



# Managing controversies when advertising underwear on social media

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## Abstract- English

Title: Managing controversies when advertising underwear on social media

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The following dissertation will explore the brand's communication strategies to manage the inherent controversy of advertising women's underwear, especially lingerie and swimwear, on social media. Previous research advocated the social media's effect on fashion brands and consumer behavior. However, the underwear's research is very limited, being mainly related to its history and impact on consumers' identity, opening an opportunity to study the underwear brands/social media's relationship deeply. A qualitative approach was chosen, and four underwear brands were deeply analyzed to proceed with this study.

This thesis' findings evidence the existence of four major challenges: 1) Managing paradoxes of communicating intimate products, 2) Managing social media communication paradoxes; 3) Managing social pressure and lastly, 4) Managing the possibility of being wrongly interpreted. Additionally, some strategies were pointed out to face the previous challenges. Although, all these strategies contribute to these brands' common goal of establishing a solid connection with audiences. These brands believe that the better the relationship with the audience, the easier the management of underwear controversies on social media will be. This strategy constitutes the way of managing the underwear's controversies when advertising on social media.

This study's relevancy is unquestionable for underwear advertisers and for the overall fashion industry since some communication paradoxes can be transposed to other fashion fields.

Key words: Underwear; Social Media; Controversy; Advertisement

## Abstract- Portuguese

Título: Gestão de controversias na publicitação de roupa interior nas redes sociais

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A seguinte dissertação irá estudar as estratégias de comunicação das marcas de roupa interior na gestão das controvérsias existentes na publicidade de lingerie e fatos de banho, nas redes sociais. Outros estudos já analisaram os efeitos das redes sociais na moda e no consumidor. No entanto, o estudo sobre roupa interior é limitado e centra-se nos impactos destes produtos na identidade das pessoas e na sua história, dando oportunidade a estudar intensamente a relação destas marcas com as redes sociais. Para realizar este estudo, escolheu-se um método qualitativo e contou-se com a colaboração de quatro marcas portuguesas.

Os resultados desta dissertação evidenciam a existência de desafios: 1) Gestão de paradoxos da comunicação de produtos íntimos; 2) Gestão de paradoxos na comunicação das redes sociais; 3) Gestão da pressão social; 4) Gestão da possibilidade de ser mal interpretado. Desta forma, foram referidas estratégias para fazer face aos desafios mencionados. Todas estas estratégias contribuem para o objectivo comum destas marcas, que se baseia em estabelecer uma relação sólida com a audiência. Assim, as marcas acreditam que quão melhor for a sua relação com audiência mais fácil será a gestão das controvérsias na publicidade destes produtos nas redes sociais.

A relevância deste estudo é inquestionável para entidades que publicitam roupa interior mas também para toda a indústria da moda, uma vez que existem paradoxos que podem ser transpostos para outras áreas.

Palavras-chave: Roupa Interior; Redes Sociais, Controvérsia; Publicidade

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## 1. Introduction

Woody Allen once said, “*I don’t believe in after-life, although I am bringing a change of underwear*”, enhancing the underwear’s impressive presence in everyone’s life, even when discussing the after-life. Researching this fashion field turns out to be an exciting topic of study, opening an avenue to explore it at length. Currently, the fashion concept crosses the barrier of being immediately related to materialist histories, luxurious purchases, and possessions since it has the ability to showcase what people are and in which way they aspire to be perceived by others (King, 2021).

Previous studies proved that fashion is a vehicle for expressing individuals’ self-concept, having the opportunity to communicate their actual and aspirational self (Carroll, 2009; O’Cass, 2004). Furthermore, the importance that each individual attributes to a fashion item depends on the connection that the entity establishes with fashion (O’Cass, 2004). Hence, each individual will see fashion in its proper manner, giving it a distinctive character.

The fashion landscape imbues various fields, being underwear among them. Although, underwear is not only a fashion field, as it is universally agreed as being the base layer of fashion, turning it an essential item (Braun, 2018). It was previously addressed that underwear is seen as an intimate clothing piece that is usually hidden from others and expressly designed for the user to appreciate (Tsaousi & Brewis, 2013). Moreover, underwear items are characterized by its proximity with the women’s body and the establishment of an identity connection with the user (Tsaousi, 2011). According to this, underwear has a unique character, by being such an intimate item, constituting an area of interest for academic research.

The history of underwear has experienced an intensive evolution as few other fashion fields, especially concerning lingerie (Lindig, 2016) and swimwear (Booth, 2021) products, being these the perspectives through which this dissertation will analyze the underwear’s sphere. Despite the clear evolution that marked the way women perceive underwear products, advertising underwear products is still considered controversial for some societies (Fam et al., 2009; D. Waller, 2004; D. S. Waller, 1999) due to easily offending audiences (Fam et al., 2009). In other words, previous research had placed underwear products in the center of a wide range of ambiguities (Amy-Chinn, 2006; Jantzen et al., 2006; Storr, 2002; Tsaousi, 2011, Storr, 2003). Due to this, it becomes easy to acknowledge that underwear brands face multiple challenges when advertising these products.

Additionally, the decision for the communication channel is considered one of the marketers' most complex choices (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011), being even more complex when advertising underwear products since it deal with a higher likelihood of offending audiences. Moreover, as a communication mean, social media can be a stage for a significant quantity of controversies, being considered one of the most controversial communication channels (Marres & Moats, 2015). Furthermore, advertising on social media increases the brands' challenges exposition, dealing with several paradoxes related to the associated risks and benefits.

Several studies have already advocated the social media's effect on fashion brands and consumer behavior (Ahmad et al., 2015; Mohr, 2013; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). However, there is limited academic literature on the underwear market (Amy-Chinn, 2006; Jantzen et al., 2006; Kojundzic et al., 2018; Sang & Paik, 2009; Storr, 2002; Tsaousi & Brewis, 2013; Tsaousi 2011) and it is mainly related with its history and meaning for consumers. Hence, there is a clear gap in scientific research that studies underwear's brands/social media relationship. Yet, everybody uses underwear products daily, making it an essential and indispensable item. Despite the universal usage of these products, it is evident it is usually hidden from others' views, which attribute an intensive personal character to it. Aligned to this, understanding strategies to publicly communicate one item that is used to be hidden from the public becomes an exciting research topic, the focus of this dissertation.

This dissertation will deal with the two different sources of controversies highlighted previously, the first one arising from advertising a controversial product, the other one created by using a controversial media channel to do it. This research will contribute to uncover social media strategies in the underwear fashion industry, by answering the following research question:

*How do underwear brands manage controversies when advertising on social media?*

The relevancy of this study is unquestionable for underwear advertisers once the best practices to face the inherent controversy of advertising these products on social media are furtherly highlighted. Moreover, this study can also be relevant for the overall fashion industry since some communication paradoxes can be transposed to other fashion fields.

## 2. Literature Review

The following chapter demonstrates a gap in the academic literature concerning advertising controversial products, such as underwear, on a controversial communication channel like social media. The first part of this literature counts with a brief demonstration of underwear's importance in the fashion industry and its evolution throughout the years. In the following section, there is an explanation about the controversial advertising concept and its link to underwear fashion. Lastly, there is a demonstration of the tension between advertising underwear products on social media.

### 2.1. The base layer of fashion industry: Underwear

#### 2.1.1. The meaning of fashion for consumers

Over the years, the fashion industry has been considered extremely important for consumer research (O'Cass, 2004). Several authors tried to address the fashion importance in the self-expression field (Ahuvia, 2005; Cardoso et al., 2010; Venkatasamy, 2015). It was previously discussed that fashion could solve the tension of expressing identity by being a social symbol that helps people create and communicate their self and group identity (Ahuvia, 2005).

The importance of Fashion in an individual's life depends on the connection each individual establishes with it, which can vary from person to person (O'Cass, 2004). Dittmar (1992, p.205) defended that possessions play a vital role in an individual's identity by its attached meaning and how individuals connect with it. Along with these lines, a prior study also covered the importance of involvement when purchasing Fashion (O'Cass, 2004), stating that involvement can be defined as the extent to which individuals are connected to Fashion and related activities. Moreover, it could be understood that as long as Fashion plays a substantial role in an individual's life, the involvement with fashion products would be more significant.

#### 2.1.1. Fashion market trends

A prior study described fashion trends as “*not only follow a diffusion curve, but they are also adapted throughout their lifecycle to fit in better with the users' norms, values, and preferences.*” (Wolny & Mueller, 2013, p.563). In other words, fashion trends follow a diffusion curve which means that the adoption process is individual, but the spread of fashion tendencies follows a collective process, reaching a global scale (Rochinha, 2018). With this, the trends' diffusion is an individual process, although its spread is collective. Hence, individuals not only co-create fashion trends but also help adapt those trends throughout time.

Additionally, fashion is considered one of the biggest industries worldwide, being an economic force that employs millions of people. This market is characterized by its high competition, counting with global brands. (Gazzola et al., 2020). According to McKinsey (*The State of Fashion 2020*, 2020), in 2019, fashion brands were used to compete in a dynamic environment, facing continuous rapid changes. Although, in 2020, the physical contact shifted to the digital one, forcing brands to adapt strongly. Currently, referring to fashion industry implies considering the digital field. Apart from this, it was crucial to address the fashion essentials that turn this industry as powerful as it is viewed. A prior article highlighted (Braun, 2018) the universal agreement on finding underwear as the base layer of fashion, becoming an exciting object of study that deserves special attention in the following sub-section.

### 2.1.2. The specificities of the underwear products in the fashion industry

As the base layer of fashion, underwear opens an opportunity to deeply study its evolution and the current individuals' perception about it.

#### 2.1.2.1. Underwear history background

Over the years, the underwear market suffered a significant transformation like few other fashion fields through consumers' eyes (Lindig, 2016). Initially, underwear was created for hygienic purposes, having the function of protecting the body. In this way, these pieces could protect the body from the outwear clothes, reducing possible harms caused by friction (Kojundzic et al., 2018) and protecting outwear clothes from bodily secretions (Paleari, 2021). In Europe, its function also expanded to keeping the body in a warm environment protecting it from cold atmospheres. Moreover, its function finally moved to reinforce the woman's body's shape (Asare, 2016). Today, underwear is no longer a unique symbol of hygienic and protection since it also plays a crucial role in women's self-identification (Sang & Paik, 2009), being considered a woman extension (Tsaousi & Brewis, 2013).

The first underwear items were created in ancient Egypt and Greece when their usage was nothing more than the attached functional character of those pieces (Sang & Paik, 2009). During ancient times, underwear worked as a "*status symbol*" for those who wore it. In other words, using underwear pieces was a synonym of belonging to a higher social stratum, in contrast to different social classes that lived in poor conditions and were characterized by using nothing under outwear clothes (Sang & Paik, 2009, p.3). The Middle ages played a substantial role in the underwear's evolution once their function expanded to design the perfect shape of the woman's body by highlighting feelings as sensuality and forcing the body to correspond to a

particular pattern as the example of corsets (Cox, n.d.; Sang & Paik, 2009). Although, at the end of the nineteenth century, there was an evident rise in concerns by medical institutions regarding the emergence of physical and mental diseases caused by using underwear archetypes, like corsets, that force a woman's body to correspond to a perfect shape (Paleari, 2021). Still, in this era, some underwear pieces were left to be hidden from others' looks by using them as outwear items, when it was highly decorated with minimum details (Sang & Paik, 2009), which revealed a significant change in women attitude. Hence, there was a clear desire in this era to expose women's curves, even if they were forced by the underwear archetype, and therefore, express sensuality. Modern times were marked by women's desire to feel free by letting those rigid underwear archetypes force their bodies to shape differently (Sang & Paik, 2009). More than in other ages, the twentieth century was marked by the vital changes in female attitudes, having consequences for underwear fashion. In recent years, women have started to expose their underwear, using it as outwear (Sang & Paik, 2009), which shows a substantial change in attitude, characterized by freedom and pride.

Having this said, it could be seen that underwear suffered several changes throughout the years, assuming different formats and shapes. Hence, the following sub-section focus on understanding the current underwear's perceptions.

#### 2.1.2.2. The perspectives of the underwear sphere

Underwear was previously addressed (Kojundzic et al., 2018, p.64) as covering “*clothing items that are worn under the outwear and are in direct contact with the body.*”. Hence, the difference between *under* and *out* wear relies on both clothing items' contact with the body skin. Therefore, underwear is related to all clothing items with the first and closest contact with skin (Sang & Paik, 2009) and is generally hidden from others' eyes (Tsaousi & Brewis, 2013). Currently, the underwear industry has expanded to a point where a wide range of options is offered, being inclusive and individual (Paleari, 2021). Therefore, women tended to assume their natural body shape, being influenced by social trends such as body positivity and self-love (Gibson, 2021), changing women's purchase intentions for fashion products.

A prior study addressed the difficulty in studying the totality of the underwear market due to the wide range of fields that it contains (Kojundzic et al., 2018). According to the Persistence Market Research, a study conducted in 2016, underwear could be looked into different areas, according to categories, price range, size, and others, resulting in different underwear types such as sleepwear, daywear, shapewear, swimwear, etc. According to this, the first big division

is related to the target's gender, having a clear separation between women's and men's underwear. Hence, the following dissertation will focus on woman's underwear, including lingerie and swimwear.

Moreover, the underwear industry suffered a substantial transformation throughout the years, starting with rigid corsets of the earliest times and moving to use underwear as outwear clothes (Lindig, 2016). Hence, there was an evident change in women's attitude towards their body exposition, enhancing the desire to feel unique and sensual (Tsaousi & Brewis, 2013). Despite the evolution in women's perceptions, the advertisement of these products is still considered controversial by several societies (Fam et al., 2009), which opens an opportunity to investigate this phenomenon deeply.

