serves as a justification for perpetuating gendered dominance in cross-national and international discussions and studies of marketing and consumption.

Furthermore, a lot of gender research in marketing and consumer behavior examines its research subjects through the lens of sex roles or culturalism. Although this has been somewhat progressive, it has emphasized chiefly the human experience, portraying consumers as either heroes, victims, or—most frequently—as "negotiators" of norms. However, this demonstrates that consumers can influence these structures or norms, making them unchallenged.

A brand's value comes from what customers think and do when encountering it. Research indicates that customers want their self-concept to be mirrored in the brands they choose and that this desire determines a company's ability to create value or brand equity (Arvidsson, 2006).

In the opinion of Hearn and Hein (2015), brands and goods appear to have a significant symbolic significance for many customers as they continue to shape elements of their extended selves and significantly influence their gender identities. Brands will thus keep producing products and marketing materials that influence customer buying behavior favorably. These brands and goods will likely continue to be gendered as long as gendered items or brands boost the chance that a target demographic will make a purchase.

Besides, Hearn and Hein (2015) specified that there is still a long way to go and more stages to accomplish before the future of cosmetics advertising is gender-neutral. Re-gendering or de-gendering a product through one marketer's efforts or campaign appears practically

unachievable given the enormous scale of the advertising business and the fixed-like gender preconceptions of civilizations.

Nevertheless, establishing gender transitions appears feasible if most of an industry repositions a product's gender. Despite this, the cosmetics sector still needs to attain equality before neutrality can be achieved. It appears, however, that the industry is becoming less divided into two wholly opposed, binary gender categories as brands emphasize other product qualities other than gender.

Influencer marketing is nothing new in the beauty business, one of the fastest-growing sectors. With influencers' help and connections with their audiences, this marketing method is becoming increasingly popular. In the social media age, influencers are crucial. These content producers interact with their big followings on social media sites. The core of the connection between influencers and their followers is trust, created via these interpersonal encounters (Despierre, 2018).

2.4.1. The Emerge of Beauty Bloggers

The beauty sector is among those with the quickest growth. The purchase decision-making process encompasses multiple steps, from problem awareness to post-purchase behavior. Product creators need to do market research. Due to the abundance of information accessible, assessing new items is made simpler for prospective clients.

According to Nosita and Lestari (2019), people who have used products or services can comment on them and share their experiences with others; this process is called word-of-mouth marketing (WoM). The cosmetic sector, which sells items for skincare, cosmetics, hair care, and perfumes, is one of the so-called "try before you buy" industries since consumers must physically interact with and smell the product in a store before they decide to buy it.

Furthermore, in their analysis Nosita and Lestari (2019) demonstrated that the term "Electronic Word-of-Mouth" (E-WOM) refers to the positive and negative comments about a product or a business by current, former or future consumers that are widely disseminated online. User-generated content (UGC), commonly referred to as E-WOM, functions similarly to traditional Word of Mouth but is disseminated via online media outlets. According to the definition, user-generated content (UGC) is any self-made content that is shared on social

media sites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram and significantly impacts consumer behavior. Today, UGC is changing how people watch videos and television, thanks to millions of video creators and viewers.

The beauty industry has established itself as a leader in retail innovation. This breakthrough stems not just from the scientific side of product improvements but also from the standpoint of digital marketing, where businesses have successfully adopted techniques to draw in and keep consumers. Building a solid social media system is increasingly essential for businesses to stay at the top of consumers' minds and reap the benefits of being present on various platforms (Tran and Nguyen, 2020). The latest new trend is influencer marketing. In the past several years, marketers have rushed to influencers to help them engage their audiences and sell their products. There is no lack of celebrities marketing various items, from fitness gurus urging us to try a new protein powder to bloggers touting their favorite cosmetics.

Referring to investigations of Tran and Nguyen (2020), consumers are more inclined to regard commercials as more honest, effective, less misleading, and more trustworthy when they and the ad creator are similar. As a result, they are more willing to trust the blogger. However, the ad's significance (authenticity) significantly impacts customers' intentions to buy the items bloggers promote. Blogs must be enjoyable to read and watch since consumers are becoming less trusting of advertisements.

Along with how fascinating the content is, the blog's design, flow, and clarity must also be considered important factors. Advertising must also be honest, genuine, and believable. Promoting businesses' goods and services using blogs may be an effective way to overcome consumer skepticism barriers since, in the internet world, trust and credibility are still crucial for gaining customers' participation.

Through blogs, customers may learn more about a product or business and develop an emotional connection. These actions can, in turn, promote brand support and loyalty, which affect consumers' intentions to make purchases. Studies on online persuasive communications and online information processing will become increasingly crucial for creating global marketing strategies as the Internet continues to speed up globalization.

Examining consumer perceptions of blog articles authored by bloggers who got advantages from a sponsor is crucial since sponsored posts on beauty blogs are frequently considered to be practical marketing tools. Beauty blogs were more successful than internet

commercials in encouraging customers' desire to buy. Beauty bloggers substantially impact consumers' purchase intentions (Tran and Nguyen, 2020).

Genuine beauty bloggers do not just review products or services because they are compensated for doing so. They could have discussed the goods or services before the company sought a relationship with them. Moreover, even when the campaign is over, and they are no longer being paid, they could still talk about it. As a result, beauty bloggers have kept their authenticity even after becoming quite well-known. Additionally, their audience looks up to them for insightful counsel and unvarnished judgments on the things they have tried.

Therefore, there is a significant probability that whatever they promote would quickly pique the interest of their followers and could even lead to a purchase. This study found a substantial correlation between purchase intention and an individual's attitude toward sponsored suggestion postings. Consumers' opinions about a sponsored suggestion post will improve if they have strong brand awareness of the company behind a product suggested in a blog piece (Tran and Nguyen, 2020).

In the opinion of Nosita and Lestari (2019), everyone may share their shopping and consuming experiences on social media, including their use of beauty products. Firms may provide them with facilities or training in exchange for their goods. However, beauty bloggers could work against brands and harm them. It has become popular for many of them to begin their online activities with educational content in which they compare similar items from multiple companies. The other method is evaluating different products of one particular brand to provide their followers with the pros and cons of using those products or brands.

As a consequence, occasionally, a brand's product might receive unfavorable feedbacks, which could damage the entire company's image or decrease sales of that particular product. Typically, beauty bloggers start sponsored partnership material after these free analyses when they have gained followers' trust and increased their followers. Therefore, from one side, beauty bloggers might serve as the virtual inspector who regularly checks the businesses' products and their quality. On the contrary, they might act as brand ambassadors helping to boost product sales and improve brand image.

Companies should thus always work to raise the quality of their goods because content creators' trustworthiness is based on their usage of the products. Marketers can keep an eye on online platforms to learn more about the level of interest in their products among the general public. Reviewing UGC comments helps marketers pinpoint product flaws to make improvements more quickly. Content producers must be truthful in their product reviews if they want their audience to believe them.

Bae and Lee (2011) discovered that, compared to items that do not require expertise, buyers are more affected by reviews from actual users of experience-required products. They also discovered that reviews from online communities were seen as being more reliable than those on the seller's website. Customers can think that the seller's review site offers biased product information since it relates to the seller's objectives. Widyanto and Agusti (2020) indicated that the influencer's beauty and persuasiveness were the only two independent traits that had a statistically significant positive impact on purchase intention.

According to Despierre (2018)'s research, another important and fascinating issue regarding beauty bloggers is the emergence of **male beauty bloggers** in this industry. As the definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman got more ambiguous and the discussion about gender stereotypes gained momentum, many guys, homosexuals, and transgender persons started working as female beauty bloggers and disregarded the gender "rules. "Although men also feel more pressure to look good, they can spend little time on their skin, makeup, and grooming to appear manly. However, the fact that women are the primary users of beauty goods means that this is expected of them and demonstrated in their purchasing habits. Beauty advertising frequently plays on women's anxieties by telling them they need to look nice to attract men, which is another persistent way that women are marketed to (Gauntlett, 2008; Hsu & Ngamnat, 2018).

Among younger generations, the practice of guys utilizing cosmetics is becoming increasingly common. The goods in the young man's beauty cabinet include skin care, toiletries, fragrances, hair care, and makeup (Hsu & Ngamnat, 2018). Despierre (2018) finding shows that in Britain, for instance, 56% of the male population claims that using cosmetic items is a daily habit, with concerns about anti-aging and skin attractiveness serving as significant motivators. L'Oréal performed a nationally representative British poll that revealed 40% of men use cosmetics geared at women. Some traditionally feminine

cosmetics companies appear to choose to promote inclusion and gender equality above creating a distinct "for men only" range.

Men have appeared in beauty advertisements, but they were often models, celebrities, or makeup professionals. A turning milestone for the beauty industry occurred in 2016 with the selection of **James Charles**, who was 17 at the time, as the face of renowned cosmetics company CoverGirl, as illustrated in figure 2.2 (Despierre, 2018).

An international company contacting a makeup-untrained influencer—and the fact that it was a man—was unheard of in the sector. James became well-known by uploading cosmetics tutorial videos on the YouTube website. He acts as an inspiration to his audience for redefining male beauty standards and speaking up for himself and others who do not comply with gender conventions because male social media influencers in the beauty world were uncommon until a few years ago (BBC, 2016).

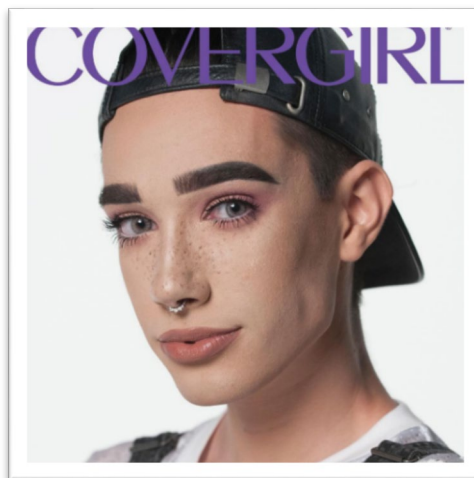


Figure 2.2. James Charles on CoverGirl 2016

Patrick Starr is another example of a male beauty influencer hired by a for-profit company. Starr has a long-term deal with M.A.C. Cosmetics, which has led to several makeup collaborations with the company. A company slogan for leading the fight for greater inclusiveness in the beauty business is M.A.C. Cosmetics (Megarry, 2018). All ages, all ethnicities, and all genders have been the brand's motto since its founding in the 1980s,

encouraging variety and originality (M.A.C. Cosmetics, undated). Advertisement promoting Patrick's collaboration featuring his feminine look can be seen in Figures 2.3.



Figure 2.3 PatrickStarr x MAC Collection 2017

Patrick said he wanted to use his platform to spread the message to young children that gender should not be a barrier to one's expression of individuality via appearance (PatrickStarr, 2016).

The dilemma is whether or not the consumers think the male influencer is attractive and able to connect with them emotionally. In her study, Despierre (2018) discovered a credibility-mediated direct beneficial effect of beauty on brand attitude. This attitude implies that if a person sees a sponsored Instagram post that considers the influencer attractive, he or she will consider that influencer more reliable and trustworthy. It means that a person seeing a sponsored Instagram post will view the influencer as more credible if they regard him or her as handsome.

Hence, when a female influencer pushes a company, consumers are more likely to link it with feminine attributes. Characteristics of a feminine person include being gentle, sweet, sensitive, elegant, fragile, or exhibiting tender emotions. However, this only makes the female desire to buy more from a feminine brand than a masculine brand. Nevertheless, as the lines between the sexes blur, it is becoming more acceptable for guys to use beauty

products. The beauty business is aiming for a new population because of this acceptance. Brands that were previously thought to be geared toward women either opened a new branch only for men or chose to take a more inclusive, gender-neutral tack by working with both male and female influencers (Despierre, 2018).

The influencer's gender did not seem to have an effect on how people felt about the business, the influencer, or their desire to buy the promoted product. Independent of who promotes them, customers continue to connect beauty businesses with feminine personality qualities over male ones since beauty goods have historically been associated with femininity. Even though women may dominate the beauty business, the male customer base and the number of male beauty influencers are expanding.

Besides, in recent years, the gender makeup of both their target audience and beauty influencers has changed. More men are becoming beauty influencers, and more men are buying beauty products because gender roles are perceived as being more ambiguous, which makes it more acceptable for men to publicly enjoy using cosmetics (Gauntlett, 2008; Gill, Henwood & McLean, 2015; Jayson, 2014). Given that male influencers are not viewed as having less knowledge or being less reliable than female influencers, this female dominance may soon end and male bloggers in the beauty sector appear to be acceptable in the eyes of the consumer.

In conclusion, through influencer marketing, cosmetics companies should be bold in working with or hiring beauty bloggers. This is because nowadays, people are more likely to follow the advice of trustworthy communicators since their viewpoints align with their personal beliefs and attitudes. A prior study demonstrated that in a trustworthy online environment, individuals are likely to seek more information and feel secure while reacting to the available information (Nosita and Lestari, 2019).

2.5. The “Mirror” vs. “Mold” Argument

For more than 40 years, academics have studied how gender roles are depicted in advertising. According to the research of Hämäläinen (2019), consumers are continually exposed to many advertising messages since they are nearly everywhere. Due to the

numerous ads, brands often struggle to break out of the "advertising clutter." Thus, marketers always seek innovative and unique ways to differentiate themselves from the competition by providing customers with something novel. Additionally, originality is a critical component of successful advertising, so efforts that defy expectations may be well-received by customers. The degree of distinguishing qualities a client searches for while making a purchase is described by the demand for uniqueness, which is an individual-level attribute. Consumers with high levels of uniqueness are more likely to seek out niche goods than those with lower levels, and they also go to extraordinary lengths to own innovative goods.

Moreover, as Champlin *et al.* (2019) emphasize, companies are working to portray themselves as morally responsible because customers are increasingly considering a brand's social effect when making purchase decisions. So, "brand responsibility" or "brand advocacy" is a strategy that is becoming increasingly popular in the advertising sector. In this approach, businesses and clients support social causes to look more ethical, transparent, and socially responsible. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to a company's attempts to take responsibility for its environmental and social consequences. However, these actions usually go beyond what is required by government environmental legislation. Hence, *brand advocacy* is a crucial advertising trend that requires further investigation due to the expanding purchasing power of millennials.

A company's brand is comparable to the interaction between an organization and its audience. So, marketing managers work to maintain consistent brand identity across all aspects of a brand as they expand and take customers' feedback into account (Lury, 2011). As customer impression and opinion are crucial to a business's success, a distinct brand identity is developed to influence and shape consumer perceptions.

According to (Biehal and Sheinin, 1998), brand managers need to pay more attention to brand advertising since it significantly impacts how consumers perceive products, whether it comes from print, television, or social media. A consumer's perceptions of brand execution elements—such as the use of colors or spokesperson selection—and brand messaging are significantly influenced by their exposure to brand advertising. Consumers will get so used to a brand over time that, depending on the success of marketing campaigns, the artifacts

that make up their brand identity will be immediately recognizable and embedded in their memories for ease of recall (Biehal & Sheinin, 1998).

Thus, to establish their brands in particular ways and show that they are trustworthy brands, marketers nowadays utilize femvertising concerning the gender equality movement that is taking place in society. Nowadays, people are more sensitive to advertising in which stereotypes or sexist contents exist. So, they expect the marketers to align with the gender rights principles because gender stereotyping can have adverse effects that limit chances in life, especially for women and other gender groupings.

For instance, stereotyping of role behaviors (such as women caring for children) may result in limited opportunities for self-development. Stereotyping physical characteristics (such as beauty ideals for women) may result in reduced self-dignity and body dissatisfaction, and stereotyping of occupational roles may result in disadvantages for women's careers. A significant issue of gender policy and a societal goal in many nations is avoiding such stereotypes and obtaining equal living possibilities for both genders in many sectors of life (such as income and profession) (e.g., European Parliament 2008).

According to Eisend (2010), gender roles in society are predominantly influenced by the social environment rather than biology. In many industrialized countries today, achieving equitable representation in all facets of life is a top priority for societal progress. According to critics, the continued employment of gender stereotypes in advertising obscures the tremendous progress made in many cultures toward gender equality.

There are two broad conclusions: pessimistic and optimistic. Studies that are pessimistic emphasize that women are still stereotyped negatively and that this stereotyping is worsening (Eisend, 2010). On the contrary, optimistic studies believe that women surpass men in many areas and overcome harmful stereotypes. They assert that female role models in advertising are more accurately depicted today's women and are advancing toward parity with males.

Over time and between cultures, there are different regulatory rules for marketing or initiatives to achieve gender equality. Given that data on gender stereotyping in advertising comes from many nations and was gathered at various times, the effects of both elements may be complicated.

The "Mirror" vs. "Mold" argument is a long-running disagreement over the effects of advertising on society (Holbrook 1987; Polly 1986, 1987). Naturally, a culture's norms, beliefs, and behavioral patterns are included in or connected to the gender-related values of a society. According to the "**mirror**" theory, advertising displays existing values (Holbrook 1987). Thus, gender roles in advertising follow societal norms around gender. Even though advertising routinely undersells some areas of life while exaggerating the importance of others, changes in advertising content are more likely to reflect societal developments than the other way around. Overall, the evidence favors the mirror argument over the mold argument in the long-running discussion concerning the social effects of advertising.

The Eisend (2010) findings also put into perspective the need for governmental initiatives to combat gender stereotypes in advertising. Advertisers adapt the images they provide to reflect what is more widely accepted since cultural shifts (such as how society sees gender roles) frequently take place.

On the other hand, the "**mold**" concept argues that marketing may shape and mold the values of its target market. Therefore, gender roles in advertising establish, shape, and promote gender-stereotypical societal beliefs and values. The argument is based on the notion that exposure to media and advertising may alter attitudes and behavior and that individuals absorb information from the media.

Additionally, Eisend's (2010) findings suggest that gender stereotyping in advertising is affected by advances in gender equality in society rather than the reverse. His findings demonstrate that, rather than attempting to change societal norms, marketers appear to respond to gender-related societal shifts by using existing values to sell their businesses.

Therefore, global marketers should be aware of the changes in gender-related values that rely on time and culture because gender representations in advertising that diverge from gender-related values in society might hurt customers. They could reject the message and refuse to trust how the main characters are portrayed, which might harm the purchases they make.

To conclude, there is still a need for an empirical assessment of both perspectives, particularly in developing countries. More research that examines the impacts of gender stereotyping on various cultures and nations is necessary to determine whether

gender stereotyping has evolved through time, whether any changes are due to cultural differences, or whether both variables are significant.

Based on the "mold and mirror" argument, this thesis, in the following two chapters, will analyze the connection between gender stereotyping in advertising and gender-related trends in societies.

In chapter three, the mirror argument will be analyzed. Considering the significance of social media marketing and its critical role as a means of communication for companies, an extensive study will be undertaken on the beauty brands of Iran and Italy; the two case studies chosen as representations of a developing and developed country, respectively. The goal is to compare the marketing and business methods of the selected beauty brands in Iran and Italy to determine the extent to which they mirror society's beliefs and values. Also, the study will explore how much brands' activities on social media platforms (Instagram) follow gender equality trends.

The fourth chapter, on the other hand, will assess the effects of advertising and brand activities on people's mindsets and buying behavior to analyze the mold influence based on an in-depth interview with Iranian and Italian women. The last chapter will conclude the study and offer recommendations in light of the theoretical frameworks and findings of chapters three and four.

Chapter 3. Case Study Research: Iranian and Italian Beauty brands

This chapter will analyze the effect of gender equality movements on beauty brands' advertisements and marketing activities on their social media accounts (Instagram). Based on the mirror arguments explained earlier, the goal is to investigate the methods beauty brands have applied to align with social movements and get considered an advocate brand, particularly in gender rights issues.

These efforts could be made in different ways, for example, by producing creative femvertising ads or just preventing the use of sexist stereotypes in the ad content. There are fewer resources regarding these subjects in developing countries, so Iran has been chosen as the case study. The driving data will be compared with those of Italy, a sample of a developed nation, to close the gap and conclude the research.

3.1. The country choice

Among all the countries world wide, Iran and Italy have been strategically selected as the case studies for different reasons.

Iran:

I decided to choose Iran based on four factors:

1. The personal experience and since Iran is my motherland
2. The situation of gender equality and the existence of various limitations
3. The massive growth of the beauty industry and the lack of data about it
4. Intriguing increase in online shopping and e-commerce due to the technological growth

1- The personal experience and since Iran is my motherland

I was born and raised in Iran and lived there for 23 years. So as an Iranian woman, I have a comprehensive and accurate perspective and knowledge about gender equality in Iran because I have wholeheartedly experienced stereotypes, limitations, and injustice discrimination. Also, I have always cared about gender issues and was active as a feminist on my social media, trying to increase the awareness of friends and family about women's rights.

Moreover, the beauty industry forms an ideal context for this thesis because I have had a great passion for the beauty industry and cosmetics products since I was a teenager. So I know the Iranian cosmetics brand perfectly because I was always too sensitive to purchasing high-quality products and investigating various available brands. All these experiences give me great insight and motivation for choosing Oran as the case study.

2- The situation of gender equality and the existence of various limitations

The situation of Iranian women in Iran is more than terrible! According to the 2022 Global Gender Gap report published by "The World Economic Forum," Iran, under the clerical regime, is at the bottom of the gender gap index, ranking 143 among 146 countries studied (The World Economic Forum, 2022). The economic involvement, educational achievement, health, and political survival of women were measured in this study, published on July 13, 2022 (Radio Liberty, 2022). The mullahs' misogynistic dictatorship that took power in 1979 lacked equal chances for women, which is the primary cause of the offensive rating.

As explained by Suleymani (2020), the political atmosphere in Iran and the restrictions on feminist activities produced hierarchies of priorities, where some concerns within movements were prioritized above others. Iranian feminist and women's movements typically concentrate on discriminatory laws and policies like polygamy, stoning, and unfair family protection laws because of the strict control executed by religious clerics and the theocratic dictatorship of the Islamic Republic. These problems leave little room and political energy to organize other significant issues.

These limitations include companies and organizations in both the public and private sectors. Hence, due to these restrictions, companies, especially beauty brands, have faced many more difficulties as they are directly concerned with beauty. The question that arises and is unanswered is whether the number of gender equality movements has increased incredibly in Iran over the last two decades. There are more limitations for brands and companies; how the Persian beauty companies pass these laws and not only try to overcome the problems but also make an endeavor to support gender equality trends.

3- Huge growth in the beauty industry in Iran and lack of data about it

The market for beauty products is flourishing; it is undergoing a generational consumer transition and heavily relies on social media communication (Herke, 2022). Iran's cosmetics and beauty businesses are also enormous and in great demand. Iran has evolved to become the seventh-largest consumer of cosmetics in the world, spending \$US2.1 billion (\$A2.26 billion) yearly on various beauty products, according to Hanzaee and Andervazh (2012). Based on the report's results, Iranian women and girls, who are primarily urban and range in age from 16 to 45, spend, on average, \$7 per person per month on cosmetics. Iran's capital and largest city, Tehran, has developed into a global metropolis (Hanzaee and Andervazh, 2012).

Almost every multinational cosmetic company exited the Iranian market during the past several decades due to the sanctions still in place. All of the foreign products that are being sold in Iran were, in a sense, smuggled and purchased via the black market. Since fake items have manipulated the market, people are more concerned and careful when purchasing beauty products since they directly impact their health, and the fake ones might harm their skin, eyes, or other organs. Because Iranians place a high value on quality, numerous businesses discovered a vast market for domestic beauty items, and some began producing Iranian cosmetic brands.

With increasing attention to personal care products and the necessity of using them to have better hair or skin, the number of beauty industries producing skin care boosted considerably, and many Iranian brands were added to the customers' shopping lists. According to data, the sales value of skin care products in Iran for 2020 will be around 428 million U.S. dollars (Statista, 2020).

Fortunately, Iranian producers and labs have started to create premium cosmetics in recent years. Many Iranian beauty brands started their advertising by raising the question of why people should consume and trust Iranian cosmetics. As they explained, the most important reason was that the Persian companies guaranteed the originality of their product. Unfortunately, because most cosmetic brands sold on the Iranian market are obtained from questionable and illegal sources, it is impossible to confirm their validity and quality with certainty. Thus, the consumer can be sure they are not fake or dangerous by using local products. In other words, customers no longer need to worry about the product's

authenticity if they choose an entirely Iranian brand since they can get the required products straight from the manufacturer's shop and their reliable dealers.

Secondly, Iranian cosmetics, on the other hand, are made for Iran's climate. These products will work better on the skin and body since they are suited to Iran's environment. Thirdly, by patronizing Iranian businesses, consumers have made a financial contribution to the country's economy, created jobs, and assisted in its development. The final crucial factor is that Iranian cosmetics companies are considerably less costly and cheaper than their foreign rivals. Customers may therefore support their pockets and the national economy by purchasing cosmetics made from Iranian goods!

However, the drawbacks of active Iranian cosmetics brands are their restrictions on production and their weaknesses in marketing and advertising. Due to this, despite the high quality of many of these products, they often need to be discovered. Since there is not much research on this subject, this thesis attempts to fill that gap by resolving the concerns and providing a valuable source for future study.

4-Intriguing increase of online shopping and e-commerce due to the technological growth

Online shopping is the most common form of pre-purchase online searching. According to the findings, online shopping encourages people to conduct more in-store purchases, whereas in-store shopping complements online shopping rather than having an utterly negative correlation (Etminani-Ghasrodashti & Hamidi, 2020).

In Iran, e-commerce websites and online beauty stores are thriving as more customers want to buy products online rather than through traditional channels. The top 10 nations in the world for makeup and cosmetic use include Iran. Also, Iran is the second-highest cosmetics consumer in the Middle East after Saudi Arabia (Jozi, 2016).

The demand for cosmetics is still increasing and has been proliferating. Launching an online store has been a popular business strategy for digital entrepreneurs because younger generations and those more technologically savvy make up the most of their beauty customers. While some customers like to test beauty products first, others frequently purchase the same item, which may be a decisive selling factor for online retailers.

Consumers in Iran are starting to rely more on online shopping due to the country's explosive development in internet usage. Iran is the second-most internet-connected nation in the Middle East, with over 62 million subscribers (Internet World Stats, 2019a). Additionally, Iran saw a > 65% increase in internet growth between 2000 and 2018 and currently ranks as the 16th country in the world with the most prominent internet users (Internet World Stats, 2019b).

This development results from several causes, including the ease of online shopping and the danger of having a lot of cash or credit cards with you when you go shopping. As investigated by Etminani-Ghasrodashti & Hamidi (2020), according to data from the Iranian Electronic Payments Corporation (Shaparak), the entire amount of electronic financial transactions in the nation in 2017 was reported to have been over \$17.5 billion, an increase of around 27% from the previous year's totals.

The direct purchase of products and services by Iranian customers made up more than 77% of all transactions (Shaparak, 2017). In Shaparak's economic report, online banking and utility payments make up around 17% of all transactions, while online purchases account for > 83% of all online transactions (Shaparak, 2019). Understanding people's buying patterns in Iran can reveal new information on how rapidly people in developing nations embrace ICT. That is also beneficial for formulating policies, particularly in regions with similar economic challenges.

Overall, given the rapid rise in the popularity of online shopping in Iran, beauty brands should view e-commerce and their platform pages as vital spaces for marketing and selling their products. The few dozen internet retailers in this industry have much room to maneuver Iran's enormous cosmetics market. Even though the proportion of customers who shop online is a small portion of those who shop offline, the culture of online shopping is continually growing, which increases the potential and size of the market for these e-commerce companies (Etminani-Ghasrodashti & Hamidi, 2020).

Italy:

As well as Iran, opting Italy as the representative of a developed country due for the following reasons:

1. The personal experiences

2. The situation of gender equality and feminist movements
3. The cosmetic industry in Italy

1-The personal experiences

I immigrated to Italy three years ago to continue my education for a master's degree and experience living in a new culture and environment. After a short time, I could clearly feel the differences between Iran and Italy, especially on the gender rights issue. Moreover, as Italy is known for its famous high-quality products, particularly beauty brands, learning more about them and their communication methods has always fascinated me.

