Binary's Metamorphosis:

Seeing through gender representations in Luxury Masstige Perfume Brands' Social Media Storytelling.

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Master's Thesis

August 2025

Word Count: 19.831

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

When navigating the social media platforms of luxury perfume brands, it is evident that these brands rely on storytelling as well as the adoption of celebrity endorsers and influencers for their campaigns and promotional strategies. In a societal and cultural context where the issue of binary versus fluid representations is of significant importance, as advertisements and campaigns are institutions that shape common beliefs, the question of how luxury perfume brands are interpreting gender in their social media storytelling emerges. Consequently, after detecting and exposing how gender is portrayed, the question of how these representations intersect with contemporary perceptions of gender and cultural values arises. Through the use of semiotics for Visual Analysis and of Critical Discourse Analysis tools for Textual Analysis, 150 posts from the Instagram accounts of luxury perfume brands were sampled and analyzed to extract concrete and real-time evidence, thereby defining the aforementioned portrayals. The main findings suggest that the storytelling approach of these brands is persistently heteronormative, with few instances of fluid representations, which are mainly mediated by the use of community-driven storytelling or by the adoption of queer endorsers. However, there were variations in the heteronormative representations between stereotypical and non-conventional portrayals of women, as the latter emphasized androgynous style codes as well as female empowerment, liberation, and self-love. Regarding the more fluid representations, it is argued that they were partly manifested through the integration of non-binary personas, the concept of community, the use of non-binary lexical marks, or the use of concepts abstractly, while lacking gendered lexical nuances altogether. It is therefore suggested that, ultimately, some brands like Dolce & Gabbana and Dior continue to reproduce sexual representations of gender identities and roles based on a binary framework. In contrast, other brands appear more progressive through the ownership of female empowerment. Nevertheless, instances of gender fluidity are rather limited, particularly in the context of textual storytelling rather than visual storytelling.

KEYWORDS: *Luxury mass prestige perfume brands, Social Media Storytelling, Gender representations, Brand Storytelling*

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1. Introduction

Well-known perfume advertisements by luxury fashion houses, such as Dior's "Adore" and Dolce & Gabbana's "Light Blue", have been seemingly adopting narratives that include binary representations of genders. To this day, even though they are capable of understanding the distinction between sex and gender identity (Parvin, 2014, p. 93), the ads' creators acknowledge the use of stereotypes and consider them important tools due to their effectiveness and the fact that they illustrate society's perceptions of gender roles (Åkestam et al., 2021, p. 66). It is also believed that consumers perceive these stereotypes as attractive and that they simplify the ad process, thus encouraging emotional rather than rational responses (Åkestam et al., 2021, p. 66). As a result, many advertisers choose to follow heteronormative translations of gender roles and identities by incorporating conventional gender stereotypes into their communication strategies, thereby adopting a traditional marketing approach or a cultural/ complacent approach that leverages postmodern playfulness regarding gender stereotypes (Stevens & Ostberg, 2020, p. 365).

From a nonbinary perspective, Eisend and Robner (2022, p. 563) argue that nonbinary portrayals of gender have become more prominent based on the social role theory by Eagly (1987), which suggests that the erosion of gender differences has led to societies becoming more accepting of nonbinary identities. Stevens and Ostberg (2020, p. 359) also indicate that the body plays a central role nowadays, but it doesn't necessarily have a fixed identity; it is more gender-blending and gender-bending. However, Eisend and Robner (2022, p. 563) identified that nonbinary representations of gender elicit more negative responses than in the case of traditional dual portrayals, especially from male recipients and consumers with conventional beliefs regarding gender behaviors.

While in a broader product spectrum and especially in regards to luxury fashion brands, there are studies on gender representations in advertising (Åkestam et al., 2021, p.66; Luo, 2022, p. 3; Songur &Yaman, 2024, p. 305; Stevens & Ostberg, 2020, p. 359) and on digital media (Popa & Gavriliu, 2015, p. 1200; Rose et al., 2012, 590; Marwick, 2013, p. 59; Kanai & Dobson, 2016, p. 2), the perfume industry is relatively unexplored. Consequently, to assess the nature of representations nowadays, as curated by marketers, the perfume market was chosen as an industry focusing on the luxury segment due to its mass appeal, which will be highlighted through the term "masstige". Given that there has been significant discussion regarding masstige marketing (Chaurasia et al., 2024, p. 2; Unnithan et al., 2024, p. 1; Kumar et al., 2020, p. 384; Mansoor et al., 2024, p. 1) and whether the term could define luxury brands, this study aspires to provide a solid approach of these brands as masstige, allowing future researchers and industry experts to adopt the term safely.

Luxury perfume brands build visual stories, de-emphasizing verbal nuances while leveraging celebrities and influencers in their narratives who often act as the storytellers' and campaigns' muses, making the ambassador choice impactful. To this end, social media and especially influencer marketing have contributed significantly to the conspicuousness and allure of luxury commodities, and are expected to launch the rapid growth of the market due to their ability to attain broader audiences through social media influencers (SMIs) (Vrontis et al., 2021, p. 619).

It would also be constructive to examine the development of gender representation in luxury perfumes' social media storytelling, in relation to the emerging nonbinary conceptualizations of gender (Eisend, 2019, as cited in Åkestam et al., 2021, p. 67). In terms of brand storytelling within luxury (fashion) brands (Kim et al., 2016, p. 304; González Romo et al., 2017, pp. 136-141; Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 405; Donzé & Wubs, 2020, p. 72; Donzé & Wubs, 2019, p. 88; von Wachenfeldt, 2019, p. 102), research is relatively narrow, while luxury perfume brands have been explored mostly in reference to brand-consumer relationships and behaviors (Stewart & Carey, 2020, p. 158; Carey et al., 2016, p. 14; Figueiredo & Eiriz, 2021, p. 243) yet far less in terms of storytelling (Mensing, 2023, p. 160). Thereby, given that the study addresses the research gap on gender representations in luxury perfume brand storytelling strategies, the textual and visual analysis of Instagram content was deemed valid to explore how these brands leverage gender in their narratives.

The extensive analysis of 150 Instagram posts revealed the persistence of stereotypical representations over more fluid ones, in particular in terms of attire, appearance, language, and endorsement. It is also interesting how, albeit through a binary approach to femininity and masculinity, some more modernized interpretations have grown stronger, fostering empowerment and freedom overall, along with female agency and independence, and the liberation from conventional male-coded restrictions in the context of expression and behaviors. Gender fluidity did not appear in the context of queer identities and was approached from the lenses of gender-blending and androgyny. In terms of storytelling, the genderless concepts were significantly limited, with a focus on heteronormative romance and symbolic settings and props. At the same time, the dominance of empowerment and liberation in the plot was a surprising twist. Finally, the conventional and non-conventional gender norms and values appeared equally in the sample, on account of the posts that often blended contradictory patterns and sub-patterns. Consequently, an overlap was observed between conventional and non-conventional representations, endorsers, and gender values, suggesting a transitional period for luxury masstige perfume brands both in terms of storytelling and portrayals.

As the research aims to detect and expose how gender is represented by luxury masstige perfume brands on their social media, in correlation with the current and possibly future societal and cultural context, two questions are generated:

RQ1: How do luxury masstige perfume brands interpret gender identities and behaviors through their social media storytelling?

RQ2: How do these representations intersect with contemporary perceptions of gender and cultural values?

2. Theoretical Framework

To understand the intricate relationships between gender representations and luxury perfume social media practices, it is essential to clearly define the concepts as they are used in this context. The theoretical journey begins with the establishment of the luxury perfume industry as an extension of luxury fashion houses, leading to their definition as mass luxury brands. Afterwards, the concept of gender is defined, focusing on the theories that laid the foundations for their portrayals and an overview of the author's current knowledge on their representations on social media based on previous literature. Finally, before delving into the research results, the theoretical tools related to storytelling will be established, along with a brief analysis of storytelling practices in the luxury brand sector, particularly in its perfume segment.

2.1. Luxury Perfume Industry

The perfume industry was selected because of its lack of functional obstacles in gender representations and the idea that perfumes are rooted in the brain's components that account for "personal feelings, moods, emotions as well as for consciousness and personality and are colored by individual memories and associations" (Mensing, 2023, p. 157). Fragrances are, in fact, mediators that offer a transformative journey to consumers who want to evolve from their current into their ideal self (Mensing, 2023, p. 158). Consumers tend to connect on a deep emotional level with their perfume (Albert & Merunka, 2013 as cited in Stewart & Carey, 2020, p. 158) while luxury fragrance research has identified symbolism as a key "ingredient" of their promotion (Aaker, 1997; Rambourg, 2014 as cited in Stewart & Carey, 2020, p. 158).

Given that fragrances are a result of the downward extension of high-end fashion houses and are perceived as entry-level luxury commodities, as it will be discussed below, it is suggested that these products are masstige for three reasons: (1) The etymology of the term, mass and prestige (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p. 48), suggests that these products have a mass appeal, (2) the aforementioned proliferation of social media and influencer marketing, emphasizing on celebrity endorsement in this particular segment, offers the reception of the brands' content from mass audiences, and (3) the emergence of democratized luxury (Kumar et al., 2020, p. 384).

2.1.1. Redefining luxury perfume brands

The luxury market is identified through certain codes that consistently differentiate it. To be precise, the values a luxury product is expected to encapsulate are exclusivity (rarity, partial inaccessibility, status and sophistication), quality (the product is incomparable implicitly and not overtly through aesthetics and its positioning at a higher pricing point that mass products) and

hedonism, (it offers personal gratification to the owner and mirrors the brand's image in a unique yet recognizable way) (Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2020, p. 15). The consumption of luxury products surpasses functionality and appeals to emotional and socio-psychological factors that are mediated through symbolism (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999, p. 118; Baer et al., 2018, p. 38; Figueiredo & Eiriz, 2021, p. 243). Accordingly, Dubois et al. (2005, p. 117) propose that consumers identify luxury commodities as hedonic and symbolic.

In understanding luxury consumers, a key segmentation provided by Dubois et al. (2005, p. 115), distinguishes them into the "elitists" who believe that luxury belongs to a limited elite, the "democrats" who claim that luxury products should be available to everyone and the "distanced" who do not consume luxury products because they do not allure them. The categorization is analyzed in Table A1 (Appendix A).

Some of the major companies currently prevailing in the luxury market are Louis Vuitton, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Givenchy, Chanel, Prada, Hermès, and Hugo Boss. These brands launch lower-priced lines or sub-brands to appeal to middle-class consumers while preserving their core luxury image and client base (Park et al., 2022, p. 10), resulting in increased profits and extension of their business. Middle-incomers' growing power and need for luxury products led to the rise of a novel market: the prestige for mass market, also known as "New Luxury" (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p. 48), and is related to "market expansion, affordability, and mass-market availability" (Mansoor et al., 2024, p. 2). The products of this novel luxury market are divided into three categories (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p. 49), "accessible super premium (products with a price near the top of their category), old-luxury brand extension (lower priced versions of goods that traditionally could only be afforded by the rich) and "masstige", through which new luxury brands have a superior level of prestige when compared to middle-range brands, even though they are sold with a small price increase" (Truong et al., 2009 as cited in Figueiredo & Eiriz, 2021, p. 244).

Silverstein and Fiske (2003, p. 49) identified as masstige the products that fall between the middle-incomers and the super-premium class. Accordingly, Das et al. (2022, p. 523) defined masstige as the "high-quality status-granting and non-exclusive products and services that are financially accessible to a large segment of middle-class consumers". Meanwhile, at the foundation of masstige marketing, is populence, a paradigm introduced by Granot et al. (2013) defining it as the procedure that mediates the marketing and popularization of prestigious products to target a broader consumer base (Paul, 2015, p. 699) marking a milestone for the acceptability of the "luxury for the masses" (Kumar et al., 2020, p. 386). To this end, a mass luxury brand is marketed as luxury, is financially evaluated below prestige, and aims for the masses, specifically middle-class consumers (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p. 50; Paul, 2015, p. 700; Shahid et al., 2024, p. 12). In fact, Chaurasia et

al. (2024, p. 3) suggest that luxury marketing professionals are striving to capitalize on emerging middle- and upper-lower-income consumers through the adoption of masstige marketing practices.

Chevalier and Gutsatz (2020, p. 22) proposed another categorization of luxury products: authentic, intermediate, offbeat, and affordable. Authentic luxury products are the result of meticulous work and craftsmanship, transcending their monetary value to satisfy emotional and status-oriented needs, and are timeless. Intermediate luxuries embody the aesthetic and hedonic values of authentic brands, but in reality, are upgrades of typical consumer products that are positioned "in the upper-middle range on the price scale" (Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2020, p. 23). Offbeat luxury items are defined as exclusive and extraordinary (Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2020, p. 24). Finally, affordable luxury can be considered a subcategory of intermediate luxury as it refers to products that sell quickly and offer psychological gratification to the consumer through reasonable pricing and diligent promotion of the brand's image (Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2020, p. 25).

Additionally, it has been suggested that masstige products are part of the downward extension strategies of luxury brands, offering increased accessibility without undermining the quality value (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2013; Hennigs et al., 2013; Boisvert & Ashill, 2018 as cited in Das et al., 2022, p. 524). Similarly, perfumes are considered entry-level luxury products, offering mass-market consumers the opportunity to own a luxurious commodity without large monetary expenditures (Mintel, 2016 as cited in Stewart & Carey, 2020, p. 159). Luxury fragrances also offer consumers the hedonic experience that luxury products promise but at a lower cost, as part of the "small treats" market (Stewart & Carey, 2020, p. 159). Additionally, in support of Dubois et al.'s (2005) democrats, Kumar et al. (2020, p. 386) suggest that the time when luxury was for the "happy few" has passed, turning luxury into a democratized concept. It has thus been suggested that luxury perfume brands are a result of the downward extension of renowned fashion Houses (Kumar et al. 2020, p. 387; Park et al., 2022, p. 10), which would make them masstige luxury products.

It is thereby proposed that masstige products bridge the gap between classic luxury and the mass-market (Das et al., 2022, p. 523) and that luxury perfume brands are the masstige extension of traditional luxury brands (Unnithan et al., 2024, p. 1), leveraging on symbolic and experiential values (Chaurasia et al., 2024, p. 3). Consequently, and based on Chevalier and Gutsaz's (2020, p. 22) categorization, the aforementioned democratization of luxury and Silvester and Fiske's (2003, p. 49) conceptualization of masstige luxury products, luxury perfume brands should not be perceived as authentic as they are created for the masses at an affordable pricing point (Das et al., 2022, p. 523), thus reaffirming their positioning as masstige and affordable luxury, in its definition as a subcategory of intermediate luxury.

Overall, masstige marketing and in particular the integration of masstige as term to describe luxury perfume brands is essential in understanding that this segment has a mass appeal and can be significantly influential in how consumers think and form their identities as "masstige brands have become important means of self-expression and formidable alternatives to traditional luxury items" (Kumar et al., 2020, p. 386).

2.2. Influencer Marketing

Following masstige marketing, another key strategy that emerges in importance is influencer marketing, which, as mentioned earlier, is a crucial tool for brands to increase their global audience reach. Given the study's focus on social media storytelling, it is suggested that SMIs and, especially, celebrity endorsers are considered important components in the storytelling practices of advertisers as they embody the stories' characters and reflect the brand's personality and values.

To this end, a major aspect of gender portrayals in luxury perfume brands' storytelling on social media is the way they operate with influencer marketing. When creating stories that conceptualize the use of perfumes, it is essential to have in mind that brands aim to build a relationship with their consumers/ followers that will ultimately create an emotional bond with the product. Leveraging influencers to achieve that is an important aspect, along with masstige marketing strategies. Celebrity endorsement will be particularly emphasized because luxury perfume brands' marketers rely heavily on it.

2.2.1.Influencer Marketing Models

Three important models set the principles for a communicator's effectiveness and persuasiveness in influencer marketing theory: the source-credibility model, the source attractiveness model, and the match-up hypothesis.

The source credibility model approaches the communicator as a source and measures their persuasiveness based on their expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990, p. 40; Yang, 2018, p. 392). Expertise is defined according to the validity of the endorser's arguments and includes their knowledge of the product, experience, or skills (Erdogan, 1999, p. 300; Silvera & Austad, 2004, p. 1512). Trustworthiness comprises the "honesty, integrity, and believability of an endorser" and is valued based on the trust paradigm that is the recipient's acceptance of the creator and their arguments, and both are major contributors in attitude change of the message receivers (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41; Erdogan, 1999, p. 302; Yang, 2018, p. 394; Silvera & Austad, 2004, p. 1513). Finally, Ohanian (1990, p. 42) defines attractiveness on the basis of physical appeal. Cosmetics,

including fragrances, are a field where physical attractiveness is deemed a fruitful component (Silvera & Austad, 2004, p. 1514).