## 2.2. Advertising underwear: A controversial advertising

### 2.2.1. The challenges of controversial advertising

Advertising campaigns can be considered controversial according to the product's nature that is being promoted (D. Waller, 2004). Previous research has already grouped specific products, which advertising is considered controversial for several societies, such as cigarettes, alcohol, condoms, underwear, and others (Fam et al., 2009; D. Waller, 2004; D. S. Waller, 1999). Along with this, it was previously concluded (Fam et al., 2009) that the enormous challenge of advertising these products' type relies on spreading the core message or image without offending the audience. The audience's offense can harm the brand's reputation and the marketing agency that produced the advertising, and therefore their overall performance (D. Waller, 2004). Generally, controversial advertising campaigns can either result in very successful outputs or very damaging ones (D. Waller, 2004), which highlights the clear need for advertisers to manage the marketing of these products well.

The importance of marketing in the business scope has grown exponentially, especially with the innovation the world is continuously facing (Yohn, 2019), resulting in a significant increase in marketing campaigns. Due to this rising tendency, there has been an increase in controversial advertising in various media channels (D. Waller, 2004), and social media was not an exception (Smith et al., 2013).

### 2.2.2. Controversial advertising on social media

Some people considered social media “*as being, by far, the most controversial advertising channel*” (n.d., 2012) due to the speed of diffusing information, the availability of a wide range of information, and the worldwide reach of these platforms (Wolny & Mueller, 2013).

Social media imbues a considerable quantity of definitions already covered for several investigators. According to this, social media can be defined as “... *the group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content*” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). In other words, social media could be seen as a technological space where a user is invited to create, share and generate content with other users, constructing a vast network of relations. Additionally, social media plays a vital role in the corporate world, and its usage is increasing with the increase of the number of social media platforms (Stohl et al., 2017). The TikTok’s boom in 2020, being the most downloaded non-gaming app, proves the previous statement is still applicable at the actuality (Paskin, 2020). The rising tendency of transferring everything to the digital scope increased social media usage, and therefore, there was an urgency to consider corporate responsibility in this field (Eißfeller, 2020). Advertisers must answer a particular pattern of responsibility generally, but especially in social media, where there is a rapid spread of information that can easily damage a brand’s reputation resulting in negative impacts on consumers’ perceptions (Zhang & Vos, 2015).

A prior study proved that outrage is considered the main engagement driver of social media (Marres & Moats, 2015). Due to this, social media is characterized by being a stage of a wide range of controversies, resulting in intensive debates and scandals. In this way, it would be easy to understand the difficulty of brands to promote controversial products on these media platforms since they are vulnerable to offending audiences (Fam et al., 2009). Hence, the referred group would tend to disseminate negative messages spread out much quicker than others (Tsugawa & Ohsaki, 2015), turning this topic viral. The truth is that virality can bring significant and positive impacts to brands, which imbues high risks when considering the possibility of damaging the brand’s reputation so quickly by disseminating negative messages (Lekhanya, 2014).

Prior studies highlighted the importance of identifying whether a topic generates polarization (Garimella et al., 2018; Guerra et al., 2013) by being controversial enough to induce contradictory opinions. The research of controversy within the social media context is limited,

mostly related to political issues (Conover et al., 2011; Zhang & Vos, 2015). Hence, there is a gap in the academic literature that leans on understanding how controversies can be managed on social media.

#### 2.2.2.1. The controversies arising from advertising underwear on social media

As stated previously, underwear belongs to a group of products whose advertising is still considered controversial, leading to various paradoxes and ambiguities. Along with this, previous research (Tsaousi, 2011; Jantzen et al., 2006; Storr., 2003; Storr., 2002) tried to identify possible ambiguities within the underwear sphere. According to this, (Storr., 2002, p.29; Storr., 2003, p.186) Storr stated that underwear is in the center of a set ambiguities: *“between concealment and display; between seductiveness and respectability; between eroticism and romance; between the feminine and the sexual; and between the luxurious and the “cheap”.*”. In other words, it can be understood that the underwear advertisement faces challenges concerning the extension at which an underwear product can be displayed and exposed. Furthermore, this advertising raises questions regarding the content’s level of respect and seductiveness, trying to find a way that both concepts are included in the advertisement without any contradiction. The same happens with eroticism and romance, which are feelings always associated with underwear that need to be balanced.

Prior research already concluded that the audience has a strong tendency to associate underwear products with two main issues: sex and sexuality. (Jantzen et al., 2006) It shows that underwear items easily suggest erotic and sexual feelings. Additionally, Tsaousi (2011) also stressed the possibility of existing an underwear ambiguity regarding the product’s physical and psychological characteristics. Hence, these characteristics can produce different sensations and, some can be perceived as contradictory when placed together. Moreover, prior research highlighted another ambiguity between private and public usage of underwear, which suggests there is a difference in the underwear’s product characteristics that allow being seen in public or not, due to social acceptance (Tsaousi, 2011; Storr, 2003, p.191).

Considering the previous challenges and ambiguities, it could be concluded there is a lack of understanding of how brands manage underwear’s controversies when advertising on social media since there are no studies to fill this gap. To contribute to this academic literature, I propose myself to answer the following research question:

*How do underwear brands manage controversies when advertising on social media?*

### 3. Methodology

The methodology chapter will be divided into three sections. Firstly, 3.1) *Research Design* will cover the importance of having a qualitative approach in this study; Secondly, 3.2) *Data collection*, will explain the data collection process and sample strategy; and lastly, 3.4) *Data analysis* will present the data's organization strategy, using the coding method.

#### 3.1. Research design

During this process, I decided to employ a qualitative methodology approach due to the exploratory nature of this research (Yin, 2009). Firstly, qualitative methods take a strong position in understanding the complexity of plural contexts and the relations that exist between them (Haq, 2015). Secondly, qualitative data enables researchers to reach real individuals' experiences by incentivizing people to express themselves in their self- language (Graebner et al., 2012). Lastly, a qualitative approach is frequently associated with providing “*rich and nuanced*” data by allowing researchers to understand crucial details that are likely to be missed by only using the quantitative methodology (Graebner et al., 2012, p.278). According to this, it can be concluded that the main goal of a qualitative approach is to reach a deep understanding through a phenomenon instead of generalizing findings which is the goal of quantitative research.

Additionally, a multiple case study is a suitable approach to study the complexity of this phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2015) since it enables the researcher to develop in-depth and logical insights within the referred environment (Marshall, 1999). In addition, previous authors (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Yin, 2009) defended that “how” questions are more probable to be answered using a case study methodology since there is the need to consider contexts, environments, operational links and evaluate these dimensions throughout the time (Yin, 2009). According to this, I chose a multiple case approach to answer the research question of this study by comparing the best practices of different cases regarding the ways of dealing with the inherent underwear controversies when advertising on social media.

The initial criteria to select the cases relied on choosing underwear brands active on social media. Therefore, I contacted five brands, but none offered availability in collaborating in this process. With this, I decided to add the requirement of being a Portuguese underwear brand from a small dimension. Hence, I contacted seven different brands receiving positive answers from five of them, although only four were given in a reasonable time. Hence, *Missus*, *Grow*

*Maternity, Hiss, and Liliana Filipa* gave me continuous support during this process, enabling me to proceed with this study. The overall cases' selection process is presented in Figure 4.

### 3.2. Data collection

Within the data collection process, the main goal was to combine primary, including participant observation which is a learning process where the researcher can observe the day-to-day interaction of the research study's actors (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012, p.83) and in-depth interviews, with secondary data. Throughout the process of data collection, I tried to triangulate the data by gathering information from different sources, to reinforce the data's validity (Carter et al., 2014).

According to this, I started the data collection process by gathering as much secondary data as possible (Table 1, 2, 3, 4) to have a deeper view of each brand's main goals and to be able to triangulate the data. To do so, I performed an intensive online search for online articles (magazines, newspapers, etc.), online interviews (podcasts, television interviews, etc.). Hence, I reunited affordable conditions to conduct well-prepared interviews within the cases in this study. In addition, I also had access to documents provided by brands such as website statistics, google analytics, business plans, etc. Lastly, I gathered information from participant observation in one physical store and one physical market (Figure 34 and 35).

Concerning the primary data collection, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews. Some authors defended these interviews englobe one of the principal methods for collecting data within the qualitative research methodology (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.138; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Hence, it gives respondents the sense of having an informal conversation. However, it was previously addressed (Webb & Webb, 1975) that these types of interviews could be seen as conversations with a clear and specific purpose. Currently, in-depth interviews are very valued in qualitative research once it allows researchers to better understand hidden meanings by exploring verbal and non-verbal signals (Ryan et al., 2009).

In total, I conducted twenty-four interviews (Figures 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), having thirteen been performed in person, and the rest of them were entirely conducted online due to the recent tendency of teleworking. However, it is important to highlight that the preferred way to run the interviews was in person since it enables interpreting non-verbal signals, such as corporal language, which give researchers a deep inside of the respondent's understanding about that matter (Ryan et al., 2009).

To identify the interviewees, I used a snowball sample technique which is a method characterized by the difficulty of finding samples that match the target’s specificities. This technique works as a “*chain referral*” (Naderifar et al., 2017, p.1), which means the interviewees are invited to identify other individuals that could add value to the research and repeatedly.

To identify the first interviewee for each brand, I contacted via LinkedIn and/or email the selected brand’s founders or CEOs, who could help me identify entities responsible for taking care of their social media communication strategies. Furthermore, those people could guide me to contact shop assistants, if existent, to provide information about clients’ feedback and purchase behavior concerning the research topic. Additionally, the brands’ models contact was provided, enabling me to triangulate data regarding the brands/model’s relationship. Although, due to the dimension of the studied brands, the first entity contacted, the brand’s founder or CEO, was also the entity that takes care of social media strategies. According to this, the following figure demonstrates the scheme of the snowball sample technique.

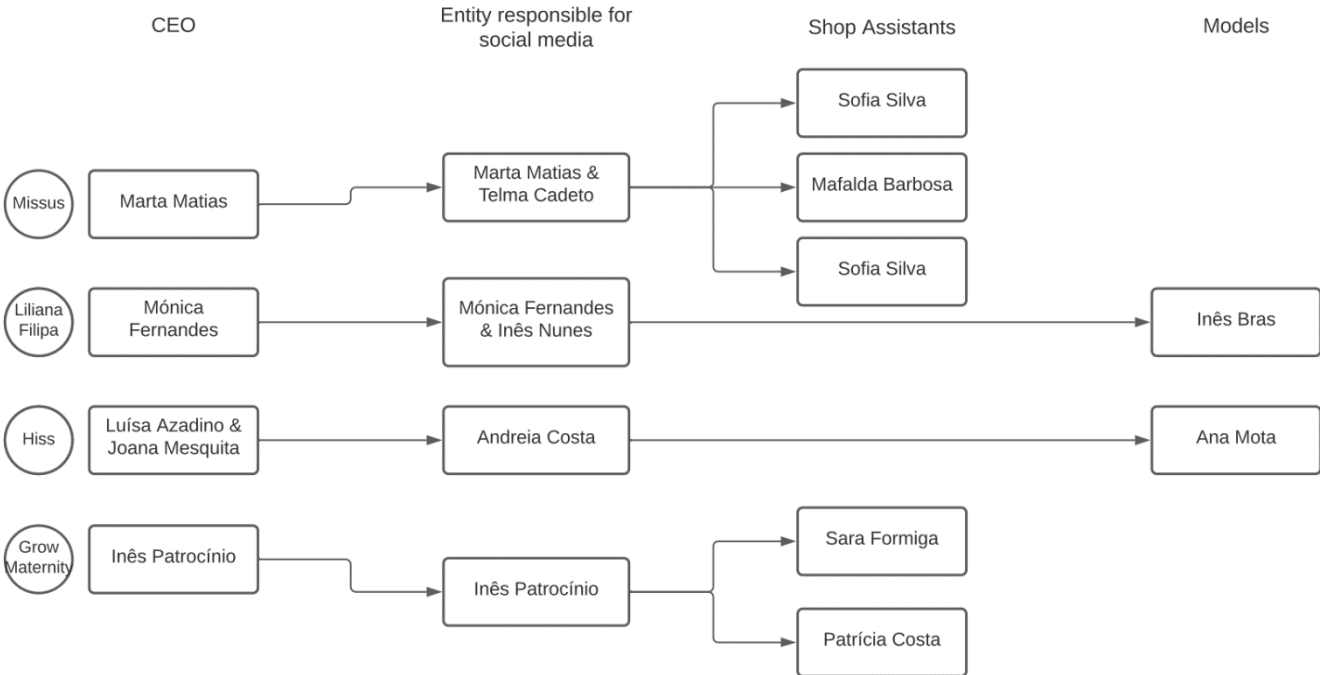


Figure 1: Scheme of the snowball sample technique

Besides the previous sampling strategy, I also decided to conduct interviews with industry experts. With this, I conducted four additional interviews (Figure 13) with the main goal of enriching my understanding throughout the Portuguese underwear market. Due to this, via LinkedIn, I contacted a district manager of the Calzedonia Group, a marketing director of Dama de Copas, a shop assistant at Cantê, and lastly, a social media specialist at Auratus.

According to this, I decided to construct five different interviews types. The first one has the main goal to gather generic information about the main challenges of the market concerning the social media exposure of underwear products, which was directed to the industry experts. The remaining interviews' types were referred to the cases, being different according to the interviewer's position in the company of study. The first one was directed to the brand's CEO, with the main goal of gathering inside information about the company's values and strategies. The second interview type was directed to the entity responsible for social media. Furthermore, the third interview type was directed to shop assistants, with the main goal of collecting clients' feedback concerning the social media account of the referred brands. Lastly, the fourth interview's type was directed to the brand's models, to understand their relationship with the brand.