Regarding my enthusiasm for cosmetics, I have found the Italian market so powerful and impressive, which makes it an excellent sample for comparison with Iran. However, in addition to the differences, both countries have many similarities in various aspects. Therefore, as I have lived in both countries, I can broadly and profoundly compare their beauty brands' performances.

2- The situation of gender equality and feminist movements

Women's rights are higher and better in Italy than in Iran. However, according to the last Global Gender Gap Report, the least egalitarian country in Europe was Italy, which came in at number 76. The least egalitarian country in the world is Iran (148th) (Rollero et al., 2022). In terms of countries that have been very successful in decreasing the gender gap, Italy has not worked very well.

Italy maintained its position as the 63rd-ranked country in the 2022 ranking of 146 countries, just one spot behind Zambia (61st) and Uganda (62nd) (Assolombarda, 2022). It also ranked 25th out of 35 countries across Europe (The World Economic Forum, 2022) and has lagged behind other European nations in closing the gender gap; Spain and France are ranked 17th and 15th, respectively, while Germany is ranked ninth globally (Assolombarda, 2022).

Therefore, as evidenced by the data, Italian women have fewer possibilities than women in other European countries to fully and equitably engage in Italian social life. Ragnedda *et al.* (2015) also emphasized that the status gap between men and women is far worse for women in Italy. Despite modest progress in reducing this disparity, Italy is still ranked among the

lowest nation-states regarding matters like female participation in government and the workforce. Discrimination based on life events like marriage and parenthood has contributed to this to some extent.

Ragnedda et al. (2015) argue that the continuous and hidden symbolic violence employed to justify representations of Italian women in the Italian media contributes to these inequalities. Due to their propensity to disseminate dominant cultural images, social organizations like the media, which have broad audiences, also disseminate representations of gender roles. The presence of persistent and pervasive stereotypes and images reinforces the economic, social, and cultural disadvantages women face in Italy, which help maintain male dominance in all aspects of social life (Ragnedda et al., 2015).

Besides, women in Italy suffer from domestic violence. In 2020, 32 women were murdered by a family member, and 67 women were killed by intimate partners, according to a report from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

The data is straightforward: during the past two years, there has been a rise in the number of assaults against women, particularly those committed by family members. Nevertheless, Italy is one of the most active countries supporting the rights of different gender groups. As explained by Chironi (2019), gender movements have been most prominent and active in Italy since the start of the economic, financial, and democratic crises in 2008. Women, as well as homosexual, transgender, and intersex persons, have been particularly hard-struck by neoliberal policies related to this dilemma.

After dormancy, preexisting groups reactivated, and new young organizations entered gender politics. "Non Una Di Meno" is an effective gender equality campaign established in 2016. The Italian section of the global campaign against male violence against women, Non Una Di Meno (NUDM, Not One Less), was founded in 2016 by activists from all generations. The battle against gender discrimination and violence against women in all forms—at work, at home, in politics, and elsewhere—serves as its rallying cry (Torrise, 2017)

Based on Cironi (2019) reports its aim was to create an intersectional collective subject sets apart from other feminist movements. Since its founding, "Non uno di meno" has concentrated its protests on the male-female sexual binary, positioning itself as the voice for the interests of all marginalized groups in society, including homosexual, transgender, and

bisexual people, working in tandem with the LGBT movement. The movement has more than just solidified today. It consists of women of various ages and socioeconomic backgrounds who work toward reaffirming a new season of awareness of women's plight in contemporary society, which is still far from equitable treatment.

In general, femicide and gender violence rates in Italy are pretty high compared to what they were in the past. Additionally, judicial warnings and expulsion orders for domestic violence have lately increased despite a decline in stalking accusations. Understanding how the gendered hierarchy is culturally replicated to uphold the status quo of power structures is necessary to comprehend gender inequities. There may be another way to encourage societal change, and more equality between men and women as knowledge of media-driven symbolic violence grows, particularly throughout the world, and victims of this silent violence become aware of its existence and repercussions (Ragnedda et al., 2015).

3-Cosmetic industry in Italy

One of the biggest cosmetics marketplaces in the world is in Italy. In particular, in 2021, the nation was Europe's third-largest market for cosmetics items, trailing only the United States, China, and Japan as the top three global players. The domestic market generates the highest income and is also the most significant market for Italian cosmetics. Nevertheless, the value of beauty product exports has increased during the past several years (Statista, 2022c).

In 2021, the consumption value of beauty products in Italy reached almost 10.64 billion euros, a rise over the previous year, when this number was about 9.78 billion euros. Italy has a well-established cosmetics market with consistently rising sales that peaked in 2019 at about 7.09 billion euros. According to the European cosmetics market, Germany consumed the most cosmetics in 2021, with an estimated 13.6 billion euros. With almost 12 billion euros and 10.6 billion euros, respectively, France and Italy came in second and third. (Statista, 2022d).

As more customers become aware of the significance of personal care, wellness, and cosmetics goods, the cosmetics and personal care business has been booming throughout Europe. With more than 27% of the European cosmetics market, skin care is still the driving force in the European cosmetics business (Statista, 2022e).

Italy has one of the major manufacturing and consumption markets for cosmetics. In 2020, Italians spent over nine billion euros on cosmetics and over ten billion in 2021. In Italy, where roughly one-fifth of cosmetic and personal care items are marketed, perfume boutiques have one of the most outstanding market shares. The market value of perfume stores was one of the biggest in 2021, hitting over 1.8 billion euros (Statista, 2022f).

These figures confirm why Italy is a great case study for our research since Italian beauty brands are unquestionably remarkable. On the other hand, there is no question that the nation is a leader in the cosmetics industry. Italian cosmetic brands are again recognized as some of the most cherished and dependable globally. Italy is the world leader in cosmetics manufacturing, and Made in Italy cosmetics are increasingly valued both in Italy and abroad.

3.2. Research design and data collection

The research is based on analyzing three main pillars in beauty industries of Iran and Italy, as shown in Figure 3.1 below:

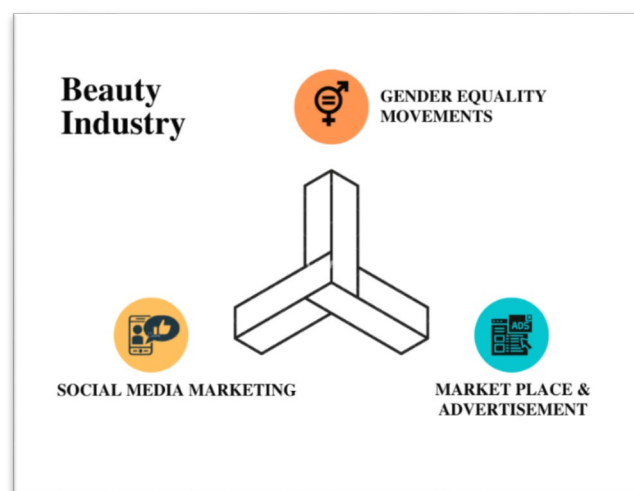


Figure 3.1 Main pillars of study

This chapter aims to analyze how the advertisements reflect societal values and attention to gender rights. The study aims to find the strategies and methods of advertising that beauty brands in Iran and Italy have implied in their social media marketing plans to support gender equality movements and improve women's empowerment.

For assessing the case studies and as a representative of the social media platform, Instagram has been selected for various reasons.

First, according to Dataportal (2022b), In July 2022, Instagram might have 1.440 billion users, making it the fourth-most "active" social media network worldwide. Additionally, according to data on its global advertising audience reach, Instagram anticipates having at least 1.440 billion users worldwide. Also, 23.1% of all persons who are 13 or older currently use Instagram. The eligible adoption rate for Instagram rises to 28.7% if we take out the individuals in this age bracket who reside in China, where the social media network is still restricted (Dataportal, 2022b).

Second, as explained by Rietveld *et al.* (2020), platforms like Instagram have become crucial channels for marketers to interact with customers due to the explosion of visual social media. Owned media, defined as media activity in a business's channel, is an essential medium for connecting with customers.

By creating posts utilizing visual and textual modalities, marketers can produce owned media and interact with their fans on platforms like Instagram. Compared to paid media activities like advertising, brands may reach a broad audience at a relatively low cost. Since attempts to increase customer interaction benefit financial returns, organizations need to understand what motivates consumer participation across various postings (Beckers, van Doorn, and Verhoef 2018).

It is interesting to note that visual, emotional, and educational attractions contained in brand-generated content affect consumer engagement in terms of likes and comments, according to Rietveld *et al.* (2020) 's findings. Customer engagement is influenced explicitly by positive high and adverse low arousal visuals. Except for informational appeals relating to a particular brand, informational appeals do not increase customer involvement. These findings support brand managers in creating a successful strategy for engaging customers on visual social media.

In addition, Marshall (2022) believes that Instagram is well suited for promoting cooperation and improving communication by utilizing influencers and celebrities. Celebrities like Cristiano Ronaldo, who has 433 million Instagram followers (Instagram, 2022a), and influencers like Lele Pons, who has 51 million (Instagram, 2022b), provide businesses with a significant basis from which to grow their followings or launch successful

campaigns. Gucci capitalized on this in 2019 with the release of their Gucci Bloom range (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 6). These are the practical tools that businesses and their brands use on Instagram to promote and showcase themselves.

Below is an overview of the importance and usage of Instagram among Iranian and Italian residents, taking into account our case study nations of Iran and Italy.

Despite Iran's complex connection with social media, Instagram, with around 45 million users, has grown to be one of the most popular platforms (Azali, 2017). According to a study by the government-run Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA) in 2021, which is referenced in Sinaee (2022), 73.6% of Iranians over the age of 18 use social media, including WhatsApp (64.1), Instagram (45.3), and Telegram (36.3). Only 4.8% of respondents claimed to use platforms created locally. A surprising number of Instagram users in Iran use the app for business.

Unfortunately, even though the majority of Iranian politicians are participating on these social media networks, Facebook and Twitter are blocked in Iran by the government. Instagram and WhatsApp were the only two significant social media platforms in the country that were not censored as of September 2022. However, during the most recent protests that are currently taking place in Iran, the government also restricted Instagram and WhatsApp to silence the public's voice and create barriers that would prevent the public from becoming more aware of the crimes committed by the regime.

Many individuals and businesses complain about this action since Instagram serves as the primary marketing platform for their businesses; for instance, they own online shops or are bloggers. With all these challenges, almost every Iranian with a smartphone has VPNs (virtual private networks) and anti-filtering software installed, allowing access to blocked websites and applications. However, anti-filtering software will fail if the internet speed is slow (Sinaee, 2022).

With tens of thousands of websites blocked since the early 2000s and the majority of social media platforms restricted, Iran has one of the worst internet censorship systems in the world.

Many Iranians rely on social media for political news and information due to the country's strict censorship and lack of free media. Nonetheless, among people, Instagram is one of the most well-known platforms. People prefer to search the Instagram account of the product they need and contact the creators directly through DM rather than shopping online from websites.

Regarding the situation of Instagram in Italy, data indicates that Italy will have 45 million internet users by 2022. According to predictions, the population accessing the internet will increase to 47.41 million people by 2027. In 2022, 75% of people in the country were using the internet (statistica, 2022g).

With 36 million users in Italy in 2021, Facebook was the social network with the highest penetration rate (statistica, 2022h). However, since December 2022, Meta's Instagram has had over 28 million users in Italy, while 56% were female and most of the audiences were among 25 to 36 years old (statistica, 2023).

Italy is one of the leading countries regarding the emergence of Instagram influencers working with various businesses to boost their sales and brand awareness. For example, Chiara Ferragni has over 28 million Instagram followers and is one of the world's most well-known and highest-paid fashion influencers. She is regarded as the first Italian influencer to have achieved global popularity and has gained legendary status among many women (Gravell, 2020)

According to statistics, Italian influencers working with companies on Instagram created 455.2 engagements per post in October 2022, up 4.9 percent from the 480.3 interactions generated in September. Over the past ten years, Italian influencers have prospered as spending on social media advertising in Italy has increased steadily. With 37% of Italians reporting daily mega-influencer following and 86% stating they take their recommendations into account when making purchases, Italian consumers are becoming increasingly dependent on influencers (statistica, 2022i).

3.2.1. A Review on Existing Limitations for Advertising in Iran

In addition to the constraints forced on Iranian women in society, the limitations are much more intense in the media and advertising sectors. Therefore, before analyzing beauty brands, one essential issue that should be noted is the advertising restrictions marketers face when promoting their brands.

Since the 1979 revolution, Iranian politicians have subjected brands and companies to more stringent and unreasonable laws, posing significant challenges for them, particularly in the beauty industry, which is more connected with women and even requires them in their advertising. Some of these rigid rules are:

1-Mandatory Hijab with strict regulations regarding covering women's heads and bodies: The typical (mandatory) Hijab that is used by Iranian women in today's Iran streets is different from those seen in the advertisement of media. Furthermore, the platform that broadcasts the ads significantly impacts the restrictions imposed on the ads.

If the ad is shown on TV or an urban billboard, there are much more limitations than those displayed on social media platforms, especially for small businesses. For example, in TV ads, women are not allowed to wear makeup, while we can find many ads on Instagram that they do not ever wear Hijab.

In general, and according to the law, women must cover their entire body, including their hair, and wear loose clothing that conceals their body organs!

To give an example for clarification, in Figure 3.2 below, we can see the hijab street style of Iranian women. In contrast, Figure 3.3 represents the mandatory hijab women must wear in TV ads



Figure 3.2. Iranian women Hijab street style



Figure 3.3. Iranian women in a TV advertisement

As mentioned earlier, the restrictions are much less strict for social media ads, as shown in Figure 3.4. It could be why most brands use influencers and beauty bloggers to advertise their products. However, if the ad is for a public organization and after its release goes viral and famous, the government starts monitoring the contents and fining the company for breaking the laws.



Figure 3.4. Iranian women on social media advertisements

To sum up, the more the brand is famous and popular, the more supervision from the government is happening to check whether the brand complies with the rules.

2- It is not allowed for a woman and a man to be in video ads simultaneously! It is only possible when a child is present in the video! Also, they cannot touch each other!

3- Using woman models on billboards is prohibited in some religious cities, such as Mashhad! In the capital, Tehran, billboard ads can use female models, but there are much more restrictions!

4-The music used in the ads must be according to the religious expert's laws and not be Haram! (To make an instance and clarify their beliefs, the music people dance with is Haram!)

5- Advertisements should not send the message that women are family managers and self-sufficient! (Because according to their idea, men are the managers and should control the household issues)

6- The ads should not show the products considered Haram in the religion! For example, alcoholic drinks, musical instruments, or Haram notions such as a man wearing gold!

7- Being considered lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer is a crime in Iran and has the punishment of execution! Only transgender people are not criminals. However, they should do surgeries, and there is much pressure on them! In this situation, using LGBTQ community members as ad models is beyond the imagination!

8- The gestures of women should not be erotica, and even their physical movements have to be as limited as possible. Even there are restrictions on the way of sitting women! In general, their acts should not be in no way erotica!

These were some fossilized regulations the Islamic Republic's government has implemented for advertisements. They claim that they have ratified these rules because they value women significantly. They oppose the commodification of women and the use of sexism and sexual attractiveness stereotypes in advertising to attract customers. However, their solution for this problem is eliminating women everywhere because they believe a woman is worth it when she stays at home, becomes a mother, and serves as a good wife! As a result, they try to force women not to be independent and not to be shown in the media! Even a religious politician in Iran once claimed that the use of Iranian women in ads should be limited to only advertising products related to women and mothers (for example, baby products!).

They criticize the western media for using women to attract people. Nonetheless, they refuse to acknowledge that the Western world is changing its stereotypical standards and now not only exploits fewer sexist stereotypes but also prepares and spreads advertisements with feminist content.

It is also evident that these religious restrictions eradicate many career opportunities and create many problems for marketers. Considering beauty brands, which is the case of this thesis, consider that an Iranian brand is specialized in producing hair colors or even women's shampoo; how can the brand advertise its product with such limitations? Can it use the hair color sample on a woman who covers her hair with Hijab?

Also, cosmetics products are based on the beauty concept, so if a brand wants to advertise lipstick, for example, it is not allowed because, according to Iranian politicians, the frame in which a woman wears lipstick is erotica, so it is forbidden!

Therefore, the lack of an effective place to advertise beauty brands led to the emergence of several beauty bloggers in Iran, who have significantly helped the advertisers of the beauty industry.

As there is less monitoring on the Instagram pages, many Iranian beauty bloggers began providing valuable and informative content and guidelines about different beauty products, how to use them, and collaborating with the brands. Iranians welcomed this trend and started following beauty bloggers inside or outside Iran. As the data shows, the most famous

Iranian beauty bloggers are Elnaz Golrokh (Instagram, 2022c), with about 6 million followers; Sadaf Beauty (Instagram, 2022e) with 4 million followers, Emel (Instagram, 2022d), with 2.6 million followers; Melina Taj (Instagram, 2022f) and Shell Beauty (Instagram, 2022g) with about 2 million followers. Among them, Melina and Shell Beauty were living in Iran, and due to their popularity and the mentioned restrictions, they immigrated to Turkey and America. However, many beauty bloggers are still living in Iran. The most exciting part is the emergence of male beauty bloggers. Shahin (Instagram, 2022h) with 113K followers, started his activities only two years ago as one of the first male beauty bloggers in Iran. He tried to break the stereotypes of the beauty concept, and now many brands collaborate with him to advertise their brands. Lanie Volant (Instagram, 2022i), with 197K followers, is another beauty blogger who is gay and, unlike him, living outside of Iran, has many followers in Iran. Another famous beauty blogger, brave Naiad (Instagram, 2022j) is a brave Iranian gay with about 110K followers who reside in Iran, accepting all of the risks and dangers of activating as a gay person inside the country.

To conclude, nowadays, the number of women beauty bloggers is increasing notably (more than 500 by now), and also not only male beauty bloggers but also LGBTQ people are courageously starting their activity in this sector and improving day by day!

The number of their followers proves that Iranians are big fans of beauty bloggers. Many brands have now changed their strategies to use influencers for advertising their products and improving their brand image.

3.2.2. Methodology:

This qualitative analysis is based on collecting data and monitoring the activities of four beauty brands from each country of Iran and Italy.

First, a list of the famous beauty brands of each country and data about their Instagram accounts were gathered, as demonstrated in Figure 3.5.

The companies have been selected based on the criteria and the reasons explained in the purpose of the thesis. One critical point for choosing the brands is the existence of similarities between them to try to homogenize the sample. Thus, brands were chosen based on the number of followers on their Instagram account first and then on the type of their products.

Inside the prototype list, Iranian and Italian beauty brands with 100K–500K followers are collected. We consider that the brands with more followers are more popular among social media networks. Moreover, the study has tried to collect data on brands that only manufacture cosmetics or personal care (skincare and body care).

1 Iranian Brands				
2	Name of the band	Instagram_ID	Followers N	Products
3	COME'ON	https://www.instagram.com/comeon.iran/	561K	Personal Care
4	deepsenseiran	https://www.instagram.com/deepsenseiran/	448K	Cosmetics and personal care
5	La farrerr	https://www.instagram.com/lafarrerr/	259K	Personal Care
6	Cinere	https://www.instagram.com/cinerecosmetics/	181K	personal care
7	Callista	https://www.instagram.com/callista.ir/	161K	only cosmetics
8	Genobiotic	https://www.instagram.com/geno_skincare/	136K	personal care
9	Inlay	https://www.instagram.com/inlaycosmetics/	141K	cosmetics
10	Schon	https://www.instagram.com/schon.ir/	125K	personal care
11	MY	https://www.instagram.com/mycosmetics/	112K	Cosmetics and personal care
12	Hydroderm	https://www.instagram.com/hydroderm_beauty/	84.4 K	personal care
13	Khanoumi (retail)	https://www.instagram.com/khanoumi_shop/	1M	Cosmetics and personal care
14	Safir Stores (retail)	https://www.instagram.com/safirstores/	468K	Cosmetics and personal care
15	Oxigen shop (reatil)	https://www.instagram.com/oxigen.shop/	238K	Cosmetics and personal care
16 Italian Brands				
17	Nabla	https://www.instagram.com/nablacosmetics/	811K	only cosmetics
18	Wycon	https://www.instagram.com/wycon_cosmetics/	552K	only cosmetics
19	Aqua di parma	https://www.instagram.com/acquadiparma_official/	351K	Personal Care
20	Mulac	https://www.instagram.com/mulaccosmetics/	351K	Cosmetics and personal care
21	Pupa	https://www.instagram.com/pupamilanoitaly/	387K	Cosmetics and Skin care
22	diegodallapalma	https://www.instagram.com/diegodallapalma_official/	313K	Cosmetics and personal care
23	collistar	https://www.instagram.com/collistarbeauty/	238K	Cosmetics and personal care
24	Deborah	https://www.instagram.com/deborahmilano/	199K	only cosmetics
25	purobio	https://www.instagram.com/purobio_cosmetics/	193K	Cosmetics and personal care
26	Santamarianovella	https://www.instagram.com/santamarianovella1221/	138K	Personal Care
27	Espresso	https://www.instagram.com/espresso/?hl=en	120K	Cosmetics and personal care
28	Sephora Italia (retail)	https://www.instagram.com/sephoraitalia/	1.1M	Cosmetics and personal care
29	Douglas (retail)	https://www.instagram.com/douglasitalia/	404K	Cosmetics and personal care
30	Notino (retail)	https://www.instagram.com/notino_it/	62K	Cosmetics and personal care

Figure 3.5. List of the beauty brands

After analyzing the pages of all listed brands, the following brands have been selected as case studies:

Iran: Come' On, La farrerr, Genobiotic and MY

Italy: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah, Espresso

In order to consider the common factors, two brands from each country have about 500K followers (Come' On and Wycon), two have more than 250K followers (La' Farrerr and Mulac), and the others have between 100K and 200K followers. This assortment helps us compare the brands and judge their performance according to their popularity. In addition, they manufacture almost the same category of products (cosmetics or skin/body care).

In order to investigate their performance and activities in terms of supporting gender equality principles, ten questions have been designed to answer them, and the research aims to provide a comprehensive and accurate comparison.

The questions are as follows:

- 1- Does the brand use models with natural faces (various skin tones, scars, wrinkles)?
- 2- Does the brand use other gender groups as the model?
- 3- Does the brand use various racial backgrounds as models or for casting?
- 4- Does the brand collaborate with beauty bloggers, especially male bloggers?
- 5- Does the brand provide any content regarding women's empowerment to develop their knowledge and help increase their confidence and self-esteem?
- 6- Does the brand prevent using sexist stereotypes or sexist humor in the content of its ads?
- 7- Does the brand try to redefine beauty standards and deviate from conventional notions of beauty?
- 8- Has the brand launched any campaign for supporting gender equality movements?
- 9- Does the brand react to social movements related to gender justice (for example, in Iran)?
- 10- Does the brand produce men's specialized products to normalize using beauty products for men?

3.3. Data Analysis and results

First, the four Iranian beauty brands will be assessed according to the questions mentioned. Then the study will analyze Italian brands, and at the end, it will provide a complete comparison and summary, considering all brands from both countries to reach a clear conclusion.

3.3.1. Iranian Beauty Brands

Considering the ten questions explained before, the Instagram content of four Iranian beauty brands of “Come On, La farrerr, Genobiotic and MY” will be analysed from point of view of each question.

1-COME'ON

Come'On Company began producing cosmetics in 2017 and is a well-known brand in Iranian beauty products and skin and hair care. Its raw materials are sourced from Switzerland, and the most up-to-date equipment and experts are used in the production of all the products. Before a product is introduced, it is repeatedly subjected to various tests to ensure a high quality product worthy of Iranian consumers. These tests are carried out in the best laboratories in Iran and Switzerland. In these laboratories, the quality and effectiveness of the products are checked, and after confirmation, they are introduced to the market. In addition, one of the most crucial goals of Come'On is not to harm the environment. For this reason, the experts behind this business have come up with ideas to reduce damage to the ecosystem caused during the production of various products.

Until today, COME'ON has specialized in skin and hair products, has been able to sell its products in 70 other countries besides Iran, and has become very popular among global consumers. The popularity and superiority of COME'ON in Iran are due to the use of valuable ingredients and all kinds of vitamins needed by the skin and hair, such as vitamins E, B6, and A, and natural ingredients, such as lemon extract and grape seed oil. Other features of this brand, which make it one of the best Iranian brands in the production and manufacture of skin and hair products, are:

- Easy access to the products of this brand
- High diversity in the production of hair and skin care products
- The quality and authenticity of the packaging
- The affordable price has made different sections of society able to buy a high-quality product
- Using modern science and technology in the production

The Instagram page of this brand (Instagram, 2023a), is one of the most followed pages among social media members, with about 540,000 followers, as indicated in figure 3.6 below.

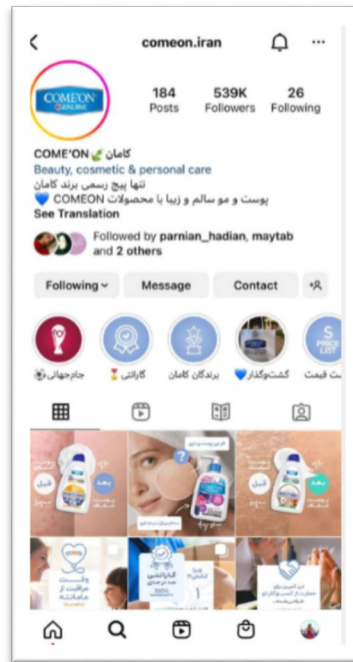


Figure 3.6. Instagram page of Come'On

Source: (Come On Instagram page, s.d.)

Analysis:

As a well-known Iranian brand that have been found everywhere, from supermarkets to pharmacies and certain stores, Come' On has been one of the progressive brands that endeavored to be socially responsible by launching various campaigns. For example, to support "International Plastic Bag Free Day," on July 3, the brand ran a campaign concentrating on raising people's awareness about the environmental crisis and how to protect and preserve the environment as a social responsibility.

In the post's caption, Come' On asked the followers to record a video of themselves collecting garbage from nature, send videos to the brand, share them with related hashtags on their social media accounts, and receive a gift package. Consequently, many people were encouraged to join the challenge and care more about environmental concerns and sent their pictures and videos to the brand, as shown in Figure 3.7.

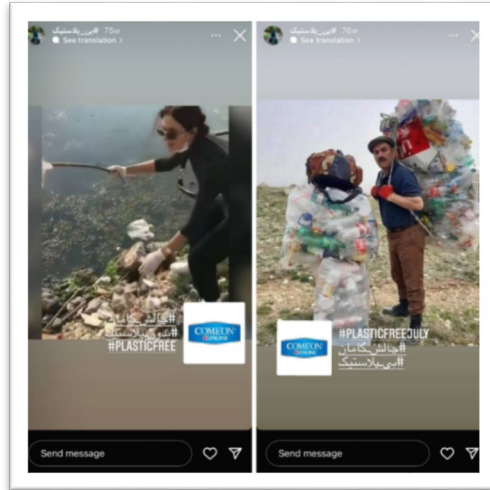


Figure 3.7. Come On followers joined the no plastic challenge

Source: (Come On Instagram page, s.d.)

The brand then assigned a highlight with the hashtag no-plastic on the page. It also provided educational videos to teach followers to use the cream bottles, as shown in Figure 3.8, as a flower pots to reduce plastic waste.



Figure 3.8. Using cream bottles as a flower pot by Come On

Source: (Come On Instagram page, s.d.)

Additionally, Come On delivered gift packages of hygiene products to doctors and nurses working in various hospitals around the country during the COVID-19 pandemic to show appreciation for their efforts to save lives.