Source credibility is significant because it nurtures parasocial relationships (PSRs) between recipients and influencers. Within those PSRs arises the notion of parasocial engagement, which translates into a consumer's cognitive, affective, and behavioral processing (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2025, p. 3). The cognitive aspect refers to the mental processing that occurs in a parasocial interaction (PI) (Hollebeek et al., 2014 as cited in Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2025, p. 4), which is a form of fictitious relationship that is developed between the creator and the recipient (Vrontis et al., 2021, p. 621). Within the PSR theory, the cognitive aspect also influences how the SMI shapes consumers' opinion (Dibble et al., 2016; Sundermann & Munnukka, 2022, as cited in Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2025, p. 5). The affective aspect refers to the elicited emotions by the SMI (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2025, p. 6). Finally, the behavioural aspect translates into "tangible" outcomes of the cognitive and affective processes such as likes, comments, and shares (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019 as cited in Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2025, p. 7). Hudders et al. (2021, p. 45) also argued that interaction with the product, which showcases the experiential aspect, is also important in forming parasocial interactions.

The source-attractiveness model refers to the creator's effectiveness and persuasiveness based on their likability, familiarity, attractiveness, and similarity to the recipients (Ohanian, 1990, p. 40). Similarity is translated into the perceived resemblance between the endorser and the recipient, familiarity is measured as the extent to which the source is known while likability is defined through affective responses which result from the endorser's behavior and physical appearance and is the most significant attribute of an endorser's effectiveness in terms of trust (Erdogan, 1999, p. 300-301). To this end, attractiveness encompasses more than physical attributes, extending to values such as lifestyle, personality, brainpower, and athleticism (Erdogan, 1999, p. 302).

Another factor to be considered in terms of the SMI's effectiveness is the match between the endorser and the brand/product (Vrontis et al., 2021, p. 619), based on the product match-up hypothesis, which focuses on the congruency between the endorser's profile and the product, leading to enhanced believability and effectiveness (Forkan, 1980; Kamins, 1990 as cited in Erdogan, 1999, p. 305) as well as identification (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2025, p. 8). For example, an appealing model in terms of attractiveness endorsing a cosmetics product/brand is considered a favorable match (Knoll & Matthes, 2017, p. 61).

2.2.2. Celebrity Endorsement

According to Campbell and Farrell (2020, p. 472), there are five categories of influencers based in followership and the "perceived authenticity, accessibility, expertise and cultural capital":

celebrity endorsers, mega- (more than 1M followers), macro- (100.000-1M followers), micro- (10.000-100.000 followers) and nano-influencers (less than 10.000 followers) (see Table A2 in Appendix A).

Given that luxury perfume brands are highly active in adopting celebrity ambassadors for their campaigns, along with a mix of the latter four categories for promotional purposes (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p. 473), the spotlight will be on celebrity endorsements. When selected strategically and leveraged correctly, celebrities "can be an effective communication strategy to promote a product/brand and influence consumers' buying decisions" (Yang, 2018, p. 391).

The source models and the match-up hypothesis have been proposed as significant theoretical bases in understanding how celebrity endorsement operates and how marketers choose their endorsers (Yang, 2018, p. 392). To be precise, ad creators have been selecting endorsers based on attractiveness to extract benefits from their status and external appeal (Singer, 1983 as cited in Erdogan, 1999, p. 298). It has been suggested that advertisements tend to promote attractive individuals towards whom consumers develop positive stereotypes (Erdogan, 1999, p. 299). Meanwhile, Ohanian (1990, p. 41) suggested that a celebrity's perceived trustworthiness is not as significant as their expertise in consumers' persuasion, purchase intentions, and decisions. On to the match-up hypothesis, Misra and Beatty (1990, as cited in Erdogan, 1999, p. 300) suggested that the fit between the celebrity's profile and the brand's characteristics is of major importance (Erdogan, 1999, p. 300) as it leads to the endorsement strategy's effectiveness and persuasiveness (Yang, 2018, p. 394) and significant "advertiser and celebrity believability" (Levy, 1959; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Kotler, 1997 as cited in Erdogan, 1999, p. 303). Three criteria have been identified in the selection process of celebrities: the fit between the celebrities and the consumer target group, the fit between the celebrity endorser and the product/brand, and the celebrity's profile (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016, p. 650). Overall, celebrities are perceived as effective endorsers due to their reputation for being believable, likeable, persuasive, and trustworthy (Freiden, 1984 as cited in Silvera & Austad, 2004, p. 1515). Their effectiveness also depends on societal variables, taking into account the temporal and spatial circumstances under which an ad is shared (Silvera & Austad, 2004, p. 1516).

Furthermore, through the lens of the Meaning Transfer Model, celebrities serve as mediators of complex cultural meanings related to gender, personality, and lifestyle (Erdogan, 1999, p. 302). There are three stages in the model (McCracken, 1988 as cited in Erdogan, 1999, p. 303): starting with the curation of the celebrity's image, cultural meanings are transcended from the celebrity to the endorsed product (McCracken, 1989; Brierley, 1995 as cited in Erdogan, 1999, p. 303) and consequently onto and within the consumers who utilize them to construct their own identity. It is suggested that advertising is a considerable medium for transferring meanings from culture onto recipients and products (McCracken, 1986 as cited in Erdogan, 1999, p. 304). It is also argued that

these symbolic meanings are constructed and integrated into the consuming ecosystem through production processes (Hirschman, 1980 as cited in Erdogan et al., 1999, p. 305) in which mass media and advertising agencies play a significant role (Erdogan, 1999, p. 306). Erdogan (1999, p. 307) suggests that consumers are continuously internalizing symbolic aspects of products in the process of constructing facets of their identity.

The social and cultural meanings associated with a celebrity carry predetermined according to their career field (Erdogan, 1999, p. 302). For example, athletes embody the connotations of sportsmanship, and actors are strongly connected to the roles they have played and the statements they have made throughout different outlets. Moreover, Yang (2018, p. 393) suggests that "consumers usually have a preconceived image of a celebrity endorser, and such an image can be transferred to the endorsed product/brand". Actors and actresses, models and sportsmen are considered amongst the most significant and effective categories of celebrity endorsers (Ahmed et al., 2015, p. 3). Knoll and Matthes (2017, p. 61) also deduced that actors outperform other celebrities.

An important construct, proposed by Magnini et al. (2010), is celebrity power, which refers to the celebrity endorser's ability to motivate the recipients (Yang, 2018, p. 395). To this end, celebrities who are widely known, trending, and physically attractive can be powerful sources of meaning, and in some cases, their power is the sole motivator for their selection (Yang, 2018, p. 395).

2.3. Gender in theory

To assess gender representations, it is essential to first have a solid idea of the theories that predispose them and provide key definitions.

Gender is a contested term. The present study approaches it as a social and cultural construct (Butler, 1999, p. 22) that diverges from the binary interpretation that tends to equate gender with the sex assigned at birth based on genetic information (Marwick, 2013, p. 60). While sex is typically understood to relate to a person's attribution as male or female based on biological features, gender comprises a set of socio-cultural behavioral patterns, whereby femininity and masculinity are subjective (Popa & Gavriliu, 2015, p. 1201). Butler (1999, p. 25) argues that gender is multifaceted, flexible, fluid, and inevitably connected to the political and cultural framework in which one is born and grows. She also suggested that gender is performative (Butler, 1999, p. 34). This theory explains gender not as a fixed, internal essence you are born with, but as something you do through repeated actions, gestures, and expressions within a societal framework. Gender performativity leads to the creation of the identity it appears to be expressing. In her words, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1999, p. 25).

Consequently, the need to define identity arises. According to Butler (1999, p. 30), identities are not assigned by nature; rather, the attributes of a gender come from discourses and unofficial social arrangements. They result from an ongoing and dynamic process (Reddy & Butler, 2004, p. 118) without temporal limitations and are based on flexibility and incessant redefinition, rather than stability and stagnancy (Butler, 2020, p. 972). A major indicator of gender identity is gender expression, which is the variable that is assessed in portrayals of the identity (Eisend and Robner, 2022, p. 560).

Stereotypical portrayals of gender identities and roles find their foundations in what Butler (1999, p. 33) calls the "heterosexual matrix", which suggests that sex, gender, and sexuality are not independent spectrums but rather have an inflexible and linear relationship. This approach nurtures heteronormative gender identities and roles (Butler, 1999, p. 34). To this end, performances that adopt the normative perceptions of gender are accepted and applauded, but those that do not lead to contempt and criticism (Lober, 1994 as cited in Marwick, 2013, p. 66). Marwick (2013, p. 66) adds to the conversation, suggesting that "heteronormativity is the presumption of heterosexuality unless explicitly stated otherwise". Predetermined sets of gendered norms are imposed upon humans from the moment they are born (Reddy & Butler, 2004, p. 118), making the formulation of the binary mentality a subconscious process.

The two main mediators of gendered norms in terms of identity are language and the body. Language can express oppressive or positive messages as a means of resistance and empowerment and is a potent tool in conveying gendered concepts through marks like pronouns or signifiers that directly connote a characterization related to sex or gender, like female/male and feminine/masculine which are enablers of "binary concepts regarding identity and roles" (Butler, 1999, p. 36). Individuals, especially in terms of their gender identity, are influenced by social mechanisms, and language is a pre-established one (Redy & Butler, 2004, p. 118). Concomitantly, the body is viewed as a mediator that assumes cultural and social meanings, with gender being perceived as what gives substance to the body (Butler, 1999, p. 50). The body is more than the materialized descriptors it has been bestowed with. According to Butler in an interview with Reddy (2004, p. 120), "cultural imprints on the body become part of the very physiology of the body" and "the body is that which embodies and enacts certain kinds of social meanings". Butler (2020, p. 972) also argued that "the body is constructed through disciplinary regimes, or through epistemic fields that seek to organize gender and sexuality in the service of the state, or that seek to find within a power-laden situation the way through or out".

Later on, Butler's approach came to resonate strongly with queer theory (Butler, 2020, p. 973), which is grounded in defying the binary perceptions of sex and, most importantly, gender. The evolution of queer came to scrutinize and criticize heteronormativity and binary gender identities, while the idea that individuals do not fall under two specific categories became queer theory's focal

point (Watson, 2005, p. 67). The scope of the queer is to "disrupt, to render unnatural and strange texts and practices that are naturalized and neutralized; i.e., taken-for-granted" (Hall, 2003, p. 15; Watson, 2005, p. 68). In this context, queer theorists question and challenge "any attempt to render identity singular, fixed or normal" (Watson, 2005, p. 69). Furthermore, closely related to Butler's heterosexual matrix is the notion of contesting "normal being", which is the framework within which queer theorists develop their critiques (Hall, 2003, p. 16).

"Queer" is an umbrella term that embraces everything and everyone that disapproves of the limitations of a restricting binary approach to male/female identity and gay/straight sexuality (Marwick, 2013, p. 62). To be queer is to be in a state of continuous and regular change, experimenting with boundaries, while challenging and dissecting the "genealogy of categories", emphasizing the inability of binary structures to describe experiences (Watson, 2005, p. 70). Additionally, as per David Halperin's (1995, p. 45) perspective, queer should be perceived as a continuous procedure of "self-construction and self-transformation".

Ultimately, queer theory's major concept is non-conformity. John Stuart Mill (1874, pp. 320-321) supported the rejection of innate behaviors that are predetermined by nature as the indicators of a moral compass, highlighting the "tyranny of the majority" and the urgency to safeguard individuals from the societal pressures to conform. This is a key element of queer theory as it fosters identities that do not conform to heteronormative standards (Hall, 2003, p. 17).

In the context of this study, gender performativity, the heterosexual matrix, and queer theory provide the foundations for understanding the differences between binary and non-binary identities that are explored during the research.

2.3.1. Gender representations on digital and social media

In discussing identities, the media have been seen as a significant enabler in defining, establishing, or even modifying them (Popa & Gavriliu, 2015, p. 1202). To this end, the way gender is portrayed can be a byproduct of a dynamic popular culture that is "often synonymous with a consumer culture that is produced for mass consumption" (Popa & Gavriliu, 2015, p. 1203).

Popa & Gavriliu (2015, p. 1204) suggest that media actively affect people's perceptions of male and female identities. Characteristics such as activeness, independence, and dominance are often associated with men, while attractiveness, dependency, sentimentality, sexiness, and submissiveness are correlated with women (William & Best, 1990 as cited in Rose et al., 2012, p. 590). Moreover, Marwick (2013, p. 63) argues that "gender expression is influenced by the context in which the technology is produced". It is therefore suggested that creators' beliefs and predispositions influence the final product.

Initially, digital media was perceived as a space for freedom, offering one the opportunity to explore and express their gender (Kanai & Dobson, 2016, p. 2; Rose et al., 2012, p. 589). However, the dynamics have changed, and digital media are now environments where gender identities are regulated (Kanai & Dobson, 2016, p. 3), while social media culture can be prone to "sexist tropes" (Marwick, 2013, p. 64). According to Rose et al. (2012, p. 590), digital platforms could also foster the reproduction of normative cultural and mass media representations of gender. Additionally, "femininity and homosexuality or queer sexualities are still positioned in opposition and inferior to hegemonic masculinity" (Kanai & Dobson, 2016, p. 4). Meanwhile, elevated levels of media use and engagement have amplified the establishment and dissemination of conventional masculine ideologies (Chen et al., 2005 as cited in Rose et al., 2012, p. 591).

2.4. Brand storytelling

Following the definition of masstige luxury products to establish luxury perfumes mass appeal, the use of celebrity endorsements in the context of influencer marketing to establish the sources that mediate their dissemination and gender theories that will enable the categorization of the resulting representations as binary or fluid, it is important to define the storytelling mechanisms that these brands leverage to convey their messages and promote their products.

Storytelling, also known as narrative advertising or storytelling advertisement, is a powerful tool for brand engagement (Dessart, 2018, p. 289). Given that when humans think they tend to follow a narrative path (Weick, 1995 as cited in Dessart, 2018, p. 290) storytelling ads are significantly effective tools for consumer engagement (Dessart, 2018, p. 291), Sometimes, contrary to factual ads, they may not even include the product and rather focus on providing emotion-driven stories that communicate the values of the brand (Dessart, 2018, p. 292).

A story needs to have a beginning, middle, and end as well as follow the triptych of goal-action-outcome (Van Laer et al., 2014, p. 803). The rules of storytelling suggest that the beginning of the story must be captivating, the middle must generate interest and maintain the receiver's attention through an authentic storyline, leading to the outcome/resolutions (Aaker & Aaker, 2016 as cited in Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2021, p. 443). Some additional characteristics of a story include the use of characters with which the audience will empathize, challenges and obstacles, tension, surprises, and conflict (Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2021, p. 442).

As narrative constructs, stories are composed of chronology and causality (Escalas, 2004, p. 40). In terms of chronology, "time is configured in narratives as episodes, each with a beginning, middle, and end" (Escalas, 2004, p. 40), while from the perspective of causality the story features are

structured in a way that each event influences the other through causal relationships (Bruner, 1990 as cited in Escalas, 2004, p. 43).

2.4.1. Narrative transportation

As it has been stated earlier, luxury brands operate on hedonic values that pertain to "sensorial pleasure, aesthetic beauty and emotional transportation", which translate into the ability to transfer the message recipient from everyday life into the brand's enchanting universe (Dion & Arnould, 2011 as cited in Kim et al., 2016, p. 304). To this end, given the emotional connection consumers develop when interacting with content from luxury brands, narrative transportation (NT) was deemed a suitable storytelling model for identifying the storytelling strategies of luxury perfume brands (Kim et al., 2016, p. 305).

NT is defined as the process of consumers' immersion into a story or narrative, who are essentially partaking in the storyline from the inside, on a first-person basis (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 703; Kim et al., 2016, p. 306; Van Laer et al., 2014, p. 801). It is a mental process that invites the recipient to experience the story, and by extension the product, with all their capacities through "an integrative melding of attention, imagery and feelings" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 704; Kim et al., 2016, p. 307). Thereby, they are not passive receivers as they actively make interpretations and bring the brand story to life (Kim et al., 2016, p. 308), returning changed from the transportation effect (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 705).

The effects of transportation are threefold: 1) It generates affective responses and minimizes negative cognitive responses as stories mitigate recipients' counterarguing and disbelief, 2) it can symbolically transform a narrative experience into real lifelike one and 3) it is able to extract intense feelings towards the story's characters which in turn, if the identification is successful, can lead to influencing the recipient's beliefs (Van Laer et al., 2014, p. 804; Green & Brock, 2000, p. 706; Kim et al., 2016, p. 309). To this end, characters are possibly the most important component as they navigate the emotional connection between the product and the consumer (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 706). This approach resonates deeply with the meaning transfer model.