### 3.4. Data analysis

Within the data analysis process, I used the coding method, an analysis process in qualitative research that allows “*indexing or mapping data*” (Elliott, 2018, p. 2851). Through this process, data is analyzed easily by dismantling the information before placing the data together logically, allowing me to answer this study’s research question (Creswell, 2007; Elliott, 2018). Due to this, the process relies on identifying information that can be grouped by codes. Before the primary data analysis, I could identify codes from the research question and the literature review, such as “Underwear controversy,”; “Challenges”; “sexual associations”. After analyzing primary and secondary data, more codes have emerged, reaching a total of forty-one codes. Hence, I decided to group them according to categories and, therefore, into two main themes: challenges and strategies to advertise underwear on social media. Figures 14 and 15 include a summary of the coding process divided by the two themes, and the citations for each code can be found in figure 16. Although the following examples could be highlighted:

Category	Codes	Citation
Manage underwear’s controversies	Sexual Associations	<p><i>“Lingerie is automatically related to sexuality.” - Marta Matias, Missus’s CEO</i></p> <p><i>“ It is easy to have people that automatically think about sex when seeing underwear”-Luísa Azadino, Hiss’s CEO</i></p> <p><i>“...there is a clear tendency that leads people to sexual connections.”-Mónica Fernandes, Liliana Filipa’s CEO</i></p>

Figure 2: Citations' examples for the "sexual associations" code

Category	Codes	Citation
Producing "respectful" product content	Avoid sensuality	<p><i>“The content needs to be as girly as possible by avoiding sensual poses.” - Marta Matias, Missus’s CEO</i></p> <p><i>“For now, we limit the way of communicating sensuality and give more emphasis to other product characteristics”- Luísa Azadino, Hiss’s CEO</i></p>

Figure 3: Citations' examples for the "avoid sensuality" code

## 4. Empirical Setting

To enrich the understanding of the research topic, I decided to start by having a brief overview of how the Portuguese underwear market includes social media in its communication strategies. In this way, this chapter will be divided into two sections: 4.1) Overview of the Portuguese underwear market on social media, and 4.2) Presentations of the cases that will be deeply studied in this research.

### 4.1. Overview of the Portuguese underwear market on social media

The Portuguese female underwear market is characterized by separating the mass-market from the premium market. The Portuguese underwear mass-market counts with generic brands, especially the three big retailers present in most of the Portuguese commercial platforms: Calzedonia Group, including Intimissimi and Tezenis, Oysho, and Women'secret. These big retailers are characterized by producing conventional products at affordable prices. Moreover, the referred brands offer similar products to similar target audiences, intensifying their competition. In contrast, the premium market is mainly characterized by producing non-conventional products, with different designs, at higher prices.

Additionally, in the past years, different business models have emerged in this sphere, turning common the existence of online underwear brands that started to be established on social media platforms, especially on Instagram. According to the interviews of industry experts, the online business model was a pioneering concept in this area due to the lack of opportunity to try. With this, social media has become more critical than ever for underwear brands, impacting people's decision-making process. Aligned with this, a shop assistant at Cantê stated: *"More than ever, people resort to social media during the purchase process."* Additionally, these industry experts associate social media with a space for spreading messages beyond the brand's core activity by covering trendy topics. With this, a social media specialist stated: *"...it makes sense that underwear brands follow the societies' trends by communicating them on social media"*. In accordance, a district manager at Calzedonia group stated: *"underwear brands need to communicate what is trendy, especially on social media"*. Moreover, body inclusivity was pointed out as being a trendy topic that needs to be urgently communicated by underwear brands. Along with this, a marketing director of Dama de Copas stated: *"More than a tendency, it is urgent for underwear brands to start taking a position regarding body inclusivity."* Hence, Portuguese underwear brands set strategies to communicate underwear products on social media.

## 4.2. Presentation of the cases

### 4.2.1. Grow Maternity

Grow maternity is a sustainable Portuguese brand born in December of 2020 with the primary purpose of designing the perfect underwear line for a mother to use during pregnancy, nursing, and beyond. The brand's core activity is to produce simple and functional bras for these periods of women's lives, with a clear and strong effort to choose sustainable materials and fabrics that follow an ethical and sustainable production. The idea was born at the beginning of the year but, due to covid-19 constraints, the brand was only launched six months later. To launch the brand, the CEO had the idea of creating a movement in social media, called “#It'sNotJustMilk”, to talk about breastfeeding and all the challenges women face during this period. The main goal of this strategy was to create a solid online community before the brand's launch, counting with more than 15k followers before any product insertion.

Since the very beginning of this business, mothers have been the focused target. Although, there is a rising tendency to widen the audience once this is not only, a product of interest to mothers but also women, in general. Currently, the brand is still managing the best way to approach these two groups since the idea is to focus on the mothers' public but not disregard other women.

The brand currently offers six bras models, whose design is characterized by its simpleness, cleanness, and functionality. Each model has several nude colors available, emphasizing the natural women's shape. Despite the core activity of the brand, it had also widened the product's offer, turning available accessories such as bags, sweatshirts, leggings. Overall, the brand's main goal is to give people the opportunity to afford these types of products, practicing reasonable prices for everyone to access, having an average of 35 euros.

Currently, the brand has the products present in a multi-brand store (Figure 30). Although, e-commerce is still considered the primary source of income. In addition, the Instagram webpage counts with more than 35k followers and is the main potential driver of the website page. According to this, consumers can find products tagged with the link to the specific website page in the Instagram account.

#### 4.2.2. Missus

Missus is a brand born in 2016 with the primary goal of producing swimsuits from recycled ocean plastic. Although, it was only in 2020 the brand launched its first underwear line, following the same sustainable ethic. The Missus's mission is to construct a brand that is 100% Portuguese and inclusive of real bodies, making all women feel sexy, pretty, and elegant. It targets young women aged between 16 and 28 who combine the youth spirit with sensuality and pride about their body shape.

Regarding the product offer, the brand is currently offering a wide range of products such as swimwear, tracksuits, accessories as facemasks, and others. The lingerie line counts with more than 15 models available in different colors, whereas the swimwear line counts with a wide variety of products. The lingerie's sizes offer varies on a scale between S and L since it was the first underwear collection, and the brand wanted to test the product in the market. In accordance, the size range is used to be higher when referring to swimwear line. Concerning the underwear products' price, it is extremely dependent on being an entirely Portuguese production which does not allow the brand to practice lower prices.

The choice of the materials used in the production process follows a sustainable ethic, being the Econyl, a material made from recycled ocean plastic, the leading resource chosen. Additionally, the brand allows clients to combine different sizes in the top and bottom of the Lingerie's set as well as the swimwear line, enhancing the acceptance of different body shapes that do not answer a typical pattern that uses the same size in both parts of the underwear's pack.

From the very beginning of the brand until now, Missus has already opened four points of sale, but currently, it only has one physical store available in Lisbon (Figure 31). Currently, the sales from online and offline purchases are equated. Furthermore, Instagram is the brand's principal social media account, having more than 85k followers. Additionally, all the products exposed on its Instagram account are tagged with the specific link for the web page on its official website. Along with these, Instagram turns out to be the main driver and booster of the website's visits.

#### 4.2.3. Liliana Filipa swimwear

Liliana Filipa swimwear was launched in 2017 to offer a swimwear line that serves all body types. Liliana Filipa, a 27-year-old designer, had some mediatic exposure after participating in a tv reality show. Along with these lines, she makes the most of her exposure by creating content for her social media accounts, especially Instagram and Facebook. Due to this, she had a wide range of people following and admiring her lifestyle, which enabled her to create a strong fans community that would support her in future business decisions. Moreover, her reputation skyrocketed, making possible a successful brand launch. Due to this, with the help of a close friend, Mónica Fernandes, the other brand founder, they decided to create swimwear by themselves. The first collection was extremely successful, running out of every available model, which highlighted the need for massive production in a factory.

Regarding the brand's main target, it could be resumed to women aged between 20 and 30, who are already financially independent and love to care about themselves. The brand was designed for real bodies, emphasizing the need for accepting different women's bodies. According to this, most of the campaigns include diverse body types to spread the referred message. Additionally, the brand's role relies on the motto: "From me to you," which means that every product is carefully through from the creators to the final consumers, making them believe there is a close relationship between them.

The brand offers a wide range of products, from fitness clothes as the example of fitness bras, beach accessories to a strong swimwear line. Currently, the swimwear line counts with more than 35 models, which price range is between 27,99€ and 75€, which is the price that enables the brand to have a certain profit margin, keeping the Portuguese qualified labor. From the very begging of the business, the brand allows clients to combine different sizes in the top and bottom of the swimwear's pack, emphasizing the idea of accepting different body types that do not answer any pattern.

Currently, the brand has not any physical store, meaning that online sales constitute the primary source of income. Having a physical store is not a priority once the brand counts with an atelier that works as a showroom by appointment (Figure 33).

Regarding the brand social media accounts, Instagram is considered the principal one, counting with more than 110k followers. Furtherly, the products posted on its Instagram account are tagged with the specific link for the web page, which turns Instagram the main driver for the website's visits.

#### 4.2.4. Hiss

Hiss is a sustainable brand created in September of 2021 that promises to revolutionize the way women see lingerie. According to this, the brand wants to spread the idea that lingerie is not only related to sensuality and beauty as it is also associated with comfort, self-care, and love. Along with these lines, it is a brand concerned with sustainability and body inclusivity that has the mission of empowering women by providing lingerie that makes them feel sensual. Concerning the brand's target, it could be resumed to women between 16 and 24 years old, that does not only like to care about themselves, as they are also concerned with sustainability issues, valuing the products' durability and quality.

Regarding the products' characterization, Hiss is currently selling three models available in three different colors: red, white, and rose gold, which emphasizes feelings as sensuality. The idea was to keep the lack of lingerie hoops and produce lingerie focused on the fitness bras, giving it a sensual side. According to this, the products are characterized by their elasticity to be comfortable and serve different body types once it adapts to each body shape. Additionally, the brand allows clients to buy different sizes in the top and bottom of a lingerie set, highlighting the brand's acceptance of different body shapes. Concerning the products' price range, it would vary between 24,95€ and 41,95€. Currently, the brand has no physical store, although it was already present in three different markets, and the first one is presented in Figure 34.

Besides this, the primary income source is online sales. Additionally, Instagram constitutes the main driver for the website's visits, being considered the most important social media account for this brand. Along with this, the brand count with more than 1400 followers, being in its initial stage of development.

## 5. Findings

The findings' chapter will contribute to filling the gap of understanding how brands manage the inherent controversy of underwear products when advertising on social media. Due to this, this chapter will present the answer to this study's research question<sup>1</sup>. It was important to have an in-depth overview of the challenges faced in this scenario and, consequently, the strategies adopted to overcome those challenges. The following chapter will be divided into three main sections: 5.1) *Challenges of managing controversies when advertising underwear on social media*; 5.2) *Strategies to manage controversies of advertising underwear on social media*; 5.3) *The overall strategy to advertise underwear on social media*.

### 5.1. Challenges of managing controversies when advertising underwear on social media

#### 5.1.1. Managing paradoxes of communicating intimate products

There is clear unanimity regarding the difficulty in communicating underwear products since brands need to deal with different communication paradoxes (Figure 17). As stated in the Empirical chapter, three of these brands (Missus; Grow Maternity; Liliana Filipa) sell products from a different nature besides the underwear sphere, which makes them believe communicating underwear products deals with more concerns than products from a different nature. Hence, these three brands think it is related to the places people see these products being worn. With this, Grow Maternity's CEO stated: "... *advertising sweatshirts deals with very few concerns comparing to bras – we need to be much more careful with it!*". Similarly, Missus and Liliana Filipa sell swimwear products. Both highlighted the difference in communicating lingerie and swimwear due to the tendency to easily accept a woman using a swimwear item rather than lingerie. Accordingly, both brands agree that this tendency is related to the place and/or situations where women use these products. In accordance, Missus's CEO, the brand that sells both products' types, stated: "*Advertising lingerie is much harder than swimwear since people are used to seeing a woman, in public, using a bikini rather than a lingerie...*". Moreover, Liliana Filipa, as the brand that only sells swimwear products, reinforced this idea by stating: "*advertising bikinis do not shock audiences since people are used to seeing it in*

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<sup>1</sup> The appendix sections (8.4 and 8.5) count with figures for each challenge and strategy that summarize the findings presented in this chapter.

*public, at the beach.*”. With this, brands enhanced the existence of a communication paradox between the underwear’s private and public usage.

Furthermore, all cases agree on the clear tendency of the audience to associate the woman’s body exposure to erotic and sexual feelings. Due to this, these brands highlighted the challenge of communicating sensuality while being respectful, which makes them feel in the center of a communication paradox, having respect and sensuality placed on opposite sides of the spectrum. In accordance, Hiss’s CEO said: “*advertising sensuality is a challenge... it is easy to have people that automatically think about sex when seeing underwear*”.

Additionally, Hiss and Grow Maternity reinforced the existence of a paradox between physical and psychological feelings that a product can provoke in users. Aligned with this, both brands felt difficulty advertising the comfort sensation while communicating sensuality. Along with this, Hiss’s CEO stated: “*...communicating that a product is sensual and at the same time comfortable is a challenge for us*”.

#### 5.1.2. Managing paradoxes of social media communication

The four cases highlighted substantial benefits and risks (Figure 18) under social media communication, making this activity dangerous but essential for the business. The following three risks were highlighted by these four cases as being hard to manage:

- The possibility of becoming viral or trendy for wrongful reasons is related to the fast speed of spreading information, reaching wider audiences. Hence, brands considered this one of their biggest fears since there is a clear difficulty in contradicting a current of opinions that had become viral since a wide audience already accessed that information and acknowledged the shared opinion. Aligned with this, Hiss’s CEO stated: “*We are afraid of being canceled by society... it’s impossible to contradict an opinion that everyone has.*”
- The easiness to be criticized by others is related to the distance implicitly imposed by social media. Missus stated the easiness of being criticized by others is likely associated with people's lack of shame to criticize through a screen. Hiss enhanced that people are less worried about the words used on social media. Additionally, due to the high level of popularity attached to a specific entity, Liliana Filipa's brand enhanced the easiness to receive free hate without any foundation. With this, the CEO stated: “*...our brand image is Liliana, and people who do not like her tend to criticize the brand as well, so we end up receiving free hate*”.