The other point is that the brand decreased its online activity on Instagram after September. The Iranian protest, which started in the middle of September, caused it to stop posting anything from August to September. As explained before, after increasing the number of victims, people got very sensitive about the brand's activities on social media. If a brand had continued its usual pattern, people would have accused it of normalizing the social environment and supporting the government. They believed that, at the time of the crisis, the attention of social media and its post had to be paid to the protest news and informative information.

Also, since the brand could not post content to be people's voice due to governmental threats, they decided to stop creating posts for months. It was a way for them to show solidarity with protesters and leave the social space free for other informational content. In January, Come On started its activity, which supported local and small businesses by advertising their pages in stories. This movement was also very worthy and appreciated by the people. Moreover, what is impressive on the brand page is another campaign in which Nasime Gholami (Instagram, 2023b), the Iranian female soccer player, advertises the Come On products (Figure 3.9). The goal of employing her as a brand ambassador and promoting women's sports in various ways has actually been to uplift women and promote their skills.

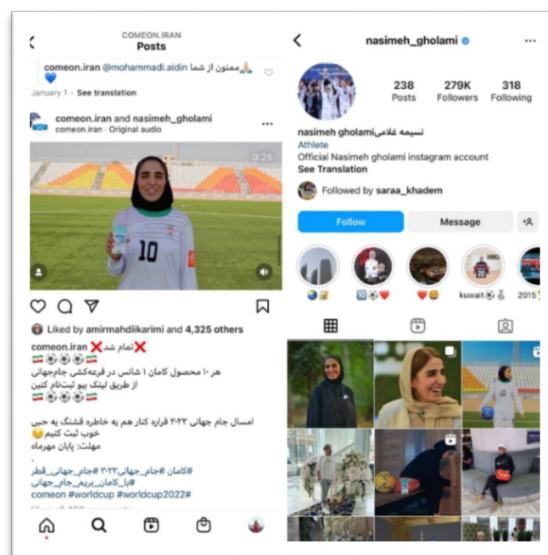


Figure 3.9. Nasime Ghomali page and her collaboration with Come On

Source: (Come On Instagram page, s.d.)

Regarding illustrating men's products and trying to break the stereotype that men should not use beauty items, the brand has produced many men-specialized products and numerous ads that used male models. However, this could also be considered a negative point because most posts are focused on male models and celebrities, and even for women's products, the brand has used product shots. Therefore, the lack of women's presence could be felt easily on the main page of the brand, which the reason could be the strict governmental regulations already mentioned. Because the brand is well-known and has many followers, government authorities might monitor it more carefully than other smaller companies.

In contrast, most of the reel content includes female models, most of whom are beauty bloggers. The brand has collaborated with beauty bloggers such as Shell Beauty and Salma Shakib (Instgarm, 2023c). To better explain, figure 3.10 shows an image of a couple that the brand published as a post on its page. On the other hand, in Figure 3.11, some beauty bloggers that have created Reels for the brand have been displayed. Comparing these two images also demonstrates that while the woman's hijab is exceptionally tight in the brand's official photo for the posts, it is not even used by the beauty bloggers in the reels.

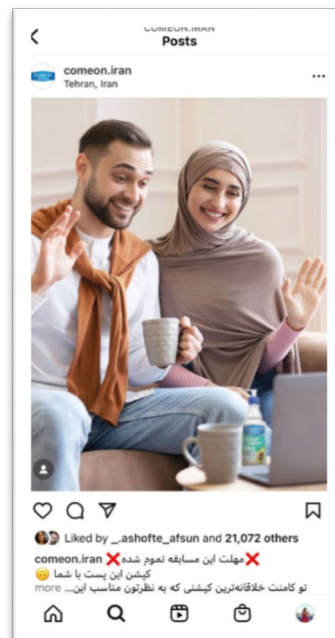


Figure 3.10. Come On post using a couple

Source: (Come On Instagram page, s.d.)

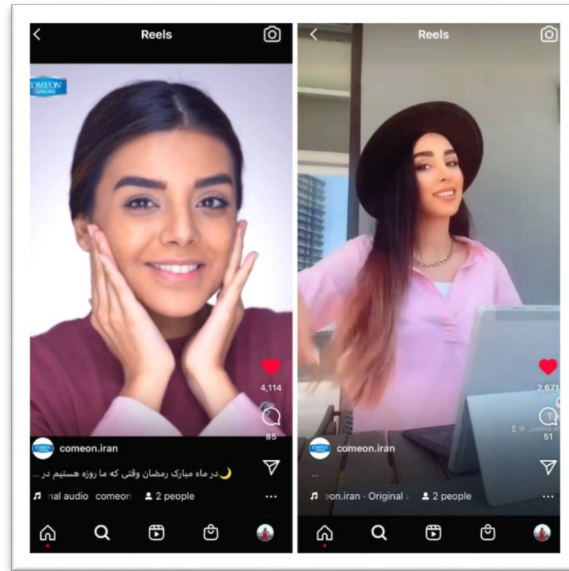


Figure 3.11. Beauty bloggers collaborating with Come On

Source: (Come On Instagram page, s.d.)

Furthermore, most brand posts and stories comprise informational guidelines about skin and body care products. Unfortunately, Come'On has not produced content on femvertising or women empowerment specifically and directly. Besides, most models and bloggers follow the ideal standards of beauty, which may make the audiences feel that they are not beautiful enough and decrease their self-esteem.

To sum up, the brand can benefit much more significantly from its position and the high number of followers and could act much better in terms of supporting gender right. Using more female models, launching innovative campaigns to raise women's awareness, and providing specialized content about females could be significant steps to take. Also, as the main content is based on holding competitions to grow engagement, the brand can design a competition or challenge regarding this gender issue.

2-La' farrerr

Lafarer was founded by Dr. Kamkar, who had more than half a century of experience producing cosmetics and health products. The brand was launched in the fall of 2008 at Dr. Kamkar's International Laboratories and Research Company. It benefited from the modern knowledge of Europe and the scientific ability of experts in this field. Respecting the demands

of consumers, benefiting from the latest technology, and providing high-quality products have always been among the most critical priorities of Dr. Kamkar's international research laboratories in producing La' farrerr products.

Thanks to its products' diversity and unique quality, this brand is one of the reliable businesses that has captured a considerable share of the cosmetics market. The most important thing is that the quality of this company's products is comparable to foreign samples, in addition to having a very reasonable price.

This company has stated that it uses only natural ingredients while making its products, including licorice extract, chamomile, white willow extract, vitamin C, allantoin, hyaluronic acid, and glycerin. La' farrerr has been active in producing various cosmetic, health, skin, and hair care products for many years.

As represented in Figure 3.12 below, with roughly 260,000 followers, this brand's Instagram profile is also one of the most successful among social media users (Instagram, 2023d).

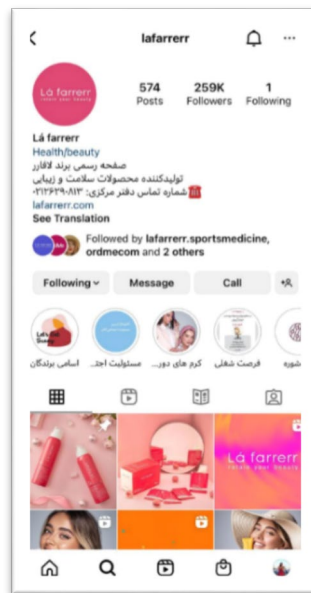


Figure 3.12. Instagram page of La' farrerr

Source: (La' farrerr Instagram page, s.d.)

Analysis:

Using the traditional colors of pink and red, the brand tries to look feminine and soft. It has also collaborated with famous beauty bloggers, such as Melina Taj, in numerous posts. Most

of the captions are informational and give tips about using the products or protecting the skin and body.

One of the most intriguing and unique movements of La farrerr that could be viewed as one of the first brands in Iran to take action to be considered a responsible brand directly is launching the campaign "does not continue the stereotypes." As explained in the second highlight of the page, social responsibility, this campaign's brand goal is to raise women's empowerment and improve their self-confidence.

It is an almost new phenomenon for Iranian women that a beauty brand is trying to give them the feeling that they are strong enough to do whatever they want, although they encounter numerous obstacles. The highlight section includes a well-done video made particularly for the campaign. The video consists of pictures of powerful and influential women from all around the world. As illustrated in Figure 3.13, it also focuses more specifically on successful Iranian women such as mathematician Maryam Mirzakhani the first woman to receive the Fields Medal Died in 2014. Minoo Mohraz, an Iranian physician, researcher, and AIDS specialist, with the hashtag "Don not continue the stereotypes" and "powerful woman.'

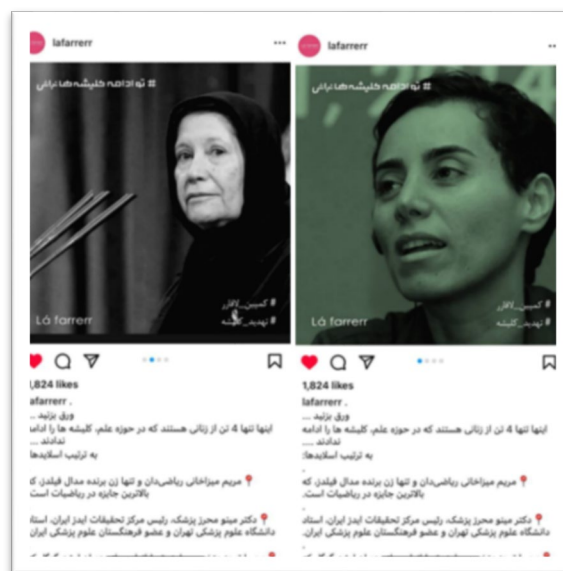


Figure 3.13. La' farrerr campaign of "Don not continue the stereotypes"

Source: (La' farrerr Instagram page, s.d.)

The vocalist of the video is Roya Nonahali, a renowned Iranian actress who, with her determined and expressive voice, describes the impressive females who changed the world and encouraged women to believe in themselves and their abilities with their strong will and hard work. Also, the video emphasizes that success has no gender, and these amazing women did not believe the clichés. “If they had been scared of being a woman to follow their dreams, the world would have fewer great people right now, so you should believe in yourself and not continue the stereotypes like them.”

This video is a revolutionary act from a beauty brand in Iran and should be appreciated. However, the brand should create these kinds of videos focusing on eradicating the beauty and sexist stereotypes which are more aligned with the brand concept and identity.

Another fascinating activity performed by the La farrerr is increasing awareness about domestic violence against women. On 25 November 2021, due to “International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women,” the brand posted a video that shows a woman who tries to hide her scars and look happy (Figure 3.14). At the end of the video is stated that hiding the violence is not the way to fight it.



Figure 3.14. La farrerr Campaign about violence against Women

Source: (La' farrerr Instagram page, s.d.)

In Iran, many women are victims of domestic violence, and providing such content will significantly influence women's awareness and knowledge about their fundamental rights.

Considering marketers' reaction to the social movement happening in society, Lafarrerr also stopped posting content in September due to the protest and in solidarity with people.

Nevertheless, some arguments exist about brand activities related to women's issues. For example, with a quick look on the brand page, we see the photoshoots of models with great skin, hair, and full makeup that their faces are what is called ideal and perfect for modeling and according to the beauty standards.

Also, the brand slogan, "Retain your beauty," can be found easily in many posts and stories. Nevertheless, which beauty and what is the actual concept of beauty?

In addition, most of the posts focused on product shots with informational captions. No products have been offered for men, so no men are used as models, and the brand feels that it is 100% feminine.

Although the brand launched campaigns focusing on empowering women as described, it should be more cautious about the content of the posts and videos. For example, in one of the brand's videos, a woman says: "the most important issue for a woman has great skin and hair." So it decreases women's expectations about their skin and how it looks.

In another post for advertising a product to help remove acne, the caption states that acne decreases women's self-confidence and that they should use the product to remove it. So, it not only does not take a step toward evolving the concept of beauty and changing its standards but also reinforces the existing stereotypes that acne or scars are against looking beautiful. Thus, although the brand tried to spread the message that all women are beautiful in one of its posts, these contents could have been better for their efforts.

To sum up, Lafarrerr is one of the pioneering brand-making endeavors to emancipate women from the sexist cliché and help them boost their confidence. However, the markets and social media team should be more careful about their content and ensure they are not paradoxical.

3-Genobiotic

Genobiotic is a specialized Iranian brand in the field of skincare products. The products are marketed by relying on the knowledge of dermatologists and using new formulation techniques to develop high-quality products that meet the needs of consumers. Regarding the meaning of the brand name, the first part is the word "Jeno," which means gene. The

second part of its name is the word "biotic," which also means life, and the combination of both words means the survival of the skin or the survival of skin cells. A wholly scientific and specialized view of the skin and its complications and skin care methods is the goal of the Genobiotic brand, which is achieved through planning, implementing, and evaluating applied research and developing specialized skin products. Innovation, invention, and improvement at all stages and reaching the highest level are essential missions of the Genobiotic.

This brand believes in its ability to create opportunities to produce future products based only on creativity, ability, and knowledge to attract talented people who can understand the concept of the brand. In addition, since Genobiotic is based on skincare and beauty products, it has sought to increase the natural properties of the product in order to produce an innovative product that is safe for consumers. The brand's slogan is to use world-class materials, employ expert and committed staff, provide customer orientation, play a critical and influential role in competitive and scientific scenes at high levels, and produce specialized products for all generations.

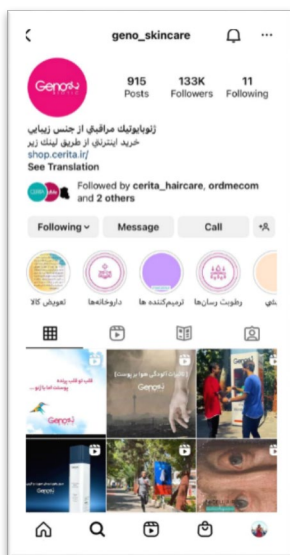


Figure 3.15. Instagram page of Genobiotic

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

Figure 3.15 illustrates the Instagram account of Genobiotic (Instagram, 2023e), which has gained more than 133,000 followers.

Analysis:

Looking at the number of followers and the post published, Genobiotic has been performing successfully as a new brand in the cosmetic market. The brand manufactures only skin and body care products for men and women.

Genobiotic is one of the most innovative and socially responsible brands in creating creative and educational content. In the following, some of the activities of the brand that make it genuine and unique will be described.

First, the presence of male models in posts can easily be seen, which is considered a positive point in breaking the stereotypes that men should not use beauty products cause it threatens their masculinity.

Posting separate but the same content in supporting women and men who are doing sports (Figure 3.16) while encouraging them to use skin care products, especially sunscreen cream, gives the audiences the sense that the brand cares about both genders' beauty and health equally.

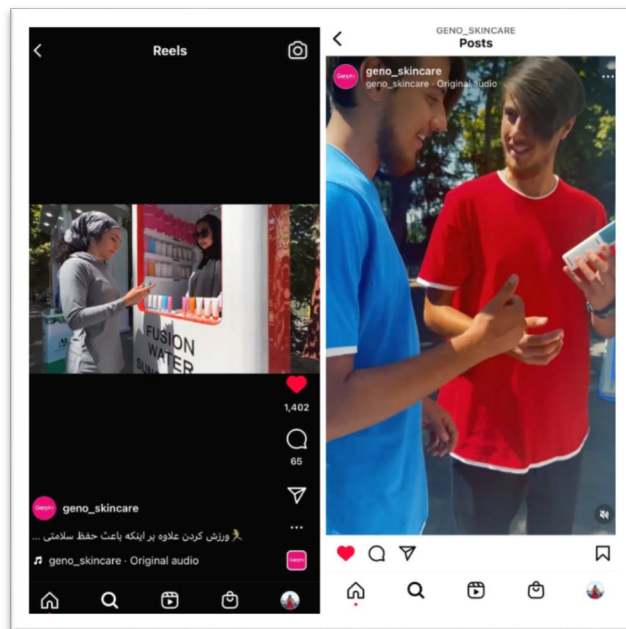


Figure 3.16. Genobiotic posts about male and female athletes

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

Secondly, a significant step that the brand has taken to support women's rights is posting content about menstruation, which in Iran is still taboo, on 28th May 2022, the national menstrual hygiene day. Many feminists have been working hard to change the view of both women and men about menstruation and help women not feel guilty or ashamed of getting a period. Thus, this campaign is very much appreciated due to its impact on developing woman attitudes and shifting the wrong cultural beliefs and stereotypes.

The post also took more steps and asked the followers to share their negative experiences and talk about the comments they had received from family, stereotypes, and difficulties they faced during their period. Through triggering the conversations among women in comments, various girls and women found common points in their experiences. They talked to each other to encourage themselves to be strong and overpass menstruation's obscenity. Moreover, this action contributed to the brand building a tied relationship with its audiences and, consequently, grew the brand image notably. In many comments, the women thanked the brand for giving voice to menstruation and its problems.

Moreover, the brand provided many informational guidelines about the products and skin types. However, in contrast to La farrerr that talked about the skin problems as a terrible incident that should be cured immediately, Genobiotic has only tried to help the audience by offering them informative tips without making the problem a big matter.

The brand also has been very innovative in generating different campaigns and challenges that are unique and genuine. For instance, it launched a competition campaign on March 2022 called "Geno Got Talent," inspired by the American got talent show. Genobiotic announced Iran's first and most significant competition for finding beauty blogger talents (Figure 3.17).

In this campaign, by using the speech of well-known beauty bloggers in the video, the brand invited amateur beauty bloggers and those interested in being beauty bloggers to join the challenge. For participation, they had to record a video focusing on skin care products and how to use them. Among selected products, they had to use one of the Genobiotic items.



Figure 3.17. Geno Got Talent campaign

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

Because the participation was free and the firm decided to give a package of its products to enrolled participants, this campaign fulfilled its supportive objectives. It also provided educational videos using a content specialist to help the candidates learn more about how to create valuable content. Moreover, the brand holds two workshops to increase the knowledge of applicants about skin problems, its anatomy, and how to protect it.

This creative challenge was a great opportunity and jumping-off point first for beauty bloggers who needed more followers and got viral on social networks and then for those aimed at starting their career of being a beauty blogger and having their dream.

Another exciting brand activity was using famous female (such as Melina Taj or Summer Beauty (Instagram, 2023f)) and male beauty bloggers in the invitation video. The male beauty blogger Shahin promoted the competition on his page specifically and contributed to fighting against the stereotypes that beauty bloggers and participants must be only women (Figure 3.18 and Figure 3.19).



Figure 3.18. Shahin promoting the competition

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

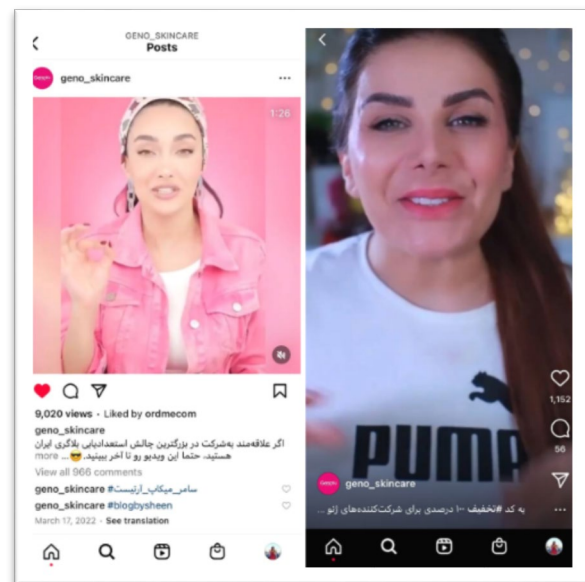


Figure 3.19. Melina Taj and Summer explain the competition

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

In addition to considering older women as a model (Figure 3.20), which is an impressive action, the brand has collaborated with many models and beauty bloggers that do not follow

the strict rules of the Hijab. They did not even pay attention to the music regulations, as in one of the collaborative posts with Emel, the famous beauty blogger; she does makeup without any Hijab while dancing (Figure 3.21). These posts have made the Genobiotic page atmosphere so energetic and upbeat.



Figure 3.20. Old model in Genobiotic ad

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

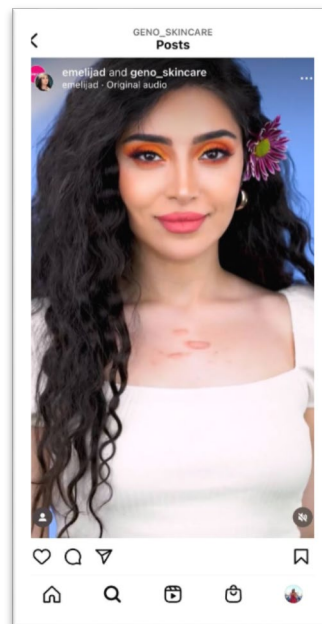


Figure 3.21. Emel Collaboration post with Genobiotic

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

Genobiotic also has provided several posts supporting female athletes, such as Fateme Hoseini, a member of the national Muay Tai of the Iranian National Team (Figure 3.22). In December 2021, the brand sponsored Fateme and accompanied her to Asian competitions. By stressing that Iranian women endure more significant challenges than women in other nations in attaining success, the caption aimed to increase their self-esteem and admire their bravery. The post-making example pointing to Fateme describes that her challenges are not only inside the ring of competitions but also before that, she had been fighting so hard to overcome the barriers and get a world champion. It adds that many Iranian women could climb the ladder of success and progress with a small amount of support.

The caption makes sense of solidarity with its audience regarding understanding their challenges and troublous as an Iranian women. In order to increase engagement and create

conversations among the followers, the brand asked them to write a sentence for Fateme as a motivated and determined Iranian girl to give her positive energy for her upcoming match.



Figure 3.22. Genobiotic supportive post for Fateme Hosseini

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

More interestingly, the brand paid great attention to the mothers who breastfeed by making informational posts about world breastfeeding week or Brest feed mothers and Covid 19.

Another cutting-edge campaign of the Genobiotic was producing a video about love and its requirements. In this video, the brand invited a young and old couple, a single woman and a man, and a girl with her father and two kids. First, it shows them another video in which an older man combed his wife's hair, hugged each other and then asked the participants to say the meaning of love from their point of view.

The final message that the post deliver is that "love needs to be protected and preserved".

While in Iranian culture, especially after spreading Islamic beliefs and government rules, it is considered offensive to express love openly, and even kissing each other on the street can be a crime, in my opinion, this video is significantly breaking the taboo of expressing love,

especially from men to women in public. Also, as represented in Figure 3.23 below, at the end of the video, the older man sings a romantic song for his wife and tells him I love you. Then the younger couple held hands and looking each other and said we so much love each other.

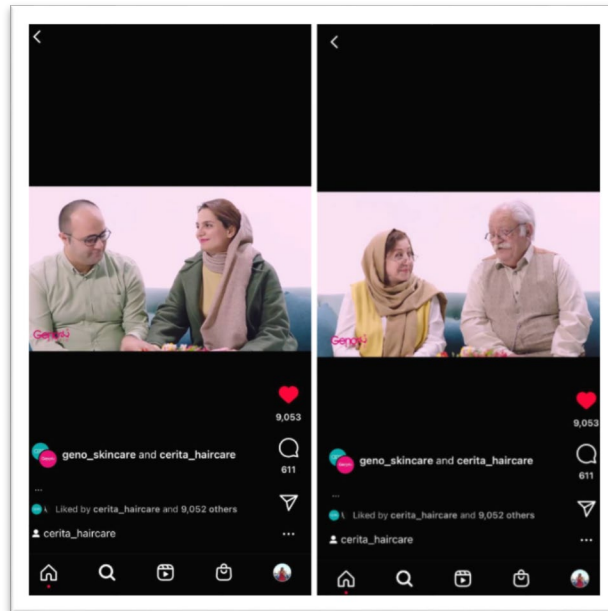


Figure 3.23. Genobiotic campaign about Love

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

So the brand demonstrated these scenes and talked about this concept bravely. This video shows the pure feeling of people toward each other and conveys the message that even men can express their affirmations easily, and love from each type needs protection, like a plant we want to grow.

Moreover, Genobiotic stopped posting content from September to January to support social movements like other brands.

Lastly, the brand claims it is environmentally friendly, as all products are vegan and cruelty-free. No testing has been done on animals in Genobiotic laboratories. The Genobiotic marketing team created a clever campaign that published a specialized video about animal-friendly matters to highlight the brand's image as a responsible one among its competitors. In the video post, which has been made professionally with extensive attention to detail, they created an animation with the main character of a rabbit called Ralf (Figure 3.24). Ralf starts

talking while he looks hurt and does not feel good. With enduring pain and hardly speaking, he explains his life as a laboratory worker and describes the tests done on him and his friends during the cosmetic experiments.

Through the superb storytelling of the character about the pain that animals tolerate in testing and employing the hashtag "#SaveRalf," the brand attracted the attention of its audience and emphasized the significance of making vegan products, and invited them not to use those that hurt the animals and environments. It was also added in the caption that, annually, 20,000 rabbits lose their lives for experimental testing. This excellent campaign was innovative and contributed to the progress of the brand's image and reputation.

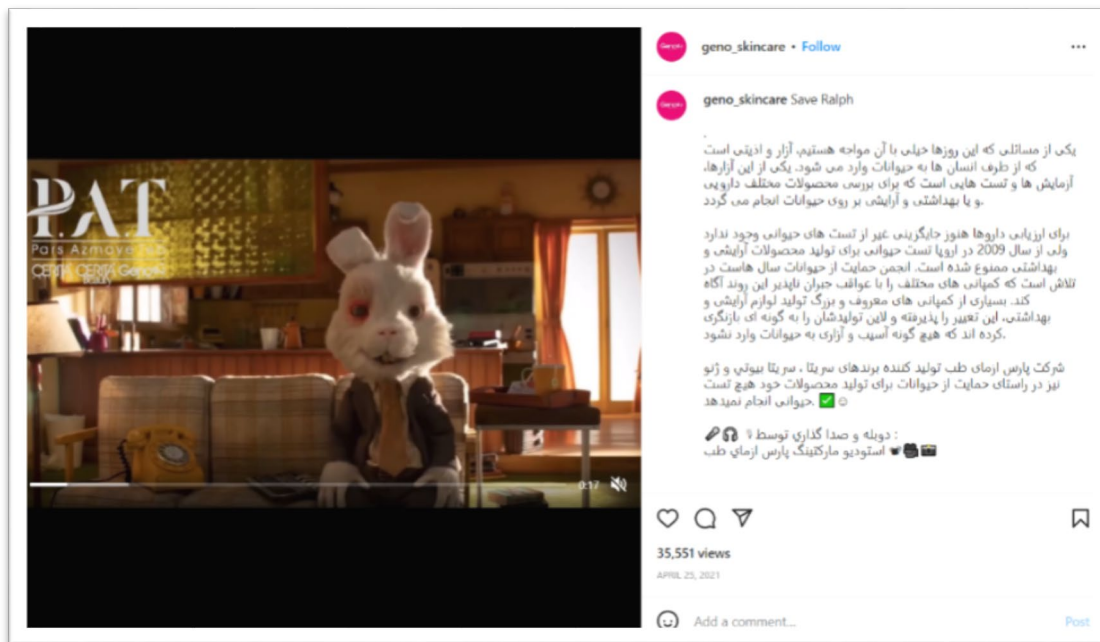


Figure 1.24. "#SaveRalf campaign of Genobiotic

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

Nevertheless, considering all of these positive activities that are unique and innovative, the only criticism toward the brand is that it should use models with more natural faces and from different backgrounds. As illustrated in pictures 3.25 and 3.26, Genobiotics used flawless models with ideal standards of beauty, which, in a way, reinforce the beauty stereotypes



Figure 3.25. Female models in Genobiotic ad

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

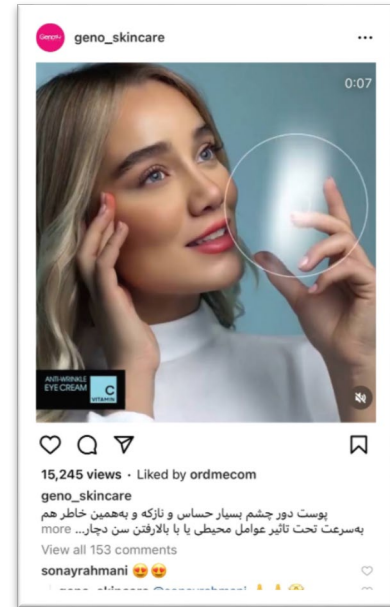


Figure 3.26. Female models in Genobiotic ad

Source: (Genobiotic Instagram page, s.d.)