While the terms story and narrative have been used interchangeably, Van Laer et al. (2014, p. 802) consider them two separate concepts and antecedents of NT, in introducing the Extended Transportation Imagery Model (ETIM) by Green and Brock (2002), referring to the storyteller's (production of the story) and the story receiver's (consumption of the story) perspectives. The term "story" describes the creation process, while the term "narrative" refers to the interpretative aspect and is "an act of consumption through which a story is converted into a narrative" (Van Laer et al., 2014, p. 803). Focusing on the storyteller's perspective, the two major mechanisms that mediate these

interpretations are empathy and mental imagery. Empathy is based on how identifiable and relatable the characters are in order to evoke the recipient's compassion, while mental imagery occurs when the receiver detaches from the real world and relies on how imaginable and cohesive is the plot as well as the story's verisimilitude (the story's realism and the perceived likelihood that the story could actually happen) (Van Laer et al., 2014, p. 805).

NT derives from mental simulation (MS), which is the emulative mental portrayal of imaginary scenarios that rely on "autobiographical memories" (Taylor & Schneider, 1989 as cited in Escalas, 2004, p. 38). In the context of stories that evoke MS, the concept of consumption visions, which are closely related to advertising settings in which advertisers utilise to motivate the audience to immerse themselves in their story and "imagine positive scenarios involving themselves and the products advertised" (Escalas, 2004, p. 39). Additionally, when people simulate scenarios, they emphasize "goals, behaviors, and outcomes" (Escalas, 2004, p. 40).

In the online ecosystem, it has been confirmed that "digital stories are capable of enhancing the narrative transportation effect" (Van Laer et al., 2019, p. 136) through the provision of interactive experiences. Given that NT is seen as a type of "experiential response to narratives" (Van Laer et al., 2019, p. 136), it is closely related to media engagement, defined as a set of motivational experiences that consumers have with media products (Wang & Calder, 2009 as cited in Van Laer et al., 2019, p. 136). Additionally, the channels and formats through which the stories are disseminated are important, as narratives disseminated through video and audio tend to have a more impactful effect on persuasion than printed formats (Van Laer et al., 2019, p. 138). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) suggest that stories told through social media platforms are especially persuasive due to their reliance on social networks, their real-time availability, and their dynamic, omnipresent, and digital nature (Van Laer et al., 2019, p. 137).

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that luxury companies are amongst the brands that rely on "narrative-type customer engagement" strategies (Van Laer et al., 2019, p. 138). Kim et al. (2016, p. 310) identified seven themes that result from consumers' interaction with luxury advertisements, indicating the types of narratives that enable transportation. As seen in Table A3 (see Appendix A), the themes were Status Aspirations, Romance and Seduction, Fantasy and Adventure, Other-Directedness, Self-esteem, Power and Success, Sensory World, and Aspiration. The ones that stood out were status and beauty aspirations, which demonstrate a consensus on owning luxury products to enhance personal identity. Nevertheless, luxury brands leverage different patterns (Kim et al., 2016, p. 311).

NT also surpasses the issue of "strong versus weak ad arguments" (Escalas, 2004, p. 41). Luxury brands engage in both overt and covert commercial narratives, also known as narrative ads,

which rely on marketing objectives, as they use rational messages that cater to the experiential properties of the products but may also lack verbal nuances altogether (Van Laer et al., 2019, p. 138). In terms of campaigns, they focus strongly on the creation of an immersive visual narrative that invites the viewer to co-create meaning. However, when using influencers, especially celebrity endorsers who offer empirical information on the product, they provide argumentation that is needed to stimulate the recipients and evoke their mental simulation of using the advertised product (Escalas, 2004, p. 42).

As discussed in the theoretical component of luxury perfume brands, consumers who purchase perfumes engage more with the emotional rather than the functional properties of these products. It is therefore safe to suggest that MS and, therefore, NT are key mechanisms through which marketers mediate the consumers' interactions with luxury perfume brands' content.

2.4.2. Storytelling in luxury and perfume brands

History, heritage, and tradition are three major components of luxury brands' storytelling process (Donze & Wubs, 2020, p. 68). European luxury brands especially rely heavily on their heritage and legacy of craftsmanship and promote the portrayals of "a westernized ideal of female beauty using mostly north-western European models" (Kim et al., 2016, p. 305).

In the context of luxury brands' reliance on symbolic and hedonic values, a study by Gurzki et al. (2019, p. 403) identified three factors regarding how they construct symbolic meaning in their advertising: "enrichment, distancing, and abstraction". Enrichment relates to endowing the brand with meaning through "symbolism, rhetoric and storytelling" (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 404), distancing describes the use of mechanisms for "temporal, spatial, social and hypothetical distancing" (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 405), and abstraction refers to the creation of discourses from an abstract perspective that leave room for multiple interpretations (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 406).

Enrichment comprises the types of signs and rhetoric that bear distinct cultural meanings, which correlate with the brand's value system (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 404). Luxury brands' sets of signs are complex as they strive "to enrich the advertising message with meaning". Through the use of signs, the formation and use of rhetorical devices occurs (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 405). For luxury brands they are more intricate as they implement irregular tropes like destabilization (metaphors that are based on familiarity and similarity or paradoxes) and substitution (the ellipsis of elements in the advertisement that leave a gap for interpretation or the use of a part to represent a whole known as metonymy), leading to enhanced engagement through advertising (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 406).

In terms of distancing, in the case of luxury brands, the temporal dimension focuses on providing references to heritage, the past, or the future through symbolism and narrative

transportation (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 407). For spatial distancing, they showcase uncommon places, like exotic and iconic locations, in an aspirational context (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 408). The social dimension focuses on the models and refers to status (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 409). Finally, the hypothetical distancing refers to the complete image and extent of realism, with luxury brands relying significantly on fictional stories (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 410). Luxury brands use distancing more frequently than mass and premium brands as a means of distancing the brand from the "realm of the ordinary" (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; McCracken, 1990 as cited in Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 405), which resonates strongly with the narrative transportation effects.

Gurzki et al. (2019, p. 402) also identified four storytelling templates: "(1) product only, (2) product and model/object, (3) product, model/object, and setting, and (4) product, model/object, setting, and story". The template determines the way signs are correlated in the story, which is known as "mise en scene" (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 403). Colors, settings, characters, and the positioning of objects within a given context can offer different meanings in different portrayals (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 404). Templates also "provide richer opportunities for interpretation" and luxury brands especially leverage them for their campaigns to tell a story through narration (Gurzki et al., 2019, p. 405).

Freire (2014, p. 2667) also suggests that "luxury advertising is particularly image-dependent" and "vehicles [its] messages by interpreting representations and cultural symbols supposed to be known by the consumer". The message of a luxury product is usually mediated by discourses of visual elements, aiming to evoke recipients' interest and ultimately their identification with the character, activating their desire to own the luxury product (Freire, 2014, p. 2669). It is common for luxury advertisements to lack written messaging and rely heavily on symbolic values in order to create the allure of a dream come true (Freire, 2014, p. 2670).

Finally, according to Mensing (2023, p. 162), the perfume industry thrives on storytelling, as perfumes are perceived as inspiring, emotional stories. However, while the focus of academic research on perfumes relies on their ingredients (Mensing, 2023, p. 163), the representations they support have not yet been studied.

3. Method

3.1. Models and tools

Given that representations and social media were at the core of the study, qualitative research was deemed the most appropriate research method due to its ability to uncover recurring or new patterns and their cultural relevance. Social media content was identified as a fruitful source of data due to its broad dissemination and accessibility, as well as its role as a mediator of representations and messages that resonate with societal and cultural perspectives.

Following the cultural studies tradition, the "circuit of culture" model developed by Du Gay et al. (1997) (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 17) was chosen to frame the analysis. This framework is based on five dimensions: representation, production, identity, regulation, and consumption (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 18). Given the purely data-driven qualitative nature of the research, this study focuses on the first three dimensions. This approach is relevant and provides constructive insights for exploring the current manifestation of gender representations as it examines how these aspects allow researchers to deduce assumptions and detect "hegemonic reproductions of a dominant culture and, conversely, the processes by which such assumptions or ideologies are contested" (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 20). To this end, given the verbal, visual, and audiovisual nature of gender representations, along with the core concept of storytelling being assessed, a multimodal analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 10) was implemented. As a result, this research aims to answer the research questions by means of textual and visual analysis.

For the textual analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was implemented, because of its goal to "reveal buried ideology" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 49-51) and the fact that according to Tonkiss (1998, p. 249), language is considered "social practice" that influences and builds people's perception and connection to society. The copies were assessed using a mix of tools. To be precise, word connotations, overlexicalization, lexical choices, and genre (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 49-51) were deployed. There are three steps that were followed in the research procedure, starting with sampling the dataset, proceeding to categorizing, coding, and interpreting the data, and finally presenting the results (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 252). This procedure was also followed for visual analysis, for which the methodological tools used derive from Roland Barthes' semiotic theory (Barthes, 1973, 1977 as cited in Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 53). Given the societal and cultural relevance of the study, CDA and semiotics were deemed the most relevant because of their origins in cultural studies. In particular, Barthes sought to explore how meaning-making intersects with cultural and historical contexts, particularly how ideology is communicated through undervalued visual elements and signs (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 21). Thereby, not only did he lay the foundations for semiotics but also for cultural studies' perspective on visual communication (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 22). Concomitantly,

semiotic analysis was deemed relevant due to the relationship between "look" and "appearance" and the purchase motives of luxury products (Dano et al., 2003; Marion, 2003; Mick et al., 2004; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995 as cited in Freire, 2014, p. 2669).

CDA is also rooted in cultural studies and intertwines with visual analysis, still emphasizing textual elements. According to Weintraub (2009), this analytic method serves as a medium for exploring "issues of truth, power, and the social construction of reality" (p. 203 as cited in Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 21). For Norman Fairclough, another CDA theorist, images and sound effects are part of what is defined as "text" and the term "discourse" incorporates "social action and interaction" as well as the notion that it is "a social construction of reality, a form of knowledge" (Fairclough, 1995b, pp. 17,18 as cited in Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 22).

More specifically, for both analyses, the content elements were categorized into denotations and connotations (Barthes, 1973, 1977 as cited in Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 50). Denotations rely on the descriptive level of the sample, while connotations on the interpretative and ideological (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 23). The subcategories, based on which denotations and connotations were extracted, are objects, settings, and salience for the purely visual data and word connotations, overlexicalization, lexical choices, and genre for the textual data. Salience is particularly important as it encompasses cultural symbols, sizes, and use of colors, tones, and focus, while it is a core tool in the detection of characters' foregrounding and potential overlapping of elements (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 54-56). For each sample, a table was formulated with three components. As shown in Appendix B, the first component refers to the various theoretical tools used during data analysis, while the second and third components contain analyses on the levels of denotation and connotation, respectively, and for each tool.

3.2. Sampling

During the sampling process, Instagram was used for the data collection due to its facilitating properties in the context of campaign promotion and influencer marketing. The brands and accounts considered fell within the luxury perfume segment, based on their mass appeal as indicated by their follower base. The primary criterion for the initial selection of the brands was their connection to luxury fashion houses. The brands' origin was also an important criterion leading to the inclusion of European luxury perfume brands. Moreover, posts that promoted perfumes as part of a gendered seasonal promotional strategy, such as Mother's or Father's Day, were also eliminated, along with content that was culture-specific, like celebrating Ramadan and the Chinese New Year. An additional criterion applied was the elimination of solely product-based posts that offered descriptions of ingredients and aesthetic features, as they did not offer storytelling data. However, product-based posts that incorporated storytelling aspects through the use of the product on a symbolic level and/or

the provision of a narrative in the caption were considered. Finally, posts that included celebrity endorsers were selected, followed by content that featured a mix of influencers, based on the categories that were provided in the influencer marketing component of the theoretical framework. Overall, as shown, the sampling strategy employed for extracting the data sample was criterion sampling. This strategy was deemed appropriate due to the complexity of the sample, which resulted from both the lack of dedicated accounts for promoting fragrances and by the vast use of product-based posts. As a result, the aforementioned elimination criteria enabled the filtration of the initial sample pool, which consisted of 455 posts, in order to reach a dataset of 150 posts. It should be mentioned that in the case of some campaigns, more than one posts were included to better understand how marketers unfold the storyline in the context of narrative transportation.

Given that fragrances are a subcategory of the beauty department of luxury brands, the data sample was collected from the dedicated accounts of the aforementioned brands for beauty products. Concomitantly, as it has already been established, some brands don't have separate social media accounts for their beauty products and were also considered through a more selective process. The size of the data sample was determined based on the chosen time frame, which spanned from the beginning of 2024 to the midpoint of 2025, resulting in a total of 150 posts, including both static and video formats. Overall, the brands under consideration, irrespective of dedicated or non-separate accounts per product category, were YSL Beauty Official (@yslbeauty, 12.3M followers), Armani Beauty (@armanibeauty, 3.4M followers), Dior Beauty Official (@diorbeauty, 13.8M followers), Chanel Beauty (@chanel.beauty, 6.8M followers), Chanel Official (@chanelofficial, 60M followers), Gucci Beauty Official (@guccibeauty, 4.1M followers), BOSS (@boss, 12.3M followers), Givenchy Beauty (@givenchybeauty, 2.6M followers), Hermes (@hermes, 15M followers), Dolce & Gabbana Beauty (@dolcegabbana_beauty, 881K followers), Paco Rabanne (@rabanne, 1.8M followers), Prada Beauty (@pradabeauty, 1.5M followers) and Valentino Beauty (@valentino.beauty, 502K followers). Out of the 150 posts, 10 promoted both men's and women's perfumes, 68 were about men's perfumes, and 72 were related to women's perfumes. The division of the sample sources was based on the categorization provided by the perfume brands themselves. Given that this categorization is gendered based on binary parameters by default, it was deemed useful to examine each category on equal terms, along with content that includes both.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The data collection was conducted through Instagram, starting with the accumulation of all posts that promoted fragrances, with the aim of obtaining an overview of the available content. Initially, 455 posts were collected, which were then filtered through the sampling criteria, resulting in a total of 150 posts that were deemed eligible for analysis. The procedure went as planned, operated

by the author, albeit with some implications due to the lack of abundant content that included characters and the dominance of product-based content.

The process of data analysis began with a thorough examination of the visual and textual elements of each video and imagery, along with their copies, including video, audio, and captions. The procedure went as follows: Starting with denotations, the visuals were assessed as a whole. Then the descriptions of objects and settings, along with salience descriptors, took place, followed by the lexical elements through the tools described above. Afterwards, the denotations were interpreted according to the societal context in which the content was developed and the existing literature, strictly eliminating personal preconceptions to avoid potentially biased interpretations, resulting in a list of connotations for each sub-category/tool. This procedure was first conducted for posts that included the promotion of both men's and women's perfumes, followed by the analysis of campaigns and promotional content for women's perfumes, and lastly by the processing of posts about men's perfumes. The materials were categorized based on the market's classification of perfumes, which were labeled for women and men, with an additional category of posts that included both categories of perfumes. There was only one unisex fragrance that was included in the men's and women's perfumes, on the basis of the sex of the endorser. This decision was deemed appropriate due to the lack of perfumes that were perceived as unisex by default. In the final stage of the analysis, in which the patterns and sub-patterns were categorized based on the theoretical areas, the posts were further assorted based on (1) Gender Identity Portrayals, (2) Narrative Themes and Storytelling, (3) Lexical Portrayals, (4) Endorser Profiling, and (5) Cultural Perspectives. Manifestations of stereotypical and modernized representations of gender identities and behaviors, based on the descriptors presented in the theoretical framework, along with binary and non-binary oriented linguistic elements and the profiles of the endorsers, were counted as evidence for the different categories.

Throughout the analysis, patterns and sub-patterns began to emerge that, in the initial sets of data samples, were not considered, as novel observations that could be assigned to previous posts in the sample occurred upon the completion of the first round of analysis. Consequently, in the second phase of the analysis, the posts were revisited in the same order, with adjustments made to the observations on the first bundles of posts. In the third and last phase of the analysis, the finalized patterns and sub-patterns were assigned to each post as a means of extracting statistics that determined their frequency and showcased the nature of gender representations. Ultimately, the connotations were grouped to produce patterns and sub-patterns, which are presented under specific categories in the results component of the study, starting with the presentation of the general observations.