- The strict regulations imposed by social media, especially the Facebook company, limit brands in terms of social media frameworks' accessibility and creative process. For instance, Instagram has already accused Hiss of having sexualized and abusive content, inhibiting them from accessing the Instagram store. On the other hand, Liliana Filipa and Grow Maternity have also been accused of publishing explicit and nudism content, preventing them from accessing Instagram's paid advertisement framework. Aligned with this, Hiss's CEO stated: *"our brand suffers from not having the Instagram store active."*

Regarding social media's benefits, all the four brands stated that social media usage exceeds the previous challenges, attributing an average of 85% concerning Instagram's importance level to their business activity. The interviewees highlighted the following benefits:

- The proximity to the audience - shortening the distance between brands and clients, allows informal communication that does not require presential contact. In accordance, Liliana Filipa's CEO stated: *"...Social media allowed the brand to become accessible in all its aspects... the idea was to make people believe that it is so easy to reach us as to become one of us..."*
- The immediateness of communication was also pointed out as a benefit of social media by providing the opportunity to communicate immediately with their audience. Due to this, Grow Maternity's CEO said: *"without any doubt, having the chance to communicate immediately with our audience is the biggest gain."*
- The opportunity to access social media frameworks can impact brands in diverse manners, such as boosting the sales by having the products hyper-linked in the *"Instagram stories"* to the specific page on the website; reaching wider audiences by having Instagram's advertisement framework activated. Both brands, Liliana Filipa and Missus, highlighted the importance of having the products linked to the specific page on the website by enabling which enables to face periods of poor sales performance. Additionally, Missus's CEO stated: *"using paid advertising is important to face the brand's seasonality..."* On the other hand, Hiss uses paid advertisement to reach wider audiences and make people know the brand once it is in its initial stage of development.

According to this, there is an agreement between these four brands, which enhances the fact that social media's communication deals with several paradoxes that can easily boost the brand's performance or dramatically prejudice it.

### 5.1.3. Managing social pressure

These cases pointed out the existence of social pressure on brands (Figure 19), which is related to people's expectations. Along with this, these brands believe that currently, people have higher expectations standards towards brands in general once they buy the product and the relationship created with the brand. In accordance, brands stated there is a clear pressure to produce content that is not directly related to the product by covering topics from the most diverse contexts such as political, social, and medicinal, that somehow worry the society.

Hiss, a brand that positioned itself according to feministic perspectives, felt there is a clear pressure from society to cover as many feministic trendy topics as possible and take an active position when covering them. Otherwise, the brand will not be correctly interpreted. Moreover, Missus also felt pressure, not only from society but also from providers, to include trendy and actual topics in their social media communication. The challenge relies on keeping the original brand's character while communicating demanded matters that make sense for the brand to cover. Otherwise, people would not perceive the communication well by accusing of lack of genuinely. In accordance, Missus's CEO said, *"I'm afraid of communicating specific topics only because people, including providers, make pressure."*

Grow Maternity believes that currently, people are more conscious about what they buy, which makes them create relationships with brands. With this, Grow Maternity's CEO stated: *"more than ever, people are conscious about brands, they want to build a relationship with them."*

### 5.1.4. Managing the possibility to be wrongly interpreted

All cases highlighted the easiness of being wrongly interpreted (Figure 20) since they believe their communication is extremely related to sensitive women's content increasing the women's likelihood of feeling offended. Additionally, people easily accuse them of taking advantage of causes and topics to make money.

Hiss is conscious about the easiness of people in associating the brand to take advantage of important causes, such as the woman empowerment topic, especially in this initial development stage. With this, Hiss's CEO stated, *"our main challenge relies on keeping communicating our beliefs while being conscient about this tendency."* Additionally, besides the conscience of this tendency from society, Grow Maternity and Liliana Filipa stated their core message was always correctly interpreted. Hence, Grow Maternity's CEO said, *"I'm conscient that being wrongly interpreted in these topics can happen easily. However, my community had always gotten the*

*brand right.*”. This brand believes that it can be related to the fact that before any product insertion, it was launched with a movement called “#It’sNotJustMilk” which attributed reliability and credibility to the brand. Missus is also conscious of this tendency from society, stating the following: “*talking about everything that goes beyond the product barriers, requires a high level of expertise and research.*”. Otherwise, the brand believes that it would easily fall into the tendency of being accused of lack of knowledge.

## 5.2. Strategies to manage controversies on advertising underwear on social media

### 5.2.1. Producing “respectful” product content

#### 5.2.1.1. Correctly communicating the underwear’s product message

As stated in the previous section, brands face a clear challenge to manage the paradoxes of communicating intimate products. Hence, there is an agreement concerning the generic strategy (Figure 21) to face the strong association of these products to sexual and erotic feelings, which relies on basing the product’s content creation on communicating the product inside the respect’s barriers.

Liliana Filipa does not feel any intensive presence of any other paradoxes in its communication strategy because communicating swimwear deals with a higher social acceptance since people are used to seeing these products in public contexts. Moreover, the remaining brands identified the presence of other paradoxes and assumed a communication strategy to deal with them. For instance, Missus’s strategy to correctly communicate the underwear’s message goes through keeping the content as girly as possible by limiting the communication of sensuality which enables the brand to reduce the likelihood of having sexualized and erotic associations. Due to this, the CEO stated: “*the idea is to keep the communication more girly and cuter than sensual*”.

In addition, Grow Maternity reinforced the importance of producing soft content that combines the communication of the product’s practicality with sensuality. With this, the brand’s communication strategy is more leaned to the functionality and practicality side of the product than to the sensuality one. Similarly, Hiss also feels the difficulty in communicating the comfort and sensual side of the product due to the product characteristics. The brand assumes that communicating sensuality seemed to overlap with the comfort one. Still, there is the desire to improve the strategy by placing the approach more inclined to the center of the spectrum having the two characteristics placed on opposite sides. Hence, Hiss’s CEO also stated, “*...the idea is*

*to produce classic content that also considers sensuality*". Furthermore, both brands enhanced the importance of including elegance in the product's communication strategy.

#### 5.2.1.2. Constructing a careful image strategy

According to the previous statements, for these brands exposing underwear deals with managing respect in the product's content creation, which limits the brands' type of photograph and edition used to showcase their products.

##### 5.2.1.2.1. Producing conscious types of photographs

The overall strategy (Figure 22) to showcase the product's details goes through producing flat lay photographs (Figure 36). In other words, flat lay photographs involve creating product photographs without any model wearing it, which allows brands to zoom in on the underwear's details. Missus and Hiss believe their lingerie products are characterized by their huge level of transparency that is not compatible with the desired respectful content. Due to this, creating these types of photographs enables them to communicate their products' details without creating revealing photographs that could be easily associated with sexualized and erotic feelings. Along with this, Missus's CEO stated: *"...when I want to show products' details, I produce flat lay photographs due to the product's transparency level"*.

Liliana Filipa and Grow Maternity believe this is a clear strategy to showcase products details such as materials, colors, etc. Moreover, both brands also include in the reasoning of this strategy the desire to produce different product content than the common one (a woman wearing the product). Additionally, both brands believe an appropriate photograph of a model wearing the product can be done through specific angles and guidelines that ensure respect and are not considered revealing. In accordance, Missus highlighted the caution level needed in photographs sessions to produce respectful content by limiting the models' corporal language (poses, facial expressions, etc.). With this, Missus ensures that the content is more girly and cuter than sensual.

##### 5.2.1.2.1.2. Editing photographs in a transparent manner

Regarding the photographs' edition, there is an evident unanimity concerning the strategies adopted by these cases (Figure 23). All cases adopted an approach that focused on keeping the photographs as natural as possible by being very few edited. Hence, these brands choose only to edit the photographs in light and color terms, not allowing any photoshop for reasons of body

modification. Therefore, this strategy involves not removing any body skin, such as cellulitis, stretch marks, tattoos, scars, etc.

For instance, Hiss adopted this strategy to reinforce their idea of body inclusivity and positivity. The brand believes that it would only be received correctly by the audience if the body's communication was transparent. In accordance, both brands, Liliana Filipa and Missus, highlighted that this strategy's adoption is related to their desire to be true to their audience. Hence, both brands believe their audience already recognizes their models from previous sessions, making them answer to compromise with the audience by being trustful and transparent with them. Moreover, Liliana Filipa's idea is also related to making people identify with the models presented, which is only possible if the photographs are as natural as possible. In accordance, Grow Maternity adopted this strategy to reinforce the idea of showing the rawest side of life by presenting naturality in their photographs, keeping the models' bodies exactly as they are in real life, which helps to communicate transparency to the audience by highlighting reality. The brand's CEO stated, "*It is a manner to make people identify themselves with the models in the photographs sessions.*".

#### 5.2.2. Reinforcing non-product content to educate and inform

##### 5.2.2.1. Communicating topics that easily generate controversy <sup>2</sup>

According to the previous challenges section, it could be understood that society plays a strong role in the way these brands produce content, having a function of alarming to the market's expectations. With this, society is becoming more demanding with brands by expecting them to cover actual topics that, somehow, worry the society. Along with this, Grow Maternity's CEO stated: "*...society believes that due to their high level of brands exposure on social media, we are demanded to cover trendy topics*" by exercising an educative and informative function. Additionally, brands believe that expertise would give them enough credibility and reliability to avoid people accusing them of taking advantage of the covered topics. Having the previous requirements and challenges in mind, Liliana Filipa, Grow Maternity and Hiss, decided to include non-product content in their communication strategies once they strongly believe the benefits from producing it overcome the barriers and associated risks.

In contrast, Missus is the only brand taking a strategy of producing very few content that is not directly related to the product. The reasoning behind this strategy is related to the vulnerable

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<sup>2</sup> This strategy's findings are summarized in Figure 24

position this type of content is able to put the brand in. Missus believes covering topics that worry the society increases the likelihood of making mistakes, making the brand deal with very dramatic risks from social media usage, as explained in the challenges section. Moreover, Missus highlighted that society expects them to react almost immediately to these topics, which does not give them the required expertise level. Furthermore, this brand does not believe that producing non-product content overcomes the associated brands' risks.

In addition, Liliana Filipa and Grow Maternity assumed that society plays an alarming function in market expectations. However, both brands acknowledge that they have enough freedom to decide which topics make sense for them to cover depending on the brand's identification level and how they want to cover those topics, having the opportunity to go deeper into the desired ones. On the other hand, Hiss highlighted the need to adopt a defensive strategy due to the risks of communicating this content type in its initial stage of development. Due to this, the brand decided to adopt an approach covering every desired topic softly, not going deep into any of them. Furthermore, the brand believes that after gaining some trust from their audience, they would be able to cover some topics deeply since the likelihood to be correctly interpreted by their community would be higher.

#### 5.2.2.1.1. Answer to the body inclusivity trend

Additionally, one subject was pointed out by these four cases as being the most demanded topic for an underwear brand to cover in the actuality, which is body inclusivity (Figure 25). Excepting Missus, the remaining brands had already communicated body inclusivity by including different body shapes in campaigns (deeply explained in 5.2.3.1. *Selecting the "right" models to perform brands campaigns*) and providing a transparent photographs' edition as described previously. Despite Missus assuming itself as an inclusive brand by adopting inclusive strategies, the brand is not communicating it yet since it assumes a huge difficulty of shifting its communication strategy to the body inclusivity's message. Hence, the CEO stated, *"the brand's image is immediately related to "perfect body shapes" which turns the communication of body inclusivity much harder."* Hence, Missus sees the communication of body inclusivity as a dangerous strategy since it will imply a change of the initial brand image. However, there is the desire to include this in future communication strategies. Still, it needs to be done gradually, at a slow pace, once people need to stop associating the brand to its actual image.

The rest of the studied cases had always adopted inclusive practices in their communication strategies. For instance, Grow Maternity assumes that the brand is not born to be inclusive but to fill a gap in the market concerning breastfeeding products, although taking into consideration the brand's values, not considering body inclusivity was not an option since it is inherent to its concept. Due to this, Grow Maternity's CEO stated: "*...the idea is to construct an ecosystem based on inclusivity, including ethnic, financial and body inclusivity...*". Along with this, the Grow maternity's strategy goes through having inclusivity implicitly present in every business activity of the brand.

Hiss enhanced the fact that it is a brand born to empower women, which implicitly communicates this trend of body inclusivity. Although, Hiss highlighted the need to do it softly due to the clear tendency to be wrongly interpreted by being accused of taking advantage of an important movement, such as body inclusivity. Due to this, the brand avoids repeating this message and chooses to have it implicit in its content but not expressly shown. Grow Maternity and Hiss also avoid labeling and categorizing sizes, using terms as "Plus size" to categorize the largest sizes since both brands consider it a discrimination type.

Lastly, Liliana Filipa started to communicate body inclusivity in 2019, when it launched a swimwear line that counts with a larger size scale. The brand chose to communicate this strategy by including models whose weight was above the average. Furthermore, the brand labeled this campaign as "*real bodies*" which, in generic lines, was well accepted by the audience. Still, the campaign was a victim of some criticism on social media, once people accused the brand of discriminating thin bodies by not including this body type. With this, the brand started to be more conscious about this topic's sensitivity and avoided communicating the extremes of body inclusivity. With this, the brand's CEO stated, "*we started to avoid exposing very thinnest or fattest models because it can easily offend audiences.*".

### 5.2.3. Building a conscious models' strategy

#### 5.2.3.1. Selecting the "right" models to perform brands' campaigns

Two main strategies can be pointed out in these cases concerning the models' selection process (Figure 26). The first strategy is adopted by Missus and relies on producing professional campaigns by choosing professional and specialized models. Moreover, Missus enhanced the importance of selecting models' agencies that do not impose strict restrictions on the way models appear wearing underwear products. Along with these, Missus's CEO stated, "*It is very difficult to work with agencies that impose strict restrictions and guidelines during the session*".

In contrast, the three remaining brands adopt a different strategy characterized by being familiar through collaborating with non-qualified models. For instance, Liliana Filipa and Grow Maternity decided to communicate open castings on their Instagram, allowing followers to participate in brands campaigns. With this strategy, both brands had the opportunity to collaborate with people that like or identify themselves with the brand's concept. According to this, both brands believe it is a strategy that helps minimize the distance between brands and audiences by easily identifying with the people used in campaigns. Furthermore, Liliana Filipa assumes that this strategy is extremely important for the brand to be considered accessible from its clients. In accordance, this brand's CEO stated: *"the brand had already adopted the strategy of performing professional campaigns, but familiar campaigns worked better since the audience receive the message easily"*.