4-MY

The Iranian brand MY was established in 2003 with private sector investment. Its products have been manufactured using high-quality raw materials in the most modern cosmetics factory in the Middle East with international standards.

The brand was launched with over 2,000 skilled workers in 4 factories with an area of about 44,000 square meters. It has certificates from prestigious European laboratories, such as Evic of France. MY's formulations are produced and supplied in Iran with the best quality raw materials, according to Germany's Cal & Co. This brand has designed and produced cosmetics with a correct understanding of the changing needs of its customers since twenty years ago. The use of high-quality basic materials has made the quality of its products reach its highest level since the beginning. Maintaining the health and protecting the skin and hair of consumers, reasonable prices, quality improvement, and customer satisfaction are the primary missions of MY.

The volume of MY products in different packages is very convenient and affordable, and all brand products are available to consumers through stores across the country. Also, according to the polls, more than 4000 skin and hair doctors in Iran prescribe MY.

This old and famous brand has about 112,000 followers on its Instagram account (Instagram, 2023g), as demonstrated in figure 3.27 below. Compared to the last brands analyzed, up to now, MY has so far produced more than 1100 posts on its Instagram page, demonstrating its expertise and rich history.

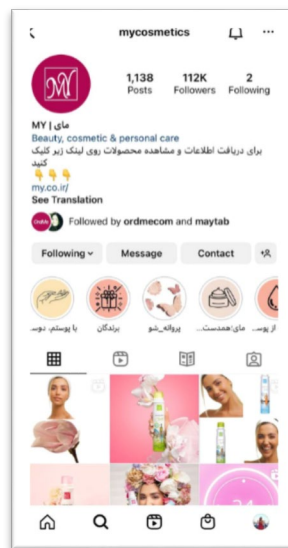


Figure 3.27. Instagram page of MY

Source: (MY Instagram page, s.d.)

Analysis:

The brand experiences came back 20 years ago, and in the last years, it has started launching specific and innovative campaigns concentrating on improving women's empowerment and supporting gender equality movements.

To mention some of these campaigns, first, the brand found a competition with the hashtag "I love MYself" asking the audiences to comment on one of the traits or things they like about themselves (Figure 3.28). The post also encouraged followers to tag some of their friends and asked them to do the same to boost the chances of getting a winner. This campaign's objective was to remind women of their strengths and positive characteristics to help them believe in themselves more than before.



Figure 3.28. The "I love MYself" Campaign of MY

Source: (MY Instagram page, s.d.)

Another influential MY movement that has assigned a highlight in the page is called "Parvane sho or get butterfly". It also invited the followers to write a sentence that helped them increase their self-confidence in the comments.

The extent to which the brand has endeavored to change the concept of beauty and remind women of their beauty and positive points is praiseworthy. These activities made the MY pioneer in being an advocate brand.

To boost and expand the "Parvane sho" campaign, MY also asked successful and potent Iranian women activating in different fields to join the challenge. Then it uploaded their comments as a separate post on the page. For instance, as indicated in figure 3.29, MY allocated a post to Maryam Rouhani, the first miss detailer of Iran, in which she explains that women are all beautiful and capable of reaching their goals; they should believe in themselves and love themselves more. She also emphasizes that being a woman is not a limitation; by making an effort and having confidence and self-esteem, women can achieve whatever they desire. The sentence she added for joining the campaign is: "Because of my diligence and passion, I followed my dream and continued."

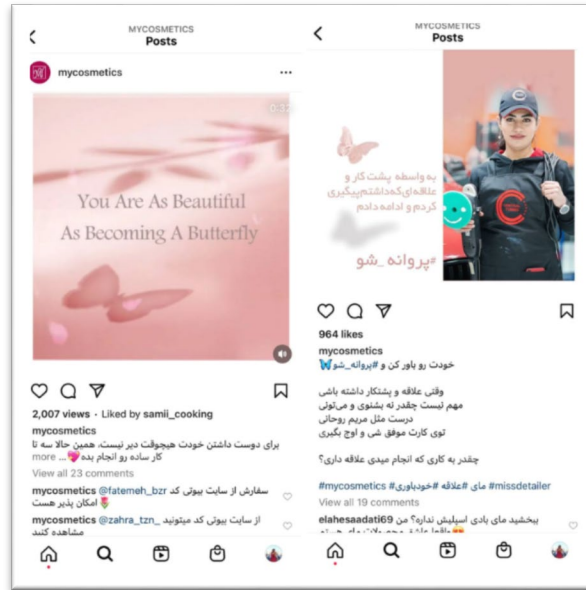


Figure 3.29. "Parvane sho" campaign of MY

Source: (MY Instagram page, s.d.)

MY was also the official sponsor of sports events of Iranian women and men, for example, for Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Therefore, there are much content supporting female athletes on the MY page (Figure 3.30).

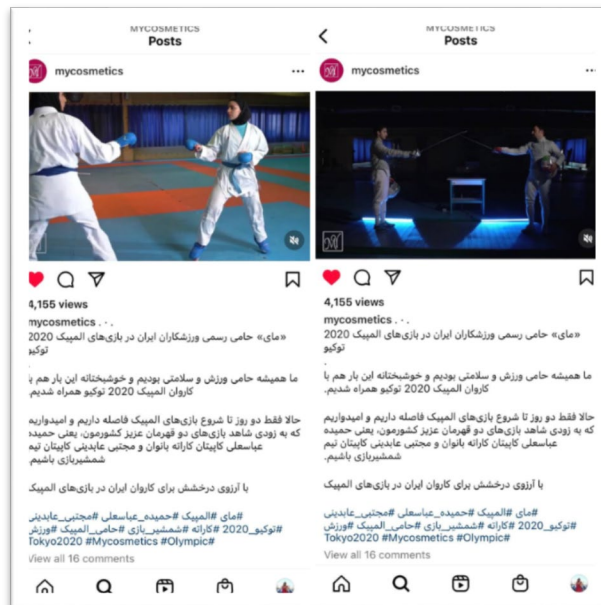


Figure 3.30. MY post for support athletes

Source: (MY Instagram page, s.d.)

Another innovative campaign of My was setting up a Private show called “GOFTEMY” in which the host, Floor Nazari, a famous Iranian actress, interviewed successful female celebrities and influencers about different topics related to women’s rights and their problems in society. The topics are so updated and impressive, from the effect of social media on women’s lives to the warrior and powerful women during history who was strong and not afraid of failures.

One of the most impressive guests on this TV show was Hasti Sadeghitabar (Instagram, 2023 h). She is a disabled woman who lost her legs but did not give up. She is now a renowned Instagram influencer who provides content about her doing sports and having everyday life despite all the existing problems. In the interview, she emphasized self-esteem, self-love, and the fact that women should not attack themselves for their problems and lose their motivation. Instead, they should believe in their capabilities and try for their goals (Figure 3.31).

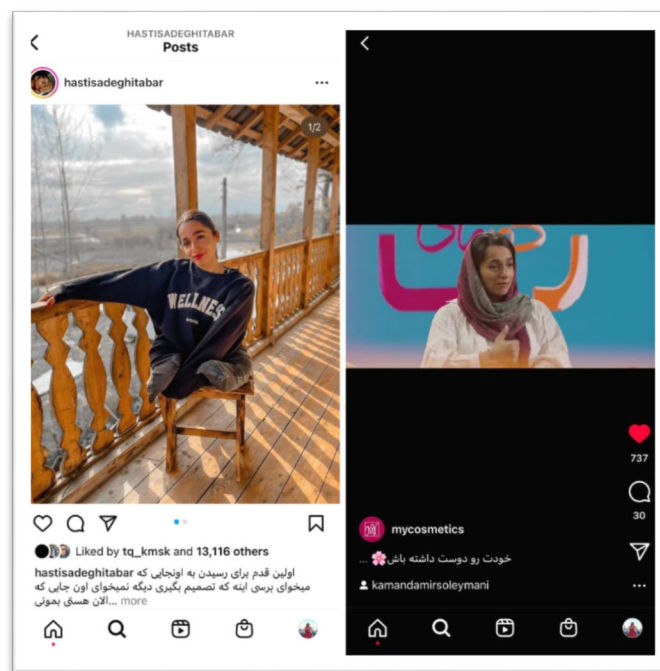


Figure 3.31. MY collaboration with Hasti Sadeghitabar

Source: (MY Instagram page, s.d.)

To fulfill social responsibility, During the Covid-19 pandemic, the brand donated significantly to hospitals by changing the production lines to Hygiene and sanitizer products.

Also, it sent gift packages, including different products, especially hand creams, to the doctors and nurses and invited all nurses from all over the country to send their identification cards and receive their gifts. In addition, like other mentioned brands, MY has not posted any content from September to show solidarity with protestors.

The last genuine movement refers to the women's day celebration. What is admired about this post is that by providing a video, the brand interviewed women from all levels of society with different types of Hijab existing in Iran, from those who were Chador to those who do not believe in strict Hijab, as illustrated in Figure 3.32. Therefore, the videos illustrate society's ordinary and natural women, not ideal and perfect models or actresses. In the video, the participants are asked who a woman is. Furthermore, they talk about the beauties and difficulties of being a woman in Iran. The goal of the video is again to emphasize the abilities of Iranian women and remind them that despite all the restrictions, they could be successful and climb the ladder of success

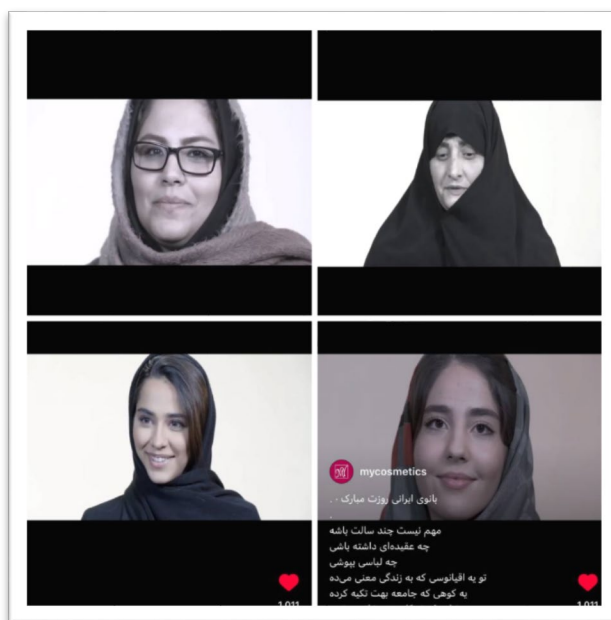


Figure 3.32. MY campaign for wemon' day

Source: (MY Instagram page, s.d.)

Despite the influential campaigns that MY has launched to support gender empowerment, some harmful activities remain, including sexist content. The brand should care about and

prevent using them because it might sense paradoxical if the post messages violate each other.

For example, in one post, the brand congratulated the " National Girl's Day" Iranian girls, while many Iranian women and girls do not recognize this day officially. In addition, Iranian activists for years argued about celebrating the day because of the origin of its appellation. It came back to the time when AhmadiNezhad, one of the presidents of Iran, added this day to the calendar about ten years ago. The girl's day is the same as the birth date of Fatima Masumeh, a religious and saint woman in Islam which her tomb is in Iran, Qom. Nevertheless, why is she, and what is the relationship between her and the national girls' day?

The reason is that because she was a virgin when she died. As a result, the government picked this day because in the Islamic republic, being a virgin distinguishes a girl from a woman, so all females are expected to remain virgins until they marry. Many feminists deducted this reason so offensive, tried to make women aware of the motive behind the day and asked them not to accredit it because it is against women's rights, privacy, and body choice. So, following MY post, some women attacked the brand for honoring the day in the comments and asked the brand to remove the post. The caption is also more sexist as the brand wrote: happy the girl's day, the day of most beautiful creatures!

In another video, the rand also published a stereotypical message. The video starts with a woman going to work but forgetting to use her MY sunscreen; thus, as she has sensitive skin and her face turns red, all of her colleagues look at her weirdly, judge her and make fun of her face. However, in the second part, after she uses the sunscreen and has normal skin, she walks confidently, and people admire her skin. This video conveying the message that if a woman does not have normal skin or suffer from scars or skin defects, she is deserved to be teased and mocked, while in today's modern values, all human with all types of skin and body is beautiful. Moreover, nobody should be humiliated for her/his face or body characteristics. Lastly, if the brand uses models with different skin colors and various categories, it will be more prosperous in engaging with Iranian women from different regions with diverse backgrounds. Posting of models with stereotypical beauty standards could lead to decreasing other women's self-confidence (Figure 3.33). Nonetheless, the practical and creative efforts of the MY should be considered drivers of competitiveness when compared to other brands in the beauty industry.

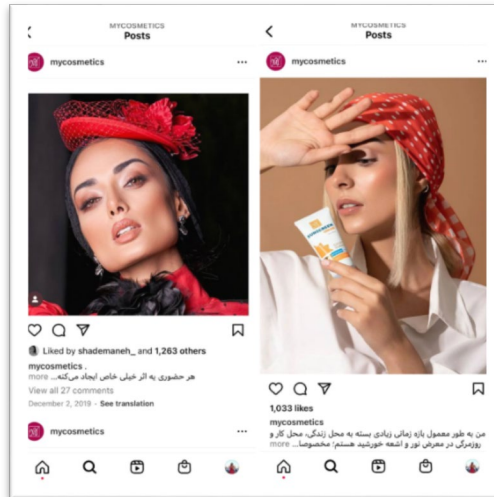


Figure 3.33. Models in MY posts

Source: (MY Instagram page, s.d.)

3.3.2. Italian Beauty Brands

In this section four Italian beauty brands of Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso will be analyzed according to the questions mentioned.

1-Wycon

Wycon Cosmetics is an Italian company founded in 2009 during the economic crisis due to the intuition of Raffaella Pagano, a product manager, and Gianfranco Satta, a businessman and renowned distributor of women's cosmetics. The original plan was to provide skincare and cosmetics at affordable prices while adhering to principles that would make the "normal" woman the face of the company. The term WYCON is derived from the phrase "We Are Icon" to emphasize the value placed on women, who should have access to various goods at reasonable rates.

The business debuted its first flagship shop in Perugia in October 2009, and soon after, it opened a branch in Bologna. Since 2009, the territorial network of stores has become more clearly defined, including Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Greece, Romania, Cyprus, Malta, and other countries abroad, as well as Russia, Kosovo, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan. There were

more than 200 points of sale in 2017. Raffaella Pagano claims that the decision to distribute in single-brand stores was made out of pleasant intuition and allowed the client to have a whole sensory experience.

Cost is the basis of the business's strategy. In an era when beauty appeared to be exclusively available to those who could afford to spend a lot, the firm seeks to break the cosmetics industry's mold by allowing everyone the chance to acquire collections of makeup and skincare products at a price accessible to anybody. The decision to only use Italian-made products is crucial. The factories in Crema, Naples, Bergamo (where the Wycon brand sources foundation, mascara, lipstick, and other cosmetics that ladies use on their faces), and Milan make 95% of the products. Only enamels and pencils are made in Germany and France (the king of paints).

The social strategy is unquestionably another one on which Wycon based its success. The business spends much on internet brand promotion through sponsorships and collaborations with influencers and bloggers. Wycon is second in social presence for this reason. The goal is to establish a strong brand identity by connecting customers to social campaigns, competitions, and viral videos with high participation. This famous brand has gained about 550,000 followers on its Instagram pages, as presented in Figure 3.34 below (Instagram, 2023i).

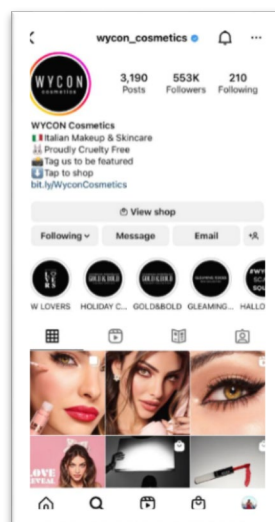


Figure 3.34. Wycon Instagram Page

Source: (Wycon Instagram page, s.d.)

Analysis:

A quick look at the Wycon page shows that most of the videos and story highlights of the brand have been assigned to introducing collections, make-up tutorials, and educational tips. Also, it is proud to be cruelty-free.

As the brand only produces cosmetics, there is no particular product for men. However, it has collaborated with beauty bloggers from the LGBTQ community, such as Italian gay beauty blogger Mirko Speranza (Instagram, 2023j). The video posts he provided for the brands show how to use Wycon products for having perfect make-up (Figure 3.35)

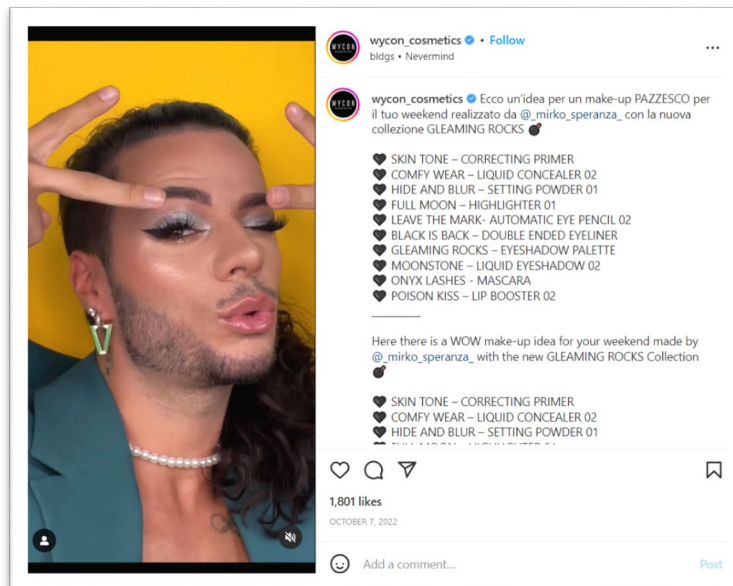


Figure 3.35. Wycon collaboration with Mirko Speranza

Source: (Wycon Instagram page, s.d.)

Another exciting and innovative activity of the brand is its charity programs. The brand dedicated one of its collections to a program, and people can donate to the related organization by buying from that unique collection. As explained on the Wycon website, it includes seven campaigns, as described below:

1. **HIGHLIGHT HOUSE:** a program in support of LILT, the Italian League for the Fight against Tumors

2. **BE BRAVE. BE BRIGHT. BE YOU:** program support "pink is Good," the Veronesi Foundation project that supports research into breast cancer
3. **GIRL POWER:** a program to support the "PINK PHONE" in the fight against violence against women
4. **KID DREAMS:** a program in support of the pediatric oncology department
5. **LIFE extension:** a program for the fight against breast cancer
6. **THE HEART OF BEAUTY:** a program against anorexia and bulimia
7. **NO MORE TEARS:** a program help for women who suffer violence during pregnancy

However, it is disappointing that they have not talked about these great programs nor in post-nether story highlights. Furthermore, this valuable content has been missed. By explaining and mentioning the program on its social media, the brand can prove to the audience that it is socially responsible, cares about women's empowerment, and improves its brand image.

Wycon also took a significant step toward becoming a pioneer among its competitors by dedicating one of its collections to Fiona May's talent & femininity. Fiona May. She is a British actress who gained Italian nationality and was a former triple and long jumper. During her athletic career, she won the long jump world championship twice, and in the same event, she twice reached the second step of the Olympic podium.

Therefore, more than four posts were assigned to this collection. The brand introduces Fiona as a determined and robust woman in the posts (Figure 3.36). It made an interview clip with her, and in the caption, it stated that Fiona is a woman who has not stopped chasing her dreams despite facing complex challenges in her childhood. Now she is a great athlete, an amazing mother, and, more importantly, a fantastic woman. Using the hashtag "#showtheworldwhoyouare," the brand aims to convey to its followers that being a woman is a beautiful and continuous challenge. However, they are more powerful than they think and should believe in their capabilities and be fearless of problems. This campaign is an excellent example of how a beauty brand could care about women's powers and try to improve their confidence and self-esteem.

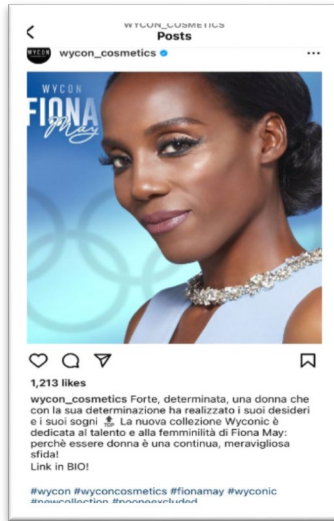


Figure 3.36. Fiona May x Wycon Colection

Source: (Wycon Instagram page, s.d.)

The brand has collaborated with beauty bloggers and some of the posts are make-up tutorial. Even one of the collection is with collaboration of a famous Iranian-Italian blogger Nilfar Adati and called WyconxNilufar.

Finally, the brand launched a creative campaign for "International Kissing Day" on July 6, using the hashtags "# nooneexcluded," "#Equality," and "#Diversity." This campaign is also considered a valuable effort to challenge stereotypes, normalize the use of all skin types and colors in advertisements, and spread love and respect among people of all nations worldwide. Also, for the visuals, Wycon has used a couple of black and white people kissing each other (Figure 3.37). In the captions, the brand emphasizes celebrating this day with different people, cultures, orientations, identities, and languages in every sense and cites "Kiss" as a miracle that could change the world.



Figure 3.37. Wycon campaign of "# nooneexcluded

Source: (Wycon Instagram page, s.d.)

Nevertheless, I argue that the social media performance of Wycon has many weaknesses regarding supporting gender rights. The brand has tried to challenge beauty stereotypes and change the concept of beauty by publishing mainly photoshopped shots of western models and celebrities (Figure 3.38). Moreover, sexist concepts have been employed for the content of many posts and stories. For instance, in a post promoting the collaboration of Georgina Rodrigues (famous businesswoman, model, and Cristian Ronaldo's girlfriend), the brand stated, "Iconic and sexy, Georgina is always gorgeous" (Figure 3.39). Thus, it somehow reinforces the cliché of being seductive and sexy by using these words and communicates the message that if women like to be beautiful like Georgina, they have to be iconic, sexy, seductive, and look like her.

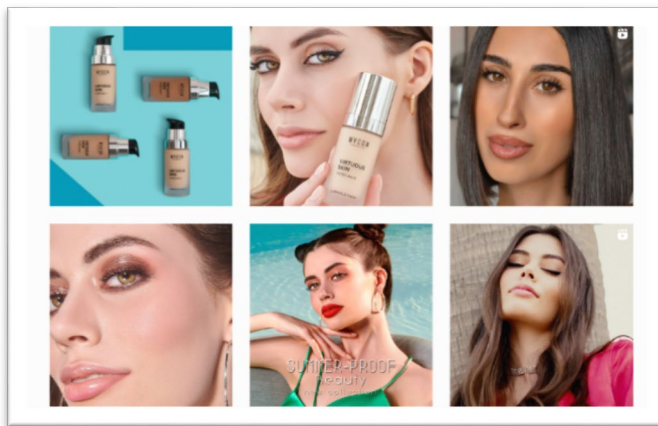


Figure 3.38. Models in Wycon page

Source: (Wycon Instagram page, s.d.)

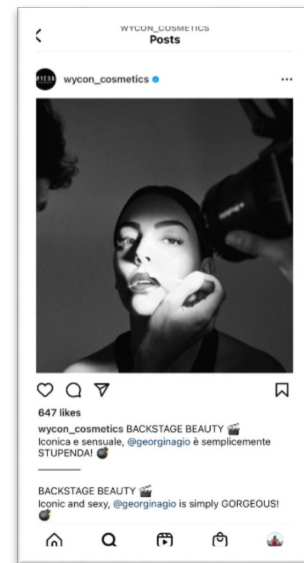


Figure 3.39. Georgina collaboration with Wycon

Source: (Wycon Instagram page, s.d.)

The brand chose innovative names and labels for its collection, such as "Genderless," "Break Rules," and "Girl Power," and used slogans typed on the products, for example, "My eyes, my hand, and my power." It needs to describe the origins of related collections and include its priceless charitable endeavors in the page's content. In conclusion, as a recognized, high-follower brand, the marketing team should be more cautious about different social values, think more open-mindedly, and stop filling the content with photoshopped pictures.

2-Mulac

As the creative brainchild of La Cindinae, the brand was established in Milan in 2014. Since then, it has maintained its commitment to growing by envisioning trends. Mulac's creative mind belongs to Sandra Sold, aka "Cindy," a makeup artist, YouTuber, and mother. A superwoman who, together with a team of professionals, has created a made-in-Italy brand that has also had great success overseas.

Versatility, originality, and creativity are the three key promises made by this brand. In other words, the brand follows the concept of creativity, giving life to always innovative and unconventional collections. They encourage people to convey ideals like individuality and diversity through a novel and innovative cosmetics with the hashtag #SHOWYOURART. Mulac was born to create cosmetics attentive to skin health but at the same time highly performing. Cindy and her team wanted to link the concept of art to that of makeup, allowing everyone to express themselves and their personalities through their cosmetics.

This Italian brand philosophy aims to establish a cosmetics company that combines the highest quality natural raw materials with the high-performance results demanded by makeup artists.

All the products are formulated without animal-derived ingredients and are not tested on animals. Mulac Cosmetics presents a wide range of products, which, since the birth of the brand, have been continually expanding with exciting news. Black packaging, minimal but at the same time refined and functional, is an ingredient in Cindy's style. The marketing team at Mulac is proactive on social media platforms, and the Instagram page of this brand has about 350,000 followers, as shown in Figure 3.40 (Instagram, 2023k).

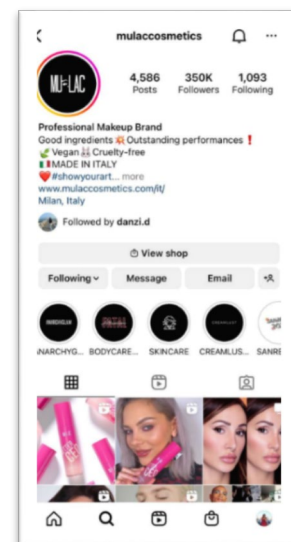


Figure 3.40. Mulac Instagram page

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

Analysis:

Firstly, Mulac paid great attention to beauty bloggers, as most of the posts are collaborative, in which bloggers teach how to do makeup step by step. These kinds of videos can positively affect audiences because bloggers start to make up their faces and show their natural faces with all their skin problems. So the content does not demonstrate only the final result of makeup in a filtered image but illustrates that bloggers are also like ordinary people. For example, they do not have flawless skin in the final picture. However, the brand could focus more on the content of the captions to talk about beauty clichés and engage the audience in the comments.

Mulac cooperates with well-known Italian celebrity and singer Achille Lauro as the brand ambassador and even made a new cosmetics collection together (Figure 3.41).

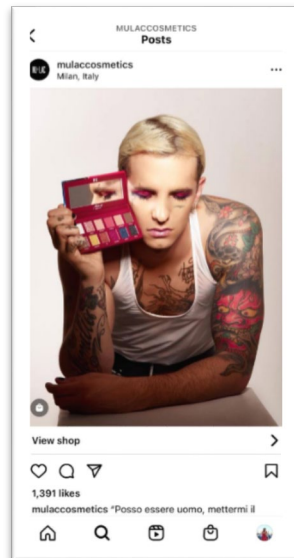


Figure 3.41. Mulac Collaboration with Achille Lauro

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

This collaboration is a positive effort by the brand to normalize the use of beauty products by men. Also, the other innovative campaign by Mulac proves this effort is generating content in which a man (not a gay person) uses cosmetics. What should be clarified here is that after most of the beauty brands started working with gay beauty bloggers, they felt more secure and confident about wearing makeup in public. Still, on the other hand, there might be

resistance among heterosexual men because they think that by using cosmetics, they will be known as gay people.