No specific software was leveraged during the analysis; however, Microsoft Excel was used for extracting statistics and determining the frequencies with which the patterns and sub-patterns appeared in the dataset. To be precise, Excel's macro commands were implemented, resulting in the

creation of pivot tables where the patterns/sub-patterns (once each) were entered. For each pattern and sub-pattern, all posts were visited through the macro commands, and wherever the pattern appeared, the metrics for the statistics and the cells for the frequencies were updated. In addition, the tables consisted of three sets: one for the overall sample, one for the women's, and one for the men's perfumes. The posts that included both perfume categories were directly counted in the table of the full sample.

3.4. Operationalisation

The theoretical perspective on influencer marketing, specifically celebrity endorsement, along with the attributes of narrative transportation and storytelling theory, were leveraged during the selection process of the sample. Thereby, the data sample included mostly audiovisual and partly static content that included predominantly celebrity endorsers and secondarily a mix of influencers from the aforementioned categories (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p. 472) focusing mainly on macro- and mega-influencers while deploying storytelling and NT elements (Van Laer et al., 2014, p. 801; Escalas, 2004, p. 40). Furthermore, in assessing whether luxury masstige perfume brands promote binary or non-binary/fluid portrayals, the heterosexual matrix proposed by Judith Butler (1999, p. 33) was deemed a significant framework to establish how the binary was perceived. Concomitantly, the idea of gender as a performance and a social construct (Butler, 1999, pp. 22-25), along with the opposition of queer theories to the aforementioned matrix (Watson, 2005, p. 70), offers an important theoretical context in navigating the sample to detect the fluid representations. Finally, the masstige theory was leveraged to showcase the broad dissemination capabilities of these brands, proving how influential they can be (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p. 48; Kumar et al., 2020, p. 386).

Through the aforementioned theories, a set of guidelines was set in the beginning of the analysis which included: (1) Binary/heteronormative/stereotypical representations, (2) Non-binary/fluid/gender-blending representations, (3) Non-conventional views on gender identities and behaviors (Modern man/Modern woman), (3) Conventional views on gender identities and behaviors, (4) Gendered narrative themes, (4) In-text gendered marks and nuances (pronouns, masculinity/femininity, man/woman) and (5) Endorsers' profile and portrayal. The theory behind the heterosexual matrix contributed to the emergence of stereotypical and modernized representations as patterns to be detected, while queer theory contributed to the latter as a means of detecting gender-fluid portrayals. The perception of the body and language as means of expressing identities and behaviors, through the theory of gender performativity, led to the creation of several sub-patterns that referred to gendered or non-gendered attire and appearance, as well as patterns that regarded binary-coded or inclusive/neutral lexical portrayals. Additionally, the narrative themes proposed by Kim et al. (2016, p. 310) served as a basis for identifying the narrative themes that emerged from the analysis,

aiming to detect overlaps or the addition of new themes based on gendered representations. Moreover, the theories behind influencer marketing, focusing on celebrity endorsement, were leveraged both to justify the sampling of posts that included endorsers and as a means of understanding their selection criteria by marketers. Given that gender representation was at the core of the research, endorsers were categorised as traditional ideal and non-conventional. These parameters and patterns/sub-patterns that were expected to arise were deemed abundant in answering the main research question in the context of the representation, identity, and production as proposed in Du Gay et al.'s (1997) (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 17) circuit of culture model. Consequently, a final category was introduced that summarized the cultural perspectives, with a view to offering insights for the sub-research question.

The criteria the materials must satisfy in order to be categorized into the prospective patterns and sub-patterns are quite clear: (1) the presence of characters, (2) manifestations of gender identities and behaviors (masculinity, femininity, gender-fluidity), (3) the inclusion of narrative elements, visual and/or textual, (4) the use of celebrity endorsers and influencers.

Ultimately, the gender representations were identified during the analysis of the social media posts through body characteristics, attire and appearance, the use of binary or non-binary-coded language, endorsers' profiling, and references to conventional/non-conventional masculinity and femininity. Altogether, the presence of higher or lower degrees of binary or fluid gender representations was measured based on the frequency of the patterns and sub-patterns.

3.5. Credibility: Validity and Reliability

In order to establish the research's high quality, the eight criteria developed by Tracy (2010, pp. 840-847) were considered. To be precise, "Worthy topic" (refers to the topic's relevance, significance, timeliness and interest), "Rich rigor" (refers to the quality of the theoretical constructs and context as well as of the data sample, collection and analysis), "Sincerity" (refers to reflexivity of the researcher and transparency regarding the methodology and implications), "Credibility" (refers to detailed descriptions, extended proof of knowledge, multivocality and triangulation), "Resonance" (refers to the research's ability to impact the audience through a number of moderators), "Significant contribution", "Ethical" (refers to procedural ethics, contextual, cultural, relational and exiting ethics) and "Meaningful coherence" (refers to the research's outcome, the methods that match the its goals and meaningful interconnections) (Tracy, 2010, pp. 840-847) were included. Furthermore, the tools that were used to further strengthen the study's reliability and the transparency of the process were established through the thorough description of the strategy and analytical methods, as well as the transparency of the theories used by establishing explicitly the theoretical viewpoint (Moisander & Valtoren, 2006 as cited in Silverman, 2011, p. 365). Finally, the validity of the study relied on self-reflexivity regarding my positioning towards the research, the inclusion of quotations, both textual

and visual, the "deviant-case analysis" (Silverman, 2011, p. 378), and "analytic induction" (Silverman, 2011, p. 374).

4. Results

Overall, the results indicated that the scales tip more towards the binary representations of gender identities and roles and less towards fluid portrayals. However, in the context of both masculine and feminine representations, there appears to be a progressive approach that embraces empowerment and liberation in opposition to stereotypical portrayals that continue to objectify and sexualize both men and women. Gender-fluid and non-conforming portrayals appeared significantly weaker.

The endorsers that are mostly used are millennial and Gen Z actors and actresses, models, singers, and a mix of influencers from all tiers. Most of them are publicly recognized as heterosexual and cisgender, suggesting that they are categorized as traditional endorsers. It was interesting, however, that the endorsers that appeared or were deemed by default as non-conventional endorsers were slightly more than the conventional endorsers.

Regarding language, the binary-coded linguistic elements overpowered the inclusive and neutral lexicon, while half of the narratives bore references to empowerment. However, the percentage of rebellious and nonconforming language was relatively low.

The research guidelines that were applied to effectively detect the gender representations and the cultural views on gender identity and roles in the social media storytelling of luxury perfume brands included binary/stereotypical and fluid/gender-blending representations, conventional and non-conventional views on gender identities and roles, textual gendered marks and concepts, and the endorsers' profiles. From these guidelines and throughout the first round of research, the initial patterns and sub patterns that emerged were: (1) the non-conventional approach to gender identities and roles (Manifestations of modern masculinity and Manifestations of modern femininity), (2) the stereotypical approach to gender identities and roles (Heteronormative representations of masculinity, Heteronormative representations of femininity and Objectification), (3) Gendered concepts (Masculine-coded concepts, Feminine-coded concepts and Lack of gendered concepts), (4) Gendered lexical marks (Fluid lexical marks, Heteronormative lexical marks and Lack of gendered lexical marks), (5) Celebrity Endorser and Influencer selection (Advocates of fluid representations and Advocates of stereotypical representations), and (6) Cultural views (Conventional views on gender identities and roles and Progressive views on gender identities and roles).

By the completion of the research, five categories of patterns emerged: (1) Gender Identity Portrayals, (2) Narrative Themes and Storytelling, (3) Lexical Portrayals, (4) Endorser Profiling, and (5) Cultural Perspectives. The first category included two patterns each of which had several sub-patterns: the Stereotypical Representations (Conventional Masculinity, Male Dominance and Female

Submission, Conventional Femininity, Sexual Objectification and the Gaze, Masculine-coded attire and appearance, Feminine-coded attire and appearance) and the Modernised Representations (Modern Masculinity, Liberation from stereotypical male-coded restrictions, Modern Femininity, Female Agency and Independence, Gender-fluid/ Androgynous Portrayals, Gender-fluid/Gender-blending attire and appearance, Mix of Conventional with Modern Representations). The second category indicated four patterns: Heteronormative Romance and Seduction, Empowerment and Liberation Narratives, Genderless Concepts, Symbolic Settings and Props. The third category included three sub-patterns: Binary-coded Language, Inclusive/Neutral Language, and Rebellious/Nonconformist Language. The fourth category, related to endorser profiling, demonstrated three distinct patterns: Traditional Ideal Endorser, Non-conventional Endorser, and Mix of Traditional Ideal and Non-conventional Endorser. Finally, the fifth category, categorized based on the dominant representations of each post, refers to the cultural perspectives as a whole, suggesting the existence of three patterns: Conventional Gender Norms, Non-conventional Gender Values, and Mix of Conventional with Non-conventional Gender Values.

4.1. Gender Identity Portrayals

In this category, it was observed how campaigns by luxury perfume brands portray masculinity and femininity, as constructs of the binary system, and gender fluidity. The results ranged from stereotypical to modern and gender-blending expressions of gender identities. To be precise, the stereotypical portrayals outperformed their modern counterparts, achieving 91%. Campaigns for men's perfumes, such as the ACQUA DI GIO[1] and ACQUA DI GIO PROFONDO[2] by Giorgio Armani, the Gentleman Society[3] by Givenchy starring F1 drivers Pierre Gasly and Logan Sargeant, the INVICTUS[4] fragrance by Rabanne, the Prada Luna Rossa[5] featuring Jake Gyllenhaal, and the Dolce & Gabbana Light Blue[6] perfume with actor Theo James as the face of the campaign, showcase stereotypical interpretations of masculinity as dominant, assertive, and abiding by stereotypical beauty standards. Similarly, campaigns for women's perfumes, like those for Dolce & Gabbana's Devotion[7], starring Katy Perry, Light Blue For Her[8], starring model Vittoria Ceretti, and Dolce Blue Jasmine[9], featuring model Chiara Scelsi, Rabanne's Olympea[10], featuring model Luna Bijl, Chanel's campaigns

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[1] Each of the posts was assigned a unique Post ID which can be found in Table C1 in Appendix C. This is IP083.
[2] IP140-IP142 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[3] IP124-IP127 and IP137 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[4] IP090-IP091 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[5] IP085 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[6] IP001 and IP094 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[7] IP053-IP058 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[8] IP032 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[9] IP073-IP075 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[10] IP077 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

for CHANCE EAU SPLENDIDE, CHANCE EAU VIVE, CHANCE EAU TENDRE and COCO MADEMOISELLE[11], where the brand used a mix of influencers/models while for the first they had Angele as the central face, and Yves Saint Laurent's Black Opium Glitter[12], starring ambassador Zoe Kravitz. These campaigns focused on depicting women as submissive, susceptible to their materialistic and carnal instincts, and therefore both sensual and sexual, as well as more passive than active.

However, the modern representations were also strong with 60%. To be precise, this pattern was particularly observable in the Rabanne Million Gold campaign[13], starring supermodel Gigi Hadid, as well as in the campaigns for the Barenia fragrance by Hermès[14], and for the Prada Paradoxe[15] featuring actress and brand ambassador Emma Watson. Some examples from the campaigns that promoted men's perfumes, as per the default categorization of the industry, include the posts dedicated to Yves Saint Laurent's MYSLF perfume[16] featuring actor Austin Butler as the main face and a blend of music artists, content creators and influencers, the campaign for the BLEU DE CHANEL[17] starring actor Timothee Chalamet, the 2025 campaign of the Dior Homme[18] where actor Robert Pattinson was the protagonist, and the Rabanne PHANTOM campaign[19] where actor Charlie Heaton was at the epicenter. All the aforementioned campaigns provided an approach to masculinity and femininity that deviates from binary-coded standards. In particular, men appear to be more in touch with their emotions, vulnerable, and expressive, while women seem more in control, independent, dynamic, and resilient. In the context of modernized representations, fluid concepts such as memories and community emerged alongside gender-blending and gender-neutral elements. Some campaigns that integrated them into their storyline and at times built the full story around them were the Born in Roma Green Extravaganza[20] by Valentino where a diverse blend of individuals was introduced, the REPLICA fragrance by Maison Margiela[21] which featured transgender model Alex Consani, among other creators and artists, and some promotional content for the Yes Saint Laurent Flowers and Flames[22], and the Givenchy Irresistible Very Floral[23] which featured male models despite their categorization as women's perfumes.

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[11] IP033-IP037 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[12] IP019-IP020 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[13] IP011-IP012 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[14] IP042-IP044 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[15] IP038-IP039 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[16] IP146 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[17] IP128-IP129 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[18] IP114-IP117 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[19] IP101-IP105 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[20] IP009-IP010 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[21] IP040-IP041 and IP093 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[22] IP024-IP027 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[23] IP080-IP081 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

It was interesting how these two contradicting perspectives overlapped, resulting in a mix of conventional and modern representations in 47% of the posts. Dior's J'adore campaign[24] where Rihanna enters the Hall of Mirrors in a regal attitude while adorned in hyper feminine attire and engaging in sensual movements, Mugler's Angel Stellar campaign[25] where transgender actress Hunter Schafer appears to reach for the stars and ends up becoming one, almost like a superhero, while dressed in an ethereal mini strapless sparkling dress, Gucci's Flora campaign[26] where Miley Cyrus struts dynamically in a path full of flowers and ultimately posing assertively in front of the Hollywood sign while her song Flowers plays in the background, celebrating self-love, are major examples. In the case of men's perfumes, these contradictions appear in the Million Gold for him by Rabbane[27], where the music artist and dancer Moses Sumney dances expressively but is shirtless, accentuating his muscularity, for most of the campaign, in the Dolce & Gabbana DEVOTION campaign[28] starring actor and singer Michelle Morrone, who seems vulnerable searching for his significant other, consumed by matriarchal values, all the while bearing a masculine-coded appearance, and the Yves Saint Laurent 2024 and 2025 campaigns for the Y perfume[29] where Lenny Kravitz appears in a state of nostalgia while his athletic physique is highlighted, albeit gender-blending elements.

The first sub-pattern emerged in the context of stereotypical representations, 33% of the posts represented masculinity as conventional, setting a hegemonic ideal. The men were portrayed in stereotypically masculine ways, as strong, dominant, stoic, and athletic. The campaigns that fostered these representations also reinforced classic male ideals such as physical power, control, and the pursuit of female subjects, without challenging gender norms. Some major examples of this stereotypical representation of masculinity are the ACQUA DI GIO[30] and ACQUA DI GIO PROFONDO[31] campaigns, where the protagonists consistently appear shirtless, highlighting their muscularity. Additionally, there are the campaigns for Givenchy's Gentleman Society[32], which promote a masculine-coded community, albeit with the presence of some female characters. Furthermore, masculine-coded attire and appearance were observed in 54% of the posts overall and in 90% of the posts that promoted men's perfumes. This sub-pattern refers to the gendered attire and appearance of the characters. Clothing, styling, and body attributes are strategically coded as masculine or feminine symbols. Specifically, the male characters were often dressed in classic masculine attire (suits, dark colours) or displaying muscular physiques, reinforcing strength and

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[24] IP045-IP051 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[25] IP0280- IP029 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[26] IP059-IPIP062 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[27] IP086-IP089 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[28] IP096-IP100 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[29] IP112-IP113 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[30] IP083 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[31] IP140-IP142 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[32] IP143-IP145 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

formality. There is, in fact, a recurring motif of men dressed in casual black clothing with limited accessorizing and not particular hairstyling, along with a lack of makeup. The most exemplary campaigns that were assigned this sub-pattern were the one for the BOSS The Scent[33] co-starring actor David Corenswet, who is dressed in a total black casual outfit, the one for the BOSS Bottled Absolut[34], featuring actor Chris Hemsworth, and the Gentleman Society[35] campaigns where the characters, regardless of background, appear in either suits or all-black outfits. Although change has been recorded, traditional representations of men continue to prevail, portraying them as active, youthful, strong, in control, and physically dominant (Rose et al., 2012, p. 590; Stevens & Ostberg, 2020, p. 369).