Similarly, Hiss's strategy concerning the models' selection follows the same logic of Liliana Filipa and Grow Maternity. However, this brand has additional requirements that the other two do not consider during this process which the brand believes is related to its initial development phase. According to this, Hiss set the criteria of collaborating with non-qualified models that are also micro-influencers (having a followers' number between the range of 10k and 20k) and are geographically spread along with the country, which ensures the brand's campaign will reach wider audiences.

Moreover, as stated previously, the last three brands (Liliana Filipa, Grow Maternity, and Hiss) communicate body inclusivity as much as possible by including diverse models with different bodies, avoiding repeating the same body type. In contrast, Missus does not have the same concern since the brand is not communicating body inclusivity yet.

#### 5.2.3.2. Protecting models from audiences' outrage

As stated in the challenges section, there is an agreement regarding the tendency of the audience to associate underwear to sexual and erotic feelings immediately. To face the previous tendency, brands assume a common caution with their models to protect them from the audience's outrage (Figure 27).

Firstly, there is an evident agreement regarding the brands' strategy to react to offensive and abusive comments with explicit sexualized messages on social media. Along with this, the unanimous approach goes through eliminating abusive comments as soon as possible, especially if it is public. Additionally, Hiss, Liliana Filipa, and Grow Maternity sent the photographs after finalizing its edition and allowed models to pre-select the ones they would

like to eliminate. This strategy makes models feel respected by brands and reinforces their close relationship, which was confirmed by two of these brands' models. In accordance, Ana Mota (Hiss's model), stated: *"Hiss was always flexible. When I showed my unsatisfaction towards specific photographs they eliminate it from their archives and never publish it on Instagram"* .

Moreover, Missus collaborates with models' agencies that take care of these bureaucracies. However, there were situations where models did not like specific pictures and asked Missus to remove them, using their social medias' personal accounts. Missus showed its flexibility and eliminated it as soon as possible, which is also related to the brand's desire to repeat the model in another campaign which implies a healthy and respectful relationship with models.

Additionally, one reason for using flat lay photographs (Figure36) is respecting models. Hence, Missus and Hiss assume that resorting to these types of pictures is also a strategy to protect their models by avoiding exposing them in revealing manners. According to this, Hiss's CEO stated: *"flat lay photographs are important for several reasons including protecting our models from excessive exposure"*.

Considering the previous practices, it is important to reinforce the brands' main reasoning behind this strategy which is related to establishing a good relationship with their models. According to this, Liliana Filipa, Grow Maternity collaborates with entities that were previous brands' followers or even clients, which makes the brands feel the need to answer to these people's expectations by behaving according to what they have been previously publishing on their social media. Hence, this strategy helps mainly these three brands to face the challenges covered in the previous section (i.e. 5.1.2. *Balancing social media risks and benefits* & 5.1.4) *Manage the possibility of being wrongly interpreted*). Moreover, Hiss collaborates with digital influencers, which can somehow influence other people's opinions about the brand, inspiring them to provide the best relationship with models to positively impact people. Despite this, Missus's main goal is to establish a good relationship with models once the brand aims to produce more campaigns with the same entity.

#### 5.2.4. Thinking but not planning a digital influencers' strategy

##### 5.2.4.1. Selecting digital influencers

Regarding the partnership with digital influencers, it is crucial to highlight the common strategy adopted by these cases (Figure 28) by not establishing paid contracts with these entities. Aligned with this, the type of relationship that exists between them goes through sending them

products and waiting for them to promote them on social media. Besides this, Liliana Filipa was the only brand assuming that these entities do not play a strong role in its business activity, making them only collaborate with entities that actively interact with the brand or those that propose collaborations. Additionally, the brand's CEO states: "*...collaborating with influencers is not a priority, neither now nor in future*".

Despite this brand, the remaining three cases enhance the importance of these entities to their business activity. According to this, there were two main attitudes that these brands have towards digital influencers. The first attitude is mutually adopted by Missus and Grow Maternity which relies on not following a specific rule in the digital influencers' selection process but considering some requirements these entities need to have. Both brands avoid collaborating with entities that establish partnerships with many other brands since they believe it can dramatically damage their credibility. Moreover, digital influencers need to be aligned with the brand's values.

Additionally, both brands enhanced the importance of these entities to boost the overall brands' performance by positively impacting the website's visits, the number of followers, and therefore sales volume. Aligned with this, Missus performs a good example of this, being explicit in Figure 37. Moreover, both brands count with physical sales points (Figure 32 and 33), where the shop assistants reinforced the importance of digital influencers in the clients' decision-making process. Aligned with this, Mafalda Barbosa (shop assistant at Missus) stated: "*... people bring references from what they see on digital influencers when they are buying at the store*".

In addition, Grow Maternity highlighted an evident caution with the entities' communication strategy and the topics covered by them, making Grow Maternity avoid entities that take a strong position regarding controversial issues for society.

Compared with others, Hiss is the brand that follows the strictest strategy that relies on choosing entities whose number of followers is between 10k and 20k and are geographically spread along with the country's territory. Consequently, a future strategy the brand aims to adopt involves establishing partnerships with people who have an active voice on topics aligned with the brand's values, such as feminist perspectives and sustainability. Although, these entities' communication needs to follow the same logic of Hiss, characterized as being reserved and soft by avoiding going deep in some matters that can easily be in the center of society's discussion.

Moreover, due to the brand's stage of development, this is an important strategy that impacts their reputation and popularity level.

#### 4.2.4.2. Dealing with digital influencers' content

Regarding the digital influencers' content, there is no evident strategy (Figure 29) concerning the way brands manage these entities' content about them. The three brands that work with these entities gave them total freedom to produce the content. According to this, none of the studied cases interfere with how these entities produce content. Moreover, Hiss is the unique brand that somehow influences these entities' content creation by stating: "*We send the products and give some suggestions for the content creation... it's not mandatory, they only do what they want*".

#### 5.2.5. Reacting to clients' feedback

Concerning the way brands manage their feedback, there is an evident agreement regarding the strategy (Figure 30) that requires redoubled attention when the feedback is public rather than private. Moreover, according to these four cases, there is a need to be selective with the feedback, dividing it into offensive feedback and constructive feedback that can be positive or negative. Along with this, it could be understood that the brand's approach would be different according to this division.

Firstly, to approach offensive content with sexual and erotic content, all the studied cases adopted the strategy to eliminate comments as soon as possible, especially when public. The reasoning behind this strategy relies on protecting models, as explained before (2.1.2. Models' protection strategy) and avoiding the sexual associations that are inherent when exposing underwear products. In this way, these four brands enhanced the importance of reacting almost immediately when those comments are public.

Additionally, to approach positive feedback, a clear strategy goes through thanking it publicly and interacting with comments by liking or answering them. Although, the approach is naturally different when it comes to negative feedback. These cases follow the same logic of thanking the feedback, apologizing for any inconvenience, and showing availability to improve in the referred field. The Grow Maternity's CEO stated, "*... first we thank the feedback even if it is negative and show clients that it is always good to receive it in order to improve. In the end, we use to apologize*". When the negative feedback is done in public, there is urgency in answering and guiding the entity to a private channel, such as direct messages or email. In this channel,

the goal is to clarify the situation and reinforce the brand's availability to improve. Moreover, there is always urgency in managing these cases, especially when the communication is still done publicly.

### 5.3. The overall strategy to advertise underwear on social media.

#### 5.3.1. Reinforcing practices that emphasize brands/audience relationship

All the strategies mentioned previously contribute to reaching a common goal referred by these four cases, based on establishing a solid connection with their audiences (Figure 31). The engagement level of social media practices could be seen as a measure of this relationship, and the following practices were considered the strongest ones:

- Delivering content that goes beyond the product's barriers. Due to this, brands are open to talking about trendy topics that society demands them to cover. Moreover, brands try to provide audiences with informative and educative content about those topics, which is highly appreciated. A good example is the brands' position towards the body inclusivity trend, a strategy adopted by Liliana Filipa, Grow Maternity, and Hiss.
- Interacting actively with audiences is a strategy that allows brands to be closer with their clients by resorting to social media frameworks, especially Instagram frameworks such as polls, open boxes for questions, surveys, etc. This is a strategy mostly adopted by Missus and Liliana Filipa since both brands enhanced the fact that people feel their opinion has been considered for future creations. In contrast, Hiss just stopped practicing this strategy once the engagement level was not very high, which the brand believes is due to their limited followers' number. Although, the brand is planning to re-adopt this strategy when this number increases.
- Providing "backstage" content is highly appreciated by these cases due to the high engagement level that it generates. Due to this, brands believe that showing campaigns backstage, product's creation process provides a feeling of transparency in communication that is well received by audiences.
- Sharing clients' photographs wearing the brand's products is a strategy frequently adopted by Missus and Liliana Filipa. Both brands believe that clients have tried to put more and more effort into the way they produce photographs intending to have the brand sharing them. Both brands believe that this practice makes audiences feel pride about being a Missus or a Liliana Filipa client.

These cases believe that as stronger the relationship with the audience is, higher the likelihood of being well interpreted, giving them more freedom in the content's creation process when advertising underwear on social media.

## 6. Discussion

Underwear products had been associated to a set of ambiguities that could explain the difficulty of communicating products from such an intimate nature (Jantzen et al., 2006; Storr, 2002; Storr, 2003). From the wide set of ambiguities presented in the literature review, some were highlighted in this study's findings. According to this, Storr reinforced the existence of an evident ambiguity between the respectability and seductiveness of underwear (Storr, 2002). In accordance, these insights suggest the clear difficulty in placing underwear content between respect and sensuality once they believe these two characteristics are positioned on opposite sides of the spectrum, having contradictions separating them. Hence, these insights proved the impossibility of being placed in the center of this spectrum, making brands lean more towards the respect side than the seduction one, avoiding dealing with further sexual association. Moreover, aligned to what was stated by Jantzen and Ostergaard, findings also reinforce the easiness of people to immediately associate lingerie to sexuality and sex (Jantzen et al., 2006). Furthermore, this study contributed to the underwear's controversial advertising knowledge by enhancing the key strategy of producing respectful content to avoid sexual associations.

My insights also found references to the ambiguity between private and public usage of underwear, which is related to the context in which the product is worn. According to this, a prior study (Storr, 2003) defended there are products inside the underwear's sphere that are easily accepted by society to be worn in public. My findings reinforced this idea by showing that underwear generally deals with more concerns than other product nature and advertising swimwear deals with much fewer concerns than Lingerie since people are used to seeing it in a public context. In addition, a prior study (Tsaousi, 2011) covered the possibility of finding contradictions between the physical and psychological sensations produced by an underwear product which can be confirmed in this study. In accordance, this study enhanced the difficulty in communicating the comfort's (physical) and the sensual's (psychological) sensation of an underwear product being contradictory characteristics. Furthermore, this study contributed to the underwear's controversial advertising knowledge by finding another ambiguity that communicates the cute and girly side of underwear with the sensual one.

Regarding social media advertising, it was previously addressed (Marres & Moats, 2015) that outrage and offenses are the main domain of social media engagement. However, my findings do not have enough evidence to confirm it. On top of that, there is an accordance between findings and the fast pace of disseminating negative messages, which is quicker than the

positive ones defended in a previous study (Tsugawa & Ohsaki, 2015). Moreover, these results proved that brands adopted strategies to contradict the speed of spreading negative messages about the brand, such as the arising urgency in answering clients' constructive feedback and eliminating abusive comments that can harm the brand's reputation.

Additionally, these cases' different strategies contributed to reaching a common goal: establishing a solid connection with their audience. With this, brands assume more freedom in the content creation process, reducing the likelihood of being wrongly interpreted. In accordance, brands believe that the better the relationship with the audience, the easier the management of underwear controversies on social media will be. Brands believe this is the overall strategy to manage the underwear's controversies when advertising on social media, which answers this study's research question.

## 7. Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to uncover the communication strategies to manage the underwear controversies when advertising on social media. Previous research advocated the social media's effect on fashion brands and consumer behavior. However, the underwear's investigation is limited, opening an opportunity to study the underwear's brands/social media connection deeply. Hence, this study aims to fill this research gap by contributing to the controversial advertising's knowledge when performed on social media. Furthermore, a multiple case study was conducted, collaborating with four Portuguese underwear brands. The exploratory nature of this research implied a qualitative design, having gathered primary and secondary data to answer this study's research question. With this, these cases' best practices were deeply analyzed and compared.

This thesis' findings highlight the existence of four major challenges: 1) Managing paradoxes of communicating intimate products, 2) Managing social media communication paradoxes; 3) Managing social pressure and lastly, 4) Managing the possibility of being wrongly interpreted. Additionally, some strategies were pointed out to face the previous challenges. All the referred strategies contributed to the brands' common goal of establishing a solid connection with audiences. These brands believe that the better the relationship with the audience, the easier the management of underwear controversies on social media will be. Hence, this strategy constitutes the way these brands manage the underwear's controversies when advertising on social media and, therefore, the answer to this study's research question.

Concerning this study's limitations, the inexistence of quantitative research could be pointed out once it would be interesting to gather information about consumer perception about these cases' communication on social media. With this, future studies should consider a quantitative approach to understand the effectiveness of these brands' online communication. Additionally, I would recommend doing a focus group with the participation of an individuals' group that knows these brands equally and, therefore, discuss and compare these cases' online communication effectiveness.

Moreover, due to the lack of academic literature that relates underwear fashion to social media, online news were read, which are not as accurate as scientific articles and therefore, it could have biased the way this study was conducted.