So there is a narrow border between these two matters, and the brand should try more to find a solution to the problem. For example, in Figure 3.42, a man is using an eyebrow lifter, a product many men might need. Alternatively, in more than two or three posts, a man is seen using sunscreen to protect his face. These posts convey the message that men also should care about their skin and beauty and prove that the era in which beauty products only belonged to women is over. Furthermore, at first glance at the brand page, many posts are found that prove Mulac cares a lot for the LGBTQ community, from many collaboration posts with gay beauty bloggers to numerous posts celebrating Pride Day and offering educational make-up videos. The brand even offered a discount code on the products for Pride Day to draw

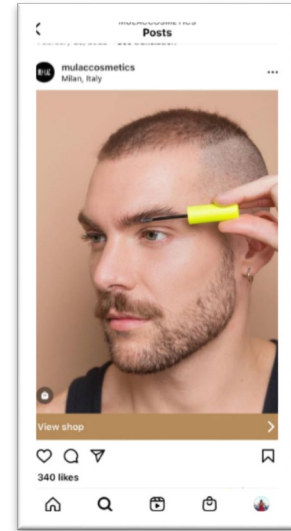


Figure 3.42. Male model in Mulac ad

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

the audience's attention. Also, it shared several posts supporting LGBTQ groups stating that "June means pride month", "You worth it" and "Be pride of who you are" with the hashtag "show your art" to motivate them to accept themselves and be proud of being who they are (figure 3.43 and 3.44).

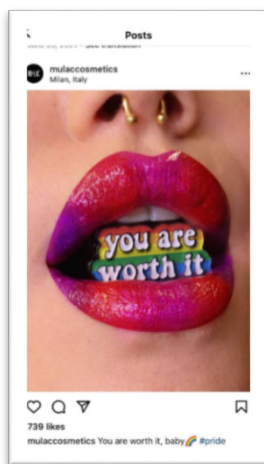


Figure 3.43. Mulac post for supporting Pride Day

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

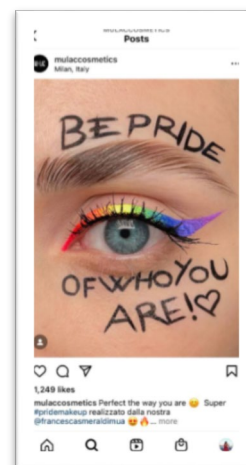


Figure 3.44. Mulac post for supporting Pride Day

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

Another significant strength of the brand's activities could be using models of different genders, ages, and skin types. Also, many models have natural faces from different races (Figures 3.45 and 3.46). So they have challenged the stereotypes that only flawless skin or white and skinny women are beautiful.

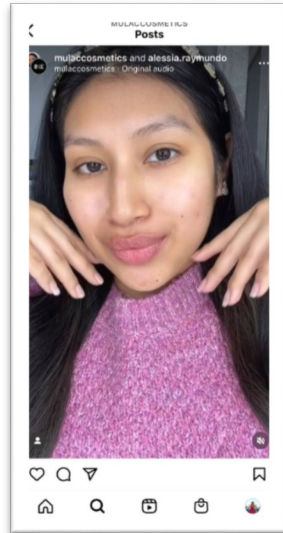


Figure 3.45. Models in Mulac ad

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

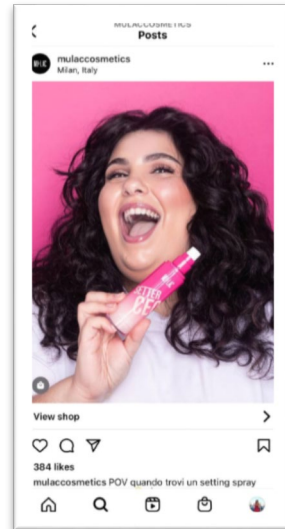


Figure 3.46. Models in Mulac ad

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

The brand also cares about animals and the environment since all products are cruelty-free and natural.

Finally, advertisements promoting the collection of body care products are the most valuable activity of this brand in terms of breaking stereotypes and overcoming body shaming. Interestingly, in many posts and stories, the brand used visuals of women of different colors and sizes who showing the reality of their bodies feel proud of themselves, as demonstrated in Figure 3.47. Also, in the captions, Mulac has highlighted that "there is no limit on beauty, all bodies are good bodies" and uses the slogan "Do not be shy to shine."

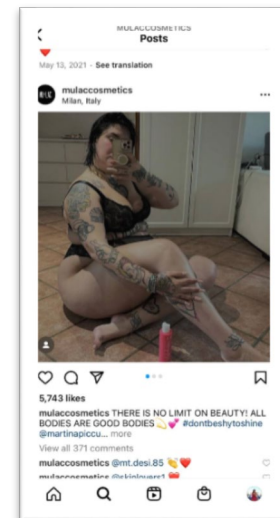


Figure 3.47. Mulac "Do not be shy to shine" campaign

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

Moreover, in one of the stories in the highlight "Body Care," the brand released an interview in which it has made a conversion with two women and a transgender man (Figure 3.48). They were asked to answer questions such as, "What is your body to you?" "How do you see yourself?" and "How do you take care of yourself?" Most of their answers are inspirational and encourages audiences to love themselves more and be proud of who they are. These movements are worthy and appreciated because of challenging the beauty standards, fighting with fat phobia and decreasing the pressure on women to be fit and perfect.

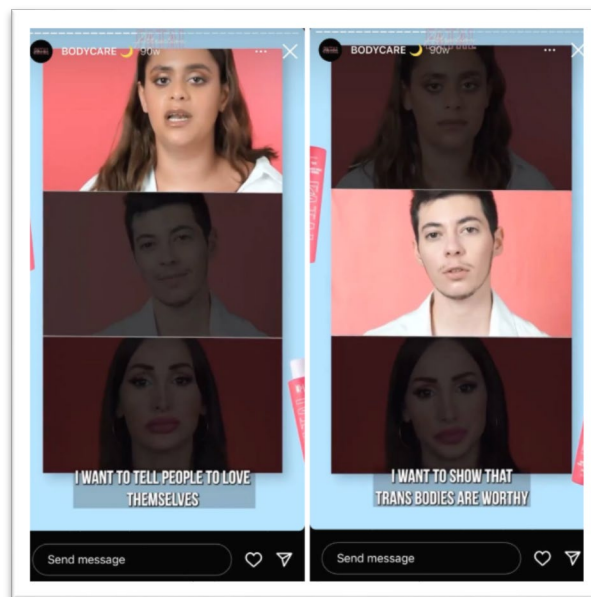


Figure 3.48. Mulac interview published in highlights

Source: (Mulac Instagram page, s.d.)

However, this campaign also might be criticized of using "gender equality" and "stop body shaming" subjects as tools for the marketing activities, and only to sell their body care products. In addition, except of this campaign, the brand has not promoted any particular activity, event, or piece of content for supporting women's empowerment, and the focus is mainly on the LGBTQ community.

To sum up, the brand page is so energetic and colorful in a way that nobody feels excluded, from the gay community to women with different skin types and colors. Yet, the brand should use fewer Photoshop images and make the content more natural and closer to reality.

3-Deborah Milano

The firm, which was established in 1903 and is currently run by its fourth generation, is motivated by a desire to develop the ideal cosmetic that is characteristically Italian: a high-quality formulation at a reasonable cost that allows every woman to have access to makeup that looks professional.

Deborah Milano, a brand of high-end cosmetics owned by the group, has been a global ambassador for Made in Italy since 1962. The colors, textures, functionality, and design of Deborah Milano's product offerings for women of all ages and professions are founded in unmistakably Italian innovation, quality, and flair. The characteristics of Italian craftsmanship are excellence, creativity, beauty, passion, and attention to detail. The Deborah Group takes pleasure in maintaining the standard of premium beauty products. They are made in Italy using fabrics, patterns, and hues that are distinctly Italian.

To keep the brand in front of the cosmetics curve, The Deborah Group laboratories' team of R&D professionals pushes the boundaries to create a consistent stream of innovative, next-generation technologies, formulas, and textures.

Making beauty available to millions of women worldwide is Deborah Milano's well-known goal. Makeup, fashion, and design all fall under the beauty category, with a value-driven product offered via a vast worldwide distribution network of merchants. The uniquely Italian capacity to offer, with the accessibility of industrial production, the finesse, and originality of handcrafted products, is transformed by the inspiration of renowned designers into unexpected "objects to touch."

Having about 200,000 followers on Instagram (Instagram, 2023L), this brand is also one of the successful and popular brands among social media community (Figure 3.49).

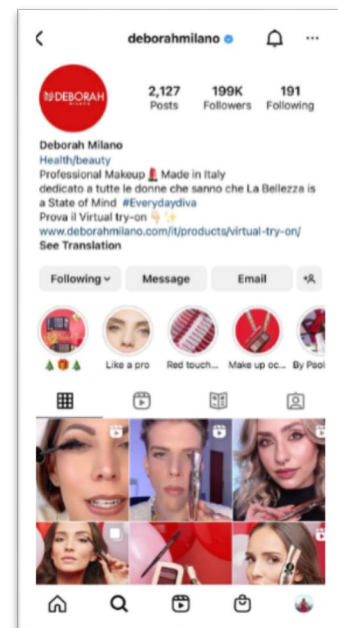


Figure 3.49. Deborah Instagram page

Source: (Deborah Instagram page, s.d.)

Analysis:

Deborah could be an example of a beauty brand that, although its slogan is "dedicated to all women who know that beauty is the state of mind," and uses the hashtag #Everydaydiva, the general content of the page is primarily beautiful Photoshop images of the European models with perfect skin, face, dress and make-up. Unfortunately, no model from other skin colors or races can be seen in the ads, and it makes sense that the products and brands are only dedicated to beautiful white women (Figure 3.50).

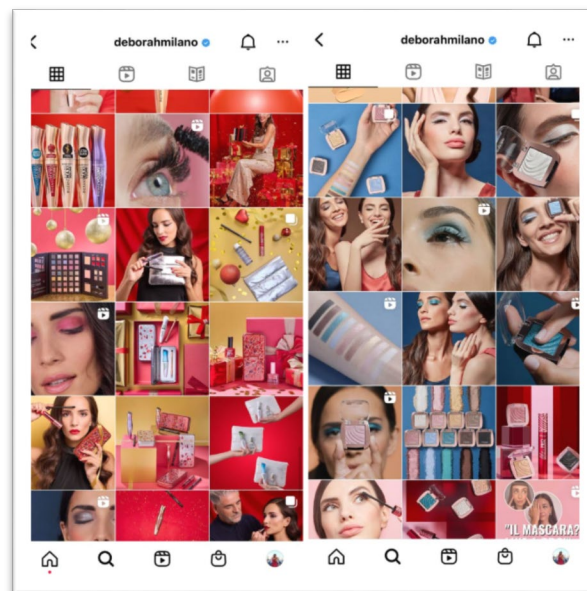


Figure 3.50. Models in Deborah page

Source: (Deborah Instagram page, s.d.)

The brand collaborated with female beauty bloggers, yet only one post was allocated to a gay beauty blogger. There is no particular product for men, so no male model is used. Deborah could be a clear example of a beauty brand that enhances the existing beauty stereotypes. The brand's focus on beauty in its traditional form can be found in many published content. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Deborah ran a campaign with the hashtag "#thenewbeauty" and invited the followers to show how they use makeup while wearing masks. Although the posts encouraged audiences to wear masks, they

simultaneously delivered the message that makeup is necessary to be considered gorgeous even when wearing a mask.

In the caption of posts, the brand used the expression "An all-female challenge," which is also an obvious weakness since it has kept out other genders. Even in the video post, only white Italian women joined the challenge and described their experiences (Figure 3.51). Consequently, in my opinion, while Wycon has tried to promote the hashtag "no one excluded," Deborah is precisely against it since, on its Instagram page, many people are excluded!



Figure 3.51. "the new beauty" Campaign of Deborah

Source: (Deborah Instagram page, s.d.)

In conclusion, Deborah has a long way to go to be considered a socially responsible brand. The brand is a very old famous Italian one, and to not lose its market share and popularity among the new competitors, it should try to align its activities with the gender empowerment movements and challenge the beauty standards.

4-Espresso

Chiara Cascella, who is 100% Italian, founded the company in 2018. After working for high-end brands in the beauty sector in Milan and Paris, Chiara noticed a huge industry gap and a significant manufacturing potential in her nation that many brands need to stand by. Her

travels inspired her to create a niche brand for busy women who identify with her: independent sirens. This brand would proudly carry the label "made in Italy."Espresso is a beauty brand motivated by an exceptional cup of coffee. The basics, like an espresso for any Italian. The desire to create the first 100% Italian independent beauty brand that was original, disruptive and outrageous gave rise to the concept. A novel idea in the field of aesthetics. An essential but also potent and robust makeup, similar to an espresso. The brand seeks to provide a makeup routine that is necessary and simple for a bold and genuine appearance. A community with a similar vision of beauty and an assertive attitude supports high-performing makeup essentials. The brand's concept is that simplicity is the key to natural beauty and that nothing is more potent than simplicity.

A bold style does not always require wearing a ton of makeup; instead, it starts with our confidence level, which cosmetics help to enhance. It, therefore, gives much attention to women's self-confidence and empowerment.

Since the brand's name is derived from a coffee emblem of Italian culture and all seven of the company's lipsticks have the same smooth feel, it was designed and made in Italy. Along with these items, Espresso also creates a mascara that promises more robust, longer eyelashes and a lightweight concealer that covers flaws without being heavy. Three fundamental and straightforward items that form the basis of any woman's beauty regimen

are created with quality to assure excellent results with minimal effort. The company has a highly distinct and identifiable look that closely connects to the fashion industry.

Since the brand strategy is built on the principle that communicative and visual trends need to be paid attention to, studied, and adapted to the brand identity, Espresso's social media activities are equally distinctive and innovative. According to the co-founder, they strongly emphasize paying close attention to their consumers' needs and meeting those requirements. This attitude could be why Espresso has successfully acquired more than 120,000 followers on

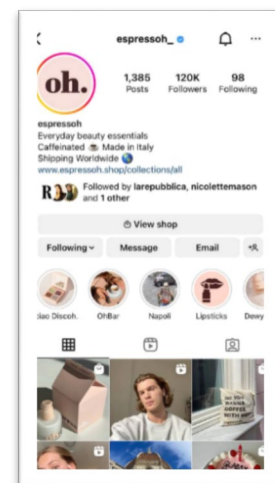


Figure 3.52. Espresso Instagram Page

Source: (Espresso Instagram page, s.d.)

Instagram (Instagram, 2023m) in only four years, despite being such a young company (Figure 3.52)

Analysis:

New but clever, original, and professional! These words came to mind after checking Espresso's Instagram page. The energetic atmosphere is the brand posts' most impressive and alluring point. In addition, the photos are not fake photos of full makeup models fitting the traditional beauty standards. Otherwise, models have been used from different races, ethnicities, and skin colors with regular and genuine faces without filters. There is no sign of luxury European models with flawless makeup and expensive clothes.

From my standpoint, the brand has been much more progressive than Wycon, Mulac, and Deborah in demonstrating the natural face of beauty and challenging stereotypes because the models are ordinary people and are of different ages, from teenagers to older women (Figure 3.53).

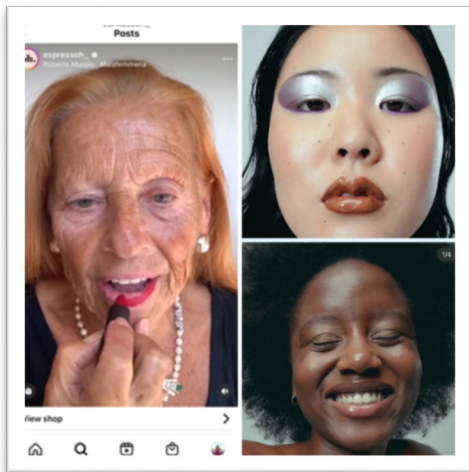


Figure 3.53. Models in Espresso ads

Source: (Espresso Instagram page, s.d.)

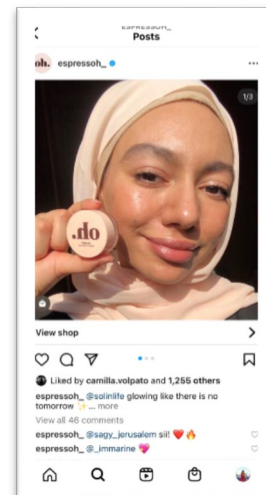


Figure 3.54. Model with Hijab in Espresso page

Source: (Espresso Instagram page, s.d.)

Espresso is also a pioneer in using models wearing hijabs to demonstrate respect for all ethnicities and beliefs (Figure 3.54). Even one of the products is a scarf with the arm of Espresso.

Another spectacular concept found on the brand page is promoting Italian culture. As mentioned, the brand resembles its products to café espresso, Italians basic drink. It claims that beauty first starts in the confidence level of women and make up could help them enhance it. So the makeup should be as simple as possible with using maximum of two or three items to look more natural and genuine. This also can be found in the beauty bloggers' posts that collaborated with the brand. Furthermore, various signs of Italian culture can be found in the brand posts, from talking about pasta or pizza to show the unknown allies of Naples (Figure 3.55). These creative posts help the audience connect with the brand's identity which tied to Italian culture.

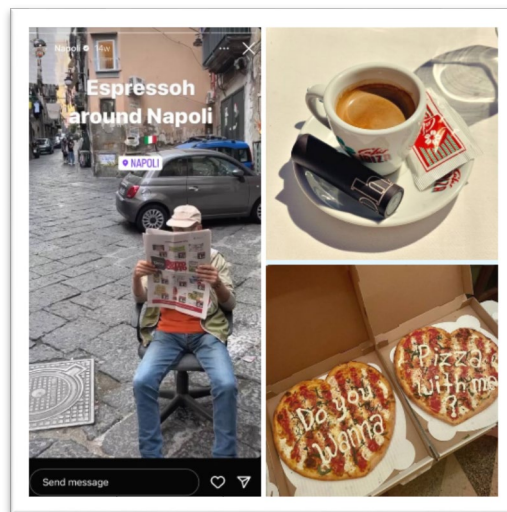


Figure 3.55. Content about Italian culture in Espresso page

Source: (Espresso Instagram page, s.d.)

As well as collaborating with gay beauty bloggers, Espresso employed male models while using beauty products. Similar to Mulac activities, this content contests the norm that men should not care about their beauty or use cosmetics.

Lastly, the brand launched a campaign to support fragile women with financial problems to help them get independent and earn money. To do that, for their product "Beauty to Go", Espresso started a partnership with "Colori Vivi" in May 2022.

As the Instagram post (Figure 3.56) explained, this project was carried out in collaboration with the Italian tailoring studio "Colori Vivi." This organization has a social responsibility to

support underprivileged women by training them and giving them real jobs so they may become financially and professionally independent. It is an admirable campaign to prove to the followers that they do not just say the words to support gender empowerment; they also endorse it by taking real action.

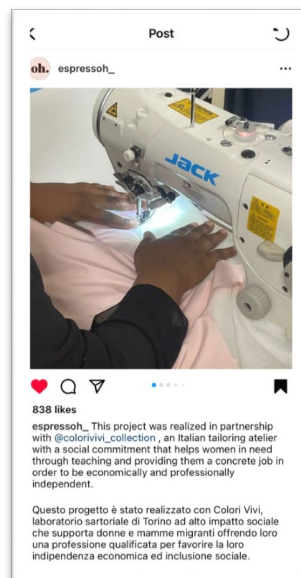


Figure 3.56. Espresso collaboration with "Colori Vivi "

Source: (Espresso Instagram page, s.d.)

Nevertheless, the brand can be more cautious about the content used in pages that reinforce some stereotypes about being sexy and seductive. To sum up, the brand has performed very well in advocating for gender rights and attracted many followers in just four years.

3.4- Conclusion and Main Results:

Overall, to present a short overview of the total performance of Iranian and Italian case studies in raising consciousness about gender empowerment, I believe the total theme of Iranian and Italian Instagram pages is almost different. The main reasons could be cultural differences and existing rigid limitations in Iran. Therefore, these differences make the comparison complicated.

For example, unfortunately, Iranian brands could not follow the same patterns as their Italian counterparts, who collaborate with gay beauty bloggers and post their content on the

brand's main page. Because in this way, they put the blogger's life at risk since, in Iran, even getting identified as gay is against the law. Therefore, brands usually participate with them only on the blogger's pages.

Nonetheless, Iranian brands care more about social responsibility and sharing gender empowerment content. One distinction that makes Iranian brand activities superior is that they talk about their supportive activities more on their Instagram pages to promote awareness and inspire social change.

They also publish more subject matter about women's challenges; for example, Genobiotic has provided content about menstruation, and MY has made a private show to focus on Iranian women's problems in the current era to help them increase their confidence and belief in their capabilities. While among the Italian brands analyzed, only Wycon and Mulac directly ran campaigns to engage audiences about body shaming, self-confidence, and beauty standards.

A critical factor that may be the cause that Italian brands have not given voice to subjects such as menstruation is that these matters have already been normalized in Italy and are not considered taboo or challenging issues anymore. In contrast, Iranian society has to take a long way to reach the Italy situation.

Thus, Italian brands do not find a need to talk about these subjects. In contrast, Iranian companies prefer to be pioneers and help women break taboos to distinguish their brand image. To conclude, when making the comparison, all aspects, such as the political and social factors and gender equality rankings in both countries, should be considered.

Another difference is that Iranian brands primarily support athletes and sports events, while Italian ones promote fashion weeks and artistic events. Moreover, Italian brands have performed better at including people of all races and skin colors in their posts and stories. It is essential to note that although the majority of the Iranian population in big cities like the capital (Tehran) are known as "Fars," Iran, with more than 80 million population is composed of various regions that have their own unique culture, race, language, customs, and norms, such as Kurdish, Azerbaijani, Baloch, and Arab. Since they live in different climates and regions, they have different faces and skin colors. Therefore, when a brand uses only beautiful, high-level women from the capital as its models, it automatically denies the presence of other races.

The other obvious contrast between Iranian and Italian brands relates to the types of products they concentrate on in their posts and stories. Iranian brands mainly have riveted their content on skin care products because advertising them is more manageable and less challenges the restriction rules. For example, if we compare the ads for putting on creams with those for wearing lipstick by a woman, the latter can lead to more problems for the company; because, in the authorities' opinions, it promotes sexual content.

Finally, if I want to create a ranking for both brand groups according to their performance, among Iranian brands, Genobitoc and MY have been more successful in increasing awareness and reflecting the existing challenges women are facing in society. Laffaree performed better than Lafarrer and Came On because she provided content about social responsibility.

Among Italian brands, I prefer the following four: Espresso, Mulac, Wycon, and Deborah. As a female audience, I feel more connected to Espresso's content because the page environment is natural and alive. The brand has included all types of females from different races and colors, conveying that beauty and makeup belong to everyone. Also, it has tried to promote an effortless makeup routine by using a maximum of two or three products to challenge beauty standards. Then, Mulac is my preference since it pays more attention to all genders and the LGBTQ community. Using models from all races and the campaign to fight against body shaming was also inspiring. Finally, I chose Wycon and Deborah for the third and fourth places.

To sum up, all the investigated brands should take steps to generate femvertising campaigns aligning with their country's cultural and social beliefs to grow their brand's values and gain competitive advantages. In this chapter, the mirror concept is analyzed to understand how much brand activities and advertisements reflect the existing values of society. However, another significant piece of research that will be conducted in the next chapter is analyzing the point of view of Iranian and Italian women about these brands; and finally discovering and reaching a conclusion on how much each brand has been successful among female audiences.

Chapter 4: Empirical Research: Interview with Iranian and Italian Instagram users

4.1. Overview and object of analysis

In this chapter, the "Mold" theory will be studied to determine how much the marketing strategies that beauty brands (Iranian and Italian case studies) have employed on their Instagram pages have had the power to influence and shape their target market's values. Specifically, the objective is to understand whether, according to the audience's opinion, the brands have contributed to changing and demolishing gender stereotypes in social views and norms. This concept is founded on the theories that people take in information from the media and that exposure to media and advertising may change attitudes and behaviors.

4.2. Methodology

After investigating the "Mirror Theory" in the previous chapter and assessing the performance of beauty brands regarding gender equality on their Instagram pages, there was a need to analyze the subject from the point of view of female audiences and fill the gap. The semi-structured interview approach was used to carry out the research because it gave the participants the freedom to provide any information they believed was relevant and valuable while keeping a basic structure to prevent going off-topic. Depending on the person, the in-depth, one-on-one online interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes.

The participants and focus groups of the study are six Iranian and six Italian women from generations Y and Z. Also, to have a broader view and reach more accurate results, women from different cities (big and small) in Iran and Italy have been selected for the interviews.

The Interview is composed of four multiple and ten open-end questions. However, as mentioned, while doing the Interview, more questions could be asked of the person to discuss the subject accurately and reach a precise result. The first five questions aim first to provide sociodemographic data to get to know the person better and then obtain information about the routines of attendees about using Instagram and beauty products. The open-ended questions start with inquiries to understand the general view of individuals about the subject and then continue by focusing meticulously on the case study brands. Moreover, for each group of Iranian and Italian participants, the detailed questions were about the selected

beauty brands of the interviewee's nationality. The Interview with Iranian women was conducted in Farsi, and the translation into English is provided in the appendix.

4.3. Data Analysis

After completing the interviews and preparing the transcription (as mentioned in the study's appendix), the data will be analyzed in two separate sections since the interviews of both groups are different (Iranian women are asked about the Iranian-selected beauty brands and the same for Italian ones).

4.3.1- Iranian Women Interview Result

To describe the results, I first mention that the attendees' different views on the subject amazed me. Some were looking at the topic in a way I had not noticed already, so their comments were beneficial for further investigations.

Firstly, according to the answers, almost all Iranian interviewees use beauty products daily (especially skincare). Also, they follow social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn more about their products daily or at least a few times per week. These data prove the importance of analyzing beauty brands' activities on social media because using their products and following their pages on social media have become part of women's daily routines.

Results show that some interviewees are considerably impressed by brands' activities, which could affect them positively or negatively. For example, Marjan believes that the content of beauty brands hurts her perception of herself. After checking their pages, she feels less confident and thinks she needs to use more makeup. In contrast, Parnia, who also has a makeup diploma and has worked as a makeup artist, defined herself as a neutral person who knows the beauty industry's reality and roots. She explained that she is not impressed by ads because she believes the beauty industry is based on consumerism. Hence, most gender empowerment activities are only for marketing goals and show-offs.

All the participants experienced the pressure of society to conform to beauty standards, especially when they were teenagers. This pressure, which could be even from friends or family, might be so high that women think of doing surgeries (and many do it, in fact). Also,

the tragic point is that, unfortunately, women might consider being beautiful equal to being valuable and acceptable by society. Even as Marjan experienced, they may feel guilty because they cannot spend a lot of time and money on beauty products and doing makeup.

Moreover, after exposure to content in which only white, blonde, and fit models have been used, who are considered conventionally beautiful, women might receive the message that they do not deserve to use the advertised products because they do not look like the models. Also, skin flaws could be understood as signs of sickness and abnormality.

Therefore, with changes in advertising strategies and models that look like ordinary people, brands can seriously increase audiences' confidence. For example, Marjan could change her view toward the concept of beauty after watching the ads of prominent brands like Gucci, which used models with natural faces or with diseases such as psoriasis.