Similarly, 34% of the posts depicted femininity as conventional, promoting a stereotypical ideal of womanhood. Especially in the case of luxury brands that originate from Europe, they rely heavily on their heritage and legacy of craftsmanship and promote the portrayals of "a westernized ideal of female beauty using mostly north-western European models" (Kim et al., 2016, p. 305). Resonating with this viewpoint, the female characters were often represented as conforming to conventional feminine stereotypes, being valued primarily for their beauty, sensuality, physical attributes, or nurturing instincts, leading to their representation as passive and objectified. These portrayals uphold binary forms of how a "perfect" woman should look and behave (e.g., delicate, sexy, catering to the male gaze). Some of the campaigns that demonstrated this sub-pattern were those for the Dolce & Gabbana Light Blue[36], where the women appear significantly passive and dependent on the male protagonist. Also known as the "carnal feminine", this type of narrative relies on the notion that female bodies are irrational and susceptible to their carnal appetites (Stevens & Ostberg, 2020, p. 362). The feminine-coded attire and appearances were also prevalent, with 53% in the overall sample and 82% of the posts that promoted women's perfumes. The female characters frequently appeared dressed in stereotypical feminine attire, such as dresses, floral patterns, and revealing outfits like super mini shorts and dresses, signifying delicacy, glamour, or sensuality. Natalie Portman's dresses for the Miss Dior campaigns[37], and Gigi Hadid's golden, form-fitting two-piece set for the Million Gold for Her[38], Hunter Schafer's see-through lingerie jumpsuit for Mugler's Angel Fantasm[39] as well as Anok Yai's bra-like top that barely covers the nipular area in the Alien Hypersense campaign[40], the Chanel uniform that consists of a tweed cropped blazer and a mini skirt[41], Katy

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[33] IP084 and IP005-IP008 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[34] IP092 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[35] IP124-IP127, IP137 and IP143-IP145 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[36] IP001-IP004 and IP095 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[37] IP013-IP015 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[38] IP011-IP012 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[39] IP031 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[40] IP030 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[41] IP033-IP037 and IP063- IP066 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

Perry's formfitting skirt and cropped bra-like top for the Dolce & Gabbana DEVOTION[42], and Chiara Scelsi's lace see-through mini dress for the Dolce & Gabbana Dolce Blue Jasmine[43], amongst several other cases, are major examples of the aforementioned feminine-coded attire and appearance.

An additional important observation, which was deemed an important sub-pattern, regards the sexual objectification and the activation of the male and female gaze. In several cases, the male characters appeared shirtless, with accentuated muscularity, gazing seductively and sensually, while the camera had several close-ups of erogenous zones. Similarly, the female characters, albeit not shirtless, appeared to be wearing minimal clothing, followed by strategic close-ups of sexually oriented body parts such as the chest or the gluteal area. To be exact, 30% of the overall posts of the campaigns used highly sexualized imagery, focusing on bodies and physical allure over the characters or the stories. Both women and men were depicted as objects of desire; however, the male characters were depicted in control despite their sexualization. While both women and men are portrayed as objects of desire, that can be sexually capitalized (Stevens & Ostberg, 2020, p. 368; Luo, 2022, p. 4) yet, albeit objectified, men appear to be still in control as the "dominant force" by which the recipients must abide and resemble with (Stevens & Ostberg, 2020, p. 368). Moreover, certain camera angles and close-ups, along with poses, were manufactured to cater to the male and the female gaze by emphasizing men's muscularity or both men's and women's erogenous features. Overall, sexuality was used as a selling point, turning the characters into visual objects, while reproducing conventional beauty standards and positioning them as ideals that are tied to the product. Some notable examples include Dolce & Gabbana's Light Blue campaigns[44], both from 2025 and from 2010 to 2013, which were republished on the brand's Instagram account in 2024. The campaigns feature several close-ups on the women's chest area and the men's covered genitalia and abdominal area. Hunter Schafer's sexualized portrayal in full body lingerie for Mugler's Angel Fantasm[45], followed by Anok Yai's overly revealing outfit and aggressively sensual gazes into the camera[46] as well as Natalie Portman's shots in bed, covering herself with a white sheet while sensually piercing the camera lenses for the Miss Dior campaign[47], are deemed major examples. This sub-pattern was also identified in the STRONGER WITH YOU by Armani campaign[48], where, while the main character, actor Nicholas Galitzine, appears to break stereotypical male-coded restrictions through his expressiveness, his movements also exhibit hypersensuality and sexuality, which is accompanied by a hazy filter. The percentage of sexual objectification may not appear significantly high, but it supports the notion that stereotypical representations and the sexualization of the subjects persist. It is also interesting how, in

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[42] IP053-IP058 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[43] IP073-IP075 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[44] IP001-IP004, IP094-IP095 and IP032 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[45] IP031 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[46] IP030 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[47] IP013-IP015 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[48] IP133-IP136 and IP138-139 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

the context of objectification, the male characters appear to be in control while the female subjects adopt a submissive reaction, thus resonating with the idea of male dominance and female submission.

The second pattern that arose refers to modernized representations, accounting for 62% of the full sample, and it appeared in 62.5% of the women's perfume-oriented content and 68% of the posts promoting men's perfumes. To be precise, 33% of the posts showed affiliation with more modern interpretations of masculinity. In several posts of the sample, there were subtle references or overt lexicalisations of the idea of modern masculinity, aiming to provide a more progressive view on an otherwise heavily stereotypical gender identity. Some of the manifestations of modern masculinity were modest masculinity, vulnerable masculinity, and fluid masculinity. The campaigns showed men embracing traits that deviated from the macho stereotype as they expressed emotional depth, tenderness, vulnerability, and playfulness. This approach suggested a more contemporary, unconventional approach to masculinity. These manifestations of modern masculinity were labeled as "Liberation from stereotypical male-coded restrictions" and accounted for 29% of the sample. Some of the campaigns that infused or even had these modernized representations at the core of their narratives were the 2025 campaign for the Dior Homme[49], where Robert Pattinson is exhibiting a form of vulnerability in the context of love, expressing passion in an explicit and not an enigmatic manner, the main campaign for the MYSLF perfume by Yves Saint Laurent[50], where Austin Butler appears liberated, emotional and expressive, embracing his true self, and the BLEU DE CHANEL campaign[51], where Timothee Chalamet jumps into a blue abyss and from the black and white aesthetic, which represents the idea of a filtered cinematic persona, he returns to the real world where he is leaving behind the idea of a manufactured self and is empowered by his true identity.

In terms of contemporary portrayals of feminine identities and behaviors, modern femininity accounted for 31% of the posts, along with 58% of the content that promoted solely women's perfumes. The posts approached femininity from more modern lenses, focusing on empowered womanhood. To be exact, modern women were often portrayed as strong, independent, or assertive, highlighting empowerment and liberation. These portrayals infused feminist qualities, such as confidence, ambition, and power, into the feminine image, thereby transcending the docile or sexual stereotype. It is, in fact, common for contemporary portrayals to focus on the depiction of femininity through the lens of "stronger, independent and confident" women who have key roles and are less passive (Popa & Gavriliu, 2015, p. 1203). An interesting example is femvertising, in which women are often depicted as possessing androgynous attributes, mixing masculine characteristics, such as ambition and athleticism, with feminine ones (Eisend and Robner, 2022, p. 560). They were, however, at times combined with traditional glamour and romance. Furthermore, another important sub-pattern

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[49] IP114-IP117 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[50] IP146-IP150 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[51] IP128-IP129 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

that emerged in this category proposes a more empowering and subversive approach to female roles. To this end, female agency and independence accounted for 29% of the posts, presenting women as assuming control and autonomy, rather than being passive. They are seen leading the action, making their own choices, or symbolizing empowerment on their own terms. This is particularly evident in narratives where the female protagonist is confident, sets the tone of the interaction, or stands as a self-reliant figure, with or without a male counterpart. These portrayals reinforce non-conventional and progressive views on gender identities, albeit from a binary perspective. Some major examples of these representations were the Rabanne campaign for Million Gold For Her starring Gigi Hadid[52], who appears to move assertively into the settings, the campaign for Gucci Flora[53] where Miley Cyrus is depicted as an empowered woman who goes through the flower "obstacles" and manages to emerge stronger from the pool and in front of the emblematic Hollywood sign and the J'adore Dior campaign[54], where Rihanna is entering the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles in a regal way and begins to walk down the hall dynamically.

Additionally, within the framework of modernized portrayals, where gender-fluid representations were also explored, some gender-blending effects were observed as these modern portrayals also mixed traditionally feminine properties with masculine ones to subvert pre-established norms. To this end, in some cases, deliberate blends or swaps of gendered attire were used as a means to challenge norms. Some significant examples are Gigi Hadid's alternating outfits between the gold, form fitting strappy dress and a black suit in Rabanne's Million Gold for Her[55], Dua Lipa's suit for Yves Saint Laurent's LIBRE perfume[56] or the carousel post from Givenchy's L' Interdit Ansolu[57] where Rooney Mara first appears in an almost off the shoulder top and a slick bun while in the second image she is wearing an oversized blazer posing with resilience in a black and white aesthetic. In the case of gender-fluid/androgynous portrayals, only 14% of the posts adopted this approach on identity. To be precise, this sub-pattern occurred mainly with posts about women's perfumes, where it accounted for 26% (19 out of 72 posts). A slightly higher percentage was observed in the case of gender-fluid/gender-blending attire and appearance, which appeared in 25% of the overall sample but was more evident in posts about men's perfumes, with 32%. The campaigns that adopted these sub-patterns blurred binary gender lines either through casting or styling. In particular, they included characters or celebrity endorsers with androgynous style or non-binary identity, thus challenging traditional gender representations. This included the use of transgender or gender-fluid/ queer icons or the blend of feminine and masculine fashion cues in one portrayal. Additionally, there were some

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[52] IP011-IP012 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[53] IP059-IP061 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[54] IP045-IP052 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[55] IP011-IP012 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[56] IP021-IP022 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[57] IP067-IP071 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

cases where the outfits were extremely neutral, leaving them open to interpretation and thus suggesting a level of fluidity, like in the case of Maison Margiela's Replica, where all three characters appeared in simple white clothing. The percentage of these fluid representations, however, was extremely low. Ultimately, the styling cues connect the viewer to either traditional gender identities or a subversion of them. Nevertheless, fluidity was also implied through the use of concepts such as freedom of expression or community building. Some campaigns where this was strongly identified were the one for the Born In Roma by Valentino[58] and the STRONGER WITH YOU campaign by Armani[59], where togetherness was emphasized both visually through the inclusion of more than one individual and textually through the actual use of words like "togetherness" and "community".

Ultimately, both patterns and their sub-patterns appeared to overlap in 48% of the sample, resulting in a mix of conventional and modern representations, which was more prominent in 59% of the campaign for men's perfumes. This blend was particularly observable in the DEVOTION by Dolce & Gabbana campaign[60] where Michelle Morrone is the epitome of masculinity yet his expressiveness suggests a vulnerability and emotionality that is not common of stereotypical representations, the Million Gold for Him by Rabanne[61] and the MYSLF by Yves Saint Laurent campaigns[62] where Moses Sumney and Austing Butler are showcasing their muscularity but their movements suggest a level of freedom that is rather unusual. Some additional paradigms come from the STRONGER WITH YOU by Armani campaign[63], where Nicholas Galitzine is wearing flowy clothes, dancing freely while masculinity is emphasized textually, and the Dior Homme campaign[64], where Robert Pattinson has completely let go of his inhibitions, all the while he uses masculine-coded props such as the motorcycle. In the case of women's perfumes, 42% of the posts (30 out of 72) appeared to blend the stereotypical and modernized patterns and sub-patterns. Some major campaigns from women's perfumes that exhibited this blend were the L' Interdit Absolu by Givenchy[65] where Rooney Mara is wearing a ball gown but is involved in a journey of self-discovery and liberation from standards that formerly restricted her femininity, the J'adore Dior campaign[66], where Rihanna is assertively entering and strutting down the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles all the while wearing a golden strapless dress, and Mugler's Angel Stellar campaign[67] where Hunter Schafer is going through an empowering transformational journey yet her attire and appearance is feminine-coded.

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[58] IP009-IP010 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[59] IP134 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[60] IP096-IP100 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[61] IP086-IP089 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[62] IP146 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[63] IP130-IP135 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[64] IP114-IP119 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[65] IP067-IP071 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[66] IP045-IP052 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[67] IP028-IP029 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

4.2. Narrative Themes and Storytelling

This second category encompasses the overarching storylines and thematic messages in the campaigns. It shows the nature of the stories and, by extension, how gendered concepts are conveyed. More precisely, it illustrates how love, empowerment, and other motifs are portrayed through gendered lenses, noting whether the narrative is communicated visually or through text/slogans.

The first pattern that emerged was that of heteronormative romance and seduction in 12% of the posts. The narratives under this pattern are classic love stories that often rely on boy-meets-girl scenarios, idealizing heterosexual romance. The campaigns that adopted these stories crafted romantic fantasies, with passionate encounters, idyllic getaways, and soulmate imagery. The female character was frequently positioned as the object of desire, while grand gestures or sensual scenes were deployed as a means to dramatize true love or irresistible attraction. Dolce & Gabbana's Light Blue[68] and DEVOTION[69], BOSS's The Scent[70], Dior's Miss Dior[71] and Dior Homme[72], and Chanel's Chanel No. 5[73] campaigns have heteronormative love at their core.

The second pattern that was extracted in this category was that of empowerment and liberation narratives. Contrary to the aforementioned stereotypical representations of genders in the context of love, the storyline of 60% of the posts centered on personal empowerment, freedom, or self-actualization. These campaigns adopted empowerment rhetoric, showcasing characters - especially female ones - who break free, pursue their dreams, or exude confidence. These narratives often used inspirational slogans or hashtags (e.g., #BeYourOwnBOSS, "Libre") and positioned the fragrance as a catalyst for one's strength or liberation. This pattern was particularly evident in cases where men were depicted liberating themselves from stereotypical masculine-coded restrictions and women were portrayed as archetypes of female agency and independence. Some exemplary campaigns that embrace this sub-pattern are by Chanel for the "BLEU DE CHANEL" fragrance[74], with Timothee Chalamet letting go of a staged persona and embracing his true self, by Hermes for the Barenia fragrance[75], where the protagonist is liberating a horse and in an imitative approach she runs, reaching the peak of a rocky mountain, and by Yves Saint Laurent for the LIBRE[76] perfume with Dua Lipa leading a story of freedom and dynamism as shown by her strut and scream into the wild. Phrases such as "ignite your freedom" from the Libre Flowers and Flames social media campaign,

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[68] IP001-IP004 and IP095 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[69] IP096-IP100 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[70] IP005-IP008 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[71] IP013-IP015 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[72] IP114-IP119 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[73] IP063-IP066 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[74] IP128-IP129 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[75] IP042-IP044 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[76] IP021-IP022 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

"Braking barriers" and "expressing without apologies" by Prada's Paradoxe campaign, and of wording such as "unbridled" and "Free-spirited" by Hermes's Barenia campaign[77] and "powerful, liberated and independent woman" by Dior's J'adore[78], explicitly highlight the empowerment and liberation narratives.

It is worth noting that some campaigns relied heavily on visual storytelling, while others incorporated textual elements, such as voiceovers, taglines, or hashtags to drive the narrative. For example, Dolce & Gabbana's couple videos are mostly visual, whereas Dior's "What would you do for love?" or Yves Saint Laurent's MYSLF[79] promotional posts and campaigns explicitly use text to engage with viewers.

Furthermore, the campaigns that adopted genderless concepts altogether were significantly limited, representing only 9% of the sample. These concepts relied mostly on the idea of memories, such as the campaigns for the Replica perfume by Maison Margiela[80] and self-discovery within communities, like in the case of the Born In Roma campaign by Valentino[81].

The fourth and final pattern is symbolic settings and props, which accounted for 75% of the overall posts. The environment and props in the ads carry symbolic weight related to gender narratives. Settings like idyllic beaches, flower fields, or sunset city skylines serve as metaphors; for instance, a secluded island symbolizes passionate escapism, or an urban landscape connotes modern ambition. Traditional romantic settings (beaches, gardens) often align with feminine-coded fantasy, while, on the contrary, sleek urban or sporty settings align with masculine-coded independence or status. Some useful examples are the beach where Natalie Portman's love story takes place in Miss Dior's campaign[82], the floral path where Miley Cyrus is running through floral obstacles for Gucci's Flora perfume[83], and the racing tracks/ driver's room where Pierre Gasly and Logan Sargeant appear with their racing uniforms for Givenchy's Gentleman Society perfume[84]. Diving deeper into symbolism, the storyline of the Barenia campaign where there is an analogy between the wilderness and the city, suggesting that the protagonist encapsulates the characteristics of a wild horse, along with the broad use of the nature vs man plots, which was observed in the Dior Sauvage campaign[85], starring Johnny Depp who tames the wilderness through his guitar, the ACQUA DI GIO by Giorgio

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[77] IP042 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[78] IP050 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[79] IP150 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[80] IP093 and IP040-IP041 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[81] IP009-IP010 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[82] IP013-IP015 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[83] IP059 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[84] IP124-IP127 and IP137 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[85] IP110-IP111 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

Armani campaign[86], where Aaron Taylor Johnson jumps dramatically into the water facing a great white whale, and the Prada Luna Rossa advertisement[87], in which Jake Gyllenhaal is fighting by himself with an aggressive storm in the middle of the ocean. Color schemes and motifs, along with props, also underscore gender themes, such as the use of soft pastels and flowers, which are correlated with femininity. Meanwhile, bold blacks/golds are anchored to masculine luxury. This can be observed through the use of motorcycles by Robert Pattinson for the Dior Homme campaign[88] and by Jacob Elordi in the Chanel No. 5 ad[89], as well as by the use of the desert lily as a symbol of empowerment for the YSL Libre fragrance[90].