## 8. Appendix

### 8.1.Cases selection process

Criteria	Brand	Communication channel	Date of the 1 <sup>st</sup> contact	Outcome
Initial criteria	Calzedonia group (Intimissimi and Tezenis)	Email and LinkedIn	25/10/2021	Negative
	Women'secret	Email	28/10/2021	No answer
	Leonessa	Email and Instagram	28/10/2021	Negative
	Lalambu	Email and Instagram	02/11/2021	No answer
	Lounge	Email	28/10/2021	No answer
Second criteria	Cantê	Email and phone call	29/10/2021	Negative
	Type	Email and LinkedIn	06/11/2021	Limited help
	Missus	Email and phone call	10/11/2021	Positive
	Grow maternity	Email and LinkedIn	19/10/2021	Positive
	Hiss	Email and Instagram	09/11/2021	Positive
	Liliana Filipa swimwear	Email and phone call	09/11/2021	Positive
	Dama de Copas	Email	12/11/2021	Late answer

Figure 4: Cases selection process resume

## 8.2.Secondary and Primary data resume

Type of data	Title of the document	Name of the author	Name of the organization	Date of publication	Use in analysis
Online article	“Inês Patrocínio conta como a maternidade a levou a criar uma marca propria”	n.d.	Caras	July of 2021	Data collected to have information about the company’s origin.
	"Grow Maternity, a facildora da amamentação"	n.d.	Portugal Têxtil	September of 2021	Data collected to have more information about the initial company’s values
	“Grow Maternity: a roupa interior pensada para o conforto das mães e das mulheres”	Francisca Dias Real	Time Out	February of 2021	Data collected to have deeper insights of the company history
	"Inês Patrocínio lançou uma linha de soutiens de amamentação sustentáveis”	Maria Salgueiro	NiT	December of 2020	Data collected to have more information about the brand’s origin, initial values and product details.
	“Vogue retail: Baby & Child”	Condé Nast Britain	Vogue	October of 2021	Data collected to have information about the way brand’s perceptions.
Online Interviews	“What’s up” tv show	Carolina Patrocínio	SIC women	July of 2020	Data gathered to have information about the #It’snotjustmilk movement
	“Eu queria um sutien para mim”	Carolina Patrocínio	SIC women	May of 2021	Data gathered to have more information about the products’ offer (characteristics, goals, etc) and the way the brand presents itself to the world
Podcasts	“Sapateado” episode 19 <sup>th</sup>	Madalena Beirão	ZilianChoose	October of 2021	Data collected to have more information about the company’s origin (#It’sNotJustMilk) and the current challenges and goals
	“N’A Caravana”	Rita Ferro Alvim	-	December of 2020	
Company’s website	“About us” “Who we are” “Our story” “Our bras”	Inês Patrocínio	Grow Maternity	n.d.	Data gathered to have information about the brand’s history.

Figure 5: Grow Maternity's secondary data collection resume

Type of data	Title of the document	Name of the author	Name of the organization	Date of publication	Use in analysis
Online article	“Biquínis e fatos de banho que favorecem todos os tamanhos”	Sara Oliveira	Notícias	March of 2021	Data gathered to have more information about the product characteristics and brand’s attitudes towards body inclusivity.
	“Missus já lançou a nova coleção – e convidou Margarida Corceiro para a campanha”	Maria Salgueiro	NiT	March of 2021	Data gathered to have more information about brand’s strategy when launching new products as well as brand’s attitudes towards digital influencers.
	“MISSUS. A nova coleção de swimwear sustentável que é feita com plástico dos oceanos”	Isabel Silva	Dobem	n.d.	Data gathered to understand the brand’s relationships with popular entities, and how they present the brand to the world.
YouTube video & Online Interview	“MISSUS Loving Swimsuits”	n.d.	FCH digital Hub	July of 2016	Data gathered to have more information about the brand’s history.
Documents provided by the company	Website statistics	Marta Matias	Google analytics	November of 2021	Data collected to understand the main website's drivers and the impact of social media in the website's performance.
	Business project	Marta Matias, Rui Nunes, Sofia Walter	-	2016	Data gathered to have more information about the company itself and its main competitors.
	Website statistics	Marta Matias	Google analytics	November of 2021	Data collected to understand the relation between the brand and a specific digital influencer, Margarida Corceiro.

Figure 6: Missus's secondary data collection resume

Type of data	Title of the document	Name of the author	Name of the organization	Date of publication	Use in analysis
Online article	“Liliana Filipa da “Casa dos Segredos” lança segunda linha de swimwear”	Ângela Mata	NiT	July of 2018	Data gathered to have more information about the brand’s creation process.
	“Liliana Filipa da Casa dos Secretos lança linha arrojada de fatos de banho”	n.d.	MoveNotícias	July of 2017	Data gathered to have more information about the products’ characteristics.
	“Liliana Filipa: Ser mulher na área empresarial é muito difícil”	Inês Sena	MAGG	October of 2021	Data gathered to understand the challenges faced by the CEO, being a woman in the business world.
Online Interview	“No dia do seu aniversário, recorde a entrevista de Liliana Filipa para a WH”	Mariana Botelho	Women’s Health Portugal	August of 2021	Data gathered to understand how one of the CEOs feel about the brand and the current challenges of it.
Podcast	“Só mais 5 minutos com Liliana Filipa”	Catarina Miranda	-	September of 2021	Data gathered to understand how the CEO feels about the brand and how promote it in public.
YouTube video	“Vlog of the “I feel” campaign”	Liliana Filipa	-	October of 2021	Data gathered to uncover company’s strategies and ways of operating
	“Q&A about my job”			September of 2020	
	“Liliana Filipa event”			October of 2021	
	“Event: Lilian Filipa design 20/21”			October of 2020	
Documents provided by the company	Website statistics	Liliana Filipa	Google analytics	November of 2020	Data collected to understand the main website's drivers and the impact of social media in the website's performance.

Figure 7: Liliana Filipa's secondary data collection resume

Type of data	Title of the document	Name of the author	Name of the organization	Date of publication	Use in analysis
Online article	“Hiss para mulheres leves e confiantes”	n.d.	Portugal Têxtil	October of 2021	Data gathered to have deeper information about its initial goals and products’ characteristics
	“Sem aros nem copas. A leveza dos novos soutiens portugueses”	Mauro Gonçalves	Time Out	October of 2021	Data gathered to have deeper information about its initial goals and products’ characteristics
Company’s website	“The brand” section	Luísa Azadino and Joana Mesquita	Grow Maternity	September of 2021	Data gathered to have information about the brand’s history and the way presents itself to the world.
Documents provided by the company	Business plan	Luísa Azadino and Joana Mesquita	Hiss	-	Data gathered to have more information about the company itself and its main competitors.
	Website statistics	Luísa Azadino and Joana Mesquita	Google Analytics	November of 2021	Data collected to understand the main website's drivers and the impact of social media in the website's performance.
	Brand moodboard	Luísa Azadino and Joana Mesquita	Hiss	-	Data collected to understand the way the brand created its identity and aspires to be perceived by others.

Figure 8: Hiss's secondary data collection resume

Brand	Date	interviewer name	Position in the organization	Duration	Way of conducting
Grow Maternity	17/11/2021	Inês Patrocínio	CEO	35 min	Presential
	19/11/2021	Patrícia Costa	Shop assistant at Nossa store	9 min	Presential
	19/11/2021	Sara Formiga	Shop assistant at Nossa store	7 min	Presential
	02/12/2021	Inês Patrocínio	CEO	33 min	Presential

Figure 9: Grow Maternity's primary data collection resume

Brand	Date	interviewer name	Position in the organization	Duration	Way of conducting
Missus	16/11/2021	Marta Matias	CEO	45 min	Presential
	24/11/2021	Joana Azinhais	Shop assistant	10 min	Presential
	24/11/2021	Sofia Silva	Shop assistant	7 min	Presential
	24/11/2021	Marta Matias & Telma Cadeto	CEO & Product manager	43 min	Presential
	26/11/2021	Joana Azinhais	Shop assistant	11 min	Presential
	26/11/2021	Mafalda Barbosa	Shop assistant	10 min	Presential
	26/11/2021	Marta Matias & Telma Cadeto	CEO & Product manager	17 min	Presential

Figure 10: Missus's primary data collection resume

Brand	Date	interviewer name	Position in the organization	Duration	Way of conducting
Liliana Filipa	15/11/2021	Mónica Fernandes	CEO	30 min	Presential
	19/11/2021	Monica fernandes	CEO	32 min	Online
	06/12/2021	Inês Nunes	Administrative coordinator	22 min	Online
	29/11/2021	Inês Bras	Brand's model	7 min	Online

Figure 11: Liliana Filipa's primary data collection resum

Brand	Date	interviewer name	Position in the organization	Duration	Way of conducting
Hiss	14/11/2021	Luísa Azadino & Joana Mesquita	CEOs	20 min	Presential
	17/11/2021	Luísa Azadino, Joana Mesquita & Andreia Costa	CEO's and Social media designer	53 min	Online
	17/11/2021	Luísa Azadino & Joana Mesquita	CEOs	42 min	Online
	24/11/2021	Luísa Azadino & Joana Mesquita	CEOs	49 min	Online
	30/11/2021	Ana Mota	Brand's model and Digital Influencer	10 min	Online

Figure 12: Hiss's primary data collection resume

Brand	Date	interviewer name	Position in the organization	Duration	Way of conducting
Dama de copas	30/11/2021	Mariana Paulo	Marketing director of Portugal and Spain	57 min	Online
Calzedonia Group	31/10/2021	Inês Durão	District managar	25 min	Online
Cantê	02/11/2021	Joana Pereira	Shop assistant	18 min	Online
Auratus	10/11/2021	Inês Filipa Varelas	Social media manager	20 min	Online