In addition, using Photoshopped shots of models has been the concern of many interviewees of all ages. For example, Ailin, a teenage Iranian girl, expects the brand not to use only filtered and retouched images of models. She then explained that while she knew the pictures were fake and photoshopped, she still felt pressure to look like them and thought she was not beautiful enough.

Women of all ages are now more intelligent and sensitive about brand movements and expect them to represent reality. Now they are not passive recipients that only buy products, but they are active and force brands to change their strategies to meet the customers' requirements. After interviews, I have understood that women have various attitudes in different aspects. These distinct views might lead to more challenges for brands if they want to support gender rights. On the one hand, they are expected to be active and supportive of women, their main customers. Also, brands feel scared to lose their market share if they do not take action, as their competitors are active in this case and even use it as a competitive advantage. On the other hand, if they discuss women's rights and promote related campaigns, they may be accused of using gender conflicts to sell more products.

For example, Hoda and Parnia believe that if a brand claims to support gender empowerment, it has to show this support in all aspects; otherwise, the brand's activity will be only for selling more products. As Hoda described, first, the essential characteristics of products must be acceptable. For example, the brand should offer high-quality products to prove it cares about women's health as consumers.

Besides, in everyday life and comparison with men, women are always expected to be gorgeous by using makeup, while these expectations are not held toward men. Thus, women have to spend a high proportion of their salary (that is still, on average lower than their male counterparts) on buying beauty products. Also, most beauty ads are made to persuade women that they need more and more beauty products to look attractive (as Romina experienced). Therefore, beauty brands should offer a reasonable price to support their female customers.

Parnia also added that some of the brands' activities concerning gender rights are exaggerated and have detrimental effects on people's physical and mental health. For instance, a brand might use an obese woman as a model in its ads, even though being obese can hurt a person's health. So through advertising and delivering the message that even being very fat is okay, people may not care about their health anymore, and their weight may lead to many diseases. Also, when the brands express that all people are beautiful, it will be hard to talk against these motivational topics. For example, if a person criticizes obesity, she might be accused of spreading hate and supporting fatphobia while just stating her idea.

Nevertheless, what is the solution to this problem? Hoda clarifies that if a brand launches a campaign to help the gender equality movement and reinforce women's empowerment, it has to be consistent and continuous. It should not touch the subject and leave it alone without complete clarification and explanation. For example, Hoda and Marjan found La Farrer's page a clear example of this argument. They made it clear that the brand has tried to only touch the subject by talking about social responsibility and publishing the campaign, "Do not continue the stereotypes." Nevertheless, the brand page is so feminine simultaneously, using only filtered Photoshop models that meet society's beauty standards. There is no diversity among them, and no one with a natural face can be seen.

This criticism also is toward MY. Marjan, as an actress, thinks that the TV show MY has produced with the aim of women's empowerment is fake and delivers no message. She stated, "About MY, it has used models with perfectly high standards, like the other brand. I also noticed some videos in which Iranian actresses talk about women's capabilities and progress. However, as an actress, I would not say I liked that because its content was fake and short and did not help me increase my knowledge about the subject. The brand could talk about more exciting issues".

Another surprising topic that women such as Ailin and Hoda (even when they have more than 14 years of age difference) both mentioned is that the change in people's norms might be limited to their social media activities. For example, Ailin described that when she was checking the comments of people under male beauty blogger posts, she mostly found friendly and admiring comments, which conveyed the message that people have less hostile attitudes toward gays and men who are doing makeup. Also, these comments encouraged gay people to be themselves and not be embarrassed by wearing makeup.

However, she also declared, "When I go to the street and see a gay or a man with makeup, I notice that almost all of the people look at him strangely with hate and not only support him but give him more destructive feelings." So, this is another huge topic that might be analyzed in further investigations to find out why people act differently in social media and in reality. Another intriguing topic while I was interviewing was that Iranian women care much more about buying cruelty-free products than before. From a 17-year-old girl (Ailin) to a 36-year-old woman (Sanaz), they always pay great attention to buying vegan products that are produced without animal testing, and being cruelty-free is a necessity and priority for them (over brands' attention to women's rights).

From my point of view and after assessing the results, the growth in the importance of this subject could be rooted in social media awareness posts published during the last few years, which impress people notably. So maybe during the following years, after expanding the content about women's rights, customers will also consider the brand's activities to increase gender equality as a priority when purchasing products.

Another interesting point is that Ailin noticed the existence of animal testing and cruelty-free products through watching the "Save Ralf" video that Genobiotic launched and made viral on Instagram. However, she ignored the video's creator and did not know Genobiotic promoted this video. It is another challenging issue for brands that might make a great effort to provide informative posts, launch a campaign, and then make them viral, but people only pay attention to the content rather than the creator. They must find ways to fix this problem and make the brands' names stand out when creating the content. In this way, brands can affect users' unconscious minds so that when they want to buy the products, they remember the brand name due to the ads and campaigns.

Moreover, almost all interviewees believed that the lack of diversity could be seen obviously in all four brand pages; however, some of them, like Ailin and Hoda, stated that MY performed better in this regard. Also, many participants mentioned that the brands primarily used models that were representatives of a wealthy Persian woman living in the capital. According to Marjan, "no brand has used models from different regions in Iran, such as Baluch, Gilak, or Kurd women." "An innovative and beautiful frame for the ads could be using these women with their unique costumes while using Iranian beauty products."

For some participants, such as Sanaz and Romina, the extent to which brands focus on and consider male models and offer them beauty products is a sign of advocating gender equality. For example, Sanaz emphasized that for her, the Genobiotic page was superior to others in terms of supporting gender rights because it has included male models, actors, or even doctors, and the page atmosphere is not 100% feminine. They expected the beauty brands to produce more content, including male products and models. Because then, Iranian men will be encouraged to break the stereotypes and use beauty products (especially since many of them need skincare items because of their complex workplaces, such as coal mines).

All six interviewees believe that the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs. They mentioned that in the modern world, many women fill their free time by scrolling through social media, especially Instagram; social media significantly influences women's lives and attitudes. Because they are continuously exposed to advertisements during the day, even if they want to resist watching them, their minds start recalling the messages. For instance, if they only watch beautiful white and blond models in ads, it will be a fact for them that this is a genuine beauty and other skin colors (like a black woman) are not beautiful. So these interactions and information shape their attitudes and affect their unconscious minds. These impacts are not only on women; they also affect male users' perspectives and help them increase awareness.

A critical point that the brand should consider is increasing engagement and triggering conversation among users in the comments sections. Nowadays, users find other people's reviews more trustworthy than what brands claim. Also, the comment section has become an informational source for them to interact with people with various attitudes and share their ideas about the brand or its posts. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter,

a great example could be the post that Genobiotic published regarding menstruation, which asked women to share their bad experiences with their period.

Most interviewees also experienced a change in their attitude toward male beauty bloggers. Sanaz and Parina have had the same experiences; they could not accept men doing makeup. However, after being continually exposed to the content in which men do makeup or use skin care products, they changed their minds, found their previous view ridiculous, and broke the cliché that beauty products only belong to women. They even take on supportive roles for their male friends, giving suggestions and helping them find the best products.

Nevertheless, Hoda argues that social belief change only happens when the brand is profoundly and constantly active in describing the subject and explaining it thoroughly. Just a short reference to gender-related subjects will not affect people's attitudes, and they might accept it at the moment and forget it later.

After analyzing whether a brand's active participation in promoting gender rights and challenging stereotypes on social media influences users' buying behavior, the ideas were almost different and could be divided into two parts.

The first group (four out of six) are the optimistic users who agreed with the question and mentioned that brand activity significantly affects their buying behavior. Because they believe that this attention means that brands value their buyers, primarily women, and respect their needs. Even one of the interviewees mentioned that the factor that the brand actively supports gender rights had higher importance than product quality for her. She believes that in Iran's current situation if a brand cares about women's rights and provides content despite all of the existing censorship and restrictions, it should be appreciated and supported by society.

On the contrary, the second group comprises those with a pessimistic view of the subject. The last two participants (aged more than 30) felt no change or effect on their buying behavior. Since they believe beauty brands misuse women for their marketing goals, women should be aware of this matter. So, just because doing makeup to look beautiful is a social norm in Iran, they should not spend most of their money to give up on the standard. For this group, quality, price, and no animal testing were prioritized over the gender-supportive activities by the brand. They mentioned that it is not acceptable if a brand produces products

without good quality and, at the same time, talks about gender rights, so basic principles like quality are essential.

In summary, beauty brands should offer high-quality products accessible to anyone with any financial state while inspiring women to rise from their current status and help increase their confidence. In addition, they must include Iranian women of other races and ethnicities, illustrate successful women (and not necessarily more beautiful women or models), and reflect women's societal struggles.

Finally, selecting the most successful Iranian brand from the interviewees' point of view is problematic because the opinions toward brands were so diverse and different. Come On, and Genobiotic were among the top companies chosen by participants based on their support for women's empowerment. MY had the third place, followed by La' Farrerr. (The use of athletes and successful women by Come On and Genobiotic was impressive in the opinion of many interviewees.) Finally, to be favored among audiences, brands should aim to be coherent and offer all factors of good quality, a reasonable price, vegan products, and attention to the gender rights movement.

4.3.2. Italian Women Interview Result

All Italian interviewees use beauty products daily, but only one woman interacts with brands on social media daily. Although Iranian women were more concerned with general concepts and found brand pages that needed to be more appealing, Italian women thoroughly examined brand pages.

However, no matter where you live, once you are a woman, you are exposed to content that puts pressure on you to focus on your flaws (that may be just called flaws according to beauty standards). Besides Iranian women, Italian interviewees have felt media pressure since they were teenagers. Ester described how, during her teenage years, the image portrayed by the media of an alluring woman was perfect and without defects. This perfection convinced women that only by buying beauty products would they be able to look like the models.

This pressure creates overthinking and stressful thoughts for girls, and they start to pay more attention to their body details; if they find something about their body different from

what models represent, they consider it a flaw. For example, in Livia's opinion, her legs were short, and her hair, nails, skin, and belly did not look good when she was a young girl.

Moreover, the continuous changes in conventional beauty standards are another factor that puts more pressure on women and decreases their sense of self-worth. One moment, women are told that the ideal form of the body is skinny; the next, they have to be "slim thick" to look good enough. These ever-changing trends in beauty standards make it even more challenging for girls and women to feel acceptable and confident. For instance, Luna experienced her teen years in the early 2000s, when the "heroin chic" look was a thing, models were sickly skinny, and wearing a shirt size M meant you were "fat." As a curvy girl, how she views herself changed negatively, and her confidence decreased.

Besides, the idea behind many beauty brands and bloggers' content is to take better care of yourself. So women got deceived into buying more and more products until they even looked like models. Livia also confirmed this view by emphasizing that "sometimes brand awareness can generate a need that did not exist before; you may end up wondering if you have a problem (for example, skin imperfections) and need the product advertised, even if five minutes ago you did not consider it an issue at all."

Women's personalities are different, and some might not be affected by societal pressures. For instance, among the interviewees, Camilla feels more confident and less impressed by ads, as she clarified, "I was lucky enough to have a body that fit society's beauty standard and had no big problems or significant "flaws." For these reasons, I think I was not too aware of my body as an "asset" or something people may look at, judge, or appreciate. "It was just my body, and I was okay with that."

However, she also felt pressure after gaining some weight, and when she found herself outside of society's standards, she started to hate her body and feel uncomfortable. As more women grow and age, they become more aware of the stereotypes and try to accept and love themselves more, which makes them feel less insecure.

In addition, the pressure to change is not only on women; brands may also suffer from the harsh competitive environment. For more clarification, Luna gave the example of Savage x Fenty (the lingerie brand by Rihanna), which used all models of different skin colors, sizes, ethnicities, and disabilities. The collection gained so much momentum that it led its famous competitor, Victoria's Secret (which has always been known for its strict rules about what

models should look like), almost to bankruptcy. So brands must always be aware of their competitors' activities and recognize their customers' needs.

Like Iranian women, Italian interviewees had different attitudes about if the attention given to gender equality movements by beauty brands on social media could change societal beliefs or not.

Luna, Alessandra, Nina, and Ester agreed that brand activities could influence social norms and overcome existing societal stereotypes, especially among the younger generation, who are more fans of social media. In addition, from some women's views, such as Ester's, the beauty industry is even responsible for the changing cultural norms and beauty standards we have today; however, it is essential that activities supporting gender rights and social movements be genuine and not just about selling more products.

In contrast, Camilla and Livia argued that brands can help but cannot change cultural standards. Brands can support and promote social changes after they have taken place in society. Camilla made an example of Barbie for more clarification; she explained that when the Barbie Company decided to produce a curvy doll, it enhanced the representation and spread awareness about the problem of beauty standards. Nevertheless, they could not change society's perspective, which is still fat-phobic nowadays.

Moreover, both Camilla and Livia provided another example of pink washing by the brands. They mentioned they could not trust the beauty brands because they can exist thanks to those insecurities and cultural norms that claim the first thing a woman should have is beauty. Beauty brands have to sell, so they need women to see some imperfections in themselves. Otherwise, they would go bankrupt. So even if they may indulge in some of these movements, they will always undermine them simultaneously.

Livia also puts more focus on Instagram performance. She thinks that because everything moves so quickly on social media, it is unlikely that a post or Instagram story can spark a conversation about more broad social activities. As a result, marketing and social movements should be separate.

The result is surprising when discussing the effects of brand activities on the buying behavior of Italian women. Among all participants, only two (Camilla and Ester) declared that they are impressed by brand attention to gender rights, which positively impacts their behavior.

Interestingly Camilla had the same experience with our case study brand, Espresso. She described that she started following its page a few years ago because she was looking for a brand that provides products with natural effects and would cover only a little. She was introduced to Espresso by one of the few influencers she was following. At first, she followed the brand and the founder to get to know the brand better, as well as looking at its site, vision, and mission, and after her investigations, she purchased the product. Nowadays, she is a fan of Espresso and recommends it whenever possible.

Camilla is an example of someone who is driven by her values and supports them every day as much as possible with every action she performs. For these people, it is significant that the brands they purchase from align with their values and beliefs and be socially responsible; so, by buying their products, they support the brands.

On the other hand, the rest of the participants believe that there are more essential factors when buying beauty products, such as adequate quality, a fair price, cruelty-free, and respecting workers' rights. Luna and Nina emphasized that they base their decisions on product features. However, Luna believes seeing a brand promote gender rights makes her feel better about that brand. Also, in her perspective, if a brand has more inclusivity and diversity in its beauty campaigns and ads, it has a wow factor. It increases the chance of customers purchasing the products (but it is not the main factor).

Alessandra and Livia have more strict views about the brand's activities supporting gender equality, thinking that beauty brands are only profiting from gender equality fights. In fact, who would they sell to if women and people stopped being concerned about being overweight and having body hair? They stressed that the brands' performances are usually not coherent. While they claim they care about women's rights and make campaigns promoting "women empowerment," they hire women and kids in a developing country because they can underpay and exploit them with no consequence. For example, Livia stated she avoids buying Wycon products since she knows a girl who used to work for the company, and they were exploiting her, so Wycon does not empower women. Thus, the second group feels that the support is only for selling more products and as a marketing strategy.

Lastly, another exciting and critical point that Livia mentioned was the existence of conservative people, a problem I did not consider until she talked about it. As she described, brands' strategy to pay attention to gender rights and use diverse models can sometimes

backfire. As has happened frequently in Italy, conservatives might begin avoiding certain brands because they have endorsed certain rights/campaigns (for example, talking about LGBTQ people). The problem is that the numbers of these people in Iran are much more than in Italy, so it is another vital factor that should be considered when analyzing the subject.

Regarding making a ranking among the four Italian brands analyzed in the last chapter from the interviewee's point of view, the surprising point is that, against Iranian women with many different ideas toward Iranian brands, all Italian women had a common opinion. These agreements and the same ideas helped me to conclude each brand's performance, while in the Iranian case, as the preferred brands were so diverse, it was impossible. The reason might be that Iranian brand pages do not possess a central and consistent theme for their activities, and users have to scroll a lot to find the general vision of the page, which makes them confused and tired.

In contrast, Italian brand pages have fixed and clear harmonies so that, with a glance, the audience gets the vibe and understands the approach. So Italian interviewees could give me a more accurate answer about their preferences with a quick look.

Interestingly, all the Italian participants believe that *Espresso* have had the best performance in empowering women's rights and changing beauty stereotypes. From their view, *Espresso*'s Instagram page is natural, simple, and authentic and represents daily life, which is very far from perfection.

Furthermore, audiences feel more confident after visiting the page since it has used more diverse influencers with unretouched tutorials and different models in terms of ethnicity, style, and colors. In a nutshell, *Espresso* has taken a side and even risked losing some customers who prefer to see the standard skinny white woman as a model of beauty products.

In their opinion, the second place belongs to *Mulac* because similar to *Espresso*, it offers much diversity in representations of gender and skin color and shows the reality. Nevertheless, one of the interviewees described that *Mulac*, to her, is the specific influencer product, and she would not buy it or trust the influencers' reviews. The vegan products of *Mulac* were another exciting characteristic that attracted participants' attention.

Lastly, *Deborah* and *Wycon* were the worst brands because, on their pages, all the models are female, white, and conventionally attractive. *Deborah* has a classical and old-style page

as if a beauty shop was turned into an Instagram profile. There is not much representation, neither in terms of gender nor body positivity.

Regarding Wycon, many interviewees mentioned that checking the profile makes users want to call a plastic surgeon! The content is boring; high-edited pictures aim at perfection, which is visible at first glance. It also uses images of the perfect women with tons of makeup and zero imperfections and has a very sophisticated and fake style.

To conclude, the concept of beauty is changing every day, and consequently, the expectations towards women are changing. A woman might be known as stunning in a period of her life and later considered unattractive since the trends have changed.

Today beauty standards have been internalized, and the perpetual advertisement is just a reminder of them; in particular, the effect is maximized through the several platforms we use, and we are constantly reminded of them. Also, the situation is even worse because belonging to those particular standards determines the person's value in a beauty-dominated society.

In order to reinforce women's empowerment and break the stereotypes, brands should use models who are more diverse in terms of skin color, size, and conventional/unconventional beauty. They must employ models with beauty marks such as freckles, acne scars, and crooked teeth so that anyone can recognize themselves in their advertisement and feel good about their appearance.

An important concept that many Italian participants mentioned was representation. They mostly believe that representations are vital and must be enhanced because it is always a win when a brand becomes more inclusive in beauty, shades, or body image. It is like communicating with customers the message that "I see you, and I know that you exist; we are also working for you, and you are part of our project."

After comparing the two countries' results, I believe Italian women are more confident and cautious in choosing brands that align with their values and do not use gender equality as a tool for marketing goals.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Gender equality movements are becoming increasingly prevalent in many nations worldwide as a sign of modern civilization, especially in developing countries with higher rankings in global gender gap reports.

Despite this, the influence these trends have had on companies' marketing plans has been very little investigated, especially in the beauty industry, while beauty brands play a critical role in reinforcing or lessening the sexist stereotypes in society since they interact more with women as their primary customers.

At the same time, the recent brand advocacy trend have had the potential to impact revenue and earnings, so companies are accepting social responsibility as a necessity to survive in the market. The emergence of femvertising advertisements in 2004 by the "Campaign for Real Beauty" of the Dove Company could prove the brand's concern for gender equality. As part of its mission to empower women and girl, femvertising challenges and deconstructs social norms that limit women's empowerment and restrict their fundamental rights. Also, social movements may receive more attention thanks to femvertising, which promotes discussion on important political and social topics.

In addition, nowadays, customers are more aware of brand activities and monitor their campaigns accurately thanks to the help of social media, especially platforms such as Instagram. Brands' Instagram accounts have evolved into a helpful platform where they can engage with their followers and communicate with consumers by creating posts that combine text and visual forms. Unlike paid media activities like advertising, with Instagram, brands can also reach big audiences at a small expense. They can also advertise their products innovatively, employing bloggers and sponsored content to run competitions and challenges.

Taken together and having analyzed the case studies and displayed the present research, we can affirm that in the beauty industry, gender equality movements, social media activities, and marketing strategies are three key factors that influence and are influenced by each other.

Considering the research questions and hypotheses mentioned in the introduction section, this chapter is going to investigate and answer each question and hypothesis according to the assessments and results obtained from the following sections:

1-Studying the previous articles existing on subjects of: "Feminism and recent gender equality movements," "the effect of gender equality trends on marketplace and advertisement," "social

media marketing and consumer behavior," "beauty industry and gender equality trends," and finally the "Mirror vs. Mold arguments."

2- Analyzing the Instagram page activities of four beauty brands from each country of Iran and Italy (as representatives of developed and developing nations) regarding their efforts in supporting gender rights and ruining beauty standards and stereotypical societal norms. The selected Iranian and Italian brands are (Come On, La' Farrerr, Genobiotic, MY), and (Wycon, Mulac, Deborah, and Espressoh) respectively.

3- Investigating the consequences of brand-supportive activities on female audiences in each country to discover how brand endeavors could change social norms and impact customers' buying behaviors. Therefore, an in-depth interview was conducted with six Iranian and Italian women from generations Y and Z.

Overall, according to the investigations, each research question will be answered, and the related hypotheses will be discussed below.

RQ #1: What are the changes and impacts that recent gender justice movements have had on marketing plans and ads for beauty brands?

(Hypothesis: Gender equality movements have significantly affected beauty brands' business plans and advertising strategies because customers expect the companies to be socially responsible.)

Due to the emergence of new gender equality trends and the increase in women's awareness, people of all genders, particularly women, are more sensitive to the messages conveyed from different sources and advertisements. They strongly express their disapproval and denounce the companies that violate women's rights and feed prejudices.

In contrast, they support and embrace brands that strengthen women's empowerment and promote gender equality. In a nutshell, today, people, as active buyers, expect a brand that, in addition to making a great product, tries to be socially responsible and adjusts its actions in a way that meets customers' expectations.

Besides, the pressure on the brand comes not only from the users' side but also from the competitive market, and the emergence of new competitors with diverse, innovative strategies complicates the business situation.

Thus, brands in different industries have had to change their strategies, controlling their published content to avoid stereotypes and launching various campaigns and ads to empower women and support gender justice.

In order to better fulfill their social responsibilities, brands have begun to modify their advertising strategies and provide gender-supportive content on social media. For example, they began using more diverse models of all races, skin colors, sizes, shapes, and ethnicities and included models from other genders, such as men and the LGBTQ community. Also, brands have tried to alter the concept of beauty by using models with natural faces and bodies and even skin flaws and diseases, such as psoriasis.

For example, diversity is what brought Savage X Fenty great success. Famous singer and celebrity Rihanna introduced the lingerie line Savage x Fenty, and the ads all included women with diverse skin tones, sizes, ethnicities, and disabilities. Therefore, its competitor, Victoria's Secret, which has traditionally been renowned for having stringent guidelines regarding what models should look like, was almost bankrupt and had to change and start using models of more varied backgrounds. It also stopped its annual fashion show, where Victoria's Secret's angels exhibited bedazzled bras and lacy underwear.

To stand out among the competitors, some brands started launching femvertising campaigns that only focus on women's empowerment to attract female attention, inspire change, and promote social awareness of women's rights. The campaigns "Campaign for Real Beauty" by Dove, "Shine Strong, Labels Against Women" by Pantene, and "Like A Girl" by Always are among the pioneering femvertising ads that captured engagement and gained popularity around the world.

Thus, the hypothesis is accepted according to the previous analyses and the results of our case studies. Because even after checking the brand pages, it is apparent they shifted their strategies and page theme. On Iranian pages, for example, the majority of the posts were only product shots or used only female models. However, now Iranian brands provide content about women empowerment and use male models, collaborate with beauty bloggers, and make more creative content to grab users' attention.)

RQ #2: Regarding the restrictions existing in developing countries compared to developed nations, what are the main marketing strategies that beauty brands in Iran and Italy have implemented on their Instagram accounts to support gender equality and promote awareness about women's empowerment? (According to the chosen brands)

(Hypothesis: In Iran, beauty brands face more challenges than their Italian counterparts if they want to present themselves as an advocate brand for women's rights. Nevertheless, compared to Italian brands, they have provided more creative and informative content to raise consciousness about women's empowerment on their Instagram pages (based on the chosen brands).

In Iran, depending on the platform for advertising the products, the constraints and dose of ad supervision differ. For example, national television has much stricter limitations for using female models. In contrast, brands have more freedom on social media, where the government monitors it much less. However, as a brand grows and attracts many followers, control increases, and the brand's activity faces more restraint than before. Some of the governmental restrictions that have more effects on social media advertising and create obstacles for beauty brands are mentioned below:

- 1- Hijab is compulsory, and there are tight regulations on how women must cover their heads and bodies.
- 2- Being recognized as an LGBTQ community member is a crime in Iran. So brands cannot hire them as models to increase their inclusivity.
- 3- Women should not make erotic gestures; even their physical movements should be kept to a bare minimum. For example, a video ad that shows a woman wearing lipstick is considered sexual content and is banned.

In order to overcome these impediments, brands prefer to advertise the products on their social media platforms, especially Instagram, the second most popular platform among Iranians. Because first, it has a lower cost than the high fee of TV ads. Secondly, they have much more freedom to use women without rigid regulations. After assessing the Instagram pages of Iranian case studies (beauty brands), some of the leading marketing strategies that they have employed to support gender equality movements are described as follows:

1. Launching various campaigns to raise women's awareness about their fundamental rights, which are disregarded in society. For example, Lafarrerr published a video on "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women" about domestic violence, which many Iranian women experience, to remind them that hiding the violence is not the way to fight it.
2. Running campaigns to help women define their strengths, increase their confidence and self-esteem, and believe in their capabilities. For example, the campaigns "Parvane sho or get butterfly" and "I love MYself" by MY Cosmetics invited the audiences to write a sentence that helped them

boost their confidence or a description of a feature they liked about themselves in the comment section.

3. Publishing creative challenges to support audiences financially. For example, Genobiotic ran a competition called "Geno Got Talent," "which asked all the individuals interested in being a beauty blogger or desiring to increase their visibility on Instagram as a blogger to send a video using one of the Genobiotic products and teaching a skincare routine. The brand also sent the participant free products and asked for no participation fee. It also provided educational videos and workshops for the attendees to help them increase their knowledge and be a professional beauty bloggers)

4- Huge collaboration with Beauty bloggers, male or female. Since it is harder for the brands to use a female model without hijab restrictions and because they cannot use LGBTQ models, many Iranian brands, including those in our case studies, have collaborated with male or female beauty bloggers and published sponsored posts. These posts' content is much closer to the reality of Iranian women and attracts their attention significantly. However, except for Genobiotic, which cooperated with an Iranian male beauty blogger, others only worked with females. The partnership with gay bloggers is still small because of strict, old-fashioned beliefs toward them and the existence of conservative users.

5. Providing content about protecting the environment and animals. For instance, Genobiotic made an innovative animation for its campaign, "Save Ralf," that informed people about animal testing and the suffering animals endure in laboratories during the experiments. Another example of a campaign focusing on environmental concern is the Come On, "No Plastic" campaign, which asked audiences that by collecting garbage from nature and sending a video of themselves; to receive a gift package.

6- Introducing successful Iranian women as the brand ambassadors (for example, using athlete women by Come on and Genobiotic)

On the other hand, the Italian brands could benefit significantly from activating in a developed country where no sign of stringent regulations is available against Iran. However, after analyzing the case studies of each brand, the hypothesis of this question is accepted because, despite my expectations, Italian beauty brands launched fewer campaigns to support gender equality and improve women's empowerment.

Nevertheless, according to the interviewees' ideas, Espresso was the most successful brand because its central theme and vision represent simplicity, diversity, and being natural and genuine.

Among other brands, only Mulac and wycon ran a few numbers of campaigns to empower women's confidence and increase their sense of self-worth ("Do not be shy to shine." By Mulac and "No one excluded" by Wycon).