4.3. Lexical Portrayals

This third category covers how language, in video copy, hashtags, or captions, reinforces or subverts gender norms. Essentially, it examines the use of gendered wording, the presence or absence of gender labels, and the overall tone of the campaign's messaging.

The first pattern that emerged refers to binary-coded language, which accounted for 60% of the sample. The campaigns of this pattern include text that overtly evokes gender in a binary way. The gendered lexicon in question consisted of product labels that explicitly targeted the perfume to specific binary-defined groups, or tags like "for him" and "for her", gendered pronouns, or statements that segment the message by male versus female audience. Such language affirms the heteronormative separation of gender, like in the case of describing confidence or strength as male traits and romance or beauty as female traits. It leaves little ambiguity about which gender is addressed. The use of binary-coded language was more prominent in the case of men's perfumes, at 69%, while it was also significant for women's perfumes, at 54%. To be precise, Rabanne's Million Gold for Her[91], Dior's Miss Dior[92], Mugler's Angel Stellar[93] and Dior's J'adore[94], to name a few, explicitly refer to "femininity" in the caption, although the latter equalises it with sensuality while the first characterizes femininity from the perspective of empowerment, Armani's SI PASSIONE[95] and Hermes's Barenia[96] target overtly a specific binary-coded consumer group by using the phrase "for the woman", along with the words "captivating" and "passionate", and "women's perfume" respectively, Yves Saint

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[86] IP083 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[87] IP085 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[88] IP114-IP119 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[89] IP063-IP066 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[90] IP021-IP022 and IP024-IP027 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[91] IP011 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[92] IP013 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[93] IP028 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[94] IP048 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[95] IP016 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[96] IP042 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

Laurent's LIBRE[97], in a social media campaign featuring models Hailey Bieber and Precious Lee, refers directly to 'feminine icons", in conjunction with "freedom and empowerment", and "the essence of being a Libre woman", as well as Dior's J'adore[98] reference to "beauty and grace" in terms of femininity. Additionally, there is a broad use of feminine- and masculine- coded pronouns such as in the case of Dior's J'adore[99] where in reference to Rihanna "she struts her way" and it is "Her catwalk" and of Invictus where the protagonist "makes life his legend"[100].

In terms of men's perfumes there are overt references to "masculinity" in Rabanne's Million Gold for Him campaign[101] and Phantom[102], and the use of gender specific wording such as "for the man" in Rabanne's Invictus[103], "a portrait of a man" in Dolce & Gabbana's Devotion[104], "the Dior man" and "modern man" in Dior's Dior Homme[105], "A masculine aura" in Armani's Stronger With You[106], and "Gentleman Society" in Givenchy's Gentleman Society[107].

The second pattern is the use of inclusive/ neutral language, accounting for 46% of the sample. The campaigns that adopted this linguistic style avoided rigid gendered terms either by using gender-neutral expressions or explicitly inclusive language. Some campaigns also evaded the use of pronouns and gender labels altogether, focusing on the recipient as an individual, regardless of demographic information, through the use of personal pronouns like "you" and "we", or on universal human qualities. In some cases, there was a lack of gendered marks and concepts altogether, as seen in the case of Maison Margiela's REPLICA[108], where the emphasis was on the idea of memories. Additionally, some, albeit limited, campaigns included non-binary terms, such as the use of "for them" alongside "for him" and "for her", to broaden the appeal. This approach frames the fragrance as unisex or beyond the gender binary, inviting all audiences to identify with the message. The use of inclusive/neutral language was equal for men's perfumes (48,5%) and for women's fragrances (47%). Some of the lexical examples that enabled the identification of the pattern were the phrases "boldness and uniqueness" and "live life on your own across" in Valentino's Born In Roma[109], "LV Lovers community" in Louis Vuitton's LV Lovers[110], "found in togetherness", " stronger with my crew" and

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[97] IP024-IP027 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[98] IP047 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[99] IP046 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[100] IP090 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[101] IP089 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[102] IP105 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[103] IP090 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[104] IP096 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[105] IP114 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[106] IP130 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[107] IP137 and IP143-IP144 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[108] IP040-IP041 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[109] IP109 and IP009 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[110] IP121 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

"unity" in Armani's STRONGER WITH YOU[111] and "authentic connections" in Yves Saint Laurent's MYSLF[112].

The third pattern is the use of rebellious, non-conforming language in 26% of the posts. In contrast with the binary gendered languages, the wording in this pattern suggests the presence of progressive discourses that counterargue restrictions and stereotypes regarding gender identities and expression. It is quite close to empowerment and liberation narratives; however, in this case, defiance and non-conformism are overtly highlighted. Among the linguistic paradigms that led to the observation of the sub-pattern were the phrases "daring spirit and audacious character", "bold and fearless spirit" and "daring, defiant" in Givenchy's L'Interdit, "individuality without restrictions" in Givenchy's Irresistible Very Floral, "The fragrance that rewrites the expected and inspires the man who rejects the rules of convention" "unconstrained masculinity" in Rabanne's Million Gold for Him[113], "electrifying, defiant and a force for the future", "nonconformist charisma" and "rebellious nature" in Rabanne's Phantom[114], "Want to stand out from the crowd?" and "set their own rules" in Givenchy's Gentleman Society[115], and "when I go against tradition" in Yves Saint Laurent's MYSLF[116] campaign.

It should be taken into consideration that campaigns that are heavily endowed with empowerment themes often use a mix of masculine-coded words like "power" and "confidence" or feminine-coded words like "love" and "beauty", depending on the target audience. The balance or dominance of these lexical choices can either challenge or reinforce traditional gender associations. Additionally, in some cases, the binary-coded language overlapped with their inclusive/neutral and rebellious/non-conforming counterparts; however, these instances were so minimal that they were not considered.

4.4. Endorser Profiling

This category refers to the role of the celebrity and influencer endorsers in mediating the gender representations. In a way, the personal image of the endorser, whether it aligns with fluid, progressive ideals or advocates traditional gender stereotypes, becomes part of the campaign's message.

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[111] IP133-IP134 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

[112] IP149 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

[113] IP089 and IP087 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

[114] IP104-IP105 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

[115] IP144 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

[116] IP148 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

The first pattern reveals endorsers who embody traditional ideals regarding gender identities, behaviors, and expressions. To be specific, they appeared in 47% of the posts and included campaigns that use celebrities and/or influencers who epitomize conventional gender ideals. For example, some brands, like Armani for ACQUA DI GIO[117] with actor Aaron Taylor Johnson or Dolce and Gabbana[118] with model David Gandy and actor Theo James, employ macho celebrities for men's fragrance or glamorous supermodels and actresses for women's, like in the case of Gigi Hadid for Rabanne's Million Gold for Her[119] and Rihanna for Dior's J'adore[120]. These endorsers foster and nurture expected norms and beauty standards, lending their star power to amplify the conventional masculine or feminine image. It should also be taken into consideration that brands' narratives often revolve around the endorser's personification of the fragrance's promised identity, thus normalizing traditional gender ideals through a famous figure.

The second pattern that emerged in this category is that of the non-conventional endorser, who can also be seen as a fluid persona, yet not exclusively. This pattern appeared in 30% of the data sample and includes campaigns that feature celebrities or models known for defying gender norms or adopting gender-fluid and non-traditional styles. By casting such figures, the brands leverage their progressive profile by integrating elements like androgyny, gender activism, or the image of the empowered rebel into the campaign. This type of endorser often embodies a more inclusive or subversive take on gender, which the campaign deploys as currency for authenticity and progressiveness. Transgender model Alex Consani[121] and transgender actress Hunter Schafer[122], as well as the queer artist Lil Nas X[123], are some of the celebrities who incarnate this sub-pattern. Under this category are also the endorsers who, regardless of their beliefs and profile, promote the image of a nonconformist and defiant persona.

Similarly to the representations, a mix of traditional ideal and non-conventional endorsements also appeared, in 23% of the overall sample. This blend refers to the overlap between traditional ideal endorsers, who promote a concept that would be enacted by non-conventional endorsers, and non-conventional endorsers that assume characteristics of traditional ideal endorsers. For example, while Hunter Schafer is a transgender woman and represents an underrepresented group of individuals, her portrayal and actions are feminine-coded from a stereotypical perspective. Meanwhile, Austin Butler is a cisgender heterosexual man whose attire and appearance are filtered based on conventional standards, yet his act is highly unconventional as he plays with flowers, laughs, and dances freely.

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[117] IP083 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[118] IP001-IP004 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[119] IP011-IP012 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[120] IP045-IP051 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[121] IP041 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[122] IP028 and IP031 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.
[123] IP148 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

4.5. Cultural Perspectives

The last category refers to the broader cultural positioning of the campaigns regarding gender norms and values, detecting whether they foster and reproduce traditional societal views or navigate through progress and reinforce change. It essentially reflects how cultural nuances and values are embedded in gender portrayals.

The first pattern that occurred relates to the consistent emphasis on conventional gender norms. To this end, 33% of the campaigns appeared to rely on conventional cultural ideals of gender, upholding the status quo binary identities and roles along with heteronormativity and traditional beauty standards. Further supported by the notions of heritage and history, these campaigns present gender roles and identities as timeless and universally accepted, thereby adjusting and normalizing familiar cultural narratives of "man" and "woman". These norms were more evident in women's perfumes, appearing in 32% of the respective posts, than men's, where the percentage reached 26%. Amongst the campaigns where conventional gender norms overpowered non-conventional values overall were Dolce & Gabbana's Light Blue, BOSS's The Scent, Armani's ACQUA DI GIO and ACQUA DI GIO PROFONDO, Givenchy's Gentleman Society, Rabanne's Olympea and INVICTUS, Dolce & Gabbana's Devotion and Dolce Blue Jasmine, Chanel's CHANCE EAU SPLENDIDE, CHANCE EAU VIVE, CHANCE EAU TENDRE and COCO MADEMOISELLE, and Yves Saint Laurent's Black Opium Glitter[124].

The second pattern that emerged is familiar to non-conventional gender values and accounts for 33% of the sample as well. The campaigns included in this pattern project forward-looking or transformative views of gender identities and roles, thereby reflecting evolving cultural attitudes that celebrate fluidity, diversity, and empowerment. These campaigns also position the overall brand in accordance with modern and progressive ideals, proposing that gender expressions are flexible. Surprisingly, the posts promoting women's perfumes included more unconventional values than those that communicated men's perfumes, with 39% and 28% respectively. Valentino's Born in Roma, Givenchy's Irresistible Very Floral, Maison Margiela's REPLICA, Prada's Paradoxe, Hermes's Barenia, Yves Saint Laurent's Libre, and MYSLF and Chanel's BLEU DE CHANEL[125] are among the campaigns that promote non-conventional gender norms more strongly.

The third and final pattern refers to the mix of conventional and non-conventional gender values, which appeared in 35% of the sample and was more dominant in the case of men's perfumes by 46%. This resonates strongly with the aforementioned blends in regards to both representations and

[124] IP001-IP004, IP033-IP036, IP083, IP140-IP0142, IP143-IP145, IP090-IP091, IP053-IP058, IP073-IP075 and IP019-IP020 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

[125] IP009-IP010, IP072, IP080-IP081, IP093, IP040-IP041, IP038-IP039, IP042-IP044, IP021-IP022, IP146-IP150 and IP128-IP129 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

endorsers, and suggests that some campaigns did not offer a clear cultural perspective, which could be translated as an effort to subvert existing norms in a way that does not alienate the brand from the eyes of its existing consumer group while approaching a new category of consumers. Overall, it is essential to keep in mind that these patterns, even contradictory ones, may coexist in a campaign. For example, Rihanna bears several feminine-coded signs, but the campaign's theme of empowerment also suggests a non-conventional approach to femininity. Some additional campaigns that blend the two approaches on gender values are Rabanne's Million Gold (for Him and for Her) and Phantom, Dolce & Gabbana's Devotion (for him), Dior's Dior Homme, Yves Saint Laurent's Y, Armani's Stronger with You and Si Passione, Givenchy's L' Interdit, Gucci's Flora, Chanel's Chanel No 5 and Mugler's Angel Stellar, Alien Hypersense and Angel Fantasm, and Dior's Miss Dior[126].

4.6. Discussion

Modern representations of gender are consistently being interpreted through heteronormative lenses. Judith Butler's (1999, pp. 33-34) heterosexual matrix is strongly evident as stereotypical manifestations of masculinity and femininity, in terms of portrayals, attire, appearances, language, and endorsers, dominate. Men are often defined by their physical attractiveness and athletic body features, and are seen as symbols of power and control. Stereotypical portrayals of women are present as well, depicting them as sexualized objects of desire that are defined through their sensuality and their conquest for love, thus subduing more substantial attributes, such as professional and intellectual qualities. Nevertheless, it appears that there are variations that allow a progressive viewpoint within the heteronormative spectrum. Female empowerment and liberation, as well as the concepts of self-love and independence, appear to grow stronger. Meanwhile, modern interpretations that view masculinity as vulnerable and expressive, while promoting the idea of liberation from macho standards, are also strongly present.

Judith Butler's (1999, pp. 25-26) theory on gender performativity also resonates with the findings, as every campaign performs gender through stylized gestures that bear symbolic meanings. For example, the repetitive diving into the ocean symbolizes the conquest and battle with the unknown, the assertive strutting connotes empowerment, and the exhilarating shouting insinuates freedom and liberation, similarly to the fluid and rhythmic dance moves of several male characters that show expressiveness and defiance of stereotypical restrictions. These acts foster the idea that identity is the performance, yet in terms of progressive representations, they are rather limited to the binary of modern masculinity and femininity. These "new" identities suggest the industry's steps towards more inclusive messages, but they are hesitant to step outside the binary spectrum. In support

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[126] IP086-IP089, IP011-IP012, IP101-IP105, IP096-IP100, IP114-IP119, IP112-IP113, IP130-IP136, IP016-IP018, IP067-IP071, IP059-IP062, IP063-IP066, IP028-IP029, IP030, IP031 and IP013-IP015 as seen in Table C1 in Appendix C.

of the latter, there are very few campaigns and promotional posts that offer space for genuine ambiguity or fluid performances; ultimately, they end up reverting to binary tropes even when the aesthetics are non-binary.

In the case of fluid representations, it appears there is still a long way to go, as they are limited to the generalization of concepts, the lack and avoidance of gendered lexicon, the limited adoption of fluid lexicon, and the use of queer/transgender endorsers. In conjunction with queer theory and fluidity, several sub-patterns emerge, including gender-fluid androgynous representations, gender-fluid/gender-blending attire and appearance, inclusive/neutral language, and the use of unconventional endorsers that nod to queer disruption. Nevertheless, they remain tokenistic as very few campaigns attempt to dismantle the binary. In a few words, fluidity is partially adopted as it is still curated through aspirational looks rather than as a sustained critique of gender norms.

Regarding social media and digital representation, gender performativity appears highly regulated, as despite early hopes for digital freedom, most campaigns show that social media reproduce sexist tropes (Marwick, 2013, p. 64; Rose et al., 2012, p. 589). The objectification and the gaze pattern, in particular, demonstrate how platforms persistently and consistently favor hyper-sexualized and consumable images. Concurrently, while freedom of self-expression is a common topic of several campaigns, along with empowerment and liberation, the majority of posts rarely allow users to co-create meaning as they remain top-down fantasy productions that provide emotional stimuli but in an aspirational context, rather than genuine interactive narratives. Nevertheless, some campaigns are community-driven and motivate the audience to become members. Stereotypical gendered codes sometimes guide these communities, and at other times, they communicate a more fluid and unrestricted set of membership guidelines.

In terms of influencer marketing, it can be safely deduced that luxury perfume brands rely heavily on the source attractiveness and the meaning transfer models, as well as the match-up hypothesis theory. To be specific, regarding source attractiveness, physical appeal is at the center of the majority of the campaigns, while brands utilize likeable personas. Some brands, such as Mugler, Maison Margiela, and Yves Saint Laurent also utilize queer and transgender celebrities to promote a more progressive view on gender identities. The challenge here relates to the similarity to the consumer, which is rarely fostered beyond aspirational, as the beauty and body standards are highly Westernized and idealized versions of the self. This does not resonate with the needs of the emerging class of middle-income earners and millennials, who are increasingly favoring the advocacy of the actual instead of the ideal self. In support of that, it was also observed that micro-celebrities and transgender/ queer ambassadors are generally limited or absent altogether.