Figure 13: Industry experts' primary data collection resume

### 8.3.Coding Process

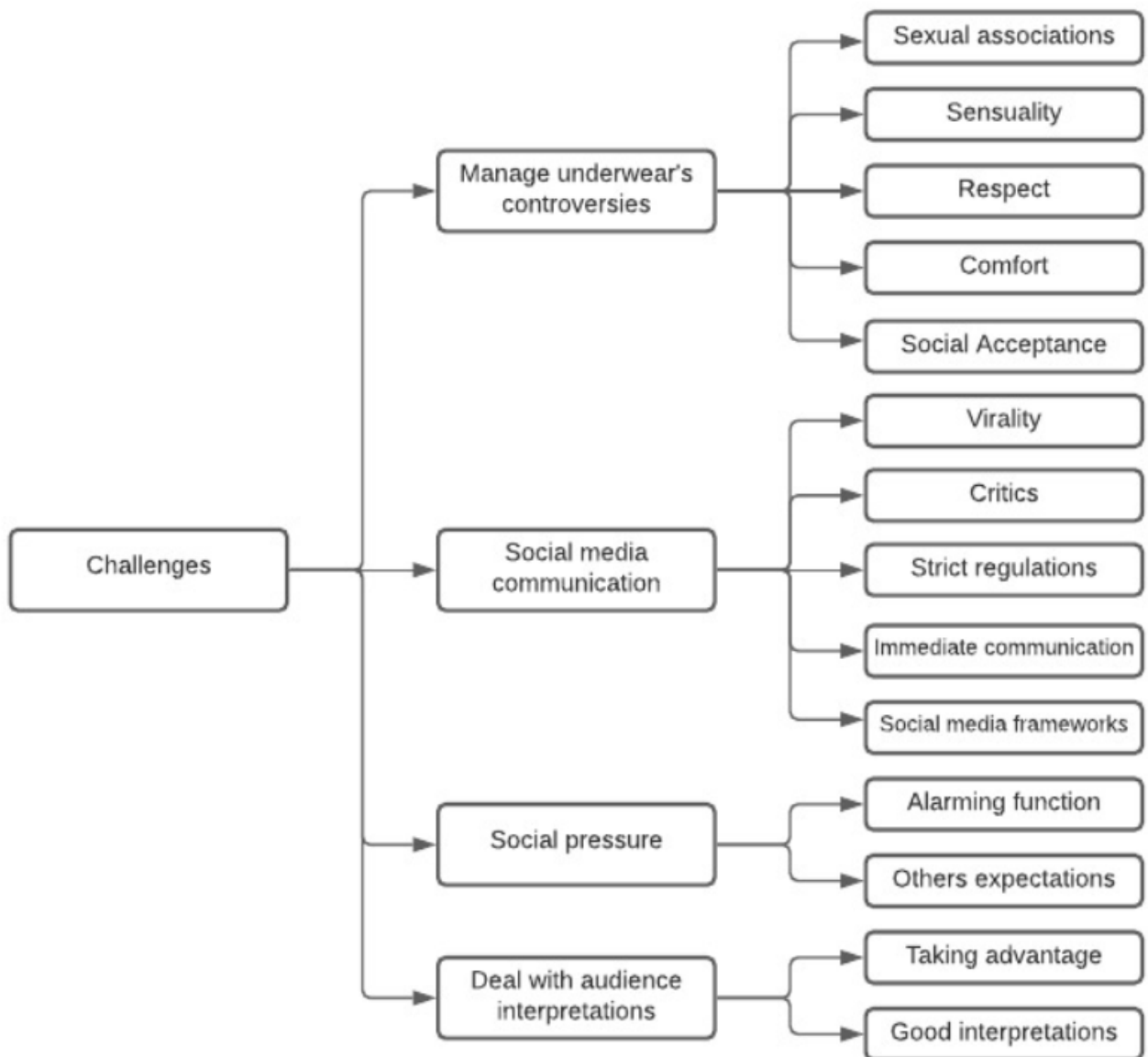


Figure 14: Scheme of the "challenges" theme of the coding process

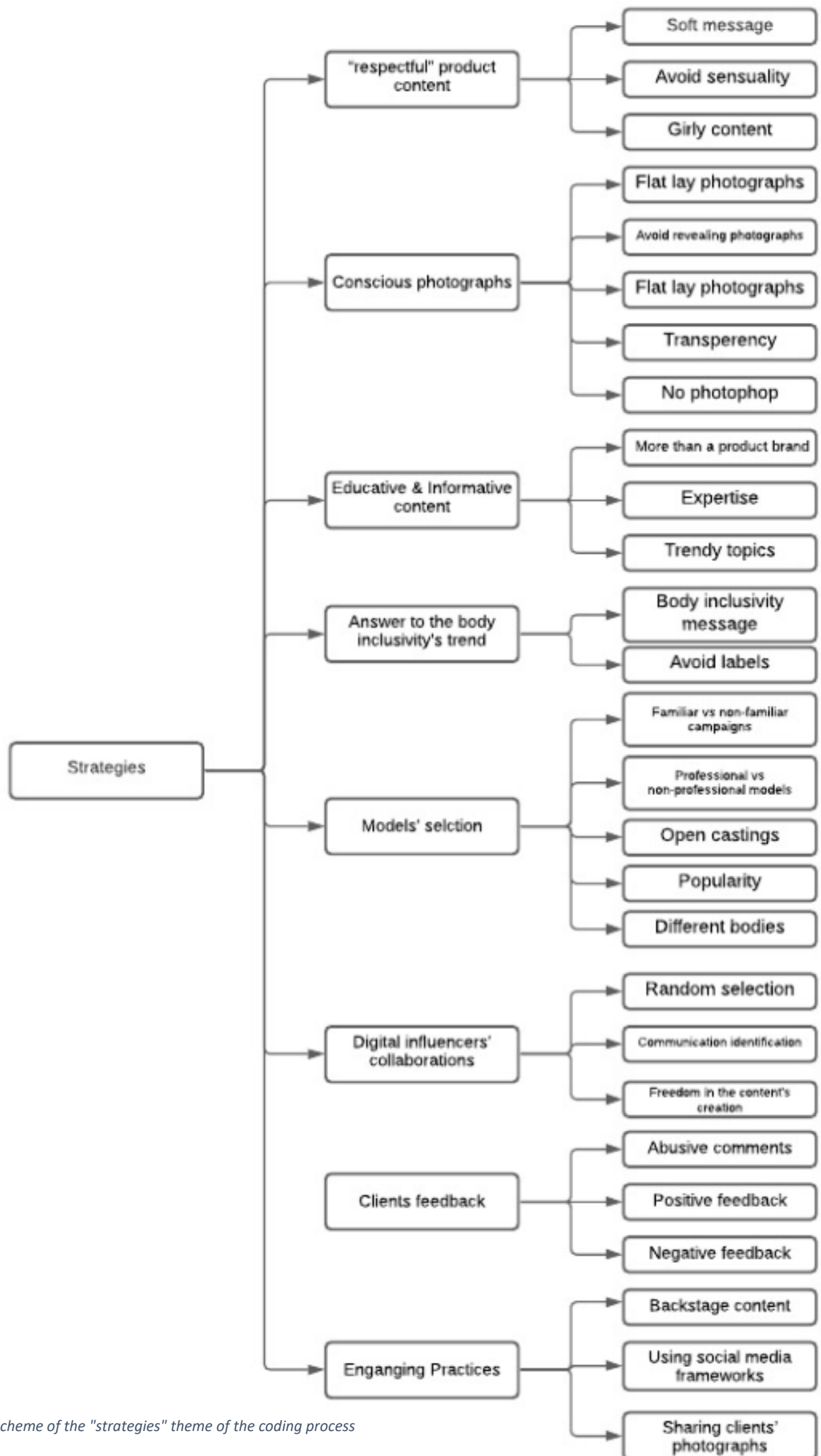


Figure 15: Scheme of the "strategies" theme of the coding process

Category	Code	Citations	
Underwear' s controversies	Sexual associations	Primary data	Secondary data
		"Lingerie is automatically related to sexuality." -1 "... it is easy to have people that automatically think about sex when seeing underwear" -2 "...there is a clear tendency that leads people to sexual connections."-3	X
	Sensuality	"The idea is to make women feel sensual when wearing our products"-2 "The brand also communicates the sensuality of the products"-4	<i>"The main objective was to enhance women's sensuality"-3.1. "The brand presented a new collection with very sensual photos"-3.2. "We want to help other girls overcome low self-esteem. We are all sexy"-3.3.</i>
	Respect	"... if respect is implicit in product content, people will receive the campaign well" -1 "Producing respectful content was the solution to manage underwear"-2 "Sharing respect is the brand's focus, to their audience, their models, clients ...everyone"-3 "The key is to communicate inside the respect's barriers"-4	X
Comfort	"The idea was to construct a lingerie that was 100% comfortable for women"-2 "The initial main focus was to construct bras that make mothers feel comfortable when breastfeeding"-4	"Comfort was very important to us, especially as we are coming out of a period when many women choose to not wear a bra"-2.1. "none of the bras contain cups, hoops or wires that might be uncomfortable for women"-2.2. "The mote was "be comfortable above all" by creating bras that work as a second skin"-4.1.	

	Social acceptance	<p>“... advertising sweatshirts deals with very few concerns comparing to bras. We need to be much more careful with it!”-4</p> <p>“advertising bikinis do not shock audiences since people are used to seeing it in public, at the beach.”-3</p> <p>"Advertising lingerie is much harder than swimwear since people are used to seeing a woman, in public, using a bikini rather than a lingerie..."-1</p>	
Social media communication	Virality	<p>“Leading with social media virality is the worst part of this communication channel...it’s easy to become viral”</p> <p>“We are afraid of being cancelled by society... it’s impossible to contradict an opinion that everyone has.”-2</p> <p>“Going viral is dangerous, even if it is for good reasons” -3.</p> <p>“Becoming a trend in social media due to an unhappy messages scares me since it reach higher proportions”- 4</p>	
	Critics	<p>“It is very easy anonymous people criticize especially on social media when they are doing it through a screen”-1</p> <p>“Especially on Facebook, people criticize everything” -2</p> <p>“...our brand image is Liliana, and people who do not like her tend to criticize the brand as well, so we end up receiving free hate”-.3</p> <p>“Of course that the ones who want to criticize you, will always do. No matter what”-4</p>	“I never carried about negative critics on social media. If it is not constructive, I would not consider it”- 3.4.
	Strict regulations	<p>“Instagram is very strict, for example arms raised is always banned”-1</p> <p>“Instagram accused us from having abusive content which does not allow us to have the store available”-2.</p> <p>“I believe that Instagram and Facebook limits our creativity with all its regulations”-3.</p> <p>“Instagram already accused the brand from having nudism or explicit content”-4.</p>	
	audience proximity	<p>“...the idea was to make people believe that it’s so easy to reach us as become one of us”-3</p> <p>“having a channel that allow us to have clients so close is very important to an online brand”-4</p>	
	immediate communication	<p>“without any doubt, having the chance to communicate immediately with our audience is the biggest gain.” -4.</p> <p>“the opportunity to access to instantaneous public’s feedback, allow us to react to everything immediately”-1</p>	

	social media framework	<p>“using paid advertising is important to face the brand’s seasonality...”-1</p> <p>“Having the products linked in the instasotries for the webpage is a great booster to increase the website’s visits”-3</p> <p>“we try to use as much paid advertising as possible, especially in its initial stage of development”-2</p>	
Social pressure	Alarming function	<p>“society plays a strong role in showing us which topics should we cover”- 2.</p> <p>“social pressure has the power to alarm us from what the market is expecting brands to talk about”-1.1.</p> <p>“Social pressure is not able to dictacte new strategies but to alarm us”- 3.</p> <p>“setting new strategies is not dependent from social pressure but it can help in the way we produce content”-4.</p>	
	Others’ expectations	<p>"There is pressure in everything that we do, not only from society but also from providers”-1</p> <p>“I’m afraid of communicating specific topics only because people, including providers, make pressure.”-1.</p> <p>“The people’s standards changed, now the expect much more from brand than what we were used in the past”-4.</p>	
Audience interpretations	Take advantage	<p>“people believe that we are only covering specific topics because we are taking advantage of them, to make money” -2</p> <p>“there is a tendency from assuming that some specific topics are being communicated to make money from them”-1</p>	
	Good interpretations	<p>“In general, the brand always count with a great receptiveness from the audience”-3.</p> <p>“I’m conscious that I’m communicating sensitive topics but in general I was always correctly interpreted”-4</p>	
“ respectful” product content	Soft message	<p>“If the message of the product is given in a soft manner, the campaign will be well received”- 4</p> <p>“The idea is to communicate underwear softly, enhancing the brand’s class”-2</p>	
	Avoid sensuality	<p>“The content needs to be as girly as possible by avoiding sensual poses.”-1.</p> <p>“..there is the need to limit sensuality’s communication”-1.</p> <p>“For now, we limit the way of communicating sensuality and give more emphasis to other product characteristics”-4</p>	

	Girly content	<p>“the idea is to keep the communication girly and cute”-1.</p> <p>“Communicating girly content keeps the brand distanced from sexual associatios”-1.</p>	
Conscious photographs	flat lay photographs	<p>“...when I want to show products’ details, I produce flat lay photographs due to the product’s transparency level”-1.</p> <p>“due to product’s transparency, there are details that are only possible to be shown in flat lay photographs”-2.</p> <p>“Flat lay photographs are also very good for not tiring people from the usual content”-3</p>	
	Avoid revealing photographs	<p>“there is the need to limit models in their corporal language, by avoiding provocative poses, facial expressions, etc”. -1</p> <p>“A carefull photograph can be done according to the right angle and it would not fall in the tendency of being considered too revealing”-4</p> <p>“there is always a way of exposing a woman in a bikini that is not revealing”-3</p>	
	Transparency	<p>“few photographs edition is a manner to make people identify themselves with the models in the photographs sessions.”-4.</p> <p>“People like transparency in the edition, it becomes easy for them to identify themselves with the brand”-3.</p> <p>“Less edition make audience believe we are being true with them, which give us more credibility”-2.</p> <p>“Our public already know the models from previous sessions so, we need to be always coherent in the way their body appear”-1.</p>	
	No photoshop	<p>“There isn’t any type of photoshop that is done in the edition process. Thus, body modifications and skin mark removals aren’t allowed”-2</p> <p>Everything is included on photographs, we do not allow any skin removal like cellulitis, stretch marks”-3.</p> <p>“There was a situation when the photographs asked us to remove stretch marks but the brand did not allowed it”-1.</p> <p>“As an inclusive brand, it does not make sense to remove anything from women’s body neither modificate it” -4.</p>	
Educative & Informative content	More than a product brand	<p>“currently people do not want a brand that only delivers a product, they want to buy the relationship created with the brand”-2.</p> <p>“more than ever, people are conscious about brands, they want to build a relationship with them.”-4.</p> <p>“Creating a relationship with our audiences implies creating more content that is not only related to product”-3.</p>	<p>“I want that it was more than a brand, I want to create a community”-4.2.</p>

Educative & Informative content	Expertise	<p>“To cover topics that goes beyond the product itself, there is the need to have enough knowledge and expertise”-1.</p> <p>“producing non-product content requires expertise but that’s the focus of the brand: educate people about breastfeeding”-4</p>	<p>“Our concepnct is very close to the health area, so we have several contact with medics, nurses that help us to communicate to our target”-4.1.</p>
	Trendy topics	<p>“People demand us to talk about any trendy topic in the world, they expect us to have an active voice about everything”- 2.</p> <p>“...society believes that due to their high level of brands exposure on social media, we are demanded to cover trendy topics”-4.</p> <p>“society and even providers make us a pressure to talk about the latest trendy topics happening in the world”-1.</p>	
Answer to the body inclusivity’ s trend	Body inclusivity message	<p>“the brand’s image is immediatly related to “perfect body shapes” which turns the communication of body inclusivity much harder.”-1</p> <p>“...the idea is to construct an ecosystem based on inclusivity, including ethnic, financial and body inclusivity...”-4.</p> <p>“Allowing to combine different sizes in the top and bottom of the underwear’s pack was the start point of this strategy”-4.</p> <p>“Communicating body inclusivity has been present since the very beginning of the brand”- 3.</p> <p>“We did campaigns with larger size scales for real women”-3.</p>	<p>“...are real women of different sizes, the lace has a high elasticity making models very flexible and adaptable to various bodies”- 2.2.</p> <p>“The aim of this campaign is to demystify the history of the ideal body”-3.3.</p>
	Avoid labels	<p>“From the very beginning we avoid labelling larger sizes using the term “plus size” because it makes people feel desciminated”-2</p> <p>“Labelling sizes using terms as “plus size” is already a type of discrimination, so the brand has never used it in its campaigns”-4</p>	
Models selection	Familiar vs non-familiar campaigns	<p>“the brand had already adopted the strategy of performing professional campaigns, but familiar campaigns worked better since the audience reiceive the message easily”. -3</p> <p>“Due to our stage of development, we do not have any other option besides producing familiar campaigns. Although, we want to keep producing it in the future”-2.</p> <p>“We only produce non-familiar campaigns, professional campaigns deals with higher costs but saves us much time”-1</p> <p>“Until now familiar campaigns resulted well but the idea is to start producing non-familiar”-4</p>	

	Professional vs non-professional models	<p>“Professional models also work better, they already know which poses to do and the way they should appear”- 1.</p> <p>“Using non-professional models have been our focus, it makes people identify themselves to the brand”-3.</p> <p>“Due to our budget we only resort to non-professional models. We also believe people receive the campaign better if they see “normal people” performing the campaign”-2.</p>	
	Open castings	<p>“We do open castings on social media and wait for people to share their mothers’ history, and photos”-4</p> <p>“We open castings on Instagram and receive people that already liked the brand and followed it previously”-3</p>	
	Popularity	<p>“We choose micro influencers to perform our campaigns. Their follower numbers need to be between 10k and 20k”.</p>	
	Different bodies	<p>“The idea is to have diversity in our campaigns by including several models with different body types and ages.”-4</p> <p>“We make sure that each campaign contains people with different bodies, more curves, less curves, everything is included”-3.</p> <p>“In the current days, it does not make sense to only include people with the body that answers the common beauty pattern, we include every body type in our campaigns”- 2.</p>	
Digital influencers’ collaborations	Random selection	<p>“We do not follow any specific rule. For us collaborating with influencers is not a priority, neither now nor in future”-3.</p> <p>“I would say that the influencers selection is a little random. Sometimes we contact some entities or we wait them to contact us and then a collaboration can emerge”- 1.</p> <p>“We are always very attentive to what is going on. If there is a popular entity that is pregnant, we suggest a collaboration”-4</p>	
	Communication identification	<p>“even not considering me very strict with the digital influencers’ requirement, I always keep attention to their communication. In this way, I avoid collaborating with people that communicate values that the brand does not share”. -4</p> <p>“since we are not communicating very controversial topics, the idea is that the people that we collaborate have the same way of communicating”-2.</p>	
	Freedom in the content creation	<p>“The idea is to send them the product and then they produce content for the brand in their desired way, we do not interfere”-1.</p> <p>“We do not ask them to do specific things since it is lingerie and we agree that it is very personal... We send the products and give some suggestions for the content creation, it’s not mandatory, they only do what they want”.-2</p> <p>“We just send them the product and then they can promote or not, it depends if they like the experience” -4.</p>	