Finally, two crucial differences between Italian and Iranian brands are that the Italian pages include more diversity in terms of color, race, and ethnicity. Moreover, the Iranian pages do not contain a central fixed theme compared to Italian brands. To analyze them, a user must search the content accurately to find the main message.

RQ #3: Does the attention paid to social movements and gender rights by beauty brands on their social media platforms (Instagram) have the potential to influence cultural norms and societal views on what defines beauty standards?

(Hypothesis: By using social media and providing content about gender rights, women's empowerment, and talking about females' struggles in society, beauty brands could find the power to change social norms and traditional beliefs.)

As explained in Chapter 3, Instagram is among the most popular platforms among Iranians and Italians. The reported data proves the importance of Instagram as a virtual space where brands can interact with their target market and communicate messages.

Moreover, my interviews illustrate that beauty products (cosmetics or skin care) have become part of women's routines, as all the participants mentioned using the products daily.

Altogether, women, especially teenagers who might feel more insecure about their appearances and are big fans of Instagram, are exposed to different ads and content during the day, even if they want to resist watching them. Each of these contents sends them a different message, from encouraging them to purchase new products to creating a depressing and stressful attitude that they do not look good enough and must conform to traditional beauty standards to be accepted by society.

Therefore, all of these posts and stories influence the user's subconscious mind and, by putting pressure on them, make them feel less confident and more anxious. So brands should start changing beauty standards by including various kinds of people, from different colors, sizes, and races, to models with flaws like freckles, acne, scars, crooked teeth, and even disabled ones, and emphasize that all of them are beautiful. So in this way, no one feels excluded, and all users can identify themselves in the ads and feel good about their looks.

Another vital change brands could make with their activities is changing people's beliefs and cultural norms. The most common experience that most interviewees had was their attitude change toward male and gay beauty bloggers. They mentioned (especially the Iranian participants) that after watching the videos in which men or gay people did makeup and advertising for the brands, their approach gradually changed, and now they do not believe anymore that beauty products belong to women only. They also encourage their male friends or family to use beauty products to protect their skin. The rapid growth of male and gay beauty bloggers in Iran and Italy also proves that people are now more open-minded than before.

Therefore, according to the outcomes of interviews and previous research, brands can change people's norms, and the hypothesis is accepted. Even some might make the brand responsible for these changes. However, the critical point is that to make social beliefs change, brands should provide content about gender equality issues constantly and consistently. A brief mention of gender-related concerns will not impact people's opinions; they may accept it now but forget it afterward. Thus, brands should not only touch the subject and leave the audience alone, but they must talk about it always and explain it thoroughly during that period.

RQ#4: To what extent do Instagram users care about the responsibility of a brand in promoting gender rights and breaking stereotypes, and how much do brand activities affect buying behavior?

(Hypothesis: while purchasing beauty products, the priority choice of all Iranian and Italian women is to buy from beauty brands who care about gender equality and provide content to inspire change to support them as a buyer, encourage them to provide more content related to gender empowerment and help them grow.)

According to the study, attitudes have a significant role in predicting customer behavior. A positive attitude can stimulate purchasing interest, and consumer attitudes may vary quickly based on behavior, motivation, demography, the sales environment, and technological advancement (Nosita and Lestari, 2019).

Therefore, beauty brands make an effort on social media platforms to create a positive attitude in users' minds. So there can be recalled and chosen by customers when compared with other brands. One way to make this effect happen and attract female attention is to show them that they care about gender rights and their problems by providing content about women's empowerment.

However, according to the interview results, brands could not act successfully. The hypothesis is rejected because many interviewees (especially Italians) mentioned that they could not trust brands because the beauty industry is based on consumerism and gives women the feeling that they do not look good enough, so they have to buy more cosmetics products to hide their flaws. In fact, who would they sell to if women stopped being concerned about their appearance?

Some participants even mentioned that after checking brands' pages, they could easily find the lack of coherency in their content. For example, a brand just mentioned motivational phrases in some posts, such as "believe in yourself" or "all women are beautiful," but at the same time, it only used a white, skinny blonde model on a retouched picture. So, they believe the beauty brands' activities are only for show-offs and selling more products.

Lastly, when purchasing beauty products, acceptable quality, a reasonable price, cruelty-free, and protecting workers' rights were more important concerns for most participants. So if beauty brands want to be recognized as an advocate brand in gender rights, they must consider all factors together. Everything a brand does nowadays affects its reputation and image. In the case of beauty brands, in particular, they speak with a specific target audience made up primarily of women, so the attention given to gender rights is even more critical. However, they have to be very careful with the kind of attention they decide to give and have to convey a special message that will leave no space for doubts or discrimination.

From the conducted analysis, we can see how all these companies aim to be socially responsible while all are aware of the challenges and limitations.

However, it is easier to talk about specific issues in some countries (generally in the Western hemisphere) than in others. For example, a brand that promotes gender rights in a country where those are compromised and not respected takes a significant step, and it should be praised. So while comparing brands' performances, it is essential to determine where the brand is activating. Table 5.1 below has been offered as a summary to provide a general overview of the differences and similarities between the performances of Italian and Iranian brands (case studies) in supporting gender equality movements on their Instagram pages.

The last doubt for further investigations is to analyze the role of conservative people in society and their influence on brand activities if brands aim to challenge stereotypes (especially in Iran, which has a more religious population). Do brands risk losing profit and reputation to change social norms and advocate for gender equality?

Factors	Explanation	Similarity or difference
Diversity	Italian brands have been more successful in using models from different backgrounds, races, colors, sizes, and so on. They also used models with natural faces.	Difference
Collaborating with beauty bloggers	Both brand groups have collaborated with different beauty bloggers. However, the Iranian brands worked only with Female bloggers. While Italian include male and Gay beauty bloggers on the pages.	Similarity
Providing content about women's empowerment	Iranian brands provided much more campaigns to support gender empowerment and inspire change.	Difference
Preventing using sexist stereotypes	Both brand groups used sexist stereotypes in their content, making their pages incoherent.	Similarity
Attention to environmental concerns and animal testing	Italian brands provided no campaign to promote environmental concerns and the importance of buying cruelty-free products (although some of them produce cruelty-free products)	Difference
Type of products advertised	Italian brands primarily focus on cosmetics, while Iranian promote skin care products.	Difference
Using male models	Iranian brands employed much more male models, while Italian primarily collaborate with them on their pages as beauty bloggers.	Difference
Possessing a cohesive page in terms of content	Italian brand pages have a fixed and well-structured theme which helps the users understand the primary strategy of the brand easily.	Difference

Table5.1. the differences and similarities between Italian and Iranian beauty brands

Appendix

Iranian woman Interviews

1-Interview conducted Marjan 26-Year Old Nurse and Actress from Mashhad

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Marjan	My name is Marjan, I am 26 years old, and I work as a nurse and theater actress in Mashhad. I am single and have a bachelor's degree in nursing.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Marjan	I use skin care products daily, and I also apply makeup for events where the beauty of my appearance is important to me.
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Marjan	I follow the pages of my favorite bloggers every day and spend a lot of time on social media, especially Instagram.
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Marjan	I follow them daily and continuously, but I only follow the bloggers and influencers that align with my preferences and social opinions. Especially in the current situation in Iran, I follow the influencers who support the recent women's movement (woman, life, freedom) and express their opinions bravely.
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Marjan	It has no importance to me because in Iran, brands cannot align with social trends, and they have a lot of restrictions and censorship, even in advertising. So they have to pay a high fee for supporting the trends, so I do not contemplate this factor when choosing a product.
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?

Marjan	Yes, a lot. Many times I feel that I am so ugly and that my face and body do not look good enough. Also, I thought about having the surgery, but I did not because I thought it was risky.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Marjan	I feel many painful and depressing emotions. The most important one is that maybe I am not a good woman and cannot be admired in society because I am not as beautiful as the other women, and I cannot spend as much time and money as they can to make myself reach the beauty standards. I also feel sick because of wrinkles and boils on my skin or because I do not have the ideal nose or face shape like models. These feelings hurt me a lot and decreased my confidence.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Marjan	Yes, the first time I saw that Gucci used a model with a natural face and a big nose, I had a strange feeling. Because I mostly saw beautiful, white, blond models with no flaws on their faces or bodies (according to beauty standards). So I always thought I did not deserve to wear the products of such brands because I did not look like the models, and my face, hair, and color were so different. After some months, I saw an advertisement for a well-known brand (I need to remember the name) that used a model with psoriasis. So, although Psoriasis is a disease, suddenly, at that moment, I thought that she was so beautiful, and this view changed my perspective about the concept of beauty that even with flaws, women can be Georges. About the male beauty bloggers, I remember once I saw a video in which a famous gay beauty blogger was doing makeup. I had a friend who was gay and enjoyed wearing makeup and doing his nail, but he always felt embarrassed and guilty since society did not accept him and put pressure on him to act like a real man. Therefore, when I faced the video, I sent it to him immediately, and after watching that, he felt better and more confident to accept himself.
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Marjan	Yes, we as women are continuously exposed to advertisements during the day, and even if we want to resist watching them, our minds start modeling them. For example, when you always see a white blond woman as a model,

	unconsciously, the black woman does not look beautiful to you. In my opinion, all gender activities and feminists should start the change from media and advertisement.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Marjan	Yes, when a brand can change my beliefs and attitudes and turn me into a better person, I prefer to buy that brand, even if it does not have the best quality.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Marjan	Many people agree or disagree with each movement, so I understand that the brand cannot show orientation directly to the movements. However, if a brand decides to take the risk and support gender rights, its value increases significantly to me, and I even advertise for the brand to enhance its image.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Marjan	The recurring trend has undergone a tremendous change and should continue. The brand should use women of different sizes, colors, and natural faces in their billboards and ads. Also, their ads must include men with different styles and disabled children. It will increase the confidence of all kinds of people, and they will be more kind to each other.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: COME' ON, LA' FARRERR, GENOBIOTIC and MY (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Marjan	I know all of them but do not follow them on Instagram. Come On, and MY are not such a professional brand. Their products can be found everywhere, not just in special shops and pharmacies. Furthermore, La Farrer provides high-quality products at a high price, and I have received numerous positive comments from my friends.
Author	9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Come On, La Farrerr, Genobiotic and MY (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check): What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment?
Marjan	I found a post on the Come On page where the brand interviewed some female soccer players and used them as brand ambassadors. Watching these videos

	<p>was exciting to me. Moreover, I admire the video about caring for the environment by collecting garbage from forests and the challenge to encourage people.</p> <p>The brand "La Farrerr" used a hashtag "not to continue the stereotypes in the stories," but I feel it is more for marketing and advertising functions than concerning gender rights. Because when you check the brand page, it uses a model with beauty standards and is strictly against this hashtag. Although the products of La Farreerr are of high quality, I have a personal connection with the brand because I am concerned about women.</p> <p>What I liked about Genobiotic is using the female athlete in the ads. Especially the woman doing sports, wear the normal Hijab that is common in my country, not the Hijab of models we can see in TV ads that are not similar to reality.</p> <p>About MY, it has used models with perfectly high standards, like the other brand. I also noticed some videos in which Iranian actresses talk about women's capabilities and progress. However, as an actress, I did not like that because its content was fake and short and did not help me increase my knowledge about the subject. The brand could talk about more exciting issues.</p>
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Marjan	It was mostly the same feeling I had before. The models are so beautiful and look European, not Asian. Nonetheless, I felt that the brands have tried to break the stereotypes and follow the gender equality movements, but I think their activities were not enough at all.
Author	11- -Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Marjan	<p>No, ridiculously, in Iran, most advertisements on social media, TV, the cinema, or other channels use models that define a wealthy Persian woman living in the capital. No models with different accents, faces, or costumes can be found in the ads. They have no place and are excluded! Iran comprises different ethnic groups, each with its own culture, language, and traditions.</p> <p>An innovative and beautiful frame for the ads could be using a Baloch or Kurdish woman with her unique dress while using Iranian beauty products.</p> <p>Finally, there is nothing about the ads related to the body or hair because of the forced hijab and Persian culture, which are against showing the body of women.</p>
Author	12- -Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?

Marjan	Among the Iranian brands you introduced, no one did a great activity that I mentioned without thinking. Nevertheless, if I want to tell you which one I prefer, I say, Come On, Geno biotic, La Farrerr, and MY.
Author	13- Can I ask you what do you mean and Expect from a fantastic activity from these brands?
Marjan	As I explained, using women of other races and ethnicities and respecting them in the ads. The brand should be responsible and representative of all the country's people. I think our brands only try to look prestigious and luxurious and, at the same time, provide content for gender empowerment, but they do not know the principles of it; it is just for show-off.

**2-Interview conducted Sanaz
36-Year Old, Employee from Rasht**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Sanaz	I am 36 years old and work as an employee in a private marketing firm in Rasht, Iran's northern city. I have a master's degree, and I am single.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Sanaz	I use them daily.
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Sanaz	Daily
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Sanaz	I am not a big fan of them, so Occasionally.
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Sanaz	It is Important to me.
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?

Sanaz	Yes, I am not good enough and cannot be accepted by others.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Sanaz	I feel that I have very little information about beauty products and My behavior and makeup do not meet the beauty standards they offer in the pages.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Sanaz	Yes, for example, I could not accept that men use beauty products, even skincare or cosmetics. However, now, after watching many beauty ads in which men are models, my opinion has changed. Now it is so typical that y male friends sometimes ask me to suggest skin care products. What is interesting to me is that now I know my last opinion was so strict and unreasonable, and I ask myself why I was so narrow-minded.
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Sanaz	Yes, exactly the same as what I explained about male beauty bloggers who can change the social belief that men should not wear makeup. So attention to these subjects can significantly influence people's opinions.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Sanaz	Yes, 100%. For example, during the last few years, I have tried to use cruelty-free brands that care about animals and the environment, and I introduced them to my friends and family. For example, once I informed my friends that I knew cared about this issue to not use L'Oréal products.
Author	-As you care about cruelty free products, I have one more question about this subject. If you want to buy a product among the following factors which one is more important to you? Price, Quality, Vegan and attention to gender empowerments and social movements
Sanaz	For me, first and foremost is cruelty-free, followed by quality and attention to gender issues, and finally, price.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?

Sanaz	I believe the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media can affect their reputation. How they handle the situation can either lead to increased public support and people viewing them as more progressive, or it could lead to a public backlash and damage to their reputation. So, they need to be aware of how they approach such topics.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Sanaz	The beauty industry has an excellent opportunity to use social media to promote positive body image and self-confidence by creating meaningful campaigns that are thought-provoking and inspiring. Companies can also challenge harmful stereotypes, creating content that shows the beauty in all people and celebrates diversity. It can be done through influencer collaborations and creating targeted content that reaches various audiences. Additionally, companies can use a hashtag or movement to promote these messages and engage with their consumers directly on their platforms.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: COME' ON, LA' FARRERR, GENOBIOTIC and MY (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Sanaz	I have used Come On (sometimes) and MY (very often), and I follow them on Instagram.
Author	9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Come On, La Farrerr, Genobiotic and MY (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check): What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment?
Sanaz	I checked all of them. I like the Genobiotic page because, despite other pages, it includes male models and is not 100% feminine. We can see male models or doctors. It means equality to me that a brand also encourages men to use its products. Why does a brand always have to talk about only women?
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Sanaz	I feel their content is so feminine and does not reflect the reality of Iranian women.
Author	11- -Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Sanaz	No, I think they have the same performances and use the same models.
Author	12- -Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?

Sanaz	Based on all the media they shared, I think Genobiotic performs better regarding gender equality. Because at least they used male participants in the advertisements and didactic context, as I explained. For example, my cousin is working at mine, and his hand needs protection because of his hard work. I suggested he use moisture cream and sunscreen, but he said no because he thought beauty products were only for women. Nevertheless, when I explained to him that these products are for all genders and help him to care for his skin, he accepted, and now he uses those products for his skincare routine. To conclude, beauty products should pay more attention to men's products.
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**3-Interview conducted Ailin
17-Year Old Student from Tehran**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Ailin	My name is Ailin, and I am 17 yeras old. I am a student and live in Tehran.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Ailin	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Ailin	A few times per week
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Ailin	Regularly
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Ailin	It is Essential to me
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?

Ailin	Sometimes Yes, because beauty brands' models always have soft and bright skin. I'm sure they spend hours applying make-up and Photoshopping their photos. So although I know their images are photoshopped, and they had the best photographers, I still feel bad about myself. And the other point is that when I saw that picture gaining many likes and comments, I thought people and society liked her face and beauty. I should look like her to be loved and gorgeous.
Author	-Thus, in your opinion, can even the number of Instagram likes on a beauty blogger's post prove that they are more beautiful and prestigious?
Ailin	Yes, because I think people like Instagram content and posts that they love. However, I consider that they might be fake numbers.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Ailin	I usually compare myself with models or beauty bloggers. It also depends on the brand or beauty blogger. For example, many bloggers ask their followers to do sports if they do not like their bodies; instead of saying that you have to love your body, they claim that beauty is tough to access. In this case, I put too much pressure on myself to be fit and look like a model, which causes me to lose confidence. However, others say that you have to love yourself no matter how you look, and I feel more confident after watching their videos. Fortunately, during the last years, the number of the second group is increasing.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Ailin	Yes, for example, before, I thought that only women had the right to do makeup, but now there is no limitation on this, and men can also do makeup. However, many people might say they are okay with men doing makeup. Even when male beauty bloggers post content, they receive encouraging and friendly comments. But this behavior only belongs to social media. Because in the street, you know that people act very badly with them (like looking at them badly), and I feel their acts are paradoxical.
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Ailin	Yes, if they stop putting pressure on girls to look beautiful and fit and encourage them to love their face and body.

	<p>Also, once, I found a video where a rabbit talked about testing beauty products on animals. After I paid more attention to cruelty-free products, they became essential to me. The video was very impressive because I felt guilty about not knowing that even a simple product that I used to get more beautiful could hurt animals severely.</p> <p>Moreover, women can overcome the taboo when brands post content about feminine subjects like menstruation. Furthermore, the brands' target audiences include both men and women. So they will be more aware of the women's struggles when they get their period and change their old opinion.</p>
Author	-So, is being cruelty-free your priority when purchasing the products?
Ailin	Yes, now it is a must for me.
Author	- (I showed her the video of Genobiotic about "Save Ralf") The video you watched is this one? If Yes, so you did not know that Genobiotic made this video?
Ailin	Oh yes, precisely this video! No, I ignored who made this video. It got viral, and I just checked the content.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Ailin	Yes, I might do that because when a brand shows attention to women's issues, it is a sign that it values the buyers, who are primarily women, which is essential to me.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Ailin	Yes, because in this case, we suggest them to our friends, and the brand gains more popularity than before.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Ailin	They should share the realities in their advertisements and posts. For example, if the brand advertises a foundation cream, do not use Photoshop after the model has applied makeup. Also, the brand should cooperate with male beauty bloggers like Shahin because if people see this content more, it will be normal for them to see a man doing makeup.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: COME' ON, LA' FARRERR, GENOBIOTIC and MY (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)

Ailin	I have used the products of Come On and MY. Come On products were terrible because my skin hurt after using them, and I found boils. Since I was outraged, I blocked the brand's Instagram page. MY was good, and I follow it on Instagram. I do not follow the other pages on Instagram.
Author	9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Come On, La Farrerr, Genobiotic and MY (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check): What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment?
Ailin	From my point of view, MY has the best page because most of the content is about women, and it cares a lot about them.
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Ailin	I have not had a special feeling. Some of the brands used photoshopped images that I did not like.
Author	11- -Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Ailin	Yes, all the models were skinny, white, and beautiful. I could not find diversity.
Author	12- -Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Ailin	I like foreign brands like Fenty Beauty and Tarte more because I often see in their stories that men do makeup. MY and La Farrerr Pages are my favorites of these four brands. Because MY offers high-quality products without animal testing, its page discusses women's empowerment.

**4-Interview conducted Parnia
30-Year Old, Art Curator from Tehran**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Parnia	My name is Parnia. I'm 30 years old. I'm single, and I live in Tehran. I'm an art curator; meanwhile, I am studying for my second bachelor's.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Parnia	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services?

	a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Parnia	A few times per week
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Parnia	Occasionally
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Parnia	Essential
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Parnia	Yes, I have. Sometimes society, friends, and family try to persuade me to do some beauty surgery to be more like "beauty standards." It happened that I felt terrible about my body. But rarely
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Parnia	Mostly I feel they are fake or at least exaggerated. To get to know me better, I have a makeup diploma and have worked as a makeup artist for a few months. So I love to do makeup, and I follow the cosmetics industry. I check out products on Instagram and do searches about them, but at the same time, I am a neutral person and am not significantly affected by their ads. I only focus on the products and their explanations and do not get impressed by the ads very much.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Parnia	About beauty bloggers, No, but I think it's the correct thing to use male or gay beauty bloggers, and the brands could even start collaborating with them sooner. From my point of view, the campaigns I have seen now look fake because I might be so rigid, but the beauty industry is based on consumerism and even harms the environment. However, I have also understood a change in how foreign beauty brands decreased the use of unrecyclable packaging to protect the environment; this was an exciting act by them.

Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Parnia	Generally Yes. In my opinion, besides the content that the brand or beauty blogger publishes related to gender equality, the engagement and conversation created in the comments among people with different attitudes are more valuable and informative. When I find these posts, I usually check the comments and read the people's ideas.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Parnia	Not always because sometimes, women's rights and related subjects are used by brands as a tool to show off. The same situation happened and led to "greenwashing" for many brands.
Author	-Could you please explain to me why do you believe that they are show off?
Parnia	<p>I believe this because their activities to support women are sometimes exaggerated. For example, during the last few years, we have seen that the brand might use a fat woman as a model in their ads. I do not have a problem with plus-size women, and even I think they are gorgeous, but we know that being oversized and fat hurts the body and health of the person. So through advertising and delivering the message that even being very fat is okay, people may not care about their health anymore, while their weight may lead to many diseases.</p> <p>Also, when the brands try to deliver the message that all people are beautiful, It is going to be hard to talk against these issues. For example, about fat people, a person might be criticized for spreading hate and supporting fat Phobia while she is just saying her idea.</p> <p>The other reason that I believe their campaign might be to show off is that they see their competitors actively supporting gender rights and feel the threat that they will lose customers if they do not follow the same structure. So, gender rights are not essential for them; they want to keep their market share and show something.</p>
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Parnia	Yes, but for me, buying cruelty-free products with high-quality products, professional branding and advertisements, and a simple package is a priority.

	I think it is not acceptable if a brand produces products without good quality and at the same time talks about gender right. Basic principles like quality are more important.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Parnia	To illustrate the reality of the body and beauty of all kinds of women.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: COME' ON, LA' FARRERR, GENOBIOTIC and MY (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Parnia	I know the brands, but I do not follow them on Instagram.
Author	9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Come On, La Farrerr, Genobiotic and MY (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check): What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment?
Parnia	I like the packaging of LA Farrerr, and I just heard about the excellent quality of some products. But I haven't noticed anything about promoting gender improvement.
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Parnia	I have not feel anything special.
Author	11- -Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Parnia	The way female models look in photos of MY cosmetics is more natural and alive. It used many colors, models, and funny content, not just products. The page encouraged me to scroll down and check out other products.
Author	12- -Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Parnia	Honestly, all of them are equally unsuccessful. I just saw an advertising campaign by beauty bloggers. And that's how I recognize the brands, not because of any distinguishing features or branding. Moreover, the content of the brands like Come On, which mostly post product shots with the same colors, could be more exciting and valuable. The feeling you receive from the brand and how it engages with the audience is more practical.

**5-Interview conducted with Romina
24-Year Old University Student from Mashhad**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Romina	I am Romina, 24 years old. I am studying for my bachelor's in business and live in Mashhad.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Romina	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Romina	A few times per week
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Romina	Regularly
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Romina	Important
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Romina	Yes, I have. I used to feel negative about myself when I was a teenager and spent time on Instagram more often. As I changed my lifestyle (for example, spending less time on social media to choosing the right pages, boosting my self-esteem growing up, and experiencing that nobody is perfect), my perspective has been completely changed.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Romina	Sometimes their videos give me the feeling that I need more beauty products to look beautiful, even if I didn't need them before!

Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Romina	Well, of course, yes. For the first time, it was disgusting for me because of the stereotypes, but after some time, watching more of these videos changed the way of my thoughts. I believe that makeup is an art, and art knows no gender. Additionally, protecting animal rights campaigns that are trying to raise people's awareness. I realized after watching a makeup tutorial that some beauty brands are using and torturing animals for clinical testing. After that, I decided to buy beauty products that do not have animal testing.
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Romina	Although this change does not happen in a day, society is ready for it. Since everyone would be happier with this alternative and be friends with their bodies. On the other hand, people use the majority of their time on social media. Therefore we should consider the influence of social Media's influence.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Romina	For sure, because when a brand decides to move with society's alternative and understand how to survive in this way, I know and respect my needs as a user, so it's not only about manufacturing a product.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Romina	Absolutly if you take a look to brands like Victoria Secret, their social , movement regarding the way of choosing models ,help them to do not go on a bankrupcy.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Romina	Show natural bodies in social media for example by do not photoshoping everything artificially. Also using normal people for ads not just skinny models.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: COME' ON, LA' FARRERR, GENOBIOTIC and MY (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)

Romina	Since I used to work as a skincare specialist, I know them quite a lot. Yes I bought some of them. But do not follow them on Instagram, because the performance of their social media pages are weak and not attractive to me.
Author	9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Come On, La Farrerr, Genobiotic and MY (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check): What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment?
Romina	Come On and Genobiotic were the only ones which were using also successful women in the last years, instead of employing only pretty models.
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Romina	Nothing special They are not attractive in comparison to foreign brands
Author	11 -Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Romina	Yes ,for example although Come On is trying to change the sales policy,it has a special line for men products which is useless becuse skin is skin doesnt matter the gender.I think there is no need to assign a specific line for men and make separation between genders, instead brands should try to make the products unisex.
Author	12- -Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Romina	Come On and Genobiotic, because with a quick look on their instagram you will get the sales change policy.they are using succseful women for their ads instead of using preety ladies.

**6-Interview conducted with Hoda
32-Year Old Sales Manager from Bushehr**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Hoda	I'm 32 years old, and currently, I'm studying for my MA. I am originally from Bushehr, a small city in the south of Iran, but I immigrated to Tehran to continue my Master's degree. I worked as a sales manager in marketing agencies, but now I'm unemployed.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never

Hoda	I use skincare care products daily, but I use makeup only occasionally (if I had to choose a box, I'd say a few times per month).
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Hoda	Daily, I follow brands. I like to keep up with new product announcements, discounts, and instructions and also learn about others' experiences with their products and customer service.
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Hoda	Rarely, I prefer to follow skincare doctors since I'm interested in learning how products and specific ingredients work to make better choices based on my needs. But if I find a product, I search for reviews done by beauty bloggers.
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Hoda	Important, I usually care about this and prefer to buy cruelty-free products since I'm vegan, but sometimes I overlook this in favor of quality.
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Hoda	Yes, it's inevitable. Especially when I was younger, I rarely saw someone with a curvy body or olive complexion, so it wasn't very easy to identify with ads or find something that matched my features based on them. Back then, I followed Jennifer Lopez's style and makeup since she was one of the few people in entertainment with a darker complexion and curvy body.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Hoda	Honestly, most of the time, I realize I won't follow that tutorial anyway, and I am definitely not their target audience. But I usually check the comment section since you typically find more honest reviews.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Hoda	Yes, this is one of the positive outcomes of social media platforms. You will be exposed to more diversity (compared to what you would experience in

	everyday life) and explore your personal ideas about it. You will also see them more as a person and not just a photo in an ad. Also, another interesting point to me is that I have understood male beauty bloggers' points of view about the make and how they feel about it (because they talked during the video, also). This has helped me to gain a deeper understanding of their needs and opinions when I listen to them.
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Hoda	Yes, but not for those who are already aware of these movements, mainly for those who were not exposed to them. Although, I think if people do not dig deeper into these subjects, these contents would only lead to superficial awareness and misguided knowledge.
Author	-Can you explain more what do you mean by misguided knowledge?
Hoda	Yes, I mean that because the advertisement duration is short, if its content only touches on the subject and does not dig deeper and explain it, then people gain uncompleted knowledge and pretend that they care about gender equality and start to say sentences like "Do not judge each other". They might support the movement on social media or in appearance. Still, in their daily lives or when facing real challenges, they act differently since they do not have more information about the subject. So if a brand tries to influence social norms positively, it should be profoundly and continuously active in describing the subject.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Hoda	Yes, although I expect an acceptable quality as well. Otherwise, it feels like they are fishing for women's approval without offering them a quality product, which is worse than a brand not promoting such concepts.
Author	-So while purchasing products, which of following factors are most significant for you respectively? Price, Quality, Cruelty-free, Attention to gender empowerment by the brand
Hoda	Quality is first and foremost, followed by price, cruelty-free, and attention to gender empowerment. However, I try to find vegan products and then make a comparison between them.
Author	-Can I ask you why the factor of attention to gender rights by the brand is your last priority?