Furthermore, regarding the match-up hypothesis theory, brands appear to actively cast celebrity endorsers who align with their brand values and product attributes. For example, Yves Saint Laurent and Rabanne favor modern empowerment, while Mugler encourages edginess and nonconformism, Maison Margiela embraces fluidity, while Dolce & Gabbana leverages seductiveness and sensuality. This theory is explicitly supported by the continuous use of embodiment lexicon by brands as well as the matching of the settings' and clothing color schemes with the color palette of the perfume bottles and liquids. The aforementioned perceived embodiment also facilitates the activation of the meaning-transfer model. Essentially, the endorsers are approached as active mediators of the intangible ingredients of the perfumes, demonstrating the experiential effects of the product, both sensorial and symbolic. For example, Gigi Hadid embodies female empowerment that is mediated by the use of the Million Gold for Her, and Austin Butler anthropomorphizes self-actualization, liberation from stereotypical masculine-coded restrictions, and overall freedom through the application of Yves Saint Laurent's MYSLF. Finally, the source credibility model is somewhat supported, given that celebrity expertise is vicariously based on their status and professional background. Meanwhile, in some cases, it is also based on their queer oriented identities. However, there are limited cases where celebrities provide direct product information or expert commentary; in such instances, persuasion is often emotional rather than factual. This finding is not definitive, as posts that were product-oriented were excluded during the sampling process. Additionally, in the context of source credibility, trustworthiness emerged through behind-the-scenes teases, director's cuts, and testimonials from the endorsers.

Regarding storytelling and the narratives that were deployed, although some cases appeared to motivate thinking outside the heterosexual matrix, such as through the use of inclusive phrasing and wording, as well as the use of neutral pronouns, the narratives remain heteronormative at their core. In terms of practical storytelling elements, the template that was used the most, based on Gurzki et al.'s (2019, p. 402) categorization, was template four, which includes the product, the model, the setting, and the story, and it can be detected in the cinematic mini-film style and high-drama teasers, followed by a few static posts where template two was used and included the product and the model. In the latter case, the narrative elements were more noticeable in the captions. Additionally, in the context of storytelling in the luxury industry, enrichment, distancing, and abstraction were detected. Enrichment was achieved through lush symbolic settings, such as the Light Blue campaign, shot in Capri, the luxurious catwalk where Gigi Hadid strutted for the Million Gold For Her campaign, and the Palace of Versailles from the J'adore campaign. Temporal distancing was achieved through references to the heritage and history of the respective brand, while spatial distancing was realized through the use of exotic locations, such as the deserts in the Dior Sauvage, Terre d'Hermès, and Yves Saint Laurent's Libre campaigns. There were, however, deviations in which more relatable settings were included in the story, thereby reinforcing the audience's identification and immersion.

Furthermore, abstraction was conveyed through the use of completely fictional settings, such as the Million Gold For Him golden universe and the immersion into the perfume bottle in the campaign for The Scent by BOSS. Finally, the emergence of empowerment, liberation, and heteronormative romance narratives, as well as the identification of symbolic settings and props, resonates with some of Kim et al.'s (2016) narrative themes on luxury brands' transportation. In particular, "Romance and Seduction", "Fantasy and Adventure", "Self-Esteem, Power and Success", and "Sensory World" were supported, with the addition of Genderless Concepts. This, however, does not suggest that "Status Aspirations", "Other-Directedness", and "Activation" were not present, given that they were not measured, as they were deemed not in tone with the research topic.

Last but not least, luxury perfumes can effectively be considered as masstige, based on Silverstein and Fiske's (2003, p. 48) theory on masstige marketing and products. Their mass appeal was evident through the use of high-profile endorsers in nearly every campaign, as well as the social-media-driven narratives. As a result, the core masstige idea of prestige for the masses, where entry-level luxury commodities like fragrances trade on both exclusivity and broad accessibility, was highlighted. Meanwhile, the consistent use of symbolic settings, narratives, props, and lexical elements (the couture gowns, Capri, and fantasy scenarios) and the emphasis on transformative journeys directly echo Mensing's (2023, p. 157) arguments that approach fragrances as hedonic and symbolic mediators of personal identity. Nevertheless, the dilemma between authenticity and intermediate/accessible luxury posed a challenge to the masstige theory. To be precise, while the theoretical framework predicted that masstige products de-emphasize craftsmanship in favor of accessibility, many campaigns foregrounded heritage cues. As a result, the relationship between original luxury storytelling and mass-market democratization emerges as a dynamic rather than a rigid dichotomy.

Having established the prominence of stereotypical and heteronormative gender portrayals over the promotion of gender-fluid representations in the social media storytelling of luxury masstige perfume brands, it is essential to propose how this finding intersects with the current societal and cultural context, particularly through the lenses of marketers and campaign creators. The persistence of binary portrayals of gender identities and roles, particularly the conventional depictions of masculinity and femininity, resonates strongly with the idea that advertisers acknowledge and are strategically leveraging stereotypes as they consider them realistic illustrations of societal perceptions regarding gender roles (Akestam et al., 2021, p. 66). They are also deemed compelling and digestible by consumers who approach these stereotypes as attractive and simple to understand and accept, thus reinforcing emotional responses and mitigating counterarguments (Akestam et al., 2021, p. 66). This resonates deeply with the goal of luxury advertising that aims to evoke emotional aspirations rather than communicate functional values. The subversive portrayals that encourage gendered

empowerment, discourage emancipation, and promote fluid discourses add an interesting aspect to the conversation, showing a shift in the luxury perfume market's perspective. However, the lack of substantial gender fluid lexical and visual references that disrupt binary gender norms altogether, rather than just in the context of modern masculinity and femininity, negates Eisend and Robner's (2022, p. 560) suggestion that nonbinary representations are emerging.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how luxury masstige perfume brands build and communicate gender identities, behaviors, and roles through their social media storytelling. Drawing on Barthes' theory of semiotics for visual analysis and critical discourse analysis for textual analysis, the research identified common representational patterns that mirror and, at times, scrutinize traditional gender norms.

Across a wide range of campaigns, for women's and men's perfume as well as for both, the analysis exposed a consistent reliance on binary, heteronormative representations, where men and women are placed in conventionally gendered roles (e.g., men as dominant, assertive and in control and women as sexually objectified or as passive romantic subjects). Several other campaigns focused more on subversive and inclusive portrayals. These included femvertising narratives that have female empowerment as their core theme, storylines that promoted non-conforming masculinity where the liberation from traditionally masculine-coded standards is a key element, and limited gender-fluid/gender-blending paradigms.

The results suggest that even though there has been significant and stronger progress in some aspects of gender representations, their binary nature persists and overpowers gender-fluid portrayals. Nevertheless, the blending of conventional and non-conventional representations from the perspective of attire, appearance, language and endorsement fosters a triple translation: (1) this is a transitional period during which brands are aiming to broaden their audience and client base, all the while maintaining their current followership and client pool, (2) luxury masstige perfume brands are indeed evolving their storytelling to make it more subversive but are still reluctant to adopt gender-fluidity at full scale and (3) the perceived progressiveness of some brands is purely materialistic and serves promotional and commercial cause.

Throughout the research, some possible limitations and implications emerged. Firstly, the blend of contradictory patterns and sub-patterns in several posts of the present data sample could be perceived as hindering the provision of clear statistics and results, in the context of the dilemma between traditional and contemporary portrayals of gender identities and behaviors. Secondly, the data sample, which included the promotion of both men's and women's perfumes, could have been larger to provide further insights regarding the binary or non-binary approach to gender behaviors and roles. This, however, was an issue of limited availability of the specific content, especially in the temporal context that was chosen for the sample collection. Thirdly, some product posts were included because there was a lack of visual storytelling content in the chosen time period. They offered, however, narrative elements in the captions, which were significantly limited in frequency to avoid compromising the validity of the final results based on the aforementioned sampling criteria.

Additionally, some of the endorsers were not initially tagged in the posts, which raises questions about the validity of their celebrity endorsements. Nevertheless, based on their Instagram profiles and follower counts, as well as in the context of the influencer marketing tiers established in the theoretical framework, they were ultimately deemed as eligible. This decision was based on the fact that if the sample relied solely on celebrity endorsement (e.g., music artists, actors, and actresses), the final pool of posts would not be abundant. Finally, the lack of dedicated accounts for promoting the fragrances, combined with the ample use of product-based posts, was a considerable limitation that led to considerable implications in terms of data processing and analysis, particularly in the context of narrative transportation.

For future research, it would be advisable to conduct a similar study with brands originating from other continents, particularly from Asia and the United States. This could offer major insights on a continent-level as well as in the context of cross-cultural research. Additionally, it would be fruitful to explore the gender representations in luxury perfume brands' social media, digital, and above-the-line storytelling in the past decades. Such an endeavor would be useful in detecting whether there has been a substantial evolution in the way luxury perfume marketers think and how these brands communicate their stories in terms of gender, especially given that the existing literature on this topic is rather generalized in the field of advertising. An additional variable that could be explored in future research on this topic is data collection from other social media platforms. As the storytelling, type of content, and tone of voice are adapted per platform, it would be interesting to explore how luxury masstige perfume brands adapt their campaigns and their communication style on social media platforms like TikTok. A comparison between platforms would offer important insights into whether and how brands operate their storytelling strategies to reach different audiences. Additionally, while a qualitative study can offer rich cultural insights, a quantitative approach would also contribute, as it would help understand how the audience perceives the representations that luxury perfume brands are currently communicating, while also detecting whether millennial middle-incomers are truly an emerging consumer group. However, if one would like to research the audience's reaction to the brand's visual and textual messages regarding gender on a qualitative level, a thorough comment analysis is recommended. Furthermore, in the context of the industry segment, while luxury perfume brands have been approached as masstige in terms of their appeal and visibility among their followers, other segments of the perfume industry could also be leveraged. To this end, the niche and commercial perfume markets would be important sources of insights regarding gender representations, especially in comparison with the data provided by the current study in the framework of the luxury perfume market. Finally, given the proliferation of Artificial Intelligence in content creation, some interesting questions are inevitably arising in the context of endorsement and influencer marketing. This is a particularly interesting area of research for the perfume market, especially its luxury segment that relies heavily on hedonic, emotional, and experiential values. A

blend of quantitative research methods, and specifically experiments with surveys, could enable researchers to forecast the impact of AI in luxury perfume brands' storytelling, and not only.

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Appendix A

Theoretical Tables

This Appendix contains the tables included in the theoretical framework as a means of providing further yet secondary insights in regards to theory.

Table A1. Dubois et al.'s (2005) segmentation of the luxury market

Segment name	Segment size	Core Belief	Key Characteristics
Elitists	28.5%	Traditional View: Luxury is reserved for the "happy few". Emphasis on exclusivity.	• Luxury consumers are "refined people" of high education • Luxury is strongly associated with "good taste" • Luxury is a means of differentiation • Luxury is very expensive • Luxury cannot be under mass production • High personal affinity to luxury • Social-symbolic path to purchase

Democratics	35.2%	Modern/Open View: Luxury should be available to "happy many". Emphasis on accessibility.	• Everyone should have access to luxury goods • Luxury is not constricted to "refined people" of high education • Unlikely to see luxury as a means of differentiation • Luxury is not necessarily very expensive • Luxury products can be mass-produced • Positive personal affinity to luxury • Hedonic path to purchase
Distants	36.3%	Distanced View: Consumers feel indifferent and unengaged by luxury products.	• Less inclined to luxury purchases • Negative predisposition • Views luxury as useless and overpriced • Exhibits feelings of discomfort in luxury environments • Perceives luxury as outdated and its consumers as snobs

Table A2. Campbell and Farrell's (2020) categorisation of influencers

Endorser Type	Characteristics
Celebrity Endorsers	- They exude "high levels of perceived expertise - Their influence and persuasiveness rely on consumers' tendency to imitate them - Usually chosen for advertisements and promotional campaigns of luxury brands
Mega-influencers (More than 1M followers)	- Individuals who have achieved celebrity-like status through expertise
Macro-influencers (100.000-1M followers)	- They are not on a celebrity status level but are significantly successful nevertheless - Demonstrate solid engagement rates and are perfect for brand exposure - Experts in their domain - Leverage on followers' desire for emulation
Micro-influencers (10.000-100.000 followers)	- Video-based content that enhances their authenticity and accessibility - Their suggestions are seen as more honest than those of higher-tiered influencers - Higher persuasiveness
Nano-influencers (less than 10.000 followers)	- In the first steps of their influencer career - Provide accessibility in their personal lifestyle, leading to high perceived authenticity, which ultimately translates into the most elevated engagement rates from all the higher tiers.

Table A3. Kim et al.'s (2016) themes on luxury brands' transportation

Theme	Characteristics
Status Aspirations	The narrative focuses on uniqueness, exclusivity, social prestige, and wealth.
Romance and Seduction	The narrative emphasizes themes like love, seduction, relationships, and is sometimes erotically charged.
Fantasy and Adventure	The narratives rely on dreams, wish fulfillment, myths, and escaping everyday life.
Other-Directedness	The narrative leverages the desire for external validation, social comparison, attracting attention, and competitiveness.
Self-esteem, Power, and Success	The narrative deals with internal stimuli like success, confidence, and empowerment, which are usually connected to the possession of luxury products.
Sensory World	The narrative highlights experiences that relate to nature, beauty, feelings of comfort and relaxation, aesthetics, and heritage.
Activation	The narrative's purpose is to motivate the recipient towards ownership, shopping, consumption, and spending.

Appendix B

Research tables

This Appendix includes an example of the research design that has been filled in, an overview of the research guidelines that were taken into consideration during the analysis process and the codebook that demonstrates the categorization of the resulting patterns.

Table B1: Example of research design: Valentino Born in Roma Green Stravaganza – 1/03/24 - @valentino.beauty

	Denotation	Connotation
General *(the image as a whole)*	A promotional static post for Valentino's Born in Roma Green Stravaganza perfumes featuring renowned models Anwar Hadid and Adut Akech. Their gaze is mysterious and inviting as they look directly at the recipient. The man's look lacks distinctive expressive elements while the woman's look exudes a sensual innocence.	The image represents luxury, inclusivity, and a mix of modernity with history, as observed through its composition. The main characters are still a man and a woman, which is quite a binary approach, but their gaze deviates from stereotypical representations of femininity and masculinity and their correlation.

Objects *(every object that is in the picture)*	- Two models (Adut Akech and Anwar Hadid) - A large old painting - Lightgreendress - Blackoversizedblazer - Tattoos - The guy has short hair, and the girl is black with super short hair, discreet earrings, and light, playful makeup.	Even though the product is not present physically, it is represented by the models through their wardrobe. The wardrobe choices are also quite interpreted from a binary perspective, but their look is quite diverse and aspires to inclusivity
Setting*(backgroundinformation)*	In the background is an old, large painting, as can be observed from the frame at the bottom of the picture, behind the models	Contrast between the old painting and the modern look of the models = history and modernity come into one

Salience *(colour, tone, foregrounding, size, focus, overlapping, cultural symbols)*	There is a contrast between earthy tones and the vibrant green, with the black as well as between the latter and the skin complexions of the models.	The product is present through the colours of the wardrobe.
		The colour and tonal contrasts insinuate the marriage of modernity with history, surpassing the limitations of tradition.
	It is also interesting how the guy foregrounds the girl and how the girl leans on him. While the positioning of their bodies suggests foregrounding, their heads overlap.	Their positioning could be interpreted from a stereotypical binary perspective, given that the man is the one leading.