Clients' feedback	Abusive comments	<p>“It is common to have men commenting our photographs with sexual and erotic messages. It is abusive and we eliminate it as soon as we see it on our page”-3</p> <p>“It is not super common but sometimes we receive abusive messages and comments, especially when promoting lingerie”-1.</p> <p>“Every time that we see an abusive comment, the approach is the same, eliminate it as soon as possible”- 2.</p>
	Positive feedback	<p>“We always start to thank the feedback, the idea is that if someone spent time giving us the feedback, it needs to be valued by the company”-4.</p> <p>“Constructive feedback is very important for us, sometimes we include in future collections what our clients have said in the feedback”-3.</p> <p>“especially in this first stage of development we need to thank the feedback, it is very important for us”-2.</p> <p>“We incentivize people to give us feedback since it is important for the brand’s creative process” -1</p>
	Negative feedback	<p>“We thank it and apologize. It is very important to give answer to it as soon as possible when the comment is done publicly”-1</p> <p>“Our approach goes through thanking and apologizing...If we feel we have something to clarify we try to do it in a private channel”-2</p> <p>“The approach to react to negative feedback goes through thanking it and apologizing. The key is to show brand’s availability to improve”-4</p>
Engaging practices	Backstage content	<p>“People really appreciate “behind the scenes content”, it generates higher engagement rates”-1.</p> <p>“Everytime that I go to a factory, etc... I try to produce content since people feel more closer to us and feel that everything is very transparent for them” -4</p> <p>“More than ever people like to see the backstage. I think that makes them know better the company and our way of producing”-2</p> <p>“The audience interacts very well with all content that involves backstage, behind the scenes, etc. People like to see the creative process”-3</p>
	Using social media framework	<p>“Making the most of social media’s frameworks like Instagram pools, surveys, open boxes- make people interact with the brand and make them feel their voice is being heard”- 1.</p> <p>“Those social media frameworks allow us to interact with people and to reach their opinions easily, like Instagram pools”-3.</p> <p>“Using Instagram frameworks allow us to interact with people and to understand their opinions concerning specific topics”-4.</p>
	Sharing clients' photographs	<p>“When we started publishing our clients’ photos wearing the products, we noticed started to put more and more effort on it. It makes them feel proud of being a Missus client”-3</p> <p>“We always share on Instagram stories our clients’ photos with the products. It generates high levels of engagement, and our clients appreciate it very much”-1</p>

Figure 16: List of codes and respective citations

Caption for Figure 16: List of codes and respective citations

1)Marta Matias, Missus's CEO

1.1) Telma Cadeto, Missus's product manager

2)Luísia Azadino, Hiss's CEO

2.1) Luísia Azadino, Hiss's CEO, for TimeOut

2.2) Luísia Azadino, Hiss's CEO, for Portugal Textil

3)Mónica Fernandes, Liliana Filipa's CEO

3.1) Liliana Filipa, Liliana Filipa's CEO for NIT

3.2.) Move Notícias for Liliana Filipa

3.3) Liliana Filipa, Liliana Filipa's CEO for TV7dias

3.4)Liliana Filipa, Liliana Filipa's CEO at "Só mais 5 minutos" podcast.

4)Inês Patrocínio, Grow Maternity's CEO

4.1) Inês Patrocínio, Grow Maternity's CEO for TimeOut

4.2) Inês Patrocínio, Grow Maternity's CEO at Sapeado- Zilian podcast

4.3) Inês Patrocínio, Grow Maternity's CEO at N'Acaravana podcast

#### 8.4. Summary of the challenges faced when advertising underwear on social media

Challenge: Managing paradoxes of communicating intimate products			
Paradoxes Brands	Sensuality Vs Respect	Private vs Public underwear's usage	Sensuality Vs Comfort
Liliana Filipa	X	X	
Grow Maternity	X	X	X
Missus	X	X	
Hiss	X		X

Figure 17 : Challenge of managing paradoxes of communicating intimate products resume

Challenge: Managing paradoxes of social media communication		
Paradoxes Brands	Risks	Vs Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Liliana Filipa</li> <li>• Grow Maternity</li> <li>•Missus</li> <li>•Hiss</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The possibility of becoming viral or trendy for wrongful reasons.</li> <li>•The easiness to be criticized by others.</li> <li>•The strict regulations imposed by social media.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The proximity to the audience.</li> <li>•The immediateness of communication.</li> <li>•The opportunity to access social media frameworks</li> </ul>

Figure 18: Challenge of managing paradoxes of social media communication resume

Challenge: Managing social pressure		
authors Brands	Pressure from society to cover specific topics	Pressure from providers to cover specific topics
Liliana Filipa	X	
Grow Maternity	X	
Missus	X	X
Hiss	X	

Figure 19 Challenge of managing social pressure resume

Challenge: Managing the possibility to be wrongly interpreted			
Paradoxes Brands	Easiness to be wrongly interpreted	Message was mainly correctly interpreted	Accused from taking advantage of cause
Liliana Filipa	X	X	
Grow Maternity	X	X	
Missus	X		
Hiss	X		X

Figure 20: Challenge of managing the possibility to be wrongly interpreted resume

### 8.5. Summary of the strategies adopted to advertise underwear on social media

Strategy: Correctly communicating the underwear's product message						
Practices Brands	Enhance the respect of the product	Enhance the girliness of the product	Limit the communication of sensuality	Enhance the practicality of the product	Enhance the comfort of the product	Enhance the elegance of the product
Liliana Filipa	X					
Grow Maternity	X		X	X		X
Missus	X	X	X			
Hiss	X				X	X

Figure 21: Strategy to Correctly communicate the underwear's product message resume

Strategy: Producing conscious type of photographs			
Brands vs practices	Producing flat lay photographs	Avoid revealing photographs	limiting models in their corporal language
Liliana Filipa	X	X	
Grow Maternity	X	X	
Missus	X	X	X
Hiss	X	X	

Figure 22 : Strategy to produce conscious type of photographs resume

Strategy: Editing photographs in a transparent manner			
Practices Brands	Natural edition	No photoshop for body modification	No skin marks removal
Liliana Filipa	X	X	X
Grow Maternity	X	X	X
Missus	X	X	X
Hiss	X	X	X

Figure 23 : Strategy to edit photographs in a transparent manner resume

Strategy: Communicating topics that easily generate controversy				
Practices Brands	Produce non-product content	Freedom in the topics selection	Freedom in the selection approach to topics (deep vs soft)	Avoid going deep on topics
Liliana Filipa	X	X	X	
Grow Maternity	X	X	X	
Missus				
Hiss	X			X

Figure 24: Strategy to communicate topics that easily generate controversy resume

Strategy: Answer to the body inclusivity trend				
Practices Brands	Communicating body inclusivity	Avoid using terms as “Plus size”	Avoid the communication of body inclusivity extremes	Avoid repeating the body inclusivity message
Liliana Filipa	X		X	
Grow Maternity	X	X		
Missus				
Hiss	X	X		X

Figure 25: Strategy to answer to the body inclusivity trend resume

Strategy: Selecting the “right” models to perform campaigns						
Practices Brands	Familiar campaigns	Professional campaigns	Open castings on social media	Flexible models’ agencies	Different body types	Micro influencers
Liliana Filipa	X		X		X	
Grow Maternity	X		X		X	
Missus		X		X		
Hiss	X				X	X

Figure 26: Strategy to select the “right” models to perform campaigns resume

Strategy: Protecting models from audiences' outrage			
Practices Brands	Eliminate abusive comments as soon as possible	Allow a pre- selection of the photographs	Use flat lay photographs
Liliana Filipa	X	X	
Grow Maternity	X	X	
Missus	X		X
Hiss	X	X	X

Figure 27: Strategy to protect models from audiences' outrage resume

Strategy: Selecting digital influencers							
Practices Brands	Criterion selection	Non-criterion selection (more random)	Almost no collaboration	Avoid entities that collaborate with many brands	Alignment with brands' values	Avoid entities that cover controversial topics	Collaborate with entities that have active voice on trendy topics
Liliana Filipa			X				
Grow Maternity		X		X	X	X	
Missus		X		X	X		
Hiss	X				X		X

Figure 28: Strategy to select digital influencers resume

Strategy: Dealing with digital influencers' content		
Practices Brands	Give freedom in the content creation	Give suggestions for the content creation
Liliana Filipa	X	
Grow Maternity	X	
Missus	X	
Hiss	X	X

Figure 29 : Strategy to deal with digital influencers' content resume

Strategy: Reacting to clients' feedback				
Feedback type Brands	Abusive content	Constructive content		
	Private and public	Positive/private feedback	Negative public feedback	Negative private feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Liliana Filipa</li> <li>• Grow Maternity</li> <li>•Missus</li> <li>•Hiss</li> </ul>	1) Eliminate the comment as soon as possible	1)Thanking the feedback 2) Interact with audience by liking the interaction	1)Thanking & apologizing the feedback 2) Show brand's availability to improve 4) Guide the person to a more private channel (email; direct messages)	1)Thanking & apologizing the feedback 2) Show brand's availability to improve

Figure 30: Strategy to react to clients' feedback resume

Strategy: Reinforcing practices that emphasize brands/audience relationship				
Practices Brands	Delivering non-product content	Actively interacting with audience	Providing "backstage" content	Sharing clients' photographs
Liliana Filipa	X	X	X	X
Grow Maternity	X	X	X	
Missus		X	X	X
Hiss	X		X	

Figure 31: Overall strategy to reinforce a solid connection with audiences resume

8.6. Stores and markets visited during the research



Figure 32: Grow Maternity at Nossa store



Figure 33: Missus store at Oeiras Parque in Lisbon



Figure 34: Grow Maternity's atelier in Restelo



Figure 35: Liliana Filipa's showroom in Oeiras, Lisbon



Figure 36: Hiss at Hyde Market - Participant observation



Figure 37: Missus at black Friday - Participant observation

8.7. Flat lay photographs



Figure 38: Flat lay photographs example of the four cases

## 8.8. Digital influencers' impact on brands- example

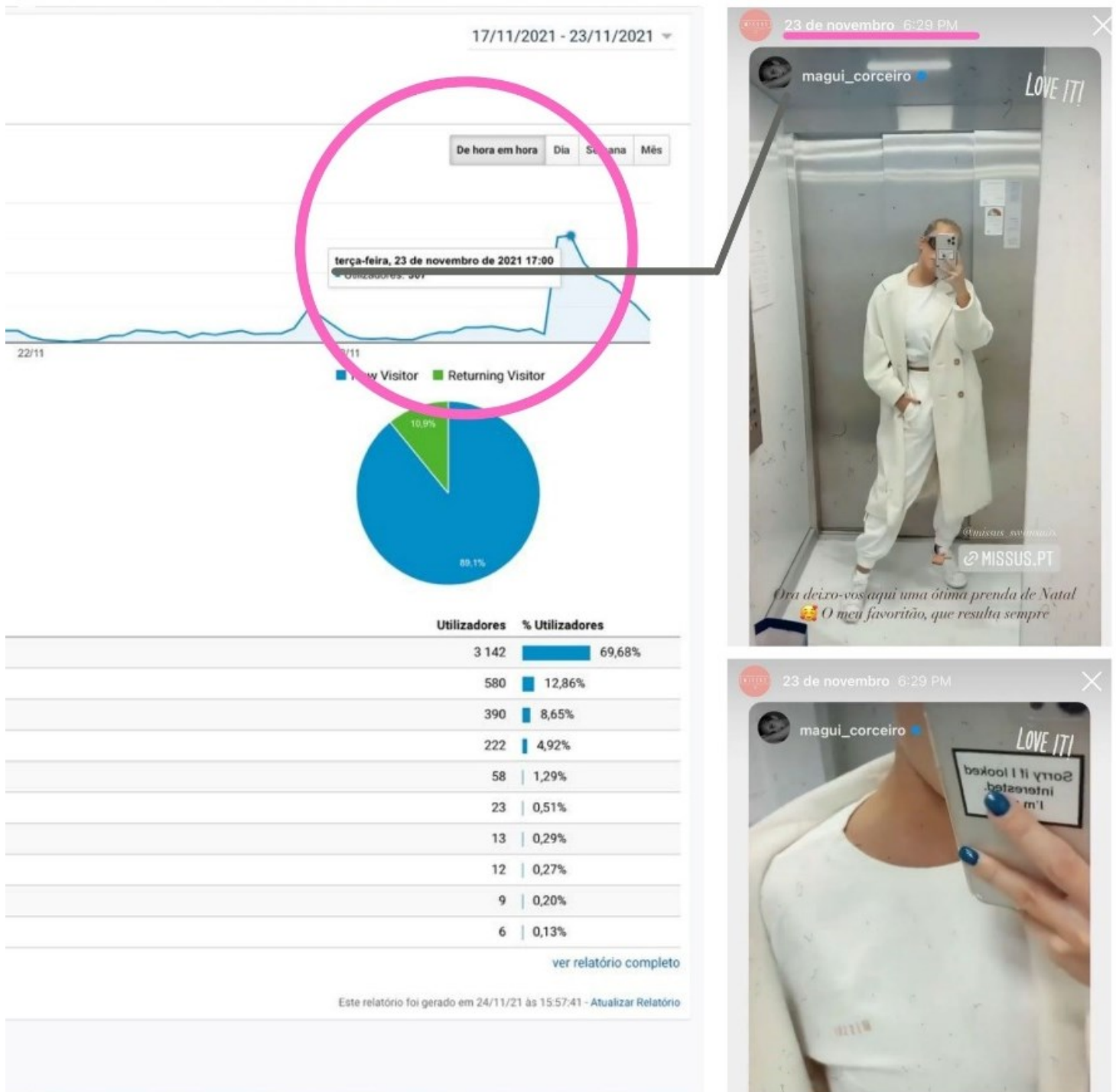


Figure 39: Missus's website statistics to prove the digital influencers' impact

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