Hoda	Because beauty brands are misusing women to increase their sales. Imagine that, compared to men, women have to pay a significant salary for cosmetic and beauty products when they might not need them. Also, we know that men's wages are usually higher than women's, and they do not have these products on their shopping lists because society does not expect them to do makeup and look perfect. So women should be aware of this matter, and just because doing makeup to look beautiful is a norm in our society, they should not spend most of their money to give up on the standard.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Hoda	Yes, it does. Nowadays, people are aware of their power as consumers. They don't only purchase the product itself but are conscious that they're supporting a brand with certain beliefs and values, so they prefer to spend their money on something they believe in.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Hoda	People are constantly viewing and consuming content, mostly on social media. Spreading the right message on these platforms would help the younger generation have a better relationship with their body image.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: COME' ON, LA' FARRERR, GENOBIOTIC and MY (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Hoda	I'm familiar with Come'On, La' Farrerr and MY. I used their products but I am not following their social media.
Author	9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Come On, La Farrerr, Genobiotic and MY (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check): What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment?
Hoda	While they are doing a great job, they are still cautious with the images they use (women with makeup and/or retouched faces). The messages seem general; they do not represent average Iranian women or reflect their struggles. Instead, the focus is on selecting beautiful or successful women. While it is good to encourage women to achieve more, it is crucial to help them accept and love who they are now. For I Come On' is very interesting since it is also cruelty-free. It means they are genuinely committed to the values they promote and actively show this commitment through their products and campaigns.

	The message I received from La Farrerr is that although it touched on some subjects about gender equality (for example, social responsibility highlight), It is still focused on offering a feminine luxury brand image for beautiful women. The content conflict with each other. Finally, now in Iran, we are experiencing a particular situation with women, and protests are recruiting, but no Iranian women have talked about this issue which is a weakness.
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Hoda	I feel the ads are fake and to show off.
Author	11- -Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Hoda	Yes, I noticed they don't exist. Most probably due to political reasons.
Author	12- -Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Hoda	<p>MY is doing better. While the brand is casting successful women, including many actresses and female athletes, they still manage to represent more diversity by selecting women from different ages and ethnicities. By representing successful women (and not necessarily more beautiful women or models), they aimed to empower women to follow their dreams and goals, which is a perfect angle. Since this brand is accessible to anyone with any financial state, so in a way, this might inspire women to rise from their current status.</p> <p>I think the image they show of Iranian women is not the reality. For example, on the Genobiotic page, I saw a video of a woman doing sports with a hijab, but now in the current situation in Iran that women fight against forced hijab; this is not the reality. The image theta brand show of women is limited to a particular level of society.</p> <p>Besides emphasizing and discussing gender equality, brands should work on offering a high-quality product at a fair price. Otherwise, the former is just a tool to sell the products.</p>

Italian woman Interviews

**1-Interview conducted with Luna
24-Year Old Student from Venice**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
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Luna	Hi! I'm Luna, I'm 24 years old, and I am a student pursuing a Master's Degree in Management at Ca'Foscari. I am in a relationship at the moment, and I am living in Venice.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Luna	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Luna	Daily
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Luna	Regularly (I follow influencers but not many beauty bloggers)
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
	Important
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Luna	I have felt pressure to conform to beauty standards my whole life, and advertisements featuring models have been one of the main reasons. I grew up in the early 2000s when the “heroin chic” look was a thing, models were sickly skinny, and wearing a shirt size M meant you were “fat.” As a curvy girl, this impacted how I view myself and my sense of self-worth. Moreover, ever-changing trends in beauty standards make it even more difficult for people – especially women – to feel good and confident in their skin: One moment, we’re told we need to be skinny. A minute later, you have to be “slim thick,” and then they tell you that big, doe eyes are mesmerizing, but a minute later, you *have* to have almond eyes because they are more fascinating.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Luna	I generally feel like I have to buy everything I see and start “taking better care” of myself. Sometimes “taking care” means doing something nice for myself and

	trying to feel more at ease in my skin. Sometimes, I need to buy everything I saw in a tutorial because I want to look like the person/celebrity who made the tutorial, which makes me dread how I look even more.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Luna	No, I don't think it ever consciously changed my attitude toward a brand. I think there should be more inclusivity and diversity in beauty campaigns and ads, but I take it as a given (I take it for granted) and not as a "wow" factor that would make me more likely to buy a product.
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Luna	This newfound attention could help shape people's minds around beauty and body image, especially young people. In a world made up of media, representation is the key to feeling good in your own skin. Also, there are already testimonies of this phenomenon, for example, when Savage x Fenty (the lingerie brand by Rihanna) was launched. Its campaigns all featured models of different skin colors, sizes, ethnicities, disabilities, etc., which led Victoria's Secret (which has always been known for its strict rules about what models should look like) almost to bankruptcy. As a result, the brand had to adapt and began to hire more diverse models.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Luna	No, it does not make me more likely to purchase their products. I base my decisions on product features, such as quality and price. But I do pay more attention online to content posted by brands that challenge stereotypes on social media, which may make it more likely for me to recall the brands and recognize them at the store.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Luna	I do think so. As in the example I mentioned above, diversity brought Savage X Fenty to success (other than the fact that it was made by Rihanna, of course). People, especially young people, nowadays pay much attention to how involved a brand is in shaping the world to be a better place and how the brand makes a person feel. If a brand makes me feel bad about my body (e.g.,

	Victoria's Secret), it is going to make me hold a bad reputation towards the brand.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Luna	I believe the beauty industry should become more inclusive, so brands should use models who are more diverse in terms of skin color, size, conventional/unconventional beauty, and models who have beauty marks such as freckles, scars, acne scars, crooked teeth, etc. so that anyone can recognize themselves in their advertisement and feel good about their appearance. Representation matters.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Luna	I know the brands Wycon, Deborah, and Espresso, and I have never heard of Mulac. I have bought from Deborah before. I do not follow any of their Instagram page.
Author	9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check): What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment?
Luna	Mulac and Espresso try to be more inclusive than the other two brands. They use more diverse influencers who make their own unretouched tutorials and then post their videos. On their pages, I see men and women, white people and people of color, conventionally attractive people, and unconventionally attractive people. Wycon and Deborah, on the other hand, are very repetitive in their use of hired models for professional campaigns, in which the use of Photoshop is very evident, and the diversity needs to be improved. All the models they use are female, white, and conventionally attractive.
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Luna	Of course, as a woman, I feel much more confident and content after exposure to Mulac and Espresso. Wycon and Deborah make me want to call a plastic surgeon and schedule an appointment for full-face surgery.
Author	11-Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Luna	The first two brands perform better in developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes because they are more inclusive in their choices of whom to give representation and voice to. They let a diverse group of people create content for their pages and provide exposure to unseen beauties.

**2-Interview conducted with Camilla
27-Year Old Student from Treviso**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Camilla	I'm Camilla Volpato; I'm 27, and, at the moment, I have a master's degree in management. In the past, I worked as a consultant, but now I'm looking for a more creative and dynamic job that will allow me to use my management knowledge and boost and work with my creativity. I currently live in Treviso, but I plan to move abroad or at least to another Italian city. Because of my experience in Turin, I've grown to love the city's fast and innovative environment, thanks to the high presence of young people from different backgrounds and the endless opportunities that big cities provide. I'm currently single.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Camilla	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Camilla	A few times per week
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Camilla	I regularly follow only Influencers.
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Camilla	Essential
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Camilla	I have always felt confident with my body for many years because I've never been given much attention. I was lucky enough to have a body that fit society's beauty standard and had no big problems or significant "flaws." For these reasons, I think I wasn't too aware of my body as an "asset" or something

	<p>people may look at (may judge or appreciate). It was just my body, and I was ok with that. There were days when, like every other person, I felt a bit insecure about something, but it was a thing that lasted a couple of hours, and it was it.</p> <p>Recently, in the last couple of years, my body underwent a slight change, I gained some weight, and suddenly I felt more and more aware of my body. I started feeling more insecure with myself and others; I began to hate my body and feel uncomfortable. As soon as I went out of society's standards, my body started to feel wrong, and I began to think that that was not how I should look, even though the difference was not huge. At that moment, I understood that everybody feels pressured to conform to beauty standards because conforming means being accepted. It is something that maybe you don't realize instantly, but you know it at the exact moment you don't fit in them anymore.</p>
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Camilla	<p>Right now, as a young woman, looking for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos doesn't make me feel less confident. However, I think this is the result of two significant shifts I made: the environment I created around me and the brands I decided to follow and support completely conform to my values and vision. They are inclusive (or at least as inclusive as possible; we can always do more), respectful of every body shape, and promote diversity; I educated myself and understood that my flaws are my strengths. I'm unique in that way, and beauty products, whatever they may be, should enhance and celebrate my imperfection instead of hiding it. I should first feel confident in my skin and rely on them to feel more confident or boost my mood.</p> <p>In the past days, however, when I was younger and certainly less confident, searching for make-up tutorials made me sad because I used to want to conform to those standards of pretty girls with beautiful make-up on. Still, I wasn't like that and felt like I didn't belong. I felt like I should be more feminine, girly, and glamorous, but instead, I was just a simple girl with a bit of mascara, which made me feel anonymous.</p>
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Camilla	No, not really. Because my values and attitudes are so strong, I start with them to decide which brands to follow. Perhaps the only perspective that changes after a campaign is my sentiment toward the brand, for better or worse.

Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Camilla	<p>Honestly, I don't know. From a certain point of view, it is always right to give attention to gender rights and social movements because they are not discussed enough; people need to open their eyes, whether through a beauty product. Representation is vital, and when a brand decides to be more inclusive in terms of beauty, shades, or body image, it is always a win.</p> <p>On the other side, I see a lot of pink washing by brands, and I also think that, to a certain extent, beauty brands can exist thanks to those bad feelings and those cultural norms that state that the first thing that a woman should be is beautiful. It can't shape cultural norms, but it can boost change. In other words, society needs to change, maybe also a small change, and then brands can give attention and give a voice to that change (then between boosting the difference and exploiting the change, there's a fine line).</p> <p>For example, I'm thinking about the model barbie when they decided to produce a curvy doll. In that way, they improve representation and spread awareness about the problem of beauty standards. However, they could not change people's mind, which is still fatphobic nowadays. (I don't know if the example is relevant, but I thought it was coherent enough to explain my words).</p>
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Camilla	<p>100%. I am driven by my values, and I strongly believe in them. I support them every day as much as possible with every action I perform. One of those actions is buying what I need. I do my best to help small brands, and even more, small brands founded by women, that resonate and are coherent with my values. Before following them on social media, for example, I try them by following them for a while to see how they communicate, their tone of voice, the values that drive them, and the things they support with their activity. In fact, whenever I follow a brand, I usually follow the entrepreneur behind that brand to find out who is behind that specific product. I create a connection with the brand I follow that allows me to purchase proudly from them and recommend them whenever I can.</p>
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?

Camilla	Yes, because everything a brand does nowadays affects its reputation and image. However, they have to be very careful with the kind of attention they decide to give: being the target particular, they have to convey a special message that will leave no space for doubts or discrimination. For example, I remember an ad by Laylacosmetic in which they promote a mascara with the line “the longer, the better” what was it? A sort of empowerment? Nobody knows, but that affects their reputation very, very badly. (also, in this case, I don’t know if the example is relevant, but I thought it was coherent enough to explain my words)
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Camilla	This is a complicated question. In doing this, a brand should be brave, honest, and consistent. A brand can promote body positivity while challenging harmful beauty standards by being bold (with innovative communication, an innovative tone of voice, risking using different means, and educating customers). Also, be honest with yourself and your audience (promoting body positivity means having a wide range of sizes and shades in foundation). For example, if you miss these things, it is tough to promote body positivity – sometimes, it may be a budget problem for small businesses. In this case, I think the brand should be honest with the customers). Lastly, I think consistency is critical because nothing matters if it’s done once in a while. You cannot change beauty standards by making one post or campaign and then forgetting about it. Also, I would listen to those who are not part of the standards to understand how to communicate in a better way.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Camilla	I am not familiar with the first three brands. I only know them by their names because I’m not very passionate about beauty products. I follow and know Espresso because it’s a small Italian brand led and founded by a woman. I started following it a few years ago (maybe in 2019?) because I was looking for a brand that provided products that would have a natural effect and wouldn’t cover too much. I was introduced to it by one of the few influencers I follow, and it was also part of a circle of mini brands and women entrepreneurs that I follow, so I decided to give it a go. At first, I followed the brand and the founder to get to know the brand (and the people behind it) better, I looked at its site, vision, and mission, and after a while, I purchased

	<p>my first products. Still, nowadays, I follow the brand and the founder, use their products, and recommend them whenever possible.</p>
Author	<p>9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check)</p> <p>What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment? Which brand, in your opinion, performs better? Why?</p>
Camilla	<p>Let's check each brand page together, and I will tell you my view:</p> <p>WYCON: Boring, boring, boring. For me, their page could be more realistic. Many high-edited pictures aim at perfection, which is visible at first glance, but unfortunately, the model is not actual. They promote something that I don't stand for, that image of the perfect woman with tons of makeup and zero imperfections, which is very, very rare.</p> <p>Maybe they tried to keep the profile a bit down to earth with the backstage pics, but they failed. I feel something between amusement and anger as a woman after seeing the profile. It represents the external and built-up world in which I don't belong. It makes me a bit sick because I think about the girls that compare themselves to that page, and it's just awful and wrong.</p> <p>MULAC: Significantly better than Wycon. A lot of diversity in terms of gender, and I'm happy to see it. I'm not really happy to see the difference in the skin of the people in the posts. Everyone has perfect skin, which is, again, very rare. Also, in this case, there is a ton of makeup, which is not totally wrong; it's just something that I don't stand for (maybe this and Wycon are what I mean when I say that beauty products exist thanks to the insecurities that we want to cover?). Moreover, if, for example, I think about a real girl with spots and the same makeup, the spots are still visible, albeit less visible, which is why I don't think these posts are representative and fair. In any case, I'm happy with the gender representation in the profile and, more or less, with the body positivity they offer.</p> <p>DEBORAH: This profile is like wycon but maybe a bit more delicate. It could be thanks to editing the pics they chose or the shades, but it looks less built-up. It seems like an old-style profile as if a beauty shop was turned into an Instagram profile. Nothing too exciting, nothing too risky. There is not a lot of representation, neither in terms of gender or body positivity. Neither of the three has a model in terms of age, which I need help understanding.</p>

	<p>ESPRESSOH:</p> <p>I'm biased toward this one, but honestly, it is the one that I like best. It is natural, raw, messy, and authentic. It represents just daily life which is very, very far from perfection. Not a lot of gender diversity but different skin compositions and different women in terms of ethnicity, style, and colors. Finally, I see an older woman (I don't know if the other profiles have them, but I didn't scroll enough). They could do more surely because we can always do more, but this is the profile that represents in the best way the reality of women. It's as if it was not just a brand but a person, a connection between the brand and a "personal entity," sort of what the brand Jacquemus has been doing, giving life to the brand as if it was a natural person, a kind of lifestyle. I feel understood by this brand.</p>
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**3-Interview conducted with Alessandra
30-Year Old, E-Commerce Content Specialist from Milan**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Alessandra	I'm 25 years old, I have a master's degree in Marketing, and I am currently working as an E-Commerce Content Specialist, single, living in Milan.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Alessandra	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Alessandra	A few times per week
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Alessandra	Regularly
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Alessandra	Low importance
Open-End Questions	

Author	1- Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Alessandra	Yes, since middle school. I think that with social media, this got worse.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Alessandra	I mainly feel confused when I search for information and watch beauty bloggers—there are too many products and opinions. Sometimes it's hard to understand who to believe and what to choose and buy.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Alessandra	Almost never
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Alessandra	I think it does. Seeing different people with different bodies and ethnicities on social media it's very helpful.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Alessandra	Yes and no. It does only when the brand has always been coherent. On the other hand, I would only feel it was done for marketing by brands.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Alessandra	Yes, in a positive light. I think brands try to capture Gen Z, but at the same time, it seems pretty fake.
Author	7- How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Alessandra	Only when the companies and influencers truly embrace the movement and do it believing in it and being consistent. Consistency, choosing the right advocates, creating campaigns that resonate with people—creating plus size clothes, foundations for all skin types, etc.

Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Alessandra	I only know the last two, but I only follow the Espresso Instagram page. I regularly buy Espresso products (I only use them).
Author	9-Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check)
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Alessandra	Espresso is my style; I like it and use it (natural, simple, few products). Deborah has a classical look and is a little bit old. Mulac, to me, is the specific influencer product; I wouldn't buy it or trust the influencers' reviews. Wycon is like Mac for me, very sophisticated, complicated, and fake style. I'm not fond of it that much.
Author	11- Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Alessandra	Wycon has almost only pretty white people who all look the same, and Deborah has only white women. The last two brands are the only ones that feel a little different to me.
Author	12- Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Alessandra	I think Mulac and Espresso are better because of the models they use (men of different ethnicities and body types). Deborah has the most classic, white look. With only a pretty white young woman and a monotonous style. Wycon has almost only pretty white people that look all the same (that plastic surgery baby doll look).

**4-Interview conducted with Ester
22-Year Old Student from Catania**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Ester	Hi, my name is Ester, I'm 23 and from Catania, but I currently live in Rome. Last year I graduated with a bachelor's degree in oriental languages, and I will start my master's in April of this year. I'm currently unemployed, and I have a boyfriend. I also lived in Iran for three months (from the beginning of September to the end of November).

Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Ester	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Ester	A few times per month
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Ester	Regularly
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Ester	Important
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Ester	Yes, I started feeling the pressure to conform to beauty standards when I was around 12 years old. Especially during my teen years, I've tried to fit in as much as possible. The ideal beauty standard seemed impossible, and I always felt I needed to be more.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Ester	I feel like the image portrayed is perfect and without any flaws. This perfection showed me that by buying the product, I would be able to look like the models, but this is never the case, so this makes you buy more and more products to reach the goal of looking perfect.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Ester	I don't follow beauty campaigns often, but sometimes I watch YouTube videos made by beauty bloggers. Because I follow some male beauty bloggers (James Charles, Jeffree Star, etc.). I think that certain brands working with these people make me more interested in buying their products, so I believe that having diverse models or sponsors makes the brand more appealing.

Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Ester	Yes, I think the beauty industry is also responsible for the cultural norms and beauty standards we have today. So, Suppose beauty brands start to embrace a more sustainable idea of beauty and give more attention to gender rights and social movements. In that case, they will also reduce most of society's problems related to body image. However, it's essential that this interest in gender rights and social movements be genuine and not a pure form of marketing.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Ester	Yes, it makes me more interested in buying their products, but since these brands are usually more petite and harder to find, I still believe the products from bigger chains are more available.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Ester	Yes, it does, and I think that in the future, more and more brands will care about body positivity because paying this kind of attention to social movements makes the brand more appealing from my point of view.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Ester	One of the main channels to promote a brand nowadays is social media. So a brand can encourage body positivity and better beauty standards by using models of different body shapes, imperfections, and ethnicities to make the standard closer to reality and not so detached from it as it is now. It would also be nice to see models of different religions and skin types.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Ester	I know and have bought some products from these beauty brands, especially Wycon, and Deborah, but I don't follow their Instagram pages as I'm not so interested in makeup.
Author	-Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check):

Author	9- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Ester	After exposing myself to these pages, I see a general trend in portraying a body-positive image, but some brands post more body-positive posts than others. Espresso has the most diverse models, while Wycon has the least, but even Wycon has more body-specific posts every once in a while. It concerns me that some of these brands seem to embrace the body-positive movement just because it's trending right now.
Author	10- -Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Ester	Yes, more mainstream brands like Wycon and Deborah almost only present skinny white women, with some little exceptions. In contrast, brands like Espresso have a diverse representation of people of different genders, ages, and ethnicities.
Author	11- -Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Ester	Espresso is the most inclusive brand; it's clear that they take a side, even risking losing a portion of customers who prefer to see the standard skinny white woman as a model of beauty products.

**5-Interview conducted with Nina
20-Year Old Student from Ferrara**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Nina	Hello. I am Nina, 20 years old and a bachelor's degree student. I am not married, and I'm living in Ferrara.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Nina	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Nina	Rarely
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all

Nina	Rarely
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Nina	Essential
Open-End Questions	
Author	1- Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Nina	Not so much. Maybe during my teenage years, I felt a lot of pressure and lacked self-confidence because of beauty standards. I felt insecure about myself, but now I feel much better.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Nina	I try not to compare myself to them, knowing they usually use filters, lighting, makeup, and photoshop to look like that. But I have done this in the past 4 or 5 years. In the past, I would have felt insecure about myself.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Nina	Maybe I stopped using the products of companies that do not pay attention to animals or workers' rights. I never pay attention to which bloggers or models they are working with. But I can say that I'm glad that in the past few years, beauty brands have been trying to give an accurate image of the human body and gender.
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Nina	Absolutely yes, because people are exposed to social media most of the time, it dramatically influences their thinking.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Nina	Honestly, I have not thought about that before, but seeing a brand promote gender rights makes me feel better about that brand. For me, the main factors are being cruelty-free, respecting workers' rights, and staying within my

	budget. But I would be so glad to buy products from a brand that gives attention to gender rights too.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Nina	Absolutely yes doesn't matter what concept we are talking about, makeup brands or car industries, everyone who has a big platform and a significant number of followers when they start to talk about social movements or gender or women's or human rights, is giving a positive image of itself.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Nina	Most of them are doing it right now. Using natural human shapes and colors, gender, and sexual orientation in their advertising, photoshoots, and representatives show the reality of human beings.
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Nina	Unfortunately, I have never bought their products, and I do not follow them on social.
Author	- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check):
Author	9- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Nina	Maybe just the last two made me feel good looking at their pages. The Wycon was unreal and faked because it mostly used models with heavy makeup.
Author	10- -Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Nina	Yes, they try to use different models and genders in their ads.
Author	11 -Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Nina	I prefer Espresso because the posts show me the natural face of women. For example, it used models with realistic faces, different skin colors, and different gender orientations while doing simple makeup. I liked the simplicity of their page. In conclusion, it shows the reality of life.

**6-Interview conducted with Livia
23-Year Old Student from Siena**

Author	1- Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, occupation, highest level of education, married or single, the city you live)
Livia	I am 23 and a master's student. I am currently working as an intern and (allegedly) writing my thesis. I am single and travel a lot because of my studies/research, but I am from Siena.
Author	2-How often do you use beauty products (Skin or body care and cosmetics)? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Livia	Daily
Author	3-How often do you use social media, especially Instagram, to interact with brands or learn about their products and services? a. Daily /b. A few times per week /c. A few times per month/ d. Rarely/ e. Never
Livia	Rarely
Author	4-How much do you follow beauty bloggers and influencers? a. Very closely / b. Regularly / c. Occasionally / d. Rarely / e. Not at all
Livia	Rarely
Author	5- How important is it that the brands you purchase from align with your values and beliefs and are socially responsible? a. Essential/ b. Important/ c. Low importance/ d. Not important
Livia	Low importance
Open-End Questions	
Author	1-Have you ever felt pressure to conform to beauty standards and experienced negative body image due to advertisements featuring models?
Livia	Yes, of course. I think we are all influenced daily, and my perception of beauty has probably changed due to advertisements. Probably I would say the things I find more problematic in my body are short legs, hair (not anymore, but it's been this way for a long time), nails, skin, and belly.
Author	2- Imagine searching for beauty products or make-up tutorial videos; how do you feel after exposing yourself to beauty brands and blogger pages?
Livia	I guess it depends on the content I see. I enjoy learning new tricks, even if it's a simple make-up tutorial. However, sometimes brand awareness can generate a need that didn't exist before: you may end up wondering if you

	have a problem (ex., skin imperfections) and need the product advertised, even if five minutes ago you didn't consider it an issue at all.
Author	3- Have you ever experienced changes in your attitudes or beliefs because of exposure to beauty brand campaigns or ads? (For example, using male or gay beauty bloggers changed your attitude toward them)?
Livia	I honestly don't know. I don't watch many campaigns/ads, so I have no idea.
Author	4- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media could shape cultural norms and contribute to societal beliefs about beauty and body image?
Livia	I hope so, even though I am highly critical of this "brand activism." In addition to doing "pink-washing/rainbow washing," I think it's a bit controversial. Beauty brands have to sell, so to sell, they have to push you into having a necessity to buy: in other words, they need you to see some imperfections in yourself. Otherwise, they would go bankrupt. So even if they may indulge in some of these movements, they will always undermine them simultaneously. Moreover, when it comes to more general social activities, it's unlikely that a post/Instagram story will create a conversation about that, as everything is so fast on social media. I think marketing and the political fight should not be mixed.
Author	5- When a brand actively participates in promoting gender rights and challenging the stereotypes on social media, does it make you more likely to purchase products from that brand or recommend their products to others? (Please explain if you have a similar experience)
Livia	No, because they are profiting from our fights. It can benefit the broader public, but it seems a bit hypocritical. Sometimes a brand will make campaigns promoting "women empowerment" and then hire women and kids in a developing country because they can underpay and exploit them with no consequence.
Author	6- Do you think the attention given to gender rights and social movements by beauty brands on social media affects their reputation and overall brand image?
Livia	I think it does to a certain extent. This strategy can sometimes backfire if, as it happens pretty frequently in Italy, conservatives begin avoiding certain brands because they have endorsed certain rights/campaigns.
Author	7-How do you think the beauty industry can use social media to promote body positivity and self-confidence while challenging harmful beauty standards?
Livia	I don't think they can because of what I explained in answer 4. If women/people stopped worrying about being overweight, having body hair,

	etc., who would they sell to? These campaigns are never entirely true to themselves: sometimes you'll have some brands advertising women with hair, but they will be blonde and almost hairless; how is a woman with many dark hairs supposed to feel?
Author	8-How familiar are you with each of the four beauty brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (Have you ever bought their products? Moreover, do you follow their Instagram pages?)
Livia	I have a Wycon shop in my city, but I don't follow it on social media. I don't know the others.
Author	9- Can I ask you to check Instagram pages of the following brands: Wycon, Mulac, Deborah and Espresso (I send the link of their Instagram now and wait for you to check): What is your general idea about the brand's performance in promoting gender empowerment?
Livia	I know a girl who used to work at Wycon, and they were exploiting her, so I know that Wycon doesn't empower women in action. Deborah Milano seems less honest in what she does for the campaign. Mulac could pique my interest as it sells vegan products.
Author	10- What do you feel after exposure to these pages' content as a woman?
Livia	Not a lot, just a bit of superficiality.
Author	11- Have you noticed differences in how diverse body types, gender expressions, and ethnicities are represented in these beauty brand advertisements and activities?
Livia	They all seem very white, feminine, and pretty skinny, even though Espresso does include much more diversity.
Author	12-Which brand, in your opinion, performs better in terms of developing gender equality and demolishing stereotypes? Why?
Livia	Espresso because it also has masculine/male people and includes people of color.

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