Word connotations*(keywords)*	"For him, for her, for them" "the infinite ways to be you" "embody" - iconicalteregoduo	- Explicit non-binary framing as "infinite ways to be you" rejects gender binaries, promoting fluidity - Freedom of expression - Call for identification with the characters - legacy and heritage
Overlexicalisation (repetition of key words, phrases, and images)	fragrance (x2) Born in Roma, #borninroma	- Evokes mental simulation, motivating the consumers to live the experience through the product - Heritage and history = emphasis on the origin of the brand and the product

Lexical choices and genre (imperatives, mix of informal and "scientific" language)	"Explore", "Discover" Mix of poetic ("infinite ways to be you") and directive (Discover. Explore)	● Motivation for immersion into the story and the takeaway of the campaign = self-exploration and self-transformation ● Blurs personal empowerment with commercial intent

Table B2: Research Guidelines

The guidelines that were taken into consideration to effectively detect the gender representations and the cultural views on gender identity and roles in the social media storytelling of luxury perfume brands were:

1. Binary/heteronormative/ stereotypical representations

2. Non-binary/fluid/gender-blending representations

3. Non-conventional views on gender identities and behaviors (Modern man/Modern woman)

4. Conventional views on gender identities and behaviors

5. Gendered narrative themes

6. In-text gendered marks and nuances (pronouns, masculinity/femininity, man/woman)

7. Endorsers' profile and portrayal

Table B3: Codebook with patterns

Category	Pattern	Sub-Pattern	Definition	Examples
Gender Identity Portrayals	Stereotypical representations		The highlighted gender identities are masculinity and femininity, interpreted through a rather traditional definition.	IP001-IP020, IP024-IP037, IP040, IP042-IP068, IP070-IP080, IP082-IP092, IP094-IP103, IP105-IP107, IP110-IP116, IP118-IP149
		Conventional Masculinity	Stereotypically masculine depictions, particularly through the lenses of dominance, assertiveness, strength, activeness and stoicism. The campaigns that exhibited this sub-pattern reinforce conventional male ideals such as physical power, control, sensuality, and the pursuit of women, without challenging gender norms.	IP001-IP008, IP056, IP063, IP065-IP066, IP083-IP085, IP090-IP092, IP094-IP095, IP100-IP103, IP107, IP110-IP111, IP114-IP116, IP119, IP123-IP128, IP130, IP133, IP136-IP137, IP139-IP146, IP149

		Male Dominance and Female Submission	Power imbalances are observed where the man is leading or is in control, while the woman is portrayed as submissive or secondary. In this context, male characters are depicted as initiators of action and are in possession of the scene and the story, thereby reflecting a patriarchal dynamic. The female subjects often appear as conquests or followers in these scenarios. They also appear as assertive without the existence of a female subject.	IP001-IP008, IP056, IP095, IP107, IP115-IP116, IP119, IP143, IP145
		Conventional Femininity	Women are approached through the lenses of feminine stereotypes. Their value is based on beauty, grace, sensuality or nurturing instincts.	IP001-IP008, IP010, IP013-IP017, IP019-IP020, IP028-IP029, IP032-IP036, IP045-IP058, IP071, IP073-IP075, IP077-IP079, IP082, IP095, IP107, IP115-IP116, IP119, IP143, IP145
		Sexual Objectification and the Gaze	Both male and female subjects appear to engage in rather sexualized acts (hypersensual gazes and movements) while there are several close-ups of perceived erogenous zones and the naked body features are significantly accentuated.	IP001-IP004, IP014, IP019-IP020, IP029-IP032, IP045-IP052, IP056, IP062, IP073-IP075, IP077, IP083, IP086, IP088-IP091, IP094-IP095, IP112, IP115-IP116, IP119, IP130, IP133, IP136, IP138, IP140-IP142, IP146

		Masculine-coded attire and appearance	The clothing of the male characters appears consistently masculine (black clothing, tuxedos, suits, casual t-shirt/shirt with pants combo), or lacks altogether, accentuating the muscularity of the characters. Their appearance adheres to rather Western beauty standards (casually and effortlessly styled hair, perfect smile, lack of make-up, limited to no accessorizing, athletic composure)	IP001-IP008, IP012, IP016-IP017, IP024-IP027, IP056, IP063, IP065-IP066, IP080, IP083-IP092, IP094-IP103, IP105-IP106, IP110-IP116, IP118-IP149
		Feminine-coded attire and appearance	The dress code of the female characters is glamorous and comprises mostly dresses, skirts, and tops, with the majority being form-fitting, thus accentuating erogenous body features. The subjects also appear lean, with clear skin complexion. Their hair is stylized in perfection, and they wear make-up. They thereby appear as conforming to Western beauty standards.	IP001-IP017, IP024-IP037, IP040, IP042-IP049, IP051-IP068, IP070-IP079, IP082, IP095, IP097, IP107, IP115-IP116, IP119, IP134, IP140-IP143
	Modernised representations		Manifestations of masculinity and femininity in ways that are defiant and subversive towards binary-coded restrictions. This category also includes gender-fluid/ gender-blending portrayals.	IP009-IP012, IP014, IP018, IP021-IP027, IP030-IP031, IP035-IP044, IP048, IP050, IP053, IP059-IP072, IP076, IP078, IP080-IP082, IP084, IP086-IP089, IP093, IP096-IP099, IP101-IP117, IP119-IP122, IP128-IP129, IP131-IP134, IP138, IP143-IP150

		Modern Masculinity	Men are often portrayed as adopting traits that transcend masculine stereotypes. The characters exhibit emotional depth, vulnerability, playfulness. and/or tenderness.	IP009-IP010, IP080-IP081, IP084, IP086-IP089, IP093, IP096-IP099, IP101-IP102, IP104-IP122, IP128-IP129, IP131-IP134, IP138, IP143-IP150
		Liberation from stereotypical male-coded restrictions	The male characters undergo a transformational journey that leads them to their liberation from the societal expectations and standards of how a man should be and act.	IP080-IP081, IP084, IP086-IP089, IP093, IP096-IP099, IP102, IP104-IP105, IP107-IP122, IP128-IP129, IP131-IP134, IP138, IP146-IP150
		Modern Femininity	Women are portrayed as strong, independent, or assertive, exhibiting empowerment and liberation. These portrayals infuse feminist qualities, such as ambition, power, and confidence, into the feminine image. These are, however, often combined with conventional glamour/romance.	IP011-IP012, IP014, IP021-IP031, IP035-IP040, IP042-IP044, IP048, IP050, IP053, IP059-IP072, IP076, IP082, IP097, IP134, IP145, IP150

		Female Agency and Independence	Women are highlighted in gender reversals of roles and behaviours. They are thus seen as in control, autonomous, and as agents of their own selves, instead of as passive characters. They are therefore seen leading the story, making their own choices, or symbolising empowerment on their own terms. These portrayals are detected in narratives where the female protagonist is confident and assertive, sets the tone of the interactions or stands as a self-assured and self-reliant figure (regardless of the presence of a male co-star).	IP011-IP012, IP014-IP015, IP021-IP031, IP035-IP039, IP042-IP044, IP048, IP050, IP053, IP059-IP072, IP076, IP082, IP097, IP150
		Gender-fluid/ Androgynous Portrayals	Binary gender lines are blurred through casting, styling or gender-inclusive wording. Characters (e.g. celebrity endorsers and influencers) with ana androgynous style or gender-fluid identity challenge conventional gender norms and rpresentations. This includes the use of transgender or gender-fluid/queer icons.	IP012, IP018-IP023, IP038-IP039, IP041-IP044, IP069, IP071-IP072, IP076, IP078, IP080, IP145, IP150

		Gender-fluid/ Gender-blending attire and appearance	Use of clothing attire that does not indicate a specific gender identity. Blend of masculine and feminine-coded fashion cues, body features, and performances in one portrayal.	IP009-IP010, IP018-IP022, IP038-IP039, IP041, IP069, IP071-IP072, IP076, IP078, IP081, IP086, IP090-IP091, IP093, IP102-IP104, IP107-IP109, IP112-IP113, IP121-IP122, IP128-IP129, IP134, IP138, IP143, IP146, IP148, IP150
		Mix of Conventional with Modern Representations	Sub-patterns of stereotypical and modernised representations appear to intersect.	IP009-IP010, IP018, IP024-IP031, IP035-IP036, IP048, IP050, IP053, IP059-IP068, IP070-IP072, IP076, IP078, IP082, IP084, IP086-IP089, IP096-IP099, IP101-IP103, IP105-IP107, IP110-IP116, IP118-IP122, IP128-IP129, IP131-IP134, IP138, IP143-IP146, IP148-IP149
Narrative Themes and Storytelling	Heteronormative Romance and Seduction		Emphasis on heterosexual relationships and the pursue for love under the prism of heteronormative standards.	IP001-IP006, IP008, IP013-IP014, IP056, IP063, IP065-IP066, IP095, IP097, IP115-IP116, IP119
	Empowerment and Liberation Narratives		The storyline and narrative is based on messages and wording that foster empowerment and a transformational journey towards freedom from heteronormative restrictions.	IP009-IP012, IP014-IP015, IP018, IP021-IP031, IP034-IP039, IP042-IP044, IP048, IP050, IP059-IP072, IP074, IP076, IP078, IP081-IP092, IP101-IP102, IP104-IP105, IP108-IP109, IP111-IP121, IP124-IP125, IP128-IP129, IP133-IP137, IP143, IP145-IP148, IP150

	Genderless Concepts		The storyline is not linked to specific binary-oriented concepts such as love and beauty. It is also connected to the use of inclusive/gender-neutral language. The concepts of community and memories are some examples.	IP009-IP010, IP038-IP041, IP080, IP093, IP112-IP113, IP120, IP123, IP134, IP149
	Symbolic Settings and Props		The settings and props bear symbolic values and are at times distanced from reality. The recurrence of some environments in conjunctions with a specific gender representation suggests a binary translation.	IP001-IP010, IP012-IP014, IP017-IP022, IP024-IP037, IP040-IP044, IP048, IP050, IP053-IP068, IP070, IP073-IP076, IP078-IP079, IP082-IP083, IP085-IP086, IP088-IP091, IP093-IP099, IP101-IP104, IP107-IP117, IP119-IP121, IP123, IP125-IP130, IP133, IP136-IP137, IP140-IP146
Lexical portrayals	Binary-coded Language		The campaigns that exhibit this pattern include the use of feminine and masculine pronouns and marks as well as the use of wording that is typically leveraged in the context of women's perfumes as feminine descriptors and of men's perfumes as masculine descriptors. The overt references to femininity and masculinity are also measured.	IP005-IP008, IP011-IP020, IP023-IP025, IP027-IP029, IP031, IP033, IP035, IP042-IP054, IP058, IP072, IP076-IP077, IP080-IP085, IP087-IP092, IP094-IP096, IP098-IP103, IP105, IP110-IP111, IP114-IP119, IP121-IP122, IP124-IP125, IP127-IP133, IP135-IP137, IP139, IP143-IP145, IP147, IP150

			The campaigns that exhibit this pattern make use of personal pronouns, such as "you", "your", "my" instead of the binary-coded he/his and she/hers. Additionally, the copies lack gendered wording altogether or do not overemphasize it and highlight generic concepts without connecting them textually to a specific gender.	IP009-IP010, IP021-IP022, IP026, IP030, IP032, IP034-IP041, IP055-IP057, IP059-IP071, IP073-IP075, IP078-IP079, IP086, IP093, IP097, IP106-IP113, IP120-IP124, IP126, IP133-IP138, IP140-IP146, IP148-IP150
	Inclusive/Neutral Language			
	Rebellious/ Nonconformist Language		Use of strong wording that explicitly, or even implicitly at times, connotes a rebellious and non-conforming spirit and behaviors. These include not adhering to stereotypical societal expectations from a behavorial and aesthetic perspective.	IP009, IP011, IP024-IP027, IP034-IP035, IP037-IP039, IP042-IP044, IP048, IP050, IP068-IP071, IP078, IP081, IP087, IP102, IP104-IP105, IP108-IP109, IP112-IP114, IP128-IP129, IP143-IP144, IP146-IP148, IP150
Endorser Profiling	Traditional Ideal Endorser		This type of endorser is either by default a cis-gender, binary-oriented individual or impersonates a character through cis-gender/binary-coded lenses.	IP001-IP008, IP011-IP013, IP015-IP018, IP023, IP032-IP036, IP052, IP056, IP063-IP066, IP072-IP077, IP079, IP082-IP085, IP090-IP092, IP094-IP100, IP114-IP119, IP123-IP127, IP130-IP133, IP135-IP137, IP139-IP142, IP149

	Non-conventional Endorser		This type of endorser is either by default a queer-oriented individual or impersonates a character through queer-coded lenses.	IP009-IP010, IP021-IP022, IP025-IP026, IP028-IP031, IP038-IP039, IP041-IP044, IP059-IP062, IP067-IP071, IP080-IP081, IP093, IP101-IP106, IP108-IP109, IP112-IP113, IP120, IP122, IP128-IP129, IP138, IP148, IP150
	Mix of Traditional Ideal and Non-conventional Endorser		The character(s) exhibit an ambiguity. Cis-gender individuals that incarnate fluid and gender-neutral ideals are included along with gender-fluid individuals who are enngaging in stereotypical acts.	IP014, IP019-IP020, IP024, IP027, IP037, IP040, IP045-IP051, IP053-IP058, IP078, IP086-IP089, IP107, IP110-IP111, IP121, IP134, IP143-IP147
Cultural Perspectives	Conventional Gender Norms		Overall, stereotypical gender ideals in terms of representation, narratives, language and endorsers are (more) prevalent.	IP001-IP008, IP014, IP016-IP017, IP019-IP020, IP032-IP033, IP045-IP047, IP049, IP051-IP052, IP054-IP058, IP073-IP075, IP077, IP079, IP083, IP085, IP090-IP092, IP094-IP095, IP123, IP125-IP127, IP130, IP136-IP137, IP139-IP142
	Non-conventional Gender Values		Overall, non-conventional gender ideals in terms of representation, narratives, language and endorsers are (more) prevalent.	IP009-IP012, IP015, IP021-IP023, IP025-IP026, IP037-IP044, IP059-IP062, IP067-IP072, IP076, IP081, IP086-IP089, IP093, IP104-IP106, IP108-IP109, IP112-IP113, IP122, IP128-IP129, IP146-IP148, IP150

	Mix of Conventional with Non-conventional Gender Values		Neither of the aforementioned categories is clearly distinguishable as conventional and non-conventional gender ideals are quite blended.	IP013, IP018, IP024, IP027-IP031, IP034-IP036, IP048, IP050, IP053, IP063-IP066, IP078, IP080, IP082, IP084, IP096-IP103, IP107, IP110-IP111, IP114-IP121, IP124, IP131-IP135, IP138, IP143-IP145, IP149

<div align="center">**Appendix C**</div>

<div align="center">**Instagram Posts Overview and further data**</div>

This appendix contains the Instagram posts overview tables along with a table of statistics that showcases the measured appearances of the resulting patterns and a table that demonstrates the frequency of the patterns' appearances. They are in online format as the file sizes put at risk the functionality of the present document.

Table C1: Instagram Posts Overview

Table C1 contains an overview of the Instagram Posts including the assignment of a unique Post ID per sample and details regarding the date of posting, the account name, the fragrance name, caption excerpts, visual features, thematic code/patterns, engagement metrics, sampling criteria and useful notes. It is in online form due to the size of the file and can be found here: Table C1

Table C2: Statistics Overview

Table C2 contains statistics that demonstrate the appearance of the patterns throughout the sample. It is in online form due to the size of the file and can be found here: Table C2

Table C3: Frequencies Overview

Table C3 contains the assignment of the posts per pattern based on the unique Post ID they were given for Table C1. It is in online form due to the size of the file and can be found here: Table C3

Generative AI tools were used for the clarification on information, the simplification of complex papers, grammar and spell check, and as a search engine for practical information related to the luxury perfume industry and the profiles of celebrity endorsers/ influencers. To be precise, ChatGPT (4o-mini version) was used to extract geological and videography terms, the names of endorsers and influencers that were not tagged in the posts and the titles of songs that were used in campaigns, as well as a means of detecting the categorization of the perfumes by the brands, in order to provide detailed descriptions on the denotations component of the analysis. All the results were further cross-checked through personal research to ensure their validity. It was also leveraged to provide the author with a time- schedule that would lead to the effective analysis of the data sample. Finally, Grammarly Pro was used for grammar and spell-check.

List of Prompts:

- How is the area that is desert like but doesnt have sand called?
- Which is the song from the 2024 dior campaign of the sauvage parfum starring johnny depp?
- What is the song of the Dior Homme 2025 campaign starring Robert Pattinson?
- What is the song that plays in the LV Lovers campaign?
- Who are the participants of the 2025 Gentleman Society perfume campaign by Givenchy?
- Which are the models from 2024 Gucci Bloom campaign?
- Which are the models in the campaign for LV's Lovers perfume?
- Is Givenchy's Irresistible a women's or men's perfume?
- Is YSL's Libre a women's perfume?
- If I have 35 hours and 25 posts to analyse how much time should I dedicate to each post?

- How is it called when someone makes a wild animal docile?

- How is the lead wolf called in a pack?

- What is the technique of a scene reversing called?

- What is the gesture called where two men greet each other clapping their hands?

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Course Assignments

Student Information
Name: Erika Malvasori Dimitriou
Student ID: 745391
Course Name: Master Thesis Project (CM5050)
Instructor Name: Heath Broussard
Assignment Title: Master Thesis
Date: 03/08/2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot)
- Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL)
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☑I declare that I have used generative AI tools,   ☐I declare that I have NOT used any generative

specifically ChatGPT and Grammarly, in the process of creating parts or components of my course assignment. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of the assignment.

Extent of AI Usage

☑I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the assignment were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☑I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in

AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature:

Date of Signature: 03/08/2025

accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:

Date of Signature: 03/08/2025